Changing times for an old industrial city

Hard times, hedonism and corporate power in Newcastle’s nightlife

Robert Hollands and Paul Chatterton

Here, focusing on the experience of Newcastle, Chatterton and Hollands continue debates around culture, capital and the ‘creative’ city already initiated in this journal (see Chatterton, ‘Will the real creative city please stand up?’ in City 4(3) (2000), and Harcup in City 4(2) (2000), for example). Research on the form, origins, regulation and ownership of the city’s nightlife lead to an image of a city which in many ways exemplifies patterns of socio-economic adjustment following the decline of manufacturing evident in other UK cities, especially in the north east region. However, ‘beset by problems of visible decay, social polarisation, and deprivation from its industrial past’, Newcastle also has its distinct idiosyncrasies. The authors argue that in a more thoughtful approach to the city’s development, room should be provided for the growth of a genuinely creative, inclusive and regionally specific urban nightlife, less dominated by large-scale corporations, and more responsive to local cultural factors. Their optimistic conclusion is that the opportunities are still there to ‘strike a balance between commercial and local need, and the interests of corporate capital and users of the city, whoever they may be’.

Understanding the ‘Geordie’ city: from coal capital to culture capital?

Newcastle upon Tyne was recently voted top UK city for tourism by readers of Conde Nast traveller magazine and in the mid-1990s, courtesy of Texas-based Weisman Travel marketers, gained a rather imprecise title of being the world’s eighth best party destination. With the addition of several major arts and cultural venues in 2003 it also bid jointly with its neighbour Gateshead to become the European Capital of Culture in 2008, and many are heralding the city as a new leisure, retail and arts destination. While these are all positive signals of Newcastle’s recovery from the manufacturing decline of the 1980s, there is also a sense of unease which accompanies such ‘success’ stories and large-scale projects, centring partly on whom such developments are for, and who stands to benefit and lose from this drive towards cosmopolitanism. This paper is an attempt to tell a story of these changing times through the lens of Newcastle’s nightlife cultures. Some wider economic and social transformations are worth briefly noting here as a context to changing times for an old industrial city like Newcastle.

There is no doubt that downtown areas in many British cities have been remodelled as places to live, work and be entertained, buzzing with activity into the night. Previous issues of City have documented similar changes in places such as
Birmingham (see Webster, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2001) and Leeds (Harcup, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2000). This move back to the city is part of ongoing socio-economic restructuring and changing political strategies and policies. Since the late 1970s, effort has been put into reshaping urban centres in response to problems of widespread unemployment, physical and social decay, crime, homelessness and dereliction. Such reshaping has been part of the neo-liberal political project since the Thatcher years, and has eroded the established labourist city strongly connected to its manufacturing and industrial past in favour of private/corporate capital, knowledge-based activities, middle-class consumption and an entrepreneurial turn in urban governance aimed at attracting and satisfying the demands of highly mobile global capital (Harvey, 1989; Jessop, 1997). Over the last two decades this ‘return to the centre’ has come of age with the whole-scale reinvention, symbolically if not materially, of the importance of cities and particularly their centres (Zukin, 1995), reinforced by a range of bodies and policy statements in the UK such as Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) of the 1980s, Richard Rogers’ Urban Task Force Report (1999), and the Government’s Urban White Paper (Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000). A whole host of city marketeers have been active in promoting a new identity and ‘cultural brand’ for cities, borrowing both from the excesses of the North American model of casinos, multiplexes and malls (Hannigan, 1998) and the continental European model associated with ‘café society’ and socially inclusive city-centre living (Landry, 2000).

Here it has become accepted parlance that the night-time economy, through bars, pubs, clubs and music venues, has an identifiable role to play in revamping downtown urban economies (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). All metropolitan centres now point towards the vibrancy of their nightlife as a growing economic sector and a key indicator of a healthy economy and prosperous population. In particular, many places have been keen to move towards becoming ‘24-hour cities’ (Bianchini, 1995) where activity stretches beyond the conventional ‘5 pm flight’. Young urban service workers, graduates and students, knowledge professionals and cultural intermediaries are the main foci for the city’s new night-time and cultural economy. Numerous studies have examined these new groups in urban contexts and have suggested that they have stimulated an explosion of cultural goods and services and have increased the range of young adult identities and lifestyles on offer (e.g. see Wynne and O’Connor, 1998).

While one might initially be quick to applaud the development of urban nightlife, especially as a tool for regeneration, our aim in this paper is to move beyond the hubbub of self-congratulation and civic boosterism to a number of crucial elements which are being overlooked. In particular, proponents of urban nightlife often say very little about who owns the night-time economy—many new, large, non-local corporate operators (Klein, 2000) are dominating and transforming city-centre landscapes and lifestyles with smaller, local, independent operators squeezed out. Second, most of Britain’s core cities are encouraged to pursue a rather ‘off-the-shelf’ approach to developing the night-time economy through multiplexes, theme pubs and casinos, which begs the question why, in whose interest, and for whom, such cities are being developed? Current trends suggest that many of our cities are becoming havens for high value-added entertainment and leisure activities for ‘cash-rich’ groups, at the expense of a diverse and locally embedded range of activities for the majority, including the urban poor (Smith, 1996). National corporate operators, in particular, are playing a disproportionate role in shaping and ‘gentrifying’ nightlife activity, as they can apply leverage on cash-strapped urban authorities through the promise of inward investment.
Newcastle has a particular story to tell within these wider processes of urban change. The city-region’s long-term economic transformation is key to unpacking the experiences of young adults within the city’s nightlife. Its historic dependency on primary industries and manufacturing meant that the city suffered more than many other UK provincial cities and had a harder time recovering and developing a new economic base (Robinson, 1994). The Tyneside economy in the new millennium remains unstable (Tomaney and Ward, 2001), although important changes have occurred. The ‘gendered’ character of the city has undergone rapid transformation, with women now making up 50% of the city’s labour market, even though the proportion working part-time is over one-third. Some argue that such vigorous gender restructuring in the labour market is connected to displays of ‘hyper masculinility’ reflected in increased male crime and violence in the community (Campbell, 1993), as well as an atmosphere of ‘machismo’ in the night-time economy, despite an increase in numbers of women going out in the city (Hollands, 1995). Young people have also been hit hard by troughs in the local economy, experiencing unemployment rates one and a half to two times higher than adults (‘Tyne and Wear Research and Information, 1998, p. 37).

During the early 1990s the city attempted, with limited success, to reverse patterns of decline and negative perceptions, with redevelopment largely focused around the activities of Tyne and Wear Urban Development Corporation and piecemeal, large-scale redevelopment, private/public partnerships, and market-led image building (Wilkinson, 1992). Attempts have been made to put in place more fine-grained approaches to urban renewal over the last couple of years, and the city has tried hard to reinvent, restructure and sell itself, giving particular emphasis to developing its ‘soft’ infrastructure (its people and their character) and emphasizing quality of life indicators such as ‘affordability’ and ‘excellent nightlife’. However, recent redevelopment remains dominated by the city’s controversial plans for Going for Growth and rather formulaic large-scale projects such as the Baltic Arts Centre, the Regional Music Centre, and an emphasis on exclusive city-centre loft apartments. Newcastle, however, remains beset by problems of visible decay, social polarization and deprivation from its industrial past.

The city centre has become something of a battleground between the old, industrial, and the newer, ‘chic’, face of a more diverse, post-industrial city. Newcastle City Council and other regeneration bodies appear keen to promote a class of urban professional/cultural workers as the catalyst for the growth of cultural and nightlife activity and the epitome of a ‘new’ Newcastle. Yet, even with several major housing, office and leisure developments in the pipeline which will swell the ranks of such classes, Newcastle is significantly behind cities such as Leeds and Manchester in terms of sheer numbers of the business-sector personnel, local entrepreneurs and clusters of cultural industries. The city’s nightlife is a patchwork of activity, with the traditional male drinking apprenticeship and rites of passage associated with ale houses and taverns from a receding era (Gofton, 1983) sitting cheek by jowl with new ‘style’ bars, alternative and indie bars, an emerging gay scene, and the city’s notorious party city image. However, more than many other large cities, the atmosphere in its bars, pubs and clubs is still heavily contoured by its social and economic past, and the continuing struggle of local Geordie drinking cultures to find a place amongst the sanitized, post-industrial world of globally branded, corporately controlled entertainment. Newcastle’s compact and continually effervescing nightlife is a backdrop for numerous conflicts and divisions between different lifestyle groups, but also between city-livers and city-revellers, and between a traditional strict mode of planning, policing and regulation, and moves towards a more liberal, European ‘café culture’. The question is what will be
gained and lost in the struggle to achieve the status of a cosmopolitan city? Below we look at Newcastle’s changing nightlife by considering in turn, ownership, governance and the experience of a night out.

Restructuring and corporate concentration in Newcastle’s nightlife

Production of the alcohol we drink, and ownership of the pubs and clubs we drink, dance and socialize in, have been subject to restructuring and concentration over the course of the 20th century. The watershed event was the 1989 Monopolies and Mergers Commission Report, which concluded that a complex monopoly existed in the brewing industry largely as a result of high levels of vertical integration in which brewers owned everything from production to the point of sale (Mason and McNally, 1997). The 1989 Report led to the Supply of Beer Orders Act, which aimed to break the monopoly ownership of the national brewers by restricting the ‘tied house’ system so that no brewer could own, lease or have any other interest in more than 2000 pubs, that at least one guest beer should be sold, and that loan tying should be abolished (Mason and McNally, 1997, p. 412).

Since then, there has been an acceleration of mergers, concentration and rationalization within the brewing and pub industry. Whereas in 1989 there were six big national brewers in the UK (Grand Metropolitan, Bass, Allied, Whitbread, Scottish & Newcastle and Courage), by 2000, Scottish Courage remains the only national-level brewer with annual beer sales in excess of £2 billion (Ritchie, 1999). Alongside the Belgian firm Interbrew (recent purchasers of Bass and Whitbread breweries, along with the Canadian company Labatts), Carlsberg-Tetley and Guinness, these four brewers control 81% of the beer sales in the UK. The more significant by-product of this restructuring has been the emergence of a new breed of highly profitable pub companies, or ‘pubcos’. While some of these were established by the brewers to avoid the restrictions of pub ownership set by the Beer Orders Act, the vast majority, backed largely by corporate financial houses, have sprung up recently to take advantage of forced divestment by the beer companies. Multiple outlet pub companies now own roughly 50% of pubs and bars in the UK, with a small number of giant operators emerging such as Nomura and Punch who own over 5000 outlets each (The Publican Newspaper, 2000). Overall, then, the Beer Orders legislation largely had the opposite effect of reducing the monopoly in the sector as pub ownership by a small number of large brewers has now been replaced by ownership by a small number of large corporate pub companies. In sum, the pub market is effectively controlled by one brewer-pub company (Scottish & Newcastle), a handful of pub companies (backed by financial institutions) and a couple of regional brewers.

The branding of multiple outlets has become a central part of the expansion strategies of many pubcos. Eight per cent of all pubs in the UK are now branded using one of 206 brands with the top five pub operators controlling 63% of branded pubs (The Publican Newspaper, 2000). All large operators are now organized around branded divisions rather than geographical areas. Brand wars have become a common feature of city centres at night as operators vie to win the wallets of consumers. Larger national chains have taken the branding concept a step further. Nightlife venues are increasingly disconnected from their brewing legacies with the signature of a pub no longer referring to the brewer or the type of beer associated with that brewer, but free-floating brands which aim at constructing a wider lifestyle rather than a narrow drinking experience. Freed from the chains of the mundane production of beer, companies now have the time and extra cash to develop brand images. Venues now attempt to draw on wider synergies associated with the experience,
beyond the mere sale of food and drink, offering instead the ability to buy into a particular cultural experience, dress code and social mores. Moreover, developing a portfolio of brands allows the company to develop a number of distinct identities, attract several audiences and operate at several venues in one location without competing with themselves. The attractiveness of branding as a strategy stems from its ability to offer a wider ‘lifestyle’ experience, to increase uniformity and hence reduce costs and overheads, to increase a feeling of consumer choice, safety, convenience and reliability.

Newcastle is caught between these general processes of change such as mergers, delocalization of ownership and branding, and processes of stasis from relatively well-established patterns of local demand, and the desire of established operators keen on protecting their markets. The city has developed a distinctive, hedonistic ‘party city’ reputation based upon its dense network of over 200 licensed premises and a capacity to hold nearly 100,000 drinkers in the city centre. Taking a longer-term view, processes of market consolidation have been occurring over the last 100 or so years. In 1850 there were over 50 individuals and partnerships brewing in Newcastle, many of which were microbreweries within pubs (Bennison, 1995). However, legislation in 1869 requiring a licence for all beer sales drastically reduced the number of pubs and independent brewers. Figure 1 shows that in 1950 there was still a relatively diffuse pattern of pub ownership in Newcastle, including small breweries and several individually run outlets. The 1970s saw a number of changes including a concentration of ownership and a reduction in the number of pubs. The 1969 Licensing Act imposed a tax on private-owned public houses which increased the financial burden on individually run businesses and strengthened the hand of the brewing companies who ran multiple-site operations. Moreover, an increase in the rise of social and working men’s clubs in the city, many of which built large concert halls, diverted leisure and recreation away from the traditional city-centre pub as did the development of nightclubs in the 1960s. Large demolition and rebuilding in the city meant that areas with large concentrations of public houses were demolished (Phillips, 1994). By 1975, Newcastle Breweries had reached its dominant position, being the first operator to own more than 20 pubs. The late 1970s also saw the rise of regional operators and the introduction of a number of distinctive bar concepts such as the wine bar and disco bar.

By 2000, ownership is dominated by two operators who own more than 20 outlets (Scottish & Newcastle and Bass). While Scottish & Newcastle still own numerous pubs in the city, it is now part of a large global public limited company (PLC). The brewery Scottish Courage has its base in Northampton and its retail wing is based in Edinburgh, with Newcastle little more than a back office. Over the 1990s, due to a restrictive licensing regime and the large stock of existing pubs, new growth of pubs and bars was moderate compared to neighbouring cities such as Leeds where between 1994 and 2001, for example, licensed premises increased by 53% and special hours certificates (post-11 pm) increased by 155%. Only in the last few years has the granting of new licences been more relaxed, enabling a wave of newer national players to enter the city-centre nightlife market, bringing new nationally recognized nightlife brands to the city.

A further noticeable feature of Newcastle compared to other cities is the significant levels of established, self-made, or regional-based operators, many of which are expanding in the city centre and other parts of the region such as Sunderland, Whitley Bay and Middlesbrough; while others have their sights set on neighbouring metropolitan areas. Many of these are based around local entrepreneurs and family businesses who have built up relatively large estates of pubs and night clubs, such as Lazi Leisure, 42nd Street Bars, Fitzgeralds, Absolute Leisure and Ultimate Leisure. Most have built up a portfolio of venues which appeal to a
Figure 1 Change in ownership of Newcastle’s nightlife, 1950–2000.
traditional night out based around vertical drinking, happy hour deals and loud chart music. These operators have made it very difficult for new, smaller operators to enter the market, and hence independent, single-site operators account for only 4% of the total, compared to 18% of bars in Leeds and 14% in Bristol.

Looking at the distribution of nightlife venues according to ownership in Figure 2, we can see that the general trend is that the core of the city centre is dominated by national and established local operators with independent operators existing in the fringe areas.

In spite of efforts to embed themselves in the local culture, many people felt that established regional operators continue to reduce possibilities for a diverse nightlife and opportunities for small scale, independent operators and venues. One independent operator commented:

![Figure 2 Ownership of venues in Newcastle city centre, 2000.](image)
‘They’re aiming for a specific target audience and that is those people who drink regularly. Your traditional Geordie male with his big belly, his shirt and his trousers.’

The development of Newcastle’s nightlife, then, is largely led by established family-run regional operators and larger national operators such as Bass and Scottish & Newcastle, and a slow but increasing role for national pubcos, who in the majority are pursuing branded strategies for their venues. This ownership pattern is doing little to balance the nightlife mono-culture, as one female consumer told us:

‘I don’t really like the pub chains that have appeared . . . and the sort of chain ones that are the thing everywhere. Everyone in there looked so miserable and there is no sort of atmosphere there at all, so I wouldn’t go back there. I used to find the [themed] Irish pubs a bit like that as well, sort of forced atmosphere, you know.’

Another person was clear about what they saw as the emerging standardization of the city’s nightlife: ‘You know these super clubs: you just go. Like I say, it’s just like going into McDonalds. You’re like a sheep. You go in for a product, get it, and leave’.

While change is occurring, it is happening at a slower pace compared to other cities. In particular, Newcastle’s consumers have shown a resilience to embrace national branded nightlife. Only 18% of city-centre pubs and bars are branded in Newcastle and this compares with a figure of 31% for Leeds and 26% for Bristol. This resilience is due to the historic market strength of self-made local businessmen who have developed a strong local nightlife ‘brand’ based around the ‘party toon’ image. The focus for this brand is the Bigg Market, where ‘knees up mother brown fun pubs’ offer standing-room only and designer bottled drinks to the rhythms of thundering commercial chart music behind a smoke screen of dry ice. This formula has
proved successful in terms of making large profits without the need for significant investment, especially by attracting stag and hen parties. The Bigg Market brand reflects the expectations of many revellers, especially the desire for fun and escapism amongst many young Geordies in the face of economic hardship. The spread of venue styles in Newcastle, then, is somewhat dissimilar to other cities. As Figure 3 shows, traditional pubs comprise the largest group of pubs at about one-third of venues, while alternative and residual pubs (i.e. market taverns, ale houses) are in stasis or decline. However, the distinctive elements of the city’s nightlife are the larger number of disco-bars (25% of all venues), and the under-representation of café and style bars, especially compared to Leeds and Bristol.

Large national operators remain nervous about introducing nationally recognized brands into Newcastle. Newcastle, for the moment, is at odds with the business reality of large PLCs who have commitments to maximizing returns for shareholders through branding. As a representative from a large national pub chain told us:

‘As far as the City of London [Stock Market] is concerned, half a dozen pubs in Newcastle mean nothing to the City . . . I mean the City loves brands, they love things that you can roll out and you can have 20, 30, 40 of.’

Nevertheless, large operators are pressured to succumb to the broader strategies of the parent company and roll out brands across the country with little recourse to local cultural practices. Rolling out national brands will erode some of the distinctive elements of the city’s nightlife. As one operator commented:

‘If Newcastle went down the heavily branded route I do not think we would have had the same atmosphere as it does, because it would be very much the same as Leeds and Birmingham and Manchester.’

However, for a number of reasons, there is evidence of a shift in philosophy away from this model. First, there is a recognition that consumers in their 30s will increasingly feel disenfranchised by the boisterous party-city brand and many operators are experimenting with new concepts based around more seating, food and quieter atmospheres. Second, due to the higher standard set by many corporate operators, there are increasing expectations of a ‘night out’ from young people in terms of design, customer service, toilets, sound and lighting quality. Third, vertical drinking bars in the Bigg Market are only profitable at certain times when the drinking circuit is in full swing during the evening and at weekends. In contrast, more mixed-use venues can be profitable over a greater time period by attracting a variety of different audiences. Branded superpubs are making their way into Newcastle. A recent £4 million development by JD Wetherspoon and a £1.2 million redevelopment by Yates’s Wine Lodge mark the beginning of national corporate and branded premises in the city.

Opportunities for independent creative venues are restricted. Independent operators play a distinctive role in the night-time economy which sets them apart from larger, more corporate, operators: unlike large PLCs who are ultimately answerable to a board of directors, shareholders and the stockmarket, sole-trading independent operators are in general more accountable to themselves and their customers; they are platforms for closer links between consumers and producers and generally provide greater opportunities for nightlife entrepreneurs such as DJs, musicians and other performing artists, and often underpin a number of spin-off industries in fashion, music and art. These operators encourage the local/regional circulation of capital due to the local roots/commitment of owners and through the use of local labour, suppliers and local brands of beer; and they have a greater ability and desire to provide experimental and less profit-motivated nightlife and promote and spread opportunities for often marginal youth cultural styles in
cities. Yet, the Newcastle city-region historically has lacked small-scale cultural entrepreneurs, an issue which is confounded by a lack of access to start-up capital. Moreover, the historic tight licensing regulations in Newcastle have inhibited entrepreneurs from developing proposals for new nightlife business ventures. Many entrepreneurs have turned south to Leeds and Manchester or northwards to Scotland where the 24-hour city idea has been embraced and it is easier to get a provisional liquor licence and Public Entertainment Licence in order to secure start-up funding. Further, many potential entrepreneurs commented that they faced unfair competition from large corporate operators who have recently been able to secure licences and development approval in the city centre, as these operators are regarded as more worthy investments for the city’s night-time economy. The local authority needs to recognise that numerous, smaller investments in the city’s nightlife can often have a greater effect on diversity, vibrancy and safety for the city’s night-time economy than one or two large-scale property-led corporate developments. Underlying this block on nightlife creativity is the dominance of larger operators who have little interest or knowledge of local music and cultural styles and are more driven by profit than local cultural creativity.

Caught between the dominance of established ‘party toon’ operators and encroaching national branded operators, one independent operator commented on what they felt they were up against:

‘With corporate enterprise taking over more and more, you have the Wetherspoons chain, you have Ultimate Leisure – they have a game plan that they will follow which is [the] domination of city-centre sites . . . but I think the long-term view is that corporate rape and pillage will continue. You know they’re all gobbling each other up because they’ve got to grow.’

Independent operators we spoke to felt threatened by current developments, while others have gone out of business by the recent spate of openings of large corporate venues which undercut them on price, especially through bulk discounts negotiated between larger operators and brewers.

Clearly, the lack of small-scale, independent venues has implications for creativity. The following quote from one of the city’s most well-known independents summed up what he was trying to do:

‘We are one of the few places in the city centre that’s offering anything . . . that isn’t Bar Oz. And we’re not driven by fads. We’ve got our own rules. And it feels, at times, like running a different country. It feels like you’re running an independent nation on the weekend. And everyone’s having a good time and its great. And that’s the buzz of it for us. I like what I do and I wouldn’t sell it for all the money in the world really. I’m far more interested that my children will grow up seeing me doing something that mattered than I am to take a big dollar off someone. Lifestyle over profit every time.’

However, Newcastle’s nightlife continues to become a competitive arena with only the strongest, or wealthiest, able to survive. It is far from being a level playing field and left to the market, many cultures, styles and tastes will cease to be represented in the city centre.

**Governing the night in the new urban entertainment economy**

Views on governing night-time activity vary widely. While for the local state the night-time economy has become a useful mechanism for urban regeneration, there is also continuing concern that the increase in both numbers of places and late licences has led to more public disorder in town centres. Fred Braugthon, chair of the Police Federation, commented recently that there was a ‘sense of disorder and anarchy’ in many UK city centres because of this change.
has become commonplace in the media, leading to discussions about shutting down ‘thug pubs’ and curtailing drink-fuelled violence and vandalism. There are a wide range of issues at stake behind these rather simple portraits of nightlife activity. To understand fully the governance of nightlife, it is necessary to appreciate a number of different dimensions—legal such as a whole range of laws and legislation laid down to regulate nightlife activity; technical such as the use of CCTV and radio-nets to monitor behaviour; economic, including pricing policies of drinks and door entry; and social and cultural regulations which include more informal aspects such as musical taste, youth cultural styles and dress codes, the latter being explicitly enforced by door staff.

There are also many different ‘players’ involved in the governance of nightlife. Licensing magistrates, fire departments, local authorities and police play an established ‘law and order’ role in advising, implementing and laying down legislation. Increasingly, resident groups have a strong role to play in regulation, mainly when conflicts arise between city livers and city revellers. Local authorities are also involved in governing the night, increasingly influenced by and aligned with capital investors and an array of public-private partnerships. The role of venue operators in nightlife activity is often curiously overlooked, yet they play an important role in shaping nightlife activity through drinking levels, door policies, style and design of venue and promotions, although they are rarely made responsible for their role in causing disorder and drunkenness. Strangely enough, the views of consumers themselves are often omitted, or only weakly considered, in discourses on nightlife. The balance of power between these different interest groups varies across time and place resulting in varied interpretations and approaches to nightlife development. What is evident is that nightlife activity is currently in the midst of a significant transition. In particular, the role of the local state has largely shifted from managing the city to encouraging and supporting primarily large-scale entrepreneurialism. At the same time, city councils also have to ‘pick up the pieces’ of some of the negative consequences caused by the development of nightlife activity such as litter, noise and violence, and have to balance the needs of local residents with those of developers and entrepreneurs.

For a number of centuries the power to regulate the night-time economy through liquor licensing has rested with licensing magistrates with input from police and fire representatives and some local authority influence in terms of issues of planning and their power to grant Public Entertainment Licences. Since the 1990s, there have been some notable changes and in particular a growing awareness that licensing committees should not be able to refuse liquor licences on the ground that there is no need or no demand for any more in a particular area (Justice Clerks Society, 1999). In many ways, then, licensing regulations have become divorced from their historic legacy in which the sale of alcohol was seen as such a potential danger to public peace that it should only be sold by fit and proper persons in specifically licensed premises. While this historic notion does remain to an extent, increasingly, licensing issues revolve more around balancing urban regeneration with potential disorder and disruption to residents. While few fundamental changes have been made to the basic legal approach that has stood for almost two centuries, this seems set to change in the near future, with a recent government White Paper (Home Office, 2000) proposing a complete overhaul of the current system which includes a single integrated scheme for licensing premises, a new system of personal licences, flexible opening hours, tough new powers for police, and a transfer of power to local authorities.

The fact that the night-time economy has been perhaps the slowest sector to respond to a loosening of regulation stems from its perceived peripheral status to the daytime economy and a historical suspicion of the night as a site of excess, vice and crime.
Historically, the night-time drinking economy was characterized by monopoly ownership of beer production and distribution aimed at mass consumption by a relatively homogenous clientele whose activities were carefully regulated through the curtailment of opening hours to ensure that workers’ leisure did not interfere with their productivity (Harrison, 1971). Part of the shift in approach towards the night-time economy in the 1990s has been motivated by the emergence of a ‘new entertainment economy’ (Hannigan, 1998) which entailed forging new sets of relations between the state, capital and consumers. In particular, many UK cities began to reinvent themselves as places of consumption dependent on the development of a diverse and vibrant ‘after dark’ economy, and this involved grappling with outdated laws and curtailments. For example, the idea of the ‘24-hour city’ was designed to break away from the industrial city with its emphasis on manufacturing production and its strict temporal and spatial ordering. Yet such changes have not been so straightforward. Ownership of the night-time economy still rests in the hands of large retail pub operators, and many provincial cities have found they have neither the infrastructure nor the clientele to fuel a 24-hour cultural economy.

Newcastle is a case in point here. When the city does find its way into the national press, it is often to highlight negative aspects associated with its crass and boisterous Geordie drinking culture. Until relatively recently the regulation of the city’s nightlife was under-girded by a need to control the habits of the local population through heavy policing and a dominance of existing operators which reduced options for new entrants and discouraged innovation and change. Over the last 20 years, licensing magistrates and police have kept a very tight control over the development of the city’s nightlife due to the perception that Newcastle is rife with problems such as violence, drugs and underage drinking. As one long-standing bar owner recounted to us:

‘Newcastle has always been difficult for some reason, [it is a] Cathedral City, run by geriatric magistrates, [with] tight control, [and] not very forward-thinking in any aspect of the deliberations.’

Newcastle’s reputation for paternalism is also evident within its police hierarchy. Previous chief inspectors in the city centre have shown a reputation for extreme caution towards licensing liberalization and for several years drinking was carefully controlled in the city by confining it largely to the Bigg Market area. As one police spokesperson commented to us:

‘The North East and Newcastle [and] the other big towns and cities as well have a culture of young people drinking, and drinking fairly heavily … that combination are going to give you certain policing problems … so the number of licensed premises, whilst it has edged up, is fairly static at the moment, and I am confident that it should remain that way.’

In particular, the police in Newcastle are keen on slowing down the granting of more licences, especially to so-called ‘vertical drinking bar-discos’, which are identified by them as the source of most problems due to cheap beer promotions, overcrowding, poor light and lack of female toilets. However, police and magistrates are largely perceived to be out of touch with current trends and they appear to be relatively uninformed about the wide range of social groups, styles, identities and divisions that grace the night-time economy. In the context of a major regional capital with European cultural pretensions, this is an issue of considerable concern. As one independent pub owner commented about a member of the police licensing team: ‘He doesn’t know the difference between Techno and Salsa and he’s running [the licensing of] a major European city!’

Door staff, or bouncers, play a crucial role in the city’s night-time economy alongside the police. Bouncers are part of what
Newburn (2001) has called ‘new security networks’ which involve hybrid, and generally privatized, policing networks in cities. There are approximately 600 door supervisors working in Newcastle city centre, mainly provided by individuals or relatively informal ‘teams’ headed and organized by a single door supervisor. Door security personnel are registered through a door registration scheme administered by Newcastle City Centre which emerged in the 1990s due to a number of perceived problems concerning the vetting of existing door staff, with some employing known criminals, and numerous examples of over-reaction and use of excessive force by door staff. Newcastle continues to have a strong arm reputation amongst its bouncers and is seen as behind national trends when it comes to door policies (Richards, 1998; Winlow, 2001). As one operator tries to explain:

‘We seem to be a little bit more closeted, we live in our own little world here. And you know that you will probably find that the door staff that they have got working on the doors have been working on the doors for 10, 15, or 20 years’.

Many clubs still adhere to a ‘no jeans, no trainers’ policy despite the fact that it has been widely recognized that trainers are a more appropriate footwear for dancing and also, from a policing point of view, cause less damage in a fight than heavy shoes.

In a case study conducted in 1997, Morris (1998, p. 11) concluded that while the link between door security and drug dealing was less organized and on a smaller scale in Newcastle than it was in Merseyside, some criminal groups forced ‘... existing door supervisors, through intimidation and extreme violence, to “pay” them a “tax” for running a door, whilst also requiring them to allow “approved” drug dealers to operate in the premises under their supervision’. A police spokesperson at the time was quoted as saying that he felt this applied to around 10% of doorstaff in the city. A small number of door supervisors with criminal and violent tendencies appear to be able to continue to work in Newcastle despite the effect of the door registration scheme (Morris, 1998, p. 10).

On a more positive note, door staff continually have to respond to changes in the world around them, especially in relation to the introduction of new venue concepts and wider shifts in music and youth cultural styles. In particular, as young people express a more eclectic ‘mix and match’ approach to style and appearance, it is much more difficult for door staff to make simple judgements about clientele based on just their initial appearance. In this sense, the role of door staff may be changing somewhat. This is not to say that many mainstream venues do not operate subtle forms of discrimination at the door based on age, appearance, social class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, nor has violence and criminality been eradicated from the bouncer community. Yet there are some positive examples of a closer relationship between door staff and consumers which go beyond the traditional more violent image of bouncers. Style pickers working in conjunction with bouncers are a case in point here. However, the latest evidence from Newcastle suggests that there is still some way to go in creating a less aggressive door culture as seen in other large UK cities intent on promoting nightlife.

Newcastle City Council has come to play a more proactive role in the development of the night-time economy. However, this has largely been in conjunction with a continuing interest in urban regeneration led by large-scale development and the attraction of major inward investors. One local authority employee outlined their philosophy: ‘The role of the local authority is to create the conditions in which developers can invest so as to stack up fairly major sites ... inevitably PLCs are going to be the ones who come forward’. Such an approach, led by the needs of larger publicly quoted companies, inevitably directs urban regeneration in a particular manner. In particular, the growth
of multi-site outlets in fast food (McDonalds, KFC, Burger King), coffee shops (Starbucks, Coffee Republic, Costa), restaurant chains (La Tasca, Est, Est, Est) and pub companies (JD Wetherspoon, Yates) reinforces the general trend towards a non-local corporate presence in city-centre entertainment infrastructures (Klein, 2000).

The sticking point is that it is not seen as the remit of local authorities to pass judgement on the activities of local businesses or to inhibit or encourage certain types of activity, unless they breach planning regulations. Increasingly, local authorities do not have much scope for manoeuvre due to their own declining financial position in relation to central government funding, restrictions on raising local revenue (rate-capping), and various protocols regarding planning applications which ensure they get value for money whenever development opportunities involve the sale of council land. As one pub owner told us:

‘The local authorities are skint. Every local authority is skint. You know through the rate-capping years and all that stuff, and they just see that leisure-driven development is the easy way out for them because they go to Wetherspoons, they’re not going to go bust, the big PLCs.’

Newcastle City Council, then, understandably is interested in ‘courting’ big national corporate operators, in getting the best deal on local authority land-sites, and is happy that big operators are coming in to fill up what were once derelict and empty buildings.

An associated problem here is that many regulatory problems in city centres (violence, drunkenness, promiscuity, etc.) often actually stem from the premises themselves. Over-crowding, queues, poor layout and lack of seating, excessive noise, discount drinks/ happy hours, lack of availability of food, and poorly skilled door staff may all contribute to the build-up of problems inside and outside premises. Ironically, the large companies that the Council often sees as ‘respectable’, both financially and in terms of regulating their premises, are sometimes the very premises in which drunkenness, violence and promiscuity are the most rife. This is not to suggest that the City Council is somehow entirely powerless to influence the nature of development. Many council development officers are aware of the problems and limitations of a ‘narrow’ large-scale, overly corporate approach to developing the nighttime and cultural economy. Moreover, local planning policies and Government Planning Guidance are critical in deciding the type of use. Local authorities are also responsible for granting Public Entertainment Licences and setting their conditions which are necessary in order to be granted a late licence by the magistrates. The role of local authorities is also set to increase through proposals in the government White Paper on licensing reform, when and if it happens, which will shift statutory control for the granting of liquor licensing to them.

In mediating between various interest groups, the local authority, magistrates and police should keep in mind differences between types of nightlife venues (such as mainstream/niche, independent/corporate), as well as consider the issue of ‘zoning’ licensed premises and licensing hours (i.e. have most late-licensed premises in primarily non-resident areas). Local authorities, then, clearly have an important role to play in helping to determine the ‘type’ rather than simply the ‘amount’ of nightlife activity. At the same time, within the existing regulatory framework, there are very few examples of regulators consulting the views of consumers of nightlife.

Clearly, the local authority has begun to embrace the idea of the 24-, or 18-hour economy, and is becoming more vocal about the potential benefits of having diverse patterns of late-night activity spreading into the night, yet they have a long way to go before the rhetoric of diversity is matched in reality. For example, there is the whole issue of providing a viable infrastructure for nightlife
to develop. This means going beyond ‘image-building’ and ‘talking up’ the night-time economy and actually providing services, such as late-night transport, to help it sustain itself. Not enough is being said about what type of nightlife premises are needed or what forms of intervention, like helping up-and-coming independent operators, might work best for both economic development, local culture and all those who live and play in the city. In particular, there needs to be careful consideration of the balance between national corporate operators, growing regional operators and independent licensed premises.

A further issue concerns the growing number of both housing units and nightlife spaces in the small and compact centre of Newcastle. In general, city lives (just over 4,000 of them) in Newcastle are young, have professional jobs, live alone and are mobile. The view of city lives towards the growth of nightlife is ambivalent: while over 40% of residents cited noise from rowdy behaviour in the street as a key problem, over 50% supported longer licensing hours (Policy and Research Services, 2000). Clearly, the city-centre population is comprised of different groups, including younger people more inclined to use the city’s nightlife, and those wanting to live in the centre but not be exposed to some of the negative aspects of city living. The paradox is that the continued growth of wealthy service-class professionals in the city-centre population is likely to stimulate even more demand for ‘upmarket’ restaurants and licensed premises. Ironically, although this social class will be users of city-centre nightlife they are also often the most articulate and vocal in asserting their objections to the negative aspects of nightlife such as noise, disorder and vandalism to their properties. Hence, several battles are being fought between angry residents and nightlife entrepreneurs eager to open new outlets with the local authority trying to mediate between the two.

Beyond the complaints of residents and other objectors, one source of opinion which may actually provide some possible solutions is often overlooked—that of the consumer. The Better Regulation Task Force document, *Principles of Good Regulation* (1998), suggests that one of the principles of good practice is that those being regulated must be left some freedom to decide how to achieve regulatory goals. How this is to be achieved is unclear, and there are few examples of regulators consulting consumers of the night-time economy as to what their views are on solving problems let alone defining them. Consumers were not simply calling for a relaxation of licensing hours, but were also cognisant of the fact that what Newcastle required was a greater diversity of late-night places. Considering the city has sold itself so hard on its party image, many people involved in promoting Newcastle felt embarrassment and unease at the city’s lack of late-night activity compared to neighbouring cities. Many consumers felt patronized by the paternalistic attitude of the police and the council:

‘It’s so backward, Newcastle . . . It’s like, I don’t know what the council think, we can’t risk it, but that is on the assumption that everyone is going to get that pissed they’re going to start trouble. It’s a bit insulting really like.’

**Experiencing Newcastle’s nightlife: tradition, gentrification and segmentation**

This final section looks at the changing experiences of a night out in Newcastle’s nightlife. It is first worth noting a number of broader changes which continue to affect the lives and experiences of young people. First ‘youth’ increasingly refers to a period which extends beyond being an adolescent or teenager to a ‘post-adolescent’ or ‘pre-family’ stage. This suspension of adult roles has meant that increasing numbers of young adults are remaining at home into their 20s and even early 30s, which means that despite having poorer job prospects, they generally
have more disposable income for consumer spending. Second, over the last few decades there has been evidence of a changing relationship in the balance between work and play amongst some groups of young people, in particular a reaction against the constraints of the work ethic (Wilkinson, 1995; Hollands, 1998; Kane, 2000). Third, the ageing of the UK population has become a well-established phenomenon in which young people will constitute a smaller proportion of the total population than in the past. As a result, many leisure and entertainment operators now see their financial future not so much with teenagers, but with ‘post-adolescents’, family and even ‘post-family’ leisure associated with empty-nesters and baby boomers.

Nevertheless, nightlife activity is a significant part of most young people’s lives in Britain. Visiting pubs and clubs is a core element of young people’s lifestyles. Eighty per cent visited pubs and clubs in 1999, an increase of 12% over the last five years (Mintel, 2000, p.15). The 15–24-year-old group is 10 times more likely to be a frequent visitor to a club, with 52% going once a month or more (Mintel, 1998, p. 22). The over-25 ‘rave generation’, continues to visit clubs and as a result ‘clubbing will remain as popular as it is now, and more sophisticated night clubs will cater for die-hard party animals in their thirties’ (Mintel, 2000, p. 45). Key to understanding such figures are the ways in which the experience of going out to night-clubs, bars and pubs has changed drastically over the last decade largely through the advent of dance music, the phenomenon of ‘clubbing’ and drug cultures of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Collins, 1997; Malbon, 1999), which by 2000 has matured into a global, multi-million pound economic sector. The experience of going to the pub has also been transformed as the traditional experience, based around dingy, male-dominated ale houses, has been eroded by the emergence of bar and café-bar culture which offers increased levels of customer service, mixed uses, blending food with music, and drinking a greater diversity of alcohol products in environments which involve high levels of design (Everitt and Bowler, 1996). Some pubs and bars have matured into pre-club venues—hybrid half-club, half-pubs—which may have eroded the popularity of more traditional night-clubs as a consumption destination.

The consumption of drugs, both legal (alcohol) and illegal (cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines) increasingly shapes the experience of a night out. In terms of young people’s drinking habits, in the 1930s, 18–24-year-olds were the lightest drinkers in the population. By the 1980s this situation had reversed (Institute of Alcohol Studies, 1999). While alcohol consumption overall is not significantly higher in the UK than in many other EU countries, the crucial difference is that young people go out more to get drunk, especially through binge drinking. Moreover, the social role of drinking alcohol has changed. In the days of ale houses, drinking was associated with masculinity and the rituals and relationships of the workplace, a rite of passage into adulthood where the young ‘learnt to drink’ through controlled ‘session drinking’ led by an experienced drinker who knew their limit (Gofton, 1983). Alcohol consumption has also become more women-friendly and geared towards branded designer drinks, especially through the growth in popularity of wine, spirits, bottled beers and alco-pops (Pattison, 2000), and hence has shifted from a largely male ritual to a broader lifestyle phenomena associated with fun, hedonism and courtship. Moreover, drinking in city centres has become more and more the preserve of the young, who in contrast to their more mature predecessors, sometimes have problems handling their drink (Coffield and Gofton, 1994). Alcohol consumption and pub attendance has also been influenced by the growth of dance and drug culture. While pub attendance for all age groups actually fell by 20% between 1987 and 1997, illegal drug taking has doubled to nearly 30% (Home Office, 1998).
These general trends act as a backdrop for young people’s experience of a night out. However, each locality has its own particular rhythms and rituals, and Newcastle is no exception. Much of Newcastle’s distinctiveness stems from the lower average incomes, levels of savings and average spending in the north-east region. In spite of these financial limitations, local young adults claimed to ‘invest’ about one-third of their total income on ‘nights out on the town’ (Hollands, 1995).

The city’s nightlife is strongly shaped by its lingering connections with its industrial past which spill over into nightlife. As one bar owner told us:

‘That is what a lot of people want in Newcastle, a bit of fun. If you are waiting for things to get better, if your mam said to you “You better not go out tonight, wait until things get better” you would be 35 now. You have watched the demise of the shipyards from the biggest ship-building town in [the] world to nothing. In Sunderland and Newcastle, you have watched the demise of the coalmines, you have watched the demise of heavy engineering. When are things going to get better? Answer is: this is about as good as it gets, so consequently people understand that you might as well go out now. That is why you see so many people walking around without a coat on, there is a toss up between 250 quid for a coat, or going out for the next few months. I would go out.’

(Bigg Market Bar owner)

A night out in Newcastle, then, is framed by escapism, local pride and a sense of place. People usually had something positive to say about the city, its culture and nightlife and its people. Indeed, ‘Geordies’ have gained a national reputation for their friendliness and hospitality. As one person told us ‘People are friendly and it has just got that reputation that it carries throughout England. Wherever you go people just seem to love Newcastle people’. Crucially, the distinctiveness of Geordie culture revolved around their nightlife activities: ‘In Newcastle people are passionate about going out. There’s no stopping people in Newcastle, and I think it’s a good atmosphere. You don’t have that elsewhere’. The city’s nightlife was seen to have a number of positive features over other UK cities such as its small-town friendly feel, a ‘slower pace of life’, as well as cheaper prices.

A night out in Newcastle’s clubs, bars and pubs is made distinctive by its boisterous and sexually permissive reputation, the larger proportion of older revellers, entrenched gender roles, stronger regional and working-class cultures, a less diverse consumer base and a smaller professional and business community, a strong element of excessive and circuit drinking, and a dominance of mainstream, chart-based clubs and ‘vertical drinking’ bars (Hollands, 1995). These characteristics emanate from the infamous Bigg Market area, areas which have a long history for debauchery, drinking, boisterousness and violence dating back to the 17th century through numerous hostleries, taverns and gambling dens which peppered the area (Armstrong, 1990). In the late 1970s the area began its transformation into an upmarket drinking location, led by the activities of a local entrepreneur Joe Robertson, who bought a number of pubs in that area of the city. The Bigg Market is now a well-established phenomena, occupying a sacred place amongst the social lives of young Geordies and the weekly rounds of ‘stag’ parties and ‘hen nights’ which pass through the city.

The Bigg Market gains its distinctive ‘atmosphere’ from the large ‘vertical drinking’ fun pubs and ‘disco bars’ and the intimate and dense networks of these pubs stretching across a tightly bound network of cobbled streets, which creates a stage between these pubs for roving groups of drunken revellers. Circuit drinking with patterns of movement heavily structured during certain times and places is a distinctive feature of nightlife here (Hollands, 1995). The special atmosphere of the Bigg Market is derived as much from what happens on the
streets, perambulating between bars, as in the bars themselves. Traditional reasons for going out remain strong such as sexual permissiveness, relationship-seeking, casual sex and flirtation. Clearly, these motives are not confined to the Bigg Market, but here they become more overt, engaging both sexes as the following quote from one young woman highlights: ‘One time we had a competition to see how many men we could pull in one night, and we were all fierce to get out there. Honestly, we were like man-eaters’. Behind such permissiveness, socializing is still partly motivated by a desire to meet a partner.

Within this boisterous and sexually charged atmosphere, going out in the Bigg Market is highly regulated around certain dress codes and social mores. Although many people feel a great attachment to the area, there is also a feeling of discomfort at its lack of ability to move with the times. There is unresolved tension in terms of the role the Bigg Market will continue to play in the city’s nightlife. For many of its revellers, its is regarded as friendly, boisterous and carnivalesque, while perceptions of fear and intimidation continue to linger, especially amongst groups unfamiliar with the area or those who do not look the same.

The area is beginning to transform, mainly in response to competition from new upmarket, mixed-use café-bar venues on the city’s Quayside. Many venues in the Bigg Market are likely to follow suit, replicating a more café-bar style. Such changes represent a diversification and sophistication of consumer taste in the city. More worryingly, they also signal the end of distinctive nightlife practices which are deeply embedded in the social structure and culture of the region. The upgrading and stylization of the Bigg Market represents a decline of local culture from the city centre and the growing influence of national branded venues.

This upgrading of the city’s nightlife has not come without its problems. Many state the increases in the price of alcohol which are pricing out many users; while others saw beyond these changes and pointed to a lack of substance and a growing standardization. As one person commented about a recently opened style bar: ‘People want to belong to that elite crowd, but what people do not realise is that it is actually McDonald’s with a marble bar’. The move towards a more ‘elite’ form of nightlife signifies the beginning of a new consumption experience in the city centre. Yet, future growth of style venues implies rising prices, more stringent dress codes and a more divisive atmosphere in the city centre. They are also likely to be dictated by branded outlets of national corporate operators, as the entry barriers to small-scale independent operators remain significant.

Newcastle is not only losing its stock of cheap, local pubs in the city centre, but may also lose its distinctiveness as a consumption destination at the hands of national bar brands.

While the brash ‘party city’ image has its own set of limitations, attempts to develop a more cosmopolitan image for the city raise a number of fresh issues. While the ‘party city’ may belong to a bygone era of highly class- and gender-bound patterns of activity, those of a more ‘arty city’ point to an increasingly polarized, sanitized and exclusive nightlife provision. Consider the following comment by an individual involved in city-centre management (also see Reeve, 1996, for a general discussion of upgrading city centres):

‘I think the slight emphasis . . . is trying to move away from the loutish party image to a more upmarket [one], but also looking to the future, the medium to longer term, [it will be] more beneficial to have, what shall we say, a better class of clientele, but probably a more mature clientèle who are perhaps not so irresponsible as some of the younger ones.’

The question is what role do existing local nightlife practices have in the continued redevelopment of the city centre as a premium art and cultural destination? In many ways the council is caught between the devil
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( ...) (the monocultural party city image created largely by the regional operators) and the deep blue sea (the infiltration of the national corporate brands which will make Newcastle more and more like everywhere else).

For the foreseeable future it is likely that this distinctive nightlife culture will be retained, mainly because it is still widely held that there is a lack of ‘class’, or ironically, due to entrenched social and economic structures, the persistence of a certain ‘class’ in the city’s nightlife. As one person mused:

‘Newcastle doesn’t have that kind of class, that kind of class is mainly in Leeds or Manchester, Glasgow, London — you know, that kind of thing. Newcastle doesn’t have that because Newcastle is generally, I mean I would hate to say it, but it’s full of, yes the art scene is growing, and getting bigger and everything else, but the fact is we still like, up North, and hey it’s grim up North isn’t it, and it’s still full of the working-class thing, the people, my friends call them workies, people who work nine to five, five days a week, you know what I mean, and they just want to go out and just forget about everything. The thing is, people in Newcastle, they’re passionate about going out, so it takes away everything else that they have to put up with.’

In spite of its cosmopolitan pretensions, then, Newcastle lacks a critical mass of younger, ‘classier, wine bar type’ consumers. More disturbingly, behind the friendly boisterous ‘party city’ image, many people took a more critical perspective, especially in terms of intolerance towards differences along lines of sexual preference, gender and ethnicity which are still strongly evident during a night out. In sum, many of the same aspects that give Newcastle’s nightlife its unique identity also produce a number of barriers and limitations. What is being neglected is a third route and the development of a more independent, locally owned mixed-use nightlife infrastructure.

Behind the media spotlight of the party city and the buzz of the new style bars there are a number of other arenas for nightlife consumption which cater for particular identity or subcultural groups such as the gay community, ethnic minority groups, alternative student sub-cultures or those groupings based upon particular musical styles such as techno, hip hop, rock, goth and post-punk (Bennett, 2000). Because of the lack of financial strength of the consumers or for reasons of self-preservation, such places are typically found on the fringe of city centres. Here attendance is based more upon a desire to attend rather than chance, or as part of circuit drinking, and as a result, such venues are generally less dependent on door staff. In contrast to mainstream or style venues, consumption on the fringe is driven by factors such as musical appreciation, a desire to meet and chat with like-minded people, often mixing pleasure with business, and is often characterized by environments which blend a variety of uses such as live music and performing arts with drinking and eating. In many cases, activities are less dictated by beer sales or profit margins.

However, over the last decade, such alternative venues have been squeezed further out of city centres or have closed altogether due to increasing property costs, the changing priorities of pub operators and brewers, especially through branding, and age-old moral panics concerning the deviancy of alternative activities. At the same time, fringe or radical youth activity and spaces are commodified and brought into the mainstream and certain groups such as skaters, Goths and punks continue to be singled out and villainized for hanging out in the city centre. Younger people in Newcastle have fewer and fewer reasons to be in cities if they are not ‘consumers’ (Brunswick Young People’s Project, 2001). Many parts of the city centre, at night in particular, become an alcohol-fuelled consumption ghetto with few public places for interaction between people of different generations. Mixed-use, age-flexible places need to be created in which young people are exposed to a wider range of experiences and resources.
Moreover, in the light of the growth of national branded pubs and style bars, working-class, local, community pubs form a residual and endangered element of city-centre nightlife, many of which are wedded to an era of ritualized, session drinkers in the industrial city. In many ways, these aspects remain stronger in Newcastle due to the lingering connections between the local nature of leisure providers and local, working-class cultures. The city centre is peppered with such pubs, many of which are teeming with activity during the day and providing high sales volumes of beer for their owners with few overheads. A common perception of such pubs is that they are populated with market traders, petty criminals, shoplifters and hardened drinkers, and as a result are often viewed with distaste. However, the loss of such places would sever the links between city centres and traditional community-based pubs, and would represent a replacement of the ‘local’ pub with the experience of the busy post-industrial branded or style bar. Moreover, it would force out those consumption groups who do not want to or cannot afford to engage with the new glitzy world of Newcastle’s style bars and café society.

There is some evidence that local identity is changing, fragmenting and diversifying, then, and in particular that there is a move away from a traditional singular identity based around a mono-culture of masculinity, manual work and class, and that local identities are being transformed by the globalization of youth cultural forms and commodities. However, the dominant youth mono-culture in Newcastle still remains strong in the city and there is not a simple ushering in of an eclectic ‘pick and mix’ consumer culture. What is increasingly evident is a social and spatial segregation of nightlife spaces. One bar owner mapped such segregation out for us:

‘The cream of the social elite drink at Osborne Road at the moment, middle ground popular, as it were, drink on the Quayside; and your kids and your arseholes, for want of a better expression, drink in the Bigg Market.’

One of the major social identities mentioned in Newcastle’s nightlife was through reference to the ‘charvers’. This local term, while specific to the region, has other city counterparts like ‘scallies’, ‘trevs’ and ‘schemes’. While it can refer generally to a local resident or ‘townie’, it also connotes an underlying assumption that the recipient is either welfare-dependent, involved in criminality or resides at the less stable end of the labour market. Many people we spoke to had a clear understanding of this group:

Jane: It is people that wear tracksuits.
Simon: They wear Ben Sherman shirts and they go out and get pissed.
Jane: The Bigg Market—have a shag and have a fight.
Clare: I think you could classify them as [people who] do not really go for the music, so much for the chance just to get pissed and maybe have a fight and [when] they have had a good night then [they] look for a lass.
Simon: Shag, fight and a kebab, very loud.

It is clear that the term as it is used here is very masculine and refers primarily, though not exclusively, to rough, local working-class young men. The female equivalent, ‘slappers’, refers to a loud, vulgar and promiscuous outlook as highlighted in a discussion about women in the Bigg Market (Hollands, 2000). Many people we spoke to felt comfortable defining this group from clothing and language styles, brands, musical preference and sexuality. Such stereotypes represent the intolerant and unaccepting face of the city’s nightlife but also expose the painful restructuring of social and gender relations in the city and region in the light of ongoing economic transitions and the parochialism of the region’s cultural practices. The image of the charver is increasingly counterposed by young locals who are
exposed to possibilities of moving up the occupational and leisure hierarchy through the growth of ‘white collar’ service-sector jobs. While people referred to the role played by these young professionals in the recasting of the city’s nightlife, many felt uncomfortable with this influx of more stylish clientele.

Our study of Newcastle appears to show that divisions based around social class are as real and as entrenched as ever. While it is not a simple class divide, leisure demarcations increasingly display divisions based upon style, income, demeanour, language, social and geographical background, and labour market position which highlight a number of discrete groups such as charvers, social climbers, students and yuppies. These divisions are reflected and extended in nightlife venues themselves through pricing policies, the amount of designer labels, entrance fees and dress codes. At the extreme, it could be suggested that city-centre nightlife is slowly becoming more ‘sanitized’ or ‘cleansed’ of ‘undesirable’ elements due to gentrification in the housing and leisure market. The exclusive nature of recent developments in the night-time economy is simply out-pricing many poorer groups of consumers and reinforcing perceptions that it is not a place for them.

The city centre is increasingly being focused on the needs of three dominant ‘cash-rich’ consumer groups—students, upwardly mobile service workers, and more style-oriented young professional drinkers. This latter group, who often have the largest disposable incomes, are likely to be the focus for future nightlife developments, and as a result, the number of style- and café-bar venues is likely to increase. In contrast, residual venues such as traditional ale houses and alternative, indie pubs will continue their decline. The city’s nightlife, then, is increasingly segmented with a lack of creative spaces which act as melting pots between different groups. Younger city-centre nightlife consumers are exposed to little choice and rather than engaging in alternative or independent cultural styles, instead seek escapism in the less risky world of corporate packaged nightlife. City planners and regulators would do well to consider the range of nightlife venues if one of their goals is diversity and social inclusion.

**Future pathways and some hard choices**

What we have pointed towards is a new type of nightlife developing in Newcastle, which is set against broader national and international economic forces, combined with political and cultural change in the locality. In particular, we have pointed towards global trends such as an increased role for large corporate players in the leisure and entertainment sector, specifically around the drive towards branding and theming, and the creation of new style and café bars, bar-club hybrids and specialist dance clubs. At the same time, local authorities and city councils up and down the country are engaging in attempts to create new ‘place images’ and increasingly catering for their more affluent, in-migrant, middle-class professionals rather than the poorer and less-mobile sections of the city’s population.

While the city of Newcastle has been influenced by these general trends, they are also tempered by various local, cultural factors. For instance, a historic lack of corporate inward investment in the city’s nightlife, and the existence of a strong regional brand of provision has resulted in consumer resistance to non-local ‘branded’ and themed pubs. However, this is changing fast and the City Council has also become much more entrepreneurial in the last few years, especially in light of its joint 2008 Capital of Culture bid. A recurrent theme within Newcastle’s nightlife relates to comparisons with other neighbouring metropolitan centres. We would warn against taking up any simple formula for development based on the direct experience of other cities, even though Newcastle may have some things to learn from elsewhere. For while cities such as
Manchester (Wynne and O'Conner, 1998), Birmingham (Webster, 2001), Bristol (Griffiths et al., 1999), Glasgow (Boyle and Hughes, 1991) and Leeds (Haughton and Williams, 1996) have transformed their urban cores into busy business and cultural destinations, it is important not to take success stories at face value and recognize that many local young people are disenfranchised from such prosperity.

Of course, there are many people that would like to see Newcastle develop into a mini Leeds, Manchester or Glasgow. Some would argue that this is an improvement on Newcastle's old backward-looking image as a masculine, labourist, welfarist mono-cultural desert, with a nightlife dominated by the Bigg Market's own brand of masculine, working-class hedonism. Yet, expanding and cosmopolitanizing the city's nightlife is not without its own pitfalls and contradictions. A focus upon profit maximization through beer sales can undermine attempts to create more tolerant and pluralistic nightlife spaces and continues to create problems of social disorder; whether a traditional boozier or new style bar, issues of disorder, sexism, violence and drunkenness remain. Our analysis suggests that a solution to many of these problems does not rest with the development of large corporate-owned licensed themed venues, but more local coalitions of producers/consumers/cultural entrepreneurs as seen in parts of cities such as Leeds, Brighton, Dublin and Manchester. In many cases these alternative independent spaces are for the most part self-regulating, with many not even requiring door men or policing resources. While the upgrading of nightlife may eventually begin to sanitize and regulate nightlife behaviour through pricing 'trouble' out of the market, it will do so only at the expense of excluding the city's poorer residents.

Whether we are looking at Newcastle, Glasgow or Leeds, there is a certain air of inevitability in the way in which urban nightlife will continue to develop. However, cities can still choose a number of different choices and ways forward, each of which has different policy implications for nightlife entrepreneurs, the local state and consumers. Because of Newcastle's late development, it still has a great deal of choice as to which pathway it chooses. First, Newcastle could simply become 'Anywhereville UK' and continue to accommodate and embrace the global corporate world, hoping that they can become its 'flavour of the month' with big brands such as Starbucks, McDonalds or Gap. This very much appears to be the current trend. The city can get lost in its own hype and begin to substitute image for reality, advertising over people. In terms of nightlife, it can continue to bend over backwards trying to attract major pubcos, ignoring independent and local operators. As such, smaller, locally owned nightlife spaces will continue to be squeezed and marginalized and the city will experience what Harvey (1989) refers to as 'serial reproduction', losing its uniqueness and distinctive flavour as it becomes more like many other large post-industrial urban centres. The problem is that even if successful in the short term, when the city eventually falls out of favour, and corporate capital moves elsewhere, there will be little local infrastructure to build on.

Balancing the global, national and the local is probably a more likely scenario. This would involve the City Council working together with all interested parties in the night-time economy, and not allowing sectional interests and the profit motive to solely influence the types of nightlife growth. In such a context, there is a need for the local state to play a stronger role in the development of the night-time economy especially to strike a balance between commercial and local need, and the interests of corporate capital and users of the city, whoever they may be. While proponents of this approach in Newcastle claim that they are making inroads here (see Matarasso, 2000), as the local authority seeks even greater returns on property, and only large commercial developers have the resources to put derelict buildings back into use, the privatization and corporatization of the city centre carries on apace.
Alternatively, the City Council, other regulators and capital interests could be more radical in their orientation and could begin actively to promote local nightlife cultures, emphasizing diversity, creativity and social cohesion. To encourage this model, mechanisms would need to be established to favour certain types of nightlife activity, encourage more opportunities for local entrepreneurs and massage property markets in their favour. It would involve more support and training for budding young cultural entrepreneurs in the region; encouragement to set up small businesses in the leisure/cultural economy; and the provision of flexible and affordable premises for those interested in the creative industries, if possible, in the city centre. Moreover, it would point to a significant change in cultural values and philosophies based around a more inclusive urban realm, encouraging the intermingling of different age groups and mixed night-time activities in which alcohol consumption, on its own, played a much smaller role. The objectives of this approach would be to stimulate diversity, creativity and more democratic relations between producers and consumers—involving young adults as active contributors to nightlife culture, rather than passive consumers. Which way the city ultimately chooses to go is up for grabs. We have suggested that unhindered it appears to be heading down the corporate nightlife route, and to be fair, with the rules stacked in its favour, this can be seen as the ‘only game in town’ sometimes. Newcastle, like other cities, has to work extremely hard to promote creativity, diversity, safety and inclusiveness if it wants to show commitment to counter-balancing the seduction of ‘corporate glam’.

Notes

1 This paper is based upon our book Changing our Toon: Youth, Nightlife and Urban Change in Newcastle (2002), available for £5 from the Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Newcastle. This publication stems from a broader research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council entitled ‘Youth cultures, identities and the consumption of night-life city spaces’ (Award Number R000238288) and a website detailing this project can be found at www.ncl.ac.uk/youthnightlife. The core of our empirical data is derived from this research project which looked at the production, regulation and consumption of urban nightlife in several UK cities. During the course of this research, interviews were conducted with 41 producers (owners, company directors, area and regional managers, bar managers, bar staff), 32 regulators (city council personnel, magistrates, police, door staff, residents’ associations) and 16 focus groups, accounting for 80 young adults representing different consumption groupings (young professionals, locals, students, gay consumers, women’s groups, alternative youth cultures, etc.). This research, and other European and North American nightlife examples, will be published in a forthcoming book by the authors entitled Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power (Routledge, 2003).

2 This figure is derived from officially recognized pub brands as listed in the Pub Industry Handbook 2000 (The Publican Newspaper, 2000).

3 These definitions refer to only the pubs and bars in the city centre excluding other venues with full on licences such as casinos, hotel bars and private clubs, and were established by the authors as a way of categorizing nightlife venues according to their overall atmosphere.


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Robert Hollands is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at University of Newcastle, UK.

Paul Chatterton is Lecturer in Geography at University of Newcastle, UK.