

Panacea or Urban Problem?: Understanding the Impact of Flagship Regeneration

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ABSTRACT

Large scale Flagship urban regeneration projects have been a favoured tool for economic growth by civic leaders, city boosters and investors for more than two decades. Such projects aim at becoming a catalyst for further urban regeneration. Flagships entail the creation of high-profile and high-end retail, residential, entertainment and tourist spaces in what were once derelict or underused urban spaces. They are often tied into aggressive city re-branding or marketing campaigns which seek to launch a new urban vision (away from an industrial city to a creative, dynamic, profitable environment to visit and invest in). They become the new symbols of a resurgent, modern city, and are used to sell the city to tourists, investors, and elites. They are often seen by planners, developers and local politicians as a panacea for the problems of deindustrialisation and regional economic stagnation. However, this support for flagships from civic leaders and developers is in stark contrast to much of the scholarly literature, which states that rather than contributing to overall economic growth, this form of regeneration diverts scarce resources from areas such as housing and education. In addition, rather than mitigating socioeconomic polarisation, it is argued by many that flagship regeneration actually contributes to it. Flagships tend to be built in the locales with the highest potential for profit, rather than the neighbourhoods with the greatest needs. Yet, despite these vocal criticisms from the academic community, this type of development, born out of the property-led regeneration in the 1980s, continues into the Twenty-first Century.

This paper will outline and critically analyse these contrasting viewpoints which exist between many academics and city boosters. It will also outline a major dilemma with flagships: if they exist to attract more outside investment and tourists, what is their implication and impact on local residents?

Key Words: city rebranding, flagship projects, urban regeneration