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## The future of the city centre: urbanisation, transformation and resilience - a tale of two Newcastle cities

### Abstract

Recent debates over the content and theoretical orientation of urban studies act as a strong reminder that the nature and existence of the city as a form of spatial urban agglomeration is changing. They have acted positively as a heuristic to inspire critical analysis of urbanisation and helped to illuminate the considerable empirical variation over time and space in urban agglomeration forms. However, in shifting the focus onto the planetary reach of urbanisation, such debates risk deflecting attention away from the city core at a time when it too is being subjected to transformation. The recent proliferation of public and policy interest in the future of the city centre as the archetypal expression of urban agglomeration has not been matched by similar growth in academic and theoretical accounts of its transformation. Drawing on the examples of two city centres, and placing them in the context of the recent debates of urban agglomeration theory, this paper seeks to initiate deeper analysis and dialogue about the future of the urban core, including how it is being articulated and by whom. It argues for a greater analytic understanding of the ways in which the city centre as a physical and emotional entity has been so resilient, and advocates for stronger engagement with initiatives seeking to reactivate the city centre as a crucial epicentre of urban agglomeration.

**Keywords:** urbanisation, city centre, resilience, urban planning; agglomeration theory

### Introduction

Recent debates over the content and theoretical orientation of urban studies act as a powerful reminder that the nature and existence of the city as a form of spatial urban agglomeration is changing. In challenging the extent to which it even remains prudent to adopt 'the city' as an appropriate empirical or theoretical lens (Merrifield, 2013; Brenner & Schmid, 2014; Storper & Scott, 2016; Brenner, 2016; Roy, 2016) these debates have sought to provide bold understandings of the changing nature of the urban and cities. Much attention, in this journal and others covering urban studies, has been given to the merits of perspectives such as postcolonial urban analysis, planetary urbanism, and assemblage analysis as ways to understand urban trends and the urbanisation process. Each perspective has acted positively as a heuristic to inspire critical analysis of urbanisation and has helped to illuminate the considerable empirical variation over time and space in urban agglomeration forms. Exploration of this diversity of urban forms has both generated a plethora of terms to capture the forms of urban development (Scott & Storper, 2015) and encouraged a shift in analytic and theoretic gaze beyond the 'city' (Brenner & Schmid, 2014). Despite this outward gaze, there remains a consensus that 'the city' continues to be a significant, albeit only one, representation of urbanisation (Merrifield, 2013).

Amidst these debates and shifts in theoretical sensibilities about cities, the city centre's constitutive and existentialist position as 'inside' the urban remains unchallenged. It has retained an ontologically distinctiveness because as Storper & Scott (2016, 1129) note the city centre "*poses uniquely problematical scientific and political questions* deriving from its mode(s) of operation" (italics in original) as well as its distinctive empirical character. Set within the wider urban agglomeration, the

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3 city centre is epitomised by the specialised land uses, dense networks of interaction, economic and  
4 institutional functions, and its impact of social dynamics, cultures and mentalities.  
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6 Planetary urbanisation and postcolonial urbanism theories, however, remind us that contemporary  
7 critical urban analysis needs to revise systematically inherited concepts and representations of the  
8 urban. Like the term 'city', analysis of the city centre (or its other variants including downtown,  
9 central district, or urban core) risks being constrained by definition bounded spatiality, distinct from  
10 other parts of the urban agglomeration, and with an empirical focus on stability and equilibrium. Our  
11 starting point in this paper is an acknowledgement that the seemingly familiar form of the urban city  
12 centre as a distinctive, extensive expression of agglomeration is itself being fundamentally  
13 transformed across the planet (Schmid, 2018). Attention needs to switch away from stasis to  
14 questions of change over time, as the gravitational pull of the city centre is weakened by  
15 externalities resulting from its agglomeration, proximity and density, and reduced by changing  
16 patterns of sharing, matching and learning provided not least by new technologies and universal  
17 online access.  
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### 23 **The city centre under threat?**

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25 Across the world there is renewed public and political attention to, and concern about, the future of  
26 the city centre. Along with the 'high street' of smaller urban agglomerations, accounts discuss the  
27 'death' of retail functions as familiar names of businesses close and new leasing agreements are  
28 sought to stave off other closures (Hubbard, 2017; Millington & Ntounis, 2017; Zhang et al, 2016).  
29 Changing needs and the design of ageing commercial office properties are generating new levels of  
30 vacancies (Harris, 2015; Bruce et al, 2015). City authorities, realising that structural change is  
31 happening in city centres, are responding by seeking to construct new collaboration between private  
32 and public sectors, and with citizens (Branka et al, 2016; Le Feuvre et al, 2016).  
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35 In developed nations, there are early signs of more centripetal tendencies (Pickett et al, 2013;  
36 Luque-Ayala & Marvin, 2015) with beginnings of a selective re-population of the city centre  
37 (Serwicka & Swinney, 2015). In developing countries, continued and rapid growth of the city has  
38 placed the city centre under renewed pressures, leading to the rise of centrifugal pressures to create  
39 more new centres serving the needs of the dispersed housing developments which accompany  
40 urban population in-migration. Such transformative change, comparable with the dissolving of the  
41 city as the single expression of urbanisation, has meant that the city centre is also not immune to  
42 different intersecting trends of economic, social, cultural and political processes of urbanisation.  
43 Indeed, if as some advocates contend planetary urbanisation offers open horizons of liberation  
44 where "suburbs, peripheries, peri-urban areas are not dangling dependently off the "urban" centre  
45 anymore" (Keil, 2018, 1594), the future of the city could be radically different.  
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49 This transformation - visible and for some threatening - however also creates opportunities for the  
50 reactivation and repositioning of the city centre as a 'liberator of agglomeration'. If as Scott &  
51 Storper (2014, 6) contend "agglomeration is the basic glue that holds the city together as a complex  
52 congeries of human activities... [with] a highly distinctive form of politics", then the city centre forms  
53 the epicentre of such agglomeration. In this sense, it is more than the physical centrality that is  
54 important, for the city centre also has a key role in helping to "circumscribe individual  
55 agglomerations in geographic space, and certainly, in the limit, to distinguish one agglomeration  
56 from another" (Scott & Storper, 2014, 7). Transformational change which reinforces the unique  
57 internal organisational dynamics and 'generic roots' of the city centre can thus have far wider  
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3 (spatial and non-spatial) positive implications. Some recent interdisciplinary research exploring  
4 opportunities for the use of smart technologies and systems to improve standards of environmental  
5 efficiency, citizen health and well-being and increase prosperity and social cohesion (Mehan, 2016;  
6 Ogbourn et al, 2014; Berman, 2016) has made a positive start in this direction.  
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9 In the following discussion, our focus on the urban core is designed to open up discussion about the  
10 'place' of the urban core in the context of processes of urbanisation, drawing upon Lefebvrian  
11 notions of urban spaces as places that can dissipate themselves, dissolving and recreating  
12 themselves, and where the classic notions of centrality can be recreated anywhere. To do this, we  
13 consider the visions for the future of the city centre of two 'Newcastles' - one in the UK and one in  
14 Australia – as they respond to wider processes of urbanisation and change. We explore how the  
15 urban core is being conceptualised and represented by two city councils and their partners, located  
16 within their respective neoliberal planning and development frameworks. In so doing, we are  
17 seeking to open up such conceptualisations to critique and in particular to suggest future research  
18 avenues to understand the processual realisation of the city centre futures.  
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## 21 **Methods**

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23 The analysis here focuses on two key planning documents produced by the municipal authorities to  
24 articulate a future vision of their respective city centres, both in developed nations. The pivotal role  
25 of these was reinforced by discussions at workshops held in both cities as part of an AHRC  
26 international research network grant, where key private, public and civic stakeholders came  
27 together to enter into dialogue about the future of the city centre. In adopting this approach, we  
28 recognise that these city plans are situated and partial, the outcomes of a process of neoliberal  
29 governance designed to mobilise particular forms of growth coalitions, and designed to respond to  
30 statutory and regulatory obligations placed on the municipal authorities by national governments.  
31 As such they represent a partisan view, and as was evident from the critical engagement in the  
32 workshops, constructed primarily by one actor – who under neoliberal urbanisation systems is often  
33 a minority partner. Municipal authorities can only suggest a future plan and vision where they can  
34 utilise their relatively limited but critical regulatory powers to help transform visions into a reality. In  
35 large part these blueprints are discursive documents designed to mobilise and align other actors to  
36 engage collaboratively towards a shared reality  
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41 The use of term city centre here is not as a distinct, bounded territorial unit of analysis but more as a  
42 relational space (Amin & Thrift, 2002). In both case studies, the city centre is nested within a wider  
43 urban region, incorporating not only the urban agglomeration but also a larger economic and spatial  
44 hinterland. The city centre is viewed as the beating heart of the urban system, under threat  
45 economically and emotionally, and needing to be reinforced through a coalition of shared interests  
46 to secure its future. In adopting the notions of the city centre constructed by the city councils, we  
47 acknowledge that these form only one, contested and far from self-evident conception. However  
48 given the relational power of this source to shape debates and direct the future of the 'city centre',  
49 their conceptions have significance. We use them here not as accepted facts or indeed as more than  
50 guiding visions, in order to explore critically some of the research questions which we feel need to  
51 be asked about the city centre and its future.  
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## 57 **Problematising the city centre**

- 58 1. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
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3 In November 2017, the City Council of the north east English city of Newcastle upon Tyne launched  
4 what was claimed to be an ambitious proposal to kick start the transformation of the city centre into  
5 a globally renowned shopping and leisure destination. Collaborating with other partners, especially  
6 the local business improvement district (BID) company NE1 Limited and its neighbouring city council  
7 of Gateshead, the plan approved earlier in 2015 follows a well-trodden path where the economic  
8 and social regeneration of the central part of the city is built around compact growth. It seeks to  
9 reinforce notions of traditional economic roles of the city centre as one where economic ideas and  
10 innovation emanate (increasingly in conjunction with educational partners) and provides the  
11 majority of leisure and retailing for the regional population serviced by a radial transport network. It  
12 also views the city centre as offering residential living for a small, but growing cohort of population,  
13 extending the socio-demographic profile through affordable housing and student rented  
14 accommodation. In the absence of both fiscal and regulatory capacity to respond more radically to  
15 the acknowledged pressures on the city centre, Newcastle upon Tyne City Council and its partners  
16 continue to implement a compact city model where scope for transformational change is limited and  
17 indeed the underlying theory of change is incremental rather than radical (Figure 1).  
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22 At the core of 2030 vision is a city centre maintaining a balance between economic and cultural  
23 activity, between pedestrians and vehicles, and between public realm and private spaces. It is one  
24 able to attract people (and their wealth) from the local area for leisure and retailing and from  
25 further field through tourism. The limited funding committed by the two municipal authorities is  
26 primarily set aside to enhance streetscapes and pedestrianisation, to capitalise on the city's already  
27 strong network of public transport, improving sustainability (Table 1).  
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30 Most emphasis, however, is placed on reversing long-term economic and social trends afflicting the  
31 urban core. Despite evidence of a sharp fall in demand for commercial and retail properties, the  
32 Newcastle plan argues that "there is still significant growth potential in the Urban Core" (Newcastle  
33 & Gateshead City Councils, 2015, 122) with its strategy being to "reinforce its continued success by  
34 bringing new businesses, particularly in science, retail, digital, creative and tourism sectors to the  
35 area". To this end, the strategic focus is on re-development of key, under-utilised interstices  
36 (geographically defined) within the existing built environment. It assumes that private sector  
37 investment alongside cityscape improvements provided by the civic authorities can strengthen the  
38 economic and social fabric of the city. Socially, the generation of an urban buzz underpins this  
39 economic growth. Based on intensifying social interactions in a compact urban space, the plan  
40 envisages continued re-profiling of the demography of city centre users through the processes of  
41 studentification and commodification of the student experience (Chatterton, 2010; Mulhearn &  
42 Franco, 2018), and the use of planning regulation to encourage use of vacant spaces for rented and  
43 owner occupied housing.  
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47 Newcastle and Gateshead Councils' vision document claims to be a product of "active conversation  
48 with our communities" (p10), setting out an agenda for future action, recognising that processes of  
49 urbanisation are impacting negatively on the functional logic of the city centre. The underlying logic  
50 remains however of a city centre more compact and lively, generating positive externalities and  
51 fostering an environment that reinforces density, proximity, and connectivity, whilst also being a  
52 driver of economic growth for the city as a whole and the urban region.  
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## 57 2. 'ReNew'ing Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia

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3 At first glance, the planning vision for the City of Newcastle, New South Wales, set out in its Greater  
4 Metro Newcastle Plan 2036, is similar to that of its namesake in the UK. It too has a vision of a  
5 compact city centre which is entrepreneurial and dynamic, seen to be globally competitive, offering  
6 lifestyles able to attract new populations, and with enhanced sustainability credentials through its  
7 'new economy' as a smart city supported by carbon neutral initiatives. It too envisages key roles for  
8 the University as a civic partner and growth of student population, a focus on culture as a part of the  
9 economic base and a renewed focus on tourism, and with densification through infill site residential  
10 development.  
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13 Here too, the city council's approach follows the orthodoxy of national metropolitan planning which  
14 for the last two decades has focussed on producing monocentric compact cities (Randolph, 2006;  
15 Bunker et al. 2017; Limb et al, 2018). This involves regulating land use types and intensities  
16 strategically distributed around hierarchical transit lines and nodes to create clustered centres. A  
17 modern light transportation system (replacing heavy rail lines) and dedicated cycling and walking  
18 routes are reinforcing the use of public spaces and buildings to integrate the urban core. The vision  
19 presents the structure as a compact city centre composed of precincts but the reality is the physical  
20 development of a polycentric linear city (Figure 2). Without any explicit reference to urbanisation  
21 processes, the vision document's underpinning message is about transformation and transition,  
22 replacing the city and city region's economic dependency on coal exportation to a more diverse  
23 "service, creative and knowledge city".  
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27 Whilst there are parallels with the other Newcastle, there is however one key difference between  
28 the two visions; the New South Wales document is the forerunner of conversations rather than the  
29 outcome of consultations. Changes at the national level updating the Environment Planning and  
30 Assessment Act (1979) has required States, and through them City and Local Councils, to engage in  
31 more transformative thinking, and to develop a 20 year vision for land use management and  
32 preservation as part of community participation plans. These are designed to make it clearer and  
33 easier for citizens to understand the planning process and its aims, and to participate in planning  
34 decision-making (New South Wales Government, 2018). The 2030 vision document for Newcastle  
35 represents a deliberative attempt to simplify and clarify the planning process, enabling improved  
36 regulatory efficiency to deliver economic development whilst also delivering greater transparency  
37 (Ruming, 2018). It forms part of a process to re-calibrate the political economy associated urban  
38 consolidation and compactness in the past two decades which saw multi-players, especially in the  
39 private sector, dominate the discourse and development agenda squeezing out opportunities for  
40 communities to be active in the planning process (Ruming & Goodman, 2016; Bunker et al, 2017).  
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45 In responding to this enforced regulatory change, Newcastle City Council has thus sought through its  
46 vision statement to present the logic (and arguably the underlying theory of change) associated with  
47 urban planning. For the city centre, which has already seen significant revitalisation spearheaded by  
48 the Hunter Development Corporation, the representation is a series of inter-locking precincts, each  
49 focused on a spatial area but designated by function and contribution to the overall economic  
50 growth of the area (Figure 2).  
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53 In bringing together a heterogeneous agglomeration of different components – urban materialities,  
54 territory, symbolisms, economic functions, and authority/power – Newcastle aims to accrete and  
55 align particular forms of urbanisation and urbanism into each distinct areas precinct (Table 2).  
56 Resembling an assemblage, and open to future assemblage theory analysis to explore how and why  
57 such elements might align, it is a framing device for thinking through the reformation of the city  
58 centre and represents an active attempt to create a 'new downtown' (Helbrecht, 2012; Dirksmeier,  
59 2012).  
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3 Workshops held in the city with key stakeholders offered some further insights on the importance of  
4 partnerships with identified key actors such as the University (civic precinct), and tourism developers  
5 (east end precinct) but like the vision statement did not reveal mechanisms about how the future  
6 vision of the urban core are to be realised.  
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### 10 **Processual realisation of the future of the city centre**

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12 The two Newcastle examples remind us that effective interventions to transform the city centre to  
13 the benefit of the 'city' as a whole are dependent on the context in which such interventions take  
14 place. This is more than just the local economic, social and cultural setting, including also national  
15 governance structures, and global economic and sustainability agendas. They, like other cities, are  
16 thus repositioning themselves within an urban world society seeking to recreate and reinforce the  
17 centrality of the urban core as new downtowns (Helbrecht & Dirksmeier, 2012).  
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20 Both Newcastles are seeking to reinforce their cores. For those growth coalitions involved in setting  
21 out their visions, the city centre is, for example, the "focal point of the Tyneside conurbation"  
22 (Newcastle & Gateshead Councils, 2017, 122) seeking to be the "place of choice for doing business,  
23 learning, entertainment and living" (ibid p136), and in Australia "an important catalyst for a vibrant  
24 and internationally-facing Greater Newcastle" (New South Wales Government, 2018, 17). Both  
25 strategic plans, with their heavy reliance on local planning and regulation, acknowledge the role of  
26 the city councils as place making leaders to manage change and avoid dysfunctionalities of urban  
27 agglomeration being able to undermine the viability of the city centre.  
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30 In analysing these two visions articulating the individuality of each Newcastle, we are not advocating  
31 notions of 'new particularism', although we certainly do not deny the considerable empirical  
32 variation existing between city centres. Quite the opposite, as we see both cities creating discrete  
33 and distinctive responses to similar processes of urbanisation. Both are seeking to foster  
34 regeneration of what is publicly and politically viewed as a key urban space. Both are facing similar  
35 organisational forces and processes which are perceived to threaten the existence of the city centre.  
36 And both set out plans for the urban core within the context of a wider urban hinterland. Equally,  
37 neither are we arguing for a theoretical articulation of urbanisation and the city centre which is  
38 totalising where specificities of cities simply reflect the local context. There is the possibility, as with  
39 other critical urban theory (Leitner & Sheppard, 2016) that no single theory can account for the  
40 variegated nature of city centres across the world.  
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44 The plans, in contrast to Brenner's (2013, 90) critique of the urban as "devoid of any clear  
45 definitional parameters, morphological coherence, or cartographic fixity", emphasise that the city  
46 centre continues to have empirical and conceptual resonance. The strategic documents offer more  
47 than just a statement of intent to reinforce the continued meaningful existence of the city centre  
48 within the urban system, as they both underline that this existence is at risk of being hollowed out  
49 along with the 'urban'. Of course in using planning processes and the associated use of bounded  
50 spaces, the plans offer a narrowly defined city centre, at risk of simplifying the connections with the  
51 urban 'outside'. Whilst acknowledging this, the plans are nevertheless creating meaningful political  
52 and spatial entities through with future institutional actors and practices will be shaped (Allen and  
53 Cochrane, 2014).  
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57 However, the political and processual realities of implementing plans like those espoused for both  
58 Newcastles have the potential of making such guiding visions little more than 'story-telling' using  
59 assumptions about the future whilst cast within narratives of the past (Devisme, 2015). For all its  
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3 claims to reposition itself from being a 'great port city' to a post-industrial city (Stevenson, 1999),  
4 Newcastle NSW for example remains heavily dependent of the exportation of coal through the port,  
5 jarring with its aspirations around urban sustainability. And with limited budgets relative to those  
6 being expended by the regional Hunter Valley Development Corporation, the Council's influence is  
7 limited. In the UK's Newcastle its limited fiscal and regulatory capacity to react to the pressures on  
8 the city centre means that here too the City Council has to achieve its visions through collaboration  
9 and partnership, relying heavily on private sector investment and support beyond the 'urban' spaces  
10 managed publicly. In this respect, a focus on the city centre may be misplaced. Its future is being  
11 shaped by urbanisation processes beyond any spatial bounding of the downtown, with those  
12 managing this area relatively powerless to make a difference as they increasingly draw support from  
13 beyond the city centre.  
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### 19 **Researching the 'urban inside' future**

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21 The current debates, arguing for more theoretically informed analyses of urbanisation, offer critical  
22 insights into how the tentacles of urbanisation processes extend beyond urban agglomerations.  
23 However, in challenging the 'city dominance' and rightly asking critically about the non-urban or  
24 'hinterland' (Brenner, 2016), such debates risk deflecting attention away from the city core at a time  
25 when it too is being subjected to transformation. Such limited scrutiny may arguably reflect the  
26 assumption that in contrast to suburban (Addie, 2016), post-suburbia (Helbich, 2012), or other wider  
27 urban areas (Scott & Storper, 2015) the centre remains analytically distinctive.  
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30 Our intention here has been to start to rebalance the focus on how contemporary urbanisation is  
31 remoulding the 'inside' as well as the urban 'outside'. Our argument is that the analysis of visions of  
32 the future of the city centre opens up key questions requiring further interrogation into, first how  
33 urbanisation processes are transforming the city centre and, second the ways in which future visions  
34 are being constructed and delivered. This needs to go beyond the contemporary attention by  
35 academia, media and public on the future of retail in the city centre (Millington, et al, 2015;  
36 Risselada et al 2019). As one key function of the city centre, the future of the retail sector is  
37 important, but the downtown core of the city and its urban character is based on more than  
38 consumption.  
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41 In responding to this call, we acknowledge that our paper offers only an initial, limited analysis. It  
42 has focussed solely on the planning and vision statements published by the municipal leadership of  
43 the two cities both in developed nations, which although viewed as significant by local  
44 representatives in research workshops as part of the AHRC international project, do not capture the  
45 breadth of analysis needed to consider the complexity of city centres future globally. Even in this  
46 restricted context, however, it is still possible to suggest potentially fruitful and desirable future  
47 avenues for research into the urban inside.  
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50 One strand is a need for greater understanding of the ways in which the city centre as a physical and  
51 emotional entity has been so resilient, especially under the planetary growth of urbanism, despite  
52 (or arguable because of) continuous 'disturbance' and flux. This lends itself to engagement with  
53 concepts of urban resilience and the recent interest in the politics of urban resilience (Meerow &  
54 Newell, 2019). But to do this, there is a need to avoid being constrained by viewing city centres as  
55 self-organising, predictable ecosystems (Beilin & Wilkinson, 2015), by avoiding inherent  
56 conservativeness and passively accepting change (Evans, 2011), and overly focus on adaptation to  
57 disruptions without sufficient attention to the underlying causes of such change (Wamsler, 2014).  
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3 The two visions above point to an amalgam of desired resilience and resistance to change, whilst  
4 also seeking to embrace and foster change, but further interrogation into how such planning  
5 decisions both enable and constrain the future of the urban core is required. With the reduction of  
6 non-statutory responsibilities for municipal government under neoliberal reforms, strategic planning  
7 documents have become more critical in representing the views of influential stakeholders, whilst  
8 also opening up local governance to wider scrutiny and engagement. The documents are  
9 intentionally ambiguous and contradictory, a position seeking both to engage local constituencies  
10 (including commercial and citizen) whilst also building extra-local legitimacy and support for  
11 development through local projects (Lauermann, 2014). The contrasting purposes in this respect of  
12 the two Newcastle documents underscore the need for further interrogation of their genesis and  
13 attention to the processes of 'negotiated resilience' (Ziervolgel et al, 2017).  
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17 Equally, and related, greater attention needs to be given to planning and strategic documents such  
18 as those considered in this paper, including whether like master plans previously generated to  
19 assisted urban regeneration (Madanipour et al, 2018) their fixed spatial and temporal foci  
20 unintentionally create greater risks of being rigid. As an ideological practice, the city centre  
21 blueprints and plans developed by both city governments can rightly be subjected to criticism of  
22 supporting local urban regimes (Addie, 2013; Olesen, 2014; Wachsmuth, 2014). They reinforce the  
23 notion of a particular conception of the 'city centre' giving it political and economic significance, and  
24 positioning it within an urban regional context of urban systems. They thus reify a particular sense of  
25 functional purpose and processual realisation, providing justification for municipal attention and  
26 investment. The approaches adopted in both cities are reinforcing the continuation of historic and  
27 critically unchallenged functional logics and spatial practice that foreground the same actors, and  
28 reduce opportunities for others to be involved in dialogues about the city centre future.  
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32 New forms of urban governance are needed which move beyond the collaboration seen here  
33 between neighbouring city councils in Newcastle upon Tyne or between the Hunter Valley  
34 Development Corporation and Newcastle City Council in Australia. Alternatives, such as the creation  
35 of 'cabinets' and other city-regional governance forms (O'Brien & Pike, 2018) associated with city  
36 deals in the UK are required to mediate and generate new and more progressive interactions  
37 between the centripetal and centrifugal tensions associated with urban agglomerations and  
38 planetary hinterlands. Under the existing urban governance arrangements, as both Newcastles  
39 illustrate, municipal authorities are struggling to operate as mediators of urban conflicts and  
40 frictions in the city centre. There is thus a need for greater consideration of achieving  
41 democratisation of city centre regeneration.  
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45 Key questions arise about who is included and excluded from the planning of a future city centre is  
46 crucial (Meerow & Newell, 2016) especially as multi-stakeholder engagement and partnerships form  
47 the basis of city centre transformation. There is, for example, a need for deeper analysis of how a  
48 'shared' sense of threat to the city centre has been generated and how such perceived vulnerability  
49 is (or is not) creating bonds between partners. And questions need to be raised about what role  
50 municipal authorities have in leveraging assistance from others as they tap into the innate  
51 characteristics of citizen and society to build social resilience (Rose, 2014). In focusing on more  
52 democratisation of regeneration of the future of the city centre, there is scope to consider a  
53 tripartite categorisation of those likely to be involved, from those *in* the core (e.g. residents), *of* the  
54 centre (stakeholders having a presence) and *for* the centre (with wider urban region). In envisaging a  
55 future for city centres, there are critical questions needed to be researched about who are involved  
56 in their evolution, and in turn who are excluded from and by the emerging plans.  
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## Conclusion



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3 As an expression of the urban land nexus agglomeration, the city centre and its future has wider  
4 significance in the theorising of urbanisation and urban change. The contemporary and public focus  
5 on the retail in the Anglophone world risks overlooking the multiple functions of city centres as  
6 places where people live, work and play, and is shaping a perception of the urban core having a  
7 bleak future. Political and policy responses increasingly reflect this characterisation, focussing on  
8 regeneration and renewal, rather than situating responses in more nuanced accounts of processes of  
9 urbanisation. As illustrated by the examples of the two Newcastle cities on opposite sides of the  
10 world, the accompanying narratives of a future of the urban core both extend outside of the core for  
11 future growth, and reify the functions and logics of the core itself as 'urban inside'.

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15 The two case studies here are not only attempts to ensure continued revitalisation and regeneration  
16 of the city centre, important though that is as part of their constant evolution under processes of  
17 urbanisation. In addition, they are projects seeking to reactivate the city centre as a crucial epicentre  
18 of urban agglomeration. In this respect, city centres and their future merit greater critical attention –  
19 as they embody the very tensions between dispersion and concentration that lie at heart of the  
20 contemporary debate about the nature and form of urban theory. Whilst contemporary processes of  
21 urbanisation are altering the historic gravitational pull of the city centre, they continue nevertheless  
22 to be potent powerhouses of the spatial concentration of the means of production and  
23 infrastructure. As part of a reflexive analysis of the city centre within critical urban theory, there is a  
24 need for a deeper understanding of their resilience to profound and rapid mutations of urbanisation,  
25 and an exploration of how city centres might have new liberating roles as part of urban  
26 agglomerations.  
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Table 1 – Newcastle upon Tyne Urban Core future development

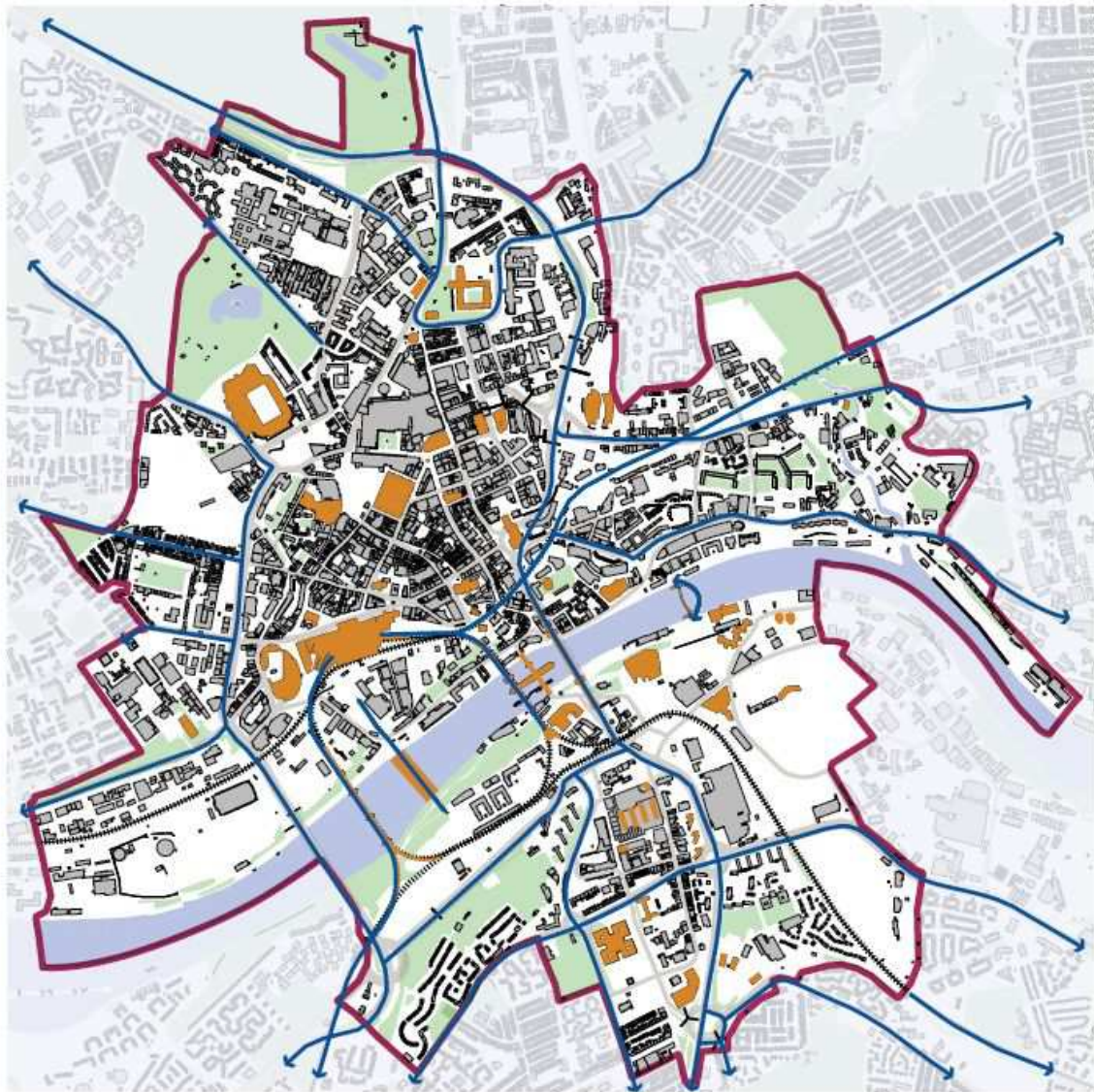
<b>Future contributors</b>	<b>Vision</b>	<b>Priorities</b>
Office and business development	Provision of at least 380,000 m <sup>2</sup> new office space	5 large scale office development in mixed-use sites
Leisure, culture and tourism	Enhance and diversify offering, both daytime and night time	Extend conference & business facilities, new hotels, family-friendly attractions + enhance riverside access
Homes	Diversify housing offer and develop c3750 new homes	1000 new homes, allocate home space in 5 mixed use sites (as above for offices), Support conversions of upper floors for homes
Sustainable transport	Promotion of sustainable transport modes and safe, better linked areas	Priority to sustainable modes on designated primary pedestrian routes; creation of direct routes to 5 mixed-use sites (as above); enhanced public transport by bus priority lanes, and re-invigoration of Metro
Other transport	Minimise impact on environment and quality of place	Focus traffic on defined urban core routes; minimise car parking for developments; promote short stay over long stay parking
Urban design and Heritage	Deliver higher quality locally distinctive places	Presumption against development which cause significant harm to views; maximise opportunities to sustain and enhance heritage assets; provide strong urban frontages, especially along pedestrian routes
Urban Green infrastructure	Protect and enhance network	Fill gaps and linkages in network
Public Realm and Public Art	Enhanced network of public and open spaces, and use public art to enhance their character	Improve add new public spaces which are flexible for use; incorporate durable materials; make provision for temporary use and events by the private sector

*Source: based on Planning for the Future: Core strategy and urban core plan 2010-30, Newcastle City and Gateshead Councils (2015)*

Table 2: Precinct model of city centre development, Newcastle NSW

Precinct	Contribution to city centre	Proposed interventions
Newcastle East	Tourism sector	Enable new and revitalised accommodation and tourism functions; stage major events
East End	Heritage and retail	Transform public spaces to connect shops and waterfront; retain and repurpose heritage buildings; revitalise shopping mall
Civic	Education and research hub + cultural axis to waterfront	Leverage from University of Newcastle NeW Space campus; encourage addition civic and cultural activities
West End	Commercial sector	Relocate key Civic functions to area; increase commercial floor space; promote area of professional, finance and office employment; new ferry wharf and extension of ferry network
Wickham	New economy space and extension of city centre	Leverage transit oriented development around interchange; provide floor space for emerging new economy business and industry

Source: Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036 (State of New South Wales Government, 2018)



← Movement Corridor / Routeways  
■ Distinctive Landmark Buildings and Structures

Figure 14.10 Respecting and Managing Views within from and into the Urban Core  
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Figure 1: Compact city regeneration infill, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK (Source: Newcastle City & Gateshead Councils, 2015)





Figure 2 – Polycentric linear ‘Precinct’ approach to Newcastle city centre renewal (Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036)