



COVENTRY ON THE COUCH: PSYCHOLOGY & THE CITY

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CONTENTS

Foreword	2
Summary	4
Section One: Coventry on the Couch: The Results	9
Why Coventry, Why Urban Psychology, Why Now?	9
The Findings	12
The Coventry City Personality Test	12
Reflections on Coventry: Interviews	14
Coventry on the Couch: Fiona Wagstaffe	18
Building The Psychologically Resilient City	22
Conclusions: What might Coventry do?	25
Section Two: Blindspots: A Deeper Dynamics of Cities	29
Rounded Thinking	29
The Sensory Experience	31
Psychological Understanding	32
A Cultural Perspective	33



A psychological approach to city making promoted in Copenhagen

FOREWORD

The Coventry urban psychology programme

Coventry was awarded City of Culture 2021 status in December 2017. July of that year saw the start of the Coventry Great Places Programme. In line with its strands focussing on art, architecture, place and heritage I felt Coventry needed a stronger understanding of its post-war history and instigated a discussion of the pioneering Modernist Heritage of Coventry. This developed into a wider arts, community and heritage project funded by Great Place Coventry and Coventry University which became to be known as Coventry Modern.

Any consideration of heritage and even more so the relatively recent heritage of modernism requires a holistic consideration of Coventry's current identity and its ambitions for the future. I sensed there was a kind of psychological blockage that needed to be unlocked to see the totality of Coventry more clearly.

I participated in a panel discussion at an event which celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus is close to my heart - not only did I receive my architectural education at its successor institution and spent formative professional years in Weimar, but I find the creativity of the original Bauhaus to this day inspiring. Although the Bauhaus was avowedly anti-historic and certainly didn't favour a conservationist approach, its own history, approaches, art works, designs and architectures are now very much part of the history and heritage of the 20th century.

The panel discussion also touched on the idea of 'urban psychology', as set out by Charles Landry and Chris Murray in their book 'Psychology & the City: the hidden dimension'. I realised that Coventry Modern could evolve in an interesting direction through a collaboration with Charles and Chris, examining Coventry from a psychological point of view. Our aim was to gain insights which could act as further catalysts to rethink the City and provide some guidance towards a city which contributes to the psychological wellbeing of its citizens.

Psychology & the City became a crucial element in the Coventry Modern project, with similarities to the multi-disciplinary thinking of the Bauhaus. Without overtly talking about heritage this project has arrived at the same approach at which Coventry Modern set out - to integrate its more recent past. Psychology is particularly useful in thinking through the past and how the life history of a person - or in this case a city - impacts on the present and shapes the future for better or worse. This approach has identified new perspectives along the way: the understanding that Coventry might have a Phoenix Syndrome (an endless cycle of boom and bust, tearing the past down and reinventing) and needs to break with that pattern instead of a continued identification with it, working with what exists, mending and making, not starting over and over again, but connecting with the past and evolving through a reflective and restorative process.

There are many people who have helped to fund and make this project work, and thanks to them are set out at the end of this document, but here I would like to thank first and foremost Charles Landry and Chris Murray with whom it has been an inspiration and great pleasure to work with, and Jacqui Ibbotson from the Coventry City of Culture Trust who has been a most enthusiastic and supportive sponsor throughout.

Sabine Coady Schäubitz

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A reminder that
Coventry was
once a pioneer in
building cars

SUMMARY

psychology
is the single
discipline most
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with human
emotional
and mental
functioning
and wellbeing

The focus of Coventry on the Couch is on the impacts of the built environment and design of the city, particularly its centre which is being redeveloped, although inevitably we stray into wider issues. Our report therefore falls into two sections. **Section One** sets out the insights gained from Coventry on the Couch, our urban psychological investigation centred on the built environment, using techniques from different branches of psychology, based on our book *Psychology and the City: the hidden dimension*¹.

Our work on urban psychology falls within a broader sphere of investigation led by **pioneering urban thinkers** over the last 30 years, challenging a more traditional economic approach (that a place that could provide jobs and income alone, was one in which people would inevitably feel contented or even happy) and enriching our understanding of what makes successful places socially, economically and culturally.

This thinking has revealed a series of **historic 'blindspots'** in the way we approach city making and management, and understanding them has radically reshaped our appreciation of deeper urban dynamics.

Section Two of this report therefore looks at four of these in particular, which have helped us to build the arguments we set out for Coventry on the Couch. They are:

1. The need for integrated thinking, planning and acting.
2. Understanding the effect of emotions on city making.
3. The importance of environmental (and other forms of) psychology.
4. The power of looking at the city through a cultural lens.

This Summary includes an overview of results of: a **'City Personality Test'** for Coventry; a series of psychologically-framed interviews; and Coventry on the Couch, a 'psychoanalysis' of the city looking at its life history.

Our key point throughout this report is that psychology is the single discipline most concerned with human emotional and mental functioning and wellbeing, and must be brought much more into the foreground in urban thinking, policy and planning. To see the city as devoid of emotional life is careless, but to be unaware of its consequences is foolish.

Coventry on the Couch takes this simple but compelling idea to the next level and is, as far as we are aware, the first project of its kind, taking a novel, psychologically informed perspective on future strategy for the city, its design and built environment.

The connections between human beings and their habitat are deep and profound, yet we have barely scratched the surface of understanding them in cities, now our primary habitat. In the words of Jan Gehl, **it is ironic that we understand more about the habitat of mountain gorillas than we do about that of people.**

Psychology - using that term in its broadest sense to encompass everything from psychotherapy to neuroscience - is beginning to **reveal the impacts of place on people.** How enriching a positive environment can be; compelling us toward pro-social behaviour, building trust, community, belonging, anchorage, purpose. Yet how devastating the effects of the negative can be; poor physical and mental health, reduced immunity, impaired brain functioning, societal division, fear, anxiety, even Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

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Each of these factors is important in itself, yet all combine to create **a kind of 'personality' of place, good or bad**, that persists beyond the coming and going of individuals, and which has a clear impact on the future of a place and its economy. Interestingly, economic geography and personality-type data have been combined in an innovative project by Ron Martin and others², demonstrating clear links between dominant personality traits within a place and economic outcomes.

With this in mind, we wondered what would happen if a city took a personality test, would it be introvert or extrovert, agreeable or disagreeable? So, we wrote one, have trialled it online and made it available to people in Coventry.

The results (which show strengths and weaknesses set out in Section One), suggest that Coventry is quite an introverted place, resourceful and self-sufficient, cares deeply about its people but can appear withdrawn and indecisive. It is emotionally intelligent and wants to please, but inward looking, can lack drive and leave conflicts unresolved. It is tolerant and open, but can be a bit self-conscious and awkward. Coventry has a strong sense of ethics, fairness and duty, is authentic and honest, but can come across as dogmatic and rigid. It is highly inventive and entrepreneurial, but can lose sight of the big picture, finding it hard to formulate plans.

Our interviews with local people generally supported these findings, revealing more detail. Overwhelmingly, people feel **Coventry is a welcoming and tolerant environment**, shown through local community relationships as well as the globally relevant Peace and Reconciliation programme. Yet there is a stoicism, as if people feel they've just got to put up with things, that 'everything's been tried and nothing works'. Stoic behaviour can also be a lid on our passions, or a way of resisting change. People are surprised to discover their own city is really innovative, with the second highest patent-rate in the UK to day, and many social and technological innovations to its credit in the past. These facts seem to get buried, like the river Sherbourne that gave the city its original lifeblood, now culverted beneath the centre, which seemed a metaphor for repressed local energy.

There is a **'Phoenix Syndrome' of boom and bust**. The Phoenix is the city's symbol, one of resurrection, rising out of the ashes

(literally after the WWII bombing - which by the way people repeatedly told us they did not want to define the city), but the Phoenix is also a creature doomed to a constant cycle of complete destruction and rebirth, always restless, never settling. The 'knock it down and start again' approach reflects this, as does the rise and fall of successive industries, leading to an underlying lack of trust in the future and sense of abandonment. All these factors are reflected in the built environment of the city, and particularly the ring road which acts as a barrier to surrounding neighbourhoods, making the centre feel both isolated and hemmed in, reflecting historic spatial divisions that began in the Middle Ages. The looming tower blocks of student accommodation overshadow the centre and further undermine its human scale.

Yet there are positives in the built environment, **many progressive post-war ideas** that worked well, new approaches to re-greening the city, animation and shifting perspective, for example through lighting projects. There is a strong sense that the city wants to, and will change, with the City of Culture programme potentially providing the catalyst for the collective, whole-place leadership people seem to crave.

Two big questions that emerged were: how can the city bridge from a fractured past to a shared sense of future; and what is the new narrative needed to drive its ambitions forward? More collective leadership could capture the nostalgic energy people feel for a Golden Age that probably never was, and redirect it toward answering these questions, achieving a different future and more wholly reflecting the aspirations of the city and its people through the built environment. This must be about **creating excellence in the everyday**, not just the iconic, sending a message of value and esteem to internal and external audiences - telling everyone that they matter.

A third part of our project undertook a 'psychoanalysis' of the city, literally putting **'Coventry on the Couch'**, looking at its life history and asking, if these events happened to a person, what would the impact and legacy be for the present and future, and what strategies could psychotherapy suggest? The results are a fascinating, ground breaking case study which cannot be reduced here into a summary, but which is set out in the report below.

Coventry is quite an introverted place, resourceful and self-sufficient, it cares deeply about its people

the centre can feel both isolated and hemmed in, reflecting historic spatial divisions

it is about creating excellence in the everyday

To help Coventry think about its future, we took **six well-known measures of psychological resilience** and applied them to the city and how it might build them in to future urban design, these being: the potential for personal growth; connection and positive relationships; autonomy, or being true to itself; environmental mastery and managing the present; enabling the discovery of a sense of purpose in life; and self-acceptance.

Finally, we made **six suggestions about what Coventry might do** to alter course toward a future that is already in plain sight, reflecting that in its urban design.

1. Flip Coventry's urban design reputation - become a renowned leader of person-centred design and go for UNESCO Design City status.
2. Think like the Bauhaus did - a city-University collaboration to unlock local creativity and attract global know-how to achieve new design ambitions, stimulating jobs and economic growth.
3. Embed psychology in the city - building on Coventry on the Couch through a programme of 'psychologists in residence' including neuroscience, cultural, environmental and social psychology, bringing fresh thinking.
4. Build a new narrative based on Coventry's ancient and recent history of experimentation and innovation.
5. Make the narrative real through a 'laboratory' of urban design which focuses on the everyday, human scale, rethinking the city and its centre in a post-Covid Net Zero world.
6. Whatever Coventry does, understand the psychological impacts, particularly on the most vulnerable, creating a 'psychological impact assessment' for any major plans or development.

We set out initial findings at the Coventry Urban Psychology Summit and at a workshop, and are grateful to all the contributors for helping to move the project forward to these conclusions - our speakers are listed under 'Thanks' below, one glance at which gives a sense of the ability and talent available to urban thinking from psychology.

Our particular thanks go to Sabine Coady Schäbitz who championed this idea, made the project possible and gave generously of her time to steer it through.



*Sigmund Freud's
famous psychoanalytic
couch in London*

SECTION ONE: COVENTRY ON THE COUCH, THE RESULTS

Why Coventry, Why Urban Psychology, Why Now?

Coventry is a city on the **cusp of major change**. What it decides now will echo for decades to come, impacting for better or worse on its people, economy and place in the world. This project, the first of its kind in the UK, perhaps anywhere, was conceived in partnership with Coventry University prior to the pandemic, focusing primarily on the future urban design of Coventry, particularly for the city centre, as plans for redevelopment got underway. The challenges at that point were significant, and have only become more so following the pandemic. They are common to many cities, but there are also opportunities that emerge from this crisis.

Pre-pandemic, something interesting was already happening in the evolution of city making, around the nexus of: **increased awareness of the role of creativity** (and in Coventry, specifically the City of Culture programme); the importance of population wellbeing; and an understanding of mental health needs. There is an opportunity for Coventry to build on this and do something unique in response, applying an Urban Psychology approach to

understand how it can best shape its own future and narrative in the face of local, national and global forces acting upon it.

In this project we talk about cities – Coventry is one of England's oldest and largest – but urban psychology is equally useful for towns, neighbourhoods, even villages. The **city or town is not a lifeless thing**. People have personality, identity and, as they are congregations of people, so do cities. The 'urban psyche' could be described as the complex personality that emerges from the interactions between people and place. Urban psychology is the evolving science of understanding more about this urban psyche alongside our own psychological response to cities, and how we can use that knowledge to effect how cities are shaped, including through urban design.

'mind of a village living in the body of a city'

Humanity is now primarily **an urban species**, a 'Homo Urbanis'. In 2008 we reached 50% of the global population living in a city, predicted to rise to 68% by 2050³. Therefore, the future success of our species is intimately linked to the success of our cities. Although Covid and the 'Zoom effect' has had some impact, there is no sign that the importance of cities will lessen.

Cities have faced pandemics before and innovated, quickening their evolution and emerged stronger, healthier. Covid has been a psychological as well as an economic and physical health crisis. There is a major opportunity for places like Coventry to respond in a way that addresses psychological and emotional wellbeing, essential to a productive economy, reliant also on addressing deprivation and inequality. Coventry can take advantage of these shifts, to reinvent and reposition, reflect and renew.

Yet the evidence is clear that cities create unique challenges to our emotional wellbeing. On some measures⁴, mental health can be twice as bad in cities as non-urban areas, yet cities can confer a kind of psychological robustness, asking us to deal with difference, build tolerance. **The purpose of urban psychology** is to go beneath these questions, reveal the basic human needs and drivers at work, what the consequences will be if places don't meet them, and how they can best respond.

For example, let's turn that 2008 figure on its head and look back over time. 200 years ago, only 10% of the planet lived in a city, reducing enormously as we go back further. Modern humans have been around for about 200,000 years, cities 10,000 at the

most. So, for most of human history, the vast majority have never lived in or even visited a city. In evolutionary terms, they are very new, and we take into them our anciently formed psychological apparatus. We are adaptable of course, but there are limits and to an extent we still have the 'mind of a village living in the body of a city'.

The scale of urban populations is far beyond anything in our past, where we likely lived in groups of 1-200 people⁵ for most of our history. Cities speed things up – New Yorkers talk, walk and eat faster than their country cousins – and time feels linear, run by the clock toward a finite end – something that has been associated with depression and increased anxiety – rather than **a sense of cyclical or organic time**, the closeness to seasonal change and life in the moment experienced by our ancestors. The noise, bustle, advertising and constant stimulation of cities makes demands on our attention, yet we also need quite time to process, reflect, and maintain psychological equilibrium. The positive effects of greenery and proximity to water are well known, increasingly included in city planning, yet we need to go further and understand the effects of different urban forms on our wellbeing, like biophilic design⁶, and simply creating interest, variety, wonder and awe in our everyday cityscapes, not just iconic architecture.

Place development and Place Attachment theory from psychology demonstrate that we internalise our connections to a place as we develop, in a similar way to our relationships with family. If the connections are weak or negative, that has major consequences. Early environments impact on everything from brain function to immune systems, effects that can be extremely negative in deprived conditions or poorly designed neighbourhoods, and can be irreversible by the age of five⁷. Research from neuroscience⁸ has shown increased levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in run down urban environments, due to the 'slow violence' of deprivation, its effects no less real than that of sudden traumatic events. The Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health⁹ has amassed **a treasure-house of robust evidence** on the psychological impacts of different design approaches.

The lesson from all this evidence is that **place really matters**, and we cannot separate out a debate on urban design, how it looks or functions, from that of its impacts on people. The Smart Cities

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agenda has positively shaped urban design, enhancing everything from crime reduction to lowering carbon. We now need a similar revolution for Emotionally Intelligent Cities, that is, understanding the systems of the city as essentially human as well as mechanical, and what will help people to live fulfilling lives within them. Places that respond to our deep-rooted psychological needs. This will help with other major challenges like climate change, social cohesion and inequality, all of which have a psychological component to their cause and resolution.

Coventry, like other cities, faces an urgent crisis through a combination of pre-existing challenges and the pandemic legacy. Urban Psychology can help by raising two important questions for the city's future, and asking how these can be reflected in its urban design. Firstly, could Coventry use this moment to think differently, shift its narrative internally and externally, and proactively shape a more innovative future? Secondly, rather than just lessening the negative impacts of poor design, could Coventry go further, **take techniques from psychology** and apply them to place-making in the round in a way that positively builds psychological resilience for local communities, that locks-in wellbeing from the start?

The late psychologist and urbanist James Hillman said "to improve yourself, improve your city", and what is certain is that business as usual will not work for Coventry. We set out some tentative answers to these questions in the next sections of this report.

The findings

There are three main components to our results. 1, The Coventry City Personality Test, an online survey that looks at the personality and identity of Coventry. 2, Reflections on Coventry - psychologically-framed interviews and discussions, including a workshop and Summit. 3, 'Coventry on the Couch', a case study by psychotherapist in residence for this project, Fiona Wagstaffe, based on discussions and perceptions of the city's life history, asking, if these events happened to a person, what would the emotional legacy be, and how might psychology help?

The Coventry City Personality Test

We wondered what would happen if a city could take a personality test - would it be introvert or extrovert, agreeable or self-absorbed? So, we wrote one, and have trialled it with many cities. This was used as a jumping off point for conversations with Coventry. 16 people took the test for Coventry. The test is based on 7 scales, e.g. 'introverted to extroverted' is a scale, and each paragraph below represents one of those scales. Importantly, the test is about the city, all its people and institutions as a whole, not about any single player, and is an automated result to spark debate, not a scientific readout.

Coventry comes across as very introverted, shy, retiring about its successes. It is resourceful and self-reliant, thinks carefully before it acts, particularly about the needs of its people. It is level headed, not inclined to hasty decisions. It can however appear

uncommunicative, withdrawn and distant, finding it hard to collaborate. Over-thinking can lead to procrastination, letting things happen rather than being proactive. Although highly creative and innovative, it can feel a bit isolated and cut off from the world, almost reclusive to those that don't know it.

Coventry is quite self-absorbed. It is a courageous city however, with an underlying determination to succeed. When it does decide on a course of action, it prefers to have approval and support of others, but will carry on regardless. Coventry is capable of taking the lead and has demonstrated it wants to be ahead of the game. But sometimes this can mean it feels as if the world is against Coventry. The city can be defensive, blame others for failures, is a bit inward looking when it needs to be out there shouting about its successes.

Coventry is mid-way between agreeable and disagreeable. It likes to dream big, yet has its feet on the ground. It is warm, open and tolerant, a friendly city. It has a healthy cynicism for the new, but an open mind about what the future might hold. The city can change direction, but may need a bit of a push. It can seem a bit unsure about its own opinion however, adding to the challenge of decision making, ending up sitting on the fence. It can be perceived as awkward, avoiding confrontations which can clear the air and lead to new ideas, masking its ability to innovate.

Coventry can be spontaneous and embrace change when needed. Its people feel a strong sense of connection and pride, even if they no longer live there. They won't stand for others criticising the city, even if they do so themselves sometimes. But things can be a little chaotic, planning ahead can be piecemeal, lacking a guiding framework. When decisions are made, delivery can be an issue and Coventry can easily become distracted.

Coventry is mid-way between curious and driven. It is inventive and entrepreneurial, welcoming of different values and lifestyles. It generally sets achievable goals and is capable of pulling together at times of need. But it can appear a bit unambitious and timid to others, losing clarity on the bigger picture when faced with competing priorities. There is a strong awareness of the challenges that must be faced, but sometimes not enough focus on tackling them decisively across all the stakeholders.

Coventry is very compartmentalised. It likes to maintain boundaries between different functions within the city, or parts of a plan for change. But the city is not so great at bringing all the different components together, and could do more to act in an integrated manner across all its communities and institutions, deploying its total resources and creativity toward a common cause. Coventry sometimes undervalues who and what it is.

Coventry is midway between idealistic and practical. It can be an intuitive city, with a sense of its place in the world, balancing cynicism and idealism. It can be original, even inspired, but has its feet on the ground and is an honest and ethical place. However,

Coventry can sometimes lack the courage of its convictions, creating tension between its more idealistic and practical sides. Good ideas come along, but too often come to nothing.

Reflections on Coventry

Our interview conversations unearthed three major pillars or dynamics for Coventry that are useful for thinking about the future of the city as a whole, and its urban design.

1. **Self or Internal dynamics.** How Coventry thinks about itself, and the interaction of different parts of the 'psyche' of the city.
2. **Others or Relational dynamics.** How Coventry relates to different partners, groups, stakeholders and other places.
3. **Physical Manifestation.** How the combination of internal and relational dynamics impacts on the built forms of the city.

Self or Internal dynamics

Much of what people told us matched the Coventry Personality Test results. Overwhelmingly, people feel Coventry is open and tolerant, a friendly and welcoming place to be. This is born out through the Peace and Reconciliation programme, a truly inspiring and globally important asset for the city. But people also said they would like to see these kinds of values woven more deeply into the total fabric of the city, including its design. How, one interviewee asked, can the values of peace and reconciliation be translated into a sense of personal safety in all places across the city, how can design help with that, for example in the ring-road underpasses?

There is a **stoicism to Coventrians** - or 'Cov Kids' as some preferred - which has perhaps emerged from dealing with adversity and a sense of disappointment. This creates an emotional buffer, but can also make people more rigid and inflexible. That stoicism is in part a reaction to the cycle of boom and bust that has taken place throughout the city's history, including its economic successes for example with the automotive industry, but going much further back.

There is a truism in psychology that surface aspects of personality also **conceal their shadow opposites**; the friendly neighbour that harbours resentment; the powerful business person that is a lost child at heart. The opposite of stoicism is perhaps a wildly passionate approach, an outpouring of emotion. Stoicism offers

control over the emotions as a route to security, a way of resisting change - the world is changing but I will remain the same. But it is worth asking 'at what cost', and if Coventry has been forced to bury its emotional life.

An example of this was given during one interview. Bruce Springsteen played in Coventry and as is usual on such tours, shouted at the start "Hello Coventry!", only to be met by silence. This is odd when one thinks about the extraordinary musical history of the city, particularly in the 1980's and 90's with Two Tone.

These internal dynamics add to the external perceptions of Coventry, but it is clearly a place that impresses beyond its perceptions when people visit - it's a lot better than the press it gets. Local perception is disconnected from the great and the good in the past and present, for example residents often don't realise how innovative the city is.

People told us time and again that Coventry is fundamentally a friendly, down to earth city with a strong sense of camaraderie, that is non-judgemental, does not pose and where you can be yourself. That's a big set of positives to build on.

Others or Relational dynamics

Coventry's behaviour toward others is very welcoming and open. It comes across as tolerant, but also **self-effacing, a little archaic in its thinking**. It is as if, one person said, the production line thinking of the past has got stuck, and there is a need to shift to a more creative and entrepreneurial mode of being, generating a positive inner rebellion to co-create the city's future.

There is strong leadership in different elements of Coventry, in communities, from the local authority, the university and private sector. But there is a sense that this is disjointed and compartmentalised, not integrated and shared. There is huge enthusiasm for the City of Culture programme and an important question about whether it can help build a more solid sense of shared leadership and dialogue about the future of the city, helping it break out of its current confines. This is as much if not more of a psychological question as it is one of structures.

We called this cycle the 'Phoenix syndrome', because that bird is the symbol of the city, and although often seen positively as emblematic of '**rising from the ashes**', in mythology it is also a creature condemned to a constant cycle of dramatic death and rebirth, of restless, constant and total change. That can also be seen in a 'wiping the slate clean' approach taken to urban design and development, where plans for the city centres post-war redevelopment, removing much of its heritage, preceded the Luftwaffe's raid. Although young people in Coventry see that part of the past as 'someone else's story', there is a sense in the city that this approach is happening again, rather than experimenting a bit more with what is already there and saving the good.

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Coventrians are very ambitious for their future, but fear that plans will go awry because of a shadow of perceived past betrayals. This includes the departure of industries that played a kind of parental role in the city, particularly car manufacturing, providing not just 'jobs for life', but social clubs, charitable activity and other kinds of support. There is a lingering sense of abandonment and lack of institutional trust, alongside an unhelpful nostalgia for a Golden Age that probably never was.

Coventry is **an historic hub of innovation**, not just industry, but also social innovation - from early medical dispensaries for the poor, to comprehensive schooling and the first smokeless zone. Today it produces the second highest rate of patent applications of any UK city.¹⁰ But this is little known outside the city and, perhaps more puzzlingly, even within the city. It is as if Coventry can't see its own strengths and abilities, can't step out of that Stoic behaviour and is stuck in a narrative that is not of its own making.

Coventry has **a strong historic theme of 'movement'**, literally through car and bicycle production, and also through the founding of movements for change including its powerful and globally reaching Peace and Reconciliation programme, and through migrant populations throughout time. But there is a sense of dispersed efforts about the cities use of its resources, if not a lack of energy; that effort is taken up with dealing with the day-to-day, rather than striking out into new territory. This is reflected in the built environment of Coventry, which has real strengths and jewels, but overall can feel draining. The ring road in particular is felt to be constricting, cutting off the centre, trapping the city's energies, symbolically, but also literally, where it covers over **the culverted River Sherbourne**.

There is a sense of hope for the future in Coventry, reflected in the City of Culture programme, but one which needs to be carefully nurtured and grown, building confidence in a shared narrative for the future, directing and not dispersing efforts, avoiding the extremes of 'do nothing' apathy or unrealistically ambitious over-reaching plans that ultimately have the same result. Fiona Wagstaffe talks of a need for the city to grieve, and there is a strong sense that a cathartic experience like this is needed.

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Physical manifestation

Our starting point in looking at the built environment of Coventry centre and its plans for the future was to ask, does this reflect who Coventry is and wants to be? What is the 'whole body and mind' experience of the city, the total impression, smell, sight, sound, feel, texture? Looking at a city from this perspective, roads and streets are literally part of who we are - place development and attachment theory from psychology mentioned above backs this up.

There is iconic and excellent design in the centre, the post-war re-conception of the city had tremendous quality of thinking, for example taking inspiration from the layout of Ancient Egyptian temples. But one has to ask how that really helps, and over time some of that thinking has turned out to not work so well, or been added to in a manner that limits its functionality, makes spaces feel closed-in and impermeable.

In particular, people feel that the ring road is a restrictive concrete collar, some went as far as to say that this was Coventry's version of a 'Berlin wall.' **The original vision even for the ring road had some quality and depth**, it was meant to be hub reaching spokes into community. But this ambition was unrealised, underpasses became barriers and the road now has negative consequences, considered confusing and un-navigable for outsiders even in a car. It is a major barrier to connecting the centre to neighbourhoods and needs addressing in the light of how city centres are changing, for example with shifts in retail and office working, to avoid a sense of Coventry centre becoming hollowed out.

Coventry is rightly proud of its medieval heritage, yet has hidden what would have been its most important asset at that time, the River Sherbourne. The origin of life of medieval cities was the river. There were other reasons for location as well of course, but without a river there could be no city. Coventry has covered up part of its original life source, restricting its sense of energy, movement and spirit, replacing it with what is now a barrier to movement and flow.

it's unique inner potential has not been seen and valued

Part of the centre is also dominated by high rise, creating a feeling of being hemmed in to a harsh physical environment. We all know cities where high-rise works well, but it has to have quality, a sense of elegance, balanced with interest and activity at street level, integrating tower blocks with human interaction and offsetting their effects with open and green space.

The station entrance to the city, a new development, offers some clues about change for the better. It is a successful change, culverting the road and creating green space. Taking this as a starting point, Coventry would benefit from thinking hard about the future purpose and meaning of its city centre. What and who should it be for, and how can it **speak clearly to the world about Coventry's sense of self and identity?** What words would we want people to associate with it: ownership, pride, feeling good, a sense of ease? For the urbanist and psychologist James Hillman, the first question to ask of a city is who it wants to be. It feels like we need to ask Coventry that question and listen carefully to the answer.

Coventry on the Couch: The Psychotherapists View, by Fiona Wagstaffe

I am a Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist and my task in this project was to imagine Coventry, the city, as a person as if that person had arrived in my consulting room seeking help.

As with a patient in my room, my first task was to identify the problem, and then to explore and uncover the antecedents and how they may have contributed to the current situation. Finally, I would think about and talk with the patient about what I thought they needed, and how the psychotherapy should proceed.

I used the information that Chris and Charles had gathered from their research together with some anecdotal information from friends and acquaintances. I then spent a day exploring the city. This was followed up with a meeting with a member of the Coventry History Society to explore Coventry's past.

I will use the pronoun she to describe Coventry in this presentation in order to give an 'embodied' sense of personhood, and as the pronoun he is embedded within the word she.

So, if Coventry had arrived in my consulting room...

I would describe her as anxious and tense, unable to relax into the session and perhaps struggling to breathe air deeply into herself. In spite of this obvious tension, there would be a flatness in her voice and very little affect. She would be cautious and distrustful. She would talk about feeling undervalued by others and yet seem to have very little sense of her own worth and she would have a generally depressed demeanour. There would be a sense of hopelessness in the room and a feeling of exhaustion.

The stand out event in Coventry's history was the blitzkrieg of 14th November, 1940. On that night and into the following morning the Luftwaffe's bombs destroyed 4,300 homes and around two thirds of the city's buildings were damaged.

Tom Harrison, who was involved in a mass observation project in the 30s and 40s, was in Coventry soon after the raid. He said that he saw scenes of:

"Unprecedented dislocation and depression." And that, "The overwhelmingly dominant feeling was utter helplessness."

(Harrison www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-34746691j 5th July 2021)

This was clearly was a severe trauma in Coventry's history, and one can draw immediate links between the emotional state of the city after the bombing, and the presentation in the consulting room, but why, given the passage of so many years, does Coventry still seem to be in the grip of this trauma? Why does this experience still seem to be so raw?

Ever since the devastation of that awful night, Coventry seems to have been engaged in what might be termed a manic defence. The manic defence is an individual's way of avoiding psychic pain. When the pain feels too big to cope with, a patient may become involved in a project that has seemingly overcome the sorrow, or grief that the person is afraid of feeling.

For Coventry, the speed of the rebuilding of the city centre after the Second World War - indeed the plans for city centre redevelopment were in already in place before the war - well intentioned as it was, may well have moved too swiftly away from the pain of that night in 1940. She has continued in something of a pattern of disrepair and redevelopment ever since.

But there are other losses in Coventry's story that are equally damaging, not because of the extent of the trauma itself, but because of its duration: its repeating nature.

So, let's go back to her youth...

Coventry was a city held in high esteem in the Middle Ages.

"By the end of the 14th century Coventry had become the fourth most powerful city in England." (Taken from local government website.)

Coventry was a wealthy city and had made money from trading fleeces, however, during the civil war, Coventry backed the parliamentarians and, when Charles II came to power he ordered the city walls to be destroyed.

there is a repeating pattern of boom followed by bust

Following this there is a repeating pattern of boom followed by bust - the weaving trade, the bicycle industry and then car manufacturing.

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In the consulting room this would suggest early narcissistic injury in which, during a patient's formative years, their unique inner potential had not been seen and valued. This results, according to the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, in an instability in the area of self-esteem. A person may swing between somewhat grandiose feelings together with an inflated sense of their own capacities, to a feeling of inner collapse and a total lack of self-belief - a flattening experience, a wiping out - not unlike Coventry's experience of the blitz bombing.

Coventry has demonstrated herself to be creative and resourceful. She holds a phenomenal number of patents. She has been innovative, and an initiator of many successful community projects, a centre for music. She has provided a home for people from all over the globe. And yet all these successes, she finds hard to recognise in herself. It is as if her experience of being wounded in the 'bust' years, has led her to be so distrustful of the outside world, that to recognise what she is good at can only result in pain. Accomplishments then become aspects of the shadow, the part of the self Jung describes as the parts we cannot bear about ourselves.

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Even her experience of the blitz, which has led to much peace and reconciliation work, is difficult for her to own. At times it is as if the outside world projects its own experience of damage and destruction into Coventry so that even that unique pain is no longer her own to relate to, and come to terms with, in her own way. It is as if the whole country is invested in Coventry remaining in the grip of her war trauma. This can be seen within families in which one child ends up carrying a psychological aspect for the rest of the family. It can be hard for that person to recognise these aspects as the projections of others, and harder still to effect the change necessary to allow, or perhaps demand, others to take back those unwanted parts of themselves.

An important symbol that has recurred for Coventry is that of the Phoenix: the mythical bird that dies in flames and is reborn from the ashes. This is clearly pertinent to Coventry's experience of the Blitz and the rebuilding that occurred afterwards. It also

seems relevant to this boom and bust pattern that appears in the city's history. However, the phoenix is destined to repeat the old patterns again and again, never able to transform itself into a new being in which the new life and the ashes of the old can be integrated. In Coventry, the place where this transformation has perhaps been achieved with some success, is where the old Cathedral and the new sit side by side. A place that appears to be very highly valued by the people of Coventry.

It could be said that Coventry hides her light under a bushel. She certainly has many treasures but she has become so distrustful of the outside world that she hides them to keep them safe. This hiding takes the form of a disparaging of her achievements, both to the outside world, and to herself.

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And so, what of the work that I might envisage Coventry and I undertaking in my consulting room?

Well, the work with Coventry will be slow. There has been too much rushing, too much manic defending against underlying loss and pain. Coventry needs space and time to tell her own story in her own way. It is interesting to think of this in relation to the phrase, 'sent to Coventry' - to not be spoken to, and indeed perhaps, not to be listened to.

It is the listening that is so crucial here, and I think a big part of what this project is about. The experience of boom and bust and particularly the 'crash' part of the bust, seems to have left Coventry so often feeling betrayed and abandoned.

There will be a need for grieving too. Not simply for what has been lost, particularly in relation to the bombing of Coventry of course, but also for what has never been. The taste of success and grandeur that was never realised, like a childhood dream that has to be let go of in order to move on into adulthood.

One hopes this might lead to an uncovering of the 'spirit' of Coventry. The hidden riches, the patents, the ingenuity, the innovation and community creativity, that is so much just under the surface and so hard to get to, and which needs so much to be discovered and celebrated, both by me in my role as a therapist, but more importantly by Coventry herself, only then can she begin to challenge the external perception that she feels other people have of her.

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There is clearly a need to listen and to follow, to meander with Coventry at her own pace, to find her inner channels and reconnect her with her hidden source, her vitality and true spirit. This seems to speak of a need to create spaces in Coventry that are neither inflated nor grandiose, for that only leads to collapse and Coventry is worn out from that. Coventry doesn't need another phoenix rising from the flames, full of splendour and promise yet disconnected from its past, rather she needs an integrated centre, in which there can be both grief and celebration: a space in which Coventry's own delicate song can be heard.

Building the Psychologically Resilient City

To Improve Yourself, Improve Your City

Fracture, healing and seeking a sense of wholeness have been strong themes throughout this project. Coventry is a very resilient place, but sometimes that's about putting walls up rather than reaching out. Psychologist Carol Ryff described that as building positive psychological resilience, the ability of a person to adapt, deal with adversity and complexity, to bounce back and continue to function. These are all attributes of cities, and it is worth asking whether place-making grounded in psychology could help all the people of Coventry flourish, develop as whole human beings, or at the very least, get less in the way?

James Hillman said: "How we imagine our cities, how we envision their goals and values and enhance their beauty defines the self of each person in that city, for the city is the **solid exhibition of the communal soul**. This means that you find yourself by entering the crowd to improve yourself you improve your city."

This implies decision makers at all levels recognizing the power and impact of psychology and feeling comfortable to explore its insights. It means going beyond wellbeing surveys and happiness indices and asking, what does the built environment of Coventry say to its people today, and what could it say tomorrow?

Carol Ryff summarizes six measures that provide people with psychological resilience, developed as they mature. They are: how people are making use of their personal talents and potential (**personal growth**); the depth of connection with significant others (**positive relationships**); whether they viewed themselves to be living in accord with their own personal convictions, in essence being themselves (**autonomy**); how well they were managing

their life situations (**environmental mastery**); the extent to which people feel their lives have meaning, purpose, and direction (**purpose in life**); and the knowledge and acceptance they had of themselves, including awareness of personal limitations (**self-acceptance**).

These themes work well in thinking about how Coventry might evolve its urban design, contributing toward the psychological resilience of a place and its people. They do not replace other priorities like employment, but are things that matter to our well-being from our earliest moments and jobs alone cannot provide. Drawing on our previous work, we ask a series of questions for Coventry in relation to its design and management. The aim is not to answer them as a tick list, but use them as a jumping off point for what Coventry wants from its design.

1. The possibility for Coventrians' improvement (personal growth): Does the city and its design display empathy, a sense of wanting everyone to do well, with programmes that match that aspiration? Is it a place where people are able to feel that anything is possible? Are basic wellbeing factors catered for to encourage: connection; activity; curiosity; learning; giving?

2. The ability to deal with difference and find connection (positive relationships): Does the city operate interculturally, are there activities and events within the cities spaces that encourage communities to bond and to mix, and to share in a collective sense of identity? Is the city able to get to the root causes of conflict and deal with them? Are neighbourhoods designed to maximise wellbeing and social capital, does the layout create interactions, walkability, build trust? Do the social institutions of the city mirror these values?

3. Reflecting the courage of Coventry's convictions (autonomy): does design create places that are locally authentic, reflect local aspiration and values? Is design delivering excellence in the everyday just as much as the iconic buildings? What are the values of the city and how are these reflected in its place-making? Is there an attempt to evaluate the psychological impacts of design decisions? Is the purpose of a housing block a roof over the head, or does it reflect a deeper mission, helping people to live well? Do the conditions to create positive Place Attachment and Place Development exist?

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4. Nurturing deep-seated needs (environmental mastery): having easy access to facilities and an environment that meet basic human needs, including natural resources and quiet space. Is there an explicit understanding of human environmental needs and a strategy to meet these? Do neighbourhoods have a high quality of amenities, and are they well-linked to bigger, city-wide cultural and social assets? Are there events that cyclically mark the passing of time, and places where a sense of time can be lost? Does Coventry actively seek to enable the following basic needs: feeling secure; belonging; self-esteem and respect; a right to cultural identity; an ability to participate; and a sense of fairness?

5. Self-awareness, knowing where it wants to go, and driven to help others (purpose in life): do the design aspirations of Coventry relate to an explicit plan for a better future and a desire to help everyone share in it? Can its design draw on its history, its major 'life-events' and geography through the 'psychoanalysis of place' that has been part of this project? Is there an awareness of how others see it, not just how it wants to be seen? Does it have a strong, visible and shared narrative for its future rooted in local identity and culture? Could it be described as generous, compassionate, a place that is here to help?

6. Balancing citizenship, self and community (self-acceptance): Is Coventry building a sense of citizenship that balances a shared identity of the city with those of different communities and individuals, and expressing that in its design? Do citizens feel listened to in the big design decisions? Is there a kind of a 'social contract' between the city and the individual (behaviours that are expected, with opportunity and support given in return)? How can design help the city feel like a place happy in its own skin, not comparing itself to others all the time?

Balancing the different components of a psychologically resilient city is complex yet important, particularly for urban design. In some cities we might experience narrow sidewalks next to looming buildings that overwhelm us, little if any greenery, low quality materials, few panoramas, nowhere to sit, car fumes. Or instead, we might feel inspired by shape, form, colour and materials, extraordinary everyday buildings, quality green and pedestrian spaces. Boring cityscapes increase levels of debilitating stress, whereas enriched surroundings broaden our capacities.

We are biologically driven to want to be in places with interest and complexity.

The city communicates through every fibre of its being, its physical and social structures, governance, its life and animation. These things combine in a powerful way that impacts directly upon the psychology of its people, which in turn impact on place, so creating a cycle: an urban psychology. This all is encapsulated in a feeling of does this place say "yes or no". We know from our experience that Coventry very much wants to say "yes".

Conclusions: what might Coventry do?

1. Flip Coventry's urban design reputation: a person-centred design leader

Coventry clearly has some urban design challenges, but there is much to build on. The post war vision had significant qualities, individual buildings are truly iconic, and its deeper history reveals a sense of medieval aesthetics.

As Coventry embarks on its design evolution it could lead the pack, once again become a by-word for beauty, but also for psychologically-informed urban design that puts people first, functions well, meets everyone's needs and writes excellence into the everyday. A city designed to help communities and individuals to grow, attracting business and visitors.

Urban psychology is also at a pivotal moment. Interest and expertise is circling, looking for projects on which to land. Coventry can seize the moment, harness a growing movement and become the first city to do so. Through urban psychology, Coventry's design can reflect the aspirations of its citizens back into the lived experience of the city, also projecting itself outwards to the world. Perhaps aiming for UNESCO City of Design status in the process. A first step might be a bigger event, inviting a global audience into a debate alongside local communities, creating new possibilities.

2. Think like the Bauhaus did: a city-University collaboration

The Bauhaus was founded in 1919, going on to become one of the most influential design movements of the 20th Century, ideas that still echo in today's urban design. They didn't always get it right, but that often chaotic, ultimately brilliant mixing of different disciplines led to an outpouring of creativity and new ideas.

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In 2019, we held an event for the Bauhaus Centenary, asking, if it was founded now, what would it do? The answer was unanimous: developed its unique interdisciplinary methods to focus not just on individual objects or buildings, but neighbourhoods, entire cities and all their interconnected circuitry. It would have brought together artists and designers, but also psychologists, economists, sociologists, environmentalists, anthropologists, historians and story tellers. Those that make, understand, reflect and debate the world we inhabit, alongside residents. Some of this work has happened, but it is occasional not frequent, considered radical not usual. A New European Bauhaus is in fact being founded, albeit focused on sustainability, a theme which the original Bauhaus would undoubtedly be considering had it continued.

The futures of Coventry City and University (including to an extent Warwick University) are intimately linked, all will succeed or fail together. This project could build on the excellent work of the Architecture and Built Environment courses at Coventry University, its plans for innovative new courses to shape a Bauhaus-style programme of interventions, starting small but thinking big. This could include weekend symposia and conferences, short courses, attracting an eclectic mix of entrepreneurial innovators across and beyond the UK. As we now know, we can do this virtually too.

Experience tells us many very talented people would want to participate in such a ground-breaking programme, particularly if it was rooted in the real-time development of Coventry, giving people the chance to learn, but also be part of something bigger, a growing movement of psychologically-aware, person-centred design rooted in the reality of Coventry's past, present and future.

3. Embed psychology in the city: a programme of psychologists in residence

Building on the work with Fiona Wagstaffe in 'Coventry on the Couch', a series of other psychologists who know Coventry, or are interested to visit and work here might be invited to spend time in residence, virtually and physically.

There are many branches of psychology each with something different to offer: cultural; social; evolutionary; environmental. Psychiatry, neuroscience and neuropsychology also have much to offer. All these disciplines are increasingly interested in the

city and its two-way interaction with human psychology, what that means for well-being, design and wider urban policy.

There is a lot of evidence out there which Coventry could benefit from, but it could also amass new evidence, for example through a research bid to get some of this work going practically, not just academically.

4. Build a new narrative based on your history of experimentation and innovation

Coventry feels like a place that needs to **take control of its own narrative**, tell itself a broader, more positive story and relay that to the outside world. That should not be done through big expensive marketing campaigns that often just feel empty or defensive, but through activity that speaks for the city and the people.

The City of Culture is the start of a new narrative. Momentum must however be sustained. The programme we describe would help leave a lasting and tangible legacy in the built form of Coventry, building on City of Culture.

This will also reveal new, fine grain texture for Coventry's narrative, from retelling the past, present and future of the city through the lens of psychology, to excavating the daily lives of Coventrians, unearthing a hidden richness to enhance the story of the city.

Coventry has a history of the kind of innovation described above, which continues today, seen in its exceptionally high number of patents, the second highest for any UK city. Its narrative should be authentic, distinctive, with a truly local voice, but rooted also in its sense of innovation, pride and ambition for the future.

5. Make the narrative real through a 'laboratory' of urban design

Narratives are important, they define who and what we are, and the same applies to cities. But unless they drive action, they will always feel hollow which can lead to a sense of frustrated ambition and grief for what could have been, as revealed in Coventry on the Couch.

Coventry also has a feeling of 'lets start from the beginning again' about some of its biggest projects, which can lead to destroying the good as well as the bad. There is **an opportunity for Coventry to experiment with what already exists** in its built environment before deciding on an irreversible course of action.

The ring road might be temporarily closed to cars, opened to people to walk an unthinkable walk, experience connection from centre to neighbourhood: urban sports, picnics, festivals. The existence of the River Sherbourne could be further revealed - a process which is partially on its way - through public art, releasing its vigour back into the city's life. A programme based around innovative meanwhile uses and temporary spaces could animate the city centre, temporarily pedestrianising, greening, or taking over spaces for community use. The recent programme of lighting in the city centre did exactly this, literally illuminating new perspectives of the city.

a growing movement of psychologically-aware, person-centred design

This will not only reveal what is good and irredeemable about the urban design of Coventry, it will engage local people, taking them on a journey toward a shared destination, a valued travelling partner and co-navigator.

6. Whatever Coventry does, understand the psychological impacts, particularly on the most vulnerable

All cities should do all they can to **understand the impacts of their choices** on the emotional and mental wellbeing of their residents, particularly people experiencing poverty and deprivation, and vulnerability. The reality is, few do.

As we have said elsewhere: 'To see the urban fabric.... and city life as empty shells devoid of human psychological content is careless, to be blind to its consequences is foolish'. Through this project, we hope we have demonstrated that urban environments impact fundamentally on people's wellbeing, and that has major social and economic consequences.

Urban design choices can also be a matter of life and death, particularly for deprived and elderly people. During a heatwave in France, elderly people living in poorer areas of Paris in badly designed, cheap accommodation were many more times likely to die than those in affluent areas - and many did. As climate change becomes an ever more present reality, design impacts must be thought through in a measurable way for both physical and mental health.

Coventry has the opportunity to place such measurement front and centre of its future plans. It already has an innovative Public Health programme and is a 'Marmot City' with a strong focus on deprivation which could be extended into measuring the effects of the built environment on different aspects of wellbeing.

It is astonishing to note that for every major new building programme, in law we must undertake an environmental and an economic impact assessment, **but there is no assessment required of a development's impact on the wellbeing of the people** that will use or be in proximity to it. This seems an extraordinary omission from our systems of design and planning, and one that Coventry could lead the way in remedying.



The ring road creates a barrier in the city - was there another solution?

SECTION TWO: BLINDSPOTS, REVEALING THE DEEPER DYNAMICS OF CITIES

Rounded Thinking

The second section of the report focuses on a series of historic blindspots that have circumscribed our understanding of the deeper dynamics that make cities work. These are: Integrated thinking, the need to understand the city as an emotional and sensory experience, the importance of environmental psychology and the power of cultural literacy.

Critics might complain, 'Oh not another thing to consider. We've only just taken in the importance of sustainable communities, diversity and climate issues.' Yet these concepts are merely enlightened common sense. There are two basic approaches: either, embedding this knowledge as a consideration within existing disciplines through adapting coaching programmes; or with the help of experts and specifically brought in as part of a team.

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The first priority is to think in a more **rounded interconnected way** to understand the dynamics of a place so as to see the connections between the tangible and intangible aspects of a city as well as how differing spheres such as the private, public and civic each have something to offer to good city making. The recognition too of how complex a city is and that there are many wicked problems that require solutions addressed from multiple perspectives. Thus, **joblessness is not only an economic issue, but also a social, health or psychological issue.** Whilst integrated thinking and acting has gained traction as a concept, for example as 'place-based' policy, organisational structures within places still largely remain siloed.

Integrated working implies allowing others - including local residents - to comment on or even rewrite the script or rules of a project. This does not displace the architect, engineer, planner or other professional: It invites them to rethink how their gifts and experience can be opened to genuine partnership within an honest, reflexive conversation. It means working towards professional institutions whose interpretation of city-making is dynamic, aware of the tensions between perspectives within contemporary society and more instrumental as a result. It means forging new hybrid and evolving practices which secure our shared values and goals. It requires a set of lateral, critical and integrated thinking qualities as well as core competencies. These draw on the insights of cultural geography; urban economics and social affairs; urban planning; history and anthropology; design, aesthetics and architecture; ecology and cultural studies as well as knowledge of power configurations.

The crucial step is to be able to define and communicate a bigger role and purpose for a city by defining a common goal based on an integrated emotional, technological, environmental, social, economic, cultural and imaginative story. It should feel like an unfolding drama where the citizen knows their role because they are gripped into engagement. It needs to tap into peoples' sense of who they are and where they might go, hinting at their role. Each discipline contributes its unique quality, traditions and focus necessary to comprehend urban complexities. It reminds us that city goals need to be delivered through a wider skill-set beyond that of planning professionals.

The Sensory Experience

The second priority is to perceive the city as a more **comprehensively sensory experience** so as to grasp its effect on individuals and how this shapes their motivation, will and commitment to their place. Emotions drive our life. They shape our possibilities, determine our reactions to situations and our outlook on the future. Yet have you ever read a city plan that starts with the emotions or even refers to them? 'Our aim is to make citizens happy.' 'We want to create a sense of joy and passion in our city, to engender a feeling of love for your place.' 'We want to encourage a feeling of inspiration and beauty.' It is rare to find such sentiments in the context of urban discourse. Yet it is odd that **emotions - such a defining feature of human existence - are absent in discussions of city-making.** Instead, the prevalent, interchangeable words and concepts proliferating involve a barren, unemotional language that is performance-driven: strategy, development, policy, outcomes, framework, targets. It feels hollow. A challenge for city leaders is to describe the aims for their city without using any of those words.

How does this connect to city-making? Just as we can test a person's emotional system, any place-making project should start with 'How does it feel?' rather than 'Does it meet a particular technical or policy specification?' The latter is not about the human condition. If one can tap into emotions, places can become more sustaining and sustainable. For example, darkness engenders fear, but stark sodium lights which seek to solve fear make us fearful as it sharpens the contours between dark and light. It feels cold and external. Soft light that feels welcoming is a better solution. High-rise blocks can make people feel diminished as overwhelming structures can feel outside a person's control, thus engendering fear and again a cold and external feeling. It makes a person feel less powerful. It takes away the sense of identity with which we manage the world. Thus, a high-rise block that works well would tend to balance the excitement of a view or a sense of awe with comforting features. These might, for example, be soft textures created through greening and planting.

Even for the non-religious, a medieval cathedral can uplift as the experience of a sense of awe and dignity balances a potentially overwhelming feeling with one of order and structure. On the other hand, a modern church can feel like a social workers' gathering place, which does not lift the person into a different state of being, belonging and wanting to feel attached. Coventry's new cathedral is a wonderful example of the opposite - it connects and transports. Attachment is a fundamental human cue. The brain, it appears, is hardwired to need a dimension we might call the spiritual - some higher-order sense of meaning, purpose, symmetry. It is a common cross-cultural response which triggers a sense of possibility and wholeness. Yet we do not have the same level of evidence as to how to respond to this desire, where to locate it in the modern city. Much of this knowledge is intuitive. Intuition, although decried as unscientific, in fact requires a highly developed sensibility, which comes from reflecting on a range of experiences. Intuitively,

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people seem to know what kind of places work and they vote with their feet as these become popular. They might not be able to explain why, as their intuition is insufficiently conscious, but it is nevertheless a powerful driver of human behaviour. Again, intuition has zero status in city-making, so people have to school themselves in accepting physical environments that conflict with their own instincts rather than trusting their own judgements. By neglecting the capacity for people fundamentally to trust their own judgements we infantilise them.

Psychological Understanding

The third priority is psychology, particularly, but not exclusively, environmental psychology which relates to the above. It measures the effect of the physical and social environment on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. The discipline has a rich history stretching back over 50 years, but is under-recognized. The evidence it has gathered includes the harmful effects of ugliness. This could be a building, cheap materials, bad urban design or townscape planning. Consider the restorative effects of beauty. The impact on people of a clutter of signs. The influence of height on the senses, feeling overwhelmed by the townscape, especially when the sidewalks are too narrow. The impact of heaviness or clunkiness of buildings. The consequences of seas of endless asphalt, wide roads and turning circles or sprawl. The effect of people feeling cut off by roads, barriers and obstacles which create a disorienting effect, confusion and a lack of feeling safe. These factors shape our mental geography, which in turn determines our sense of wellbeing. Feelings about dirt and rubbish and the subsequent lack of care people have for their environment are significant. The repercussions of noise and car dominance is only now coming sharply into focus. Taken together **city making done badly can not only create anxiety**, but as neuroscience now demonstrates, impact very deeply on mental health. Clearly aesthetics plays an important role in city making even though we can argue about both beauty and ugliness and these may differ according to culture, gender, disability, education, stage of life and age. Yet, what is deemed ugly tends to cut across divisions - people just know. Unsurprisingly, the net effect of perceived beautiful, well-designed, high quality physical environments is

that they feel restorative, more care is taken of them, feelings of stress and fear of crime is reduced, and social mixing increases as does hope, motivation and confidence in the future and thus wellbeing. 'Natural' environments have similar restorative effects.

Cultural Perspective

A fourth priority is a cultural perspective which, in all its dimensions has risen dramatically up the agenda. 'Culture is a people's way of life. It is people's ways of being'. So, culture is who we are and creativity shapes what we can become, thus the cultural perspective can be a powerful and most insightful lens through which to look at our place. It helps explain what drives us and our motivations, why our economic and social life is as it is. By exploring the textures of culture within a place, opportunities and resources emerge as well as what the blockages and obstacles are. So, places are seen not as machines or just inanimate clumps of buildings. A city is its people and so a complex living organism. It is primarily a cultural artefact, as even its built form is culturally conditioned.

Over the last thirty years the understanding of concepts like cultural resources, cultural mapping, cultural planning (or better: planning culturally), cultural literacy, and the cultural industries have come into sharper focus. They all share the search for the special, the unique, the distinctive. The idea of cultural literacy has moved centre stage: a vital skill as important as numeracy, especially now that cities are far more diverse and polarising narratives increasingly rife. It is the ability to read, understand, find significance in, evaluate, compare and decode the local cultures in a place. This allows one to **work out what is meaningful and significant to people who live there**. We understand better the lifecycle of the city in motion. We understand more what we see, feel, smell and hear. We grasp better the shapes of urban landscapes and why they came about. We sense history in how the city goes about its business, who the historic names of places refer to and what their purpose was and how the resources of the past might be used for the future of the city. We recognise how perhaps the placement of facilities like markets often seemingly chaotic at first sight are thought through at root. We feel the city's economy viscerally both through obvious signs like a steel plant or whether it is going up or down because of shabbiness or 'for sale' signs. We identify the social consequences of urban economies in transition as when 'lower value' uses get supplanted by 'higher value' uses. We appreciate aesthetic codes so understand the meanings of colours, the style of buildings and their presentation. Subconsciously 'trained' in advertising symbolism the culturally literate intuitively and interprets the manifold urban distinctions and identifiers - to whom a shop is targeted, what draws people in and what repels.

What we call the culture of a place is the residue of what has stood the test of time. It is what is left and deemed important after the ebb and flow of argument, the fickleness of fashion and negotiation (followed by constant renegotiation) about what is valuable has passed. **Culture is the response to circumstance, location, history and landscape.**

the values of a culture leave tangible marks

The values of a culture leave tangible marks: the buildings respond to weather and wealth and the spirit of their times; their quality, design, style or grandeur to the values and foibles of the powerful; how good the buildings of the poor are depends largely on how well they are empowered; places of power, ritual and worship reflect the role of politics and religion; places for culture like museums, libraries, theatres or galleries from more reverential times through their appearance demand obedience, they seem to say 'come to our hallowed ground', whereas more modern and democratic buildings invite and entice, they can be more transparent in style. This is reflected in the materials used, perhaps granite in one and glass in the other.

When we look at places through the lens of cultural literacy we see at once **whether care, pride and love is present or disenchantment, disinterest and disengagement**. We see too, without needing to know the details whether corruption or simply a lack of strategy are the order of the day. Being culturally literate means understanding the weft and weave of a place; what matters to a people and how they have expressed it. Without such understanding one walks blind. It can be learnt by paying attention, watching, learning to look closely, finding out how and why things work as they do, assessing the past to know how it shapes the present.

Culture, when acknowledged, gives strength in moving forward or even in being able to reject negative features. It then becomes a backbone that can create the resilience that makes change and transformation easier. Confidence is key for creativity, innovation and renewal. When cultures feel threatened or weak or that another culture is superimposing themselves upon it, a local culture goes into its shell. Culture then becomes a defensive shield not open to change, imagination and creativity

The cultural resources of a place are embodied in peoples' creativity, skills and talents. These are the raw materials of a place and cultural attitudes represent a city's value base. The appreciation of culture should sit at the core of urban planning and overall development, rather than being seen as a marginal add-on. The method by which a community identifies and documents its local cultural resources is known as cultural mapping. Culture-led development then grounds the approach with a perspective that puts human experience at the centre of how we design places. It

involves having a culturally sensitive mindset and it helps create better places.

Normally culture is equated with one of its key components, the arts, and leads people to think that culture in a place is only about putting on a festival or commissioning a piece of public art. Our definition of culture is broader. However, the role of arts cannot be underestimated as we are witnessing currently in Coventry's City of Culture. Indeed, in this respect city making has moved forward with its recognition of the power of arts. However, there has been a recent major set back with cuts of 50% announced for university arts education. This will create longer term damage.

The arts can help create an open-minded culture that is more resilient and adaptable to the changes brought about by political ructions and globalisation. Think of any problem or opportunity and the arts can in principle help. What other activity can better deal with dialogue between cultures, ethnic conflicts, allowing individuals to discover talents, to gain confidence, to become motivated, to change the mindset, to involve themselves in community.

What is special about the part of culture associated with the arts: singing, acting, writing, dancing, performing music, sculpting, painting, designing or drawing especially in relation to the development of a city, is that participating in the arts uses the imaginary realm to a degree that other disciplines might not do so to such an extent as sports or most of science. Those are more rule bound and precise. The distinction between the arts and writing a computer programme or engineering is perhaps that the latter are generally seen more as ends in themselves, arguably they do not change the way you perceive things in quite the same way as other cultural activities, they tend to teach you something specific.

Engagement with arts combines stretching oneself and focusing, feeling the senses, expressing emotion, self-reflecting and original thought. Essential to it is mastering the craft through technical skill on top of which is layered interpretation that sums up something meaningful to the listener or viewer. The result can be: to broaden horizons, to convey meaning, with immediacy and or depth, to communicate iconically so you grasp things in one without needing to understand step by step, to help nurture memory, to symbolise complex ideas and emotions, to see the previously unseen, to learn, to uplift, to encapsulate previously scattered thoughts, to anchor identity and to bond people to their community or by contrast to stun, to shock by depicting terrible images for social, moral, or thought-provoking reasons, to criticise or to create joy, to entertain, to be beautiful and the arts can even soothe the soul and promote popular morale. More broadly expression through the arts is a way of passing ideas and concepts on to later generations in a (somewhat) universal language. To have these effects the arts have to be communicated and then they affect how societies develop.

Humans are largely driven by their sensory and emotional landscape in spite of centuries of developing scientific knowledge and logical, analytical, abstract and technical thought.

humans are largely driven by their sensory and emotional landscape

They are not rational in a scientific sense, that does not mean they are irrational but rather a-rational. This is why all cultures develop the arts. As the arts can speak the language of the senses and feelings it has immense power that the 'scientifically' minded should understand and use as it can help them achieve their aims. There are hardly any other ways of tapping into this knowledge.

This highlights **the role of the arts in revealing potential**. The assumption is that everyone can in principle be more creative, involved, engaged, informed and that this is significant in creating citizenship. The out of the box, lateral thinking and use of imagination present in the arts is perhaps the most valuable thing the arts can offer other disciplines such as planning, engineering, social services or to the business community especially if allied to other emphases like a focus on local distinctiveness.

Culture in its broader sense (for example including Coventry's Peace and Reconciliation programme, very much part of its culture) and the arts in particular help cities in a variety of ways. First with their aesthetic focus they draw attention to quality, and beauty. Unfortunately, this is often expressed in a limited way, typically a piece of public sculpture in front of an ugly or ordinary building. Yet in principle they challenge us to ask: Is this beautiful? This should affect how urban design and architecture evolve. Second the arts challenge us to ask questions about our environment as a place. This should lead us to ask: 'What kind of place do we want to be and how should we get there?' Arts programmes can challenge decision makers by undertaking uncomfortable projects that force leaders to debate and take a stand. For example, an arts project about or with migrants might make us look at our prejudices. Arts projects can empower people who have previously found it hard to express their views, so artists working with communities can in effect help consult people. For example, a community play devised with a local group can tell us much more than a typical political process or consultation. Finally arts projects can simply create enjoyment. A useful question to ask is: What is the problem and can a cultural approach help; can the arts help? For example, intergenerational communication or mixing cultures, clearly the arts are more effective than many other initiatives.

Within this thinking about culture and the arts the idea of the Creative City emerged, and the now global movement that followed it, although since its origins over 30 years ago its scope has broadened to consider the importance of social innovation and that of business as well as the 'Creative Bureaucracy' - that is a public administration willing to be adaptive and agile in the context of the new circumstances (now an annual global Creative Bureaucracy Festival). The core definition of the creative city remains pertinent. It states that in a world of dramatic change people, organizations and the city as a whole need to create the conditions to be able to think, plan and act with imagination in solving problems and creating opportunities.

In conclusion in getting across the changing landscape of planning and associated disciplines it is useful to reconceptualise the new requirements. For example, to create good cities we need: Good observers, explorers, galvanisers, visualisers, interpreters, contextualisers, story tellers, revealers, information gatherers, strategists, inspirers, critics, agenda setters, processors, facilitators, consultants, translators, analysts, problem-solvers, decision-makers, procurers, managers, makers, constructors, builders, brokers, mediators, conciliators, educators, arbitrators, implementers, evaluators, appraisers, presenters. And then in addition, the classic disciplines associated with urban development like design, planning, valuing and engineering come into play. The terrain is large and many people will have a combination of these skills and it is not assumed that everyone will have all to the same degree of intensiveness. Thus, collaboration and team working are crucial, as is an openness to different disciplines and ideas.

In particular, the many branches, ideas and evidence-base of psychology represents an under-utilised resource for city making, and it is surprising that the single area of study concerning itself most with the dynamics of human feeling and emotion has not been taken more seriously as an urban discipline. Work to develop an 'urban psychology' seeks to address this imbalance, including pioneering projects like this one with Coventry.

psychology represents an under-utilised resource for city making,

THANKS

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Chris Murray works with cities and governments in the UK and abroad to improve their economic and social potential. In the UK he has helped lead a process of devolution from national to local levels. Prior to working with cities, he worked in psychiatry. **Charles Landry** works with cities around the world to help them make the most of their potential. He is widely acclaimed as a speaker, author and facilitator of complex urban change projects.

Coventry on the Couch is an innovative experiment in Urban Psychology, the first of its kind. Using tools and techniques adapted from psychology to investigate place, it gets beneath the skin of people's relationship to the city's urban design and the city centre, at a moment when major redevelopment is planned.

A 'psychotherapist in residence' analysed the life history of the city as if it were a person, asking what the emotional legacy of events might be for its present and future, the impact on residents, and whether strategies from psychotherapy could be employed to unlock more of the cities potential.

The City Personality Test revealed different facets of Coventry's identity from the perspective of Coventrians - or 'Cov Kids' as many preferred - revealing a curious blend of introspection and openness, stoicism and tolerance, and an undercurrent of innovation and untapped entrepreneurial spirit.

Psychologically framed interviews with different groups and actors in the city dug deeper into the detail, understanding how symbolic acts in the city's past and present can play an important role in shaping its future, and how the unique 'psyche' of Coventry is manifested in its built environment.

All these strands were brought together to make a set of suggestions for how Coventry can tap into more of its creative potential, design and evolve a built environment that reflects that ambition, and support the development of a psychologically resilient population in a manner that addresses deprivation and makes economic gains for residents.

The project took place during Coventry City of Culture, when alternative ways of seeing the city and people's relationships to it exploded creatively. This contribution is intended to provoke new thinking and dialogue, but also to shift the dial on Coventry's narrative through actions that can have tangible results, creating a positive and lasting legacy for the city, which is to say, the people.

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