



Talk: No Mean City: Narratives and Realities of Glasgow

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[applause]

Robert Rogerson: Thank you very much, and it's, actually, the last session of the day. I think I have a role here which is to warm you all up for a field trip, before we send you out into the slightly cooler conditions than you're experiencing here in the Technology and Innovation Centre. That's part of my role. The other is perhaps one to set a context for the field trips, introduce them, introduce the ideas that you're going to explore wherever you're going in the city and hopefully learn a little bit more about this interesting city, where inequality is something that comes to the forefront of both political debate and often civic debate.

My title. My title draws on three pieces of work. I'm an academic and I think through the topics from lenses of what's written. The first one, *No Mean City* is something that's probably very Glaswegian, a book written in the 1930s, 1935 it was published, talked about the inequalities in the city. The things that Darren McGarvey was talking about yesterday, about the way in which slums in the city created communities, but also inequalities, how they represented civic engagement but also crime. The *No Mean City* idea of the 1930s was lost throughout the 1950s of Glasgow. But in the late 1970s and 1980s, it was resurrected, not by politicians, but on the back of a television programme.

For Glasgow was portrayed through a programme called *Taggart*, which talked about crime in the city. It was fictitious but in every episode of *Taggart*, there was a murder, and that represented to the wider world of Glasgow, Glasgow of the 1970s and '80s. It's the first backdrop to the field trips that we're going on. Then perhaps I could also draw on another piece of literature opens it up from Glasgow to the United Kingdom, Charles Dickens's work of *The Tale of Two Cities*. I take my quote, "It was the best of times, and it was the worst of times." That suggests there are alternative ways of reading, of learning about, of representing the stories of a city.

I'm going to use of that as the lens as we go through the next 20 minutes or so. There's a third text, one that perhaps represents for the institute future cities works, which is recognition that across Europe, across the world, cities are inherently unequal. They're unequal now, they've been unequal in the past, and they're going to be unequal in the future. Inequality is part of an urban condition, and that's the challenge we work with.





It's not necessarily to say we can get rid of it, but it's how to mitigate it in ways that work for everyone. How can we be inclusive but also recognizing the inequalities that are part of that urban fabric?

In particular, the point of my quote here is that the urban fabric of the past, the heritage matters today, it shapes the nature of inequalities that you are going to see in the field trips. It's something we have to work with, we can rework in some ways, but we can never neglect it, and of course we can't fundamentally change it. Today you're going to go out and listen to narratives from the city from, Glaswegians, from those who have lived and work in the city. There are going to be multiple voices, you're going to hear often different narratives of the city. What I'd like to try and do is provide a context for that so let's have quickly a little bit of history.

Glasgow is a city, started in the 14th century as a city, but really it was in the late 19th century and the early 20th century that Glasgow in its current structure came to the fore. It was built around things like this, shipbuilding. A black-and-white picture from the 1950s only 60, 70, years ago, Glasgow looked like this. You can just about see in the distance there the tower of the University of Glasgow. If you're not going to see to the West end of the city, and this is looking towards the city centre. Glasgow was an industrial city. It was called, in the 1930s, the second city of the empire, reflecting a colonial history.

Glasgow's role in that as we'll see in a minute has some bearing on the city positively and negatively, but it was at the heart of much of the industrial revolution of the UK. At some point in the 1910s, 1920s, it was reckoned about 30% of all the ships in the world had some connection with Glasgow. It wasn't just ships, in the 1930s more than half the locomotives of the world had either been built in Glasgow, or been renovated in Glasgow, repaired in Glasgow. Almost all of the engines that were in the colonial Southeast Asia came somewhere from Glasgow. Glasgow was an international city reaching out from its origins here. The consequence of that was it was very cosmopolitan, it attracted migrants into the city.

It used the connections, the interconnections, the internationalization that we now talk about on the globalization, to help build the engines, not physical engines, the nature of the engine of the city, the heart of the city. In the 1930s, and 1940s, 1950s Glasgow's population was probably more diverse than most British cities. A feature we now see, of course, in cities around Europe. That wealth, that internationalization brought capital into the city. For those of you walking through the city centre if you've not been there for your shopping yet, the main shopping street, then most of the buildings, the fabric, represent the capital brought back into the city at the period of the late 19th century, the early 20th century.

There was a wealth in Glasgow that few other European cities could talk about, but it was unequal. Even then there were significant issues for Glasgow about how to deal with inequalities as we'll see in a few minutes. Of course, that wealth created its own issues and problems, perhaps now coming to the fore a hundred years on. For those of you who have passed the Gallery of Modern Art building between here and the hotel if you're staying in the motel. You'll see this lit up famous for its statue of the Duke of





Wellington with his cone on the outside, the traffic cone on the top, it looks great but there's a history.

It was built as a town house for one of the wealthiest members of the community of Glasgow, built on the back of the slave trade, the tobacco trade that was funding the capital back into the city. It's problematic, it continues to be problematic here in Glasgow. Perhaps coming to the fore 100, 150 years on as to quite where those resources came from, what were the consequences elsewhere that brought benefits to Glasgow. The inequalities we are talking about in Glasgow are not just parochial they're global. That wealth spread westward, why westward because the wind took all the fumes, and the mist, and the steam, all the fumes, all the pollution from the city centre eastwards.

The wealth went West and the poorer communities were to the East. These are the images you see to the West end of the city. Glasgow University that used to be just across the road here on High Street, moved in 1879 out to the West end in the park lands that were donated to the city by the wealthy merchants, to create what was called the Green Place, the Dear Green Place – the name will get you on to your websites, the internet connection here today. Glasgow was at the turn of the 19th century, a green, really green city. I've run them all through 136 parks in Glasgow more than almost any other city of Victorian era. That was due to foresight of the city officials, but also the wealth that was being brought into the cities where they could afford to lay aside land for that purpose. Park Circus is probably the most dominant one on the West end, it's on the top of a drumlin.

If you have not yet worked out, Glasgow was built on hills, little drumlins, lots of them, and the highest value properties, the top of the hill, the lower one is where most of the others live. Park Circus is the top. It represented at the time a civil group who was strongly engaged in developing Glasgow, had a social conscience, put much of the wealth back into the city, but career had wealth generated through trade elsewhere that might, now at least, it must seem to be more problematic. Byres road is now is currently the West Ends hub of civic and cultural activity, and that's where you're going tomorrow night. Some of us are going to, some are going tonight for dinner and I recommend it as a place for congenial tastes that are very mixed. That's one side of the city.

For those who go into the field trip to the other end, Bridgeton and Dalmarnock, to the East End of the city and that's where the workers were. While we might think in contemporary lenses that this was the poorer parts of the city, and it was, it was relative wealth here represented by some of the things you see here. Bridgeton Cross if you're walking down to, that field on that field class, you see some of the architecture, some of the investment that was put there, not by the wealthy merchants, but by local communities building it up.

There was a relative wealth even in the East End of the city, even the poorest parts of the city. The city council, the corporation as it was called, and that by 1911, then invested in this area, they created the city, cattle and meat market, the abattoir that connected to the local communities and the trade around the city itself.





When we think of East and West straight up, poor and rich, we need to recognize that in various times over the last 200 years in Glasgow those terms have been used in a variety of different ways. For many, living in the East End in the 1920s and 30s, perhaps a little early, 1910s and 1920s, excluding the war years. This was Boomtown. It brought migrants in from Italy, from Ireland, from other parts of Europe, sometimes to stay in Glasgow, sometimes just to work here for short periods of time, learn skills and leave and go back and return elsewhere in the world.

For many of them, like many Scots, they went elsewhere as entrepreneurs. Glasgow's room was often in the 1920s, seem to be one of the entrepreneur's zone. We could have one narrative, therefore, that Glasgow past is one that's positive with problems, but one of the developments, but perhaps by the 1930s, the Glasgow effect, the impact that was having on the city and Glaswegians became evident.

In the late 1930s, Glasgow was the hive of cultural action. 114 cinemas, just imagine that. 114 cinemas around the city and total capacity 175,000 people watching it. That's what people did. The film industry owes much to what happened here in Glasgow. The theatre's development of Europe was much of what happened in Glasgow and many of the top comedians, Laurel and Hardy and equivalent came to Glasgow, wanting to be in Glasgow as part of the Civic Centre, the civic pride of the city. That represented in the 1938 Empire Exhibition, which was hosted here in Glasgow and talked about style, cosmopolitanism, and physical education.

That was one side of Glasgow, but the inequalities of Glasgow also became clear in the 1930s. One in three of its population didn't have any work. The depressions of the 1920s, continued for nearly a decade in Glasgow. Civic society broke down. It was the murder capital of Europe. Somebody even say the world probably. There were streets that were no go places for police. It was one where communities ruled and they ruled on their own terms. That happened largely because there hadn't been investment in housing. The tenements had been left unattended, community life found its own way to work within the spaces that they were living when conditions were getting worse.

For a large part that was because they were run by the private sector. Throughout the 1910s to 1930s, Glasgow's corporation's response was to take over housing, was to take away from the private sector, away from private rented and run them estate once run by the City Council. Very innovative in the 1920s. Much more common by the time we get to Europe in the 1930s, but that was a response to the beginnings of the state of inequalities, of the Glasgow effects that we've been talking about in various different sessions.

I'm going to jump forward to today, but in the process of doing that, Glasgow has had to reinvent itself. It's had to find ways to deal with the legacies of that past. Bonded warehouse if you go up to the Civic House, you'll be going next door to this one, Speirs Wharf, which is on the canal system that used to feed coal into Glasgow. The Bonded warehouse, one now that's an art centre.

Adjacent to that was the largest coal-fired power station in the city designed specifically to power the tram system of the 1910s and 1920s. Now demolished and





the fancy water centre, or the railway station that brought the workers in from the East End to the city centre. St Enochs, is now a shopping centre from the 1970s.

Glasgow had to work over the last 50, 60 years with a fabric from the past that is outdated, inappropriate, but also creating opportunities, but there are deeper issues that you're exploring, we are exploring in this conference, and we want to talk about too and the field trips. Throughout that time, despite investment, despite change, Glasgow continues to be at the bottom of the league, if you have things like life expectancy. It's improving, but it's improving no more quickly than elsewhere; in Scotland, in Britain, in Europe, globally.

That's the challenge we've had. That legacy of the conditions left in the 1920s and 30s continue to have an impact on Glasgow, as you will be seeing on some of the trips. That inequality is reinforced. Reinforced by multiple deprivation that's made up of issues of poverty, inequalities, economic opportunities, in terms of housing structure, in terms of housing quality, and perhaps a lot more than just that.

There's you can see here from the trend if you look at the blue which is the least deprived, and the green the most deprived, Glasgow has been improving since the 1990s but has not solved the inequality issues, they remain. You may already have seen this I don't know in other presentations, but it's represented in Glasgow, from the East to West that West End where the wealth was in the Victorian period to the East end of the city where Bridgeton and Dalmarnock field trips are going. This map, a map of the transport system. From West to East, for every station on that line, an average male like myself will lose nearly two years of life and that's a legacy. A legacy of our history.

The fact that generations from the East End the working ones, those images I showed before of the East End, continue to have an impact on the city today. That relative wealth of Park Circus and their Bryes Roads have an impact on the West End of the city. Of course, it's different people but our structures, our urban conditions that we work with have themselves been shaped by our heritage. That's the big question Glasgow's had to face. How do we deal with something so deeply embedded in the urban fabric itself? How can we change that? How can we address those inequalities?

Academics like myself and others working here in Glasgow, of all points, is the fact little of this that happened that's positive over that time. It hasn't changed the previous graph, that differential. But it doesn't mean things aren't happening but it does mean there's a real challenge here. The classic models of trying to do interventions in cities around the world are not working in the same way in Glasgow.

Welcome to the uniqueness of Glasgow on the challenges that we face. It's not just health because as we need hearing through the sessions, that inequality can be expressed in a variety of different other ways. I'm not quite sure why my graph doesn't say what they are, but the blue figures are unemployment for young males. The red figures are the percentage of people voting in the local council election in 2017. East-West splits. Inequalities and the effects they have are not just about health, they are played out in all these other different ways.





I could take any election, not just the 2017 one, although it's particularly important, as you'll see in a minute, I could look at any era, any decade from the 1870s onwards, and I'd see similar spread in terms of the variation between East and West. The red figures are perhaps interesting because there's been quite a lot of work done in the last two years to try and understand why we've got that democratic deficiency. Why we have in many areas a very low turnout. One of the messages I've come across is that no one listens, so what's the point?

Turn out at referendum were much higher but I said in an earlier conversation in one of the sessions, if no one listens to you, in fact, everyone argues against what you vote for, why bother voting? It's an issue Glasgow is facing, and it has consequences. The 2017 election, the local council one, brought a change of government here in the city. After generations of Labour running it, discusses national parties you find out last night half of the province runs the city. Nothing has fundamentally changed in the political makeup but the absence of people voting brought a political change. There are real deep-seated issues that come and arise from the ability to mobilize certain things around inequalities that are here and this just represents a little of it.

To finish, I want to suggest two narratives. You're going to hear others on the field trip but I've had the luxury of the last 30 years of working as an academic, of engaging with marginal communities here in Glasgow, and with the officials. You heard at the beginning I worked with the Commonwealth Games, I worked with redevelopment projects at the East End and the West End and the south of the city. I've heard the official narrative and I have worked with communities. I want to talk about those two narratives of the city just to give you a picture of that inequality and how its represented.

Is it the first one? I'm sure of, well, I wasn't there last night, but I suspect that the Provost will have given you the idea of a city that's going somewhere successful but if you are in the sense that Glasgow is maybe despite problems and still with problems, advancing. And that's around a particular strategy. It's not one that everyone buys into, but it's one that crosses party political boundaries. The idea that the city would regenerate itself through what we call an event strategy. Getting away from the No Mean City image by encouraging people to come to Glasgow, through events, experience Glasgow as you're doing, and go away and be ambassadors for us. Ambassadors about our problems, but ambassadors about how we can solve them. You coming to the city might help solve them.

For the last 30 years, Glasgow has had a series of events designed to try and encourage people to come here, be part of it, invest in us, bring new capital, financial, social, and human capital to help us address the inequalities. That's created a new fabric. It's taken those old dockyards which you saw on the first slide and brought a new cultural environment.

BBC, the SEC centre, BBC Scotland, FTV, Science Central, created a new cultural hub. It's regenerating the city centre. It's brought financial capital in with investors from outside of Glasgow, outside of Scotland in many cases to try and rebuild the fabric, address that fabric question of the urban condition and it's had great success.





Glasgow is seen to be a sports city because of its events, because of the way it's been able to represent itself and bring events to the city it's one lots of accolades. It's the future city demonstrative of United Kingdom Government. It's a smart city. It's trying to show how we can use technology to help address the problems the social and inequalities of the city and it's got a faster the city deals here in Scotland, investing in infrastructure and infrastructural change to address inequality. That's the first narrative.

There is a second narrative. One that says my legs have been disrupted. Change is hard. Change is bringing about things I'm not sure about. Uncertainty, it's demolishing some of the things that I know about the fabric. It's often disrupting the social character, the social circles, the social capital that I have. I'm told there will be something in the future. It's broken down much of the neighbourhoods and communities that you're going visiting the field trips. This might not look much as a place to live but when I was brought up in the 1960s in Glasgow, this is where we used to play. These are the spaces where social capital, connections, lifelong connections were built.

If you don't have that, it's really difficult. If you're not engaged in the labour market, if you're not engaged in education, to replicate this in any other way. It made it even harder when the rate of change is so slow. This represents two phases of change. The high rise was what happened in the 1950s and 1960s in Glasgow. They looked to Europe, particularly Paris, to get an idea of how we might densify the city and created high rise flats. At the moment, we're demolishing them quickly. People don't live in them. They're not well built. You don't meet the environmental conditions. I mean by that the weather here in Glasgow, and are really difficult and expensive to maintain, but they did densify.

They did bring back people and keep people in the city, but that process of investment was really slow. What happens is you get this, people displaced temporarily, the official narrative and then not coming back, moved out of the city, never coming back into the city itself. A slide taken in 2012, this has been like this for 40 years. The space had been left empty. The city didn't have the money to do things, but rather than leaving anything, they demolish things. They further broke down much of the social capital, and connections that people had. It created vacant spaces. It created buffers in the fabric between different communities. It created opportunity for crime and thus by No Mean City issues of the 1980s, but things are changing.

There is a positive message for you to take when you come away to the trips today. These areas are being regenerated perhaps more quickly now than they were before. The event strategies of the past particularly around the Commonwealth Games of 2014 have been used not just to bring people to the city but to speed up regeneration. When you go to trips, either Speirs Wharf East End, you see a rate of change, the expression of a rate of change which my parents would have been astonished by, rather than 40 years of regeneration, we see regeneration in four. New homes, new communities have been built on that vacant land, and school education is at the heart of that.





The city's learned that it needs to put schools into communities. It needs to get engaged through education, lifelong education to be able to try and address some of those social inequalities. Perhaps the message I'm going to leave you with is when you listen to your field trips and the narratives you hear, there's perhaps a convergence, one between the official narrative and what citizens are saying. That's the hope. Now you get a chance to go and explore and test out whether those narratives or what have been worked really in Glasgow, and what you can take from Glasgow as a test-bed. Thank you very much and enjoy the city.

[applause]

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