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# City of Democracy Executive Summary

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**A report by ResPublica for Newport City  
Council**

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## Executive Summary

ResPublica was commissioned by Newport Council to explore the cultural re-invention of the city and how a new city brand can achieve this.

Place branding can play an important role in place-making, helping to articulate a sense of unique and authentic difference that can make a city stand out in an increasingly competitive world. This report sets out the case for a city brand that builds on Newport's historical, industrial and cultural legacy to shape a new vision for the future. At the centre of this vision is the idea of 'Democracy', a concept that speaks to the city's rich political history, its association with the Chartist movement and its legacy as 'home of the vote'.

Newport as a 'City of Democracy' is a distinctive brand proposition that could be transformative. More than a superficial marketing exercise; it is something that has depth and meaning, something that can embody Newport's ambitions, and re-position the city in relation to local, national and potentially international networks. It could allow a number of related activities – festivals to celebrate political history, democratic models of shared ownership, and new methods of participating in local decision making - to connect citizens and communities; shape public services; and drive economic development.

'City of Democracy' captures a sense of Newport's cultural identity which, we argue, can play a significant role in place-making. This type of cultural led development has been attributed, by some academics and urbanists, to whole city regeneration and in some places the emergence of a new cultural and 'creative class' (Florida, 2002). The development of cultural events and institutions to attract visitors and investors has been a central feature of urban planning in many metropolitan cities in the UK and internationally.

Democracy is a tangible concept which, in its broadest sense, can encapsulate the social and economic interactions of particular citizens and communities that come to define a sense of place. And place, as the Brexit result reminds us, is a decisive determinant of outcomes, be they health, education or income. Newport as 'City of Democracy' offers the promise of a shared future that can counter the effects of fragmented communities and refashion a mutual understanding of economics, politics and an enfranchised society.

The effects of globalisation and particularly the impact of automation, out-sourcing and off-shoring has contributed to the hollowing out of many middle skilled jobs in Newport and other post industrial cities, leading to divergent employment, skills and income distributions. The City of Democracy brand could help shape a place-based response to globalisation offering the prospect of a more equitable future. This could, for example, build on the anchoring role of the University of South Wales in widening participation and further raising overall skills levels to meet the requirements of the new economy.

Democracy is an ideal to aspire to, which, to be realised, requires citizens to be autonomous, capable, and invested with the information they need to participate in society. *Effective* democracy requires better use of the powers and resources available to society. The question for a *representative* democracy is how good its systems and rules are at representing the views of the

people and whether there are more effective means of allowing a wider group of citizens to participate in the process of government.

The principles of localism and place-making, that are beginning to take root in Wales and around the UK, provide a real opportunity for communities to develop and transmit an unmistakable offer that can capture and build on their unique cultural heritage while forging the possibilities for a new but genuine future. Newport's city brand can enable communities to build on their local heritage and assets, and, anchored by a deep sense of civic ownership, help shape a new and locally distinct settlement. This could provide a major rebalancing of investment and economic growth.

A deep and fully realised understanding of the role of democracy could not only help Newport drive a place-making agenda but also transform local democracy itself.

### **Newport's legacy**

Newport's story is intertwined with the history of Britain's economic and political development. As one of the first places in the world to industrialise, it was also instrumental in the development of the Labour movement and the right to vote – the armed uprising in 1839 by the Chartists being the last of significant size on British soil. The effect of subsequent de-industrialisation, experienced by many western economies, has not been without its problems, some of which persist today. Yet, the city has adapted better than most.

Newport has recovered from a period of economic decline to become an important base for employers from a range of sectors in the nascent Cardiff City-Region. It is well connected via the Great Western Main Line and M4 to Cardiff, Bristol and London. Its population is better-educated than the Welsh average, with 35% of working age adults having a higher level of qualification (Level 4 or above – the equivalent of one year of university), and its workforce is more productive (productivity per worker, at £43,920, is almost equal to Cardiff's at £44,350). Recent regeneration projects, primarily in the city centre, have also helped to transform the city's profile.

However, Newport still needs to overcome certain challenges. It must tackle high unemployment and high levels of deprivation, concentrated in some areas of the city and which threaten to hold back future growth. To fully realise its potential Newport will need to create a more balanced economy, one that is less dependent on the public sector and large employers. It must secure its position linking South Wales to the West of England, grow its emerging digital cluster, and diversify its economy.

Newport as 'City of Democracy' can build on its political heritage to help promote the principles of inclusive growth, to ensure that future steps to attract business and investment can enable Newport to become an attractive place to live and work, where people can afford a good standard of living and play an active role in the wellbeing of the city.

### **City branding**

Whether it's to boost tourism or to help create a general sense of civic pride, city branding has become an important part of place-making for many cities around the world. Responding to their own challenges, other cities have successfully used city branding to provide a focus and a strategy for life in the city. 'I love NY' is the first and perhaps most famous of city brands but Glasgow is also celebrated for its long running campaign which in its current form is branded 'People Make

Glasgow'. City brands are typically targeted at a wide audience of potential residents, investors, and culture producers. They often act as an 'umbrella' for various city sub-brands, such as destination management and inward investment, and when most effective they are strongly integrated with city marketing agencies and partner organisations.

Those cities that have succeeded in city branding have moved beyond early attempts at simplistic exercises in logo creation and 'sloganeering'. The lessons are that city branding is more likely to succeed where strategies are consistent and long term; where partners and the various agencies of city marketing are coordinated and integrated; and where the brand functions as the primary overarching platform for all city messaging and promotion, to which other sub-brands are strongly connected but clearly subservient.

We argue that if Newport is to embark on such a strategy, to re-vision and rebrand its social and economic future, then the concept of 'City of Democracy' can help achieve this by connecting with and renewing its cultural heritage. As a potential brand it is something familiar and known, an idea that has depth and which is in its own way uniquely and authentically associated with the city. It can speak directly to Newport's history as well as its connectivity to a global debate about the future of democracy. In this way, the brand can become more than an empty slogan. It can function as a platform for ideas that could once again make Newport a leader in the development of a new democracy.

### **Delivering a 'City of Democracy'**

Making the concept of a 'City of Democracy' real and authentic could involve drawing on the links between cities and democracy in the past, and creating new ways of governing and representing Newport's people in the future. Historically, the republics of ancient Athens and Rome, and the medieval Hanseatic League alliance, remind us of a time when cities were in many ways stronger than nations. Today, cities are again taking on an increased role in governing all over the world, for example through the *Global Parliament of Mayors*. Cities are responding to global crises and the impacts of a global economy which nations are ill-suited to deal with, and new democratic technologies enable their citizens to play an active role.

In Newport, the democratic context of the city is changing. The vote to leave the EU, the creation of the Cardiff City Region, devolution to the Welsh Government, and low turnout in council elections; these are all issues that combine to raise a complex of new questions.

The implications of 'democracy' span many areas. Economically, the legacy of co-operatives and friendly societies provide a way in which people could gain power through shared ownership. In the future, new fiscal powers for the region could enable prosperity to be better shared. With increasing growth, the displacing of lower-income families and small businesses must be managed to avoid disempowering communities without ~~land~~ assets. The skills system must also enable the council to actively help those 'left-behind' and who need help to participate in economic and political life.

To better represent citizens, Newport should stay involved with discussions on the future of the voting system in local elections and introduce new democratic tools, starting with small scale trials. These could include collaborative policy-making, virtual currency rewards, responsive notification of council decisions, and direct forms of democracy. These tools, some of which were developed by the EU-funded *D-cent* project, are already used in cities around the world such as Reykjavik, Helsinki,

and Madrid. The Newport Citizen's Panel offers an idea test-bed to trial these new methods of involving citizens in decision-making.

### **A Festival of Democracy**

A 'Festival of Democracy' would be an ideal way to introduce the public to the concepts of 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy, to debate and test them in a controlled environment. Festivals are increasingly regarded as an important element of urban regeneration globally and can be good value-for-money, often generating local economic benefits, and leaving a lasting legacy. Newport is already looking to build upon its successful Food Festival and Chartist Festival, and a one-off or recurring Festival of Democracy would both draw in the city's communities and prominently promote the city to a wider audience.

All members of the local community, including heritage groups, schools, colleges, businesses and wider stakeholders can be involved in the design, organisation and delivery of an inaugural Festival of Democracy in November 2017, to coincide with the anniversary of the Chartist uprising. This could take place across a number of city venues, including locations associated with the Chartists. The festival will explore all facets of democracy and appeal to all members of the community, including those less likely to engage, with varied content that is both entertaining and intellectually challenging.

We suggest that this could include a TEDx event as part of the festival programme which will provide a platform for local speakers to address a global audience; public debates and competitions; and the trial of a collaborative policy-making tool to draft a 'declaration' to be released at the end of the festival. Alongside this we would envisage the conventional attractions of food, drink, music and performance as well as other carnival elements such as street events and historical re-enactments.

We propose that this should be an event organised in partnership with community groups, individual citizens and local business who will volunteer their time and services to staging such a festival. However, once a detailed budget has been prepared, identifying all elements of a festival programme, we anticipate that Newport City Council would need to fund at least half the required costs with the remainder coming from Welsh Government, the EU (where permissible) and private sponsors.

### **Outline recommendations**

1. A branding strategy for City of Democracy should be agreed with all stakeholders and partners
2. Measures to support co-op and mutual ownership for established and new local businesses should be implemented
3. Newport should remain engaged with ongoing devolution discussions with Cardiff Capital Region around fiscal devolution, and to prioritise its digital cluster in growth discussions
4. Newport should closely track the influx of more affluent arrivals and the potential displacement of lower-income families and small businesses in the city and support Welsh Assembly Government efforts to pass Assets of Community Value legislation, with the aim of identifying such assets.

5. Newport should examine how community hubs can work with Jobcentre Plus, Families First and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to deliver labour market interventions, including data-sharing from DWP.
6. Bring together employers and the University of South Wales to provide skills that will adequately prepare citizens for the disruptive effects of globalisation and automation
7. Explore incorporating the 'Newport Story' into the school curriculum
8. Use the Citizen's Panel to trial a range of new, collaborative digital democracy tools
9. Participate in discussions around electoral reform
10. Create a 'Festival of Democracy', drawing on both historic and modern contexts, generating debate and pioneering real-world uses of new democratic tools.