

IJS - 15 UGC III: THE WELSH OFFICE SAYS NO TO CARDIFF

Residents  
and  
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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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NO TO CARDIFF

44 Canfield Gardens,  
London, N.W.6.

5th May 1972.

Mr. Richard Nolte  
Executive Director  
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535 Fifth Avenue  
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

In my last newsletter, IJS-14, I told the complicated story about planning the expansion of the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology (UWIST) and University College (UC) in Cardiff, Wales. At that point in time the application by the City of Cardiff for permission to create a Higher Education Precinct in central Cardiff was under advisement in the Welsh Office, the regional arm of national government which has planning authority for Wales. As luck would have it, within a week after I wrote IJS-14, the Secretary of State for Wales rendered his decision. And because it was such a surprise to everyone concerned, I want to report and comment on it.

The Secretary of State for Wales, upon the advice of his Inspector, who held the public planning hearing, denied the request of the City of Cardiff for permission to create the Higher Education Precinct and to exercise the right of compulsory purchase of property. He indicated that in the future University College could get planning permission for central city expansion but that UWIST could not. This decision supported the petitions of the neighborhood residents who had opposed the City Council, the Planning Office, national planning experts, the universities, and the University Grants Committee.

Because of the neighborhood Davids' success over the local and national Goliaths, I believe it is worthwhile to look at the reasons for the negative decision and to consider its implications for the role of the UGC in the planning process which led to it.

#### I. THE DECISION

The Inspector supported his negative recommendation on three general grounds: first, the hardship to existing residents of the proposed Higher Education Precinct; second, general planning considerations for the City of Cardiff; and third, the balance of educational costs and benefits.

The Inspector said that the condition of the housing which was to have been affected by the Precinct is still quite good. And the

population of the area, according to the Inspector, is about 570 "of which some 190 are students, and the average age of residents who are not students is high." [ pl, the letter from the Secretary of State for Wales to the Town Clerk of Cardiff, 21 February, 1972. ] In addition, he said that although Cardiff could provide Council housing (public housing) to displaced tenants, this provision would be at the expense of equally needy people already on the waiting list. And property owners would not get enough for their houses to allow them to buy equivalent property elsewhere. [ letter, p4. ]

A number of general planning considerations influenced the Inspector's recommendations. He thought that the Higher Education Precinct would create an extra burden on traffic flow patterns in the central City. It should be noted that this particular observation directly contradicted the evidence offered by the City's expert and the author of the general Cardiff traffic plan, Sir Colin Buchanan. Also, the Inspector thought that the development of UWIST outside of the City would in no major way detrimentally affect the economic development of the city and might even enhance it. Finally, the Higher Education Precinct would leave it open for more flexible use in response to new demands at the end of the century. [ letter, pp3-4 ]

All of these considerations led the Inspector to recommend to the Secretary of State that a very strong burden of proof be placed on the universities and the City. The Secretary of State accepted this recommendation. The phrasing of this burden of proof is quite important, because its force is really what decided the case:

The Secretary of State agrees with his Inspector's view .... that a case of overwhelming strength and decisiveness would need to be made out to justify the UWIST development in the central area rather than on a peripheral site, bearing in mind the severe hardship which such a course would inflict on the considerable number of people, many of whom are old and infirm, who would be displaced from the area.  
[ letter, p5 ]

It was this burden of proof -- "a case of overwhelming strength and decisiveness"-- which the educational institutions and the City would have had to have met. That they did not is indicated by the character of the educational judgments made by the Inspector and then the Secretary, which we must now consider.

The Inspector made a number of educational judgments which affected his recommendation to the Secretary of State for Wales. In his finding of facts, the Inspector agreed that additional accommodation for university facilities would be needed, especially for UWIST. He accepted the projections for growth offered by the UGC and the universities. However, though admitting the desirability of close

proximity between the institutions for both economic and educational reasons, he did not agree that the central site would in the long run be best for both institutions. This particular conclusion was based on both educational and planning judgments. The educational judgment was that certain parts of UWIST could still be located in proximity to University College, even if the main campus was in the suburbs, without hurting the educational viability of UWIST. There was little evidence on this point and little argument to justify the conclusion. The planning judgment was that the suburban Radyr site for UWIST offered better possibilities for future development. As the Secretary said:

"In the Inspector's view development at Radyr would have fundamental long term advantages in that it would allow adequate land for student residence and outdoor recreation near the academic buildings, it would allow for further growth beyond that which is now envisaged and it would be better placed for the nearby development of research institutes likely to be needed to put into practice co-operation between academic technology and industry."  
 / letter, p3 /

This planning judgment was based on the important educational conclusion that UWIST's educational objectives presently and in the future could be better met at Radyr than in the central city. Whatever the possibilities for inter-institutional co-operation in the central city, the educational future of UWIST would be better guaranteed at Radyr.

Of course there were disadvantages to such development on separate campuses, but the findings by the Inspector indicate that the evidence from the UGC focused strictly on the economic issues without a systematic discussion of the educational advantages to be gained by the contiguous development of the two institutions. The only educational point "found" in the UGC evidence by the Inspector was the future demand for scientists, which the UGC said would continue. The rest of the evidence dealt with costs of operating the two institutions. The Inspector accepted the educational point about the demand for scientists, but this argument did not affect the choice between central and suburban development. No educational arguments were directed to this point. / See the Report of the Inspector on the Cardiff County Borough Application, 9 August 1971, pp 11-13, s81-97. /

No evidence to support the central city development of the universities, particularly UWIST, on educational grounds, seems to have been offered by any of the witnesses. It appears not just that the evidence was not strong enough to overcome the burden of proof, but that no systematic argument was offered at all to indicate the educational importance of developing both institutions in the center of town. When the Inspector made his educational judgments on the evidence, he

concluded that the grounds for central city development were purely economic: and in regard to the economics of university finance even this evidence was not clearly and strongly in favor of central city location for UWIST. So he had to rule that the educational considerations were not overwhelming. Indeed, he could have said, though he did not, that the educational considerations were not even satisfactorily put.

There are "political" reasons which explain the inadequacy of the educational arguments presented to the Inspector. The competition between UWIST and UC meant that each would not strongly argue the virtues of co-operating with the other. In fact, UWIST was clearly sceptical about its identity in co-operative ventures. The major impetus for co-operation came from the economic pressures brought by the UGC and political influence wielded by the local Cardiff Council. Since local politicians are unlikely to put, or at least unlikely to be believed in putting, educational arguments, it would have had to be the UGC which put them. But it did not. And this fact raises important and interesting questions about the UGC role in the whole affair.

## II. THE UGC ROLE

You will recall from IJS-14 that the staff at the UGC said that its sole role in this affair was to provide educational advice to the local institutions and authorities and to make educational judgments about the allocations of scarce resources. The UGC's sole claim was one of educational expertise. Indeed, this UGC role and its limitations were offered as excuses for not encouraging the involvement of local residents in the planning process: it was not appropriate for the UGC so to urge, in the view of UGC staff and members.

But this special expertise and advice were rejected by the Inspector at least in regard to the most significant UGC recommendation: that there be a contiguous development of UWIST and UC campuses. Perhaps one reason the Inspector was not persuaded by the UGC evidence on this point was that it rested its educational judgment on a strictly financial analysis of long and short term costs. The UGC does not seem to have attempted to develop any, much less sophisticated, educational arguments for contiguous development on its own merits. The overall impression which the Inspector had of the UGC evidence -- and the impression which any reasonable reader would have -- was that the UGC thought it would be nice to have contiguous development but that the educational justification rested on preference not strong argument.

The UGC approach to educational justification before the Inspector was quite consistent with its overall approach to the problem of justification: the invocation of its own expertise in educational matters with no real attempt to provide a coherent and detailed set of educational justifications for its position. This approach is most inadequate when important institutional interests and individual rights are at stake. The evidence was not persuasive for the Inspector or the Secretary.

The UGC evidence was indicative of the role which the UGC played in the whole planning process in Cardiff. Because of the UGC's perception of its role as that of educational expert in the narrowest construction of that role, it in no way attempted to use its great influence in the Cardiff setting to involve those individuals affected by the planning process or to protect the interests and rights of the same people. This restricted vision of role and interest on the part of the UGC is now going to be quite expensive in direct educational costs and financial loss. The waste of the past few years and the new planning process entailed by this decision, along with the expense of the green field site which will now be quite inflated compared with the 1960s, will add up to an educational and financial deficit which could have been avoided with some foresight in the past. And because of the availability of similar experiences in other countries at the time of this planning exercise, this criticism is not just that of the master of hindsight.

In addition to the inadequacy of the planning role played by the UGC in this affair, the Cardiff result indicates that the criteria used by the UGC for university construction, which is applied to both urban and rural building, is not flexible enough to meet the needs of the urban environment. Had the UGC authorized greater density and building height in Cardiff, it would have been possible to reduce the number of residences to be destroyed and to allow for the relocation of some of those displaced back into the Higher Education Precinct. I am not suggesting that the UGC should have offered to finance the relocation and construction of residential facilities for existing residents: this should have been undertaken by the City of Cardiff. But if there were important educational reasons for the contiguous development of University College and UWIST, the construction criteria -- and therefore the construction grant -- should have been revised for these institutions to allow construction standards appropriate for a city center campus. And if the educational benefits did not justify the added construction costs, then the joint development should never have been recommended by the UGC.

The UGC role has not been especially constructive in the Cardiff context, although, as I showed in IJS-14, it has been exceedingly important. The lesson of the Cardiff experience to date for the UGC must be that it ought to take a much more active role in the overall planning process in urban communities where university expansion is contemplated. Also, it must view its responsibilities in a broader context, which recognizes the rights and interests of all of those affected by new urban developments. Such a revision of the UGC role in urban planning would in no way represent any more of an infringement of institutional rights than did its past activities in Cardiff. What such a change would mean is that the UGC could contribute more effectively not only to the interests of educational institutions involved in development but also to the interests of all of those involved in the planning process.

## CONCLUSION

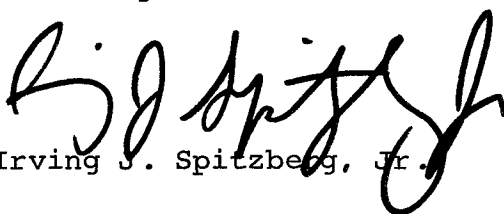
As I concluded in the previous newsletter, I still believe that the contiguous university development of the two institutions in Cardiff is educationally sound and would contribute to the increased strength and quality of both institutions. The liberal arts emphasis of University College and the technical orientation of UWIST would complement each other and could, in the long term, result in co-operative programs which would transcend the strength and quality of either institution by itself. But the cost of the original plan was too high in terms of displaced persons. Also, the inadequacy of the planning procedures with their lack of resident involvement made the final plan quite suspect.

My hope would be that the Inspector's recommendation that UWIST move to Radyr in view of the negative decision on the plan for the Higher Education Precinct would not be taken as final. But instead the UGC, the City of Cardiff, the institutions themselves, and the affected residents could jointly negotiate a plan for a central city Higher Education Precinct which would allow most of the present residents to return to the area. It is possible within the constraints of space and resources to create a mixed-use urban neighborhood which would be a credit to Cardiff and also a stimulating educational environment.

But one cannot expect this new process to be undertaken. UWIST will be unwilling to wait, because it has lost so much in the past. And the past record of all other participants in this exercise cannot lead one to expect a fast settlement of outstanding planning and political problems. The current environment of institutional rivalry, political disagreement, neighborhood distrust, and bureaucratic ineptness is not conducive to compromise.

Yet if the UGC were to provide real leadership -- and it is the only potential source for it -- all of the parties working together could create an outstanding example of urban university development and civic design, which would enhance the center of Cardiff as both a living and learning area. One can only hope that this possibility might graduate into a probability.

Sincerely,



Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.