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Leisure Space Reflecting Changing City Demography: Tracking the Phase of an International Quarter Development in Parnell Street East, Dublin

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‘Leisure space reflecting changing city demography: tracking the phases of an international quarter development in Parnell street East, Dublin’.

Key words: Chinatown; international quarter, ethnic enclave; leisure space, immigrant entrepreneurship; Dublin

A. Introduction

While Ireland is now in recession, it is a country which has undergone significant economic change being the fastest growing economy in Europe in the mid 1990s (ESRI, 2010) and doubling its GDP over little more than a decade (Barnes, 2010). One of the impacts that this has had on the country is in terms of its demography with former emigrants returning home and also many new economic immigrants choosing to come to Ireland. This paper is concerned with the capital city of Dublin, where immigrants now represent 17% of the population (CSO, 2007).

This research is part of a project that focuses on leisure space in Dublin city and how it has adapted to reflect the increasingly multicultural Dublin population. This research note is particularly concerned with the role of Asian entrepreneurs who provide leisure services and products in this space. The focus of this paper is on the analysis of the preliminary findings of the first phase of the project which tracks the development of Parnell Street in the north inner city, into Chinatown and its current emergence as an international quarter.

This urban space has experienced considerable change over the last decade. Parnell Street is an area of the city which is of historical importance, is significantly disadvantaged and in recent times has seen a rapid increase in the proportion of immigrants among the communities who both create and use this urban space. The key research questions are: (1) how has this leisure and

commercial space developed? (2) What has been the role of local Asian immigrant entrepreneurs in these developments? And (3) what role have policy makers played in this process?

This research is timely as it is being conducted in the early stages of the multicultural leisure space development in this area. It is within this timeline of the quarter's emergence and development that different stakeholders' decisions, actions and lobbying are actually occurring. Thus this research provides an important current analysis of the process and roles that are undertaken in the development of such leisure spaces by entrepreneurs and local government in particular.

B. Literature Review

1. The changing demography of Dublin City and policy responses

Ireland's migration patterns have been changing significantly over the last two decades. While prior to 1996, Ireland was historically a country of emigration, after 1996 Ireland experienced a long period of immigration until 2009 when the migration trend reversed once again (CSO, 2009). For the first time in 2006 the Census introduced a question on ethnic and cultural identity. According to the CSO (2007), in 2006, approximately 11 percent of the Irish population were foreign-born, while those coming from the outside of the EU represented 4.5 percent of the total population.

The last available Census (2007) data show that there has been a 51 percent rise in the number of immigrants in Ireland since 2002. Focusing on Dublin and the geographical spread of where immigrants in Dublin live provides interesting findings. The 'rest of the world' category is of primary interest here and 11.3 percent of this group live within the five electoral wards, ½ km radius, of Parnell Street (CSO, 2007), the area of concern for this paper.

Despite growing immigration, changes in the government policies have followed only slowly. The immigration policy adopted by the Irish government aspired to be based on a mid-way

approach between assimilation and a multicultural model (Mac Cormaic, 2007), stressing the importance of the two-way process. However, due to the recently changing economic circumstances of an economic downturn, many of the previous initiatives in the area of immigrant integration were affected by significant spending cuts, leading towards more protectionist policies (Department of Finance, 2009). On the local level, in 2008 Dublin City Council (DCC) published a policy document called 'Towards Integration – A City Framework' (Hegarty, 2008) in an attempt to enhance social cohesion within the city and embrace the potential of the newly arrived residents. To date, DCC has actioned some initiatives from the document, such as creating intercultural community centres around the city.

In spite of the fact that the population of Dublin has become much more mixed, there has been no academic research on how this has changed the development or usage of space in the city. This research represents the beginning of a concerted effort to remedy this situation. It focuses in particular on the Parnell Street East area and reflects on the significant changes that have occurred in this area as a result of changing demography.

2. Research on Immigrant Enclaves and Leisure Spaces

This study focuses on immigrant entrepreneurs and their impact on creating leisure spaces within Dublin city. Definitional inconsistencies exist within academic debate on this cohort. 'Ethnic minority' is very often interchangeably used as a nationality (such as in the UK – Barrett et al., 2003). Pieterse (2003) noted that ethnicity is only one dimension of an individual make up, rather than a defining characteristic in its own right. Furthermore, 'ethnic' entrepreneurs are often defined from the Caucasian perspective (Light and Gold, 2000). On the other hand, the term 'immigrant entrepreneurs' includes all of those whose main socialisation was undertaken in their home country and who engage in entrepreneurial activities in a host country (Kim, 2001, Kloosterman and Rath, 2003). It is this classification of immigrant entrepreneurs which is adopted in this research.

Earlier entrepreneurship theories examining spatially concentrated entrepreneurial activities of immigrants saw these groups as operating on the entrepreneurial and spatial margins in an

attempt to achieve upward social mobility. Wilson and Portes (1980) are associated with coining and developing the concept of ethnic enclaves. Portes (1981, p.290-291) defined ethnic enclaves as ‘immigrant groups who concentrate in a specific spatial location and organise a variety of enterprises serving their own ethnic market and/or the general population’. Within this context, the enclave provides the advantages of clusters of immigrant firms which can take advantage of intra-group links and group solidarity such is the case of Balti restaurant quarter in the UK (Ram et al., 2000). An emerging concept is that of international corridors (Walcott, 2002; McDaniel and Drever, 2009) which observes the fact that while a lot of different immigrant businesses create leisure spaces for others, the individual business owners do not necessarily live within these enclaves.

Another perspective is that of observing these spaces as ‘new destinations for leisure and tourism consumption’ (Shaw et al., 2004, p.1983). This, perspective on immigrant business concentration, moves from viewing enclaves as production spaces to immigrant quarters as tourism and leisure spaces. Werbner (2001, p.671) described how Chinatown, Koreatown, Little Havana and Little Italy create an image of ‘cultural plurality and urbanism [which] often evokes ... a colourful mosaic of ethnic cultures visible in the urban landscape’. Hayden (1995) emphasises how different stakeholders such as indigenous residents, immigrants and planners all co-create such urban spaces and attach different meanings to them.

Areas denoted as Chinatown have long provided a leisure experience for visitors. Lin (1992, p.174) outlined how ‘in the 1880s it became fashionable for middle-class New Yorkers to go slumming in Chinatown, the Bowery, and other less respectable parts of town to “rub shoulders with the sinners” and see “how the other half lives”’. Research on Chinatowns in the European context addressed the issues of their spatial and cultural concentration (for example Christiansen, 2003; Rath, 2007). However, authors such as Judd (1999) question the reality of such experiences which are often contrived and exaggerated.

There has also been discussion about the perception and image of such spatial areas. Wong (1995) notes that Chinatowns in the big North American metropolitan areas have been perceived negatively by those not living in those areas. On the contrary, in a study of leisure spaces in Belfast, Detroit and Berlin, Neill (2001) discussed how fear and crime associated with such

places played their role in marketing and attracting visitors to those areas. More current analysis by Santos et al. (2008, p.1010) notes that the discourse about [Chinatown] has evolved over time, and studying tours of Chinatown in Chicago they note that 'Chinatown: An exotic, yet comfortable place to visit' is the best representation of the area. The authors contend that changing ideological and political-economic conditions have impacted on this change in perceptions. Mura and Lovelock (2009) questioned the differences in a perception of authenticity comprising of food, architecture and cultural performances among tourists and residents visiting an Italian quarter.

Shaw et al. (2004, p. 1983) note how 'disadvantaged multicultural districts of cities in the UK and elsewhere in Europe have been selected, developed and marketed as new destinations for leisure and tourism expressions of multiculturalism ... where markets, festivals and other events in public spaces, are presented as picturesque back-drops for consumption'. Investigating gay quarters, Binnie (2004) is critical of the way that urban villages are constructed around particular identities and ways of behaving as he says this eliminates differences. Similarly, Shaw et al (2004, p.1998) note that a monocultural approach results in 'territorialisation of the public realm [which] may alienate those who perceive little personal benefit, marginalising if not excluding other minorities'. Following this line of argument, in some cases, such as Green Street in inner London, it has been decided to develop a quarter which is more international rather than associated with just one immigrant group.

In such cases, national and local government's decisions are driving the development and branding of leisure space within the city. This mirrors policies to develop cultural and historical quarters within cities. The objectives of such government policies can be quite diverse from encouraging rejuvenation, to enticing investment, to encouraging business tourism as in the case of Birmingham (Chan, 2004). More specifically, within Dublin city, apart from the evolving international quarter, other cultural spaces such as a cultural quarter of Temple Bar were previously developed by city planners.

Bassi's (2006) work on gay villages shows the role that entrepreneurs can have in the emergence and development of a quarter within a city, and Lin and Moy (2006) show that not only do the immigrant business leaders play an important role, but in the case of Los Angeles in the 1930s the local business elite aided the development of Chinatown. Lin and Moy (2006) also note the role of community based artists, historians and activists. But Ching and Rath (2007, p.191) noted that in Washington 'this Chinatown does not represent the nodal point of a vibrant community. On the contrary it is artificially kept alive by city planners and a handful of self-appointed Chinese spokespersons'. Henderson (2005) found that large extent of leisure spaces planning control by governments can have a negative impact on perceptions of such places. Similarly, Atkinson (2003, p.1841) warned against the danger of restrictive planning policies on urban spaces which are 'based on distinctly White, middle-class and suburban values' thus being selectively inclusive. Clearly in different cases the local and immigrant communities, entrepreneurs and government can play key roles in the direction of development of such quarters.

C. Research Methods

This research is exploratory in nature and is the first phase of a bigger ongoing project. The research approach taken was qualitative and explorative in nature with in-depth interviews being conducted with key informants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). In the first instance, a mapping exercise to establish the business make-up of the area was also conducted. This was carried out on the whole of Parnell Street but it became apparent very quickly that the highest concentration of immigrant businesses was on the east side of this street. Accordingly, the first research stage was limited to this area. Detailed maps of the area were constructed showing the concentration of immigrant businesses and their activities.

A snowball approach was then taken whereby the first interview led to many of the other informants. This was particularly useful as the first interviewee was a key businessman in the area. In addition to interviewing three Chinese business owners (interviewees A,B and C) and one Korean business owner (interviewee D), interviews were conducted with the key informants

who had an inside knowledge of the Chinese business community. These included a member of the Chinese community, who has been living in Ireland for 7 years (interviewee E), and a Chinese PR and event organiser (interviewee F). Interviews were also conducted with the DCC Integration Officers (interviewee G and H) to gain additional views of those who are involved in the Dublin city planning.

The interviews were carried out at places convenient to the interviewees. In the majority of cases, these included the respondents' business premises. The DCC Integration officers were interviewed by phone. All interviews lasted between 45 -90 minutes and themes such as individual and business background, motivations for the business location, relationships with other actors such as competitors in the area, customers and local government, challenges and future business plans were discussed. In accordance with Ram's (1994) experience, the non-Irish author who conducted most of the interviews also found that this seemed to have encouraged a more open connection between the respondents and interviewer. Finally, secondary data such as media and city policy reports highlighted current and historical developments of the Parnell Street area

D. Findings and Analysis

This section outlines the key findings of the research on the development of Parnell Street East into a recognised leisure space in Dublin city.

Parnell Street development prior to the arrival of immigrant businesses

Parnell Street East is in the north inner city of Dublin close to the capital's main street O'Connell Street. This area has a significant history as Charles Stewart Parnell was the leader of the Irish nationalist movement from 1880-1882 and was often referred to as Ireland's 'uncrowned King of Ireland' and following his death, Parnell Street and Parnell Square were named after him. There has been significant re-development in the Western side of this street and on Parnell Square and the Garden of Remembrance, the Dublin Writers Museum and Hugh Lane Gallery act as

attractors to the area. However the east side of the street has remained relatively undeveloped and while plans for development of the area were published in 2005 (Clerkin, 2005), these have not materialised.

While parts of Dublin city, in particular on the southside, have been gentrified, poverty and disadvantage remain an issue in other parts and a study commissioned by the Inner City Partnership (Hasse and Byrne, 2009) contends that in fact Dublin is a divided city. The electoral ward area (Mountjoy A) in which Parnell Street East is located is one of four areas in the city which was categorised as extremely disadvantaged in 1991. By 2002, no areas of the city retained this classification but Mountjoy A area remained disadvantaged (Hasse and Byrne, 2009). Drug addiction has also been a characteristic of many parts of the inner city and particularly in the Parnell Street area. It was in this area that the Concerned Parents against Drugs group emerged in the early 1980s in response to the explosion of drug addiction in the neighbourhood and this went on to become a national campaign. So while this street has a notable history, it is equally as notable that it has experienced considerable social disadvantage and public policy neglect.

Phase 1: The Emergence of an Asian enclave

At the beginning of the new millennium, the area of Parnell Street had begun to change. In 2000, two separate observers noted the emergence of the African community in this area. Haughey (2000) commenting on racial tension in the area spoke of the Parnell Street area as an 'African enclave' with a hairdresser, three Nigerian grocery stores and a restaurant, while Spiller (2001) analysed this area's identity as 'Little Africa'. However, during this period there were a number of racist incidents in the area including threatening letters and arson attacks and according to Haughey (2000) this may have resulted in a number of African businesses leaving the area.

In 2002, a Chinese entrepreneur who was well-known within the Asian community, acquired the long-term leases of a significant number of buildings on the street, developed his own businesses and began leasing the business premises to 'other business owners from the community' (Interview A). He stated that 'at the time (2002/2003), this area was the baddest street in Dublin,

with many buildings closed down and run down, and additional problems with drugs and crime. [I] was the first person to open a Chinese restaurant in Parnell Street [and] acquired a long term lease for about 35-40 buildings on the street'. Although located in a disadvantaged area, Interviewee A saw the location as very central, affordable and with future development potential. It is this action of gaining a long-term lease of a substantial number of buildings in the area and then leasing them out to other Asian entrepreneurs from the community which acted as a catalyst for the initial development of an Asian enclave on Parnell Street. This process continued with members of the Association of Chinese Entrepreneurs pooling together their financial resources to purchase buildings and each member becoming a shareholder in the new venture. This reflects the *hui*, rotating credit associations, which Light (1972) described as being common among Chinese entrepreneurs.

By 2007, Hardgrave (2007, p.1) described Parnell Street as a 'fascinating and fast-changing view of our multiculturalism. Turn right at the northern end of O'Connell Street, walk about 50 m down the road and you will discover Dublin's vibrant little patch of Chinatown'. The initial mapping study of the area carried by the authors in 2008 found that just over 50 percent of the businesses in this area were immigrant businesses. While there is a mix of immigrant businesses on the street including Eastern European, African and Asian, the clearest concentration is of Asian businesses which were the focus of the first part of the study. These are primarily restaurants which represent 25 percent of all businesses in the area. Geographically, there is clearly a spatial concentration of Asian immigrant businesses on this street. This area is known as 'mini Chinatown' amongst the Asian community in Dublin (interviewee F).

As previous research shows (Light and Gold, 2000, Ram et al., 2000) the businesses located in spatially concentrated areas often employ members of their own community and serve the needs of their co-immigrant counterparts. This seemed to be the case in Parnell Street during the initial period of development. All of the interviewed Asian entrepreneurs state that most of their employees are Asian. Interviewee D employs his cousin as a restaurant manager and most of his part-time employees are Asian students studying in Ireland. . With regards to serving the needs of co-immigrant customers exclusively, Interviewee C recalls how in the beginning, the customer

base was mostly of Asian origin. However, the customer base changed over time. Thus it seems that during the initial phase of development, this spatial area was predominantly focusing on serving the needs of its own community.

Phase 2: The emergence of an Asian enclave and efforts to develop as a Chinatown

Interviewee C noted that since more Asian restaurants opened in the area, the customer make-up started to change. As a restaurant owner (interviewee A) estimated, in some restaurants a number of ‘foreigners’ (referring to the Irish and European customers) can be presently as high as 70 percent. So this space has changed from being one which was primarily used by immigrant businesses to sell goods and services to others in their community, to becoming a leisure space which is accessed by a range of other communities. Parnell Street has now transformed into a part of the city which attracts people from other communities and cultures to come and experience the offerings in this area.

The reason that more non-Asian leisure users are attracted to Parnell Street may be due to the increasing concentration of the firms in one area. This makes it more noticeable to the broader community and acts as an attraction in itself (Interviewee F). Interviewee B also mentioned that even though the competition is high, business owners are attracted to the area due to the increasing numbers of this leisure space users who are both of Asian and non-Asian origin. Another reason may be the increasing media interest in this area (Hardgrave, 2007) and increasing DCC’s interest in the development of this area (Hegarty, 2008). What is clear is that Parnell Street has been transformed and has become a recognised leisure space within the city. This status is apparent in the fact a local hostel describes its location on its website as ‘in a great location on the edge of Chinatown’ (Why Go Ireland, 2010). Travelblogs states that ‘the only Chinatown in Ireland is located on Parnell Street in Dublin’ (Rowland, 2010) and the Food Vacation restaurant review website mentions restaurants in Parnell Street which it says is in the tiny Chinatown area of Dublin (Culinary Travel Guide, 2010). Finally, the dublin.ie tourism website makes travellers aware of the Chinese restaurants available in Chinatown (Dublin.Info, 2009). Clearly, in common parlance among the Chinese community, Dublin residents and the visitors to the city this area has become established as a Chinatown. This may reflect what Ealham (2005) calls ‘imagined geography’ whereby in Barcelona elite groups and social

commentators branded the Raval area of Barcelona as Chinatown and this ‘continues to influence historical representation of the area’ (p.373).

While the area may have become known as Chinatown in recent years, a concerted effort has also been made by members of the Chinese community (Interviewee A) to create an actual identity for this area as a Chinatown. The Association of Chinese Businesses in Ireland was established in Dublin to bring together Chinese businesses operating in Ireland. The main vision of this organisation was to establish a successful Chinatown in Dublin. In 2007, Interviewee A, who was also the president of the Association of Chinese Businesses in Ireland, approached DCC in an attempt to get an arch placed at the beginning of Parnell Street as a way of marking an entrance into Chinatown. Having an arch at the beginning of Chinatown is an important symbol and is common in other Chinatowns across the world (interviewee F). Dublin County Council refused his request but interviewee A continued to be determined that in the longer-term a Chinatown should be developed in the area. He wants to see the development of a Chinatown whereby a large Asian centre would be built in the place of old buildings and where ‘restaurants, cultural centres and sports activities would be located under one roof’.

It is clear that immigrant entrepreneurs such as Interviewee A has played a key role in the development of this area. His purchase of many buildings provided opportunity for development in the area and by leasing his buildings to members of his own community he created a concentration of Asian businesses in particular. His key role in the Association for Chinese Businesses in Ireland and the fact that he applied for permission to erect an archway symbolising Chinatown combined with his vision of what a Chinatown should look like shows his importance as a key player in the development of this area.

Phase 4: A move towards an international quarter

More recently, there have been new developments of the Parnell Street’s leisure space positioning, mostly initiated by the local government. In July 2010, in his inaugural speech, the

new Dublin Lord Mayor noted the concentration of immigrant businesses in Parnell Street and stated ‘ I want to rebrand this area as the Chinatown of Dublin and I have asked the events team to create an event to allow the city celebrate the vibrancy and success of this area’ (Breen, 2010). However, in November of the same year, the DCC passed a motion to designate the street and surrounding area as ‘Parnell International New-Irish town’ (Galvin, 2010). Councillor Tormey who proposed the motion stated that ‘this area should not be specifically designated to any particular cultural group but should be assigned the role of Dublin’s International district’ (Galvin, 2010). He states that this is ‘in recognition of the multi-ethnicity of the business traders in the area’ (Tormey, 2010). The city council’s Arts, Culture, Leisure and Youth Affairs Strategic Policy is now investigating this further and deciding what the official name for the area may be and how this urban space will be positioned.

Such increased government planning control over a development of a previously immigrant community-led leisure space is supported by previous research (Atkinson, 2003; Henderson, 2005). These recent events show the tension that exists between whether areas should be encouraged and supported to develop as specific monocultural area such as a Chinatown, or in a more multi-cultural form encompassing other immigrant and local groups who operate and use such urban space. Councillor Tormey’s motion mirrors the concerns discussed by Shaw et al (2004) and Binnie (2004) above. Interviewee G also noted the position of DCC as being more open towards incorporating the needs of many different nationalities present in the area in a creation of a leisure space in Parnell Street. However the Asian entrepreneurs interviewed were in favour of a Chinatown specifically as such areas are common in all major cities (Interviewee A). It is interesting to note that the difference between the area being designated a Chinatown or international district is not apparent for some with Kelly (2010) reporting that ‘one of Dublin’s busiest and multi-cultural streets is to be made into an international quarter making it the Chinatown of Ireland . To date this issue has only been the subject of discussion among DCC councillors and they have determined the path of categorising the area as an international area. It will be interesting to see how this plan progresses and whether it gets the support of the local businesses, communities and users of the services.

E. Conclusions

While this research note comments on early work in this area, it makes a contribution to the understanding of how immigrant-led urban spaces in cities can develop and the role that different stakeholders who participate in the development of such spaces can have in the process.

It is clear that the area of Parnell Street has undergone development from its emergence to the current status. However, tensions between the government planners and communities who have been developing this urban space is beginning to emerge. While during the initial phase of the area's development, immigrant entrepreneurs' actions were less restricted by the DCC, more structured and controlled planning seems to be emerging. While Asian business owners have had a clear vision that this space can become a Chinatown mirroring Chinatowns in many other capital cities, other stakeholders including local politicians and the DCC have decided to develop a strategy of creating a more internationally focused space which could be utilised by diverse leisure users. This process is still at a very early stage and the coming years will see how the stakeholders develop their positions and strategies and what the consequence will be for this leisure space within Dublin City..

The analysis of the development of city space is important in terms of identifying the roles of stakeholders and how these spaces can change over time. This can sometimes happen as a result of public policy but also as a result of the actions of a group of entrepreneurs. Equally as interesting is how the roles of policy makers and planners and entrepreneurs interact and change. In this research, while the initial development of the area has been driven by the Asian entrepreneurs, this has led to a policy response from the DCC after some time. It will be interesting to see in the forthcoming stages of development to what extent these two groups will work together on a plan or whether the power has now shifted to the county council. This research contributes to and supports much of the literature in this area. It is of particular significance because it focuses on how an international quarter can emerge and the particular roles of different creators of such space.

From the perspective of Parnell Street, what is evident is that this area has now been clearly identified as a distinctive part of the city which offers a particular leisure experience to diverse

communities, future years will show how these plans and this leisure space develops. For now, Parnell Street has the status of being officially identified as Ireland's first international district and this is an important marker in the move to make the leisure space in the city more reflective of the increasingly diverse Dublin population.

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