

<b>Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: C21 Sociology</b>		
<b>Title of case study: From vernacular creativity to tactical urbanism: Utilising a place-based approach to transform the vitality and viability of the UK's high streets</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2009–2020</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Steve Millington	Reader in Place Management	1996–present
Cathy Parker	Professor of Marketing & Retail	1997–present
Nikolaos Ntounis	Senior Research Associate	2014–present
Chloe Steadman	Lecturer in Marketing	2017–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – present</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014 No</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>Sociological research into the vitality and viability of high streets and town centres by Dr Steve Millington, Director of the Institute of Place Management (IPM), has led to significant changes in governmental policy and place management practice, improvements in the sustainability of UK and international high streets, and enhanced collaboration between local stakeholders. The research directly influenced the UK Government's creation of the Future High Streets Fund announced in the 2018 budget allocating GBP830,000,000 to 72 areas in England. As part of this high-profile initiative, IPM were awarded a GBP8,600,000 contract in 2019 to lead the High Streets Task Force, which has a mission to revitalise high streets and town centres across England. In the wake of COVID-19, this taskforce is now playing a key part in ongoing national recovery efforts.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>Dr Steve Millington's research addresses the development of innovative place-making strategies to enhance convivial life in the city by focusing on the politics, aesthetics, communal benefits, and economic potential of effective urban place-making. The research has rehabilitated aspects of popular culture by reappraising the role of the vernacular in municipal event planning and general policy-making discourse. Working on the everyday spaces of Christmas lights, seaside illuminations and football stadia, Millington's socially engaged sociological practice has uncovered how apparently prosaic entertainments enrich the lives of participants. Millington's research goes beyond the metropolitan experience to explore the unexplored and marginalised and the embedded creativity that exists there [1].</p> <p>Extending these findings into large-scale regional, national and international projects is the focus of this impact case study. Since his appointment as Director of IPM in 2015, Millington has contributed an essential sociological perspective into the IPM's place-based research that has complemented the work of regular collaborators Cathy Parker, Professor of Marketing (returned to C17 Business and Management), and Dr Nikolaos Ntounis. Collectively, Millington and colleagues in the IPM have delivered far-reaching impacts that significantly build upon earlier work reported in the impact case study on "Urban Place Making" in the University's submission to Sociology in REF 2014.</p> <p>UK town centres are experiencing turbulent change. In 2000, high streets accounted for 50% of all retail spending; by 2018, this had fallen to 36.6% (Centre for Retail Research, 2019). 31,005 store closures and c.552,500 retail job losses are predicted in the next three years, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet it has become clear that place stakeholders responsible for town centres struggle to respond effectively and do not base their decision-making on research. IPM have developed a place-based engaged scholarship approach enabling knowledge exchange between a wide range of academics, practitioners and policymakers. Building on this, IPM were awarded ESRC funding (G1) in 2014 for the <i>High Street UK 2020</i> (HSUK2020) project. The main aim was to understand how the <i>vitality</i> (i.e. how lively a centre feels) and <i>viability</i> (i.e. centre sustainability) of the high street can be enhanced and sustained over time. Outputs included a new classification of</p>		

towns and city centres based on how they are used and proposals that town and city centres need to rediscover their role as multifunctional centres if they are to be sustainable [2].

A systematic literature review and Delphi study with a panel of place experts identified the top 25 factors for vitality and viability, and these were developed into a toolkit for building local consensus, agreeing priorities and implementing interventions [3]. The research revealed that local stakeholders involved in place management respond to high street decline by repositioning. The research identified the challenges faced by the towns considering repositioning and highlighted examples of good practice, particularly around the role that knowledge exchange between stakeholders involved in place management can play in informing the identification of new objectives, interventions, project planning and delivery. Evidence provided insights into how town centre stakeholders collect, interpret and analyse data, revealing the challenges and opportunities involved in developing and implementing repositioning strategies [4]. This was further developed into the 4Rs Framework (*Reinventing, Repositioning, Rebranding and Restructuring*), an evidence-based model providing expert advice on how to implement the most effective place interventions [5].

The challenges facing town and district centres are the focus of two ongoing projects involving a partnership between IPM and Manchester City Council, brokered by Millington: *Vital and Viable Neighbourhoods* and the INTERREG GBP150,231 funded project, *Area Based Collaborative Entrepreneurship* (ABCitiEs). These formed the evidence base for the 2020 Manchester Action Plan, co-authored by Millington and Manchester City Council senior staff [6].

### 3. References to the research

1. Edensor, T., Leslie, D., **Millington, S.** and Rantisi, N. (eds) (2009) *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Rethinking the Cultural Economy*. London: Routledge.
2. **Parker, C., Ntounis, N., Millington, S.,** Quin, S., and Castillo-Villar F. (2017) "Improving the vitality and viability of the UK High Street by 2020: Identifying priorities and a framework for action." *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 10(4): 310–348. DOI: 10.1108/JPM-D-03-2017-0032. Citations: Scopus 12, WoS 11 (expected 8.34)
3. **Parker, C., Ntounis, N.,** Quin, S., and **Millington, S.** (2016) "Identifying factors that influence vitality and viability". *IPM Project Report*.
4. **Millington, S.** and **Ntounis, N.** (2017) "Repositioning the High Street: evidence and reflection from the UK." *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 10(4): 364-377. DOI: 10.1108/JPM-D-08-2017-0077
5. **Millington, S., Ntounis, N., Parker, C.,** Quin, S., Roberts, G. and **Steadman, C.** (2018) "High Street 2030: Achieving Change". *Report prepared for the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government*.
6. **Millington, S.,** Findley, K. and Roberts, G. (2020) "Area Based Collaborative Entrepreneurship in Cities: Action Plan City of Manchester". *Report prepared for INTERREG Europe, Manchester City Council*.

### Funding:

- G1.ESRC (ES/L005182/1). High Street UK 2020: Transferring knowledge to facilitate the repositioning, reinventing, rebranding and restructuring of sustainable retail centres. (2014–2015). GBP111,935. PI: Parker, Co-I: Millington.
- G2.Department for Communities and Local Government. Establishment and Management of a High Street Task Force. (2019–). GBP8,689,506.
- G3.Interreg Europe. Area Based Collaborative Enterprise (ABCitiEs). (2018–2022). GBP150,231. PI: Millington.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Shaping government policy: The High Streets Task Force

In 2018, Millington's research formed the basis of written evidence provided to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) High Streets 2030 Inquiry [A]. The evidence captured the attention of the MHCLG who commissioned IPM (on behalf of Minister Jake Berry and Sir John Timpson) to collect evidence to inform the Government's Expert Panel on the

future of the high street. The experience from the ESRC-funded HSUK2020 project played an integral role, particularly in terms of framing stakeholder workshops and activities. Millington was awarded a Manchester Metropolitan Chancellor's Fellowship (see REF 5b) to engage with the MHCLG Local Growth Unit, providing a literature review and policy briefings which helped MHCLG shape the agenda for the Future High Streets Forum. On 12<sup>th</sup> June 2018, Millington facilitated a national event in London bringing key sector leaders together to prepare evidence for the High Street 2030 Enquiry. IPM submitted two pieces of key evidence with the Association of Town Centre Management and The BID Foundation which were fed back to the UK Government and directly influenced the creation of the GBP675,000,000 Future High Streets Fund, established to support the renewal and reshaping of high streets and town centres. Because of his deep understanding of the issues, Millington was invited to sit on the Future High Streets Forum Executive, presenting twice to the Minister and key national sector leaders. Through this activity, Millington and IPM colleagues had a direct impact on the national political agenda subsequently enacted by the UK Government and MHCLG. The Chancellor's Fellowship enabled Millington to run evidence-gathering workshops which formed the basis of the influential 'High Street 2030: Achieving Change' report (co-authored by Millington) that underpinned Sir John Timpson's review of high streets. This work with national government led to opportunities to directly influence the wider agenda at a senior level, including discussions with Bill Grimsey (veteran retailer and instigator of the independent 'Grimsey Review'), briefings for the British Retail Consortium Property Board, Key Cities, Core Cities and the Local Government Association. New contacts and networks were formed with Big Issues for Small BIDS in Shrewsbury, Revive and Thrive (Durham), Public Policy Exchange (London), and the International Downtown Association [B]. The HSUK2020 project report was cited in the Government's announcement of the fund's creation [C]. In 2019, IPM were awarded a GBP8,600,000 government contract to lead the High Streets Task Force for five years, supporting local leaders in revitalising high streets and town centres, with IPM research insights informing the tender document which led to the contract. The MHCLG's Deputy Director, Infrastructure and Regeneration underlines the important role that IPM played in the development of MHCLG policy and funding decisions, including the instigation of the High Streets Task Force: *'The IPM supported the work of the department's 2018 Expert Panel on High Streets. The work of the panel and of IPM supporting them, was instrumental in the development of a package of support for High Streets that included the £675m Future High Streets Fund (later expanded to £1bn) and the establishment of the High Streets Task Force'* [D].

### **Transforming Place Management Practice to improve place outcomes**

Millington's research is also having an impact on the vitality and viability of city, town and district centres across the UK and internationally.

#### **Regional impact:**

Research findings directly informed the *Vital and Viable Neighbourhoods Project*: a collaboration (2016–2019) between IPM and Manchester City Council (MCC). In 2016, MCC established a District Centre Subgroup to formulate effective strategies for the long-term promotion of sustainable and vibrant district centres. A core aspect of the work was to install footfall counters in 10 of Manchester's district centres and to work with IPM to run *Vital and Viable* centre pilots in Chorlton, Gorton, Harpurhey, Northenden, and Withington. Millington led this project and delivered the workshops. The aim was to understand the key factors that the local authority and its partners could influence to create more vital and viable local centres, promote the creation of active collaborative partnerships, and monitor district centre performance across a range of factors. IPM were able to establish how each district centre aligned with a multifunctional footfall signature, providing stakeholders with evidence to underpin their decision-making to improve town centre vitality and viability. For example, Northenden district centre organised a successful community Christmas event in 2018, following analysis that emphasised the role of entertainment and leisure. This led to a 109% increase in footfall compared to the previous Saturday. Following IPM evidence regarding the importance of activity hours, the 'Withington by Night' event was held in October 2019, with businesses collaboratively extending opening hours. This resulted in a 30.2% footfall increase compared to averages over the previous 52 Fridays, in addition to record takings for retailers, with the result that further late-night events were planned. The effectiveness of the work has been acknowledged by MCC, with IPM's policy recommendations accepted by the Council's District Subgroup (19<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020) and Economic Scrutiny Committee (5<sup>th</sup> March 2020). The

collaboration between MCC and IPM has led to a change in policy, and the City is now supportive of area-based partnership formation [F]. A local councillor and Chair of the District Centres Subgroup 2016–2020 provided a testimonial underlining the value of the projects for the Council stating: *'I commend this work, which has already had significant impact on district centres across Manchester and will have a great deal more in the future'* [G].

#### **National impact:**

Building on this success, IPM developed *Vital and Viable* as a knowledge exchange product to help town and city centres prepare for the future, drawing on state-of-the-art research to provide expert insight and analysis. The multi-stage programme allows communities and stakeholders to discuss current challenges facing their centre(s). It can be offered as a series of workshops or as a more substantial initiative that employs the full 'Manchester model' of footfall counter installation, data analysis, and evidence-based policy recommendations. Variants of the programme have been rolled out in Stockport, Salford, Bristol, Salisbury and Torrington (North Devon). In Salisbury, Millington led and facilitated a workshop on 15th February 2019 at the invitation of Wiltshire Council, Salisbury City Council, and Salisbury Business Improvement District (BID), which formed part of Salisbury's journey to revitalise itself following the 2018 poisonings. The workshop engaged 38 local stakeholders to assess the future of the city by 2030. The Chief Executive of Salisbury BID highlighted the value and subsequent impact of the workshop, stating: *'We found the IPM Vitality and Viability programme a really valuable exercise to bring the city stakeholders together to discuss their different perspectives and challenges for the city. The 'Town Hall' style event gave everyone the chance to understand place challenges and the key factors that effect a place, and the ensuing report kickstarted a number of new partnerships resulting in a new 'Place Board Partnership' to take the city forward. The report also helped develop the city's Central Area Framework that was signed off by the Local Authority recently'* [H].

#### **International impact:**

Following a successful bid led by the IPM/Manchester City Council partnership and colleagues from the University of Applied Sciences Amsterdam/City of Amsterdam, the ABCitiEs project was established to embed the learning from the work in Manchester into local policy across Europe. ABCitiEs investigates the role of collaborative partnerships in understanding place and building local capacity. Five European urban regions are involved: Amsterdam, Athens, Manchester, Vilnius, and the conurbation Varazdin-Cakovic (Croatia). All of the partner cities have used learning from the project to draw up action plans to increase their growth, cooperation and cohesion [I]. In 2019, Millington co-delivered a two-day international conference in Australia, in partnership with the University of South Australia and the state Regional Development authority. Millington was also invited by the Victoria State Government to share his research with over 100 businesses, local government representatives, and the Ministers for Small Business Development and Suburban Development. This involved three *Vital and Viable* events: one workshop for local government officers and nationally elected representatives in Sydney, a masterclass for local government officials in Adelaide, and a regional workshop for the Victoria State Government. The Senior Policy Officer for Business Programs within the Victoria State Government Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions stated: *'Dr. Millington provided an excellent presentation during the conference the Victorian Government held for the economic development staff of local government areas. The two-day workshop held by Dr. Millington following the conference was highly successful and I received very positive feedback from the participants who have brought the learnings back to their local government areas. One local council in particular had reserved a significant portion of their budget for place-based activation as a direct result of participation in the workshop'* [J].

#### **COVID-19 Recovery**

The High Street Task Force was instructed by the UK Government to provide an immediate response to COVID-19 restrictions and their short- and long-term effects on the national economy, resulting in the *COVID-19 Recovery Framework*. Place leaders, local authorities, and Business Improvement Districts across the UK and in the US have already been putting the framework into practice. The Town Centre Manager for St Helens, one of the towns that has adopted the framework, has acknowledged its value in bringing different areas of the Local Authority together to talk about recovery, and its direct value to local business owners, stating: *'I've been giving businesses the framework and the information there because they've been able to apply it to their business. So, for me it's a framework not just for place but for businesses as well.'* In Manchester,



the installation of footfall counters has been utilised by MCC to allow for rapid, evidence-based analysis of changes to the occupancy of district centres as a response to COVID-19 measures. The Principal Policy Officer, Growth and Development and Strategic Neighbourhood Lead, Neighbourhood Directorate, MCC commented that: *'MCC has now begun to apply the IPM's Recovery Framework. So far, it is not yet known precisely what the impact of lockdown will be on small businesses and local traders. Ultimately, the work between IPM and MCC as part of the ABCitiEs programme will underpin the review of the municipality's Local Plan, to accommodate new policy guidance'*. Millington presented two webinars related to the framework, the first (7th May 2020) focused on the pre-recovery stage of the framework (attendance of 133). The second webinar on 'Tactical Urbanism' focused on transformation (10th July 2020, attendance of 416) and has since been uploaded to YouTube and been viewed 134+ times, as well as being added as a resource to the High Streets Task Force website [K].

### Media Coverage

Research findings have featured in numerous local and national news articles, e.g., *BBC News*, *The Scotsman*, *The Conversation*, and *The International Business Times*. Millington has been invited to discuss IPM's research across a range of media outlets around the world e.g., *BBC 3*; *BBC Radio 4*; *ABC Australia*. Articles in written press (mainstream and online) mentioning Millington, IPM and/or high streets have reached a potential audience of 85,645,959 [L].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. IPM's written evidence to MHCLG regarding the future of the high street (2018).
- B. UK Government's 'The High Street Report' citing the IPM's High Street 2030 research; High Streets 2030 report from IPM; London event: <https://v1.placemanagement.org/news/ipm,-atcm-and-tbf-submit-to-high-street-2030-inquiry/>
- C. Web link to Government Budget announcement about the new Future High Street Fund, which cites project HSUK2020 report <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund/future-high-street-fund>.
- D. MHCLG testimonial; web link to government's announcement of IPM awarded £8.6 million contract to lead the High Street Task Force: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-task-force-to-help-revitalise-high-streets-and-town-centres>.
- E. IPM [recommendations accepted by Manchester City Council District Centre Sub-group](#) – 19<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020; IPM [recommendations accepted by Manchester City Council Economic Scrutiny Committee](#) – 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020:
- F. Millington, S., Roberts, G., Steadman, C., Parker, C., Quin, S., and Ntounis, N. (2020) "Vital and Viable Manchester District Centres". *Report prepared for Manchester City Council*; MCC report outlining the sub-group acceptance of IPM recommendations, and how the 25 factors and 4Rs will inform Manchester's district centre policy.
- G. Personal testimony from Chair, District Centres Sub-Group about the impact of IPM research on district centre policy and practice in Manchester.
- H. *Vital and Viable* national reports from Salisbury and Torrington; testimonial from Salisbury BID Chief Executive.
- I. ABCitiEs action plans; INTERREG final report.
- J. Victoria State Government Testimonial.
- K. Testimonial from St Helens; *Recovery Framework* website; webinar links and screengrabs showing engagement; [ABCitiEs blog by MCC](#)
- L. Media Coverage links; Meltwater data on press articles.