

Researching 'against' the grain: beyond dominant narratives of learning, city-regional development and urban sustainability

Susan L. Robertson
U of Bristol

Presentation to RENKEI Researchers, 10th July, 2013



Outline

- Imagining, and making, the future of the Bristol City Region
- Cases
 - Bristol Bike Project
 - FOODcycle
- Researching against the grain: resources of revealing creativity and sustainability?

Imagining the City, its Economy, Enterprise and Innovation



FutureStory

Bristol and the
South West

Building blocks of the future

Below are some of the companies, organisations and people that shape our FutureStory. Together they amount to a template for prosperity in the years ahead.

- Succeeding globally
- Supply chain business
- Local meeting global
- Attracting inward investment
- Global cultural identity
- Entrepreneurial start-ups
- Trade & export growth
- 21st century education
- Valuable commercial research
- Low carbon economy

Bristol is home to over **17,500 businesses** – and more than a **third of the UK-owned FTSE 100 companies** have operations in the area

A cluster of more than **50 high-tech companies** make up the **Silicon Corridor** running between **Bristol and Swindon**

The Bristol and Colonial Aerospace Company was **founded in Filton in 1910** – and today **3,500 people are employed** there by Rolls-Royce

The region around Bristol and Bath is home to the **biggest silicon design cluster** anywhere in the world outside Silicon Valley – its start-up companies have **attracted more than \$1.25 billion investment** in recent years

Bristol is the **world capital of the wildlife and environmental film industry** – responsible for **25% of the sector's global output** and **employing around 1,500 people**

The **creative industries** are worth around **£360 million** to the local economy – **employing 3.7% of the workforce**

The Bristol area has an estimated **300+ companies** in **environmental technologies**

Across the West of England, about **13,600 people** work in **environmental technologies and services**

There were almost **900,000 jobs in Low Carbon and Environmental Goods and Services** in 2008 – research commissioned by the Government estimates this could **grow by 45% over the next 8 years**

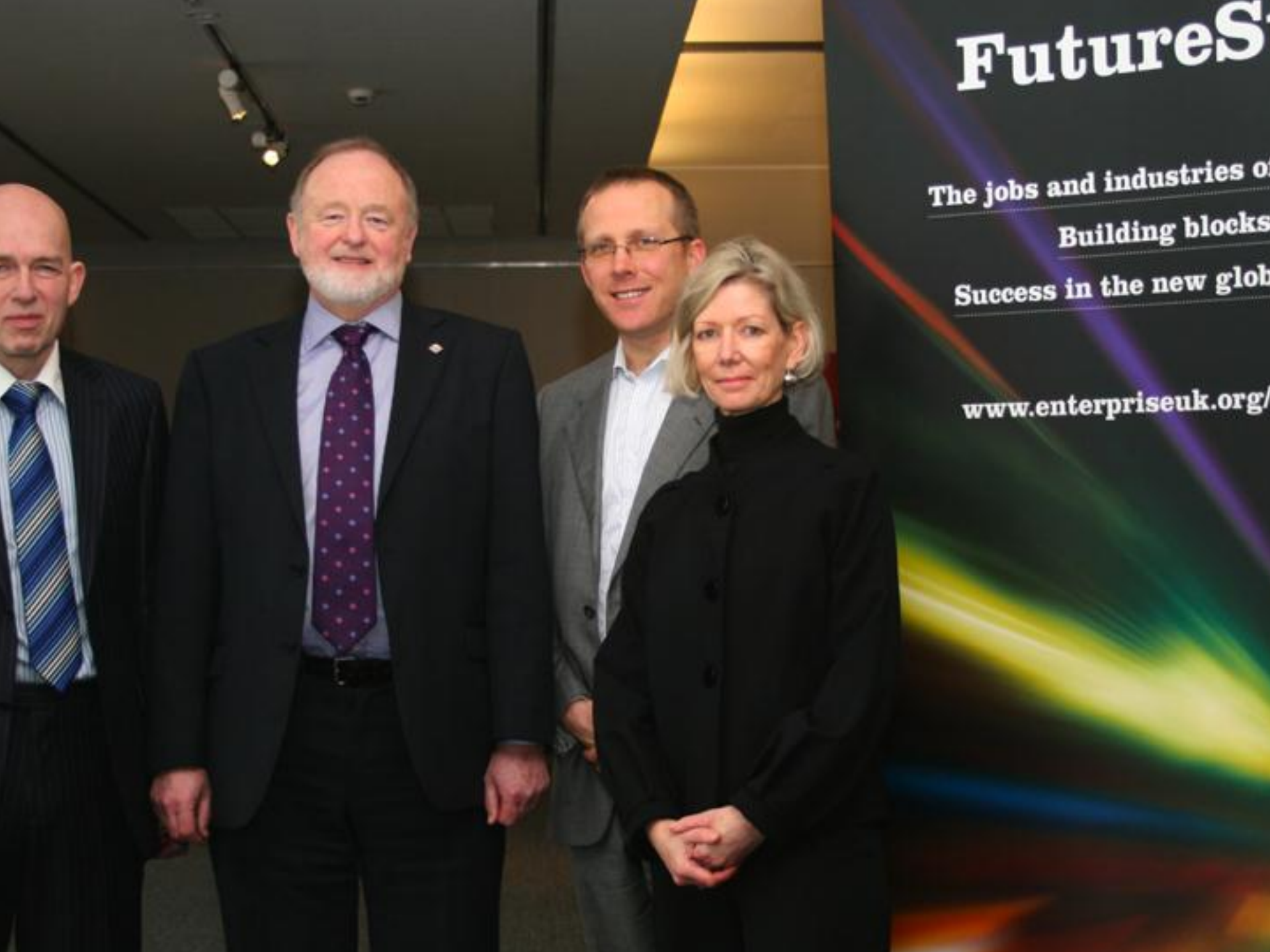
FutureStory launches at the @Bristol

When great minds come together, great things can happen.. are happening and continue to happen.. as was highlighted at the [Bristol launch of FutureStory](#) which brought together just a few of the many business leaders from the different industries in and around Bristol and a selection of young people from surrounding schools.

Held at the [@Bristol](#), one of the UK's biggest interactive centre famous for bringing the sciences to life, it was an exciting and buzzy afternoon with lots of interesting conversations taking place over presentations, workshops and panel discussions.







FutureS

The jobs and industries of

Building blocks

Success in the new glob

www.enterpriseuk.org/

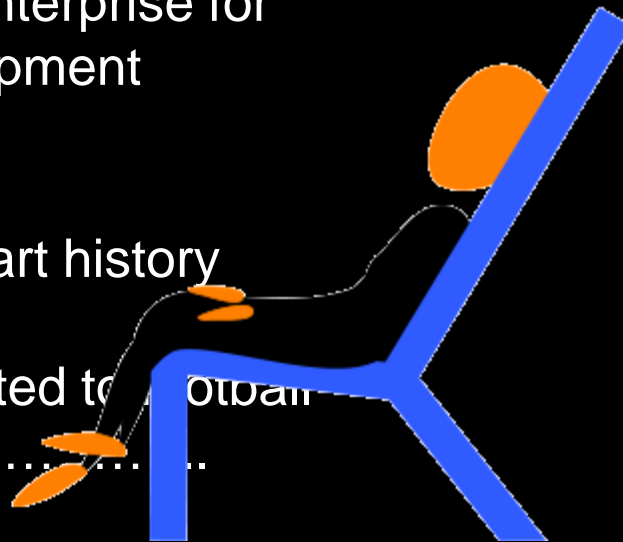
How important are the following for you in studying at university?	BRISTOL %*	UWE %*
Gain academic qualification	95.2	94.6
Enhance personal development	89.7	87.2
Meet other students with similar interests	61.3	51.1
Meet students with diverse backgrounds	49.3	42.7
Make world a better place	44.8	44.2
Advance career opportunities	79.0	83.2
Gain academic knowledge and skills	93.0	91.5
Gain technical knowledge and skills	73.6	81.3
Gain leadership and management skills	53.5	66.7
Gain enterprise and entrepreneurial skills	33.0	45.7
Gain skills to start up my own business	17.3	30.4

Importance of different learning experiences at university

* 'Very Important' / 'Important' (4 and 5, on 5 point scale)

Example of range of business 'ideas' in open ended section –

...Social enterprise
Consultancy in heritage
Literary journal
NGO working on tribal arts and crafts
Dental practice
Shhhh....its a secret.....
Education academy
Electronics supply in hobbyist market
Grassroots social enterprise for international development
Property
Psychotherapy
Services related to art history
Possibly a charity..
Something that related to Otoban
Fashion retail café.....



...Wood pellets from sustainable sources to sell directly and to use biomass gasification to generate electricity to input into the national grid...[student]

...I plan to be an academic, possibly independent, itself an enterprise. If it does not work out I would hope to fall back on my entrepreneurial qualities as I do not enjoy being a cog in a machine...[student]

Researching 'against'
dominant narratives of urban
development and
sustainability...

Hello and Welcome!

We are a volunteer-run, community bike project, repairing and recycling unwanted bicycles in order to provide them to underprivileged and marginalised groups within Bristol.



Bristol Bike Project

Began in Dec 2008 on outskirts of Bristol; moved to a community neighbourhood (Stokes Croft) in 2009. Doubled floor space in 2011.

Provide a service to underprivileged and marginalised people whose lives would improve as a result of having access to affordable and sustainable transport.

Maintain workshop for volunteers and project users to facilitate skill sharing, socialising and collective empowerment.

Redirect functional bicycles from landfill to people who need them (asylum seekers etc)

"...I became aware of the need for refugees and asylum seekers to be mobile, and aware that a lot of the housing for them is quite a way out of the city in the suburbs, and it was common place for people to be walking a couple of hours in, and a couple of hours out of the city centre, because that was for the most part where appointments they had to go to, and the welcome centre itself, various bits of voluntary work, and some of them who are attending college, its all very centrally based... so, ok, here's something that's making life a lot more difficult, the fact that they can't be more mobile, so let's see if we can see a solution, bikes."

"...I'd spent a year, or two years before, being out in South America doing some voluntary work with a group there, and there was the idea of sweat equity which I really liked and took away with me, the idea that its not a financial thing, but the time and energy rebuilding peoples houses, and in a small community or village you'd have groups working on one person's house, and when that was done you'd work on the next persons, and you'd all put in the labour and time for free, but help each other out. I really liked that, and it was a really empowering way of doing it. It wasn't just a group of people from overseas coming in and doing work and then sorta pissing off again, and no involvement or engagement, but they were engaging the people they were doing it for. The realisation of the process of how we were doing it was important."

"...at that stage I didn't really have a massive concept for what it [The Bristol Bike Project] would be, for me its like the social aims and endeavour of it, which is trying to help people out, I guess that was the spark for it, that yeah, there are unwanted bikes out there."



THE BRISTOL BIKE PROJECT

REPAIRING & RELOCATING BICYCLES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [OUR SERVICES](#) [OUR WORKSHOPS](#) [NEWS](#) [RES](#)

How We Roll

Since the project's inception in December 2008, we have operated at a very grassroots level, choosing not to have bosses, hierarchy or to jump through any hoops that we don't like the look of. The project wishes to remain autonomous and to be self-funding.

We are:

A community interest company, a social enterprise (to tackle social problems, a cooperative structure in order to unite (voluntarily to meet common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations, and not for profit company where gains are reinvested back)



Q: How important is idea of it being a not-for-profit] enterprise?

- I suppose its, first and foremost, whenever I hear that term it not for profit enterprise, to me means that [the BBP] not a money-driven operation, something that is not about making lots of money, which is refreshing really, in the sort of society in which we live where that seems to be such a big factor for so many people, making lots of money. It overlooks how we can make just enough to live... Just this obsession with making lots of money. Its nice for it to be reflected in groups where its not about that, all that time and energy spent trying to make more money and be bigger and make more money in that way... that sort of energy can be harnessed and put into working with people."

Q: Do you see yourself as an entrepreneur?

- People have said that to me, in that sense, but I don't really think that, massively, but perhaps some of the characteristics of what it means to be an entrepreneur I think I have. I think, it sounds big-headed, but I'm just trying to be honest... I guess I am good at motivating people, and creating enthusiasm, I think I'm good at curating people... I think an openness is good, being open to ideas, and in that sense helping people to flourish in that space... I've always liked that idea, that kind of enabling, its exciting... and in this sense, the social concern that I had originally, I wanted to see if we could help people... ” [....suggest chantrepreneurs]

FOODcycle

- Network of university student volunteer-run organisations that collect surplus food from local retail industries (supermarkets and markets) and using volunteers in free kitchen spaces creates meals that it distributes free to people affected by poverty.
- National initiative - but new hubs can be created - supported by funds from the centre, and where money raised from the hubs go back into the centre [franchise of sorts]



FoodCycle Bristol Hub

Bristol student heard about FoodCycle in late 2008 and established Bristol Hub in 2010. First out of London hub.

Weekly kitchen - Sundays - serves 40-50 people in need - collected and prepared by volunteers; fortnightly student restaurant operates same way by charges nominal amount.

Bike Project donated bike to FoodCycle for transporting food.

May 2012 named best Social Enterprise at SETsquared annual student award.
Current coordinator collected the award.



AMY [student volunteer]: ... although I've been doing stuff on social enterprise, I have difficulty with the word entrepreneur, because I feel that that kind of label is- I dunno, it's sort of like people- no one wants to go round saying 的'm an entrepreneur. Well, some people do, but they're the kind of people that you maybe wouldn't wanna chat to quite so much.

I dunno if Max [initiator of hub in Bristol] would call himself an entrepreneur really... but it's difficult...cause [FOODCycle] is nothing really, compared to what it was when it started out.... So it's almost like everyone who's on that team is an entrepreneur because they're all contributing their ideas and their energy and their passion, and their hard work to kind of see something extra.

AMYSo it's difficult, I mean there's that term 'intrepeneur' which means innovating from within an organisation, but it's quite a similar thing I think in a lot of ways. And it's like- I mean, there are people that do start businesses on their own, but there are a hell of a lot of people who sort of have an idea and then get people on board and it's so much more of a kind of collaborative effort than just that one person.

Returning to dominant policy narratives
and the need to reveal diverse cultural
and political practices that make up urban
landscapes.....

Researching against the grain: resources for urban sustainability??

The entrepreneur ...[heroic, individual figure, or organiser and collaborator....]

The university ...[credentials, or knowledge creation and community building in a wider sense]

The global...[circuits of capital, or critical cosmopolitanism that fosters the local]

Enterprise... [scalable, money making or ...social sustainable activity]

Value....[profit, or values creation, valuing, new economy of the value chain]

Third mission ...[or new vision of knowledge creation and community]

Economy....[or post capitalist development]

Knowledge...[private good or societal good]

Innovation...[high tech, or social innovation].