

Cultural industries in Sheffield, UK

In cities where industry is running down there are different problems and opportunities. Territorial Employment Pacts initiated by the European Development Fund were established to help regeneration. Sheffield, England's fourth largest city, participated in one such. The city has for decades survived on steel making and cutlery production and the decline of these industries has resulted in a loss of some 50,000 jobs since the 1970s.

The need to develop a more diverse economic base became a necessity if the city was to survive and prosper. The City Council therefore started to work alongside the private sector to focus on the development of activities in the cultural sector - mainly video, sound-recording, film and broadcasting - to create employment and regenerate the city. One area of the city centre was designated a Cultural Industries Quarter (CIQ). Here the private sector was supported in a number of ways, including training and business support for potential entrepreneurs, the provision of managed workshops at favourable rates, the provision of facilities, particularly redundant buildings such as factories at favourable rates and support in redeveloping such buildings.

The CIQ has emerged as a lively vibrant location for business, education and culture and is now home to 132 media and science-related businesses. Significant music and arts venues have emerged, inducing the "works Station and Media Centre" opened in 1993 and a new cultural business and training complex housing 35 companies in a managed workspace environment providing conferencing, child care, reception and exhibition space.

Low-budget but high quality films such as 'Brassed off' and 'The full Monty', which gave a somewhat dubious reputation to the city are one of the results of this concentration of media knowledge. The funding for this ambitious initiative comes from a combination of sources including the UK Urban programme, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Development Fund, the City Council, and the National Lotteries Fund. And it leaves Sheffield in an excellent position to open itself up to the new possibilities of the technology for learning.