

Exploring Greater Manchester

a fieldwork guide

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4.3 Consuming the Trafford Centre: a critical reflection on space and place

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Aims: To encourage you to look critically at everyday landscapes. You should reflect on the use of space in the Trafford Centre and to consider how space is used and organised in order to create particular geographies of public space.

Location: Trafford Centre.

By car: M60, junctions 9 & 10.

By bus: routes 250/251 from Manchester City Centre (Piccadilly Gardens).

By Metrolink: Take the Altrincham line to Stretford, then a bus link to the Trafford Centre.

Estimated time: minimum 1 hour.

Further Information:

Crang, M. (1998) *Cultural Geography*. London: Routledge (Chapter 8)

Goss, J. (1993) 'The 'Magic of the Mall': an analysis of form, function, and meaning in the contemporary retail built environment', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 83, 18-47

Mitchell, D. (2000) *Cultural Geography: a critical introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell. (especially Chapters 4 & 5)

www.traffordcentre.co.uk (includes an information pack and maps)

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Academic Context: New Cultural Geography

This trip is based on the idea of thinking about the landscape (in this case, the 'landscape' of the Trafford Centre) as a 'text' that can be read and interpreted. Drawing on ideas from social and cultural geography, you are asked to think about the ways in which the landscape of the Trafford Centre is socially and culturally constituted.

Until relatively recently, geographers tended to research patterns of consumption (shopping) by thinking about 'patterns': the location of shops, distribution and so on. More recently, however, social and cultural geographers have begun to focus on the 'contexts of selling' (Crang, 1998: 120), that is, they have begun to think about the 'spaces' that are created by society in order to sell us things.

Since the late 1960s, large shopping centres (malls) have been built on the outskirts of a number of North American and European cities to provide covered shopping places with many car-parking spaces. Essentially, these malls reflect the post-war changes in American and European societies particularly increased consumer spending and car ownership, technological change and a rise in the number of women in full time employment. Out-of-town shopping centres are not just a collection of shops: there are carefully designed to promote consumption and to provide entertainment. They are controlled spaces within which your movements are restricted. On the one

hand, they are designed to ensure you walk past as many goods as possible while, on the other, your movements are monitored through the use of CCTV and by the 'door policy' whereby certain groups (e.g. youths) are excluded from the centre. So these shopping malls are not 'haphazard' but have been carefully designed to create a 'space' that promotes consumption. (see Goss, 1993). During your visit you can analyse and interpret the space of the Trafford Centre in order to develop an understanding of how the space 'works' in promoting consumption.

The 'success' of the Trafford Centre

The Trafford Centre was opened in 1998 and is the largest shopping and leisure venue in the North West of England. The centre cost approximately £880 million to build and includes 280 shops, a twenty-screen cinema, bowling alley, games arcade and a restaurant/entertainment venue. The Trafford Centre now employs over 7000 people mainly as shop workers, but including 160 cleaners and 90 security staff.

In its first year of trading, the Trafford Centre attracted 26 million customers. 95% of visitors came from within an 80km (50-mile) radius of the Centre while 65% of customers visited at least once a month. However, interest in the Trafford Centre extends far beyond its customer base. The Centre has attracted the attention of

the European and North American retail industry with more than 1500 representatives from shopping centre management teams around the world having visited the Trafford Centre since its opening (see Trafford Centre Website).

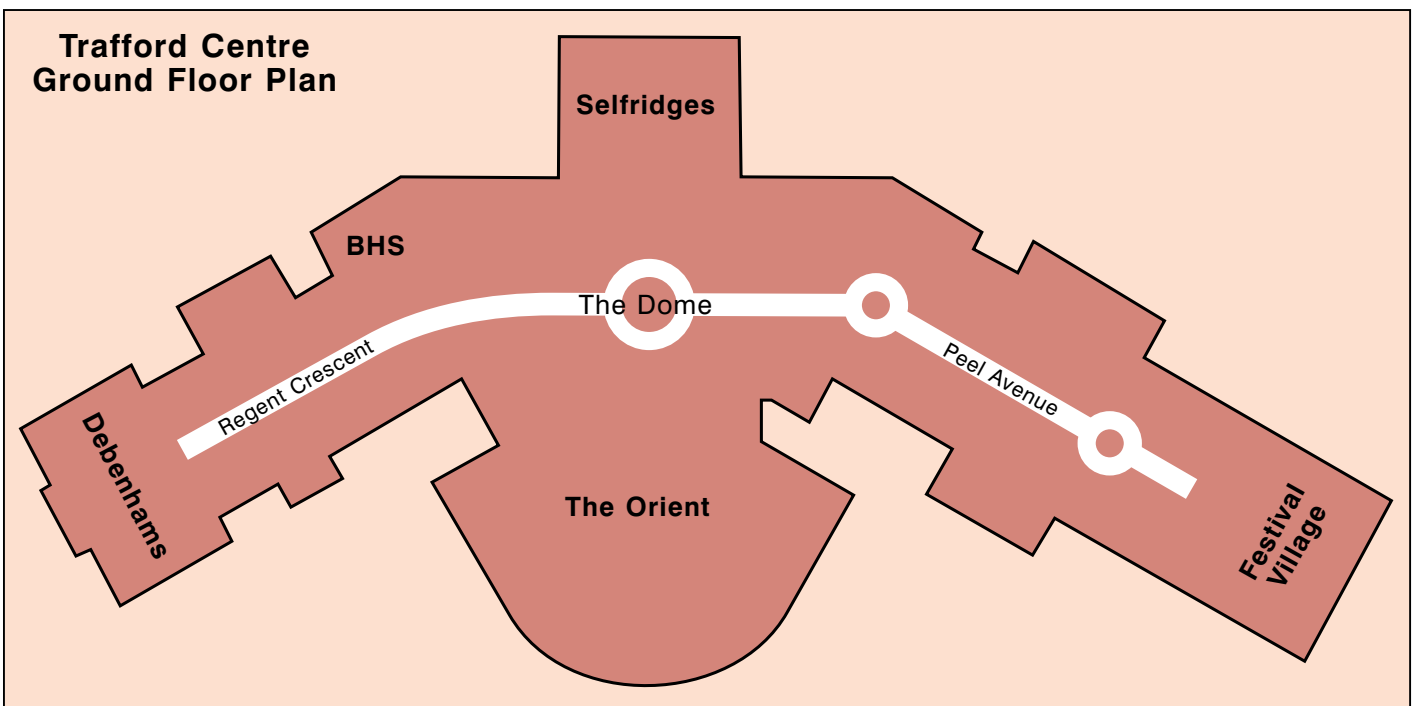
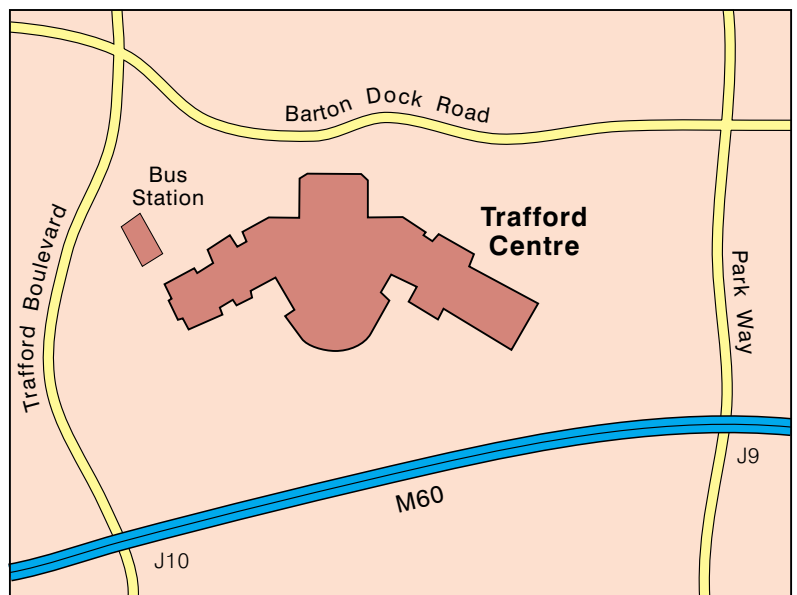
Visiting the Centre

This trip aims to:

- explore the use of space within the shopping centre,
- examine the ways in which space is managed and
- explore the role of place within the shopping centre.

You should try to look critically at the Trafford Centre. In particular, you should look at how space is used within the Centre to create a particular sense of place. You should explore the different 'zones' of the centre and look at how the space is managed. [If you are unfamiliar with any of the geographical terms used in the questions below, try consulting the *Dictionary of Human Geography*]

Each 'theme' begins with a general research question. You should be able to address these research questions when you have thought through the other questions in the section.



1. The external appearance of the Trafford Centre

How is the Trafford Centre an 'icon' of consumption?

Begin by looking at the outside of the Trafford Centre. In its own words,

'The Trafford Centre is more than just a shopping centre – we have set out to create a world class experience: a breathtaking building superbly constructed and beautifully decorated ...' (www.traffordcentre.co.uk).

What are your impressions of the outside of the Trafford Centre? What do you think the architects were trying to achieve in the external appearance of the centre? How is architecture used to create a sense that the centre is an important shopping location?

2. Design: internal architecture

To what extent is the internal architecture of the Trafford Centre post-modern?

Many shopping centres are designed around an eclectic set of themes. For example, Covent Garden in London draws on historical themes and idealises that sense of the past to create a place for shopping and entertainment. This kind of 'post-modern architecture' is really a mix of many themes and ideas. To what extent do you think the Trafford Centre is post-modern? Does it draw on a particular retail or architectural theme (or indeed a mixture of them)? Does it include idealisations of the past or historical details? Why do you think the interior is designed as it is?

3. Design: zones of the Trafford Centre

How is space produced and consumed within the Trafford Centre?

Walk around the shopping centre and locate the different 'zones' within it (including: Regent Crescent, Peel Avenue, The Orient, The Dome, Children's Wonderland, Festival Village).

How can you distinguish between the different zones? How is *space* used differently in the different parts of the centre (e.g. lighting, style, products)? Why do you think they have chosen to have different 'zones' rather than one large shopping centre?

Select one zone and look in detail how it is designed and how space is used and managed within the zone.

4. Case Study: Festival Village

How is space produced and consumed within the Festival Village?

Look in detail at the Festival Village Market Place. This 'zone' of the Trafford Centre is very different to the others and yet such market places are found in a number of other

retail centres in Britain (e.g. Meadowhall Centre, Sheffield) and elsewhere in the world. Goss draws our attention to the 'formula' of many shopping centres in the United States:

'historical landmarks and water exposure are critical features, as this retail environment is consciously reminiscent of the commercial world city, with its quaysides and urban produce markets replete with open stalls, colorful awnings, costermonger barrows and nautical paraphernalia liberally scattered around' (Goss, 1997: 270.)

How is the 'Festival Village' designed? Why does the design draw on a tradition? Why has this particular version of history been chosen for the design of 'Festival Village'? Why do you think 'Festival Village' was included within the Trafford Centre? What other evidence is there of historical idealisation within the Trafford Centre?



5. A Sense of Place and Placelessness

To what extent is a sense of place created within the Trafford Centre?

How different is the Trafford Centre to other shopping centres that you have been to? Is there any attempt to draw on the local history/culture of the area in designing the centre? When you are inside the centre, what evidence is there that you are in Greater Manchester? What senses of other places are created? How? Why? Do you think place is important?

6. Promoting Consumption

How is consumption promoted in the Trafford Centre?

What strategies exist to 'promote consumption' or encourage people to spend money (e.g. fashion shows, day care facilities for children)? How might you critically interpret these strategies?

7. Public Services within the Trafford Centre

To what extent does the availability of public services in the Trafford Centre make the shopping complex inclusionary to some and exclusionary to others?

Many people suggest that in large retail complexes, public services are not always consistent with the context of consumption. For example, there are often relatively few public toilets (which are expensive to maintain and may attract undesirables), drinking water fountains (reduce drinks sales) or telephones (attract youths) etc. To what extent do you think this is true at the Trafford Centre? Why do you think this might be the case?



8. Interpreting the Orient

How is a sense of place created within the Orient-zone of the Trafford Centre?

The Orient is the food and entertainment 'zone' of the Trafford Centre. It is designed to suggest that you are wandering through streets of restaurants reflecting New Orleans, New York (Grand Central Station), China town, Morocco, Italy and 'The Orient'. How is the sense of these 'places' created? Why has this style been chosen for this part of the centre? How is the design of the Orient different to the design in other parts of the centre? How are each of the places represented within the Centre (e.g. 'mystic East')

9. Controlling the space:

How does space in the Trafford Centre work to make the complex inclusionary to some and exclusionary to others? Retail developments are public spaces that are open to anyone. Many shopping centres have strategies to promote a sense of public space (e.g. street-signs, street-lamps, benches, shrubbery etc) and most are well kept and protected from vandalism. What evidence of this is there at the Trafford Centre?

In contrast, however, shopping centres can also be exclusionary. They attempt to attract shoppers and to exclude 'undesirables'. This exclusion has become central to the policy of the Trafford Centre. The centre operates a zero-tolerance policy towards shoplifters and fraudsters. It is monitored by 350 CCTV and is the first shopping centre in the world to introduce 'civil recovery'¹ procedures against shoplifters. What other policies exist at the Trafford Centre (see the Trafford Centre web-site)? Why do you think security is so important? What interpretations can you offer to explain why security is seen as so important?

10. The role of the Trafford Centre within the local community

What role does the Trafford Centre play in the local community? Why?

In the United States, out-of-town shopping places are intended to be pleasant places to shop that offer an alternative to the centre. However, their role is also to act as 'centres of cultural enrichment, education and relaxation'. How true is this of the Trafford Centre? What role does the Trafford Centre play in the local community? Why do the management of the Trafford Centre perceive their role in the local community as important?

¹ Civil Recovery procedures already operate widely amongst individual retailers in the United States. The scheme 'requires offenders to pay for the value of goods stolen, the cost of their detention, investigation into the offence, as well as a proportion of the cost of security and surveillance' (www.traffordcentre.co.uk/news/ accessed 16th October 2000).