FRAMING THE FUTURE

RESEARCH, TEACHING AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE FROM CIVIC DESIGN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL
INTRODUCTION: 100+ YEARS OF INNOVATION AND WORKING WITH OTHERS

The teaching and research of planning at the University of Liverpool has always been driven by innovation – from our origins as the world’s first planning school in 1909, to the launch of the first marine planning course to be accredited by the Royal Town Planning Institute in 2013.

This innovation continues today in the areas you might expect — our teaching and research — and in a field that is perhaps less well known: ‘Knowledge Exchange’. Knowledge Exchange, sometimes called Outreach, is a way of describing the work of mutual learning and support we undertake with communities and practitioners. Again, we have a strong history of this type of work, with one of our Lever Professors, the esteemed Sir Patrick Abercrombie, being responsible for the world-famous Greater London Plan of 1944. As you will see, our staff and students today continue to make valuable contributions to practical planning activities in many ways, and at many scales, in Liverpool and around the world.

Working with others is leading our approach. In our teaching this includes embedding client-based projects and opportunities for practice placements in our undergraduate and postgraduate studies and the development of new international educational partnerships. In our research we are increasingly engaged in multidisciplinary projects that bring together academics and external stakeholders from wide-ranging backgrounds. We are also active participants in local, regional, national and international partnerships and play a lead role in many arenas.

This booklet contains only a sample of what we have been doing in recent years, but we hope it provides a flavour of the depth and breadth of work going on. If you would like to find out more, please don’t hesitate to contact us using the information below.

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Studying planning at the University of Liverpool has always involved learning about practice in other countries. In 2006 the University of Liverpool in conjunction with Xi’an Jiantong University opened a new campus in Suzhou, Xi’an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJTLU). Shortly afterwards the Department of Urban Planning and Design was created, mirroring the undergraduate programmes in Liverpool. Chinese’s urbanisation in the past thirty years has arguably been more rapid and spectacular than at any other time in history, which both makes it a fascinating case study for urban and environmental planning, and provides an excellent opportunity for us to both share knowledge and learn from China.

Every year we welcome students from XJTLU, and elsewhere in China, to study on our programmes alongside students from the UK and from other parts of the world. This variety of experiences and skills leads to great opportunities for shared learning, particularly in our modules featuring client-based projects.

It’s not all one way, however, and thanks to our ever-growing links with, our sister institution in Suzhou, students and staff now have the opportunity to share these experiences. Students can now undertake a field class module entitled Planning in China based in and around Suzhou and Shanghai. In the last trip, students visited one of the ‘relocation’ villages where people, who previously worked as farmers on land around Suzhou, have been offered apartments to both live in and rent out as compensation for their land being taken up by the expansion of the Industrial Park, on which the XJTLU campus sits. This Industrial Park is approximately 48 miles by 24 miles. In Shanghai they visited the city’s urban planning exhibition, where a giant model of the city helps visualise the plans for Shanghai’s growth and change – an interesting contrast with the (lack of) publicity for planning in the UK! In addition from 2016/17 all students at the University, including planning students, can choose to spend a year of their degree programme studying at XJTLU and this will be reflected in the title of their degree.

From a staff perspective new opportunities are opening up for research as we now have a base in China. Working closely with staff in XJTLU we are currently joint supervising several PhD students and working alongside XJTLU’s recently established Research Institute for Urbanisation, we were able to co-ordinate a Russell Group China Workshop on Sustainable Cities.

“I have no doubt that the exchange has improved my knowledge of planning and contributed enormously to my education. Perhaps more importantly, however, international exchanges serve a greater purpose in the development of the next generation of professionals. It improves you immensely as an individual and helps you to adapt and be better prepared to integrate into an increasingly globalised world.”

Richard Byrne, MPlan student who spent a semester in XJTLU

XJTLU Campus in Suzhou, China
We often describe Liverpool, Merseyside, and the wider North West as great ‘laboratories’ to study planning – whether it’s the regeneration of our urban centres, the interaction between the land and the sea, community-driven planning or a variety of other themes, we have the opportunity right on our doorstep to see how planning is working in practice. We also recognise that our student’s work has the potential to be a useful community resource providing opportunities to make progress on emerging planning agendas where time, money or expertise may be in short supply.

Our client-based projects are one of the ways in which we draw these strands together and they are a feature of all our degree programmes. This is great for clients, who are often impressed with the work that students produce and make use of the results; it is also great for our students, who get to develop their planning skills outside of the classroom; and for staff in updating their practice experience and extending our professional networks.

Our longstanding, award-winning postgraduate Spatial Planning in Action module is an example of what is involved. Working across the North West and North Wales recent projects have included: Manchester City Link, exploring station related development and regeneration opportunities along the newly electrified Manchester to Liverpool rail line; taking aspects of the Atlantic Gateway Adapting the Landscape agenda forward; exploring how Liverpool City Region could build upon the Capital of Culture experience to become Cultural Capital for the North; and working with the Canal and River Trust in the Greater Manchester and Pennine and North Wales and Borders regions looking at how CRT’s activities might contribute to local development ambitions.

“We are keen to make anyone, in particular young people, who show an interest in our town, feel welcome and support them. We feel lucky to work with them and value their work, which focuses on real-life issues.”
Jonathan Williams, Middlewich Town Clerk

Planning practice also becomes increasingly international, which is reflected in the module International Planning Studies, where a field study visit to another EU country complements student understanding of how the culture, history, legal and administrative structures of different countries shape spatial planning practices. One motivation for considering planning from an international perspective lies in the potential for policy learning and the diffusion of policy approaches and ideas. Another often cited reason is to understand more about one’s own assumptions and the institutional context in which one works, through comparison with ‘how things are done’ or ‘how things work’ in another national context.

“In the top 3 UK planning schools and for practice, probably the best”
Martin Willey, RTPI Past President, External Examiner

Dortmund, Germany in 2016
Manchester and Pennine Waterways Plan. Our first project with the Canal and River Trust aimed to contribute to the development of the Manchester and Pennine Waterways Plan. Here students worked in groups on selected parts of the canal network to provide inspiring ‘Windows on the Waterways in 2030’. For example the Middlewich Canal Hub group explored how the canal corridor could be developed to contribute to the future growth of this once important historic industrial site.

North Wales and Borders Strategic Waterways Plan. In 2015 we worked with the Canal and River Trust on a project which aimed to assist the implementation of the North Wales and Borders Strategic Waterways Plan by preparing a series of action plans which illustrated the potential of key stretches of the waterway network to contribute to the sustainable development in the region. In Llangollen for example one of the groups came up with ideas about how links between the canal and the town could be enhanced and better connected to the development of the tourism and leisure economy in the area.

Liverpool and Wirral Waters 2030. Developing City Region Connections is our most recent project working to a Steering Group comprising visiting professors and staff from Peel Holdings and Liverpool City and Wirral Councils. This collaboration between staff and students from Architecture and Planning aimed to stimulate discussion about ways in which the Liverpool and Wirral Waters schemes can connect to the sustainable development of neighbouring communities and the wider Liverpool City Region.
Liverpool was the first Russell Group university from outside London to open a campus in the city. The University of Liverpool opened its London campus in order to provide an internationally recognised centre of professionally focussed education, informed by the latest academic research. Planning was one of the first disciplines to engage with this exciting new initiative. London is arguably the ideal city within which to study the production of the built environment from both an aesthetic and a commercial perspective. Put this together with the University of Liverpool’s status as a leading global centre of excellence in professional planning education and research – and you have discovered a great place to study urban design and property development.

From our base in the heart of the City at 33 Finsbury Square we offer two post graduate programmes: MSc Urban Design and Property Development and MSc Urban Planning. Both programmes are sharply focussed on preparing students for professional life. We believe that it is this focus on professionally-orientated education in the unrivalled environment of central London that has resulted in our programmes experiencing exponential growth.

The MSc Urban Design and Property Development is one of the first of its kind in the UK, marrying the related areas of property development and urban design. Students are engaged in exploring the dynamic connections between real estate valuation and the character of the built environment in one of the most rapidly changing property markets in the UK.

The MSc Urban Planning programme offers a unique combination of specialist study in urban planning, complemented by a range of optional modules in property development and design, drawing upon a range of expertise across the University of Liverpool in Urban Planning and Architecture.

“Your portfolio of Planning programmes is designed to deliver to our students an inspirational, professional and global experience in state-of-the-art facilities at the heart of London, one of the world’s most dynamic and inspiring cities.”
Janet Thistlethwaite, Head of Operations, University of Liverpool in London

“You can take your dream course with the support of excellent teachers and facilities and it will influence the choice of your career here!”
Yue Liu, project executive planner in Beijing for Vanke, China

Through our campus in London, we are ideally placed to build on our excellent networks with the professional community both nationally and internationally. We are opening our doors not only to students wanting to study in the capital, but also to businesses wishing to develop mutually beneficial partnerships alongside our academic offer.
For the first time in human history the majority of the Earth’s population live in cities. Urbanisation on an unprecedented scale is the hallmark of societies in much of the global south including the emergence of a new breed of mega cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Mexico City and São Paulo. The picture in Western cities is much more varied: While some metropolitan areas are under extreme pressure due to sustained growth of the economy, many cities still suffer from deindustrialisation and declining populations. All cities together, however, face the challenge of adapting to climate change.

As a result the principal policy challenges that face virtually all nations take on a specifically urban character: for example how can we engineer resilience to threats such as climate change, how do we regenerate areas in decline or how do we provide housing at prices that most can afford.

At Liverpool we are at the forefront of providing answers to these questions. Our cluster of urban researchers have conducted grant-funded research for the Economic and Social Research Council as well as working on projects funded directly by the world of policy and practice, such as the British Government, the European Union and the Royal Town Planning Institute.

“The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) commissioned the Department of Geography and Planning to conduct research on how proactive planning in parts of Europe produces a better built environment. This cutting-edge research, using the latest thinking in behavioural economics, has helped the RTPI to make the case for the value of planning and to open-up new areas for further research.”

Dr Michael Harris, Deputy Head of Policy and Research, Royal Town Planning Institute
GLOBAL GATEWAYS AND CORRIDOR REGIONS

The growth and development of Global Gateway and Corridor Regions (GGCRs) has been a phenomenon across various global regions in recent years – for example, the Pacific Gateway initiative in Canada; Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor in India; the Antwerp and Rotterdam area; the public-private Atlantic Gateway initiative for the Liverpool–Manchester corridor; and, the Axe Seine (Seine Gateway) in France between Le Havre and Paris.

Research into their governance and the strategies for their planning and promotion has been undertaken in a number of disciplines including urban and regional planning, geography, economics, management, transport and regional studies. However, to date they have rarely, if ever, been explored from an interdisciplinary perspective.

In policy and impact terms GGCRs are also in the spotlight of organisations such as the EU, NAFTA and the OECD. Recognising this context and building on Civic Design’s traditions of practice-facing and multidisciplinary research, Liverpool planning staff are undertaking work around this theme with colleagues from across the University of Liverpool and beyond.

We are currently working with Peel Holdings in a CASE studentship on the land–sea interactions of regional strategies with distinct maritime dimensions. Using the Atlantic Gateway as study area, this project explores the emergence of maritime-linked strategies designed to maximise the regional development opportunities presented by changes in the volume and patterns of global maritime trade.

In June 2016 a seminar aimed at developing an interdisciplinary research agenda on the theme of GGCRs has been held in the University of Liverpool’s London Campus. This brought together academics from across faculties at Liverpool and the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy and Practice and overseas institutions, including the Indian Institute of Management, Pantheon-Sorbonne University, Paris-Sorbonne University, the University of Amsterdam and Ghent University. This developing theme ties together the research interests of Civic Design staff around urban planning and policy, territorial and environmental impact assessment and marine spatial strategies and sea–society linkages. This research agenda explores how the planning and development of such regions is being driven by large-scale actions by both the public and private sectors and builds on our links with practice and external stakeholders.
Green Infrastructure is considered by many to be the ‘life-support’ system that our urban areas need to thrive. Urban green spaces provide health and education benefits for children and families, they provide economic and property uplift, and they ensure that key environmental systems remain functional.

At the University of Liverpool we are engaged directly, ensuring that Green Infrastructure planning is an influential aspect of local, regional and national decision-making. Working in a number of settings including the UK, Europe, India and China, staff in Civic Design are engaging politicians, built environment specialists, engineers and the public to promote an understanding of how investment in urban green space coupled with good design can be used to promote socio-economic liveability. A range of projects have been completed, whilst others are still underway highlighting the value of Green Infrastructure in academic, but more specifically, practitioner focussed arenas.

For example, in India staff have been exploring the role of Green Infrastructure as a method of delivering liveability in rapidly changing urban areas. Working with colleagues in CEPT University (Ahmedabad) the links between effective environmental planning and urban prosperity have been reported to local decision-makers and academics. Moreover, urban greening in China and Liverpool has been used to illustrate the value of green space and effective water management with University of Liverpool students.

Through innovative and multi-disciplinary teaching, students, local environment groups and the university have been engaged in discussions reflecting calls to increase the sustainability of the campus. Staff have also been working with the World Health Organisation and UN-Habitat to explore the value of promoting public engagement with Green Infrastructure planning as a route to better health and well-being. The outcomes of which could lead to impactful changes to policy and practice.

Furthermore, in the last three years we have worked with regional partners such as the Mersey Forest, the Land Trust, the Atlantic Gateway Parklands, and the Canals and Rivers Trust to assess the role that Green Infrastructure can play in delivering environmental sustainability. Staff have also been working with Liverpool City Council and the public for two years on the Strategic Green & Open Space Review Board, a national leader in reassessing how Green Infrastructure can be valued and financed in an urban context. This work is being promoted as an exemplar of innovative practice regionally and nationally, and will potentially influence the ways in which local authorities manage their landscapes in the future.

Overall, the rise of Green Infrastructure planning as a form of urban design, planning and investment has been guided by research and thinking based at the University of Liverpool. We will continue to engage stakeholders to ensure that Green Infrastructure remains a thought-provoking form of landscape and urban management.
The Environmental Assessment and Management (EAM) Research Centre is seen as a key academic player in the UK. Research Centre staff work on various research and consultancy projects on environmental governance, policy analysis, and sustainable decision making, mainly with partners in Europe, East and South Asia. Based on the reputation obtained through these projects and ensuing publications, we have attracted numerous international EAM PhD students over the past 10 years. Furthermore, we have and continue to attract international academic visitors from various countries who spend prolonged periods of research and knowledge exchange time with us.

“Liverpool’s [...] lead in organising [the] seminar on the role of Impact Assessment in Disaster Management [...] has been the only serious attempt [so far] to critically analyse this field of study and to provide an opportunity to pool and publish practice between practitioners, academics and government staff involved in disaster management.”

Dr Ross Marshall, Head of National Environmental Assessment Service (NEAS), Environment Agency

At the moment, areas in which we are internationally recognised as a place of global excellence include strategic environmental assessment/environmental impact assessment and alternative flood risk management approaches. Whilst our main focus is on EAM in the context of spatial planning, we have also contributed to various aspects of transport planning. Furthermore, we have been working extensively on health aspects for, and with, the World Health Organization (WHO).

There have also been several international research projects with a higher education component with a particular focus on South and East Asia, including the European Commission funded ‘Enhancing Attractiveness of Environmental Assessment and Management Higher Education’ (TwoEA-M) with partners from China, Japan, South Korea and Malaysia, and the related PENTA project together with Indian institutions. Furthermore, we have been involved in the Dutch government funded National Impact Assessment Programme for Pakistan, the biggest capacity development programme globally focusing on one particular country of the past decade. In this context several training programmes were conducted and the resulting Environmental Assessment Curriculum was formally endorsed by the Pakistani Higher Education Council.
One hundred years after the first UK planning act guiding land-based development, the 2009 Marine and Coastal Access Act heralded the establishment of a new English planning system for the sea. Similar Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) systems are now being set up across the world. Civic Design is playing a leading role in shaping and supporting these developments and is increasingly recognised as an international centre of excellence in this new arena for planning, combining an RTPI accredited MSc in Marine Planning and Management with cutting-edge research and active support for public engagement in marine and coastal affairs.

European Union funded contracts are the focus of much activity. These have included the first European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) study to step into the sea, where Civic Design led a team of researchers from the Atlantic, Arctic, Baltic, Black, Mediterranean and North Seas in the investigation of European Seas Territorial Development Opportunities and Risks (ESaTDOR). This, and the follow-on North Sea Star project, fed into the development of the maritime dimensions of the 2014–2020 EU Structural Fund programmes. Other projects are facilitating transboundary working in European marine regions, such as Transboundary Planning in the European Atlantic (TPEA), involving the Department of Environment Northern Ireland, the University of Cork and partners from the Portuguese and Spanish governments. Currently the SimCelt project is supporting the French, UK and Irish Governments in MSP for the Celtic Seas. Staff are also acting as the Atlantic focal point for the EU’s MSP Platform.

Civic Design recognises the special role it can play in bringing coastal and marine stakeholders together, through various marine and coastal networks, including the North West Coastal Forum and the Irish Sea Maritime Forum where Civic Design provides central secretariat services. The University is also a partner in the EU LIFE-funded Celtic Seas Partnership project supporting implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. In addition, staff were founder members of the international MSP Research Network established in 2013.

Civic Design is now leading the Sea and Society theme for the new Liverpool Centre for Sustainable Coasts and Oceans (LISCO), a partnership between the National Oceanographic Centre, the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University. This will draw together the wide-ranging network of maritime expertise in the Liverpool City Region and support continued transdisciplinary working in this area.

“The University of Liverpool has been a prime mover in seeking to use research as a basis for real change, conservation and growth, for stimulating new economic opportunity and for enabling those outside of its immediate area to learn about stakeholder involvement, to take part in open debate and discussion and through its encouragement, to become stakeholders themselves.”

Flo Clucas OBE, First Chair of the Irish Sea Maritime Forum
Even when the Department of Civic Design was created in the first decade of the last century, there was a strong interest within the planning discipline at Liverpool that it should have an impact and effect beyond the local and the national. This philosophy is still deeply embedded in our culture with many of our research activities and influences being internationally focused. Here we focus on one of our most recent projects in Saudi Arabia and the influence we have through our involvement in international planning journals.

Currently several members of staff are working on a project which has the potential to be enormously influential in reshaping the planning system for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Working with colleagues from the University of Cairo the Liverpool team has been appointed by UN-Habitat to undertake a major piece of work which evaluates the state of the current planning system as a whole and the local plan making system in particular, with a view to providing advice and guidance as to how the system can be reformed in the light of new aspirations for the Kingdom as recently articulated in Saudi’s Vision 2030 to build ‘A vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation’, within which planning or place making should play a central role. The work is part of a wider portfolio of activities being undertaken by UN-Habitat call the ‘Future Saudi Cities Programme’ which is four year partnership with KSA’s Ministry of Municipalities and Rural Affairs (MoMRA) to improve various aspects of urban governance, including plan-making and implementation. The project, which is still in its early phases, has involved detailed negotiations with actors in many agencies including women and youth groups with a greater emphasis being placed on openness and transparency in decision-making.

Civic Design also helps shaping planning around the world through its involvement in international planning journals. For more than hundred years Civic Design’s ‘home’ journal Town Planning Review has provided a globally recognised forum for communications between researchers, policy analysts and practitioners with an interest in planning. It publishes a diverse range of articles contributing to the advancement of town and regional planning research around the world.

More recently, Civic Design has become the editorial home for key international journals related to Environmental Assessment and Management. From 2009 to 2016 staff coordinated the publication of the Journal of Environmental Assessment Policy and Management and since 2016 Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal, the journal of the International Association of Impact Assessment, has its editorial base in Liverpool.

We are also delighted to play a key role in editing Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning. This online journal is a new initiative of AESOP, which aims to promote excellence in planning education and research by supporting and disseminating scholarly work of high quality covering the wide spectrum of the planning discipline.
The Department of Civic Design was founded in 1909, five years before the creation of a professional body for planning, the Town Planning Institute. The industrialist William Hesketh Lever had made a large donation to the University to support new ventures in tropical medicine, Russian studies and, significantly, town planning and civic design. It was the Liverpool Professor of Architecture, Charles Reilly, who suggested town planning, appealing to Lever’s interest in workers’ housing (Lever had personally supervised the planning of Port Sunlight, 1899–1914) and in architecture and planning more generally. In 1950, the fourth Lever Professor, Gordon Stephenson, wrote his plans for a restructuring of the courses at Liverpool, resulting in the launch of the two-year postgraduate degree in planning, the Master of Civic Design, which has been our flagship programme ever since. Being the world’s first planning school has always been understood as an impetus to deeply care about both the history of the discipline and the history of the built environment in our teaching and research.

“"It is the opinion of the Donor that it will be a boon to future generations that there should be an opportunity of training men to a full knowledge of the best possible methods of Town Planning and Civic Design."

William Hesketh Lever, 1910

Members of staff work with organisations such as the Liverpool Waters Conservation Management Board and Liverpool’s World Heritage Site Steering Group and has recently prepared an outline research agenda for World Heritage UK. Many (former) members of staff are active in the Mersey Civic Society, founded in 1938, which campaigns to preserve the best of our existing buildings and spaces (often successfully) and to insist on good quality design for our new ones. More recently we have engaged with our colleagues in our sister institution in China (XJTLU), working on heritage conservation in modern China.

The department’s work is not only concerned with the historic environment, but also developed a strong interest in the history of the discipline, resulting in numerous academic contributions, such as the recent book Great British Plans: Who Made Them and How They Worked, which was published in 2016.
The appointment of Visiting Professors from a variety of backgrounds is a relatively recent initiative for the Department which is opening up new and exciting opportunities for working with others. Bringing a wealth of experience to our teaching, research and outreach activities the Visiting Professors also greatly extend our network of external contacts and help maintain a sharp practice edge to our work.

An example of their contribution is the creation of the Framing the Future event series which champions excellence in place making, sustainable development, and planning for the future of cities and regions. It aims to make connections between the academic community and practitioners in the outside world and provide a neutral forum for vigorous debate and imaginative thinking about key planning issues of the day. In putting together our events we draw on resources from outside the university including our visiting professors, contacts with business, politics, the development professions, and the voluntary sector.

The first Framing the Future event ‘Business Planning for City and Regional Innovation’ was held as part of the 2014 Liverpool International Festival for Business. Our second event ‘A Sustainable and Resilient Northern Powerhouse: A Charrette for the North’, timed to coincide with the 2016 Liverpool IFB, aims to contribute to Northern Powerhouse and Great North Plan thinking by exploring what ‘good’ growth could mean for the North. With external sponsorship from Turley, Ramboll, Protos, Wirral Waters and the Peel Group, and with The North West Business Leadership Team, Atlantic Gateway Parklands and the University of Liverpool Heseltine Institute for Policy and Practice as event partners, the charrette demonstrates our ambition to showcase the value of planning in all its forms and take a lead in moving forward important planning agendas in collaboration with others.

The event also marks the launch of the University of Liverpool research centre on Sustainable and Resilient Cities (SARC). Here Civic Design is taking a lead in bringing together staff with related interests from across the university, including Architecture, Engineering, Computer Science and Management. Working alongside, and collaborating with the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy and Practice, SARC will focus on cities and city regions, searching for ways to implement change, understanding how cities function, making them more sustainable and resilient, and using our best practice science and social science expertise to meet future challenges, including climate change and resource depletion.

These are some of the ways in which Civic Design continues to strive to be a leader in Framing the Future of planning research, education and practice, and in creating positive patterns of development around the globe for current and future generations.
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