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SHIPWRECKED IN THE URBAN ARCHIPELAGO
Living Cultures in Glasgow

Glasgow represents today a unique example of a scattered metropolis. This has not always been the case. During the 19th century Glasgow expanded enormously: based on heavy industry like ship and engine building the population grew from around 50,000 to more than 1 million inhabitants. In parallel, the city's fabric developed from a small provincial town with mostly two-storey buildings to a dense metropolis of four- and even five-storey tenements, all built in local sandstone and forming – even if developing from former villages – a quite continuous cityscape (Reed 1993). Some of these areas, especially the middle class in the West End and on the Southside, are today the most popular and the most expensive areas – featuring a rich mixture of flats, terraced houses and urban villas, all built in wonderful sandstone with amazingly large windows. It was the time when Glasgow architects developed models for city living which set the highest standards in European cities – just to mention the famous terraces by Alexander "Greek" Thomson, especially Moray Place which once was praised as "the finest terrace in the world" (Stamp 1999).

All this glorious development of a continuous metropolis came to an end in the 20th century, caused by different factors. Already during the 19th century, there was the tendency by the rich to leave the city and to build up green suburbs, separated from the central city. During the 20th century this tendency became a model for the whole middle class, encouraged by Ebenezer Howard's propagation of Garden Cities. Thus already, between 1920 and 1945, the new neighbourhoods were generally less dense than the developments from the era before. But the radical changes only started after the Second World War when Britain lost its overseas markets. Glasgow's industry collapsed and the city lost more than a half of its people, declining from a peak of 1.3 million inhabitants to only 600,000 within 40 years. But economic changes alone could not have definitively changed the form of the city. The massive destructions which followed were due to a technically based modernism which introduced the car into the city by radically cutting motorways through existing neighbourhoods and by erasing housing areas of worker's tenements and building new social housing tower blocks (Glendinning 1997).

The specific pattern of Glasgow, separated into partially no longer connected neighbourhoods, divided by motorways and derelict land from former industries is mostly due to this combination of deindustrialisation and modernist planning. Still in the post-industrial city of today, the forces to build new neighbourhoods on greenfields in the surrounding area instead of using the brownfields of derelict land within the city are strong. But the task of the day – ecologically, ecomocially, politically as well as aesthetically – is to reconnect the city's form, to densify the urban fabric, to build neighbourhoods of high quality urban living (Frey 1999). Or, more poetically, to reshape the scattered archipelago into a majestic and attractive island.

Today, Glasgow – like many other cities – is shaped by two ongoing processes: urbanisation and decentralisation. This process has generated over the last decades a new urban form and structure with the following key characteristics:

- the once compact and mono-core city has diffused into a multi-nucleated structure with larger and smaller settlements linked by a network of infrastructure. This structure

necessitates people to be mobile in order to have access to services and facilities as well as work places which are disbursed throughout the network. Access to good communication and transport links has become the driving force behind the location of uses.

- the settlements are to a higher or lesser degree separated by open green spaces and countryside; these open spaces, once at the city edge, have become part of an urbanised landscape frequently called meta-city.

- the political structure of this meta-city has boundaries for local authority areas that no longer coincide with the structure of interconnected urban settlements. The communities within the urbanised landscape are functionally, socially and economically interconnected and interdependent but fragmented into different administrative areas that compete with each other for people, tax revenue and development growth. Competition in turn effects those development areas that are located at key transport nodes and arteries and provide a higher quality environment and better access to key services and facilities than others attract people and businesses away from more disadvantaged urban areas, thus generating a socio-economically stratified urban landscape. As a result of the decentralisation of people and urban functions and the fragmentation of the urban fabric, there is an excessive need of resources and energy input to make the urban network function. Furthermore, there is an excessive production of waste that is discarded into the air, water and landfill sites as the result of a linear metabolism that discards rather than recycles waste products.

It is the main task of urban planners and designers, together with geographers, urban economists, social scientists and environmental psychologists, to understand and deal with these characteristics of the urban region. The Urban Design Studies Unit (UDSU) at the Department of Architecture at the University of Strathclyde tackles these issues, through both research and teaching.

Research in the Department shows that the link between local and global sustainability is currently not supported by adequate knowledge – a theory of sustainability clearly identifying structures for global management. Without such a theory, the efforts to generate a sustainable urban form, from a social, economic, physical and environmental point of view are vain and not viable in a very near future. The key factor for survival is a balanced relationship between the city and its hinterland, not only at local but also at global level; city and countryside must be considered as an entity and much more regard has to be paid to the ecological footprint of cities (Frey 2004).

The projects presented as part of this exhibition illustrates UDSU's philosophy through some of its work with graduate students in the Department of Architecture, offering a range of three different approaches to city living. The focus is Glasgow, the major city in Scotland which, with its development process over the past one and a half century, its planning and housing policies, and its current lifestyle, is an interesting example of "exploitation of the earth's biosphere to a degree that threatens the natural renewing capacity of our global ecosystem" (Frey 2004:4). Glasgow is in the same league as many other cities around the world whose footprint is clearly no longer sustainable (for example, Glasgow's footprint is 2.5 to 3 times the average share of resources). The major factors affecting it are waste, food, and energy consumption, with built land playing only a minimal part – these are both global and local factors. Actions must therefore tackle both at the same time, dealing with local issues of density and attitudes in a coordinated way.

All projects were carried out by students belonging either to the Urban Design Studio or to the Advanced Architectural Design studio, two Master courses offered by the Department and tackling current urban challenges. The Urban Design Studio in particular has a well-established and recognised profile in addressing urban problems strategically, trying to create responsible environments for sustainable communities and

well-designed architecture of the city. As part of its programme, students generally work on the urban design of a complex area of the city – integrating physical, social, economic and ecological aspects within a uniform framework of development well responding to the city phenomena. Their design work is accompanied and supported by the latest research produced by the members of the UDSU. As the following examples demonstrate, this combination provides a variety of innovative, and at times controversial ideas for our cities.

Our choice of projects covers three different scales: the region, the city and the neighbourhood. The first project, by Douglas Bodell, is a proposal for regional reorganisation of green spaces, to be combined and jointly planned with urban development, to reduce land and food consumption at a global scale, advocating a form of self-sufficiency of our cities by investing in locally available resources and wasteland. This project has been developed as part of a Master Degree in Urban design and has developed into a thesis which brings together ecological theories with very practical recommendations on how to integrate land-use management, transport, housing and recreation, food production as a means for sustainable urban development. Starting from an area in Glasgow's east, the project develops an overall strategy for the region. Focusing on the ecological aspects and the recreational spaces, its architecture is not yet meant to be a concrete design, but a more abstract proposal for densified housing.

The second project, by Stuart Young, tackles the issue of urban densification and reuse of brownfield sites in proximity to central areas, as opposed to dispersion and use of open land, reducing the need for new infrastructure, and the footprint of our cities. Albeith developed at a smaller scale than Bodell's project, Young's proposition covers urban districts and supports innovative housing models and lifestyles. Again the project is set in Glasgow and addresses pressing problems the city is currently facing. Glasgow, as a post-industrial city, represents a quite unique example of a scattered metropolis. The strange physical structure of the city consists of different quarters and neighbourhoods – some of them historical and dense – spread around in a quite undefined pattern. This kind of metropolitan archipelago – once proposed as an urban model and today a source of problems– holds opportunities for urban development and exploration. A viable model is the use of quite dense urban blocks, forming a clear street space and at the same time offering green private areas in the interior courtyard, as they have been developed on the early 20th century (Sonne 2003).

As about one third of the population is living in developments of public ownership, and as quite a lot of housing schemes from the last 40 years are awaiting renovation or redevelopment, there is the opportunity for a strategic development of the whole metropolis according to a new model of density and city living. Instead of building up new areas at the periphery, the existing holes in the urban fabric could be used for new types of urban living including work, but also green spaces that really respond the peoples needs. Over the past year Glasgow has transferred its entire public housing stock – through a process called Stock Transfer – to Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) which "acquired" 82,000 units. Of these, 15,000 will be demolished within 10 years; 7,000 are expected to be lost through right to buy; GHA will remain with 60,000 houses and a plan to build 3,000 new houses for the next 10 years. This is a considerable number which inevitably calls the need for integrated, strategic development. Young's proposition addresses these challenges very clearly.

The third project, by Ewan Imrie operates on an even more local scale. Here, the Department works on issues of neighbourhood development, its impact on urban lifestyle, on local identity and engagement in regeneration processes (Romice, Frey 2003). Issues of identity, place attachment and territoriality are linked to specific urban forms and densities. This work suggests a scenario for the improvement of one of the areas of housing being transferred to Glasgow Housing Association, advocating the need for nourishing, strengthening and enabling the local community to become responsible for its own area, through management and direct involvement in its upgrading. Again, this is a very current problem that Glasgow is encountering and fits well in the global-local relationship highlighted in the introductory paragraphs. Imrie's idea is well rooted in Glasgow's strong tradition of community involvement, that makes

of the city one of the most established examples of civic engagement in Europe, adding a more strategic dimension to it.

Glasgow Housing Association now owns this housing stock, but manages it through 63 Local organizations, all of which will be seeking progressive independence (for local management, rent agreement, accountability, and more importantly for us, planned investment) in the near future; Local Housing Organisations (LHOs) are community-controlled, decentralized organizations. Ideally, if these LHOs will gain strength, the role of GHA could diminish over the years. It is clear that GHA and the LHOs early years are fundamental in developing the mentality and skills for strategic urban housing development and effective participation.

Imrie's project focuses on a rundown area called Gallowgate in the East End of Glasgow which hosts a fairly strong community but that, for its position very close to the city centre, could be subject to comprehensive development, with the risk of population displacement to accommodate private investment tailored to medium-high classes. Imrie advocates the need to upgrade the area retaining its current population, through a slow community based process, capable of generating effects on the population in terms of employment, food production and education.

Overall, the three projects address the urgent need for comprehensive planning strategies – regional, urban and local – which todays' metropolis are experiencing. The greatest challenge is to combine ecological necessities with cultural ideas on city living – and it is still a long way to go until the extraordinary quality of the dense and liveable Victorian quarters in Glasgow is reached again – still forming the most popular, expensive, beautiful and ecological areas in the city.

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