

## Title of case study

Imagination takes Command: students as agents of civic engagement

## Staff Lead

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School of Architecture

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## Name of course and module (if applicable) case study took place within

BA (Hons) Architecture (K100) ARCH 302 & ARCH 352

## Please briefly describe the activity undertaken for the case study

Liverpool School of Architecture has a long history of involvement with Liverpool City Council dating back to its foundation in 1894, when the city Mayor saw the potential for the School to design the City. Since 2016 the School has undertaken three consecutive, extremely successful projects: “Architecture + Bluecoat: process and product”, “Playing around the Docks” with Tate Liverpool and most recently “Anfield Urban Commons” a project involving the urban regeneration of Anfield. In this case study we are going to focus on the collaboration with Tate Liverpool and the project at Anfield. These projects, conducted in partnership with real-world institutions and in consultation with local communities, allow final year architecture students to experience the process of working on a professional architectural design project. This includes working to a brief, undertaking the research, sketching, modelling and presentation work required of a professional architect, experiencing having their work critiqued by other industry professionals and clients and developing the interpersonal skills required to professionally communicate with clients and the public. As a result of being involved in these projects students experience the reality of working as a real-world engaged professional and are therefore well prepared for entering the workplace with a mature mind-set upon graduation. They develop their confidence and employability throughout the project with support from the School of Architecture staff that includes highly skilled practitioners.

In the “Playing around the docks” collaboration with Tate Liverpool, School of Architecture staff developed a project that involved final year undergraduate architecture students and members of Liverpool’s community to explore the ‘production’ of architecture at Tate Liverpool and the relationship with the city’s identity. Students were asked to develop an

unrealised proposal for the gallery and redesign the space in light of the relationship of the building with the City's history, current character and people.

The "Anfield Urban Commons" project was developed as a reflection on the complex relationship between Liverpool Football Club and the residents of the Anfield community. Liverpool Football Club draws visitors and supporters from all over the world, however the community surrounding the ground live in an area subjected to extreme negative as well as positive impacts of their internationally famous neighbour. In collaboration with Liverpool City Council, final year architecture students were asked to conduct an analysis to identify and design a building that would serve to act as a hub, linking together, or maybe mediating between, the community and the football supporters and redeveloping derelict areas near the stadium.

## How was the activity implemented?

### Playing Around the Docks

In a famous doodle of the early 1980s, while working on the concept stage for the new Tate Liverpool [Stirling and Wilford, 1982-88], James Stirling sketched an imaginative proposal for the entrance of the new gallery. It consisted of a ship, collaged into the sidewall of the warehouse, offering all the elements to generate a clear, unmistakable landmark. This proposal was accompanied by an evocative handwritten caption:

Albert Dock – L'pool about 1958? the warehouses of the Dock were full of broken up ships' parts – funnels, bridges, propellers...

Sadly this sketch did not become a built work and it is from this unrealised idea that the project began.

Final year undergraduate architecture students were provided with a brief and asked to build a tridimensional model interpreting Stirling's sketches. The students received feedback on these models as a result of a formative assessment and feedback mechanism used in the School of Architecture informally known as 'crit', a studio review. Over the course of approximately 30/40 minutes they are required to present and rationalise their plans within the studio environment to an audience of their lecturers and peers; in mid-term and final reviews industry professionals, commercial partners and clients experienced in commissioning architecture were also present at these events. Following a presentation of the work, lecturers and peers ask questions and critique and interrogate the scheme, helping students to see where further research may be needed, or if a structure won't work due to the materials chosen. Students receive both verbal advice at the time and written feedback/feedforward as a result of these reviews which helps them to refine and improve their proposals. The students' tridimensional models were subsequently put on display for the general public at the Tate, which saw more than 5000 visitors in a week, allowing the cohort of students staffing the exhibition to interact directly with the public. Students were also required to analyse the current gallery space and imagine new options for it working with Tate staff and the public. This involved conducting research with them regarding potential uses of the space and developing drawings of proposed changes. Students also

benefited from the use of the 'crit' approach to formative assessment at this stage of the project. As well as hearing from their peers and teachers, on this occasion the reviews took place at the Tate where gallery staff and the public were invited to attend. The final element of the project was to widen the focus of the project brief to encompass the redesign of the whole of the Docks area involving conversation and input from waterfront residents' communities – Liverpool Engage and the Merseyside Civic Society as well as local major landowner/developers such as Peel Ports, Royal Albert Dock and Liverpool City Council.

### **Anfield Urban Commons**

This project was completed over semester 1 and 2 of the final year of undergraduate architecture studies. During the first semester students focused on analysis of the site (including historical, social and environmental factors), material properties and their structural application including their relationship to spatial and environmental qualities. Their research included a presentation and debate with the chief executive of Liverpool Foundation Homes, a local government owned regeneration vehicle working in the Anfield area. They finally developed a detailed design of their proposed building. Students presented their drawings to staff from the School of Architecture and their peers in their 'crit'.

During semester two students developed their building conceptually and spatially. They were required to present a series of study models to explore their ideas and the structural system. Students produced support plans, sections and elevation models to demonstrate how their proposed materials would be used in feasible construction. A second "crit" was held midway through semester two for students to receive further feedback and feedforward prior to their final review that culminated in a presentation by the student of their drawings, posters and models to commissioners and clients, representatives from the Anfield community and professional architects.

The purpose of both of these projects was to enrich students' ability to engage with the public, industry professionals and clients, to develop their critical approach to real-world, properly researched problems, to provide them with the opportunity to describe their own ideas and to develop their projects considering external feedback. At the same time the events also represented an occasion to involve residents, and other members of the public in the complex process of an architectural project development.

### **Has this activity improved programme provision and student experience, if so how?**

Students were able to grasp the innovative nature of the Studio, reflecting on their role in society and shaping their role as the architects of the future. An example for the partnership with Tate was the thoughtful analysis written by the undergraduate student Alicia Tymon-McEwan:

“At the culmination of the project, the metamorphosis our architecture has undergone within the Studio is staggering. Whilst the quality of representation improves for everyone within the third year of architecture school, each of the final projects contains a totally individual understanding and analysis of Liverpool's history, and vision for what this means for the city's future, both on the global stage and for its inhabitants. Yet, each one of these positions has one thing in common; it is totally different from that with which each student possessed when we joined the Studio. Quite a defining characteristic.”

## Did you experience any challenges in implementation, if so how did you overcome these?

Despite receiving a precise brief at the beginning of the year, shared with the collaborating institution, the Studio develops the fulfilment of a brief iteratively. Weekly afternoon discussions are held with the entire cohort, of 45-60 minutes. A number of particular approaches by 4 students, selected by tutors, is presented each week to the class by the students themselves to discuss theoretical and pragmatic aspects of the projects. It facilitates a process of growth, from which the class constantly refines the strategy of the project and allow the tutors to define a clear pathway for the entire cohort.

## Which Liverpool University Hallmark(s) and Attribute(s) does this case study relate?

<b>Research-connected Teaching</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Active Learning</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Authentic Assessment</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Confidence</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Digital Fluency</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Global Citizenship</b>	<b>X</b>

## How does this case study relate to the Hallmarks and Attributes you have selected?

### **Research-connected Teaching**

Students were expected to demonstrate the research they had engaged in when designing their structures through their work and when questioned during their crits. There is an expectation that students undertake research to ensure their structures are viable in terms of materials and spatial design. Students were also expected to base their work on research informed architectural designs and in light of appropriate architectural literature. Furthermore, the absolute uniqueness is to consider students and school as an agent towards urban regeneration: the research produced becomes knowledge for the institutions we collaborate with. It moves the role of academia towards society from passive to active, building civically engaged partnerships.

### **Active Learning**

Students undertook field trips to the sites where their building was to be situated and met with interested members of the public and/or community stakeholders. They designed and built models of their proposed structures. They were required to demonstrate how they had developed their work as a result of the feedback and forward received during their reviews, understanding the role of design both in problem setting and problem solving.

### **Authentic Assessment**

Students were assessed on the skills required of professional architects, in a real world setting as a result of commissioned work between the School of Architecture and Liverpool City Council. The Heads of Regeneration and planning officers were involved from the beginning in a mutual exchange and the Studio produced a document that synthesised the challenge and our findings. It must also be highlighted that the two professionals working in the Studio - both from the prominent British architectural office Sheppard Robson - can follow the undergraduate's growth during the year and often become employers of promising students. The partnership with Sheppard Robson is an established, developing and nuanced one, based on several years of collaboration: as well as bringing up-to-date professional industry expertise into the classroom, the relationship benefits the profession through research thinking disseminated back into practice.

### **Confidence**

Students built confidence as they learnt and refined new skills through the result of a long term piece of project work that they had ownership of. They developed their presentation skills and ability to answer questions "on the spot" through the formative and summative crits. The group work is also an important characteristic of the Studio; students analyse, research the brief and the site together, later discussing a joint master-plan - the need to negotiate their ideas teaches them about real-world collaborations.

### **Digital Fluency**

Students built their digital skills through desk top based research, use of modelling software and development of posters and digital drawings/ 3D representations of their work.

### **Global Citizenship**

Students were engaged in activity which served the community; they learnt how to work with a diverse range of people with multiple perspectives and to consider the environmental, societal and ethical considerations of architectural development and building. Particularly within the Anfield project, there was a strong social justice perspective to the work undertaken which the students had to reflect on and develop sensitively into their proposals.

### **How could this case study be transferred to other disciplines?**

Industry partnerships or partnerships with public sector agencies are a great way of developing students' employability skills and their confidence as it provides them with opportunities to work on real world projects with working professionals. The assessments

the students underwent in this final year project were completely authentic, as they involved the development, design, modelling and presentation of a pitch to win a contract to design and oversee the building of an architectural structure. Other disciplines could equally seek to engage in their own area with industry, public and third sector companies to source briefs or placements for students.

### If someone else were to implement the activity within your case study what advice would you give them?

It is important to rethink the role of academia in these very uncertain times. Regardless of the discipline, there is always research, or aspects of research, that can be applied to civic society – humanities based disciplines are too often an undervalued but exceptional agent that can facilitate interaction among different realms. The advice is, therefore, simple: identify which part of your research can be applied to the wider society, engage with partners – public and professionals – focussing on everyday problems via research. One collaboration often leads to the other, naturally, but be prepared to revise your plans, to tweak a cutting edge approach keeping the main idea consistent. Be always reassured that what you give to students and institutions in terms of time and effort comes back in terms of engagement and opportunities.



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