Peter Hawley

Designing a project



'everyone can do both similar and different things in similar but different places'

How might one construct a design studio project? In addition to achieving educational objectives, it must engage both the student and his or her teachers, but if it also involves the whole year as a group it can prove especially rewarding. Last session I looked for an Honours year programme whereby each student could evolve a project that would have similarities with those of their colleagues but that would also be different. If a project were to start with something conceptual – for example, a thematic thread – then there could be both common generic facilities and uniquely different facilities arising from data collected during field studies in particular locations. I've discovered that this sort of idea works well when a large group is doing a project over a whole academic year. On the one hand there is always a common level of interest across the studio because every student feels they are in the same boat as their mates, but on the other hand their own project has unique characteristics. This means that the type of collaboration between students isn't suffocating because no one is ever actually doing the same thing in the same place; everyone is doing both similar and different things in similar but different places. The title of the programme that emerged was 'Stretched City – East meets West'.

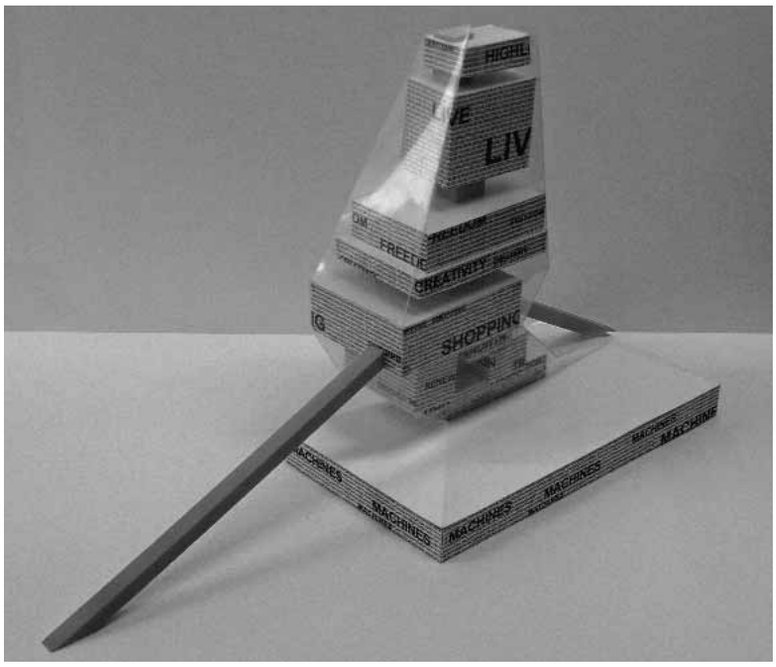
For the thematic thread, three strands of thought proved to be particularly useful. The first of these related to British Waterways Scotland and their Millennium Link Project, which has re-opened the link between the Forth and Clyde Canal and the Union Canal in the Central Belt of Scotland. The Forth and Clyde Canal connects Glasgow and the Atlantic in the west to the North Sea; originally it shortened trading routes from mainland Europe to America and could accept quite large craft. The Union Canal was conceived as an investment by Edinburgh's 'Wise Men of the East' to connect their city with the Forth and Clyde to increase business. The difference between the two is that the Union Canal is flat all the way – there are no locks as it follows the 240 feet contour and its geometry is interesting since it is a prisoner of the geography. This is very different from the Forth and Clyde Canal, which has locks and whose geometry is therefore less dependent on the terrain. Because canals with locks lose a lot of water, the canal between the two seas is kept topped up from lochs high up in the hills away to the south. The canal that is flat hardly loses any water at all, only a little through seepage. This makes it really efficient and also faster because you don't have to negotiate locks. Originally the two canals met at Falkirk via a series of adjacent stepped locks, but these eventually fell into disrepair. The Millennium Fund, in partnership with British Waterways and other agencies, replaced them by a rotating boat-lift known as the Falkirk Wheel. Now these waterways again connect Edinburgh and Glasgow and attract an increasing number of visitors and boats; in so doing they act as a catalyst for economic regeneration and the revitalisation of communities – indeed British Waterways is committed to work in partnership with other agencies to protect and enhance the canals for the benefit of the areas through which they run.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135508000961 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In contrast to the concrete nature of the canals, the second strand was a more abstract and strategic thought about secondary education and lifelong learning. The Architecture Policy Unit of the Scottish Executive had put me in touch with Kier Bloomer, the then Chief Executive of Clackmannanshire, whose views on education I found engaging. He felt that there was an urgent need for change in secondary education to match changes in the modern world; priorities such as citizenship and enterprise, for example, require wider learning experiences than are traditionally offered. It appeared that secondary education was in a sort of terminal state of dysfunction (serving certain categories of children well and a whole lot of others not very well at all) and that this was accompanied by the thought that lifelong learning centres might provide a more progressive education with wide-ranging facilities and more involvement in their communities. In that model, boundaries between school and out-of-school learning would become blurred, value would be placed on different kinds of success and so relevant educational opportunities could be offered to everyone.

The last strand was the rather negative relationship between the two cities at the ends of the canals, Edinburgh and Glasgow – geographically so near, yet historically and culturally so distant. The question arose of how you might promote more connectivity and social integration between the two.

A formula for an architectural programme that might deal with this was complicated but as one answer I came up with the concept of 'Stretched City'. This focused on a visualisation of Glasgow connected to Edinburgh by the potential of the canals to act as a social condenser between the two. In time that connection might be the genesis of a different type of city, incorporating both traditional cities, serviced by road and rail from the periphery, and nourished from within by the reintroduction of public life into canal-side communities in the form of lifelong learning centres. These centres would be like seeds, affecting people's imagination about further investment and from which other things might grow. Along the connecting ribbon of canal, then, density might vary considerably and give a range of qualities of occupation from neon to pastoral.



The Collective Incubator by Jane Mulvey: architecture operates as propaganda in this metaphoric representation of a city. Selected programmes act as vehicles to comment on banalisation while visitors are presented with new ways of thinking and better ways of living

'The centres would be like seeds, affecting people's imagination about further investment and from which other things might grow'



Wake + Foam by Abreowong Etteh: the re-occupation of redundant gasometers alongside the canal provides an intricate gossamer of people and places and reflects a multicultural, heterogeneous society

We invited informed talks on the political, economic and social situation of the Central Belt and these, together with mapping studies and other surveys, helped the students to reach an understanding of both the canals and the region. The whole stretch was coded through 26 field studies in which we followed the approach to surveying territories used by the urban design practice Chora and its founding director, Raoul Bunschoten. These studies revealed surprising local patterns of occupation and activity in each of the sectors and also suggested areas of potential connectivity

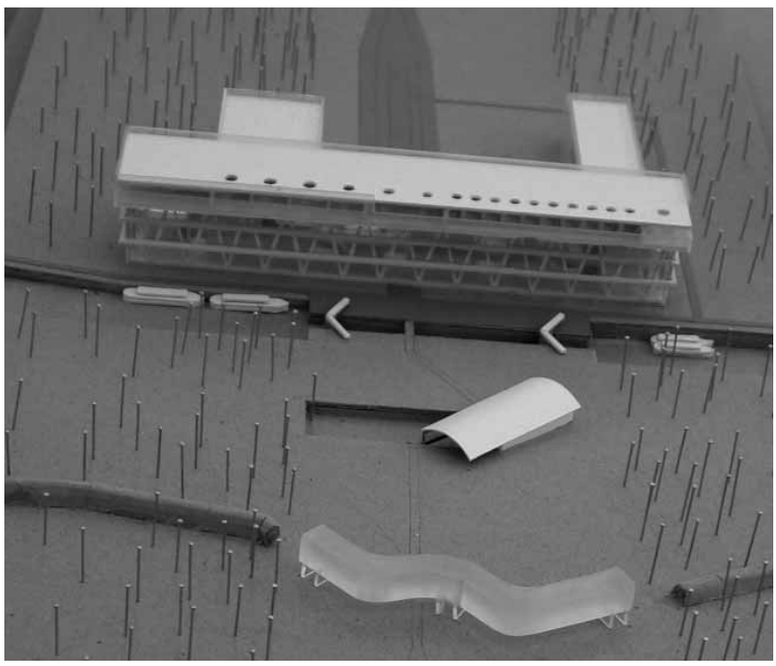
https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135508000961 Published online by Cambridge University Press

between them. In turn, of course, it provided the material for 52 architecture students to evolve a brief for their own lifelong learning centre to be designed for strategic locations along the waterway. Each centre would provide generic teaching and learning spaces, facilities for meeting councillors and MPs (with video links to parliaments in Holyrood, Westminster and Brussels), overnight accommodation and a mini ideas store; each would have its own barge with a mooring. Furthermore, each would accommodate unique facilities prompted by the circumstances around them as revealed by the field studies.

In short, there would be 52 magnets dotted across the Central Belt of Scotland, some in clusters and others in isolation. They would promote enterprise through imaginative economic investment in new and existing urban and rural situations and they would attract an unprecedented quantity of house-building in association with the waterways (which themselves could be considered as an experimental and sustainable environment). But most significantly, these centres would begin to generate a formulary for a new urbanism, one where the categorisation of learning and life as separate activities would be superseded by their transformation and unification into everyday life in association with new neighbourhoods arising and existing neighbourhoods being revitalised.

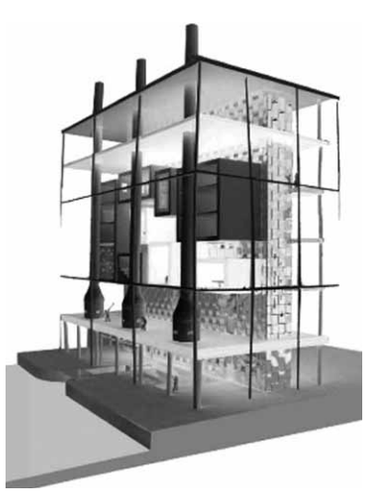
As we witness the fast growing developing world of the twenty-first century, we see a parallel economic necessity of immigration into Scotland. In this context our Stretched City could reasonably be predicated on the view that an increase in the density of population in the Central Belt would operate in tandem with an increase in its productivity and social integration. It could become a sustainable region. In conversation, Raoul Bunschoten was generously supportive towards our project and felt that it would take three academic years to exhaust its possibilities. With 52 seeds already sown last session, the focus this session has been towards students becoming familiar with the utopias, experiments and provocations during the last 50 years in order to broaden their capacity to engage with their own collective visions of Stretched City and to evolve more lifelong learning centres arising out of field studies focussed on urgent and pressing social need. The present programmes describe interests ranging from sewerage, international peace, geo-poetics, asylum seekers and refugees, young mothers, meteorology, free culture, water treatment and, appropriately enough, barge building; the project feels alive and ongoing – much more than just an educational ploy.

When, sometime before last year's end of session degree show, I heard that the Lighthouse architecture gallery in Glasgow had commissioned various designers to make projections into the future of the Central Belt (subsequently shown in the exhibition *Shifts*) I thought that perhaps there was something in the air. At the degree show itself, the level of investment exhibited by the students was superb: they had engaged in projects, executed them with precision, made beautiful models and, in all their work, showed evidence of an apparently inexhaustible level of commitment, productivity and caring.



The Stein Institute by Karlyn Sutherland: a research and teaching hospital for Crohn's Disease (osmosis through the intestinal membranes). Here the Forth-Clyde Canal, the Roman Ditch and the Antonine Wall become geographical membranes that are negotiated in support of the programme

'our Stretched City could become a sustainable region'



Scrapheap Challenge by Donnie Duncanson: glass for recycling arrives in low-emission barges and is melted in kilns. It is reformed by artisans into glass products and sold in the rooftop shop. Literally a bottom-up process, the exhaust heat provides heating to local homes

Peter Hawley is an architect. He has practised in London and Edinburgh in partnership with Angela Williams, has taught in several schools of architecture and now both coordinates and teaches in the Honours year at Edinburgh College of Art. Among those who taught in the studio were Douglas Cruickshank, Neil Gillespie, Madelon Vriesendorp-Koolhaas and John Adden. Additional important contributions were made by British Waterways, Buro Happold and Max Fordham and Partners

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135508000961 Published online by Cambridge University Press