

The background of the entire page is a detailed architectural line drawing of a town plan. It shows a complex network of streets, building footprints, and open spaces. The drawing is executed in black lines on a white background, with some areas filled with fine hatching or stippling to indicate different materials or structures. The overall style is that of a technical or conceptual urban planning sketch.

Re:New Towns

A Symposium

New Towns are central to the UK Government's planning policies and ambition to build 1.5 million new homes by 2030. Join us for a symposium at Newcastle University where we address what a 'New Town' can mean today.

**Thursday 16 &
Friday 17 April
2026**

Organised by ARC,
the Architecture Research Collaborative,
School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape,
Newcastle University,
in conjunction with PIE,
Planning Infrastructure and Environment,
and the Farrell Centre.

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Paper Session 1

Collaborative Imagination with Young People Insights from a Case Study

Cara Lund & Matthew Margetts

Conventional community engagement methods, such as open questionnaires or community-wide consultation events, often fail to acknowledge young people as essential contributors and fall short of providing the capacity building necessary to support design thinking. Targeted co-design events offer an alternative, with the methods employed in those sessions critical.

The purpose of this paper is to build on the growing interest in co-design methods to engage young people in the design of the built environment. Through presenting, analysing, and critiquing a case study, this paper explores how the use of gamification and speculative artefacts in co-design sessions can build young people's capacity to imagine alternative futures. The case study, titled Empathising Blyth, involved targeted workshops with a group of young people aged 17 to 18 and staged a display for the wider school population aged 11 to 18. These sessions were designed and facilitated by practising architects and undergraduate architecture students. Methods included a game inspired by the Surrealists' Exquisite Corpse and speculative artefacts such as storytelling zines.

Our analysis, based on workshop outputs, observational notes, and participant feedback, indicates that gamified methods and speculative artefacts can be valuable tools in a co-design process with young people. This paper goes on to present facilitation strategies for practitioners, facilitators or stakeholders seeking to build young people's capacity to imagine alternative futures for the built environment.

Paper Session 1

Collective works of art for the 21st century and beyond

David Nichols

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, ongoing pressure for decentralisation of Australian populations has led to state and national governments programming and/or facilitating more than twenty new city projects. Of these, only one (Canberra) has developed beyond initial expectations, though others have been highly successful. Most, however, foundered on the twin breakers of (lack of) long-term political will and unsympathetic economic cycles.

Achievement has been patchy, as demonstrated by the 1950s 'new town' of Elizabeth in South Australia and the 'new cities' of the early 1970s (Salvado, Monarto, Albury-Wodonga, Campbelltown and Bathurst-Orange) - hampered by the fractured relationships between (largely, conservative) state governments and a progressive federal administration. Other projects have been strategic: Kwinana, Western Australia, or the state 'satellites' of Melton and Sunbury in Victoria. Though instructive, local government 'metrotowns' like Berwick, Victoria, have left little tangible legacy.

Drawing on five years of research on Australian new cities programs, this paper presents an overview of the many incomplete, partially complete, and fully realised new cities of the last 125 years. It does so to draw broad lessons from this very urban nation's attitude to its regions; the battle between vested interests and ideological stakeholders; the national ambivalence to cities (and, particularly, suburbia); and the problematic rivalries in matters of federal engagement ('interference') in urban affairs. It takes its title from the words of Percy Johnson-Marshall at a 1970 'Canberra Forum' which explored best-practice new city creation in a period of heightened optimism amongst Australian urbanists.

From these examples can be derived further universal truths not only about the problems inherent in the creation of new cities in democratic nations (that is, push and pull factors for populations) but also, relatedly, the importance of imaginative design and rhetoric in the promotion of the new city ideal. Using case studies and drawing from field work and archival images, the paper will seek to uncover how extant 'new' towns/cities might be revived, and new ones established, in the 21st century.

Paper Session 1

Digging up Roots: Meaningful Co-design of New Towns

Clare Penny

Clambering men in big bad boots
Dug up my den, dug up my roots
Treated us like plasticine town
They built us up and knocked us down

The Housemartins -- Build

In their 1987 song Build, The Housemartins bemoaned the 'clambering men in big bad boots' who 'dug up my den, dug up my roots', a primal scream against the 1980s housing boom that displaced working class people in favour of growth and profit (Atkinson, 2000, p.316). There was no mention of meaningful consultation, just a process in which the designers' ideas were written down 'in case of doubt'.

As we move from an era of 'consultation' to an era of 'co-design' (Local Government Association, 2024), what will this new approach mean for the New Towns of the future? Is co-design really the panacea designers believe it to be, or is it just the latest buzz word in the development process?

This paper will explore the history of public engagement, from the ubiquitous town hall meeting, through the mandatory public consultations of the early 2000s, to the new era of co-design. It will identify key failures in historic engagement practices and highlight the changemakers leading the way in the co-design movement.

The paper will review best practice in co-design, drawing upon the author's own experience of public engagement whilst working in local government, to evaluate how it can avoid the shortcomings of previous approaches and instead ensure that community needs are rooted firmly in the development of New Towns.

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Paper Session 2

Heritage in Practice: Teaching the Landscape of Britain's New Towns

Camilla Allen

This paper responds to the symposium theme of history, memory, place-making and locality with a reflection on heritage in practice through an exploration of the landscape and landscape architecture of Britain's New Towns. This is undertaken from the perspective of recent experiences in research and teaching using the early 'waves' as the departure point.

The New Towns Act of 1946 made landscape architects an integral part of the professional teams that planned these exciting new environments and this aspect of the history and heritage of the profession formed the departure point for a Master's design studio at the University of Sheffield's School of Architecture and Landscape. The students examined the history of the first, second and third generations of New Towns and applied this knowledge and understanding to 21st century values and aspirations, facilitating a critical discourse about the role of landscape as a driving force for social, ecological and economic change.

The aim of the studio was to facilitate a critical and creative approach to landscape-led housing development and design in practice. This was then developed through an examination of the tangible and intangible landscape heritage, and developed by the students into contemporary proposals for the extension or replication of the principles. Through a reflection on the research, teaching and learning that was undertaken in this studio, this paper proposes that the heritage of Britain's New Towns presents distinct and rewarding approaches to the landscape architecture curriculum and the training and motivation of the next generation of practitioners who will be working on their 21st century iterations.

Heritage and Inclusivity: Integrating Local Vernaculars into New Town Designs for Enhanced Place-Making and Safety

Oscar Leung

The UK's New Towns policy, aiming to deliver 1.5 million homes by 2030, presents an opportunity to reimagine urban development through the lens of heritage and inclusivity, ensuring that rapid expansion fosters a sense of belonging, safety, and cultural continuity (GOV.UK, 2025). This paper examines how integrating local vernaculars—traditional building styles, materials, and forms—can enhance place-making while addressing challenges of accessibility, openness, security, and social justice in contemporary New Towns.

Drawing on UK and international exemplars, the analysis highlights successes and failures. Poundbury in Dorset exemplifies effective integration: its design draws on local heritage, incorporating vernacular elements like flint and thatch-inspired facades to create cohesive, walkable neighbourhoods that promote community cohesion and perceived safety through familiar aesthetics (Poundbury, 2025). This approach has reduced social isolation by blending historical memory with modern needs, yielding high resident satisfaction and inclusive public spaces. Conversely, post-war UK New Towns like Milton Keynes often failed to embed local vernaculars, resulting in placeless, modernist landscapes criticized for exacerbating inequalities and insecurity due to alienating designs that ignored historical contexts (Clapson, 2018). Internationally, Songdo in South Korea, a high-tech smart city, demonstrates similar pitfalls: its focus on sustainability and innovation overlooked cultural heritage, leading to a sterile environment with limited place-making and inclusivity, where rapid development prioritized efficiency over community resilience (Halpern et al., 2022).

Incorporating relational ethics, the paper proposes strategies such as participatory co-design to weave indigeneity and memory into planning, using adaptive reuse of local materials for equitable, safe urban fabrics. These align with symposium themes of heritage, inclusivity, and ethical decision-making, offering progressive solutions to harmonize top-down policies with bottom-up locality for resilient, just New Towns.

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Rethinking Vernacular Architecture in the Context of UK New Towns

Beniamino Polimeni

The paper presented argues that any meaningful engagement with vernacular architecture in contemporary planning and urban design must begin with a critical reassessment of the term itself, acknowledging its historically and culturally contingent nature. Rather than treating vernacularism as a universally understood category, the paper opens with a deconstructive reading of its definitions, tracing the semantic, cultural, and disciplinary dimensions that have defined its use across different contexts. Within traditional architectural historiography, vernacular architecture has often been described as an anonymous, spontaneous, or non-professional mode of building, typically positioned in opposition to formally designed architecture (Brunskill). While such interpretations have been instrumental in recognising the value of traditional environments, they have at times overlooked the sophisticated systems of environmental knowledge, social organisation, and technical expertise embedded within these constructions. In many local contexts, vernacular buildings are closely related to cultural identity, layered knowledge, and community needs. Rather than representing “architecture without architects,” they are more accurately understood as culturally grounded practices produced by and for the communities that inhabit them.

More recent scholarly works and international heritage frameworks, most notably the ICOMOS Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage (1999), have advanced a more open and dynamic understanding of the vernacular. These approaches frame vernacular architecture not as a static legacy to be preserved unchanged, but as a living, adaptive process that integrates material form and intangible cultural values, while recognising continuity alongside transformation over time.

Building on this pluralistic understanding, the paper identifies three transferable principles relevant to the planning and design of New Towns:

1. **Socio-Cultural Embeddedness.** Vernacular environments articulate shared values and collective meanings. Applied to New Towns, this principle calls for participatory co-design processes and sustained cultural programming from the outset, fostering social cohesion and a sense of belonging.
2. **Environmental Intelligence.** Vernacular solutions emerge from a long-term dialogue with local climate and ecology. In the context of New Towns, this translates into a bioregional design approach that prioritises passive environmental strategies, regional materials, and ecological resilience.
3. **Adaptive Resilience.** Vernacular settlements are inherently evolutionary, shaped by incremental change. New Towns should therefore adopt long-life, loose-fit spatial frameworks capable of responding to demographic, economic, and climatic transformations across generations.

This applied logic is termed “New Vernacularism.” Rather than a stylistic exercise, it is proposed as a forward-looking ethical and operational framework for contemporary urban development. The paper concludes by presenting selected contemporary case studies of architecture at different scales and types that exemplify this approach and by suggesting how the UK’s New Towns programme might deliver not only housing but also resilient, culturally meaningful, and widely valued places for the twenty-first century.

Workshop

Transforming Houses and Homes for Future Generations

Joel Cady and Lucy McFadzean

Transforming Housing and Homes for Future Generations is a £7.9 million AHRC-funded research project. It involves residents, industry, practitioners, local authorities, community-led organisations, and researchers working together to co-design the transformation of UK social housing built between 1920 and 1940. It is led by the Welsh School of Architecture at Cardiff University, with the Universities of Bath, Bristol and Exeter and six community, public sector and commercial partners.

To address what a New Town means today, we cannot forget the 'old town'. The UK currently has 1.5 million more homes than households, so our proposal asks: how can we include the transformation of our existing housing stock in our visions for future towns and communities?

The 1.5 million social homes built between the First and Second World Wars are the first example of housing planned and delivered at scale across the UK. Shaped by the earlier Garden City Movement, the homes and estates built were an important precursor to both the New Towns of the 1950s and 60s and the speculative low-rise estates proposed through the current government's New Towns policy. Now a century old, interwar homes and estates risk being overlooked. Our research seeks to highlight these 'old towns', provoking questions around what it means to plan, design and care for New Towns and communities in the long-term.

At the Re: New Towns Symposium the Transforming Homes, the team will host a hands-on generative workshop activity which showcases and develops design research methods developed in our programme of co-design activities. Participants will have the opportunity to build and adapt cardboard models of interwar homes, streets and neighbourhoods, exploring how the transformation of these homes can provide quality, affordability, homeliness and efficiency as part of future towns. Participants will have the opportunity to test and record design thinking about the home from across the symposium, and feed into the ongoing development of the Transforming Homes tools for co-design.

Keynote Session 1

Salma Samar Damlugi

Vision-Making and Values: Why They Really Matter in the Creation of New Towns.

Emma Street & Victor Nichols

Urban regeneration can become dominated by transactional values and associated metrics such as rental returns, asset value, and financial viability. In turn, the role principle-based values play in creating successful places is typically underplayed. History - including that of the British New Towns - shows us that creating socially cohesive, high-quality environments requires multiple factors to align with commercial conditions. Underpinning this is vital, but often invisible, work to harness professional, personal and community values, and shape inclusive regeneration visions in response. When it comes to planning the next generation of UK New Towns, the paper argues that principle-based values should be front and centre.

Bracknell town centre's regeneration journey illustrates this. One of the UK's original post-war New Towns, built rapidly in the 1950s, by the late 1990s its town centre was run-down and unloved, earning it the title of one of England's "ugliest towns." The paper tells the story of Bracknell's 20year+ regeneration which delivered 1 million sq ft of retail, leisure, and civic space, new housing and public realm improvement. The Lexicon scheme, opened in 2017, and has been branded a success according to transactional metrics such as retail rankings.

Our research shows these successes were built on the hard (governance) work done to uncover and align stakeholder values. Practices included partnership-working, community consultation and vision-making, while planning tools such as Development Agreements and Masterplans gave this work focus and form. The paper argues these practices help explain how the scheme came to fruition. The council's place-leadership role was critical and focussed on aligning transactional and principles-based values so that viability questions did not undermine civic goals, including in major periods of crisis. A residents' survey showing widespread satisfaction with the regenerated centre, suggests the right balance was struck.

For future New Towns, the Bracknell case underscores the need to firmly embed professional and principle-based values—such as ethical practice, openness, and cultural vitality—into planning and development systems. These values support resilience, enabling projects to adapt to economic shocks without sacrificing community objectives. Moreover, the paper shows that professional and principle-based values are not constraints on profitability but foundations for successful places that endure far beyond market cycles.

New Towns at High Density: Hong Kong and Singapore

Miles Glendinning

The recent fire disaster at Wang Fuk Court, Tai Po, has highlighted to Western audiences what may appear to be the spectacularly and unfamiliarly high densities and block heights of housing in Hong Kong, both public and private – or, as in the case of Wang Fuk Court, the hybrid public-private pattern of subsidised 'Home Ownership Scheme' projects. What is perhaps less well appreciated, even by historians of planning and urban development, is that Tai Po is in fact a planned 'New Town', part of a huge programme ongoing since the 1960s and stemming in some respects from the original 1940s-80s New Town programme in Britain. This is a programme developed around population targets and densities that dwarf into insignificance not only the original Garden City-style patterns of Britain's 'Mk 1 New Towns' but also the (from a Hong Kong perspective) paltry attempts at densification in some later British projects such as Cumbernauld – or even the densest multi-storey council developments in Inner London, with their 200 persons per acre maximum (compared to the 1,215 ppa standard for Hong Kong public rental housing in the 1980s).

A similar, although somewhat less extreme pattern equally applies in the case of the new towns developed in Singapore since the 1950s by the government Housing and Development Board. This paper outlines the origins of these programmes in a complex combination of decolonisation, community identity-building and East Asian developmentalism, contrasting the greater acceptance of draconian state control over land supply in Singapore with Hong Kong's more tightly constrained circumstances.

The paper also explores the contrasting environments that resulted, including drastically higher densities and tall standardised blocks in Hong Kong (after 1992 mostly of 41 storeys or more – dwarfing the scale of Wang Fuk Court's 32-storey 'Flexi' blocks) and lower 'precinct' plans in Singapore, and argues that while one perhaps unexpectedly negative aspect to higher densities has been highlighted by the Tai Po fire, the overall balance of ultra-high density development is arguably highly positive, both in terms of the viability and immediate accessibility of high quality community and commercial facilities, an excellent public transport links.

Beyond Infrastructure: Logistics Landscapes and the Future of Milton Keynes

Mengting Zhang

This design-research thesis investigates how Milton Keynes, a paradigmatic British new town, reveals the evolving tension between standardisation and contingency in large-scale planned environments. By examining the town's original planning standards alongside the rapid rise of its contemporary logistics landscape, the research seeks to understand how new towns adapt to temporal forces that exceed their founding logics — and what this means for future models of design and planning. Milton Keynes is approached as a dual chronotope: first, as a 1960s post-war new town designed by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation to provide “the greatest possible scope for freedom and change”; and second, as a renewed town designated again by the current Labour government. Over sixty years, the town's strategic location between London and Birmingham, combined with extensive infrastructure, has transformed it into a major logistics hub. These logistics centres, expanding along the urban periphery, manifest an inevitable order of global production and distribution. Yet, they are subject to technological volatility, shifting trade relations, and seasonal flux. The project therefore compares the planned logics of the town with the emergent, contingent forces driving logistics-led growth.

The research draws on archival material and historical literature to reconstruct the standards that shaped the city's original grid, land-use policies, and spatial composition. Parallel to this, technical documents, planning reports, and site analyses uncover the systems governing current logistics landscapes, which overlay and extend the original infrastructure. Fieldwork and interviews provide qualitative insight into how these landscapes operate, how they respond to socio-economic pressures, and how they influence everyday experiences of the town. Together, these methods establish a framework for analysing the interplay between structure and change.

Findings reveal a gap between responsive, incremental forms of ecological or sub-urbanism and the function-driven super-urbanism of logistics, imposing ground-flattening interventions. The thesis argues for a more balanced approach that negotiates programme and site, temporality and permanence. It concludes by suggesting a regenerative framework for future new-town development — one that embraces contingency not as a threat to planned order, but as a critical design driver for resilient urban futures.

Paper Session 4

Decolonising Modernities: American Comprehensive Planning in Kolkata (1961-66)

Martin Beattie

The focus of this paper is the process of developing the Basic Development Plan for Calcutta 1966-1986 (BDP) which was produced between 1961 and 1966. The BDP was formulated by the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Agency (CMPO) with assistance from a group of American consultants funded by the Ford Foundation. The Foundation's urge for a planned and ordered city was part of an agenda stretching back to the colonial era, to 'modernise' Kolkata along western lines by applying planning solutions from urban America. There was deep suspicion by many in West Bengal government departments to the Foundation. Many saw the Foundation's involvement in India as a 'soft power' initiative or form of 'informal imperialism' related to US cold war diplomatic strategies, although their motives were equally in line with Jawaharlal Nehru's desire to do the same for the benefit of the Indian nation. Following the partition of West Bengal in 1947, an unremitting series of crises hit Kolkata including mass migrations, famine, war, social revolution, and anarchy. Some staff at the Foundation wrote about administrative chaos at the heart of the project. A lack of trained staff, fragmented administrative government structures, and lack of public participation were all legacies of colonialism. There were disagreements, conflicts, and tensions throughout the whole process. I argue these interactions led inevitably to an imperfect transfer of modernity and to partial and multiple forms of modernity. By opening up this process I explain the day-to-day reality of how modernity arrived in post-independence Kolkata through the modern state.

New Baghdad: A Curtailed Imperial Dream

Sana Al-Naimi

Young, talented, backed by the might of a formidable empire, and in full control of redesigning the ancient city of Baghdad. This was the position that the Scottish architect J.M. Wilson found himself in just before the end of WWI. It was the most important project of his career. To him, it was the chance to ascend to the Olympus of the architectural universe alongside greats like Lutyens, his previous mentor and employer.

This paper focuses on two archival maps, dated 1918, housed in the British Library and largely lost to history. They show an ambitious proposal for the dramatic expansion of Baghdad and reveal the extent of Britain's imperial ambitions for the land they carved away from the Ottoman Empire during WWI. The maps also reveal, once the context of their production is explained, the personal ambitions of both Wilson and Gertrude Bell, the powerful British figure who elevated him to the position of Government Architect of Iraq.

As a close friend of the Viceroy of India, Bell had the luxury of being shown, by the Viceroy himself, around the construction site that would become New Delhi. Her knowledge of Lutyens' designs of New Delhi, as explained to her by Lutyens himself, gave her the authority to enable a similar ambitious scheme for Baghdad. Finding Wilson amongst the ranks of the British army and knowing he had worked on the New Delhi plans under Lutyens, was the perfect opportunity for Bell to achieve her ambition in shaping a new realm for the empire.

But, with the changing global political context after the war, the imperial dream was only fractionally implemented, as visually evidenced by later plans of the city. New Baghdad was never to be, and the abortive dream serves as proof of the British Empire's anxiety and diminishing power.

New Town Development is Sociolinguistic Policy

Daniel Duncan

The inherent cultural effects of planning and policymaking must be considered in planning assessments. However, such considerations often set aside aspects of intangible cultural heritage, such as language. This may be problematic; linguistic varieties (for example, Tyneside English, or 'Geordie'), while intangible, nevertheless serve as strong markers of local identity used by speakers in placemaking.

This paper reflects on one key finding of sociolinguistic research into language variation and change in New Towns and similar developments globally: such communities lose the regional and socially marked dialect features that speakers rely upon as emblems of local identity. This was most clearly observed in Milton Keynes, where young speakers avoided the socially marked dialect features in their parents' input and developed a new local dialect within a generation of the New Town being developed (Kerswill and Williams 2000). However, this pattern occurs in New Town-like communities globally, whether planned, as in the case of Brasília (Bortoni 1991), or unplanned, as in the case of many suburbs in the US (Duncan 2019).

What these communities have in common is that their development constituted a dialect contact situation. Speakers originally from a range of localities were brought into close contact as neighbours, coworkers, and oftentimes, families. This mixture provided the impetus for language change in subsequent generations. The key takeaway is that this link between a contact situation and language change is causative.

This matters because the decisions made in the course of planning a New Town development—where to put it; what communities to link it to via public transport; who will be able to access the new housing; etc.—are effectively decisions about what populations will be entering into a period of intense contact. In this sense, New Town planning constitutes sociolinguistic policy: how the New Town is developed, and who moves in, will guide the direction of language change in the community. At the scale of HM Government's intended development, this means that New Town planning has the capacity to shape the future of British Englishes. I argue that this presents a challenge for planners and policymakers to consider moving forward.

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Exhibition Tour: Farrell Centre

Housing for All

Keynote Session 2

Wayne Hemingway

Keynote Session 3

Katy Lock

Keynote Session 4

Kristiaan Borret

Heritage, People, and Attachment: Local Communities' Involvement in Heritage Management in Cairo

Dina Abdelsalam

Following the introduction of critical heritage studies and the Authorised Heritage Discourse, discussions were introduced recognising heritage as cultural, social and political phenomenon rather than a purely material one. While these concepts are developed mainly in Western societies, exploring them in non- Western societies is challenging and crucial to the management of cultural heritage and requires an understanding of cultures, historical backgrounds and contexts.

In the Egyptian context, centralised top-down approaches to heritage management are usually employed, reinforcing an official narrative that isolates local communities from heritage. Aware of this fracture, professionals employ community-oriented approaches to heritage management to foster a stronger connection between local community members, their urban environment and their heritage. Accordingly, this paper addresses the following questions: How is built heritage perceived by different stakeholders: the state, practitioners and local communities, in the context of Egypt? How do practitioners, as mediators and negotiators in the heritage management process, attempt to challenge the official narratives through community engagement? And how do these efforts influence local communities' relation with their surroundings and heritage?"

The research adopts qualitative approaches including policy analysis and semi-structured interviews with heritage professionals working in Al Khalifa neighbourhood. These methods were used to examine decision makers' perceptions of heritage and their practices. In addition, semi-structured interviews with local community members and participatory workshop employing photo elicitation and map making collages are employed to explore community understandings of heritage, particularly those aspects that are difficult to articulate through words.

The paper examines perceptions of heritage reflecting on notions of ownership, social value and place attachment. It also explores how practitioners navigate the existing governance structures and negotiate the relationship between the state and local communities in a context where engagement is not prioritised, while investigating the possibility for a different narrative. It finally looks at the impact of community-oriented strategies on local communities and their relation to the built heritage.

New Towns: An Architectural History Between Britain and Hong Kong

Cole Roskam

In July 1962, Hong Kong's South China Morning Post's editorial board publicly reflected on the British report *Urban redevelopment: report of a committee appointed by the Civic Trust*, which would become a consequential document in the history of postwar British planning. Rather than embracing it as a model for sensible development, Post editors considered the publication a cautionary tale. "Colonial status in many ways facilitates quick and robust action," noted the newspaper, prompting one to "think of the relative speed and ease whereby such ambitious projects as the development of industrialised Tsunwan and Kuntong and the satellite town of Shatin" in comparison to Britain, which from the colony's perspective remained unduly burdened by staffing shortages, a lack of financial resources, and general organizational complexity.

Such tension, interactivity, and juxtaposition between the British metropole and colonial Hong Kong with regards to New Town planning principles form the basis of this paper, which traces the history of postwar welfare architecture between Hong Kong and Britain through a range of printed materials, exhibitions, films, experts and politicians circulating between the two places beginning in the late 1940s and extending through the 1970s.

Revisiting this history offers several lessons. For one, it destabilizes stubborn perceptions of colonial knowledge and expertise as radiating unidirectionally from the British "centre" to the Hong Kong "periphery." In fact, the effects of Hong Kong's development upon Britain's own urban renewal policies were arguably equally if not more significant to British planning, complicating historiography not only with regards to British town planning but the end of empire in Britain. Reconsidering the global dimensions of New Town planning also prompts timely questions related to the presumptive locality of planning as an expression of heritage, vernacular, and indigeneity. Ultimately, reassessing the history of these encounters offers a more diffusive set of strategies and influences that may help to recast the past, present, and future of New Towns in new, creative, and more globally resonant ways.

Architecture in Suspension: Housing, Waiting, and the Lived Time of Urban Renewal

Eda Bozkurt

From post-war New Towns to contemporary large-scale redevelopment schemes, housing has often been imagined as a stabilizing architectural project; one that resolves social need through spatial form, standardized delivery, and forward-looking planning. Yet across many renewal contexts, housing is less a completed object than a prolonged condition, shaped by delay, uncertainty, and uneven temporalities. This paper argues that contemporary urban renewal produces an architecture of suspension, in which dwelling is reorganized around waiting rather than settlement.

The paper draws on extended fieldwork in Ankara's New Mamak district, one of Turkey's most extensive gecekondu-to-apartment redevelopment areas, to examine how residents inhabit the long temporal gaps between demolition, relocation, and promised delivery. Situating this case within broader histories of state-led housing and New Town-like development, the paper approaches renewal not as a singular moment of transformation, but as a process unfolding across time, policy, and everyday life. Housing is examined here as an unfinished architectural condition, materially present yet socially and politically unresolved.

Using community-engaged methods, including Photovoice workshops and narrative interviews, residents document how waiting reshapes domestic space, neighborhood relations, and expectations of permanence. These visual and narrative materials are treated as architectural evidence, revealing how planning timelines, compensation mechanisms, and design decisions structure lived experience long before, and often long after, construction is complete.

By foregrounding temporality as a critical dimension of housing, this paper contributes to architectural and urban debates on New Towns, renewal, and participation. It suggests that attending to the lived time of redevelopment, how long people wait, how they dwell while waiting, and whose time is rendered expendable, offers a necessary corrective to design and planning discourses that privilege spatial resolution over temporal consequence.

Our Past of This Future: British Planners making Hong Kong New Towns 1940s-1990s

Juliana Yat Shun Kei & Alex Ka Chun Wong

Patrick Abercrombie, William Holford, Graeme Shankland and Oliver Cox... These are familiar names in British post-war new town histories. In this paper, we turn attention to these prominent town planners' interventions in Hong Kong between the 1940s and 1990s. Although British planning influences on the former colony have long been known, few have discussed the urban, architectural, and environmental implications of the new town designs in one historic arc. Hence, we construct an alternative genealogy of new towns by mapping the British-Hong Kong exchanges, considering Abercrombie's plan for Hong Kong (1948), Holford's consultation for Shatin (1968), and Shankland Cox's plans for Tin Shui Wai (1983), Junk Bay (1984) and Tung Chung (1992). We compared them with well-known precedents such as the British New Town Act, Holford's plan for Corby, and Shankland Cox's proposals for Ipswich, Bolton, and Milton Keynes. The relatively small size of Hong Kong – just about 430 square miles – enables exploration into how these new towns interact with one another.

This paper moves beyond a historical analysis of how new town ideas were “exported” from the metropole to the periphery (King, 1977). Building on Beebeejaun's call for “provincialising planning,” we focus on how planning ideas evolved as new towns were being realised, developed, or deemed failed in both places (2021). The time-lag between Britain and Hong Kong, we argued, does not mean that the latter is a mere recipient of ideas, but a place where new town ideals have been able to adapt to socio-economic and industrial changes since the latter part of the 20th century. In this effort, Shankland Cox's works on the third generation of Hong Kong new towns are particularly intriguing as they were made after parallel efforts in Britain waned. This paper, therefore, is at once a history of new towns in Hong Kong, but also a speculation on what British new towns would have been if they were drawn in the 1980s and 1990s by a likely group of established planners. The continuity of Hong Kong's new towns, we hope, offer alternative insights for British new town efforts in the 21st century.

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GIS for Imagining Macro-Scale Futures: Reframing Spatial Data as a Generative Design Medium

Arturo Romero Carnicero

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have traditionally been framed as analytic instruments used by geographers, planners, and data specialists to describe existing territorial conditions with precision and objectivity. Yet, within contemporary design practice—particularly at macro-scale and infrastructural levels—GIS remains significantly underutilised as a driver of imagination. Drawing on insights from an academic laboratory engaging architecture and landscape architecture students, this paper argues that when designers appropriate GIS differently than analysts, the tool becomes a catalyst for speculative, future-oriented thinking rather than a system of constraint. Designers do not merely read data; they reinterpret, contest, restructure, and reassemble it through their own spatial reasoning, design intuition, and critical reflection.

This paper positions GIS as a medium that can actively expand designers' cognitive and imaginative capacities by transforming mapping from a descriptive act into an operative one. When mapping is understood as a process of world-making—rather than world-representing—it opens a space where data can stimulate alternative macro-scale scenarios, infrastructural speculation, and the design of new naturecultures. Observations from the laboratory show that even basic GIS literacy enables students to move beyond linear workflows, shifting from late-stage data consultation to early-stage generative exploration. Through layering, filtering, and transforming datasets, students produced unexpected spatial readings that unlocked new design questions, redefined problem boundaries, and triggered “what-if” scenarios grounded in ecological, infrastructural, and socio-technical interdependencies.

The findings reveal that designers use GIS differently from analysts: less as a tool of optimisation and more as a cognitive device enabling systemic thinking, multiscale, and narrative construction. This creative use supports a renewed form of design competence—one that embraces complexity, temporal dynamics, and posthuman ecological perspectives. By mobilising GIS in speculative workflows, designers can formulate large-scale propositions that are contextually grounded yet creatively disruptive, offering new pathways to imagine New Towns and macro-infrastructures amidst contemporary ecological and socio-technical challenges. This contribution advocates for an expanded design pedagogy and professional culture in which GIS becomes central to cultivating imaginative, critical, and future-forming design practices.

Paper Session 6

In Concrete, at the Softest Stages: Situated, non-human knowledge of the house, home and landscape

Toby Blackman

This critical-creative paper explores the situated, non-human knowledge of house, home and landscape.

As I remove the layers of the previous owner's home, a narrative of intention and inhabitation forms in the notations, warnings and guidance revealed alongside and over traces of deviation, failure, and impurity. Stories of events, happenings, and the historic landscape play out across active, visual, material and textual surfaces. The house holds a situated knowledge developed over the course of decades, in dialogue with multiple human, and non-human actors and agents. As new work to the house is carried out, a new narrative is documented, activating the archival surfaces and writing the home. Thomas inspects and supervises all work on the house. Mannie, my second cat, contains his curiosity better. Together, they share and inhabit the home with us. We come and go from each other and the home, and the house remembers — in concrete and clay, plaster and paint — at the softest stages.

This paper employs narrative non-fiction writing, interweaving feline and material perspectives — considering the spatio-temporality of circulation and inhabitation, use, and trace — with discourse at the intersection of ecocriticism, posthumanism, material culture and climate writing to imagine the house, home and landscape.

Workshop

ACAN Workshop with contributions from HES, TCPA, and Washington History Society

Lessons from the New Towns of North East England

Ged Parker

Drawing on his experiences of working for development corporations in Telford, Washington and Tyne and Wear, Ged Parker will look at the record of the three statutory new towns located in the then County of Durham that were active between 1947 and 1988.

He will set them in the context of the wider new town movement in the United Kingdom, drawing attention to their governance, legal powers and the practical and political challenges they faced. He will examine their records in meeting their stated social and economic objectives.

The development of New Towns in County Durham were significant in the post-war reshaping of North-East England, reflecting both national planning ambitions and the distinctive social, industrial, and geographical character of the region. Conceived during the period of post war reconstruction, the New Towns were intended to address acute housing shortages, modernise living conditions, and stimulate economic regeneration during the decline of traditional industries. They were much more than housing projects but attempts to create balanced communities in which residential neighbourhoods, employment zones, green spaces, and civic amenities were integrated. Their visions drew on contemporary planning principles that emphasised neighbourhood identity, pedestrian-friendly layouts, and the separation of industrial and domestic environments. Significantly the development of the underlying infrastructure of utilities, highways and social facilities were delivered in lock-step with the expected population growth.

He will ask if these New Towns are relevant to the challenges of future planned communities. How do design intentions interact with economic change, demographic shifts, and the lived experiences of existing residents? He will illustrate his talk with images, maps and graphs of these very rapid changes.

Paper Session 7

Re:Newing Scotland: Thoughts for the future from the Scottish Post-War New Towns

Alistair Fair

Between 1947 and 1973, six new towns were designated in Scotland. East Kilbride in 1947 came amid a wave of 'mark one' new towns which also took in England and Wales; Stonehouse in 1973 was the last formal new town designation anywhere in the UK - to date. Of the Scottish new towns, Cumbernauld received particular international attention on accounts of its radical planning. This paper, which draws on a recent collaborative research project at Edinburgh and Glasgow universities, resists the idea of 'learning' from a past which politically, architecturally and socially was very different from the present, but argues that there are nonetheless points which might usefully inform consideration of a new generation of new towns today. In particular, the paper will reflect on the interconnectedness of social, economic and architectural ambitions, the extent to which the new towns process was used for a variety of ends and with different outcomes, the place of avant-garde design, and the value of a long-term outlook.

If it Looks, Swims and Quacks like a New Town: A Systematic Review of the Defining Characteristics of England's New Towns.

Michael Crilly and Georgiana Varna

There is shockingly “no settled definition of new towns in legislation” (New Towns Taskforce 2025) or indeed in the wider academic literature in the UK context. This lack of definition and precision of the term limits our understanding of “new town” visions, objectives, strategies and detailed delivery plans. In response, we present the results of a systematic review of the extensive mixed literature, combining peer- reviewed sources, grey literature, and planning policy documents, to identify the presence and extent of core attributes of a “new town”. We use the scope of these existing sources to create a hierarchical typology of descriptive characteristics, relating to a broad range of strategic and detailed, socio-economic, managerial, and technological parameters. This is set within a chronology of “new town” initiatives and presented as the basis for an evolving common definition. We present a robust methodological process with the starting semantic search terms drawing from recent government initiatives from the Millenium Communities, Eco-Towns, Garden Communities, to the New Towns Task Force, identifying overlapping records, filtering sources (language, location, date), with content and thematic analysis undertaken utilising a number of large language models (LLMs). This is presented as a process / flow diagram leading to a detailed and layered set of parameters that are both descriptive and analytical, including metrics for governance, funding, value-capture, quantum, diversity and accessibility. This work is aimed at clarifying and structuring the current confusing, overlapping and contradicting definitions of new towns. We believe this will assist address uncertainty and fuzziness surrounding the term and will have direct benefit for planning policy and practice, specifically for local authorities currently seeking to promote their own definition of “new towns”. We show the current extent of fluidity and ambiguity of “new towns” being considered within the statutory planning system, highlighting the multiple limitations that this creates in our current negotiated system, attempting to transform it into a more precise coded system. The definition of characteristics grounded in multiple and mixed sources will help inform strategic masterplans and design codes that will by default set the attributes and parameters of our future “new towns”.

Balancing Growth and Degrowth: Ecological Strategies in New Town Planning Amid UK's 2030 Housing Targets

Ye Ha Kim

The UK government's ambitious target to deliver 1.5 million new homes by the end of the current Parliament, as outlined in its New Towns policy, underscores the urgency of urban expansion to address housing shortages (GOV.UK, 2025). However, this growth imperative must confront escalating ecological crises, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion. This paper explores the tension between traditional growth-oriented planning and degrowth principles—emphasizing reduced material consumption, localized economies, and environmental regeneration—to propose sustainable strategies for contemporary New Towns.

Drawing on international and UK exemplars, the analysis probes successes and failures in integrating economy and ecology. Freiburg's Vauban district exemplifies effective ecological strategies: its car-reduced layout, passive solar housing, and community-managed green spaces have achieved up to 85% reductions in energy bills while fostering social resilience (Construction21, 2015). Yet, initial high costs and social exclusion risks highlight potential pitfalls. In the UK, North West Bicester eco-town demonstrates mixed outcomes; its zero-carbon homes and rainwater harvesting systems advance efficiency and affordability, but planning delays and incomplete adherence to eco-standards reveal governance failures amid pressure for rapid delivery (The Ecologist, 2012).

Incorporating degrowth perspectives, such as those from shrinking city models (e.g., urban farming in Detroit or material reuse in European retrofits), the paper advocates for balanced approaches: prioritizing compact, mixed-use developments over sprawl; embedding circular economies to minimize waste; and enhancing community participation to ensure equity and resilience (Kohn, 2019; Revalu, 2023). These strategies align with the symposium's themes of economy and ecology, growth and degrowth, by offering progressive solutions like low-impact infrastructure and adaptive heritage integration. Ultimately, reimagining New Towns through a growth-degrowth lens can mitigate inequalities, promote energy-efficient materiality, and support the 2030 targets without compromising planetary boundaries. This relational framework calls for ethical decision-making that harmonizes top-down policies with local contexts, paving the way for enduring, progressive urban futures.

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Paper Session 8

A System Going Round: Strategic Housing Sites and the Political-Economy of Land

Julia Heslop

Drawing on examples from strategic housing sites in the UK, the paper offers a multi-narrative account of the role that land economies play in an on-going and intensifying housing crisis. Through interviews, creative responses and policy analysis focused on volume housing developments, the paper argues that without a critical reappraisal of the relationship between land, power and politics, the potential and promise of new towns is unlikely to deliver, and the 'housing question' and the associated housing precarity will persist.

Participatory Planning and Citizen Engagement in Infrastructure: Balancing Top-Down Policies with Local Contexts in New Town Development

Ye Ha Kim & Oscar Leung

The UK's New Towns policy, targeting 1.5 million new homes by 2030, necessitates innovative approaches to infrastructure planning that integrate citizen engagement to ensure equitable, resilient, and inclusive urban growth (GOV.UK, 2025). This paper investigates the role of participatory planning in fostering civic life, social justice, and ethical decision-making, probing how community involvement can mitigate inequalities and harmonize national directives with local lived experiences in contemporary New Towns.

Analyzing UK and international exemplars reveals both successes and challenges. In the UK, neighbourhood planning initiatives have demonstrated the power of participatory methods, such as film-making, to amplify diverse voices and resolve conflicts, as seen in case studies where residents co-created visions for their communities, enhancing resilience and addressing governance tensions (Vigar et al., 2020; Vigar, 2017). However, uneven capacity and power imbalances often hinder full inclusivity, underscoring the need for relational ethics in processes that value local expertise. Internationally, Medellín, Colombia, exemplifies transformative participatory planning: through budgeting and co-design mechanisms, marginalized neighbourhoods have been revitalized, promoting safety, accessibility, and economic equity by empowering residents in infrastructure decisions, though initial resistance highlighted risks of exclusion without robust facilitation (Participedia, n.d.; WomenTech Network, 2025).

Drawing on interdisciplinary insights into social relations in architecture and planning, the paper advocates for hybrid tools—like digital platforms, workshops, and media-based co-creation—to embed participation in New Town infrastructure, aligning with themes of equity, resilience, and community imagination (Sharr, 2012). These strategies offer progressive solutions to labour, heritage, and ecological challenges, ensuring ethical, bottom-up contributions inform top-down frameworks for sustainable urban futures.

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