

Here & Now

Winter 2024

THE ACADEMY
OF URBANISM

Contents

Click any page number or headline to be directed to the article

1 Welcome from the Chair

2 Editor's introduction

3 The Academy in Action

4 Getting better value for our land

Nick Falk tackles the issue of value in a multi-book review

7 ArtPlace

Astrid Guthier shares her JTP Image of the Year winning illustration

8 Chair to Chair

Outgoing AoU Chair *Jas Atwal* interviews her successor, *Andreas Markides*

12 Canada and Traffic in Towns

Andreas Markides reflects on 60 years of the Traffic in Towns report during a trip to Canada

16 Planning for Productive Places

Barry Evans makes a case for bring the UK's productivity crisis to the design table

19 The Big Debate

Harry Knibb weighs the impact of social vs environmental on the real estate industry

21 The Hundred-Year Plan

Harrison Brewer considers plan making for the long term

23 Digital or In-Person?

Sophia de Sousa reflects on the impact of the pandemic on co-design processes

26 Life, Cycle, Analysis

Guest philosopher Mark Bessoudo explores the philosophy of cycling and place

Supporting people and organisations to deliver and sustain great towns and cities

The Academy of Urbanism is a politically independent, not-for-profit organisation that brings together both the current and next generation of urban leaders, thinkers and practitioners. Our mission is to understand, promote and celebrate what makes great places and to apply these lessons to the improvement of towns and cities across Europe and beyond.

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Welcome



Welcome to this issue of Here & Now, the last to be published during my tenure as Chair, but the first to be published in our e-journal relaunch. The AoU Here & Now Journal first moved online in 2019, and four years on I'm delighted to oversee a revival of the flick-through format, while remaining paperless. It's a great note to start 2024 on, and I know it's a nod to a fabulous year ahead.

Here & Now is a shining example of the passion and diversity of the AoU community - from the Editorial Team, to the authors, to the readers. To me, it always serves as a reminder and celebration of the broad church that is urbanism. When we bring together contributors from such a range of backgrounds - architecture + design, government + policy, arts + cultural programming, transport + highways - we can achieve a multi-faceted approach to urbanism and one that makes every day a school day.

We are so grateful to our members, and it's wonderful to hear from so many of you in this issue of Here & Now. I'm looking forward to taking away some interesting lessons and perspectives and seeing how I can apply them in my own practice.

Given the importance of our task I hope you will continue to believe in our mission and get involved - the Academy will champion great urbanism, if we all champion the Academy.

Jas Atwal

AoU Chair

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Editorial



We're doubly excited here at the AoU.

First, because it's 2024 – welcome. What a year this is going to be with endless urbanism possibilities. And second, because we're launching the new and improved Here & Now, your favourite urbanism magazine, in e-journal format.

Our hope, of course, is that your enjoyment of this high-quality journal is heightened through this new approach. More digestible, and with greater impact. Given this is our first issue we are open to comments, thoughts, suggestions and ideas. We are also, more importantly, open to your views as fellow members, so please do send them to share in a public, yet safe and supportive space. Ideas that move us forward. Let's see them: journal@theaou.org

In this issue we say thank you to the great **Jas Atwal** for her time at the helm and celebrate our new chair, **Andreas Markides**. You can read more about Andreas, his influences, views and aims for the Academy in our Chairs interview.

Regular contributor, **Nick Falk**, tackles the thorny issue of value in a multi-book review, and we have a beautiful Art Place illustration of a new town centre extension by JTP's **Astrid Guthier**.

Andreas appears again, relinquishing his usual resident philosophers' position to draft a piece celebrating the 60th birthday of Sir Colin Buchanan's seminal report Traffic in Towns. Despite not getting everything right, Andreas marvels once more at the foresight and breadth of issues covered.

Packed full of opinion, **Barney Evans** starts a much missing conversation on productivity, **Harry Knibb** debates the next big disruptor (is it the S or the E?), and **Harrison Brewer** wrestles with the enormity of a 100-year plan. **Sophia de Sousa** considers how lockdown changed co-design processes and where we can go from here.

Finally, **Mark Bessoudo** steps in as our guest philosopher, exploring the philosophy of cycling and place.

We hope you enjoy!

The editorial team

The Academy in Action

In the past three months since the last issue of the Here & Now Journal, we at the AoU made sure to balance a restful Christmas break with an assortment of activities and events. In person, we held The Carbon Challenge evening conference at Arup in November, and we also got the AoU Community into the party spirit with two pub nights in Glasgow and London.

Our online offering has continued, with monthly Urbanism Hours on Learning from Europe (Urbanism Awards Special), Festival, and Transport & Placemaking. 2024 is off to a great start and, at the time of publishing we are looking forward to welcoming AoU Members at tonight's winter party.

Coming up at the AoU:

- **The John Thompson Memorial Lecture with Sadie Morgan OBE**
Tuesday 13 February 2024, Cambridge University
Tickets at theaou.org/jtlecture
- **The Urbanism Hour: The Metropolitan Dimension**
Friday 23 February 2024, online
Tickets at theaou.org/tmd
- **Deadline: Nominations for the 2024 Urbanism Awards**
Sunday 3 March 2024
More info at theaou.org/nominate

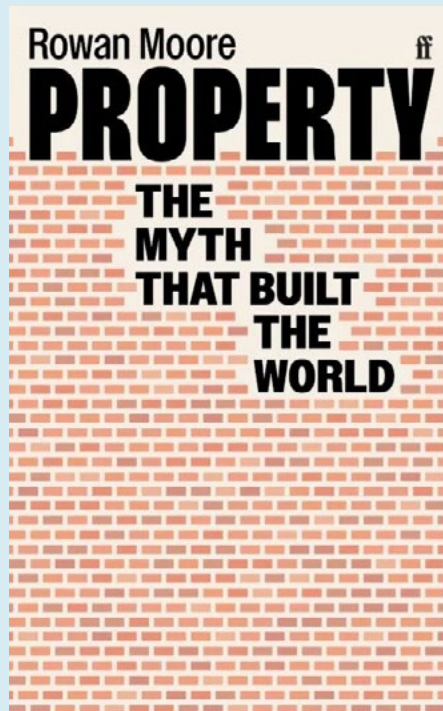
We're looking forward to sharing more of the 2024 programme over the coming weeks and months, and even more so to meeting with, hearing from, and collaborating with you, our members. If you have ideas, news, or want to find out more about getting involved, contact Connie Dales at cdales@theaou.org

Getting better value from our land

Book review

Back in 2010 an expert report for the government's Foresight programme called for 'setting overarching goals for UK land spanning the urban and rural domain and sectoral interests.'¹ The report showed how much land was used for different purposes, and came up with a series of proposals, which like much of the work done under the Labour government, were largely shelved. The root problem is not just the competing uses for land, which the report explored through a range of scenarios and excellent diagrams, but the unresolved issue of whose values should prevail. For not only is there competition between the private and the public interest, but also between the short and longer terms, which perennial flooding catastrophes highlight. It is therefore really helpful to understand the factors that shape property values. A new book by Rowan Moore, architectural critic for *The Observer*, is one every urbanist should read.

Property values, rather than masterplans or design guides, tend to build the world we live in. In the UK and countries with Anglo Saxon cultures, such as the USA, the interests of private property owners generally prevail. Rowan Moore, in his extremely readable book, starts



with how ownership creates value, where it is perceived as a 'natural right'. However this does not have to be so, and even Winston Churchill famously recognised that 'land is the mother of all monopolies' and hence the accidental land owner should not have the right to all the 'unearned increment' resulting from development. For as Moore says property ownership 'is a human device for organising land, often useful and effective, but not unique or unalterable.'

In a series of fascinating case studies Moore shows how the free market system can go badly wrong due to vested interests, as the rise of Donald

Trump highlights. The same problems that have afflicted the West Coast of the USA are now playing out in places that try to copy them, such as Gurgaon, a new town on the edge of the Indian capital city of Delhi. Over valuing land impedes efforts to accelerate house building or tackle carbon emissions and climate change.

The middle part of the book deals with the different philosophies underlying how property is valued. America took up the ideas of English philosopher John Locke in granting title to those who worked the land. But there are other alternatives, including much more collaborative societies where land is held in common. It is this profound difference that helps explain why compact European cities are so different from American ones, which sprawl over the land. Rowan points out that '*the value of property does not exist in a vacuum but depends on actions beyond its boundaries, such as law, infrastructure and investment by others than its owners. It is social as well as individual.*'

This insight was recognised by Ebenezer Howard when he coined the name The Social City for his original concept for what

¹ Foresight Land Use Futures Project, 2010 HMSO

became 'Garden Cities', such as Letchworth. It was then applied in building the post-war New Towns such as Milton Keynes and Warrington. The third part of the book will be of most interest as it deals with 'What else there could be'. To my great surprise and pleasure Rowan Moore devotes four pages at the end to the scheme David Rudlin and I devised for what we called Uxcester Garden City, for which we won the 2014 Wolfson Economics Prize. Alas our sclerotic planning system and fractured set of local authorities prevented the proposals being put into practice in Oxford or York, our test cases. Instead much effort goes into debating plans and proposals but little actually gets built.

A scholarly book from Nicholas Boys Smith and colleagues at Create Streets called *Beyond Location* shows how a different approach to urban form could produce schemes that are not only more beautiful, but would also create more value in financial terms, with over 300 references to the extensive literature. This is a highly practical book that will help those looking for evidence. Nicholas is a former McKinsey

management consultant who has won support from the current government through setting up Create Streets as a think tank, and is now establishing the Office for Place in Stoke on Trent.

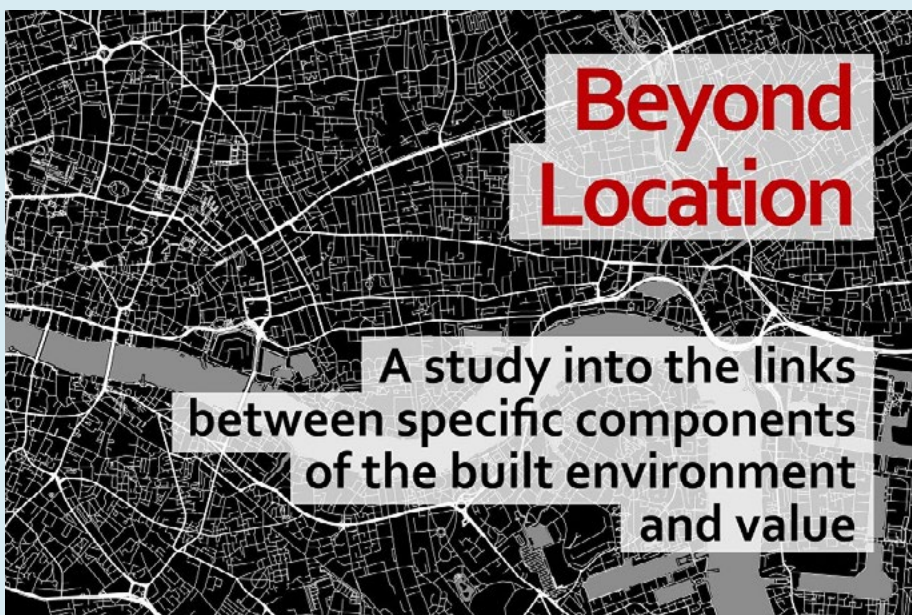
The central argument is to call for building places like those that people prefer to live in, which is reflected in the prices people pay for their home. As the authors rightly state at the start of the book *'Economists have overly focussed on accessibility. Urbanist studies have tended to focus on greenery and walkability'*. Yet there is a mountain of research evidence to draw on. For example, published research shows that tree-lined streets create much more desirable places than isolated tower blocks, but it is access to greenery that really matters. Design Codes should help raise quality standards. However Create Streets have gone further in developing their Place Value Pyramid, which combines four factors: what they call 'national value', such as property rights, 'city or town value', which reflects factors such as income and education, 'neighbourhood value' based on accessibility and beauty, and



'building value', which depends on size and running costs. Their model apparently predicts 74% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation and 54% of Sales Values.

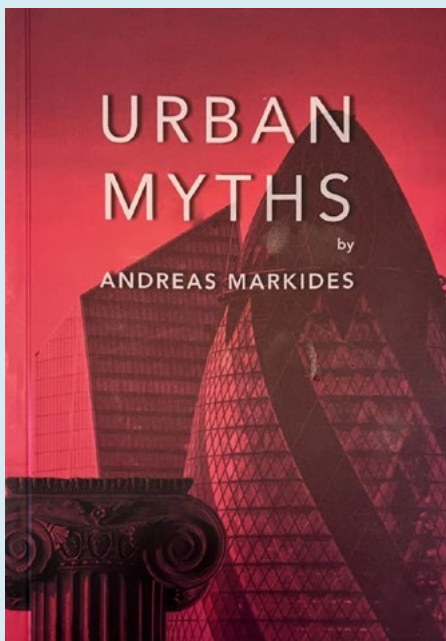
But I fear there are too many factors for most designers and planners. Furthermore location or connectivity can be paramount, which public investment can alter. A research based report from the Green Alliance, in their *Build Up* report, convincingly argues that development needs to be located where people are not dependent on owning and using private cars. Yet in the UK the volume house builders who dominate new housing prefer to go for isolated green field sites rather than contending with all the problems of land assembly and environmental objections in more central sites. The *Build Up* report calls for strategic spatial planning to determine where new homes should be located. 'Green washing', as in the government's garden settlements programme, is not enough to build truly sustainable settlements at scale.

My final book by incoming AoU chair and distinguished engineer Andreas Markides



provides plenty of food for thought in 91 pages on Urban Myths, some of which first appeared in Here and Now. Andreas shows how Greek myths illuminate complex moral issues. For example, people get besotted with appealing ideas that totally neglect wider considerations of what makes places valuable, such as high rise towers or fast roads. He writes *'in my own profession of Traffic Engineering we have seen one of the biggest changes in approach and policy. Up until the late 80s traffic engineers would do everything possible in order to increase traffic capacities and keep traffic flowing smoothly. Then suddenly another lone voice had the temerity to inform us that "the more roads we build, the more traffic would be created"'*.

His first philosopher Herodotus succinctly pointed out 'everything changes'. Andreas's book is timely because he exposes his own personal history as a refugee from Cyprus, and what he has learned through his personal journey. He shows how a place can be somewhere we carry in our heads, which is why his poems are so poignant. He



stresses the value of calmness, solitude and leisure, referring to both Pythagoras having great ideas in his bath and Prometheus constantly having his liver eaten by a vulture because he tried to steal fire. His story made me recall when an AoU assessment of Hulme, the redevelopment of a failed council estate in Manchester, marked it down as not being busy enough when tranquillity can be what residents value.

Andreas attacks the sterility of the redevelopment of South of the River in Vauxhall and Waterloo, where private profit has prevailed. He also criticises the treadmill that consultants often end up on. Achieving quality or possibly beauty depends not just on great designers or even a favourable location but on following a set of principles that create places of lasting value rather than short-term profit. His book raises the kinds of moral or ethical dilemmas that consultants face. His own experience of setting up Markides Associates after a long career with Buchanan and Partners offers real inspiration for how to get value out of one's life, as well as the places we help create or improve.

So I concluded from these four books that urbanists must pay more attention to philosophy as well as to research what has been proven to work. They should not be swayed by short-term private profit or wishful thinking but get inspiration from myths as well as history. I had not realised that Pandora's box, which let out so much mischief when she opened it, also gave rise to hope. Plans need to enable diversity to flourish, and make it easier to

break free, as Daedalus did in flying from the Minotaur, or as perhaps Transport for London is doing in giving more space over to people on foot or bike. The book is beautifully illustrated, and as Andreas convincingly argues, poems or pictures enable us to see the world differently. Perhaps if they read these books, traffic engineers may see themselves as 'place makers' rather than road builders. The research and stories behind these books and reports should help create much better (and incidentally more valuable) places than we have been achieving in the UK in recent years.

Nicholas Falk is an Academician and Executive Director of The URBED Trust.

Rowan Moore, *Property: The Myth that Built the World*, Faber 2023, pp 315 £14.99

Nicholas Boys Smith et al, *Beyond Location: a study into the links between specific components of the built environment and value*, Create Streets 2017, £12.95

Zoe Avison et al, *Build Up: the environmental case for new homes in sustainable locations*, Green Alliance, 2023

Andreas Markides, *Urban Myths*, available electronically as early pre-release. For a copy contact chair@theaou.org

ArtPlace

Artworks inspired by the built environment

Town Centre

Astrid Guthier

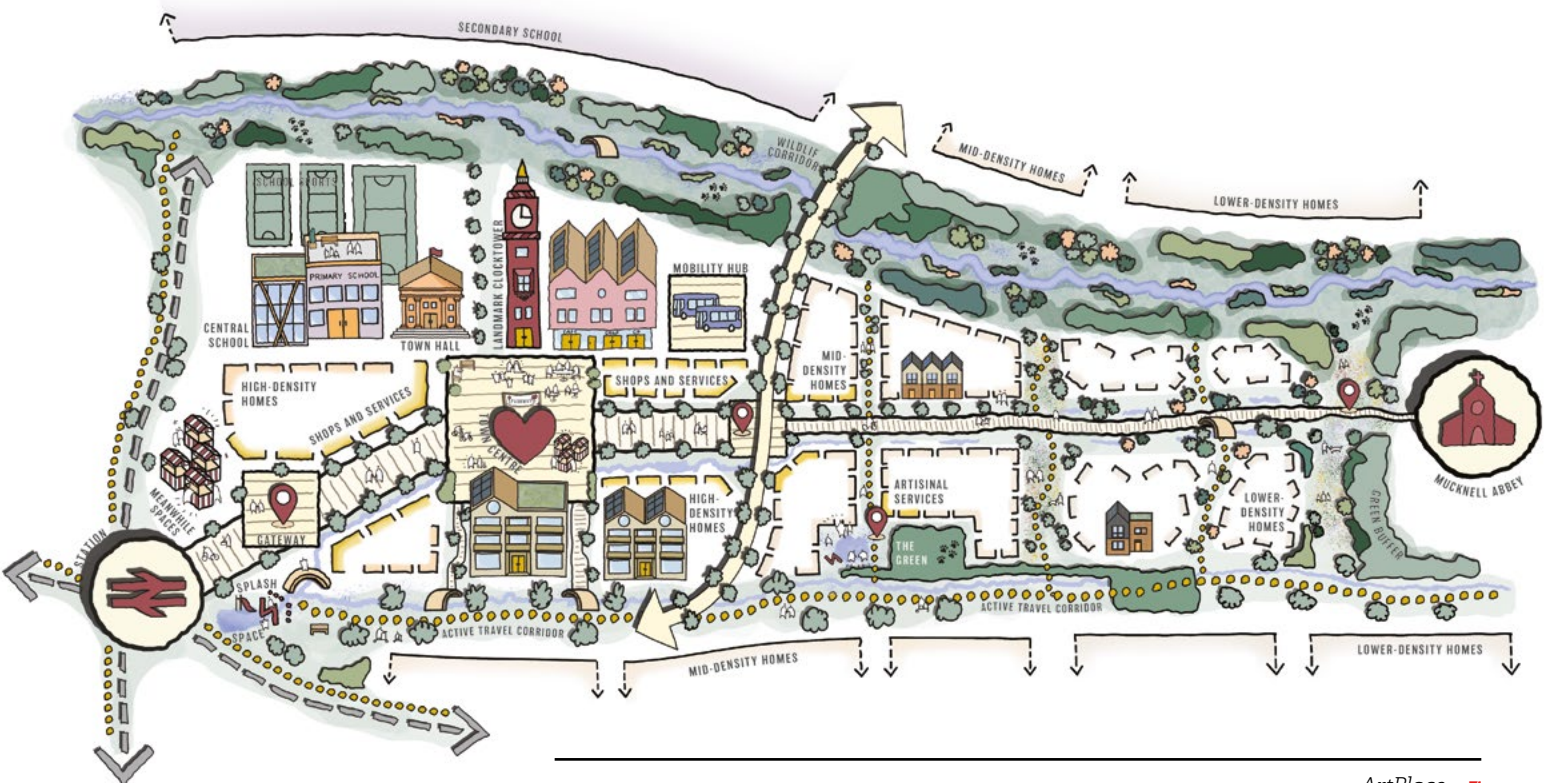
Urban Designer, JTP

It was so gratifying to win the Image of the Year at JTP, especially as the diagram is for such an exciting and forward-thinking project. I hope to continue developing my drawing skills which transform placemaking narratives into exciting and fun drawings that everyone can enjoy.

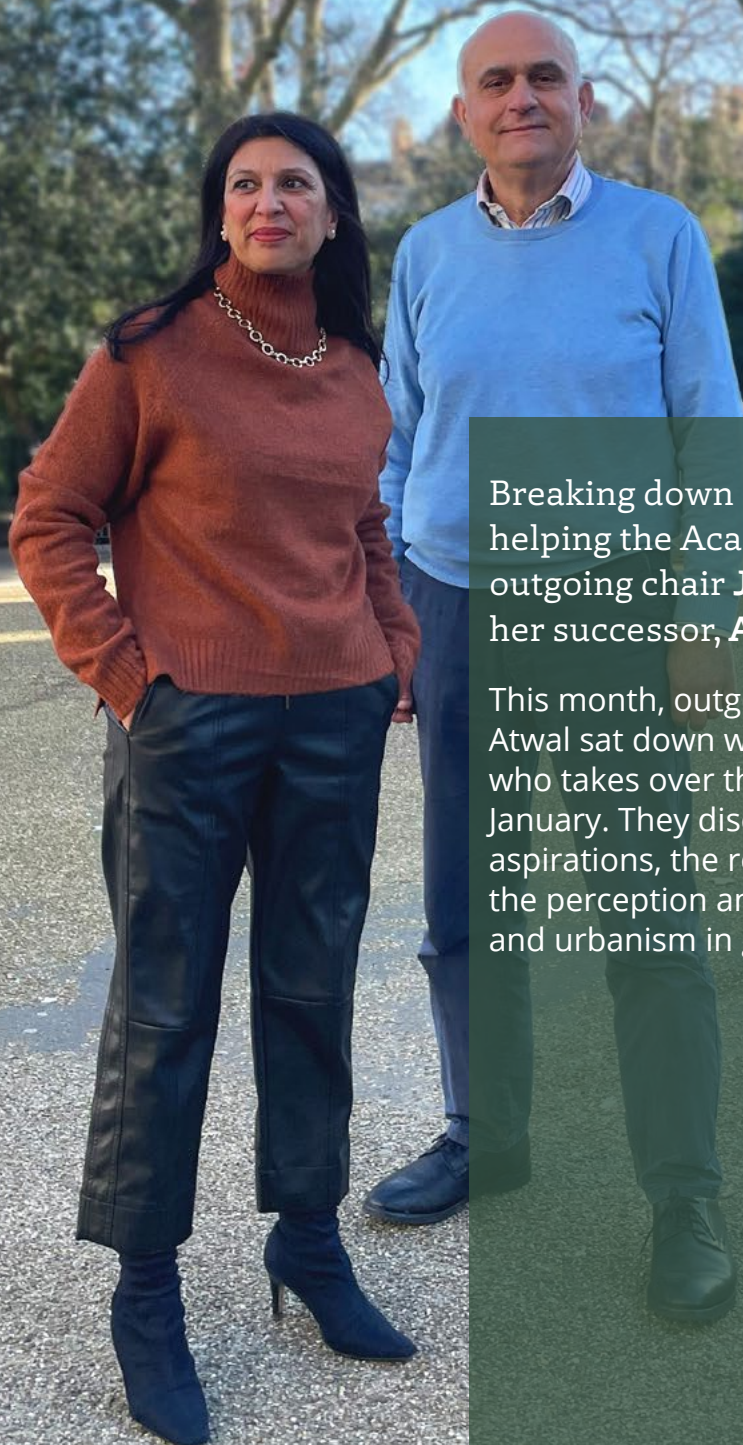
This diagram encapsulates vision for a vibrant Town Centre at the heart of a new settlement near Worcestershire Parkway station - a 10,000-home community that will offer multiple new schools, retail, healthcare services, cycleways and footpaths, employment, and a network of green open spaces including a substantial Community Park.

Have you got a sketch, model, or other artwork inspired by the built environment? Get in touch at journal@theaou.org to share yours in Here & Now

TOWN CENTRE NARRATIVE - STAGE SET EXTENDED



Interview: Chair to Chair



Breaking down sector silos, and helping the Academy spread its wings: outgoing chair **Jas Atwal** interviews her successor, **Andreas Markides**.

This month, outgoing Academy chair Jas Atwal sat down with Andreas Markides, who takes over the position at the end of January. They discussed their inspirations, aspirations, the role of chair, and the ways the perception and impact of the Academy and urbanism in general is changing.



About twelve years ago he gave me a call and asked if I would be interested in getting involved, and the rest is history.”

JA: “John was always such a persuasive figure – I’m not surprised!”

AM: “I don’t think I knew what I was letting myself in for, but I have absolutely loved it. I’ve learned a lot and made incredible lifelong friends.”

JA: “Returning briefly to Cyprus and your childhood – what have you taken with you through your life?”

AM: “I don’t know if I’ve romanticised it – but it was idyllic. I grew up in a small village, where everyone worked in agriculture. My father had orchards. We were comfortable and happy. I remember the smell of the blossom, and the picnics in the Troodos mountains.

“But we were displaced after the Turkish invasion, which was a traumatic event for everybody. We lost everything – though my parents helped inspire us to stand up again – to go to university and work hard.

“It all stays with me. I recall George Seferis’ poem, Helen, about a local village: ‘the nightingales won’t let you sleep in Platres,’ he says.”

JA: “And from an urbanist’s perspective – this is the sort of community and environment that we always seek to create.”

AM: “Absolutely. We need to get a team out there! There is a lot of good. The mountain village has still retained its magic. But I don’t like what I see in the cities. It’s well worth a visit, as there are lessons to be shared in both directions.”

“Our sector builds walls and groups disengage from one another. We must bring them together”

Jas Atwal: “There can’t be many people in the Academy that don’t know you, Andreas! Professionally, you’re a chartered civil engineer, with a master’s degree in transport planning from Imperial College London. You’re the founder of Markides Associates and its growing team of transport planners. But what do you get up to outside of work – and what would you be doing if your life had taken a different path?”

Andreas Markides: “As well as spending time with my wonderful family and four grown-up children, I love reading and writing. My interests have always been focused on people – on humanity – inside and outside of work. I can imagine myself having taken that sort of path into literature, history, human sciences, or academia.”

JA: “And you have branched out in that direction – with your wonderful recent book *Urban Myths* – mixing your passions: myths, history and urbanism.”

AM: “I have indeed. Though growing up in Cyprus the pressure was to get a good job, and so professionally I went into engineering. I’ve been so lucky that this has also introduced me to so many interesting people that have guided and inspired me.”

JA: “Is that how you discovered the Academy?”

AM: “It is. I’ve always been fortunate enough to meet and make amazing friends, one of which was John Thompson, founder of the Academy.

Inspired by Cyprus, the conversation turned to other challenges Andreas sees in the sector that need to be overcome.

AM: “The biggest challenge I see day-to-day is the compartmentalisation of the professions within urbanism and placemaking. This seems to be more of an issue in the UK than elsewhere – and in Europe the so-called ‘holistic’ approach to problem solving is more commonplace.”

“As C.P. Cavafy says in his poem, Walls, ‘With no consideration, no pity, no shame, they have built walls around me, thick and high’. Society, and especially our sector, builds walls and groups can disengage from one another. The Academy has an important role to play to bring elements of the sector together.”

JA: “Yes – completely. I often think of it like the human body. Whether it is a street or a neighbourhood, or your heart and lungs, every part has its role and its specialism, but you need everything working together for the whole body or the whole town or city to not just survive, but to thrive.”

AM: “To pick on my profession – traffic engineers – we can rely too much on numbers, when urbanism is so much broader. We need to do more to appreciate wellbeing, health and other factors not caught in the traditional figures.”

JA: “It comes down a lot of the time to the need for everything to be evidence based, and it can be easier to quantify figures as benefits: numbers of parking spaces, economic value. To really enable a shift in placemaking across our sector, we must embrace new ways and new criteria for measuring value and benefits.”

“It’s been a real strength of the Urbanism Awards that we carry out our assessment reports across Europe. These are robust studies that bring back lessons from the places that are ahead of the curve – such as cities where they measure quality of life as the main indicator of successful development and transformation. Our finalists for European City of the Year in 2023 all put this front and centre.”

AM: “I think there is a real opportunity and appetite for how we do things in the UK to change. When we visited Copenhagen – they had a strategy to improve active travel, they had the

will to achieve it, and now 50% of people journey by bike. As an Academy we can help to develop the strategies for positive change here – tackling short-sightedness. We can grow the appetite for change too by showing people the incredible outcomes that can be achieved.”

The discussion next moved to Andreas’ ambitions as he steps into the new role.

AM: “My focus for my term as Chair is growth – picking up on the excellent work you have done, Jas. For me, becoming Chair is an opportunity to give back to the Academy which has given me so much.”

“One important element of this is growth of the membership. The number of people who value and benefit from the Academy is vast and increasing. We are cross-discipline, cross-sector and cross-generational, and the membership remains passionate. We always want to build on this and increase our reach.”

“Becoming Chair is an opportunity to give back to the Academy”



“The other side is growing our influence. There’s always a danger in our world that we’re speaking to the converted – but we’re doing more and more as the Academy to break out of that and target national and international decision-makers. There will be more to come on this through the year as we spread our wings and grow our voice on policy.”

JA: “What would you say to people who agree with this, or agree with the mission of the Academy, and want to get more involved?”

AM: “If you’re a member – the more you give, the more you get. We’ll be working hard in the coming months and years to offer our members even more of interest and value than ever – and participating in the sessions, meetings and activities is the best way to contribute. If you’re not a member: join! You’ll love it, learn a lot, and make great friends.”

JA: “We both know how experiential the Academy’s offering is. It’s what makes it unique. We’ll be out there, bringing people together in amazing places, and taking those lessons back internationally.”

AM: “Happy learning. What more could you want!?”

***Jas Atwal** is a Director at Kevin Murray Associates, and has been Chair of the Academy since January 2023.*

***Andreas Markides** is the founder of Markides Associates. His term as Chair begins on 1st February 2024.*

Canada and Traffic in Towns

On its 60th anniversary, **Andreas Markides** dusts off his copy of Buchanan's seminal *Traffic in Towns* report and reflects on what the forward thinking transport planner got right and wrong.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the publication of the nominal report *Traffic in Towns*, I decided to leaf through my copy of the report (signed by Sir Colin Buchanan, himself) one more time. One more time I marvelled at the breadth of issues covered, at the emphasis it had placed on the environmental impact of traffic, of its warnings about the future, and even of its use of the English language, beautiful and easy to understand by everyone.

And yet, there are those who at times have criticised the report. Invariably they will say that 'it placed undue emphasis on bypasses' or 'it encouraged the use of multi-storey car parks' and so on. It is easy to be critical in hindsight but in my own view at least, the report was a turning point. It demanded the setting of environmental standards; it asked for a much improved concept of professional collaboration with greater emphasis on mixed-team working; and it warned that it will be easily within our ability to ruin this island by the end of the century. The greater part of it could easily degenerate into a wilderness of sprawled-out, uncoordinated development. The report was prophetic and very important.

However, there is one criticism of the report that I have always found hard to defend against -and that's the suggested separation in the report of pedestrians from traffic. The illustration of how the Tottenham Court Road area can be tackled (pictured opposite page, middle) has stayed vividly in people's minds and has remained proof that, in this instance, Sir Colin and his team had got it wrong.

But have they?

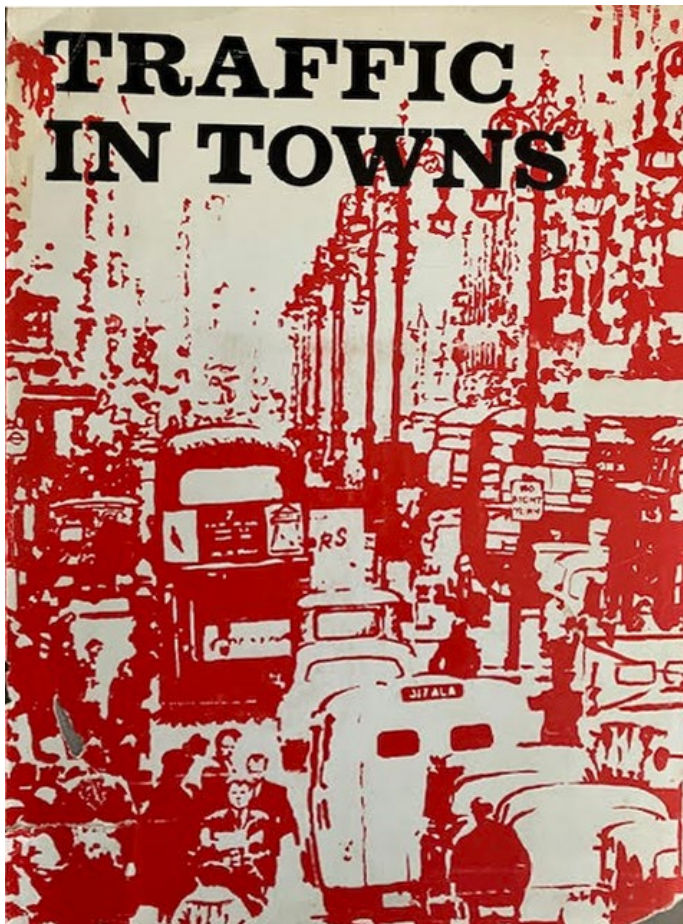
Let's start by asking the obvious question: would it have been more acceptable if they had suggested the reverse, i.e. keep pedestrians on the ground and put traffic either in a tunnel below or on an elevated structure? This would clearly not have worked at all for many reasons, not least the environmental impact as well as the cost of such a solution. The inevitable conclusion is that the authors of the report were simply being pragmatic.

That pragmatism has manifested itself in numerous places since then. Is this proof that the idea is, if not justifiable, at least acceptable? Let us consider some examples. Elevated walkways have become the norm in places such as Dubai (protecting pedestrians from the extreme heat), Hong Kong (humidity) and Canada (extreme cold). In fact, Canada - and many other places - have extended the idea from humans to animals with elevated walkways being designed as a continuation of the natural kingdom (pictured opposite page, bottom).

It would appear that the suggestion in the report has a number of applications that make sense. Is it wrong being pragmatic?

In my view, pragmatism is acceptable in many situations but could the question be turned on its head by asking: is it wrong being bold?

Background image: Calgary by Patrick McVey on Unsplash



Whilst accepting that the car's onslaught on our lives is real, could we be a little more imaginative about how to tackle it? It was many years after the report's publication when such ideas started to surface. For example the idea of shared space whose protagonist was the Dutch Hans Monderman caused a strong reaction amongst engineers in the early 80s. The application of this concept in a number of different places has often produced admirable results but people are still fearful of applying it on a wider scale -and engineers continue to design the road network very much as before. Why? There can only be one reason for this -that's what they have been taught to do! Does this mean that we need to re-consider our educational system?

More recently there has been another bold initiative with the introduction (particularly since Covid) of the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) approach. Is this faring better? The populist (and political) reaction to such schemes from across the country would suggest otherwise. Why? Possibly because such schemes try to forcibly remove the car. Force is never appropriate and very rarely works.

What then? What are we left with?

I have long held the view that instead of seeking to eliminate the car from our world (something impossible and impractical), we should seek to tame it instead, i.e. make it subordinate to human activity. I have often provocatively said to friends that many people mistakenly believe that roads are for cars! They are not; they are for movement (and that very definitely means the movement of much more than cars).

On a recent trip to Canada, I have seen how others have attempted to change that relationship and mostly succeeded. Many Canadian towns as well as their bigger counterparts, such as Vancouver and Calgary, work on two key principles - low speeds and excellent pedestrian infrastructure. These two applications lead to a reduction in car dominance. But there is still a third factor required in order to be successful and that is respect. It is clear from what I have witnessed that drivers are respectful of each other and of pedestrians as well as cyclists. They are always looking out for them and this is something which reminded me of the late Ben Hamilton-Baillie's philosophy based on drivers making eye contact with other road users.



Once that contact is made the dehumanisation effect of the car breaks down. Put in another way - the car is subjugated and it stops being the king of the road.

How do we arrive at such a scenario? Quite simply through a change in behaviour - the behaviour/approach of the designer but also the behaviour of all road users.

People and communities need to learn to respect each other. This will make them look out for each other. They also need to be law-abiding. On a recent trip to Zurich, I saw schoolchildren crossing busy streets unescorted. Why do they (and their parents) feel that it would be safe for children to do that? Because they knew that car drivers were law-abiding and they would not jump the red light.

Once you reach that level of understanding and respect, you may not even need traffic lights! Again going back to my Canada trip, I was bemused to observe that many crossroads were not even signalised. It was left to the drivers themselves to show the necessary civility in negotiating the junction - even though in some cases it was a very large junction.

Yet one last traffic sign said it all for me. Be courteous! Show respect to people and simply be courteous. Such a simple message with significant consequences.



My conclusion? Elevated walkways are the answer in many different situations but of course, they are not the only (or the best) answer everywhere. Other concepts have been attempted since the Buchanan report 60 years ago such as LTNs, Shared Spaces, vehicle underpasses etc. but none of these represent the panacea that we are all looking for.

So, did the report get this particular point wrong? I think that they were correct in giving pedestrians their own space but they were not daring enough in attempting to subjugate the car. Of course, in many cases, the car cannot be subjugated as it is still the most convenient means of moving about. However, where speeds and volumes are both low I believe that the existing order can be reversed.

How can that be achieved? The answer in my view does not depend on technical solutions. It depends on the values that we hold as a society. The answer lies with people's education, their sense of community, and the level of respect that we show to each other.

The answer is neither complex nor complicated. It is very simple.

Andreas Markides is the incoming Chair of the AoU and Chairman of Markides Associates.



Create, edit, write for the AoU

Here & Now Journal

We'd love to hear ideas and opinions from, see art and photography by, or curate with more of the AoU community in future issues of the quarterly Here & Now Journal.

Join the Editorial Team and help source, refine, and curate articles as part of a friendly, passionate team who meet regularly online to plan the next issue.

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Planning for Productive Places

The UK's productivity crisis is not typically discussed at the design table, but it should be, argues **Barney Evans**, who wants to start a conversation.

The UK's productivity crisis is well known and long-term. We lag our G7 comparator countries and productivity has hardly grown since the 2008 financial crisis. If productivity gains had followed the previous trajectory our economy would be around >30% bigger. Ever since the 2008 recession the traditional growth rate of productivity has been much lower than the long-term trajectory. From 1974 to 2008 UK productivity grew at **2.3% a year and 0.5% after 2008**. Harry Knibb's **article** in this magazine last year gave more detail on the problem.

Improved productivity could reduce poverty, fund infrastructure and fund healthcare. The 'Productivity Puzzle' has engaged many great minds and there have been numerous suggestions of the cause, including:

- **Education and skills** - Our education system has been criticised from various angles; too much focus on Higher Education versus technical training, poor early years provision or the decline in adult education / life-long learning.

- **Lack of saving and investment** - The UK had the lowest private sector investment rate in the G7 and has had a declining rate for decades.
- **Government picking winners, or not picking winners** - Criticism from the left around not investing in sectors that can grow, and criticism from the right that the government has interfered too much in the market, distorting signals.
- **Mismeasurement** - There is even some suggestion that part of the gap is around productivity mismeasurement because of the growing difficulty in capturing output that is increasingly virtual and free to users.

What is rarely discussed is the role of the planning process, which is strange because its impact is fundamental. A **report** from the Centre for Cities in 2023, estimated there is a housing gap of over 4 million houses in Britain compared to the average European country. This is predominantly due to government policies

on the planning system. It is not just quantity that affects productivity, quality too has a role. Even the RAC says we are **building development that increases congestion**.

Planning: From high-level policy to your home

We regenerate about 1% of our built environment each year. Most agree we should build faster, but it soon adds up; since the 2008 recession we have constructed approximately 15% of the built environment. Done well, this would enable people and businesses to thrive and be more productive. It would also enable the broader economy to be more productive. Despite this, the issue of productivity is not a strong theme in our planning process and discussions.

There are opportunities to address productivity from the high level government perspective; the Green Belt and land value capture are major topics of conversation. There is even the suggestion of changing our planning system from a discretionary system where permissions must be sought, to a rules-based system. Here, a

developer would be confident they could develop providing they met established conditions. These macro perspectives aim to address big issues, such as how we build more, allocate benefits, build in the right places and so on.

On specific developments it is the detail of the current planning system and how that affects productivity at a development level. This is an area less discussed, and at Turley we want to bring focus to that as well.

The amount of paperwork in the planning process, long determination periods, the cost and uncertainty are all cited as holding us back from building at all. There is much validity to this, but what planning policy (and Building Regulations) do not address is how to ensure what we do build enables higher productivity.

Of course, much of policy addresses productivity implicitly; the requirement for new schools, S106 and CIL have links to productivity. It is similar in Building Regulations, issues like noise control, ventilation, energy efficiency and access, link to how productive occupants will be. Many Local Plans have requirements around transport provision, health and wellbeing and energy efficiency. However, this only considers productivity indirectly. The National Planning Policy Framework mentions productivity, but we don't assess it directly or use tools to consider the optimum decisions for long-term performance.

Some of this will align with the aims of development; most new developments seek to be attractive to occupants and users. To do this, they will be designed to show how the resident or business can succeed. It does not all align,

however; most development must focus on day one capital/rental value. This can lead to decisions that hamper long-term productivity, such as lowest cost build standards, increased traffic in surrounding areas or mix of uses that increase burdens externally. It is not just developers; many councils and regional governments need development and can plan immediate actions that create long term issues.

What do we mean by productivity?

What we mean by productivity is how much effort must be put in to get an output. In most cases that can be measured by economic output or GDP, but it could also extend to less quantifiable issues like our enjoyment of where we live,

Photo by Mārtiņš Zemlickis
via Unsplash



ability to sleep well or travel to see friends. The idea of national wealth, including natural capital, human capital, is compelling. It may be that a method for assessing the optimum development uses a national wealth calculation.

Specific ideas include ensuring a better mix of uses, public realm that encourages presence and interaction, flexibility for innovative uses that don't fit well in planning classes such as advanced manufacturing, last mile logistics and co-location, and transport net gain, where development must enable the whole area to move faster than before.

How?

At Turley, we have been discussing the issue and some of our immediate thoughts around ways we can start to address this are below:

- **Data capture** – It is now easier than ever to capture data around jobs created, occupant happiness, traffic speeds, congestion, footfall, wealth generated, etc. Ensuring new development has a set of factors that need to be tracked through the development and beyond will help to give us data to inform future decisions. It may also be a useful mechanism that could be used to hold pre-development commitments to account; you said your development would reduce congestion, did it? You said it would have a >85% occupant satisfaction factor, did it?

- **Long-term interest in all development** – Working with the growing Build to Rent sector shows how the relationship of an investor/developer with a development can be deepened. When you know you are going to be involved in a place for 20 years or more, you think long-term. Do we need to ensure all investment in development has a long-term stake in a place?

- **Allowing Innovation Areas** – The combination of planning policies and Building Regulations ensure that most development is safe and of reasonable quality. They also act as a straight jacket on progress. This is partly because the sheer volume of it creates a mentality of compliance, but also the fact that documents like Local Plans are updated so infrequently that they are often not able to embrace changes in technology or processes. Creating some locations where industry and academia would be allowed to work without these requirements would enable innovation. It wouldn't be a free for all, there would still be some basic standards, but would enable exploration of unconventional materials, use types, technologies and approaches. The results could enable testing of ideas and feedback that will enable standard policies and standards to be updated. (The new Freeports are hinting at some of this.)

- **Discussing the issue** – Although it isn't scientific, just discussing productivity when considering new development would help to start to inculcate the idea that what we build, and how, has a direct link to our national productivity.

At Turley we are committing to discussing the issue and using our influence to improve things. We are starting with a roundtable of academics, developers, economists and planners. Our discussions and findings will be shared, and we would welcome engagement from anyone who is interested in this topic.

***Barney Evans** is a Director at Turley advising on corporate net zero and the energy transition. He has aimed to see how these areas and the broader development system can increase productivity in the UK.*

The Big Debate

Will the 'S' in ESG have a greater impact on commercial real estate than the 'E'?

At a time of hyper focus on carbon and energy, **Harry Knibb** explores why 'social' may have an even greater impact on the real estate industry than 'environmental'.

Very recently, I was asked to join a debate to establish whether 'social' or 'environmental' will be the greatest disruptor to the real estate industry. Intuitively it is hard to think how anything could overtake the 'E' given its seismic impact on our thinking, designing and delivery of real estate projects nationally. However, while exploring the case for social, I am beginning to wonder if the answer is far from clear.

When looking at a broad question like this it is important to dissect key factors from noise. We are interested in the real needle movers which can support, or scupper, action. For me this means looking at three dynamics:

- Business case – the carrot. Can money be made through greater focus, clarity, and delivery mechanisms than would otherwise be the case?
- Regulatory environment – the stick. What regulations exist to push less enlightened actors forward to do more, to do better?
- Definition - How clear are we when we use words, do we really know what they mean, what relevant examples can you pinpoint?

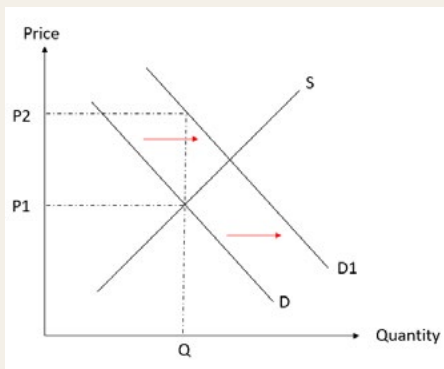
Using this as a framework I explore the case for social being the bigger disruptor.

The business case

Interestingly, there is a good level of academic, and a small yet increasing amount of grey, literature to suggest social activities drive commercial outperformance. One strong example from the Creative Land Trust who, alongside Get Living and Creative Estuary, looked at residential values in creative clusters against residential values in London more generally and found a 4.4% year on year outperformance in more creative places.

This is phenomenal, but also intuitive. Given the choice would you prefer to co-locate near makers and artists, bringing life and buzz to your





neighbourhood? If yes, then it is easy to see why creative clusters are in elevated demand. And, as we know when the demand line moves out and supply remains constrained (by slower than ideal planning policy and higher than ideal construction and financing costs), then prices will increase. In our imaginary and simplified economic model, the creatives drive demand from D to D1, and in turn the price moves from P1 to P2.

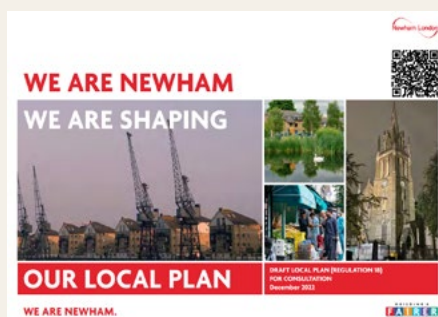
Secondly, real estate developers and investors are currently laser focused on carbon (or the lack of it) as a differentiator in the market. New commercial office developments now need a robust and priced net zero strategy to drive premium rents. Partly because of market forces and partly because of regulations and public awareness, we could be rapidly moving towards a market where low carbon aspirations are no longer a unique proposition. (And if everyone has gone green, then it becomes hard to argue for a green premium.) In that instance, a new differentiator will be needed and 'social' is an obvious contender.

Regulations

The existing regulatory framework for social is fledgling and arguably indirect, but it exists, especially in the public sector through the Social

Value Act (2012) and wider public procurement policy requirements. Working in the private sector, this may not initially seem overly influential. But on deeper examination it is easy to see the huge quantities of money are spent by the public sector each year (over £1.2 trillion in 2022) and as government grow, so too does their spending. Supply chains working across both public and private spheres have by necessity developed skills and methods for generating, and promoting, social value. These approaches will permeate across into the private sector.

Looking forward at future regulations, early shoots can be seen especially within planning policy. In London, Islington's draft Local Plan requires developers of major schemes to provide a social value self-assessment and Newham is consulting on policy seeking developers maximise both social and health impact.



There is a policy base, and that base is set to grow.

Definition

This is a thorny issue and as the Institute of Economic Development has said on social: 'it's too diffuse and lacks focus.' However, while one unified definition may be out of reach – currently – it is possible to make progress. Complex yes, impossible no. Besides,

it has been 37 years since the Brundtland Commission produced their seminal report 'Our Common Future' and put environmental sustainability on the map. We are now laser focused on energy use intensities and carbon use intensities, but it has taken a while. I predict a much faster journey for social and would be willing to guesstimate that within five years we will have organised around one unified definition. At which point, comparables can be compiled, valuers can appraise, and policies can align. But it does need focus and collective effort to get there. An industry body should accept the mantle, collating disparate approaches, thoughts and case studies whilst driving collective agreement.

Given there is a small yet growing business case, regulations currently exist and more are coming, and the definitional issue is likely to be resolved in the short term, coupled with a greater pace of change, more interest in progressive development and a need to secure a social licence to operate, perhaps social will overtake environmental in its disruptive capabilities. After all, as selfish Homo Sapiens, what could be more important than that?

Harry Knibb is a board director at the Academy of Urbanism, a chartered town planner and Development Director at Oxford Properties.

The Hundred-Year Plan

Harrison Brewer considers plan making for the long term, and finds it's not as unusual as you may think.

New Year, same problems - this is often how I feel during the frenetic reflection we undergo on January 1st. We set resolutions and plan how we want to reinvent ourselves over the next 365 days all the while knowing that nothing has drastically changed between New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. What the New Year really represents is the hope that with incremental shifts in our behaviours creating change over time, real transformation can be brought.

This New Year will probably be the hottest on record around the world. The Met Office predicts the first '1.5°C year'

meaning the earth will be on average one and a half degrees hotter than the pre-industrial period (1850-1900). This is the 2nd hottest consecutive year on record. The trend is ticking upwards and whilst we are slowly turning the dial, I, and many others, have a concern that it's turning far too slowly.

The climate emergency is a wicked problem that exposes obstacles to change within human society ranging from the difficulty of trans-national collaboration, vertical and horizontal inequality, critical path dependency, and the entrenchment of vested interests in the way we operate.

What I want to explore here is a solution to the issue of short-termism in taking action. Brief political terms, competing priorities ranging from the personal to the international, a dominant world-view of growth, and the scarcity of time and resources all contribute to collective inaction. At the human scale, we can reframe this as procrastination - everyone has left important tasks till the last minute, scrambling for a deadline and finding an invigorated sense of purpose to get something done when the pressure is on. The main difference here is that by the time the 'pressure is on', it will be too late. The climate



emergency doesn't pose a hard deadline but a steady decline until we pass the point of no return.

On a brighter note, humans haven't always thought of time in the short-term. The Hindu belief in karma is rooted in time being cyclical - what you do in this life will have repercussions in the next. The Tao, a Chinese philosophy translated literally as 'the way', refers to the cycle of growth and decline of all living things. These ideas connect the future to the present through consequence and action. Just like the tagline from my personal favourite 'Gladiator', 'what we do in life echoes in eternity'.



So what does this mean for urban planning and climate change? What does long-term planning look like in practice? Michael Palwyn and Sarah Ichioka, the authors of 'Flourish - design paradigms for the planetary emergency', suggest the 'Hundred-year plan'. The idea draws inspiration from 'seven-generation sustainability' - a paradigm from the nations of the Haudenosaunee confederacy, more commonly known by the colonial demonym 'Iroquois'. Seven-generation sustainability takes into consideration 'those who are not yet born but who will inherit the world'. It's a belief in stewardship of the planet, of culture, and of a way of life.

The hundred-year plan is one



axiom of Flourish's toolkit for regenerative design. Geological time spans many billions of years, colonies of trees live for tens of thousands and ecosystems change over centuries. In contrast, our plans and strategies for urban development look forward in periods of 10-15 years, half a human generation at best. The hundred-year plan sits in between natural time and human time, helping to bridge the gap of intervention and understanding, and encouraging actions that echo intergenerationally, precisely the kind of action that will help address the climate emergency we are facing.

The UK is no stranger to this model. The Magna Carta's lesser-known sibling, 'The Charter of the Forest' enshrined the common people's right to the land, its resources, and its conservation for future generations. According to Guy Standing, a labour economist, the charter "was not about the rights of the poor, but about the rights of the free. For its time and place, it was a radical assertion of the universality of freedom, its commonality." It enshrined stewardship and protection of common resources for all people, later generations included. The Charter of the Forest was slowly eroded via the privatisation of

land which paradigmatically changed the way we viewed the natural landscape. More recently, the 'Well-being of Future Generations Act' (2015) in Wales mandated public bodies to embed stewardship and intergenerational thinking into decision-making. A similar act in England had its first reading in March 2020 with a second reading 'to be announced'.

The more interesting discussion is what a hundred-year plan would look like and this is hopefully something Here & Now, and the Academy of Urbanism more widely, can be a platform for. The case is clear - we are reaching a critical point in the history of human civilisation. We can all agree that urbanism has a clear role to play in imagining and designing a sustainable future. Perhaps it's time for us to work with those in authority to put these plans into action and ensure that the next generation won't be writing 'climate action' onto their New Year's resolutions.

Harrison Brewer is a Young Urbanist and Graduate Planner at Arup.

Image credit: Kimon Berlin (previous page); Universal / Getty Images (this page, left); Ocean Cleanup Group (this page, right)

Digital or In-person?

A new balancing act in collaborative placemaking

How did lockdown change co-design processes, and where do we go from here? **Sophia de Sousa** reflects on years of necessary adaptation and the hybrid balance in post-pandemic society.

The Covid pandemic threw us all into embracing technology at great pace, in so doing discovering some fantastic digital tools and resources to tackle daily tasks and stay connected both in our personal

and professional lives. We were forced us to improvise and to experiment, and as we emerged from lockdown, we found ourselves in a “new normal”.

Some of the behavioural and

systemic developments have raised both practical and ethical questions. Covid exposed a huge disparity in access to and confidence with these digital systems across geographical regions, socio-economic groups, sensorily different and neurodiverse groups, and generations. We also became more aware of how our personal data is collected and the risks to cybersecurity. So, while the digital revolution has offered us a whole new world of opportunity, there is also a whole new set of potential pitfalls to navigate.

Our working lives and practice have also changed. Not only



Pictured: Intergenerational Cities WEdesign event, Glasgow 2019 (this page); Children and parents working together to use Roblox Studio to co-design playable landscapes (next page, right); Ideas for reuse of an undercroft created by participants at an online Design Training session (next page, left). All courtesy of The Glass-House Community Led Design

do some of us now have the freedom to work from home, we also find ourselves rethinking how we operate organisationally. Is it necessary to travel across the city or country for a meeting when we can do it over Zoom? With so many people accessing content digitally, should we still be producing printed material? Should events be in-person, online, or hybrid? Are traditional publications still relevant at all?

The ever-developing tools that this digital revolution has placed at our fingertips are astonishing. However, returning to in-person activity also found us delighting in the enduring power of being in a room together, and its role in better understanding the nuances of the people and topics we are connecting with. While many have grown to love and frequent online collaboration tools and platforms, we have also seen a resurgence of people coming together to enjoy tactile and social experiences.

I think that most of us now agree that it should not be an either or - that both digital and in-person have their place



today and workplace - and that more important is how you use and combine these different approaches, rather than a matter of staunchly defending a single approach.

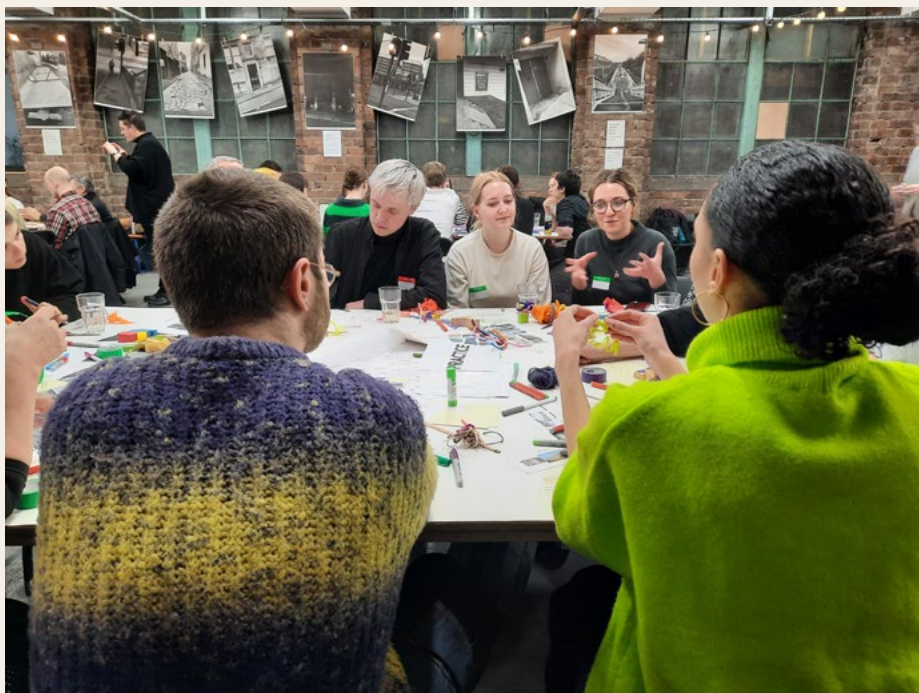
Here lies what I think is one of the toughest balancing acts we face today: between in-person and digital spaces, services, and systems.

When it comes to the endeavour of working collaboratively to shape our built environment, I would argue that we now need to develop complex strategies that take advantage of the best of both approaches and, at

the same time, remain vigilant about their potential pitfalls. We need to be mindful that either approach helps us extend our reach and empower some people, but creates barriers for others.

It gets interesting when you start to experiment with how to weave in-person and digital together across a programme of work with a range of objectives, partners, and participants. I offer an example from our charity, [The Glass-House Community Led Design](#), to illustrate the point.





Every year, The Glass-House delivers a programme called WEdesign, which began as a national series of public events that combine discussion, debate, and co-design activities to explore challenging themes in placemaking. Forced online over lockdown, we brought in students from partner universities as co-facilitators to keep our events interactive and support co-production alongside discussion. The following year, as restrictions eased, we decided to go hybrid, creating events where participants were working together simultaneously in-person and online to co-design propositions for change. This was great fun, but frankly exhausting and a huge logistical challenge.

Last year, rather than delivering a series of hybrid events, we opted for a hybrid series that combined online events and content with in-person events - a formula we have also applied to this year's programme. The online events allow us to bring together speakers and audiences from across the UK and abroad for a conversation,

whereas in-person events allow us to integrate playful, tactile activities and to explore the physicality of the place and location we are occupying.

As we continue to work with students as co-facilitators, we use both online and in-person sessions. Our in-person sessions with students bring together a collaborative working group to develop a shared understanding as a team or to look back on the delivery of a particular co-design event, while our online reflection spaces can bring together students and tutors from all our partner universities to share experiences and compare notes.

Our WEdesign Think Pieces, a series of blogs authored by a range of people from different disciplines and locations, allow us to share their voices and stories with people around the UK and abroad. They also make it possible for people to access these voices at their convenience.

We do our best to share what we do. The Glass-House and

participating students write blogs about the events, which we share on our website and through social media with those who attended and those who could not. We also produce a WEdesign series publication in both print and digital form.

So, the devil is in the detail. I believe that the answer to the conundrum of balancing digital and in-person is to experiment with how they can best complement each other to achieve a given objective. We ought to be mindful of the resources required for either approach, and what this means financially, environmentally, and in terms of what you are asking of people. Experiment, reflect, learn, and adapt. Above all, share what you discover and help others build confidence and capacity to work in both digital and in-person spaces. Both have so much to offer.

Sophia de Sousa is an Academician and Chief Executive of The Glass-House Community Led Design.

The current season of WEdesign: People, Place, Planet is now live. Visit The Glass-House website to find out more about the programme of online and in-person events in London, Sheffield, Glasgow and Newcastle, and the evolving series of insightful Think Pieces.

Pictured: Lively discussion and debate at REdefine WEdesign event in Glasgow, 2023



Life, Cycle, Analysis

Urban philosophy

There is no better way of experiencing a place or indeed finding yourself than from the saddle of a bike. **Mark Bessoudo** explores the philosophy of cycling and place.

The only thing I knew about the place I was about to ride a bicycle through was that it was precisely the kind of place I should not ride a bicycle through. Or so I thought.

To be fair, I knew a few basic facts about this place - like how this township on the southwestern edge of Johannesburg, South Africa, was associated with fatal anti-Apartheid **protests** in the 1970s, and that Nelson Mandela had **lived here** at some point - but beyond that, I didn't know much. I just knew that traveling on two wheels through a town that, to outsiders, had a reputation for being dangerous, was probably not a bright idea.

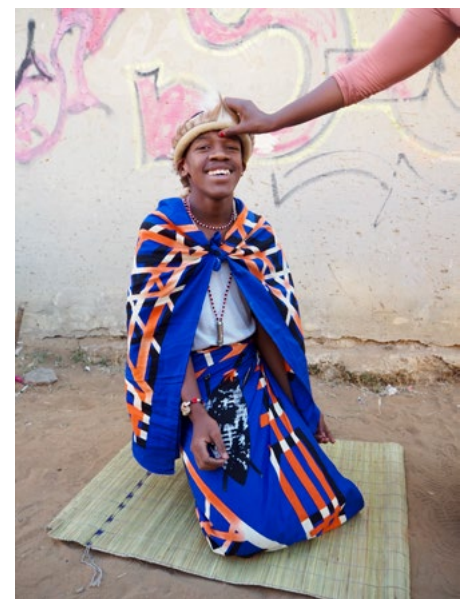
But here I was in Soweto on a cloudless mid-June afternoon, signing my name on a liability waiver form before joining a cycling tour with a local guide and a half dozen other curious visitors. I had no idea what to expect. Over the next four or five hours we would pedal over dusty dirt paths and coast along paved roads. We rode next to an open landfill, beyond which, far in the distance, could be seen structures that dominate the skyline like juxtaposed bookends: the iconic cooling towers of the decommissioned **Orlando coal-fired power station** at one end and the modern architectural gem of **Soccer City**

stadium on the other.

We didn't just visit historical landmarks at predetermined stopping points. In between bouts of cruising on our bikes, we also had an impromptu conversation with a sangoma (traditional healer), encountered a raucous engagement party and were offered grilled chicken by a friendly group of locals at a front yard barbecue. We were active participants, not just passive observers.

We covered a lot of ground over a relatively short period of time - not just geographically, but experientially. Far from being the small homogeneous shanty town that I had imagined it to be, Soweto revealed itself to be a complicated, complex and surprisingly contemporary city.

That this experience left a positive impression on me shouldn't have been surprising. It's true that as a visitor to any new place, my default mode is to pay attention to the otherwise ordinary things that are invisible to locals, but novel to me: the vernacular



architecture, the street signs, the bus stops, the street life in public spaces.

But my positive mood that afternoon wasn't just due to the fact that I was a wide-eyed visitor eager to soak in a new urban experience. I was also under the influence of a substance that is almost perfectly designed to enhance awareness, sharpen the senses, focus concentration, raise heart rate and elicit feelings of warmth, happiness and well-being.

That substance? The bicycle itself.

It was only later that I realized that my mind had been flirting with a feeling known as 'flow'. Psychologists define flow as a positive mental state that materializes when you are fully immersed in an intrinsically rewarding activity. It's characterized by a sort of 'hyperfocus' - an intense and energized absorption of the present moment - combined with a merging of action and awareness, a loss of reflective self-consciousness and a sense of personal agency over the activity involved. Cycling ticks all these boxes. Even if the cycling is only leisurely, the sheer physicality of it - the repetitive movements and sustained exertion - still plays a part. And while flow may be more easily produced on longer uninterrupted rides that are only possible in rural areas, it can also be induced by the unique cognitive demands placed on cyclists in dense urban areas.

When you cycle in the city, it becomes clear how you are something that exists 'out there'



in the real world, embedded in the flux and ecosystem of everyday life, vulnerable to all its latent uncertainties and unpredictability. You must negotiate the road while contending with dynamic conditions involving other cyclists, pedestrians, potholes, buses, distracted drivers, street signs, traffic lights, construction sites, and inclement weather.

But it's not all precarious. City cycling also provides its own set of small satisfactions. It just requires a sufficiently mindful attitude or qualitative mindset to appreciate them. For example, there's something intrinsically enjoyable about communicating with others on the road through non-verbal micro-gestures: the symphony of arm signals, head nods, eye contact, over-the-shoulder checks and the blind spot and



occasional smile. There are the passive pleasures of zipping past so many pedestrians: catching a glimpse of an interesting character, or overhearing fragments of a conversation with no context. It's like people watching from an outdoor cafe, but on a whole other level. Then there's the thermal delight of the breeze brushing past me on a hot summer day. And, of course, the tactile feedback of feeling the imperfections of the road through my handlebars and the soft soles of my sneakers. It's a saturation of the senses.

It reminds me of the classic philosophical fiction *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* when the narrator reflects on the drastic difference between driving a car and riding a motorcycle. "You don't realize that through that car window everything you see is just more TV," he laments. "You're a passive observer and it is all moving by you boringly in a frame." But traveling by motorbike instead, he continues, removes this artificial frame: "You're completely in contact with it all. You're in the scene, not just watching it anymore, and the sense of presence is overwhelming. That concrete whizzing by five inches below your foot is the real thing... The whole experience is never removed from immediate consciousness." In other words, the driver and the biker may be traversing the exact same terrain in geographic terms, but their experience of the journey is miles apart. This metaphysical distinction is even more pronounced when comparing the car driver with the urban cyclist.



Movement is core to humanity. There is **more to us** than just our brains. The growing field of '**embodied cognition**' demonstrates how our thoughts are powerfully shaped by the sensations, gestures and movements of our bodies. As the science writer Annie Murphy Paul **notes**, we are not just solo actors, stranded alone in the cosmos. Rather, she says, "we are networked organisms who move around in shifting surroundings, environments that have the power to transform our thinking." The mind does not stop at the brain. It **extends** into the world and augments the capacities of the biological brain with

outside-the-brain resources - a resource like a bicycle, a computer or an iPhone. (Steve Jobs once remarked: "What a computer is to me is it's the most remarkable tool that we've ever come up with, and it's the equivalent of a **bicycle for our minds**." Jobs so loved the bicycle that he had even wanted to change the name of Apple's Macintosh computers to Bicycle at one point.)

Cycling is the fastest, cheapest, easiest and funnest way to get you from point A to point B, full stop. Happier people, more engaged communities, cleaner air and reduced dependence on fossil fuels are just incidental

benefits - significant benefits, but incidental nonetheless. This might be why cities whose citizens are consistently ranked among the world's happiest, like **Copenhagen**, Amsterdam or even **Bogotá**, often have a progressive culture of cycling.

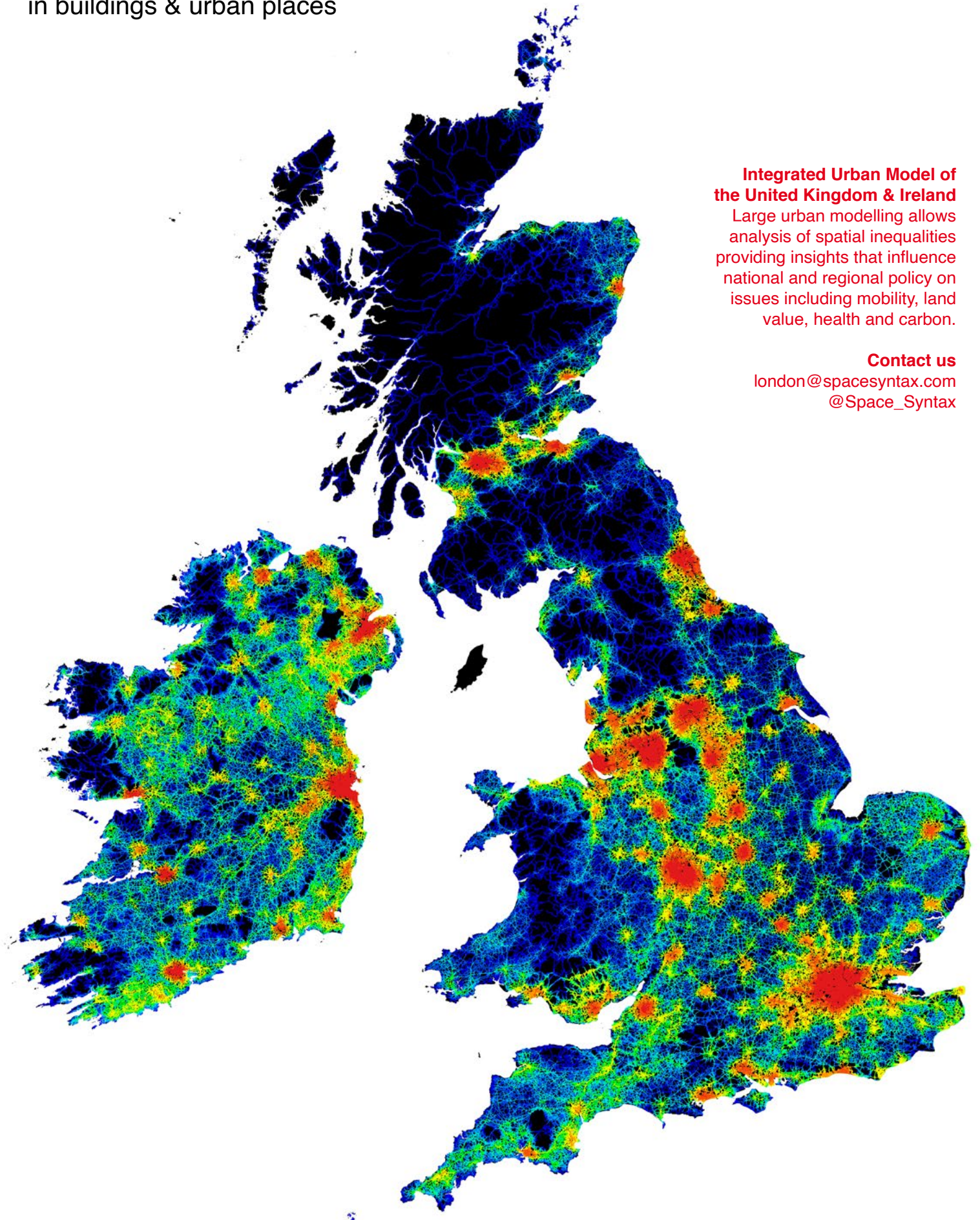
These facts, combined with its low-tech simplicity, is what makes bicycle '**the nearly divine epitome of sustainability**', according to the Danish philosopher Steen Nepper Larsen in *Becoming a Cyclist: Phenomenological Reflections on Cycling*. But sustainability takes many forms. While a **life-cycle analysis** of a standard bicycle might demonstrate just how minimal its environmental impact is compared to other mobility options, supporting the widespread adoption of cycling isn't just a matter of cold quantitative calculations of carbon emissions or commute times; it's also a matter of qualitative attitude. It's about looking at the bicycle's role in improving embodied cognition, not just embodied carbon. It's about considering the social with the environmental, the physical with the cerebral, and the material with the spiritual. City cycling is a matter of both the head and the heart - the two most important things that exist between the road and the helmet.

Mark Bessoudo is an urban sustainability researcher based in London. He is a Member Chartered Building Engineer and Fellow with the Centre for Conscious Design.



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