

## Design and regeneration in Liverpool city centre 1990–2010

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### Introduction

In the post-industrial era many UK cities have witnessed considerable urban decline. In response, city authorities and urban planners have sought to regenerate these previously industrial centres. Geographers have been particularly interested in the social, economic and environmental impacts of these regeneration activities.

This case study explores the impacts of regeneration activity in Liverpool city centre between 1990 and 2010. It focuses particularly on the extent to which regeneration attempts have affected the design of the built environment. The study is based on analysis of documentary evidence, observation work, secondary data analysis and interviews with key players engaged in the regeneration of the city.

### Findings

#### Background

Today Liverpool is the third largest city in England, with a population of approximately 435,500 people. The city of Liverpool achieved this significant scale due to its role as one of the UK's major ports. However, a decline in the shipping industry led to considerable urban decline in Liverpool, which

in turn has resulted in decades of regeneration attempts, some more successful than others. I consider the extent to which these regeneration activities have affected the design of the built environment.

#### The design and regeneration of Liverpool

In general, the types of development that have taken place in Liverpool reflect urban design principles which emerged in the UK during the 1980s. For example, there has been a strong and welcome trend towards mixed use developments in areas such as Rope Walks. In the 19th century this area was characterised by warehouses and merchant's houses, servicing the shipping industry. Since the early 1990s the area, which was in decline, has been redeveloped as a centre for Liverpool's night-time economy, a location for creative industries and a site for refurbished apartments.

In Liverpool there has also been a strong commitment to privatised public spaces. In these spaces there is an element of management and control of public spaces, for example in the Waterfront and other redeveloped areas there has been a notable increase in the use of CCTV in order to reduce crime. Whilst the quality of these areas has improved since



regeneration, it is unclear if some people, perceived as less desirable, are being removed from these spaces as a result of more aggressive management policies.

A proportion of redevelopment in Liverpool has been retail-led. A strong list of significant commercial and retail projects have had a big regenerative impact on small areas of the city centre environment (New Hall and Paradise Streets). Most recently, Grosvenor's Liverpool ONE project has involved the development of 1.5 million sq ft of retail space. This is reportedly the largest retail-led regeneration project in Europe. Despite the positive design impacts of retail-led regeneration, it is unclear how the most deprived neighbourhoods might benefit from such work.

In 2008 Liverpool was named European capital of culture. One of the key objectives of the European capital of culture initiative is to promote the social, economic and environmental regeneration of an area. Initial evidence suggests that achieving this status did lead to a lot of investment in the public realm and greater management of these public spaces.

### **The future of regeneration in Liverpool**

Within major regeneration settings it is often key individuals who pursue the physical development agenda. More recently an organisation called the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) has been instrumental in emphasising the substance and process of the physical development which planners and designers should pursue in the city- including a design champion, a design review process and urban design training. With CABE's driving force and support mechanism in place, there is certainly potential for good design to be at the heart of future developments in Liverpool.

Despite the support and guidance of CABE and the local regeneration agency (Liverpool vision), there is some concern that the City Council may not make use of the considerable volume of guidance available to it when making planning decisions about new developments. Developers have also

faced some difficulties where landownership monopolies have undermined development progress. To some extent this happened in the Rope Walks area.

### **Conclusions**

- Following the decline in the shipping industry Liverpool has adopted a range of different approaches to regenerate its declining urban centre, including; retail-led regeneration and culture-led regeneration.
- Redevelopment has led to areas of mixed land use, including; accommodation, retail, leisure and business.
- Redevelopment has increased the privatisation of public spaces, which results in increased use of urban management tools such as CCTV. It is possible that some people are being removed from these places as a result.
- Despite the positive design impacts of much of the redevelopment, it is unclear how the most deprived neighbourhoods might benefit from such work.
- Whilst there is good guidance and support for well-designed future developments, there is some uncertainty about whether Liverpool City Council will adhere to this when it makes decisions about new developments.

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### **References**

- Biddulph, M (2010) Liverpool 2008: Liverpool's vision and the decade of cranes, in Punter J, Urban Design and the British Urban Renaissance, London: Routledge

### **Further information**

- Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership - <https://www.liverpoollep.org/>