

Future of Glasgow could be built on creative place-making

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Creative place-making which considers health, social and environmental issues as well as an economic argument could be the key in shaping the future of Glasgow.

From its development over the last 40 years which has seen it rebuild itself from an industrial city grounded in shipbuilding to leading a revival through culture in the 1980s and 90s, Glasgow is a city which has embraced change.

Now a report recommends a shift in how Glasgow creates and manages its 'places' can deliver significant economic, health, environmental and social benefits and help tackle the climate emergency.

Professor Brian Evans, Glasgow's City Urbanist led an expert group the Place Commission for Glasgow which included prominent practitioners in architecture, design, economics, engineering, and public health.

With the future development of the city particularly post pandemic, Professor Evans said concentrating on outcomes of health, social, economic and environmental is a platform as to how we intervene in a place.

"This is important because too much of what we have done around about places default to 'we need a plan', but we don't spend enough time, or investment, on the delivery of these plans and achieving these outcomes for the quality of place and people's lives," said Professor Evans.

"What we are saying is rather than look only at international, national and local policy, turn that on its head and look at people's lives and the quality of their places in terms of value and attachment and the outcome are you trying to achieve in terms of community, culture, health, local economy and environment and create a balanced combination of these outcomes.

“Place attachment is important because until recently it has been seen as emotive, an ethereal concept but when you talk about a city like Glasgow it is clearly in people’s consciousness. Attachment to Glasgow is very, very strong and current national research by the AHRC, the Arts & Humanities Research Council part of UKRI United Kingdom Research & Investment, suggests that we have not properly understood or valued attachment to place, but if you do understand it and value it, that contributes to the quality of place. That in turn contributes to the value of place which is much more than its monetary value.”

Prof Evans said it is often the economic argument that is considered first and foremost when decisions are made.

“There is often the view that if the economy isn’t working nothing else works,” he added. “That is true of course, but ‘fixing’ the economy in a singular and ideological way can exacerbate division. We need to follow economic propositions that will maximise all of these other outcomes as well. This is essential if Scotland is to achieve its aims of a well-being economy and Glasgow is to achieve just transition to a net zero carbon city.”

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Professor Evans said at a time when are retrofitting our cities to make them fit for the consequences of climate change, the idea of place is important.

He added: “There are some 450,000 houses across the Glasgow city region that require retrofitting so my argument is that place is the mirror image or the other side of the coin to climate adaptation and zero carbon which if we are not careful will be done to people rather than with them. There is a lot of things people say with respect to energy efficiency or carbon fuels. We need carrots as well as sticks. The stick is to threaten a sanction if you don’t change your gas boiler by a certain date, and sweeten this with a grant to help out. That is the traditional way of going about things, but how do we sensitise and empower communities and people, to help them take their places along the way towards the just transition? How do we get everyone behind the movement as opposed to just rolling out a programme?”

The report gives example of projects in Glasgow which are already working as a 'place' including the Glasgow Women's Library in Bridgeton, one of 16 place stories from Glasgow in the report.

Glasgow Women's Library has grown from a grassroots project into the main hub for information by, for, and about women in Scotland. It is the only accredited museum of its kind in the UK. As well as being a lending library, they hold an extensive archive of historical and contemporary artefacts and materials that celebrate the lives, histories, and achievements of women.

It has become a leading charity and social enterprise that supports thousands of women across Scotland every year by coordinating and hosting a range of public events, services, cultural programmes, and learning opportunities. It is considered to be a leader in equality, diversity, and inclusion and looks to act as a catalyst to eradicate the gender gap that contributes to widespread inequalities in Scotland.

Prof Evans added: "Why is the Glasgow Women's Library a place? Surely that is all about female emancipation etc, which it is but the women who are involved are also very outgoing, inclusive and in my view it has very much become a place project. You have women dealing with female emancipation but in a very open and inclusive way, that brings others into it. All you need is an opener into a conversation. It has also saved a fine building and created a physical place in the east end that is now an active part of the street and people care about it. It is also creating meaningful conversations and that is why I feel it is a place.

"The place stories are quite eclectic but all of them have tell why the project was set up in the first place, how they have brokered some degree of consensus and taken people with them along the way. I think that is really interesting. A good place project has buy-in from the local community and as a consequence of that it has become successful as project of its type, and as a place."

The report also highlighted other work already being done by the council and city partners, notably housing associations, and cites several examples of placemaking in practice, including the New Gorbals regeneration, Scotstoun Community Garden, Clyde Gateway, and the Clyde Climate Forest plans.

The Commission's key recommendations include a 'Place Stock Transfer' and the development of Place Associations in the city. A Place Stock Transfer would draw on the transformative experience of the housing stock transfer of the 2000s, a catalyst for the physical and social regeneration of city neighbourhoods, and further transfer city assets to communities. Place Associations would play a key role in reflecting community interest, particularly in relation to any stock transfer proposals.

Prof Evans said: "Place is increasingly seen as the lens through which we need to plan, design and manage our quality of life within communities, neighbourhoods and across towns and cities. Placemaking is the hopeful complement to climate action in order to affect a just transition for people and their lives. The Place Commission has been given a rare opportunity to build an evidence-based view across the city of Glasgow now published as *People make Places*."

The Commission's report concludes that a focused and more systematic approach to placemaking in Glasgow will help to deliver improved economic, environmental, health and social outcomes and hopefully help cost-of-living pressures, reducing energy consumption and emissions, better educational outcomes, and civic pride.

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Glasgow City Council leader Susan Aitken said the report was extremely substantial and powerful piece of work.

"It goes into a great deal of thought and detail about the role of placemaking within Glasgow and how we progress regeneration for our communities and towards our Net Zero ambitions," Councillor Aitken said. "The report also considers how we can use place to really advance community empowerment.

"Much of the commentary about Glasgow can still be ill-informed or chooses to focus on a particular area at a particular time. It often doesn't give us the full or accurate picture. Professor Evans' report provides a detailed picture of the progress - and indeed the lack of progress - of Glasgow's transformation in recent decades and, crucially, how and where we need to go next."

The City Council will now consider the recommendations of the Place Commission for Glasgow.