



## Research Article

# Regenerating Liverpool Pier Head Waterfront: the Role of Urban Design

Mohamed Fageir<sup>1\*</sup>, Nicole Porter<sup>2</sup>, Katharina Borsi<sup>3</sup>

1 2 3 University of Nottingham, UK

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the processes by which the regeneration of the historical Pier Head waterfront in Liverpool took place during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The research focuses on three key regeneration projects at Pier Head Waterfront, namely the Fourth Grace, the New Museum of Liverpool and Mann Island Development. Each of these projects has undergone a relatively different process and, hence, faced different challenges and produced different outcomes. This study is based on a series of lengthy interviews with key stakeholders closely linked with the regeneration of the waterfront, a review of project related documents including urban design policy and guidance, a substantial review of relevant news articles that were written throughout the period of the recent transformation of the waterfront, and numerous site visits. By understanding the peculiarities of the global forces that drive large scale developments and the local context in which they occurred at Pier Head, several insights regarding the process of regeneration emerge. Findings foreground the role of urban design in urban waterfront regeneration, illustrating that despite the complexity of managing change, urban design has the capacity to mediate between the local and global forces and the needs/desires of investors and local communities. Urban design is also imperative for challenging the negative impact of globalisation on the urban landscape.

**Keywords:** Waterfront Regeneration, Urban Design, Liverpool, Globalisation, Image, Architecture

**\*Mohamed Fageir**, The University of Nottingham, Department of Architecture and Built Environment, Sustainable Research Building, University Park Campus, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK.  
Email: m0fageer@gmail.com

**Nicole Porter**, Department of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Nottingham, Lenton Firs House, University Park Campus, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK.  
Email: Nicole.porter@nottingham.ac.uk

**Katharina Borsi**, Department of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Nottingham, Lenton Firs House, University Park Campus, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK.  
Email: katharina.borsi@nottingham.ac.uk

## 1. Introduction

Since the decline of waterfronts in post-industrial cities the concept of waterfront regeneration has become widespread. Bruttomesso (2001) indicated that many cities have reacted to the presence of derelict areas with innovative programs of regeneration, characterised an opportunistic application of new urban ideas (Bruttomesso, 2001). Dovey (2005) pointed out that as a result, the waterfront has become a primary scene for experimentation in architecture, planning and urban governance. Nowadays, with the huge proliferation of the number of waterfront projects worldwide, the urban waterfront has become associated with ways to reshape the image of a city, recapture economic investment and to attract people back to abandoned sites.

However, despite the wider benefits of waterfront regeneration for the city; including the physical, economic and cultural aspects, waterfront regeneration is also rather contentious. Marshall (2001) noted the significance of contemporary urban waterfronts in cities derives from the high visibility of this form of development and their unique location advantages with high amenity values. The regeneration of derelict waterfronts, therefore, magnifies a number of conflicting urban forces, such as the objectives of the developers and the conservationists, the needs of global investors and the local/traditional residents, and others. Dovey (2005, p. 9) stated that:

“The urban waterfront has become a new frontier of the city with opportunities for significant aesthetic, economic, social and environmental benefits; it is also the new battleground over conflict between public and private interest”.

This research aims to investigate the process of the regeneration of the historic Pier Head waterfront in Liverpool. Liverpool, located in the North West of England, is the core city of Merseyside (Figure 1). The history of the city goes back more than 800 years. Since becoming an independent port in 1647, the city has experienced extremes of growth and decline. The city has benefited from its prime location facing the Irish Sea, with straight access to Dublin, Glasgow and New World colonies across the Atlantic ocean, and on the other side a hinterland of rapidly industrialising regions in Northern England and the Midlands with its newly built canals and railways (O. Sykes, Brown, Cocks, Shaw, & Couch, 2013).

The growth of the city was enhanced dramatically by the industrial revolution which increased the pace of handling and the variety of goods (Belchem, 2006; Wilks-Heeg, 2003). This wealth resulted in a significant increase of Liverpool’s population and fuelled its urban evolution. It also created one of the UK’s richest architectural legacies (Hughes, 1999). During this period, Liverpool built 7 miles of docks and it was the second largest port in the British Empire after London. Unfortunately, the economic prosperity of Liverpool did not continue. A number of external and internal factors caused Liverpool’s declining economic fortunes. Some of these factors included technological changes e.g. the decline of the dock system due to the massive development in cargo system technologies, the shift from commonwealth orientation to European Trade where Liverpool found itself increasingly uncompetitive compared to other ports, and the decline of the North West manufacturing industry (Belchem, 2006; O. Sykes et al., 2013). The decline of the city was also exacerbated by a number of planning policy decisions during the 1960 and 1970s, most significantly the adoption of comprehensive area clearances which raised housing standard temporarily but dissipated existing communities, businesses, and changed inner city’s urban fabric (Couch, 2003). These planning policies also, in fact, had significantly aggravated the decline of the waterfront.

However, since the 1980s, in response to the pressing economic and social issues in Liverpool, the regeneration of Liverpool waterfront became a national concern. Several initiatives were introduced and key development agencies were established (Couch, 2003; Parkinson, 1988). This paper aims to distil part of the story of Liverpool waterfront regeneration through engaging in a discourse that focuses on the regeneration of the historical Pier Head waterfront. The area is of historical significance not just for the city of Liverpool, but also for the international community. In 2004, the site was categorised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site (WHS) for its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)<sup>1</sup>. However, this nobility has in fact complicated the regeneration process, adding new extra dimensions and challenging the transformation process. WHS title meant that international heritage organisations such as UNESCO would have more say on what is appropriate for Liverpool waterfront regeneration. This study explores how the regeneration of the Pier Head Waterfront took place within this context. It also aims to investigate how the city has sought a balance between different intersecting forces involved in the process of regeneration. The study is specifically concerned with the role of contemporary architecture and urban design in urban regeneration.

This paper is organised as follows: The next section briefly describes the methods employed, followed by a review of the global and local context of regeneration in order to allow understanding of the key theoretical issues. The case of the Pier Head Waterfront is then presented, with description, commentary and analysis emphasising the three key regeneration projects - the Fourth Grace project, the New Museum of Liverpool, and Mann Island Development - that were proposed within the study area. The un-built Fourth Grace project represented an attempt to design an iconic building with the aim of shaping the new image of the city and exploiting the cultural tourism economy. The second case study project discussed is the new architectural masterpiece of the new Museum of Liverpool. This project aims to reanimate the context of the waterfront and add a cultural value. The third project is the Mann Island mixed-use development which consists of three modern black buildings intended to enhance the identity of the waterfront and improve its physical and visual connectivity. Significantly, each of these projects undertook relatively different process and, hence, different challenges and outcomes which provide rich materials to be studied. The final section extracts key lessons and conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> A cultural World Heritage Site is an historic monument, group of buildings or site which is of outstanding universal value to the international community. Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City was inscribed by UNESCO in July 2004 as “The supreme example of a commercial port at the time of Britain’s greatest global influence” (UNESCO, 2004)



Figure 1. The Location of the city of Liverpool

Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2002), *Your Region Your Choice*, The Stationary Office, London.

## 2. Methods

This study is part of a larger body of research that examines the regeneration of Liverpool waterfront. The study follows a single explanatory case study approach that combines multiple sources of evidence in order to allow the development of converging lines of inquiry, and a process of triangulation to take place (Berg & Lune, 2004). This study begins by introducing some of the key theoretical issues (e.g. globalisation, intercity competition, and place image and branding) that influence and shape the practice of waterfront regeneration. This, however, allows binding the case study and guiding the process of data collection. It was also crucial for interpreting the findings of the case study.

The research relies on several sources of evidence 1) documents, 2) direct observation, 3) news article collection and 4) interviews. Documents such as strategies and policies, reports, administrative documents, previous researches on the same case study and maps were systematically collected from various sources. Documents were valuable in providing the study with stable and factual information that can be reviewed repeatedly. Direct observation was conducted in an informal manner through a number of field visits. Several of these field visits coincided with interviews. The primary purpose of the direct observation was to contemplate about the developments carried out and to collect photographs. Another source of evidence was a collection of 388 news articles that traced the regeneration of Liverpool waterfront for the period between 1999 and 2014. The news article collection was significant in understanding the general process of regeneration of the waterfront and identifying patterns, themes, and issues. Although the news article collection has some minor drawbacks such as its subjectivity, yet, it provided the research with significant descriptive and analytical insights. The collection was also critical in understanding the general issues of concern to the public.

Thirteen interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in the process of the regeneration of the waterfront. The list of the stakeholders included representatives from developers, heritage agencies, civic societies, research institutions, cultural institutions, government departments, municipal planners, critics and professional planners, architects and urban designers. The interviews were valuable for reflecting upon the key issues of regeneration and identifying some of the hidden aspects. They were also significant in understanding the role played by the different key stakeholders.

By cross referencing and combining these sources of information, the research engages in a lively discourse and debate about the different factors and issues that influenced the regeneration of the Pier Head waterfront. Figure 2 illustrates the structure of the research.

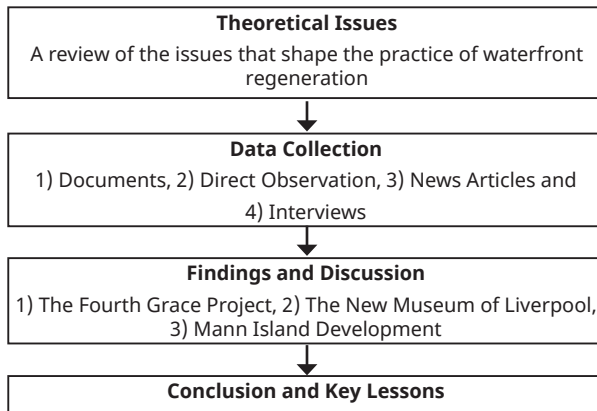


Figure 2. The Research Structure

### 3. The Global and Local Context for Liverpool Waterfront Regeneration

#### 3.1. Globalisation, intercity competition and waterfront regeneration

Waterfront regeneration has its birth place in North America in the early 1960s, specifically in Baltimore and San Francisco. Since then, waterfront regeneration started to evolve and emerge as a global phenomenon in a form of successive distinctive generations of developments (see Shaw (2001)). Bruttomesso (2001) pointed out that the success of certain 'models' of waterfront regeneration has led to a 'globalisation' of waterfront themes. These waterfront themes, which are based on successful cases, have set precedents and have been replicated globally, with a concomitant international uniformity of organisational methods, spatial typologies and architectural styles (Smith & Ferrari, 2012). However, waterfront regeneration nowadays needs to respond to a number of global needs. These needs are primarily driven by intercity competition and market interest (Begg, 1999). Smith and Ferrari (2012) summarised these global needs as being *good connectivity, image and branding*.

Urry (1995) indicated that *good connectivity* is critical for the development of cities. He pointed out that with the development in high speed communication routes, large-scale centres for consumption have become more competitive, and therefore, what is essential is good accessibility rather physical proximity. Similarly, Kantor (1987) said that the issue of physical proximity has become less important, he specified that in the past, competition between cities and urban areas were based on their territorial locations, however, today the significance of cities is reliant on their connectivity and urban qualities.

In globalised economies, where resources and people can move with some ease, the issue of the image of the city has become of great significance to attract people and investment (Madanipour, 2006). Begg (1999) maintains cities at global level have to increase their competitive capacities in order to secure their future growth. However, although globalisation is held responsible for increasing the monotony of cities through dislodging places' identity (Carmona, Heath, Oc, & Tiesdell, 2011), it has, simultaneously, increased the quest for image creation and brand differentiation. In this context, according to Beriatos and Gospodini (2004), the quest for image creation can take two forms: nostalgic 'built heritage' or alternatively technological 'innovative design of space'. The first is based on reconfiguring historical areas for new uses, primarily cultural and commercial, through a process of 'commodification'. The second is based on urban developments that are technologically innovative and creating intelligent iconic masterpieces of architecture, which are generally associated with 'star' architects (Urry, 1995). It should be noted that the latter approach has been heavily criticized by Sklair (2010) as it strives to turn more or less all public space into consumerist space, however, Gospodini (2004) argued that iconic architecture permits divergent interpretation by individuals thereby fitting the 'diversity' and 'individuality' of new modernity.

The increasing attention paid to the image of the city has been accompanied by an increase in place branding practices and theories. Kavaratzis (2005) pointed out that the concept of place branding has developed in recent years as a powerful instrument in creating and shaping the place image. Buncle (2006) indicated that the importance of branding stems from the necessary shift in the way places have represented themselves with a more market orientated approach caused by the growing dominance of the service economy and the decline of traditional industries. Zukin (1991) maintained that the process of branding in cities occurs via the creation of theme areas such as cultural districts, business parks, and universities and research parks, with the aim of generating urban concentration processes. As a consequence of these three market dynamics, Grasland and Jensen-Butler (1997) argued that cities today in the global urban system are not positioned in strict hierarchy but, somehow, in a form of interwoven and overlapping network according to their particular participation in certain sectors or activities (for instance, services, industry, tourism, etc...) along with the diameter of the influence (regional, national or global). From this perspective, upgrading a city's competitive edge is a key factor in increasing the city status in the hierarchy of the national and global urban system (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004; Cox, 1993).

Tallon (2013) stressed that understanding the dynamics of place competition is essential in order to address the issues of urban regeneration. Smith and Ferrari (2012) argued that these dynamics demonstrate the necessity for generating highly competitive environments that aim to express innovation and technological progress in order to attract global capital. Waterfronts, in this context, have become perceived as spaces of great opportunity for the city as a whole. They have been considered as places of urban transformation with potential to attract investment and reverse patterns of decline (Dovey, 2005). Marshall (2001) argued that the high visibility of waterfront areas within cities extends the benefits of regeneration beyond the recovered area. Waterfront regeneration has the capacity to reshape the image of the city by expressing new city identities and aspirations.

### 3.2. The Context for Regeneration in Liverpool

The first phase of modern regeneration of Liverpool waterfront began in the early 1980s, however, the context that has derived the recent transformation of the city started to take shape in 1997 when a new Labour national government was elected. The new government was keen to reinforce the role of the cities and adjust peoples' perception of urban life (Biddulph, 2011). It also recognized that the performance of cities will have a considerable bearing on the overall economic success, and therefore, the efficiency and the well-being of cities has considered as matters that of national concern (Begg, 1999). In 1998, the government established the Urban Task Force (UTF) led by Lord Richard Rogers to establish a vision for urban life that will bring people back into cities. The resulting 313 page report *Towards Urban Renaissance* (1999) established a vision for urban regeneration based on the principles of design excellence, social well-being, and environmental responsibility, through a viable economic and legislative framework. Punter (2009) argued that the report helped to reshape the planning system, housing and regeneration in the subsequent years in Britain, through focussing in particular on the role of urban design, which has been considered as a critical element in enhancing the quality and longevity of development, whilst becoming a key component of the progression towards zero-carbon development and more sustainable cities. The report was also seen by a number of critics as a clear commitment to entrepreneurial governance and gentrifications (Lees, 2008; Punter, 2007).

Liverpool, soon after the publication of UTF's report, established *Liverpool Vision* in 1999 as the UK's first Urban Regeneration Company 'URC' with the aim of guiding the regeneration of the city centre and the waterfront (Parkinson, 2008). *Liverpool Vision* aimed to bring key public and private sector agencies to strengthen the city economy and enable it to compete more effectively in international markets than ever before. The establishment of *Liverpool Vision* was a significant step in the process of the regeneration of the city. *Liverpool Vision* identified that the city centre and the waterfront were potentially major drivers for economic and social change in the city as a whole (*Liverpool Vision*, 1999). The reasons behind this were; the availability of land around the city centre and the commercial core, the high quality of the historic environment and the need to regenerate it, the area is the most visited and most seen by the residents as well as the visitors, the existence of economic drivers such as the two Universities, retailing and vibrant culture (Biddulph, 2011). In 1999, *Liverpool Vision* commissioned an international consortium to produce a plan for Liverpool, and after extensive public consultation the plan titled 'Strategic Regeneration Framework' (SRF) was published in 2000.

The SRF set very ambitious long term strategic goals designed to raise the aspiration of the

city, the document was produced to hone the vision and establish the way in which the city centre was to develop physically, whilst showing flexibility in, identifying different potential development scenarios, with the aim of providing guidance for the city council, Liverpool Vision, North West Development Agency (NWDA) and the private sector on priorities for the dynamic evolution of the waterfront and the City Centre (SOM, 2000). The SRF identified seven Action Areas in order to focus on deliverability of the strategy and achieve the overall vision of the regeneration (Figure 3). In general, the SRF was fundamental to the subsequent development of Liverpool's City Centre and the waterfront. In essence, it was about modernisation and trying to transform the city into a place for living, working and entertaining. A number of specific master plans and design guidances were also produced following the publication of this strategy.



Figure 3. The SRF Action Area plan  
Source: (SOM, 2000)

#### 4. The Regeneration of the Pier Head Waterfront

The Pier Head waterfront is the key waterfront in Liverpool and the most recognisable landmark of the city. It was the point of departures and arrivals from the river Mersey for decades. The Pier Head Waterfront is a part of Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City WHS, it is built entirely on reclaimed land and has undergone several changes during its lifetime (LCC, 2004). The Pier Head comprises the three Edwardian landmark buildings of Liverpool known as the Three Graces, namely the Port of Liverpool Building (1907), a Grade II\* Listed building, the Royal Liver Building (1911), a Grade I listed building, and the Cunard Building (1916), a Grade II\* listed building. There is also a lesser known building east to the Port of Liverpool building called George's Dock Tunnel Ventilation Building and Offices (1934) which is a Grade II listed building (Figure 4). The waterfront hosts many listed monuments, including several commemorating the lives of those lost at the sea (LCC, 2004).

This section aims to study the regeneration of Pier Head Waterfront since the 1997. Figure 5 compares two maps of Pier Head Waterfront on 2000 and 2012 which shows a huge transformation occurring during this period. The projects are the unbuilt Fourth Grace scheme, the Museum of Liverpool development and Mann Island. Each of these projects will be studied in the subsequent sections allowing their individual impact to be analysed and assessed.





Figure 4. The Three Graces on the Pier Head Waterfront from left to right, The Liver Building, Cunard Building and the Port of Liverpool  
Source: the author

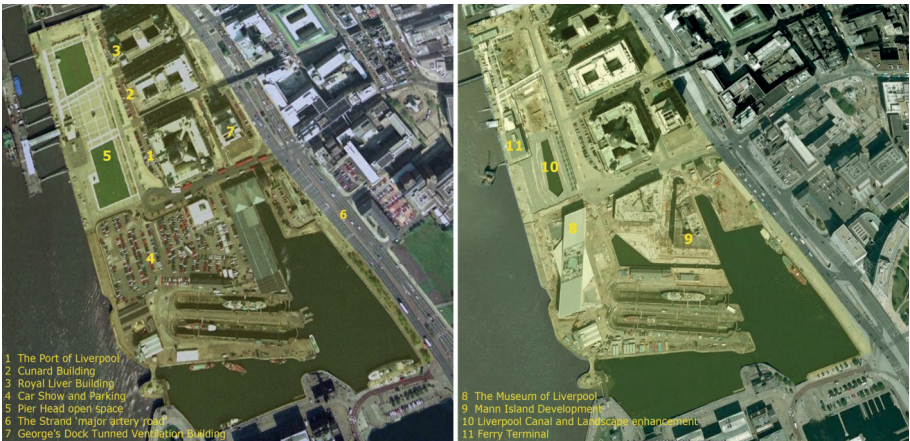


Figure 5. Map of the Pier Head Waterfront in 2000 (left) and 2012 (right) which shows the transformation in the southern part, the area number 4 was previously the proposed site for the Fourth Grace project and now it is the location of the Museum of Liverpool and the Mann Island Mixed-use development

Source: Adapted from Google Earth

#### 4.1. The Fourth Grace Project

The SRF recognized the opportunity for adding an architecturally significant building to enhance the existing waterfront composition. Driving this initiative was the rationale that the city needed a development capable of grabbing international attention and shaping the new image of the city in order to exploit the cultural tourism economy (SOM, 2000). In 2002, Liverpool Vision announced an international competition to design *the Fourth Grace* on Pier Head Waterfront between the existing Three Graces and the Albert Dock (Figure 6). The city aspired to create what is known as 'the Bilbao effect' which would help to boost the image and the tourism economy of the

city besides strengthening the city's bid for the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2008<sup>2</sup>. The competition brief for the Fourth Grace called for a symbol of Liverpool's future, and a landmark that would complement the three existing civic buildings whilst providing a dynamic venue for public activities (Rogers, 2003).



Figure 6. The site of the Fourth Grace (2000) between the Albert Dock and the Three Graces offered the city a great opportunity to build an iconic building on its waterfront

Source: acquired from <http://www.edwardcullinanarchitects.com/projects/4g.html> adapted by the author [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013]

The Fourth Grace project was an extremely significant project for the city for two reasons, firstly, the nature of the project as an iconic landmark building, and secondly, the location of the project in the historic Pier Head waterfront. The Fourth Grace project, since its inception has received a massive response from the media as a big futuristic step that the city of Liverpool would embrace.

The announcement of the project drew 17 expressions of interest from different developer-led consortiums. This was considered by some critics as a low demand to develop in Liverpool despite the inspiration for iconic building (Biddulph, 2011). Nonetheless, four famous architects had been shortlisted; Richard Rogers, Norman Foster, Edward Cullinan, and Will Alsop. The four proposals were initially widely criticised for their appearance and for their contrast with the city's historic skyline (Figure 7). However, Foster's design came first in a poll by visitors at an exhibition in the Walker Art Gallery displaying the various plans of the four proposals (Hetherington, 2002). The language of aspiration for the future can be grasped in Glancey (2002) when he stated in the Guardian that the city hopes that the Fourth Grace, to be designed by one of the four leading architects, will have the same impact as the Guggenheim in Bilbao.

Despite Foster's design coming first according to public perception, Liverpool Vision chose the least publicly favoured design – Alsop's - defending its decision by saying that Alsop's design is the most original (Hetherington, 2002). The competition became a rich topic for media debate, with newspapers fuelling the discussion about the impact of the Alsop's design on the city's waterfront. Alsop's design was formed from three major structures; the Hill, which is an exhibition space and auditorium, The Cloud, which was the main structure and was heavily criticised for its undefined use, the Living, an apartment building consisting of 19 storeys next to the Cloud. One of the positive elements of the scheme was the comprehensive landscape and urban design vision to integrate the whole area together (Figure 8).

Will Alsop's winning design caused significant controversy amongst the local population which was reflected in the newspapers labelling it as a "deflated balloon, wart, monstrosity ... etc", for example. The Guardian (2002) pointed out that "Rarely, it seems, has an issue stirred up such emotion and hostility among readers of the Liverpool Echo, who on the last count rejected what

<sup>2</sup> ECoC is one of the most prestigious and high-profile cultural events in Europe which aims to show the diversity of the European culture.



has been called a space-age design by a 51-49 per cent margin". Sudjic (2002) indicated that "The lurid computer generated images of the project show an appropriately liver coloured tottering spiral, propped up on spindly legs, ambushing the imperial Edwardian relics of Liverpool's past like something out of *The War of the Worlds*", he also noticed that in any more culturally confident period, the Alsop's winning design which he described as 'the custard pie thrown in the city's face', would be considered as satire, or outrage. Sudjic (2002) reasoned that the febrile climate of post-Bilbao civic boosterism led the project to be warmly welcomed by the same people - the politicians, planners, councillors - who would be most expected to be outraged.

However, on the other side Glancey (2002) reported that Alsop fought back, defending his design saying "from its earliest days Liverpool has attracted people with an appetite for the new and the different - people with the courage to travel and explore: risk-takers, pioneers and investors. Only a genuinely daring and distinctive design will succeed in revivifying the spirit of Liverpool and capturing the imagination and attention of an international audience". BBC (2002) reported that Alsop himself said that he did not expect everyone to immediately like the building, he also argued that the Liver Building was itself controversial at the time. He added that "all the three buildings have served Liverpool very well, but they have been serving for a very long time, now is the time for a new building that captures the spirit of those original three and in that sense it sits very well besides them" (BBC, 2002).



Figure 7. The Fourth Grace proposals for Richard Rogers and Norman Foster respectively

Sources: acquired from [http://www.skyscrapernews.com/4th\\_grace\\_foster1.jpg](http://www.skyscrapernews.com/4th_grace_foster1.jpg)

<http://www.richardrogers.co.uk/render>.

aspx?siteID=1&navIDs=1,4,25,474&showImages=detail&sortBy=&sortDir=&imageI=768

[accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013]

The Cloud by Alsop was expected to be one of the jewels in the crown of ECoC 2008. Nevertheless, it was beset with difficulties, and was cancelled due to spiralling costs in 2004. The failure of the project resulted in very pessimistic language in newspapers doubting the city's ability to deliver large ambitious projects and events. Ward (2004) reported in the Guardian that "Liverpool's preparations for its year as European Capital of Culture in 2008 suffered a setback yesterday when plans for a waterfront building designed by one of Britain's most adventurous architects were scrapped", he continued to conclude that "The loss of the Cloud will embarrass Liverpool and call into question the city's ability to deliver a major scheme on its waterfront".

Carter (2004) highlighted in the Guardian the huge stir created by axing the Fourth Grace "it has dominated the front pages of the Liverpool Daily Post and its sister evening Paper, The Echo, all week. The Fourth Grace will no longer be joining the Port of Liverpool, the Liver and the Cunard buildings on the city's waterfront, and the decision has caused a huge furore". Similarly, Finch (2008, p.17) argued that it is very disappointing that too many architectural competitions, which are sponsored by public bodies for public projects, end in disastrous failure. The reason behind that is because architectural competitions are used often as substitutes for real decision-making, which in turn derives from the absence of a comprehensive long-term vision about (in this case) Liverpool's urban future (Finch, 2008). In fact, Sudjic (2002) previously argued before the failure of the project that the city actually did not need the project, it was merely for the purpose of image

creation and the city did not know exactly what to do in this priceless location. He indicated the city needs more to repair its fractured nature, the city does not have one clear city centre, instead it has four disjointed districts, and the city's affection with icons and museums will exacerbate this problem, he added, *"the fabric that rebuilds the city, is not isolated landmarks"*. Despite the massive criticism of the city for the failure of the Fourth Grace, it meant that Liverpool passed the worst periods and is looking towards the future (Sudjic, 2004).

The question for Liverpool is, can iconic buildings such as the Fourth Grace transform the image of the city? Or does Liverpool really need iconic buildings to transform its image? Different points of views from the research interviewees were expressed in this regard. In interview with planner and academic (personal communication, 2012), he argued that iconic architecture can be used to market cities like Bilbao 'the Guggenheim Museum' or Birmingham 'the Bull-Ring shopping centre', a city with poor or no image, but Liverpool already has its image and there is no need for such costly projects. A former chair of Liverpool Architectural Society also affirms this view saying: *"does the city need iconic buildings, it is questionable ... iconic building is quite good in crystallising changes in the city into individual buildings so they always do serve purposes but I am slightly suspicious here, Liverpool has got a number of iconic buildings anyway and there is no shortage of iconic buildings but there is shortage of decent quality modern architecture true, at some point in the future they could have one yes I don't see why it couldn't, but I don't think they have that effect"* (personal communication, 2013). Correspondingly, an activist and urban designer argued that *"Liverpool can manage without new 'iconic' buildings – it already has more iconic landmarks than most cities. However, new architecture of recognised quality would be welcome if it symbolised the city's renaissance – at the moment, Liverpool's recovery is still fairly tentative, and we may have to wait a while for genuine new icons to emerge"* (personal communication, 2013). These points of view demonstrate that although iconic buildings can have some positive impacts on the city; there is a doubt about their suitability in Liverpool.

The failure of the Fourth Grace sparked discussion about the identity of the area, especially the impact of new design on the authenticity of the site. The World Heritage Committee (2004) in response to concerns raised about the impact of the Fourth Grace on the WHS had requested that the national authorities pay particular attention to monitoring the transformation on the WHS with the aim of not adversely impact the heritage, on the other hand, it also had demanded that the City Council should assure proper height for any new constructions, respect the qualities of the area, and they should complement the area's historic character. This can be seen as a serious challenge to any new development let alone strikingly iconic buildings such as the Fourth Grace.

In general, what can be seen from the findings of the interviews and the language and expressions of news articles that the iconic Fourth Grace project was very controversial on the popular side as well as the professional side. Jencks (2012) in his article 'The Coming of the Cosmic Icons', indicated that iconic buildings often take the debate beyond the professional side to the popular side, this was clearly seen in the amount of articles written about the project and the open poll for the selection of the project and the debate that had emerged. A former chair of Liverpool Architectural Society (personal communication, 2013) pointed out that despite the failure of the project, it was useful for raising debate, it got people interested in the site and the public exhibition for the four schemes was very successful in engaging with a lot of people and a lot of opinions and ideas.



Figure 8. The Cloud, the winning project of the Fourth Grace competition in Liverpool Waterfront

Source: acquired from [http://stevocreative.com/category/portfolio/architectural\\_illustration/](http://stevocreative.com/category/portfolio/architectural_illustration/)  
[Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> June 2013]

## 4.2. The New Museum of Liverpool

The idea of developing the site after the collapse of the Fourth Grace still remained. A new masterplan was produced by Liverpool Vision, Liverpool City Council LCC, and the site owner, the North West Development Agency NWDA. The site was divided into two more moderate schemes; the Mann Island Development on the east side and the Museum of Liverpool to the west. The aim was to develop a vibrant mixed-use development that would reanimate Liverpool waterfront and link the different parcels of the city centre and the waterfront together. The brief for the western side of the site called for a new museum of Liverpool life, intended to explore the social history of the city. The historic nature of the site was an important feature; the brief emphasized that the new museum building should act as a symbol and contributor to the regeneration of the city, and enhance the role of tourism in Liverpool.

The site required a high level of sensitivity, hence, the philosophy of the architect, 3XN, was to treat the site as a part of the pedestrian flow on the waterfront between the Albert Dock and the Three Graces, turning the building and the public space around it into a gathering space with a building structure that would open the views rather than obstruct them (Dezeen Magazine, 2011). Additionally, the city demanded a building that would be bold, functional and act as a social place, which meant that the place should be flexible, dynamic and facilitate changing exhibitions in the galleries (Bayley, 2010).

The architect described the design as being a reminiscent of the trading ships which were previously dominating Liverpool waterfront (Figure 9), while the façade's relief pattern creates a new interpretation of the historical architectural details of the Three Graces. The huge gabled windows open up the views from inside the museum to the harbour and the city, symbolically drawing history into the museum, and simultaneously allowing the building to be seen from outside (3XN, 2011). Another important element was the urban design and the public spaces created by the building, the building in fact offers outdoor external steps with views to the water, the Three Graces, and the Albert Dock which adds to the dynamic urban environment and serve as a meeting place for both locals and visitors (3XN, 2011). Frearson (2011) described the design of the museum as a dynamic low-rise structure which enters into a respectful dialogue with the harbour promenade's taller historical buildings, which has resulted in a modern and lively public space. The design of the museum was very challenging in terms of size. The museum was the largest national museum to be built in the UK over the last 100 years. The location of a museum of this size on a UNESCO World Heritage Site next to the Three Graces in a high visible historic area meant the building was likely to be contentious.

Interestingly enough, content analysis of news articles revealed a slightly different approach towards the Museum of Liverpool compared to its unbuilt predecessor. Unlike the Fourth Grace, where the vast majority of media discourse concentrated on the architectural and the imagery side of the project rather than its content, articles for the Museum of Liverpool focussed more on the cultural dimension of the project, with the architecture of the Museum and its location in the UNESCO WHS appearing to be of relatively less importance.



Figure 9. The Museum of Liverpool aims to resonate the trading ships of the harbour also the external cladding of the building seeks to find a new interpretation for the historical architectural details of the Three Graces

Source: The author

In terms of the architecture of the building, the project had less response in the media compared to the earlier Fourth Grace project, apparently, because the modesty of this building in contrast with the unusual design of the Fourth Grace project. However, the design of the new Museum of Liverpool has been unpopular with critics since its opening. The building was nominated by the Building Design Magazine to receive the Carbuncle Cup for the ugliest building completed in the UK during that year (Frearson, 2011). Several articles were also very critical about the museum design and its integration with the surrounding historic environment, besides its contents and its internal galleries. In general, it can be argued that this might be exacerbated by the location of the museum in World Heritage Site alongside the Three Graces, and whatever the design, there is no way to avoid criticisms. Moore (2011) stated in The Observer that *"the main issue is not the presentation of the museum's contents nor, exactly, the design of the building that houses them, but, rather, the composition of the museum building, combined with other new structures that are rising around the historic monuments that were already there"*.

The main issue that was of concern for the interviewees of the study was the contextualisation and integration of the new development with the old historical fabric, while the issue of architectural style and design was considered as a personal matter. The majority of interviewees argued that in general the building was successfully integrated into the historic context of the waterfront. An academic and civic activist pointed out that *"the Museum of Liverpool and Mann Island Development (see 4.3) both angular in slightly different way, one white and one black and against the classical lines of the Port of Liverpool, I think they complement each other and they work very good"* (personal communication, 2013). In general, Booth and Gates (2002) emphasised that despite the huge development in the architectural forms and techniques, it fails to find a common public language.

In general, the Museum of Liverpool demonstrated the shift of the city's rationale from achieving global significance through a strong image of architectural masterpiece to a more explicit cultural approach where the architecture become merely the container for that content 'the culture'. The first approach proved to be controversial, risky, and ambitious, while the latter is more welcomed, yet less aspiring.

### 4.3. The Mann Island Development

The brief for Mann Island demanded a highly imaginative and sensitive design approach in view of its location within a World Heritage Site and its position between the historic commercial port buildings and the Albert Dock. The brief of the project also pointed to the need for the proposal to respect and conserve a series of key vistas of the Three Graces that were considered essential to the visual ambience and the character of the WHS (Bayley, 2010). Additionally, the urban design challenge for the project was the poor visual connection between the site and the city. The Strand, a busy multi-lane highway (see Figure 6), forming a physical and psychological barrier between the site and the city centre, presented a major challenge to overcome.

In 2005, Broad Malyan was commissioned by the site developers (Neptune Developments, and Countryside Properties) to produce a new proposal for the site. The architect worked very closely with the city council and his design proposal gained a strong support from both the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE)<sup>3</sup> and English Heritage<sup>4</sup>. The design consists of three black buildings, three public spaces and a new canal basin. The project is mixed-use, comprising residential, commercial and office facilities. The developers of the project noted that the project is designed to complement and enhance existing and planned attractions on the Liverpool historic waterfront and will form a pivotal point between the Three Graces and the Albert Dock with the geometry of the new buildings reflecting this transition (Island, 2007).

The Mann Island Scheme design is very unique and strikingly different from the surrounding historic environment; it does not aim to continue the composition of the Three Graces, but as Bayley (2010) indicated its composition reflects the 'hinge point' in the urban grain. The shape of the two residential blocks relates to the waterfront docks and the linear commercial building relates to the Strand and the city grid beyond (Figure 10).

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<sup>3</sup> The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) was an executive non-departmental public body of the UK government, established in 1999. It was funded by both the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Communities and Local Government. It was merged into the Design Council on 1 April 2011. Its role is to advise on architecture, urban design and public space in the UK.

<sup>4</sup> English Heritage is the government watchdog for heritage in the UK.





Figure 10. The Mann Island Development, a very strikingly different design from its surroundings  
Source: The author

The project defined three public spaces, forming a sequence of transition between the city centre and the historic waterfront. The first public space collects the pedestrian from an enhanced pedestrian crossing from the east point and opening the views towards the Albert Dock, the Three Graces, and the Mann Island Development. The second transitional public space is a covered, glazed public space between the two residential blocks which connects the outer public space on the east next to the Strand with the inner sheltered one facing the canal basin. This public space also works as a foyer to the next one besides providing space for temporary public exhibitions. The third public space is around the canal basin, well defined by the two residential blocks, and providing spaces for food and external leisure activities.

The cluster of the three black buildings is placed over transparent double height commercial and leisure podiums, with projected overhangs forming pedestrian roots around the cluster. These transparent podiums provide a very sharp contrast to the solid heavily decorated bases of the adjacent Three Graces buildings. The inclined roofs of the two residential blocks form a contrast to the building's side elevations, the sliced roofs which can be considered as a fifth elevation create a sense of scale and providing residents with views to the surrounding WHS. CABE (2006) raised concerns about the commercial building located along the main street (the Strand) in respect to its form, materials and its effect on the immediate context. On the other side, and with regards to the other two residential buildings, CABE (2006) indicated that the arrangement and form is very convincing, relating to a series of views towards the Three Graces and deflecting to accommodate these vistas. The approach of responding to the historic environment by dramatic contrast with competing with them was also highly appreciated.

The Mann Island Development was widely applauded despite there being some controversy about where the buildings are located. In this regards, a planner and academic (personal communication, 2013) stated that *"the Mann Island development provides a good solution, some people criticise it but I think they are quite sophisticated, quite clever solution to that particular location"*. A representative from the neighbouring 'TATE Liverpool' (Albert Dock) stated that although she did not like the design of the scheme, she pointed out that the Mann Island fits very well within the context, adding significantly to the identity and the image of the area while not constraining or impacting the waterfront (personal communication, 2013). Several interviewees have stressed the importance of the contextualisation of the new development within the historic environment of the waterfront; a senior staff in Liverpool Vision stated that *"the Mann Island development is very contextualised, they are a wonderful complement to the historic Three Graces because they pick up the reflections from them, they are very simple, straight lines and black against white ornamental, I think it was a genius design that the architect came with"* (personal communication, 2013). Similarly, a planner and academic explained that the Mann Island development integrates within the waterfront historic environment *"... the black buildings I think they do work for a variety of reasons, firstly, if you get closer to them they do visibly reflect the very florid architecture of the Edwardian Buildings so in a strange kind of way they do integrate, secondly, because the sheer simplicity compared with the highly ornament Edwardian architecture they are an appropriate foil, thirdly, the black mass of those buildings echoes the black mass which is created by the black water areas so I think they do work"* (personal communication, 2013).

The role of contemporary architecture as a reflection of and prompt for economic activity



in our times was stressed by an urban designer and activist, he stated that “... I expect every new development to be ‘international’ in character. They have the potential to act as a modern frame around the historic city, and restore the city’s economy” (personal communication, 2013). Affirming this was an academic and civic activist, who argued that “... the Three Graces were planned separately and not as a group, they were each individual bold statements of the economic power of the city of their age, and what was needed is something which was contemporary of the today value”, he also continued arguing “... to build something like the dockland today will be astronomical and ridiculously expensive, you could never do it, and you could never match it by adopting classical style because it will be nonsense, and it will be a sort of pastiche imitation” (personal communication, 2013).

In spite of the argument that the Mann Island has obstructed the classical views towards the Three Graces, A former chair of Liverpool Architectural Society (personal communication, 2013) asserts that the three black buildings have framed the view to the Three Graces quite nicely. Similarly, an academic and civic activist specified that “... the architect did a tremendous job in the way using the sloping roofs to retain some of the views, I think he exceeded the brief in that in chopping off some of the vertical constraint to reveal views which would not be there if it was only driven by commercial pressure” (personal communication, 2013).

In 2006, the Mann Island development along with other developments in the WHS fuelled concerns within UNESCO about the impact of these developments on the integrity of the WHS. The UNESCO mission to Liverpool in 2006 noted with great concern that the new museum of Liverpool next to the Three Graces did not comply with the recommendation of the WHS Management Plan as it was designed to be dominant rather than recessive; and also noted that the three additional buildings are being planned on the waterfront, one of which could be intrusive in architectural terms (the commercial block). Consequently, the mission requested from Liverpool City Council to put in place strategic plans for future development that set out clear strategies for the overall townscape, the skyline and the waterfront (WHCommittee, 2006). In response, Liverpool City Council has committed itself to introduce a stricter planning control based on comprehensive analysis of the townscape characteristics, urban pattern, density, and sense of place. This has resulted in the WHS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which, in fact, proved to be central for the management of new developments in the waterfront.

This section has given an account of the impact of Mann Island on Pier Head Waterfront and the emerging debate it has generated. The design of the buildings succeeded in complementing the Three Graces and providing a glimpse to them through the formation of the buildings form. The role of contemporary architecture in regeneration can be imperative for two reasons: beyond its economic contribution it is seen to add significantly to the identity of place. However, what is important is the contextual integration of contemporary architecture within its ambience. Mann Island and the Museum of Liverpool although they are strikingly different from their context, yet, they seem to be very well contextualised. This section and the previous also demonstrated the shift of the city from iconic architecture to contextualised contemporary architecture. The former epitomises where the city’s centre of attention is placed on the significance of the architecture itself while the later illustrates where issues of urban design and integration are more critical (Figure 11). Table 1 provides a summary of the key aspects for the three projects that were discussed above.



Figure 11. The mixture of contemporary architecture and historic buildings in the Pier Head waterfront

Source: photo by Tim Dutton @ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/specky4eyes/14888167649/in/photostream/> [accessed 15th august 2014]

Table 1. A summary of the key projects in the regeneration of the Pier Head Waterfront

<b>The Project Indicator</b>	<b>The Fourth Grace</b>	<b>The New Museum of Liverpool</b>	<b>Mann Island Development</b>
<b>Stakeholders</b>	Liverpool City Council (LCC), Liverpool Vision.	LCC, North West Development Agency NWDA, and the National Museums of Liverpool, Liverpool Vision.	LCC, NWDA, Neptune Developments, Countryside Properties, and Liverpool Vision.
<b>The inclusiveness of the process of Regeneration</b>	Although LCC tried to engage people through a public exhibition and consultation process which were generally very useful, however, the idea of the project was not derived from an inclusive process and there was not a real need for an iconic building in Liverpool.	This project did follow a more inclusive approach. The project was derived from a shared vision embraced by all stakeholders. This is evidenced in the more considered brief of the project in terms of its contextual integration, reference to its contribution to the city's history and its programme. The project also gained the support of public agencies such as CABE, English Heritage and Merseyside Civic Society MCS.	This project also followed an inclusive process. It was derived from a shared vision that was agreed upon by all stakeholders. Even though the project has raised some concerns from the UNESCO about its impact on the integrity of the WHS, the project on the other side has gained the support of a number of public agencies such as CABE, English Heritage and Merseyside Civic Society MCS.
<b>The outcome</b>	The project failed due to the spiralling cost and the controversy around the appropriateness of such iconic building for Liverpool.	The project is perceived as a substantial architectural and cultural contribution to Liverpool Pier Head Waterfront.	Three uncompromising modern buildings. The layout of the buildings enhances the connections to the waterfront and adds new public spaces. The buildings are perceived as significant additions to the character and the identity of the waterfront.
<b>The Key Lessons</b>	Cities need to understand their qualities and opportunities and develop accordingly. Furthermore, in order not to fall into minor fashionable trends such as iconic architecture, the regeneration process should be based on a comprehensive vision and an inclusive approach.	Despite the unusual form of the project, the building itself was not the key aspect and what was significant is its cultural value for the city. This, however, shows the role that can be played by culture in regenerating waterfronts.	The role of contemporary architecture in urban regeneration cannot be underestimated. However, contemporary architecture needs to be contextually integrated within its ambience. To achieve that, a shared urban design criteria need to be established with the aim of analysing and informing the contextual integration of those buildings.

## 5. Conclusions

The regeneration of historic waterfront sites is an extremely complex process. This complexity arises from the need to satisfy a number of global conditions that are based on competition and market preferences while also responding to local needs and heritage. As indicated by Marshall (2001), waterfronts represent and echo the complexity of the numerous processes that derive, physical, social, environmental and economic change. Indeed, the regeneration of the Pier Head Waterfront was shaped by a complex interaction of global and national trends and local strategies and initiatives.

The Pier Head Waterfront was, in fact, a platform that showed Liverpool's endeavour to achieve distinctiveness and enhance competitiveness. The waterfront developments were quite unique and interesting. The first waterfront attempt of this period was the Fourth Grace project

which was considered as an iconic building and it was designed by what is known globally as a star architect, the aim of the city was to reimagine the city and replicate the so-called 'Bilbao Effect'. However, although the project failed to materialise, it has, on the other hand, drawn significant attention and public interest to the area. Several interviewees argued that such an iconic building may add to the waterfront composition, yet, they questioned its importance or relevance when existing iconic (heritage) architecture exists nearby.

This research emphasises the importance of having a shared vision based on an urban design agenda. The role of urban design is critical for guiding and co-ordinating. Urban design has provided a route map that connects the initial intentions to the final outcomes through the process of masterplanning. However, this alone is not enough, an inclusive process is also essential. The process of regeneration of the Pier Head Waterfront demonstrated that gaining the support of all stakeholders, in the case of Liverpool, English Heritage, CABE, and local civic organisation through their early involvement proved to be crucial. It has resulted in expanding the support for the project and helped throughout its progression until the completion.

Contemporary architecture such as the Museum of Liverpool and Mann Island has significantly contributed to the regeneration of the waterfront. Gospodini (2004) pointed out that contemporary architecture may result in landmarks and promote tourism and economic development, that might generate new social solidarities among inhabitants grounded on 'civic pride' and economic prospects. Nonetheless, the issue of building in a historical setting is very debatable. Contemporary architecture needs to respond to and integrate within its historical context in order to add and not to detract. Urban design is a useful tool that can be implemented to inform and analyse the contextual integration of contemporary architecture.

Lastly, despite globalisation being held responsible for dislodging places' identity and blurring the individuality of cities (Madanipour, 2006; Sklair, 2006), Liverpool waterfront has, in some respects, challenged this notion. The regeneration of the Pier Head Waterfront was predominantly driven by the quest of the city to upgrade its international status through reconstructing the image of the city, yet, with the central role played by urban design, the regeneration has resulted in achieving a more distinctive, genuine and imaginative urban identity. Accordingly, this research argues that globalization is not a rival of urban identity rather than an opportunity which needs to be understood appropriately, with urban design proving to have the capacity to work as a medium in the urban global-local nexuses.

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