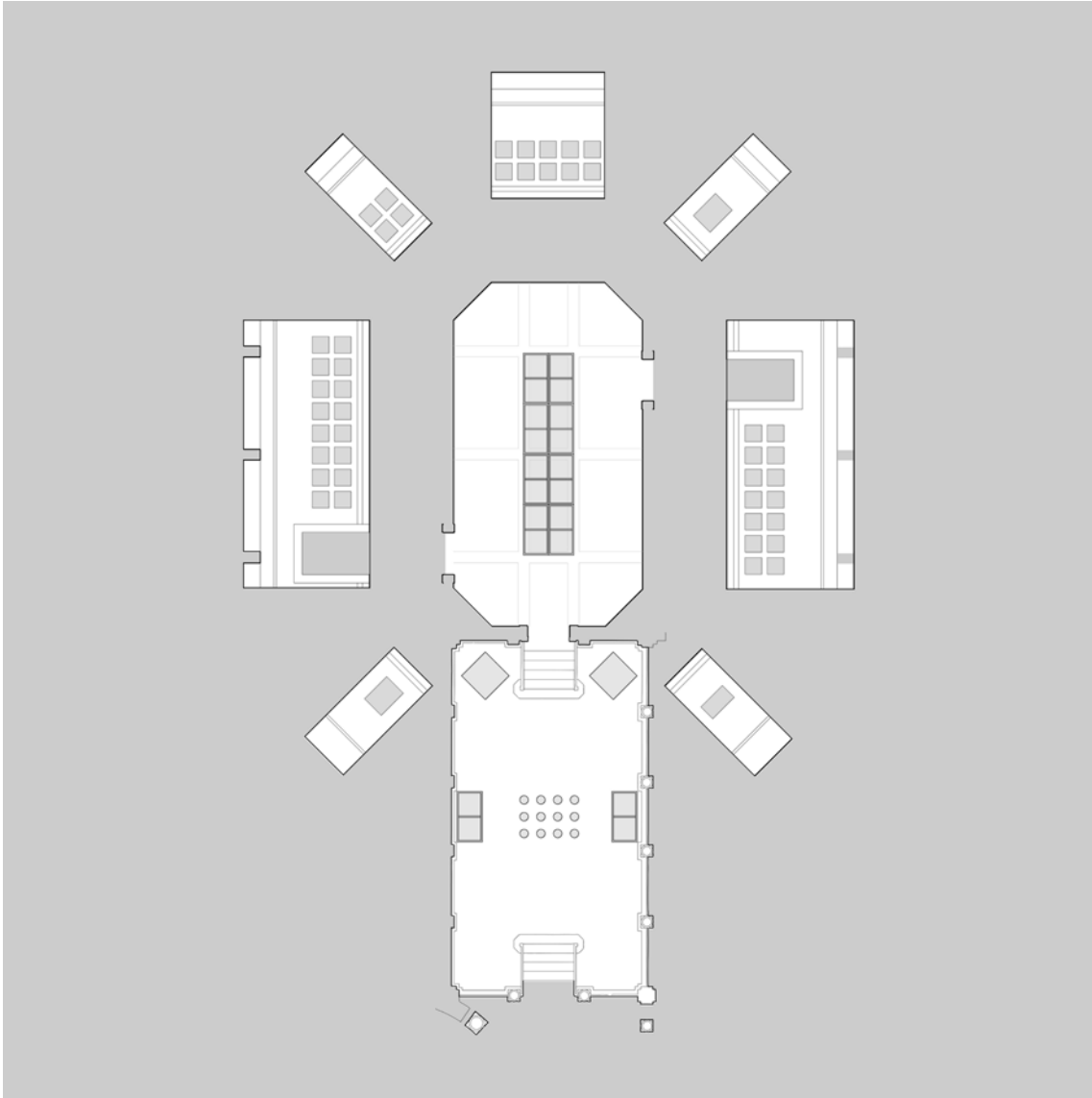




# **A BOTANIST LOOKS AT THE WORLD**

**The Life and Work of Patrick Geddes (1854 – 1932)**

*Reflective Practice*



A Botanist Looks At The World, Exhibition Plan

## BY COLLABORATING WE.....CO-CREATE

Graham Ross

*Vivendo discimus. Pesando creamus.*

P. Geddes

It has often been suggested that cities are humanity's greatest achievement; furthering civilisation by the exchange of ideas and innovations through collaboration, enabled by proximity.

Architecture, urbanism and planning are fundamentally collaborative disciplines. The design and construction of buildings rarely occurs without collaboration. Place-making and place-mending at a neighbourhood, town, city or regional scale demands it.

I was first introduced to the life-work of Patrick Geddes in my late teens and was immediately struck by the apparent timelessness and resonance of many (though not all!) of his ideas to our contemporary world. I continued to research his work throughout my architecture studies in Edinburgh and Berlin. At that time I was extremely fortunate to regularly work with several artists inspired by Geddes, notably George Wyllie and Kenny Munro. It was a formative, creative experience which reinforced the significance of interdisciplinary collaboration.

As an architect, planner and urbanist, always mindful of Geddes' life-long advocacy for interdisciplinary thought and action, I have actively sought the creative opportunities that emerge from immersive collaborative working, through practice and design

research. This has involved numerous collaborations with other architects, artists, designers, engineers and, most significantly, clients, end-users and local communities.

At Austin-Smith:Lord we have a long-held ethos of working as a *creative collective* – seeking to co-create designs through the open sharing of ideas and pooling our shared knowledge and experience. This approach is encapsulated in our recent and current work in town / city / urban regeneration; fusing our architecture, landscape, conservation and urban design practice with expertise from (many) others.

Our recent public realm project in Helensburgh Town Centre clearly illustrates collaborative practice; moving from theory through design process to delivery. Austin-Smith:Lord, *WAVEparticle* (artists), Argyll + Bute Council (client) and other team members facilitated an array of public and stakeholder consultations from the start of the design process. This intensive, iterative and collaborative approach revealed hidden opportunities.

The local community desired a town museum; a focus for their town. Our remit was to redesign the main town square, principal streets and seafront esplanade. Through collaborative discussions between architect and artist ideas were shared, tested and refined and the concept of an Outdoor Museum, integrated in to the town square, quickly emerged.



Charrette Hands

The granite street bollards could become plinths to present the town's social history. It was a neat way to enrich the design, meet our brief and respond to the community's requests. The square has become imbued with the collective memory of the town.

Scotland's first 24/7 Outdoor Museum was unveiled in 2015, curated by *WAVEparticle*, and features the work of numerous artists and artefacts from local people and was executed in close creative collaboration between *WAVEparticle* and Austin-Smith:Lord. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. The square has become a focus for events and festivals, and plans are progressing to extend the Outdoor Museum to reveal more of Helensburgh's story.

The increased awareness and application of Geddesian thinking is exemplified by the recent emergence of the design charrette in contemporary Scottish planning and place-making practice. Over the last five years Austin-Smith:Lord have worked



The Outdoor Museum, Helensburgh

in very close collaboration with Doug Wheeler (regeneration consultant), Peter McCaughey and *WAVEparticle* (artists), Ryden (property advisers) and Transport Planning Ltd. on charrettes throughout Scotland.

Collectively we have evolved and developed an array of charrette techniques to enable the local communities (young and old, usual and unusual suspects) to fully engage, guide and take ownership of ideas through co-authorship of the emerging whole-place plan for their town or neighbourhood. The local communities are the experts on their place and our team seeks to facilitate and reveal the possibilities for their place. This work is always framed within Geddes' temporal progression of understanding the place's *Past*, to comprehend *Present* challenges and explore *Possible* future opportunities for positive change.

We often augment our charrette team with our peers, including Fergus Purdie Architects, to challenge

and refresh our approach from time to time and to continue to learn and develop our collective practice, processes and proposals through authentic and reflective collaboration.

This ethos also underpins our forthcoming work for Glasgow City Council on the City Centre Districts Regeneration Frameworks being taken forward by many of our charrette team in an international collaboration led by MVRDV and involving Space Syntax.

This fusion of international and local practice – Geddes's *Think Global Act Local* manifest in a design team – is founded on integrated, interdisciplinary, international collaboration.

Our methodology has a significant focus on intensive citizen engagement through face to face dialogue, charrettes, pop-up in-situ events, proof of concept / prototyping, social media, interactive websites, Smart City techniques and the development of an *urban room* – a compact 21<sup>st</sup> Cent. version of Geddes' Outlook Tower.

It is hoped that by combining big data analysis with the intuition and wisdom of the local *expert* communities canvassed via real and virtual engagement we will enrich the future vision for Glasgow City Centre through participative, interdisciplinary collaboration.

Hopefully Geddes would approve. And perhaps we could be bold enough to extend his sequence of oft-cited mottos;

*By leaves we live,  
By living we learn,  
By creating we think,  
with....*

*By collaborating we.....co-create!*

## EPILOGUE

My own interest in Geddes began as a student of architecture with an introduction to the valley section, thinking machines and notations. An unlimited source of visual thinking informing our practice preoccupation that seeks to interpret Geddes's ideas and values in real world outcomes. There are many aspects of Geddes's life and work that can be considered beyond the academic; practical advice to *Look and see and then go to find out and do* is testimony to Geddes's belief in direct action. Geddes's built projects demonstrate this approach and philosophy to placemaking.

The exhibition provides the opportunity to combine the best of all worlds; teaching, research and practice. In doing so the exhibition has evolved into a series of events and publications that offer for some an introduction to Geddes, to others a reintroduction or affirmation of Geddes's ongoing relevance to current social, economic and cultural conditions - as a botanist would look at the world.

These selected essays have been invited from friends and colleagues I have encountered through Geddes the educator, practitioner, academic and theorist. André Schimmerling and Bernard Kohn during my visits to the Scots College and participation with Le Carré Bleu, and Graham Ross as a co-practitioner in Charrette design workshops. Collectively they represent an understanding of the democratic and transformative nature of enacting the Geddesian motto - *By Living We Learn*.

**Fergus Purdie Architect, RSA**

# Acknowledgements

With Thanks To

## SUPPORTERS

Culture Perth and Kinross  
Festival of Architecture 2016

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Fergus Purdie Architects

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Shabnam Noor  
St. Ninian's Episcopal Primary School Pupils  
University of Dundee, School of Architecture Students  
*WAVEparticle*

Published by Land Works 2016  
[www.fwp-architect.com](http://www.fwp-architect.com)

Printed In Perth 2016  
Limited Edition of 200 copies

Typeset in Arial  
Cover: 250gsm Horizon White  
Inners: 150gsm Silk



**Perth & Kinross**  
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