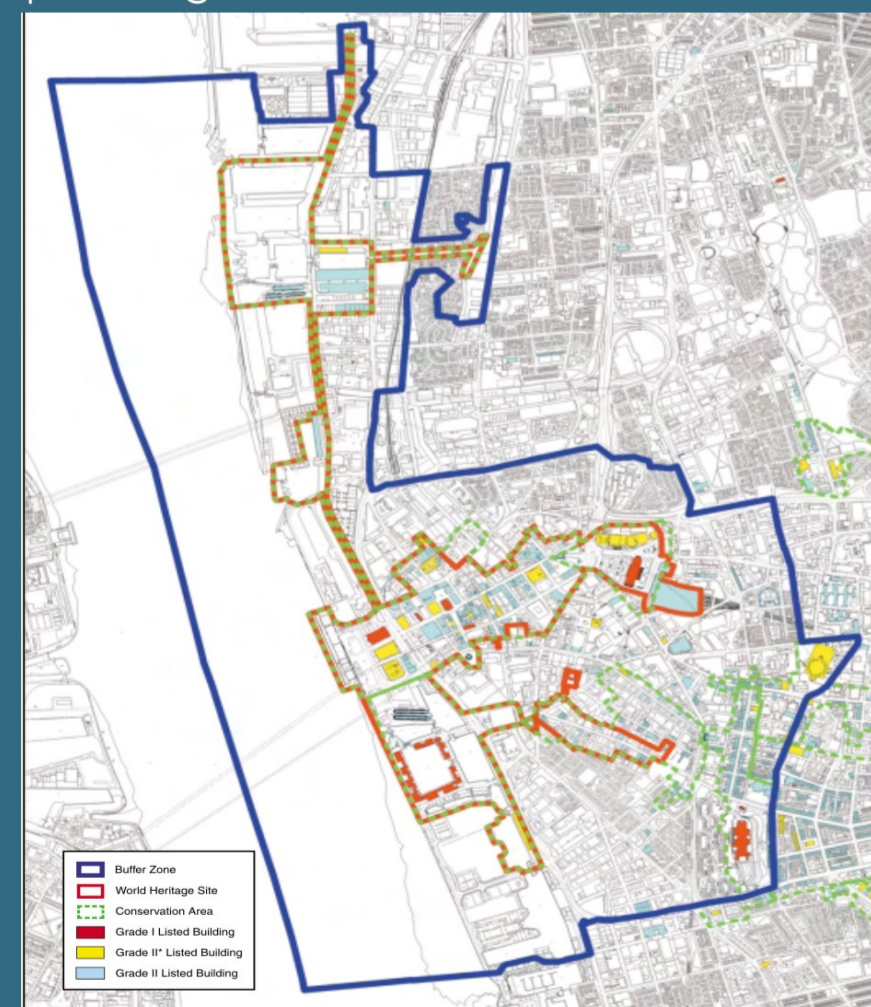




# The Delisting of Liverpool Maritime Mercantile World Heritage Site: An Axiological Analysis

## Introduction

This case study focused on UNESCO's 2021 deletion of the Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City (LMMC) World Heritage Site from its list of World Heritage Sites. UNESCO was prompted to act when Liverpool City Council granted planning permission to developments within the designated limits of Liverpool's World Heritage Site - the £5.5 billion 'Liverpool Waters' mixed-use development and the £500 million football stadium at Bramley-Moore Dock. This disciplinary 'delisting' highlights values, value tensions, and evaluation processes in the arena of heritage management and town planning.



Map of the LMMC Area (2004-2021)



The Waterfront within the LMMC World Heritage Site

## Methodology

The case study was based on documentary analysis and axiological coding of over 100 policy documents. This approach allowed us to capture the relationship between the **encoded values** that are written into the mechanisms of evaluation deployed by UNESCO and UK Government and the **emergent values** that actors produce when they deploy evaluative mechanisms in social space.



The Albert Dock within the LMMC World Heritage Site

## Results: Value Tensions

The central tension in the Liverpool World Heritage Site value controversy was presented by UNESCO as a simple case of **economic development versus heritage preservation**. This is an archetypal value opposition and was seen to operationalise UNESCO's protectionist rationale, predicated on resisting 'changing social and economic conditions' (UNESCO, 1972:1). However, such a value opposition obscures nuance and denies the values articulated by Liverpool City Council. Development may, indeed, involve a rapacious orientation focused only on profits and rents to be had from new construction. However, 'development' could also embrace a strong social element (such as jobs creation or affordable housing), environmental concerns (sustainability), and sensitivity to heritage (as in heritage-led development). In Liverpool, the City Council and developers framed the proposed Liverpool Waters project as providing socio-economic benefits to a deprived area of the city, externalities which were outside the scope of UNESCO's evaluations in Liverpool. Interestingly, Liverpool's cultural sector was also supportive of the proposed Liverpool Waters development as it was seen to secure the city's future cultural offer following the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Value Alignment and Stabilisation

Initially, there was a value consensus between disparate value regimes, broadly UNESCO and Liverpool City Council with the LMMC site framed from the outset as 'an exemplary demonstration of sustainable development and heritage-led regeneration' (Liverpool City Council, 2003). This dialectical discourse also overcame a temporal dislocation where an orientation towards the past implied in 'heritage' stands in contrast with an orientation toward the future encoded in development.



The planned 'Liverpool Waters' Development

## Value Divergence

The consensus between UNESCO and the UK State maintained by the 'sustainable development and heritage-led regeneration' discourse collapsed because of two key factors. Firstly, UNESCO's *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* (2011) restabilised UNESCO's strict preservationist values, after a period of evaluation predicated on the addition of 'Industrial Heritage' to UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites. Industrial heritage assets are often associated with sites of post-industrial decline. Liverpool had been awarded World Heritage Site status based on its 19th Century Industrial Heritage. However, the city also faced major socio-economic challenges connected to post-industrial decline. UNESCO's 2011 policy amendment reframed its evaluation criteria regarding the value of development with World Heritage Sites. Secondly, shifts in UK Planning Regulations, under the auspices of post-2008 austerity, further centred 'development' values in Local Government evaluations, prioritising socio-economic impacts and inward private investment to overcome the city's socio-economic problems.

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