

SCHOOL OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

Specialism:	MDes Design Innovation and Citizenship
Partner:	Every Tree Tells a Story
Project Name:	Ecological Citizenship - Tree Narratives in Urban Glasgow
Duration:	1 Semester
Submission:	Group Presentation, Individual Project Document
Due Date:	28/04/2026 Project Document Submission – 30/04/2026 Project Presentations
Core Staff:	Prof. Elio Caccavale
Visiting Staff:	Prof. Sarah Dodd and Prof. Juliette Wilson - University of Strathclyde/Every Tree Tells a Story Beth Gallagher and Heather Knudtsen - Every Tree Tells a Story Rebecca Richardson - Enterprise Fellow, University of Strathclyde Dr Julia Romer - GSA PhD Graduate – Design and Education Alicia Bickerstaff - Associate Researcher, GSA; Citizenship Graduate Giulia Preponis – Designer, Centre for Civic Innovation, Glasgow City Council; Citizenship Graduate



Introduction

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Trees are a source of life, vitality, and inspiration in our cities. Beyond their beauty or shade, urban trees make our communities healthier, more sustainable, and more joyful places to live. They purify the air, cool our streets, support thriving ecosystems, and contribute to our mental and physical wellbeing. In an era defined by climate change, urban expansion, and growing challenges to wellbeing, trees stand as allies in creating resilient environments. When people come together to nurture and protect them, it fosters stronger communities, a deeper connection to place, and a shared sense of responsibility for the natural world. Trees are not just part of our cities - they are their living heart.

The presence of trees nourishes our wellbeing. Research shows that time spent in green spaces can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Simply walking through a tree-lined park or glimpsing greenery from a window can lift one's mood. Trees encourage outdoor activity and provide communal spaces that strengthen social bonds. They also offer vital habitats for birds, insects, and other wildlife, reminding us that cities are shared environments where humans and non-human species coexist.

However, these benefits depend on care and collective engagement. Planting, maintaining, and protecting urban trees fosters a personal connection to place and an understanding of nature as alive, fragile, and intertwined with our own lives. Civic participation in tree care strengthens environmental stewardship, social cohesion, and intergenerational thinking: the trees we care for today will shape the lives of tomorrow's citizens. For example, education plays a vital role in nurturing this ethos of care. [Julia Römer](#)'s PhD research at GSA shows how creative, place-based learning - such as observing and narration - helps people develop deeper emotional and ethical connections to the natural world. Her work highlights how education can cultivate ecological awareness and inspire long-term stewardship.

This ethos of care, connection, and narration lies at the heart of the [Every Tree Tells a Story](#) project in Glasgow, which invites citizens to share memories, stories, and personal experiences linked to specific trees or broader aspects of their lives. Through this narrative approach, trees are transformed from biological entities into living witnesses of history, culture, and community life. The project highlights how trees are deeply woven into the city's emotional and social fabric - commemorating loved ones, marking life milestones, or symbolising resilience during difficult times. This participatory, place-based approach resonates with wider movements/projects such as [Letters to the Earth](#), [CommuniMap](#), and the University of Glasgow's [GALLANT](#) initiative, all of which explore how narration, mapping, and community-led action can deepen our relationship with the environments we share.

The *Every Tree Tells a Story* project shows how narrative can humanise and personalise environmental issues, encouraging people to see trees not as passive elements of the landscape but as active participants in urban life. By connecting personal narratives with environmental stewardship, the project empowers Glaswegians to engage emotionally and practically with the trees around them, deepening their care, appreciation, and sense of shared responsibility for the city's natural heritage.

Project Outline

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This project builds on the *Every Tree Tells a Story* project by investigating how designerly approaches can enhance civic engagement and foster ecological citizenship through Glasgow's urban treescapes. You will explore how trees might be more meaningfully integrated into urban life to promote wellbeing, environmental awareness, and social cohesion. Using methods such as visual narration, participatory workshops, speculative prototyping, and spatial interventions, you will examine, communicate, and reimagine the roles trees play in the life of the city and its citizens.

Working in dialogue with citizens and experts, you will map current practices and policies around urban tree planting and care. Grounded in lived experience and public imagination, your research will surface latent narratives, emotional attachments, and overlooked opportunities. You will co-create situated stories and develop proposals that emphasise the civic, ecological, and symbolic value of urban trees.

At the heart of this project is the belief that design can make complex, systemic issues - such as human-non-human relationships - more tangible, relatable, and actionable. Through experiential interventions, artefacts, and designed encounters, you will create opportunities for public dialogue and reflection that recognise and reframe the presence of trees in the urban landscape. Your work should demonstrate how design can mediate between people, nature, and place - amplifying voices while envisioning a more inclusive present and resilient urban future(s).

You are expected to develop design interventions that inspire appreciation for the natural world and integrate care for nature into everyday urban life. Your exploration should lead to the design of new experiences or interactions with trees that do not yet exist, underpinned by clear evidence and

thoughtful communication. This work contributes to a design-led approach to ecological citizenship and expands your practice in meaningful and future-facing ways.

Task 1: Desk Research

Conduct initial research into existing case studies related to human–non-human relationships in urban environments - particularly involving trees, but also broader nature-based interactions. Identify relevant stakeholders and organisations to engage with during the qualitative research phase. Begin mapping your findings, focusing on ecological citizenship as a lived, performed, and experienced practice. Prepare this research for tutorial discussions and presentations.

Task 2: Ethnographic Research

Engage in qualitative research through conversations, interviews, and observations with key publics and actors -e.g., experts, community groups, environmental organisations, local businesses, and governmental bodies. Document insights and identify emerging themes. Consider how these insights build on your desk research and guide the project's focus. Which issue or opportunity are you investigating?

Task 3: Design Response

Synthesize your desk-based and qualitative research into actionable insights that inform the development of design concepts intended to provoke changes in personal or social behaviours and enhance civic engagement. Develop multiple ideas (iterations) that will be critiqued during studio sessions. Your final design outcome should be highly resolved and persuasive - clearly communicating a transition from the current situation to an envisioned one. The narrative must articulate the relationship between publics (who), places (where), events (when) and things (what).

Task 4: Reflective Submission - Project Document

Compile your research, insights, and design process into a final reflective Project Document. This should clearly outline the project's context, key decisions, and rationale - showing how your thinking evolved. Possible designerly explorations may include illustrations, animations, diagrams, videos, maps, photographs, and artefacts. Whatever medium you choose, your design outcome should clearly communicate its relevance and impact - demonstrating how it contributes to ecological citizenship and fosters more inclusive, caring relationships between people, place, and the more-than-human world.

Some key ideas and questions you should consider:

- What new types of interactions can people have with trees?
- How might we support citizens to engage more meaningfully with trees?
- In what ways can trees be seen as active participants or stakeholders in civic life and public space?
- How might indigenous, ancestral, or local knowledge systems influence our understanding of trees and their roles in ecosystems?
- What sensory or emotional experiences could deepen human empathy toward trees?
- How can design practices help visualise the temporal rhythms of trees - such as growth, decay, or dormancy - as meaningful parts of everyday life?
- How might creative, place-based learning help citizens form deeper emotional and ethical connections with trees?
- What forms of Ecological Citizenship could emerge by adopting radically non-human perspectives?
- Can design facilitate Ecological Citizenship actions that generate a new conceptual platform for civic engagement rooted in relational and ecological understanding?

- “Who” and “what” are you designing for? How might this affect your design decisions regarding aesthetics, interactions, and behaviours?
- Engage with a wide range of perspectives. Who might you want to speak to, and why? What questions would you ask?
- What aspirations or influencing factors might shape societal and environmental change?
- What new personal and social values might emerge from your exploration - and why?
- How will you evidence and visualise your approach and key findings?
- How are you planning to refine and communicate your final concept to position your design project as an exploration of Design Innovation and Ecological Citizenship?

Studio Space

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Your designated study space for Independent Team Project Work is on the first floor of the Haldane Building.

Assessment and Submission Details

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Assessment will be based on group presentation (40%) and the submission of an individual Project Document (60%). The final Project Document must include a summary reflection of the full Semester Two.

Submission

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You will submit a Project Document on 28/04/2026. You will also present as a group to staff on 30/04/2026 (details to follow). The length of this presentation should not exceed 10 minutes. You should be able to show an understanding of your design process and methodology with a clear emphasis on the experience and the value to “stakeholders”. You will be able to communicate the process from insight gathering to final proposal(s) verbally in presentation, in a written format within the document and visually in both elements of the submission.

Presentation

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The group presentation should be a concise and visual account of your process and outcome. It should show the key research findings that informed your insights and led to the opportunity that your group then pursued. It is an overview of the project and will contain less than the Project Document but should still be rich in detail and explanation of the pivotal parts of your process and outcome.

Assessment will take into account:

- The level of communication, both verbally and visually.
- A clear evolution of your research findings to your proposal.
- Clear examples/evidence of how your research informed project directions.
- Ability to explain the challenges of the context effectively yet concisely.
- Engaging use of “narration” to explain your proposal and its value/impact.
- An understanding of how your proposal has or could have a wider impact.
- Timekeeping of your 10-minute presentation.
- Quality of responses to any questions for clarity.

Project Document

A detailed and self-reflective visual document that demonstrates understanding of the process, appropriate use of methods, an outcome that shows value and impact in response to unmet needs. It should show a solid understanding of the context in which the project is based and how evidence and research has informed your process and proposal.

Assessment will take into account:

- The level of communication in both written and visual form.
- Structure of the document and understanding of process.
- Exemplifying the use of the methods and tools.
- Ability to explain complex challenges in further detail.
- Detailed examples of how research findings and insights informed your decisions.
- A clearly justified evolution of your research to your proposed outcome.
- Engaging use of “narration” to explain your proposal and its value/impact.
- An understanding of how your proposal has a wider impact.
- Personal reflections on learning at appropriate intervals.

Submitting Your Stage 2 Ethics Application

Submission of stage 2 ethics applications should be done through the [PGT Ethics form submission site](#). All the key documents that you require to understand the ethics procedures at GSA for your projects can be found in the [Modules](#) section.

If you are required to submit a Stage 2 ethics application, you should ensure that it is submitted on time. The committee meets monthly, and outcomes of the committee are communicated within two weeks of the meeting. Please make sure you provide yourself plenty of time to seek and be granted ethical approval prior to starting any data collection.

Project Timeline

WEEK 1 - First Task

When: 26/01/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Project Briefing with Prof. Sarah Dodd and Prof. Juliette Wilson

Where: Reid General Seminar 1

When: 29/01/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Tutorials

Where: Reid General Seminar 1

Week 2

When: 03/02/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Tutorials/Seminar 1 - What is Citizenship?

Where: Reid Principal Seminar 1

When: 05/02/26

What: Peer review session

Where: Library Quiet Study Space (1st Floor)

Week 3 - Second Task

When: 10/02/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Tutorials

Where: Reid Principal Seminar 1

When: 12/02/26 @ 14.00 pm - 16.00 pm

What: Seminar 2 – Dr Julia Romer

Where: Library Quiet Study Space (1st Floor)

Week 4

When: 17/02/26 @ 14.00 pm - 16.00 pm

What: Seminar 3 - Alicia Bickerstaff

Where: DEAL Space (Reid Ground Floor)

When: 19/02/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Tutorials

Where: Library Quiet Study Space (1st Floor)

Week 5

When: 24/02/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Tutorials

Where: Reid Principal Seminar 1

When: 26/02/26 @ 14.00 pm - 16.00 pm

What: Seminar 4 - Rebecca Richardson

Where: Library Quiet Study Space (1st Floor)

Week 6

When: 03/03/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Tutorials

Where: Reid General Seminar 1

When: 05/03/26

What: Interim Review

Where: TBC

Week 7 - Independent Study Week 09/03/26 - 13/03/26

Week 8 - Third Task

When: 17/03/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Tutorials

Where: Library Quiet Study Space (1st Floor)

When: 19/03/26 @ 14.00 pm - 16.00 pm

What: Seminar 5 - Giulia Preponis

Where: Library Quiet Study Space (1st Floor)

Week 9

When: 24/03/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Review/Tutorials with Prof. Sarah Dodd and Prof. Juliette Wilson

Where: Reid General Seminar 1

When: 26/03/26 @ 14.00 pm - 16.00 pm

What: Seminar 6 - Dr Julia Romer

Where: Library Quiet Study Space (1st Floor)

Week 10

When: 31/03/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Tutorials

Where: Reid Principal Seminar 1

When: 02/04/26 @ 14.00 pm - 16.00 pm

What: Seminar 7 - Beth Gallagher and Heather Knudtsen

Where: Library Quiet Study Space (1st Floor)

Spring Break 06/04/26 - 17/04/26

Week 11 - Fourth Task

When: 21/04/26 @ 14.00 pm - 17.00 pm

What: Tutorials

Where: Reid Principal Seminar 1

When: 23/04/26 @ 14.00 pm - 16.00 pm

What: Project Work > Project Document and Presentation

Where: Studio

Week 12

When: 28/04/26

What: Project Document Submission

Where: CANVAS

When: 30/04/26

What: Project Presentations

Where: TBC

References

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[American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation by Eric Rutkow](#)

[Behold Cam-1](#)

[Biopresence](#)

[Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants by Robin](#)

[Wall Kimmerer](#)

[City Trees: A Historical Geography from the Renaissance Through the Nineteenth Century by Henry W.](#)

[Lawrence](#)

[CommuniMap](#)

[Creative Carbon Scotland](#)

[Design Beyond the Human: Trans disciplinary Conversations about the Planet by Elio Caccavale and](#)

[Gordon Hush](#)

[Designing a Park for Generations to Come, IDEO](#)

[Every Tree Tells a Story](#)

[Gallant Project](#)

[Future Library](#)

[Garden Futures: Designing with Nature](#)

[How to Read a Tree by Tristan Gooley](#)

[If Trees Could Talk by Holly Worton](#)

[Letters to the Earth](#)

[My Naturewatch](#)

[One Tree ID – How To Become A Tree For Another Tree](#)

[Plant Trees in Chicago](#)

[Pollinator Pathmaker](#)

[Sycamore Gap Tree](#)

[The Book of Trees: Visualizing Branches of Knowledge by Manuel Lima](#)

[The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate by Peter Wohlleben](#)

[The Nature of Cities: Ecological Visions and the American Urban Professions by Jennifer S. Light](#)

[The Nature of Urban Design: A New York Perspective on Resilience by Alexandros Washburn](#)

[The Songs of Trees: Stories from Nature's Great Connectors by David George Haskell](#)

[The Tree: A Natural History of What Trees Are, How They Live & Why They Matter by Colin Tudge](#)

[The Wood for the Trees: One Man's Long View of Nature by Richard Fortey](#)

[Three Words for Forest](#)

[To Speak for the Trees: My Life's Journey from Ancient Celtic Wisdom to a Healing Vision of the Forest by Diana Beresford-Kroeger](#)

[Tree Antenna](#)

[Tree Hunting by Paul Wood](#)

[Tree Listening Project](#)

[Treebour](#)

[Trees: Their Natural History by Peter Thomas](#)

[Urban Forests: A Natural History of Trees and People in the American Cityscape by Jill Jonnes](#)

[Wildwood: A Journey Through Trees by Roger Deakin](#)