DESIGNING with COMMUNITIES

Lessons on Social Design from the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design

Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art & Design

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THE HELEN HAMLYN CENTRE FOR DESIGN ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART DESIGNING WITH COMMUNITES

The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design (HHCD) is an international leader in Inclusive Design and Design Thinking. Over the last 29 years, we have used design to address challenging social issues, working with organisations to create impact projects and developing new methods. We have created knowledge exchange through publication, events and executive education. The Centre has built a worldwide reputation, working with industry, the community and the third sector.

This publication will discuss what we have learnt works, and what to look out for, when *Designing with Communities*.

We describe these insights through **The 8 Lessons**, supported by examples from three past projects from the HHCD portfolio: **Our Future Foyle, Creative Citizens** and **In The Shade**.

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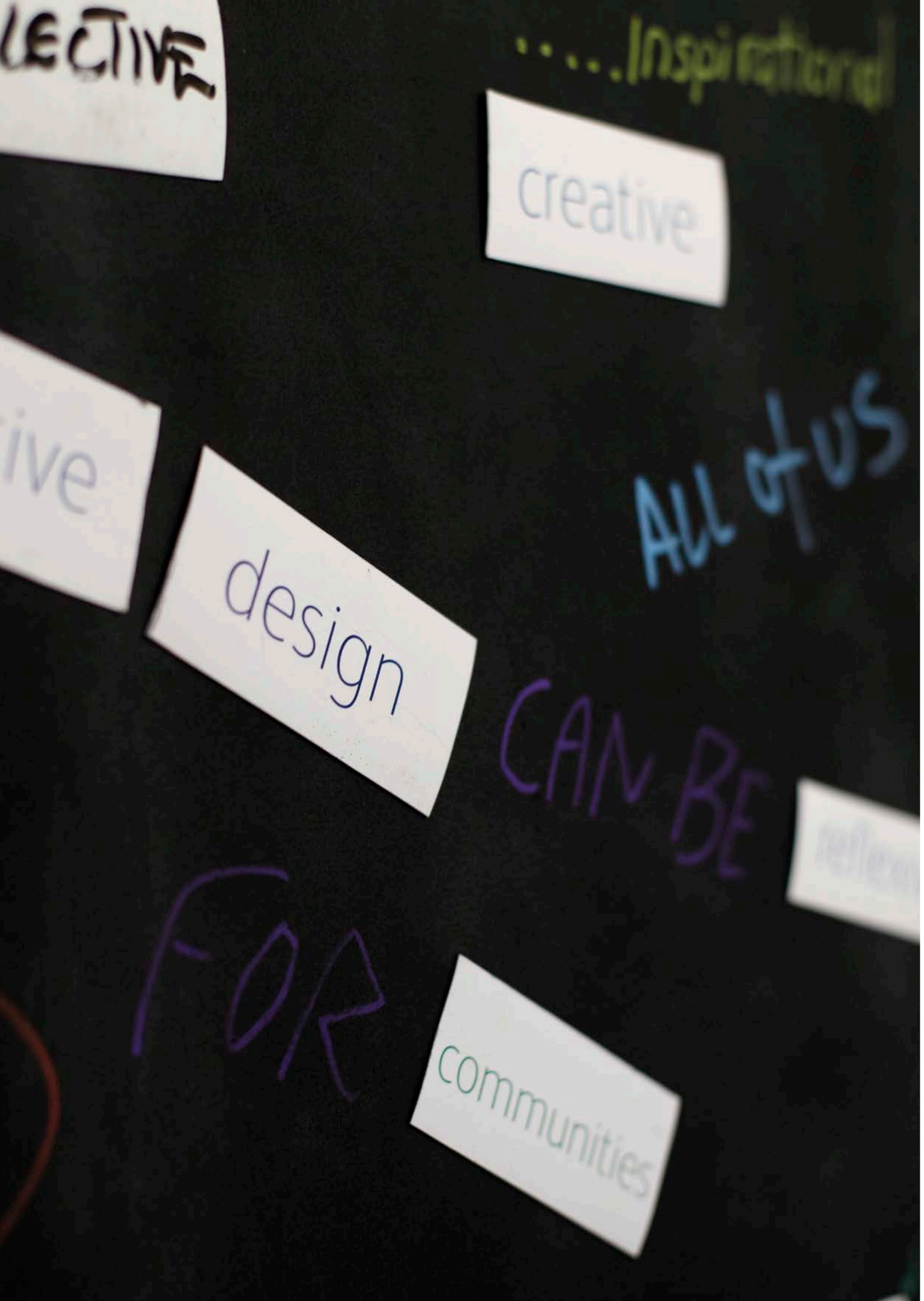
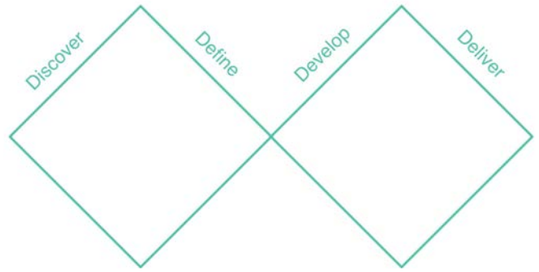
Authors: Gail Ramster, Carmel Keren
Design: Carmel Keren, Juliette Poggi



INTRODUCTION

At the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design we carry out design research projects using people-centred and co-design methods. We involve citizens in our research to find out about their experiences, recognising that they are experts in their own lives. This leads to insights for future designs, to concepts and prototypes, implemented by ourselves or our partners. We research areas such as designing for healthcare, for all ages and abilities, and addressing social challenges faced by communities.

The projects follow the 'double-diamond' methodology where the creative process twice goes through a cycle of divergent and convergent thought. The first - often overlooked - cycle (discover, define) recognises the need for design research to understand and correctly define what the problem is, before in the second cycle (develop, deliver) developing solutions to address it.



The 'Double-Diamond' design process

We have been designing with communities in successive research projects since 2011, learning and improving with each project, and noticing unique challenges and distinctions with these projects compared to when we work with unconnected individuals.

In these projects, 'community' refers to a geographic community, where we are working with people living or working within a neighbourhood. This might include active citizens such as members of a community group, right through to people who simply live, work or study within the boundaries of the area we are looking at. We address through design an issue that is affecting that community, by developing concepts that relate to the local context of their neighbourhood.

How we see designing with communities as being distinct from community engagement is that we include community participation not just at the start but across all stages of the design process. Our case study projects have done this to different degrees, whether that is initiating or reframing the brief with community groups, co-designing ideas, or local people prototyping and taking ownership of project outputs.

It is part of a co-design methodology, a way of designing *with* people instead of designing *for* people, by involving them in an active and ongoing way.

The relationship between us and the community might also differ in terms of who is leading on the project from one where we develop ideas that we share and evaluate with the community, to one where the project is led by the community and our role is more focused on facilitation than design development. In some cases the relationship balance of who is leading shifts back and forth throughout the course of the creative process.

This process makes these projects distinctive in many ways. They involve large numbers of participants, need time and trust to develop relationships and create engagement opportunities, and require new methods to aid participation. They may also have complex relationships to navigate between ourselves, the community, and research partners who might be funding the project.

OUR FUTURE FOYLE

Duration: 2 years (2016-2018)
Researchers: Ralf Alwani, Gavin Gribben, Elizabeth Raby

PROJECT RESEARCH QUESTION

How can we design and deliver impactful interventions for regeneration and wellbeing along the River Foyle, Derry/Londonderry?

PROJECT PARTNERS AND NETWORKS

The project was commissioned by **Public Health Agency Northern Ireland** following a review of health and wellbeing. They identified that additional capacity and expertise were needed to bring about sustainable change in behaviours and perception surrounding the River Foyle.

Public Health Agency Northern Ireland helped bring together a wider network of relevant professional stakeholders for our research team to involve, such as Foyle Search & Rescue, for the RCA to work with. The RCA team then initiated their own ways to establish links with the wider Derry/Londonderry community.

DESIGN PROCESS

We proposed a design-led approach to address the mental wellbeing of the local population, and re-conceptualize the river and its banks as an area associated with life-affirming activities.

Resulting from stakeholder engagement, the team created a community engagement project to connect with residents about the issues they wanted addressed long-term in relation to wellbeing and the riverfront.

The series of engagement events and activities included an open-air cinema night, a series of locally-designed interactive installations along the riverfront, and an engagement space in the shape of a full-size orca (see p.28) that once swam up the river.

We identified twelve insight areas, and presented these at community events for feedback. We refined our designs and attracted further funding for the ideas with most support.

OUTPUTS

- Community events
- Twelve insight areas with six detailed designs
- Three designs now in an implementation phase:

Foyle Reeds, an interactive, sculptural installation spanning the length of the Foyle Bridge.

Foyle Bubbles, a series of affordable spaces along the riverfront for local businesses, who will receive mental health training.

Foyle Experience, wayfinding features around the riverfront to attract visitors and increase footfall.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The project is in a planning and delivery phase, in partnership with Urban Scale Interventions (a design innovation company set-up and run by former HHCD researchers Ralf Alwani and Jak Spencer); City Centre Initiative; and a series of strategic partners from regional and local government.

Facing top: 'Dopey Dick' public engagement space at the Clipper Festival, Derry/ Londonderry 2016. (Credit: Our Future Foyle)

Facing bottom: Visualisation of Foyle Reeds, a sculptural installation along the Foyle Bridge. (Credit: Our Future Foyle)

CREATIVE CITIZENS

Duration: 2.5 years (2012-2014)
Researchers: Catherine Greene, Gail Ramster, Dr Alan Outten, Dr Dan Lockton

PROJECT RESEARCH QUESTION

How can new media and digital tools be used to engage more people in community-led projects? What value does this bring?

PROJECT PARTNERS AND NETWORKS

Creative Citizens, funded by the **Arts & Humanities Research Council**, with **Nesta** as a community partner, worked with community-led projects on how they could better used digital tools for engagement.

We found two London-based projects to work with. Both projects had been started and were run by residents to create better services or spaces in their neighbourhood.

The first project, **The Mill** in Walthamstow, NE London, supports local people to start new clubs or social groups, hosted in The Mill's building, a former library. They wanted to make it easier for local people who had never visited The Mill to understand what they do and feel that they could get involved.

Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum (KTNF), a group of local people creating a Neighbourhood Plan for the area, wished to share their policy ideas with the diverse residents of Kentish Town to make it truly representative, before a public referendum which would decide whether to implement it.

DESIGN PROCESS

We worked with the community-led projects to identify briefs that would meet their needs. We then designed and facilitated a series of engagement and co-design activities to hold with each community project to generate ideas. One idea would be developed to a prototyping stage, with £5000 per prototype allocated from our research grant.

We also created an asset-based evaluation activity, to create a snapshot of local assets used by the community project at the start and end of their involvement with Creative Citizens, as a means to evaluate the value added during the research.

OUTPUTS

- **The Story Machine**: an iPad-based storytelling booth for The Mill to take visitors to take photos and videos of the Mill's activities, automatically uploading to their website.

- **KTNF Stickyworld**: an online neighbourhood engagement platform for KTNF to share the proposed plan and also encourage ideas and debate, The technology is now called Confers.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Each community project was gifted their digital tool to use or repurpose beyond the end of the research period.

Some participants were photographed and interviewed about their experiences in the project for a portrait exhibition and book chapter entitled "Conversations about Co-Production' in the book The Creative Citizen Unbound.

Facing: A young visitor to The Mill, uses The Story Wheel to interview local artist Michelle Reeder (Credit: HHCD)

IN THE SHADE

Duration: 2 years (2010-2012)
Researchers: Megan Charnley, Tom Jarvis

PROJECT RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the needs of a community after dark, and can improvements to under-lit neighbourhoods create a more sustainable city?

PROJECT PARTNERS AND NETWORKS

The research project was commissioned by **Megaman Charity Trust Fund** who fund research into lighting, and architectural lighting company **Paviom**. Our researchers chose a neighbourhood, the Boundary Estate in The East End of London, that they felt would work well with the project brief, and worked to identify and establish links with local people and community groups.

DESIGN PROCESS

We engaged with residents through a series of workshops, run with established community groups each representing a different demographic within of the community, as well as one-on-one walks around the estate, to gather varied insights into attitudes towards the neighbourhood and its challenges after dark. We then held a pop-up community event to bring everyone's reactions and aspirations together. Finally, we developed design solutions, which were tested around the estate to gather feedback.

OUTPUTS

- The **Nighttime Neighbourhood Network** lighting strategy of brightly-lit nodes.
- A working prototype of **TubeLite,** a strip light within a steel tube mount, used to construct illuminated goal posts on a local football pitch.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Local young people who used the sports pitch were invited to care for the goals. The TubeLite prototype was developed into a product and distributed by the project partner Paviom.

Below: Boundary Estate in daylight and after dark (Credit: HHCD)

Facing: The Great Balloon Swap, a community event at Arnold Circus on the Boundary Estate, 2011 (Credit: Katherine Leedale)

THE 8 LESSONS

Through our experiences and mistakes we have refined many aspects of our approach, from project initiation to how we move on.

These 8 lessons reflect what we find works - and what to look out for - when designing with communities.

THE 8 LESSONS

1. Clarity of intention

The nature of designing with a community can lead to a lot of possibilities and ambiguities as to what might be created. To reduce the risk, we have in the past been very clear from the start about the size and scope of outputs. This can seem restrictive, but everyone's cards are on the table. In projects where there are fewer obvious limits we have let people dream bigger, with success, but with no guarantees and more risk of failure. So long as we're clear and the partners are on board, it can work.

2. Broader brief = longer process

Projects that seek to engage the community to tackle difficult complex social issues need to consider that the process of research will take longer than projects with a narrower, more design-oriented brief. As we learn from the community, the direction of the project might shift during its duration. It's normal for briefs to need reviewing and reframing during engagement so we are addressing the right problem.

3. Building trust

There is a triangle of relationships between us, the community and the partners. Sometimes the partner and community are unconnected, in others they're connected but may have their own power dynamic. These differences change how we approach the project. How do we fit in? When required, will we advocate for the community or the partner? We must find ways to show the community that we are trustworthy. We in turn must trust them, by respecting their judgement when making design decisions that directly affect them.

4. Pacing the project

There is a desire to fill a project with activities, but in-between time is needed to reflect and react. Then we can design the next engagement to build on the last. Meanwhile, the community once engaged wish to see momentum behind their ideas. It's hard to get this balance right and we can feel that we've rushed a step or missed a trick. By pacing the project right, and keeping everyone informed of our work behind the scenes, we can strike the right balance between engagement and having time to think!

5. Value what already exists

In every community we have worked with, the project begins by scoping out existing networks, events or groups. Valuing opportunities to connect with people who welcome the research helps us to get started. We then develop ideas with them to reach less connected individuals. By understanding the neighbourhood we can design activities that speak to local people and help them to open up.

6. Make engagement accessible

We value participants' time and effort, so try to make participation easy by choosing times and places that suit them. A mutual exchange, where we give something in return for people's time, be it vouchers, homemade biscuits or something less tangible, is a good way to show our appreciation and create a balanced environment. We are also explicit about how participants' contribution will shape the final outcome.

7. Be visual + stimulating

Being able to visualise and communicate ideas quickly and well is a skill that designers have which can sometimes be undervalued. The ability to make information beautiful and have methods that are stimulating and fun can set designers apart when it comes to engagement. Part of that is thinking how to involve citizens in the design stages when they may not consider themselves 'creative'.

8. Leave responsibly

Preparing for how we leave a project needs to be started early on. It's crucial for us to know what the partners plan to do next for us to leave the community and partners in the best position possible. A co-design approach makes this transition more achievable as the community feel ownership over ideas, and are drawing on local assets and skills. But we rarely move on completely. We're finding new ways to stay involved in a paired-down role during implementation, to see that the project stays on track. Unexpected relationships can also develop between our designers and the communities where we work that continue in other guises for years.

PROJECT INITIATION

WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED?

When the initial brief is a broad, complex social challenge, it takes hard work and time to understand the factors at play within the local community context. The shorter the project, the more focused the brief needs to be. A high level of community participation also requires more time, to establish and organise.

If the project has been initiated by the researchers or the partners rather than the community, then the first step is to find ways to engage people's interest. In shorter projects, we still spend significant time at the start to engage residents in a more open-ended way that helps to reframe the project brief into something meaningful and engaging to them. Short timeframes also mean quickly narrowing down the focus of the project between each period of community participation.

In the projects presented here, we've had a longer involvement of two-years or more, sometimes by design, sometimes because the partners have wished to further explore the outputs of the first year. Year one is for research, engagement, reframing the brief and ideas generation, ending with concept development. The second year is for design development, through iterative refinement and prototyping in situ with the community.

For example, in its first year, **In The Shade** developed an outline strategy towards lighting: a network of local lighting nodes connecting an urban neighbourhood.

The introduction of a product designer in the second year helped to focus on one realisation of this strategy, where the designer developed a lighting product tested around the Boundary Estate. This physical prototyping gave tangible meaning and representation to the original strategy.

Below: Participants at an initial engagement workshop for community-led projects, part of Creative Citizens. (credit: HHCD)

WHAT WILL BE DELIVERED?

A common understanding between partners, researchers and the community about deliverables will help keep the project on track. How far can the design brief stray from what was initially proposed? What type of design output would everyone be open to? What restrictions exist, from the partner or community, that limit what could realistically be implemented?

When the design process involves, and is answerable to, a wider community as well as project partners, more uncertainty exists around the direction in which the project might develop. Partners need to be aware of this uncertainty, whilst being clear at which point the project might deviate too far from their original remit.

Whilst partners can be open to this, it can be challenging for them to communicate the potential outputs and impact of the project to their wider networks. For example, would we be working towards a product, a service, a communication campaign?

Leaving the scope broad at the beginning demonstrates the partner's willingness for the project to be community-led. Great ideas can emerge from this which may be beyond the scope of the project but are of value to the community to explore themselves.

However this should be matched by clear communication between the research team and the partner to avoid over-commiting to directions which are not well suited to the partner's resources or impetus, and would never be realised.

The uncertainty in direction and outputs as a known factor can be navigated successfully. In **Our Future Foyle** the project partner was understanding of the uncertainty in the project and gave us the freedom to direct our focus in response to the community's insights.

This was supported by the partner's funding model which allowed them to regularly review the direction, then focus future support and unlock resources for the parts of the project that had the most community support.

More limits can be a blessing, allowing us to make more efficient use of the community's involvement, particularly in projects that run for months rather than years.

In Creative Citizens, we placed limits on the final output from the start. Our research grant limited us to outputs that used new media or digital tools, with a budget of £5000 per tool. This clear specification enabled us to choose community projects to work with where both us and them were confident there was the potential for such an idea to emerge and to be of joint-interest.

We could also be upfront with the community projects that any ideas that were outside of this specification could still be developed by them on their own, but they knew that it would not unlock the funding.

In Creative Citizens, these details were set out in a Memorandum of Understanding with each community project, which also defined the process for how they would be involved and the nature of our and their commitment (time, money, skills).

It gave us the opportunity to be upfront about our commitments to our funder (the research council), and for the community project to be clear on the conditions of their involvement too. Once these aspects were made clear in writing, we felt predominantly accountable to the community project on a day-to-day basis, which made the project straightforward. We had effectively managed expectations.

***PROJECT INITIATION* LESSONS:**

1. **Clarity of intention**
2. **Broader brief = longer process**
3. **Building trust**

THE DESIGNER IN THE COMMUNITY

REPRESENTING OURSELVES: WHO ARE WE?

Communicating to participants who is involved in the project and how we fit into that is crucial to avoid confusion over accountability. It's important to consider what is the most useful message to give to the public?

We always need to be open with the community about who the project is funded by, whilst distinguishing it from existing partner initiatives. We'd like a project to have a fresh starting point, without being confused with partner's day-to-day work. This distance also gives the project more freedom and space to operate, as we can bring our own methods whilst shielding the partner slightly should our approach not be well received.

For **Our Future Foyle**, we chose this project name as it was positive and inclusive to emphasis the community and wellbeing focus. Whilst we would always put our logo on communications, we could see that the Royal College of Art's involvement was not necessarily a selling point to the community: it can be confusing to people not familiar with design research as to why we are working on briefs outside of art or education, as well as provoking questions as to why the London-based RCA had been chosen to work in Northern Ireland. It would be a distraction from the purpose of the engagement.

As we were asking for brief, low-level engagement from the general public through events rather than a long-term relationship of sustained participation in a co-design process, we felt it was acceptable to not focus on the RCA's role.

The project was successful in developing a brand strong enough to be adopted and continued by the new steering group after our design and research work had concluded.

Our public image as a reknowned arts and design institute can also bring benefits. In several of our projects, including **Our Future Foyle** and **Creative Citizens**, we hav run a week-long cross-disciplinary sprint where we invite our Masters students to create and participate in community engagement activities and quick-fire ideas generation.

This can breathe fresh air into a project and give the community the chance to work with artists, architects and designers. It also provides an opportunity for the students to work within a live research project addressing social challenges, and to hear first hand from residents' lived experience, promoting the value of citizen engagement and participation in art and design in their future careers.

Left: Postcards for Our Future Foyle (credit: Our Future Foyle)

Top facing: AcrossRCA 'Creative Citizens' student project to engage new audiences with Tate South Lambeth Library (credit: Jia, Liu, Hammond, Borup)

Bottom facing: Young people in Stockwell, London helping AcrossRCA students to map local activities (credit: Wittrick, Bassiri, O'Shea, Yi)

ESTABLISHING OURSELVES IN THE COMMUNITY

How do we build relationships with the community?What happens when we are also active members of the local community, whether these links are pre-existing or developing through the immersive nature of a research project?

When the **Our Future Foyle** team didn't want the focus to be on us as outsiders, playing down our background was not enough. We needed to demonstrate our commitment to the community through actions as well as words, by understanding and in some ways being part of the wider community.

Little things such as staying in local hotels and rental apartments rather than national chains made a big difference to both our knowledge and experience of the city and people's attitudes towards us. We also employed local young people to help on the project. One of our researchers has since chosen to relocate to Northern Ireland for the project and still lives and works there.

The Boundary Estate in Shoreditch, East London - the community studied in **In The Shade** - was chosen by our researcher as one that not only appealed to her as an architectural researcher due to its design and social history, but also because it was near her home. This meant that she was already aware of existing community groups that could provide an easy way-in to the community for a project which needed to get off the ground fast.

Whilst the researcher was always open about being employed by the RCA, her local knowledge and connection helped her to also participate more informally in groups, and to explain why she was interested in this particular local urban neighbourhood.

Without prior connections, our research teams need time to become familiar with the people and the environment and make ourselves known locally.

This can be made easier by project partners who have established relationships with local groups. They are able to direct or introduce us to people.

We have to be considerate of these relationships, which in some cases had their own power dynamics, such as when the local group is also a tenant of the partner. To be accountable to both, we have to stay neutral and be clear that we don't wish to be take advantage of our partner's position.

We spend a lot of effort developing our own researcher-community relationships and building trust. These need time and space to emerge. Attending local events and engaging with existing networks such as residents groups and online forums is a good way to start, to find interested participants and to spread the word about the project organically within the community.

Left: Researcher Elizabeth Raby on the Foyle with Foyle Search and Rescue. (credit: Our Future Foyle)

Facing: Participants from community-led projects mapping their use of media at a Creative Citizens workshop. (credit: HHCD)

THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNER

If a project is truly led by the community in that they are the ones generating the ideas and developing them towards implementation, it can be hard to distinguish where the role of a designer comes into the equation.

Facilitating creative outputs from community members is in itself a design challenge that should not be underestimated. Generating exciting workshop plans that are relevant to the user group, with visually stimulating materials and activities, requires the skills of a designer. Creative skills also help to make clear engagement strategies and design processes, promote events, facilitate discussions and collect feedback in different ways.

It is important to communicate what goes into this process with the project partners as early as possible as it is not always obvious how much time, effort and skill is required to develop engagement and co-design activities.

In the co-design project **Creative Citizens** we also use our skills as designers to support the contributions of the community by developing their initial ideas into more detailed concepts. We would visualise ideas for individuals to make them easier to understand and share with others, helping to get deeper and wider responses. This design work would take place in the weeks between community engagement or co-design activities as a way of moving the project forward before the next event.

As paid designers working on projects with community volunteers, it feels important that we show that we are contributing our expertise to the project and investing our time and focus on their suggestions - as well as sharing but not pushing our own ideas. This shows that we are commited to the co-design process.

THE DESIGNER IN THE COMMUNITY

LESSONS:

3. Building trust
4. Pacing the project
7. Be visual + stimulating

PLANNING ENGAGEMENT

WHO TO ENGAGE

When seeking to engage a community, first we need to pin down who is 'the community' that we are talking about. Do we mean active members of local community groups with whom we have built a relationship, or are we interested in the views of everyone who lives or works within a neighbourhood, even those who may not feel they are part of a strong community?

In **Creative Citizens** we were really focused on the first, although interestingly the purpose of the research was to design tools to reach the second. With Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum (KTNF), they wished to engage a much broader audience in developing the draft proposals for their Neighbourhood Plan. For one activity, we invited KTNF members to bring along one local friend or acquaintance completely unconnected with their project as a way of tapping into this new audience. We then ran a 'speed-dating' activity where each member spoke to each new person for 3 minutes in turn. This helped the members to hone in on the new person's interests and think how to relate them to the quite dry policies in the draft neighbourhood plan (parks, traffic, housing etc..), as a way of making it interesting and relevant to people's lives.

This method also showed us the barriers that people might face when considering turning up to a community event for the first time. With this set-up, those new to the project felt welcome, wanted, valued, and less nervous as they knew at least one other person.

When we seek to focus on community in the broadest sense of all residents rather than active citizens, the challenge is to include the views of those not usually heard from by our partners and stakeholders. The technique we employed in **Our Future Foyle** and **Creative Citizens** was to run activities at well-established local events where we could reach a ready-made audience, such as school fetes and summer festivals. We also conduct ad-hoc street interviews, and have run creative sessions in schools with primary and secondary students.

When thinking about the hard-to-reach we are aware that those underrepresented in our research are not necessarily disconnected from a local community. Some may be disenfranchised; others may be active, but not interested or feel able to participate in our particular project. We cannot make people take part, but we can give them the opportunity to do so in a way that appeals to them, that is initially light-touch, and which is inclusive of all. We also aim to design the engagement to appeal and to stand out from traditional consultation.

In **Creative Citizens**, a key focus was on online participation as a way to reach new audiences. KTNF had the traditional set-up of a community group with evening meetings and AGMs, and whose membership was mostly long-term residents many of whom had active roles in other community groups or local organisations. We were aware that many local people who might be interested in the future development of Kentish Town's housing and the urban environment, were unlikely to participate in this type of organisation.

A better online presence, including social media and an online forum for discussing elements of the neighbourhood plan, would provide people with a way to contribute from their own home, at a time suitable to them, and without the social commitment or anxiety of a public meeting.

In general, our engagement strategies are broad at first, with engagement designed to be simple, enjoyable, accessible and inclusive. Through open invitations, we give people the agency to say 'no', making disengagement a conscious decision on their part. That way there is less risk that they will feel they were excluded. We recognise the value of the networks of community groups and gatekeepers, and appreciate the contributions of active citizens, whilst acknowledging that this does not excuse us from trying to reach those not actively involved in traditional civic life or local organisations.

p.20 left: Sharing ideas for an online neighbourhood plan at a local event, Kentish Town. (credit: HHCD)

p.20 right: Children drawing their hopes for the Foyle riverfront, in Derry/Londonderry. (credit: Our Future Foyle)

Below: 'Speed dating' style activity with Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum, Creative Citizens. (credit: HHCD)

AN EQUAL EXCHANGE

Part of creating meaningful opportunities for engagement and participation is making sure that what we are asking people to give to the project is realistic within their lives and in proportion to what we can offer them in return.

For example, in the very simplest engagement activity such as an on-street questionnaire or a post-it wall we try to make it easy to understand, quick and welcoming. If we're asking people to contribute longer, such as a workshop, we design it to minimise pressure on their time.

In all these projects, all workshops took place within the local community; at community centres, GP surgeries, in community rooms above pubs or in local cafes; with a fair few planning meetings taking place in people's homes over tea and biscuits. People are almost always volunteering their time to our engagement activity, which might be on top of other volunteering activities if they are active members of the local community, whereas we are paid researchers. It felt important to make sacrifices ourselves by running workshops in evenings or weekends, or fitting around the school day, whatever felt better for the intended audience, and no more than two hours in length.

When we ran a pop-up community event in the Boundary Estate for **In The Shade**, the aim was to attract people who had not necessarily been involved before, so had no long term investment in the project or its outcomes. They were asked to take an illuminated balloon and place it within the bandstand near to the word they felt most reflected what they thought was the purpose of a neighbourhood at nighttime ('shopping', 'eating', 'dancing', etc.). By way of thank you, our researcher made balloon-shaped biscuits to show her immediate appreciation of their participation.

We always make workshops and other activities fun and interesting, so that they feel rewarding. This means thinking about what the participants will get out of the session immediately, as well as the long-term objectives of the project.

Some groups meet anyway and we can join in on a community group session where they are keen to have an activity to structure their regular meeting around. **In the Shade** took this approach, Our researcher, a local herself, still took the time to get to know the community groups where possible, participating in a group of mostly minority ethnic women for several weeks before running her own activity with them. During this time she worked on a quilt that they were making, and was taught how to make curry by the other members, after she had shared her frustrations in not knowing how.

In any events that we hold, we will be inviting people who are strangers to each other, so we make sure that there is the time and atmosphere for people to meet, chat and find shared interests and experiences. These chance connections have value in building social capital, an important aspect for making strong communities. For example, at one workshop, two women met: one managed the community garden and the other had always wanted to get involved but had been putting it off as she didn't know who to approach or how to join.

Even when we designed an evaluation activity in **Creative Citizens**, in which we needed to ascertain the change in 'value' that might come about within the community project due to our involvement, we designed an activity that we felt would also benefit the community. This involved asset-mapping, which would allow the community projects to reflect on what local assets they were using in their projects, and crucially, what assets they were aware of but were not engaging with, highlighting any untapped potential within their existing networks.

Small wins like this from each activity help to keep participants interested, rather than placing all the emphasis on the final project outputs which might take a long time to materialise.

***PLANNING ENGAGEMENT* LESSONS:**

5. Value what already exists
6. Make engagement accessible
7. Be visual + stimulating

Top facing: The Great Balloon Swap, Arnold Circus (credit: Katherine Leedale)

Bottom facing: Asset mapping with Kentish Town Neighbood Forum (credit: HHCD)

DESIGNING ENGAGEMENT

HOW TO ENGAGE

One thing that has stood out from our engagement activities is how well it works to weave in elements of the local area, culture, or history. This is particularly important in early engagement with the wider community where we are new to them and where we want to attract people beyond those involved in community groups.

In **Our Future Foyle**, the basis of our engagement activity was the story of 'Dopey Dick', an orca whale who swam up the Foyle in the 1970s and stayed for a week becoming a local attraction. Dopey's visit came during the height of 'The Troubles', and for many who were children at the time, it is a happy memory of the river and of meeting people from other communities.

The research team built an engagement space based on the structure of a whale, in collaboration with local creatives. The structure drew on other aspects of local culture, such as the whale's skin made from material donated by the city's last shirt makers, drawing on the city's historic shirt-making industry. Through these references to stories and culture, it gave people different ways to find intrigue and connection with the whale, along with fun, friendly aesthetics to attract children and adults alike.

This positive, politically-neutral engagement space was set-up during the Clipper Festival, a 9-day festival attracting 163000 people to Derry/Londonderry and a celebrated event in the city's calendar. An estimated 1250 people came to the space, with 1 in 5 engaging with our consultation around people's experiences and aspirations for the river, through commenting on postcards, voting using stickers, decorating the whale's skin with drawings or sharing stories in interviews.

This is a style of mass engagement which needs the interaction to be simple whilst appealing to as many people as possible, as a way to gather collective thoughts from the community. By asking them something positive that they know about such as their own aspirations for the neighbourhood, we're giving them an easy route into engagement.

In engagements like this, we're not only interested in the insights collected through written comments, votes and drawings, but also those that emerge from the conversations sparked between researchers and local people.

More targeted engagement allows designers to work more closely with a smaller number of people and get deeper, rather than wider insights. We use this in the early engagement phase, such as with stakeholder groups or community groups, right throughout the co-design process.

Our workshops for **In The Shade** ran an engagement activity with three different community groups: a group of minority ethnic women, an older people's group and a Bengali men's group. The workshops aimed to find out how people use and feel about urban space after dark. We used word association, discussion and mapping exercises, such as making their own personal maps of the estate using chalk on black card to illustrate the neighbourhood at night. Participants were encouraged to map their emotional reactions as well as physical spaces, with people including sounds and smells (noisy clubs, curry houses) as well as pockets of light.

Top facing: In The Shade workshop with Boundary Women's Project (credit: HHCD)

Bottom facing: A local participant's map drawn for In The Shade (credit HHCD)

p.26-27: Dopey Dick the orca, Derry/Londonderry: activities and storytelling. (credit: Our Future Foyle)


ASSEMBLE
MINIONS


Beauty
ONLY £1
Dopey Dick
Returns to the River
let him know your hopes and aspirations
for the riverfront and help us build Our Future Foyle.
Public Health Agency
Our Future Foyle is a research and design project aimed at empowering
the local community to co-create the river and the surrounding banks and bridges.
The aim is that through the co-creation process, the community's sense of ownership of the river.
The area will become associated with wellbeing, community events and public space
The project is commissioned by Public Health Agency Northern Ireland,
in collaboration with local community, voluntary, public and private sectors.
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HOW TO CO-DESIGN

In **Creative Citizens** we ran many different co-design workshops with both The Mill and Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum. Each workshop was bespoke, with both old and new participants. We co-designed with them at successive points in the process to generate, develop and sometimes implement ideas.

When co-designing, the community have an equal role in steering the direction of the project. Our role is about designing and facilitating this process, As researchers we find examples from other places or contexts that the community may not have seen or considered, but which would excite them and push their own thinking. As designers, we also aim to think creatively. We can present these ideas to the group in response to their chosen direction, to push the boundaries and see what they think.

We also apply these skills when working on the project back at our research centre, to move the community's ideas on a level in terms of concept development, ahead of presenting them back during the next co-design session.

Whilst we want ideas to be creative, innovative and exciting, we are careful to add our creativity within the context of everything that we have learnt of the community's needs. We don't to take ownership of the project away from the community. Through an iterative process, with mutual respect between the community and us, we often land on a concept that's innovative and desired by both parties.

***DESIGNING ENGAGEMENT* LESSONS:**

4. Pacing the project
5. Value what already exists
6. Make engagement accessible
7. Be visual + stimulating

Facing: Creative Citizens
(credit: Miguel Angel Valdivia)

PROJECT OUTPUT

ORIGINALITY ISN'T EVERYTHING

Sometimes outputs may not seem exciting to a designer and that they could have been thought of without a lengthy co-design process. However, this process ensures that it is the community's role to decide which path to take. They know what is right for them.

By placing our trust in the community's ability to make decisions, this ensures that both the right idea is chosen, and done so with the community's backing and acceptance, rather it having been imposed upon them.

Community-based design research can also seek to address shortcomings with existing infrastructure, as well as introducing new concepts. Here our role is as about sharing existing views or identifying existing barriers. The faster that we can show participants that these are being addressed, the more time we have to push further the level of creativity.

IMPLEMENTING OUTPUTS

What are we and our partners able to delivered at the end of the project? How will this involve and benefit the community? Are we proposing a potential long-term solution, or an intervention that brings the research to life?

When we prototype or pilot our designs, we consider both what new skills are needed and what skills exist within the community that can support, manage or take ownership of it.

We brought in new team members midway through **Creative Citizens** (software developer), **Our Future Foyle** (architectural designer) and **In The Shade** (product designer). This worked well especially when there was an overlap with the research phase, so they had a thorough understanding of where insights or concepts have come from as well as time to build their own relationships if they were new to the community. That way original participants were kept informed and felt connected to final project outputs.

This also avoided projects being overly dependant on one researcher as guardian of the knowledge and relationships with local people, which could jepordise the project should anything happen that meant they are unable to continue working.

In The Shade had less overlap between researcher and product designer. The researcher came up with a lighting strategy to illuminate a network of nodes within the neighbourhood focusing on places people stood, walked, waited, played. Then, the designer developed a lighting strip fitted within a steel tube mount, the size and shape of scaffolding poles. This meant that it was compatible with all existing scaffolding fixtures and fittings as well as other street furniture that might use steel tubes, such as cycle stands, railings, benches.

This reinvention of steel tube infrastructure much loved by local authorities changed a product that's robust and functional but otherwise unloved, into something creative and original. These settings were prototyped to see how people responded, and the design modified based on local feedback.

The most developed prototype - an illuminated goal - was produced following a conversation our designer had with local young people about how little use the football pitch got as it was unlit. During installation he encouraged the group, who were already watching, to help assemble it. The designer let them know that this would be theirs to care for, for as long as it remained working and in place.

Whilst the transition of the project from research to product development led to a well designed prototype, it was more difficult to evaluate what the original community groups thought of the goalpost concept. The football pitch had little obvious relevance to the community groups we originally worked with but might have been of indirect benefit: some who played there were from the same families, others were neighbours. It also gave a positive activity for young men to do, who had only previously featured in the research as a group that others felt unsafe around after dark.

Below: Local people help construct the goal posts on the Boundary Estate, In The Shade (credit: HHCD)

Below: Children playing football on The Boundary Estate, illuminated by the goal posts (credit: HHCD)

In **Creative Citizens** we needed to be mindful of the gap between the capability of any new technology that we wished to test, and the digital literacy of the community groups. This was particularly true at The Mill where the final prototype was intended to be used by anyone visiting the Mill, so needed a very low entry point. 'The Story Machine' is essentially an iPad that uploads photos and video to a file directory. However whilst the digital technology is not complex, the design around it is more nuanced. The iPad is mounted in a steering wheel, which itself can attach to a mount that is housed with a chair within a pop-up circus tent.

Both the tent and steering wheel add a sense of drama and storytelling to the technology to encourage people to either sit down and share their stories of what they do at The Mill, or to take the wheel out of the tent and become a roving reporter. The heavy wheel also served to make it hard for the iPad to get lost, or be slipped into someone's bag! Once the concept of a security mount and a space for sharing had been agreed upon, the final colourful design came out of a co-design workshop with families at The Mill, with lots of sticky tape, glue and props.

By keeping the technology simple it also reduces the risk that the prototype would become obsolete. As the **Our Future Foyle** team observed, there were lots of relics around the city of Derry/ Londonderry of past art or design projects, yet even a sculpture needs long-term maintenance.

In **Creative Citizens** we had the advantage that we were working with a specific community group who could own the prototype after our project had ended, however we still provided a fair amount of voluntary technical support for several months after we had officially finished, to help the groups when problems arose. We wished to keep helping the people and their work that we had gotten to know so well. Were we now part of the community?

***PROJECT OUTPUT* LESSONS:**

5. Pacing the project
7. Be visual + stimulating
8. Leave responsibly

Top facing: Co-design workshop with local people to create and prototype ideas for storytelling at The Mill (credit: HHCD)

Bottom facing: The Story Machine at The Mill, Creative Citizens. (credit: HHCD)

PROJECT END

How do we build relationships and networks with the community, and still leave responsibly? What's the impact of the project after we leave? How much control do we have over the future of the project, and how do we accept what's beyond our control?

Whilst we want our projects to have a lasting legacy, we are also conscious that our involvement is finite, and that the direction of the project beyond that period is sometimes unknown, whether by design or by factors outside of our control.

We are open with community participants about the limits of our involvement, both in terms of an end date and in what we have control over. Whilst we ideally have a budget for prototyping, that's not always the case, and the ambitions of some of the resulting designs can go far beyond that of the original research project, such as one of the designs to emerge from **Our Future Foyle**.

The Foyle Reeds is an illuminated art installation designed to run the length of the Foyle Bridge. The partner unlocked extra funding so we could create a section as a full-size working prototype. This was possible in part due to the strength of this design and the support of the community and stakeholders. It could not have been guaranteed from the start that we would reach this point.

Now in its third year, **Our Future Foyle** is no longer a project of The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design as the research is complete and it is now in a delivery phase. One of our team also left to set up a company that continues to work on the project's design implementation, This, along with oversight from a steering group, ensures a level of continuity with the original research, helping to check that the design doesn't evolve into something that no longer meets the community's aspirations. The steering group also includes local representation to keep a sense of community-ownership of the interventions.

In The Shade, which is the oldest case study, wasn't designed as a project that would deliver an output for a particular neighbourhood, nor did we ask much from local people or present it as such. By focusing on an inner-city housing estate, its findings such as the neighbourhood lighting strategy were intended to be replicable in similar neighbourhoods nationally or beyond, and are captured in the publication *In The Shade*. The design rights for the steel tube light were owned by the project partners, and produced under the name *TubeLite*.

There was an additional, unexpected impact too: our researcher chose to be a Trustee of the 'Friends of Arnold Circus', a society for the public bandstand and garden at the centre of the estate, a post she retained for nearly 8 years after the end of the project. This commitment reflected how rewarding she had found it to get to know local people.

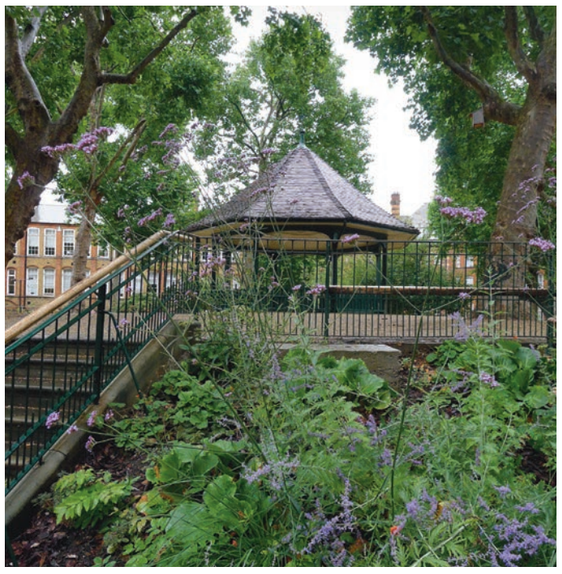
As an academic research project funded by Arts & Humanities Research Council, **Creative Citizens** had a formal requirement to evaluate the impact of our involvement. We focused on how the community projects that we partnered with used local assets, and increased the number of assets they used, during the course of our involvement, captured through a process of asset-mapping.

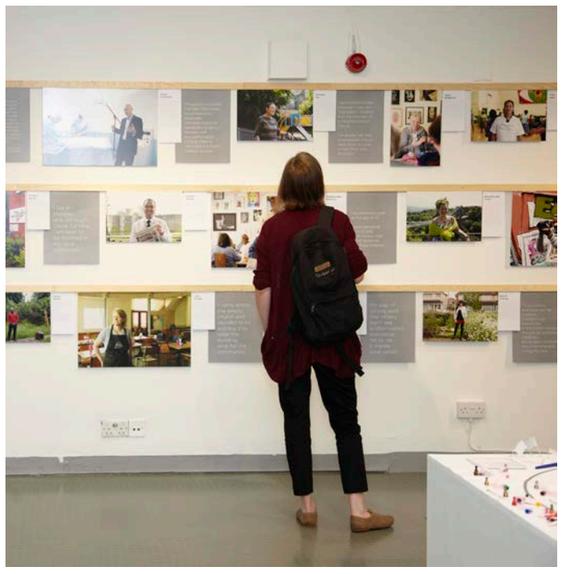
Alongside this we reflected with individuals from community groups on their experience of co-designing with us. This was presented as a photography exhibition featuring portraits of community members and their experiences, as well as in the book *The Creative Citizen Unbound.*

The photography exhibition was displayed at *Creative Citizens: The Conference,* a two-day event held at the Royal College of Art. The conference was designed to bring together researchers, practitioners and community groups, including those with whom we had worked throughout the project.

***PROJECT END* LESSONS:**

1. Clarity of intention
8. Leave responsibly





p.34 left: Full-size prototype of Foyle Reeds, exhibited in Derry/Londonderry (credit: Our Future Foyle)

p.34 right: The bandstand and gardens at Arnold Circus. (credit: HHCD)

This page: Portrait exhibition of participants' views on co-design, at Creative Citizens conference 2014 (credit: HHCD)

OTHER PROJECTS BY THE HELEN HAMLYN CENTRE FOR DESIGN

OUR STOCKWELL

Duration: 9 months (2018)
Researcher: Carmel Keren
Partners: Hyde Foundation,
Battersea Power Station Foundation

Can a community-led design approach be used to address childhood obesity, within a housing estate in Stockwell, London?

The core aim of this project was for us to engage parents, young people and children within the Stockwell community through people-centred design methods, to understand the local challenges that residents faced that made living healthy active lives more difficult.

This led us to redefine the problem within four insight areas relevant to the Stockwell context:

- responding to cultural differences
- the lack of a high-street hub
- concerns around safety
- boredom for young people

These insight areas were used as design briefs at co-design workshops to develop concepts that could attract wider community support.

AGEING IN A VERTICAL CITY

Duration: 10 weeks (2017)
Researchers: Sidse Carroll, Gabriele Meldaikyte, Elizabeth Roberts, Samantha Wang
Partners: Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Debbie Lo Creativity Foundation.

How can we represent and engage with the diverse experiences of ageing in the dense urban spaces and cultural context of Hong Kong??

We worked with students, academics, researchers and designers from Hong Kong Polytechnic University to conduct research with older people, care home staff and family members, using prototypes and design provocations to engage people throughout. We co-created solutions around sleeping, eating and living: some of the most important activities of a person's life, whatever their age.

Bed spaces in care homes typically have a medical colour palette relating to hospitals rather than homes. The designs, showcased in an exhibition, revealed a newly imagined palette to aid rest, give respite and bring a sense of the domestic into the care setting. Ideas for crockery, cutlery and food services were also presented.

TALKING PEOPLE

Duration: 12 months (2011)
Researchers: Catherine Greene, Lisa Johansson
Partners: Research in Motion (Blackberry)

How might online and offline spaces come together to enhance communication and social exchange in communities?

he project began with a month long workshop with 20 RCA masters students from Visual Communication, Innovation Design Engineering and Design Products.

Working in interdisciplinary teams, the students conducted their own research through a combination of workshops, interviews, surveys and interventions with nearly 150 people – from school children and parents to homeworkers and urban joggers.

The student teams developed design propositions for selected groups, such as the Garden, an online public space for people in long distance relationships, These proposals were exhibited in London in an exhibition entitled 'Beyond the screen'

Following this, HHCD researchers conduced a second phase focusing on two London high streets, with the leafy suburb of Chiswick contrasting with the gritty, urban area of Clapton. We ran a series of interviews with local shopkeepers and residents.

The research uncovered a range of insights into the various means of local communication, noting a lack of crossover between online and offline worlds, meaning many people missed out on information.

In response to this, the study explored how community noticeboards could be digitally enabled, providing real-time information from online and offline sources – and how navigation technology and online maps, currently linear in character, could be enhanced to encourage more chance exchange or discovery within communities.

These and many other ideas were compiled within an online insight bank specially commissioned by the partner to be used internally to gain a deeper understanding of how design and technology can support the changing needs of communities.

p.36 left: Community participants in Stockwell vote on the final concept designs (credit: HHCD)

p.36 right: Project participant, Ageing in a Vertical City (credit: HHCD)

This page: HHCD resarchers Catherine Greene and Lisa Johansson in Clapton. (credit: Petr Krejci)

FURTHER READING

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Elizabeth Raby
Gail Ramster

PROJECT SUPERVISION

Jonathan West
Jak Spencer
Jo-Anne Bichard
Jeremy Myerson

PROJECT PARTNERS

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COMMUNITIES

Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum
The Mill, Walthamstow
Friends of Arnold Circus
St Hilda's East Community Centre
Residents of Derry/Londonderry

Below facing: The Great Balloon Swap, Arnold Circus, for In The Shade (credit: Katherine Leedale)

AUTHORS

Gail Ramster is a design researcher focusing on people-centred and co-design approaches to address social challenges with citizens and communities. Her ten years of experience at The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design has extended across public services, infrastructure and autonomous vehicles to designing workplaces for better wellbeing and the use of digital tools to support community engagement.

An expert in public toilet design, she is director of Public Convenience, which runs The Great British Public Toilet Map. In 2020 she launched the Public Toilet Research Unit with Prof. Jo-Anne Bichard, at the RCA.

Carmel Keren is an urban designer and researcher with expertise in community-led design. Her work spans across urban strategies and masterplan projects, as well as research and small-scale build projects across London, Glasgow and Lisbon, championing engagement with local communities.

Aftr working at The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design as researcher on the community-led project Our Stockwell, Carmel joined the Greater London Authority (2019). Here she focuses on establishing a new best practice approach to consultation and engagement through Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks for the capital's most significant growth locations.

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