Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: The Open University		
Unit of Assessment: D32 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
Title of case study: Empowering disenfranchised community groups to become co-designers of their local environment and agents of change		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Theodore Zamenopoulos Katerina Alexiou	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in Design Senior Lecturer in Design	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2005-present 2005-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2013 - 31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Alexiou and **Zamenopoulos**' research on community-led design has enabled disenfranchised groups across the UK to become co-designers of their local environment and effective agents of change. Notably, the research enabled:

- A grassroots group in North London to build community support and obtain planning permission for a plan to save a Latin-American market;
- Over 5 UK charities and social enterprises to use co-design and extend their reach and impact, leveraging over GBP6 million to tackle social isolation;
- 55 UK faith groups to develop and acquire funding for building design projects that enhance the historic, cultural and social value of their spaces.

2. Underpinning research

Alexiou and **Zamenopoulos**' research explores the human, social or political conditions that determine community groups' capacity to lead local design projects. They work in partnership with public, private, third and civil sector organisations to study, influence and co-create practical approaches and resources to develop real-world community leadership in design.

Between 2012 and 2016, the researchers worked with Wards Corner Community Coalition (WCC) during their campaign to prevent the demolition of the historic Wards Corner Building and Latin-American Market in Tottenham, North London, and protect the community from misplacement. This Creative Citizens research project examined how social and other media can engage people and empower them to use community resources and skills to make design decisions about their local area. The project developed a new methodology to map communities' often hidden ecosystems of local *assets*, such as skills, spaces and networks and evidenced how this approach can drive place-based social innovation **[O1, O2]**.

In their Scaling up Co-design research project (February 2013 to June 2014), **Alexiou** and **Zamenopoulos** further developed their asset mapping methodology and applied it in the context of collaborative work between civil society organisations (CSOs) and academics. The research explored the principles and mechanisms necessary to scale-up co-design practice and expertise of CSOs and communities. The project involved a partnership with 5 social enterprises and charities across the UK. Together they co-created a new 'cross-pollination' approach to incubate projects and partnerships. The research provided evidence of the empowering effects and value of co-design and cross-pollination **[O3, O4]**.

Between 2014 to 2020 the researchers' Empowering Design Practices (EDP) project further developed and evaluated different processes and mechanisms for empowering those looking after historic places of worship to engage with design processes and reimagine their places as resources for the wider community used to meet spiritual, cultural and social needs **[O5]**.

3. References to the research

O1. **Zamenopoulos, T**., Sobers, S., **Alexiou, K**., Chapain, C., Alevizou, G., and Williams, A. (2016) 'Varieties of Creative Citizenship', In The Creative Citizen Unbound, I. Hargreaves editor. pp103-128 ISBN 978-1-4473-2495-9. [Physical copy available on request].

O2. **Alexiou, K**., **Zamenopoulos, T**., Greene, K., Alevizou, G., Chapain, C., Agusita E., Harte, D., and Ramster, G. (2016) 'Asset mapping and civic creativity', In The Creative Citizen Unbound, I. Hargreaves and J. Hartley editors, Policy Press, pp 181-204. ISBN 987-1-4473-2495-9. https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781447324942.003.0008 [Physical copy available on request].

O3. **Zamenopoulos, T**. and **Alexiou, K**. (2018) Co-design as collaborative research. AHRC Connected Communities Foundation Series, Facer, K. and Dunleavy, K. (series eds). Bristol University/AHRC Connected Communities Programme. Link: https://connected-communities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Co-Design_2.pdf

O4. **Zamenopoulos, T**., Lam, B., **Alexiou, K**., Kelemen, M., de Sousa, S., Moffat, S., and Phillips, M. (2019) Types, obstacles and sources of empowerment in co-design: the role of shared material objects and processes. CoDesign: International Journal of CoCreation in Design and the Arts. https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2019.1605383

O5. **Alexiou, K**., **Zamenopoulos, T**., Hale, V., West, S. and de Sousa, S. (2020) Empowering Design Practices: exploring relations between architecture, faith, society and community. Open Arts Journal, Issue 9, article 5. https://doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2020w05

4. Details of the impact

Empowered a group to build support for a plan to protect a historic building and its Latin-American community

Alexiou and **Zamenopoulos** worked closely with a core group from the Wards Corner Community Coalition (WCC) (15 people on average) and used asset-mapping to identify individuals, organisations and other resources to feed into the development of their community plan for the Wards Corner market **[O1, O2]**. The researchers supported the group to co-design and launch a digital public consultation platform for the plan, implemented on StickyWorld in January 2014 **[C1**, p.2**]**. This platform was used to showcase the community plan through a 3D virtual tour and to invite feedback from the local community. More than 200 local community members provided comments on the plan **[C1**, p.3 comments on pp.3-335**]** which the group fed into a detailed planning application to realise their vision for the site, gaining Council approval in April 2014 **[C1**, pp.336-341**]**.

In a 2014 interview, a WCC member said: "*it was really nice to have a collaborative project with academics that actually came to something"*, and explained that it sparked a *"marked re-engagement of people on the site"*, particularly local traders, by giving the community an accessible plan to "*galvanise around*". In an email to the researchers in 2020, another WCC member commented: "*The StickyWorld platform created through the OU Creative Citizens collaboration with WCC [...] was a really useful tool to engage people and to mobilise support for the community plan […] StickyWorld came at exactly the right time for the campaign*" **[C2]**.

Enhanced the practice, impact and reach of civil society organisations

The 'cross-pollination' approach **Alexiou** and **Zamenopoulos** developed with partners during the Scaling up Co-design research project helped seed new collaborations and enhance the

capacity of participants to secure new projects, diversify and improve their practice and reach more communities **[O3, O4]**. The initial project network (in February 2013) included 15 collaborators (5 CSOs, 4 universities and 5 communities) who agreed to work on 3 community projects. By June 2014, and following the cross-pollination process, the network grew to 32 collaborators who delivered 10 community projects **[C3**, pp. 2-32**]**.

During the project evaluation, Silent Cities Founder reported that the project gave her "*the energy and confidence to talk about co-design in an authoritative way*", and enabled her "*to embed co-design into Sheffield's Big Lottery bid for [GBP6 million] to reduce isolation and loneliness for older people".* As she explained, co-design was 'cited as the key factor' in the bid's success **[C3**, page 39**]**.

The Blackwood Foundation's Head of Innovation also reported "*We now listen, we now involve, we work with people to make sure homes are inclusive, and a lot of that work comes from the Scaling up Co-Design project*" **[C3**, page 39**]**.

The project was used in AHRC's April 2014- March 2015 report to highlight the impact of AHRC research **[C3**, p. 67**]**.

In a November 2019 letter to **Alexiou** and **Zamenopoulos,** The Glass-House Community Led Design's Chief Executive, explained how the national charity embedded the cross-pollination approach in their subsequent practice. It was applied in a workshop on housing provision in 2015, for which she wrote: "*Bringing organisations that had often operated as competitors to explore this cross-pollination approach quickly illustrated the opportunities that collaboration offered".* The approach was also applied in a 2019 event focused on the regeneration of Portobello in Edinburgh: "*One of the most striking and useful learning outcomes from this was the potential for cross-pollination to connect assets and projects of different scales within a larger conversation about the place and how it is working*" **[C4]**.

Built the capacity of custodians of historic places of worship to transform their buildings for local communities

Through the Empowering Design Practices (EDP) project, **Alexiou** and **Zamenopoulos** supported more than 55 UK communities responsible for historic places of worship to engage with design and reimagine their buildings as community resources **[O5]**. Between 2014 and 2020, the researchers offered design training and specialist support to more than 460 people, through activities such as live student projects, workshops and skills development programmes **[O5]**. In post-event feedback, participants reported that the project changed their perspectives and helped them develop new knowledge and skills, such as how to engage in the design process and collaborate effectively. They also noted participation had enhanced their understanding and appreciation of heritage buildings, improved their confidence in their design and leadership capabilities, and encouraged them to adopt a positive stance towards change **[C5]**. The Community Church Edinburgh Team Leader, reported that the experience inspired them to look at their building with "*different eyes, not only thinking what functionally do we need*" but also how to make it a space that "*inspires something of beauty and wonder and curiosity*" **[C6]**.

EDP activities also empowered groups to secure funding to develop their buildings and the activities they offer. After participating in project workshops, Cemetery Road Baptist Church in Sheffield were able to secure a total of GBP134,000 in funding from various sources to invest in repairs and making the building energy efficient **[C7**, pp. 2-4**]**. During a 2018 interview, their volunteer fundraiser, said EDP "*raised our aspiration to use our building for community mission and ministry, to meet the needs of both ourselves as a growing multi-ethnic church community and our neighbouring communities, in one of England's 10% most deprived areas*" **[C6]**. In an email to the EDP team in July 2020 he wrote "*Securing the funds for this project is largely due to the support and training we received from the EPD Team*" **[C7**, p.5**]**.

Similarly, through participation in EDP workshops, Hanley All Saints Church in Stoke-on-Trent developed ideas and connections to successfully obtain GBP283,000 from National Lottery Heritage Fund and other funders to repair and transform the space for the community **[C8]**. In an interview in 2018, Hanley All Saints Vicar explained: "*All Saints was always a narrative of neglect. There were the broken windows, the guttering, the place was falling apart, it was cold, it was unattractive […]. But at the [EDP project] meeting I started hearing, "what you're asking for is not that much" […] they spoke in a way which was confident because they'd seen it possible*" **[C5]**.

The Israac Somali Community Association based at the Vestry Hall in Sheffield, built on EDP workshops and training to start thinking about their building differently and expand their partnership working. In December 2020 they secured a grant from Tudor Trust to fund two key posts to take activities forward **[C9].** In an interview in December 2019 the Israac chair reported that EDP helped them "*take a step back and look at the space, the historical [elements], all the opportunities and the challenges in terms of assets […], if you didn't come along, we wouldn't look at that aspect*". Another Israac member suggested that EDP opened up possibilities for working with local universities which they all felt was "*was pretty inspirational*" **[C6]**.

Historic England's Head of Places of Worship Strategy, in a video interview in February 2020, talked about the project's impact on thinking about sustainability of historic places of worship and their value to the whole community: "*What I think this project has shown is that the future of those buildings is based in their value to the whole community. They are a fantastic resource which can be used for worship certainly, but also for a wide range of other things that will enrich lives and bring joy and create a sense of identity and engagement, all of those things which are top priorities in the country as a whole today. That gift if you like of a place of worship to a whole community gives us a very different perspective on its sustainability than thinking of it as being a burden on half a dozen of people […]. One of the things that the project has taught me and I think has taught the 50 odd congregations that have joined in with it, is that it is possible to think about using your building differently, working with different partners and engaging with the fabric of a historic building*" **[C10]**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1. Evidence of work and impact on Wards Corner Community Coalition:
- WCC StickyWorld platform. January – March 2014 (p.2).
- Report collating the online comments on the StickyWorld platform which was submitted to Haringey Council as evidence of support for its community plan. Includes community feedback and dates of the consultation (pp. 3-218).
- Handwritten support for the community plan collected during the WCC consultation using the StickyWorld platform and in submitted in support of the application (pp. 219-335).
- Evidence of approved Wards Corner Community Coalition planning permission. Haringey Council letter, 25th April 2014 (pp. 336-341).

C2. Collection of quotes from Wards Corner Community Coalition participant interviews and feedback 2014-2020.

C3. Evidence of Scaling up Co-design project impact:
- Report developed for advising the Cabinet Office on co-design and civic action, January 2016 (pp. 2-13).
- Public project report, describing the projects co-designed and co-delivered with partner civil society organisations (14-32).
- Independent report by Brighton researchers evaluating the impact of the Scaling up Co-design project alongside other AHRC connected community projects. Includes quotes from participants (pp. 33-46).
- AHRC 'The Impact of AHRC Research, April 2014- March 2015' report. Including the Scaling Up project on page 67 (pp. 44-92).

C4. Testimonial letter from Glass-House Community Led Design, 14th November 2019.

C5. Mid-term impact review of Empowering Design Practices conducted by independent consultant Ashley Jay Brockwell, August 2018, including quotes from participants.

C6. Collection of quotes from Empowering Design Practices participant interviews and feedback forms, 2014 – 2019.

C7. Evidence of Cemetery Road Baptist Church funding and the project's impact:
- Press Release evidencing the funding obtained (pp. 2-4).
- Email from a volunteer fundraiser, July 2020 (p.5).

C8. Evidence of All Saints Hanley funding in local press.

C9. Evidence of Israac funding, announcement on their website December 2020.

C10. Video from the Empowering Design Practices celebration event on 12 February 2020, containing testimonials from project partners and participants DOI: 10.21954/ou.rd.13626794. (Timestamp: 3:18-4:02).