

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Aberdeen		
Unit of Assessment: UoA30 (Philosophy)		
Title of case study: Spinoza, equality, and housing design		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Beth Lord	Professor	01/2013-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Beth Lord's project <i>Equalities of Wellbeing in Philosophy and Architecture</i> investigated concepts of equality and wellbeing in Spinoza's philosophy, and applied those concepts to architecture and housing. This unique pairing revealed the significance of Spinoza's thought for the UK housing crisis, space standards policy for new housing, and design for wellbeing. Architects and charities found the project important and influential. The widely viewed project film, <i>Equal by Design</i>, informed, shaped, and was selected to feature in a museum exhibition and public programme. The research had social and cultural impact, and impact on the UK's most prominent housing/homelessness charity that influences policy.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza is well known for his <i>Ethics</i> but his relevance for contemporary debates on equality and wellbeing is not widely recognized. Beth Lord has undertaken research into the concept of equality in Spinoza's work since 2012. She found that Spinoza's thinking anticipates recent research in the social sciences about the negative impact of income inequality on wellbeing. In 2013, Lord (PI) and Peg Rawes (Co-I, Architecture, University College London) were awarded an Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Standard Research Grant for the project <i>Equalities of Wellbeing in Philosophy and Architecture</i> (2013-16). This project aimed to investigate how a concept of equality based on proportion, found in both philosophy and architecture, could ground a more equal distribution of wellbeing, particularly in housing design. The project involved workshops, a conference, publications, websites, and producing the film <i>Equal by Design</i>.</p> <p>The grant enabled Lord to publish two peer-reviewed journal articles (Lord 2014 and 2016) and three book chapters (including Lord 2017 and 2018). Key findings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spinoza denies that human beings are naturally morally equal; that is, that they merit equal treatment and respect just by virtue of some essential human quality such as rationality (Lord 2014). This sets Spinoza apart from the dominant tradition of European thought (e.g. Locke, Rousseau, Kant) that makes moral equality foundational for the principles of equal justice and rights. • By contrast, the type of equality that Spinoza most strongly upholds is equality of wellbeing (Lord 2016). Other forms of equality (e.g. political, social, and moral equality and equal rights) are important only insofar as they contribute to equality of wellbeing. Hierarchies and inequalities in these other areas may, in Spinoza's view, be preferable where they enable more equal wellbeing. 		

- Equality of wellbeing is achieved through social and political structures that enable all people to get the resources and help that they need to thrive, especially money and housing. Spinoza upholds the importance of taxation, income equality, mutual aid, and the fair distribution of goods, including adequate housing (Lord 2016 and 2017).
- Spinoza's concept of equality is grounded in Euclidian geometry (Lord 2018), which is also foundational for architectural design. Unlike arithmetical equality, which posits the equivalence of identical units (e.g. $1 = 1 = 1$), geometrical equality is based on the equivalence of different ratios (e.g. $4:8 = 3:6$). This is equality as proportional equivalence: Spinoza believes that to achieve equal wellbeing we should aim for proportional, rather than arithmetical, equivalence between people.
- Rawes' research demonstrates that architects and planners can achieve greater equality of wellbeing by using this concept of proportionality to inform good housing design and the allocation of housing.

Lord is working on a monograph, *Spinoza and Equality* that will develop these themes further and make a substantial case for Spinoza's distinctive concept of equality and its social and political significance.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Key Grant: Equalities of Wellbeing in Philosophy and Architecture. Awarded to Beth Lord (Principal Investigator, Aberdeen) and Peg Rawes (Co-Investigator, University College London). AHRC Standard Research Grant, June 2013 – June 2016 (GBP230,164).

References:

- *Equal by Design*. Film by Peg Rawes and Beth Lord. Directed by Adam Low. Produced by Lone Star Productions, 2016. Funded by AHRC grant noted above. 25 minutes, digital. Freely available online at www.equalbydesign.co.uk
- Beth Lord (2018), "Ratio as the basis of Spinoza's concept of equality", *Spinoza's Philosophy of Ratio*, ed. Beth Lord (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press). Book chapter in edited collection resulting from a conference of the AHRC grant. The chapter was revised as a result of feedback from an external peer reviewer and from audiences who heard the paper in Aberdeen, London, Dublin, and Groningen in 2014 and 2015.
- Beth Lord (2017), "The free man and the free market: ethics, politics, and economics in Spinoza's *Ethics IV*". In Y. Melamed (ed.), *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Invited contribution to a prominent critical guide published by a major press, edited by one of the top scholars in Spinoza studies.
- Beth Lord (2016), "The concept of equality in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*", *Epoche: a Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol 20, no. 2, pp. 367-386. Blind peer-reviewed article in international journal.
- Beth Lord (2014), "Spinoza, Equality, and Hierarchy", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol 31, no. 1, pp. 59-77. Blind peer-reviewed article in international journal.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Non-academic advisors were engaged with the project from the start. Lord and Rawes worked with architects, Shelter, and The Equality Trust, who attended workshops and contributed to the development and content of the documentary film *Equal by Design*.

Shelter is the largest and most important national charity addressing housing and homelessness. It advises millions of people annually, and its research and campaigns influence government

housing discussions and policy. Deborah Garvie, Policy Manager, contributed to the project and film, and said learning about Spinoza had led her to consider the housing crisis as an equality issue. Asked what she most got out of the project, she said: *“Spinoza! I learned a lot about his philosophy.... I hadn’t thought that you can’t have human rights without equality of space”. She started to consider homelessness as attributable to inequality (rather than deprivation), and gained a new concept of “spatial inequality” – the disproportionate distribution of space – relevant to her work with families in “one-room living” [2].* These insights were communicated in the “Green Book”, Shelter’s 2016 report on the housing crisis [3]. The project led Garvie to conclude that inequality is a cause of homelessness (pp. 42-51) and to work with an architect to develop diagrams that visualize problems of overcrowding (p. 20). *“My idea for that very much came from the project”,* she said, as did the Green Book’s conclusion *“that homelessness doesn’t occur because of deprivation, it occurs because of inequality”*. In future, Shelter will build on these links: *“the philosophical concepts of equality and rights were integral to the usefulness and uniqueness of the project”*. Lord’s research on Spinoza, applied to practical considerations in housing, had a direct impact on Garvie’s connecting inequality, justice, and wellbeing in housing, and fed into Shelter’s publications.

Equal by Design argues that Spinoza’s proportional concept of equality helps us to evaluate the wellbeing implications of unaffordable and low-quality housing. The film was launched in 2016 through public screenings to approximately 400 viewers. Lord and Rawes were invited to present the film in specialist contexts: Levitt Bernstein architects (London) [6], the Scottish Young Planners’ Network (Edinburgh), Aberdeen City Council’s planning department, and Shelter’s London headquarters. The film is freely available online (<http://www.equalbydesign.co.uk/>) and has attracted over 9,800 visits from over 5,300 unique visitors internationally as well as media attention [5, 7].

Harriet Jennings, Public Programme Curator at The Building Centre, a charitably-funded London exhibition venue, selected *Equal by Design* to feature in the exhibition *Making Wellbeing from Birth to Death* (Oct. 2017 – Jan. 2018), which attracted approximately 60,000 visitors. The film caused Jennings to display the architectural designs that featured in it: *“It’s because of the film that we included these architects in the exhibition”,* she said. *“They were key to the show. There were some [architectural] models and the public interacted with them very well. [The film provided] a reason to put all of these people together and gave it a narrative” [4].* A public event featuring these architects was one of the Centre’s most popular, with 200 attending (full capacity) and 1100 watching online. The film was an outreach success and inspired the Building Centre to develop further exhibitions and events on wellbeing and architecture. Jennings said the philosophical content of the film made it *“unique in the housing conversation”*: *“looking at how the past can influence the future, I think the video does that so clearly through the framing with Spinoza. ... It’s really powerful to think about the housing crisis in different ways”*. The film, stemming from Lord’s and Rawes’ research, had a decisive impact on Jennings’ development of the exhibition and public programme [4].

Lord’s research on Spinoza changed the perceptions of architects and urban planners who viewed the film online. One viewer remarked, *“I’m redesigning a social housing project, using wellbeing principles. I hadn’t thought about how applicable Spinoza’s thought was”*. A typical comment was: *“the film made me appreciate Spinoza in relation to design, social, and wellbeing issues”*. Several survey respondents said the film had led to concrete change, such as *“reviewing the scope of the Active Citizenship project to adolescents of small Brazilian cities”* and *“understanding how Birmingham City Council can use their existing land bank to have a positive impact on the housing crisis”*. Respondents reported joining a political party, writing to their MP, or supporting Shelter as a result of seeing the film [1].

This unique project generated changes in thinking and practice that would not have happened otherwise, thereby having social and cultural impact.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] Survey data including testimonials from viewers

[2] Policy Manager, Shelter. Interview transcription. Blog post citing the project's relevance to the problem of poor-quality affordable housing: <http://blog.shelter.org.uk/2015/11/we-must-end-one-room-living/>

[3] Shelter - The Green Book <http://www.shelter.org.uk/greenbook> (site no longer live at time of submission; report available by request). Blog post about The Green Book: <https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2016/12/the-green-book-50-years-on/>

[4] Public Programme Curator, The Building Centre. Interview transcription. *Making Wellbeing* exhibition: <https://www.buildingcentre.co.uk/wellbeing> (site no longer live at time of submission; exhibition images available by request)

[5] Google analytics data for film website

[6] Testimonial from Levitt Bernstein architects: <http://www.levittbernstein.co.uk/now/equal-by-design/>

[7] Project research mentioned in an article in the THE: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/resilient-ideas-from-the-past-offer-powerful-tools-for-today>