

<b>Institution:</b> University of Huddersfield		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA32		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Strengthening and sustaining a vibrant offer in a UK town: embedding a mixed ecology of culture and creativity into the high street.		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Anna Powell	Senior Lecturer in Art and Design	2012-present
Dr Rowan Bailey	Director of Graduate Education in Art, Design and Architecture	2009-present
Professor Nic Clear	Dean of the School of Art, Design and Architecture	2017-present
Professor Donal Fitzpatrick	Professor and Head of Art and Communication	2017-2020
Professor Steve Swindells	Professor of Creative Practice	1999-2017
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2018-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Kirklees local authority was listed in the highest 10% of deprived districts in the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Like much of the UK, Kirklees is experiencing shop closures on the high street, exacerbated by the credit crunch in 2007, austerity policies and a move to online retail. Using Huddersfield town as a case study for modelling and reflecting on cultural re-development, the School of Art, Design and Architecture (ADA) at the University of Huddersfield has engaged in action research to support the conditions for creative and cultural activity and contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre.</p> <p>Researchers at the University of Huddersfield (UoH) worked closely with the Creative and Cultural Development team at Kirklees Council to populate approximately 40 former retail units with a two-year programme of events and activities, that continues to iterate into 2021. Impact arising from the research has included benefits to artists, creative organisations and audiences based in Huddersfield, through a more visible, vibrant and collaborative cultural offering. Further impact was achieved through changing the way that Kirklees Council envisioned creative and cultural activity, embedding collaborative working into the 'Huddersfield Blueprint' regeneration plan and post-Covid-19 road maps to cultural recovery.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Huddersfield is situated in the North of England with a population of around 160,000. The town, and the wider Kirklees region, have many positive attributes, however, in the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation published by the government, Kirklees was listed in the highest 10% of deprived districts and scored extremely low for living environment, crime, education, skills and training. The town has been experiencing, like much of the UK, a change in the ways consumers use the high street. Within the centre of Huddersfield many units in the Queensgate Indoor market and surrounding high street stood empty. Sociologists have argued that shop closures may lead to a breakdown in the social contract (Yuill, C., 2017; Hubbard, P., 2019). However, cultural production has been identified by Kirklees Council as one of the ways to sustain economic benefits</p>		

and prosperity in Huddersfield. This research addresses the problem of shop closures as part of a proposed model of cultural redevelopment.

During 2014-2016, **Professor Steve Swindells** (tenure at Huddersfield 1999-2017) and **Dr Anna Powell** partnered with Kirklees Council and Huddersfield Art Gallery in a programme of research titled ROTOP III & IV. The ROTOP projects were collaborative exhibition programmes, testing public engagement strategies and partnership working models, based at Huddersfield Art Gallery and funded by Arts Council England. The insights that ROTOP III & IV generated included: the efficacy of its partnership model (based around a council and HEI and incorporating other creative and cultural producers), the importance of stakeholder consultation, and the value of establishing localised networks of creative and cultural practitioners to respond to wider social problems with site specificity. These insights were effectively disseminated in a range of publications (**3.1**, **3.2**, **3.3**). In February 2018, Professor Swindells and Dr Powell brought together the network they had established through ROTOP for the *Culture, Community, Creativity* conference. This was an opportunity to reflect on what had emerged during ROTOP, identify the concerns of the network and develop strategies to implement live action research in the town. At the conference, the most important question that the network settled on for future collaborative working, using Huddersfield as a case study, was: *How might creative thinking and action be nurtured and lead to the growth of places?* This question, along with the insights from the ROTOP research, led directly to the creation of a new programme launched in 2018 by **Dr Rowan Bailey**, **Professor Nic Clear** and **Professor Donal Fitzpatrick** titled *Temporary Contemporary*.

Using the method of live action research, *Temporary Contemporary* tested its contention that embedding creative and cultural activity into the town and making this activity visible through a shared ecology would bring benefits for the participants, including but not limited to: **artists, cultural organisations, arts development professionals, audiences and students**. It initiated this testing through a collaborative programme that occupied shop and indoor market retail units, encouraged the formation of a network of cultural activities and producers, and then reflected on the benefits of the programme as it unfolded. The aim of the programme, in direct partnership with the Creative and Cultural Development Team at Kirklees Council, was to strengthen the conditions for creative and cultural production in Huddersfield by extending the partnership network initiated by ROTOP. The programme, combining research exhibitions, art, craft, music 'greening', sport, public meeting spaces, food, drink and opportunities for young people, entrepreneurs, artisans and retailers, interrogated the nature of **place-based making** and the values of generating a '**mixed ecology**'. The exhibitions themselves included reflections on Huddersfield (**3.4**), place-based making, commoning practices and future visions/ways of seeing the town.

The findings of the research (disseminated in a book **3.5** and journal article **3.6**) have helped to augment the population of vacant retail units in Huddersfield (within Queensgate Market and the Piazza shopping centre) with 'happenings' (exhibition events) and by fostering a network/critical mass of partners – including local authorities and HEIs – has improved the conditions for cultural creation in the town. Moreover, the research has found that the values arising from the initiative have not been exclusively economic, but rather social, aesthetic, educational and 'ecological', meaning that different cultural practices and people are more effectively and meaningfully linked. This model of collaborative working and its findings has influenced other space providers in Huddersfield through the network and has led to a set of guidelines, shared branding and advertising through Creative Kirklees and Hello Huddersfield (the platform run by Huddersfield Business Improvement District (Hudd BID)).

Yuill, C. (2017) 'The Credit Crunch and the High Street: 'Coming like a Ghost Town' Sociological Research Online. December 2017.

Hubbard, P., (2019) 'Enthusiasm, craft and authenticity on the British High Street.' Social & Cultural Geography. Volume 20 Issue 6 July 2019.

### 3. References to the research

- 3.1 Powell, A. and Pitwood, L., (2020) *ROTOP Review II*, Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press \* ISBN-978-1-86218-179-3  
<https://unipress.hud.ac.uk/plugins/books/21/>

- 3.2 Swindells, S. and Powell, A., (2014) *What is to Be Done? Cultural Leadership and Public Engagement in Art and Design Education*. Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing ISBN-13:978-1-4438-5890-8 [can be supplied on request]
- 3.3 Swindells, S. and Powell, A., (2016) 'Measuring the Immeasurable: Articulating the Value of Culture'. *The International Journal of Social, Political and Community Agendas in the Arts* Vol 11(4) <https://doi.org/10.18848/2326-9960/CGP/v11i04/39-47> [can be supplied on request]
- 3.4 Clear, N., (2018-2020) *Synthetic Spaces* (multi-component output research portfolio of exhibitions, artefacts and written publications). [listed in REF2]
- 3.5 Bailey, R., Powell, A., Clear, N., Fitzpatrick, D., Pittwood, L., (eds). (2020) *Temporary Contemporary Creating vibrant spaces to support the conditions for creative and cultural activity* Volume 1. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press. ISBN-978-1-86218-1755 <https://unipress.hud.ac.uk/plugins/books/22/> and website: [Temporary Contemporary - University of Huddersfield](https://www.unipress.hud.ac.uk/Temporary-Contemporary-University-of-Huddersfield/)
- 3.6 Bailey et al, (2019) 'Cultural Ecology and Cultural Critique' *Arts* 8(4) 166 special edition *Reconsidering the State(s) of Criticism*. MDPI. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts8040166>

\*The ROTOR III & IV exhibition and events programme at Huddersfield Art Gallery was peer reviewed through the process of creating the book *ROTOR Review II* (3.1) which included reviews by Dr Christine Checinska Associate Research Fellow at the University of Johannesburg, and Professor Luigi Stendardo, University of Padova, Italy. The other outputs (3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6) have been peer-reviewed through academic journal submission processes and review board approvals for exhibitions.

#### 4. Details of the impact

##### **Benefits to the locally-based cultural organisations, workers and audiences (activities, opportunities)**

As part of this live action research project, the *Temporary Contemporary* initiative strengthened the conditions for cultural production in the town and demonstrated a strategy that increased the vibrancy of the high street, to the benefit of cultural organisations, cultural workers and audiences. The project began in 2018, in Queensgate Market, an important modernist landmark and retail destination in Huddersfield, when around 30-40 of the Market's approx. 100 stalls were vacant. In 2019, the Piazza shopping centre, an area of high footfall in the town centre, had over 13 empty units. The vacant spaces in the market and the shopping centre were occupied during the research project by arts and cultural organisations including: West Yorkshire Print Workshop, Children's Art School and Lawrence Batley Theatre at low or no cost (the rents, rates and utilities value of the spaces are around £700pcm) on a rolling, temporary basis that suited their project-based work. Crucially, the temporary nature of the occupation of the units was underpinned by a longer-term membership of the network, with joined up marketing and strategy meetings and a sense of shared identity, the further impacts of which are outlined below.

Prior to *Temporary Contemporary*, cultural sector workers based in Huddersfield and the surrounding region did not have regular opportunities to convene and plan future partnerships. The importance of *Temporary Contemporary* in strengthening the conditions for the creative sector is underscored by the Director for Northern Economy and Partnerships, Arts Council England, who writes: "Cultural practitioners that operate in Huddersfield are based over a wide geography – including Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield. It is important to have opportunities like the *Temporary Contemporary* happenings to meet and network in Huddersfield. It is critically important and shouldn't be under-estimated" (5.1). This is reiterated by the Curator of Yorkshire Sculpture Park: "[*Temporary Contemporary*] has created conditions for supporting arts and culture in Huddersfield, by embedding arts and culture within a wider ecology and cultivating a network of practitioners and organisations. This is a huge benefit to artists and organisations based outside of large cultural centres who may not otherwise have seen themselves as part of a critical mass" (5.2).

Specific cultural sector workers who have benefited from *Temporary Contemporary* include Victoria McCorkell, an independent arts development professional, who set up the 'Parlour' space in Queensgate market to provide artists with professional development training opportunities. McCorkell explains that Parlour has benefitted from sitting within *Temporary Contemporary* where

it provides artist development support: “[being situated in an] open space in the heart of a community with links to *Temporary Contemporary* and an artistic and creative community led to new networks and relationships being formed in a short space of time [...*Temporary Contemporary has*] had a direct impact on our success to date” (5.3). Local artisan beverage businesses Magic Rock and Kwas have benefitted from promoting and selling their products at *Temporary Contemporary* events. Duncan Sime from Kwas confirmed that it had enabled them to reach new audiences and connect to other creatives: “The happenings have given us a platform and connected us with new audiences, it has been a networking opportunity – helping us spread the love!” (5.4).

The second phase of the project in the Piazza involved delivering joint programming and benefitted from the crossing-over of the arts organisations’ different audiences. The Director of WOVEN in Textiles organisation in Kirklees, which temporarily occupied a Piazza shopping centre unit, describes the impact of the programme in creating a community of cultural producers in Huddersfield: “The [second phase of *Temporary Contemporary*] is offering a unique opportunity to bring [diverse] organisations together as a collective voice. The partners may not naturally have come together, however, within the opportunity afforded to them they see the power in working together” (5.5).

In July 2020, between the April and November Covid-19 lockdowns in the UK, the project partners organised the event *Temporary Contemporary: What’s Next?* using the Zoom platform, to reflect on the first two years of programming and plan for the future, given what was already known about the likely effects of Covid-19 on Huddersfield. Following the event, around 15 beneficiaries (locally-based cultural organisations, workers and audiences who had participated in *Temporary Contemporary*) took the opportunity out of around 200 attendees to feed back to the partners about the first two years of programming and the vision for the future of the initiative in the context of Covid-19. Their feedback included that the initiative promoted: “Social collaboration and cohesion” and was “innovative and exciting”. Another said that the values they associated with the initiative were that it: “[filled] a gap in arts and visual culture that takes place outside the traditional arts venue [and had] power to support regeneration and cultural development” (5.6). The event confirmed the impacts of the initiative to date and helped to shape funding proposals for the onward development of the initiative, in the context of Covid-19 cultural recovery.

### **Changes to culture, society and environment in Huddersfield**

During the period 2018-2020, *Temporary Contemporary* has increased the vibrancy of the market with: over 20 research exhibitions (some of which have toured internationally to China and New Zealand), music and artisan pop ups, exhibitions by emerging and mid-career artists and practitioners, undergraduate and postgraduate research showcases from the School of Art, Design and Architecture, providing opportunities for students to curate in the public realm, and a host of ‘happenings’ to create networking possibilities for cultural producers. These new activities both support the cultural life of the town and offer a solution to the changes happening on the high street. Audiences reported enjoying “the atmosphere, the space, the curation, the market as an example of classic modernist architecture” and remarked that the initiative added “character to what had become a dated market” (5.7).

Kirklees Council comprised the other main stakeholder and beneficiary group. Insights from the *Temporary Contemporary* programme fed directly into the Huddersfield Blueprint regeneration plan (5.8), as confirmed by the Creative Economy Manager of Kirklees Council and the Chief Executive of Kirklees Council (5.9, 5.10). The Blueprint is a 10-year vision, launched in 2019 to ‘create a thriving, modern town centre.’ The Creative Economy Manager of Kirklees Council writes: “Eighteen months into the [*Temporary Contemporary*] programme and we have been extremely pleased with the results. The partnership has created a sustained, flexible, sensitive and cultural offer that supports place-based making. The perception of the indoor market has shifted from being seen as a building in a managed decline to now a building with potential – it has been identified as a site for cultural activity in the future of the town through its new master plan, The Huddersfield Blueprint”. [...] Further to this, the insights and reflections of Art, Design and

Architecture have provided a greater understanding of how creative spaces can contribute to wider place-based making” (5.9).

The Chief Executive of Kirklees writes, “For Kirklees Council, the most important insight generated through the *Temporary Contemporary* research initiative is the importance, not just of arts and culture in place-based-making, but in the close co-existence and negotiation of the arts with food, drink, sport, green spaces, retail and people – all of which, we believe, make a town centre thriving and attractive. [...*Temporary Contemporary*] benefits the community of artists and makers involved in the initiative, as well as the wider community” (5.10).

The Markets Manager corroborated other testimonials: “A huge benefit to the market, arising from the initiative, is that people can get involved and feel greater ownership of the market – a space that belongs to everyone. [...] The occupation of the vacant market stalls has increased the vibrancy of the market. [...] It has encouraged people to set up small businesses or events here – they can recognise that there is strength and value in setting up something new within an established community of traders and catering outlets. *Temporary Contemporary* has generated a change in people’s mindset about more established market contexts and what they can offer against a backdrop of changes on the British high street” (5.11).

*Temporary Contemporary* is now a core feature of Kirklees Council arts and culture planning. For example, it is embedded within a range of consortia, including the High Street Heritage Action Zone, to help strengthen the cultural offer of the high street, WOVEN in Kirklees and is now operating in collaboration with other space providers in Huddersfield to offer vacant/meanwhile spaces for a range of creative and cultural activities. The *Temporary Contemporary* partnership secured Innovation of the Year in the National Association of British Market Authorities awards in 2018 (5.12).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### Evidence to corroborate the importance of the Department’s research to local cultural organisations and cultural workers

- 5.1 Statement Director for Northern Economy and Partnerships, Arts Council England.
- 5.2 Statement Senior Curator, Yorkshire Sculpture Park.
- 5.3 Statement Director of Parley and Parlour, artists’ development organisation based in Queensgate Market, Huddersfield.
- 5.4 Statement Director Kwas Wine Shop and Magic Rock Brewery, Huddersfield.
- 5.5 Statement Director WOVEN textile festival, Kirklees (organisation currently occupying a Piazza unit) and Co-Director HATCH Projects art organisation.
- 5.6 Beneficiary feedback captured at *Temporary Contemporary – What’s Next?* event.

### Evidence to corroborate the importance of the Department’s research to the future planning of Kirklees Council and to Kirklees Council as a beneficiary

- 5.7 Visitor feedback - *Temporary Contemporary* happenings.
- 5.8 Huddersfield Blueprint <https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/huddersfield-blueprint/index.aspx>
- 5.9 Statement Creative Economy Manager, Kirklees Council.
- 5.10 Statement Chief Executive, Kirklees Council.
- 5.11 Statement Markets Manager, Kirklees Council.

### Awards

- 5.12 Innovation of the Year in the National Association of British Market Authorities awards.