

Institution: Staffordshire University		
Unit of Assessment: 32 Art and Design: History, Theory, and Practice		
Title of case study: Driving urban regeneration and empowering communities through socially engaged arts practice.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name: Anna-Marie Francis	Role: Associate Professor of Fine Arts and Social Practice	Period employed by submitting HEI: 2005-Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 11 July 2015 –31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This Case Study describes impacts generated by Associate Professor Anna Francis's research into the effects of having professional arts practitioners facilitate public-participatory art within community development and urban regeneration initiatives. The research has led to specific types of impact: fostering community development and cohesion in underprivileged areas of Stoke-on-Trent; influencing local government policy; and developing new initiatives in social arts organizations. It secured GBP566,116 to fund practice-based research, regeneration and new community hub spaces, instituted skills development programmes in an area where 40.9% of over 16s have no formal qualifications, achieved 100,347 in-person engagements with community members, and provided participatory arts training to 479 artists nationwide.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Once a thriving industrial city, the home of English pottery, Stoke-on-Trent is now the twelfth most deprived English local authority (Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019). This deprivation includes a cultural participation rate of 34%, one of the lowest in England (Arts Council England, Active People Survey, 2010). Francis's research examines how professional artists can engage with community members as co-producers, using collaborative methodologies to boost participation in and benefits from civic regeneration initiatives.</p> <p>Francis's research is practice-based. Outcomes include exhibitions, editorials, and practitioner workshops, and new regeneration projects within Stoke-on-Trent. These outcomes were achieved with funding won from the UK Government's Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (then the 'Department for Communities and Local Government' ('DCLG')), The Local Trust (including funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation), Stoke-on-Trent City Council, and Arts Council England.</p> <p><i>Indefinable City</i> (2007) [3.1], an exhibition in collaboration with the AirSpace Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, curated a range of multi-media and site-responsive works from regional artists. These works addressed the role of artists in documenting and leading urban renewal processes. The project supplied the impetus for Francis to develop the action research methodology that shapes this submission. This methodology treats projects as stage-based and collaborative. It encourages investigators to pause and reflect after completing each stage in a project timeline, inviting stakeholder feedback, reviewing emergent impacts, and rethinking issues and assets in line with community strengths or needs.</p> <p><i>Rethinking the Brownfields</i> (2012-ongoing) [3.2], which includes <i>The Spode Rose Garden</i> (September 2013-ongoing) involved reframing and developing urban brownfield sites to maximize their social and ecological value. Over several stages, <i>Spode Rose Garden</i> transformed a derelict site at the Spode ceramics factory into a community garden, then opened to the public in 2016. The projects investigated how action research and artistic co-production give stakeholders meaningful involvement in project planning and implementation. Emphasizing co-production led participants to reframe community benefits as sustainable, ecological, and social, rather than short-term, economic, and exclusive.</p> <p><i>Community Maker</i> (2015-2017) [3.3] was extended by <i>The Portland Inn Project</i> (2016-ongoing), a collaboration with the professional artist Rebecca Davies. Both projects used and explored action research in asset-based community development projects. Focused on Hanley, an underprivileged area of Stoke-on-Trent, the projects apply arts practices to empower community</p>		

members to strengthen and revitalize public assets, including the derelict Portland Inn pub. As with *Estate Agency* (London, Stoke-on-Trent, Glasgow 2017-2019) [3.4], these projects investigated how the arts can support communities to take long-term approaches to community-led urban development, avoiding potential harms from non-inclusive gentrification processes. The research shows how co-creation can lead to secure, sustainable buy-in from funding partners and community stakeholders. This sustainable buy-in helps development projects to address local issues including social isolation, economic exclusion, skills deficits, and criminality.

3. References to the research

3.1 *Indefinable City* (2007). Exhibition. Stoke-on-Trent. <https://eprints.staffs.ac.uk/6908>

3.2 *Rethinking the Brownfields* (2012-ongoing). Project. Stoke-on-Trent, Bristol, London, Walsall and Birmingham. This reference forms a multi-component research output that has been listed in REF2 with a comprehensive [PDF](#) of Contextual Information, which includes the discrete project, *The Spode Rose Garden* within it. <https://eprints.staffs.ac.uk/lists/49>

3.3 *Community Maker* (2015-2017). Project. Stoke-on-Trent, and *The Portland Inn Project* (2016-ongoing). Project. Stoke-on-Trent, Slough, and London form a multi-component double-weighted research output that has been listed in REF2 with a comprehensive [PDF](#) of Contextual Information. <https://eprints.staffs.ac.uk/lists/48>

3.4 *Estate Agency* (2017-2019). Project including exhibitions and performance. London, [Stoke-on-Trent](#), and [Glasgow](#). <https://eprints.staffs.ac.uk/5704>

Francis's research has won significant **prizes** within the assessment period. An exhibition based on the *Spode Rose Garden* project won an RHS Silver-gilt Medal at [RHS Tatton 2017](#). The *Portland Inn Project's* 'Raising the Roof' structure, designed by Baxendale Architects in collaboration with Francis and Davies, was shortlisted for the [RIBA Journal MacEwen Award](#) (2019). In 2020, *The Portland Inn Project* was one of four shared winners of the [Whitegold International Ceramics Prize](#).

4. Details of the impact

1) Improving Community Development and Cohesion

With the abrupt conclusion of Stoke-on-Trent City Council's [Pathfinder housing renewal scheme](#) (2006-2010), the Portland Street area of Hanley was left a fractured, partially boarded-up community. The area had empty properties, widespread crime and anti-social behaviour ('ASB'), and few community facilities. Francis's research has created impact by enabling the community and service agencies to approach regeneration in a cohesive, collaborative, and inclusive way.

a) Economic Investment

Targeted investment: The research has shown how participatory arts can identify community needs and support engagement between service users and providers. It has also shown that dedicated spaces for delivering arts-based training and activities can assist community development and renewal. The research has supported Francis and the Portland Street community to secure total funding of GBP566,116 to build on the findings by establishing programmes and providing infrastructure for community development.

Investment in people: GBP236,295 for community programming, employment, and training or skills development. This included 17 funding awards. Major awards include GBP104,000 (employment), GBP38,700 (skills development), and GBP9,100 and GBP10,000 (outreach activities) from the Creative Civic Change stream (2019), and GBP20,000 from the EU Social Fund (via Staffordshire Community Foundation) to support artist training fellowships for community members (2019) [5.1a pp. 32; 34]. In addition, since May 2015, Francis has won research funding worth GBP75,931 (6 awards) to implement creative community projects with residents in the Portland Street area [5.1a p. 35].

Investment in infrastructure: GBP253,890 for dedicated spaces (11 funding awards) Major awards include GBP63,000 from Red Industries (2019), GBP50,000 from Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Community Investment Fund (2019), GBP48,200 from the Local Trust's Creative Civic Change funding stream (2019), and GBP50,000 from the City Council's Environment Works Budget (2017) to support the renovation of the Portland Inn pub. Following the project's initial research, *Rethinking the Brownfields* won GBP16,000 from DCLG Pocket Parks to support the regeneration of the Spode Rose Garden site into a public garden (2016) [5.1a p. 33].

b) New Infrastructure and Training:

New community space: The research has led to working towards a permanent community space located in the old Portland Inn Pub. In 2017 its focus on collective rethinking of overlooked local resources led to the establishment of a monthly community and services meeting. In May 2018 Stoke-on-Trent City Council transferred the building to community ownership for 25 years. Davies and Francis undertook the 'Raising the Roof' programme (06/08/18 - 03/11/18) as part of the *Portland Inn Project*. 'Raising the Roof' involved local people building a temporary community space to host an artist-led community programme. The programme included *The Portland Architecture School* where community members, led by Davies and Francis with architect Godson Egbo, finalized plans to redevelop the Portland Inn building. Planning permission for the redevelopment was granted in December 2020 [5.1b].

New jobs: In 2020, *The Portland Inn Project* created three paid roles for two Youth and Families Workers (YFW) and an Artist (headcount: 3; FTE: 0.8). The YFWs provide targeted support and lead on community sports sessions. All employed reside in or come from Hanley [5.1d p.1].

Community arts activities: *Community Maker* and *Portland Inn* have hosted arts activities to build social cohesion and local inclusivity. In the period 2015-20, they have included over 100,347 engagements with people as participants and in-person audience members [5.1a p.37]. In addition, approximately 600,000 people participated in the extended 'Raising the Roof' programme as remote audience members worldwide (broadcast, online, and in print) [5.2 p.11]. The activities engaged local people in cultural participation and in decision-making about their area. They located partners, stakeholders, and specialists to support continued space development; and contributed to local, regional, and national awareness of deprivation in Stoke-on-Trent. Evaluation comments from community participants focused on the creative opportunities as benefitting community cohesion: *'It has been good to reclaim our green space and to make it a usable space for families and children, to be creative and have a go of things they probably would not experience in such a diverse and deprived area of the city. It has had a positive impact on the area'; 'The Portland inn Project is fantastic, its what's needed in this area to get the community together'* [5.2 p.44].

Community skills development: In 2020 [Local Insight](#) recorded that 40.9% of over 16s in Hanley have no formal qualifications. Francis's research has become the foundation of arts programmes that have achieved impact by benefitting community members' skills and employability. Since 2015, *Community Maker* and *The Portland Inn Project* have reported total 3,261 people attending skills workshops. Workshops include ceramics, illustration and other technical art skills, emotional wellbeing skills, and employment skills (including CV writing and social media marketing) [5.1a pp.36-7]. *Portland's* youth group has helped 19 people, children from the area, to earn Discover Arts Awards through the *Portland Pigeon* ceramics project (Summer 2020) [5.1c]. As the Local Trust recognizes, the workshops' participatory methodologies have had a significant impact on the community: *'Anna and Rebecca have embraced the issues that matter most to their community – providing space to get together, improving safety and security, and developing skills. They use creativity as a means to achieve these goals but on the community's terms. You can see the trust that this has built when visiting the area. The network of community members they have built over the years is brilliant to see and will hopefully be a lasting legacy for their area'* [5.3]. Similarly, the Chair of the Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Education Partnership reports that the research has raised local aspirations and supported local people engaging with skills development. The research, she testifies, *'is a part of the community and not an organisation coming in and then leaving the people. The team have created a hope that things can change, a belief that things will change and an ambition for the community to be that change'* [5.1a p.13].

c) Health and Wellbeing

Residents report increased community wellbeing, with the projects *'putting some wind in to some previously disheartened people's sails'* and that *'Around here it's a way of life – what goes on (the negative activity). There is a happy feeling about this project'* [5.2 p.44]. The BBC documentary *We Are Stoke-on-Trent* (2019) demonstrated the project's contribution to wellbeing: *'I come down here in a foul mood, I'd work with clay, and then I'd feel a lot better'; 'I cook for the community. I think it's a bit therapeutic'* [5.4]. Similarly, a Community Development Officer for Stoke-on-Trent City Council found that *'These activities and workshops help to address health and wellbeing and increase confidence and aspirations'* in Hanley [5.5].

d) Reduced Crime and Anti-social Behaviour

Improved police outreach: Francis's research projects have supported the community and police to work together to address ASB and other crime in Hanley. Resident feedback describes the importance of the artists having a '*vested interest in the area*' and providing a '*bridge between the people who live here and the agencies these same people do not trust*' [5.2 p.44]. Police confirm the research has improved communication with the community and helped target resources. A Police Community Support Officer for Staffordshire Police stated that Portland's '*biggest achievement has been bringing the community together and highlighting the positive things the area has to offer. The project has been crucial in my role allowing the community a place they feel safe to talk and let us know what needs to be dealt with*' [5.1a p.15].

New steps to tackle ASB: This community engagement and feedback has led to tangible change. Police have installed new CCTV, prioritized fly tipping, and increased their surveillance and action to combat ASB, particularly drug taking and dealing [5.1d p.2]. The City Council's ASB Manager acknowledges the impact as ongoing, writing that the *Portland Inn Project* '*is changing lives, it will continue to change lives for the better*' [5.6]. The Council's Community Development Officer also reports that '*The activities provided ... has shown a reduction in antisocial behaviour and an increase in residents participating in the activities to help to identify and address the issues within their community*' [5.5].

2) Influencing Local Government Policy

A new approach to local government outreach: The Local Government Association (LGA) highlighted findings from *Community Maker* and *Portland Inn* for the design of future urban regeneration projects nationwide. The LGA study *People, culture, place – The role of culture in placemaking* (2017) emphasized the research's capacity to foster community cohesion by bringing residents into planning the use and development of community assets [5.7 pp.26-7]. Francis now sits on the Local Trust's Policy and Advocacy Panel (since January 2020), which provides guidance to Non-Government Organisations, researchers, and artists who seek to influence national government policy [5.8].

Housing policy: *The Portland Inn Project* continues to influence Stoke-on-Trent City Council's design and implementation of housing policy. The City Council's Empty Homes Manager confirmed that *Portland* helped the Council to '*understand what is necessary to revive a community, with the artist being a significant factor,*' and that *Portland* was a '*major driver*' encouraging the Council to commission a second, '*more proactive and inclusive*' phase of the GBP1,500,000 'Reviving Communities Scheme' to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of Hanley residents [5.9].

Participation in democracy: The research's collaborative ethos has resulted in *The Portland Inn Project* hosting a monthly Community and Services meeting in conjunction with My Community Matters and multi-agency representatives (since 2017). The project also hosts a bi-monthly Community Decision Making panel, established March 2019. The panel seats 10 people as volunteer community members and 6 people as government agency representatives. The panel has given local government a way to involve the community in planning and decision-making, and given the community agency over decisions affecting the area [5.1a p.15; 5.2 p.7]. In 2020, the panel enabled the community to object to a local factory's plan to increase onsite flammable materials storage. As a result of this objection to the potential risk, the factory's planning permission was only awarded with a reduced flammables storage capacity [5.1d p.31].

3) Developing New Initiatives and Cultures in Social Arts Organisations**a) The Spode Rose Garden**

New public engagement opportunities: *Rethinking the Brownfields* established the Spode Rose Garden as a new community space in 2016. The Garden is located at the Spode factory, home of the internationally recognized British Ceramics Biennial ('BCB') exhibition. The Garden receives an estimated 15,000 people as visitors per year [5.1a p.16]. The Garden has since become a key location in the delivery of BCB's community and education work [5.1e p.5].

New volunteering opportunities: The redevelopment also led to the formation of the Friends of Spode Rose Garden community group (June 2016), with 12 people as community volunteers who have gained gardening, governance, and engagement skills, along with increased wellbeing and civic pride: '*Volunteering in the garden...helps with my chronic health condition. Seeing the plants and trees growing makes me feel invigorated and it makes me feel good that I'm*

contributing to the town I live in. It makes me feel proud when I see others enjoying the garden, and I enjoy seeing the other friends and meeting new people when I volunteer. I've learned new skills and acquired new knowledge about plant maintenance' (Volunteer, 2020) [5.1a p.18]. The Group hosts monthly community gardening sessions and quarterly public engagement events. The Royal Horticultural Society has recognized the Garden's positive effect on the community with Level 4 ('Thriving') It's Your Neighbourhood awards (2018 and 2019) [5.1a pp.16, 38].

b) Professional Development for Artists

New participatory arts training: Since August 2013, Francis's research has provided the core of development activity delivered to 479 people who are artists. In collaboration with Davies, Francis has designed workshops to train artists and arts organisations in the research methods and findings. Events at the Social Art Summit (Site Gallery, Sheffield) (November 2018) and the Social Art Assembly (Tate Modern, London) (April 2019), and with the ceramics organisation Collective Matter (Fulmer) (September 2019) trained 261 people who are social arts practitioners [5.1a p.20].

New approaches to participatory arts projects: This wide dissemination has led to new approaches in social arts organisations nationwide. Collective Matter report *'It was a very important moment of clarity for us, to understand that our focus should be on supporting artists and projects such as the Portland Inn, rather than trying to be the ones facilitating that front line community engagement'* [5.1a p.23]. The Director of Appetite, an Arts Council funded participatory arts organisation in Stoke-on-Trent, states that the research has *'led me to think differently, act differently and see the impact of our own work in a broader strategic and personal level for participants and attenders'* [5.1a p.27]. Artists state that Francis's research has informed initiatives including the 'Soup Water Bread' community workshops (2019) at The Drawing Shed (London) [5.1a pp.24-5] and The Waiting Room, Longport (2019) in Stoke-on-Trent [5.1a p. 25-6]. The 'In Certain Places' public curatorial programme (2019-ongoing) in Preston reports that Francis's *'success in building long-term and meaningful partnerships with artists, municipal decision-makers and community stakeholders in order to engender positive change within a place has encouraged us to adopt a similar approach'* [5.1a p.25].

François Matarasso, an internationally respected expert in community cultural practice, has recognized the significance of Francis's research impact, including increasing understanding of the role of socially engaged artists in urban renewal. He documents the research in an online case study (2018) [5.10a], and in the book, 'A Restless Art: How participation won, and why it matters' [5.10b]. Referring to Francis and Davies' work in Portland Street, Matarasso states: *'Their work is valued by their neighbours, and from it may come a permanent new home for creative, educational and social activities. But the questions they are asking might be even more important. Other agencies could take on the Portland Inn and turn it into a community centre, but who else would raise their questions about the city, its culture and its people?'* [5.10a p.12].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1a] Impact Report (a collation of verifiable impact evidence, including testimonials and results from 3 impact surveys); [5.1b] Planning permission confirmation S-O-T City Council; [5.1c] Cultural Education Partnership Newsletter Sept. 2020; [5.1d] Creative Civic Change 6-monthly evaluation for funder May-Oct. 2020; [5.1e] Pocket Parks Case Study, DCLG.

[5.2] 'Raising the Roof' Funder Activity Report 2020 (submitted to Arts Council England).

[5.3] Statement: Senior Programme Co-Ordinator, Creating Civic Change, The Local Trust.

[5.4] ['We are Stoke-on-Trent: The mums and artists reclaiming a city's streets'](#) (23/09/19). BBC Radio Documentary film on Portland Inn Project. 0:00-0:13, Interviews with Kerry and Tina.

[5.5] Statement: Community Development Officer for S-O-T City Council.

[5.6] Statement: Anti-Social Behaviour Manager for S-O-T City Council.

[5.7] ['People, culture, place – The role of culture in placemaking' report](#) pp. 7, 26-7.

[5.8] Email: invitation to join The Local Trust Policy and Advocacy Panel, January 2020.

[5.9] Statement: Empty Homes Manager, Housing and Customer Services Directorate, S-O-T City Council.

[5.10a] ['The Portland Inn Project'](#), case study by François Matarasso (2018) [online].

[5.10b] ['A Restless Art'](#), book by Matarasso (2019). [print and online] p. 95.