

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award

Project Title				
Co-creating regenerative futures: The role of architectural and social lab processes in communities shaping their civic and social infrastructures				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	Birmingham City University			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation	CIVIC SQUARE			
Website URL	https://civicsquare.cc			
THE RESEARCH PROJECT				
<p>We should all have the right to shape the places around us– both for the present and for future generations. This project brings people together in creative ways to collectively reimagine and create architectural and social visions for their future spaces and places.</p> <p>Successful communities are complex ecosystems, which allow change and regeneration in ways that heal rather than damage the environment. But how can we support communities to do this? How can communities come together to make regenerative places? This project brings together CIVIC SQUARE, an innovative organisation that has been working on systems change and 21st Century civic spaces for over a decade, with the Birmingham School of Architecture and Design (BSoAD) to develop and test creative ways to engage people in shaping their communities and places. The project develops CIVIC SQUARE’s existing action-research on the regeneration of an inner-city Birmingham neighbourhood in order to develop broader, more transferable recommendations for how communities can co-create their own regenerative community ecosystems.</p> <p>The project contributes to an international focus on cultivating community control and decision-making power in regeneration strategies. The UN’s New Urban Agenda identifies, among other things, an aim to develop cities that are participatory, civic engaged, and inclusive (UN 2017). This is important since research shows that the more control that individuals have over their lives, the greater the benefit for their health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Alongside this, academics at the Birmingham School of Architecture and Design are keen to work with the city and region and argue that they have a civic responsibility to use their expertise to work with communities to co-create more sustainable, resilient communities.</p> <p>The proposed research project will synthesise the expertise of CIVIC SQUARE and BSoAD academics by testing and extending the approaches used in the regeneration of one inner-city neighbourhood to other contexts in order to develop a framework for co-creating regenerative community ecosystems. The project builds on successful collaborations between these partners such as a collaborative project with BSoAD students to imagine regenerative futures for Dudley High Street, a collaboration with CoLab Dudley who are learning partners of CIVIC SQUARE.</p>				

The research asks: 'How can a combination of participatory architecture processes and social lab approaches provide a platform for communities to co-create community ecosystems that are grounded in regenerative design principles?'

The key aspects of the project are defined below:

Participatory architecture processes;

Participatory architecture enables communities to be co-creators of the design process of their built environment. Co-creative architectural processes can include site analysis, reimagining, design and visualising using drawings, sketches and models. Underpinning these approaches is the principle that everyone has the right to use and re-make the city (Harvey, 2003).

Social lab approaches;

Social labs are '*platforms for addressing complex social challenges that have three core characteristics: they are social [...] experimental [...] [and] systemic*' (Hassan 2014). Social lab platforms offer a basic infrastructure and act as enablers to support co-productive explorative and open-ended activities and actions (Beunderman, 2014).

Community ecosystems;

'Community ecosystems' suggests successful civic and social infrastructures with the complexity of a flourishing natural ecosystem including, for example, cultures '*capable of continuous learning and transformation in response to, and anticipation of, inevitable change*' (Wahl, 2017).

Regenerative design principles;

Regenerative design shifts the principle of sustainable design from merely minimising damage to promoting positive regeneration or renewal (Pawlyn, 2019). Regenerative design moves away from short-termism to taking responsibility for future generations and prioritising actions for the future collective good (Krznaric, 2020).

This project will explore and prototype a process that moves beyond participation to co-creation by facilitating communities to respond to contemporary challenges with creativity using Cultural Animation; a participatory arts-based method of engaging research through creative action. This way of researching invites participants to engage in fun activities, that help them to think through and visualise important issues for the research, and for the participants. The process can involve collectively producing poems, sculptures, short plays and 3D drawing. Analysis will be informed by contextualisation in relation to literature on architecture, urban culture and regeneration. Outputs will include a thesis and a new framework for regeneration.

The successful applicant will be supported by an expert supervisory team, including members from BSoAD and CIVIC SQUARE, and will be welcome to engage in CIVIC SQUARE and CoLab Dudley's current methods of working out loud. They will also have access to professional development opportunities at BCU, including the PgCert in Research Practice and PGR Studio.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

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