

**SOCIAL
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CLUB**

**KING'S
HEATH**

Mapping Kiosk

PROJECT REPORT

November 2022 - July 2023

**SOCIAL
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**KING'S
HEATH**

**Mapping
Kiosk**

MAPPING KIOSK PROJECT TEAM

Artist researchers: *Professor Andy Hewitt and Professor Mel Jordan, Partisan Social Club*

Design researcher: *Michael Wright*

Research Assistant: *Dr. Polly Jarman*

Research Assistant and Evaluation: *Melissa James*

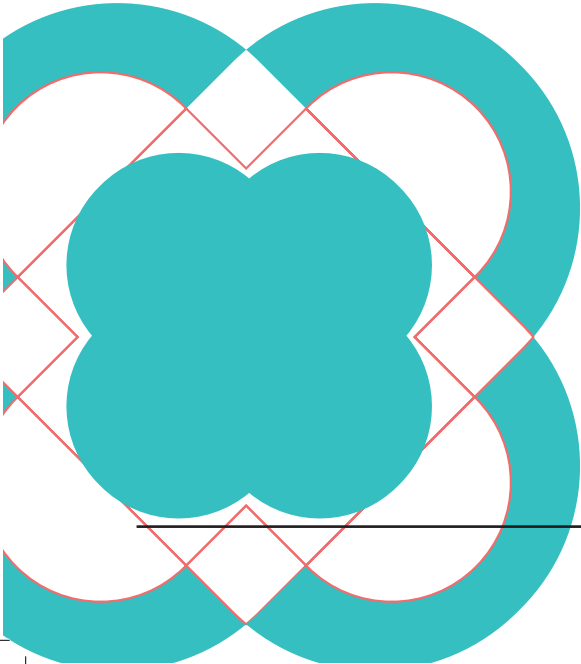
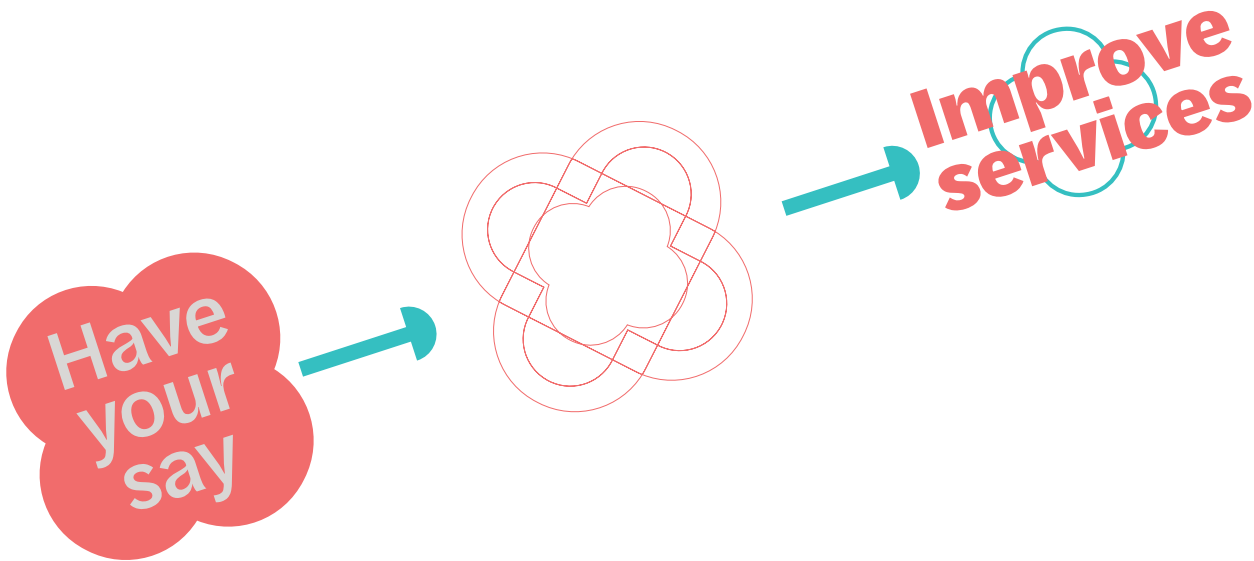
Community development team: *Carolyn Howe, Team Leader for the Well Northants Project, Hayley Cannon, Community Development Co-ordinator, West Northants Council.*

PROJECT FUNDING

The Well Communities Research Consortium received funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for the University of Northampton, totalling £50,154. In addition, the evaluation of the Mapping Kiosk was funded through the QR-funded Impact Accelerator programme, with the project titled 'Development of Impact Analysis on Participative Artworks' by the University of Northampton, valued at £3,000. Coventry University contributed in-kind support valued at £2,600 for Professor Mel Jordan's time on the project, while Middlesex University provided in-kind support valued at £2,000 for Michael Wright's time.

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PROJECT RESEACH SUMMARY

This project research summary brings together a project overview, an authored conference paper, and an independent evaluation report. The project overview offers a detailed description of the wider *Well Communities Research Consortium* project, including its aims, objectives, context, stakeholders, researchers, and funding sources. We then focus on our specific contribution, the *Mapping Kiosk*, which forms the basis of and Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan's conference paper. This paper outlines the methodology behind the practice and intervention, providing specific details on the use of social art practices. Lastly, the evaluation report authored by Melissa James presents an analysis of a series of six interviews, reflecting on anonymous testimonies that capture the experiences of both stakeholders and the project team in using art and design methods. Please note there may be or repetition or overlap between the three sections, as they were authored at different times for specific contexts.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

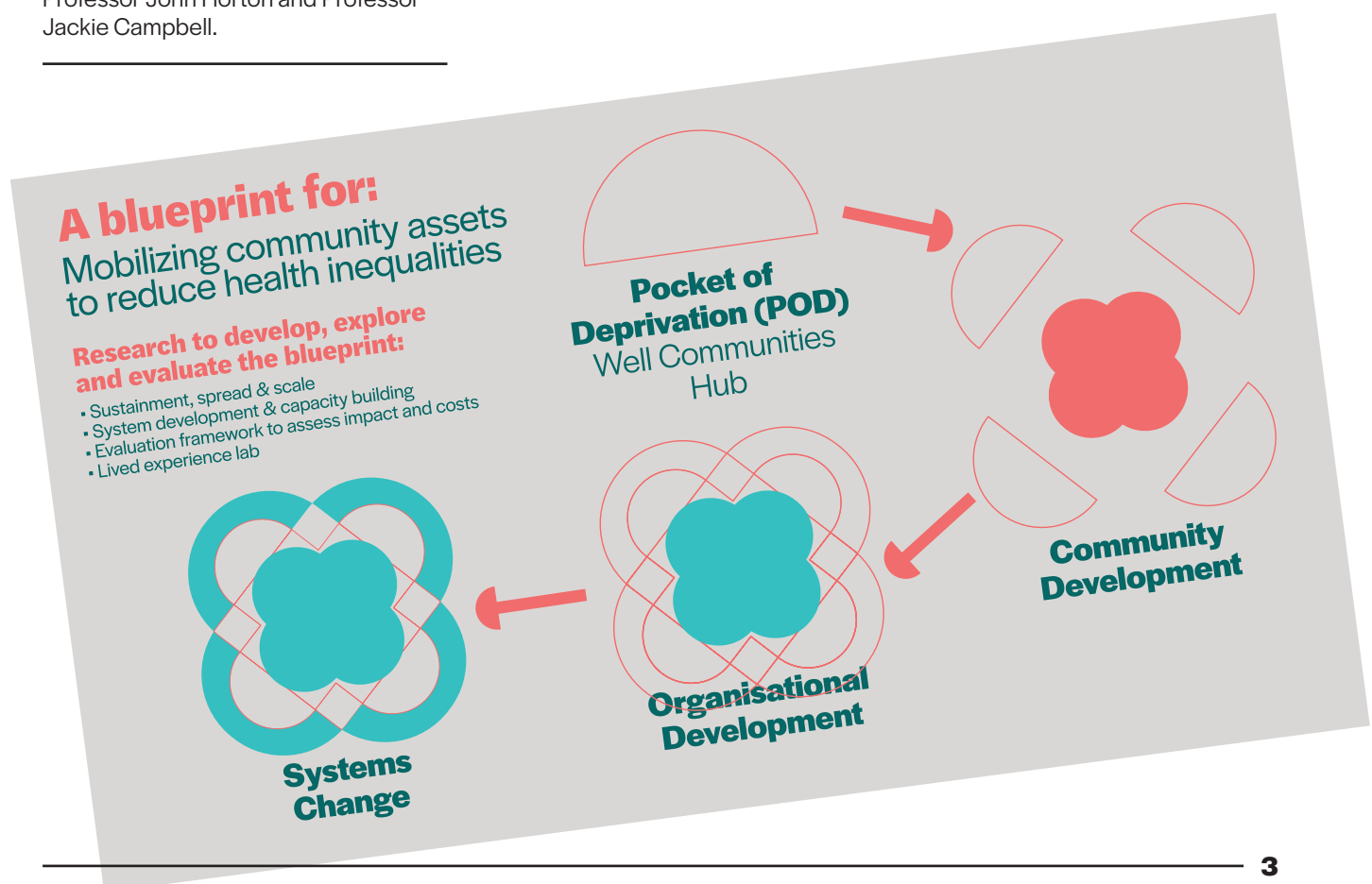
Well Communities Research Consortium

Established in response to the AHRC call “Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities,” the Well Communities Research Consortium (WCRC) (grant number AH/X006271/1) aimed to develop testable and replicable collaborative models for integrating cultural, natural, and community assets into healthcare systems. Led by Professor Gail Findlay and Professor Angela Harden, City University, London, in partnership with the University of Northampton, East London University, West Northamptonshire Council, and NHS health trusts in Northamptonshire and East London, WCRC sought to address health inequalities through these models. Professor Andrew Hewitt, Co-Investigator (Co-I) on the WCRC project, collaborated with University of Northampton leads Professor John Horton and Professor Jackie Campbell.

WCRC was guided by two key research questions:

1. How can new Integrated Care Systems better engage with, develop, and mobilise community assets—particularly cultural, arts, and natural environment assets—to address health inequalities?
2. How can approaches, models, and tools for supporting and mobilising community assets be scaled, embedded, and sustained?

The project aimed to integrate these assets into health systems to support both prevention and intervention strategies, particularly in deprived areas. It also sought to identify complexities, barriers, and enabling factors in aligning local asset ecosystems with public health systems, ultimately informing the wider adoption of collaborative approaches across the UK.



Mapping Kiosk: Engaging Communities through Art and Design in the WCRC Research Action

One key component of WCRC, the *Mapping Kiosk* project, was an art initiative led by artist-researchers Professor Andrew Hewitt (University of Northampton and Partisan Social Club) and Professor Mel Jordan (Coventry University and Partisan Social Club), in collaboration with design researcher Michael Wright (Middlesex University). This project explored how participatory art and design methods could support community development research, specifically within Integrated Care Systems in Northamptonshire and East London.

Mapping Kiosk engaged residents of Kings Heath through interactive workshops, capturing their lived experiences via visual and design-led approaches. Serving both as a tool and a process, it contributed to the consortium's co-production activities and broader research objectives, fostering dialogue and community engagement.

In addition, Hewitt secured funding from the University of Northampton's QR-funded Impact Accelerator programme for the *Development of Impact Analysis on Participative Artworks* (Hewitt, Jordan of Partisan Social Club, with designer Michael Wright). This funding supported researcher Melissa James, who followed the WCRC's Community & Stakeholder Engagement, Asset and Systems Mapping, and Co-Design (CSEAD) initiatives. James contributed to projects such as Street Conversations in Kings Heath, Community Mapping Cafés, the Integrated Health Care System (ICS) World Café, and engagement with community and voluntary sector groups focused on cultural, arts, and natural environment assets. Additionally, James contributed to *Working Together Workshops*.

Mapping Kiosk Aims and Objectives

Aims:

- To develop innovative visual and dialogical methods in participative research.
- To enhance the accessibility and comprehensibility of research processes using visual methods.
- To facilitate inclusive participation, enabling individuals to share their experiences, opinions, and knowledge through various forms of visual and dialogical communication.

Objectives:

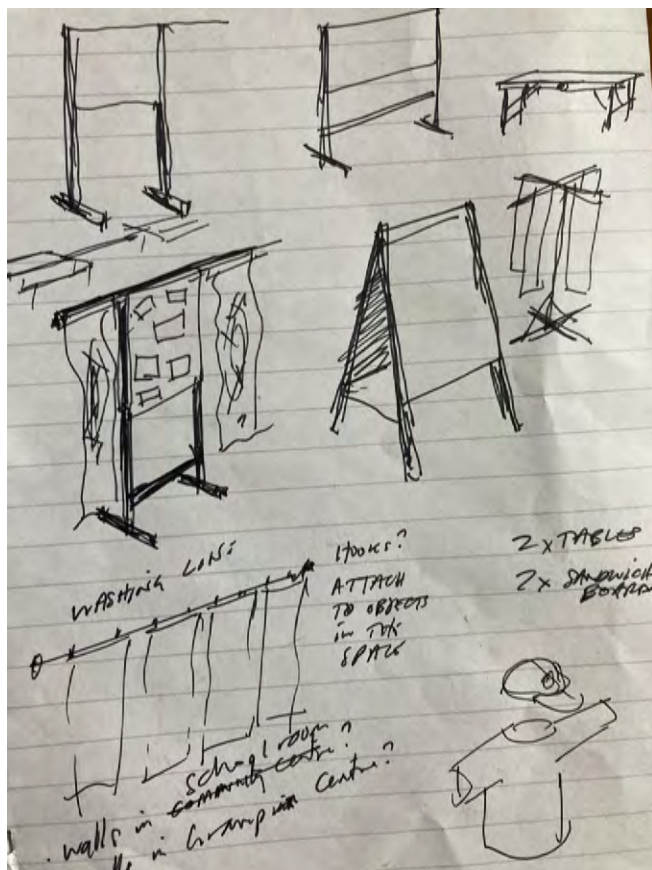
- To design and test a series of visual tools (e.g., maps, diagrams, or art-based activities) for collecting both qualitative data from participants.
 - To implement a range of visual and dialogical communication strategies (e.g., interviews, group discussions, or participatory design activities) that encourage diverse forms of expression and feedback from community members.
 - To collect and analyse data on how participants engage with these visual and dialogical methods and assess their effectiveness in enhancing data collection.
-

Mapping Kiosk Overview

The *Mapping Kiosk* project focused on developing and testing visual art and design processes within the WCRC research action, aiming to encourage residents of Kings Heath, Northampton, to share their stories and experiences. The pop-up kiosk served as a platform for residents to engage in discussions about their lived experiences and offer insights into the community's development needs.

Over the course of nine months in 2023, the WCRC consortium led a series of community meetings with residents, the community development team, health and social care workers, and an integrated care partnership. The goal was to identify community assets and service provisions to improve health and social care delivery, particularly in Kings Heath, a 1950s housing estate facing significant deprivation. With limited social and cultural opportunities, residents expressed a strong desire for activities that would foster a sense of togetherness and pride in their neighbourhood.

By using visual and design-based methods, the project aimed to provide more intimate, engaging experiences compared to conventional surveys, allowing for deeper insights from participants. This approach also demonstrated how art and design practices, when applied in public spaces, can contribute meaningfully to interdisciplinary, multi-partner research projects. The insights gathered helped inform resource allocation and future strategic planning, fostering stronger community connections and engagement.



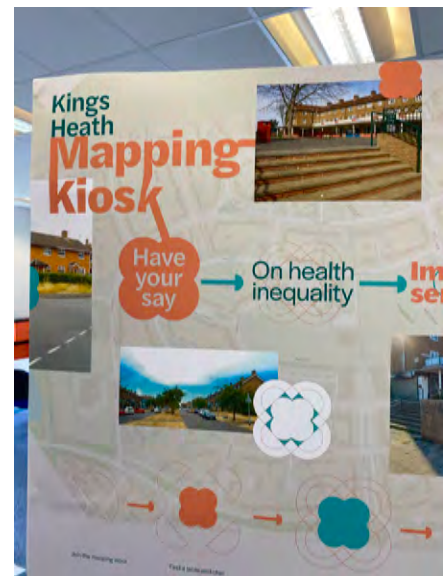
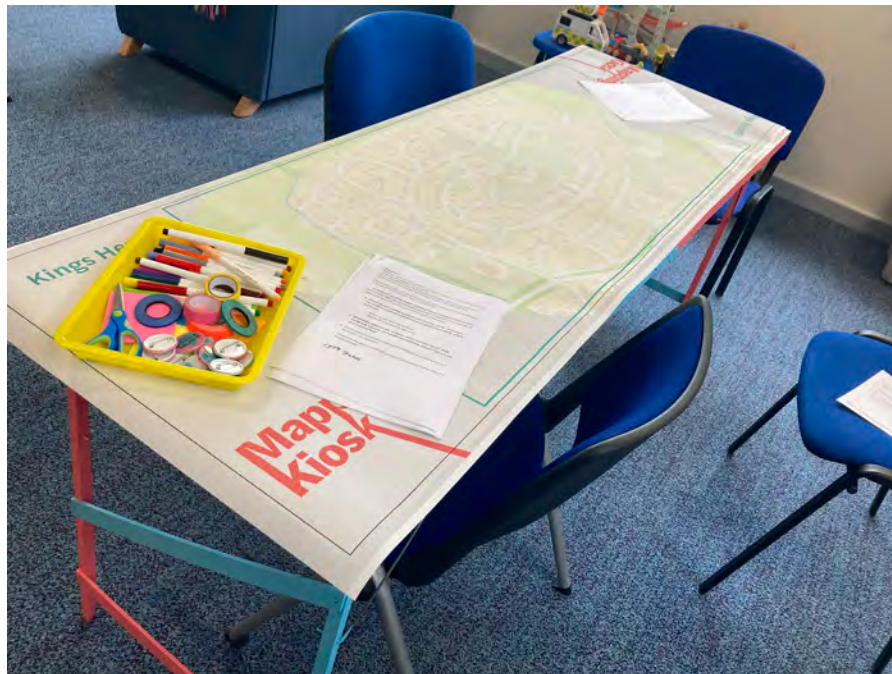
Drawing from arts-based research practices, we created spaces for critical citizenship and collective agency through creative methods and media. Between May and June 2023, we focused on creating engaging elements to facilitate interaction with residents and stakeholders. This included the development of a 'social' map, which took considerable time to finalise. While it drew on existing maps of the area, it was reconfigured to serve as a shared tool — enabling participants to plot their daily routines and memories of Kings Heath.

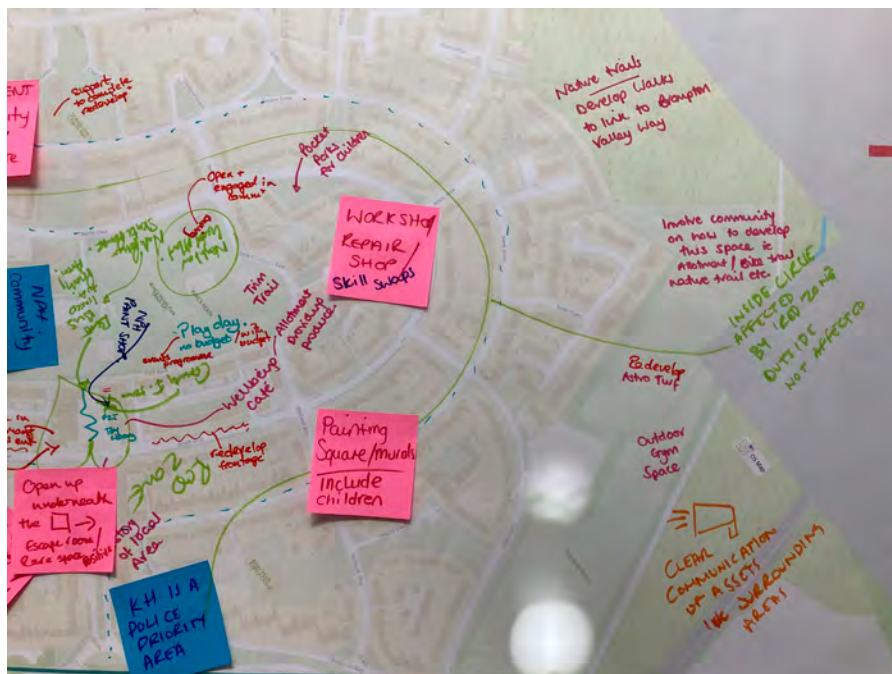
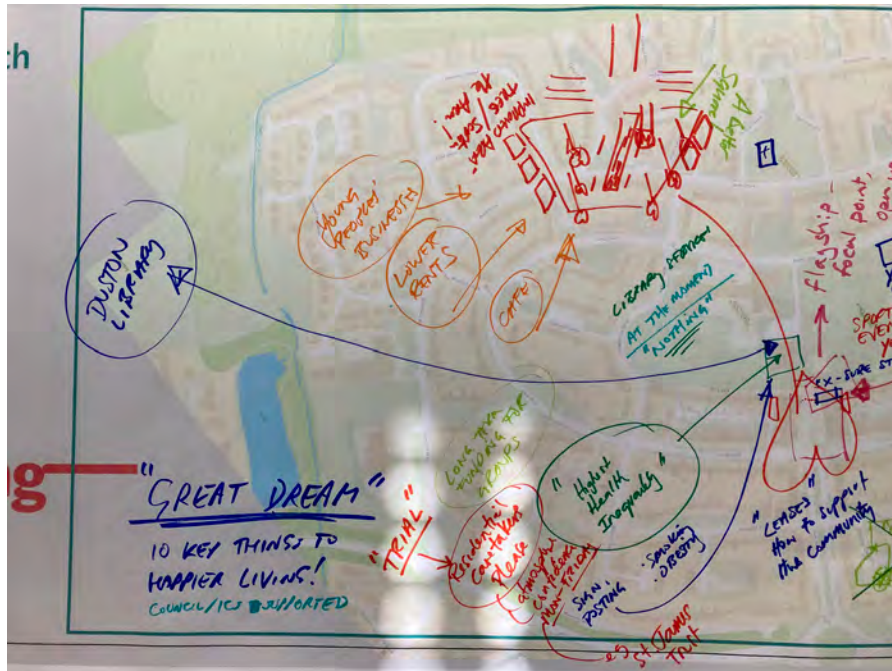
To encourage participation, we developed a bold, colourful visual identity for flyers, posters, badges, and project materials. The flyer, which invited residents to the *Mapping Kiosk* event on May 5th, 2023, was also distributed during street conversations in Kings Heath (involving 10 participants) and via a mail drop (850 flyers).





At the first *Mapping Kiosk* session, held in a community function room at the Kings Heath Primary Academy, six participants engaged with a simplified map of the area. The map helped them orient themselves and identify the spaces they used. We initiated discussions about the project's aims and fostered dialogue around residents' experiences. Arts team members acted as scribes, recording feedback directly onto the maps, both visually and textually. While initially reluctant to draw or write on the maps, participants preferred to point to locations and direct the scribes' additions.





We installed a series of wallpaper tables painted in bold red and blue, mounted maps and project materials on space frames, and positioned posters on A-frames both inside and outside the venue. These elements formed a dynamic visual and spatial intervention across sites including the schoolroom, library, shopping precinct, and youth club. The designs reanimated often-tired public spaces through a fresh and contemporary aesthetic.





To create an inviting and informal atmosphere that encouraged participation, we offered food and drink, establishing a café-like setting that helped visitors feel at ease and linger longer. *The Mapping Kiosk's* equipment and structures were purposefully designed for mobility, enabling rapid setup in a range of unfamiliar venues, including public sites like the shopping precinct.

Its compact design allowed everything to be transported in a single vehicle, ensuring flexibility and ease of deployment.

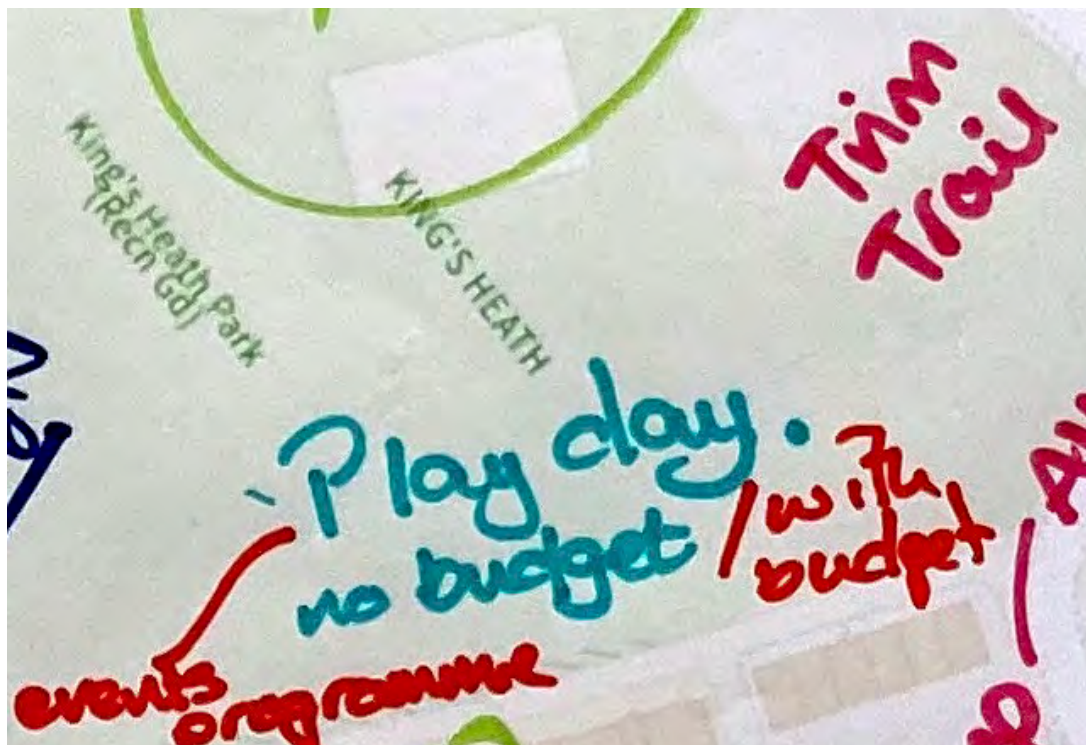
From the *Mapping Kiosk* events, four key themes emerged, which were presented at a stakeholder meeting to guide decisions on resource prioritization: Ownership & access to buildings, community spaces & shop units; Maintenance and use of public spaces and the natural environment; Feelings of isolation and disconnection; and Sustainability of funding and commitment to change.

Ownership and access to buildings, community spaces and shop units



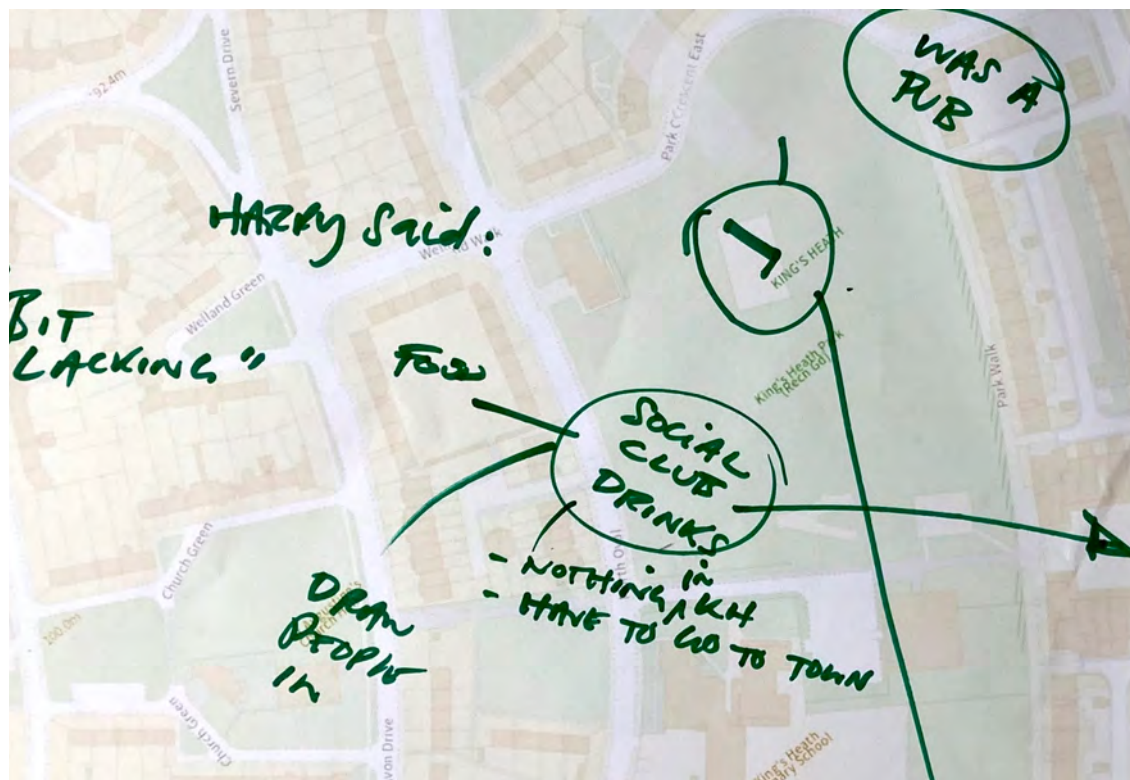
- "Provide social enterprises with the opportunity to use the empty shops in the square" – community org
- 'A community centre run by local people with either a lease shared lease (council/ local people or businesses) or a council paid for lease. Long term funding is desperately needed to support this, as well as the current support services such as 'Free2talk' – Integrated Care Systems
- 'Start with small projects and then step back and let communities run them themselves. We need to be encouraging self-organised community groups. How can we make venues available for them?' – community org
- 'Would like a bigger place for youth club' – young person

Maintenance and use of public spaces and natural environment



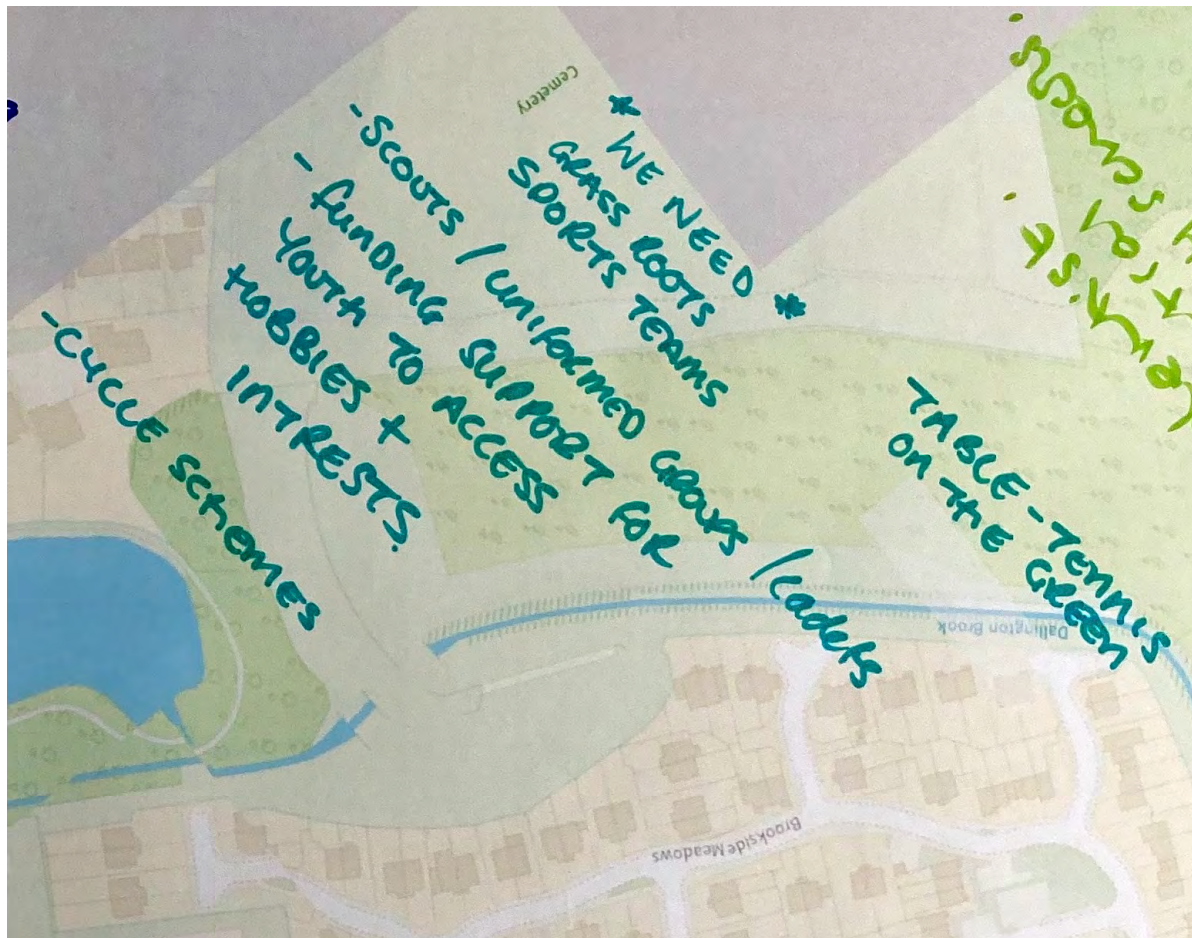
- 'We need a more attractive environment, nothing inviting here, it sets the tone' - resident
- 'Wish there was a garden or somewhere to spend time outside' - resident
- 'The MUGA is covered in glass and it is not clear who has responsibility for sorting it' – community org
- 'Would love to see raised beds of flowers, trees, a café, murals and soften the square in terms of colour' – community org
- 'Add a park to the land near Dallington Brook' - resident
- 'Could a cycle route be created from Kings Heath into town running along the railway?' - ICS
- 'Employ residential caretakers to look after the upkeep of the area. This has proven to work well on the estate by the lift tower' – Integrated Care Systems

Feelings of isolation and dis-connection



- 'I am isolated, if the weather is bad I can't get out and meet people. I'd like to be able to meet more people' - resident
- 'Teenagers go out of KH to go to (secondary) school and don't do after school clubs as it may be dark and is far away and so come home early. Perhaps link with the primary schools to do something?' – community org
- 'When we come across criminality it's a high percentage of the same people. Need to work with the culture of the community, the mentality of these few families' – community police
- 'The neighbours are the worst. I have experienced bullying and harassment by neighbours and its caused real distress' – resident
- 'Bus routes, costs and times are poor, there are no buses in the evenings' - resident'

Sustainability of funding and commitment to change



- The 'Sure Start Centre' has closed and requires someone to take on the lease and related costs. One idea is to buy the lease for the community and community to help run the centre – ICS
- 'Lots of things get started and then get scraped' - resident
- 'Could each LAP area have a Community Hub?' - ICS
- 'GP surgery has bought the side of their premises that was a community site' – community org
- 'Longevity is important otherwise we get 'we've had this before' –community org
- 'A consultation was done about 8 months ago, we need a repository for consultation to share across agencies and then follow through (with action)' – community org

Views of King's Heath
Photographs by Tim Lloyd









CONFERENCE PAPER

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? ARTS ROLE IN REBUILDING ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE

Authors:

Mel Jordan, Andrew Hewitt

Affiliation:

Coventry University, UK
University of Northampton, UK

INTRODUCTION

The prolonged adoption of neoliberal economic and political ideologies by recent UK governments has significantly reshaped public life.¹ Embracing free-market capitalism while limiting government intervention, endorsing deregulation, privatization, and reduced public spending has exposed massive inequalities, stifled economic growth, and contributed to a decline in associational life.² Local associations play a crucial role in facilitating participation in civil society.³ A lack of diverse opportunities to develop social associations (waning of civil society organizations, change in working habits and lifestyles, technology, the pandemic, etc.) leads to a decline in political deliberation, this produces atomized citizens and 'the rise of individualistic forms of participation at the expense of collectivist form of participation'.⁴

Art projects have established their place in city planning through public installations in placemaking and regeneration contexts.⁵ Artists working within community and social art projects have explored ways to engage with publics, with outcomes not defined by material outputs, but by the interactive processes that occur between the context, local people, and the artist.⁶ Although these strategies integrate art into the social structures of everyday life, critics

of neoliberalism argue that the role of art in city development is often used to manage publics and project an image of community cohesion through the involvement of local communities in participatory art projects.⁷ Moreover, the act of contributing to an art project can result in superficial participation, replacing meaningful critique with token involvement.

Within a political framework dedicated to advancing capitalism, artists engaged in social art practice must critically explore ways to address its constraints and limitations. However, when artists are constrained by existing institutional structures and unable to propose new social systems, expecting them to drive innovative change may be unrealistic. Additionally, attributing solutions to artists where others have failed may oversimplify the complexities involved.

DISASSEMBLING AND REASSEMBLING THE SOCIAL WORLD

In *Reassembling the Social*,⁸ Bruno Latour critiques the conventional use of the term "social" by social scientists. He argues that sociologists often treat the social as a pre-existing entity—an established, fixed category that is taken for granted. Instead, Latour proposes that the social is not a given but something that must be actively formed, shaped, and continuously remade. He challenges us to rethink how the social comes into being and he encourages a more dynamic approach to studying it. This leads to his contribution to, "Actor-network theory".⁹ "Actor-network theory" asserts that human and non-human actors create everchanging webs of relationships that define situations and determine outcomes, agency is manifest only in the relation of actors to each other. The intention is to acknowledge that society, organizations, ideas, and other key elements are shaped by the interactions between actors in diverse networks rather than having inherent fixed structures or meanings.¹⁰ Rather than being seen as pre-existing, relations within the network are conceptualized as precarious, emerging through network interactions and requiring

continual reiteration.¹¹ An assemblage is a technical term for a network, it is the entirety of the actants that make up the thing, or event. Actor-network theory challenges both social and technological determinism by asserting that sociological and technological factors hold equal importance, and no occurrence can be attributed solely to either realm.

Since the 1990s, "Actor-network theory" has been employed as an analytical tool across various fields, including, informatics, health studies, geography, sociology, anthropology, feminist studies, technical communication, and economics.¹² Latour's work has also impacted upon the field of contemporary art theory and practice¹³; actor-network theory has shared perspectives with curator Nicholas Bourriaud's theory of Relational Aesthetics.¹⁴ As Francis Halsall describes when making this link, "Relational art", [Bourriaud] argues, takes as its theoretical horizon, "the realm of human interactions and its social context rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space."¹⁵ This is a fundamental principle of social art practice today.

TYPES OF INFRASTRUCTURES FOR LIVING TOGETHER

Relational encounters are also central to Rosi Braidotti's thinking on the "Posthuman".¹⁶ "irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity and desire, which one is not in charge of."¹⁷ More specifically for Braidotti's project, is the question of identifying power relationships and utilising various means to enact political and ethical resistance and propose alternative ways of living together. Braidotti asserts ideas of "becoming", of being open to otherness and not perceiving ourselves as closed, static or fully formed. She goes further than Latour in seeking a positive outcome of the relational networks that she describes: "posthuman ethics urges us to endure the principle of not-One at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple 'others' in a vital web of complex interrelations. This ethical principle breaks up the fantasy of unity,

totality and one-ness, but also the master narratives of primordial loss, incommensurable lack and irreparable separation.”¹⁸

Braidotti concentrates on empathy as a path to this end. As it, “identifies in emotions, rather than in reason, the key to consciousness.”¹⁹ It is in intimacy achieved through bumpy relationships that Lauren Berlant²⁰ offers as a way towards alternative models of being together. Berlant rejects the idea of togetherness, typically perceived of as central to the commons, and asks if there is more to be found in confronting the things that we don't have mutual empathy for? She suggests that maybe the role of the commons is instead a tool for helping us recognise the instants of exchange where we don't agree: “The better power of the commons is to point to a way to view what's broken in sociality, the difficulty of convening a world conjointly, although it is inconvenient and hard, and to offer incitements to imagining a liveable provisional life.”²¹

WHAT CAN BE DONE? WORKING WITH 'THE COMMUNITY' WHERE THERE IS 'NOT-ONE' ²² COMMUNITY

Latour's concept of “the social” as never remaining static, Braidotti's “no one total” view of the world and Berlant's version of infrastructures, have been a useful way to reflect upon our recent practice.²³

Returning to the contemporary conditions we outlined in the introduction to this paper, we directly address our concerns about the diminishing social provision with places, towns and cities by working within a community development context. In this section we discuss our ongoing relationship with the community development team in Kings Heath, Northampton, UK. Kings Heath is a housing estate built in the 1950's as a new model community. We first worked in Kings Heath in 2023, in an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project entitled the Well Communities Research Consortium (WCRC). WCRC was a consortium of local authorities, health bodies

and universities, aiming to tackle health inequalities in areas of high deprivation.²⁴



Figure 1: Signage and shopping precinct Park Square, Kings Heath, Northampton UK. June 2023. Photograph by Tim Lloyd

Kings Heath has lost most of its community facilities and resources, with few opportunities for cultural and community events, and was recently designated a Pocket of Deprivation (PoD). The WCRC project set out to build a method for system change within organisations - removing obstacles to change, hearing about challenges from key workers, learning from the lived experience of residents and identifying the barriers to well-being they face in their area. The emphasis was on asset-based community development work; a methodology for the development of communities based on their strengths and potentials.

Our role as artist researchers was one of developing engagement. We were disillusioned by the way in which artistic research was allocated to the role of technical support, in short applying novel techniques to improve data collection. We devised the project *Mapping Kiosk*, a pop-up kiosk consisting of a table and drawing tools with a large map (60cm x 180cm) of Kings Heath that spread across the surface of the table. The map was a prop to talk through the strengths and challenges of neighbourhood resources.

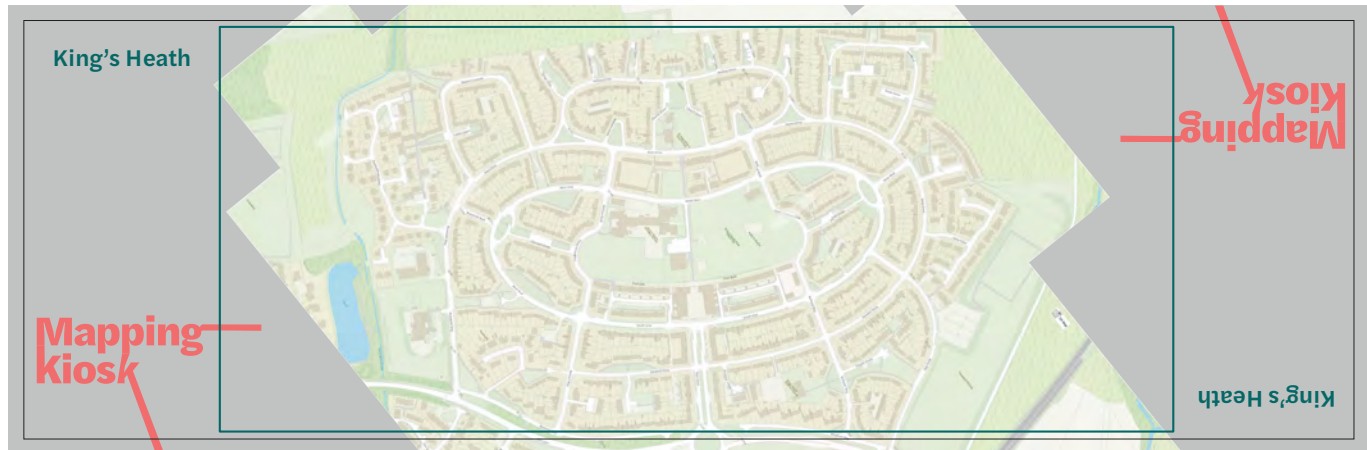


Figure 2: Partisan Social Club, image of discussion map design for Mapping Kiosk events to be printed at 180 cm x 60cm. May 2023.

As we spoke to residents, we were able to highlight where people lived and what they did in Kings Heath, what facilities they used and how they travelled to school and work etc. We had problems trying to find places to meet with people, as there is no public facing space, no library, no community centre in Kings Heath.



Figure 3: Mapping Kiosk event with participants and researchers. Community room, Kings Heath Primary Academy. June 2023. Photograph by Partisan Social Club

We had to use a range of borrowed spaces, (including the precinct) to meet the residents in.²⁵ One of the most significant insights was confronting the tangible challenge of finding a space to gather and have meaningful conversations. This revealed a critical gap: while projects are often designed around the assumption of an established community (and the presence of a communal space), this assumption can mask deeper complexities. Such approaches risk perpetuating a “fantasy of unity, totality, and oneness,” overlooking the fragmented realities of community dynamics and the structural barriers to genuine connection.²⁶ Community development teams struggle with meeting this expectation. Doubts arise, and presumptions about available space become attached to the idea of ‘making’ a community.



Figure 4. Mapping Kiosk in use with participants at the WCRC World Café, Duston Library, Northampton. June 2023. Photograph by Partisan Social Club.

The confusion about the making and serving of a community could be a glitch in the infrastructure, or a reliance on a predetermined function of the commons. The problem is possibly too difficult to admit, as uncertainty here can unravel one's sense of being, or the constructed desire for consensus. As Berlant says, “Although the commons claim sounds like an uncontestably positive aim, the concept in this context threatens to cover over the very complexity of social jockeying and interdependence it responds to by delivering a confirming affective surplus in advance of the lifeworld it's also seeking.”²⁷

UNLEARNING. WILL WE EVER UNLEARN?

The WCRC project did not receive further funding from the AHRC, but relationships were built and commitments established. In 2024 we, Andy Hewitt, Mel Jordan and Michael Wright²⁸, were invited back, by the Community Safety and Engagement Team, West Northamptonshire Council.

Despite the difficulties of engagement, we were eager to return to see some of the people we had already started to get to know. We devised a zine²⁹ making project under the title *Social Art Club: Kings Heath Calling*. The project developed a “zine kiosk” where residents could produce zines and posters that tell their personal stories of Kings Heath.

We ran into similar issues, lack of space, no resources, poverty, public drug taking, ethics difficult to achieve, no defined group or association to connect to, a community development team stretched and still feeling redundant. Also, the ongoing questioning of our motives, the strange structural gap between the funding we applied for, the expectations of its articulation, and the reality of the situation.

As the project ‘timeline’ ended we started to think about the problems – the ‘glitches of infrastructures’ as something to be embraced. To openly admit the issues arising, and not attempt to articulate this as a success, but to think about it as part of an assemblage of engagement.

CONCLUSIONS BUT ALSO BEGINNINGS

The role of contemporary art in city making whether in placemaking schemes as permanent public art or as part of community engagement initiatives, exists as part of the institution of urban planning. Latour reminds us that “the social” is not a pre-existing entity and that it is continually made and remade. This aligns with contemporary art processes which play a part in the perpetual nature of cultural and social



Figure 6. *Social Art Club: Kings Heath Calling*. Zines made by people from Kings Heath. May 2024. Photograph by Partisan Social Club.

life. Contemporary art is produced as a response to the world and at the same time, through exhibition and publishing, it effects new understandings of the world. Hence, if arts practice is engaged in the process of remaking the social, then it needs to be recognised as an inherent part of the making and remaking of livable cities.

Bariotti³⁰ gives us hope through her articulation of the complexities of publics, which are never reduced to a single entity. This allows us to embrace a fragmented understanding of the social. When working in social contexts, it means we shouldn't worry about the complexity of the social makeup of subjects. What we experience is not necessary a failure on our part - for not creating a more innovative or inclusive project - but rather the inherent nature of how the social operates.

By considering Berlant's ideas of the commons as a tool for highlighting the issues that arise from striving for unity, we can potentially identify a practical and adaptable path through the complexities of working with others in social contexts and embrace the “inconvenience of other people”: “I am proposing that one task for makers of critical social form is to offer not just judgment about positions and practices in the world, but terms of transition that

alter the harder and softer, tighter and looser infrastructures of sociality itself.”³¹

We are returning to work in Kings Heath in 2025 (or perhaps we never truly left), but we will be rethinking the role of art in rebuilding associational life. We will engage with the infrastructures we identify through the agency of the people we meet, but not necessarily following a typical grassroots approach. Instead, we will embrace the intimacy and learning that emerges from our awkward encounters with others, accepting the complexities of living and being together rather than seeking a singular sense of community or predefined ‘successful outcomes’.

NOTES

¹ Susanne Wallman Lundåsen, "Civil Society and Political Participation: What Type of Political Participation is Influenced by Community Level Involvement in Civil Society?" *Swiss Polit Sci Rev*, 21, 2015: 140-157, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12140>

² Nancy Fraser, "Cannibal capitalism: How our system is devouring democracy, care, and the planet - and what we can do about it". London: Verso, 2022.

³ Carol Pateman, "Political culture, political structure and political change", *British Journal of Political Science*, 1:3, 1971: 291-305.

⁴ Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Patrick Whiteley, P, "Citizenship in Britain Values, Participation and Democracy" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

⁵ Mel Jordan and Andy Hewitt, "Depoliticization, participation and social art practice: On the function of social art practice for politicization", *Art & the Public Sphere*, Special Issue: 'Politicizing Artistic Pedagogies: Disciplines, Struggles, Teachings', 11:1, 2020: 19, https://doi.org/10.1386/aps_00066_1

⁶ Mel Jordan and Andy Hewitt, "Depoliticization, participation and social art practice: On the function of social art practice for politicization" 26.

⁷ Mel Jordan and Andy Hewitt, "Depoliticization, participation and social art practice: On the function of social art practice for politicization" 30.

⁸ Bruno Latour, "Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to ActorNetwork-Theory". Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

⁹ Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law, are pivotal figures in the development of Actor-Network Theory. See, Callon, M. "The sociology of an actor-network: The case of the electric vehicle", eds. Callon, Michel, Law, John and Rip, Arie, "Mapping the dynamics of science and technology, 1986: 19-34. London: Macmillan Press. Latour, Bruno. "The power of association". In Law, John (Ed.), "Power, action and belief: A new sociology of knowledge?" 1986: 196-223. London: Routledge & Kegan-Paul. Law, John. "Notes on the theory of actor-network: Ordering, strategy and heterogeneity". *Systems Practice*, 5 (4), 1992: 379-393.

¹⁰ Bruno Latour, "The power of association", ed. Law. John, in in "Power, action and belief: A new sociology of knowledge?" 200.

¹¹ Bruno Latour, "Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to ActorNetwork-Theory" 5.

¹² Lorna Uden, "Actor Network Theory and Learning", ed. Seel, Norbert .M, in *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*. Boston, MA, Springer, 2012. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_507

¹³ Bruno Latour curated art exhibitions most notably *Making Things Public: The Atmospheres of Democracy*, with Peter Weibel in 2005, and more recently along with Martin Guinard, he curated the *Taipeh Biennale of Art*, 2020.

¹⁴ Nicholas Bourriaud, "Relational Aesthetics", Dijon: Les Presses du reel, 1998.

¹⁵ Francis Halsall, "Actor-Network Aesthetics: The Conceptual Rhymes of Bruno Latour and Contemporary Art", *Literary History*, Vol. 47, No. 2/3, *Recomposing the Humanities—with Bruno Latour* (Spring & Summer 2016), 442.

¹⁶ Rosi Braidotti, "The concept of human has always been associated with relations of power", *Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona*, 2022, accessed May 5, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mb2_a-UX1OE

¹⁷ Rosi Braidotti, "The concept of human has always been associated with relations of power", 2022

¹⁸ Rosi Braidotti, 2022

¹⁹ Rosi Braidotti, 2022

²⁰ Lauren Berlant, "On the Inconvenience of Other People", New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2022.

²¹ Lauren Berlant, "The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times*". *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 34(3), 2016 395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816645989>

²² Rosi Braidotti, 2022

²³ Our work explores the intersection of art and politics, focusing on the theory of the public sphere and the concept of opinion formation. We create artworks through methods such as agonistic participation and manifesto or slogan making. These artworks aim to envision new ways of living together rather than merely criticizing the current status quo. Our methodology is grounded in contemporary art history, cultural studies, critical theory, and the practical act of acting in and making with the social arrangements we encounter. Through this approach, we aim to discuss the complexity of dissensus within the normative practices of liberal democracy, this aim drives the tactics present in our projects. Our project is called the "Partisan Social Club". <http://partisansocialclub.com>.

²⁴ The WCRC consortium consisted of City University London, Royal College of Music, University College London, University of Northampton, Voluntary Impact Northampton, Tower Hamlets CVS, North East London Integrated Care Board, Northampton Integrated Care Board, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.

²⁵ Kings Heath primary academy has a community space inside the building and although this makes sense for parents with school age children, it is limited in providing the open access we needed to reach a broad range of people.

²⁶ Rosi Braidotti, 2022

²⁷ Lauren Berlant, "The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times*". 397

²⁸ We raised some engagement funding from the University of Northampton (Hewitt) for project costs and Coventry University (Jordan) and Middlesex University (Wright) allowed research time for us to pursue the project. Dr. Polly Jarman, was a research assistant on the project.

²⁹ A zine is a small-circulation self-published work of original or appropriated texts and images, usually reproduced via a copy machine. We utilise zine making as a process to enable agonistic exchange. To make a zine you must understand what you believe in and what you stand for. When creating a zine you reflect upon your values, opinions and expectations.

³⁰ Rosi Braidotti, 2022

³¹ Lauren Berlant, "The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times*". 394

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PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT

WELL COMMUNITIES RESEARCH CONSORTIUM IMPACT REPORT

Authors:

Melissa James, June 2024

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, Hewitt, Jordan and Wright collaborated with the Well Communities Research Consortium (WCRC) to engage publics in sharing their lived experiences of residing within the area of Kings Heath, Northampton. The WCRC project was part of a larger bid to work with communities in Northampton and East London, in improving access to services and facilities for health and community benefit in their locality, deemed as pockets of deprivation. Thus, the project relied on the engagement of local community members as well as that of community services (e.g., healthcare providers, council members). As art and design (A&D) practitioners, Hewitt et al. sought to introduce practice research methods as a means of engaging these groups in the project. The process of production was employed to encourage a meaningful exchange of thoughts and ideas between the researchers and their various respondents. Here, this included creating a visual identity for the project, which when applied to flyers, badges, information boards, and large maps displaying the Kings Heath area, made up the WCRC 'Mapping Kiosk'. Importantly, the Mapping Kiosk went beyond its visual appeal, and was a thoughtfully curated space and experience for participants to share their thoughts and ideas in response to the WCRC aims. Within the space, the process of production allowed residents and service workers to use the oversized maps freely using coloured pens, tape and sticky notes, to create an artefact that reflected themselves and their lived experiences within the

community.

The introduction of practice research was novel to many of the members of the WCRC consortium despite its growing recognition as a meaningful data collection method. As such, this report seeks to explore the impact of employing practice research methods, and the benefits offered through art and design contributions, on the interdisciplinary consortium. Specifically, the ability of art and design practices to enable communicative exchanges between people, co-learning and opinion formation, will be drawn upon. This provides a means of understanding how well the Mapping Kiosk enabled the WCRC research team to learn from and understand the cultural and environmental resources available to the residents, as well as what may be required in the future. Further, it allows for an understanding of the benefits extending beyond the lifetime of this project, afforded to those working in collaboration with art and design practitioners as part of an interdisciplinary team.

Six interviews were conducted to explore the opinions and experiences of the WCRC collaborators. The interviewees worked in art and design (the Mapping Kiosk research team), social sciences, healthcare, community development, and research settings. All data from the six interviews has been anonymized for the purposes of this report, and pseudonyms have been provided. A semi-structured interview schedule was employed, allowing for interviews to deviate naturally around the questions where relevant, and participants to expand on their comments where necessary. It was the role of the interviewer to listen actively and decipher how best to navigate the conversation, whilst aiming to seek answers to the pre-determined questions in a natural and appropriate manner. Two of the key aspects to this research were in determining the *impact* and *scope* of practice research and the collaboration of art and design practitioners among a wider research consortium.

The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA), an accessible and flexible method of organising data into patterns of meaning - or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The flexibility of TA as a data analysis method allows for an inductive, or bottom-up, approach. Here, themes are derived from the content of the data in response to the research aims, independent of broader theoretical or conceptual issues which may be relevant. The data were analysed using a critical realist epistemological perspective, whereby one's experiences and beliefs are seen as reflecting their reality, which is in itself influenced by socio-cultural context.

Three key themes were derived from the dataset; 'the visual', 'beyond the visual', and 'beyond the project'.

THE VISUAL

The theme 'the visual' explores the tangible outputs designed by the creative team and the impact of those outputs on the quality of the overall research project. The maps were noted as being an important aspect of the workshops' success. For example:

"I think having something for people to visualise that's literally a visual point of reference was an inspired idea really." "Because if we hadn't had that [maps]... we wouldn't have been able to have those discussions... it would have just been very factual ...whereas with the maps it became visual, it was more, we were able to add to it." (Simon)

Simon is expressing that the maps allowed for a depth of discussion that wouldn't have otherwise been possible without the input of the A&D practitioners. He posits the maps as allowing the researchers to ask follow-up questions, adding layers and meaning to the comments made by the participants. Simon stated that without the maps the researchers "wouldn't have had a clue" about the references residents were making to Kings Heath, as the researchers themselves didn't know the area well. As such, Simon is expressing that the maps afforded a more effective exchange of thoughts

and ideas between researchers and residents, which was echoed in Georgina's comment:

"having something practical and visual to engage people over is really something positive... it provides that third element that you and that they can relate to because they can point to places and share places and highlight areas that are important to them or have issues." (Georgina)

Here Georgina is commenting on the effectiveness of the shared experience between researchers and participants, in relating to the maps as a means of sharing information and ideas. The "third element" (the map) is a common ground for two individuals who know little about one another to find ways to relate to one another's ideas using the shared map. Echoing Simons comments, Georgina highlights this as being "positive" in affording the researcher an easy understanding of the residents' ideas and issues. As such, the communication between parties was aided by having a visual, tangible tool over which to share ideas. Others within the WCRC team also praised the effectiveness of using the maps as a way of gathering data. "...once you got people to the tables it [map] was really effective at getting deep insights from people." (Natalie). Once again, Natalie's comment nods to the efficacy of art and design practices in obtaining rich and insightful data. Gary's comment also indicates that these creative practices prove more successful than other methods of data collection, in suggesting that the art and design research practice led to "richer discussion":

"There are definitely a lot of design elements and creative elements in this particular kind of discussion, that just made it feel different and I think made more people more able to contribute and it was like a richer discussion." (Gary)

Whilst the maps were used by the participants to create meaningful artefacts of their lived experiences in Kings Heath, they were also hung on frames within following meetings with service providers, showcasing the work completed by those in the previous

workshops. This was recognised by the WCRC team as an impactful way of displaying the data being gathered and ensuring that those present in meetings could quickly and easily bring themselves up to date.

"those frames were really good because it just meant that we could refer back to things and we could make comparisons about how the different maps looked." (Georgina)

"the displays [frames] that we had in that room I think really got people up to speed quite quickly. It really helped them be like OK this is what we're talking about, like we're in this piece of work." (Angela)

The maps' benefits are thus greater than their impact on the data collection process. Displaying the maps also allowed for the professionals involved in the research process to focus their efforts on the project at hand and learn quickly about the lived experiences of those living within Kings Heath as had been explored in a previous workshop. The notion that the maps allowed for a focused conversation was echoed between the WCRC in both the residents meeting and the service provider meeting.

BEYOND THE VISUAL

The theme 'beyond the visual' tells its own story reflecting the resounding sentiment among all interviewees that collaborating with art and design practitioners led not only to improved visual outcomes but to an enriched data set through the intangible skills brought to the project via art and design practitioners. The subtheme '*breaking down barriers*', explores the ability of art and design practitioners to thoughtfully and intentionally create spaces which remove hierarchies and improve the accessibility of an event. In doing so the exchange of ideas between WCRC collaborators and the residents of Kings Heath was notably improved, allowing for an openness in conversation and a flow of idea generation that had seldom been seen by interviewees in their previous work. The subtheme '*designers as practitioners*' explores

the value added by art and design practitioners to this interdisciplinary research project by means of encouraging participants to openly share their thoughts and opinions in a way that can be difficult to achieve.

Breaking down barriers.

One way art and design practice research extends beyond the visual is in its ability to curate a space which elicits a feeling, and thus generate a certain response from the intended participants. In this instance, that meant designing a space which encouraged open communication in a setting which many residents may have felt nervous or unsure about partaking. This intentionality and thoughtfulness in art and design practice, was recognised among the collaborators of the WCRC project. For example,

"...as soon as people came into the room, people from very different backgrounds, very different roles... were just having a little chat about how cool something looked... real attention had obviously been given to the layout of and the design of the rooms and the space and making it kind of, I'm not sure I can even pinpoint this down... colleagues working on the design of the room had just managed to create a space which was sort of a little bit non-judgemental and non-intimidating..." (Gary).

Here Gary is highlighting that the thoughtful design of the space and the elements within it led to open communication between people with different life experiences, who may have otherwise struggled to find common ground. He mentions the non-judgemental nature of the space, alluding to the idea that the art and design team were able to create a safe space for participants to express their lived experiences. Gary also mentions the indescribable nature of the work in designing the space in such a way. In not having the vocabulary to describe how the design team created the space in such a way, Gary illustrates that these are skills that the team may not have otherwise had, which highlights the added value provided to the team in collaborating the A&D practitioners. This sentiment is echoed by Angela who said:

"At the same time as being more kind of professional, it also felt more like engaging and actually maybe more welcoming because you could kind of see you were coming into a particular like designed space... it'd been very clearly thought out." (Angela)

Again, Angela highlights that the work of the art and design practitioners went beyond creating visually engaging materials, into the curation of a welcoming and engaging space for participants to explore their lived experiences. She also indicates that this is an improvement on other projects she had worked on in the past, highlighting that a space feeling engaging and welcoming is not a given, and something that was intentionally created by the art and design practitioners.

All the participants noted the nature of the space as being a factor in aiding the exchange of ideas between researchers and respondents. Natalie also noted "it definitely helps a lot... it's more accessible, it's less threatening... it's more informal... and the way that it was designed, they got a lot of valuable insights.". In her use of the word 'more', Natalie is again emphasising that the art and design practice research methods used here were an improvement on projects she had previously collaborated on. Natalie's quote also indicates that the design of the Mapping Kiosk led to valuable insights. This was a sentiment held by all the participants, that in breaking down the barriers of communication through the intentional curation of an inclusive and inviting space, the art and design practitioners contributed meaningfully to the collection of deep, rich data.

Designers as practitioners.

The WCRC collaborators recognised the importance of the art and design practitioners working in tandem with their creative outputs, for successfully engaging participants in the project. By collaborating with the art and design practitioners the WCRC team felt that there were positive implications on the quality of the data collected throughout the project. Building on the previous sub-theme '*breaking down barriers*', '*designers as practitioners*' explores how this collaboration enriched the

findings, and thus the potential impact of the WCRC research consortium.

"I think what really worked well was actually the quality and depth of the discussions that were happening around those tables in the events particularly. Again, that's not something that just happens by accident, that needs a lot of care and preparation also reflects I think really well on the approach of the people who facilitated the conversation." (Gary)

Gary clearly highlights the intentional curation of an event which has allowed for a rich, quality discussion between researchers and participants. He recognises the attention to detail that has been given to ensuring that the approach provided data which is meaningful for both parties. Further, Gary's comments on how well this reflects on the people facilitating the conversations (namely the art and design team) signifies the importance of utilising the broad skillsets of art and design practitioners, of their skills beyond the visual. Not only did the art and design practitioners create a welcoming and accessible space, they were also able to embody that quality leading to deep, meaningful discussions.

"...like maybe sometimes a bit of hesitancy about writing on the maps, so like they don't necessarily stand on their own, they need to be in tandem with a skilled facilitator to then use the maps to write on..." (Angela)

Angela is describing the hesitancy felt by some of the participants in engaging with the mapping exercise due to its novelty or their unfamiliarity with it. Whilst often art and design practitioners are perceived as providing visual value to an event, Angela illustrates that art and design value extends beyond the visual, that art and design practitioners are vital for the facilitation of workshops within which their tools are being utilised, to ensure that the most benefit is extracted from the carefully curated activities. Angela is referencing that the visual components provided by the designers was only part of the role of the art and design practitioners, and that the success of creative

workshops comes from the presence and facilitation skills of the designers alongside their creative outputs.

BEYOND THE PROJECT

The skills recognised within the art and design practitioners were valued by all of those working within the larger WCRC research consortium. The theme 'beyond the project' explores the lasting impact of the art and design practitioners on the WCRC team and considers some improvements for the future implementation of research practice methods within interdisciplinary teams.

"what I really valued working with the kind of creative arts experts and practitioners was just their, like just learning from seeing their skills in like improvising, making the most out of the materials to hand and like with quite a limited budget and in a short amount of time." "I'll definitely take on board the value of having those creative skills and expertise as part of a research project team." (Gary)

This clearly highlights the extension of art and design practitioners impact beyond the WCRC project by inspiring interdisciplinary professionals to learn from their skills. In learning new skills, Gary is able to apply new knowledge to aid his own work, indicating that the impact of collaborating with A&D professionals will continue to benefit research projects beyond the end of that being discussed herein.

"I don't have a background in art and design but I just think it would really help us going forward in doing our work if we could incorporate more elements." "... more, more please. Because it's a gap. Because we need... to be finding new, innovative, creative, engaging ways to attract people's attention." (Georgina)

"it was great to bring more of this artistic expertise... we hope to have more of it." (Natalie)

The two quotes above highlight the desire for art and design practice to be

embedded in interviewees future works, indicating the lasting impact that the team had on them in this project. The value of the diverse and under-utilized skills of art and design practitioners is recognised and demanded after having experienced collaborating with them. As such, working with art and design practitioners benefits research design by encouraging it's use in a greater capacity which allows for the testing and betterment of various methods, including those employed within this project.

The importance of using these projects as a means of seeking methodological improvement cannot be understated, with this project being no exception. Whilst the team valued the art and design contributions to the project, some key points for improving future collaborations were noted. When discussing the usefulness of maps as a form of data which needed analysing, Angela said:

"if you have people using like stickers or post it notes or like drawing lines, unless they're interpreted and you know what that sticker means, if it's like a dot, you know like actually a lot of that is lost out of context of that meeting. So, when you're actually trying to analyse it, you don't know what it means."

Angela is highlighting that the creative methods that were implemented within the project led to difficulties in her applying the findings in a social science context. Due to the conversational aspect of the meetings, much of the discussion being had around the maps were lost data, since the maps were used as a tool for note taking within the conversations being facilitated. This indicates the importance of interdisciplinary teams collaborating throughout the duration of the project and sharing insights and expertise to ensure that all parties can gather the data needed for the successful completion of their own elements of the project. In order to ensure that researchers can collaborate throughout the entirety of a project it is imperative that they are all treated with the same importance from its inception. This was an issue raised here by Gary:

"it [art and design] turned out to be really integral to the success of the events... and was treated like a bit of an optional extra... rather than being really integral", "the involvement of the creative arts practitioners was still a bit of an add on, and you know, imagine how great it would have been if we have had like twice as much of your or Andy's or Michael's time, you know." (Gary).

Gary expresses that the value of collaborating with art and design practitioners should be recognised and compensated as such by allowing the time needed to design and implement meaningful research practices. He recognises the benefit in incorporating art and design practitioners into the wider research team in order to achieve successful outcomes. In reflecting upon this issue Gary shows that working alongside art and design practitioners has changed his perspective on the importance of this type of collaboration in that the project positively impacted his value of art and design research practices.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the WCRC sought to explore the lived experiences of residents and service workers within the area of Kings Heath, and in doing so collaborated with art and design practitioners to employ novel, creative and engaging research practices. This report corroborated the ideas and opinions of those within the research consortium, reflecting the impact of the collaboration and its scope for future impact. Interviews among the WCRC collaborators indicated three key theme's: 'the visual', 'beyond the visual' and 'beyond the project'. 'The visual' explored the impact of the tactile, tangible outputs delivered by the art and design practitioners in allowing for deeper engagement, and more focused collaborations. 'Beyond the visual' explored the intangible skills brought by art and design practitioners within this project, such as their ability to curate a welcoming and inclusive space, as well as their facilitation skills, both of which enriched the data collected.

Finally, 'beyond the project' highlighted some key areas for the benefits and scope of incorporating art and design practitioners within future interdisciplinary projects as well as some key takeaways for improving such collaborations.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Melissa James is a social science researcher. James was commissioned to evaluate the art and design aspect of the WCRC Project by University of Northampton. The funds were from the University of Northampton **Research Accelerator Impact Fund** designed to support engagement and impact activities, led by PI Professor Andrew Hewitt.

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