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Examining the impact of austerity on Community Place Initiatives to explore how ‘live’ architectural pedagogy can better support them towards urban capacity building and future resilience.

Community Place Initiatives post-austerity, and how a ‘civic’ School of Architecture might support them

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The impacts of austerity measures have been discussed widely since governments made sweeping budget cuts following the global financial crisis of 2007–08. More than a decade later, the impact of these measures is still growing and the focus of academia on these issues has produced a substantial body of work.¹ This research has led to better understanding of the impacts of austerity across many sectors, informing ways in which this impact is, in part, being mitigated. In the context of the UK, the majority of academic research on austerity focuses on poverty and related health and welfare issues,² healthcare provision,³ social services and procurement,⁴ and on the spatial consequences of budget cuts – especially focusing on affordable housing.⁵ Less attention, however, has been placed on the various roles that ‘Community Place Initiatives’⁶ (in further text referred to as CPIs) play in mitigating the effects of drastic cuts to Local Government budgets. We are interested in revealing the impact that budget cuts have had, and are still having, on these CPIs, exploring how changes in policy at a national and city level influence the relationship between communities and their place.

This article discusses recent research by a team of researchers from the Urban Education Live Project.⁷ The team worked closely with a number of CPIs in the city of Sheffield, the UK, who work in relation to place – both in the physical sense of shaping the built environment in an urban context, and in a social sense, looking at production of space as a social construct.⁸ Our research examines how these CPIs deal with a context that has changed fundamentally over the past decade. Through a multi-modal approach combining interviews, case studies, and ‘live’ pedagogy we explore how collaboration between these local initiatives and architectural researchers and students can be mutually beneficial within this context. In the light of our findings, we then speculate upon what this means for the role that schools of architecture can play outside the academy.

The majority of the research involves students of architecture, urban studies, sociology, and art, who were engaged through the curriculum by volunteering or via fellowships. At Urban Education

Live Project Team Sheffield (in further text referred to as UEL:SHEF) we are collaborating with architecture students as our co-researchers, through Live Projects,⁹ Design Studios,¹⁰ and our extra-curriculum project office, Live Works.¹¹ The involvement of students in UEL research is key to our exploration of the mutual learning possibilities between universities and communities, and Sheffield students are contributing extensively to UEL:SHEF activities and findings. An emphasis on ‘live’ pedagogy is central to the School of Architecture’s ethos and expands beyond the ‘live project’ to include external collaborations in many forms. This broader approach to ‘liveness’¹² embraces the role that critical design speculation can play within co-design, alongside the more conventional deliverable outputs of live projects. Over the course of UEL, Sheffield students have carried out ethnographic research via interviews and surveys, and co-designed both deliverable and speculative design proposals with our community partners.

This article focuses on highlighting the challenges faced by CPIs in Sheffield and on their recent collaborations with the University of Sheffield School of Architecture, within the context of the Urban Education Live research project. Through this research we seek to explore ways, beyond these specific cases in a specific city, in which schools of architecture can be more effective in their contribution to local place-based urban capacity building and future resilience.

The shifting relationships between city and university in the context of localism and austerity

Over the past ten years the impact of central government policy on the restructuring of the finances of local government has been substantial.¹³ Council budgets all across the UK have been reduced significantly, however, councils in the post-industrial North have been affected the most.¹⁴ In Sheffield, the City Council’s main source of Central Government funding, Revenue Support Grant,¹⁵ has been cut by 22% since 2009/10, leading to a reduction in many local services including social care, housing, environmental, and regulatory services.¹⁶ This drastic



1 Isaac is located at the edge of the city centre in a building, shown here during the Public Presentations of the 2016 Live Projects, hosted by the Live Project 'A Vision for Vestry Hall'.

scaling-down of funding has resulted in a local government with a much-reduced capacity to support and deliver services. Since 2020, this has been exacerbated even further due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With only limited resources now available, short-term provision to deal with immediate pressing needs is consequently prioritised over longer-term developmental funding.¹⁷

In 2010 the new UK Coalition government set out their agenda for what was called at the time the 'Big Society'. Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg stated:

*[...] it is our ambition to distribute power and opportunity to people rather than hoarding authority within government. That way, we can build the free, fair and responsible society we want to see.*¹⁸

Cameron has since then openly criticised this 'Big Society' agenda and this shift to localism, recognising that community groups and organisations needed more financial and technical support than the government had anticipated when the agenda was published in 2010.¹⁹

Over the same period, the University of Sheffield and many other universities have increased their influence as major stakeholders in cities – through employment, land ownership, development, and investment.²⁰ Alongside this growing urban prominence, increased demand for public accountability, and making the benefits of public investment more visible, have led to the emergence (or in Sheffield's case,²¹ reinvigoration) of the 'Civic University'. Where universities may have once prioritised national and global impact they are now increasingly focusing on impact closer to home. Recent political developments have seen the emergence of a whole host of university initiatives that are ostensibly filling the gaps left by the lack of council funding for communities.²² As Lord Kerslake puts it:

*Universities play a key role nationally through their teaching and research work. But they are also hugely important to the economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of the places in which they are located. I saw this for myself during my time as chief executive of Sheffield City Council, when the two universities played an essential part in the regeneration of the city [...] As the United Kingdom grapples with the challenges of low growth, low productivity, the impact of austerity and widening spatial inequalities, universities can be [...] significant 'anchor institutions', able to make an enormous impact on the success of their places.*²³

In the light of this complex landscape of need, innovation, institutions, and diverse objectives, how can universities and CPIs collaborate effectively?

The changed sociopolitical and economic context as a result of austerity and the growing recognition of the civic responsibilities of universities calls for, at the very least, reflection on the nature of the relationships and interdependencies between the university, the city and its communities. This article situates this reflection within the context of schools of architecture and their collaborations with community partners in their 'host' cities. How can the structures, processes, and outputs of live architectural pedagogy be shaped to best support community groups in their place? How can this support address current challenges while also helping community groups build capacity for a sustainable future? How might these collaborations model new ways of architectural education and practice? And how do we ensure that this work, given the power imbalance between large institutions and small community groups, is done ethically and to the mutual benefit of all involved?

To start to answer these questions, the following section describes how we worked with a number of CPIs in Sheffield to better understand the day-to-day challenges they are currently facing.

Stories from Sheffield – our research approach

To gain an understanding of current CPIs in Sheffield the UEL:SHEF research team began by mapping community groups and organisations across the city. The starting point for this was our extensive number of collaborations that have developed through the School of Architecture's Live Projects over many years.²⁴ In total, we charted about two hundred groups – some of which the School of Architecture had previously established links with, but others emerged as the research progressed.²⁵ While the focus of the research is on groups that relate directly and actively to the built environment, it is important to state that not all mapped groups engage with the built environment to the same extent. However, they all deliver services that have a spatial dimension, for example a hub or community centre that they operate or hire to run their activities. From this initial mapping we set up four focus groups with twenty representatives from sixteen diverse types of CPIs from across the city. In these discussions particular attention was paid to how much agency they feel they have in the production of space and investigating the relationship between delivering day-to-day activities and possibilities for longer-term strategic development. The focus groups were then followed up by semi-structured interviews with individuals to dig more deeply into specific issues and contexts. Emergent themes, patterns, and

conditions were captured through qualitative analysis, informing the observations discussed in this article.

The groups investigated include charities, social enterprises, cooperatives, community-interest companies, and groups run by volunteers. Some have only been established recently and others have been operating for decades. Their activities and interests include community development, education, sustainability, arts and culture, food production, heritage, well-being, religion, equity, and housing. UEL:SHEF are particularly interested in understanding how community place initiatives pursue their mission in the current economic and social climate. In order to gain a deeper understanding of their operations, we have asked them what they do, who they engage with and where, what networks they are part of and how they are funded. We further explored how groups develop their activities over time, how they learn from past activities and how they prepare for future uncertainties.

² The Live Project developed a strategy of how to fund and deliver sustainable phased development of the building. This model played a key role in exploring this with Israac.



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The overall goal of this research has been to better understand the challenges faced by Sheffield CPIs as a result of the austerity agenda, and the different ways the groups have responded to these challenges. Within this context we explore experiences the groups and organisations have had working with academic partners, and how such collaborations might contribute or have already contributed to the delivery of current activities and the development of future strategies.

In this article we focus on three CPIs out of the sixteen that were interviewed – Israac Sheffield Somali Cultural Organisation, Pitsmoor Adventure Playground, and Heeley Trust. These groups have been selected as they share common features: they are well-established groups, embedded in their communities over many years; they all play a vital

role within their communities, providing safe spaces for their community to socialise, seek support, and access services; they have all collaborated with the University of Sheffield School of Architecture over several years and multiple projects.

However, beyond these similarities, they differ in the activities and the scale and type of spaces they use, and so exemplify the wide range of work of CPIs in the city. The scale of spaces they operate from are: a large single building – a former vestry hall purchased from Sheffield City Council with member donations (Israac); an external playground, including a small building, saved from closure and now leased from the Council (Pitsmoor Adventure Playground); a network of community parks, green spaces and heritage buildings developed and maintained over the last twenty years (Heeley Trust).



3 Dracula's den-building workshop with children from the playground during the second Live Project collaboration 'Play/Grounds' in 2019. Pitsmoor is located within Burngreave, a culturally diverse area in the northeastern part of the city, close to the city centre.

4 As part of the ESRC Festival in 2019, Live Works hosted Pitsmoor Adventure Playground at a public event 'Play/Grounds' to explore the role of children and play in city development.



The following sections trace their stories in more detail – focusing initially on the relationship they have with the spaces they occupy.

Introducing the case study Community Place Initiatives

Israac – Somali Community & Cultural Association

Israac was established in 1981 by a group of Somali immigrants, and at their peak they employed about forty staff on their payroll. At that time, Sheffield City Council were encouraging the establishment of community organisations to enhance their engagement with minority communities in Sheffield and become the first point of contact for the Council's engagement with these communities. In recent years, due to austerity cuts, they can no longer support these organisations to the extent they used to. However, Adam Yusuf from Israac emphasises that the need to give communities a voice and support on specific issues remains, despite the lack of Council resourcing: '[...] we know we've got a mission, we know we've got a job to do, to represent our community.'²⁶

Soon after they were established, Israac were offered the use of the Council owned Vestry Hall located just south of Sheffield City Centre [1].²⁷ As austerity measures started to impact on local funding, the Council began selling council-owned properties, including buildings and land that were being used by community organisations. Vestry Hall was no exception and, with impressive speed and determination, Israac managed to develop a business plan and purchase the building with donations from members of the community. At the time of writing this article, they own the building, but with no paid staff, a couple of volunteers and very little funding they struggle to stay in operation.²⁸

The School of Architecture has collaborated with Israac since 2016, initially via a Live Project 'A Vision for Vestry Hall' that co-designed a strategic plan to link funding with phased development of the building [2], and also via numerous research and teaching events and activities held in the building.

Pitsmoor Adventure Playground

This long-established organisation fulfils a much bigger role in its community beyond its provision of playspace. It is an inclusive space with the aim of creating a sense of community in an area that is ethnically diverse and one of the most deprived in the city. They host large events, offer day trips for children and their parents, and collaborate with other NGOs in the area to support local people. The playground was set up in 1970 by a group of locals who wanted a safe space for their children to play and, after a number of years, the Council took over its management. In 2013, due to budget cuts, the playground's closure was announced. A number of local residents and supporters came together and established a charity to lease the playground from Sheffield City Council for a fixed period of twenty-three years [3]. At the time of the interview, the playground was operating with six paid staff, eight trustees, and many volunteers. Patrick Meleady, the playground's manager, describes their work: 'It's a

bloody worthy piece of work that we're doing but the challenges are always there.'²⁹

The School of Architecture has collaborated with Pitsmoor Adventure Playground since 2015, including two Live Projects in 2015 and 2019, the Leap of Faith AHRC research project 2016, partnerships with MArch design studios 'In Residence' 2018–19 and 'In Process' 2019–20, and the 'Play/Grounds' public event held at Live Works as part of the ESRC Festival in 2019 [4]. Outputs from these collaborations have included designs for retrofitting the playground building and a nearby chapel into a youth centre, design and construction of new play structures, and co-research on the value of play in city futures.

Heeley Trust

Heeley Trust is a charity based in the Heeley and Meersbrook neighbourhoods south of Sheffield city centre. The Trust was established in 1997 in order to regenerate a strip of derelict land resulting from housing clearance. A group of residents set up a charity and applied for funding to initiate community ownership of the local landscape in an attempt to regain a sense of agency towards the future of their neighbourhood. Their mission is as described by Heeley Trust manager, Andy Jackson: 'Engaging and making people feel safe, making the place feel like it's an identifiable community with its own vibe.'³⁰

At the time of the interview in 2018, Heeley Trust had twenty-two full time equivalent paid staff, and around forty staff altogether. When the Trust was founded, they were completely reliant on external funding, whereas today, the management of the green spaces and buildings in their ownership is funded by income generated by the Trust themselves. Jackson believes that local ownership of assets is crucial to a sustainable community, where the income generated through their activities is reinvested in their area:

*So our future has been driven by how do we, in an enterprising way, develop things that are able to meet social need, address the issues that are faced in our community over decades, over generations, and at the same time earn the money that enables us to plan for that long term. The best way to do that is to own the bricks and mortar and to develop income streams that aren't grant-dependent.'*³¹

Jackson also strongly believes in the importance of non-monetary value of community assets:

*We always say, our area is not poor, it's rich. It's just not rich in money. It's rich in challenges and other things.'*³²

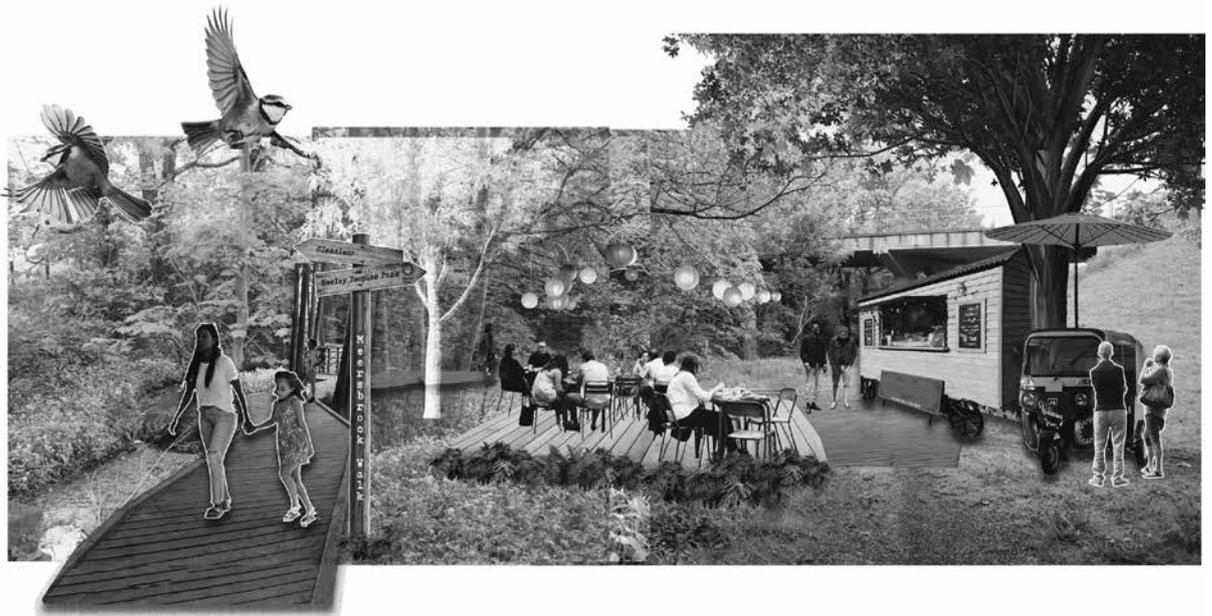
The School of Architecture has collaborated with Heeley Trust since 2011 and has completed three Live Projects: 'ReCycle Bikes' – developing designs for a new cycle workshop, 'Making Meersbrook' – a vision for Meersbrook Hall as a community hub [5], 'Thriving Heeley' – a network of walks and spaces for well-being across the neighbourhood [6].

A deeper dive

These case study CPIs are firmly rooted in their place and have invested a great deal of time, resources, and energy into bringing buildings and urban spaces



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into community ownership or management. Keeping these community assets afloat and *delivering* their social mission has never been straightforward, and the last decade of austerity cuts has brought added uncertainty and precarity in terms of funding and long-term sustainability. In this section we explore these challenges in more detail.

Adapting to a new funding landscape

Precarity of funding can result in CPIs struggling to find staff to support service provision between contracts. Having had the original support they received from the Council cut drastically, they now have to apply for public funding, which tends to be short term, as Adam from Israac points out: 'three years sounds a lot. But three years is three years. After the programme is done, and if there is no replacement, you lose the programme, you lose the staff.'³³

5 Heeley Trust are negotiating with Sheffield City Council to lease Meersbrook Hall – shown here during an event for Ruskin Makeover Week, a collaboration with the Live Project 'Making Meersbrook' in 2018.

6 Image from 'Thriving Heeley', a third Live Project with Heeley Trust in 2020, developing ideas for spaces of health and well-being in the neighbourhood.

With limited funding options and increasing competition, most Sheffield-based organisations we interviewed told us it is getting harder to keep winning bids.³⁴ To become more competitive the initiatives have started tailoring their services and activities to fit the requirements set by the funding bodies. Most public funding opportunities align with national government policy decisions, and therefore may not be as responsive to local needs. Adam from Israac mentions: 'there were the buzzwords, and every organisation was trying to fit what the government is funding.'³⁵

This highlights not only the challenges of providing services in a context of austerity, but also how CPIs have to change and adapt according to the current political climate. In order to survive, the initiatives we interviewed have had to become more flexible in the way they operate. Many have redefined their activities and diversify their sources of income. Israac, for example, generate income from space hire: ‘we have three regulars renting our spaces: martial arts, table tennis and a Church group’,³⁶ while Heeley Trust expanded their business model to reinvest the profits back into the charity: ‘[we work] very business-like, these contracts allow us to make a margin, and to reinvest back into the local infrastructure and the charity.’³⁷ They have developed creative ways of tapping into ad-hoc income streams and developing alternative models of operating. Some groups we interviewed within the wider research project have made a clear strategic shift away from sole reliance on grants to expand their business activities; pursuing alternative sources of income, setting up social enterprises, and running elements of their organisations as not-for-profit businesses.

Finding and keeping good people

Adapting to a new funding landscape and adopting new ways of working adds complexity to the already existing demands on staff, requiring them to operate outside of their skills, expertise, and knowledge. ‘We now have the responsibility of running [the Playground] like a small business and it’s really demanding’,³⁸ says Meleady. Yusuf feels that, despite all of the years of experience at Israac, ‘again we’re starting from scratch. So although it’s been thirty years, again it’s trying to go back to the basics, and getting it right.’³⁹ Many of our participants mentioned that running a charity is based on learned experience, rich knowledge, and social capital amassed by their teams through the years. And yet many initiatives struggle to retain dedicated and skilled people, as Andy from Heeley Trust puts it: ‘a lot of talented people, a lot of confident and experienced people have moved on. It’s very difficult to maintain long term linear collaborations.’⁴⁰

And finding skilled staff and volunteers who are willing to stay with the challenges of community work is difficult, as Robin from Israac reminds us:

*When you’re working in the voluntary sector, at the end of the day it comes down to individuals. In the end if you haven’t got good people who have the right skills, it won’t work.*⁴¹

Respecting the value of individuals, building relationships and networks is one of the main ingredients of successful work, describes Jackson from Heeley Trust:

*We’ve had a very stable staff team, those relationships and the way people link together – there’s organisations and there’s people. And really it’s always about the people. So the connections we make with other organisations are made with individuals there.*⁴²

He adds, however, that the value of volunteering, people offering their time, work and skills to build

the capacity of a community and contribute to the overall economy, is not fully recognised by policymakers, even though the work of volunteers offsets a large amount of costs to local government: ‘we have failed to put across to [the Council] the value and importance of our sector and the infrastructure and what we do.’⁴³

The complexities around ownership

The successful delivery of both short-term and long-term goals of CPIs often depends on the buildings and spaces in which they operate and deliver their activities. Our research shows that the relationship these groups have with their place and the challenges around building ownership, operation, maintenance, and sustainability demands a great deal of their capacity.

The service provision of all grant-dependent CPIs is compromised if they do not have a sustainable source of funding to maintain the building or land they are responsible for. Uncertainty surrounding ownership is a very common concern among the Sheffield organisations we studied. Challenges arise when the organisation does not own the land or buildings that they operate from: for instance, when they lease the building from the local council. While one would assume that the leaseholder is responsible for repairs and maintenance, this is not always the case. Often, despite their position of financial precarity, the upkeep of the building falls to the lessee with no long-term security of this investment in return. Still, there are some situations where not owning their building or land can be more preferable to a CPI. Pitsmoor Adventure Playground are custodians of the land where the playground is located, while ownership is retained by Sheffield City Council. They have a twenty-three-year contract on a three months’ notice, which means they can be removed if the City Council decides to sell the land. However, this arrangement suits them: ‘I, from a personal point of view, wouldn’t want to own it because it’s a liability. Because if we don’t get the resource we can’t provide the service that’s required.’⁴⁴

In Israac’s case, they had to make a quick decision when the City Council decided to sell the building they had been in for many years: ‘after thirty years of using the building, the Council was selling all their buildings, assets, and land because they ran out of money.’⁴⁵ As an organisation they could not compete financially with private buyers interested in purchasing the building, and so they had to think creatively or they would be left without a building to operate from: ‘we are already a deprived community, we do not have funding, let alone just to run the organisation, so we had to come to a solution.’⁴⁶

Israac are lucky enough to have a large community base that showed their support by raising money to purchase the building under the ‘Community Right to Bid’ legislation.⁴⁷ Now facing the challenges of owning the building, Israac are very aware of the liability they purchased:

*So we own the building, but we now have to make it work – that's the challenge and it's hard and frustrating. What keeps us going is the spirit – the members of the community who bought the building are passionate about it.*⁴⁸

While securing their building brings opportunities, it also brings new challenges now that they are liable for maintaining a building that they struggle to afford: 'in terms of a SWOT analysis, you get to a point where your opportunities are also your threats.'⁴⁹

And yet, for others such as Heeley Trust, owning the buildings and spaces that they operate from is the only way forward, despite the difficulties that may entail. They firmly believe that a community should own and operate its assets, however, as Jackson points out, this has to be done with 'income streams that aren't grant-dependent',⁵⁰ such as bike shop and workshop A Different Gear, community enterprise hub Sum Studios, and digital learning platform Sheffield Online.⁵¹

In summary, each case describes clearly the day-to-day struggles faced by CPIs as they attempt to provide vital services to their communities in the context of dwindling public funds and uncertain futures. They highlight the intricate relationship between CPIs and their buildings and spaces. All three could not carry out their social mission without their buildings and/or spaces and, in the case of Heeley Trust and, to a certain degree, Israac, they have utilised their buildings to diversify their income generation. However, along with these opportunities comes the burden of the ongoing operation, maintenance, and repair of these buildings and spaces in the short term, and meeting this immediate demand leaves very little time and capacity to plan and adapt for longer-term futures.

How can a School of Architecture respond to the challenges facing Community Place Initiatives?

The Civic School of Architecture

A growing number of Schools of Architecture have found Live Projects⁵² to be a useful mechanism for students to develop their skills beyond the traditional confines of the academy. In addition to the benefits to student learning and employability, the benefits that Live Projects can bring to external partners is well documented.⁵³

Live Projects at the University of Sheffield School of Architecture is one of the longest standing live project programmes in the UK, having started in 1999.⁵⁴ Since then, approximately 2,150 masters students have delivered 265 place-based projects, across sixteen countries in partnership with groups and organisations from the public and voluntary sectors. Many of these projects have been in Sheffield and the South Yorkshire region and, over the last decade or so, this has given us insight into the growing challenges faced by local CPIs as austerity cuts take their toll. There has been a marked increase in enquiries from potential community 'clients' and, although our capacity to run projects has increased from ten in 2010 to eighteen in 2022, need still vastly exceeds capacity. We have also noticed a difference in

the nature of the enquiries – whereas a few years ago community groups may have been looking to expand or maximise the potential of their buildings beyond their core services, they are now much more likely to be facing fundamental challenges with their buildings or places that are threatening the delivery of the core services themselves.

As a response to this growing need the School has sharpened the criteria for Live Projects, bringing a much clearer strategic and critical focus to the aims for the programme. Consequently, we work only with clients from the public and voluntary sectors, the vast majority of our Live Projects are with clients who could otherwise not afford architectural services, and there is a focus on working with clients who serve deprived or marginalised communities. Over recent years our understanding of the mutual interdependence between student learning and the work of our community clients has grown, as we document more carefully the impact that the students and their work have had on CPIs in the city. This has led to an expansion of our 'live' pedagogy, where many more instances of 'liveness' across the School of Architecture's courses were developed, beyond Live Projects. Since 2014, students and graduates have also had the opportunity to work with local CPIs through the School's project office and urban room, Live Works.

The Urban Education Live project has given us the opportunity to explore the impact of these instances of 'liveness' even more closely, in collaboration with the CPIs Israac, Heeley Trust, and Pitsmoor Adventure Playground. Focusing not only on Live Projects but also on wider collaborations through Design Studios⁵⁵ and Live Works, we asked the CPIs if they thought this work was beneficial, and how it can be developed even further. In essence, the research explored the potential of the University of Sheffield School of Architecture as a joined-up, outward-facing 'Civic' School of Architecture that, through its live pedagogy, brings long-term support to community partners.

The following sections describe key aspects of the relationship between the School of Architecture and its community partners, mapping the benefits from the partners' point of view and speculating upon how each could be developed further.

Joining things up

The students bring an injection of fresh energy and positivity to the community groups they work with. When an organisation is struggling to operate on a day-to-day basis, it can be extremely heartening for them to see students respond enthusiastically to what they do. As Jackson from Heeley Trust puts it:

*The biggest thing [the Live Project] brought was 12 young, optimistic, uncynical, energetic people into the heart of our organisation. And all of their enthusiasm and energy and how much they loved what we were doing. Somebody comes in and says what you're doing is amazing, this is the way forward.*⁵⁶

In addition to this immediate boost, our diverse student groups, working within the context of a global university, develop a wide range of design

outputs informed by best practice and research from across the world, in only six weeks. After this intense and short period of production there is the risk, however, that the clients are left with a vast amount of possibilities that they don't necessarily have the capacity to pursue once the students have moved on, 'So after six weeks they left us with huge documentation, which was very valuable to us – past, present, future.'⁵⁷ It also should be recognised that there is the risk that once students have moved on, clearly having had a valuable learning experience, clients can feel exploited if there is no continuing support from the School of Architecture once a Live Project has ended.

As a direct response to these challenges we have focused on developing a joined-up strategy towards aspects of live pedagogy across the School in order to establish collaborations that are as ethical, non-extractive, and mutually beneficial as possible. We now seek collaborations with CPIs that can develop through multiple Live Projects over several years, that also have the potential to continue within Design Studios and that could also become extracurricular activities or projects via Live Works. Taking this approach enables us to streamline, expand, and magnify the support we can bring to our community clients, bringing in different pedagogical mechanisms to suit the different needs and stages of the collaboration and also bringing in action research opportunities where possible. This is exemplified by our collaboration with Pitsmoor Adventure Playground, which has developed since 2015 through two Live Projects, two Design Studios, activities in the Live Works urban room, and continues to evolve through the critical reflection afforded by the Urban Education Live research project. Meleady from the playground summarises the impact of the student work completed between two years of Live Projects as follows:

*[Our] experience with the Live Projects, it's excellent. You know the legacy you left us [...] we could secure initial resources and also a physical build that the children could engage with, to a very high standard.*⁵⁸

There are, however, clear institutional obstacles to building these longitudinal, long-term collaborations that are essential in providing the sustained, layered support that CPIs need to thrive. This level of commitment demands a level of sustained coordination and resourcing that is not traditionally allocated to teaching, across modules, and across years. It is often the structures of the University⁵⁹ that mitigate against effective collaboration, rather than any limiting factors on the part of the community clients, for example: inflexible course timetables; the annual churn of the academic year; the need for assessment; learning outcomes not aligning with community needs; etc. These limitations can be obstructive within one department but then magnified even further when collaboration is also sought between departments and faculties in other disciplinary 'silos'. However, the complex challenges faced by CPIs often demand a multidisciplinary approach and so, despite these challenges, we are developing collaborations with

other departments across the University of Sheffield (for example, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Engineering, Medicine, and Public Health) to enhance the support we offer our community partners.

Overall, this emphasis on joining up, across academic years, projects, modules, and disciplines, greatly enhances the support we can offer CPIs in Sheffield and the region. If effective, this level of coordination can draw on the extensive expertise, knowledge, capacity, and resources of the University to deliver transformational projects in collaboration with community partners. As a result, we are challenging ourselves to work differently, to be critical of our own structures and approaches and to scrutinise our own institutional priorities and values.

Laying foundations

In addition to the need for change around the University structures and ways of working, live pedagogy highlights the value of non-traditional roles of the architect. Working at a grassroots level in collaboration with local people and CPIs opens up, for many of our students, new forms of practice that expand the role of the architect beyond traditional parameters.

In 2011 the RIBA Building Futures Report identified valuable work that architects often do for clients but that rarely gets acknowledged, or indeed paid for. This work is 'Pre-project – all the community consultation and analysis, brief development, strategic thinking and preparatory work that lies behind the early design stages.'⁶⁰ A substantial amount of our live engagement lies in this area, where students and community groups explore together the local needs and ambitions in order to understand the spatial opportunities that could emerge. This stage is about building a solid and sustainable foundation upon which to base the actual 'project'. The context of 'mutual learning' that a Live Project offers means that expansive, open-ended, and challenging questions can be explored in ways that time-poor community groups rarely get the chance to do:

*[the students] had time to get into the ethos of adventure play and understand us [...] It was a joint journey – they weren't the experts coming to tell us what we needed, which I think was great.*⁶¹

This mutual exploration quickly gets to the heart of issues such as capacity and resilience of the groups and the consequent sustainability of any future projects. This speculation and holistic thinking is usually impossible for community groups to commission professionally and yet could make the difference between an ill-thought through project that becomes a burden and a project that can flourish well into the future. A collaboration between a civic school of architecture and a CPI can fill this existing gap in the traditional architectural service that results in so many projects either being badly briefed or not happening at all.

Following the publication of the Building Futures Report, a revised Plan of Work⁶² was published by

the RIBA in 2013, which included a new ‘Stage 0’, called ‘Strategic Definition’. This went some way towards defining the ‘pre-project’ tasks identified in the Building Futures Report, for example, preparing client requirements and a business case, appraising the site and assessing risk. However, this assumes that a client group has formed and that a project has been identified. Our experience shows that some CPIs need what might be called ‘pre-pre-project’ or ‘Stage -1’ input to help them coalesce as a client group, form partnerships and stakeholder networks, and engage their communities towards a future, as yet possibly unnamed, project. It is very difficult to access public sector funding for this and, even if funding is available, it is difficult to find architects who offer these skills. Working with a group of curious, enthusiastic Master’s-level students can not only start to give shape to a future spatial project but also have more intangible outcomes for the CPI, such as instilling confidence, developing robust governance, and forming a clearer understanding of project-related aims. The connections made between a CPI and a local university can help to build civic partnerships and open up funding opportunities for future projects as Pool states here in relationship to our work with Pitsmoor Adventure Playground, ‘our relationship with the university [...] validates that we’re an organisation that’s got longevity and can manage funds and other organisations take us seriously.’⁶³

This capacity building is vital to prepare CPIs as they embark upon the challenge of a project, and collaborating with a civic school of architecture can help them lay that foundation. Through UEL we have gathered robust evidence of the impact that live pedagogy can have supporting CPIs and thereby kickstarting projects. To value these intangible and long-term impacts of engaged teaching and research requires an expansion of the methods used to evaluate such work. We believe that academia needs to work much harder on demonstrating the social and economic benefits of this expanded non-traditional approach and to prove its value to the architectural profession, clients, and funders.

Opening things out

An obvious benefit from Live Projects is the provision of pro bono research, design and technical expertise for community groups who are struggling with the immediate challenge of buildings that are not fit for purpose or at risk of dilapidation. Much of our Live Project output addresses this need, providing valuable advice that combines detailed design, technical drawings, funding options, and procurement routes. This level of contribution could be described as ‘service provision’, the delivery of a solution to an identifiable problem. However, on its own, this type of work offers only short-term solutions without addressing more complex systemic challenges faced by local communities. Recognising the fluid and precarious nature of securing community funding through fixed-term grants, this research is keen to explore a more emancipatory trajectory. How can a university,

through teaching and research, become a partner in transgressing and circumventing austerity agendas in order to develop other imaginaries?⁶⁴

Heeley Trust recognises the wider benefit of working with universities to speculate collectively upon possible sustainable futures:

*Alternative thinking is not coming from politics [...] Maybe the University has a role to play there? And looking ahead is how to do it.*⁶⁵

We suggest that universities can be where these alternate trajectories are modelled – opening up the processes of urban production to developing new visions and transform the making of a city from grassroots up. This speculative futures thinking is becoming increasingly urgent as communities face the impact of the climate emergency, the energy crisis, material shortages, and of potential future pandemics. Our research has shown the transformative potential of live pedagogy to offer a space of mutual learning where students can collaborate with CPIs to embed long-term zero-carbon and post-pandemic strategies into their buildings and neighbourhoods. This is recognised by Ruth Nutter, a creative producer who works in partnership with Heeley Trust:

*I think that universities can really help clarify ways forward in local communities. I think that [they] can create a sense of sharper thinking and action in the communities, because you’re working with people who are maybe asking you questions in different ways. It’s quite a demanding process, but I think that’s why it’s so fruitful, as a really genuine exchange.*⁶⁶

More widely, live pedagogy offers a unique learning space to ask, ‘what if?’, to speculate on alternate ways of living and working together in the city. This recognises the capacity for Live Projects and other live learning situations to become ‘liminal spaces’⁶⁷ apart from the conventional spaces of academia and community practice, a common ground for creating and testing ideas collectively. This experimental space requires openness and flexibility from both community groups and students alike and can oscillate between the deliverable and the speculative to become a valuable and empowering experience for all involved. From this understanding we move beyond the notion of the Live Project as a vehicle to deliver short-term technical service to embrace its potential as an experimental space for collective dreaming – a unique learning space that cannot be found solely in academia or solely in the city, but hovers between the two.

Being there

As part of the Urban Education Live research project UEL: SHEF is managing the work package that explores and evaluates the role of the ‘local hub’ within university/community collaborations. The term ‘local hub’ is used by the network partners to identify physical spaces created in the city and outside the university to bring communities, researchers, and students together to develop shared knowledge, build capacity, and influence change in their local built environment. The use of local hubs is a key research method across all UEL partners and

they take on various forms, scales, and timings. For example, UEL:BUCH's Urboteca, 'a mobile lab for public engagement with urban development, travelling around Bucharest's neighbourhoods',⁶⁸ UEL:TAMP worked with high school students and local stakeholders in 'a shopping mall in Salo that [...] functioned as the basecamp for the pedagogical experiments',⁶⁹ and UEL:LJUB carried out longitudinal action research in Tobačna, a hub for creative industries threatened by gentrification, via an 'open-ended stream of in-situ events and studies'.⁷⁰ UEL:SHEF is researching the 'local hub' through Live Works, the School of Architecture's permanent, city centre-based project office, and through temporary satellites in closer proximity to our community partners, for example, an adventure playground, a community library and a supermarket. In the UK, the 'local hub' has clear connections to the emergence in recent years of the 'urban room', a multidisciplinary network of spaces (of which Live Works was a founding member) 'where people can go to understand, debate and get involved in the past, present and future of where they live, work and play',⁷¹ that itself builds on the traditions of 1970s urban study centres, 1980s community architecture, and the long-standing arts practice method of being 'in residence'. Using diverse local hubs has enabled us to test, across UEL, the effectiveness of different spatial and temporal scenarios to create space for creative, responsive, and sustainable engagement, and we will be presenting the evaluation of this work in future papers. It has become clear to us that local hubs offer an effective mechanism to spatialise the mutually beneficial relationships between universities and communities that we are attempting to nurture. Zak Ahmed of Aalfy, another UEL community partner, describes this potential:

*The role of Live Works in the city centre [is] as a facilitator, to create a space of dialogue and discussion, and to create a space where people come together, and can share knowledge [...] I think a space in the city centre – really accessible – [is] super useful to have for those kinds of conversations.*⁷²

Bringing academic pedagogy out of the campus and into the city and neighbourhood is a first step towards addressing the power imbalance between universities and communities. If used with care and creativity, local hubs can spatialise the liminal space of collaboration between students and local people. Such hybrid spaces that combine learning, community and civic engagement, research and practice, point towards the emergence of a new high street typology where groups can come together to build urban capacity, both to address current challenges and to imagine resilient futures.

Conclusions

This article has explored the role that a 'civic school of architecture' can play in supporting Community Place Initiatives in its host city. Our research has shown how local CPIs have benefited from working with the School of Architecture at the University of Sheffield, highlighting how schools of architecture

can share their resources, in the form of research and design ideas, to address current challenges and find new ways to co-create sustainable community futures. Our research has highlighted local precarity and limited capacity to fully utilise community buildings and spaces. Through live projects and other forms of live pedagogy, transformative projects can be supported at grassroots level, building urban resilience through creative partnerships. Such collaborations can be empowering experiences for everyone involved; students, supported by academics, can bring valuable energy and enthusiasm, coupled with research and, working with the local expertise of community groups, can offer both advice for immediate problems and design speculations for greater resilience in the future. Working in collaboration with communities introduces students to new forms of practice that expand the traditional role of the architect, and CPIs can also approach their own work from a new perspective.

In our case, the School of Architecture at the University of Sheffield plays a valuable role in providing support for CPIs, whether they are struggling with buildings that are not fit for purpose or are lacking the capacity to engage stakeholders. Primarily through the use of existing in-house resources, the School of Architecture is helping to bridge the gaps of precarity around funding and retention of staff. And, expanding beyond the conventional remit of Live Projects as offering short-term solutions, we have shown that there is a role for schools of architecture to work through live pedagogy with communities on longer-term speculative design projects that can develop local capacity and resilience in order to face future challenges and explore future opportunities. Schools of architecture have the potential to play a key role in modelling alternate urban trajectories, helping transform cities from the grassroots up by opening up the processes of urban production and co-creating new future imaginaries. However, there are barriers to effective co-production between communities and universities resulting from academic structures, disciplinary silos, and inflexibility in both curricula and research objectives. Effective collaboration requires openness and flexibility on the part of all involved and it is often the rigid structures of the University that cause the biggest barriers to long-term and sustainable co-production.

In the light of this complex ecology of need, innovation, institutions, and diverse objectives, what are the lessons from the Sheffield cases upon the priorities and practices of schools of architecture and, more widely, their universities, if these collaborations are to be equally beneficial to both communities and universities?

The research project Urban Education Live, drawing on many years of live pedagogy practice at the School, has identified four key areas that schools of architecture and, more widely, universities should consider to develop to maximise the support they can offer Community Place Initiatives. These are:

Joining things up

Coordinating work across academic years, projects, modules, and disciplines to make the most of the extensive expertise, capacity, and resources of the university and enhance the support we can offer.

Laying foundations

Working with CPIs even before RIBA 'Stage 0' to offer 'Stage -1' input that can support them to coalesce as a client group, form their stakeholder networks and engage their communities towards a future project.

Opening things out

Embracing the potential of live pedagogy to act as an experimental and liminal space for collective dreaming, hovering between academia and the city, and between the present and the future.

Being there

Spatialising this liminal space of experimentation by moving live pedagogy out of the campus and situating it on the high street through the flexible use of local hubs/urban rooms.

Our research in Sheffield has highlighted the challenges that community organisations face and recognised the value that the University can bring in tackling these challenges, both in the short term and in building urban capacity to meet future challenges. We suggest that the challenges faced by many Community Place Initiatives in the city of Sheffield, although site-specific in many ways, are similar to those found in other UK cities struggling with the effects of austerity. Thus, the findings from this research will be relevant to other 'civic' Higher Education Institutions and communities seeking to engage in live pedagogy to build urban capacity together through mutual learning.

Notes

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6. Term 'Community Place Initiatives' is used in this article as an umbrella term to cover disparate community groups and organisations defined as follows: 'Community groups' have no legal structure, they are also referred to as an unincorporated association. Incorporated organisations are a legal body, and can be registered as a 'Charitable Incorporated Organisation' (CIO), a 'Company Limited by Guarantee' (CLG, including a 'Community Interest Company'), a 'Registered Society' (Community Benefit Society or Co-operative Society), or a 'Social or Community Enterprise'. The groups we mapped in Sheffield are mostly Community Groups with a constitution, and the incorporated ones are Companies Ltd by Guarantee with charitable status (CLG) or Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIO).
7. This research is by Urban Education Live Sheffield (UEL:SHEF), a team of researchers and educators from the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield in the UK and the Institute for History and Theory of Architecture and the City (GTAS), Technische Universität Braunschweig in Germany. UEL:SHEF is part of a co-funded multidisciplinary research project Urban Education Live (UEL), with partners from across Europe funded by the Joint Programming Initiative Urban Europe's ERA-NET co-fund Smart Urban Futures UKRI grant, number ES/R000247/1. All UEL partners are engaged in forms of action research; developing, testing, and iterating models of collaboration between universities and communities. They operate in very different urban political and social contexts ranging from the shrinking city of Salo, Finland, the gentrification of Ljubljana, Slovenia, the post-Soviet context of Bucharest, Romania, and the post-industrial, post-austerity context of Sheffield, UK. Although our situations are different in many ways, they are similar in the lack of effective and meaningful dialogue that occurs between communities and civic decision-makers in the production of the city. Our shared aim is to develop methods of creative co-production that can open up

- the processes of urban production to those who are generally excluded from these conversations, building capacity in those communities to effect change. See <www.urbedu.live> [accessed 28 September 2022].
8. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991).
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 11. See <<http://live-works.org/>> [accessed 16 September 2022].
 12. See <<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/architecture/march/theory-forum/>> [accessed 16 September 2022].
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 14. Sheffield is the sixteenth most affected Local Authority in terms of reduced spending power, according to Cities Outlook published by Centre for Cities (2019) <<https://www.centreforcities.org/reader/cities-outlook-2019/a-decade-of-austerity/#figure-5-change-in-total-spending-200910-201718-201718-prices>> [accessed 29 January 2019].
 15. Sheffield City Council Revenue Budget (2019/20) <<http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s33986/Revenue%20Budget%202.pdf>> [accessed 29 January 2019].
 16. Centre for Cities Cities Outlook (2019) <<https://www.centreforcities.org/reader/cities-outlook-2019/a-decade-of-austerity/#figure-5-change-in-total-spending-200910-201718-201718-prices>> [accessed 29 January 2019].
 17. Michael Harris, 'Four Reasons Why Cuts to Planning Are a False Economy', in *Royal Town Planning Institute Blog* (2015).
 18. Cabinet Office, *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government* (London, 2010), p. 7.
 19. Rebecca Cooney, 'David Cameron Admits Failings in His Big Society Agenda', *Third Sector*, 24 November 2017 <<https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/david-cameron-admits-failings-big-society-agenda/policy-and-politics/article/1451160>> [accessed 10 February 2019].
 20. See UPP Foundation Civic University Commission, *Truly Civic: Strengthening the Connection between Universities and Their Places* (2019); Josef Konvitz, 'The Coming Revolution in Public Services, and What It Means for Cities and Universities', *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 22:1 (2016), 88–106; Kafui Attoh, Don Mitchell, Lynn Staeheli, 'The University in the City: The Campus as a Space of Dependence and Engagement in the Age of Austerity', *Alternate Routes*, 28 (2017), 264; and John Goddard, Paul Vallance, Jaana Puukka, 'Experience of Engagement between Universities and Cities: Drivers and Barriers in Three European Cities', *Built Environment*, 37:3 (2011), 299–316.
 21. Over the past few years, the University of Sheffield has begun to give increased importance to its role in the city, following its historic civic commitment made in the late nineteenth century to become a 'University for the people of Sheffield'. First implemented as a top-down strategy, a more nuanced approach has been emerging in recent years where relationships between local communities and University educators, researchers, and students are valued. See <<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/civic-university-agreement-sheffield-1.830350>> [accessed 16 September 2022].
 22. See UPP Foundation Civic University Commission <<https://upp-foundation.org/civic-university-commission/>> and Civic Universities Network at Sheffield Hallam University <www.shu.ac.uk/about-us/civic-university-network> [accessed 17 April 2020].
 23. UPP Foundation Civic University Commission, *Truly Civic: Strengthening the Connection between Universities and Their Places* (2019), pp. 4, 79.
 24. Sheffield School of Architecture has a long history of conducting 'Live Projects' where students work closely with community clients, in Sheffield and beyond, on research, feasibility studies, and designs. Since 1999 the School of Architecture at the University of Sheffield has been building strong on-going relationships with many community groups and organisations in the city via those Live Projects as well as other 'engaged' teaching and research projects. See <<http://www.liveprojects.org/>>.
 25. A map showing these Sheffield Community Place Initiatives was produced as an output of this stage of the research. See <<https://urbedu.live/the-university-of-sheffield-school-of-architecture/>>.
 26. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 – participant Adam Yusuf of Israac (Sheffield, December 2017).
 27. Vestry Hall is a listed building, subject of collaboration with SSoA Live Projects in 2016. See: <<http://www.liveprojects.org/2016/the-vestry-hall/>>.
 28. At the time of writing this article, Israac has secured some funding for one paid staff member for a limited amount of time.
 29. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 – participant Patrick Meleady of Pitsmoor Adventure Playground (Sheffield, December 2017).
 30. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 4 – participant Andy Jackson of Heeley Trust (Sheffield, May 2018).
 31. Ibid.
 32. Ibid.
 33. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 – participant Adam Yusuf of Israac (Sheffield, December 2017).
 34. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 (Sheffield, December 2017).
 35. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 – participant Adam Yusuf of Israac (Sheffield, December 2017).
 36. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 – participant Adam Yusuf of Israac (Sheffield, December 2017).
 37. UEL:SHEF, Interview with Andy Jackson of Heeley Trust (Sheffield, September 2018).
 38. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 – participant Patrick Meleady of Pitsmoor Adventure Playground (Sheffield, December 2017).
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 40. UEL:SHEF, Interview with Andy Jackson of Heeley Trust (Sheffield, September 2018).
 41. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 – participant Robin Forsythe of Israac (Sheffield, December 2017).
 42. Ibid.
 43. Ibid.
 44. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 – participant Patrick Meleady of Pitsmoor Adventure Playground (Sheffield, December 2017).
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 46. Ibid.
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 49. UEL:SHEF, Focus Group 1 – participant Robin Forsythe of Israac (Sheffield, December 2017).
 50. UEL:SHEF, Interview with Andy Jackson of Heeley Trust (Sheffield, September 2018).

51. See <<http://heeleytrust.org/>> [accessed 30 April 2020].
52. “Live Project” comprises the negotiation of a brief, timescale, budget, and product between an educational organisation and an external collaborator for their mutual benefit. The project must be structured to ensure that students gain learning that is relevant to their educational development.’ *Architecture Live Project: Pedagogy into Practice, First edition*, ed. by Harriet Harriss and Lynnette Widder (Oxon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), p. 13.
53. See <<https://liveprojectsnetwork.org/>>.
54. See <<http://www.liveprojects.org/>>.
55. See <<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/architecture/march/studios>>.
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Competing interests

The authors declare none.

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