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Edited by
Lucy Natarajan
Michael Short

Engaged Urban Pedagogy

Participatory practices in planning and place-making

Engaged Urban Pedagogy

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN CITY-MAKING

Series editors
Sarah Bell, Tadhg Caffrey, Barbara Lipietz and Pablo Sendra

This series contributes to the urgent need for creativity and rigour in producing and sharing knowledge at the interface of urban communities and universities to support more sustainable, just and resilient cities. It aims to amplify community voices in scholarly publishing about the built environment, and encourages different models of authorship to reflect research and pedagogy that is co-produced with urban communities. It includes work that engages with the theory and practice of community engagement in processes and structures of city-making. The series will reflect diverse urban communities in its authorship, topics and geographical range.

Engaging Communities in City-making aims to become a central hub for investigation into how disciplinarity, transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity can enable schools, teacher trainers and learners to address the challenges of the twenty-first century in knowledgeable and critically informed ways. A focus on social justice is a key driver. The series explores questions about the powers of knowledge, relationships between the distribution of knowledge and knowledge resources in society, and matters of social justice and democratisation. It is committed to the proposition that the answers to questions about knowledge require new thinking and innovation, that they are open questions with answers that are not already known and which are likely to entail significant social and institutional change to make the powers of knowledge and of knowing equally available to all.

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Participatory practices in planning and place-making

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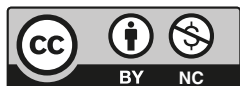Lucy Natarajan and Michael Short

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Preface

During 2019, while co-teaching our university students about the management challenges that built environment professionals face today, we started to have a conversation about how to promote learning for students who come from a wide variety of backgrounds. We were also reflecting on our different intellectual starting points – given Michael's central interest in the quality of design outcomes in place-making and Lucy's core focus on the democratic potential within processes of planning for urban development – and how we were both driven by a focus on stakeholder engagement. Although we might not have described it as such at the time, together we were pursuing a more critical, participatory and equitable form of pedagogy for urbanism.

The genesis of those discussions led to further explorations during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, culminating in research exchanges at the UK-Ireland Planning Research Conference 2020, hosted by the Bartlett School of Planning. We were worried about how participatory activities in teaching, research and urban development practices might fare if we were all socially isolated for long periods. We were able to reach out to others who we knew already shared our concern for 'widening participation' in our fields – we were hoping to at least talk it through. Others joined the debates, and there were even more questions around who might be involved in this 'nexus' of urban learning and to what end.

What struck us throughout was the recognition that built environment higher education is bound with urban development in very specific ways. There were such fruitful discussions about where the worlds of teaching, research and practice meet, and we agreed to look to publish examples and reflect on them. It didn't take long to agree that a work of this type should be open access and we were extremely fortunate to gain the support for this book from UCL Press. Along the way we have been heartened by the encouragement of others for the ideas behind *Engaged Urban Pedagogy*, and we very much see this as the starting point for ongoing exchanges.

Acknowledgements

10

Co-production and the pedagogy of exchange: lessons from community research training in Birmingham

Sara Hassan and Liam O'Farrell

Co-production is a term that is applied to a range of different forms of engagement with society to identify challenges and articulate solutions to these challenges. In the context of urban planning and development, co-production builds on debates in planning theory that stem from collaborative and communicative planning. Co-produced research is found within a number of disciplines, including (but not limited to) development, health, education, housing, public policy and social care. However, the term 'co-production' can be profoundly different in its application and implications across different fields and contexts. This chapter draws lessons from the use of co-production in 'left-behind places', which is a term that can refer to places with higher concentrations of poverty, unemployment or marginalised populations such as ethnic minorities. Findings from the process demonstrate the reality, applicability and challenges of co-producing knowledge with left-behind communities.

The Unlocking Social and Economic Innovation Together (USE-IT!) programme was an innovative intervention that developed a community research training model organised by the University of Birmingham. The programme sought to empower local communities and articulated a new active role for the university as an anchor institution with overarching social justice principles (O'Farrell *et al.*, 2022). The project was a three-year Urban Innovative Actions initiative that was part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and ran from 2016 to 2019. USE-IT! involved a participatory action research approach with

communities adjacent to large-scale urban transformation projects in a deprived transect of inner-city Birmingham. The core focus of USE-IT! was tackling urban poverty through testing and developing co-produced knowledge, and applying principles of collaborative governance as part of a partnership of anchor institutions.

The community researcher training project successfully achieved its target outputs, including training and mentoring more than 80 community researchers from a super-diverse area of Birmingham, a city undergoing a rapid urban transformation driven by inwards investment predicated on the High Speed Two (HS2) rail connection with London. The research presented in this chapter highlights that the project was able not only to empower local communities but also to influence inclusive growth, challenge assumptions of planning thought in urban regeneration, and involve communities in the co-production of knowledge as equal partners in the identification of problems and articulation of proposed solutions. The research planning and evaluation was not predetermined, but instead embraced the different voices of participants and diverse stakeholders. While initially used as a community engagement method, the community research methodology offered great insights into a wide range of processes, relationships and knowledge exchange at the community level.

This chapter begins by reviewing the context of current literature on universities and their civic role. It then introduces the case study of the USE-IT! programme in Birmingham, which is followed by detailed analysis of the delivery of the project's community research training model based on co-producing materials, collectively identifying challenges and partnering with relevant organisations to suggest community-led responses. While noting that USE-IT! was a successful case of empowerment and engagement, the lessons learnt from this programme and its implications on both the university and local communities are described so as to suggest future steps to embed this approach, whereby knowledge can be produced and continued as a legacy of the project. This research thus contributes to the literature on urban planning pedagogy, community engagement and co-production. The chapter closes by suggesting further research and the change required to enable and sustain these mutually beneficial pedagogies of exchange that disrupt established hierarchies of power and knowledge in both teaching and research. It also advocates the call for more qualitative and participatory research that tackles problems and issues identified by communities themselves.

Context

Universities in the United Kingdom are under increasing scrutiny to demonstrate the impacts of their activities. While many have strengthened their reputations as castles of research expertise, as teaching powerhouses and, in some cases, as international brands with campuses overseas, universities often overlook the importance of playing active civic and economic roles within their local communities. While some universities strive for global recognition, boasting of the internationally recognised excellence of their academic staff and resources, they have also become increasingly invisible to their local areas and surrounding populations. Many universities have, in essence, become gated knowledge hubs, perceived to be for those who do internationally orientated research without paying attention to how this directly benefits their local communities. Meanwhile, universities have built their prestige in teaching that caters to people aspiring to careers requiring higher education degrees. Our initial conversations with residents living around the University of Birmingham found that many local people perceive the university as a surreal place that is not for them or for their children, but instead is accessible only to those who can afford – or need – such education. Moreover, while academic literature discusses universities' role as anchor institutions and civic centres in their localities, the full extent and potential of this role is not currently activated (O'Farrell *et al*., 2022).

The literature suggests that higher education institutions can affect change in growth and development through coordinating their supply chains towards local spending, local recruitment, and increasing the local level of human capital through auditing their training and development activities (Ehlenz, 2018). This frames universities as large examples of anchor institutions, which are rooted in place and have a significant impact on the economies of their local areas (McCauley-Smith *et al*., 2020). Recent studies show that universities are prioritising their role in regional economic development with limited priority given to social or community-level initiatives (Goddard *et al*., 2014; Lebeau and Cochrane, 2015). This can be attributed to the strong influence of national research agendas and funding priorities. Within the context of neoliberalism and an increasingly financialised higher education sector, there is a particular focus on knowledge exchange and creating partnerships with industry to commercialise research. Universities in the United Kingdom are thus compelled to demonstrate the return on investment of their research, teaching and knowledge transfer. Far less attention is paid to the role of

universities in building connections with their local areas and empowering marginalised communities through active engagement strategies.

The USE-IT! partnership aimed to facilitate collaboration and the coordination of actions by public institutions and charities, building social resilience into communities challenged with urban poverty and the risk of displacement in an inner-city district undergoing a rapid transformation. The project partners held monthly board meetings to agree on the programme's scope, aims and progress. The partner board also got detailed updates on changes and agreed a common agenda for the USE-IT! programme. The programme included seven work packages or projects delivered by 15 partner institutions. These included the delivery of a community research training scheme, a skills matching programme to identify unrecognised overseas medical qualifications, a social enterprise support scheme, and a legacy projects plan that could continue after the end of ERDF funding for the programme. USE-IT! was thus both people-focused and place-focused in its intentions, designed to concentrate on a highly diverse transect area of Birmingham adjacent to the city core and under growing gentrification pressure. The area included Soho and Ladywood of inner-city Birmingham and neighbouring Smethwick, which is part of the Sandwell council area (see Figure 10.1).

After the Second World War, a significant section of this area was developed into a large social housing estate for Birmingham's industrial working class, which has since become a key destination for migrants and refugees moving to the city in recent decades (Zwicky, 2021). The many challenges facing this area characterise it as 'left behind', including high poverty rates, low employment and weak educational attainment when compared to national averages. Demographic data on the Ladywood ward within the transect show that only 36.9 per cent of residents are of white British ethnicity, with large numbers of South Asian, Chinese, Black African, Black Caribbean and non-British white residents (Birmingham City Council, 2020). As such, it is also an active site of superdiversity, with a highly diverse population from multiple countries of origin who are internally stratified by factors such as legal status, income and education level (Vertovec, 2007). Our experience on USE-IT! of finding 200 highly trained professionals in the transect, with medical qualifications gained overseas that had not been accredited for work in the United Kingdom, further demonstrates the diversity of the population of this area.

The catalyst for the programme was a series of major infrastructure projects planned to be built in and around the transect that pose a significant risk of gentrification. Ladywood already had some of the fastest
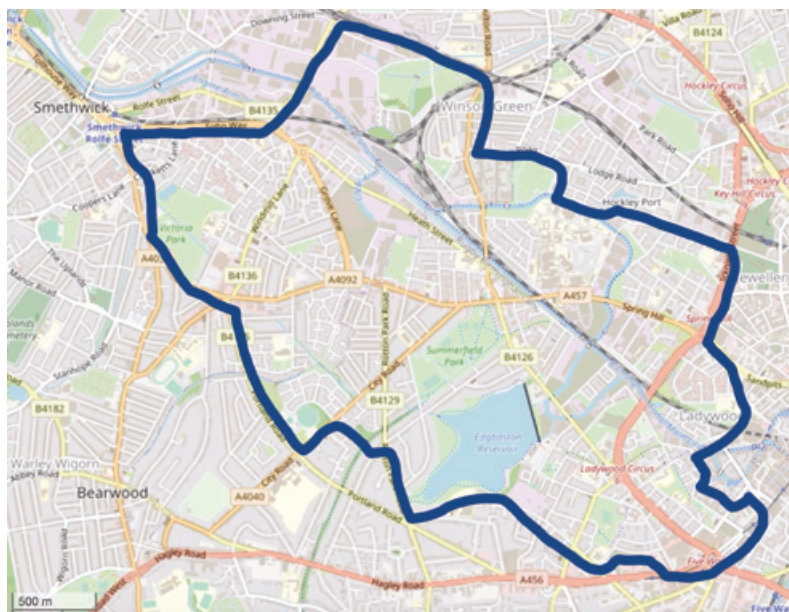
Figure 10.1   Area map of the USE-IT! transect.

growing house prices in the United Kingdom in 2017 (Jessel, 2019). USE-IT! was therefore designed to address these challenges through creating mechanisms to affect change. The community research training model sought to give residents a stake in this urban transformation through mitigating negative impacts and building on the positive impacts of development in their neighbourhoods. As part of the participatory action research agenda, the USE-IT! academic team developed and delivered an accredited training scheme for community researchers. The community research training model was used to empower and upskill residents and enable them to work with the University of Birmingham to define the problems that they face, gather data, and write policy recommendations and reports to inform decision-making processes among the USE-IT! partnership, which included Birmingham City Council, a range of local non-governmental organisations and a local hospital. The scheme thus sought to overcome the discrepancies between university and community priorities identified in literature on universities (Harris, 2019).

Qualified community researchers were commissioned to conduct research on behalf of the partnership. In total, 85 participants gained community research qualifications alongside work experience as a

researcher. Two were awarded scholarships to subsequently study a master's degree at the University of Birmingham. Five received additional training enabling them to deliver the training to others, ensuring the capacity to replenish the skills transferred to the community in the years ahead. Although some of the training units were found to be challenging for several community researchers, the model was able to satisfy the demand among citizens in the local area to access the knowledge and skills a university can offer without the barrier of high fees, also providing participants with the lived experience of learning and working in an academic environment, which encouraged some to seek out further study on campus that they would not otherwise have considered. USE-IT! laid the foundations of a community research social enterprise that can be sustained beyond the end date of the programme and benefit both residents and institutions through its knowledge generation activities. Further legacy achievements include the establishment of the Birmingham Anchor Network to enable future collaboration and the coordination of anchor institutions' activities across the city.

Community research training model

The free accredited community research training model set up as part of USE-IT! focused on training local people in conducting social research and then developing further self-contained research projects in partnership with these 'experts of their neighbourhoods', as people that know about their area and are engaged with their own communities. The co-production this involved meant uniting technical and lived knowledge, overcoming the arbitrary dichotomy between the two noted in the literature (Negev and Teschner, 2013). Community researchers were commissioned to work on research projects for institutions within the USE-IT! anchor network and thus support the decision-making processes of organisations from across the West Midlands region.

Co-production models typically have a social empowerment mission at their core and the USE-IT! model is no exception. Operating in a superdiverse inner-city ward undergoing rapid urban transformation, the project team recognised the significant potential for population displacement from gentrification in Birmingham (Zwicky, 2021). As such, USE-IT! sought to give residents in the area a stake in the process of urban change and the ability to influence decisions made about them and their neighbourhoods, thus strengthening community assets and mitigating

the risks of top-down planning and decisions that are not adapted to local needs and aspirations. This is particularly important given that the demographic characteristics of the area mean it can be characterised as marginalised or left-behind. Thus, the area is already at high risk of being the target of policy interventions that may be constructed on stereotyping and stigmatisation, both intentionally and unintentionally, be decision-makers far removed from the lived reality of the citizens in question (Møller and Harrits, 2013). The USE-IT! approach is also in line with other work carried out with marginalised groups – for instance, engagement with Roma migrants in Manchester – which has shown the benefits to service design of allowing service users to participate in identifying and tackling problems they face, redesigning service delivery in a way that learns from this insight (Cools *et al.*, 2017).

As the leading partner for the community research training, the University of Birmingham engaged with local partners to reach out and gain trust among the different communities with the aim of encouraging residents to apply for the training on offer. The university organised and delivered the community research training, while local USE-IT! partners and charities used their embeddedness and knowledge of the area to promote the training and support offered through other USE-IT! projects, such as the social enterprise support and skills matching schemes. Some local partners also further supported the community researchers as mentors and trainers. The community research training developed by the university comprises four practice-orientated modules. These modules covered social research skills, practising qualitative methods (e.g., conducting interviews and surveys), analysing data, and reporting and presenting results. The training modules were co-designed with the first cohort of community researchers and further developed based on different experiences and cohorts. The training was designed to support the participants towards carrying out their own research projects in their communities and neighbourhoods, with a view to subsequently working as professional researchers on commissioned projects from the USE-IT! partnership. In addition, community researchers had to conduct a research project as part of their training, with support from the academic team and mentors. These projects had to be beneficial or of relevance to the USE-IT! focus area and the communities living there. In order to gain further experience and increase the capabilities in doing research, more than 20 commissioned research projects were organised, with some including teams of accredited community researchers.

Pedagogies of exchange

The research findings and lessons learnt presented below build on three years' worth of data gathered by the USE-IT! team. In particular, the qualitative material in the next section is drawn from 36 semi-structured interviews and 10 focus groups. Interview participants were asked about their perceptions of the university and other partner institutions, as well as how they felt about their experiences on the USE-IT! programme. In addition, responses from surveys conducted in the first and third years of the programme have been incorporated to develop a fuller picture of change in perceptions over the course of the programme. Survey questions related to life experiences, economic challenges people faced and their aspirations for the future. Almost one-quarter of the interviews analysed for this research were carried out by community researchers as part of commissioned research, with discussion guides co-designed alongside the academic team in workshops on campus.

USE-IT! was based on methods that could respond flexibly to opportunities and challenges that arise in a context of rapid urban change. Thus, a bottom-up approach was decided on to identify needs and assets that USE-IT! could build on, incorporating the lived expertise of residents into the design of the programme. The project was based on past experience of community researcher training with various communities, with members of the academic team having previously worked on participatory action research projects and community research training among marginalised communities at Birmingham's Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS). There is a rich heritage of community-engaged scholarship at the University of Birmingham. IRiS itself is engaged in many of the same issues that preoccupied the seminal work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies founded by the cultural theorist Stuart Hall, which was closed by university management in 2002. USE-IT! was influenced by this academic milieu that has a strong interest in issues such as racial and gender inequality, noting the impact of class within intersectional studies, and seeking to actively empower citizens through research and teaching agendas, as well as the use of innovative methods such as co-production. The project was guided by the aim that community researcher training delivery should be as flexible as possible and led by community needs and constraints, such as time, rather than being determined by the academic team (Goodson and Phillimore, 2012).

There are several lessons learnt and challenges uncovered by our academic team and community researchers as knowledge was exchanged

on USE-IT!. These are outlined below. External project evaluators at the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) wrote an impact report on USE-IT!'s effect on the area and among the participants in the project (CLES, 2019). These findings address many of the challenges facing universities and their local communities, particularly considering left-behind and marginalised groups.

Community researcher recruitment

The community research training project started with the challenge of recruiting residents onto the training programme. Initially, this was done solely through community organisations and charities embedded in the local area. However, this proved to be problematic. Many local organisations had a limited understanding of the aims of the project and understandably prioritised more pressing challenges with their users. The recruitment phase therefore lagged and took more time than planned. Thus, there is a need for an approach of building longer-term relationships to engage local, community-based organisations with university research, so as to be able to reach out to potential participants and inform them about projects and potential benefits for them. The academic team organised local 'recruitment events' and attended neighbourhood events to inform residents about the project. Word-of-mouth recommendations from community researchers already participating in the programme was very successful, as well as leaving leaflets at places where people must wait and have time to read, such as in medical practices. One of the community researchers spoke about recruitment for the project, saying 'you always find people with amazing skills, you simply have to look for them. There is no shortage of skills.'

Another challenge for recruitment was that some people had not been in touch with the world of academia before and were intimidated by doing research and work with the university, or they did not see the benefits of doing so. Many participants described consultation fatigue, with a sense that they were constantly asked for their views and were encouraged to participate but did not see any changes as a result. Having information sessions and meetings in neighbourhoods and not at the university allowed a low-threshold access to the programme on familiar ground for the community being recruited. The academic team quickly realised the importance of having a physical presence in the neighbourhood for more successful recruitment and ongoing management of community research training. Therefore, the team was co-located at a community centre in the area so that the project team was

accessible and in a setting that was more accessible and less intimidating to the target group.

A solid communication strategy was key to reach out to the community. The strategy emphasised how community researchers and their communities could benefit from USE-IT!. Community researchers told us that the benefits of taking part in the community research training needed to be clearly stated in the strategy for future recruitment, which helped inform an iterative approach towards promoting the scheme. Community researchers described benefits they perceived, such as:

- doing their own research project for personal interest;
- developing professional skills;
- broadening their own personal perspectives and meeting new people;
- receiving an accreditation from the university for their CV;
- being engaged in work that is beneficial for their community and feeling that they were doing something useful;
- making the needs of their communities heard and better understood by local institutions (e.g. the city council);
- working with the university to increase the credibility of the work they were already doing in their local area; and
- being part of community research network and building up links to academics at the university.

As part of the communication strategy, feedback from participants to shape the approach was critical. Community researchers told us it was important for the academic team to mention what is important about the community researcher methodology itself, as a motivation to those being trained. Working together in co-production workshops, we identified benefits to the university and wider USE-IT! partnership of using this method, such as:

- receiving information and evidence from hard-to reach communities and gaining hyper-local knowledge;
- reaching communities that can be very difficult for an 'outside researcher' to understand and gain trust;
- bringing in different perspectives on the local situation;
- making the local communities heard and their needs better articulated; and
- bringing local projects forward by establishing connections between community researchers, local organisations, city-wide institutions and research projects of mutual interest.

ENGAGED URBAN PEDAGOGY

Through the local knowledge and embeddedness of the community researchers, the academic team became more sensitive to the local situation and gained knowledge on residents' lived experiences, which gave a more holistic impression of challenges than would have been the case with solely accessing the technical knowledge held within the university. This process helped the project team to increase empathy, which helps to better understand communities' different challenges and needs, and to identify issues that may not have been considered had a 'classic' research project been conducted. For example, some of the research identified problems such as a high incidence of knife crime in specific pockets of the area or concerns with children being used as drug mules. Classic academic research projects often identify challenges at the outset based on an external perception of an area, such as perceived issues with relation to unemployment or the need for more investment. Instead, USE-IT!'s community research approach resulted in a research agenda co-produced with hard-to-reach groups and the very specific knowledge they had about neighbourhoods and local cultural and social perspectives, meaning a wide range of collaboration opportunities were available for researching sensitive topics.

The training modules

Interviews with participants of the community research training demonstrated benefits related to empowerment and building social connections, as well as the knowledge and skills gained. Most community researchers expressed positive thoughts about the training. For example, one reflected that 'it was practice-oriented, mostly jargon free language and the 'homework' helped to test the methods learnt'. The training not only helped to improve participants' research skills but also enhanced their confidence in applying those skills in practice. The CLES impact report (2019) evaluated the training scheme as follows:

> It was reported as a well-designed programme of learning, which was accessible for people with no formal education, or with limited language skills. The course was praised for being very practical, about learning by doing, and an exchange of ideas. Finally, it was also considered important that some elements of the training course were delivered at venues in the local community, which were locations where the community feel comfortable, and are easily accessible. It also created trust between staff from the University, and the community – a vital step in the development of the programme.

However, there was also criticism of the initial training that too much was expected of the participants in terms of learning outcomes. This highlights the importance of academics reflecting on the different kind of curricula that might be drawn up for community-orientated courses rather than courses embedded in degree programmes. One participant shared that many of their fellow community researchers felt that 'training was too academic, and experience of the programme depended on educational background'. In addition, the participants found themselves in different starting situations in terms of available time and interests. In this regard, some participants needed more support than others to be able to continue the training. While the training was free, it nevertheless required a time commitment that meant disproportionately recruiting from those who were not in full-time work, including retirees. There was also a general under-representation of male participants on the project.

The community researchers appreciated that the training allowed them to get to know each other, collaborate, exchange ideas and network across the area. These possibilities were consciously promoted throughout the training. In addition, participants were given access to other academics and the university staff. As one participant explained in an interview to evaluate the scheme, 'an important aspect of the community research programme was the approachability of the university team. This eases things and made everything more personal.'

Mentoring

Mentoring was a crucial part of the community research training. It was designed to support the community researchers as they worked on their projects, with personal mentors assigned to each participant. Mentors were either drawn from the academic team at the University of Birmingham or worked at one of the USE-IT! partners. The community researchers could contact their mentors through email and arrange face-to-face meetings to ask for advice and feedback. Throughout the training, community researchers were encouraged to go through the results of training interviews, discuss their experience of applying knowledge gained on the training modules, and raise issues such as how to engage the community in their projects. The academic team also organised regular drop-in sessions at a local community centre. Some were held on fixed dates and others were on-demand sessions. Mentors contacted participants regularly to discuss the progress of their research and ensure steady progress on the training.

Mentoring was an important part of the training project. This was in part because it was a means of providing technical guidance on matters such as how to structure a survey or conduct and analyse material from interviews. However, the mentors also provided the community researchers with confidence, reassuring them that they could make it, and that they were a contact they could build a relationship with, and ask questions about USE-IT! and the aims of the organisations represented on the programme.

Commissioned research projects

The commissioned research projects were an important complementary development to the training. Midway through the project it was observed that some community researchers did not have an individual research project and/or had lost interest in the training. The commissioned research projects allowed those researchers to continue working and complete their accreditation. In addition, those who worked on the projects were paid for their work. This was highly appreciated and gave a strong motivation to continue with their participation on USE-IT!.

Commissioned research projects were developed to meet a need for information from one of the institutional partners on USE-IT!. An additional benefit was that this meant the community researchers could see that they were working as real researchers to solve real-world problems for a commissioning organisation. It was important to pay the researchers so that they would not feel exploited but instead could see themselves as peers whose time was valuable to the partnership. In addition to gaining knowledge – including from hard-to-access communities – the costs to pay for researchers' time on the commissioned community research projects were lower than rates for an established consultancy company. The community researchers worked alongside academics from the university on these projects, thus enabling an exchange of knowledge, contacts and research practice.

USE-IT! funding for this research allowed the investigation an array of topics that could have been very hard to fund otherwise and can be viewed as seed funding for small projects with the potential to uncover issues for further research in the future. For example, based on encouraging findings from one project, a larger bid was made for funding to research childhood obesity strategies for the city, which won £150,000 in funding for the local council. This is not to claim that the value of research should be measured solely in monetary terms, but instead to highlight

that community research can deliver a significant return on investment on these terms. In an interview with a member of the academic team, one participant explained, 'it was important for us to value the time commitment of community researchers and show the appreciation of their work', with paying the community researchers to conduct work as professional researchers being instrumental in this regard.

The commissioned research projects encouraged community researchers to bring in their own perceptions in addition to the perceptions of participants who were interviewed. Their personal perceptions provided new perspectives, given that some participants were users of services they were researching and thus able to identify problems in service design through their lived experience in a way that might be more challenging for someone removed from the situation who has not experienced using the service. Some projects proposed by the community researchers allowed them to conduct research on projects and topics that matter to them and their communities. However, many of the projects ran the risk of going nowhere, as sometimes community researchers did not have a target institution to take up the results and follow up with actions. The need to match a community researcher-in-training with a target institution early on is thus an important piece of learning for the academic team, which can be recommended to others working on similar training projects to factor into their own practice.

Personal skills development

The community research programme contributed not only to achieving research skills, but also to developing personal skills. Above all, the programme promoted the personal development of the community researchers. Many community researchers mentioned the increase of self-confidence that came with completing the training. They developed a network of other community researchers and academics, and contacts in their communities and in public institutions, which has subsequently led to a higher engagement with their neighbourhood. Working on commissioned research projects raised participants' self-esteem because 'someone wants your results', as one community researcher put it. This feedback suggests that the USE-IT! model of community empowerment through participatory action research can provide an important social benefit as a tool for overcoming the consultation fatigue that many residents described feeling at the outset.

Community researchers were optimistic about the potential of the collaborative efforts on the project. For example, one spoke about the

links between loneliness, feeling disempowered and having poor mental health, commenting on the need for public services to collaborate on these issues. The community researchers felt that the link to the university gave them additional credibility as researchers and helped them make contacts and gain access in ways that were not possible for citizens working alone. This can help break down the idea of the university as an 'ivory tower' or place for privileged people, as such, democratising knowledge and knowledge production. On a personal level, one participant spoke about how presenting their work at Birmingham's central library was also a special moment in their life; such meaningful personal experiences are difficult to quantify but are an important output of a training scheme geared towards empowerment.

The USE-IT! programme has increased the university's presence in the area. Our conversations within the university and with those working in other public institutions across the city encourage us that USE-IT! was able to demonstrate to leaders a practical way of activating the economic and social roles that the university can play as an anchor in its community. The community research training scheme has created a pool of local experts that live locally and have research skills, technical and lived knowledge and a network of contacts. While the impacts that this might have on the city in the future cannot be controlled or predicted, there is hope that the 85 accredited community researchers from USE-IT! will continue their work of researching and advocating in the interest of their communities. In terms of legacy outputs, the Birmingham Anchor Network coordinates the activities of anchor institutions in the city with the aim of building community wealth. Skills transferred to the community can also be replenished by community researchers who have been trained to deliver the training, and there are ongoing discussions about creating a community research social enterprise that can continue the model of community researchers being commissioned to conduct social research in the area on behalf of external organisations.

Universities' visibility and communities' aspirations

USE-IT! was interested not only in economic impacts but also in transferring knowledge to the community, building resilience among marginalised groups and helping to mitigate the impacts of development that can displace these groups. As such, the project aimed to increase the visibility of local residents in knowledge production and decision-making about the future of their area. Considering the university as a space for visibility

entails reflecting on the literature around space and power. The issues of seeing or being seen at the university, and who the university is for, were raised by participants who felt that campuses were for elites and were not places that those without degrees could or should access. Such perceptions of the university as a closed space were repeatedly expressed at the USE-IT! community meetings. For example, at the beginning of the project, an attendee at a community meeting commented that the 'university is for rich people, not for people like me'. Similarly, another local resident felt that access to the university was restricted to those who had something to offer in return: 'the doors are closed unless there is funding, volunteering, investment … there is an exclusive business perception when it comes to the university.' One participant on our training scheme said that they had never visited the university before, despite living in the area.

However, the training scheme helped alter these perceptions, with participants reporting that they felt the training bridged the gap between communities and the university. For instance, when community researchers in focus groups reflected on the training, one noted that beforehand they perceived research to be elitist, but that community research could overcome elitism and allow a wider range of people to take part. Another noted how USE-IT! had enabled them to visit the campus which made them feel empowered, saying that it proved universities were for everybody, not only for people with degrees.

The project therefore sought to overcome the barriers to marginalised groups accessing the university and seeing it as a space where they feel welcome and heard. Throughout the project, notions of how change can be visible in university operations were discussed by community researchers and academic staff, considering issues such as local recruitment, local procurement, and the university supplying products and services that are more ethnically and culturally diverse. We also noted different definitions and descriptions of what constitute 'communities'. Where researchers might refer to groups of people as 'communities', people living in a particular place or having one particular demographic trait might not feel or identify as such. For example, a participant on USE-IT! told us they felt that 'community is a middle-class construct. Nobody in this neighbourhood would understand themselves as being a community'. Moreover, many made comments that framed universities as big schools detached from the real world, rather than as diverse organisations with operations that go beyond research and teaching. Some local representatives reiterated that 'if you went into any school in the city and asked if they were thinking of working at the university, I don't think a single one would put their hands up'. Many of the participants believed

that universities rarely make attempts to be visible and present in their areas. Universities were instead perceived as places where people had to pay for access, creating a significant perceptual barrier for those on lower incomes or those who live in deprived areas.

Many participants expressed their frustration at not being included in universities as public spaces, with multiple comments criticising academic projects that parachute into communities for a few years without long-term impact or legacy. As one participant commented, 'I'm sick of telling my story, it doesn't make any difference'. Another added that 'not a lot happens' after participating in research. Academics were accused of using their own language and narratives that further exacerbate the barriers between themselves and the very communities that they intend to work with. One participant explained this, saying that 'no one wants to live in a deprived area, so do not label us'. Another felt that, while there are attempts to include and empower local people, their representation in the research is only to be used as a source of data, a descriptive 'about us but not with us' approach. One local resident wanted the university to 'tell a better story about this place; we want to have pride in it!'. Another wanted the university to understand people's lived experiences, saying that 'the community could enable the university to learn about reality'. The community research training model helped shift these attitudes towards more positive perspectives, providing a practical demonstration of how universities can be visible within their local areas and break generational barriers of elitism in favour of empowering minorities and poor people, through acknowledging their lived experience as an equally valid and powerful form of knowledge.

Based on the success of the commissioned research projects, several community researchers have developed the idea of a community research social enterprise, which is currently in development. The idea of the social enterprise is to continue with community research and look to both help other communities develop their own team of researchers and to provide a long-term pathway for other agencies to unlock community expertise. This is a very important step to delivering a legacy for USE-IT! beyond the formal end of the project and providing a sustainable platform for the local community to articulate its needs as an equal partner, gathering knowledge that could support more holistic and sensitive interventions by organisations that seek to work in the area. In the impact report, the evaluators state:

> This is a significant opportunity for the researchers to continue to pursue their research interests and do so in a manner that rewards them financially. It also has the potential to influence the wider

West Midlands area in terms of the ways in which research is done, the types of projects that are developed, and in bringing in 'lost voices' to research. Finally, there is the potential to cement the legacy of USE-IT! by creating this asset within the neighbourhood. (CLES, 2019)

It has also demonstrated to the partner organisations that the community researchers are able to carry out research to the standard they require, with the added benefit that community researchers come with local knowledge and lived experience of marginalisation that many professional researchers working in universities and other organisations often lack. USE-IT! also provided an opportunity for the community researchers to be paid for their time and gain not only an accredited qualification but also professional experience as a researcher, which may shape their future careers or social and political activism in ways that cannot be predicted.

Universities have civic and social responsibilities in relation to supporting community development. This needs to be supported by having more meaningful interactions with communities, underpinned by universities demonstrating their long-term commitment to collaboration for building trust rather than 'parachuting in' each time a new project begins, as one participant put it. Linking to this is the need for universities to 'communicate better', using terms and language that people outside the university can understand, and spend more time 'working and learning in communities to break open the gates', as one resident at our community meeting stated. The USE-IT! programme demonstrated that there is a real appetite among citizens to access the knowledge and skills held at their universities, and that the process of doing so can be mutually beneficial for communities, universities and organisations commissioning research alike. Universities can empower citizens through active participation in research, while also supporting community capacity building at the local level, inviting left-behind groups onto campus or meeting them in their local area to learn in a two-way pedagogy of exchange. At the same time, this moves knowledge and its production outside the walls of the university and into the public realm, establishing a presence for the university in the community and helping shift perceptions of what a university is, does and can be.

Reflections and recommendations

With the results of the community research training scheme, embedded within a multi-year programme of projects that brought together

institutions across a city collaborating on tackling urban poverty and social marginalisation, several lessons arise that can guide and inform future practice and attempts to activate the potential of universities to have a visible and active role in their local areas. These lessons relate to debates around the concepts of civic universities and anchor institutions, as well as the way in which the notions of visibility and empowerment are operationalised in planning, development and policy research in the United Kingdom.

Community research training is a powerful tool that can be used not only to empower local communities but also to deliver results that can inform decision-making and policy and service design. It has the potential to change the dynamics of the current policy arena and have a significant impact through enabling more democratic, co-produced agendas for left-behind places that are tailored to local needs and aspirations. The USE-IT! experience showed that partnerships with communities increase the chance of interventions that are inclusive and are more sensitive to local needs and outcomes. The project's bottom-up methodology in practice complements the academic theories of collaborative and participatory planning discourses. Enabling citizens and service users to take a meaningful role in shaping the design of policies and institutions fundamentally increases the democratic legitimacy of such decisions and the interventions that are developed as a result. This is not to present technical expertise of academics and policymakers as being oppositional to the lived expertise of citizens; instead, both can complement each other and can lead to more holistic outcomes. As such, universities – along with a wider array of institutions – should begin by reflecting critically on established modes of gathering data and conducting research, considering whether there is space for an approach that taps into the expertise by experience of the citizens who are most affected by decisions regarding the delivery of services.

Another advantage of the community research approach is enhancing access for both communities and universities. Citizens, particularly those from more deprived or marginalised groups, should be supported to engage with universities, on campuses or in their neighbourhoods. Through co-producing knowledge with academics, citizens gain access to training, knowledge and skills that are free at the point of access, rather than having to pay high fees that serve as a barrier. Academics and policymakers benefit in turn, gaining far greater access to hard-to-reach communities and rich data to inform decision-making that is gathered by researchers who are more trusted than academics who are perceived to be 'parachuting in' and are often not attuned to the everyday life of the community in question. While USE-IT! faced an array of challenges

including time constraints, difficulty of encouraging buy-in from centralised institutions, and of course the perennial issue of budgetary constraints, the flexibility of the project design and committed engagement of the academic team helped to overcome these problems.

A number of challenges were encountered that prompted us to reflect on problems with the design of the project and the cultural change required to make a network of public institutions be more than just a cumbersome talking- shop. For example, on a practical level getting and maintaining the buy-in of senior leaders can be difficult, as can be the logistics of multiple organisations of varying scale seeking to co-ordinate their efforts and reduce duplication. Nevertheless, in our experience the USE-IT! model of co-production proved to be a flexible mechanism for transferring knowledge and skills between community and academic researchers, in turn delivering policy research projects that demonstrated benefit to the anchor institution network on the project, to the extent that they decided to continue their collaboration in the form of the Birmingham Anchor Network. The return on investment might be considered as the enhanced visibility and empowerment dimensions of the project, but in financial terms, data gathered by community researchers led to the awarding of a six-figure research grant orientated towards tackling childhood obesity in a community-led approach, representing significant potential cost savings for local government and the health service in the future.

Several recommendations can be made for future action research-based projects that use the community research methodology as a tool to facilitate community engagement and visibility. First, communication is key. Using trusted community organisations and making information available in places where people have time to stay and read is important. Putting effort into building longer-term relationships, rather than 'parachuting' in for projects, can help create mutually beneficial relationships of trust and, in doing so, can shift the perception that the university is present in its local community only when it wants something (be it research data, participants or funding). Once participants are recruited onto a training scheme, at the outset there is a need to assess their skill levels and deliver a tailored approach according to individuals' needs, recognising that some will have more qualifications, language proficiency or familiarity with research concepts than others. Therefore, some participants may need additional tutoring and training support. Other participants who already have more developed research skills could go through a fast-track process. The training modules need to be flexible, corresponding to different starting positions, interests and time capacities of

the participants. Content should be iterative, responding to what does and does not work. In turn, sharing learning materials and best practice between universities could be beneficial to help reach common standards in delivering community research training.

While some community researchers praised the effectiveness and success of the training, some noted that the follow-up of research results was unclear or did not happen. Improvements that can be implemented in the future include focusing on particular topics of research ideas; identifying research interests of (local) institutions and organisations, and understanding at the outset in which areas they want to become active; linking these partner organisations with a community researcher early on to facilitate relationship building; and supporting community researchers to present their research findings at relevant institutions. Developing collaborative networks of anchor institutions, identifying where there are spaces for cooperation in work and gaps in knowledge that can be addressed with material gathered by community researchers, can help sustain the exchange of knowledge between communities, universities and institutions to create more holistic solutions to challenges. Transferring skills to the community, including training for five community researchers to train others, was one way of embedding the USE-IT! approach in the community and continuing this knowledge production beyond the university. Likewise, efforts to establish a community research social enterprise that can be commissioned by organisations interested in the communities and places represented by these researchers is another dimension of anchoring the aims of the project.

The USE-IT! community research model presents the opportunity to address three types of connection between higher education and the built environment. This ranges from reviewing the design and delivery of community research training and recruitment, to teaching that includes creating space for innovative and experimental ideas coming out of co-production, as well as collaborating as equal peers to design research that is in line with citizens' motivations and issues. Finally, through successive cohorts of community researchers, the model creates a space for embedding this approach to research and knowledge exchange, including through the training of trainers practice, whereby accredited researchers get the opportunity to further their knowledge and recruit and train others beyond the university.

Future research could dive deeper into the cultural and institutional change required to enable universities to achieve their potential for social empowerment, matching the growing interest in community wealth building that has resulted from the wider understanding of universities

as local anchor institutions. More research also needs to investigate how institutional partnerships can be developed with a formal role for citizens to feed into knowledge gathering and decision-making processes. Supporting the emergence of a culture of civic engagement to build truly participatory practices, while also facilitating the inclusion of local communities, is an important ongoing challenge to academia, particularly in highly marketised contexts. Researchers might perhaps also consider the dynamics of virtual space and the challenges and opportunities of online community research, which was not a consideration of this project that took place in a pre-pandemic world. Moreover, future research must continue to explore issues around social and public spaces where local people can be seen, speak and be heard, and be present in the co-production of new knowledge and ways of understanding the world.

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Engaged Urban Pedagogy presents a participatory approach to teaching built environment subjects by exploring 12 examples of real-world engagement in urban planning involving people within and beyond the university. Starting with curriculum review, course content is analysed in light of urban pasts, race, queer identity, lived experiences and concerns of urban professionals. Case studies then shift to focus on techniques for participatory critical pedagogy, including expanding the 'classroom' with links to live place-making processes, connections made through digital co-design exercises and student-led podcasting assignments. Finally, the book turns to activities beyond formal university teaching, such as where school-age children learn about their own participation in urban processes alongside university students and researchers. The last cases show how academics have enabled co-production in local urban developments, trained community co-researchers and acted as part of a city-to-city learning network. Throughout the book, editorial commentary highlights how these activities are a critical source of support for higher education.

Together, the 12 examples demonstrate the power and range of an engaged urban pedagogy. They are written by academics, university students and those working in urban planning and place-making. Drawing on foundational works of critical pedagogy, they present a distinctly urban praxis that will help those in universities respond to the built environment challenges of today.

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