

Project title:	Enabling and Co-designing Retrofit
Discipline	Design
Key words:	Co-design, participatory design, sustainability, retrofit, social innovation, community leadership in design, urban regeneration
Supervisory team:	Vera Hale and Katerina Alexiou
URL for lead supervisor's OU profile	https://www.open.ac.uk/people/vh3457 http://www.open.ac.uk/people/aka56

Project Highlights:

- Opportunity to engage with live research projects
- Work on community projects to conduct socially responsible research
- Develop skills in mixed methods approaches in design research

Project Description:

The [Insulate Britain campaign](#) has been raising widespread awareness over the country about the need to improve our housing stock to meet environmental objectives. There are already some great community examples where collective community action is focused on retrofitting whole neighbourhoods collaboratively, for example in Manchester and Birmingham, by [People Powered Retrofit](#) and [Zero Carbon House](#).

However, when we are implementing retrofit to a community level, we need to focus beyond the technical refurbishment solutions of the buildings, to retrofitting society as a whole: When upscaling to a larger, urban scale, retrofit we need understand what is needed to swift perspectives and enable the wider collective mindset to come onboard of these community initiatives. Co-designed projects are a great way to establish and maintain relationships and trust with communities, which can than help improve the quality of the homes that are regenerated (Morrison, 2022).

We are looking for a design PhD student to conduct research focussed on co-design and enabling in the

context of community retrofit. Potential community case studies include the collaborative work already done in Manchester and Birmingham.



Figures: Examples of community-design engagements and training from the AHRC funded Empowering Design Practices reserach project.

The research will look at advancing knowledge on the barriers and enablers that influence the actions and methods of co-designing community retrofit engagements. We are particularly interested in how civic design pedagogies can be used as knowledge scaffolds to empower communities, and how use of reflective inquiry can help draw learning from active projects and case studies.

Research Methods:

The student may use a variety of methodologies, from instrumental case studies to ethnographic case studies, using interviews, focus groups and experimental action research methods to explore these issues. Also they might be expected to work directly with groups and organisations engaged in collective design activities.

The project will contribute to expanding our understanding of design as collective action, and how it is enabled, to further support the national retrofit agenda and support design in the built environment.

The student will benefit from access to a variety of organisations and grassroots initiatives working in design projects building on work conducted by the supervisors in the last decade.

References

1. Ehn, P., Nilsson, E., and Topgaard, R. (eds.) (2014) *Making Futures: Marginal Notes on Innovation, Design, and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
2. Manzini, E. (2015) *Design, when everybody designs: An introduction to design for social innovation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
4. Sanoff, H., (2011) 'Multiple Views of Participatory Design' *Focus* 8:1
5. Zamenopoulos, T. and Alexiou, K. (2018) *Co-Design as Collaborative Research* in Facer, K and Dunleavy, K. (eds.) *Connected Communities Foundation Series*. Bristol: AHRC Connected Communities/ University of Bristol.
6. Tavory, I. and Timmermans, S. (2014) *Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
7. Parker-Jenkins, M., 2018. Problematising ethnography and case study: reflections on using ethnographic techniques and researcher positioning. *Ethnogr. Educ.* 13, 18–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2016.1253028>
8. Morrison, E.J., Sean, 2022. Rethinking regeneration: Could co-design help transform Bristol's housing estates? [WWW Document]. Bristol Cable. URL <https://thebristolcable.org/2022/10/future-of-cities-housing-solutions-rethinking-regeneration-could-co-design-transform-city-estates/> (accessed 12.1.22).

Further details:

Students should have a strong background in design and enthusiasm for participatory design. Experience in co-design and/or practice-based research is desirable.

Please contact **Vera Hale** and/ or **Katerina Alexiou** to discuss your proposal: vera.hale@open.ac.uk, katerina.alexiou@open.ac.uk,

Candidate Applications

Applications should include:

- A 1000 word cover letter outlining why the project is of interest to you and how your skills match those required
- an academic CV containing contact details of three academic references
- an Open University application form, downloadable from: <http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process>
- IELTS test scores where English is an additional language

Applications should be sent to

STEM-EI-PhD@open.ac.uk by 15.02.2023