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| Project title: | Community-academic co-design partnerships in the built environment: models and routes to sustained engagement and impact |
| Discipline | Design |
| Key words: | Co-design, community-academic collaboration, partnership, built environment |
| Supervisory team: | Vera Hale, Katerina Alexiou and Theo Zamenopoulos |
| URL for lead supervisor's OU profile | https://www.open.ac.uk/people/vh3457 http://www.open.ac.uk/people/aka56 https://www.open.ac.uk/people/tz98 |

Project Highlights:

- Engage in research with non-academic partners active in the built environment and placemaking sector;
- Develop ways to support partnership and sustained engagement between academic and non-academic partners;
- Explore the future of co-design through action-based participatory research.

Overview:

We are inviting candidates to carry out a collaborative project with The Glass-House Community Led Design (The Glass-House), a national charity that supports communities, organisations and networks to work collaboratively on the design of buildings, open spaces, homes and neighbourhoods. The Glass-House has been a strategic partner of the Design Group, and has been engaged in collaborative research, teaching and knowledge exchange projects with the supervisors for over 10 years.

This type of collaborative partnership working is becoming more and more important in the context of placemaking as funders, politicians, practitioners and local communities are all realising the benefits of sustained collaboration in order to incubate and support projects that will benefit local people and places.

A recent report by the Arts and Humanities Research Council reflecting on the practices and impact of collaborative place-based research highlights partnership working as an important route to addressing complex local issues and agendas (AHRC, 2023). Community-academic partnerships can enhance quality, equity and sustainability of design and placemaking projects.



Figure 1. Image of co-design workshop with partners across academic and non-academic sectors

However, how such partnership working can be nurtured and sustained in the long term (beyond one particular project or initiative) is an open question.

The project will explore the partnership between the OU and The Glass-House, as well as other relevant examples in the built environment/placemaking sector (e.g. Live Projects) in order to understand the challenges and to explore what works in order to develop mechanisms of support. It will also seek to develop practical tools and recommendations to inform policy-making and practice.

Methodology:

The successful candidate will be expected to run co-design workshops, focus groups as well as one-to-one interviews in order to explore collaborative practices between academic and non-academic partners in the context of design and placemaking. The student will

also be expected to develop a set of case studies using ethnography and a variety of creative methods.

Applications should be sent to
STEM-EI-PhD@open.ac.uk by 16.02.2024

References & Further reading:

1. AHRC (2023) Developing a people-centred place-led approach, the value of arts and humanities, AHRC Place-based research project report.
https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_978141_smx.pdf
2. 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.
3. De Sousa, S. (2023) Celebrating a Decade of Strategic Partnership between The Glass-House Community Led Design and the Open University. Blog post:
<https://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/design/celebrating-a-decade-of-strategic-partnership-between-the-glass-house-community-led-design-and-the-open-university/>
4. Trencher, G., Bai, X., Evans, J., McCormick, K., Yarime, M. (2014) University partnerships for co-designing and co-producing urban sustainability, *Global Environmental Change*, Volume 28, pp. 153-165.
5. Zelenko, O., Gomez, R., & Kelly, N. (2021). Research Co-Design: Meaningful Collaboration in Research. In *How to Be a Design Academic* (pp. 227-244). CRC Press.

Further details:

Candidates should have a strong background in design and enthusiasm for participatory design/co-design research. They should have strong collaborative skills and experience working with people. Experience working in the built environment/ placemaking sector would be welcome.

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