

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Leicester</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA17 Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology: Geography</p>
<p>Title of case study: Helping planning professionals design buildings, communities and urban areas which fulfil community needs</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Successful buildings, communities and urban areas must incorporate the needs of users into their design. Human geography research at Leicester has enabled town planners and local authorities to incorporate the community's needs into the design of new schools, villages and urban areas. This work has benefited both professionals (e.g. in Local Authorities in Northamptonshire and Leicester) and the community groups they serve. It has also successfully brought together users (especially children, young people and adults), community organisations, practitioners and policy-makers into direct dialogue, enabling productive partnership working between these groups.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since 2006, Human Geographers at Leicester have repeatedly engaged in participatory research that enables users and community members to voice their needs. This strand of research straddles two of the Human Geographers' research themes: <i>geographies of communities and the everyday</i>; <i>spatial politics of change</i>. Several projects have sought to critically interrogate and support user involvement in planning/design. Human Geographers have also repeatedly collaborated with others in the department (especially GIS researchers), leading to joint policy research projects. On the basis of their expertise in community/participatory research – especially with 'minority' groups^{1,2} – Leicester geographers have repeatedly been commissioned to undertake impactful policy & consultancy research (for a key, recent example, see Survey of Leicester, section 4). Key research strands that have led to impacts in section 4 are as follows (superscript numbers <i>throughout this document</i> denote references in section 3).</p> <p><i>1. Pupil participation in school design</i>² (2007-2009).</p> <p>This research strand centred around pupil involvement in ten schools in the English Midlands undergoing re-design, refurbishment or complete re-building. It took place during a period of extensive investment in schools (e.g. New Labour's <i>Building Schools for the Future</i> programme). A key finding was that whilst in many schools, pupil participation was 'lost' under in the complexity of school-design processes, there were several examples of best practice: from participation in design of pupil social areas, to meaningful encounters with design professionals that enabled participation based on knowledge of the technical parameters of school design³. In collaboration with Coventry, Northampton and Keele Universities, Dr Peter Kraftl (Co-I), from the University of Leicester (at Leicester since 2007), was central to securing funding for this research, given his longer-standing background in architectural geographies of schools⁵. Dr Kraftl also line-managed a Research Assistant (Dr Olga den Besten, 2007-2009), and was instrumental in the dissemination of the project's findings⁴ (e.g. best practice guidance: see section 4).</p> <p><i>2. Young people and everyday lives of 'Sustainable Communities'</i>⁵ (2009-2013).</p> <p>In the context of New Labour's <i>Sustainable Communities</i> agenda, inter-linked research projects⁵ explored young people's (aged 9-16) everyday lives, mobility and citizenship in new, large-scale residential communities. Given that little was known about <i>any</i> residents' experiences of such new communities, it was highly significant. It uncovered a range of findings: tensions between young people and adults as a result of complex design processes; strikingly high levels of mobility amongst young people in new communities; what it is like to move into a new, unfinished community; young people's conservatism about 'cutting-edge' sustainable architectures. In collaboration with Warwick and Northampton Universities, Dr Kraftl (Co-I) was instrumental in framing an original project proposal in the context of <i>Sustainable Communities</i>; he led on several important impact activities – for instance the consultation with DCLG and consultation documents for NNJPU (see section 4). In addition, the work of Dr Claire Jarvis (PI for GIS component, at</p>

Leicester since 2002) was indispensable: the GIS data were core to the methodology and the success of the research, and have been powerful tools for dissemination to policy-makers.

3. References to the research

Numbering refers to superscript numbers in Section 2.

1. **Kraftl, P.** (2008) “Young people, hope and childhood-hope”, *Space and Culture*, 11: 81-92.
2. Funded by **AHRC/EPSRC**, “Realising participatory design with children and young people: A case study of design and refurbishment in schools” **Awarded £330,000**, (2007-2009). **Kraftl Co-I**. Example of project output: **Kraftl, P.** (2012) Utopian Promise or Burdensome Responsibility? A Critical Analysis of the UK Government’s *Building Schools for the Future* Policy, *Antipode* 44: 847-870.
3. Den Besten, O., Horton, J. and **Kraftl, P.** (2008) “Pupil involvement in school (re)design: participation in policy and practice”, *Co-Design* 4: 197-210.
4. **Kraftl, P.** (2006) “Building an idea: The material construction of an ideal childhood”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 31(4): 488-504.
5. Horton, J., Hadfield-Hill, S., Christensen, P. and **Kraftl, P.** (2013) Children, Young People and Sustainability. *Local Environment* 18: 249-254. Funded by: a) **ESRC**, “New Urbanisms, New Citizens: children and young people’s everyday life and participation in sustainable communities (NUNC)”. **Awarded £670,000**, (2009-2013), Kraftl: Co-I, Jarvis PI for GIS component; b) **Higher Education Collaboration Fund (HECF)/East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA)** “Sustainable Homes Innovation Network of Expertise: Transdisciplinary Research on User Experiences (SHINE TRUE)” **Awarded £44,000**, (2009-2010). **Kraftl Co-I and leader for work package 3** (children and young people’s views of sustainable design).

4. Details of the impact

Research has been used by several local authorities/councils to inform planning and community engagement. It has also been used by a UK Government Department and a Political Party to inform national strategies. Finally, it has provided significant benefits to residents of several local communities.

Local Authority Planning

North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (NNJPU) is responsible for preparing the North Northamptonshire Core Strategy – the planning framework covering Corby, Kettering, East Northamptonshire and Wellingborough Councils. From 2012 onwards, Dr Kraftl worked collaboratively with NNJPU (drawing on ESRC ‘NUNC’ research) to help them better understand aspirations of residents and shape planning policy. A Senior Planner at NNJPU^a said the NUNC research⁵ had been particularly significant in:

- identifying young people’s issues and aspirations within North Northamptonshire and establishing relationships with young residents;
- providing a robust evidence-base for the entire Core Strategy and the development of policies therein;
- discussing policy development with NNJPU and other Local Authority colleagues, and sharing best practice^a.

Leicester City Council – Schools

The findings of Dr Kraftl’s research on pupil participation in school design (AHRC-EPSRC research²), were incorporated into a pupil-participation best-practice guide. The guide reached every English Local Education Authority (433 in total). During 2009-10, it was used by Leicester City Council (LCC) in fostering pupil participation for the *Building Schools for the Future* programme – a £235 million programme of investment in secondary school buildings in the city^b. For an LCC youth engagement officer, the guide provided clear, accessible information about pupil participation that enabled participatory methods to be tailored for LCC’s use; it was also used in

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initial meetings with headteachers to justify pupil participation activities – leading to engagement with 450 pupils at 16 schools^b.

Leicester City Council – Survey of Leicester

Based on research expertise in the UoA, and a workshop organised by Dr Kraftl in 2011 (part-funded by the Department's Human Geography Research Fund), Leicester City Council commissioned a collaborative research project (costing £65k) to undertake a pilot survey of the city's population. Led by Leicester GIS staff and Human Geographers, the project involved the analysis/compilation of existing datasets (Dr Comber) and the use of datasets to create 'storyboards' about local communities (Dr Jarvis), later used as the basis for participatory community workshops (Dr Kraftl).

The pilot study had several significant impacts on LCC practice, which reaches across all of the city's communities. LCC's Research and Intelligence Manager listed three benefits^c:

1. "It has informed the approach of the City Council's Research and Intelligence Service to help co-ordinate and quality-assure the organisation's consultation practice". In particular, it has provided methods and evidence to enable staff "to tailor individual consultation exercises [...] and, where necessary, explore new ways of reaching out to engage those likely to be affected by proposed interventions."
2. "It has informed the approach to evaluation taken by the council's transforming neighbourhood services initiative. This project, which is pioneering new ways to improve the quality of front-line services while also cutting costs, is adapting the methods developed in the Survey of Leicester pilot study [...] to underpin public consultation"
3. "The pilot work has prompted the council to further invest in developing capacity for local research through the creation of a new, fixed-term post of Project Co-ordinator [which will] further increase the council's understanding of community needs and the impact of policies on local people"

National Government Departments/Political Parties

In July 2012, Dr Kraftl and NUNC colleagues were invited to consult with the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) as the latter developed the UK's large-scale housing strategy. The invitation was extended after the findings of the NUNC research were sent to the Department by Dr Kraftl. Thereafter, the academics delivered briefing papers on the NUNC findings, in November 2012 and July 2013.^d

The findings of the NUNC project are cited as key evidence in the Labour Party's (2013) *Policy Review on Community Engagement in Planning*. Specifically, the benefits of consulting with young people – rarely directly acknowledged in recent national-level planning documents – are directly addressed, with the project providing the key (and only) example of relevant research^e.

Impacts on residents

Just as significant as policy impacts, participatory research has led to important benefits for residents/users. It has enabled residents to participate in shaping their own environments – visible repeatedly through feedback from participants in the NUNC project. For example:

- evidence from the NUNC project supported two successful community applications for funding for play equipment (total £49,000).^f
- a local councillor involved in community workshops, facilitated by Dr Kraftl/NUNC, spoke of their benefits in bringing younger and older residents into dialogue: "[i]t gives you more confidence to talk to children...the longer-term benefits of this work, [will be] that it facilitates meaningful dialogue and action."^g Dr Kraftl has facilitated similarly successful workshops in several other communities, each comprising ca. 2,000 residents.
- one of several similar testimonials from a young participant in the NUNC research: "[w]e learned how we could make a change to our community ourselves and met lots of people to help us."^h
- many young people cited positive educational and emotional benefits of being involved in the

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NUNC research, collated in a published survey of participants⁹. The overwhelming majority indicated that the project had improved their knowledge about sustainability and how their communities were changing.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

^a Statement available from Senior Planner, North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit

^b Statement available from Youth Engagement Officer, Leicester City Council (2009-10)

^c Statement available from Research and Intelligence Manager, Leicester City Council

^d Statement available from Housing Supply and Markets Division of the Department for Communities and Local Government

^e *Labour Party Policy Review on Community Engagement in Planning*. A draft of the *Policy* is available but published version should be available at time of REF evaluation from corresponding author at Institute of Urban Affairs, The University of Northampton (contact details supplied).

^f Statements available from Chair of the Villagers Association, and young people.

⁹ Results of survey publicly available in: Hadfield-Hill, S. and Horton, J. (2013) "Children's experiences of participating in research: emotional moments *together?*", *Children's Geographies*, online early, DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2013.783985.