

## Shape Our City

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### Keywords

*community, place,  
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### Context

Shape Our City was the public engagement arm of Upstream (a three-year national urban health environment research project), which used participatory methods to pilot different creative ways in which the public, and particularly marginalised groups, can contribute to urban decision-making.

The bigger project was concerned with quantifying the health costs of current urban development schemes, ranging from transport initiatives to housing and the food environment, to make the case that public health needs to be at the centre of decision making for livable cities. The project also involved industry and other key upstream decision makers (e.g., financiers, landowners, city mayors). Shape Our City, which ran for 18 months from 2017-2019, partnered with arts professionals and used creative and participatory methods in Bristol to raise awareness on these systemic issues. Evidence was gathered that showed how residents' priorities for change can differ between communities. Rather than using broad brush responses to complex problems, the collaborative project worked to create a feedback loop between local residents and decision-makers, so that local knowledge could be included alongside evidence on public and environmental health when considering the implications of planning decisions.

The public engagement project was set up following discussions between the Science Communication Unit at UWE (SCU), and other UWE colleagues who worked on Upstream. Shape Our City was awarded a public engagement grant from The Wellcome Trust, which also previously funded Upstream. Project partners included the University of Bath, independent consultants and artists including Upfest, The Factory, Luke Jerram, Andy Council and Ellie Shipman, as well as community centres in areas of multiple deprivation.

## Process and outputs

Shape Our City involved multiple partners, including scientific researchers gathering data at scale (systematic reviews, economic analysis), project managers, a project coordinator and project-based learning students from the HEI partner. From the cultural sector, partners included graffiti artists, sculptors and participatory artists. From the social sector, collaborators included community centres (The Network - Barton Hill Settlement, Filwood Community Centre, Knowle West Media Centre, Ambition Lawrence Weston), primary schools (Springmead Prep, Whitehall Primary) local citizens and Alive Activities, a charity dedicated to improving the quality of life for older people and their carers. The community centres served as key 'bridging organisations', whilst the artists' involvement was crucial for motivating participants and making the invisible visible, in addition to sparking interest and curiosity.



*Figure 1: Luke Jerram's In-hale Sculpture at Festival of Nature, 2018.*

*Image © Sophie Laggan*

Tangible artistic outputs of the collaboration included an interactive website that enables members of the public to spend a 'budget' on improving the health of their city, a 'park replacement service' graffiti art piece that featured at Upfest, a giant soot particle sculpture, fabric banner walks and a laser cut wooden board game.

The consultations in some cases led on to positive community action. The collaboration partnered UWE live-project students in Architecture and Planning with two communities. The first of these collaborations took place in a local residential street, where students interacted with residents to co-create planters out of old pallets in order to re-green the area. This partnership continued to enjoy a legacy of interaction, as the following year the project was still in communication with the street residents, sending them a community newsletter and seeds for planting.

*Figure 2: Making planters with residents before filling them with plants and flowers.*

*Image © Sophie Laggan*



The second collaboration involved a local care home, where students engaged with the residents to co-design and plant a sensory garden. In addition, the students petitioned the Council and highways agency to lower the curb near the care home so the residents could access the shops more easily.

The feedback and ideas received from the public during the project activities went on to inform city developers and city mayors, including those involved on the UPSTREAM project, at a conference in London in December 2018.



*Figure 3: Sharing stories, designing a garden.*

*Image © Sophie Laggan*

## Evaluation and impacts

SOC gathered evidence on the different priorities and trade-offs that exist across the city between diverse communities. Altogether, the project had 1,537 face-to-face engagements from presence at festivals, the running of distributed dialogues and consultations, schools' engagements, and community actions. The consultations revealed stark differences in each area's priorities for change, ranging from improving access to local supermarkets, to preserving green space over transport infrastructure.

The project found that multi-channel communication is necessary in order to reach and engage diverse audiences. In addition, the project leads learnt that:

- Centering engagements around food helps discussion of systemic issues
- Intergenerational activities are important for learning
- It is essential to build lasting relationships with community organisers and invest in time and people
- Local residents are mostly aware of what change or improvements they would like to see effected in their local area, but views on what action to take in areas further away from their home diverge more widely.



- This project enabled local residents to have a voice and agency in public health planning, helping them to lead the change. Co-design and active listening were essential ingredients in enabling this activism.

*Figure 4: Sharing food and memories with Alive gardening volunteers.*

*Image © Sophie Laggan*



## **Additional Information**

<https://urban-health-upstream.info/impact/our-city-our-health/>

<https://urban-health-upstream.info/info/>

<https://www.upfest.co.uk/>

<https://kwmc.org.uk/thefactory/>

<https://www.lukejerram.com/inhale-2/>

<https://bit.ly/shapeourcity>

[https://issuu.com/eleanorshipman/docs/shape\\_our\\_city\\_newspaper\\_final\\_v1](https://issuu.com/eleanorshipman/docs/shape_our_city_newspaper_final_v1)

<https://aliveactivities.org/>

<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/1492594>

<https://urban-health-upstream.info/shapeourcity/>