NCACE

S.H.E.D

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Context

Dr Rhiannon Jones is an artist-researcher and thought leader in Social and Design innovation through Civic Practice based at University of Derby. She co-founded the artistic research network, InDialogue, (2012-) an international artists research network that has commissioned and curated four International Symposia and artist residencies. As founding CEO of Designing Dialogue CIC, (2019-) she co-created S.H.E.D, a unique public arts space co-designed with communities and providing a platform for emerging and established practitioners and artists. S.H.E.D is a collaborative initiative with a wide range of stakeholders that works strategically with large organisations such as the Football Association Charitable Trusts, local authorities, National Museums, Design Council, Arts Council England, Derby Opportunity Area, H.E sector and creative Industries to stimulate debate on regenerative place-making.

S.H.E.D stands for The Social Higher Education Depot, reflecting its position as a social and transient, yet expansive and dynamic space - a mobile shed which acts as a bridge between High Education and the public, in a safe and inclusive way. The concept for S.H.E.D was developed in 2019 in partnership with a core team of 'shedders' including Dr Victoria Barker, Sarah Webb, Simon Burrows and Barend Slabbert and a group of stakeholders; they have created 32 possible S.H.E.D configurations as an initiative to generate opportunities for people to talk. Sheds are safe, familiar, common spaces that can also spark curiosity, not to mention the mission behind the initiative was to enable the "shedding" of preconceptions about people and place.

S.H.E.D explores creative place-making as a methodology to address civic, societal and economic issues through the design of a unique site for public discourse. It does this by creating innovation projects that embed teaching and learning opportunities through research. This is manifested through

co-designing bespoke S.H.E.D environments for performative, sporting, cultural and artistic engagement; and achieved in partnership with students, stakeholders, local authorities, policy makers, academics and the business sector.

The concept of the shed was deconstructed, reconfigured and co-designed through a collaboration between University of Derby academics and as a live module for students from University of Derby's BA Hons. Interior Design, industry partners and community groups. Innovation emerged through the inclusion of diverse partners, such as chief executives, freelance producers, and local artists, who wanted to participate in the development of the concept and commission the S.H.E.D for different activities. The research enquiry into how to design for dialogue through the design of S.H.E.D as a mobile arts and public space, has developed opportunities for students to take part in live modules at University of Derby, and been presented as a case study for students at University of Lincoln, Manchester Met University, Nottingham Trent University, Royal College of Arts, University of Ohio and University of Roma and Aalto University, Lapland.

The funding model is bespoke and responsive, changing from project to project. In any one project, there could be between 5 to 25 partners providing a

blend of financial and in-kind support. The needs of any particular project will determine what types of funding are most conducive towards achieving the collective aims of that project. For example, funding has been awarded by the Design Council, Arts Council England, local authorities, private businesses and individuals, football clubs and museums, trusts and foundations.

By March 2020 S.H.E.D was established as community interest company (CiC) and became a formal spin out company for Derby University. S.H.E.D aligns closely the institution's focus as an Applied and Civic University of today and for tomorrow; along with the work being undertaken at the University which can be identified within three clear categories: its Learning and Teaching, its Innovation and Research and its Civic responsibilities. S.H.E.D creates opportunities for people to access arts and culture recognising the value of Design capabilities to attend to a broad range of issues including helping to problem solve social inequalities, lack of social mobility and injustices.

https://repository.derby.ac.uk/item/95638/s-h-e-d-a-case-study-acting-locally-thinking-globally
www.weareshed.co.uk
The full list of the S.H.E.D team can be found here https://weareshed.co.uk/meet-the-team/
Protest S.H.E.D
https://nationaljusticemuseum.co.uk/museum/news/welcome-back-s.h.e.d
Design for Planet 2021
https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-mission/design-for-planet-1/design-for-planet-festival-2021/
Co-design with Community, Track Talk: https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-mission/design-for-planet-1/design-for-planet-festival-2021/

Process and Outputs

Since its launch in 2019, S.H.E.D has toured schools and visited arts and cultural festivals. As a touring project, S.H.E.D can visit hard-to-reach locations or areas where audiences would not travel to participate, such as festivals or car parks in inner-city Nottingham. The projects that take place within it are tailored to the specific problem or question raised by the community it visits, and the physical reconfigurations of the S.H.E.D are

designed to reflect this. S.H.E.D is available for community engagement through civically engaged activity, commissioning for full-cost booked activities that offset the community and participatory work, and for research-driven knowledge exchange - giving voice to place, engaging communities in dialogue, creating and disseminating academic outputs. These iterations have had individual, organisational and community impact as the design continually adapts. Although always driven by artistic practice, the design responds to civic need - from individuals and communities - and is being informed by people and place.

Image 2: Timber22SHED.
Credit: Rhiannon Jones

The case studies detailed here demonstrate the range of activity, its core purpose as a reconfigurable space, driven by the research question into how we design for dialogue through cultural and creative innovation in order to support communities, and our stakeholders and collaborators needs in order to understand the culture of a place. It is through that activity that S.H.E.D are able to present at policy level the impact of this way of working. Driven by a clear focus utilising culture as a driver for change on place-based local concerns – through to Global issues of sustainable development, climate crisis, Social, economic and political issues providing solutions, ideas and questions.

With the outbreak of the global pandemic in 2020, when the government mandate was to stay inside four walls and behind closed doors and the arts sector was effectively being shut down, the S.H.E.D team found themselves in a unique position as an outside, COVID-safe venue, where people could come to talk about what was happening at such an unprecedented time in history. The Social Higher Education Depot (S.H.E.D) created co-designed, site-specific installations in prominent city-centre locations, offering a platform for artistic expression to enable and empower young people in the city; Departure Lounge (Jones 2019), This is Derby Installation (Jones 2019), This is Derby Re:Imagined School Tour (Jones, Nunn 2019), Derby-Voice (Jones, McMahon 2021) and Shedding it in Derby! For City of Culture public consultation (Jones, 2022). This space and its research events provided young people with opportunities to share concerns and reflections on issues exacerbated by the pandemic: Black Lives Matter (BLM), education reform, employment, and personal/mental wellbeing.

Fundamental to the way S.H.E.D operates is that it is a blended and non-hierarchical approach where young people, stakeholders, public and policy writers, corporates, world leaders, or students feel they can be a part of a public facing message about climate change. This is a call for action through a sustainable, green and creative approach to research and learning.

An example of how S.H.E.D continued to work can be illustrated the project Protest S.H.E.D, which was a three year collaborative project (2020-2023), led by the National Justice Museum, in partnership with Arts Council England, Renewal Trust, King Edwards Park and a host of freelance companies and artists. In August 2020, 2021 and 2022 over 40 days, 2,547 people engaged with a wide range of public workshops, performances, a ProjectLAB exhibition at the Museum, outdoor S.H.E.D interventions and installations including: film screenings, panel debates and performances by artists, students, academics, and the public.

Building on this work, Design for Planet 2021 provided a critical moment to look at protest, justice, sustainable design and education. S.H.E.D were invited to be installed at the V&A for Design for Planet 2021. It showcased the research findings and works from participants on a range of themes that use design to facilitate the creation of a bespoke, safe space for dialogue to occur about climate crisis. S.H.E.D led workshops in partnership with the V&A and invited school children from Dundee to come to work with S.H.E.D

designers and artists to create placards and potted seeds with messages of hope, change and calls for action. These artworks were immediately installed at S.H.E.D for public and Design Council Summit VIPS to engage with, and Dr Jones spoke as an expert of co-design with communities and spoke of the methodologies employed by S.H.E.D to explore the importance of designing with community at the heart. This creative place-making highlights the benefits of artistic installations as spaces for stakeholders, public and policymakers to engage directly with urban youth, contributing to the city's cultural offer, informing youth voice engagement plans. This cultural asset supported Derby's City of Culture2025 bid, modelling best practice for APDIG and CHEAD Research.

Image 3: Design Council.
Credit: Rhiannon Jones

The questions being asked in the S.H.E.D became ever more pertinent, amid the cost of living crisis, Levelling up agenda and increased pressures on community and public services. It provides a space for people to talk and to share their worries about society. Members of the public were invited to co-design the space, and then participate in conversations through workshops or public debates, or through creating commissioning opportunities for artists to make work or to create performances. During the pandemic S.H.E.D was busy with projects and collaborations, creating opportunities for building resilience.

At its heart is how S.H.E.D attends to being a platform for individuals and communities to be heard and seen. A series of podcasts and original music have been commissioned and often tour and are broadcast from the S.H.E.D PODS, featuring members of the public from the ages of 6 to 25, who had worked with employers or Youth Voice, a local community radio, or Derby sounds, speaking about the climate crisis and what it meant to them, about the challenges and potential solutions.

The Youth Shedders have worked on multiple S.H.E.Ds, including some young artists who have been commissioned for different projects. Two of the Youth Shedders have now formally started studying at the University of Derby and another three are being mentored to sit on the strategic board for the company. It also created opportunities for over 15 researchers to utilise S.H.E.D as an incubation space for research and development.

So what's next for S.H.E.D? They are developing Shedding Light on Long Covid, a national touring project and programme of activity for 2023/24. It will use data obtained through scientific and clinical research over the last two and half years to create arts-inspired public engagement installations and safe talking spaces aimed at increasing awareness and highlighting what it is like to live with Long COVID. They will be working with a wide range of H.Es, NHS, Charitable trusts and foundations and Cultural partners.

Image 4. Credit: Rhiannon Jones

Evaluation and Impact

S.H.E.D was shortlisted for Shed of the Year competition, and was a finalist in the Unexpected Category, 2020. S.H.E.D was also a finalist for the Green-Gown Awards for Benefitting Society Category, 2020.

Rhiannon Jones was invited to speak about S.H.E.D at the CHEAD Leadership Programme Seminar: Atypical Leaders, as well as participating in the All-party Parliamentary Group Design and Innovation (APDIG) where she was invited to speak about the work of S.H.E.D and to take part in closed roundtables at policy level.

Supporting youth voices and alternative education pathways is one of the most important impacts of the projects. Other collaborators have made connections through S.H.E.D and are now in employment working in other arts and cultural organisations. Other individuals have received support and mentoring from the S.H.E.D team to improve their CVs or create a portfolio of work. Through this community of Shedders, the project is facilitating pathways into and out of higher education by making learning fun and demonstrating that creativity exists everywhere.

The organic growth of the Youth Shedders community demonstrates how an academic-driven research project can work with communities in an innovative and embedded way; working with, rather than on behalf of, their public stakeholders. S.H.E.D has created an alternative model for cultural value which is not economic, but rather a cultural ecosystem that's demonstrating a reflexive and equitable practice, facilitating autonomy and empowerment for the communities involved. An example of impact can be noted through both DerbyVoice and Shed Mural to help turn the building into a welcoming space that reflected the values of the school and wider community. To create the mural, S.H.E.D ran workshops with students from Littleover Community School, from Year 7 through to Sixth Form, to explore how a mural design could capture the school's ethos of learning, caring and succeeding. Youth Shedder and Commissioned Artist Adoniah Haslam led on the design and worked with other artists to create this bespoke Mural.

As a civic university, Derby is committed to working collaboratively with schools to support creative and cultural endeavours. The collaboration

between S.H.E.D and the University reaffirms an ongoing commitment to the prosperity and wellbeing of the city of Derby and the county of Derbyshire.

S.H.E.D is touring nationally on average 8 months of the year; with international research partners and international interest. It is a fantastic example of cultural innovation, grounded in academic knowledge exchange and anchored by a sense of civic responsibility. As Rhiannon Jones describes it, it is 'a labour of love, blood, sweat, tears and splinters'.

Team S.H.E.D are social design innovators and were invited by CHEAD, Council for Higher Education, to attend to A-typical leadership and worked with them on their 2020 conference, creating a virtual S.H.E.D for delegates to come to online during the conference during the peak of lockdown. The team also spoke about Design for Emergency during the pandemic, framing S.H.E.D as an open design challenge for UK-based designers and artists to test out some of the internationally proposed designs generated because of this research initiative.

Image 5. Credit: Rhiannon Jones

S.H.E.D continues to work with researchers and stakeholders to galvanise on its civic and social responsibility, as a university spin out company, to provide a unique opportunity for people to talk about what matters to them. And the research activity, undoubtedly, unearthed the desire from the public to bring change on many urgent matters; not least climate change. S.H.E.D shares a common purpose which is echoed in Derby, as a Civic University in a UNESCO City of Life Long Learning. Who knows what configurations and conversations are yet to be co-designed!

Additional Information

https://weareshed.co.uk/projects/littleover-mural
https://www.chead.ac.uk/events/chead-leadership-programme-seminar-atypical-leaders
https://www.chead.ac.uk/conference-21
https://www.chead.ac.uk/design-for-emergency
Civic University