



FIFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2025

Connected Communities

Wednesday 25 & Thursday 26 July
at



In partnership with



Fifth Annual CivicLAB™ Conference 2025



Supporting academics, creative and cultural industry professionals to share their insights on research and practice through a place-based approach to knowledge generation.

Wednesday 25th and Thursday 26 June 2025



Welcome to CivicLAB™

Dr Rhiannon Jones, Associate Professor Civic Practice, Head of Civic and Communities. Lead of CivicLAB™ and convenor of CivicLAB™ Conference



Dr Rhiannon Jones is an Associate Professor of Civic Practice and Head of Civic and Communities at the University of Derby. I lead CivicLAB™ an Institution-wide centre on participatory culture, creative dialogue, and civic practice and leads the curation and delivery of the Civic flagship programmes. I am a PASCAL Associate and Chair of the International Contemporary Working Art Group for Cumulus, the only Global Association in Art and Design. She is a member of the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, stakeholder for Bolton Arts CIC and Trustee of New Art Exchange, a ground-breaking, Global Majority, NPO

for Arts Council England and an award-winning and internationally recognised Gallery and is a member of the UK UNESCO Learning Cities board.

She regularly work with the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design and the Royal Society of Arts and Manufacturing. My research into community building and placemaking is a case study for the National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange and my ground breaking community practice and methodology has been published and presented to All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Groups, Policy Connect, Westminster H.E, RSA and Design Council UK et.al. I am a published academic, most recently with Intellect Books (2024), Taylor and Francis (2024-5) and had work featured with Council for Higher Education in Art and Design on Women in Leadership (2023-5) and NCACE (2024) as example of best practice. I frequently provide keynotes Nationally and Internationally within the Civic, Creative and Cultural Industry Sector. I judged the UKNA artists in 2024 and judged the Derbyshire Community Business Awards for East Midlands Chamber of Commerce in 2022-23.

She is the founding director and CEO of Designing Dialogue CIC the first spin out from the University of Derby, that tours S.H.E.D; a public arts, touring and innovation space which has received several national honours and has engaged with 12 counties, 41 partners and 42,596 people directly, 700 creatives and commissioned 50 new works.

She has received funding from partners such as Design Council, UK, CHEAD, Arts Council England, UKRI, RSA and local trusts and councils. Accolades include: finalist for Universities Alliance Award (2022), Shed of the year finalist (2020), UK Green Gown Awards: Benefiting Community (2021). Design for Planet, Design Council Uk, Keynote and Installation at the V&A (2021), Policy Connect & All Party Parliamentary Group (2021-22),

Royal College of Arts Keynote (2023). Delivery partner of CHEAD Women in Leadership events (2023 - 2025). Selected as a social regenerative entrepreneur and am a Catalyst Grant holder from, the Royal Society of Arts (2023-4). Socitm Keynote at Presidents Conference (2024 and 2025) and St Georges House, Windsor Castle closed event - Socitm (2024). Fund holder for ARC Accelerator UKRI ESRC/AHRC (2025) from ESRC: Economic and Social Research Council, and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Derbyshire County Council, Local Nature Recovery Strategy lead of public engagement (2025). Lead for the Create Growth D2 Impact and Evaluation work (2025)

Letter from the Chair of CivicLAB™ Conference 2025



It is a privilege to return as Chair of CivicLAB™ in 2025, at a moment when civic responsibility, care and creativity are more vital than ever. CivicLAB™ continues to offer a rare and generous space: one where diverse knowledges and roles are held in dialogue, where provocations are met with care, and where people from across disciplines and sectors are invited to rethink what civic agency can look like – in our cities, our communities, our cultural and educational spaces.

As someone who has worked across place, culture and community for nearly three decades, I know the value of time spent in such spaces. We too often operate under the pressure of outputs, deadlines, and deliverables. CivicLAB™ offers a pause – but not a retreat. Instead, it is a creative and critical site of recharge. A moment to notice what's shifting in our work, what's being asked of us now, and what becomes possible when we act together.

This year's contributors bring an astonishing depth and breadth of perspective: from arts practice to policy, from lived experience to research, from the hyperlocal to the systemic. They remind us that civic practice is not one thing, but many. It lives in the everyday. It is shaped by care, courage, and connection. It asks us to take risks and to stay with difficulty, as much as to celebrate possibility.

As Chair, I invite you to meet this day with openness – to share, to listen, to question, to dream. And to leave with not just ideas, but new alignments and affirmations that carry into your work long after today.

And while you're here, I encourage you to keep asking:

What kind of civic future are we making – and with whom?

Dr Cara Courage is a Culture, Communities and Place Consultant. She has led and advised on place-based and socially engaged arts initiatives across the UK's urban and rural landscapes, championing authentic collaboration between artists and communities. She is co-author of *Trauma-Informed Placemaking* (Routledge, 2024) and editor of *The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking* (2021).

Letter from our Partner

We are Socitm, a charity dedicated to supporting public sector professionals.



Our mission is to:

- Maximise the effective use of technologies and data to deliver improved public services and outcomes.
- Support our members to develop professionally, share best practices, and achieve their organisation's transformation goals.
- Provide resources that help organisations and improve social outcomes in the communities they serve.
- Collaborate across the public and private sector to drive positive change and innovation.

Why we're partnering with CivicLab

At Socitm, we believe in the importance of actively engaging with like-minded organisations to drive meaningful change. Our partnership with CivicLab reflects our shared commitment to a place-based approach to improving outcomes for all. By collaborating with an institution like CivicLab, we demonstrate how public sector organisations can benefit from innovative research, fresh insights, and a focus on delivering real public value. Together, we aim to support and inspire transformation that makes a tangible difference in the communities we serve.



Artcore is a visual arts charity encompassing an art gallery, artistic studios, a shop, and a cafe. The gallery is a vibrant hub for contemporary art nationwide, hosting group exhibitions and private events year-round. Artists have the opportunity to participate in local and international residencies. Our new studios are open for hire at affordable rates, aiming to retain talent from Derby and Derbyshire.

But Artcore is more than just a gallery! It is a lively community hub dedicated to supporting and collaborating with local communities. Our commitment is reflected in our tailor-made training workshops, catering to diverse groups, including senior citizens, recent immigrants

facing language barriers, schoolchildren, youth, unemployed adults, individuals with physical disabilities, those with borderline mental health issues, and members of BME and LGBTQI+ communities. This inclusive approach ensures that Artcore is a welcoming space for everyone, nurturing creativity and connection within a diverse range of individuals.

At Artcore, we are passionate about the power of creativity. We believe in art's potential to enrich lives.



<https://artcoreuk.com/>

Connected Communities Conference Programme

09.00 – 09.30	Conference registration/welcome refreshment
09.30 – 09.45	Welcome address: Dr Rhiannon Jones, Associate Professor Civic Practice. Head of Civic and Communities, University of Derby. Civic Alchemy: connecting communities.
09.45 – 10.00	Conference opening address: Professor Keith McLay Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Derby
10.00 – 11.00	Roundtable Session: Led by Dr Cara Courage and Dr Rhiannon Jones. Civic Alchemy: Understanding the changing nature of communities, sustaining and enhancing life through connected practices, research, teaching and learning.
11.00 – 11.15 (break and group photo)	
11.15 – 12.45	Parallel paper presentation sessions (incl. 15-minute papers and 15-minute questions at the end with all speakers).
Group A lecture room: Heap Lecture Theatre Facilitator: Callum Bate.	
11:15 – 12.45	Presentation 1: Growing Connectivity: Driving Civic Change through Community Gardening (The case study of WCGN), Enke Huang; Richard Galpin, Walworth Community Gardening Network (WCGN); Pembroke House. Presentation 2: Connecting students and charities to work towards safer communities: A Community-Engaged Learning experience, Dr Giulia Levi, Dr Rachel Rafferty, University of Derby. Presentation 3: Public and Community Engagement: Bridging the Gap Between Researchers and the Community, Claire Sedgwick, Ellie Calin, Gill Mooney. Presentation 4: Tender Steps: Connecting Communities to Break the Silence on Babyloss Through Dance – Alice Marshall, University of Derby. Presenters group discussion - questions from the audience, chaired by Callum Bate.

Group B lecture Room: OL2 Facilitator: Dr Cara Courage	
11:15 – 12:45	Presentation 1: Rethinking Civic Engagement: The Case of Create Cambridge and Cambridge Room, Idrees Rasouli; Minna Sunikka-Blank; Zhuozhang Li, Anglia Ruskin University and University of Cambridge. Presentation 2: Morecambe Bay Curriculum; a place-based, teacher-led movement for Sustainability, Dr Bethan Garrett, Lancaster University. Presentation 3: Young Urbanist - Change Starts with Understanding of the Place Where I Live: Strengthening Civic Connectivity Through Community-Led Participatory Art Research, Patricie Kyslíková; Salim Murad PhD, Yourope project. Presentation 4: Empowering Communities Through Place-Based Cultural Research: The Coventry Experience and Its Civic Impact, Mark Scott, Research Fellow - Warwick Business School; Professor Jonothan Neelands, Academic Director for Cultural Partnerships, University of Warwick; Salla Virman, Head of Culture and Creative Economy, Coventry City Council. Presentation 5: Neighbourhood Assembly: Arts-led, co-productive research & practice for comfortable, energy-efficient homes, green skills and quality jobs, and thriving places, Rachel Macrorie, Jennifer Vanderpool, NTU and University of Derby. Presenters group discussion - questions from the audience, chaired by Cara Courage.
12.45 – 13.30: Lunch (Atrium)	
13.30 – 14.30: Guest speaker panel	
13:30-14:30	Adam Ellis Leach: Programme Director, National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA) and Head of Civic Strategy & National Initiatives, Sheffield Hallam University. Dave Tuer: Innovation Lead, East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA). Daisy Carter: RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce). Chaired by Dr Rhiannon Jones

14.30 – 15.30:	Fishbowl session Chaired by Callum Bate
15.30 – 15.45: Break	
15.45 – 16.30	Keynote Presentation: Yogita (Pabari) Popat Programme Director, Strategy & Engagement, Culture and Sustainability, at Barnet Council, post of vice-president and trustee, SOCITM.
16.30 – 17.00	Closing remarks and thanks Dr Cara Courage and Dr Rhiannon Jones.

Speaker Abstracts and Biographies

Wednesday 25th June



Professor Keith McLay is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Derby, an appointment which followed two three-year stints as the Provost (Learning & Teaching) and as the University's Pro Vice Chancellor Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities & Education. Keith joined the University in January 2018 from Canterbury Christ Church University where he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Humanities while prior to that appointment he served successively as Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of History & Archaeology at the University of Chester.

An early modern military and naval historian of Britain and Europe who has published on war and warfare from the 17th to the 20th centuries, Keith holds an MA and PhD from the University of Glasgow, an MSc from the London School of Economics & Political Science and an Executive MBA from the University of Edinburgh.

As Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor McLay is principally involved in the strategic leadership and management of the University, ensuring the achievement of academic excellence, operational efficiency, and the University's strategic objectives. He maintains teaching commitments through PhD supervision and the good grace of History colleagues in the School of Humanities & Journalism, College of Arts, Humanities & Education, who allow him to contribute to the teaching on their modules relevant to his subject expertise as a historian of the early modern military and navy.



Dr Rhiannon Jones (FRSA) is Associate Professor (Civic Practice) and Head of Civic at the University of Derby. She chairs Cumulus Global Contemporary Working Art Group, is a member of the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement and Trustee of New Art Exchange, an award-winning and internationally recognised Gallery. She is on the consortium for Make/Shift, Creative People and Places ACE and on the steering group for D2 Create Growth DCMS funded project. She regularly works with Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD), Royal Society of Arts,

National Saturday Club, British Academy and Design Council UK.

Her research into placemaking is a case study for the National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange and has been presented at the All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group. She co-founded InDialogue, curating international conferences and residencies, supporting over 600 artists from over 15 countries since its inception. She founded the company S.H.E.D, a pop-up public arts space. Accolades include: finalist for Universities Alliance Award (2022), Shed of the year finalist (2020), UK Green Gown Awards: Benefiting Community (2021). She has been selected as a social regenerative entrepreneur and Social Impact and Catalyst Grant holder from, the Royal Society of Arts (2023-4).

She is a published academic with Intellect, Taylor & Francis and Palgrave and Routledge. She works closely with SOCTIM on their Towards Connect Place: Insights into Actions as invited participant at St Georges House, Windsor Castle (2024) and is a guest speaker at SOCTIM Presidents Conference, June (2024). She was a speaker for H.E Women in Leadership: Compassionate Leadership & Eco-stewardship with CHEAD and co-published a working paper with CHEAD and University of Huddersfield (2024). She is leading on Public Engagement strategy and policy through the work of S.H.E.D with Barnet Local Authority (2024), Timber Festival (2024), UKNA (2024-5) and Derbyshire County Council Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2024).



Ruchita Shaikh DL is the CEO of Artcore, an international centre for contemporary art delivering a vibrant programme of cultural and creative activities for artists and the community. She holds a range of leadership roles, shaping diversity and impact in the art, health and community sectors and works with community leaders, practitioners and individuals in under-represented communities enabling access, involvement and participation in arts and local development agenda. She is an appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Derbyshire.



Jamie Thrasivoulou is an award-winning writer, poet, lyricist and workshop facilitator from Derby. He's a passionate East Midlander who likes nothing more than extolling the virtues of his home county of Derbyshire and its near neighbours, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. He also won the project Man Up, which he collaborated on with Restoke,

received the award for Best Collaborative. He's currently the writer-in-residence at HMP Foston Hall. Jamie is also a visiting lecturer at Derby University.

Jamie wasn't always a poet. That talent was first spotted by our [Creative Writing](#) academic team. Now he's had two collections of poetry published. He's written commissions for the BBC and ITV, including a poem to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of Second World War. And his work has appeared on BBC Arts, ITV, BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio 3, and TalkSport.

But his 2018 poem *We Are Derby* for Derby County Football Club is the piece of work that continues to resonate across the city and beyond. "The Derby County stuff is massive to me," says Jamie. "Being asked to write a poem for the football club that I love and have supported since going to the Baseball Ground as a kid. That's massive. Watching my poem get played live on the big screen at Wembley Stadium at the EFL Final against Aston Villa in 2019. That was massive.

"There's not a week goes by when I don't get a message about the *We Are Derby* poem. Three years later I still get messages about how it's impacted positively on the community of Derby. All these people getting in touch: 'I love your poem, it's given me a sense of identity'; 'it was so nice to hear a Derby lad saying words about the city I love and the football club I love'."

Jamie has also written a play, [Extra Time](#), centred on the 75th anniversary of Derby County winning the FA Cup in 1946. Commissioned by [Derby Theatre](#) and Derby Creative Arts Network, it was first performed in October 2021. And he's an award winner. He won the 2018 Culture Matters Bread and Roses Award for Songwriting and Spoken Word and the 2019 Saboteur Award for Best Spoken Word Performer. He was also a member of the winning slam poetry team in both the UniSlam and the Hammer and Tongue national poetry slam finals in 2019.

<https://www.derby.ac.uk/undergraduate/student-stories/jamie/>

Speaker Abstracts and Biographies

Thursday 26th June

Keynote: Yogita Popat – Programme Director, Culture and Sustainability, London Borough of Barnet. Vice-president and trustee at SOCITM



Yogita is Programme Director, Strategy & Engagement, Culture and Sustainability, at Barnet Council, London's second largest borough; and holds the post of vice-president and trustee at SOCITM. Having only declared a climate and biodiversity emergency in 2022, the borough has been working at pace to deliver outcomes for residents; striving to become one of London's most sustainable boroughs. In 2024, Yogita took on the portfolio of Arts & Culture, working to make Barnet a destination for all through the Art in Barnet campaign.

And more recently, has taken on the Strategy & Engagement Portfolio, recognising how all these different elements play together to enable better outcomes for the residents of Barnet.

She has an extensive background in using data and insight to drive decision making, having previously headed up the councils Insight and Intelligence function, within Public Health and worked in Children's Services to deliver their improvement journey; supporting the drive to becoming one of the fastest turnaround boroughs. Yogita and her team have been working with the Uni of Derby to develop their Climate Adaptation & Resilience Framework, find out how this has gone and the impact it's had on some of the most vulnerable residents across the borough.

Speakers: Enke Huang and Richard Galpin

Title: Growing Connectivity: Driving Civic Change through Community Gardening (the case study of Walworth Community Gardening Network)

Overview: Across cities worldwide, grassroots civic groups play a vital role in shaping their public environments, from changing urban spaces to advocating for better local policies. However, these groups often face two persistent challenges: 1. navigating complicated government structures due to bureaucratic processes, securing resources, and ensuring accountability, 2. organising themselves sustainably while maintaining collective decision-making, long-term participation, and leadership renewal without burnout.

Commissioned by the Pembroke House, Enke conducted long-term ethnographic research with Walworth Community Gardening Network (WCGN), set out to address these very challenges through mapping their journey from informal activism to structured influence to civic governance in the past 8 years. For residents in council housing - where land is state-owned - community gardens became not just spaces for growing food or plants but platforms for resistance, resilience and civic negotiation. WCGN, entirely community-led, achieved what individuals never did: they successfully lobbied the local government to create a dedicated role to support them, shifting how public land is managed in a contested urban environment. This case study unpacks the mechanism of grassroots power - how networks navigate systemic barriers - bureaucracy, funding issues, and leadership burnouts, while exploring what makes community-led change sustainable.

The research was conducted over four months, employing an anthropological lens to understand the intersection of collective intelligence, governance and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. It critically examines whether distributed leadership, informal organisational models, and power negotiation allow grassroots networks to function sustainably. Employing an ethnographic and mixed-method approaches, the research involved five garden site visits; twelve contextual in-depth interviews (1-3 hours each) with WCGN leaders, council staffs, and community gardeners; archival research on key documents, newsletters, WCGN's WhatsApp group conversations, and 58 meticulously documented meeting minutes of WCGN from 2018-2022.

Biographies



Enke Huang is an anthropologist, research consultant and placemaking strategist. Over the past decade, she had led participatory research and strategy project across the UK, Europe and Asia for public institutions and research agencies. Enke's work explores participation, collective decision-making, and cross-disciplinary knowledge production in public life. Her innovative work that combines research rigour, creativity and financial acumen has won her awards like the 2023 Global Insights Leader (30-under-30), 2023 Women of the Future, and the 2019 Innovation Award by RAI.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/huangenke/>

enke.huang@gmail.com



Richard Galpin is Director of Partnerships for Pembroke House, working towards a connected, just and thriving neighbourhood in Walworth South London. Drawing on community organising, systems thinking, and creative practices, he has been working since 2021 to build the Walworth Neighbourhood Food Model, aiming to transform the food system at a neighbourhood scale, linked to policy and practice further afield. Richard is an experienced urban food grower and network builder. He founded the Alberta Fruit Commons, a community food growing project on the estate where he lives and is an active member of the Walworth Community Gardening Network and the London Freedom Seed Bank. He has been working for ten years, from his small backyard, to breed a new variety of resilient red speckled lettuce called 'The Bloody Marvel'.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/richard-galpin-3735a42b4/>

richard.galpin@pembrokehouse.org.uk

Speakers: Dr Giulia Levi and Dr Rachel Rafferty

Title: Connecting students and charities to work towards safer communities: A Community-Engaged Learning experience

Overview: This paper presents the work carried out in the B.A. (Hons) Sociology and Criminology programme to establish community-engaged learning (CEL) practices through collaborations between the University of Derby and Derby based charities. In particular, it will focus on the module “Community Solutions to Crime” which examines the contributions communities and community organisations play in preventing crime and supporting victims of crime.

This paper will explore how involving community organizations in teaching benefits students, community organizations themselves and the University as a whole. By providing testimonies from students and charities’ representatives, the paper will show how CEL practices improve students’ skills, world-awareness and employability prospects, benefit charities’ work through innovative students’ projects and strengthen UoD’s role as a Civic University by supporting its image as an open and approachable institution for the local third sector.

Biographies:



Dr Rachel Rafferty, University of Derby. I teach and research across the fields of sociology and criminology. I teach modules at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and my research has been published in academic journal articles and professional reports. My work engages with a broad range of topics relating to peace and security such as preventing violent extremism, supporting communities to reduce crime, addressing inequalities and social exclusion and resolving intergroup conflicts.



Dr Giulia Levi, University of Derby. I am a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Derby, where I teach both undergraduate and postgraduate courses on social activism, social inequalities, and war and peace studies. My research focusses on social cohesion in multicultural societies, as well as post-war memorialisation and reconciliation processes. This work is informed by my professional background in the charity sector, where I was involved in projects addressing the long-term impacts of conflict and promoting interethnic dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Speakers: Dr Claire Sedgwick, Ellie Calin and Gill Mooney

Title: Public and Community Engagement: Bridging the Gap Between Researchers and the Community

Overview: Our presentation will use the work of Teesside University's Participatory Research Fund as a case study for discussion on the intersection of community engagement and research. In our presentation, we will explore the potential benefits of participatory research for local communities, as well as drawing attention to some of the challenges. We explore the role of the university in local communities, and the importance of developing ethical and equitable relationships that do not reinforce hierarchy-based researcher and participant dynamics. We explore the extent to which university funding for community based, participatory research projects can both be a driver for challenging these hierarchies whilst at the same time unintentionally reinforcing them. We intend for our presentations to highlight both examples of innovative best practice but also sharing of the barriers to equitable research partnerships that we have encountered. Drawing upon the conference theme of connected communities our paper we argue that making creating connections takes time and an understanding of research that eschews traditional hierarchies of knowledge.

Biographies:



Claire Sedgwick: Claire Sedgwick is a Senior Impact and Engagement Manager at Teesside University where she supports the development of impact and engagement across the university. Alongside Gill she supports the Participatory Research Fund. In 2024 she co-led the Teesside University Being Human Hub. Alongside her work in impact and engagement she is an active researcher in the cultural and creative industries, with particular interest in interdisciplinary research. Before joining Teesside, she spent two years as an Impact Officer at University of Derby.



Ellie Calin: Ellie is a Public Engagement Officer at Teesside University. She plans, delivers and evaluates activities that connect the public with research. Her work includes supporting projects such as the Research England Hydrogen Innovation Project, organising central events like FameLab and Pint of Science, and delivering training through the Researcher Development Programme. Prior to this role, Ellie supported research funding applications. Before working at a university she worked in the arts and museum sector.



Gill Mooney: Gill Mooney is a Senior Impact and Engagement Manager at Teesside University. She primarily works with researchers to develop and record real world impact from their work. A significant focus of her current work is preparing for the University's REF2029 submission, alongside developing a strong culture of impact and engagement across the institution through training and engagement schemes and events. Prior to coming to the university sector, Gill worked for many years in the voluntary sector in her hometown of Hull.

Speaker: Dr Alice Marshall, University of Derby

Title: Tender Steps: Connecting Communities to Break the Silence on Baby loss Through Dance

Overview: This presentation will explore how Tender Steps exemplifies the conference theme of Connectivity by harnessing partnerships across the arts, health, and community sectors. The project was designed to bridge gaps between artistic practice

and perinatal mental health support, engaging both bereaved families and the wider public. Through collaborative working with Connected and the Work Health Hub, the film was embedded within local support networks, enabling the project to extend beyond artistic expression into meaningful civic impact. This analysis will highlight the ways Tender Steps delivered local engagement and facilitated open conversations around baby loss, while also reaching digital audiences beyond geographical boundaries. It will encourage discussion on how dance and film can act as catalysts for social connection, community healing, and cross-sector collaboration.

About Tender steps: *Tender Steps is a 10-minute dance film created to raise awareness of babyloss, produced as part of Baby loss Awareness Week 2024. Funded by Arts Council England and supported by Dance Mama, the project was developed in collaboration with local partners, including the perinatal charity Connected and the Work Health Hub. The film serves as a platform for grief, healing, and community connection, addressing an often-silenced experience through movement and digital storytelling. #tendersteps @adairetodance*

Biography:



Alice Marshall (Vale) is a Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader for Dance at the University of Derby. An accomplished academic and practitioner, she combines her expertise in choreography and pedagogy to create impactful works that engage diverse audiences and advocate for social change. Alice is the Artistic Director of Adaire to Dance, her contemporary dance company that specialises in creating touring works designed to connect with audiences new to dance. Her innovative

collaborations with Illuminos have resulted in visually compelling and thought-provoking performances, establishing her as a leader in audience engagement. Drawing from these experiences, Alice has expanded her practice to develop works that address pressing societal issues, raising awareness and dialogue through the art of dance.

Her recent ventures include exploring dance for film as a medium to convey complex themes. Projects like Long Covid Diaries and the Arts Council-funded Tender Steps exemplify her commitment to using dance as a powerful storytelling tool. Alice's research delves into the accessibility and relatability of dance, examining its capacity to entertain while provoking thought. She has shared her insights in academic discussions, contributing to the field with Routledge credentials. Alice's passion for dance transcends performance; she views it as a vehicle for meaningful change, blending artistry and advocacy to inspire and educate.

Speakers: Idrees Rasouli, Minna Sunikka-Blank and Zhuozhang Li. Anglia Ruskin University and University of Cambridge

Title: Rethinking Civic Engagement: The Case of Create Cambridge and Cambridge Room

Overview: Civic engagement is transforming as cities seek more inclusive, accessible, and active place-based participation that integrates cultural and social values. This shift embraces joined-up thinking and approaches that are contextual, ecological, strategic, and systematic. It is fundamental for an 'equitable and inclusive society' that values democratic problem-solving for social cohesion, especially in cities like Cambridge where deep-rooted social and spatial inequalities co-exist in one of the UK's fastest growing cities.

This paper explores how Create Cambridge (a new cultural compact for Cambridge City region) and Cambridge Room (a collaborative space for the improvement of the built environment in Cambridge) serve as models for fostering connected practices to influence citizen's involvement, trust, and representation in meaningful research and innovation. It examines a) how Create Cambridge promotes civic participation by making cultural and social knowledge accessible, fostering intergenerational dialogue, and allowing residents to see themselves as active agents in shaping their city's future; and b) how Cambridge Room focuses on community consultation and widening participation in urban planning through projects like 'Living Atlas of Community Activism', 'Let's Go Fly the Kite', 'Book of Cambridge', and 'Sharing Knowledge is Shared Power - Community Group Research Symposium'.

By rethinking civic engagement through the lens of place-based research, this paper explores how such community-centred, geographically bounded initiatives provide opportunities for driving collective change and how conscious and creative engagement strengthens civic ties, offering insights for other cities and academic institutions seeking to build connected communities through place-based research.

Biographies:

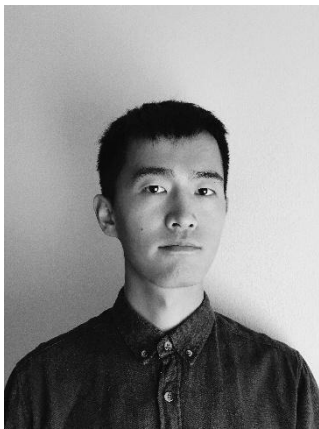


Dr Idrees Rasouli is an award-winning designer, academic, and researcher of products, processes, and places who specialises in [Design and Innovation for Urban Justice and a Post-Oil World]. Driven by a passion for [arts and design that heals, prepares, and transforms], Idrees currently serves as Associate Professor of Design and Urban Innovation at Anglia Ruskin University [Cambridge, UK], building successful ecosystems and partnerships to support the needs of regional

and international communities, industries, and governments. He is the Director of inter/transdisciplinary postgraduate courses at the Cambridge School of Art with a particular focus on ethical, inclusive, and systemic education, research, and practice. Idrees is the Founder & Creative Director of X-Crop, a Cambridge-based research and innovation lab focused on making cities, organisations, and people better by design. He is also a Co-Founder & Co-Lead of Create Cambridge, ensuring that Cambridge can become a globally recognised champion of creativity and innovation.



Professor Minna Sunikka-Blank is Professor of Architecture and Environmental Policy at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Churchill College. Her research focuses on sustainable urban development and social equity. She has led the AHRC-funded Filming Energy project and an ESRC IAA project on solar energy transitions in rural India, employing participatory filmmaking to document women's energy transitions and lived experiences in low-income housing. Her work has been featured in the BBC Arts Animated Thinking series. In Cambridge, she co-leads Behaviour and Building Performance (BBP) research group and Global Energy Nexus in Urban Settlements (GENUS) network, and is a member of the Cambridge Room team. She is a registered architect and served as a jury member for the Stirling Prize 2024.



Dr Zhuozhang Li is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Cambridge. As an interdisciplinary urban scholar his research focuses on two themes: inclusive urban design, and co-production of urban knowledge through creative methods. These two interwoven strands form the core of his work at the Cambridge Room, where he works with local communities to co-create a 'one-stop-shop' for community consultation. Alongside research and teaching, his recent curatorial practice includes 'Location, Imagination and Transformation (Hong Kong, 2024)', 'Planting and Placemaking (Liverpool, 2024)', 'Traces Under the Surface (Beijing, 2023)', and 'Knowledge is Power (Tate Liverpool, 2020)'.

Speaker: Dr Bethan Garrett, Lancaster University

Title: Morecambe Bay Curriculum; a place-based, teacher-led movement for Sustainability

Overview: In 2019, teachers and educators around Morecambe Bay were inspired by The Eden Project's decision to locate its next venture in the North-West of England. This action challenged typical views of Morecambe as a deprived coastal town and instead

highlighted the special nature of the Bay, which is one of the largest and most biodiverse intertidal areas in the country. Lancaster University were key partners from the start and have been working to support local educators across all age phases ever since. This presentation recounts the story of how the Morecambe Bay Curriculum (MBC) grew out of the desire and will of the community to embed place and sustainability into their educational offers, and reflects on the civic role of the university in making this happy.

The Morecambe Bay Curriculum is an educator-led movement, which is supported by a partnership board of Lancaster University, University of Cumbria, Lancaster and Morecambe College and Eden project. As founder members, Lancaster University have invested a team of dedicated staff to ensure that the dream and vision of the teachers could be brought to life. Since its inception, we have helped to deliver over 30 teacher-led projects and educators have been meeting on a monthly basis to share ideas and find innovative ways to bring place-based education to life. However, we have also managed to bring some structure to the grass-roots nature of the movement, without losing the original passion and dedication of the educators; we have developed an agreed theory of change model, a membership scheme and reformed the working groups to open up the opportunities more broadly.

Our largest project to date involved academics from the university working with local teachers from Early Years to Further Education, in order to co-design curriculum resources. These took a place-based approach to education, combining the cutting-edge expert knowledge of sustainability from the university, with teachers' expertise in curriculum design and what would motivate their students. The resulting materials are now being used across the Bay and demonstrate the power which university-community collaborations can have. This is just the beginning of the MBC and we share plans for our next steps, including how we can develop further resources for schools but also take more steps into the community itself.

Biography:



Dr Beth Garrett's role is Lecturer in the Morecambe Bay Curriculum at Lancaster University. Based in the Department of Educational Research, she works on the development and evaluation of the university's flagship place-based education initiative, which connects educators, academics and the wider local community. The MBC team facilitates six teacher-led working groups, has delivered over 30 projects and has recently developed a suite of co-designed resources which were created by university lecturers and local teachers. The ultimate aim is to ensure every child around Morecambe Bay has access to high quality, environmental education. Beyond the MBC, Beth has research interests in teacher motivation, music education and coastal learning. She teaches on Education

and Social Justice programmes, is developing work in environmental justice and co-leads the North West Beach School network.

Speakers: Salim Murad, PhD and Patricie Kyslíková, BA. Representing: EMMIR (Erasmus Mundus in Migration and Intercultural Studies)

Title: Young Urbanist - Change Starts With Understanding of the Place Where I Live: Strengthening Civic Connectivity Through Community-Led Participatory Art Research.

Overview: The city and public space play an important role in civic life, yet young people are often excluded from critically engaging with them. The Young Urbanist methodology offers students and pupils tools from urbanism, social work, and visual sociology to deconstruct the places where they live or study. Through this interdisciplinary approach, students develop sensitivity to diversity, power structures, and community dynamics. The city becomes an open classroom, where photography, mapping, and semi-structured interviews foster civic awareness and media literacy.

The research, using a qualitative strategy and art-based methods, was conducted in Český Krumlov with students from local and international schools (EMMIR, NYU). It explored two main objectives: 1) understanding the current urban situation in Český Krumlov from the perspective of locals and students, and 2) comparing graffiti in Český Krumlov, the Máj housing estate in České Budějovice, and Stavanger, Norway. The research revealed that real life takes place in housing estates, not in the tourist-oriented city center, which is perceived as unaffordable, inaccessible, and depopulated. Informants expressed a need for civic-friendly spaces and more authentic, inclusive public life.

The graffiti analysis enabled intercultural dialogue and highlighted graffiti as a global form of self-expression and defiance. While Český Krumlov's graffiti is diverse but concentrated, Stavanger offers legal platforms for creation, and the Máj housing estate shows graffiti as a form of youth expression. The findings show how urban space, art, and power relations intersect and how participatory methods can equip social workers and educators to promote community resilience and critical engagement among youth.

The findings show how urban space, art, and power relations intersect and how participatory methods can equip social workers and educators to promote community resilience and critical engagement among youth through place-based learning.

Biography:



Salim Murad is engaged in research and teaching in political science and migration studies at the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. There, he also oversees the international master's program EMMIR (European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations – www.emmir.org), which he helped establish in the Czech Republic. As of currently, he leads Horizon project Yourope. In his teaching, he focuses on topics such as citizenship,

citizenship education, and participation. He also explores innovative approaches to citizenship education at the intersection of social work and political science. He was a founding member of the team behind the Grammar School of the Nation's Memory, where he also taught social sciences. Since 2007, he has been lecturing at New York University in Prague, where he teaches the course Advertising and Consumer Society.



Patricie Kyslíková is a social worker and young researcher currently pursuing a Master's in Management of Social Work in Organizations at the University of South Bohemia. Her academic and practical work centers on cultural humility, youth participation, and intersectionality. She is part of the Horizon Europe project YOUROPE, where she develops participatory strategies to strengthen democratic engagement among underrepresented youth. She collaborates closely with Romani and

queer communities and has led international workshops on anti-bias education, place-based education, and social justice. As part of the EMMIR program (European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations), she contributes to intercultural learning, research and connects students with community-based initiatives in excluded localities.

Speakers: Mark Scott, Research Fellow – Warwick Business School. Salla Virman, Head of Culture and Creative Economy – Coventry City Council

Title: Empowering Communities Through Place-Based Cultural Research: The Coventry Experience and Its Civic Impact

Overview: Focusing on Coventry's approach, this paper underscores the importance of place-based research in building inclusive, connected communities, particularly as universities increasingly embrace their civic roles. The paper illustrates how hyper-local,

data-informed strategies and tools – like the Joint Cultural Needs Assessment and Coventry Cultural Place Profiler can drive cultural participation and support equitable outcomes in a city with vast inequalities. The UK City of Culture 2021 initiative served as a pivotal moment for the city, where participatory governance, citizen input, and geospatial data identified areas of need and guided cultural investments with the broader ambition to tackle socio-economic disparities through culture-led regeneration.

Moreover, the paper highlights innovative civic engagement strategies, such as citizen assemblies and co-designed services, that empower communities to shape local policy. It presents Coventry as a model for how universities can extend their influence beyond traditional research, contributing directly to urban planning and cultural strategy. By evaluating the legacy and ongoing impact of the City of Culture programme, the presentation offers critical insights and transferable lessons for other civic universities stressing the need for sustained, collaborative frameworks that align cultural efforts with wider place-based goals, ensuring the longevity and resilience of local cultural ecosystems.

Biography:



Mark Scott is a Research Fellow at Warwick Business School who is an early career researcher whose research focus is the evaluation of Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 and the legacies of other major sporting and cultural events. Mark was a contributor to the AHRC-funded Warwick Cities of Culture project which demonstrates the importance of independent research sitting alongside a UK City of Culture. Mark contributed to the development of the Joint Cultural Needs Assessment

Guidelines for Arts Council England and led the development team for the creation of the Coventry Cultural Place Profiler, a digital tool which brings cultural and non-cultural data together. Mark has recently been appointed to the DCMS College of Experts panel.



Currently the Head of Culture and Creative Economy at Coventry City Council, **Salla Virman** is an experienced senior leader in the culture and creative industries sector. Prior to joining Coventry City Council, Salla worked as the Strategic Lead for Culture for the West Midlands Combined Authority, setting up the culture policy area and working on a number of strategic regional initiatives. Prior to this this worked as a senior manager at Arts Council England, leading on projects such as the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. Salla has over 25 years of experience in working in the cultural

sector in various senior roles, both in the UK and internationally, including USA and her native Finland. She holds an MBA from Aston Business School (2023), an MA in Arts Management and a BA in Media Production and has been a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts since 2017

Speakers: Dr. Rachel Macrorie and Dr. Jennifer Vanderpool

Title: Neighbourhood Assembly: Arts-led, co-productive research & practice for energy-efficient and healthy homes

Overview: The UK's approach to retrofitting homes needs a radical overhaul if we are to make the scale of upgrades required to meet net zero targets and deliver the cross-cutting social, economic and health benefits that will directly impact on people's everyday lives. Too often overlooked in favour of technological fixes and economic incentives, local communities are central to the drive to make the nation's existing homes more energy-efficient and sustainable. The urgency and scale of home energy retrofit required also demands skills development and training to build the necessary labour force, presenting clear opportunities to generate quality green jobs, boost regional supply chains and create thriving economies. At present, these opportunities are being overlooked.

We set out a co-creative methodology which assembles diverse partners (from academia, industry, policy, the third sector, and community representatives) in a co-designed process, to generate an inclusive, mobile research and innovation (R&I) space in and through which we investigate opportunities for citizen-led home energy retrofit at the neighbourhood scale. The touring socially engaged, arts-led R&I space, encourages engagement from marginalised and disaffected groups of residents, exploring their ideas, identities, tacit knowledges, expertise, and DIY maker abilities through a range of media (including printmaking, crafting, filmmaking, and oral histories). Located in four socio-economically deprived and culturally diverse residential districts of Nottingham and Derby (D2N2 region), the R&I workshop space will lead to a co-curated public exhibition and symposium, a co-created public mural and reflection on process, and will contribute to academic and policy recommendations.

Biography:



Rachel Macrorie is an urban and environmental geographer whose research agenda focuses on the governance and politics of just urban transformations to decarbonised economies and societies. Her research considers multiple urban domains, governance levels and diverse types of stakeholders. Her current interests include; the governance of home energy retrofit set against the

context of regional devolution, the role of industrialised construction and offsite prefabrication in addressing the affordable housing crisis and decarbonising existing homes, inclusive vocational education and training (VET) as a means to strengthen skills and grow the workforce for the domestic repair, maintenance and improvement (RMI) sector, and bottom-up creative engagement processes that place citizens at the heart of neighbourhood-scale retrofit and placemaking. She is a Research Fellow in the School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment (ADBE) at Nottingham Trent University (NTU). She previously held research and teaching contracts at CRESR (Sheffield Hallam University), Utrecht University (The Netherlands) and The Urban Institute (University of Sheffield).



Jennifer Vanderpool is a Los Angeles-based multidisciplinary artist whose practice creates a storytelling platform as a mode of public discourse that underscores structural inequalities and calls for social reform. Vanderpool has exhibited solo shows at museums and galleries in the U.S., Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, the UK, Denmark, Sweden, Ukraine, Russia, and Vietnam. Her practice

received funding from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the **Visual Arts**, the British Academy Leverhulme Trust, the US-UK Fulbright Commission, the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Ohio Arts Council, National Endowment for the Arts Challenge America Grant, Kunstrådet: Danish Arts Council, Kulturrådet: Swedish Arts Council, Malmö Stad, and Deindustrialization and the Politics of Our Time, a partnership with the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. She is a Lecturer in the Art Department at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Guest Speakers

Adam Ellis Leach: Programme Director, National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA)



Adam established and now leads the National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA), a nationwide ‘what-works’ initiative, funded by Research England, designed to deepen the civic impact of universities across the country. He leads a team of professionals at Sheffield Hallam University and multi-disciplinary teams across NCIA partner organisations across the UK. Previously a civil servant, Adam specialised in complex data analysis and intelligence to improve national education policy, improving educational outcomes

from the early years to adulthood, developing regional strategies to address skills gaps, and leveraging the power and resources of educational organisations like universities to drive positive societal change.

Outline of talk: Adam will explore the all-encompassing nature of civic engagement and its transformative potential for universities, communities and places. His speech will highlight recent publications from the National Civic Impact Accelerator such as the Theory of Civic Change, discuss the evolving national policy landscape, and share some international best practices. Attendees will gain fresh insights and practical ideas to help their institutions drive meaningful civic impact.

Dave Tuer: Innovation Lead, EMCCA (East Midlands County Combined Authority)



Dave is Innovation Lead for the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA). He established its Innovation Advisory Board (IAB), and is leading work to identify, evidence and articulate the region’s innovation strengths.

Previously, he led on innovation and analytics for the Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (D2N2 LEP), where his analytical work focussed on skills and the labour market.

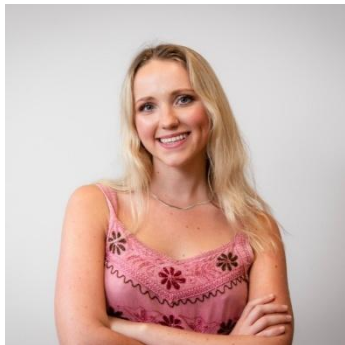
Before that, he worked in knowledge exchange at the University of Nottingham, with responsibility for its HEIF allocation, managing an SME growth programme, and enabling management of the Enabling Innovation SME engagement programme.

Increasingly aware of his creative streak, he is an experienced performer, producer and teacher of improvised comedy theatre. He holds a leadership role in the Nottingham

improv community, and is well connected to other improv scenes nationally and internationally.

Outline of talk: Dave will be highlighting the importance of effective local collaboration and consortia in the context of devolution, outlining the work done to date on regional innovation strengths, and sharing some of the emerging thinking from within EMCCA on economic and social opportunities for the East Midlands.

Daisy Carter: Senior Service & Systems Designer, The RSA (Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce)



Daisy is a design and systems practitioner focused on community-led innovation and place-based change. She works on programmes that strengthen social connection, support inclusive growth, and build collective capacity for locally led transformation.

***Outline of talk:* How connected we are, and who we're connected to, profoundly shapes our life experiences and life chances. Yet while most of us instinctively understand the value of relationships, social capital remains overlooked in policy and strategy, hard to measure, underfunded in practice, and weakened by the erosion of civic spaces where people meet.**

Drawing on new research mapping six billion Facebook friendships across the UK, this talk explores why connection- especially across lines of difference- is one of the strongest predictors of mobility and wellbeing, and why in all of this, place really matters.

Through the RSA's Connected Places programme, we're working with communities in Ealing, Essex and Baltimore to map and strengthen social capital at a regional and neighbourhood level.

We'll share early learning from this work, including how we're combining asset-based community development with place-level data to identify what's already strong, what's missing, and what could be reimagined. It will introduce a growing global network of practitioners committed to valuing, measuring, and investing in the power of relationships. Ultimately, we make the case for rethinking how we design, fund, and measure connection, because the relationships that help us thrive shouldn't be left to luck.

Conference Organising committee



Dr Rhiannon Jones (FRSA) is Associate Professor (Civic Practice) and Head of Civic at the University of Derby. She chairs Cumulus Global Contemporary Working Art Group, is a member of the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement and Trustee of New Art Exchange, an award-winning and internationally recognised Gallery. She is on the consortium for Make/Shift, Creative People and Places ACE and on the steering group for D2 Create Growth DCMS funded project. She regularly works with Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD), Royal Society of Arts,

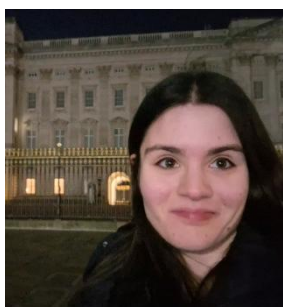
National Saturday Club, British Academy and Design Council UK.



Callum Bate is the Civic Operations Officer at University of Derby. He has a background of working with charities and arts organisations, most recently looking after RSA Fellowship Engagement in Central England. He has a strong passion for community focused work, social action, and the role arts and culture has to play in this.



Jordan Carr is the Civic Coordinator at the University of Derby. Jordan's background is in the retail industry and is a graduate of the University of Derby History programme.



Jorja Hooper is the Civic Event Coordinator at the University of Derby. Jorja's background is in the hospitality industry and is a current undergraduate student at the University of Derby Business Management programme.

Past CivicLAB™ Conferences

The CivicLAB™ is led by Dr Rhiannon Jones, Associate Professor (Civic) at the University of Derby. CivicLAB™ is located centrally to the University's core business, within the Provost of Learning and Teaching. The work of CivicLAB™ supports the six academic themes, with close alignment to Cultural and Creative Industries. It is an interdisciplinary group that cuts across research and innovation, and teaching and learning. Find out more at derby.ac.uk/civic/civic-lab/

CivicLAB™ Symposium 2021

The online Symposium presented the work of researchers, artists and creative industry colleagues from across the UK, including international colleagues from Venice, Finland and USA. Each speaker focused on participatory culture, creative dialogue and experiential design for social impact. Questions asked included how we build communities and how can we create the conditions in which those communities can sustainably develop, innovate and thrive within the social, economic, environmental and cultural challenges of the 21st century.

CivicLAB™ Symposium 2022

The second CivicLAB™ Symposium called for participation from practitioners and academics who centered their research and teaching practice on participatory culture, creative dialogue and experiential design for social impact. CivicLAB™ Symposium 2022 explored, discussed and reimagined the value of creative practice to the public sphere with a special theme on 'Designing for Civility and Cultural Impact'. The Symposium explored how we build civic communities and how practitioners and academics create the conditions in which those communities can sustainably develop, innovate and thrive.

CivicLAB™ Conference 2023

This event was the third CivicLAB™ Conference, hosted by the University of Derby in partnership with Derby County Community Trust and Artcore. The conference explored this through a series of presentations, keynotes, workshops, networking sessions and a community meal. The conference setting provided a thinking space to bring together participants from academia, creative and cultural industry, third sector and freelance practitioners. Together, discussions took place in relation to approaches to building civic practice, research and community capacity as a means of addressing long-standing social issues.

Read our Civic University Agreement



To find out more about CivicLAB™ visit our website



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Fifth Annual Conference for CivicLAB™

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