Project Highlights:

- Opportunity to engage with live research projects
- Work with non-academic partners to conduct socially responsible research
- Develop skills in mixed methods approaches in design research

Project Description:

Design is essentially an activity that aims to create better futures. As designers are becoming more and more aware of the cultural, social and environmental implications of their work, design thinking and design action also becomes more commonplace among non-experts who are able to lead the development of solutions relevant to their own situation. Design activism, community-led design and creative citizenship are some of the terms used to describe design activity that is generated and carried out from the grassroots.

We are looking for a design PhD student to conduct research focussed on co-design, design activism and social innovation particularly in the context of placemaking. Examples include co-designing interventions in public spaces, re-imagining unused places or places of untapped potential, or co-designing services to meet the needs of excluded or disadvantaged communities. The research will look to advance knowledge on the conditions that influence collective design action and leadership (human and social conditions, such as skills, emotions and social structures), and the methods and practices that can facilitate it (processes, tools, technologies).

The student may be using a variety of methodologies from ethnographic studies, to interviews and experimental methods to explore these issues, and will be expected to work directly with groups and organisations engaged in collective design activities.

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**Project title:** Co-designing futures  
**Discipline:** Design  
**Key words:** Co-design, participatory design, design futures, social innovation, community leadership in design  
**Supervisory team:** Katerina Alexiou and Theodore Zamenopoulos  
**URL for lead supervisor’s OU profile**  
http://www.open.ac.uk/people/aka56  
http://www.open.ac.uk/people/tz98

**Figures:** Examples of community-designed futures from the Prototyping Utopias and Creative Citizens projects, funded by AHRC
The project will contribute to expanding our understanding of design as collective action and how it can be better facilitated.

The student will benefit from access to a variety of organisations and grassroots initiatives working in design projects building on work conducted by the supervisors in the last 9 years.

**Research Methods:**
The project is expected to employ a primarily abductive research approach, aiming to develop knowledge based on observations and reflections from real design actions. The student will be expected to use a mixed methods approach i.e. combining qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse data.

**References**

**Further details:**
Students should have a strong background in design and enthusiasm for participatory design. Experience in co-design and/or practice-based research is desirable.

Please contact Katerina Alexiou and Theodore Zamenopoulos to discuss your proposal:
katerina.alexiou@open.ac.uk, theodore.zamenopoulos@open.ac.uk

**Candidate Applications**
Applications should include:
- A 1000 word cover letter outlining why the project is of interest to you and how your skills match those required
- an academic CV containing contact details of three academic references
- Open University application form
- Applicants will need to demonstrate good competence in the English language. International students need an overall IELTS score of 6.5 with no less than 6.0 in any of the four categories of reading writing, speaking and listening.

Applications should be sent to STEM-EI-PhD@open.ac.uk by 28.02.20