E&I Research Studentship project proposal 2019

Project title: Collective Design Futures

Supervisory team:
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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 collective design futures, particularly the how and why collective design action is fuelled. This includes understanding the key conditions that influence collective design action (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 experimental methods to explore these issues and will be expected to work directly with groups and organisations engaged in collective design activities.

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 8 years.

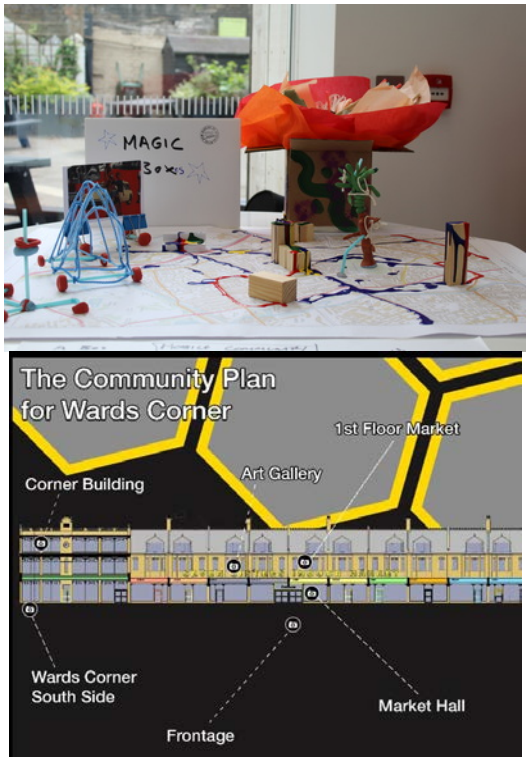

Figure 1: *Examples of community-designed futures from the Prototyping Utopias and Creative Citizens projects, funded by AHRC*

Research Methods:

The project is expected to employ a primarily abductive research approach, aiming to develop knowledge based on observations 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.

Indication of project timeline:

Year 1: Conduct literature review and identify non-academic partners for the research
Year 2: Conduct field-work
Year 3: Analyse data and complete thesis write-up.

References

1. Ehn, P., Nilsson, E., and Topgaard, R. (eds.) (2014) *Making Futures: Marginal Notes on Innovation, Design, and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

2. Hargreaves, I and Hartley, J. (eds.) (2016) *The Creative Citizen Unbound: How social media and DIY culture contribute to democracy, communities and the creative economy.* Bristol: Policy Press.
3. Manzini, E. (2015) *Design, when everybody designs: An introduction to design for social innovation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
4. Sanoff, H., (2011) 'Multiple Views of Participatory Design' *Focus* 8:1
5. Tavory, I. and Timmermans, S. (2014) *Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
6. Zamenopoulos, T. and Alexiou, K. (2018) *Co-Design as Collaborative Research* in Facer, K and Dunleavy, K. (eds.) Connected Communities Foundation Series. Bristol: AHRC Connected Communities/ University of Bristol.

Candidate Applications

- 1000 word cover letter outlining how they are equipped in their educational background and expertise to conduct the research project,
- a CV including contact details of two academic references
- An Open University application form, downloadable from: http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process (Note: This is an Advertised studentship and you do not need to submit a proposal).
- IELTs English Language test scores on application. An average of 6.5 and no less than 6 in anyone of the four components. Applicant should have these results when applying.

Applications should be sent to STEM-EI-Research@open.ac.uk by 28 February 2019