

# The Ripple

HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES

THE **BINKS** HUB



## ALTERNATIVE FUTURES: WHO DECIDES?

The honest inclusion of community voices in decision-making

Published by the University of Edinburgh

Text © Images © The Ripple Project & The Binks Hub 2024

The authors have asserted their rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the authors of this work. This book is published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC 4.0),

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Attribution: The Ripple Project & The Binks Hub, 2024

*Alternative Futures: Who decides? The honest inclusion of community voices in decision-making*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh.

<https://doi.org/10.2218/ED.9781836450788>

Any third-party material in this book is not covered by the book's Creative Commons license.

Details of the copyright ownership and permitted use of third-party material is given in the image credit lines. If you would like to reuse any third-party material not covered by the book's Creative Commons license, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright owner.

ISBN (ebook): 978-1-83645-078-8

ISBN (paperback): 978-1-83645-077-1

DOI: 10.2218/ED.9781836450788

Published by the University of Edinburgh



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



EDINBURGH  
DIAMOND

# The Ripple

HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES



## **The Ripple Project:**

Rachel Green  
Todd Bielotti  
Danielle Ward  
Dawn Baxter  
Mallory Hybl

## **The Binks Hub:**

Jimmy Turner  
Autumn Roesch-Marsh  
Amrita Puri  
Kirstin Lamb  
Rhiannon Bull

## **Lead Artists:**

Bobby Sayers  
Jenny Capon

## **University of Edinburgh Library:**

Nel Coleman  
Rebecca Wojturska

## **With the support of:**



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
Library



UK Research  
and Innovation  
Future Leaders Fellows  
Development Network

## **Special thanks to:**

The Binks Trust, whose funding of the Binks Hub financed this project.

# ALTERNATIVE FUTURES: WHO DECIDES?

## contents

<b>1</b>	Executive Summary
<b>2-3</b>	Overview
<b>4-5</b>	Why It Matters: A Note from The Ripple Project
<b>6</b>	Project Outcomes
<b>7-8</b>	Green Spaces
<b>9-10</b>	Community & Civic Spaces
<b>11-12</b>	Recognising & Validating Lived Experience
<b>13</b>	Call to Action: What's Next?
<b>14</b>	Resources
<b>15</b>	Project Partners



# executive summary

## GREEN SPACES

- Community members want more and better green spaces in their local area.
- When spaces are managed without consultation with and direction from the community, these spaces can easily become detrimental to community wellbeing.

## COMMUNITY

- Community spaces for meeting, socialising, and acting together are vital for wellbeing, but sorely lacking in Restalrig, Lochend and Craigentenny.
- People want spaces that are community owned and community controlled with no economic bar to usage.

## INVOLVEMENT

- Policy-making that draws on the depth of local experience, knowledge and wisdom is essential to ensuring successful policy decisions.
- People want to be not just consulted, but also actively engaged in decision-making.
- Inclusion should be using methods that allow community members voices to be heard best.

**“Listen to the people, the community, and  
its collective wisdom”**

# overview



**Image above:** Staff from the Ripple project and local community members viewing a finished piece from the ‘Past’ focused part of the research project.

**The following report is a call to action. It describes the outcomes from a research partnership between “The Ripple Project”, a Community Centre serving Restalrig, Lochend and Craigentenny, and the “Binks Hub”, a research group based at the University of Edinburgh.**

This collaboration has highlighted both a strong desire for improvements in core areas – such as community and green spaces – and demand from the community that their voices be heard on their own terms. Community members feel excluded from decision-making processes, despite prior engagement attempts from local and national government. They feel that lip service is paid to their local knowledge and lived experience, but they are not able to set the foundational terms on which policies are formed.

The collaboration shows that different ways of working together are possible: ways that allow community knowledge to be brought to the forefront and which deliver more efficient outcomes that will have a much greater positive impact on the communities being served.

# overview

## THE RIPPLE: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

The Ripple Project, Binks Hub and artists Bobby Sayers and Jenny Capon ran workshops and art-making sessions. Here community members communicated their knowledge and experiences of the area's past, its present lived reality, and their hopes, needs and demands for its future.

### THE PAST

---

We used the three-decade history of the Ripple Project and worked with members of their Older People's Group to communicate their stories and remembrances through an artistic timeline, which was produced by artist Jenny Capon.

### THE PRESENT

---

The 'Present' project used a merging of focus group and tapestry weaving methods to build a community-led view of the area. This challenges the 'official' view built through the Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data.

### THE FUTURE

---

The future was explored through: a series of workshops with children and young people in which they drew their dreams for the area in 2050 onto a collective map; and workshops at which artist Bobby Sayers invited community members to communicate their hopes and dreams, and therefore needs and wants, for the future of the area through ceramics.



# why it matters

## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE RIPPLE PROJECT

**As the Director of a charity based in an area of North East Edinburgh, living in the community and working as a community development practitioner for 30 years, words like “multiple deprivation”, “lived experience” and, more recently, “wellbeing” and “flourishing” have been persistent elements of my career vocabulary.**



**Rachel Green**  
**Director of the Ripple Project**

It has, however, also been my experience that the policies and practices of governments, statutory partners and funders to tackle the causes and effects of deprivation have not led to sustained change in communities that are steeped in poverty and disadvantage. Such policies reflect little awareness of what matters to local people in their community and do not invest in the aspects that allow people to flourish.

Projects like this matter because people matter. For too long our community has been the target of regeneration policies that are missing the mark. With diminishing resources there is an ever increasing need for smarter and more effective investment that will actually make a difference to people’s lives. Short-term solutions do not illicit long-term change. Retracted services do not save money.



Recognising that people are experts in their own lives and using procedures that rely on joint decision-making based on dialogue that facilitates an understanding between partners and the community can provide more cost-effective, more satisfying and more sustained change in a community that benefits all parties.

Communities are complex, not complicated and so a one size fits all approach does not work. We need to understand our communities, trust in them and start behaving differently. The systems we have are not broken, they were built that way. We need to call this out and be brave enough to learn from the past, take stock of where we are and plan a different future.



**Image above:** Community members at the 'Future' phase ceramics workshop at the Ripple Project.

**This project has highlighted that there are readily achievable ways of learning from the experiences and insights of community members. We used creative and artistic methods as we found that these enabled people to engage their imaginations to explore their hopes for the future. Similarly tailored, targeted work that brings in lived experience at the start is economically viable and absolutely necessary.**

# project outcomes

Over 200 community members were involved in the project, and together they developed several significant themes. Of these three key outcomes were expressed most clearly and widely. Two of these, the importance of well-tended green spaces and the hunger for more communal and social spaces, reflected central prominent and clearly expressed desires from the participants. The third and most frequently emphasised demand was to be at the forefront of decision-making which affects the area. They want increased control through collaborating in setting agendas and priorities based on their lived experience and deep knowledge of their communities.

## THREE CORE THEMES

1

A call for more green spaces, and for the management of greenery and green space in the local area to be improved.

2

A call for investment in more community and civic spaces in the local area.

3

A call for the lived experiences and wisdom of community members to be recognised and validated.



# the call for...

## THE IMPROVED MANAGEMENT OF GREEN SPACES

Community members consistently emphasised the importance of green spaces in the local area. They highlighted the need for these to be maintained properly and for the negative issues of the area – rubbish, litter, fly tipping and unkempt areas – to be addressed with a sustained approach built upon the expertise and local knowledge held by residents within the community.

## THE LOVE OF NATURE & GREEN SPACES

- “ I’ve been having my coffee in the little park in the morning and the sun was shining and it’s just so nice and people start smiling
- “ I don’t need a garden, I have a whole walk-in park, I just go there every spring and summer and meditate, read whatever and meet friends

## THE CHALLENGES RAISED

- “ All this trash on the street and faeces it just doesn’t make you feel good at all
- “ It just feels like when you see all this some part of you is kind of dying
- “ It’s a depressing area to live in



The focus group run by Rachel Green with community members offered the opportunity to them to share their views on the present state of the area. This focus group discussion led to the design of our community tapestry. This emphasised just how important nature, the environment and green spaces were to community wellbeing. In this design the greens of the tapestry merge and meet with yellows and golds, chosen to represent love of and pride in the area and the social connections which make it a community.



**Image above right:** A section of ‘Community Malflourishing - Who Decides?’ the Tapestry produced as part of the ‘Present’ phase of the project.



**Image above left:** A ceramic tile produced by a community member for ‘Manifesting the Future’ artwork. They communicated that it represents the importance of caring for the environment.

These themes were echoed by many of the 100 community members who contributed to ceramic images of the future. Members of our team who researched the workshops ethnographically noted how frequently participants recognised that care for green space is not only vital for community wellbeing, but also planetary health. Well cared-for green space and nature is necessary at all scales.

Residents emphasised that the problem was not simply that green spaces were not in existence, and not solely that they were poorly maintained. It was also that decision-making on green spaces neglected their own desires, hopes, and local knowledge. This neglect led to poor and often wasteful decision-making on the part of the local council, with investment going to the wrong areas, and mismanagement of local resources.

“People want more green space in their communities, and they want power over how it is done. They know whether trees, flowers or grass would be better in a given space!”





# the call for...

## INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY AND CIVIC SPACES

Our research revealed just how important the Ripple is as a space in which community members can gather together. Participants in the design of the tapestry talked about the “great community spirit” in the area, and how the Ripple is a vital community resource, but not one that can do everything.

More community spaces which are free to use and in which all members of the community can gather and socialise without needing to spend money were widely called for. People communicated to us that no matter how strong the community spirit and pride in the area may be, without more physical spaces in which they can come together as a community, it can never reach its potential.

## THE CHALLENGES RAISED

- “ If you want to go and do something at night you have to go out of the area
- “ [The area can feel like] just a place to go where you have your meals, sleep and then you get up and go to your work
- “ There could be a weekly open-air market or a jumble where people can come together every week and hang out. As of now, there is just ‘The Ripple’

A recurring theme in the research was that spaces for the community to come together bring multiple benefits. One group of white men told us that they wanted to get to know their neighbours of different races, religions and cultures better, but the community lacks such spaces that are welcoming and comfortable for all. Others stressed the key role community plays in reducing isolation and improving mental health.



**Image above right:** A ceramic tile produced by a community member for ‘Manifesting the Future’ artwork. The community member explained that it depicts people working together to heal mental scars - a bandage over a wounded brain.



**Image above left:** a section of ‘Imagining Restalrig in 2050: a youth view’ in which children drew the sports, play and garden spaces which they saw as vital for their future.

In focus groups and workshops when we asked community members about their priorities for the future, they told us that children and young people having more spaces to socialise, and which are free to use, was very important. This was reflected in the artworks produced by children and young people, which was full of demands for more spaces in which to be together.

Even within a capital city which is renowned for culture and full of leisure and social activities, communities like Restalrig, Lochend and Craigentenny can easily feel isolated and limiting to residents. The requirements to travel and, too frequently, to pay to enjoy community and cultural spaces limits communities such as these. They stressed to us in our research that all areas should have multiple spaces and places where communities can come together irrespective of income.

“[It is a] multifaceted area that needs more resources and community gathering areas – but it is ready to grow!”



# the call for...

## THE VALIDATION AND RECOGNITION OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

Throughout the project, community members expressed very clearly to us that they want to be even more deeply involved in decision-making which affects them and their area. They had strong feelings, lived experience, and wisdom about what would and would not work. They demanded to be given a choice!

When asked what they wanted to say to those with the power and influence to make changes, they stressed that policy-making that doesn't draw on the depth of local experience, knowledge and wisdom is bound to fall short.

### COMMUNITY MESSAGES TO POLICY MAKERS

---

- “ Collaborate with locals and groups about decisions affecting them
- “ Listen to the residents and work with them
- “ Listen to what people want and their thoughts and culture, to know who they are
- “ Take into account the ideas and opinions of the community that live here and are most affected about these decisions
- “ Listen to the people who live here properly, this would make a change

At the Binks Hub we specialise in conducting participatory research with communities which is driven by their priorities, interests and curiosities, and which is conducted in a mode through which they feel comfortable communicating. As social scientists we use a range of traditional methods, including interviews, focus groups and ethnography, but we also integrate artistic and creative methods. We do this because whilst it may be more difficult to integrate the outcomes of this approach into policy and impact activities, it can afford participants greater control and influence over the focus and direction of the research.

Surveys and opinion polling are commonly-used methods for research at a community-scale. They are effective large-scale tools, but they are by necessity directive, with questions, categories and themes being predetermined. Using creative methods as we did in this project makes it possible to start with a 'blank page' and allow communities to define and decide the key themes and priorities that are most important to them.

Collaboration with experienced participatory artists like Bobby Sayers and Jenny Capon is also an important factor in the success of this approach, making it possible for the key outcomes to be ones which community members crafted, rather than having been defined by us in advance.

People live in and with their communities every day, and know them better and care more about them than anyone else could. This lived experience, wisdom and passion are resources that are not drawn upon enough by city, regional and national power systems, and it is in everyone's interests that they are integrated much more and much earlier. People do not want to be asked their opinions on what seem to be decisions already taken, they want to form the questions and priorities that are then carried forward into policy.

**“Take into account the ideas and opinions of the community that live here and are most affected about these decisions”**



# call to action

## WHAT'S NEXT?

The priorities and desires of communities like Lochend, Restalrig and Craightinny are too often not known, let alone acted upon, by those with the power to effect change. When people do not see and feel these priorities in the policies that affect them they feel alienated. It is incumbent upon those with power to engage on equal terms with communities and work with them to plan the future. Here is what we recommend you do:

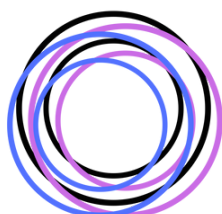
- Do not do policy *to* communities, but craft it *with* them, defining key categories and themes together.
- Partner with and provide resources for community organisations, your key local partners.
- People experience on a daily basis the strength and healing that community can generate – investing in community spaces will generate savings through amplifying these benefits.
- Recognise that there is support out there. Participatory research is a growing field, and there is a rapidly growing local and national resource base to draw upon.
- Use creative ways for communities to express their priorities, and partner as equals with experts such as participatory artists to do so.

**“Listen to the people, the community, and its collective wisdom”**

# resources



A charity working to make public participation and deliberation an everyday part of policy making and governance. Their website includes a large number of resources relating to participatory methods.



**ScotPEN**

The Scottish Public Engagement Network brings together specialists working in a variety of engagement roles to share knowledge and experience, provide guidance, and collaborate.



**Co-Production Collective**

A community of co-production and participatory methods facilitators, with a number of resources available online.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
**Library**

The Library's Open Research initiative is home to a new team dedicated to supporting participatory research methods, including in areas where this intersects with policy.



Finally, it is always worth remembering that communities themselves can provide resources: they know how they want to be engaged with.

# project partners

## THE RIPPLE & BINKS HUB

### The Ripple

HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES

The Ripple Project was established in 1996 and is a community-led charity and social enterprise. Our mission is to tackle poverty and inequality by responding to local priorities, circumstances and needs in a sustainable way, helping the people of Restalrig, Lochend and Craigentenny to help themselves.

We offer a wide and diverse range of services and provisions for this community. The most prominent include: Open Access Youth Work; an Older People's Service; Health and Wellbeing services; Food Dignity work through the Café and Ripple Refillery; and Community Democracy and mobilisation.

---

### THE BINKS HUB

The Binks Hub draws on creativity and the arts to co-create community-driven research that makes a difference to people's lives. Based on an ethos of working together in equitable and respectful collaborations we strive to ensure that co-creative forms of knowledge are produced for the benefit of the communities with whom we partner, and that this knowledge is shared, valued and used as evidence in policy and decision-making.

We are involved in research on a range of topics and themes related to social inequalities and social justice. What makes the Binks Hub stand out from most similar groups is the integration of artistic and creative methods and practices. We believe these offer opportunities for more imaginative and creative expressions of community knowledge and desires

## CONTACT THE RIPPLE PROJECT



admin@theripple.org.uk



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



0131 554 0422



@RIPPLERESTALRIG

## CONTACT THE BINKS HUB



binks@ed.ac.uk



[binks-hub.ed.ac.uk/](https://binks-hub.ed.ac.uk/)



@THEBINKSHUB

**DOWNLOAD A  
DIGITAL COPY**



**DOWNLOAD THE  
PROJECT  
MINI-BOOK**

