

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES – WHO DECIDES?

A story of lived experiences told through art



The Ripple

HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES

THE BINKS HUB

RACHEL GREEN AND JIMMY TURNER

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Alternative Futures - Who decides? A story of lived experiences told through art.

Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh.

<https://doi.org/10.2218/ED.9781836450818>

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ISBN (paperback): 978-1-83645-080-1

ISBN (ebook): 978-1-83645-081-8

DOI: 10.2218/ED.9781836450818

Published by the University of Edinburgh



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

WELCOME TO ALTERNATIVE FUTURES – WHO DECIDES?

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With the support of

Nel Coleman and Rebecca
Wojturska from the University
of Edinburgh Library

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO THE 'ALTERNATIVE FUTURES - WHO DECIDES?' EXHIBITION, WHERE COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM LOCHEND, RESTALRIG AND CRAIGENTINNY TELL STORIES OF THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES THROUGH ART. TOGETHER THE RIPPLE PROJECT AND THE BINKS HUB PRESENT ARTWORKS WHICH EXPLORE THE MEMORIES, EXPERIENCES, REALITIES, HOPES AND DREAMS OF THESE COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

The exhibition is the result of an authentic collaboration between the Ripple Project and the Binks Hub from the University of Edinburgh.

We first met in May 2022, and spent the next 18 months getting to know each other, with Jimmy spending time with the various groups who use the Ripple and Rachel studying for a Masters degree at the University of Edinburgh.

In 2023, having developed a depth of knowledge of, and trust in, each other, we designed 'The Ripple Project: Past, Present and Future', which gathered a team of Ripple Project staff, volunteers and members; Binks Hub researchers and students; and freelance artists. Together we worked through a variety of workshops, art-making sessions, and fun activities to create the four artworks which we present publicly through three exhibitions, each with different key audiences in mind

The first exhibition, in June 2024, was curated as a celebration of the artworks produced by the community. It was open to all, but was directed primarily at the people who the Ripple serves in Lochend, Restalrig and Craigentenny, and was staged alongside the annual the 'LCR Stands Up' participatory

budgeting day which the Ripple organises and hosts.

The second exhibition runs over three days in October 2024 at the Dovecot Studios in central Edinburgh and is curated with the wider community of Edinburgh in mind. A particular focus of ours in this second exhibition is to speak to policymakers, people, and organisations who have the power to impact the lives of the community. We hope that they will engage with the desires, dreams and demands of the people of Lochend, Restalrig and Craigentenny.

The third exhibition, in June 2025, will be hosted at the Scottish Parliament. It is through this exhibition that we will carry the voices of the community into the heart of national power.

In this guide, which accompanies these exhibitions, we will explain the background to the project, its key findings, and introduce the artworks which we collaboratively produced.

Rachel Green and Jimmy Turner,
Co-Curators

September 2024

WHO ARE WE?

The Ripple

HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES

The Ripple Project (The Ripple) was established in 1996 and is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, operating as 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. The challenges in this context are considerable, as seen through the Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data. These show that the area is among the 10% most deprived in Scotland across four categories, three of which place it in the 5% most deprived.

The Ripple Project offers 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 was formed in 2021 through a donation to the University of Edinburgh by the Binks Trust. We draw 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.

OUR PROJECT

For a year the project team, comprised of Ripple Project staff, volunteers and members; Binks Hub researchers and students; and freelance artists, worked through a variety of workshops, art-making sessions, and fun activities to co-create four artworks. It is through these artworks that community members have expressed their knowledge and experiences of the local area's past, its present lived reality, and their hopes, needs and demands for its future.

THE PAST

The first stage of the project saw us focus on the past of the area, using the three-decade history of the Ripple Project as our framework. Todd Bioletti (Ripple Project Older People Service Co-ordinator) and Jimmy Turner (Binks Hub researcher) worked with members of the Ripple Project Older People's Group to collect stories and remembrances and add detail and colour to the timeline, which was designed by the artist Jenny Capon.

THE PRESENT

The 'Present' project was led by Rachel Green, Ripple Project Director, and used a merging of focus group and tapestry weaving methods to build a community-driven view of the area. This both converses with and challenges the 'official' view of the area as built through the Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data, following which this community would seem not to be flourishing in any way. What emerged through the research was a recognition that the categories used in the SIMD are driven by state and institutional priorities, and do not necessarily reflect what is most important to communities themselves. This led to the production of two tapestry artworks which are collectively titled *Mal-flourishing – who decides?*

THE FUTURE

The future was explored through two connected streams:

1. *Imagining Restalrig in 2050: A Youth View* was led by Ripple Project youth worker Mallory Hybl, Youth Services Manager Danielle Ward and Binks Hub researcher Autumn Roesch-Marsh, alongside artist Jenny Capon. They ran a series of workshops with children and young people in which they were invited to think about how they would like their area to be in 2050, and then draw their dreams onto a collective map.
2. A second stream was led by Ripple Project Director Rachel Green, artist Bobby Sayers, and Binks Hub researchers Amrita Puri and Jimmy Turner. They ran a week-long residency at the Ripple Project which invited community members to design and make small clay plaques which expressed their hopes and dreams for the future of their local area. These plaques were then hung on a wishing-well inspired sculpture constructed by Bobby Sayers to form the *Manifesting the Future* artwork.



THE RIPPLE PROJECT: A HISTORY THROUGH ART

DIGITAL PRINT ON CANVAS

CREDITS:

JENNY CAPON (LEAD ARTIST); TODD BIOLETTI (ARTIST/RESEARCHER); JIMMY TURNER (ARTIST/RESEARCHER); DAWN BAXTER (ARTIST/RESEARCHER); THE RIPPLE PROJECT OLDER PEOPLE'S GROUP; RIPPLE PROJECT STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS.

The Ripple Project: a history through art is an artistic timeline which traces some of the key stories, events and memories of the Ripple Project and the community it serves. It started life on a large roll of paper which the Ripple Project team, alongside some of their members, used to trace some of the key milestones in the nearly 30 years since the Ripple began. This initial timeline was one of the key inspirations for the 'The Ripple: Past, Present and Future' project, and the first artwork we produced.

Using this early version as our inspiration, Todd Bioletti (Ripple

Project) and Jimmy Turner (Binks Hub) held a workshop with members of the Ripple Project Older People's Group, during which they shared stories and remembrances and added detail and colour to the timeline.

Jenny Capon, our lead artist, took this expanded version and worked it into the first draft of an artistic history, which we then shared with the Ripple's staff, volunteers and members, who all added further memories. Jenny then took all of this collective wisdom and crafted it into the mixture of memories, events, milestones, and myths that you see here.

MAL-FLOURISHING: WHO DECIDES?

Mal-Flourishing – who decides? is a story told through three tapestries, and is the result of Ripple Project director Rachel Green's innovative research for her Masters degree at the University of Edinburgh. The tapestries are exhibited together as two distinct, yet closely linked, artworks.

PERSONAL MAL-FLOURISHING – WHO DECIDES?

WOOL TAPESTRY

CREDITS:
RACHEL GREEN (ARTIST/RESEARCHER)

Personal Mal-flourishing – who decides? was woven to give an example of how data can be 'read' and visualised through tapestry, based on Rachel Green's lived experience. Using her own life as data, Rachel wove the 'years' of her life from childhood to now. She used different colours to express different life events, and the completed tapestry shows the challenges that life throws at us as well as periods of calm and growth.

Colour was very important; the colours chosen represent the following kinds of experience:

stress/chaos (red); loss (black); children (green); can't remember (blue or grey); awkward (purple); relationships (pink); hot summer of 76 (yellow).

Yet this weaves a limited view of a person's life, which led Rachel to question whether we can really synthesize a life like this. Did she flourish? Or could she be considered to be mal-flourished? Are we more than the sum of our parts? And, if we are, can we apply this to other sources of data? Do stories of lives and communities told through data become overly reductive?



COMMUNITY MAL-FLOURISHING – WHO DECIDES?

RECYCLED MATERIALS AND BIN BAGS WOVEN INTO TAPESTRIES

CREDITS:

RACHEL GREEN (ARTIST/RESEARCHER); COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM
LOCHEND, RESTALRIG AND CRAIGENTINNY

Community Mal-flourishing – who decides? is comprised of two tapestries and depicts the area of Lochend, Restalrig and Craigentenny. The first of these tapestries uses a statistical point of view, while the second uses the points of view of those with lived experiences and deep connections to the area.

[Left] This tapestry is woven to visually represent the data that is produced and published through the Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).



This is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas across Scotland (called data zones). SIMD looks at the extent to which an area is deprived across seven domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing.

The area of Restalrig, Lochend and Craigentenny has 3 data zones in the top 5% most deprived, 4 in the top 10% most deprived and 8 in the top 20%.

The colours of the tapestry follow the SIMD's colour coding, in which red hues indicate higher deprivation and blues lower deprivation. In the first tapestry, red was used to indicate stress and chaos, and this theme inadvertently carries through to SIMD and this tapestry.

[Right] The final tapestry was co-created by Rachel and a group of community members. They designed their interpretation of their community based on their own experiences and priorities, rather than the 'official' measures of SIMD.

They did not dismiss the more challenging elements of where they live, using black bin bags to represent depression, drabness and neglect in the area, and white bin bags to represent a lack of community and leisure spaces.

Despite not shying away from the challenges and deprivations the community faces, this tapestry also weaves a more holistic picture of the area. In its fluid and swirling form, it captures the human connections and spirit of the community, one which enables people to flourish even within deprivation.

This results in a tapestry which contains hope and positivity alongside struggles, contrasting sharply with the SIMD tapestry's unrelenting bleakness.



IMAGINING RESTALRIG IN 2050: A YOUTH VIEW



DIGITAL PRINTING ON CANVAS

CREDITS:

JENNY CAPON (LEAD ARTIST), MALLORY HYBL (ARTIST/RESEARCHER), AUTUMN ROESCH-MARSH (ARTIST/RESEARCHER), RIPPLE PROJECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S GROUP MEMBERS: RAISSA; RHYS; ANNA; HAYDEN; CHLOE; RUBY; STEPHANIE; DEREK; MAYA T.; LARA A.; LARA C. A.; GURDAIGE; LOUISE; ALIZA; EMMA; MAYA B; CALLIE.

In this work, young people from various youth groups at The Ripple created a map using elements of collage to visualize how they would like their community to look in 2050.

The finished piece, brilliantly put together by artist Jenny Capon, is a collaborative space where the young people involved manifested their individual dreams, such as: owning a dance studio; engaging in spaces of play; and attending university. Along with this, they also got to explore their hopes for the wider area, including: a

hospital with more staff and shorter waiting lines; more clothing and food shops; green spaces and park improvements; community art venues; free ice cream for under 15s; and the absence of bullying.

It was a fun activity for those who participated, and it was beautiful to see how art gives us space to imagine our futures and new ways of being, while also allowing us to hold on to the things from our community that we love!

MANIFESTING THE FUTURE

CLAY AND PAINT

CREDITS:

BOBBY SAYERS (LEAD ARTIST), JIMMY TURNER (ARTIST/RESEARCHER), AMRITA PURI (ARTIST/RESEARCHER), RACHEL GREEN (ARTIST/RESEARCHER), RIPPLE PROJECT STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM LOCHEND, RESTALRIG AND CRAIGENTINNY

Manifesting the Future is the brainchild of Edinburgh-based participatory artist Bobby Sayers. It takes the form of a wishing well on which community members could hang clay artworks representing their hopes, dreams and desires for the future of the area. Accompanied and assisted by Amrita Puri and Jimmy Turner from the Binks Hub, and with the support of the incredible team of staff and volunteers at the Ripple, we spent a week working with Ripple Project members and the wider community of Lochend, Restalrig and Craightinny to craft over 60 clay plaques, the majority of which now hang on the ceramic wishing well which Bobby made to hold them.

Each of these expresses the hopes, dreams and desires of the individuals and groups from the community who joined Bobby and explored potential futures with him. Some were also made collaboratively over several days by different people, with one contributing the idea and the design, and someone



else making and painting the plaque. These desires were both humble and grand, practical and abstract, and personal and collective, and some of the common themes they express are community, sociality, nature and the environment, wellbeing, happiness and the role of the Ripple Project.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The project has revealed much about the experiences, views and hopes for the future of the community who live in Lochend, Restalrig and Craightinny, including the wide diversity of different priorities and interests to be found there. This diversity of thought reflects a problem the Ripple Project has identified over the years. Much of the research and data that is used to govern policies, funding decisions and narratives about the area does not account for the full humanity and human experiences of the people who live there. Although it identifies problems and deficits it does not even attempt to capture the hopes, desires and priorities of people. In this way the 'official story' of the area can feel to the community like a tool designed for and by policy and decision-makers which is based on their ways of working and desire for efficiency.

The key message from our project is that there is a collective demand for the following to be raised up as priorities by those with the power and influence to effect changes:

- **A DESIRE FOR THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND WISDOM OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO BE RECOGNISED AND VALIDATED.**
- **A DESIRE FOR MORE GREEN SPACES, AND FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF GREENERY AND GREEN SPACE IN THE LOCAL AREA TO BE IMPROVED.**
- **A DESIRE FOR INVESTMENT IN MORE COMMUNITY AND CIVIC SPACES IN THE LOCAL AREA.**

We will explore these themes in a little more detail over the next few pages, but to read the Ripple Project's comprehensive account of our findings and the community's demands for the future, please follow the QR code here:



<https://edin.ac/4d8jwTp>

1. A DESIRE FOR THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND WISDOM OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO BE RECOGNISED AND VALIDATED



Through the process of producing *The Ripple Project: a history through art* it was clear that attempts made by the Ripple to increase community involvement in local decision-making were significant and important to participants.

During our first exhibition many visitors expressed clearly to us that they want to be even more deeply involved in decision-making which affects them and their community.

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

"collaborate with locals and groups about decisions affecting them"

"Listen to the people, the community, and its collective wisdom"

"Listen to the residents and work with them"

"Listen and have an open mind. Ask questions of those it will benefit"

"Be as broad-minded as possible"

"To listen to what people want and their thoughts and culture, to know who they are"

"To 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"



2. A DESIRE FOR MORE GREEN SPACES, AND FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF GREENERY AND GREEN SPACE IN THE LOCAL AREA TO BE IMPROVED



The Ripple Project: a history through art makes clear the importance of green and outdoor spaces and activities for the community, and how central these activities have been to people's experiences.

The vivid green and blue in the tapestry reflects the importance of green and blue spaces.

As the tapestry was designed the participants expressed how the lack of upkeep of the nature they have is a source of frustration. One told us for example that "you know one day there's a telly on the grass and the next there's a mattress – it really gets you down".



The artworks which represent the community's visions and hopes for the future are deeply concerned with green spaces, with trees and flowers being featured very regularly. They communicate a deep concern for the environment, climate crisis and planetary health.

In the designs which community members produced before making their ceramic plaques community members noted down words connected to nature, green space and environment more than any other category.

3. A DESIRE FOR INVESTMENT IN MORE COMMUNITY AND CIVIC SPACES IN THE LOCAL AREA

The Ripple Project: a history through art reveals how the Ripple has provided, perhaps more importantly than anything else, 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. The Ripple is, for them, a vital community resource, but not one that can do everything.

They explained that “if you want to go and do something at night you have to go out of the area” and that what is needed are more spaces to socialise and build community.



The future-orientated artworks are full of representations of a wide range of community and social spaces that participants wished to see in the area in the future.

The children’s map depicts many different social and play activities, and Manifesting the Future participants added to this the recognition of the importance of community spaces to the reduction of isolation and improvement of mental wellbeing.

CREDITS

The Ripple

HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES

Many staff, volunteers, and community members have contributed to this project, including: Rachel Green (Ripple Project Director; *The Ripple Project: Past, Present and Future* co-lead; Exhibition Co-Curator); Dawn Baxter (Operations Manager); The Older Peoples Group and Older People Service Co-ordinator Todd Bioletti; The Children and Young People who use the Ripple, and Danielle Ward, the Youth Services Manager; Greg Brown and his fabulous team of staff and volunteers in the café.

THE BINKS HUB

On this project our core team has been: Amrita Puri (Postgraduate Researcher; Exhibition Co-Curator); Mallory Hybl (Researcher); Autumn Roesch-Marsh (Binks Hub Co-Director; Exhibition Co-Curator); Kirstin Lamb (Exhibition Co-Curator); Jimmy Turner (Research Fellow and *The Ripple Project: Past, Present and Future* co-lead; Exhibition Co-Curator).

The design of this guide was led by Rhiannon Bull and Kirstin Lamb.

OUR ARTISTS

Jenny Capon (<https://www.jennycapondraws.com/>) is an illustrator & graphic recorder based in Portobello. She makes prints, drawings & collages and is especially passionate about working on projects around the environment, inclusion and mental health. Jenny was the lead artist on *The Ripple Project, a history through art* and *Imagining Restalrig in 2050: A Youth View*.

Bobby Sayers (<https://www.bobbysayers.com/>) is a socially engaged artist, poet, and producer based in Edinburgh. He engages in social practice research around community building and agency, infrastructure as care and reaching wider audiences, often drawing from hidden stories and histories, depicting struggles and transformations that show another present is possible. Bobby was the lead artist on *Manifesting the Future*.



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This guide was produced with the support of Nel Coleman and Rebecca Wojturska from the University of Edinburgh Library.

SPECIAL THANKS

To the Binks Trust, whose funding of the Binks Hub financed all the fabulous work in this project and exhibition.

To Jane Carey, Elinor Brown and all the team (especially the cleaning staff) at the Dovecot Studios for hosting and supporting the exhibition.

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To read the Ripple Project's comprehensive account of our findings and the community's demands for the future, please follow the QR code here:



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