

Title: Social Hubs Research: providing space to grow

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

Appreciate the advantages of a cross-disciplinary approach to assessing the development of the learning environment and social spaces

Understand the research methodologies and how these engaged staff and students

Assess the impact of student engagement on employability

Session Outline

Understanding the impact that space can have on teaching and learning on campus (Miller, 2009) has encouraged creative and flexible approaches to planning University environments (Neary et al., 2010). Anthropologists and architects have long been interested in the creation and transformation of space – ways that buildings and environments reflect, project or impose upon people’s needs and identity and how spaces reflect and engage with theory. Space has material, conceptual and political dimensions that is key to generating certain aspects of social life.

An innovative project empowering the University community to change spaces (Bride et al., 2013) engaged staff and students in the improvement, design and creation of social spaces on the University of Kent’s Canterbury and Medway campuses. This workshop will explore research methodologies that have provided opportunities for student engagement and promoted employability through development of novel social spaces. Led by staff in the School of Anthropology and Conservation in collaboration with Architecture, a core team of five postgraduate students and fifteen undergraduates from both Schools were employed as paid participants in both the design and execution of the project. Following two initial research design workshops interspaced with walkover and specific site observations, a mixed method participant observation approach was developed that utilised a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Students gained valuable research skills and experience through participating in a piece of local, real-world research. This interdisciplinary project has led to development of several new learning and teaching and social spaces, as well as food growing initiatives that have provided space to grow – academically, socially and literally! In turn, such activities develop a wide range of creative, team working, organisational, communication and practical skills and encourage a sense of ownership of place. *‘Knowing*

that the work conducted will benefit students was a confidence boost – plus it looks great on my CV. (MA Anthropology graduate).

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Please provide an indication of how the session will be structured and how activities and discussion will be facilitated. For discussion papers please include a few indicative questions which will focus the discussion element.

Introduction to Social Hubs project– 15 mins

Workshop discussion groups exploring research methodologies – 20 mins

Summary – 10 mins

References

H,Miller (2009) Adaptable spaces and their impact on learning

<http://www.hermanmiller.com/research/research-summaries/adaptable-spaces-and-their-impact-on-learning.html>

Neary, M, Harrison, A, Crollin, G, Parakh, N, Saunders, G, Duggan, F, Williams, S and Austin, S. (2010) Learning Landscapes in Higher Education

<http://learninglandscapes.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/files/2010/04/FinalReport.pdf>

Bride, I.G., Naylor, L. and Tunåker, C (2013) The Creative Campus: empowering the University community to change spaces. In E. Dunne and D. Owen (eds.) *The Student Engagement Handbook: Practice in Higher Education*, Emerald Books. (Chapter 15) pp255-269