

Blue sky spaces



Students at the University of Southampton are amongst those whose ideas will be developed.

Public spaces ripe for regeneration in three of the South East's biggest cities will be featuring a one week only design experiment this summer. Can good design turn a space into a place?

This summer, three south east cities will be temporarily transformed by design ideas developed by architectural students from their local universities to test ideas for future permanent redevelopment.

The Places from Spaces project aims to demonstrate how 'good design can turn a space into a place'. Attractive, safe and accessible public spaces are a vital element of any city, contributing not only to quality of life, but also to such things as community cohesion, economic vitality and the identity of a city.

A carefully targeted programme has brought together officers and members of the local authorities in Brighton, Portsmouth and Southampton with the universities in each city, to explore the future development of public space

A series of workshops and study visits offered an opportunity to engage with experts in the field of

public space and urban design from London, New York and Helsinki. This encouraged new thinking, giving a different perspective and enabling discussion of the issues of importance to each city.

Study visits to Porto and Copenhagen enabled participants to compare and contrast the nature and use of public space in their own coastal cities with a southern and northern European coastal city.

The Hard in Portsmouth, Valley

Gardens in Brighton and Queens Park in Southampton all have proud histories, but are now under used and each local authority wants to look at ideas for revitalising them in the future. Each are featuring the temporary transformations – two last month and one which will be up and running in the next few weeks.

For the universities, the project offers students a practical project to work on, giving them experience of working in a real world environment

"Places from Spaces is showing decision makers in the public sector how to test and challenge visions"

Miranda Pearce, Urban Renaissance Manager, SEEDA

with the kind of constraints they might face, helping to ready them for professional employment.

This programme identifies actual sites that are subject to development plans and challenges the 'what if' scenarios of future visions. So rather than only say, the new town centre 'could be a vibrant market,' what if the existing space is licensed and hosts a market for two days to test what it really takes to make this happen?

Rather than say the new public spaces 'will become a place for meeting for new and existing communities', what if 400 chairs are introduced onto the site for three days with wardens to continually rearrange them to host events for different ages and interests?

Rather than say 'making a connection between the water and the town centre', what if for one day water is rerouted to allow paper boat races between river and town centre.

It is this approach that can lead to greater involvement in the decision making from a broad range of stakeholders. It can be the key to unlocking innovative and often simple and cost effective solutions. It can lead to greater use and diversity of use in public space. It can lead to the long term success and further investment in the public realm.

The details

The programme is being run for SEEDA by the Solent Centre for Architecture and Design (SCA+D), with support from the Kent Architecture Centre, and in partnership the universities.

The main objectives include encouraging design knowledge transfer, showing the value of creative urban design to local authorities, enabling the authorities to explore innovative creative thinking and evaluate the possibilities for more radical schemes ahead of major investment decisions.

Following a targeted training programme for senior councillors and officers in each of the cities, a 'client brief' was developed for each site and this brief set the practical challenge for the students. The training enabled the local authority team to assume the role of expert critic and, finally, as judge to the student proposals.

"The project is showing some

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really positive outcomes," says Phil Smith, SCA+D's Project Manager. "It gives local authorities the opportunity to consider and test some exciting ideas for the development of spaces earmarked for future investment, while the universities get the chance to demonstrate their design capability and the students obtain practical project experience."

Each 'live' project is tested during its installation period and the local community encouraged to give feedback to the Councils to help them with long term planning, showing how creativity and design can add value.



Beach huts are being erected in Portsmouth as part of the project to animate routes and spaces.



Brighton students are developing under used gardens near the city's one-way system.