

## Place-Based Research Programme

### Enabling integrative leadership and cross-sector design collaboration: insights from the *Cross-pollination* project

**Tackling social and regional inequalities requires different sectors to work together to co-design and co-produce place-based initiatives and solutions. This brief uses insights from the *Cross-pollination* project to make recommendations for enabling integrative leadership and cross-sector design collaboration in placemaking.**

#### Challenge and Context

Across the world, organisations are calling for a more **integrative** type of leadership to tackle socio-economic issues and inequalities. Integrative leadership is a form of place-based leadership that emerges from cross-sector collaboration, harnessing the creativity, interests and capabilities of different actors rooted in a place (community groups, social enterprises, voluntary sector organisations, public bodies, universities, local media, businesses, and local governments). Integrative leadership underlies the UN's 2030 Agenda, which calls for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (SDG 16.7) and encouragement and promotion of effective civil society partnerships building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships (SDG 17.17)<sup>1</sup>. Integrative leadership, co-production and partnership working will be important in helping deliver social and environmental sustainability goals in the UK (net zero, affordable housing etc) anticipated in the new government's [Power and Partnership plan](#). However, while individuals and organisations may desire to collaborate and work in partnerships, there is often a lack of trust, confidence, experience and opportunity to to combine ideas, projects, and assets.

This policy brief shares insights and recommendations from the *Cross-pollination* project which successfully trialled a flexible model for enabling integrative design leadership by embracing principles of asset-based development, design creativity and experimentation.

#### The *Cross-Pollination* project

The *Cross-pollination project* was a collaboration between [The Open University](#) and [The Glass-House Community Led Design](#). The team conducted participatory action research with thirteen partners in England, Scotland and Wales, working in different locations, from the hyper-local to city-wide. Our activities brought together people from different sectors and local residents, fostering collaboration across sectors and with the community to share assets and create ideas for joint place-based initiatives. Outputs include a [Cross-pollination Resource Pack](#), the [project blog](#) and [a series of films](#).

*“Cross-pollination helped everyone in that room step back, understand what the place around us really meant for one another and how we might all help make things better.”*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/04/agenda-2030-civic-participation-sustainable-development-goals/>  
[last accessed 25 September 2024]

- ❖ **When:** January 2022-April 2023
- ❖ **Local Partners:** Merthyr: [Wellbeing Merthyr](#), [Merthyr Valleys Homes](#), [Healthy Hillside](#)s, [Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council](#), and [The Open University in Wales](#); Glasgow: [Many Studios](#), [DTA Scotland](#) and [Glasgow Community Food Network](#); Edinburgh: [Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council](#) (EVOC); Sheffield: [Gleadless Valley Partnership and Sheffield City Council](#); London: [Becky Lyon](#) and [London National Park City](#).
- ❖ **What:** Workshops/ events; training and mentoring cross-pollination champions; interviews; sharing workshops. With over 50 organisations across sectors and over 450 people.
- ❖ **Who:** Local residents, activists, community organisations, local authority officers, community development practitioners, housing providers, local councillors, artists.

### What is 'Cross pollination'?

Cross-pollination is a creative design-led approach that brings representatives from different groups, organisations and sectors together to establish a 'collaborative economy' of assets (e.g. skills, networks, funds) and develop actions to enhance existing initiatives or co-design new ones. It was applied in different contexts to instigate and grow cross-sector design collaboration to create more inclusive, democratic and sustainable places and place-based services.

### The outcomes of Cross-pollination

- ❖ **Individual level:** building new & stronger connections, skills, understanding and confidence.
- ❖ **Organisational level:** developing new practices and networks/community of practice.
- ❖ **Social level:** shifting power relations and empowering individuals to lead change.

### Enabling integrative design leadership and collaboration requires:

- **Creating safe spaces for experimentation.** Providing opportunities for people across different communities and sectors to experiment on ideas and collaborations, built trust and confidence.
- **Building on community-academic partnerships.** Coming together under the auspices of a research project led by a long-standing community-academic partnership, was considered crucial for providing a 'safe', but also 'neutral' space for people to define their own agendas and develop their leadership and sense of ownership.
- **Connecting and leveraging existing activities, places and assets.** Participants valued the fact that activities enabled them to unearth and connect their assets to enhance what each was already doing individually. As a result, cross-pollination enhanced existing initiatives and the participants' capacity to create new ones.
- **Nurturing cross-pollination champions.** Scaling-up of collaboration within and across places, relied on individuals or organisations to connect and convene diverse groups together around a common theme or place. These champions were embedded in different networks (locally and nationally) and had creative, co-design and facilitation competencies.
- **Supporting incremental organic growth.** The seed funding made available to different networks for cross-pollination activities, enabled collaboration to happen in small incremental steps. This created a legacy of collaboration and promoted organic growth.

### Recommendations: (for local authorities, policy makers and funders)

- ❖ **Direct funding towards cross-sector collaborations, partnerships and networks as well as projects.**
- ❖ **Create spaces for experimentation** that enable action to emerge through a bottom-up collaborative process of sharing and connecting assets.
- ❖ **Invest in long-term community-academic research partnerships**, by providing funding to non-academic organisations for their participation in bid development and ongoing work to embed research findings & outputs into practice and communities.
- ❖ **Enable organic growth** by providing seed funding for small exploratory collaborative projects/ventures.
- ❖ **Support training for cross-pollination champions**, from academia, practice, and the private, public, and voluntary sectors, to enable them to use facilitation and creative design skills to support co-creation and co-production.
- ❖ **Support knowledge exchange within and across places** to create a culture of collaboration nationally.

Find practical recommendations and tools for practitioners & communities in the [Cross-pollination Resource Pack](#)

### What Next?

We aim to establish a national Cross-pollination infrastructure to support integrative design leadership and cross-sector collaboration, within and across places.

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**Funding:** HEIF: Incubating Civic Leadership, AHRC: AH/W00884X/1: Cross-pollination: Growing cross-sector design collaboration in placemaking

**Suggested citation:** Alexiou, K., Hale, V., de Sousa, S., Zamenopoulos, T. (2024) 'Enabling integrative leadership and cross-sector design collaboration: insights from the *Cross-pollination* project' AHRC Place Programme Policy Brief, Glasgow: University of Glasgow DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21954/ou.ro.00098736>

Thanks to all those who contributed to the project and who continue to champion co-design and collaboration. Thanks to the Place Programme team.

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**Place is a strategic priority for UKRI and Cross-pollination is part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Place-Based Research Programme based at the University of Glasgow.** The Policy Brief Series General Editors are: Place Programme Director, Prof. Rebecca Madgin ([Rebecca.Madgin@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Rebecca.Madgin@glasgow.ac.uk)), Dr. Michael Howcroft, Ieuan Rees.