Green Gown Awards 2017
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Finalist's case study

University of Brighton
Community Category
Community21

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About the project
Community21 is a social design agency that works with diverse publics and socially focused organisations to support sustainable community development.

Project partners
Multiple communities and community groups, local authorities, community orientated charities, NGOs and social enterprises.

The results
The problem
Sustainability is a global concern that, due to its scale, often disenfranchises and disarms people and is sometimes not seen as a local issue or an issue that individuals can do something about or benefit from.

The approach
Community21 works at supporting and reinforcing the role and value of 'community' as a scale in which we can act and make a difference - through the co-design of 21st century tools, technologies and methods we can enable and amplify this difference to make impacts that are locally important and globally significant.

Our goals
To empower diverse communities to enact sustainable development.

Obstacles and solutions

Obstacle	Solution
• Ensuring the engagement of diverse publics (especially young people). • Supporting under-developed communities in remote countries to turn waste from an environmental problem to a development opportunity. • Supporting active but disconnected communities to share good practice around grass roots action planning.	• The co-design and co-production of innovative digital tools (digi-tools) that support young people's engagement with sustainable neighbourhood development. • Using accessible internet enabled technology and communication tools and methods to enable staff and students to co-learn with remote communities and to collaboratively design new products that transform problematic waste into development prospects. • To co-design and develop new digital tools (digi-tools) that support a range of community needs in local planning and enable the development of a peer-to-peer intercommunity

• How to engage creative students in a 'post-disciplinary' agenda and complex issues of sustainability	network of grass-roots actions. These increase inclusion, transparency and share-ability. • By developing real projects with real communities and their concerns and needs as a means to learn through action what are the role of designers and creative professionals in the 21st Century.

Performance and results

Students from a range of disciplines provide innovative responses to identified needs and opportunities, as well as engagement and enabling tools. These are then available for corporate businesses, academic institutions and public service providers, with 2017/18 Community21 awarded contracts set to exceed £200,000.

Any reserves generated are reinvested in sustaining project management, supporting innovative teaching and learning models in areas of sustainable and social development through additional equipment and through recruiting student interns and supporting graduate social enterprises.

The future

Lessons learned

1. The shifting economic, environmental and social contexts communities find themselves in provide an infinitely rich and diverse set of opportunities for creative learners to interact and to define a role.

2. Running a functioning enterprise between real communities and an institution the size of the University is challenging but vital in helping define relevant educational experiences for students and ensuring the application of the University's creative capital.

3. Local issues and opportunities often (if not always) translate to global contexts.

Sharing your project

We have always sought to develop tools and methods that are openly available and usable by diverse communities. We have developed a robust technical internet platform to support share-ability. We have presented at international fora, conferences and commissions, to community sector events, national commissions and summits and to governmental departments. This has helped to engage other networks and communities that we are able to learn from and work with.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

Helped to reinforce and give credence to our principle that sustainability is a social concern – rather than just an environmental one.

Further information

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