

RESEARCH HISTORY

Developing the Participatory City Foundation systems approach

The research on which the design of Every One Every Day is based is grounded in Participatory City Foundation’s close to nine years of deep engagement with those at the forefront of developing ‘participation culture’ around the world.

The genesis of the idea has been built on research aimed at developing an understanding and an approach to fostering these new types of projects, seeing this approach as key to building sustainable urban neighbourhoods.

Research Phase 1

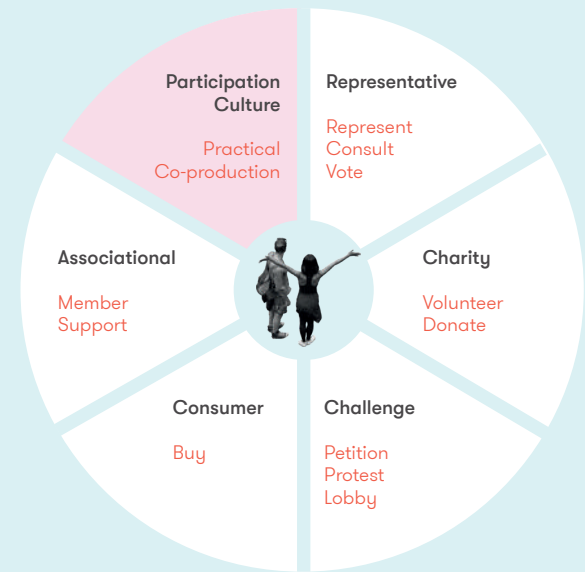
Foundation research for developing a systems approach

The background to the development of Every One Every Day in Barking and Dagenham is summarised in the Executive Summary section of the report on page 14.

This isn’t the first time society has invented a new way to take part in improving in society. Each of the different ways we can participate is shown on the chart below. Each of these models has a set of structures, practices, methods and behaviours depending on what they are trying to achieve, all with a corresponding professional practice designed to stimulate and support activity. Different ways to participate tend to appeal of different people, attracting people depending on what energises them or where they can best use their skills.

Hand Made becomes Community Lover’s Guide

A collection of 28 case studies were sourced directly from project teams from around the world and Hand Made was published as a book in September 2010.



A collection of similar projects, the Community Lover’s Guide, created links with many more people involved in participation culture projects and has published 12 City Collection books, describing case studies for over 150 projects, all of which have since also been codified and brought into the design process.

The Travelling Pantry

An analysis of these case studies revealed a new project design process based on drawing on existing assets and resources rather than starting with needs. A set of workshop activities and materials were designed for this new project design process. The workshops took ‘participation culture’ ideas on the road to 63 communities around the UK from October 2010 to April 2011 to find out how local people would respond to these new ideas and models and to determine if ‘participation culture’ would be appealing to very different people in different contexts. The workshops also aimed to test a new set of workshop methodologies and to see if they could be used to stimulate and grow more projects of this kind.

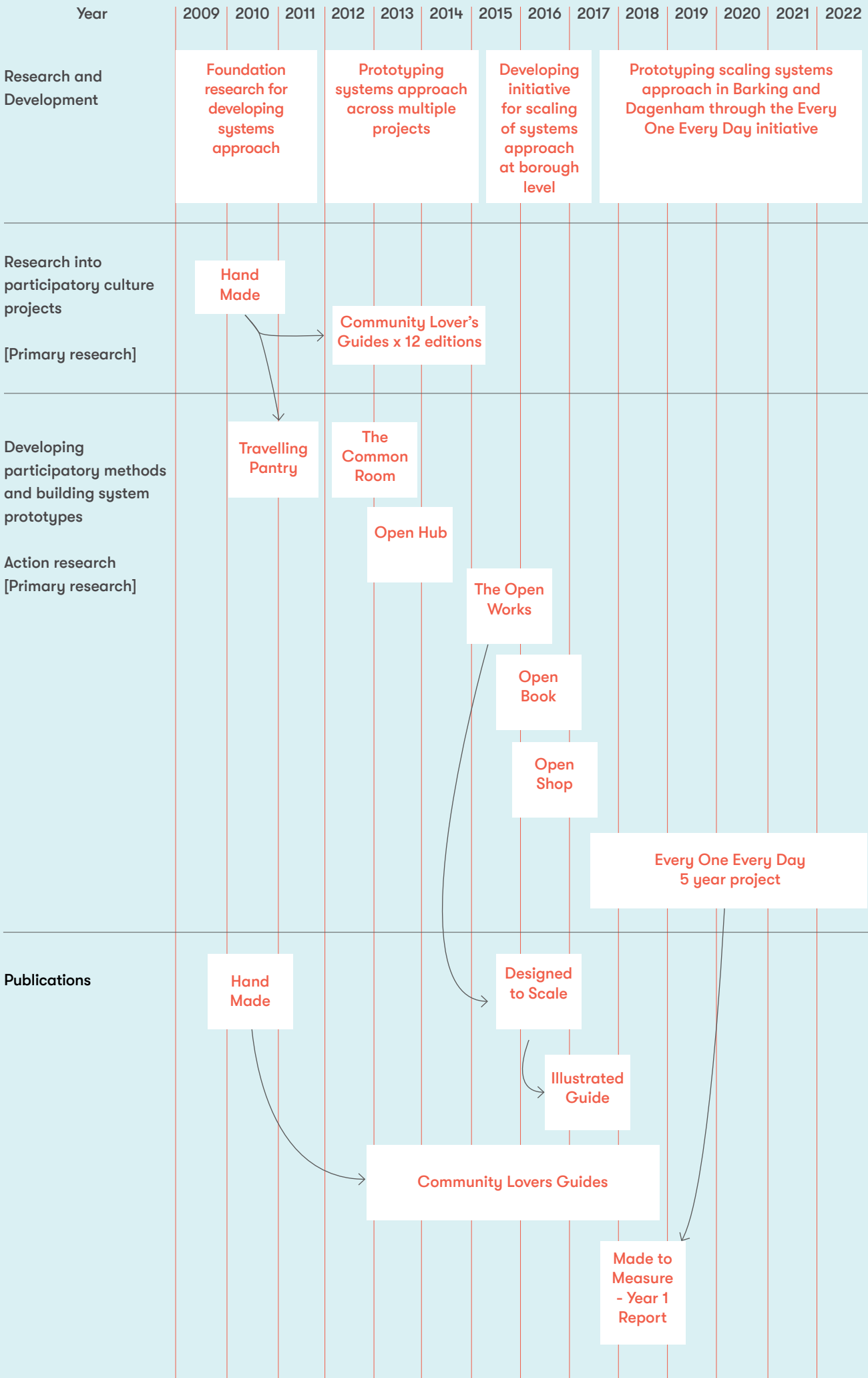
An emerging design for a new systems approach

Although the participation culture projects proved to be universally appealing across the country these workshops also revealed a list of barriers to both participating regularly in projects and to starting these types of local projects. A list of ‘essential ingredients’ for starting participatory projects was co-created with workshop participants over 6 months. It was through the insights shared by local people across the country during this research process that the idea of developing a shared support structure to grow a network of ‘participation culture’ projects emerged.

Barriers to starting projects include the sense of risk and exposure, lack of support and valuable ideas feeling ‘small’ or not useful on their own. The insights led to the development of the approach which involves providing support, sharing risks, encouraging learning, and supporting collections of small ideas.

Other barriers to starting projects include ineffective meetings stalling enthusiasm, waiting for funding after an idea is generated, not having enough people involved, relying on one or two people with too much responsibility, and missing practical resources or skills - hence our approach deliberately aims to fast-track projects from ideas to implementation, with a team available to provide support to identify resources, recruit participants etc.

Please refer to the Illustrated Guide to Participatory City for more details on barriers to participation.



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Research Phase 2

Prototyping systems approach across multiple projects

Designing a support system approach

As a result of the first research cycle, it was determined that in order to scale up and mainstream this type of participation, two separate systems needed to be built. Each of these two systems operate with different components and design principles and these are outlined below, separating what is required to start and grow projects and what is required to participate regularly in projects with neighbours.

	SYSTEM 1 Support Platform for growing projects	SYSTEM 2 Participatory Ecosystem for growing participation
What each system consists of	A collection of many support elements shared across all the projects: design team, functional spaces, project ideas, organising, insurance, promotions, digital, metrics etc.	A collection of many and varied ‘participation culture’ projects, connected and not formed into mini-organisations
What each system does	Makes is easier to support, maintain or grow collections of projects.	Makes it easier for many people to participate in practical projects that fit with their everyday life.
What each system achieves	Builds and sustains Participation Systems together with local people.	People participating generates many benefits to themselves, their families and the neighbourhood.

These system designs have been incorporated into a number of important experimental projects that have been undertaken with different partners, in different places and contexts. The prototypes included The Common Room (Norwich), Open Hub (Dudley), Open Book (Essex) and Open Shop (York). Each of these prototypes had different ingredients and contexts, and it has been through this process of trying and testing, working within the constraints and opportunities of particular places that Participatory City Foundation has over these years established which ingredients are vital to the support structures.

The Open Works

The Open Works was a 12 month prototype project that took place in 2014-15. in West Norwood, London Borough of Lambeth.

This project, undertaken in partnership with the Lankelly Chase Foundation and Lambeth Council was the first where the team was able to conduct in-depth research into the impact of participation culture projects.

The Open Works team co-created a network of twenty practical projects. These included cooking, skills sharing, making, play and childcare, and gardening projects as well as project incubators and programmes of participatory opportunities.

Just over 1,000 people took part in the projects. The projects shared resources and helped one another, participants in one project became instrumental to instigating others.

The Open Works team recorded detailed activity data on all of the projects, recording the number of project activities, participants and attendances. Rich detail on the nature of the activities was also collected, for example, the dishes cooked in The Great Cook project sessions and the skills taught in the Trade School project. This is described in detail in the report Designed to Scale.

Conclusions from Open Works research

Through the analysis of the interviews an outcomes framework was developed. Time and again participants emphasised the need for increasing the scale. Participants emphasised the need for a greater diversity of opportunities (types of activity, skills needed), and the need for very frequent participation opportunities and for many people to take part.

At the root of these recommendations was the observation that important outcomes can be achieved through small scale participation, but only when multiple actions, by many people, add up over time. Micro outcomes need to accumulate and combine, building over time to achieve long term change, for individuals and for neighbourhoods.

Multiplier effects at scale

The research pointed to micro-participation needing to reach a threshold to create long-term impact for individuals and neighbourhoods. Residents need to be participating regularly for multiplier effects to be achieved, which greatly exceeds levels of participation reached through current models.

The broad evidence base on social capital

The evidence underpinning Participatory City Foundation’s focus on connecting and engaging people also includes the academic evidence base on social capital and its benefits.

Research Phase 3

Developing the Every One Every Day initiative

The conclusions from the Open Works research were both exciting and challenging.

The research indicated that scaling practical participation using this systems-based approach was possible, and offers huge potential for neighbourhood transformation through creativity and co-production. However it also strongly suggested that micro-participation through this model needed to reach a certain threshold in order to create accumulated outcomes for individuals, families and neighbourhoods.

Build it to measure it

An ambitious project was shaped with these findings which involved scaling this model to borough size over five years, with the intention to build a large prototype of this participation model and to measure the impact.

At a time in the UK of austerity and government cuts it was unknown if a project of this scale, budgeted to cost £7.2m, was viable.

With an initial development grant from Lankelly Chase Foundation a process of feasibility exploration was initiated. This involved discussions with a number of funders and councils in the UK, but also included research visits to the US, Canada, South America and several cities in Europe to establish potential viability in different countries.

Eight months into this process discussions began with the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and a partnership was formed to conduct a feasibility study in the borough and discussions began with a number of funders.

Over a period of eighteen months the Every One Every Day initiative was developed and the first £3.95m was raised, allowing for the project to commence.

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	£1.5m
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	£1m
Big Lottery Fund	£1m
City Bridge Trust	£450,000
Total raised	£3.950,000

The Participatory City Foundation, a Barking and Dagenham based charity, was formed specifically for the purpose and began recruiting for the team on the 31 July 2017.

A further £850,000 has since been raised through the LGA’s Good Growth fund for the Warehouse facility, a co-working and makerspace for residents.

Research Phase 4

The Every One Every Day initiative

The Every One Every Day initiative aims to scale practical participation on a borough level through the systems approach developed. It aims to build the first large scale, fully inclusive, practical participation system in Barking and Dagenham.

This system creates dense networks of residents working together to re-imagine and create neighbourhoods made by everyone, for everyone.

Through the Every One Every Day programme, Participatory City Foundation encourages and supports residents across Barking and Dagenham to co-create and participate in projects within their communities.

Every One Every Day adopts a person-centred approach as its starting point. Every resident has ideas and talents that they are invited to bring to this collective effort. But more importantly, the model takes into consideration that people also have constraints as they have busy and demanding lives; holding down jobs, growing businesses, caring for young children or older relatives mean that most residents are very busy. This new participation system takes account of both: people’s talents and energies, but also their demanding, often difficult, lives.

Every One Every Day co-creates a large number of diverse, small-scale opportunities. These practical, universally appealing ‘common denominator’ activities are accessible entry points in an inclusive participation network – attracting people from different cultures, backgrounds and ages, and with different types and levels of confidence, skills, health, available time and interests. The model removes every barrier we encounter to participation, be it low confidence, ill health, low time or previous experiences of stigmatisation. Any logistical, structural, or cultural barrier is being systematically identified and removed in order to develop the first fully inclusive, fully integrated system of participation.