



**Civic University**  
Network



**Institute for  
Community Studies**

Case Study:

# Growing Communities through Nature

**Growing Communities Through Nature** was developed to explore three key questions:

1. How to engage with local communities to promote the role of public green spaces in climate mitigation
2. How different routes to engagement might lead to different outcomes
3. How universities can engage with diverse communities through place-based activities.

The project ran from December 2019 to May 2020 and was a collaboration between the University of Exeter and the Cornwall Council's Environment Service. Professionally facilitated workshops were held in 3 towns, inviting the public to co-design a local green space. Funds were made available to make physical changes to sites, either through the Council or research funding.

This activity resulted in a community-designed food growing garden, and two professionally designed open spaces. The project demonstrates a number of lessons for civic engagement:

- The value of practical workshops and projects on things that people are already interested in, as providing a vehicle for reaching the public and building relationships with them.
- The importance of working with local partner organisations in doing this work
- Having the structure and funding to engage people in workshops **and** the ability to make changes increased people's engagement and excitement about the project.
- The value of small-scale projects for making connections, demonstrating ways of working and learning by doing.

# Summary

<b>Role of Community</b>	Community involved as co-designers of open spaces.
<b>Depth of Collaboration</b>	Medium- community involved in sharing ideas and co-designing local green spaces.
<b>Lens</b>	Addressing Climate Change/ Improving Community Assets.
<b>Inclusivity</b>	Open to any residents who wanted to participate. Appealed to people with a specific interest in the spaces and with the time to participate in workshops.
<b>Data Generated</b>	Designs to improve community assets. Insights on place-based partnerships and their role in addressing climate change through the creation or enhancement of nature.
<b>Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Project worked on particular spaces- cantering engagement around things that already matter to local people helps to generate interest</li><li>• Action-oriented: the funding available to improve the spaces ensured that the ideas created were put into practice, demonstrating the practical benefits</li><li>• The project helped to build relationships between the university and local authority through a practical exercise</li><li>• Project successfully combined a variety of interest and agendas to achieve mutual benefits, including climate change mitigation; community development; public realm improvement; partnership building etc.</li></ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requires access to funding to make improvements</li><li>• How do you choose what type of community asset to work on? May require prior work that identifies the most important community assets within an area</li></ul>