

## Constellations ° Assemblies: How can we move beyond sustainability? Transcript

Elisabeth Del Prete 0:05

Hello, hi, and thank you everyone for coming here today. Thank you for coming to our fourth online *Assemblies* event: *How can we move beyond sustainability?* an approach that becomes even more obvious for us to reflect and act on, as we experience days of extreme weather conditions worldwide. I am Elisabeth Del Prete, Senior Curator (Learning and Live Research) at UP Projects. And I'm a white woman with long, brown curly hair, and wearing a blacktop and sitting in my living room. My pronouns are she/her. We are really pleased that you're joining us for this event as part of *Constellations ° Assemblies*, which is a series of free online events open to anyone - open for anyone to attend who is interested in the expanded field of public art and the programme takes place between March and November 2022. By the "expanded field" we mean the work that happens at the intersection of contemporary art and culture, social practice, and the public realm. In the UK, while there are increasing opportunities for socially engaged work, particularly in the urban development and regeneration programmes, there are very few opportunities to develop sector specific knowledge and skills. And to address this, UP Projects has developed this programme. So, we are delighted to be working in partnership with Flat Time House, a partner with whom we have been collaborating for a number of years, and Liverpool Biennial who we are now partner with. The programme of six events explores lines of inquiry that we feel are most vital for the sector to pursue right now. And these include questions around how can art affect social change, contexts, democratic decision-making, issues relating to the memorial, and of course, the question of sustainability that we're exploring today. If you haven't already done so, please do register for the upcoming events later on this year. I'm delighted that today's events will be moderated by Cíaran Malik. Cíaran is a Structural Engineer, Regenerative Designer and Teacher currently teaching at several schools of architecture including the Architecture Association and Kingston School of Art. Cíaran's current research is into regenerative design, with projects looking at whole life carbon, timber - timber construction, and how to communicate climate emergency and technical ideas. But before I hand over to him, I would like to quickly run through some virtual housekeeping. If you experience any technical issues during the event, please use the chat function at the bottom of your screen to chat with our dedicated tech support. On the right of your screen, you will see our Slido bar where you can post questions using the Q&A function for our speakers. Feel free to write your name when prompted a slider uses anonymous as its default. Please do note that our moderator and speaker - speakers will only be picking up questions from the Slido

Q&A and not from the chat function. Please do post any questions that you would like Cíaran or the speakers to reflect on. Please make sure that these are posted in the Slido Q&A. We have a British Sign Language interpretation available for this event. So, if you need a BSL interpreter, please do message us in the chat. And our tech assistance will give you a dedicated access link. And if you would like to access closed captions, please select CC button at the bottom of your video conferencing screen to read along. And just finally to note that we will be recording the event today. I hope you do enjoy the event and please contact us if you experience any technical problems. I'm going to hand over to Cíaran now who's going to kick off the event. Thank you.

### **Cíaran Malik 4:27**

Hi, hopefully you can hear me okay. Well morning and thank you to UP Projects for inviting me, and for your joining in, and for Andy and Amy for being here and open and willing to share and discuss their projects. I'm Cíaran, I am a cis man. I have white skin, brown curly hair, stubble. People often assume that I'm from the Mediterranean or South America. I'm sitting in a blue chair. I have a blue jumper on in a room with, with orange and white walls and ceiling. And there's some mess. I think it's; I think I'm just going to share my screen, which I should have been doing from before. That's fun. So hopefully you can see my screen? And I think it's normal of these kinds of things to tell it everyone about yourself. So, I'm a Structural Engineer - I've designed bridges and towers, I've taught at Primary, Secondary, University and professionals. So, I've also done a lot of training courses. And as I've taught more about these topics, and more research and designing in a climate emergency, I've decided to become a regenerative practitioner. I have for me, going beyond sustainability means moving to regenerative design and development. Most people in this area from Daniel Wahl to Bill Reed at some point, use a diagram like this to show to show you just get a pen, conventional design at one end, regenerative design at the other end and sustainable in the middle. But as you kind of learn more about this field, it feels really inadequate, because it kind of seems to say, we just have to take sustainability and turn it up to 11. And I would say that kind of box ticking approach can get you to restorative. But to get to regenerative design, we have to think we have to change the way that we think. So, you can read much more about regenerative principles. And that's the this is the plan in which we're going to frame our discussion today around these three aspects of co-evolution processes, nested systems, and essence thinking. So, what I would like you to do is I'd like to invite you all to think of a project that you're working on, or that you've worked on. And I'm going to ask you some questions around this kind of idea. So, I'll give you a few seconds to image a project that you'd like to think about. And I think we're going to ask you in the poll to click when you're ready. Is that correct? Hopefully it comes up...No, I think we have the wrong question up. But anyway, I'll let you think of a project. So hopefully, that's enough time for you to think of something. And so,

what I'm going to do is...So the first thing I wanted to, when you think of that project, I want to ask you a couple of questions. So, do you think you really understood the history about the site? I want to know what were the changes in the area that led to your project coming to life? What do you imagine that your project might become in the future? Thinking about it in terms of nested systems, what do you think the people around your project consider to be the area? What's the local - what would be the local area? How far do you have to walk to actually leave that local area? Where does that area interact with? And how do those wider areas interact with your particular project? The last one, I want to ask you, is about the essence of that project. So, what aspects of the history of that site did you - do you think you understood? Did you understand the economics of it? The cultural aspects? The social? The ecological? Going even back to the geological? What was that? What is this? What is the area of your projects been in its lifetime, that was the most successful? And what ways and the people tried to change the area and been less successful? So, this - so this is some of the areas where my knowledge has come from. And I'm really grateful for the people who've helped me with that. Amy and Andy are going to share some excellent projects with us. And so, we have a couple of options. One option is that we could sit back and listen like a normal kind of Q&A. But what I was going to suggest is whether or not you can in this just for this time, you're going to be with us. Just think of yourself as part of those projects. Imagine that they were your own projects, working on them. And think of questions that would be useful for yourself working on those projects, to elevate them beyond sustainability. So that's how we're going to frame that. A couple of people have asked for the questions to be put into the chat. So, while - so during the next presentation, I'll put the questions down there, so you can reflect back on them later. So yeah, hopefully we can all have that kind of mindset of being part of the projects that we're about to see. And we can and we can ask questions on that basis to kind of move the projects beyond sustainability together. So, I'm going to stop sharing. And I'm going to introduce our first speaker. And it's lovely moving between different technologies. So, our first speaker is Amy Franceschini who's an artist and designer whose work facilitates encounter, exchange, and tactile forms of inquiry by calling into question the certainties of a given time or place where the work is situated. An overarching theme in her work is a perceived conflict between humans and nature. Her projects reveal the history and currents of contradictions related to the use, sorry, related to this divide by challenging systems of exchange. And the tools we use to hunt and gather, using this as a starting point, showcase relational objects that invoke action and inquiry, not only to imagine, but also to participate in and initiate change in the places we live. So, without further ado, I'll hand over to Amy. I need you to...

## **Amy Franceschini 11:40**

Can you hear me? Yes. Hello. Hello. Thank you for the introduction. And for everyone who's made this come together. I'm Amy Franceschini. I'm sitting in

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Ghent, Belgium, in an orange room in an old worker labour house that was renovated by my partner Lode Vranken, and we have a lot of spider webs. I have brown hair, and it's in braids. Um, so I will begin, I'm going to focus on one project. And it's an older project, but it resonates with the present work we're doing. And it sort of shows kind of an arc of the different ways we work within one project. So, it's called *Flatbread Society*. But what you're seeing now is just a portrait of Future Farmers, which is a working group of artists, designers, farmers, anthropologists, and architects. And we form working constellations in the contexts where we're invited to work. So, this is just kind of a portrait of the last 12 years of places and people and projects. In this question of beyond sustainability, I think that I find I'll talk for myself about in representing Future Farmers is that you have to be quite stubborn. So, this was recently a retrospective where we had these donkey suits made and wore them within our exhibition, to kind of remind ourselves how much you have to be stubborn, and also quite organised. So, the donkeys might be stubborn and feral, but they're also quite, they can type. They find their way into the domestic life. So Future Farmers was invited in 2010, to come to Oslo's waterfront where they were basically redoing a productive port that was about building port and turning it into a cultural waterfront. We installed a project there called *Flatbread Society* for eight years. And this is the context, and this is what we saw before we got there, it was a complete remaking of the waterfront. And for us, it was like how to where do you situate yourself here? There's tonnes of questions we can talk about in Q&A, like how do you come to a place? I'm from San Francisco going to Nordic country, like how do you work here. So, what we often do is look back like 100 years at a place and this is a picture from this port area 150 years before, where there was actually a garden; the king's garden that was used to feed all of the labourers and also the Kings court. And so often we take this as kind of the precedent for something that can happen now. And often historical precedent works quite well with policymakers because they, in our experience, can't quite imagine something they can't see or have already happened. So, this image was quite an important image for us. We formed a working group called *Flatbread Society* and sort of played with this history of flatbread in Norwegian culture as a currency that also translates to different cultures that are living in Oslo, which is - has quite a diverse community of immigrants that also are eating flatbread. So, what we did is we asked if we could occupy one of these spaces in the, in the construction area and ask if we could just farm there. And the city thought that was not interesting, and nobody would sign up to do it. Long story short, 4000 people signed up to farm here, we only had 150 boxes, we met with nearly 4000 people. And in a public forum and chose 150 people that would commit to three years of gardening here with the caveat that we would work together to try to transition this to a permanent farm with no more promises than that. A key point of sustainable projects for us is a local producer, commissioner; someone who's very embedded in the project. So, we always celebrate Anne Beate Hovind, who was with us for the eight years to make this happen. The place became kind of a

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mess, messy allotment garden, self-organised, people really loved it. But aesthetically, it was quite messy. But the whole area was quite a mess at this point as because it was a construction site. So, in a way we chose this site, because it was sort of out of that view of the main construction area. And we kind of knew we could get away with maybe a slower process that will lead into something more permanent. So, in the third year, we proposed to make a gathering site, a big house, and we did a temporary bake house to test out this idea of having a permanent bakehouse. And this is a very Norwegian tradition to have communal bakehouse. It wasn't completely open space, 24 hours a day. And everything we did was done in the forms of workshops. So, we built - ended up building this kind of mothership oven, which was all made from clay from the region and hay, and we made three ovens in one. So, there's a bread oven, a tender oven, and a tandor which is a traditional Norwegian oven and a heated bench to sit between. And just by making this tool, people came from all walks of life to use it. So, people were immediately using the tandor oven. There were universities came to have their after conference parties, vote people came, it became quite a busy hub. So, this temporary site was at the waterfront and then we created a suite of what we call relational objects. So, this was a canoe oven that we walked around, actually rode around the fjord and would walk into different neighbourhoods to talk to people about the idea of a farm and the bakehouse at the waterfront. We ran an internet radio station to stream these conversations that we had with people while we were baking. And for us these two components of having the mobile kind of wondering architecture. And having the temporary architecture really created this network of a feedback loop of bringing people to the site and people going back into the city and talking about this new potential site that we were thinking together. So, through these wanderings in the canoe, we met a lot of people who wanted to use the site or didn't really know it existed as a farm. So, we were able to, I think someone mentioned this earlier, we were able to host a demonstration against the privatisation of seeds in 2015, which ended up not completely happening. But through this action, we seeded the field with ancient grains that were trying to be brought back into production in Norway. And in this action, a lot of media came, and I actually always think the media is quite a collaborator when trying to embed a practice and get a debate going. So, this moment was quite key, where people saw that this piece of land was actually being used for multiple uses beyond just recreation. So, we transitioned in this year to the allotment gardens, a green field and relationships with local farmers who wanted to bring these grains back into production and use this site as a stage for that practice. This is our key collaborator, Johan Sward, who's standing in a crop of rye that was fallen out of production had been not been grown since the 1800s. And was found in an old barn and was brought back into the into production here. With this suite of tools, we had the canoe oven, we also had this rolling pin telescope that was sort of this practical tool, but also a way to think about where we are looking in the future and what do we where do we draw from the past, so this is the barn where that rye was found in

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the ceiling that was grown by a group of nomadic farmers up until the 1800s. So, at this point, we formed a board, very civilised board that ate raised bread. And formalise a process with the city to build a permanent bakehouse. We held the temporary bakehouse was welcomed and kind of more successful than we imagined. And so, the city said, what would it look like to do this permanently? So, we held, you know, classic kind of design charrette, but animated it quite beautifully, and thought together, what would a permanent bake house look like? What would an alternative economy be at this site? And how can we create this into a durable permanent artwork. At this point, so we were located here on top of a tunnel, so part of the redevelopment was to create a tunnel that so that cars wouldn't go through the city. And there was no soil, and no one ever lived here. And it was just rock. So, we had to bring soil and in 2015, we, instead of just bringing in clean soil, we worked with 52 farmers and invited them in a soil procession to bring their soil to the city and lay it upon the land. So, we asked, through this procession, we asked everybody to bring one little handful of the contributions to the site, and mix all of these cultures together into a new culture that was named on this day, and this whole site was named Losæter after which means a common in the city. Through this process of three years, many ideas about how this site could be used or thought of, and we together wrote this document that was called A Declaration of Land Use, that this site would be dedicated to urban farming, which connects to peri urban farming, and as a site for art and agriculture. And this new mixture of soil was the witness. And this was the name new name at the site. And so, once this became kind of permanent in this soil procession happened, things started to happen, like beekeepers came and started beekeeping. A farmer drove by one day and said, oh, you're going to need to plough that soil - I have horses. And so, he comes once a year to plough. We partnered with the Norwegian Farmers Union and took some of our art funding to provide a job. So, we've now had three farmers who are hired every two years to run this site. And to build a permanent site, we wanted to pay homage to this history of this port. This is a picture of a rescue boat that's quite often in the harbour, and also has the name of the former name of Oslo, which is Kristiania. So, we worked with a group of boat builders nearby to build a bake house that was in the form of this rescue boat, thinking about the fact that this project is actually kind of rescuing these ancient grains. It's rescuing practices that are disappearing. And as a site for transformation. So, this is the permanent bakehouse. One side is a baking area, and the other is a propagation house in the winter and a meeting place.

**Elisabeth Del Prete 23:28**

Amy, I'm so sorry to jump in. But I think we're...

**Amy Franceschini 23:30**

I'm done. Yeah, so two more slides. And I'm done. Okay, so this project goes on. It's this bake house is programmed; we can talk about how its programmed and how it's the material it's built out of. This is a picture of it a couple of years ago. And just to give you a sense of this strange site where it is. This has been developed a lot. But this is sort of this swath of land of multiple uses allotments, Community Farm, and the bake house, so I will stop.

**Cíaran Malik 24:03**

Thanks, Amy. It's great! I apologise I should have; I should have been...

**Amy Franceschini 24:09**

I was waiting for the signal...

**Cíaran Malik 24:10**

...Track of time. No, no, no, it's fine. I, I was getting way too much into the presentation. So, I'm really sorry about that. And so, we're after Amy, I get to introduce Andy Merritt, who is our second speaker. And the merit is one half of Something & Son. Through experimental solution-based work, he explores social and ecological issues via permanent installations and functional sculptures which provide a framework or a foundation for communities and ecologies to build and grow upon. And without further ado, I'll hand over to Andy.

**Andy Merritt 24:49**

Hello, everyone. I am Andy. I'm a guy sitting in a room in Rome with white walls, I have dark hair, a dark beard, and a dark top. Okay, so I'll get the presentation up hopefully. Yes, so yeah, the work I do creates foundations or platforms for people or other species to build upon. Essentially, they're kind of half built in some ways or half done, allowing for - allowing for them to grow after the initial opening of the project. They - the project is going to manifest in four different ways, installations like this one, which was around fish and chips. And we tried to - tried and failed to grow one day's worth of fish and chips within over three months. Sculpture, this is a sculpture for swifts, the birds that migrate up from Africa to the UK or Europe in general every year. And happenings and performances, and this is at the V&A Museum and was a kind of stock exchange for seeds. Like Amy kind of around the privatisation of seeds, and people so people came down and bartered with their seeds essentially. And then the other part of our - the work that I do with Something & Son is around kind of experimental economies, essentially, this was the first project we did together, which is called *Farm Shop*, where we took over a Victorian shop, and then had different growth systems within the within the building kind of showing all the different realities of how food is grown. But as part of it, we also had a restaurant and a desk space to allow the project to be open to the public for free. And the project start, it was only supposed to be a three-month

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project at the start. But it was open for 10 years in the end, closing in 2020. And another kind of project example about how we create these sort of mini little economies around a project. This is a *Barking Bathhouse*, or the visual of the *Barking Bathhouse* that we did for the cultural Olympics. And we were given a bunch of money to do the project. And as part of it, we said, well, we're not going to use it all on the physical, we want to put a major part of that funding aside to pay for staffing for the project, and to give out grants to local businesses to run from the building. And, and we also and because all these overheads that were contained within the project budget, it meant that we only had to charge local people £1 to enter. And that was really just to sort of, to encourage them to when they did book a place to actually come to their booking. And then this is another example at Somerset House called Makerversity, which is essentially we were let me see my notes, where we we've got 350 members, and they all make in some way. We were given the space and then had slowly over the years sort of ploughed the money back into the project to keep it growing. And it's an example about how we, and I work in the sense that the there's no one really within Something & Son we create teams around the project. So, this employs people purely for male diversity. And I want to bring this model going into the into future projects away from the sort of, but up until now it's been mainly around these kinds of economic systems around these projects have mainly been around buildings and I want to start taking it into landscapes instead. And one of these projects is in Sheppey, which is an island down the river Thames in the Thames Estuary. And so, I've been working there for about a year now with Cement Fields which is an organisation based in Kent. So, and this this project has sort of been born out of a long-term project that I've been doing called *The Manuals*, which is essentially exploring how to how we can use the infrastructure and how we can use the infrastructure and systems and actions of our every day and turn these into benefit for other species in some way. Initially, with Cement Fields were up, I was proposing to do a project around shopping trolleys and using those to create oyster reefs. It's something I still want to do. But on reflection, we thought that we actually wanted to step back a bit and sort of understand the context of Sheppey in more depth. But the one thing that I took over from the trolley reef idea into the into the current scenario is this idea of stack systems, and how nature builds on top of each other. Nature doesn't just - different species don't just have one function, they will have multiple functions. But within humanity, we tend to build things just for one function. As an example, this is and also like nature tends to sort of co-opt human made structures. And I love that kind of I think it's like a positive thing that's coming out of the Anthropocene essentially, that even at our worst, we can create these spaces for other species to cohabit with. And this is an amazing example in Mexico City Texcoco, which is an airport that was designed by Norman Foster, the people put the vote to the people, and they said that they didn't want the airport. So, the airport was half built. And in turn, it's sort of since turned into this amazing kind of wetland kind of airport for birds. And this is the kind of scale that I would love to

work at as well. So anyway, back to Sheppey. So, there's a lot of erosion in Sheppey. It's, it's right at the sort of forefront it's one of the worst places for erosion on the UK coastline, it's kind of made worse by the Thames Barrier, because every time that shut the water rebounds back down the river and creates further erosion to the to the seafront on the island. This is a sort of I don't know quite why I put this image next to that one. But anyway, this is a sort of example about how you can create biodiversity and build these layers onto an existing infrastructure. Well, that's the way I view it. So, it's kind of like if you look at the bottom field, that's kind of the scenario that we're currently at with most of the infrastructure that we have, could it be the top one instead. So, it's like building these layers across on top of infrastructure. And also, just rethinking how we sort of only one minute left, okay. So, this is a concrete, concrete reef and oyster reef. So, this is Sheppey. They've built all these large coastal defences sort of very kind of brutal. And I've got my eye on this beautiful concrete fence. And I want to try and to build an allotment on the on the concrete sea defence, because there's an allotment just very near to it. So, there's already that culture within Sheppey, and also the infrastructure to work with, though, with the people that run the allotment, and they've got a waiting list. So, it's like building onto that. This is kind of examples of the coastline there, which is very kind of militarised, which I want to work with. And these are some of the these are the sort of two sights, so the one on the left and the one on the right, building an allotment onto the concrete sea defence, essentially. And start to look into the different kinds of creatures that that allotment can support. So, it's providing people with food, but also providing habitat for other species. This is some charts looking into the type of food and which what kind of food but grow at different levels of the intertidal technique, which is used in being used in Holland for centuries and centuries, which is essentially using willow, which doesn't biodegrade very quickly or doesn't biodegrade quickly in the sea. And using that to create this kind of a lot of them essentially, and that kind of communal nature of how it is built. And maybe around the project as well, sort of creating this willow plantation and grow.

**Cíaran Malik 34:55**

Andy, I'm going to ask you to wrap up but that's okay.

**Andy Merritt 34:58**

Yeah, goodbye *[laughter]*

**Cíaran Malik 35:00**

No, I meant like, do you is there any like particular one you want to finish them before we start discussing.

**Andy Merritt 35:05**

That's the last one. So, it's all good!

**Cíaran Malik 35:08**

I would have been so much smoother if I just waited a second longer. So, thank you so much. For both of those presentations, they're really interesting. And it's really hard to kind of think about my job as a moderator while I'm making notes. So, one of the first ones I saw, I'm going to come to so if anyone has any questions, please put them into the Slido and I'll read them as they kind of come up. But obviously, as the moderator, I get to ask the first questions, which is great. It seems so one of the things that I - it's really interesting that you kind of presented again, everyone, this wasn't entirely planned. But these two projects, which are really, really similar in terms of location, in terms of idea. And so, I kind of wanted to ask you both about the kind of way that you're working with the community and kind of creating an energy, because from Amy's project, you were describing it that you started, and there were 4000 people signing up, which is really exciting. And so, it's really, it'd be really interesting to hear how that kind of energy created. And it would be really interesting, Andy, to hear from you the same kind of position where I think you'll probably you'll probably be a bit earlier. And before you'd kind of get that 4000. I was just kind of curious what the kind of energy is on this on the site. So, I'll start with Amy, and then I'll come back to Andy, if that's okay?

**Amy Franceschini 36:33**

Thank you. Thank you, Andy, for your presentation. It's so nice to learn about your work. Um, so the 4000 people, was a surprise. But it came from a project we did in San Francisco that was similar. And what we did is we asked our commissioner to publish a call for participation in like eight languages and put them in different neighbourhoods and libraries and put a post in the newspaper. So, this, I mean, the city really thought people didn't want to farm because they had moved from rural areas to the city to become urban. And so that was quite a surprise. And what came out of that was actually the city made allotments based in different parks throughout the city. Another thing that really galvanises people around how our projects is being present. So, we this temporary bakehouse was a six-week presence where we were there every day, all of the Future Farmers. And just by being present, and then the canoe going out, you start to create these relations. And actually, these kind of self-imposed ambassadors start to come, who want to talk about the project, do their own projects there. But I think it's just a navigation of having an open platform where really what is needed to manifest can manifest. Like it's already there, we're just kind of creating a space for those things to come together.

**Cíaran Malik 38:05**

And Andy?

**Andy Merritt 38:09**

Yeah, so obviously, at the start of the project now, so but kind of making decisions like just talking to key people right now or seeking out people essentially and talking to them. And developing the project with them, rather than doing a sort of like big, open, open call, essentially, about the about the project. But that will happen. Like the first project that Something & Son did, the 'Farm Shop', we, we got the building, we had the idea, we didn't have any idea how we were going to do the idea, but we have the idea. And we just opened the doors to the building literally just had the open all the time, and people started to wander in, and word just going around. And it was very anarchic. And we had some really bad paint jobs and stuff like that happening. But as people got involved and volunteered, but that, that kind of model of working is, what we like to do is we like to start really early days. But through my experience, now I'd kind of start to stage it a little bit more. And like I say, with the Sheppey one, we're kind of talking with the allotment. People that run the allotment, for example, people that understand the coastline, really sort of starting to talk to/with people that really understand the context. And then when we're at a point where we don't make false promises, essentially. Then we open it up to more people.

**Cíaran Malik 39:43**

Yeah, that makes sense. One of the questions that's come up, and actually the chat, which I think is slightly kind of building on what Amy was just talking about was that they loved the bake house Project. Amy, and they said it must need a lot of time on the ground from you as a practitioner and you he touched on it. So, I kind of thought this was a good time to talk about it. And they were asking how do you balance this work? When you're when you as a practice? Are you personally doing multiple projects?

**Amy Franceschini 40:11**

Yeah, that's a good question. I don't think we'll ever do it again like that. So, we formed a group working group, of four core future farmers. And we would go there for like six months, six weeks at a time, every year. And so, we installed this kind of annual insertion of the Future Farmers kind of method. But because it was so successful in that first year, we partnered with a local programmer, and a curator and some people who wanted to do their own projects at the site. And so, they kind of tended to the site over the periods of time when we weren't there. And then we would come in and do these kinds of festivals or, you know, more intensive weeks of programming, and then that would cultivate new audiences. But I think the main thing is that we didn't ever know we would have permanent, this would be a permanent project. And so, there was a sort of certain sort of leap of faith taking in everyone's efforts. And I think that creates, like, a certain amount of trust. And we never promised anything, like you said, Andy, it's like with the allotment gardens, we said, we can promise three years, but we don't know what will happen. And so, I

think that was something and then also always trying to have our meetings with the stakeholders at the site and not in the 16 storey building where the master planning was happening, because that's where they would, our commissioners would have really liked us to be having these meetings up there and not in the mess of all these desires on the ground. So, it's definitely a decision of being very present.

**Cíaran Malik 41:57**

Thanks. So, I like this actually, someone's asked like a similar question to what I was going to ask. And so, they've like kind of asking you both about how do you scale up your fantastic projects, impact broader strategies and frameworks? And I was, I kind of was going to ask the same kind of thing. Because from what Amy was talking about, you talked about how your project like led to more allotment work later on. And I was curious, Andy, if you see, actually to be really interesting, because you could either see your project as scaling up to like, impact wider, or actually, you could see the allotments nearby as kind of scaling up to kind of inform your project. So, I'll ask Andy first, and then Amy, if that's okay?

**Andy Merritt 42:44**

Yeah, I think so like I've kind of view the projects that I do are often kind of breaking down doors. And using sort of the art world essentially, to sort of allow these things that may be harder to, to happen in normal circumstances. So, there's the kind of I could scale it up, I could keep working on it to scale it up to like you say, local people can keep scaling up if they're, if they want to. But also, it's just putting it out there. It's just getting that idea out there, setting a precedent and then not allowing other people to do it. So, I guess that's that kind of letting your baby grow up, essentially, and becoming an adult. And they go off and do their own thing. And like not controlling it too much. But yeah, like, I think it's more kind of just sharing the sort of - sharing the knowledge that you've gained. Through that kind of like, because, you know, like, you have this project, it's sort of creative, but also, it's got, there's so many rules and regs, you've got to jump through to try and get it off the ground. So, there's that kind of it's, I think the scaling up is the idea, but also sort of providing that knowledge about how, how to - how to do the project in the first place. So, like, been working, I was working with Blue Marine Foundation, and they were doing an oyster reef out in Essex, and they, they gave me a lot of, so that they're just doing purely ecological-based projects, but they just gave me all the different hoops to that I'd need to jump through to get the project off the ground, even though it's different. But it's all yeah, if I answered the question.

**Cíaran Malik 44:37**

Now you've done it. You've definitely covered a lot. And I still like I like; I don't know if you have to answer this but I kind of think it's really interesting because then even then you just like at the start you discussed allotments nearby and

you're making like you have an idea for an allotment and then you were talking about another project that was giving you inspiration. So, in some ways, you could think about your project is going out like you said, and letting it grow, but you could also actually see your project as other projects growing, and like you're at this intersection of those ideas, which is also really exciting way to think about it.

**Andy Merritt 45:12**

Yeah, yeah.

**Cíaran Malik 45:15**

Amy? *[laughter]*

**Amy Franceschini 45:20**

Um, I think for me, it's about creating this idea of scale scares me a little, but I, I think that providing like low sceptre, this land actually creates a platform for many practices to coexist. And so, they're all self, it's, it was a very tricky way to get it to. It happened quite on its own. But I think why it works is it's a collective of collectives. And that the site is, it's quite clear that you can, it's, you can come in, you can start something, it's been an incubator for actually businesses, like the beekeepers are now the city beekeepers, you know, the farmers are now the city farmers, the first city in Norway to have a city farmer funded by the Norwegian Farmers Union. And so that started to happen in other cities. So, I, I think, for me, I like to think of our projects as sort of these, I always like to think of them as a state of a pilot project. And by calling it a pilot project, I think potential is always there. Like if something is kind of finished, like my partner says, then you're just maintaining something. And so how does it have that feeling of always having a potential for to become something new? And I think the idea of scale for me is that it permeates in other places and other ways. So, like with these urban farmers now in Trondheim, and in other cities around Norway. Yeah, they kind of were born through the project.

**Cíaran Malik 46:55**

And like, does it - is it scary? Or is does it make it more difficult working in this kind of way of not seeing the end of the project? Like does that - like do you have like sleepless nights? Or does it make it really difficult when you're trying to talk to people about it? Like, I know what it'll look like in the next 24 hours? But in a week's time, I don't know, what's it? Like, how does that - how does that affect how you work?

**Amy Franceschini 47:20**

I think I might have been more scared of that when I was younger. I love that. I mean, of course, in a way it's finished for us, the Oslo project, but it goes on. And you know, it's definitely takes different directions depending on who the farmers as

well, which is kind of beautiful. Like they have different tendencies. But it's not that's not scary to me, I think. Let me think about it. Andy, you answer that question while I think about the scale question.

**Andy Merritt 47:54**

Yeah, and I think it's so often work with well, always worked nearly always worked with arts organisations, as well. So, with Cement Fields, a.k.a Whitstable Biennial, they - Like Sue has been working in the area for a very long time, Sue, the director has been working in the area for a very long time knows a lot of people there. Emma, the curator-producer that I'm working with, likewise. And, and then so but they also they provide a sort of buffer essentially, as well, that, that organisation that you're working with, and then also just creating, so like any projects, Makerversity, etc, etc. They all have, like, they're, they're all they're all their own companies. So financially as well, like you have to think about these things crashing or whatever. They've, they, they, they're self-supported. And they can't impact the sort of mothership. If they do say it allows that kind of - it gets rid of the scariness of doing it a little bit but also, I'm just like, I'm a bit of a bull in a China shop and I'll just go running around and do things and that's just my natural inclination is just to try and get projects off the ground.

**Cíaran Malik 49:19**

I want to like I'm going to ask you about this because this has come up like three times now that you both talked about this, like the that you have to come up against these really hard walls; you've used language like breaking down doors, of like being stubborn, of like being a bull in a China shop. And it's interesting because like it's a way of thinking about it. Like part of this has been that those restraints in some ways have created your projects. And it's really in some ways for your - you've been part of it is your ability to see the potential that's been there. And like work with those restraints or up against those restraints and you've come out with something. So, I was wondering like at the end of it, do you - do you kind of love your restraints? Like how does that change how you think about it? Would that change how you would design it?

**Andy Merritt 50:09**

Yeah, I think it moulds. It makes every project unique to the context. Sometimes it's annoying, but also it can, it can be beneficial. It's kind of the annoying side is if it's kind of so I've currently two sites for the Sheppey project. And it's there's two sites because one might fall through, because there's more fear around doing the project there, essentially, then the other one. Or it might take more money to do it, etc, etc. I've lost myself a bit *[laughter]*. Amy, you go!

**Amy Franceschini 50:54**

I think that I think the challenges are yeah, definitely make it more interesting. Like it's kind of, I mean, it was impossible for people to believe that life could exist on this rocky terrain. It seemed completely undesirable to the city and the stakeholders for that to be the place for us to start. It was sort of off the map. And so, I think it's exciting to kind of switch and there's more malleability when people kind of can't imagine, you can it's like a new space for negotiation. Of course, that picture I showed you also helped in convincing that we could do something there you know that life had been there before it can happen again.

**Cíaran Malik 51:49**

Andy did you want to come back or?

**Andy Merritt 51:53**

I, you know, like with the I think it's also sort of trying to hit. So, like with the with the Sheppey project, we're getting a lot of positive responses, even though it's, it's quite an extreme idea, you could say, I think people because it's people aren't, there's a, there's a general sort of awareness that things can't carry on as they current as they are. So, it's also just sort of when you get that kind of feedback from people on the ground, then it gives you that strength to carry on. Because you know that you're doing something that that local people want and need. So, yeah.

**Cíaran Malik 52:45**

So that kind of came up in the chat. And then someone's asked about asking about your personal motivations, not what personal motivations for you and your organisation. But then I think it's also interesting to think about, like, how - I'm curious about how your personal motivations have one place, and then you'll have the kind of motivations of the people who were in the place, and then the motivations of the people who manage the place. So that might be local governance, or something like that. That's your motivation, the local motivation, and then the kind of governance motivation. And I was really curious about how, like, I'm asking some really, but you can take a second if you need, like, like how do you kind of see those, how do you reconcile those?

**Amy Franceschini 53:43**

I can start. I think doubt plays a big part of it for me. And for Oslo, I actually formed a board of like, councillors that didn't take part of the project, but it was really thinking like, do we want to take part in a massive capital waterfront development project? Would we do this in our hometown? I don't know I might be protesting it. And so, we worked with an anthropologist in New York, political scientists working on migration and gentrification issues in Berlin, and intellectual property artists have around this idea of the seeds and planting them in the city and like what this

stage could actually due for thinking about keeping our seats in the hands of the many rather than the hands a few. And they helped me you know, just to kind of see the value in having this place at the table with stakeholders like your you do get invited to the 16th floor and there is this little window of possibly changing the way things are made or developed. I mean, they had a master plan. It was already finished. Our site was supposed to be a football field. Nice lighting, some yoga chairs. And we said, what that would be 20 years from now, you know, we said, well, can we sit there, and we have the idea, maybe we can change this from a football field. I think the local motivation in the beginning was none. Like people were very upset about this, and waterfront development. And so that was an interesting thing to enter into. But I think when our temporary, I don't think but I know when our temporary bakehouse was put up, it kind of made people think, well, this, there's maybe something a different alternative that could happen here. And let's show what can happen and make it irresistible and permanent. The governance motivation, of course, I would say is many folds. I think our project definitely gave the waterfront development a good face, it had a pretty negative face with the locals when we got there. And so, you have to be honest, that that's part of what you're taking part in. But I think that, you know, we actually did change the policy during one era of governance of the government that it changed while we were there. So, the green policy was always shifting, but the green policies that they were making, we're influenced by this new land use that we were doing. But I ultimately, I think that the city of Oslo is quite special, and they wanted to make their waterfront have multiple uses and have it be like, completely popular. And so, I think that's what fuelled a lot of the participation in our project.

**Cíaran Malik 56:41**

Nice, very succinct answer. Andy?

**Andy Merritt 56:47**

Yeah, there's all the work I do now is based around the idea that humanity is essentially sort of invented all these amazing things. And 99% of them aren't of any use to the planet or other species. And that's sort of that, I just use that as a starting point for everything I do now, and just walk around and see constant opportunities to stack up these places with other with other functions. So yeah, that's, that's my, that's my motivation for everything. And I just, and then I've got the, you know, in my, maybe in my arrogance, I've kind of like, well, that that will be that will create a much better place by doing it. And, and then it's just like, sounding it out, like, you know, with the it's just walking around and talking with people and having this sort of general kind of idea, but not a fixed idea at all. And then it's just you the by walking around the place, it starts to tell you what, what is needed. And that place might be an international context as well. It's kind of like, well, we've got food crisis. So, it's going to, and then how does that fit within a local context? Because it's kind of, I think the learnings that I've had, from working on

these projects for over 10 years is that you can do locally based projects, but essentially, everyone's facing very similar problems all over the world, because we're all so interconnected. So, you know, like, when we when we did *Farm Shop*, it's a local project, but people from everywhere, every little corner, we're saying, you know, like we're had it felt a connection to the, to what we were doing. And it just that was those early days, that just gave me the realisation that you can do a locally based project that can still be speak to people in many different contexts.

**Cíaran Malik 58:59**

I want to come back to your allotment project, though, because you described your personal motivation, then you so talk about the people there, but I was just curious about like, how, like, how are you thinking about the local motivation and the governance like motivation in that area?

**Andy Merritt 59:16**

Well, they've got all the there's all the sea defences that they've got all the way along the north coast of Sheppey. So, like, Sheppey is kind of half the north part is developed. And it's residential and heavy industry, etc. And then the south part is still wetland, and kind of a bit of agriculture. But there's, there's a general like realisation that they're doomed a little bit, I think that it's going to be really hard to stop the sea rising, so they kind of I think there's just a sort of appetite to try to find another way forward. And we get, you know, like early days, it's not just me talking, it will be an engineer, for example, talking. So, I'm - so I'm saying I've got this idea. And then a structural engineer will come in and say, well, yeah, this is kind of like sound, a sound practical idea as well. So, it's I, you know, you it's early, early days, you get these other professionals around you, to add to the add to the voice, voice and add to the idea, because my voice alone is just kind of like I'm coming at it from an arts point of view. You need these experts to sort of say, Yeah, this could work. If that answers your question, but I think there's a yeah, what we found in Sheppey, is that there's that there's a need to try to find another way. They can't just keep building - building more contract, they can't afford to keep building concrete, concrete defences, they know it doesn't work long term, and they can't afford to keep. They don't see any point in, in fixing the concrete defences as well. They're doing a bit of light fixing here and there, but there's, yeah.

**Cíaran Malik 1:01:12**

I like, maybe it's maybe that there is no current, like direction for it. And so, you're kind of you're kind of trying to suggest and trying to tap into what could happen that because there's no current plan for it. And one of the questions that came up, actually, it was talking, and I think this comes back to, I think, your presentation and the way you were talking about what did they say? Sorry? I was having a look at the Oh, yeah. They said, how do you connect to the local intervention to, to, to

wider structural or political change? And it was very interesting, when you were showing that report, and you were showing the kind of like, lack of biodiversity. And I was going to ask you about, like, how it's this really interesting way of, of looking back, like you're in this position, where you're looking forward in a climate emergency kind of manner. And you're looking backwards at this, like, this is what the ecology of these areas used to be. And so, I was just kind of curious where like, how do you - how does that process work for you of like, looking backwards and looking forwards, and at the same time, like fitting them within political and like wider changes? *[laughter]* Amy's smiling, because she's like, I didn't get asked that first.

**Andy Merritt 1:02:41**

Like, with this project is still in development. So, it's still kind of understanding things. So that slightly gets me out of that one. But yeah, it's just it, there's some basic, so you like looking back, you kind of you're not trying to - Amy, do you want to go first?

**Cíaran Malik 1:03:07**

I come back, I come back, I come back to you a second. Amy, I was going to ask you a similar kind of question about that. Because you took this, you showed in your presentation, looking back, and you showed it was a king's garden? I think that's what it was. And I was wondering whether or not like, actually, did you look further back and see what it was before that? And I was kind of curious how that would affect how that would affect, like, would looking back even further change? Or would it would change what you did? Or would it encourage what you did in the end?

**Amy Franceschini 1:03:36**

That's a great question, because, I mean, I'm interested in farming, and how we sustain ourselves through that practice. And so that picture was actually important for my personal motivation. But another artist actually who was part of this programme of public art, Ellen Sorenson, went farther back and is recreating a portion of the waterfront, to be the fjord it was before humans. And there's an actually an island just across, you can see it from our site. That was, nobody ever lived there, except some Portuguese monks were there at one point. So, it's pretty much intact, and the flora and fauna are totally different than just like, three blocks away. I mean, it's the waters between us. So, she's actually like making a carbon copy of part of that island in the waterfront. And it's a very slow process, but I think it's, it's kind of completely made people rethink what that waterfront has been and the impact of the industry and even just living there and having, you know, grey water movement to the shore and seeing how little life is there. So, I think you asked this question, how do you go beyond the sustainability? But I think

the combination of the two projects is quite nice to you know, sandwich these different ways of using the land there.

**Andy Merritt 1:05:01**

Yeah, I can come back in now. So, the yes, kind of looking at obviously, you it's we're understanding the lost ecology of the of the intertidal zone around there. You can do that a little bit by looking at the wetlands on the south side of the island, but the south side is different to the, to the north. And also, it's just how does it's looking at the past, but then also looking at the present. And thinking, well, it's, you've got a massive stack load of concrete there to try and work with. So, it's trying to fit that fit that past into the present, and then also look to the future and sort of try to understand what kind of sea levels we'd be looking at, and how, how to make that structure last as long as it can. And then also, like, around the ecology, it's like, the idea is that this is a moving allotment. So, the crabs that maybe grow that live within that allotment are, you know, the idea of that kind of something you can eat. So, it's kind of looking at the ecology as food as well because I think that's an important part of rebuilding lost ecologies is that you've got to think of them as food, you because and then you've got to think of them in as try and think of them in a sustainable way. Because if you if they're just an ecosystem, they might - I think it's important to try and find a way that they benefit people and other species. And so, I'm kind of very sort of geared towards doing projects that aren't necessarily just pristine ecosystems, they're something that we actually interact with and eat. Because I think there's a, there's a risk that ecosystems become these kinds of things off the side. And then we carry on with industrial agriculture in the same way. And they're kind of like, we've got these two, two worlds trying to coexist, whereas I would try to, I think there's a different model where you can create ecosystems that sustain themselves, but also provide, which is what we would have done many millennia ago, but obviously, we're now doing it in a completely different time.

**Cíaran Malik 1:07:20**

We're going to like, I'm going to ask you both really quick question just because that means we also got through it, we got to look at all the questions. But one, one of the points has been in the context of regeneration, there's a tendency for all projects to look similar, basically giving the space back to nature. Now that kind of like, was really good, what like in it's really interesting and reflection to what you were just saying Andy, about nature being food. And it's, and it's interesting, because like, the spaces that were both projects have been in a space that's been human occupied for 500,000 years, at least. So, like, it's an interesting, it's an interesting discussion about whether or not you give it back to nature, or like are humans part of that nature? And I was just kind of curious how you how you both see that relationship, and I think your site, you're touching on Andy, where you were, like, let's, let's eat this nature, which, which I think might not reach might

horrify some people, but I'm, like, curious, where you how that, how that, what you think about that?

**Andy Merritt 1:08:19**

Well, I just, I just think that we have to try and find a, I would, I want to try and find a way that we live within ecosystems and if you're going to live within an ecosystem, then you've got to eat from it as well. And it's going to, I guess, there was, I was/been doing a bit of research around in Brazil, and, you know, like, they some people there were saying that the, the Amazon rainforest isn't virgin rainforest, it's been farmed for millennia. And that kind of idea, you know, like, it made me sort of realise that you should, we should never be sort of trying to partition ourselves away from nature in any way, we've got to try and find a way back in. And the reality of that is that we, we eat it, and maybe it eats us as well. And yeah.

**Cíaran Malik 1:09:15**

I want to I want to make sure that that's the last thing that you get to say. Amy, would you be able to quickly answer it?

**Amy Franceschini 1:09:22**

Oh, good. Now I have to have something as - no, I would just say I would agree. And I would also just say that, um, you know, this living with the ecologies that around us is quite messy, and that we have to embrace that messiness. I think part of our, our, you know, we, we want it to look a certain way, or we have a certain idea, and then that's imposes a certain kind of control. So, how much of this maybe we don't call it a mess anymore, but I think that's something to think about.

**Cíaran Malik 1:10:00**

Thank, thanks. So, I'm just going to quickly finish up here. I just want to thank our presenters for being wonderful and being really game for some intentionally difficult questions. I really want to say thank you to UP Projects for hosting this event. I think it's been really interesting to kind of explore this whole entire topic with you of like, you've been really good at showing your projects as processes as evolving. And seeing like, showing how they've, like, been connected to their systems and how they've like had impacts outside of themselves. And I really like this way that you've like both, for some reason, you both nailed to really tap into the essence of those places and create this really great energy from that. So, it's really, it's been really, I've thoroughly enjoyed it. So, thank you.

**Andy Merritt 1:10:53**

Thank you!

**Amy Franceschini 1:10:55**

Thank you all so much.

**Elisabeth Del Prete 1:10:57**

Yeah, yeah. Thank you, Andy, this was a really inspiring and generous conversation. And, yeah, it was great to explore the scaling potential of projects, how we live within ecosystems and our motivations for working within these contexts. I also wanted to thank the BSL interpreters for being with us today and being very patient. Thank you, also to our audience for participating. We had some great questions today. So, thanks for doing that - for being so active and engaged. This is the fourth event in the *Constellations* ° *Assembly* series. And we really want to listen and build on your feedback for future events. So, there is going to be a survey in the Slido bar up towards the end of this event. So, if you could spare a couple of minutes to fill that out, that would be absolutely great. Answers to your questions also help feed into the evaluation - the evaluation of *Constellations*, so we really value feedback. Also, I very much hope to see you at the next *Constellations* ° *Assembly* event: *How can we rethink the memorial?* that will ask, how can we find a more imaginative and nuanced way of making memorials? What if memorials were used as opportunities to speculate on future alternatives and scenarios rather, rather than symbolising and reinforcing past memories? We will be announcing a very exciting line-up of speakers via our social media channels in a couple of week's time, so do follow us on our social media channels. We will also upload a recording of today's events on YouTube that will include captions and BSL interpretation. And do please sign up to our mailing list for more information about *Constellations* ° *Assemblies* and UP Projects programme overall. And finally, a huge thank you to our amazing speakers, to the Art Fund to the Arts Council England, Barrington Hibbert Associates, our *Constellations* Patrons, and UP Supporters for supporting this programme, and to our partners Flat Time House and Liverpool Biennial and to the *Constellations* programming team and tech team. So, thank you so much. Let's keep this conversation going and hope to see you soon at our next events, thank you.