

Transforming a run-down waterside park led to higher wellbeing in Plymouth community

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Fig. 1. Photos of Teats Hill before and after the ‘urban blue acupuncture’ intervention (photos taken by SB). Credit: DOI: [10.1016/j.landurbplan.2021.104232](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2021.104232)

Transforming a run-down waterside park in Plymouth into a high-quality open air theater and play area has led to higher wellbeing and life

satisfaction among residents and visitors, new research shows.

The £70,000 capital renovation of Teats Hill in Coxside has also improved feelings of personal safety and community belonging, according to a new study led by the University of Exeter, in partnership with Plymouth City Council.

The renovation was brought about in a partnership between Plymouth City Council and a European-wide research [project](#) involving the University of Exeter, called BlueHealth. Part of the research group's remit was to study the impact of high-quality waterside spaces in urban communities. Teats Hill was one of five areas in Plymouth to benefit from the Big Lottery-funded Active Neighbourhoods project, and BlueHealth was able to contribute funding and expertise, including landscape architectural design, to conceive ideas for the [space](#) that then went to community consultation. The end result is a high-quality play area and open-air community theater.

The developments at the park took place over the winter of 2017/18, and were accompanied by a social program of events for [local residents](#) hosted by Plymouth City Council, Devon Wildlife Trust, and partners in the Active Neighbourhoods Project (which funded the majority of the redevelopments).

Once the redevelopment was completed and the park was in use, the research team conducted surveys with households in the area around the park, with their findings now published in the journal *Landscape and Urban Planning*. They were aiming to gauge the impact of how a relatively small-scale redesign, co-created between the university, council, and local residents, might have a bigger impact on the well-being of the local community.

The research team surveyed 312 households and individuals visiting the

park before the work and 332 around three months after the work was carried out.

Overall, they found that psychological well-being within the community was higher after the redevelopment took place. The greatest improvements in life satisfaction were observed in those who had visited the site recently. Increased feelings of community cohesion and safety were partly responsible for these results.

Gem smith, creative education director at Plymouth arts organization Take A Part, said the redevelopment has proved a catalyst to unite the community in setting up a thriving arts program.

"Since the development of the amphitheater space at Teats Hill arts organization Take A Part (TAP) have been collaborating with the local community, Active Neighbourhoods and Plymouth Community homes as lead partners and have supported the community to raise funds to develop projects that animate and respond to the space.

Firstly, using art and creative projects to reflecting on and share the histories and untold stories of the community in the midst of the Mayflower 400 commemorations in the city. Then following that work connecting with and supporting the ambition and drive of the community a look at what next for the area. Community art group Coxside Resident's Art Board (CRAB) formed as a direct result of TAP's work in Coxside and the two continue to collaborate to work with art and creativity as a conversation starter and a vehicle for change in the community."

Dr. Lewis Elliott, from the University of Exeter Medical School, one of the research co-authors, said: "The improvements to Teats Hill would not have been possible without the incredibly hard work that Plymouth City Council put into engaging the local community and local stakeholders in

the redevelopment. We're delighted that our results demonstrate that carefully thought-out improvements to waterside city spaces can promote psychological well-being, but it is clear that the community-led process and promotional program of events that accompanied the redesign were also key to its success."

The research was conducted as part of the BlueHealth project, a pan-European project involving the University of Exeter which investigates the links between urban waters, climate and health.

The results underline the importance of accessible blue space for socio-economically deprived communities, and highlight the needs for these spaces to be social and safe spaces. The results also highlight the need not only for infrastructural interventions, but accompanying social and promotional programs to foster a sense of safety and community cohesion.

One of the project leads was Professor Simon Bell, chair of landscape architecture, Estonian University of Life Sciences, who visited Teats Hill and devised a number of ideas for the space, including the open air theater that won community support. He said: "Teats Hill is one of several European case studies for BlueHealth where we're working with the local community to design improvements to blue spaces. BlueHealth is all about using planning and design to enhance blue spaces—using small projects in under-used spaces to potentially have a big effect, what we refer to as 'urban acupuncture.'" These projects can change the way people interact with, use and get the most mental and physical benefits from, blue space."

More information: Nicole van den Bogerd et al, Urban blue space renovation and local resident and visitor well-being: A case study from Plymouth, UK, *Landscape and Urban Planning* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.landurbplan.2021.104232](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2021.104232)

Provided by University of Exeter

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