

CASE STUDY

REPORT

Integrated development in action!

PROJECT

USE-IT! - Unlocking Social and Economic Innovation Together (Closed)

📍 Birmingham, United Kingdom

TOPIC

Urban poverty

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Birmingham - USE-IT!

See on UIA website



About USE-IT!

USE-IT! aims at testing innovative approaches to inclusive urban development in an area of persistent poverty and deprivation in inner city Birmingham. Orthodox urban economic development approaches often exacerbate inequality and have little impact on altering patterns of deprivation. Therefore, the USE-IT! partnership set out to test an alternative approach rooted in a commitment to recognise and build the assets of local communities by connecting them with the resources of the ‘macro assets’ of the area, including developers and anchors institutions, like local authorities, universities, colleges, hospital trusts, and housing associations.

The project was selected as a case study because of the way that it integrates policies in a place-based approach and uses empowerment and participation to achieve its objectives.



Map of the USE-IT area showing community assets @City of Birmingham

The USE-IT! programme emerged from the context of regeneration programmes which have been pursued in the UK over the last forty years. Urban regeneration policies started in the UK in the early 1980’s with the desire of the Urban Development Corporations, driven by the market, to create the conditions for economic success. Other programmes followed the proceeding, but it could be argued that the historical approach of physical, neighbourhood and social regeneration has not worked. Aware of the failures of these programmes to deliver lasting change for many communities across the UK, in recent years several cities, among which Preston is the most well known, started to embrace a community wealth-building approach to developing thriving and equitable local economies.

The USE-IT! approach builds on these attempts by seeking to unlock the potential of macro assets, including anchor institutions and property developers, by linking them to the micro assets of the area, like civil society organisations, community activists, and people with specific skills or expertise.

Context

Greater Icknield, the part of Birmingham in which USE-IT! operated, has been the subject of millions of pounds of regeneration funding. Despite these investments, the area continues to be deprived and has a lack of jobs available to local people. Therefore, the [City of Birmingham](#) decided to implement an innovative and integrated solution to tackle urban poverty and improve the quality of life of the citizens by recognising and building on the assets of local communities and connecting them with the resources of the macro assets of the area such as the hospital and University.

In this article, we describe how USE-IT! was delivered following the Integrated Territorial Development approach with a specific focus on how the place-based, multi-sectoral, multi-governance, and participation principles were translated into project design and implementation.

Description

Consolidation of the partnership

USE-IT! emerged from several years of prior work by many of the project partners in the USE-IT area. The [University of Birmingham](#) had been involved in more than six years of work in the USE-IT! area through a postgraduate course focused on the neighbourhoods of the area with students working with residents living locally. The local [hospital](#) had been assessing its impact as an anchor institution for several years with a focus on understanding how it could utilise its hiring of employees and procurement of goods and services to improve wider determinants of health in the area. As a result of these prior activities, when the UIA put out a call for project bids on Urban Poverty, some of the building blocks for the approach were already in place.

Even though the one month for the bid was very tight, in a way we had been working on it for 10 years already.

Conrad Park, Project manager during the design phase

The initial team, the University, hospital and City Council, held stakeholder events with an open invitation to organisations interested in participating. As a result, there were 17 delivery partners of USE-IT!, spanning both public sector and third sector organisations. The high level of involvement of small community organisations is noteworthy given the nature of the UIA programme.

The four principle strands of activity

USE-IT! based its approach on four main strands of activities.

- Connecting refugees and migrants with overseas medical qualifications to jobs in the local hospital - sought primarily to provide overseas nationals moving to the UK with the support required to move into employment opportunities within the NHS.
- the University of Birmingham led the community research training. This sought to develop research and analytical skills in the local community. Initially, local people were trained to gain an accredited qualification, subsequently, these accredited researchers worked with University academics to deliver research for clients from across the region.
- establishing and supporting social enterprises to grow and embedding them in local markets -aimed to help local people solve local social and economic issues through starting or growing social enterprises, cooperatives and community businesses. This included the development of a peer network of social entrepreneurs, engagement and market development with local anchor institutions, a business support programme for social entrepreneurs and a business mentors and coaches programme.
- understanding and strengthening community assets -focused on supporting community economic development activity in the neighbourhoods within the project area, building a strong legacy for the project and building an infrastructure to support social enterprise in Birmingham.

The legacy of the USE-IT! approach

USE-IT! aimed to create a strong legacy for the project and build an infrastructure to support social enterprise in Birmingham. Lessons learnt will be embedded in future policies and programmes of the Birmingham City Council to be mainstreamed.

The Council has committed to embedding the USE-IT! approach in the [East of Birmingham Inclusive Growth Strategy](#). Additionally, the Council had the desire to achieve even more and to transfer the principles and activities

of USE-IT! elsewhere, which is why Birmingham City Council applied to lead an [URBACT/UIA Transfer Mechanism](#) with the cities of Poznan (Poland), Rotterdam (The Netherlands), and Trapani (Italy).



Community researcher training delivered by the University of Birmingham @ City of Birmingham

Nature of integration

Birmingham took a place-based approach because deprivation is spatially concentrated. This was backed up by a partnership that has been formed specifically for the project. This was the cornerstone of the USE-IT! model that brought lead anchor institutions and large organisations working together with embedded neighbourhood organisations. The place-based approach identified local assets in terms of skills, knowledge and potential in the project area with the aim of unlocking them with the help of the local partnership. This action increased business opportunities for local social enterprises and ultimately employment prospects.

The partnership was, also, multi-level. Two adjacent local authorities were involved: Birmingham City Council and Solihull Council with the metropolitan level West Midlands Combined Authority. Importantly, mapping and assembling existing initiatives in an area allowed for building on earlier visions and can help to create long term strategies. In this regard, the University of Birmingham and the Hospital have been working in the area for several years. Subsequently, other organisations and stakeholders, either public or from the social sector joined the partnership and put their knowledge to work.

There were several cross-sectoral policies that the project succeeded in bringing together. Throughout the USE-IT! approach the project strived to increase the employment prospects of the residents and migrants, to generate jobs and stimulate the local economy and their ability to engage and influence the public planning, investment and strategy that took place in Greater Icknield. Most strikingly, the cross sectoral partnership integrated the needs directly in the co-design phase, and a set of clear and tangible targets for each policy objective was communicated. This permitted investment in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning.



Workshop mixing social entrepreneurs and anchor institutions @ City of Birmingham

Takeaways

- The model for recruitment of foreign born medical professionals pioneered by USE-IT! provided an example of an anchor institution approach to employment.
- USE-IT! has generated numerous examples of the ‘unlocking’ of community assets, increasing the social productivity of land and buildings.
- The Community Researchers from minority groups were able to reach into and engage with communities.
- There is the risk that the focus on growing a social and solidarity economy and connecting people to the opportunities in anchor institutions, without strategic commitment and support for such approaches, remains marginal to the city’s wider economic strategy and may have only limited traction on the economic conditions in which people live.

Further reading and selected key resources

- [Project site](#)
- [Project news on promoting social enterprises](#)
- [USE-IT! transferability study](#)
- [Impact report](#)

See on UIA website

