

Consumption

Fair Trade

Problem solving

Storytelling

Strategy

Case study Elio Studio

Who Creative studio and consultancy

What Design storytelling, writing and brand consultancy

Where London, UK

Why it matters

Flexible collaboration allows professionals from different backgrounds who use articulated organizational methodologies to work together on both client-driven and self-initiated projects.

4.31 Kings Cross, London (UK)

Elio Studio proposed a space (rendered by Chris Haughton) that allowed people to relax and have fun. It was designed to have a different feel from the surrounding environment, but to make the most of its location next to the canal and the heritage structure of the gasholder. The landscaping was influenced by carboniferous forests that contrasted with the modernity of the building.

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Flexible collaboration

Elio Studio, a creative studio and consultancy, uses storytelling to inspire businesses and individuals to create positive change. Founder, Leonora Oppenheim is a multidisciplinary designer with a background in working for design studios in the UK, Spain and the Netherlands. The Elio team expands and contracts depending on the scope of a project. Under Oppenheim's direction, a diverse group of designers, architects, writers and engineers may collaborate on a competition, work as consultants, or develop self-initiated projects. Elio Studio uses design storytelling to help forge emotional connections between people and the environment. The studio has three main areas of focus: design is used to craft visual stories; consulting helps communicate brand narratives; and writing, which focuses on highlighting purposeful innovation, is used to package the output created by consulting, and to narrate proposals and competition applications.

Oppenheim's impetus for creating a working model based on ideas rather than products was a reaction to the commoditization of most design outputs. While researching stories for TreeHugger (a media outlet for sustainability), Oppenheim discovered how disconnected people are from how and where products are made. She was amazed at how arbitrary most design decisions are, and how little responsibility designers take in their roles. 'The more I wrote, the more I understood about wastefulness, scarcity, pollution and crazy inefficiencies,' she says. Eventually, Oppenheim could no longer imagine making high-end furniture or consumer products and became interested in finding a way to combine writing and design. She now believes that design can and should be used to work towards Millennium Development Goals and in the service of issues impacting the world.

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4.32 The Pulse

The design of The Pulse (lead architect Nick Hancock Design Studio) would have sustained itself environmentally through its advanced biomimetic systems, and financially, through a schedule of public and private events and its café franchise. The competition proposal was visually engaging and informative.

Creating solutions

'Collaboration is important because the issues surrounding sustainable innovation are complex,' says Oppenheim. To create the most relevant solutions, she suggests that 'a networked systems approach is needed and the best way to do that is to leave our disciplinary silos and cross pollinate with others.' Not every designer is suited to working in multidisciplinary, less-defined situations. Connectors, translators and managers are needed. To that end, Oppenheim acts like a ringmaster for Elio Studio. Different types of projects require distinct expertise and the number of people working on a job will vary depending on a project's scope, budget and the skill sets needed to produce the intended outputs.

The flexibility of Elio Studio's system allows team members to work on projects they would not be able to undertake on their own, while still giving each individual the time and space to pursue personal work.

Design in context

For an architectural competition sponsored by Kings Cross Central, property developers of a 67-acre complex in central London (UK), Oppenheim and her team created a unique vision of a public and commercial space designed to communicate a historical narrative, while looking towards a future. The project team included designers, architects, illustrators, structural engineers and landscape architects, with each team member playing an integral role in creating the final design and competition proposal.

The *Pulse*, the title of the Elio Studio proposal, was set in Gasholder 8, a space formerly used for a complex system of energy regulation and release. Design elements highlighted the history of energy use and connected viewers to the space's previous function. Patterns were inspired by the sori spores on fern leaves and the kinetic sculpture acts as a roof, capturing rainwater and collecting solar power through photovoltaic films. Unfortunately, The *Pulse* proposal did not win the Kings Cross competition, but Oppenheim remains enthusiastic about the project and feels that one unrealized project may lead to new opportunities.

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4.33–4.34 Petal flyer

Participants chose a petal and wrote down what they thought they were best at. Then they attached it to the sculpture. 'Petals' built up slowly over two weeks and made the sculpture – which represented *One Planet Living* – change and appear fuller by the end of the event.

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One Planet Living

An Elio Studio working group can shrink all the way down to one person if the specifications of a project do not necessitate a larger team. BioRegional, a social enterprise, devised *One Planet Living* (OPL). Oppenheim was commissioned by them to design an exhibition stand at The Garden Party to Make a Difference, as part of the Prince of Wales's Start initiative. The goal for the space was to illustrate ten principles of *One Planet Living*, to influence behavioural change in viewers/ participants, and to connect with like-minded business owners. The resulting installation and exhibition included several interactive elements and games. In the simplest interaction, a pin badge of the *One Planet* logo was handed out to festival-goers to wear. Repeatedly seeing the event logo created a moving symbol of OPL at The Garden Party.

Another interaction was based on a sculpture, which evolved over the course of the event with the addition of participant feedback. Oppenheim also created wallpaper that illustrated how many of the planet's resources are used on different continents. Posters showed the ten OPL principles.

Connections through data

For Elio Studio's *Creative Data* initiative, Oppenheim was inspired by sustainable consultancies like Beyond Green, a UK-based company that helps clients to plan, design, build and manage beautiful, long-lasting sustainable environments. Many consultancies create detailed reports that do not always result in actual implementation. This became the impetus for Oppenheim to use design in order to give visual form to complicated information and statistics.

Creative Data is a long series of installations designed to produce innovative and engaging ways of communicating data and research. Its strength is its ability to bring together stakeholders who otherwise might not collaborate with each other. Projects take inspiration from environmental, social and material studies and are driven by a replicable model that includes research, installation and education.

Creative Data works as a mediator between scientists and the public. It seeks to help climate science transition from its reliance on popular images, such as polar bears stuck on the ice cap, to a more nuanced and applicable view of climate change.



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The Butterfly Effect

For the *Butterfly Effect*, the pilot project in the *Creative Data* series, Elio Studio collaborated with climate and social scientists at the University of East Anglia. The goal was to use creative manifestations of the scientists' work to spark a dialogue with the local community about the future of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads (see page 130). Using Paul Munday's PhD thesis 'Visualizing Future Wetland Landscapes' as a starting point, the concept of changing land use in the Broads and its relationship to future socio-economic scenarios and climate change were investigated. The resulting installation, which took place at the Sustainable Living Festival in Norwich's Forum (UK), was a visually powerful interactive exhibit. Various designed outputs and educational materials invited visitors to explore their own views on the future of the Broads' environment.

4.35 Installation

The *One Planet Living* installation uses graphics to inform the public and to reveal data; at the same time, interactive elements invite participation.

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4.36 Creative Data

A large map of the Broads connects viewers to an environment with which they are already familiar.

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4.37 Map of the Broads

The public were invited to contribute to a map of the Broads using stickers that represented different land uses. The map evolved daily as more and more stickers were added, creating a real time butterfly effect over the course of one week.

Entrepreneurship

Creative Data has been funded through a combination of public and private sources, and Oppenheim says fund-raising is one of the biggest challenges she faces when trying to expand the initiative. Oppenheim is interested in monetizing the learning and outputs created during the first iteration of the project. She plans to produce course packets and other educational materials, which could be used to fund new forms of the project.

When outputs are motivated by ethics as well as profits, the path taken by entrepreneurs may be non-traditional. For example, hiring someone to work on fund-raising or who has experience of selling to the educational market may be more important than securing permanent offices or employing additional designers.

Good For Nothing

Good For Nothing is the social mission of the Pipeline Project, an innovation consultancy focused on social and environmental challenges. Through drop-in sessions and collaborative workshops people donate time and money to support others trying to make positive changes (see www.goodfornothing.com).

The Broads

The Broads are a network of mostly navigable rivers and lakes in the English counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. They make up Britain's largest protected wetland and are home to some of the rarest plants and animals in the UK.

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Facilitating a repeatable process

Good for Nothing is an example of how a problem-solving process can be repeated with consistently strong results. A division of the Pipeline Project (see www.pipelineproject.co), Good for Nothing events act like a creative think tank on super drive. They bring together individuals from various backgrounds who donate their time to work on three creative strategy briefs submitted by non-profit groups. Participants choose the project they would prefer to work on and spend 48 hours creating an 'emergency response' to problems outlined in the briefs.

Oppenheim, who is a key participant in The Pipeline Project sessions, points out how working with such a wide range of professionals allows team members to learn about other businesses and gain valuable experience. In one scenario, participants may develop a branding strategy and rewrite an organization's mission statement, while another team might identify ways in which a non-profit organization can tap into new revenue streams. Good For Nothing is successful because the event revolves around a working process rather than predetermined outcomes. This allows the context and objectives to change at the same time as new participants join. A constant flux might be a hindrance in a more traditional workplace, but it is the lifeblood of Good For Nothing and is proof that non-traditional systems can be used to respond to a range of problems.

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4.38–4.39 Creative projects

Elio Studio worked with local education authorities, teachers and children to develop creative projects that help disseminate the project themes into the local community.

The challenges of collaboration

Elio Studio's loose structure has benefits, such as low overheads and flexibility, but there are challenges as well. Oppenheim admits that it is sometimes difficult to keep up momentum when everyone works in different geographic locations. She is the driving force of project management and needs to be totally committed to producing results. Also, since some projects are self-initiated, it can take a long time to find funding and get started.

Stakeholders and collaborators may have different working styles or understandings of what is expected. For example, the *Butterfly Effect* partnered with school personnel who had little experience of working online. Simply getting teachers to reply to emails proved difficult and Oppenheim had to adjust her expectations and the pace of the project to match the realities on the ground.

On the other hand, if team members have similar working styles, collaboration can be effortless, as was the case with geographer, Lucy Rose, who worked on *Creative Data's* engagement strategy. Using Skype meant that communicating was easy even though Rose was in Cornwall (in south-west England) and Oppenheim was in London. 'We would Skype each other at least once a week and then make plans to catch up in person every few months.'

The diversity of Elio Studio's collaborators may sometimes require that special attention is paid to project management. However, the benefit of working with professionals from diverse backgrounds more than makes up for any difficulties encountered. It is this influx of fresh ideas that enables Oppenheim and her team to tackle projects that are beyond the traditional purview of designers.

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4.40–4.41 The Butterfly Effect

Education packs and workshops use the materials from the *Butterfly Effect* installation to disseminate the project into the local community. Networking among schools enhanced the educational outreach of the project. Schools came together to create a final exhibition that demonstrated the value of learning resulting from the project.

Activity: One Planet Living

In the previous case study, Leonora Oppenheim designed an exhibition booth, which highlighted the ten principles of One Planet Living at a garden party. One Planet Living uses ecological foot printing as its key indicator of sustainability and promotes the idea that living sustainably should mean a better quality of life. For this activity, create a customized display or interactive activity/game designed to help people in your community understand the importance of the OPL principles.

Part A: Design

01	Research the ten principles of <i>One Planet Living</i> and why they are important. Begin by visiting www.oneplanetliving.org and www.oneplanetliving.net . Read about the communities and companies who use the OPL model to reduce their environmental impact and demonstrate their commitment to sustainability.
02	Teach the OPL principles to a particular age group or segment of the population within your local community. For instance, an interactive activity may target school-age children, whereas an exhibition booth or display at a local government office or in a public space may be aimed at working adults.
03	Create a visual language to make the ten principles more engaging (you may focus specifically on principles that you think will have particular resonance in your location or with your target audience).
04	Sketch how a visual display might present information to the public or how an interaction/game will engage users.
05	Show your design proposal to a colleague or classmate for feedback.
06	Create a 3D rendering (for a display) or a mock-up of the interaction/game.

Part B: Outreach

07	Make a list of five or more physical locations or local community groups who could use your interaction or display.
08	Contact non-profits, schools or divisions of local government to see if they might be willing to exhibit the display you have created, or test the interaction with a group of students.
09	If possible, exhibit your display and interview viewers for feedback. Similarly, you can test the interaction/game with members of the target audience. Find out if your design is effective and whether the audience is more or less interested in OPL principles because of your work.

Global challenge	OPL principle	OPL goal and strategy
Climate change due to build-up of carbon dioxide (CO ₂) in the atmosphere.	Zero carbon	Achieve net CO₂ emissions of zero from OPL developments Implement energy efficiency in buildings and infrastructure; supply energy from on-site renewable sources, topped-up by new off-site renewable supply.
Waste from discarded products and packaging create a huge disposal challenge, while squandering valuable resources.	Zero waste	Eliminate waste flows to landfill and for incineration Reduce waste generation through improved design; encourage reuse, recycling and composting; generate energy from waste cleanly; eliminate the concept of waste as part of a resource-efficient society.
Travel by car and plane can cause climate change, air and noise pollution, and congestion.	Sustainable transport	Reduce reliance on private vehicles and achieve major reductions of CO₂ emissions from transport Provide transport systems that reduce dependence on fossil fuel use. Offset carbon emissions from air and car travel.
Destructive patterns of resource exploitation and use of non-local materials in construction and manufacture increase environmental harm and reduce gains to the local economy.	Local and sustainable materials	Transform materials supply to the point where it has a net positive impact on the environment and local economy Where possible, use local, reclaimed, renewable and recycled materials in construction and products, these minimize transport emissions, spur investment in local natural resource stocks and boost the local economy.
Industrial agriculture produces food of uncertain quality and harms local ecosystems, while consumption of non-local food imposes high transport impacts.	Local and sustainable food	Transform food supply to the point where it has a net positive impact on the environment, local economy and people's well-being Support local and low-impact food production that provides quality food while boosting the local economy in an environmentally beneficial manner; showcase low-impact packaging, processing and disposal; highlight benefits of a low-impact diet.
Local freshwater supplies are often insufficient to meet human needs due to pollution, disruption of hydrological cycles and depletion of existing stocks.	Sustainable water	Achieve a positive impact on local water resources and supply Implement water-use efficiency measures, reuse and recycling; minimize water extraction and pollution; foster sustainable water and sewage management in the landscape; restore natural water cycles.
Loss of biodiversity and habitats due to development in natural areas and overexploitation of natural resources.	Natural habitats and wildlife	Regenerate degraded environments and halt biodiversity loss Protect or regenerate existing natural environments and the habitats they provide to fauna and flora; create new habitats.
Local cultural heritage is being lost throughout the world due to globalization, resulting in a loss of local identity and wisdom.	Culture and heritage	Protect and build on local cultural heritage and diversity Celebrate and revive cultural heritage and local and regional identity; choose structures and systems that build on this heritage; foster a new culture of sustainability.
Some in the industrialized world live in relative poverty, while many in the emerging economies cannot meet their basic needs from what they produce or sell.	Equity and fair trade	Ensure that the OPL community's impact on other communities is positive Promote equity and fair trading relationships to ensure that the OPL community has a beneficial impact on other communities both locally and globally, notably disadvantaged communities.