

# Place-Maker-Space;

A workshop of tools and methods for crafting communities' and 'making places' in the post-localism era.

By Nick Gant.

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## Introduction

This workshop brought together international paper presentations and a range of participatory activities in a two-day workshop to form perspectives on co-defining The Place-Maker-Space as a concept. Originally conceived as part of the University of Brighton's Community21 initiative which has developed 'a community space for making better places' (Gant 2015) this workshop opened up and explored the idea of different 'making methods' situated in communities as a means to engage with broad social, economic and sustainability problems and opportunities. For Making Futures academics, practitioners and community members brought perspectives from North and South America, as well as the UK and Europe, New Zealand and Australia in forming a vision for inclusive maker-spaces that explore the betterment of places. Each participant was asked to provide a method for place-making (with a capital M) so that we can build collective understanding of the role of making in participatory processes of engagement and envisioning better places.

## The context for the workshop and the Community21 Place-Maker-Space initiative:

The most radical changes in national planning policy in a generation combined with recent localism legislation (NPPF and DCLG 2011) have theoretically 'empowered communities as the architects, planners and makers of their neighbourhoods' (Gant and Gittins 2010). UK government agendas seek to engage the public in helping define the future of neighbourhoods through statutory Neighbourhood Plans. These require local communities to form 'visions' for the future of their community through participatory planning. There are now over 1,000 community driven, neighbourhood plans being undertaken in the UK (UGov 2015) and evermore demands for public participation in planning, design and development of place. However there is a lack of tools and processes to support this activity (Owen 2011; Wates 2014).

'Place-making' has become a pervasive term within a range of disciplines – but how does this relate to the making-focused practices of design and craft? Maker-spaces have emerged, providing evolving models for social capital and interactions around communal making of things - however a recent, influential, government commissioned report suggests the need for 'Urban Rooms' and 'Place Spaces' in which places are communally shaped (Farrell Review 2014). So what might a Place-Maker-Space provide in terms of tools and methods for helping craft resilient, sustainable communities and neighbourhoods? Would this be a new type of communal workshop or a range of better defined, more accessible and transferable place-making methods – or both? How do we define and champion the role of making practices in the post-localism era and how might they influence and impact the (co)design of places, communities and / or the built environment of the future? Are communities and places too diverse or idiosyncratic to define and therefore methods are not transferable beyond the local? Can these methods be taught and would such practices be well placed within current disciplinary fields within education or do we require new visions of multi-disciplinary programmes for 'place-making'? What role do objects, making and materiality perform within 'the community' or in helping engage visions for the future of places and are these combined with new technology?

## The Making Futures Place-Maker-Space workshop.

Through the [Making Futures](#) conference we sought to engage with these questions as a means to help propose possible specifications (technical and methodological) for such spaces and practices and to help better understand possible agency of making in the context of place.

Ben Zugami presented views of Australian urban and suburban landscape and community, which he propositioned as resulting from the use of 'psycho-geographical' tools. Contrary to many of the methods presented, this approach suggests that through a proscribed set of observational and communication techniques the cultural map of 'micro- rhythms' can be unearthed and deepened without the need for modes of intervention, disruption and regeneration. Where as Bridget Harvey formed a case study, which proposed the act of repair as a physical space and situated activity that facilitates 'social learning' as well as material learning through the [Department of Repair](#) initiative. This engaged with the overarching conference theme and identified that 'post-awareness' communities can coalesce through common purposes for more sustainable consumer behaviour where the acts of making are more specifically a means to repair and renew.

From damage comes opportunity to fix; both fractured communities and objects – making therefore becomes a cohesive method for 'convivial reconstruction of social and material tools and values' which in-turn constitutes a redefinition of ownership and power. The makers workshop in this instance is seen more reflectively as a place for social interaction and cohesion, knowledge distribution and transfer. The 'remaker-space' then, enables then re-authentication of local knowledge through making practices that redress composite concerns of society, economy and environment. Margaret Lewis inspired the workshop by exploring the situation of making with her presentation of the [The Street Loves Nana](#) – giant community tapestries woven by diverse participants from the locality in New Zealand encourage intergenerational exchange and cohesion. Cultural artefacts and possible new or nascent identities of a place arise through communal activity.

The use of found or waste materials that form the thread in such community textiles, enable the emergence of new vernaculars of a place within the fabric of the street. Making within a place to experience and perpetuate belonging through the forging of new interactions was also highlighted through the CARE initiative presented by Mary Loveday-Edwards, Fiona Hackney and Deirdre Figueiredo. Built through experimentation of material, digital and situated methods of making or making networks the project exposes the 'messy' materialisation of various social interactions and innovations that can occur through the deliberate engagement with difference and diversity. As with Margaret's weaving of a social fabric, the ethnographic embroidery formed through the Making Things Together and Beyond the Toolkit platform and places demonstrate the social agency of making as a means to unearth and enable space for addressing community issues and / or well-being.



**Margaret Lewis – 'The Street Loves Nana'.**

By leading the development of a new educational, community space; The Red House in Plymouth, UK, David Strudwick was able to articulate how a modern making space can define a place both architecturally and pedagogically. Through the strategic planning of a community resource as significant as a new school David was able to evidence how championing making as a central ethos and activity can facilitate numerous experiences that can characterise and embody community culture and enable the educational aspirations of its citizens.

The project demonstrated how a 'studio ecology' can be nurtured through a place that makes and how this system can empower positive, communal reflection and engagement with the diversity of a place as community of difference. Whilst The Red House established the role of a space defined by making as iconographic of a community's identity, Carla Paoliello explored how the landscape of place becomes a cultural identity through making. By analysing the relationship between idiosyncratic community crafts and the landscape of Brazil the discourse shifts to considering how crafts may be manifestly territorial and reflective of society and their occupation of a place. Demarcation of place through the construction of borders both geographically and materially enables the formation of identity in this context. But here too, place is identified through its people's acts and objects of making as a contrived, cultural, constructs of definition and difference.

Situated, critical material and / or making practices can signpost alternate methods for engagement and action. In the case of Brave-New-Alps Fabio Franz and Bianca Elzenbaumer create places for the making of maps as a means to unearth opportunities for creative community commons. The COMUNfARE presents making activities which aim to constitute and cultivate diverse methods for communal making as a means to redefine the characteristic identities of locality in geographically defined communities and places - through the critical curation of making spaces, tools are for the exploration of new layers and strata in the knowledge maps and cultural geology of localities. In Gabriel Wulff's analysis of community gardening in European cities, both maps and tools feature as part of an arsenal of repurposed 'left-over' materials, which can facilitate the production of community food. Here the place-maker-space converges around 'new views' of the city as constructed through the emergence of waste-opportunities. The repurposing of materials of a place when deployed within the community garden help make new connections and reframe notions of identity through material narratives that materialize and surface in the garden. The intertwined materiality and meaning of a place were further disentangled when Jivan Bradshaw-Heap, Laura Darbourne and Rachel Astfalck tipped a municipal dustbin load of dis-guarded jewellery onto the floor of the Making Futures workshop - a pile of indecipherably complex materialisations of social history, narrative and value were imbued in the equally confused cocktail of material typologies.

From semi-'precious' to faux and fake, hybrid plastics and metals mixed with organics. The entangled heap made for an arresting image of jettisoned 'belongings' and 'left-overs' of failed user and material relationships. JUNK is making (performance) in place; a collaborative sifting of social interactions embodied in the materiality. The remaking processes form opportunities for the convening of new communities of practice performance and place. Vicki Clough also brought North American perspectives on waste in place. Negative consequences to the marine environment and natural places were highlighted through collaborative making missions that sought to facilitate environmental literacy in communities through the formation of communities of making and networked activism.

Acts of making were situated within the workshop space itself throughout the two days - it was in fact a sort of place-maker-space. Katie Hill and Lizzie Harrison facilitated making responses to the workshop subjects and themes, which culminated in an articulate artefact and reflection of the event. Hill and Harrison have explored a diverse set of making spaces situated in places as a means to involve communities in considerations of the culture, consumerism and the deepening of material understanding and empathy that can be facilitated through making. The continual, creative contemplation and making by attendees of the workshop bought both a critical and physical reflective practice to the space.



**Responsive making (Katie Hill and Lizzie Harrison) – The Place-Maker-Space workshop.**

As convenor of the workshop I presented the project that instigated the idea and the first Place-Maker-Space concept as realised in Brighton, UK. This Place-Maker-Space initiative aims to respond to demands to create spaces for collaborative debate and creative interaction between universities, the public and private sector and communities (Farrell Review 2014). However the methodological and technical specification of such a space is ill defined. Equally the consideration of what making offers to the process of place-making is, it seems, diverse.

Place-making encapsulates broad practices relating to how people and communities transform the environments in which they find themselves, into the places in which they live (Schneekloth and Shibley 1995). Through the prism of 'community' and place-framing it encourages people to become locally active (Martin 2003) - But what of making with a capitol M? How might material acts of making enable the participation of publics in the envisioning and development of their places within the politics and practice of place-making?

Maker-Spaces have emerged as communal craft and technology workshop spaces that help form social bonds and develop new skills and practices within communities through acts of making (Hatch 2014).

Place-making + maker-spaces = the Place-Maker-Space?

The Brighton Place-Maker-Space is a collaboration between the University of Brighton, Community21 initiative and graduate social enterprises Blockbuilders and Exploring Senses and is co-funded by the university, private sector and through community consultation work. We use accessible technology and making methods to engage often disenfranchised, marginalised or disengaged members of the community in making a difference, through participation in generating meaningful visions for the future of the neighbourhood in which they live. The act of making is itself engaging as an experience but the making methods also enable deeper, more reflective ideas of what might be needed in a community (Gant et al. 2015). Examples of the made outcomes of these place-making activities include a talking tapestry and maps, which use augmented reality to embed animated visions made by participants into publically accessible artefacts.

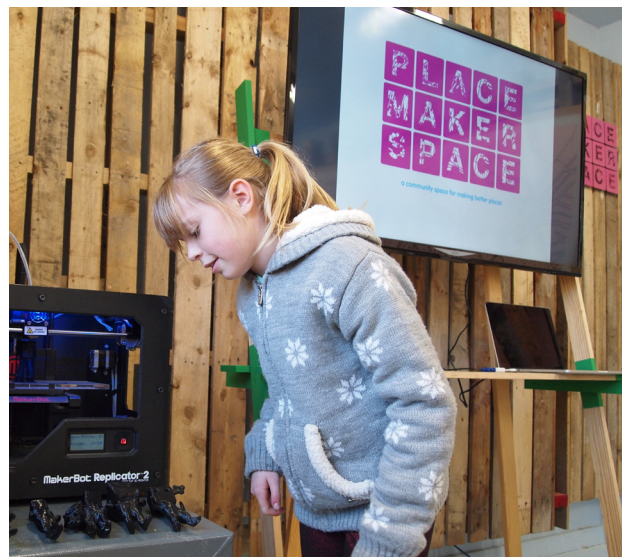
We use Minecraft as a virtual making platform, which enables the inclusive and collaborative formation of virtual spaces and models, which can be experienced as living, interactive and gamified environments through virtual reality headsets. These can be shared locally, regionally or internationally (Reckien and Eisenack 2010). By constructing representations of the future of place in cardboard, we can use simple ipad mounted 3D scanners to digitise these physical objects, which can be remodelled by a 3D printer or imported into virtual spaces. These making methods have emerged through three years of funded research in collaboration with community organisations and form the specification on test now in the Place-Maker-Space; assessing the role of making methods and The Place-Maker-Space as resource for cities and villages in the processes of democratic, participatory planning and co-design of communities. This collaborative process of co-design actively seeks to enfranchise communities, community practitioners and service providers into the development process of the tools and methods developed (Stappers and Saunders 2008; Yong Park 2012).



The Talking-Town- Tapestry (Nick Gant, Tanya Dean, Josh Barnes and Kelly Duggan)



Place-Maker-Space Brighton / Preston Barracks.



3D printing miniature versions of cardboard 'visions' of the community in The Place-Maker-Space Brighton, UK.

## Reflections

In considering the questions and notion of the Place-Maker-Space at Making Futures 2015, we have experienced a set of situated practices and case studies, which present pluralistic forms of making as a means to engage people in their places across the world. Despite the international nature and diversity of approach, the projects nonetheless connect in the critical and purposeful consideration of how we create communities and produce the places of the future. There are distinctions formed in the variability and correlation of the elements of place, space, people and making and how these are interwoven and deployed methodologically. This 'community of practice' (Wenger 2000) provides a rich set of counterpoints and fertile ground for the consideration of (place) making methods and practices. Universally, the various methods presented at the workshop all sought to make a difference. There was a comprehensive, creative consensus in the way in which they each endeavoured to form social and cultural value - the literal construction of social fabric and the crafting of culture through making as a means to engage with place. This commonality poses interesting questions for education and practice; the curriculum of craft and the pedagogy of product design. How many of our making or material focused educational programmes explicitly contain place-making activities or centralise making as a means to fabricate social capital? It may be that Place-Making is, and should remain trans-disciplinary as an activity, which can unite different fields of enquiry for innovation. However, the concern is that if the intellectual and practical territories of Place -Making are not claimed by, or credited to making practices, then the critical space required for its growth and potential impact on society may not be fully realised. (Place) Making practices may be seminal in forming the patterns from which social fabric is knitted, and yet without greater disciplinary ownership and critical engagement, it will likely remain the preserve of planning, architecture and urbanism. Therefore when considering the content of programmes of study, making-focused education may need to be considerate of the critical contrast between more expressive or introspective modes of making, versus 'user-centred' or collaborative methods. This is to acknowledge that (place) makers and (place) making as a modes of making require methods that are skilled, but that are participatory, enabling and facilitative.

Place-Making may be emergent and responsive to shifts in the social, economic and environmental context – and historically making practices have responded to each of these. Perhaps current contexts of inequality, isolation and environmental and economic instability require making practices to provide more embedded, systematic provision in communities. In this case, the Place-Maker-Space reconsiders the role of the workshop; where Fab-Labs and maker spaces have renegotiated the culture of communities of makers in places (Hatch 2014), the Place-Maker-Space may be the 'urban room' or workshop required to facilitate the collaborative-design and realisation of transformative and more social and sustainable futures (Saunders and Stappers 2008; Manzini 2015). Indeed a network of diversely different but interconnected Place-Maker-Spaces might situate (place) making activity within the locality whilst also evolving a culture of best practice. These might provide individually defined and idiosyncratic methods, which are unified in engaging with the burgeoning role of making in the formation of better, more engaged and empowered communities and places. In the post-awareness age, communities face significant, composite social, economic and environmental issues. By making connections between such situated community initiatives and action within co-constructed spaces (Franklin and Marsden 2015) we can engage with these topics in ways that are both locally and globally meaningful (Manzini 2009).

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i The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is responsible for appraising the impact of research in UK Higher Education.

ii See also Indra Kagis McEwen's book, *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings* (MIT, 1993)

iii Marcel Proust in Remembrance of Things Past 1923  
iv <https://vimeo.com/9498805>

v Anders Gammelgaard Nielsen, Aarhus School of Architecture, Denmark

vi See <http://www.studioswine.com/can-city>

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