

# CREATIVE PARTICIPATION IN PLACE-MAKING

## Newcastle, Cumbria & Bristol

This project investigated how three communities participate creatively in place-making. At a time of 'localism' it explored how groups could transform their cities and rural spaces. Rather than relying on 'top down' regeneration, this project sought to learn the lessons from initiatives that are 'bottom up'.

### THE PARTICIPANTS

The project was a collaboration between the Newcastle Elders Forum; Young Cumbria; the People's Republic of Stokes Croft in Bristol and researchers from Cardiff and Exeter Universities.



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council



## Positivity, Inclusivity & Support

The research findings included three headline messages from community participants. (1) the great appetite for **positive** action, working proactively to improve street furniture, buses, lavatory access and the aesthetic landscape (2) the need to **include** many

groups in society: the young, the older, immigrant groups and the homeless and (3) that community participants need **support** from council officials to facilitate improvement and change and financial support to compare best practice and innovative designs.



YOUNG CUMBRIA is a support organisation providing advice, information & development support services to clubs & groups



NEWCASTLE ELDERS FORUM The Elders Council is the older people's forum in Newcastle run by and for older people in Newcastle



THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF STOKES CROFT Urban renewal by the people for the people in the Stokes Croft area of Bristol



## BEING



## HEARD

‘The voices from the bottom are not heard’ (Chris, Bristol)

‘Your voice can get a bit muted ... [You] have to use every avenue that you can’ (Vera, Newcastle)

‘The theatre was silent to show that our voices hadn’t been heard’ (Megan, Cumbria)

‘It’s like Yes Minister all over again’ (Bill, Newcastle)



# Creative Citizen: An Exhibition of Creative Activism



## THE FOCAL POINT FOR OUR WORKSHOP WAS THE CREATIVE CITIZEN EXHIBITION CURATED BY KATY BAUER AND CHRIS CHALKEY AT PRSC

The exhibition illustrated the importance of material objects, theatre props, china mugs and t-shirts, to move from the ‘paper world’ of planning back to the streets. Art can raise the debate ‘in the real world’, illustrating through flashmobs or theatre, street art or guerilla gardening, the range of concerns local people have with service provision, aesthetics or design. The objects and images displayed, and the china mugs designed and crafted by PRSC to include the logos and images of each group, demonstrated how tactile approaches can also be used in place-making.

## HEADLINES

Creativity should ‘be bottom up and harness the skills of the people’ (Chris)

## Positivity

‘It is the humanizing of policy and of approach and of communities that is required’ (Katy)

## Inclusivity

‘It was only £1000 to do the garden – but it took a lot of work to get that small amount of money’ (Megan)

## Support

## DIALOGUE



### Research Findings

The project found that many aspects of place-making are not captured by the planning system. When considering new developments, planners are required to assess location, access, transport and external appearance. These questions are clearly important yet they do not capture all the concerns of local people. There is, for example, no way of engaging with how the

interior of a shopping centre or a gallery should look unless you work directly with the property owner (as the Newcastle Elders Forum have done).

Creatively engaging councillors attention can work. A picture speaks a thousand words. Artistic practices can also be used to engage participants who might otherwise feel unwilling to give their view. This is particularly the case with young people who may

be willing to write a script or act in a film but feel too shy to stand in front of councillors because for them this is intimidating.

Graffiti, rap songs and slam poetry may not seem to be obvious vehicles to debate place-making in a planning system reliant on paper, meetings and formal consultations. Yet these innovative approaches engage and promote participation.





## Lessons for Localism?

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This project demonstrated the many ways in which communities can be incredibly creative. These strategies have often emerged in response to the frustration experienced by citizens who felt unheard through conventional channels. In terms of localism and neighbourhood planning the research demonstrated that community groups often have a very good understanding of planning and policy detail. The project illustrates, however, that place-making is a much broader activity than just planning. It focuses on the 'felt environment' as much as the 'built environment'.

Within localism then there seems to be a strong role for positivity, which is much more engaging than negatively critiquing individual applications or plans. This may fit in with neighbourhood plans if

these plans can also consider aspects of place-making not conventionally included within the planning remit (including street art, for example, gardening, signage or lavatory access).

Important questions of representation remain: who speaks for whom? Yet it is also clear that communities believe that often, the

*RUNNING SHOES* are suitable footwear for using pedestrian crossings and beating the green man



*BINOCULARS* and a mangnifying glass to read the directions and maps on fignposts.



## CREATIVE CITIZENS: CRAFTING PLACE



'The aesthetic is what attracts and repels us as human beings. We investigate what we're attracted to'

— Katy, Bristol



'A 50 page document won't have the same effect as a cartoon or the performance in front of the council.

— Bill, Newcastle

