Reimagining Urban Voids: Using design provocations to support placemaking processes in Teesside

Bobbie Bailey

School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape

Newcastle University

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i. Abstract

In response to the challenges posed by urban voids in post-industrial regions, this research addresses the pressing need for alternative solutions to transform such neglected spaces. The research focuses on the role of prefiguration within placemaking as a transformative tool for reimagining these spaces. Drawing on related concepts of tactical urbanism, and urban acupuncture and using design methods, the thesis challenges local government dominant imaginaries and, rather, empowers communities in actively envisioning and shaping alternative futures for neglected urban spaces.

The study focuses on Teesside, UK, where through a series of case studies, and in collaboration with three community groups, the research examined how non-planning experts could actively contribute to envisioning alternative futures for urban voids. The case studies involved deploying digital tools and design provocations. The first case challenged demolition at an industrial site through digitally materialising alternative futures, the second explored community-led envisioning via an online platform and physical toolkit, and the third employed speculative future scenarios through a mobile app for in-situ discussions.

The research revealed that design provocations can effectively open spaces for discussion, provoke citizen groups to reimagine urban voids, and enable challenges to top-down decision-making. The design processes empowered community groups to articulate their aspirations, addressing issues of civic pride and cultural inertia within the citizen groups, but struggled to engage the wider public and found non-digital tools to be more effective in co-designing place futures. The primary contribution of this research lies in showcasing how prefigurative placemaking, supported by a combination of digital and non-digital tools, serves as a mechanism for eliciting community-led visions for the transformation of urban voids. By including citizens in the initial ideation processes of placemaking and utilising imaginaries to challenge existing narratives, the study provides valuable insights into how more citizen-led alternative futures for urban voids can emerge.

ii. Acknowledgements

In a region facing formidable challenges, these organisations serve as beacons of hope, igniting the spark for Teesside's resurgence and vibrancy. Their unwavering dedication to their community inspires me with optimism for the future.

Lastly, I extend my gratitude to the people and places that define Teesside – a place of remarkable contrasts yet characterised by a deeply passionate community determined to see its resurgence. Teesside's unique identity and pride served as the driving force behind this research, with the hope of contributing, albeit in a small way, to a thriving future that Teessiders can be proud of.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Societal impacts of urban voids on community capacity to imagine place futures

Urban spaces are in a constant state of flux, perpetually being transformed by evolving patterns of use and demand. The decline of heavy industries, an economic recession and most recently the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in a sustained problem of urban voids with increasing dilapidation in urban areas. Abandoned factories, vacant commercial units, derelict buildings, empty car parks, decaying infrastructures and the underutilised public spaces in-between have been observed as exerting a persistent detrimental impact on the socio-cultural vitality of urban areas (Hwang & Lee, 2020). In particular, in those post-industrial regions where there is a large presence of urban void spaces.

The ramifications that can arise from the existence of urban voids can exacerbate challenges urban areas face and hinder their ability to prosper. Over time, their neglect can lead to increased crime, reduced connectivity, decrease the aesthetic beauty of place and affect a community's sense of civic pride. Consequently, residents may disengage from their environment because of a perception of urban neglect and abandonment. Local authorities have often struggled to address the complexity of these issues and rejuvenate urban voids through regeneration initiatives since the effective abandonment of urban regeneration policy in the UK since the early 2010s (Wilks-Heeg, 2015). This lack of investment and strong policy stance can lead to a perpetual decline of the built environment and create a collective frustration of the lack of progress in revitalising neglected spaces among a population. These factors have made it difficult for communities to imagine a world beyond the degradation of these spaces and to visualise the potential they have to uplift their neighbourhoods and bring back a sense of belonging, an issue that will be explored throughout this research.

Furthermore, the stigmas and negative perceptions urban voids create around a particular neighbourhood can become a symbol of place failure in local psyche, further affecting a community's ability to imagine beyond the current neglect and abandonment of their area (Chapman, 2011). There is therefore a need to explore ways in which a cultural and mental

shift can be fostered among local communities to think differently towards the use of these spaces in their neighbourhoods. This research argues for a need to provide new avenues for people to visualise that an alternative to the current state of their community is possible through the creation of tools that enable non-experts to reimagine these problem spaces, and thus give agency to communities to reshape their neighbourhoods.

1.2 Opening opportunities for participation within the planning process

Traditional planning processes have long struggled to engage citizens in discussions on place futures (Healey, 1997; Dixon & Tewdwr-Jones, 2021). The power given to residents to contribute ideas for alternative uses for urban voids in their communities is severely limited to the confines of what has been described as tokenistic consultation processes (Parker & Murray, 2012). Engaging with the current planning system has been described as complex, slow, jargonistic, cumbersome and difficult to understand (Baker et al., 2007). Whilst proposals put forward or policy decisions may appear abstract and the real-world consequences of these decisions not immediately apparent. The public are used to consultation processes that aim to just provide people with the information to be able to understand the changes proposed as opposed to having a say in, or influencing the design of a development (Wilson et al., 2019). This tendency towards tokenistic engagement is well-documented in critiques of planning processes, with Sandercock (1998) and Peattie (1968) noting how professional expertise can often overshadow community input. These critiques challenge the assumption that design automatically fosters democratic participation, raising questions about the balance of power between professionals and communities. In this research, I critically reflect on my own role as both researcher and designer, exploring whether my expertise sometimes reinforced these power dynamics.

The importance of citizen involvement in the reshaping of place is paramount to its success as people experience the problems of the places in which they reside first hand; they understand the intrinsic values, meanings and problems inherent that make a place and are therefore best placed to provide the solutions to reimagine urban voids (Rydin & Pennington, 2000). As residents lack the tools and knowledge to articulate the change they would like to see outside of the confines of the current planning system, new approaches must be explored. In the UK, citizen-led planning processes have a longstanding tradition.

However, they often face marginalisation and are crowded out by issues of land ownership, statist and capitalist hegemonic practises and cultures (Ward, 1973; Brownill & Inch, 2019). This research therefore concentrates on the creation of tools to support citizen groups articulate and create visions that help them to address the problems of urban voids, counter-act dominant narratives and imagine alternative futures.

Furthermore, the lack of visual methods within the current planning system to articulate possible futures not only supresses opportunities for residents to express their dreams and desires for the built environment around them, but also leaves little scope for residents to participate in co-designing a shared vision for their neighbourhood. Planning is usually conducted behind closed doors and outputs are presented to citizens as detailed CGI visuals without opportunity for citizen input. Eiter & Vik (2015) have argued that there are missed opportunities in this process where imaginaries of future places should be used as visual aids to stimulate discussion. There has also been criticism of how planning has become increasingly procedural and legalistic. Fainstein (2006, 2010) has challenged the increasing proceduralism and legalism in planning, calling for more inclusive and equitable approaches. Whilst Friedmann (1987) has criticised the limitations of proceduralism in addressing complex planning issues. Therefore, there is a need to explore how community-led visualisation exercises can be harnessed as a tool to challenge top-down authority-led narratives of the future uses of urban voids, enabling communities to co-produce their own visuals that capture their aspiration for place and move beyond legalistic and procedural approaches within the planning process. At the same time, there is a need to understand how we can equip local communities with the knowledge and skills to envision radically different place futures that challenge pre-conceived ideas of what urban voids can become.

1.3 The effects of technology on urban change and its potential to increase participation

Human Computer Interaction (HCI) research has long been interested in the positive role technology can play in how we view, use and interact with urban environments (McCarthy & Wright, 2005; Quercia et al., 2014; Foth, 2017; Freeman et al., 2019). By understanding how technology can support meaning making in place, increase participation and enhance placemaking practises (Crivellaro et al., 2016; Peacock et al., 2018), it has been suggested

that digital tools could be used to offset the damage the technology revolution has had on the traditional use of our urban centres (Grimsey, 2018).

Commentary on the damage to urban centres due to a shift in reliance on technology has been put down to the growth in digital platforms such as the likes of Amazon replacing traditional retail environments, and the likes of Facebook changing the way people socialise from in-person to an online environment as well as the ubiquity of smartphone technologies meaning there is less reliance on urban centres to provide people's daily needs. It has resulted in a change of habits for many urban residents, where their relationship to, and use of urban centres changes, with people choosing the convenience of online retailers as discussed by Hughes & Jackson (2015) and Cullinane (2009) . Whilst the use of social media platforms and other forms of online entertainment have changed how people meet their social and cultural needs, as forewarned by (Putnam, 2000). Putnam argued with an increase in the use of technology to meet our daily needs, including TV and social media, it will lead to a decline in our social capital and a decrease in civic engagement, impacting the vibrancy and community spirit of urban centres.

As Putman correctly pontificated, this has had a detrimental effect on urban centres, such as High Streets, as well as the places that typically served a purpose as meeting points, such as parks and public squares, leading to their decline as citizen's demands and needs change. This shift in the social and cultural dynamic of city, town, suburban and village centres, as community hubs and as the central anchor of a shared civic pride for residents, offers opportunities to explore how the very technologies that have taken people away from urban centres could be harnessed to re-imagine people's relationship and perceptions of place.

In recent years, local authorities have explored how to develop alternative uses for urban centres in an attempt to change citizen's perceptions, improve visitor experience and bring underused spaces back to life. Studies have increasingly looked into the importance of culture and the arts to increasing a place's vitality. Cultural regeneration (Miles & Paddison, 2005) and creative placemaking (Courage & McKeown, 2018) have emerged as pivotal strategies for cultivating a renewed sense of place, with the ability to combat the lingering

impacts of industrial decline (Boland, 2010; Collins, 2016). Harvey (1989) posits that this coordinated effort to reshape place image through culture can create a sense of civic pride and attachment to place.

Digital Civics, a term used to explore how the deployment of technology and the co-design of new tools and systems can be used to enhance public participation in service redesign and societal problem-solving (Olivier & Wright, 2015) has offered numerous examples of ways in which digital technologies can enhance places by building a stronger connection between communities and the built environment (Crivellaro et al., 2015, 2016; Peacock et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2017). These studies have shown how digital civics can create new avenues for placemaking practises and challenge existing commonly shared imaginaries on the future of place.

The importance of urban imaginaries - the ways that people form collective understanding and values around a particular place (Sartre, 2010) to the potential for a society to understand and envision how a place could change - is a major factor at the centre of this research. It aims to identify current imaginaries that don't reflect local needs and that have failed to disrupt dominant top-down narratives of what will happen or what could happen. It explores how community-led action that prefigures new imaginaries through an envisioning process can break with the status quo, with the hope that communities are able to generate more creative and transformative ideas on how to transform urban voids.

With the democratisation of digital technologies, new opportunities are opening to engage citizens in placemaking processes and providing them with the tools to create meaningful change in their communities. This work explores how perspectives prevalent in Human Computer Interaction can help to develop innovative solutions that foster civic debate around place futures and reflect local aspirations.

1.4 Introducing prefigurative placemaking as a tool to reimagining urban voids

The term prefigurative placemaking is used within this work to describe the processes communities collectively undertake to bringing in to being their desired futures for the built

environment around them. Drawing from its roots in prefigurative politics, it builds on a tradition of grassroots political organising. A term coined by Carl Boggs (Boggs, 1977), who describes how those practising prefigurative politics within social movements intentionally enact the very social relations and political structures they envision for their future (Sartre, 2010). Through action, grassroots organisations envision alternative futures by enacting them in the present. At its core, prefigurative politics is concerned with democratic participation, a core concern of this research. Prefigurative politics is the root of anarchism, where work "expresses the political 'ends of their actions through their 'means'", enabling the articulation of principles and incorporating them into collective future imaginaries (Monticelli, 2022).

I coin the term prefigurative placemaking as a contribution within this work to describe an overall process that focuses on reimagining and challenging current imaginaries and perceptions of place, but through the specific action of prefiguring a possible spatial future, through visual outputs to show alternatives futures are possible. This research argues that a prefigurative placemaking approach can support communities in shifting mindsets about the potential of space, open space for more participatory planning processes and challenge existing dominant imaginaries by bringing in to being alternative future worlds.

Prefigurative placemaking draws on design and visual methods to support community-led envisioning processes. Unlike conventional planning or placemaking, which often focus on achievable, pragmatic outcomes within existing frameworks, prefigurative placemaking involves creating spaces that reflect aspirational futures and embody values of radical thinking and transformation. The main goal is not necessarily to find the most achievable, realistic vision but to explore what is possible through radical thinking. This concept stems from activist traditions, where the goal is to model new social possibilities in the present rather than waiting for systemic changes. In this work, prefigurative placemaking offers a way to explore how communities can engage in reimagining urban voids in ways that are not constrained by traditional planning parameters. It serves as a guide for engaging participants in envisioning spaces that reflect community values and aspirations for the future, independent of immediate feasibility.

It also builds on theories within alternative planning movements such as tactical urbanism (Lydon & Garcia, 2015) and urban acupuncture (Rubió & Zardini, 1999; Rubió et al., 2008), that aim to bring about change using low-cost, short term, small-scale and scalable interventions to prefigure alternative futures for underused spaces, showing what could be. However, as I will reflect on throughout this research, it is important to recognise the power dynamics that can impact this process. As Friedmann (1987) and Ward (1973) have argued, professionals often exert unbalanced influence, even when attempting to facilitate community-led processes. In this research, I reflect on the tension between my role as a researcher and the perceived authority I may have as an expert. Whilst the aim is to democratise the envisioning process of urban voids, there is a risk that my own expertise may have shaped the outcomes in ways that reflect professional rather than community-led visions.

Having said this, the research demonstrated that a prefigurative placemaking process which utilises these methods and theories can support community groups to prefigure changes to urban voids and materialise the change they want to see. I argue that, through the deployment of digital tools and artefacts as prompts and provocations, there is an opportunity to change planning processes that enable local communities to lead the envisioning process and reimagine radical transformations of urban space, in the process, reversing the growth of urban voids in post-industrial regions.

1.5 Research Aims

This research aims to understand how design provocations can support community-led reimaginations of underused, neglected, and derelict urban spaces. It explores how, through a process of envisioning alternative futures, non-planning experts can create their own visions for urban voids that challenge preconceptions of what a place is and what it could be. It contests traditional planning approaches often deemed as tokenistic (Baker et al., 2007; Brabham, 2009; Wilson et al., 2019) by creating the tools that enable citizen groups to collectively design visions to transform these spaces.

It places importance on the attachment and meaning people hold about a place, and addresses issues of civic pride by providing avenues for citizens to articulate their

aspirations for better place futures. It presents a series of case studies that explore the challenges of reimagining what an urban void can be, the tools required to enable the design of community-led visions and the issues inherent in envisioning alternative place futures. To achieve this, the research includes the design, deployment and evaluation of provocations that attempt to foster discussion, challenge preconceptions and foster imagination in citizens when thinking about the future of place. It achieves this through addressing the following research questions:

1. *How can the use of design provocations support citizen groups to articulate their aspirations for the future of place and challenge top-down decision making?*
2. *What are the challenges for citizens in reimagining urban voids in post-industrial areas?*
3. *Can prefigurative placemaking provide a mechanism to enable change of urban voids?*

To explore how citizens can develop their own visions for underused spaces, a series of design provocations were deployed to understand the ways in which people discuss and articulate their thoughts and desires for place futures. Collaborating with different citizen groups in a variety of differing contexts where some form of urban void was present, from exploring the reinterpretation of large-scale industrial structures as sites of heritage interpretation to reimagining residential alleyways through temporary interventions. Design provocations were created to explore different ways of provoking citizens to question the future of urban voids at various scales. The research sheds light on the extent to which such provocations can support citizen groups to develop their own vision for these spaces. Outcomes of these case studies are evaluated through observations, workshops and interviews to inform findings on the effectiveness of the tools in supporting people to envision alternative futures. Whilst set in the same geographical area, and where learnings from each case study helped inform one another, the aim of this research is not to compare and contrast the case studies but to understand the effectiveness of different types of design provocations in supporting citizen groups to reimagine urban voids. However, learnings from each case study were fed in to the next where possible.

1.6 Context

This research is set on the backdrop of a rapidly urbanising world. It is projected that by 2050, the world will be more than two thirds urban (United Nations, 2018) (United Nations, 2018). In the developing world, the rapid expansion of urban areas is straining resources, with a scarcity of housing, a strain on public services and inadequate transport infrastructure. Whilst these problems are prevalent in Europe, developed regions that industrialised centuries ago are now face very different challenges from shrinking economies, car-reliant developments, and population decline. Areas that were built for the purpose of feeding the industrial revolution and that became major manufacturing centres are having to reinvent themselves due to a sharp decline in industrial activity (Monticelli, 2022). It is these urban areas within the developed world that are explored in this case study, due to their nuanced issues, particularly those of an increase in urban void spaces.

This research also takes place within the context of the so-called death of the high street (Grimsey, 2018) with contributing factors such as out of town and online shopping changing consumer habits, leading to the closure of many traditional high street retailers. Likewise, this research is also situated within the aftermath of the covid-19 pandemic that further exacerbates these issues and has contributed to a shift in the way people use and think about the built environment around them, forcing urban centres to reinvent themselves. Likewise, there is increasing recognition of the need to revalue public spaces that were previously taken for granted, supported by increasing epidemiological evidence on the importance of green space and preserving nature for human well-being as evidenced by Public Health UK (2020) in the white paper 'Improving access to greenspace A new review for 2020', Van Den Berg et al. (2015) and Zhang et al. (2020) have found similar evidence. This work has demonstrated the potential positive impact of green spaces on mental and physical health, as well as the intrinsic value of nature itself. It can therefore be argued that reimagining and renewing public spaces becomes a crucial element for wider holistic factors, such as health and wellbeing. Not only is this work offering a response in dealing with the challenges faced by the high street and the pandemic but also highlighting the role public space can have in creating healthier and more sustainable urban environments.

This research focuses on a specific geographical area, a polycentric urban region in the North of England, Teesside. An area without a dominant core city and with ill-defined boundaries, Teesside is a region with a proud industrial past due to it being situated on land rich with iron ore. It became a world leader in steel production, something that the area is still synonymous with today despite the loss of almost all of its steel making production. The industry that built up on the banks of the Tees attracted people from across the world and Teesside prospered on this industry and immigration (Medhurst, 2010). Whilst this still holds a sense of pride in local psyche, years of austerity and neglect have left the area a shadow of its former self with a myriad of issues (Chapman, 2011). The loss of major industries has left vast neglected areas across Teesside, from derelict factories to contaminated land (Warren, 2018). Furthermore, the lack of investment in its urban centres has created numerous neglected smaller spaces from empty retail premises to poorly maintained public spaces that have suffered from the effects of the covid-19 pandemic, commonly seen in many areas of the UK.

The consequences of deindustrialisation, austerity and neglect have had a profound impact on not just the planning system's ability to intervene and improve the area but also on the wider state's ability to intervene. More broadly, issues associated with planning such as place meaning and attachment have been affected as people's relationship with, and experience of place, changes (Stals et al., 2017). Teesside has also suffered from low levels of investment from the private sector, relying on state funding for investment, which has created a perceived perpetual state of decline during a period of austerity, resulting in the area developing a collective sense of cultural inertia, as argued by Chapman (2011) (described in more detail in Chapter 2). This inevitably leads to disengagement with any attempts to intervene and affect change as citizens deem opportunities to get involved and have their say on future developments as pointless due to a shared belief that change won't come to fruition.

The growth of neoliberal urbanism policies in the area also should be highlighted as an important contextual element for this research. As (Stals et al., 2017) discussed neoliberal policies aim to apply free market principles to the management and development of place, such as the privatisation of public assets, deregulation and a focus on economic

competitiveness. Examples of neo-liberal urban planning can be seen in various urban voids across Teesside as there is a growing contestation of land ownership and the selling of public assets to private developers (Mazza, 2023). Regional authority-led initiatives - in their attempt to regenerate former industrial land - are pursuing policies that take large swathes of public land and sell them to private developers (Williams, 2023). Likewise, attempts to rejuvenate urban centres, particularly in Middlesbrough, are seeing public land being handed over for private developer control and the town is increasingly seeing the commodification of its public realm as spaces of profit making and consumption (BBC News, 2021).

This research is also carried out in the spirit of rekindling early attempts of participatory planning that were pioneered in this geographical area (Brown, 2009; Motouchi & Tiratsoo, 2004). An early adaptor of the importance of involving local communities in the envisioning, design and planning of place futures was Max Lock. Lock, an architect and planner was commissioned by Middlesbrough council in 1944 to re-plan Middlesbrough and hired the likes of A.E. Smailes a prominent thinker in the field of geography and Ruth Glass a prominent thinker in the field of sociology. Together, they set out with the intention of finding new ways to approach planning and challenge traditional ways of envisioning place futures (Brown, 2009). A pivotal approach they took was to plan *with* inhabitants rather than *for* inhabitants, an approach that is still not widely adopted even today. Their idea was to turn what had always been considered a technical discipline in to a democratic process (Motouchi & Tiratsoo, 2004).

Whilst Lock's approach to participatory planning in Middlesbrough was revolutionary at the time, his work still lacks much recognition today. Despite it coming some 20 to 30 years earlier than what is normally considered as the emergence of participatory planning in the 1960s and 1970s with the likes of influential work such as *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs in 1961 and Sherry Anstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation* in 1969. Therefore, this research, whilst not directly alluding to or using the work of Lock, recognises its importance for rekindling this spirit of participatory planning in Teesside, and plays homage to this work that was pioneered in Middlesbrough as a legacy that can inspire a more community-driven approach to envisioning the future of Teesside.

In summary, this section has outlined how urbanised and industrialised areas are experiencing decline due to deindustrialisation and austerity. This coupled with the changing role of urban centres, with many primarily mono-use retail areas no longer serving a purpose due to the changing shopping habits of citizens. Likewise, social distancing measures of the covid-19 pandemic have had a major effect on working patterns leading to surplus of office space and peoples' social patterns. The focus of this research on the Teesside region, provides a good example of a place struggling to deal with these issues and is also set amongst the backdrop of pioneering work in participatory planning by planner Max Lock. It discussed how the loss of industry, neglect of public space and the perceived perpetual state of decline has had a profound effect on local psyche[1] (Siegler, 2023), where citizens disengage from planning processes and struggle to imagine alternative place futures. However, as will be detailed throughout this research, there are opportunities to explore how non-traditional methods and novel approaches in planning can reengage citizens in envisioning better futures for their daily lives. Through the combination of digital and non-digital design provocations, the case studies presented take in to account the various contexts prevalent within this work in order to explore ways in which a prefigurative placemaking process can support reimaginations and empower citizens to address the challenges of urban voids at various scales in Teesside.

1.7 Motivations for Research

There are few studies that explore the implications urban voids have on the vitality of places (Hwang & Lee, 2020) and with the increasing struggles local authorities face in combatting decline - in particular of former commercial uses and industrial sites - there is a need to explore alternative solutions to transform these spaces. Likewise, there is little research on Teesside and the effects its urban void spaces have had on the local populations ability to participate in, and have agency in, the betterment of their community.

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[1] I describe "local psyche" as the idea that there can be a shared belief, attitude, values or collective mindset within a community or geographical area. This can include the psychological attachments or socio-cultural characteristics that define the way people in that place perceive of, interpret, or engage with the environment around them. Local psyche in a community can be influenced by various factors such as history, culture, socio-economic conditions, and the physical characteristics of a place. Understanding the local psyche is important for understanding community dynamics, decision-making processes, and the formation of place-based identities, imaginaries, and aspirations.

As discussed in earlier sections, the growth of urban voids in post-industrial regions is having a detrimental effect on the social, economic and environmental sustainability of places as they are often seen as someone else's problem (Carmona, 2010) and as a result, remain neglected, effecting the development of the surrounding area as it becomes undesirable (Aruninta, 2009). The increase in these problem spaces has been demonstrated to effect residents' civic pride and creates an environment of disillusionment and perpetual decline. Communities can become disengaged from the planning process and lack the capacity to imagine an alternative future (Chapman, 2011), nor feel the desire to care for their area, something that has been termed as the broken window theory (Wilson, 1982) (as explained in Chapter 2).

The issue is further exacerbated by the lack of creative processes in traditional planning that engage residents in placemaking. Studies have explored the role novel technologies can have in encouraging participation from citizens (Pak et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2019). However, these studies often show that technologies replicate traditional planning processes by going only as far as enabling citizens to provide opinions on proposed plans or reporting issues with the built environment. They don't go as far as to creating the spaces for non-experts to engage in the initial ideation and design of a vision for a space.

In order to support community-led action in the remaking of place, new avenues need to be explored that provides non planning experts with the tools to design their own vision for place change, one where citizens have agency to express and articulate their desires for the future of their neighbourhood. Similarly, there is a need to explore how, through a process such as prefigurative placemaking, current imaginaries of what will happen and what could happen (Nalau & Cobb, 2022) can be challenged.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This research is formed through the presentation of a series of case studies, each exploring a design process to reimagine urban voids in the same geographical area, using a variety of methods and tools, the effectiveness of these tools and processes to supporting community-led visioning of urban futures is then analysed. Each case study involves

collaborations with different community groups, responding to the specific context and needs of that group. Crucially, they all explore the idea of reimagining urban voids; however, these void spaces vary in scale dramatically. The differentiation of the spaces in question offers an extensive understanding of how placemaking processes to reimagine underused space can be applied at a variety of scales.

Chapter 2 draws on literature from a range of fields including urban planning, arts and design, human geography and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). Chapter 3 details the various approaches taken in order to conduct the research. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 explain the findings from the three case studies. Within each of the finding's chapters, a context-specific literature review and methods section is provided to add additional information and clarity to each case study. Chapter 7 discusses the research and offers reflections, whilst chapter 8 provides overall conclusions to the thesis.

The literature review provided in chapter 2 details some of the difficulties urban voids create for envisioning place change. It starts by providing a brief explanation of what urban voids are, how they come to be and the problems they cause for peoples experience with and relationship to place. Before moving on to explain the barriers to community participation in the reimagining of these spaces as well as the benefits community-led visions can offer to creating sounder plans for place futures. The literature then details the history of the placemaking movement and the variety of novel approaches that can be taken, often at a community level, to reimagine urban voids and challenge traditional methods of implementing place change from tactical urbanism to urban acupuncture. I define the process of materialising visions at a community-level to challenge top-down proposals for urban change as prefigurative placemaking. Finally, it introduces ideas prevalent in HCI, more specifically Urban HCI, to explore the role technologies can have in aiding communities to reimagine urban voids and address the barriers prevalent in planning participation.

Chapter 3 details the methodological approach taken throughout this thesis. It sets out how the use of technology can support the process of creating publics around place-specific

issues before detailing the role of prefigurative (Dussault, 2022) and adversarial design (DiSalvo, 2015) in collective place reimagining. It then uses these ideas of design in different ways across the three case studies by introducing design provocations amongst participations to support them in the creation of visions for urban voids. The chapter also describes how action research and research through design are applied through the design provocations as well as the importance of visual based methods to aid participants in articulating their ideas for place change. Before finally going on to describe data collection methods, research partners and ethical considerations to conducting research in this context.

Chapter 4 offers insights from the first case study undertaken, whereby urban imaginaries were digitally materialised by a local heritage group to support political action. This study explored the impact of materialising urban imaginaries to support the development of counter-visions to challenge dominant narratives of the future fate of a derelict industrial site in Teesside.

Through a series of design provocations of speculative futures and through the deployment of adversarial design thinking, it describes how the created visuals supported the heritage group to apply pressure and challenge local politicians. It discusses the potential of design to provoke imagination and materialise previously unimaginable concepts, whilst also detailing the difficulties in shifting understandings and changing entrenched beliefs about the future potential of urban voids. It highlights a need for future work to explore ways in which participants can play an active role in co-designing the visuals as a way to build agency and buy-in from participations on a collective vision for a space.

Chapter 5 details insights from the second case study that built on an existing community organisation's initiative to think beyond the present state of a space and make small incremental changes to affect wider place transformation in their neighbourhood. Building on learnings from chapter 4, this case study aimed to explore ways in which tools could be created to support participants to be become better involved right throughout the envisioning process of space transformation. By harnessing existing local knowledge and lived experience, this study appropriated the social media platform Pinterest to curate ideas

and foster a community dialogue around the reimagination of urban voids. The iterative process of this research led to the co-creation of a tool that supported the community organisation to demonstrate novel planning concepts to local residents that could be used to improve known problem spaces. The tool facilitated participations in the ideation and the co-design of visions for alternative uses for urban voids in various locations across Middlesbrough from derelict underpasses to residential alleyways. This chapter discusses how the creation of a physical, tangible tool used as a design provocation can encourage discussion on complex urban issues, support non-experts articulate their desired futures for places and enable the prefiguration of material change within urban voids.

Chapter 6 details insights from the third and final case study whereby speculative future provocations were used as a tool to elicit reimaginations of urban voids. It discuses a collaboration with a community organisation to developed a series of walking routes that aimed to facilitate discussion on the future of urban void spaces in central Middlesbrough. This chapter utilised a smartphone application and non-digital prompt sheets that were designed to be used in-situ, where participants were prompted to think about what they would do to transform a space in the event of a speculative future scenario. This study found that using novel approaches to encouraging discussion on place change and broad future-based thinking can help non planning experts articulate their hopes and aspirations for the future of their area. It offered insights into how complex global issues such as environmental, economic and social challenges can be addressed on a local level and demonstrated residents' capacity and eagerness to imagine a positive future for their town, despite considerable challenges.

Chapter 7 brings together a series of overall reflections on the combination of all three case studies. It discusses how the design provocations demonstrated a useful method in fostering discussion amongst participants around alternative uses for urban voids. Whilst, at the same time, detailing how the accessibility of the design process to non-experts enabled citizen groups to pre-configure their own reimaginations for urban voids, building agency in the process. It demonstrates how the provocations were useful in challenging preconceptions of the potential of place. Whilst changing expectations of what is possible

through the combination of digital and non-digital tools that helped to explain complex and novel planning approaches.

Chapter 8 provides conclusions for this thesis, it reflects on how a combination of digital and non-digital tools could be used to support community-led placemaking processes. The chapter also explores the impact of visualising and reimagining uses for urban voids as a way to build agency and foster a sense of collective action in influencing material change in the built environment. It discusses how the capacity to imagine beyond the current state of things can challenge perceptions, rebuild a sense of place and rekindle civic pride in struggling areas. This chapter finishes with a discussion of the overall research questions, wider impacts from this research and future research opportunities.

1.9 Effects of COVID-19

The covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on the carrying out of this thesis. It must be noted that the majority of initial background research and the finding of collaborators took place before the first lockdown in March 2020, leading to much of this initial work being lost due to having to reassess the research to ensure it could be carried out during lockdown restrictions. The first case study took place entirely during the social-distancing restrictions and the second and third were also severely affected by lockdowns. This disruption meant that case studies had to be redesigned to take place on zoom and the uncertainty of potential new lockdowns meant that it wasn't possible to plan more than a couple of weeks in advance of an engagement.

On a personal level, the tole of navigating a PhD during a global pandemic and the anxieties and external challenges that this difficult period caused, meant that the scope and scale of research had to change, however I am proud of what I was able to achieve given the exceptional circumstances in which this research was carried out. Therefore, the covid-19 pandemic has had a detrimental effect on the quality of the finished thesis. To the best of my ability, I have tried to highlight throughout where the effects of Covid restrictions affected the decisions made when conducting this research.

Chapter 2 – Community-Led Envisioning of Urban Voids: Transforming Place Futures through Urban Imaginaries

The following chapter explores the relevant literature that sets the groundwork for this research. It offers a discussion on urban voids, their implications and why they are an integral part to the future of urban areas. Before discussing the inherent problems within the UK planning system in relation to public participation in reimagining place.

The chapter also sets out the potential for community-led envisioning and use of urban imaginaries as tools for supporting citizens to articulate aspirations for place futures. Before finally, investigating the growth of new placemaking approaches and their ability in fostering participation within the reimagination of urban voids.

2.1 Urban change, public space and the rise of urban voids

Whilst much of the developing world is experiencing rapid urbanisation, many western regions are in a state of flux between expansion and shrinkage (Hwang & Lee, 2020) as they attempt to forge new identities as a result of post-industrialisation and the closure of the very industries that built them. Urban decline has left towns and cities with swathes of derelict and abandoned industrial land (Audirac et al., 2012), whilst urban cores struggle to deal with the dilapidation and neglect of the public realm in the wake of numerous socio-economic factors leading to the so called 'death of the high street' (Grimsey, 2018) and the growing poly-centric structure of urban regions (Chapman, 2011).

Several factors have contributed to the changing demand and shift from the original purpose of urban spaces (Accordino & Johnson, 2000); The loss of heavy industry and the subsequent decline of post-industrial regions that were built primarily on their industrial strength, has led to shrinking cities (Oswalt, 2005), with a trend of population decline in poorer problematic inner-city areas due to high levels of unemployment and the undesirability of living in these perceived problem areas.

The recent changes in socio-cultural habits due to the growth of out of town and online shopping (Grimsey, 2018), the effects of the global pandemic and austerity policies that reduced access and investment into civic infrastructure has resulted in an increase in vacant

land that no longer serves a purpose (Hwang and Lee, 2020). These spaces often become unused, underused or misused and have a detrimental effect on the development and social and culture life of places. Furthermore, attempts in the 1970s and 80s to regenerate neighbourhoods through the destruction of much of the original urban fabric of places to make way for car-centric infrastructure have left communities desolated, creating pockets of underused, neglected and in-between spaces with little to no functionality or purpose (Roberts, 2016).

Various terminology has been used to describe these spaces such as neglected, unused, hidden, abandoned, unloved, misused, redundant, under-appreciated, underutilised, abandoned or empty. The term urban void will be used as an all-encompassing term throughout this thesis as has been suggested by Hwang and Lee (2020) due to the fact that it is an inclusive term to describe the varying types of these spaces. A void suggests 'a lack of presence, a vagueness, or an emptiness, and it implies embedded or potential urban spaces that can be reutilised' (p.2). Examples of urban voids include: brownfield sites (such as former industrial sites or land that has previously been used for another function but now lay empty); empty, derelict or abandoned buildings and shop fronts; rooftops; residential alleyways; underpasses; vacant plots of land; road junctions and passageways or service alleys.

2.1.1 The existence of urban voids at various scales

(Pagano & Bowman, 2000) discuss the problematic nature of these spaces as they lack definition. From the difficulty in defining what is and what is not included as an urban void - due to the fact that they often grow spontaneously overtime as surrounding areas fall into decline and eventually form a part of larger urban void - to the scale and boundaries of where the void begins and ends due to there often informal or fortuitous nature.

The wide variety of urban spaces that eventually become urban voids are scattered throughout cities as Hwang and Lee (2020) discuss. Not only do these spaces vary massively in their scale, but also in their shape, ownership, level of dilapidation and time they have been left abandoned or unused. Therefore, Hwang and Lee have argued for a need to form a collective perspective on understanding these spaces and to build discourse on how they can be brought back in to use through a multi-scale approach. Akkerman & Cornfeld, (2010) have categorised these spaces into large-scale brownfield voids, such as abandoned and derelict industrial sites or factories and small-scale voids, such as leftover parcels of land between

buildings and urban infrastructure. This research will explore the reimagining of urban voids at both these scales.

Rahmann & Jonas (2011) argue that the lack of definition, ambiguous nature and the myriad of unique complexities attached to each urban void means that there is a poor understanding of what must be considered in order to alleviate the issues of these spaces. They also discuss how policies to deal with urban voids within planning are lacking, due to their ambiguous nature. Hwang and Lee (2020) highlighted the various complexities of urban voids in their work and discussed how there is a need to build processes within the planning system that consider the various human activities, perceptions and stigmas, existing community relationships and values and attachments inherent in each urban void if we are to effectively bring these spaces back in to meaningful use. This thesis provides a study of urban voids of various scales, locations, ownership and at different levels of community involvement with the aim of supporting understanding of how the transformation of urban voids can be better dealt with through a community-led approach and plug the gaps in a planning system that has failed to address the challenges created by these types of spaces.

2.1.2 Understanding the causes of urban voids

Leaders in the redefinition of how we observe social life and think about the use of public space have long argued for the need to design better public spaces and alleviate the potential for the creation of void spaces (Carmona, 2010).

Trancik (1986) discussed the growth of undesirable urban areas that are poorly designed or that are intentionally designed as anti-public spaces in that, they make no positive contribution to their surroundings or provide any benefit for the users of the space. These spaces are often "ill defined, lack measurable boundaries, and fail to connect elements in a coherent way (p. 4). He defines these spaces as lost spaces rather than urban voids. Describing them typically in areas around abandoned waterfronts, industrial complexes, the edges of arterial roads that nobody cares to maintain and detreating parks and housing estates. Carmona (2010) describes how Trancik believed the fault for the creation of these lost spaces lies with the car and urban renewal projects when, in the 1980s many void spaces were created when motorways cut through neighbourhoods, splitting them in two and leaving communities isolated from one another. He also laid blame with the growth of privatisation of public space and the encroaching commodification of public space as places of solely

consumption. The separation of uses and creation of mono-functional areas such as strip malls, most commonly seen in the US, and the residual in-between spaces that are created as a result of these types of developments.

In the 1996 article, 'Cracks in the City', Loukakitou-Sideris describes urban voids as areas where there are "gaps in the urban form, where overall continuity is disrupted; the residual spaces left undeveloped, under-used or deteriorating; the physical divides that purposefully or accidentally separate social worlds; the spaces which development has passed by, or where new development has created fragmentation and interruption" (1996, p. 91).

Hwang and Lee (2020) have also pointed out however, that urban voids are not only generated through the physical urban changes made to a place but can also be generated through problems in the planning system, whereby zoning or permitted use classes prohibit change. Issues with a weak property market and low land values along with a turbulent political or economic situation can also generate urban voids via external national and global factors.

2.1.3 Issues urban voids create for urban regeneration efforts

Urban voids create numerous social and economic problems for places. The existence of urban voids can lower surrounding property values and increase social problems as they become magnets for anti-social behaviour. They can lead to more isolated communities - as urban voids create bigger distances between residents and the services or infrastructure they need in their daily lives - as well as create a sense of detachment and loss of civic pride amongst residents due to the fact that the poor environment can create places that are not seen as worthy of investment, maintenance or improvement due to their perpetual state of dilapidation.

Hwang and Lee (2020) describe how some urban voids remain neglected and derelict for long periods of time due to the fact that they usually have ownership issues whereby it's not exactly clear who owns or is responsible for the maintenance of the space. Urban voids at both the large and small scales often come with many constraints when being considered for redevelopment. For example, in large-scale voids issues of cost of remediation of land can often make redevelopment economically unviable. Whereas, small-scale voids are often sandwiched between infrastructures or existing uses that cannot be disrupted, such as service

alleys where access is needed or close to important live infrastructure such as railway lines or motorway under and overpasses. Finally, urban voids often lack categorisation or are identified within the planning system, therefore these spaces are often over-looked and are exempt from potential funds that could support their regeneration due to their non-status legally.

Urban Voids fragile status leads to further decline as opportunities for regeneration are limited and new development is deterred, thus causing yet further abandonment of these spaces (Aruninta, 2009; Hwang and Lee, 2020). Hwang and Lee (ibid) go on to discuss the wider implications for this, as urban voids become more and more neglected and problems in these spaces are augmented, so does the effect this has on surrounding neighbourhoods. Urban voids become spaces perceived to lack safety and fail to provide the basic amenities needed for usable public space, thus leading to the emergence of social problems. This, in turn, leads to a decrease in property values in surrounding areas and creates a catalytic effect of decline in an area.

Wilson (1982) theorised this argument through their 'Broken Windows Theory' in that they argue an inertia or failure to deal with small signs of neglect – such as a broken window in a neighbourhood – could foster a rapid spiral of decline. Other examples of small-scale urban decline that, if not fixed fast, can lead to further decline, and ultimately the generation of urban voids can be seen in common urban blight such as graffiti or fly tipping. This can create a perception of nobody caring and a belief that an area has no value or worth, thus creating further decline. A community that sees the neglect and generation of urban voids in their vicinity on a daily basis can begin to wonder why they should spend time in those spaces and lose an interest in maintaining them, effecting their sense of belonging (Trancik, 1991). This causes these spaces to become deserted, bringing in a higher possibility of crime, perceptions of insecurity and a loss of civic pride (Wood, 2006). However, there has been much critique of the broken windows theory as it is often asserted with a middle class, often white and privileged idea of how space should be used.

For example, Taylor & Harrell (1996) argued that the theory's emphasis on the physical signs of neglect can overlook the root structural causes of urban decay such as poverty, unemployment and inadequate housing. Likewise, Herbert (1996) and Sampson & Raudenbush (1999) have criticised the theory for its narrow focus on criminal behaviour and

how it fails to consider the complex nuance of community life. Urban voids may be the only places for some groups to socialise, particularly marginalised groups. The desire to beautify them, whether this is consciously or otherwise, could be seen as an attempt to cleanse a community of these groups. As Jacobs (1961) discussed, the need to maintain a vibrant and diverse neighbourhood with a varied mix of uses and social interactions is more effective in preventing neglect and decay than solely addressing the visible signs of decay.

Likewise, Colin Ward (1973) cautioned against professional-led interventions that aim to 'cleanse' urban spaces of signs of decay without fully considering the social practices of those who inhabit them. Ward's critique within 'Talking to Architects' reminds us that attempts to revitalise urban voids can sometimes marginalise the very communities they are meant to serve, especially when design processes prioritise aesthetic renewal over social justice. In reflecting on this tension, I explore how my own positionality as both researcher and designer may have shaped the interventions I facilitated in ways that inadvertently reflected top-down assumptions about space

Carmona (2010) describes the idea that public realm is often seen as 'someone else's problem'. In that, he describes how the general public often perceive the maintenance of public space as solely for the local authority with an expectation that someone will be there to clean up after them. However, Carmona argues that the same can be said for numerous organisation who have a formal role in the design, creation and maintenance of spaces. Thus, urban voids within this context, are a forgotten space where there is no management, control or forward planning as to how these spaces can not only be maintained, but flourish as an asset to the neighbourhoods within which they are situated.

Despite the numerous apparent problems that bring urban voids in to being and the subsequent issues that come from the existence of urban voids, studies have started to explore the potential urban voids have for solving issues many urban areas are now facing (Pagano & Bowman, 2000; Tibbalds, 2000; Aruninta, 2009; Rahmann & Jonas, 2011). Whilst the structures, locations and objectives within urban voids are now being interpreted as positive urban aspects to be celebrated (Hwang and Lee, 2020) as they contain the fundamental building blocks that enable urban areas to thrive. Hwang and Lee describe how urban voids provide opportunities for the re-densification of urban areas where land is scarce or in areas that need to be repopulated. They also provide the spaces for experimentation

and can be reshaped in radical ways based off of reimaginations that do not fit within the traditional realm of past ways of designing public space. They offer opportunities to challenge traditional land uses, promote sustainable development and community cohesion, whilst reengaging citizens in the transformation of their neighbourhoods. Whilst, ultimately, allowing communities to reclaim urban spaces in the pursuit for social justice and their right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968).

2.1.4 The effect urban voids have on civic pride, sense of place & place identity

`Sense of place' describes a resident's relationship with that place and encapsulates people's emotions, imagination, stories and describes ways in which people experience and make meaning of their experiences in and with a place. A sense of place is said to create strong feelings of identity for both residents and visitors alike, with those who feel an emotional attachment to a place more likely to be proud of its past, its present and be confident about its future (Freeman et al., 2019) creating strong feelings of civic pride, belonging and a strong place identity.

However, the appearance of urban voids in a neighbourhood can lead to a loss of civic pride in an area. The visible neglect and decay in the public realm does little to help people's feelings of pride and can exacerbate the issues of neglect as citizens become disillusioned and unmotivated to maintain the environment around them, or lose willingness to transform the places in which they live. If a place is perceived as empty or neglect of life, it becomes harder for a community to maintain or build a sense of attachment as they become uninviting places to be. This in turn effects the identity of place from one of a unique and vibrant area that serves the needs of its users to one to be avoided (Siegler, 2023).

Towns and cities are socially constructed places, shaped by the experiences and actions of those who inhabit and govern them (Ellery & Ellery, 2019). It is the amalgamation of these actions and experiences that instils each resident with their own notion of what makes a place, influenced by numerous factors from a places geography, history, socio-economics, culture, past experiences and the different meanings and values associated with a place

(Peacock et al., 2018). It is through these factors that urban imaginaries are constructed, internal mindsets held within a society about what a place is and what it could be (Dunn, 2018). Whilst some citizens may see an urban void and associate it with a relic of the area's history and heritage, others may see it as a reminder of failure. Likewise, some will see urban voids as having potential to be transformed or restored, whilst others view them as signs of neglect and decay. It is for these reasons that Ellery & Ellery (2019) have argued that attempts to build a stronger sense of place and community through physical interventions, i.e. via various placemaking approaches can in fact cause friction among stakeholders, creating narrow viewpoints that fail to encapsulate the diversity of values and nuances of place that give some them their sense of civic pride and gives others a sense of disillusionment (Crivellaro et al., 2016; O'Regan, 2001).

Citizens hold sentimental attachments to the areas, buildings and spaces they reside. This can create contentious issues when it comes to a failure to address neglect and decay of urban voids, whilst also creating problems when urban renewal is proposed as change can be seen as attempting to eradicate a past that holds value and importance to people. For example, if an area's identity is attached to a specific industry that brings a sense of pride to its citizens, or likewise becomes a symbol of failure due to its closure, a change to this area will evoke strong emotions and meanings for different citizens on both sides.

Chapman (2010) explains how what he terms as 'cultural inertia' - an imaginary that can affect processes of urban renewal and make it difficult for areas to move out of a spiral of decline and could be said to provide a good definition of the negative side of urban imaginaries:

> *"Cultural inertia is defined as a shared mind-set (held by key stakeholders in the public, private and third sectors, by local politicians and by the population in general) which can help or hinder an area in its future development. Cultural inertia, it is argued, produces and reproduces tolerances and intolerances to change and informs people in the locality about what is possible and desirable. While cultural inertia is defined as a commonly accepted mind-set about local potentiality, this does not mean that such ideas are necessarily grounded in empirical reality. Indeed, is it*

argued that many of the oft-quoted and taken-for-granted assumptions about what constrains progress in achieving recovery (in comparison with other areas) may actually be false" (p. 1037).

Thus, it is often the emotional attachments and mindsets - their shared imaginaries - that people attach to an area that can affect a places' ability to reinvent itself as oppose to a tangible issue. There is therefore a need to explore within future studies of the reimagination of urban voids as to the extent local psyche and collective shared mindsets about the potential of an area can affect change and people's ability to imagine beyond the neglect and decline they see in front of them. This potential inertia to change is seen as a mindset that can hinder progress and can ultimately lead to the generation of more urban voids, as places become stuck in a cycle of decline.

Therefore, it is argued that civic pride can only be constructed through building on the foundation of shared meanings, values and aspirations of communities (Collins, 2016). It can also be argued that the same rings true for tackling issues of cultural inertia and ensuring they do not hinder imagination nor the potential to transform urban voids. It is considered that local governments, civic actors and community groups, when adopting placemaking approaches to urban renewal within urban voids, should attempt to reflect the shared local and cultural knowledge of its residents, building on what is valued, cherished and experienced in place (Harvey, 1989). It could also be argued that their role should be to challenge the cultural inertia inherent within a community if they are to be successful.

2.1.5 Urban Imaginaries and their effect on how we remake place

Imaginaries are seen as powerful tools to rethink how we might otherwise be (Yusoff & Gabrys, 2011), they enable us, as Cornelius, (1987, p. 81) argues to 'see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is'. Sartre (2010) and Neuman & Hull (2009) have discussed the notion that if we cannot imagine alternative possibilities of the world beyond its current state then we cannot be free nor can we manage and seek to build a better world. Davoudi et al. (2018) has argued that imaginaries offer space for challenging preconceived assumptions and allow for alternative ideas of what could be to come to light.

The ability of imagination to transport us to another reality, enables us to tackle the most challenging problems through the sharing of ideas and the exploration of pluralistic possibilities that can reimagine the status quo (Dunn, 2018). The pluralistic nature of imaginaries means that they are able to operate on an intersubjective level where collective understandings develop among a group of people and are often centered around a shared identity of a specific place, this has been referred to as a spatial imaginary (Davoudi et al., 2018).

These spatial imaginaries form through the development of collective meaning making in specific societal and spatial geographies. They are created by the lived experiences of people in spaces via the constant contestation, perception and remaking of places and their politics. They are spread and promoted through various forms of media including images, stories, texts, art, data and algorithms (Davoudi et al., 2018). The struggles and continuous disputes over dominant urban imaginaries leads to the formation of collective counter-imaginaries. They aim to challenge deeply held beliefs and call for a reimagination of places (Healey, 1996) in order to address the societal issues that an area is facing. I argue that it is through the creation of these new imaginaries that prefigurative placemaking occurs and this process supports the questioning of power relations and narratives that exist of who designs and shapes the future of our urban environments (Dunn, 2018).

Urban imaginaries have the power to reshape how we envision the future of place. Moreover, traditional planning tools such as maps, images, diagrams and scenarios that are normally used to materialise urban imaginaries don't only represent an alternative urban future, they make visible the future in the present (Davoudi et al., 2018), i.e. prefigurative placemaking. In doing so, Davoudi (ibid) believes that they essentialise a specific imaginary of the future of place over other possibilities and can heavily influence how places are reimagined, planned and redeveloped. Thus highlighting, whilst imaginaries can be a force for good in a community, it also shows how they can be harnessed as a powerful tool to push specific political or social agendas of what is possible.

Similarly, as Friedmann (1987) and Sandercock (1998) have argued, the process of imagining alternative futures is often constrained by the professional expertise guiding it. While urban

imaginaries can democratise the reimagining of place, the authority of design professionals in shaping these imaginaries must be critically examined. This research reflects on how my own design literacy may have influenced the creation of these imaginaries, questioning whether the democratic potential of design was fully realised or if professional assumptions prevailed in shaping participants' visions.

2.1.6. The perils of urban imaginaries

Whilst urban imaginaries can promote critical thinking and lead to a deeper understanding of the improbabilities, paradoxes and risks (Dunn, 2018) that are inherent in the reimagination of place, they can also marginalise visions that are deemed undesirable according to the dominant development narrative (Davoudi et al., 2018). Crawford (ibid) argues that urban imaginaries can fail to incorporate the needs and desires of certain groups if their vision doesn't adhere to that of a top-down policy, where the main goal is usually based around global economic competitiveness (Hofmeester et al., 2012). This leads to community voices being silenced (Davoudi et al., 2018) based on the pressure to provide a 'realistic' economic vision that is centred around the arguments of capital realism (Fisher, 2009) i.e. the belief that we are not capable of imagining an alternative to capitalist systems. However, Grunow (2017) has argued that the process of envisioning futures and the role of imagination as a method to discuss the future can be a powerful way to foster a renewed discourse between governments and their citizens, creating new avenues for civic participation.

Urban Planning has long championed the success of imaginaries designed by visionary urbanists from the work of Ebenezer Howard to Le Corbusier (Davoudi et al., 2018). The influential work of (Lynch, 1964) called for cities to be designed in their totality by experts based on their visual quality. These urban imaginaries, whilst influential, are the work of individuals and take a top-down approach to designing places, or as Lindner & Meissner (2019) put it, the belief that cities should be designed by a 'planning mastermind'.

Certeau (1988) argues that this top-down approach to envisioning urban futures shows a fundamental lack of understanding of the everyday functions of places. In his book, 'The Practise of Everyday Life', he makes the point that the everyday actions of citizens plays as

much of an important role to the shaping of public space as does the grand visions and interventions imposed from planners and architects. Lindner and Meissner (2019) note that the urban imaginaries of those who live and work in cities on a daily basis are not fully formed and are based on the practicalities and experiences of place in the everyday. Therefore, imposing top-down urban imaginaries that don't reflect the daily lives of its inhabitants, whether this be created by planners and urbanists, or through manipulated media narratives can have long lasting implications on how a place develops and is reimagined.

An example of the top-down imposition of urban imaginaries and the effect this has on the everyday shaping and perception of place can be seen in the City of Detroit, Michigan. (Davoudi et al., 2018) describes how the work of Nate Millington is a good example of how the assigning of distinct characteristics and, in this case, negative stigmas of the city can force out competing and more constructive or positive imaginaries. Millington (2013) reports how the repetition of specific images and stories of deindustrialisation and degradation has brought about a dominant imaginary of Detroit as a failed and decaying city. Davoudi et al. (2018) argues that this imaginary is shaping the future of Detroit as it attempts to reconfigure its past. By stigmatising the city as de-industrialised or as a failed place, Davoudi believes this can further perpetuate the decline of the city as the potential for residents to reimagine the city is hindered by this narrative of failure. In turn, this influences the mental image residents and outsides hold of the city and thus, affects people's decisions to live, visit or invest in Detroit. This process can create a perpetual cycle of decline that affects the cities growth and hinder citizen's abilities to imagine an alternative beyond this dominant urban imaginary.

Davoudi (ibid) goes into further detail on the damaging implications these urban imaginaries can have on certain populations, citing the work of Golubchikov (2010) who describes how the pitting of one place against another is a process of 'othering' which aims to stigmatise some places as underdeveloped and undesirable in order to glorify others as modern and creative. Davoudi believes this can be seen on macro levels dividing the global North and global South or Western Europe and Eastern Europe with the former having being viewed as successful, wealthy and safe and the later as often dangerous, poor and undesirable

according to a global collective imaginary. Martin & Simmie (2008) argue that the widely accepted view of economic competitiveness acting as the deciding metric as to a places success and growth means that governments at national, regional and local levels must compete with one another in order to survive. Globalisation and the narrative that places must be 'the smartest', 'the most innovative' or 'most creative' in order to survive perpetuates this 'othering' process and inevitably, places that aren't able to keep up with the neo-liberal agenda are peripheralised (Crawford, 2018). Dunn (2018) has argued that we must recognise the influence particular urban imaginaries that are conceptualised and disseminated across various forms of media can impact the way we perceive place and how this, in turn, effects how we discuss and shape urban futures.

Lindner and Meissner (2019) have encapsulated how these stigmas and reputations of places created by urban imaginaries can affect the function of places on an everyday level. They highlight how an urban imaginary that envisions a place as a "no-go area" or as a "wasteland" can reproduce the same conditions of urban decay and degradation that caused them in the first place. Lindner and Meissner (ibid) have argued that if an area has a reputation of being dangerous due to high crime rates or is not considered attractive because of years of abandonment, this is likely to produce conditions in which residents do not feel a sense of ownership or civic pride (Collins, 2016) in where they live, lessening the possibility that they will use local public spaces as places for recreational activity or enjoyment. Likewise, these places are unlikely to attract visitors for leisure and tourism and will fail to attract the critical mass of cultural and institutional facilities that support the continued success of places, leading to further decline. Therefore, the reputation of a place is a majorly important factor in the actual safety and success of an area. On the other hand, Lindner and Meissner (ibid) have pointed out that a place that has developed a reputation as being a creative and a vibrant hub will further attract local residents and visitors. This will entice external investment and draw in media attention from the likes of travel guides and social media influencers which further reiterates this urban imaginary as a desirable place.

These contrasting situations act as a self-fulfilling prophecy for neighbourhoods and shows how both scenarios of urban imaginaries, whether these are positive or negative, "can reproduce the socio-spatial conditions that brought them into being" (Lindner and

Meissner, 2019, p.9). This dynamic raises the question for Lindner and Meissner of what role urban imaginaries can play in *reconfiguring,* rather than *reproducing* the socio-spatial politics of places.

2.1.7 The 'crisis of imagination' and the potential role of urban future-ing

Debates have arisen around the crisis of imagination (Mulgan, 2020) across all facets of society in recent years and the potential impact this can have on how we tackle the complex societal issues of the future. The phrase "If we cannot imagine, then we cannot manage" (Neuman and Hull, 2009 p.7) has been used extensively in relation to urban imaginaries to argue for the importance of imagining to solve increasing complexity in our urban environments (Teipelke, 2013; Ache, 2017; Dunn, 2018).

Dunn (2018) has argued that over the last fifty years, rather than an expansion of innovative and diverse imaginaries, we have seen an increasingly narrowing of possibilities of future scenarios. Arguing that there has been a convergence rather than divergence of proposals to address urban challenges and design ideas for the future transformation of place. This trend has been highlighted by the homogeneity of town centres, such as retail districts across the western world, with the same practises and tools deployed in order to tackle what has been coined 'the death of the high street' (Portas, 2011; Grimsey, 2018) 'Clone Town Britain' (Simms, 2005) described how there has been a death of diversity across the UK's towns and cities with 'cookie cutter' housing developments, the same pattern of chain stores in place of independent local retails and a copycat approach by local councils who are all trying to stand out by rebranding themselves as the next "creative", "smart" or "global" city (Lindner and Meissner, 2009).

Therefore, it is critical that we reassess the role urban imaginaries can play in challenging the convergence of ideas and explore how they offer the potential to fundamentally change the processes of constructing, envisioning, and creating urban futures (Dunn, 2008; Lindner and Meissner, 2009). Levitas (2013) argues that urban imaginaries need to be seen as a method rather than a goal to deconstruct commonly held ideas of what is possible, and in

doing so we can build capacity to radically reassess urban challenges through the process of collectively creating alternative place visions (Dunn, 2018).

This radical re-imagination of urbanity has been seen to throw-up challenges around the way in which urban imaginaries represent a transition and effect the relationship between the present and the future (Lindner and Meissner, 2009). Grunow (2017) has argued that we need to question the power dynamics inherent in the making of futures and ask for 'whom are we creating these futures?' Therefore, we need to challenge the narrative of those who claim ownership and have the capital to decide urban futures.

Dunn (2018) believes that we must first acknowledge the way the majority of urban imaginaries are presented. He argues that too often they are articulated as fully fleshed-out plans that are simply broadcast at people instead of being more speculative or provocative, that in a way, would enable and empower the viewer to respond and actively participate in the visioning process. Lindner and Meissner (2009) support this argument by stating that we need to map out and question who participates in the process of urban future-ing as well as ensuring that any interventions are decided democratically whilst taking in to account the existing power dynamics of decision making in urban transformations. (DiSalvo, 2015) has argued that designing agonism into the process and recognising the co-existence of competing ideas is a vital part of ensuring urban imaginaries address present issues whilst creating the space for transformative urban futures.

Dunn (2018) has discussed that we need to create spaces for the articulation of alternative futures through creative and unconventional thinking in order to perceive of new ways of relating to and perceiving the urban environment. Lindner and Meissner (2009) have highlighted how technological innovation and the ubiquity of smartphones has facilitated the co-creation and design of new ways of being in and experiencing place. The way we navigate and visualise the present and future of places has been enhanced by the democratisation of GPS technologies via mobile apps and geo-tagging as well as the ability to manipulate and simulate new concepts of place through digital photography. The increasingly availability and experimentation with 3D modelling, AR and VR has enabled users to be transported to parallel worlds that resemble the familiar yet challenge

preconceived ideas of what place can be. At the same time, they have opened up a space for debate and have provided a tool for thinking speculatively about the future of place (McVeigh-Schultz, 2020), opening up new possibilities for creating future imaginaries.

2.1.8 Fostering collective and political action through urban imaginaries

Places are produced and transformed by the everyday practises of its citizens through the constant contestation, negotiation and co-operation of the different stakeholders involved in creating the urban (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). Levitas (2013) has argued that urban imaginaries need to be appropriated as tools to challenge what we are told is impossible, can be possible. It is therefore argued that urban imaginaries can be harnessed as a way of fostering collective political action in the urban, as citizens have the opportunity to see and articulate what they want from the future of their community.

 has argued that the aim of political action should always be to strive to shape society through the imagining of our desired futures. However, Harvey (2008) in his work on '*The Right to the City'* argues that there are many inequalities and power dynamics at play which leads to the marginalisation of certain groups and raises questions on who's desired futures are enacted. Grajales & Andres (2019) has discussed the idea that in practise, all citizens have the ability to imagine a desired future for where they live, however many lack the political leverage and access to be involved in the reshaping of place and the decision-making process in comparison to the likes of private developers and local, regional and national authorities. This therefore raises the question of how urban imaginaries can be reclaimed as a tool to support participation and increase influence for citizens to have a stronger voice in the transformation of places.

Grajales (ibid) argues that even the process of citizen-led reimaginations of the urban is, in itself, a political action. By envisioning alternative and desired futures (in particular, when they are challenging a dominant developer or local authority led narrative of the future of place), urban imaginaries can be a powerful tool to mobilise support and influence decision-makers. This research looks at ways in which citizens can reimagine the urban through the utilisation of ubiquitous digital tools and platforms, with the aim of understanding if they

provide citizens with a way to envision and materialise (i.e. make real) abstract concepts of their own desired futures. The output of this process, has the potential of competing against top-down created proposals and in turn, force those in power to re-engage with citizens to co-create alternative visions. Grajales (ibid) believes that "imagining is far from being a naïve act of dreaming, but [is] an active verb" (p. 264). Through a prefigurative placemaking process where citizens are provided with the tools to materialise their own imaginaries, they can feel a sense of agency over the process of reshaping place as they have the ability to articulate their own desired futures.

Grajales (ibid) therefore argues that imagining alternative possibilities for a place is a pivotal starting point to engage citizens in rethinking what their aspirations are for the urban environment around them. I therefore argue and demonstrate through the case studies the need to explore to what extent prefiguring places through alternative urban imaginaries has as a form of collective political action in influencing top-down decision-making. Whilst also aiming to understand the role digital technology can have as a tool to supporting the co-creation of citizen-led urban futures.

2.1.9 Small-scale Interventions as catalysts for new urban imaginaries

Dixon & Tewdwr-Jones (2021) discuss how urban planning must place importance on understanding a places uniqueness through ensuring the emotional connections that people hold of a places past are preserved. In addition, planning must develop scenarios that highlight new possible futures as opposed to reproducing developments from elsewhere to avoid the creation of 'identikit cities'.

Dixon (ibid) goes on to argue that urban planning must be thought of as a toolkit, where common best practises are called upon depending on the specific needs and challenges of a place. By placing more importance on hyper-local and often small-scale place improvements, the approach advocates for implementing interventions that are based on local intelligence. These interventions can then be analysed in real time by a wider variety of local actors and decision makers as opposed to traditional planning approaches which

advocate for large scale all-encompassing masterplans that are implemented long term by top-down decision making.

Kallus (2016) discussed the power of images and visualisation for igniting resident's imagination for the everyday spaces they inhabit. Through building understanding of how residents can change the built environment around them at the hyperlocal scale, they are able to imagine alternative futures that deal with issues inherent at the neighbourhood level. Kallus goes on to say, when discussing an urban walk where young residents created visuals of reimagined underused spaces; "It changed them from mere pedestrians, everyday passers-by, to owners of the place, urban participants who could re-envision the place and take action to change it. They exercised their ability to make change, and the meaning of appropriation (even if only virtually) as a right to the city. They re-learned the potential of their neighbourhood as an important part of the city which they have the power to change" (p. 13).

Lindner et. al (2019) talks about the idea of 'interventions' and how they have been harnessed as a tool to discuss the implementation of new urban imaginaries and challenge the ways in which public space is traditionally used. Lindner (ibid) argues that in this context, urban imaginaries have been used as tools to articulate and build support for certain place futures from both top-down and bottom-up urban initiatives. For example, Rosol & Blue (2022) discusses the recent ubiquity of Smart City discourses in urban planning, where top-down interventions that aim to realise smart city imaginaries fail to take in to account the desires of citizens and fail to address issues of urban social justice.

On the other hand, Lindner (ibid) argues that bottom-up interventions in recent years have utilised the urban environment to advocate for more socially just cities by using public space in alternative ways through the implementation of interventions that transform the function of public spaces. These interventions aim to develop new urban imaginaries by challenging the way we perceive of public space and reclaim citizens right to the city. These interventions are often developed under the umbrella of "tactical", "guerrilla", "DIY" or "grassroots" urbanism and have also been referred to through the lens of urban acupuncture (Foth et al., 2015). Whilst varying in scale and scope, these interventions are

often designed to provoke debate and disrupt the existing usage of public space in order to advocate for change and articulate possible alternative futures, a term I coin as prefigurative placemaking.

Lindner (ibid) discusses examples of bottom-up interventions that have helped to communicate alternative urban imaginaries and articulate citizens desires for aspirational futures that deal with societal issues and injustices. Often through urban social movements, protests or uprisings, small-scale urban interventions have been utilised to change the way in which public space is used in order to raise awareness of issues and demonstrate the potential for alternative futures. Examples such as Occupy Wall Street (2011) used prefigurative politics and other movements such as the Arab Spring (2010-2012), the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement (2014) and the Catalan Independence Movement (2017) all built on the ideals of citizens right to the city through the appropriation of public space that was used to call for social change and develop new imaginaries of what place and societies could be. Lindner argues that, whilst these movements have diverse goals and contexts, they all strategically used the public realm to articulate their cause, which created new imaginaries of how urban upheaval can be used to support collective political action.

Whilst, as Lindner points out, these examples represent more extreme forms of urban activism. Bottom-up interventions have also been utilised to build new imaginaries of the urban through small scale placemaking transformations and prefigure a world a community wants to see. For example, Lindner points out that urban farming is not only about communal food production but is also about creating a renewed sense of community. Likewise, guerrilla gardening movements are not only calling to attention issues of excessive urbanisation and the need to re-wild the city (Hardman et al., 2018) but also lead to the beautification of public space and a renewed sense of civic responsibility amongst local residents (Hoover, 2013). The installation of small-scale art projects such as yarn bombing and art murals are not just about fostering more creative and vibrant centres where artists appropriate the public realm to display their work, but also have the potential to amplify voices within marginalised groups and stress the unique sense of place inherent in each community (Melnyk, 2020). As examples of prefigurative placemaking, these interventions enable citizens to manifest their aspirations for their community and prove to the wider

community that alternative futures are possible, whilst challenging formal procedures of intervening to bring about urban renewal.

However, these types of interventions that have, in many regards, become common place and mainstream since the pandemic have been criticised as leading to state de-responsibilisation (Certomà et al., 2020), with national governments and local authorities taking advantage of grassroots movements willingness to invest their own resources in to tackling societal issues, giving authorities the opportunity to neglect their responsibility to providing services and investment in the regeneration of communities.

Placemaking efforts that have an agenda to change the image of an area or build new urban imaginaries of places as new art districts through the growth of creative industries have also been criticised as leading to displacement and to the gentrification of neighbourhoods (Ley, 2003). Mould (2014) argued that tactical urbanism style interventions have become a brand within themselves. Local governments now use these terms interchangeably as a vehicle to enforce neoliberal policies of urban development and the commodification of public space.

Despite the negative aspects of these interventions as highlighted by Certomà et al. (2020) and Mould (2014), there is room to explore as to what extent these bottom-up interventions and prefigurative placemaking ideas can provoke debate and interrogate new possibilities for how we use and view our relationship to the built environment, in particular, urban voids. Exploring whether they still hold value in supporting community-led placemaking initiatives and provide the flexibility for grassroots envisioning of alternative place futures, outside of traditional planning processes.

2.2 Addressing issues with participation in reimagining place futures

As previously discussed, planning systems struggle to deal with urban voids due to the fact that they suffer from a myriad of issues including but not limited to, ambiguous or unclear land ownership issues, not being easily identified nor categorised within the planning system as well as market conditions such as unpredictable nature of property values and speculative investments that overlook the potential of urban voids for alternative uses or community-led initiatives. Notwithstanding issues of cultural inertia and the capacity to

imagine alternatives that inhabit the transformation of voids. Hwang and Lee (2020) found that there are a lack of planning guidelines or policies on how to deal with urban voids, particularly at the small scale, nor are there many solutions offered for interventions to deal with them in traditional planning practise.

However, movements such as urban acupuncture, tactical urbanism, and community-led placemaking interventions may plug the gap in an inadequate planning system that fails to deal with the complexities of urban voids and enable current imaginaries to be disrupted. Moreover, these novel planning practises offer opportunities to challenge issues of participation in planning processes and increasing community engagement in decision making, a debate that has grown massively in recent years (Wilson et al., 2019).

The following section will offer a brief overview of recent planning reforms and the impacts they have had on public participation. It will also delve into the growth of community-led practises within planning and set the groundwork to understand the importance of new planning movements that have the potential to transform planning participation and the design of urban change.

2.2.1 Localism and the big society agenda

The introduction of the big society agenda between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010, promised to reform the planning system through increased community involvement and transferring power from planning experts to non-experts, with a reduction in the role the state plays in people's lives (Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012). However, this also came with major funding reductions from central government to provide services at a local level (Lord et al., 2017). Thus, leaving local authorities with major funding gaps to deliver vital services, and a growing reliance on third sector organisations and citizens to plug the gap.

The Localism Act 2011, a major part of the big society agenda, set about focusing planning on a neighbourhood level and aimed to introduce approaches that would increase public participation in planning by enabling citizens to shape the future of their neighbourhood, remove bureaucracy and speed up the planning system (UK Government, 2011). It aimed to

shift power in decision making to citizens and reduce the role of local authorities. However, it has been argued that the power citizens gained during this reform was somewhat constrained (Tewdwr-Jones, 2012; Wilson et al., 2019). Additionally, it has been noted that whilst simultaneously granting more local powers, central government has reduced the availability of state resources that could support the implementation of these powers (Bradley & Sparling, 2017). The shortfall of resources can result in ineffective implementation of local initiatives, ultimately undermining the potential benefits of this local empowerment the localism act was trying to address.

That being said, the introduction of Neighbourhood Development Plan's as part of the statutory system has provided opportunities for a shift in power dynamics within the planning system. Likewise, the adoption of the Community Right to Bid as part of the Localism Act in 2011 gave powers to communities to nominate buildings or land within their neighbourhoods as assets of community value. In relation to urban voids, this offers opportunities for communities to protect these spaces before they are sold on the open market.

Given the changes within the UK planning system over the last decade it can be deduced that there is a continuing shift within government planning reforms to transfer power from planning experts to non-experts. The role of planners has shifted considerably, whilst still seen as providing expertise, the power they had throughout the planning process has been greatly reduced (Vigar, 2012). More recently, the white paper 'Planning for the Future' (2020) expanded permitted development rights, further reducing planners' powers. There is therefore a need to explore how non-experts, whom now have more power within the planning process, can be provided with the tools to support them shape the future of their neighbourhoods.

This research aims to progress understanding in this field, whilst investigating how meaningful participation can take place within the planning system through prefigurative placemaking and community-led envisioning exercises that avoid the mistakes made by the big society agenda and subsequent planning reforms.

2.2.2 The importance of participation in reimagining places

The lived experience of those who reside in neighbourhoods and use them daily are the most important stakeholders when designing place futures (Baker et al., 2007; Bugs et al., 2010; Rydin & Pennington, 2000). It is these citizens who go about their everyday life in urban spaces who understand the realities, intricacies' and complexities prevalent in the multi-layered dynamics that make up a neighbourhood. Therefore, they offer unique perspective on the successes and failures of place and are most likely to be the ones who will be impacted initially by change (Baker et al., 2007). The importance of these voices not only being included in decision making, but leading the discussion on the future of place is pivotal to the success of any development. Citizens understand the problems and know the reality of place better than anyone else (Bugs et al., 2010), thus are best placed to design solutions to urban problems.

However, the complexity of the planning system and issues of land ownership, in particular England's land tax system, which is opaque and does little to discourage urban voids, makes it hard for citizens to take part in decision making, and the inadequacy of this system means that communities are often disillusioned by the planning process for several reasons. First, the use of jargon and complex language makes accessing and understanding information on developments difficult (Baker et al., 2007). Second, the implications of policies and the scope or limitations imposed by the planning system is often poorly explained (Brabham, 2009). Finally, the tokenistic nature of many consultation exercises often gives the impression that they serve no purpose and community voices are not listened too since developments are often negotiated between local planning authorities and developers behind closed doors prior to engaging with communities (Baker et al., 2007).

Another major implication on informal planning participation, is the influence of power dynamics within this process. Flyvbjerg's work (1998) on rationality and power explores the relationship between power and rationality, particularly in the context or urban planning and development. Flyvbjerg argues that decision making on large projects is often influenced by power dynamics and that rationality is often used to justify decisions that favour powerful stakeholders. Power is excreted in different ways such as through political influence, financial resources or via the control of information. It is important to recognise

the impacts this can have on participation, the effects power can have on informal planning participation and the ability for citizens to participate can be influenced by those wanting to exert their influence on the process and can effect outcomes.

Likewise Hillier, (2000) describes the concept of "going round the back", a strategy used in urban planning processes to circumnavigate formal procedures and exert influence in unconventional ways. The concept implies that it is common for those wanting to exert influence to find alternative routes to influence planning processes when traditional avenues aren't accessible or effective. Hillier's work is crucial to understanding the complexities of reshaping places and to understand the nuances under the surface, noting that power dynamics can be subtle or hidden and exerted in overt ways. It is therefore important to consider the influence of power dynamics when reimagining places in informal participation exercises and the possibility they have on influencing outcomes and shaping the direction of thought amongst participants. By the same token, it is of interest to explore how citizen groups can exert their own influence through non-traditional avenues through the likes of prefiguration and visualising alternative place futures as a way to influence the reshaping of place.

In order to create the environment for meaningful participation, methods need to be developed that enable citizens to understand the issues that lead to a need for change, the proposed development itself and, most importantly, create the spaces that empower people to voice their opinions (Wilson et al., 2019) and articulate the change they want to see.

Rather than traditional engagement methods where plans are drawn up and are then presented to the public for their opinion (Baker et al., 2007), involving communities at the earliest stage of planning, i.e. the envisioning or ideation stage can have a major impact on the success of a development. Not only this, but it builds collective community capacity to learn through knowledge sharing and empowers citizens with the impetuous to take action (Pretty, 1995) as they develop a sense of agency in their neighbourhood. This is a fundamental element of successful placemaking, a terminology to describe a community-centred approach to development in recent years.

2.2.3 Enabling community capacity building to lead envisioning

Community-centered approaches entail the development of strategies, processes or interventions with the aim of improving a local place or service through a collective, community process as oppose to via an external organisation or institution (Veronesi et al., 2022), they can also provide the tools to disrupt negative urban imaginaries of place and enable communities to rethink the way they use place. Attygalle (2020) argued that communities, since the beginning of civilisation, have always been working for the betterment of their neighbourhoods, but the power dynamics that exist between institutions and communities makes it hard for community groups to influence change. However, Attygalle (ibid) goes on to state that the recent turn in popularity for community-led approaches doesn't signify that they didn't exist before, rather there is now a desire from institutions to be involved in community-led approaches or support them to develop.

The idea of community-led approaches, particularly within an urban planning context, grew during the 1960s with the growth of a sense of social responsibility during the civil rights movement. This led to a growing focus to establish services that enabled local communities to create and implement their own visions for their neighbourhoods, in particular, across the United States and United Kingdom (Sanoff, 2006).

Much of this work was influenced by the advocacy model of intervention within planning, a theory coined by Paul Davidoff in the 1960s. Davidoff believed that citizens not only deserve to have a voice in place futures, but they should be provided with the ability to be well informed about the intricate problems of places and the reasons why certain aspects of proposals are presented. He goes on to say that people should be able to "understand the technical language of professional planners" (Davidoff, 1965 p. 193).

Davidoff called for the concept of plural plans whereby multiple competing ideas for the same site should be proposed as competition is healthy and leads to better results. Therefore, a community-led vision for a place that goes in contradiction to that of the institution can lead to a sounder plan and allows for a larger range of voices. To that end,

Davidoff beliefs it is a necessity that citizens should be in opposition to planners and institutions creating top-down proposals for place futures. An electorate that is well versed and knowledgeable on the context and plans for a place can provide accountability to planners and authorities.

Likewise, those communities who are against a proposal would be forced to articulate an alternative vision and develop a concrete alternative plan in order to legitimately challenge the professional. This process, lends itself to community-led planning of interventions as it empowers non-professionals in the belief that their ideas and input can influence tangible change in the future of a place.

As will be seen throughout this thesis, the research has engaged with several community groups to enact advocacy planning. This has been achieved through the design of tools that build knowledge and, in a sense, train non-experts on particular principles, ideas and inspirational projects they can look to in order to enact their own vision. This process, through envisioning change, enabled these groups to develop and articulate their own vision in direct contradiction to the plans of authorities and developers.

This research therefore focuses on the effectiveness of community-led approaches in terms of envisioning, ideation and advocacy for the reimagining of urban voids, set in the context of a move towards localism, small government and big society agendas. Whilst this context offers more opportunities for grass-roots movements and brings community-led approaches in to the public eye, it must be remembered that this is set amongst a backdrop of government service cuts and austerity which hinder community development. Likewise, a realisation from the local authority that it doesn't have the capacity itself to transform communities, rather it must work with the communities and leverage local knowledge and lived experience to bring about change.

Therefore, there is a need to explore ways in which communities can lead envisioning processes that challenge conventional development processes, where communities are empowered in the design and implementation of alternative place futures. This thesis takes the principle that through prefiguring the world citizens want to see, design activities can

enable that capacity building and develops non-experts' ability to influence the reshaping of place.

As Margolin (2007) noted, all design activities take place in between the space of the world that is and the world that could be. The aim of design is therefore to shape, manifest or materialise this potential world through interventions that can provide solutions to the issues of the current state of the world (Pollastri et al., 2018). Design plays a vital role in supporting community-led envisioning processes; therefore, design activities must support non-experts in articulating complex concepts and enable them to envision what could be. It should aid rather than hinder communities who generally don't have knowledge of planning concepts or the skill sets to articulate their desires through design tools that materialise their ideas, both physically and digitally.

Discussing place futures through creative methods and design-based approaches can enable community capacity building and as (Mallo et al., 2020) discussed the act of creating and remaking place as a collective can build mutually supportive and self-sustaining groups who organise around a shared desire to reshape place. Known as design activism, this approach as Mallo et al. argue, builds on the work of Faud-Luke, and can be the catalyst to build communities of practise where, through creativity and design, communities find solutions to common problems and prefigure alternative futures for urban voids. Tardiveau & Mallo (2014) define urban voids as 'anonymous spaces' with no use or exchange value, they argue that through tactical urbanism approaches their perception can be transformed and quality enhanced. In their work, they argue how tactical urbanism as an approach can elicit new social dynamics, building community capacity to reimagine place. Tardiveau and Mallo's socially engaged practise has used tactical urbanism, design participation and co-production to build community capacity and reimagine anonymous spaces (urban voids) and enable envisioning of alternative futures through prefiguration.

Likewise, Mallo et. al (2020) discussed how creative methods to envision more sustainable futures for a city-edge office park could break existing path dependencies. Building on the work of Paterson (1997), who argued for the need for radical reimagining of public space in order to enable community building, the work of Mallo et. al argues that creative methods

to reimagine spaces holds significant potential to disrupt or challenge traditional participation, current patterns, practises and routines (i.e. path dependencies) to the way things have been done, and thus challenge and change the status quo. Therefore, creative methods hold the potential to build community capacity, and provide non experts with the toolset required to challenge and disrupt traditional planning process.

2.2.4 Alternative Planning Approaches

It has been said that conventional planning processes are no longer fit for purpose and do not address the challenges societies face (Batty et al., 2012), therefore new approaches to the reimagining of place futures are emerging that take a more unconventional approach to place changes and can enable more effective community-led envisioning. The bureaucracy of traditional planning processes within a European context have been criticised as overly formalised and prioritising the interest of private developers (Falleth et al., 2010) over the needs of citizens. These issues, coupled with the fact that recent government restructuring and economic uncertainty has meant that local authority resources have decreased considerably, meaning they struggle to effectively address local challenges such as the growth in urban voids and urban decay.

The widespread usage of neoliberal approaches to planning and the effects of capital realism (Fisher, 2009) has led to more division and marginalisation between government and residents and within communities themselves. The failure of neoliberal approaches to address societal challenges, such as the growth in urban voids has led to a call for alternative approaches to address these challenges.

Various terminologies that generally apply much of the placemaking principles described in the following section have grown in response to traditional planning approaches. Initiatives such as Guerrilla Urbanism, Tactical Urbanism, Urban Acupuncture, DIY Urbanism and the Lighter-quicker-cheaper approach are all similar models to deal with urban problems that often fall in the grey spaces when it comes to traditional planning practises. This is due to the fact that these models often stem from bottom-up, grassroots and non-constituted or non-structured groups who work in collaboration to transform their neighbourhoods through unofficial or unsanctioned initiatives, as opposed to centrally managed or government sanctioned projects. There is a tendency for these alternative planning models to be led by

artists, community development organisations, non-profits, activists as well as community champions who represent their local neighbourhood.

As discussed, placemaking, since the work of Jane Jacobs in "*the Death and Life of Great American Cities*" (Jacobs, 1961), has been seen as an alternative way to bring about positive change in urban spaces, often through a lighter, quicker and cheaper way of regeneration, as set out by the Project for Public Space (Bravo et al., 2013). It is also seen as a way of giving agency to community groups, through empowering them to make physical changes in the urban realm and putting the decision-making process in the hands of local people (Silva, 2016). Some see it as a manifestation of the daily conflicts that arise in cities and a way for grassroots organisations to express their disaccord and resistance to local authority decisions (Wohl, 2018). Others see it as a way of bringing to attention issues of importance in the community through, for example, the creation of temporary interventions that change perceptions of places in the long-term (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

2.2.4.1 Tactical Urbanism

Examples of Tactical Urbanism include communities who, after battling with local authorities to introduce traffic and speed calming measures in their communities took it upon themselves to extend pathways with low-cost materials such as paint and chalk or through installing plant pots and hosting events on their street to either slow traffic down or temporarily remove cars all together through prefiguratively making the change they want to see. The ide,a as Lydon & Garcia (2015) articulate, is to improve the experience pedestrians and non-car users have on the street by designing interventions at a human scale, which in turn changes perceptions and habits of users of the space.

This process has been labelled tactical urbanism which is also referred to as temporary urbanism, guerrilla urbanism, pop-up urbanism or DIY urbanism amongst others (Hwang and Lee, 2020). It is increasingly seen as an alternative planning approach to materialise physical change in urban spaces through a lighter, quicker and cheaper way of place improvement (Bravo et al., 2013). It is also seen as a way of empowering community groups and highlighting their own agency and ability to make changes themselves. This empowerment or realisation that communities already have the knowledge and skill sets to

make physical changes in the urban realm has been said to be a powerful way to place the decision-making process in the hands of local people (Silva, 2016) . Some see this approach to the remaking of place as a provocative action that manifests the daily conflicts that arise in cities and a way for grassroots organisations to express their disaccord and resistance to local authority decisions (Wohl, 2018). Others see it as a way of bringing to attention issues of importance in the community through the creation of temporary interventions that strategically attempt to change perceptions of places in the long-term and influence institutions to take action faster (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

Tactical Urbanism has emerged as an alternative approach to addressing contemporary urban issues. As Hernberg & Mazé (2018) argue, the approach offers more flexible, resource-efficient, and inclusive urban planning mechanisms by activating underused land that has no immediate development demand and using this land to address local issues such as poor access to green space, traffic calming or the prioritisation of non-vehicular transit on streets. It has been associated with "spontaneous interventions made by artists and community activists on vacant sites or buildings" (Moore-Cherry & Mccarthy, 2016, p.1) that often grow organically as oppose to through a structured process, where groups often implement interventions without the explicit knowledge or intention that their actions are a form of tactical urbanism. Stevens & Dovey (2019) define this approach to planning as "typically short-term and low-cost adaptations of the urban fabric that also involve a circumvention of conventional urban planning rules and approaches. Such agile open space projects embrace a wide variety of forms, functions, scales, and durations. They range from relatively regulated artificial beaches, floating swimming pools, pop-up buildings, outdoor theatres, and container villages, to more informal projects such as instant plazas, unsanctioned guerrilla gardens, and parklets. Their functions include consumption, recreation, public art, performance, community engagement, and creative production" (Stevens & Dovey, 2019, p.2).

Hwang and Lee (2022) discuss how tactical urbanism is not only seen as an approach to transform urban voids that arise in public spaces such as streets, alleys and parks but has also been used as an approach to transform disused factories and abounded industrial sites into live-work units, cultural and performance venues, co-working spaces and as urban commons. The growth in meanwhile uses that enable short-term uses of a space can allow

for more flexibility as to what a buildings primary function is and can also plug the gap in providing active usage for sites until a more permanent solution can be found. Pearsall & Lucas (2014) argue that this model of building usage can often prove to be more sustainable than permanent site redevelopment and the improving legal status of these schemes make them more attractive for groups to undertake, offering a potential solution to reactivating buildings in the wake of the death of the high street (Grimsey, 2018) brought on by changing consumer shopping habits.

Glick (2012), has argued that tactical urbanism affords alternative planning approaches with a various set of tools to combat local issues and transform urban voids. Glick argues that tactical urbanism offers a framework to create a deliberate, phased approach to instigating change. It creates opportunities for local ideas to be tested out that address local planning challenges. Tactical urbanism can foster the creation of increased social capital among citizens and the building of organisational capacity, strengthening relationships between public and private institutions, non-profits and NGO's and their constituents. Ultimately, tactical urbanism enables short-term commitment and creates the environment for realistic and achievable expectations that are low-risk asks with the possibility of a high impact reward and the opportunity for wider change that builds on the back of such positive developments. This has been referred to as 'urban acupuncture'.

2.2.4.2 Urban Acupuncture

It has been said that placemaking is an acupuncturing strategy (Hes et al., 2020), in that it "is an interventionist approach which uses puncture points in public spaces to catalyse long term positive change" (Lerner, 2014). An example of a puncture point could be an urban void, underutilised or neglected area of public realm in need of an intervention, albeit small or low-cost, it is argued that urban acupuncture as a specific placemaking and tactical approach to reshaping place can have a ripple effect that benefits the wider community and leads to further place improvements in the areas surrounding the initial intervention.

Drawing on the metaphor of traditional Chinese medical practise, urban acupuncture is a term theorised by Catalan architect Manuel de Solà Moralies i Rubió to describe a

placemaking process that uses remedies i.e. small, targeted interventions to release pressure on a pain point, in other words, a problematic area of public space that can then provide wider relief in the surrounding areas leading to further improvements. The idea of urban acupuncture builds on the work of Patrick Geddes who argued for contextualising a place through diagnosis before treatment, he developed the concept of "conservative surgery" which could be argued as early inspiration for the idea of urban acupuncture (Haworth, 2000). In his work 'Designing Cities' (Rubió & Zardini, 1999) and 'A Matter of Things' (Rubió et al., 2008), Rubió discusses the idea of Urban Acupuncture through practical examples in practise, predominantly in Catalonia and Southern Europe. The concept can fast-track drawn out planning processes and implement hyper-local changes in place using low-cost materials. The benefits of such an approach means that there is less red tape and bureaucratic procedures to fulfil as is typical in traditional planning processes. It has been demonstrated how these hyper-local changes can foster a chain reaction in improving the surrounding urban environment, as Cutieru (2020) describes this is achieved through improved social cohesion and changes in perceptions of public safety in the changed spaces and surrounding areas.

In their own words, Cutieru (2020) describes urban acupuncture as a "design tactic promoting urban regeneration at a local level, supporting the idea that interventions in public space don't need to be ample and expensive to have a transformative impact. An alternative to conventional development processes, urban acupuncture represents an adaptable framework for urban renewal, where highly focused and targeted initiatives help regenerate neglected spaces, incrementally deploy urban strategies, or consolidate the social infrastructure of a city".

An example of urban acupuncture applied to urban void spaces can be seen in the growth of community gardens in these spaces across the globe. Hwang and Lee (2020) describe how this relatively small-scale intervention not only provided much-needed green spaces in neighbourhoods but have the potential to act as "an alternative to conventional public spaces and enable spontaneous and unobstructed activities that are likely to involve diverse social groups" (p.547).

Lerner (2014) who served three terms as Mayor of Curitiba, Brazil is seen as a leading advocate of urban acupuncture principles, he utilised the concept as a means to bring about rapid changes and circumnavigate complex, bureaucratic planning processes and as a way to overcome economic obstacles (Cutieru, 2020). Lerner describes his frustrations with traditional planning processes and the inertia it creates to change as well as the belief that we can't wait for the perfect moment or have all of the economic requirements in place before we act, he argues "the lack of resources is no longer an excuse not to act. The idea that action should only be taken after all the answers and the resources have been found is a sure recipe for paralysis. The planning of a city is a process that allows for corrections; it is supremely arrogant to believe that planning can be done only after every possible variable has been controlled" (Anderson, 2023). Cutieru (2020) highlights the fact that urban acupuncture interventions can come in various forms and at different scales, as projects vary considerably in size, from as he states the re-organisation of the corner of a street to the implementation of new transport lines, such as cycle lanes.

2.3 Placemaking

Public spaces provide a forum for interaction and can create opportunities for citizens to build a sense of community around a common identity . The role these spaces play in forging connections offers opportunities to explore how urban voids can become a usable part of the urban fabric as spaces that foster social interaction, create the space for political action and encourage cultural exchange (Carmona, 2010). Creating and recreating space through community-led initiatives has been referred to as placemaking, a strategy or process that empowers communities to enhance places by building on the needs of its users and the unique character of the area (Mateo-Babiano & Lee, 2020).

This section will explore the process of placemaking, defining the term, its origins, uses and practical implementations within the context of urban voids and finally understand the criticisms made of the process.

2.3.1 Defining Placemaking

Placemaking is still considered an emerging field in urban planning and design and is seen as an evolving concept which has gained popularity as a framework for a more people-centred approach to the development of urban spaces. At its core, placemaking attempts to maximise the benefits of physical space, ensuring that they are complimentary to the functions and needs of urban areas whilst being designed based on the knowledge and aspirations of local people.

The Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT defines placemaking as *"the deliberate shaping of an environment to facilitate social interaction and improve a community's quality of life",* noting that the iterative actions and collaborations inherent in the making of places nourishes communities and can empower citizens (Silberberg et al., 2013). It is inherently a participatory process that should encourage community building through the design, planning and management of urban space that provides the catalyst for civic improvement.

Placemaking is a continuous, iterative process that should empower local communities to co-design urban spaces around their needs and aspirations (Hes et al., 2020). Providing them with the support to overcome the challenges of steering the development process and offering the flexibility and agility to quickly adapt spaces according to the changing needs and interest of their community.

Wyckoff (2014) described placemaking as a way of creating meaningful experiences from and for people. This process of shaping places should increase citizen participation in imagining new possibilities for urban spaces whilst also ensuring that they remain authentic and meaningful to the communities they form a part of.

The shaping of spaces through placemaking has been described as a process (Ellery & Ellery, 2019), a movement (Kent, 2019; Laven et al., 2019), a concept (Strydom et al., 2018) and a philosophy (Devereux, 2015; Jelenski, 2017) rather than a tightly defined framework that can be applied across various locations. Every placemaking project will differ in that the context, communities and challenges will differ considerably. Thus, finding one agreed upon definition of what placemaking is and is not can be challenging.

2.3.2 History of Placemaking

Placemaking is a concept that's origins lie within the 1950s when urbanists began to critique the way places were being shaped and the failure of large-scale masterplans or regeneration projects to consider the needs of citizens in the design of urban spaces (Kent, 2019). This change in thinking that sought to define how public spaces can improve a community was spearheaded by William H. Whyte and Jane Jacobs. Whyte criticised growing suburban sprawl across North America and described how top-down decision making was destroying the quality of life of local communities. He advocated for the need to consider small-scale interventions that would enhance human interaction (Kent, 2019). Whyte's influential work, "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces" (Whyte, 1979) was key in understanding the successes and pitfalls of public space design and highlighting the elements needed within public space to encourage social interaction. He also pioneered tools that helped better understanding of the way in which people use public space through observing and analysing people's interactions.

The work of Jane Jacobs also provided the foundations for what is known today as placemaking. She advocated for designing cities that were created for people rather than for vehicles and commerce and called for vibrant and inviting public spaces that encouraged neighbourly interactions (Jacobs, 1961). Her concept of 'eyes on the street' noted: "there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street" where she advocates that great urban spaces should naturally provide informal surveillance of the public realm. Arguing that in order for people to feel safe on a street there needs to be other people and activities happening that contribute to an atmosphere of safety, building on Whyte's idea that we need to foster 'social life in our public spaces' in order to create safe, usable and attractive urban environments (Whyte, 1979).

Carmona (2019) described how placemaking is said to have emerged from the Urban Design discipline. However, as Hes et al. (2020) argues, the placemaking movement came about '*as a response to the monotony of modernist design and architecture for public space*' (p. 3). *Hes et al. (ibid) go on to state that 'Modernism was perceived to be more concerned with the form of these spaces rather than how these spaces were being used. Many perceived that*

most design approaches have resulted in buildings and places that were isolating rather than connecting' (p.3).

Gehl (2013) has long argued that urban spaces should be shaped along a priority of people and life first, followed by the public realm and then finally buildings, noting that planning often functions the other way around with buildings taking priority over the spaces they are in and the people that use them. He argues that this doesn't work and creates the dead, lifeless and urban void spaces we are now accustomed too in many modern developments. Hes et al. (2020) highlighted how Jan Gehl's work has played an important role in the recent development of the placemaking movement, stating that the likes of Gehl, Jacobs and Whyte have all played an *'instrumental role in stirring alternative ideas for urban designers, planners, landscape architects and architectures to design public spaces that primarily cater for the needs of people, arguably over the needs of non-human participants'* (p.4), a fundamental principle of placemaking, however one that fails to articulate the importance of bottom-up and grassroots input into the development of these design processes.

The role citizens play in the production of space is vitally important to a successful placemaking process. Lefebvre (1968) conceptualised the idea of 'the right to the city' and the later work of Harvey (2012) has argued that not only will urban spaces only be a success if citizens are enabled to participate in their shaping and reshaping, but that citizens have a fundamental collective right to change the city and shape the future of their communities.

Since Placemaking's conception and evolution from the 1950s to today, there has been a philosophy or set of values that bind the different ideas of what placemaking is. One that challenges the homogeneity and lifelessness of modern developments and critiques the social impacts on car-led and commerce-led developments over the needs of communities. Finally, placemaking challenges top-down decision making in favour of community-led processes that empower citizens to conceptualise, plan and implement physical interventions in the public realm that benefit their livelihoods.

The work of Fred Kent and Project for Public Space has played a vital role in harmonising various placemaking ideas and advocated for placemaking in the design and redesign of

urban environments. Originally set up as an antagonistic process that advocated for returning public spaces as places for people, the organisation has played a major role in diffusing the placemaking movement on a global stage, with various forms of placemaking approaches being adopted by many cities worldwide.

2.3.3 Different approaches to Placemaking

As placemaking has grown in popularity globally, various additional terminologies have been attached to describe specific forms of placemaking that encapsulate different agendas, values of a project or attempt to provide a solution to specific urban challenges. The following section provides an overview of these; however, this list is not exhaustive as new theories and terminologies emerge.

Wyckoff (2014) argued that there are various facets of placemaking. Splitting the concept in to four different types. 'Standard' placemaking, 'creative' placemaking, 'strategic' placemaking and 'tactical' placemaking.

He argues that the 'standard' definition for placemaking is most related to the work of Fred Kent and Project for Public Space. Stating that:

> *"for the most part, placemaking is used as an incremental way to improve the quality of a place over a long period of time with many separate small projects and/or activities. However, placemaking can also be used to create and implement larger scale transformative projects and activities that can convert a place in a relatively short period of time to one with a strong sense of place that serves as a magnet for people and new development….all placemaking will improve the quality of life amenities and choices within a neighbourhood, community, or region'* and that *'all forms of placemaking depend on broad engagement of stakeholders to design projects and activities" (p.4).*

However, he argues that there are three specialised forms of placemaking besides the overall goal of creating quality places where people want to dwell that have various differentiating aims depending on a number of factors.

Strategic Placemaking

A strategic approach aims to make investments in the regeneration or creation of new public space in order to attract investment, residents or business to an area. The aim of this form of placemaking is to make places attractive through the creation of new amenities in order to appeal to certain demographics (Wyckoff, 2014). This targeted approach to placemaking would primarily be used by developers wanting to raise their property values or sell space to particular clients. It would also commonly be used by local authorities or business improvement districts who are trying to change the identity or perception of a place through making it more appealing to some groups over others.

An example of strategic placemaking is Granville Island in Vancouver, Canada. Once an industrial wasteland in the 1970s, the islands derelict structures were transformed in to public space, a market and an artistic and cultural hub. The official Granville island website claims that "the destination now attracts millions of visitors each year from Vancouver and from around the world… home to more than 50 independent food purveyors and contributes to the Island's appeal as a renowned culinary destination. In the Net Loft Shops and in the Artisan District, many of Canada's best artists and designers can be found…Granville Island is home to many cultural venues and hosts numerous performing arts and cultural festivals year-round…operationally self-sustaining, Granville Island is home to more than 300 businesses employing more than 3,000 people" (Granville Island, 2022).

Figure 1 - Granville Island's strategic placemaking approach transformed empty industrial units in to a public market (Granville Island, 2022)

Whilst strategic placemaking could be used by communities to change the image of a place, this approach can often be construed to favour developers over local neighbourhoods, as discussed in more detail in section 2.3.4.

Creative placemaking

Creative placemaking attempts to engage the arts and cultural strategies in order to reactivate under-utilised spaces. It is argued by (Courage & McKeown, 2018) that this arts-driven process offers the potential for art to contribute to regeneration and revitalisation. The term was first coined by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa (2010) for the National Endowment for the Arts in the USA, their definition is:
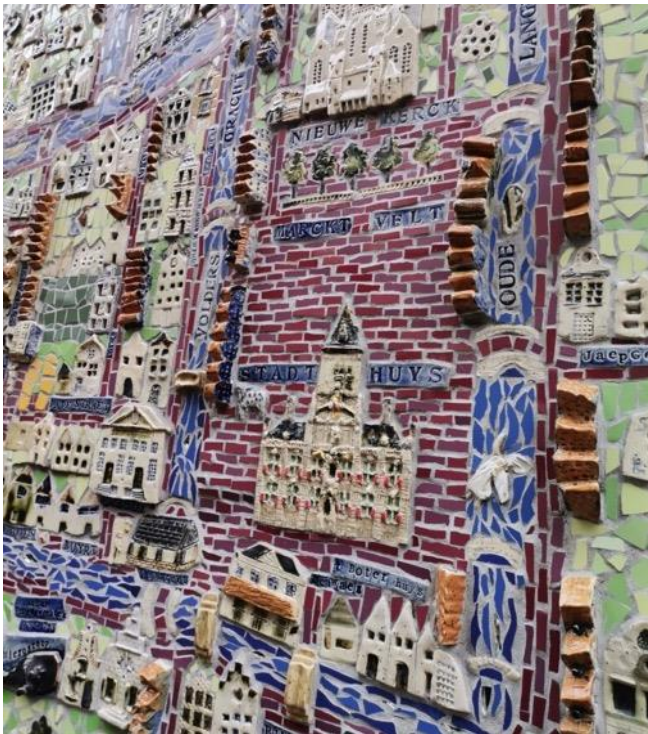
"In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired" (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010 p.3).

Figure 2 - Community curated mosaic in Delft, Netherlands (Van Den Berg, 2021)

Wyckoff (2014) argues that creative placemaking often attempts to "to institutionalize arts, culture and creative thinking in all aspects of the built environment" (p.6). An example of creative placemaking can be seen in the Netherlands, the 'Ceramic Map of Delft' ('Keramieken Kaart van Delft') that transformed a blank wall on an urban street. It was a co-created map by local volunteers and artists of the town that features local landmarks, bridges, trees and street names all made from ceramics. Van Den Berg (2021) in an article on the Dutch Review explains "*although both artists guided the process, the 'Keramieken Kaart van Delft' was an ambitious community project undertaken by the people of Delft in various workshops throughout the area. It is fitting that this depiction of Delft's history was crafted by a community of devoted Delft volunteers.*" Van Den Berg goes on to highlight the craftmanship and community involvement that meticulously built on the area's local identity "*even though the making, firing and glazing of the ceramics, inlay and grouting was a lengthy process, it was made with enthusiasm by Delft's people. What was possibly most challenging to achieve was that every house, tree and part had to be glued separately according to the street plan and in the right place. The result is a combination of scale effect and recognisability of specific buildings and neighbourhoods…*stories, symbols and clues can be discovered on every small part of the artwork. In addition to creating art that one can

look at and explore for hours*". Alongside this, the groups Facebook page regularly posted stories and clues about hidden gems on the map which allowed them to engage with people who hadn't seen the map physically.

Tactical Placemaking

Tactical placemaking, aims to make small scale, temporary or pop-up interventions to influence the redesign or change the use of a space. Wyckoff (2014) defines tactical placemaking as "the process of creating quality places that uses a deliberate, often phased approach to change that begins with a short term commitment and realistic expectations that can start quickly (and often at low cost)…it targets public spaces, is low risk, with possibly high rewards" (p. 7). Often seen as an iterative process that changes places in small ways over time, this process is often called tactical urbanism or urban acupuncture, concepts previously discussed in this chapter.

An example of tactical placemaking, and perhaps the most famous example of both placemaking and tactical urbanism is Park(ing) Day. Initially started by a group of activists in San Francisco as a one-off installation in response to their frustration at the car-dependence of the city and the fact that the majority of street space is given over to vehicles, has now become a global phenomenon (Coombs, 2012). Herman & Rodgers (2020) explain how *"one parking spot in central San Francisco was, for two hours on a November day in 2005, transformed into a public space. Parking was paid for at the parking meter but instead of depositing a rectangular steel box on four wheels, activists-designers from the Rebar group used these 12 square meters to park a park. They laid out some lawn, a bench and a tree" (p. 2).* This singular, modest action as Herman and Rodgers describe it, was a truly bottom-up intervention that transformed a space into a place. Owing to its simplicity and replicability, this one action has transformed into a global movement with the now international Park(ing) Day taking place in countries worldwide. Community groups take car parking spaces and transform them into usable community spaces whilst infusing the spaces with their area's own unique character.

Figure 3 - Example of a parking day intervention Source: https://www.downtowntempe.com/post/parking-day

Alongside the 4 types of placemaking as set out by Wyckoff (2014), there are various other forms of placemaking that will be detailed in the following sections.

Community-led & Institutional Placemaking

Whilst, in theory, all placemaking should be focused around community involvement, some successful placemaking processes have been carried out by local authorities, developers and other institutions. Mateo-Babiano et al. (2019) have highlighted several terminologies such as community-led placemaking, community-driven placemaking or bottom-up placemaking to differentiate approaches that are led by grassroots communities. Often, these projects emerge as a result of addressing local issues through creating installations or repurposing public space as oppose to an intentional structured placemaking process, such as in the Park(ing) Day example given above.

An example of institution-led placemaking can be seen in Sommerville, Massachusetts where the non-profit organisation Culture House worked with the local authority to transform a plaza in front of the town's library that enabled residents to access Wi-Fi during the Covid-19 pandemic. This project was a low-cost way to increase social interaction and create a meeting space at a time of social distancing restrictions. Likewise, Culture House

also temporarily transformed the Old Town Hall in Salem, Massachusetts in to a pop-up culture space. This enabled the local authority to test out ideas and concepts for the space before investing in its permanent transformation. Culture House worked with local communities through a series of engagement activities and then programmed a three-month series of events that reflected the local community and opened up opportunities for residents to use the space as a meeting point or place to showcase their creative work.

Figure 4 - Somerville Public Library Wi-Fi Pop-Up (Culture House, 2021)

Critical placemaking

(Toolis, 2017) has devised the term critical placemaking, theorised as a tool to support the process of reclaiming space from master narratives of what space is, should or could be. Toolis defines critical placemaking as: *"efforts that attend to inequities and work to promote social justice by disrupting systems of domination and creating public places that are accessible and inclusive, plural, and participatory"* (p. 186).

Toolis goes on to argue that critical placemaking affords two ways in contributing to societal change. Firstly, that critical placemaking can be seen as a tool that "facilitates empowerment by reimagining and transforming our relationship with place, our relationships to others, and our understanding of what behaviours and actions are possible in public places" (p. 189). Secondly, it can create the necessary spaces for dialogue amongst

underrepresented communities, where those occupying different social positions and perspectives encounter one another, which facilitates discussion on developing more inclusive community narratives. It also provides the catalyst for healing and finding common ground as community members are afforded with the opportunity to find their common identity, values and beliefs that bind their place together. Toolis argues that "critical placemaking allows for the representation and remembrance of histories previously rendered invisible, which can challenge the unanimity of master narratives" (p.188). It is in this antagonistic nature of critical placemaking where the potential for communities to link their personal stories to collective stories emerges. This in turn provides opportunities for bridging divides and thus, as Toolis articulates can contribute "to a stronger civic fabric and more resilient communities, serving as the basis for collective mobilization" (p.188).

Social practise placemaking

Courage (2017) coined the term social practise placemaking (social arts-informed placemaking) which recognises the contribution of those possessing cultural capital, i.e. creative practitioners, and those with social capital such as residents and blends them together. *Wrecked!* (Walker, 2018) a project in Southend, UK combined local, experienced and external creative practitioners to vocalise local and situated knowledges and harness local opinion against the building of an island airport in the Thames estuary, which openly criticised top-down decisions that were contrary to local interests. As Walker stated, these types of projects can spur communities into action by building on the collective identity and its public spaces to argue for bottom-up approaches to reimagining place.

Also drawing on the work of Lefebvre's '*right to the city*', Courage (2017) argues social practise placemaking offers a tool to support citizens' collective right to make changes to the city. Courage discusses how arts in place can support individual and collecting meaning-making where citizens can re-determine space use on their own terms, and co-produce shared meanings and identities attached to these places. Courage says social practice placemaking aids this as it can operate as a 'cultural, dialogic and embodied production of people and place' (p. 6). Supporting contemporary urban political discourse, Courage argues that there is a growing movement that challenges who is, can and should be shaping places and that we need to understand the implications of dominant design narratives in the

reshaping of places. Courage highlights how much of this work manifesting in reality can be seen at the hyperlocal, community level and is carried out on a neighbourhood scale where citizens are empowered to address local issues in their areas. Courage calls these people 'citizen placemakers' who can be defined as arts and non-arts actors who become active in the (re)creation of space and challenge the dominant narrative of a spaces function.

Courage (2017) discusses how social practise placemaking differs from creative placemaking in that social practise is specifically concerned with the connection between arts and participation in regards to reimagining places. It is therefore argued that social practise placemaking can therefore be an effective method to bring together artist's and residents to improve a local area's public space. These artists are able to use their cultural capital to stimulate interest among local residents who hold social capital. Walker (2018) argues that if artists can then translate this interest from locals into action, by considering themselves and locals as equal experts in the decision-making process, artists can therefore help highlight local interests and advocate for social, cultural and physical change in their towns. Technology has the potential to further empower these groups, by using digital tools to communicate ideas and opinions and give these local voices a platform.

Clarke et al. (2014) has explored the role of technology in socially engaged arts practises. The potential for technology to augment lived experience and create new possibilities to engage people in site-specific interactive arts pieces, has led to new possibilities for digital placemaking. The digital turn in placemaking and how it can be utilised to reimagine urban voids is explored in later sections of this chapter.

2.3.4 Criticisms of placemaking

As has been demonstrated, placemaking should be people-centred and involve communities in the shaping of public space. However, as the movement has grown, various forms of

placemaking have developed from truly community-led and bottom-up processes to government or developer-led. This has created numerous criticisms of placemaking.

The concept of placemaking has been criticised for being co-opted by private developers who are attempting to mask the role they have played in the gentrification of neighbourhoods through the use of placemaking aesthetics and the overall correlation between placemaking intervention and subsequent neighbourhood gentrification (Irazábal & Farhat, 2008; Jones, 2020; Burbeck, 2020; Nance, 2021). The beautification of places based off of top-down imagined interventions that are designed to enhance the uniqueness and identity of a space fail to engage with or understand the values of existing communities. Critics have argued that private developers are using placemaking to whitewash communities in order to make them more attractive for investors or that the consequences of placemaking interventions may unintentionally lead to gentrification and whitewashing (Anthony, 2012; Berglund, 2020; Chantry & Zoe, 2021; Knee & Anderson, 2023).

Placemaking has also been criticised as a corporate narrative that attempts to regenerate a specific area without considering, or intentionally trying to change the history, culture and politics of a community (Jia Lou, 2010). Menina (2021) highlights how placemaking initiatives led by private entities have led to the gentrification of Kaka'ako in Hawaii, stating "how narratives of neighborhood identity and boundaries become manufactured, reinterpreted, and commodified by corporate-led urban development in Kaka'ako" (p.1). In order to challenge these ideas of what placemaking is and who it is for, community-led efforts need to ensure that placemaking is used as a vehicle to amplify marginalised and unheard voices in their processes and confront attempts to co-opt placemaking as a tool for private developers.

Coura ge (2017) discusses the work of Mitchell (2003) as she argues that "urban spaces in the neoliberal city are produced for us rather than by us" (p.18), thus the private developer has too much power and control over the reshaping of our neighbourhoods. Any potential for community-led placemaking can be criticised as having a lack of detail on how it will be implemented and its sustainability or longevity. Therefore, the inevitable need to seek private partnerships arise in order to fund or maintain a space. Courage (2017) goes on to argue that traditional planning processes and the relationship between communities and politics exacerbates these issues and can hinder community-led placemaking processes

further. This is due to the fact that there is, as Lydon and Garcia (2015) state, "too much process and not enough doing" (p. 83) when it comes to urban change and there is an overall sense of disillusionment or "malaise" (Courage, 2017 p. 6) when it came to the bodies in control of the planning system. Building again on Lefebvre (1984), Courage argues that there is a contestation over placemaking and in many ways, the problems inherent in the placemaking sphere symbolise the blight of urban struggle generally. In that, there is a struggle over who space is for, how it functions and what it means to the different actors who vie to remake place according to their aspirations, hopes and desires. As Harvey (2008) argues, urban space should always surpass individual need and be a collective exercise to reshape space, with the aim of creating a better quality of life for the citizens that inhabit these spaces.

Therefore, the increasing trend amongst local authorities and developers to utilise placemaking concepts in an attempt to revitalise public spaces and create a sense of place and belonging can be problematic as this section has demonstrated. This top-down approach has often failed to truly engage communities in meaningful ways and has not addressed the range of issues that affect citizens. On the other hand, new forms of DIY or guerrilla activism from grassroots community groups are beginning to utilise placemaking methods to address societal issues and create the places they want to live in using a bottom-up approach (Fredericks et al., 2016), in defiance of traditional models of urban planning and in contrary to the agendas of private developers.

2.4 Prefiguration within placemaking

As the placemaking movement has grown, so have the definitions of what is and what is not placemaking as has been demonstrated in the previous sections. Used as a tool to regenerate urban voids from grassroots community groups to private developers and local authorities, the aim is to build more vibrant neighbourhoods and improve quality of life through creating spaces people want to gather, socialise and collaborate in. As a relatively new process within urban development, placemaking has been used to identify issues within local contexts and build on the essential elements that make that place unique. Often used as a process to transform urban voids and derelict public spaces through enhancing or

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creating new community amenities that change the social and economic conditions of a neighbourhood, it is argued that placemaking, when local communities are involved in the design, implementation, and maintenance of a space, can be an effective tool in improving the health and wellbeing of residents.

I detail how the case studies in this work represent a form of prefigurative placemaking (Fisker et al., 2018; Dussault, 2022). I define prefigurative placemaking as the specific and intentional process of communities working together to bring into being alternative futures, through the envisioning and reimagining of place. With the aim of co-creating solutions to transform urban voids that directly challenge top-down proposals for urban change through various placemaking approaches.

The notion of prefiguration within placemaking introduces an intentional and radical approach to community engagement, one that differs from traditional planning or placemaking by focusing on embodying desired social futures in present actions. In prefigurative placemaking, communities are encouraged to reimagine spaces in ways that model radical futures, rather than limiting aspirations to what may currently seem feasible or practical. This concept serves as a reference point throughout the work, framing the potential of design provocations to open up new, aspirational ways of thinking about urban voids.

It must be noted that the case studied detailed in this work incorporate various elements of the placemaking approaches outlined in this section. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of the various forms of placemaking, it offers an insight into the scope of approaches taken within the placemaking movement as well as some of the criticisms of its development and usage.

For example, the case study detailed in chapter 4 incorporates elements of critical placemaking in that it intentionally challenges top-down narratives of what place can be through the prefiguration of digitally materialised visions for the reshaping of place based on the desires of a local heritage group. Chapter 5 incorporates elements of digital, creative and tactical placemaking as it utilises technology to ideate with communities to prefigure

their desired futures based off of creative, low-cost and fast implementations to transform urban voids. Finally, chapter 6 incorporates elements of community led and social-practise placemaking through the desire to enable communities to imagine creative solutions to hypothetical futures and challenge societal issues that have yet to come to fruition. The term prefigurative placemaking is used in an attempt to provide an overarching definition to describe the commonality in the processes and motivations across the three case studies.

2.4.1 Articulating future visions of public space through prefigurative design

Civic engagement, democratic participation and collective action depend on the formation of publics whom respond to current social conditions and strive to build a better future for the larger social good (Dewey, 2013). Through the combination of artefacts, people and institutions, publics can be constituted on the basis of articulating design responses to issues in a community and, once reflected upon, provoke discussion through the designing of artefacts (Le Dantec, 2016).

Prefigurative design can offer one way of fostering an environment within publics that enables the imagining of alternative futures. The aim of this design work is to pursue progressive political goals that prompt communities to image alternative futures through the design of and response to artefacts, prompts and provocations. Whilst, at the same time, structuring the process of design in a way to manifest these visions in the present (Asad, 2019b). In this process, communities are able to collectively highlight the lack of imagination of the world we currently live in (Boyd & Mitchell, 2012) and identify the possibilities for a better world.

Prefigurative design shows some relation to existing participatory design work, in that it attempts to represent unheard voices and affected communities. However, at the same time, it allows for the reimagining of radical futures as is often seen in the work of speculative design. Building on these different design methods, prefigurative design emphasises a commitment to the material and actualisation of future visions (Asad, 2019a, 2019b). In particular, the design of participatory systems and experiences which can provide encounters with speculative future worlds has long been a concern of digital civics research (Asad, 2019b). These types of systems enable more inclusive, open discourses that critique

the existing state of things and thus, foster the construction of potential new imaginaries through common learning and understanding (McCarthy & Wright, 2005). When applied specifically to the reimagining and design of the urban, we use the term prefigurative placemaking to describe the act of using prefigurative design in placemaking processes to support urban void transformations.

The physical qualities, or, degradation of public space can be the inspiration and canvas for the cultivation of alternative ideas on how space can be used. However, public space can also symbolise the restriction of alternative place-based activities through the regulations of the planning system and technical requirements required to action interventions (Hernberg & Mazé, 2018). Design in digital civics and tactical urbanism combined, has the potential to restructure and challenge these existing power structures and suggest more lighter, quicker and cheaper interventions in public spaces. This can be explored through offering examples of how prefigurative models of mobilising publics in the redesign of public space could provide alternative forms of remaking place (Courage, 2017) that overcome existing barriers within urban planning.

Prefigurative design can be seen as a protest response in visualising alternative futures for public space as it challenges top-down decision making directly. It can lead to the creation of urban commons, whereby due to the need to form collective action in order to challenge top-down decision making a public takes ownership of, and repurposes public space, in order to meet common community goals (Bresnihan & Byrne, 2015) as opposed to the desires of decision makers. As Courage (2017) argues, the re-appropriation of public space requires the building of alternative and new relationships within that space, one that operates away from traditional planning processes and promotes common forms of belonging (Bresnihan & Byrne, 2015; Courage, 2017) whereby groups are able to challenge top-down decision making and bringing in to being alternatives based off of local aspirations for place.

In the context of public space, prefigurative design becomes a way to experiment with alternative uses, explore civic interactions (Asad, 2019a), share ideas and encourage debate through the articulation of future visions of the urban. But, it also offers an agonistic way of

making visible and exploring different possibilities for the future (Courage, 2017) through provocations, conflict and challenging existing power dynamics in public space design.

2.4.2 Adversarial design as an approach to provoke reimaginations of place futures

The way we use and relate to public space in urban areas is constantly changing as economic, social and cultural factors affect the built environment both positively and negatively. As (Asad, 2019a) stresses, the consequence of this state of constant change is that the many visions for what constitutes a place and what it may become are under constant and, more importantly, contested revision. Asad (ibid) highlights the fact that people tend not to engage in civic processes out of a sense of duty or responsibility, but rather they are more likely to engage out of a feeling of injustice or disagreement with local authority decisions. Community engagement, particularly in terms of imagining place futures, must utilise the politics of conflict and contestations inherent in public space to increase community engagement and provoke debate around place issues.

Creating an environment for these tensions and frictions between and within publics may be one of the most valuable insights into the role design and technology can play in improving places. This agonistic approach to design is known as 'adversarial design' (DiSalvo, 2015). It acts under the premise that there are benefits to conflict and contestation, as Mouffe (1993, 2000) argued, contestation is at the heart of a healthy democracy. Digital civics is best placed to deal with these tensions as it seeks to enable mutual learning and transformation of places through the probing and solving of conflicts (Crivellaro et al., 2015; Asad, 2019a).

DiSalvo (2015) takes this agonistic approach to democracy in which contestation and dissensus are encouraged as an integral part of democracy and applies it to the concept of adversarial design. Some refer to this approach as 'agnostic space' (Björgvinsson et al., 2010) or 'design for dissensus' (Keshavarz & Maze, 2013), however they all work around the idea of designing 'things' to tackle controversial issues and aim for dissensus rather than consensus. Thus, building on the idea that the creation of dissensus and 'agnostic spaces' in design has a role in addressing conflicting voices amongst stakeholders (Hernberg & Mazé, 2018).

In placemaking and the re-appropriation of public space it is the built environment that is at the centre of agonism with a myriad of controversies and conflicts playing out in everyday life, as public space is seen as 'the object of negotiation, regulation, planning, ownership and interpretation' (Hernberg & Mazé, 2018 p.4). Korn & Voida (2015) have described these frictions that exist in everyday politics as an important design element in the creation of civic engagement. This approach can challenge existing engagement strategies of local authorities that are solely intent on sharing information and soliciting feedback (Asad, 2019a; Wilson et al., 2019) calling for the creation of a more participatory design process through the design of agnostic spaces (Björgvinsson et al., 2010) that encourages discourse and dissensus between different stakeholders.

Artefacts, systems and technology platforms can offer agnostic qualities and be purposefully designed in an adversarial way (DiSalvo, 2015). Grace & Hone (2019) designed a computer game to highlight fake news and improve news literacy. By challenging users to identify fake news stories, the researchers were able to design a system that provoked users to reflect on the legitimacy of news sources. Another example, Led by Donkeys (Stewart et al., 2019) is a campaign in the UK that uses digital and non-digital artworks to transform public spaces to bring to attention the failings of governments and hold them to account, making visible political conflict and reimagining public space as a canvas for political dissensus. Purposefully adversarial visualisations of place using digital platforms can explicitly call to attention these contestations and experiences. Stimulating dissensus and the sharing of ideas through the designed 'thing' can create more inclusive and radical interventions in public space design, challenging existing narratives of what space is and what it could be (Asad, 2019b). Thus, bridging prefigurative and adversarial design methods together in order to support more inclusive and effective placemaking.

Community-led placemaking projects, such as those seen in tactical urbanism approaches have the potential to explore and address conflicts and contestations of urban change and the use of public space. It has the ability to expose the different interests and agendas at stake amongst stakeholders of a particular locale, be it social, economic, environmental or cultural (Hernberg & Mazé, 2018). The experimental, temporary and flexible nature of these

projects means they are able to become more resilient and adapt to external factors that longer-term, officially sanctioned projects cannot. These places can therefore act as spaces of resistance and insurgency, advocating for alternative futures and challenging formal planning decisions (Hernberg & Mazé, 2018). These insurgent interventions in the public realm can destabilise existing political structures and relationships, challenging the conventional understanding of who designs and decides on the making of space, allowing for the creation of new and alternative identities, relationships and place meanings (Courage, 2017). Courage (ibid) also argues that these types of social practice placemaking models offer a means to counter neoliberal urbanisation. By enabling dissensus and exposing the dominant consensus, space for debate can be created across all urban actors (Munthe-Kaas, 2015).

This intentional contestation and politicisation of planning decisions highlights the difference between 'design for politics' and 'political design' (DiSalvo, 2015). Design for politics attempts to improve access to information, i.e. notifications of planning applications or to improve the way in which people can comment, or vote on these matters. Political design on the other hand is intentionally contestational, with the aim of investigating an issue and raising questions around that issue (ibid). It could be argued that tactical urbanism is inherently a political design process due to its informality and experimentational nature that is in opposition to the formal and rigid planning systems that attempt to control and govern public space.

Whereas some placemaking projects may be informal, they can be supported by existing powers depending on the actors and activities involved. Therefore, the real political contestation exists between those activities that are considered legitimate and those that are delegitimised (Courage, 2017) by local authorities. The design of new socio-technical systems must therefore recognise these imbalances and aim to overcome them, prefigurative and adversarial design can help to challenge the existing landscape through provocations and the imagining of future alternative public spaces.

2.4.3 Speculative Design approaches to envision place futures

Speculative design, is a design practise that attempts to push the boundaries of traditional design thinking, by encouraging critical reflection on the future (Dunne & Raby, 2001, 2013). The approach uses hypothetical and often provocative objects, scenarios, and prototypes to foster discussion and critical thinking about the future. Its role is to empower individuals to imagine and even prefigure more desirable scenarios for the future, often using utopian ideas to think about place futures.

The prefiguring of places through scenarios, prototypes, prompts, models and visualisations has long been an achievable aim of design research as argued by (Dunne & Raby, 2001, 2013). It has the ability to create ways of making possible futures visible and tangible through these mediums. Mitrović et al. (2021) believes that speculative practises within design research enables imagination due to its radical approach. It can provoke thinking, raise awareness, open discussion, bring in to being alternative solutions and inspire action.

Mitrovic & Šuran (2016) argue that speculative design enables participants to ask thought-provoking questions about the future that can aid in the discovery of finding alternatives that are essential for transforming places. They argue that speculative design is a discursive activity that relies on dialogue reflecting design practise and critical thinking. It utilises the power of imagination and opens up possibilities for a diverse range of visions for possible future scenarios.

Hope et al. (2019) argue that design practise can create non-technical methods to thinking about the future and enable collaboration between individuals, institutions and community activists as subject-matter experts and as equal co-designers. Pollastri et al. (2017) discussed how these types of participatory design methods can enable the co-design of visions of urban futures, and the use of visualisation techniques can aid non-experts in visualising worlds that don't currently exist.

However, Mitrović et al. (2021) has called for speculative design processes to become more accessible through the development of collective strategies that engage people in rethinking their social realities. That is to say, speculative design has the potential to provoke imagination beyond conventional thinking if, as Mitrović et al. (ibid) argue, we recognise

that in order to be accessible, speculative design cannot be defined as a closed practise with a specific set of methods. Rather, speculative design as a practise needs to remain open and be characterised not by belonging to any one design context or not having to follow a particular set of rules or methods. It is therefore argued that speculative design's strength lies in its ability to adapt to any context and should not be defined through one particular way of applying it.

Speculative utopian futures and scenarios

The use of utopian scenarios in speculative design, can offer opportunities for critical thinking and offer ways to challenge existing paradigms (Mitrović et al., 2021). Hope et al. (2019) discusses, how utopian futures can provoke thought on alternative envisioning's of radically different futures and create space for participation. Hope et al. (ibid) discusses the work of Bardzell (2018) in which groups can utilise scenarios to bring in to being the change they are wanting to make, i.e. prefiguring through speculative utopian scenarios. Bardzell (ibid) describes this as "utopianism as an activity" in which they bring together feminist theory, democratic values and participatory design to envision and prefigure utopian scenarios. This practise can enable publics to address complex societal issues at scale, enabling these groups to address the diverse range of problems their area faces including social, environmental and economic factors.

Pollastri et al. (2017) argues that, within an urban context, rather than think about alternative futures we need to think about diverse futures, building on the arguments of (Davidoff, 1965). Describing the need to develop pluralistic composites rather than coherent narratives, there is the possibility for different and at times, competing visions to exist in the same space. Therefore, it is argued that there is a need to develop platforms and tools that enable this through the capturing of different perspectives on possible urban futures. Thus, Pollastri argues that there has been a lack of research into methods that create the space for multiple visions to exist simultaneously.

2.4.4 Weaving together the benefits of different design approaches for public space reimagination

The arguments raised in the above sections around contestation, changing power dynamics and creating alternative visions (Mouffe, 1993, 2000; Dunne & Raby, 2001, 2013; Hernberg & Mazé, 2018) are used through the prism of applying tactical urbanism principles within placemaking to provide examples of how design methods and technology could overlap to support more participatory planning processes throughout this research. It is argued that they are able to engage with current conditions and adapt to future conditions of places by fostering important questions about alternative possibilities and "what if" scenarios.

Community-led activist projects such as those of organising mass bike rides or re-appropriating roads for cyclists and pedestrian rights of way can be seen as agonistic whilst at the same time prefiguring an alternative way to use land in the urban realm. Likewise, the global growth of 'parklets' whereby residents occupy parking spaces and turn them into mini-parks or events spaces, can be considered adversarial in that they challenge notions of who public space is for, whist at the same time prefiguring the greening of urban space and reclaiming land as urban commons (Boyd & Mitchell, 2012).

The design methodologies discussed offer a theoretical framing for this work and show how publics can be created through the reimagination of public space. It builds on mechanisms of community participation and offers insights into engaging various stakeholders through conflict. Whilst, at the same time, advocating for the articulation of visions through creativity and radicalism (Asad, 2019b).These design methodologies create the space to construct imaginations of alternative futures and changes existing thinking in order to enact material change in public spaces.

2.5 The 'digital turn' in placemaking and role of Human Computer Interaction in reimagining places

The development of new technologies, whilst to some extent has had a detrimental effect on our relationship with, and the ways in which we use urban spaces (Cullinane, 2009; Hughes & Jackson, 2015; Jones & Livingstone, 2017), has also afforded us with new opportunities to engage wider groups of people in the planning of place futures. Social media platforms that enable communities to form groups around place-specific issues offer

novel ways for community engagement as well as opening up opportunities for community-led initiatives to develop, something referred to as network publics, as Varnelis (2008) describe, the term refers to how technology has changed our relationship with places, cultures, politics and infrastructure .

Platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest, Next Door and Twitter offer opportunities for citizens to discuss their concerns, challenge development proposals and articulate their aspirations for the future of their communities. However, these platforms are seldom utilised in formal planning processes nor are the comments used as a part of any informed decision making (Wilson et al., 2019). However, the use of technology has been shown to provide the infrastructure for community-led placemaking process to be initiated and for a continued conversation to take place (Wilson & Tewdwr-Jones, 2020) . The growth of crowd-funding platforms such as Spacehive have also provided alternative ways for community groups to fund projects (Davies, 2014; Stiver et al., 2015). Likewise, technology has also been used in-situ to improve communities' quality of life and augment interactive elements in place, further changing how we experience the urban environment. The role in-situ technologies can play in placemaking will be explored in the following section.

The growth in smartphone usage and location enabled devices coupled with the spreading of ubiquitous technologies across urban areas is reshaping how we perceive of place and plan for their future (Varnelis, 2008). Many organisations are now looking towards placemaking as a means to create more engaging experiences in our cities that are increasingly interactive and responsive (Dunne & Raby, 2013, 2001).

This has led to the rise in the term 'digital placemaking' which according to Calvium is *"the augmentation of physical places with location-specific digital services, products or experiences to create more attractive destinations for all"*. Through the use of location-specific technology digital placemaking aims to create stronger relationships between citizens and the physical spaces in which they inhabit whilst at the same time adding cultural, social and economic value to a place (Calvium, 2018).
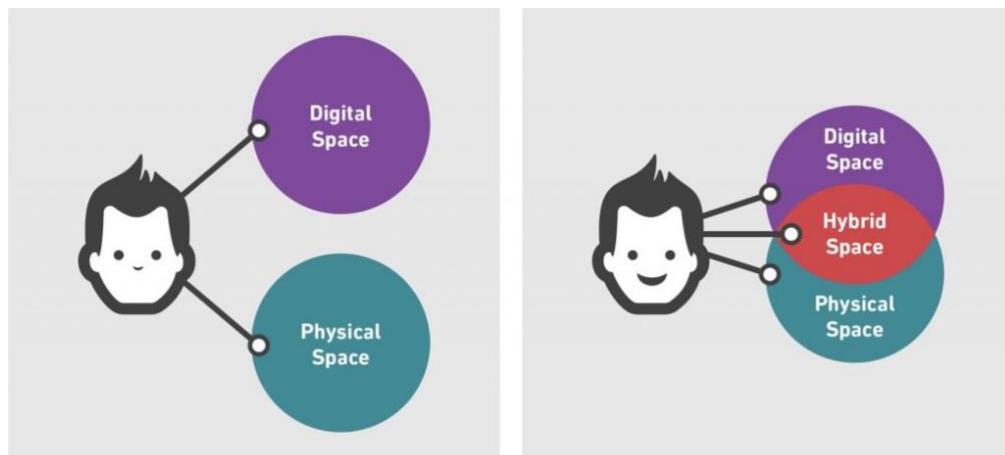
Figure 5 - Digital Placemaking opens up a 'hybrid space' between the physical and digital world (Calvium, 2018)

Digital Placemaking has played an important role in HCI research, with discussion around the relationship between technology and placemaking starting almost 30 years ago (Harrison & Dourish, 1996). Digital placemaking offers opportunities to understand the boundaries between physical space and digital space. Enabling us to gain a deeper understanding of how the use of digital interventions can affect how we perceive place and change our relationship with the built environment. It offers new possibilities for citizens to interact with place; from learning about the history of a place through digital storytelling to understanding how future developments could affect the existing fabric of the city (Dourish, 2006; Giaccardi & Palen, 2008; Ciolfi, 2018).

HCI studies have tried to understand how technology could be used to support the better understanding of places and how we interact with the urban realm (Foth et al., 2015; Koeman, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015), as well as how HCI practises can be used to enhance placemaking processes in order to bring about positive change in urban environments (Foth, 2017). Research has looked at how digital interactions can build conversations around place heritage (Ciolfi, 2018), and how digital platforms could be used to create alternative routes in places that evoke positive emotions (Quercia et al., 2014). The increasing ubiquity of smartphone technology has been seen as a way of raising awareness amongst communities of the urban environment as well as an opportunity to engage residents in learning about the places in which they reside (Richardson et al., 2017). In the ParkLearn project, for example, Richardson et al. (ibid) supported park volunteers in creating their own interactive learning experiences about the area to share with the local community.

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HCI research has explored how technology affords new opportunities to enhance places in terms of efficiency and management as well as building a more socially and culturally enriched urban environment (Freeman et al., 2019; Kandpal, 2018; Pereira et al., 2017). However, the growth and increasing monopoly of large tech companies and digital platforms is affecting how the physical landscape of our cities is developed (Kumar, 2016), as the ever-increasing integration of these digital platforms in our daily lives is transforming how we communicate, socialise and do business (Schwab, 2017). As a result, the way we interact with urban centres as social, commercial, and cultural hubs is changing (Grimsey, 2018).

The importance of meaning and attachment citizens hold of place and the role HCI can play in the communication and design of civic pride and building a stronger sense of place among communities is increasingly a matter of discussion in planning and HCI research (Chapman, 2011; Crivellaro et al., 2016; Freeman et al., 2019; Peacock et al., 2018; Ritter, 2007; Trueman et al., 2008; Wood, 2006). Research has focused on how HCI supports meaning making in place, fostering stronger communities, increasing civic participation and supporting processes of urban renewal (Crivellaro et al., 2016; Harvey, 1989; Wood, 2006). HCI research has examined how residents express their perceptions of place through photography (Garrod, 2008), how feelings of civic pride can be fostered through digital tools by geotagging residents stories of places (Balestrini et al., 2014), understanding what people value in place through recording communities memories of place (Crivellaro et al., 2016) and using check-in systems such as Foursquare to understand how social media is affecting people's perceptions of urban areas (Cranshaw et al., 2012). HCI design approaches can therefore act as a way of capturing, envisioning, and leveraging people's emotional experiences of places and build relationships among different community actors to foster stronger feelings of civic pride (Adams, 2013; Crivellaro et al., 2016), making them more likely to use and take ownership of place.

Research has found that HCI and Urban Design practices can support meaningful placemaking processes that fosters a sense of community attachment, promoted by the creation and communication of interaction spaces that are specifically designed to encourage engagement and use of a particular space. This has the capacity to build

satisfaction, loyalty and passion in a community when a physical space is cherished by its inhabitants (Freeman et al., 2019). Giaccardi et al. argue that this can be achieved by harnessing technology's ability to enhance engagements with local communities and support the social construction of cultural identities, adding a sense of belonging to a particular territory (Giaccardi & Palen, 2008). Cities are therefore not simply physical spaces for social and technical phenomena, but should be thought of as the convergence of multiple actors including people, places, histories, language, and technology; the combination of these elements contribute to the production of a unique sense of place, and thus can foster sentiments of civic pride in a community (Cranshaw et al., 2014; Harvey, 1989).

2.5.1 Urban HCI and its benefits to placemaking practises

The term 'Urban HCI' has been used by numerous studies in recent years (Fischer & Hornecker, 2012; Foth et al., 2015) to define any situation that is made up of the built environment, the interface, a computer system and the overall social context. The central aim of Urban HCI is to focus on issues within the city rather than the lab (Fischer & Hornecker, 2012). Thus, taking a place-based and co-produced approach to research within the city (Olivier & Wright, 2015). Much of the research in this area is centred around the use of media and digital technologies that are situated in an urban context in order to understand how new interactions between people and technology can change how we think about and use public space.

Studies have begun to look into placemaking processes and how digital technologies can support community groups in the regeneration of underused urban spaces, "Meet Taipei: Design" (Chapman, 2011; Clarke et al., 2014), focused on increasing the prominence of neighbourhoods and alleyways in the city of Taipei to its residents in order to increase social interaction, the project included over 100 urban co-design activities with local residents with the aim of heightening visibility of alleyways to create new connections among different districts of the city. Additionally, "Who Gets to Future?: Race, Representation, and Design Methods in Africatown" (Tran O'Leary et al., 2019), explored a community-led design initiative to activate place with the intention of challenging decades of disinvestment and

ongoing displacement in a historically Black neighbourhood of Seattle. Both studies highlight a community-led regeneration project that were amplified by the use of digital technologies to support the design process.

2.5.2 Use of the digital in facilitating place reimaginations

2.5.2.1 Digital Materialisation

Urban imaginaries or depictions of possible place futures have traditionally been materialised through the production and manipulation of imagery that is designed to encapsulate the emotional essence of a place and express or influence the collective identity of its people (Debarbieux, 2016). The increasing ubiquity and democratisation of technology has made it increasingly easier for people to produce and share their own imaginaries of place, whilst at the same time creating an environment where digital materialisations of photo-realistic simulations are common place in the representation and communication of urban futures (Ponzini, 2018).

Dunn (2018) has argued that envisioning potential urban futures through the materialisation of images is an important element to foster debate amongst different facets of society. Specifically, imagery that is designed to be photo-realistic in order to represent the articulation of a desired future can open up complex ideas of place change to non-specialists (Ponzini, 2018). They can play a major role in the consultation process in order to communicate abstract ideas in too accessible and relatable possibilities where the public, communities and experts of various disciplines can visualise potential futures and work together in order to democratically co-create policy and plans (Dunn, 2008; Ponzini, 2018).

However, the affordances technologies now give to be able to digitally materialise such photorealistic simulations and 'make real' abstract ideas in digital form can legitimise the

dominant imaginary (Ponzini, ibid), thus marginalising groups pursuing alternative ideas who may not have the capacity to articulate such ideas in photorealistic ways.

Ponzini (ibid) also discuss the way in which photorealistic renderings exert enormous amounts of power as they become widely publicised across multiple media channels due to their eye catching and often dramatic nature which lends itself to publication and front-page news. These renders also make projects readable and shareable in laymen terms and have therefore become widely accepted tools for developers to communicate plans (Batty et al., 2000). The problem as Ponzini has argued, is that these representations of the urban environment are perceived as objective truths (due to their realism) by the general public with little room for interpretation or mechanisms for community voices to challenge these imaginaries. Calls have therefore been made to design more participatory methods to involve citizens in the creation of visualisations or ways to use visual prompts as tools to create more inclusive processes at the conception phase of development where citizens can question and challenge dominant imaginaries (Al-Kodmany, 1999, 2001; Kunze et al., 2012; Glaas et al., 2020). Thus, enabling citizens to contribute to the design phases and influence outcomes.

Visual methods and digital materialisations of photo realistic urban imaginaries have become common methods for planners, architects and developers to communicate urban futures. At the same time, the general public have become more accustomed to this way of visualising projects and therefore have developed a habit of 'inattentive glances' as citizens are regularly bombarded with new projects communicated in this way through online channels and print media and are only viewed for a short duration (Ponzini, 2018). Ponzini (ibid) argues that plans are increasingly only viewed through the gaze of photo-realistic materialisations rather than through technical drawings and descriptive texts as these are not as widely accessible and require a certain level of skill to interpret. This means that the important details that are often found in supplementary documents go unnoticed and those in control of interpreting how a plan is visualised through renderings have the power to manipulate what is seen and what is hidden for their own political gains.

However, the speed at which photo realistic renderings can be created and the availability of digital tools in order to visualise these imaginaries in new and innovative ways opens up opportunities to improve the understanding of plans and increase participation in the discussion of place futures (Glaas et al., 2020) if citizens are involved in their creation or are given ample opportunity to give their opinions on these renderings. Alternative ways of materialising urban futures through visual means using digital tools (Gordon et al., 2011) affords us with the ability to rapidly prototype and test out new ideas. They can also foster a conversation with a wider demographic who may have felt a barrier to participate in the processes of placemaking due to traditional planning tools such as technical drawings and mapping exercises lack of ability to engage citizens in meaningful ways (Wilson et al., 2019).

2.5.2.2 Media architectural interfaces

Tangible interactions have been used as a form of bringing HCI into an urban context (Smyth & Helgason, 2013; Claes & Moere, 2015), using tangible artefacts throughout the public realm as a means to interact with digital facades. This has given rise to the term 'media architectural interfaces' (Afonso et al., 2019). These are interactive systems set within an urban environment that aim to entice people to step out of their normal routine and perceive the urban space in which they are situated in a different way (Foth et al., 2015).

There are a growing number of public information displays that are now being designed with tangible interfaces (Fischer et al., 2014; Chu, 2015; Fuchkina et al., 2016; Foth, 2017), affording new opportunities to actively attract and engage users of public space through informative data that promotes the idea of knowledge sharing amongst communities, local authorities and cultural organisations (Claes & Moere, 2015). The integration of tangible technologies within museums and cultural attractions offers a world of opportunities to improve and deepen visitor experiences, with the possibility to present information in a fun and novel approach.

The use of tangible interactions within a cultural and heritage setting creates opportunities for more immersive storytelling (Ciaffi et al., 2013) and enables cultural and tourist organisations, researchers and historians alike to share knowledge with a wider audience. Embedding tangible interfaces into places within a cultural context enhances the arsenal of

tools available to creative placemaking and presents us with new opportunities to increase citizen engagement through telling the story of a place's past, present and future in an engaging, entertaining and accessible way (Foth et al., 2015; Foth, 2017).

A pilot study at University College London (Afonso et al., 2019) looked at how the use of a media architectural interface could be used as a means to understand how the interaction between humans and computers could act as a platform for placemaking practises.

An urban media installation, named *'the pool'* (Afonso et al., 2019) was installed in a square at Canary Wharf in London. It aimed to understand human interactions with urban media by exploring how using the entire human body as an agent can engage with the public realm in novel ways, through a range of movements, such as walking, jumping or running across the installation. It was determined that the installation attracted people to the location, where they would linger and use the space for social activities, which had not been observed in this space prior to the implementation of the installation. *'The pool'* also increased social diversity, attracting a wider range of families and businesspeople alike to congregate in the space.

The researchers noted that providing the users engaged with the space in new and playful ways and changed their usual routine in the space, new meanings and relationships with the public realm could develop. As long as the development of these new meanings and relationships were positive, they could change people's perceptions of a location and create a deeper attachment to a place.

It can be said that media architectural interfaces, whether through tangible design or through an urban media installation, can be used in order to foster social awareness, increase participation in community activities, build a sense of place attachment and create an environment for debate around issues relevant to that community (Afonso et al., 2019).

2.5.2.3 Use of social media platforms to support place reimagining

The act of using social media platforms to share content has been labelled a form of digital curation (Yakel, 2007; Hall & Zarro, 2012; Scolere & Humphreys, 2016). Digital curation incorporates a process of selecting, maintaining and collecting digital content (Yakel, 2007) and has been described by Martinon (2013) as a form of meaning exchange where publics

come together around a shared activity to disseminate and curate new knowledge around specific topics.

Scolere & Humphreys (2016) believes digital curation, in particular on social media platforms, places greater emphasis on participation and therefore shifts the role of expert, with users able to contribute and curate new artefacts through the tagging, sharing and organisation of content. Hall & Zarro (2012) defines this process as social curation as oppose to digital curation, however much of the affordances of social curation have been due to the ubiquity and growth of social media platforms where curatorial practises can take place. Discussing the evolution of these platforms as the 'participatory web', Hall argues that the ability for users to create, evaluate and distribute information amongst peers has led to an increase in the quantity and variety of social annotation and user-generated metadata.

The ability to share ideas and curate knowledge through the formation of new publics in an online environment (Varnelis, 2008), I saw as an opportunity to explore how the formation of new communities could enable discussions on place futures during the restrictions of social-physical contact during the COVID-19 pandemic. Video conferences that utilise platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams have become the predominant mode of carrying out research activities with participants during the pandemic as they attempt to replicate in-person activities in an online environment. I saw the adaptation of a social media platform to curate ideas and discuss place futures as an alternative way of carrying out research activities with participants during the pandemic through the creation of an asynchronous workshop that would enable continual discussions in an online environment over an extended period of time as opposed to a series of time structured sessions in a video conference.

Lapolla (2014) explored how user-generated content from the website Pinterest.com could be used to increase participation in co-creative processes. Appropriating Pinterest as a co-creation toolkit, Lapolla found that the platform can be a useful platform to encourage active engagement by non-designers in the initial development of ideas as part of a generative design process. She argues that using social media platforms in co-creative practises can increase participation and enables creativity by triggering different feelings,

emotions and desires as part of a socio-technical system (Argyle, 1973). Thus, creating spaces for dialogue and increasing opportunities for involvement from the very beginning of design activities.

Scolere & Humphreys (2016) has defined Pinterest as a social curation website since it offers a way to collect and organise content whilst also offering common social media features such as liking, following, sharing and commenting. Scolere argues that, as the main use for Pinterest is sharing content as opposed to the creation of new content, it offers a great opportunity to explore curatorial practises in an online environment. Whilst other image sharing and social network platforms such as Flickr, Instagram or Facebook are used as a way to upload user-generated original content, Scolere found that Pinterest users are more likely to circulate images found on Pinterest or import content from elsewhere online. Scolere examines the way in which the platform is predominantly used and found that the most common activity on Pinterest was 'repinning' images from others users boards rather than adding new content from outside of Pinterest.

Hall & Zarro (2012)argues that Pinterest offers users a curational experience as users have the ability to copy content from its source and reconceptualise and categorise it to articulate and express new ideas. The formation of new categories and contexts for content can enable reimaginations of existing concepts, and in the case of ideas for urban transformation, enable reimaginations of spaces based on inspirational projects users are able to curate under one collective board, offering an accessible tool for users to articulate desired place futures. Scolere & Humphreys (2016) found that users were able to creatively express their thoughts and ideas through the action of finding and organising content from other places rather than through the creation of original content. The ability to do so and share these ideas with a new community can lead to the formation of new publics who hold a shared interest and offers a tool for these publics to collaborate and articulate ideas as a group.

Hall & Zarro (2012) found that, Pinterest was predominantly used for the sharing of content on; Food and Drink, Home/Garden Design and Fashion which represented over 30% of all content posted and Travel/Places, Art, Architecture and Design which represented 10% of

all content posted on Pinterest. Therefore, showing the interest and rich amount of content on the website where users can find inspiration and cultivate new ideas based on these categories that hold relevance for the discovery of best practises in urban planning as well as showing popular places that are considered hallmarks of design and hold value for locals and visitors alike.

2.5.2.4 Social media as a tool to foster debate on urban change

Numerous studies within HCI have explored the potential for social media to increase participation in socio-political discussions, in particular using these digital platforms to foster debate, understand public sentiment towards urban change as well as citizens' desires and aspirations for the future of their communities (Cranshaw et al., 2012, 2014; Crivellaro et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2019).

Researchers have explored how social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are used for informal discussion between citizens, studying how new publics are formed in the digital sphere through a collective desire to change places. Crivellaro et al. (2014) studied how a local community group appropriated Facebook's group feature to organise around a shared aspiration of restoring an outdoor pool. Crivellaro et al. (ibid) found that citizens came together to share lived experiences and discuss the value the facilities have played in their lives during the pool's peak popularity. The sharing of old photos, anecdotes and memories of the pool within a Facebook group led to the creation of collective political action and the formation of a new public around the shared desire to save the pool from closure.

Wilson et al. (2019) explored how Twitter could be a useful tool for engaging new perspectives and as a way to gain public input during formal planning processes. He describes how previous research has aimed to understand the usefulness of Twitter for engaging in socio-political talk, however there is little work on how the platform has been

used to form new publics around changes in the built environment. This study found that citizens use Twitter to discuss place-based issues among peers and hold to account decision makers. Exploring how citizens discussed issues on a local transport network, Wilson provides insights in to how the platform is used by citizens to express frustrations and desires for the future of the network.

Both Crivellaro et al. (2014) and Wilson et al. (2019) illustrate how informal discussions on social media platforms can lead to the formation of new publics around planning issues. However, both studies found difficulties when it came to translating informal discussions into actionable interventions that could affect real transformation in the built environment and influence change within the formal planning process.

Wilson et al. (2019) found that the formal planning process is still yet to harness the potential of social media in creating meaningful engagement between citizens and decision makers. He found that planners tend to use social media as a means to disseminate information and share decisions as oppose to provoking discussion and canvassing views on place futures. Given that useful discussions are already taking place on digital platforms in relation to planning issues, there is scope to explore how more visual-based social media platforms such as Pinterest can be used to support collective participation in reimagining uses for places and exploring alternative imaginaries for cities that are co-curated by or with citizens. Whilst these previous studies explored how digital platforms were used to discuss planning issues and the changes needed, they didn't go as far as to exploring how these same platforms can be used to design interventions and find solutions to place-based issues such as the degradation of the public realm. This study aims to build on that research by providing tools in order to support communities envision solutions to local place-based issues.

2.5.3 Participatory design in HCI and the role of 'the user' within an urban context

The change in HCI from human factors to human actors (Bannon, 1992) can be seen to mirror the shift in urban planning more generally, where in both HCI and in planning a focus on participatory methods was recognised as best practise (Cranshabe et al., 2012, 2014;

Crivellaro et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2019), with the work of influence planners such as Jane Jacobs (Jacobs, 1961; Campanella, 2011) who challenged the notion of planning as a representative practise and called for a more participatory approach that involved communities through consultations. Placemaking practises can, with the assistance of HCI build on these advancements in planning to go a step further and co-design and co-produce developments in our towns and cities.

The broad spectrum of urban planning that includes, urban design, urban interaction design and placemaking, has as its central focus in the needs of 'the user' within public space. This could be in the form of a resident, a visitor, an explorer, an occupant, an onlooker, or a citizen to name but a few. However, HCI's focus within the human elements of the discipline have been centred around psychology, cognitive science and human factors engineering. Raising the question as to whether 'the user', within the context of urban HCI, needs to be thought of differently, beyond the traditional concerns within HCI that is centred around the usability of technical interfaces (Foth, 2017).

If HCI is to be used as an effective tool within an urban context, it must encapsulate and address the issues of the diverse range of users within the city. The user as a consumer of resources, as a resident, as a participant or as a co-designer of the city (ibid). It is therefore important that as a digital civics researcher we ensure that HCI is used in a broader sense within an urban context, one that incorporates not only how the user experiences a place through technology but also how we can utilise technology to leverage a process of co-design and co-production amongst different users of the city.

It is important to define what the role of 'the user' is within a city, establishing how and why we can appropriate technology to form collective power as citizens that influences the decisions that determine how we interact and develop the urban realm. Harvey (2012, pg. 4) argues this fact, stating:

"the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of daily life we desire, what kinds of technologies we deem appropriate, what aesthetic values we hold. The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an

individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights." (Harvey, 2012)

Participatory design practises offer the potential for digital civics researchers (Olivier & Wright, 2015) to involve people in the process of designing technologies that address these societal issues, situated within an urban context. Participatory design can therefore foster the creation of collaborative partnerships and affords the co-construction of knowledge and co-construction of change within society (Gregory, 2003).

It is, however, important to note that the use of technologies is not always the answer to facilitating a participatory approach to designing in an urban context. As Harvey (Harvey, 2012) argued the kinds of technologies we deem appropriate should be carefully considered. Arguments have been made that technology can cause digital exclusion (Warren, 2007) i.e. where a certain section of society has continuing unequal access and capacity to use technology in order to fulfil their daily needs. As the necessity to use technology in our daily lives increases, the widening gap of digital exclusion can create barriers to participation rather than facilitating participation (Al-Alaoui et al., 2008).

2.5.4 Capturing Experiences & Building Shared Memories

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the different actors and elements that make a place unique, HCI researchers -- when employing technology to augment the urban lived experience -- must further untangle the complex nuances of the emotional experiences people have with the urban environment as explored by Adams (2013) and Richardson et al. (2017). The emotional experiences induced in an urban environment can shape how places are imagined, experienced and governed, and can underpin the fundamental values local people hold about a place (Collins, 2016). Our experiences and the relationships we build with the physical and social make-up of a place over time shapes and defines our sense of belonging, identity and culture (Giaccardi & Palen, 2008). Giving local people a platform to express their passion for these elements

whilst capturing their emotional experiences and vision for a place can be the catalyst for a renewed sense of community and civic pride (Grimsey, 2018).

When designing for in-situ interactions in Urban HCI, the experience of residents must consider the emotional, intellectual and sensual aspects of our interactions with technology (McCarthy & Wright, 2004), as McCarthy and Wright have proposed:

"A sensory and affective experience becomes transformed in thought and story, a building, the top of a mountain, and a chat room can become significant places for people-not just physical structures, natural landscapes, or digital discourses, but also meaningful and heartfelt places. When they become places, they become encultured, such that natural landscape-as a place-is no longer just natural but also cultural." (McCarthy & Wright, 2005)

It is therefore important that technology captures or creates an environment where these experiences can be supported. An urban environment, space or the architecture of a place, can be experienced via the movement, touch, perception, sound, interpretation and meaning-making of that experience (Freeman et al., 2019). Facilitating these encounters in a particular location can induce a stronger sense of attachment and provide an emotive way for people to connect and express their civic pride with place, creating alternative uses for urban voids.

2.6 Literature Summary

The chapter discusses the concept of urban voids and their implications for the future of urban areas. It describes how urban decline has led to the loss of heavy industry and the decline of post-industrial regions. It argues that recent changes in socio-cultural habits have resulted in an increase in vacant land that no longer serves a purpose, and, as these spaces often become unused, underused or misused, they create a detrimental effect on the development and social and culture life of places. It highlights the potential for community-led envisioning and the adoption of placemaking approaches to support a process of prefiguring alternative possibilities for these spaces.

The literature, theories, concepts and processes explored in this chapter have identified a growing trend of alternative planning approaches that, despite the fact that many of these exist in the informal and often, legal grey areas of urban planning, have the potential to transform top-down planning process to one led by community development at the neighbourhood scale.

The combination of urban planning concepts and concepts within Human Computer Interaction research, as discussed in this chapter, affords opportunities to explore how the use of digital tools can support creative approaches for non-experts to prefigure alternative possibilities for the regeneration of urban voids.

The potential for these approaches to support community-led envisioning and reimagining of urban voids are area's I have explored in the following case studies. The variance in scale, context, location, methods used and stakeholders involved offers valuable insight into the extent alternative planning approaches and community-led envisioning can have on building better place futures and transforming urban voids. Whilst, at the same time, exploring how technology can be used to support reimaginations and improve citizens relationships to, and experience of place.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The literature review demonstrated some of the issues surrounding urban voids, their implications on society and how they affect the development of place futures. It went on to discuss the issues inherent in traditional planning processes and highlighted the growth in alternative planning methods that support community-led development of urban voids. The chapter also critiqued the potential for community-led envisioning and use of urban imaginaries as tools for supporting citizens to articulate aspirations for place futures. It ended with a discussion on the role and implication of technologies, exploring how HCI provides opportunities for new methods of engagement with non-experts in the planning system and the possibilities new technologies affords us with in the redesign of urban voids.

This chapter will begin by explaining the theoretical framing for this thesis. It discusses different design concepts and the importance they have to understanding the role of design in this work. The focus throughout this methodology is based around building an understanding of the mechanisms needed to support community-led envisioning and reimaging of urban voids. This will include an explanation of the two methodological approaches taken, Action Research and Research through Design, demonstrating why both methodologies were appropriate for the subsequent case studies detailed.

It will end with a discussion on the effects of Covid-19 and the implications this had on data collection and the difficulties in conducting research with communities during a global pandemic.

This research is conducted through a series of case studies. The purpose of these case studies is to explore how design interventions and provocations can support community-led envisioning of alternative futures for urban voids. The case studies selected vary in terms of their context and scale but are all situated within an existing community group who are challenging conventional approaches to planning and providing alternative ideas to top-down decision-making agendas.

3.1 Research Approach

3.1.1 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to how we understand knowledge to be produced. It pertains to the theory of how we know things. In order to clarify how this research was carried out, it is important to explain my epistemological stance as there are competing understandings of what knowledge is and how or when it is produced. The implications for how we interpret knowledge determine how research is conducted as well as how it is analysed (Corburn, 2003). The researcher must therefore reflect on how their understandings of knowledge can impact and influence the entire research process and resulting findings. This is known as being a reflective researcher, and is a fundamental aspect of ensuring the rigor of this research, Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) define this as:

"Reflexivity is a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes" (p. 242).

For example, the various power dynamics at play in the various case studies detailed in this work, show that, as these emerged throughout the research process, they influenced and changed the outcomes of tested interventions. Something that was not initially expected when designing the research with participants. However, without a process of reflection it would not have been possible to have determined to what extent power dynamics affected the later outcomes of the case studies detailed in this work.

The researcher's epistemology influences the methodology framework chosen (Bardzell & Bardzell, 2011). A methodology aims to "describe, evaluate and justify the use of particular methods" (Ahmed, 2008 p. 5). Crotty (1998) describes the methodology as "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of the methods to the desired outcomes" (p. 3). Therefore, the methods are a tool or technique that is used by the researcher to gather data and information (Bardzell and Bardzell, 2011).

3.1.2 Social Constructionism & Positionality

This research takes a social constructionist view of understanding reality to define how knowledge is understood and constructed. Schwandt describes how this realm of thinking believes that realities are constructed through the everyday interactions between people and focuses on the social practises, in the form of cultures, traditions, customs and shared beliefs that people engage in in order to construct their shared realities.

Schwandt (2000) discusses how a constructionist view argues that truth and knowledge are created as opposed to being discovered. This understanding challenges the belief that only one reality has always existed and that new realities, truths and knowledges can be constructed depending on the social interactions of a particular group. Schwandt (ibid) also argues that just because concepts are constructed rather than being discovered, it doesn't mean that they don't relate to an existing concept in the real world. This is to say that, understanding of reality is defined socially through the subjective lived experience of everyday life rather than via the objective reality of the natural world (Andrews, 2011).

Andrews (2011) discusses the work of Berger and Luckmann (1991) noting how they examine the origins of knowledge and how it comes to be constructed through developing a certain significance within society. Andrews goes on to explain how the development of reality in society is tied to a particular group developing a specific shared identity. In that, our identity originates from the social realm in which we inhabit as opposed to being created from an individual themselves (Burr, 2006). Therefore, our understanding of reality and how we believe things to be, or coming in to being is intrinsically linked to the society in which we are a part of.

This is relevant for the work carried out in this research in that the ways in which people imagine reality or their ability to reimagine or envision alternative futures is determined by their social relations and identity. For example, the community groups worked with throughout this research are centred around one specific geographical location where there is a shared identity and culture which determines their collective realities. In particular, as argued in chapter 2 of this work the concept of cultural inertia is paramount to understanding local psyche and belief systems in relation to the development and progress

of their local area. It plays a role in effecting how they understand the current state of the built environment around them, but also the ways in which they have the capacity to imagine alternative worlds. It is within this framing of how realities are constructed that the research deploys methods that test these understandings through deploying tools that enable participants to challenge their own realities and those of their society.

Alongside the geographical location where a shared social identity constructs particular realities, the social dynamics of the different groups themselves can play a role in how knowledge and understandings are formed (Schwandt, 2000). For example, chapter 4 details working with a heritage group who held shared understandings of realities through the identities constructed of the importance of industrial heritage. Likewise, the groups worked with in chapter 5 and 6 hold a shared belief in community-led action and activism to achieve their goals. In summary a social constructivist viewpoint is appropriate for this research as it helps to explain the knowledge and understandings people have within their given contexts is influenced by external forces and that the shared social understandings of reality are inherently linked to the group's collective identities.

It must also be noted how social constructivism fits my positionality. My motivations and reasons for conducting the research in the way that I have and with the groups that I have, stems from a belief that my own realities and understandings are based on my identify and are socially constructed through local traditions and beliefs. My view of local political issues and pride in my local area influenced the groups I worked with. Likewise, it could be said to have influenced an ulterior motive of, for example, personally wanting to see the industrial heritage of the area saved or to see the betterment of the public realm in my local area through the transforming of urban voids. These were decisive factors in the research direction I undertook. Therefore, my positionality has inevitably shaped the choices I have made when carrying out this research, however the reflective approach I have taken to this work, alongside my awareness of my position within the research has enabled me to enter a dialogue with other perspectives and viewpoints that differ from my own.

When reflecting on my positionality as a researcher, designer and activist it is important to understand the work of the likes of Friedmann (1987) and Peattie (1968) whom have

critiqued the paternalistic tendencies of professionals in community-led processes, warning that expertise can obscure community agency. By reflecting on my role in shaping the design provocations and guiding discussions, I aim to account for the ways my own design literacy may have influence the research outcomes.

3.1.4 Using a case study approach

This work has undertaken a case study approach throughout. Crowe et al. (2011) define a case study as:

"a research approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It is an established research design that is used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. A case study can be defined in a variety of ways, the central tenet being the need to explore an event or phenomenon in depth and in its natural context" (p. 1).

Given the different contexts, scales, organisations and methods used within this work, a case study approach lends itself in order to best provide a nuanced representation of the diverse people and situation inherent within each case. As Cohen et al. (2000) stated, this approach enables researchers to understand complex ideas and lived experiences of participants in real world settings as opposed to describing abstract theories.

Each case study was developed within its own self-contained action research cycle. A diagram showing the different stages undertaken within each case study is provided in section 3.2.6.

3.1.5 Why Design Provocations?

This research is conducted through a series of design provocations. Their role is to engage participants in reimagining urban voids through out-of-the-box thinking and promote innovative solutions to issues of urban decay. The aim is to provoke participants to think of radical or even unrealistic ideas for the transformation of the urban environment and "to challenge the status quo" (Raptis et al., 2017, p.30). Participants are encouraged to

contemplate new realities and rethink traditional conceptions of land uses and the role place plays in their everyday lives.

Pangrazio (2017) argues for the value of design provocation in social science research, stating:

"provocation might enable the social science researcher to initiate critical reflection amongst participants on issues that are often otherwise overlooked, obscured or accepted as naturalised practice. By assuming the role of provocateur, stimulator and/or agitator, the social science researcher can interrupt the flow of everyday life in order to illuminate and draw attention to complex social issues. Using research interventions that embrace, rather than deny, the socially constructed nature of the research process, provocation provides an alternative to largely non-obtrusive methods favoured in much social science research." (p. 1).

The design provocations detailed throughout this work all utilise technology to some extent, either as a tool to visualise speculative worlds that don't yet exist or through the appropriation of existing digital platforms to foster discussion and enable ideation. This work fits within the digital civics agenda which explores how technologies can be deployed or new technologies co-designed with participants in order to facilitate participation in reimagining services and solving societal issues (Oliver and Wright, 2015). The aim of using technology in these design provocations is not to provide a critique on the effectiveness of the technology itself, but to understand how they can be used to facilitate participants in designing new urban imaginaries that elude to possible place futures. The technologies deployed aim to make it easier for non-experts to ideate, co-design and articulate their own visions for urban voids where the process is open-ended allowing for a pluralistic set of possibilities and outcomes.

Case study one uses technology through a series of digital photo simulations that aim to elicit discussion and provoke further ideation from participants in order to create a shared counter-vision to a top-down created vision. Case study two appropriates a popular social media platform to provoke discussion and encourage the co-curation of ideas that was

eventually used to support the design of a toolkit to support the co-design of visions for underused spaces through low cost, temporary interventions. Case study three utilised a mobile application that provoked users in-situ to reimagine the future of a space through speculative future scenarios. All of these case studies offer insights into the role of design provocations and technology as tools to facilitate non-experts in envisioning and articulating desired place futures.

3.1.6 Action Research Approach

Taking an action research-based approach to this work affords the opportunity to explore a case study through participatory and flexible means that is open, rich and situation-based, allowing for the exploration and understanding of real contexts and experiences (Tekin & Kotaman, 2013).

Action research rejects the positivistic view that the only way to generate credible knowledge in research is through an objective and value-free approach and instead promotes an approach that is intentionally political, democratic and socially-engaged (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Avison et al. (1999) describes action research as an iterative process where researchers work together with participants through a cycle of activities that includes identifying problems, exploring possibilities, forming a set of actions and interventions and a phase of reflection. The aim of this methodology is "to try out a theory with practitioners in real situations, gain feedback from this experience, modify the theory as a result of this feedback, and try it again. Each iteration of the action research process adds to the theory—in this case a framework for information systems development—so it is more likely to be appropriate for a variety of situations" (ibid, p.91).

Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) explain that action research provides a deeper understanding of communities needs and aspirations. Detailing that the benefits of action research help to truly understand the actions of a community, stating that the aim of this approach is to provide people with the support and resources to do things in ways that will fit their own cultural context and their own lifestyles. The people, not the experts, should be the ones to determine the nature and operation of the things that affect their lives.

Taking an action research approach to this work has enabled a richer understanding of the communities in which I have worked. By iteratively designing research in a way that enables

communities to decide the direction of research has provided the agency these groups needed in order to take action and either design implementable interventions to tackle the issues they are aiming to address or provide them with the platform to challenge top-down decision making.

However, it must be noted that, ss Friedmann (1987) and Sandercock (1998) have highlighted, there is a risk that professional involvement in community-led processes can create power imbalances. By critically reflecting on my positionality, I aim to mitigate these risks, questioning whether my design expertise facilitated or constrained genuine community participation.
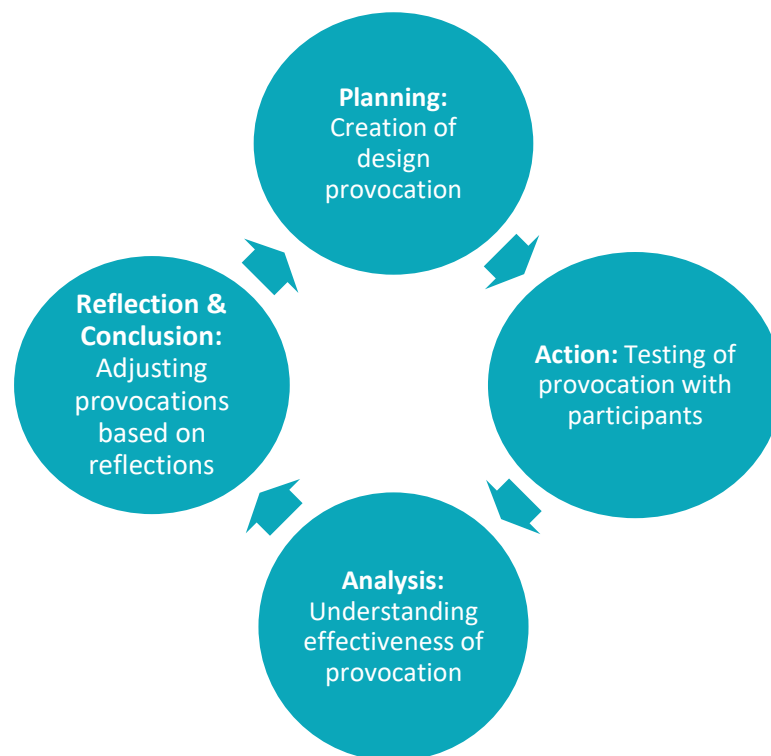
Figure 6 - Action Research Stages. Source: Author

3.1.7 Research through Design

This thesis takes an action research approach with Research through Design. The use of design as a tool to conduct research with participants was a crucial element in eliciting responses from participants. Each case study used a design approach to create artefacts that were then used in a creative way to provoke responses from participants about the

future of the place in question, something that Zimmerman et al. (2010) believed Research through Design could offer. This approach creates opportunities for more visual ways of conducting research that in turn, lent itself to one of the aims of this research in understanding how prefiguring place futures can support alternative ways of thinking about and using underused spaces.

Godin & Zahedi (2014) define Research through Design as "an approach to scientific inquiry that takes advantage of the unique insights gained through design practice to provide a better understanding of complex and future-oriented issues in the design field" (p. 1). Zimmerman et al. (2007) argue that there is no overarching definition or agreed research framework for this approach, besides the creating and evaluation of effectiveness of design methods and the created artefacts implications on addressing research questions. Therefore, as Godin and Zahedi discuss (2014), validating research through design is a difficult task as results cannot be evaluated by their ability to be reproduced in another study. Zimmerman et al. (2007) argues that even if various designers are given the same problem to address they won't produce the same results nor design the same artefacts.

Zimmerman et al. (2010) defined Research through Design as "process of iteratively designing artefacts as a creative way of investigating what a potential future might be" (p. 312). Each of the case studies detailed in this work incorporate the design of an artefact that supported community groups in envisioning alternative place futures. Therefore, if we take Zimmerman's definition of this approach it can be argued that this work is a form of Research through Design, used in conjunction with action research cycles.

3.1.8 Using visual based methods

Pink (2007 & 2012) argues that visual ethnography enables the researcher to implement visual approaches that can support learning and knowing about the world as well as a way to articulate and communicate these ideas to others. Urban imaginaries and the envisioning alternative place futures are inherently linked to the production of visual material, namely via imagery and photographic mediums (Ponzini, 2018). Visual methods have also been seen to be a useful tool to foster discussion and increase participation in discussions on urban

futures (Al-Kodmany, 2001; Wilson et al., 2019; Glaas et al., 2020). Therefore, this offered an opportunity to explore how visual ethnography could be applied in order to understand how urban imaginaries are formulated through visual means.

Throughout the case studies detailed in this work I employ various visual-based methods to understand how they can support non-experts in the envisioning of alternative place futures for urban voids. Chapter four uses photo-elicitation methods to reimagine an industrial site and provoke conversation on the future of place. Chapter five uses visual precedents and prompt cards to support the ideation process of urban void transformation. Finally, chapter six uses visual provocations to provoke reimagining's of utopian futures for urban voids.

3.1.9 Creating Publics through design methods

It is important to understand the background on how publics are formed around place specific issues and the ways in which design can be used as a tool to action for these publics who are reimagining urban voids to better understand the theoretical framing behind this work. Therefore, this section provides an overview of the theories behind how communities form in relation to place-specific issues and the role of design in enabling participation. First, it will discuss the creation of publics and the role technology has on enabling this formation. Before discussing the various design principles inherent within this work, explaining how design can provide a useful tool in research interventions and provocations.

Creating Publics around place-specific issues

Alternative forms of shaping cities through the likes of implementing community-led placemaking principles and the use of tactical urbanism concepts to reimage the use of public space offers opportunities to build on Le Dantec's (2016) work on designing publics and offer new insights. Through collective action, Le Dantec believes that design can bring together diverse groups of people around societal issues. His work builds on the idea that publics are formed around a set of shared conditions and actions that a group takes to achieve a desired set of outcomes. It is through the articulation and response to these specific sets of social issues that publics are created (ibid). Throughout this work it is argued that prefigurative placemaking enables the formation of publics.

Tactical Urbanism takes an experimental approach to urban development and encourages collaborative design practises (Hernberg & Mazé, 2018). The democratisation of planning in this way gives a voice to those that are usually unheard (ibid) in placemaking processes. Identifying place-specific issues, the sharing of ideas and engaging with one another can lead to the formation of new publics through mobilising collective actions (Le Dantec, 2016) in the reimagining of place.

The importance of place, and the coming together of people based on an infinity to a particular place, also known as 'place attachment' (Florek, 2011) is pivotal in the creation of these publics. Without attachments, the possible formation of a public around common problems, and the ability to co-construct material responses to shared issues fails (Le Dantec, 2016). A common attachment to place is critical in building the collective capacities (ibid) and socio-cultural understandings of a locale to reimagine its future.

Enabling Publics through Digital Technology

The ubiquity and democratisation of digital technologies offers new opportunities for the creation of publics through self-organisation around local issues (Fredericks et al., 2016). The myriad of issues communities face about the present and future identity of their neighbourhoods can foster the creation of publics through civic debate (ibid). As Le Dantec (2016) points out, these communities form in different ambits; they may be tied to a specific location that requires the physical presence of its members, they may form virtually through distant interactions online, or they may develop from a set of shared conditions. Digital technology can support the creation of these publics by offering a platform to express issues and support action (Le Dantec, 2016). Le Dantec argues, as designers, we have an opportunity to create tools that 'both amplify the ability to identify and articulate issues and empower action in response' (ibid, p.17), this is achieved by considering both the social and technical elements in a design space.

Alternative forms of democratic participation, such as tactical urbanism (Hernberg & Mazé, 2018) and as I argue, prefigurative placemaking, tend to challenge conventional planning processes, create dissensus and contestation between communities and local planning

authorities (Courage, 2017). Leveraging technology to support the organisation and implementation of tactical urbanism projects can work towards local solutions that form collective action, establish shared identities and support placemaking processes (Asad, 2019). The innovative responses that can arise in these scenarios, offers opportunities for examining the socio-technical landscape that supports these contestations and offers new space to explore socio-technical design interventions (Le Dantec, 2016).

Combining Publics, Design and Technology in Public Space Re-appropriation

I take DiSalvo's (2015) interpretation of design as an interdisciplinary field which incorporates a range of practises that are concerned with how we construct visual and material environments, including future imaginaries of spaces, events, interfaces and artefacts.

As Le Dantec (2016) argues, design interventions can act as a focal point to bring a public together and create actions through the design process. By using the practises and products of design, debate can be shaped and contributions made to public discourse and civic life (DiSalvo, 2015). Therefore, design is concerned with the artificial, i.e., how things might be rather than with the natural, i.e. how things are (ibid). Thus, design has the ability to move beyond interpretations of what currently exists and proposes that the current state of things can be transcended (Le Dantec, 2016).

The endeavour of design is therefore about conceiving and effectively articulating experiential forms of artefacts, visuals, systems or events (DiSalvo, 2015). Design can thus support future imaginaries of place and act as a way to shape beliefs and facilitate the enabling of community-led action (ibid). This work aims to understand how the formation of publics, design methods and the appropriation of digital technology can be combined to create unique opportunities for reimagining the use of public spaces and offer alternative avenues for expression, debate and action in placemaking.

3.2 Research Partners

This section briefly details the organisations and groups partnered with at each stage of the research. Whilst there were three principle groups that are highlighted throughout this

research, various informal engagements with wider communities and groups took place throughout this research including representatives from neighborhood watch groups and other individuals not associated with one particular group. The three groups highlighted below gives a brief outline of their background and how the collaboration in this research came to be. Further context on each organization is provided in their retrospective case study chapters of four, five and six.

The case studies were chosen based on all having to have the following criteria:

1. An urban void space in Teesside (as defined in section 2.1)
2. Existence of a citizen group with a desire to see change
3. A dominant narrative of what the space is or a top-down imaginary of its future

The three sites explored within the case studies share similarities in their geographical location, all set within Teesside, a post-industrial area in Northern England, as well as they all meet the criteria of an urban void space as defined in the literature review. However, they differ in their scale. The first site explored in chapter 4 is a large industrial site at a macro-scale, chapter 5 explores small spaces such as alleyways at the hyperlocal level and chapter 6 explores streets or specific buildings at the medium scale. Initially, these sites weren't planned to differ in scale so vastly however, they were identified in collaboration with the citizen groups I worked with depending on what each group wanted to explore. All three sites share similarities in that they are citizen-led attempts to prefigure alternative futures for an urban void as they attempt to challenge or disrupt dominant top-down imaginaries of the current state and future of these spaces.

The differentiation of scale offers opportunities to explore different approaches to reimagine place by co-designing approaches depending on the size of the site, its context and the needs and aspirations of the citizen groups I work with. By exploring the different geographical sites in each case study at the macro, meso and hyperlocal levels, it is possible to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how scale can influence the way in which people envision alternative place futures.

Chapter 4 – Macro-scale   Chapter 5 – Hyperlocal   Chapter 6 – Meso-scale (street
(large industrial site)   (alleyways and small spaces)   or building)
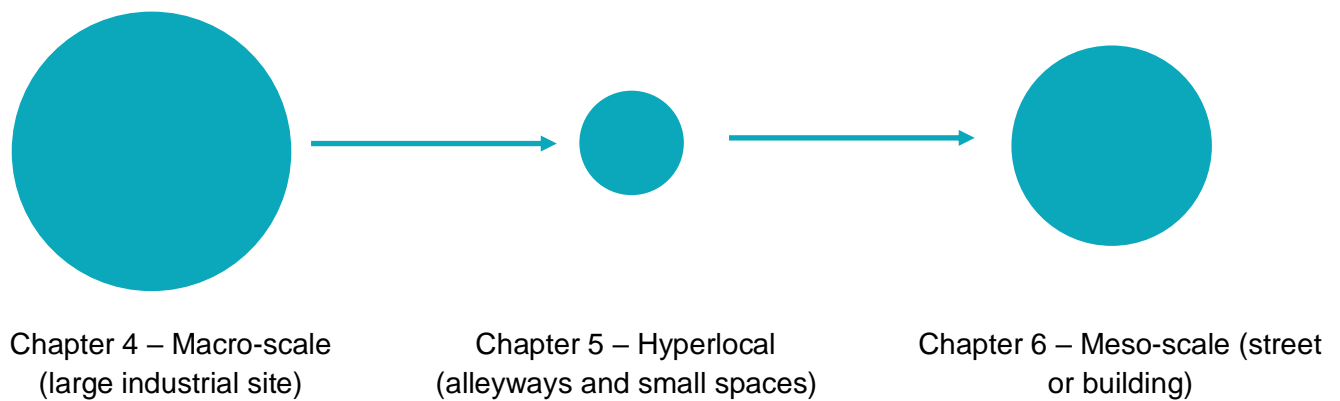
Figure 7 - Diagram demonstrating the different scales of the 3 case studies. Source: Author

The order of the case studies was determined by when they were carried out, rather than through any sequential order. Due to the constraints of the covid-19 pandemic and shifting timescales as a result, they had to be carried out depending on the availability of the citizen groups and adhere to time constraints of conducting data collection during the pandemic. The intention of this work is to explore each case study and deduce the best approaches depending on the unique context of that site and in response to each citizen group, as opposed to attempting to compare and contrast each case study against each other. However, learnings from the initial research helped inform the development of the provocations used in the following case studies.

Save Our Steel Heritage – Macro-scale urban void

This was an informal group of industrial heritage enthusiasts, artists, former site workers, politicians, local historians, and local residents who formed after the decision to demolish a series of industrial structures deemed to have local significance to the history of the industrial development of Teesside was made public. Inspired by the Save Our Steel campaign which attempted to stop the mothballing of the steelworks in Redcar in 2015, with the resulting loss of over 1,700 jobs. The heritage group aimed to explore alternative options for saving the structures as remnants of the area's industrial legacy.

I began to engage with the heritage group by attending their weekly zoom meetings during the first lockdown of the covid-19 pandemic, and then co-designed a series of provocations

with the group to help them create their own vision for how the site could be reimagined. I was actively involved in supporting the group make decisions on the direction of their campaign as well as providing technical support to help them improve their online presence through social media and online petitions.

Community Connectors Teesside – Hyperlocal scale voids

Community Connectors Teesside is an informal gathering of local activists in Middlesbrough, who hold weekly drop-in sessions to support one another in community-led action in the town. Alongside weekly gatherings, the group also host and facilitate sessions where they bring together local stakeholders to reimagine radically different futures for the town and attempt to address the town's issues through bottom-up, community-led approaches to development.

I began by attending the groups weekly gatherings to understand the work they are involved in and how they support each other. I then identified areas where they are working that they would like support in, which was centered around ways in which they could implement changes to improve the built environment around them as opposed to relying on top-down local authority led initiatives. I played an active role in supporting the groups projects and contributed knowledge on ways in which the group could better work together to achieve their aims.

Freestyle Community Projects – Meso scale voids

Freestyle Community Projects is a Teesside based community development organization that works across the area to implement projects to support communities to flourish and thrive. They conduct social research to identify local needs and aspirations for the future of the town and then design initiatives that address these issues and provide opportunities for people to further explore their aspirations. This work includes projects like Public Living Rooms; a social space where everyone is welcome to come take a seat in an agenda free-space to feel more human over a chat and a free cup of tea and coffee. Sharecycle, a lending library which provides infrequently used items at affordable prices to hire allowing people

to share resources with the wider community. Community Craft sessions; which teach people useful skills in creative practices as well as using art for mindfulness and wellbeing. Finally, community organising projects that facilitate communities to take action and make the changes they want to see through hosting workshops, talks and community action days.

I began work with this organization by meeting with the team on a regular basis and describing my research aims, this led to a discussion around how a project they were hoping to build upon could be supported through my research. I then began a collaborative process with the group to design and deploy a series of interventions that met the aims of the project they were hoping to improve upon

Further detail is provided within the study design and context of each chapter on each research partner and their related contexts.

3.3 Data Collection

This research takes a mixed-method approach. The majority of methods used within this research are informal observations, workshops and semi-structured interviews as well as the artefacts themselves that were used as a design method to elicit responses and support participants to envision change. The principle focus of the data collection was not to assess the effectiveness of the technologies deployed but rather how the design provocations affected participants ability to envision alternate futures for places. The research also studies the local issues inherent in each place and the affects they have on people's ability to imagine new futures. The following section will detail the methods used across the three case studies, as well as the types of data collected, and participation recruitment across the course of this work.

3.3.1 Participant Recruitment

Participant recruitment was a collaborative process between the researcher and the research partners. Whilst the first case study involved working with a specific group as the principal participants, there was also some passive participation through those who shared comments and opinions on social media on the design provocations put forward. The other case studies involved working with the research partners to utilise their existing networks to

reach people who would be interested in participating. These people were generally those who had an interest in taking action to transform their town but weren't experts in the envisioning process required to prefigure that change.

This type of recruitment is called opportunity sampling, whilst this approach has been criticised as not providing a representative selection of participants for research, the objective was not to reach all members of society. Rather, the aim was to explore the ways in which tools could support groups to articulate a vision for place change who had already began a process to some degree to address place-based issues. Therefore, this research does not claim to have engaged with all perspectives, rather augment already established networks of people involved in place change.

3.3.2 Methods Overview

This section provides an overview of the data collection types used throughout this research as well as the type of data analysis used. The use of field notes was common throughout the three case studies, however only the Save Our Steel Heritage and Urban acupuncture case studies used the harvesting of social media posts and co-design sessions. The speculative future walks were the only case studies to use a form of survey as a method to collect data.

	SAVE OUR STEEL HERITAGE	URBAN ACUPUNCTURE	SPECULATIVE FUTURE WALKS
DATA COLLECTION TYPE	Field Notes, Informal Interviews & Harvesting Social Media Posts	Field Notes, Co-design sessions & Harvesting Social Media Posts	Field Notes, Co-design sessions & Surveys
DATA ANALYSIS TYPE	Thematic Analysis	Thematic Analysis	Thematic Analysis

Figure 8 - Detailing the different data collection and analysis types for each case study Source: Author

3.3.2.1 Field Notes

The use of field notes to capture the activities, settings and nuances of human activities when presented with a particular provocation can be an effective way of collecting data 'in the wild' as opposed to in a controlled lab study (Bannon, 2011). Baker et al. (2007) has described how this approach can sometimes be a chaotic process where the environment in which the data is being collected cannot be controlled, the potential for interruptions is much greater and being able to gather divergent groups of participants together can be particularly difficult to carry out research. For example, this was particularly difficult during the turbulent months of covid-19 lockdowns where, continually changing restrictions meant even gathering groups together virtually on platforms such as zoom was difficult. Likewise, when in-person gatherings were possible, the nature of the spaces they were conducted made group discussion challenging such as background noise in coffee shops and the coming and going of participants in these spaces added extra challenges to being able to capture data.

However, whilst there were limitations to field notes and challenging experiences to overcome as previously mentioned, there was also advantages to collecting data in this way. First, from early on in the research during the save our steel heritage case study, not using a recording device removed the nervousness and apprehension of participants to speak their minds and allowed conversations to flow more naturally. Given the political and contentious nature of this case study, participants felt more at easy if they knew the conversations weren't being audio recorded.

From there on, I decided to use field notes to collect data when appropriate as it allowed for a more consistent process throughout the case studies, which ensured a more rigorous research process. Another advantage of this method is its adaptability to a variety of settings. Given the different settings data collection took place through zoom calls, in-person discussions as well as through the variety of approaches to collecting data through workshops, informal interviews and co-design sessions the flexibility in collecting data through field notes seemed the most appropriate. Building habits of immediately writing up field notes based on observations and then iteratively reflecting on those observations was a crucial element to ensuring consistency.

The field notes collected throughout this research were, as Rapport (1991) described a type of inscription where the researcher records notes from sessions, their impressions on what occurred as well as potentially highlighting any keywords or standout points of interest. Alongside, note taking and then writing up field notes immediately after a session, some of the field notes collected were in the form of visual inscriptions. Canfield (2011) describes how visually capturing data as a part of field notes enables the researcher to pay more attention to the detail of what's been said and can enable elements that may have been missed through taking notes.

3.3.2.2 Co-design Sessions

In order to design the provocations as part of each case study as well as to understand how participants articulated their visions for the urban voids explored, a series of co-design sessions were used as a way to ensure group participation throughout the work. These particular sessions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were also taken for consistency and visual elements created from these sessions collected for analysis alongside recordings and notes.

3.3.2.3 Harvesting Social Media Posts

Alongside field notes from the various workshops, informal interviews and design sessions, data from social media posts were also collected. This included harvesting the comments on the save our steel heritage groups Facebook page following on from a design provocation published. Likewise, the comments and the visuals on the Pinterest board in the Urban Acupuncture case study were also harvested for analysis. This data contributed alongside the field notes to build a larger picture of the ways in which the tools deployed throughout the case studies could support community groups to articulate alternative visions place futures.

3.3.2.4 Surveys

The Freestyle Community Projects case study (Chapter 6), alongside the workshops, used a mobile application as well as a physical version of the questions to provoke in-situ responses about the future of certain physical locations. The responses that users inputted in to the app in the form of written comments, drawings, audio and video recordings were noted as well as comments and drawings provided through the paper version of the provocation and added to the overall harvesting of comments. Whilst not a survey in the traditional sense, the mobile app and paper versions were effectively a series of questions where the user was asked to input a response before submitting this back to the researcher.

3.3.3 Thematic Analysis

After completion of the various workshops, informal interviews and co-design sessions with participants across this work, observations were typed up and any additional reflections noted. The value in doing this meant having the space to reflect upon my observations about what occurred and the meanings of the events that took place is a crucial initial step to begin to analyse the data. I felt it important where possible, to ensure the field notes were typed up as soon as possible upon completion of an activity with participants to ensure I was able to remember as much detail as possible. I also ensured that this included every detail I could remember, even if it appeared insignificant at the time, as they may later appear to have some relevance when conducting analysis. Writing up field notes in this way helped to ensure rigour throughout the research.

Once the observations and reflections had been typed up and the various visual elements collated, I was able to begin a reflexive thematic analysis (Byrne, 2022) by looking for patterns throughout the notes taking and the creation of codes from the data. Whilst there are various approaches to thematic analysis, the processes initially defined by Braun & Clarke (2006) is a widely accepted approach to conducting thematic analysis with rigour. Braune and Clark identify thematic analysis as an approach that identifies, analysis and interprets meanings, known as themes, within a particular data set. The flexibility of this approach means that it can be applied in a mixed method approach and across various types of data collection – in this case written and visual field notes as well as comments

from social media and surveys. The flexibility in this approach also allows for it to be applied to a variety of different theoretical stances and epistemologies.

Braune and Clark (2006) suggest a six-step framework as a guideline to conducting thematic analysis which generally includes a process of first, the researcher becoming familiar with the data before generating initial codes which enables large data sets to be broken down in to small chunks of meanings. The researcher then searches for themes from these codes, before reviewing them to ensure they articulate the meaning of the data. These themes are then further defined before the final step of writing up the findings. This research takes a semantic approach to meaning by understanding the message as it is conveyed through the words, visuals and logic within the given context.

Thematic analysis was undertaken on a case study by case study basis rather than as one larger data set. Therefore, each case study chapter includes its own findings and discussion section. The learnings at the end of each case study informed the design of provocations and engagement for the following case study through an iterative process. Whilst the intention of this research is not to compare the case studies, a reflection chapter is provided which highlights the main contributions across all case studies and how they apply to the overall research findings. This is to say that the findings from each case study will be brought together at the end of this work as opposed to discussing the findings of each case study separately. It will reflect on the themes discussed in regard to reimagining urban voids across all of the three case studies.

3.3.4 Limitations of Data Collection Methods

Despite the fact that the research methods selected throughout this research are common across social sciences, they do have some limitations and weaknesses which will be highlighted in the following section.

Whilst every attempt was made throughout the research process to capture the detail and nuance of conversations through the field notes, the issue with field notes is that the event cannot be replayed and inevitably detail can be lost. Attempts were made to mitigate this

when field notes were taken by, as previously discussed, writing up field notes up immediately after sessions. It must also be noted that the researcher's subsequent reflections may raise issues of bias as Tessier (2012) highlight that this data is reliant solely on the researcher's interpretation of events and thus, could mean the perspectives closest to that of the researchers' beliefs may be the most prominent or be the only ones to surface in the field notes.

Whilst field notes were taken for justifiable reasons as previously mentioned where politically sensitive information was being shared or due to the obstructiveness of using recording devices, the use of various data collection methods such as the co-design sessions, harvesting of social media comments and surveys provided a richer data set and removed the reliance on just the field notes to articulate findings.

The use of opportunity sampling could also be seen as a limitation as it could exclude participation. However, as previously discussed, the aim of this research was around depth not breadth, in that it aimed to work with specific groups to support their existing work as opposed to reaching every member of a particular community.

3.3.5 Ethical Considerations

All of the ethical procedures of the university were followed for this work. Given there was no immediate engagement with vulnerable groups or sensitive research topics according to university guidelines, it was deemed that one overarching ethics application would suffice for this research. This was reviewed as the research developed to ensure no major changes were required.

3.3.6 Data protection

All information collected that pertained to this research was stored in secure servers at Newcastle University to mitigate against the risk of any participant information being shared externally. Throughout the research, no personally identifiable information was taken which further reduced risks and ensured participants remained anonymous.

3.3.7 Information sheets and consent forms

Where possible, information sheets and consent forms were given to participants before beginning any research (examples shown in appendix B, D and G). This included information on the research project, how participants would be involved and the types of activities that will take place, how long the involvement will take, clearly state that participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw themselves and their data at any time as well as how to contact the researcher and information on how data will be collected, shared and used. However, due to fluctuation in being able to conduct research in person during the covid-19 pandemic's social distances restrictions, it was often necessary to provide an online form for participants to fill in to agree to take part. The online form attempted to replicate the paper version as much as possible to ensure consistency, and each form was amended depending on the type of research activity participants were involved in.

3.4 Methodology Chapter Summary

This chapter explains the approach to research taken throughout this work. It describes how the design of provocations, deployment and evaluation will be undertaken. It discussed the epistemological stance that underpins this thesis before describing the mixed method approach taken and the justification for doing so. Finally, it provides an overview of the data collection methods used including why several methods were used depending on the context and activity taking place as well as how participants were recruited and the ethical considerations that were considered when working with community groups.

Chapter 4 – Digital materialisation of urban imaginaries to support political action

4.1 Introduction

Urban imaginaries have been used as a tool to create, control and manipulate dominant narratives and exacerbate stigmas around the future transformation of places. However, they have also been used to challenge top-down decision making through radical reimaginations of the urban in order to tackle issues of decline and neglect of underused spaces. In this chapter, I report on engagements with a Heritage Campaign group who attempted to stop the demolition of a disused industrial structure and reimagine alternative uses to provide a community-led counter-narrative of future possibilities. I detail how a prefigurative placemaking approach was used, where digital photo-simulations of radical urban futures provoked discussion and facilitated the creation of new counter-imaginaries. Drawing from my insights, I argue the need to open-up initial ideation phases within placemaking processes to wider audiences in order to mobilise publics and secure political support.

The loss of many industries in western Europe and the subsequent closure of many factories in post-industrial cities has had a detrimental effect on the development and spirit of communities in their vicinity. The emotional attachment people had to these places as they formed an intrinsic apart of their identity, coupled with the civic pride people felt for these places, has created a complex relationship between local people and the industries that once stood there. The loss of jobs, skills and tradition passed on generation by generation was not the only problem for local communities when these industries disappeared, but the physical scar left by the remains of a once thriving industry was a reminder of what once was.

For some, the derelict structures left represented failure and came with a sense of anger as to a loss of part of their identity, to others, what remained was a reminder of the area's purpose and showcased the ingenuity and accomplishment of the area. The socio-political issues that emerged from this led to a political struggle whereby certain ideologies called for the demolition of the remnants of the past industry to make space for industries of the

future, but also as a way to obscure local people's views on the failures of previous governments to protect local industries. Other ideologies, wanted to celebrate the heritage of the area and use what remained of the industry to tell the story of the town's industrial past. They saw the remaining structures as a monument to what was achieved there and wanted to preserve the area for future generations to understand the area's history.

Over the course of a 6-month period I worked with a heritage campaign group to explore ways the remaining structures could be saved. Whilst at first, this case study intended to support the group to reimagine uses for the site and build a discussion with the wider community to understand ways in which they would like to see the former industrial site used in the future, the project evolved in to a political campaign whereby the heritage group utilised their own reimaginations for the structure as a tool to attempt to counter the decision by local politicians to demolish the remaining structures.

The resulting insights from this case study showed how a group could co-design a vision for an alternative future for the site and utilise different digital tools to materialise their vision in order to offer a counter-narrative to demolition. However, the inability to engage with the wider community and the concentration on battling with local politicians meant that the campaign was not successful in gaining enough community buy-in and failed to capture the imaginations of local people. The suggestions for building on this case study in future work include developing tools that involve communities in the initial ideation process and to create spaces for non-experts to co-design and articulate their own aspirations and desires for reimagining underused spaces.

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Action Research

Using an action research-based approach (Avison et al., 1999) to this particular case study was deemed important as it demonstrates the importance participants knowledge plays in the development of the research and helps to gain a deeper understanding of the actions the campaign group took as well as to learn more about the ability they have to address the issues confronting them and their communities (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). A description of what the action research cycles looked like in this case study are shown in section 4.3.3.

4.2.2 Visual Methods

In this case study, a photo-elicitation method (visuals used are shown in sections 4.3.3 and 4.41 and appendix E) was deployed to support the envisioning process and as a tool to foster discussion about alternative urban imaginaries for the former Blast Furnace. Harper (1998) argues that this method facilitates dialogue as the typical roles of research are reversed. The researcher acts as a listener as participants explain their interpretation and feelings towards imagery.

Whilst the photo-simulations that were presented to the group as part of these activities were centered around very specific potential futures, they were intentionally designed to be provocative and adversarial to encourage debate and challenge the dominant imaginaries participants had of what would be possible for the future of the site. The intention also wasn't to co-design these visuals at this stage, rather to present a series of provocative future possibilities in order to aid the envisioning process and encourage debate on the potential for the site beyond demolition.

I base this method on the work of Warren (2018) who states that the objective is not to undertake an in-depth analysis of the content of the photo-simulations themselves but is instead concerned with the discussions that are created as a result of viewing these images and the actions that are then taken as a result of this discussion. Warren (ibid) quotes the work of Knowles & Sweetman (2004) who explain how they "are concerned here with visual methods and the use of visual material in the research process: with the conceptual and analytic possibilities of visual methods rather than the status of the visual image itself" (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004 p.6). Therefore, as Warren (ibid) states the principle aim in using this method is centered around getting people to talk about change and discuss their desired futures in order to come to a consensus on a collective counter-vision for the blast furnace site.

Warren (2018) discussed why visual methods are an appropriate way to engage people especially given the context of this case study and where it takes place. Warren discussed

the way in which visual ques influence the way people conceive of the social world around them. He used visual methods of the industrial past to elicit memories, emotions and stories from local people. He notes the reason for this as the following:

> "Teesside is visually still an industrial place, whilst the petrochemical and steel industries employ a fraction of the people that they once did, unlike most of the region, and indeed the country, industry is not just something that happens in another place, or something that happened in another time. Taking this as a starting point I reasoned that individuals would be able to respond to images of the industrial past, either via their own experiences or those of their families and friends." (p. 26)

However, as Warren further articulates, there are drawbacks to utilising this visual method in an area that has still so many emotional attachments to its industrial past. He quotes Strangleman et al. (2013) noting that this way of eliciting responses from participants could be construed as "smokestack nostalgia" and "ruin porn". Describing how researchers need to be conscious of the ways in which "geography, history, work and workers interact to produce norms, values, cultures and social life" (p. 26).

Whilst the visual methods used in this case study depicted images of alternative futures and brought about urban imaginaries that do not yet exist, they also are still intrinsically linked to a nostalgic or romanticised notion of the area's past. Likewise, as Warren also articulated in his work, I needed to reflect on my role in the campaign on an ongoing basis. My role as a researcher in this process was to support the campaign to articulate their vision through visual methods, collect data and foster discussion that would help them to imagine alternative futures. As oppose to actively influencing the direction the campaign decided to go in.

4.2.3 Thick Descriptions

Data was collected using field notes throughout this case study and thick descriptions from these field notes written to capture the nuance of conversation that took place around the

visual ques used within the research. I apply Geertz (1973) definition of thick descriptions as the writing of detailed narratives to explain situations and provide information on the context in which they are set. Denzin (1989, p. 83) argued that a thick description "does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another", whilst (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 542) says, a "thick description involves accurately describing and interpreting social actions within the appropriate context in which the social action took place".

This was a useful approach to take as it allowed for the explanation of significant and complex cultural contexts that were ever present. These cultural meanings, whilst crucial to understanding why certain discussions and decisions were made, would not be visible had I simply described the situation, or recorded audio discussions. Geertz (1973) argued that the aim for ethnographers is to go beyond simply reporting on what they see but instead, to describe very complex and intricate conversations in detail that explain the ways people make meaning and arrive to decisions based on their specific cultural contexts and lived experiences.

Geertz (ibid) also highlighted that thick descriptions are more than just objective observations, they require interpretation of events. He argues that researchers need to be able to use their prior background knowledge that encircles the context in which they are studying. Geertz (ibid, p. 318) argues that "most of what we need to comprehend of a particular event, ritual, custom, idea, or whatever, is insinuated as background information before the thing itself is directly examined." Therefore, we need to be able to interpret it in order for it to make sense.

The thick descriptions were then analysed using thematic analysis. This was achieved by identifying, analysing and reporting on thematic patterns across the entire data set (Byrne, 2022). An iterative process of reviewing the data several times formed the basis for defining common themes generated from codes (Appendix E) that represented patterned meaning in the data, the findings of which are detailed below.

4.3 Case Study

4.3.1 Context

This study took place following the events of the mothballing of the last remaining blast furnace on Teesside in 2015 that resulted in the loss of thousands of jobs and an end to over 170 years of steelmaking in the area. The former industrial site has stood unused since 2015, until an announcement by the Mayor of the Tees Valley Combined Authority in 2020 that the remaining industrial structures on the site would be demolished to make way for new development in heavy industries. The redevelopment site, known as Teesworks is over 4,500 acres and is the largest brownfield regeneration project in Europe.

Figure 9 - The former Redcar Blast Furnace and steelworks earmarked for demolition at time of research *(Northern Echo, 2022)*

The last remaining blast furnace in Teesside, of which was the largest to ever be built in the UK has stood as a symbol of the area's industrial legacy and is seen as a major icon in the urban imaginary of the area. The structure, whilst a proud reminder of the area's achievements to some is also seen as a representation of failure, hardship and an eyesore to others (Warren, 2018). Built in 1979, on a site where steel production began as early as 1875, it could produce 10,000 tonnes of iron a day before it was mothballed in 2015. It's

closure resulted in the loss of over 2,000 direct jobs and several thousand more in the supply chain.
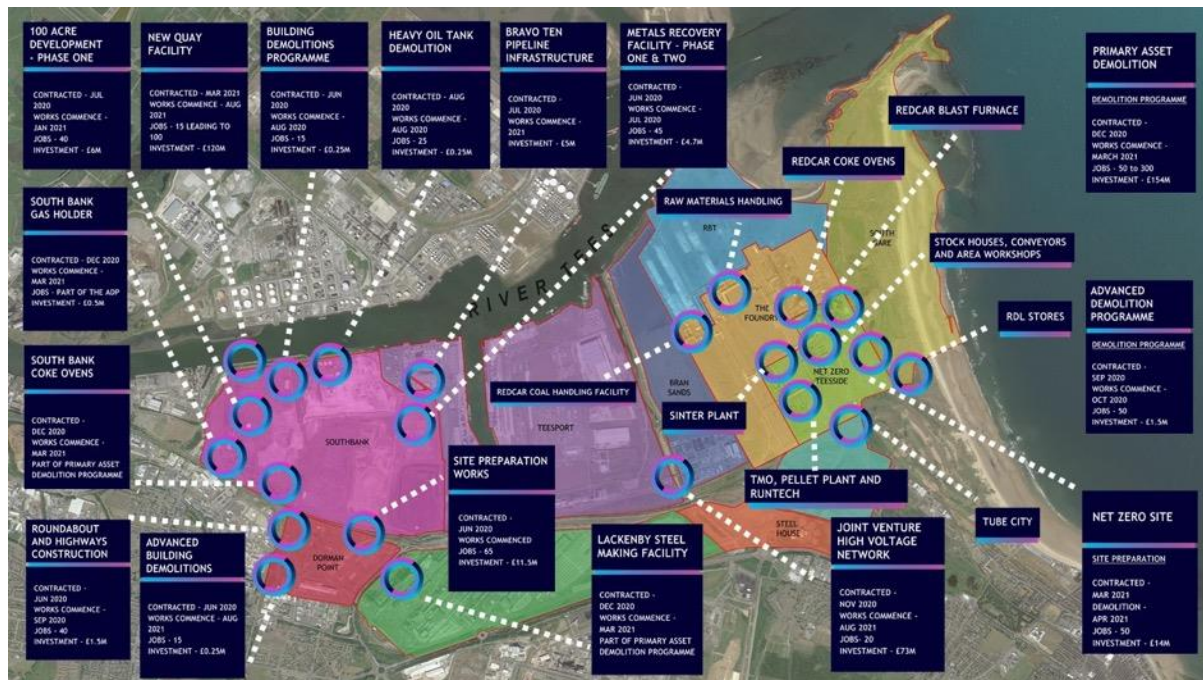
Figure 10 - Proposed masterplan for the blast furnace site and wider TeesWorks site (Teesworks, 2023)

A local heritage campaign group, "Save Our Steel Heritage" formed as a result of the mayor's announcement to demolish the former iron and steel works. Consisting of anywhere between 7-15 people at any given meeting, from a range of backgrounds and interests including historians, local politicians, activists, local residents, former steel workers and artists, the group met on a weekly basis via zoom during the covid-19 pandemic to discuss the campaign to save the relics of the area's steelmaking past. The group had no formal membership or structure, rather individuals volunteered their time to the campaign as and when they were able.

The group strongly believed that the potential demolition of the blast furnace and other industrial structures of local significance would be an act of 'cultural vandalism', arguing that the Mayor is attempting to wipe out the area's heritage and industrial legacy. Whilst the mayor argued that the steelworks needed to be demolished in order to make way for new development and transform the area into a new centre of industry, the campaign group believed that alternative uses for the land should be explored in order to preserve the

most iconic structures of the site, such as the blast furnace, which is seen as a local landmark.

4.3.2 Rationale for this case study

This case study was identified as it met the criteria detailed in chapter 3. Namely, a large industrial site that could be described as an urban void. Furthermore, I identified that the current top-down imaginary for the site was to demolish all remaining structures and the site also suffered from a negative imaginary that could be challenged or disrupted through prefiguring alternative possibilities for the site. Finally, there was an existing citizen group who wanted to challenge the current imaginary and plans for the site and preserve the history.

4.3.3 Study Design

The group started by discussing the best approach to counter-act the Mayor's announcement that the blast furnace is going to be demolished. It was agreed that the campaign needs to put forward alternative proposals to show the potential of what could be done on the site and challenge the idea that preserving local industrial heritage will hinder future progress. However, there was some disagreement amongst the group as to what vision they should put forward, I therefore worked with the group to develop this vision, coming up with new urban imaginaries that would challenge the Mayor's decision to demolish. An iterative process of developing the vision included a cycle of inquiry and reflection as described by Atkins & Wallace (2012). These cycles involved several phases of ideation, prototyping and refining. Each phase involved the use of imagery and the creation of digital photo-simulations and 3D models that acted as prompts to enable discussion on future possibilities whilst at the same time aiding the campaign to articulate complex ideas of place change.
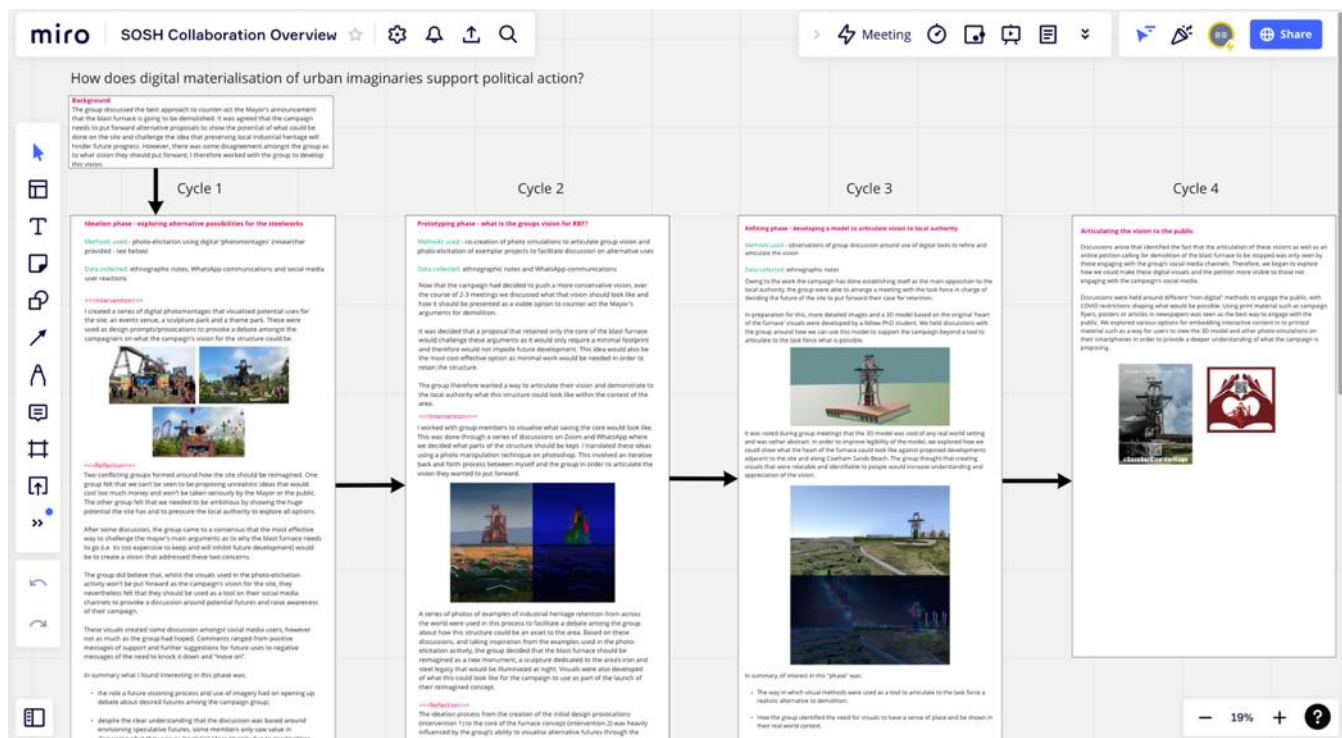
Figure 11 - Iterative Action Research cycle used throughout this case study. Source: Author

4.3.4 Data Collection and analysis

Over a 6-month period I collected thick descriptions to capture the discussions and subsequent actions of the campaign group during their scheduled weekly meetings. This was for a total of 24 meetings and participants ranged from 4 to 10 people at each meeting. By embedding myself in the project and becoming a member of the team rather than as a researcher observing from a distance, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the campaigns activities and build trust within the group. Whilst thick descriptions offered numerous benefits as I will subsequently discuss, the unobtrusive nature of collecting data via thick descriptions allowed the meetings to flow freely without participants becoming nervous about recording helped due to the politically sensitive nature of the discussions that took place.

Alongside the thick descriptions, I also scraped comments and reactions from the campaign's official social media pages to understand how the groups interventions were perceived by the public and to explore how effective they were in achieving the campaign's aims of articulating an alternative vision for the site.

4.4. Insights

I structure the following section into three themes that were generated from the thematic analysis of my data using thematic analysis as outlined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes are 'fostering debate through the digital materialisation of imaginaries', 'co-designing alternative futures as a form of political action' and 'mobilising and engaging publics'. In each theme I look at how urban imaginaries and desired futures are enacted and articulated through the envisioning process. I report pseudonymised quotes from my field notes in order to offer an insight into the effects of the heritage campaign's attempts to stop demolition of the structures through the creation of alternative future imaginaries.

4.4.1 Fostering debate through the digital materialisation of imaginaries

Instead of simply opposing plans to demolish the industrial structures and call for the site to be left in its current state, the campaign members wanted to develop a creative process that reimagined what the structures could be.

The nature of the structures as iconic symbols of the area's industrial past is tied to a collective narrative of decline and neglect. Rather than viewing this as a fixed barrier, the design provocations aimed to recontextualise these associations by presenting speculative futures that could open new possibilities for how the site is perceived and imagined. This use of visual strategies worked to disrupt the narrow and restricted imagination tied to the current state of the structures, encouraging a rethinking of their potential beyond that of disuse. Therefore, members wanted to develop a visual process that would challenge the dominant narrative of what the site means to local people and provoke them to see something beyond the structures current state.

I started by introducing some visual methods of exemplar industrial regeneration projects from around the world as part of a photo-elicitation activity to foster a conversation and sensitise the group to begin to think about developing an imaginary for the former iron and steelworks. This helped the group to articulate and generate ideas for the concept they wanted to put forward. Incorporating the use of real-world examples at this stage acted as a

prompt that supported members to begin to think creatively around their personal desires for the site:

> *"A venue for live music, festivals or markets with lighting at the furnace to enhance it. Or having it as an interactive museum of some sorts with a cafe and good views out to the sea. Many people will not have seen the blast furnaces up close."*

Another member said:

> *"You have to look at the German models of repurposing industrial works – which is usually to decontaminate and regreen the landscape. Some have new buildings and shops, others are used as museums to talk about the regional history. Alternatively, consider repurposing them for outdoor sports, zip lines, mountain biking, climbing."*

Jim, a founding member of the campaign group said:

> *"there was over 22,000 people working at the factories on this site and whilst some will want to see the back of it because of the gruelling and dangerous work involved, others feel a strong sense of pride for what was produced there. We need a way to visually show that the site can have a future that doesn't harp back to the pain of a dead industry, but one that also celebrates the achievements of the area's past"* (04.09.20).

However, the group were unable to arrive to a consensus on what this vision should look like in order to show how the structures could be reused. Therefore, I developed a series of digital photomontages that visualised potential uses for the site; an open-air events venue, a sculpture park and a theme park, based off of the comments in the previous exercise of using example projects as visual prompts. The digital photomontages were used as design provocations to foster a debate amongst members on what they believed the possibilities for the future of the site were, whilst at the same time acting as a way to introduce alternative visions to the public and get their input via the campaign's social media pages.

The aim of this process was to sensitise the group to think beyond what exists and form new imaginaries that challenged conventional thinking.

The idea of using digital photomontages to articulate alternative futures for the site was seen as a powerful way to challenge the dominant narrative of what must happen to the industrial structures and as a way to prefigure new possibilities that accounted for the values and hopes of the group. Joanna made the point that she liked the strategy of presenting visions as if they had already materialised, stating:

> *"it tells the story of the future as it gives a presentation of what could be" (24.09.20)*.

Whilst Mark thought that presenting speculative futures in this way didn't need to point to a realistic vision of what should be built, rather, articulating radical reimaginations through a digital materialisation can be a tool to encourage discussion about place futures and inspire ideas:

> *"This will make people think about the fact that there is a different way to do this and there are other options than the one that is in front of them. Therefore, if the group were able to display these future possibilities for the site, albeit unrealistic to what could actually be built, it opens up the space for discussion and new thinking on what can be achieved."* (24.09.20)

Therefore, some members really saw the value in prefiguring what could be through these counter-urban imaginaries as a strategy to articulate abstract concepts about place futures as they challenged the Mayor's vision and began to ask the question of 'what if' an alternative plan is possible. However, this strategy led to two conflicting groups forming around how the site should be reimagined. One group felt that the campaign can't be seen to be proposing unrealistic ideas that would cost too much money and therefore won't be seen as a credible alternative by the Mayor.

The other group felt that we needed to be ambitious by showing the huge potential the site has and to pressure the local authority to explore all options in a collaborative way with heritage groups as well as open up debate about the site's future with local communities.

Figure 12 - The digital photomontages created during the envisioning process. Top left; live entertainment venue, Top right; Sculpture Park, Bottom; Industrial theme park. Source. Author

Those members who were more pessimistic of this strategy expressed concern that promoting these digital materialisations may do more harm to the campaign's efforts to save the structure than they would do in successfully persuading people of its value. Jim thought that presenting these radical reimaginations to the wider public would make the campaign look like they are out of touch, describing these ideas as:

"absolutely barmy! There's no chance it will ever happen" (18.09.20).

This feeling was echoed by another member of the campaign, George who stated:

"if we are seen to be proposing theme parks etc. we won't be taken seriously" (24.09.20).

Whilst another member expressed a desire to portray what they considered to be a realistic vision due to the fact that it had more chance of getting the mayor on their side. Jim said:

> "allowing people on to the site as part of a leisure development is not the best vision for our group to follow as it is not realistic and will not be seen as a serious proposal" (24.09.20).

These remarks were reiterated by Tim who felt that any articulation of potential futures needed to be grounded in reality in order to persuade decision makers to reverse their decision to demolish, Tim said:

> "A vision that is too ambitious and looks like it would cost a lot of money to achieve will not get the support of the Mayor" (24.09.20).

Other members of the group did see a value in the creation of a series of more radical materialisations of alternative futures, but only to validate a more realistic proposal that the campaign should develop. Dan noted:

> "it is often very useful at times to have a lot of noise and discussion around ideas that are never going to happen. As, if all of this stuff is out there for wild imaginations of what could be possible, and if what the campaign is asking for is actually a lot less than that then it helps strengthen our argument and legitimizes our proposals as a viable option" (29.09.20).

Despite the dissensus within the group as to the effectiveness of taking the approach of using radical reimaginations to support the campaign's goals, the discussions fostered through visualising radical alternative futures did help the group to shape a collective desired future and formulate a strategy that they felt would have the best chance of success.

Materialising these new imaginaries in the form of photomontages forced the group to move the debate beyond the ideation phase and begin to question what is realistically possible. At the same time, prefiguring futures in an adversarial way helped the group to begin to articulate and refine a vision that would challenge the widely held assumptions of why the structure must be demolished, through the formulation of a concept that takes in to account the constraints of the site, whilst also building in their aspirations for how it should be saved.

Therefore, it can be said that the campaign members did see value in the process of prefiguring different imaginaries through visual material as it helped them to articulate complex ideas of what is possible. At the same time, it enabled them to draw out contentious issues of how the structure could realistically be saved. As Mark said:

> *"being able to develop rapid digital prototypes of what is possible in a visual way, has helped to see the scope of the site and understand the many different ways we could think about transforming it"* (06.10.20).

The envisioning process I introduced helped the group to materialise different imaginations of what the site could be by opening space to articulate ideas beyond the confines of what is realistically possible. Enabling the group to express their desired futures for the site inevitably led to a series of compromises and the creation of a collective vision that encapsulated their hopes for the site whilst addressing concerns of developing a feasible vision.

We continued to use the same process of materialising the campaign's vision through digital photomontages, photo realistic visualisations and 3D models to convey the groups final imaginary in a highly visual way. The ideation process from the use of example projects as prompts for discussion, to the creation of the initial design provocations and finally, to a more refined concept was heavily influenced by the group's ability to visualise alternative futures through the designed artefacts.

This process also helped refine how the campaign wanted to articulate their imaginary. Defining their reimagined blast furnace as a sculpture or monument, members compared the structure to the Angel of the North and labelled it the next of the Tees Valley Giants[2], harking back to a previously stalled regional project that would have seen the area host the biggest public art structures in the world. The idea being that comparing it in this way could gain more community support as it became more relatable, would attract media attention and support from artists and art institutions. I found it interesting how the group wanted to shift the way this structure is used as a functional structure to one as a piece of art. Shifting local imaginations of what this area has been and could be. George reiterated that the vision the group puts forward must articulate that

> *"this sculpture or monument is the final iteration of iron and steelmaking on Teesside and therefore is an important symbol for our heritage and is something that needs to be kept. It is a visual representation of 170 years of history, it's a statue that speaks to the past and looks to the future."*

The group did believe that, whilst the visuals used in the photo-elicitation activity and the digital photomontages won't be put forward as the campaign's vision for the site, they nevertheless felt that they should be used as a tool on their social media channels to provoke a discussion around potential futures and raise awareness of their campaign.

The digital materialisations of alternative futures were therefore shared on the campaign's social media pages with the aim of fostering a conversation in the community on aspirations for the future and challenge preconceived ideas of what is possible. These visuals created some discussion amongst social media users, however not as much as the group had originally hoped. Comments ranged from positive messages of support and further suggestions for future uses to negative messages of the need to demolish the blast furnace. Comments were categorised in to 4 categories; personal imaginaries people had for the future of the site, negative remarks, emotive responses and political positioning. For

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[2] The Tees Valley Giants was a £15m public art project that would have seen 5 sculptors installed within each of the 5 Tees Valley unitary authorities; Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees, Darlington, Hartlepool, Redcar & Cleveland. If completed it would have become the world's largest public art project. At the time of writing only one, Temenos in Middlesbrough, has been completed, designed by international sculptor Anish Kapoor.

example, a user can be seen articulating their own imaginary as a result of the Facebook prompt:

> *"Options to make this an environmental visitor attraction should at least be explored fully before it's torn down and replaced with steel boxes. The symbolism for Teesside could be astronomical".*

Whilst other users suggested a theme park or arts and culture centre dedicated to the local area:

> *"Water Park. Theme park based on industrial Tees Valley and the Yorkshire Coast"*

> *"I like that building and like the idea of arts and culture centre. But worry about the cost of upkeep to keep it safe for public use."*

Whereas another user expressed a negative reaction to the imaginaries put forward:

> "*Take it down before it falls down, all it is is a huge rust bucket and has been for years".*
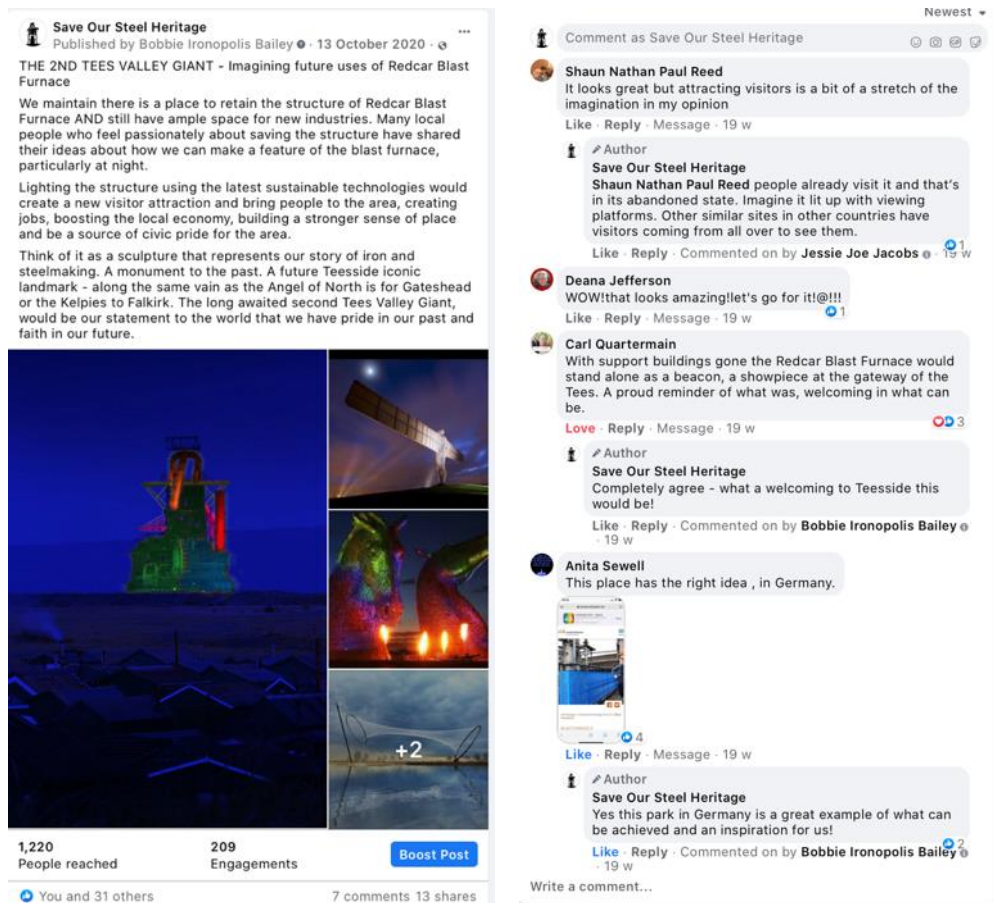
Figure 13 - Showing one of the campaign's imaginary visual prompts (left) and users subsequent discussion (right). Source: Author

Some users were provoked into an emotive response around the loss of identity and heritage, comparing it to other areas that have lost their industrial legacy:

> *"Recognition of the importance of these familiar structures to community pride and memory is so important: Consett was totally cleared incredibly quickly, and the shock of the landscape loss was tough, regardless of how good the regenerated use of the site proved to be".*

> *"My dad was heavily involved with designing the computer systems for the Boss Plant. The iconic skyline evokes many emotions"*

> *"I love the view of the blast furnace, it's always a focal point for local photographers and artists so can't really be that much of an eye sore."*

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"I would rather see people in work then look at what we have lost."

At the same time, users saw this as an opportunity to make political statements that represent wider societal issues:

"Never mind saving the heritage, why aren't we pushing the government to re-nationalise our industries. Never mind outsourcing the labour to skimp on costs, they should be investing in creating local jobs. They're not going to do that though; the government need the north weak and dependent".

"A couple of years ago there was a report on arts finding per head of population. Redcar had one of the lowest amounts. Time to make up that difference."

Whilst the act of 'making real' these alternative imaginaries for the site through materialising them digitally in a visual format was seen by some campaign members as a way to articulate an alternative to the mayor's plans for demolition and open a space for dialogue with the local community on social media, other group members were reluctant to share these visuals externally as they believed they could weaken the campaigns position.

Despite my initial presumption that there was a clear understanding within the group that these urban imaginaries were designed to envision speculative futures, this wasn't the case. Some members saw the value of the imagining process to creating a discussion and provoking wider participation in developing a counter-vision for the space. However, some members couldn't see the value in discussing what they saw as "unrealistic ideas", potentially due to poor communication within the group as to why undertaking an imagining process could be of value to raising awareness and fostering a discussion.

4.4.2 Co-designing alternative futures as a form of political action

As a result of the debates exploring radical reimaginations of the site and the materialisation of these imaginaries, the group came to a consensus that the most effective way to challenge the rational provided by the Mayor as to why the industrial structures

must be demolished - namely that it is too expensive to keep and will inhibit future investment - would be to create a counter-proposal that directly addressed these arguments. Through prefiguring their aspirations for the site, the group wanted to challenge the dominant narrative that the structures no longer serve a purpose and demonstrate that they hold an intrinsic architectural and heritage value to the area.

Mark argued in one of the group meetings:

> "one of the main problems we have in the UK planning system and psyche is that we get presented with: you either keep the past or you destroy it in order to build the future. What we need to persuade people is that there is a way to have a future which retains elements of the past and this is the bit that we struggle with. Our vision needs to demonstrate that the structure holds an emotional value to the area and in a way, challenges the presumptions of the local authority that they can just demolish without consequences" (18.09.20).

Therefore, challenging this dominant narrative that the structure is not worth saving from both an economic and historical standpoint the campaign felt it important that disproving these arguments must be the principle aim of the campaign and the best way to do this was through the materialisation of an alternative imagination of the site. The group saw their vision not merely as an articulation of a possible alternative future, but as a tool to actively call out the inaccuracies lauded by the mayor as to the advantages of demolishing the structures. By iteratively rematerialising their vision in the form of several digital photomontages, photo-simulations and 3D models that articulated their arguments, the group was able to react to statements released from the Mayor's office in relation to the demolition of the structures by articulating alternative ways of saving the blast furnace. Thus, the co-design process within the campaign and the digital artefacts that were created as a result acted as a form of political action within themselves.

In doing so, the campaign wanted to play off a growing sentiment in the area that demolishing locally important heritage assets is a controversial decision. Mark articulated this by saying:

> *"this idea about the past being important and should we really just be knocking everything down? This sentiment is something the campaign should be playing off and using to their advantage. If we can show future possibilities of the site this helps strengthen our argument that other options are possible beyond a slash and burn everything approach"* (03.11.20).

By purposefully prefiguring their vision in this adversarial way, the campaign sought to highlight strongly felt sentiments and concerns within the community in order to apply pressure on the Mayor to reverse the decision to demolish the blast furnace. Mark made the point that it is difficult to compare and draw from any local success stories of industrial heritage preservation due to the fact that local and national policy has always been to demolish everything. Therefore, it's difficult for the local community to understand what is possible unless they have previous knowledge of success stories from the likes of Germany.

> *"the problem we have is the establishment are in our way and as there isn't many places in the immediate area where a heritage project like this has happened due to the "scorched earth" policy of deindustrialisation that has been prevalent in the north east for the past 30 years, i.e. the idea to just obliterate it all and landscape it"* (14.01.21).

The group agreed that their vision must tell the story of the importance of the area's industrial legacy and use this sentiment of a lost heritage to their advantage, and in many ways educate the local community on the potential of what is possible through their digital materialisations for the future of the site.

However, there was some concern as to whether the group should act as an adversary to the mayor by continually challenging the dominant narrative. Some argued that the campaign should seek a form of collaboration with the local authority in order to develop proposals that ensured the structures would be saved. Joan believed that the campaign needed to position itself as a campaign that is willing to work with the Mayor, but isn't afraid to stand up for itself and call out inaccurate statements.

"a constructive partner who can help provide advice on heritage and ways the structure could be saved. However, if it appears they are not willing to engage with us we need to be their adversary and ensure we hold them to account and challenge at every possible opportunity" (11.09.20).

The way the group formed around the co-creation of an alternative vision that had the explicit goal of responding to the Mayor's proposals to demolish the structures enabled the campaign to position itself as an expert on this issue. Materialising and articulating alternative possibilities in this way became a form of political action where the group took on the role as design experts and, in a way, allowed the group to claim agency over the design process, advocating for a rethink of the plans that was then reported on by several local media outlets[3].

The campaign members took on the role as place makers through prefiguring their desired futures in the digital photomontages. This created a parallel proposal that was used as a tool to hold the Mayor to account and enabled the group to speak directly with the local community via their social media channels and have their vision published as a credible alternative to the local authority in local newspapers.

4.4.3 Importance of mobilising and engaging publics

Digitally materialising an alternative vision for the site through photo-simulations and using these visuals as a tool for political activism helped the campaign formulate a concrete proposal for the site's future. At the same time, it helped to positioning the campaign as the main opposition to the Mayor, becoming the go-to group for any media outlet looking for a counter-argument relating to the site's future.

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[3] Example of Newspaper articles covering the heritage group's campaign:
https://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teesside-news/should-redcar-blast-furnace-demolished-19073284
https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/19035428.redcar-blast-furnace-demolition-report-whitewash/
https://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teesside-news/campaign-group-still-determined-retain-19427253

However, despite the campaign's initial success creating a counter-proposal through their internal reimagining processes, they inadvertently recreated the envisioning process of the local authority by not engaging with the wider public to develop the vision. The campaign's rational for doing so was to be able to react as soon as the mayor or local authority put out a statement. A group member said:

> *"to keep the decision-making process and development of the vision within the core group in order to be able to respond quickly to the mayor and not dilute the main aim of stopping demolition of the structures" (18.09.20).*

By being reactionary rather than proactive, the campaign became reliant on having to come up with a counterargument to the mayor, which created a situation where they were heavily concentrated on this aspect rather than involving the local community, alienating them from this discussion.

The failure to open the envisioning process beyond the campaign's core group due to a fear of the campaign's image as a serious organisation at the initial ideation stage affected the campaign's ability to mobilise the public and garner support. The overriding worry across the core group to present a realistic and economically viable vision hindered imagination, creativity and opportunity for wider participation. The possibility for the group to take two approaches, one more conventional that appeased members and a more provocative, activist approach using these visions may have enabled the group to move forward on more than one front.

Therefore, this presented a barrier to engage with the public in the reimagination process and ultimately affected the campaign's effectiveness to articulate the importance of saving the industrial structures. This can be seen by a comment made by Jim, stating:

> *"people will think this group is crazy if we propose that a theme park should be built on the site." (06.10.20).*

Jim went on to note that there is some value in the envisioning process when negotiation, but it would make the campaign look unprofessional if we were to pursue a debate about things like theme parks, stating:

> "we should use it as a negotiating strategy to get a more realistic proposal accepted but people will not take this group seriously if we propose a theme park as it would just cost too much" (06.10.20).

The focus on producing a sensible and economically viable proposal inevitably stifled the ideation process and the campaign's ability to articulate radical alternatives. Thus, reducing any potential for imaginative discussion on future possibilities to arguments on the economic viability of their vision. As the campaign's envisioning process was shut down at this stage and moved on to developing a more refined vision as previously described, little room was then available for public engagement.

Ultimately, this led to the campaign developing a vision that did not take in to account local voices, and the group was unable to gain the support from the public in order to apply the necessary pressure on the Mayor to save the structure. The need to demonstrate that the campaign's proposal was economically viable hindered the creative process and didn't leave the space for alternative imaginaries to materialise.

Another reason why the campaign wasn't successful in mobilising community support was due to the power dynamics at play within the campaign. Jim seemed to take on the role as principle decision maker and as a lead voice within the campaign steering discussion within the group to take the approach that they needed to change the mind of the Mayor rather than win over public support. He said:

> "we need to achieve something that is viable now, it's no good us continuing the discussion around theme parks as a realistic alternative, these are great ideas for a debate but the core of what we seek to do has to be something we can deliver as a realistic proposal to the Mayor" (20.09.20).

The persistence in trying to appeal or appease the Mayor as opposed to working with the wider community to develop a vision, hindered their ability to build a dialogue that could have created a more participatory visioning process and applied indirect, yet more effective pressure on decision makers.

I felt that the approach Jim wanted to take was the wrong direction for the campaign. He pushed the idea amongst the group that we first needed to get acceptance from the mayor before we open dialogue within the community.

> *"we need to get them to accept that our proposal is an option and then we get something out to the public that inspires them"* (17.11.20).

Jim wasn't happy about putting other visuals out that suggested anything other than the fact that we are campaigning to save the core structure of the furnace. This meant that all prior discussion around radical reimaginations of uses for the site were abandoned and conversations became solely focused on how the group could materialise a vision for saving one small part of the wider site. I felt that taking such a narrow approach and not creating the space for the public to continue to contribute ideas meant we had lost the potential to engage the public. Thus, emulating the top-down decision-making process of the Mayor that the campaign was initially trying to fight against.

The problem of one member imposing their ideas on to the group and leaving little room for collaboration did indeed affect the final vision that was put forward and hindered the group's ability to explore other options as well as to share ideas and aspirations for the redevelopment of the wider site. Jim's influence over the campaign's decision making meant the group was unable to enter a constructive dialogue beyond the need to stop demolition of the blast furnace. This I felt had been a major problem throughout the campaign's meetings and Jim's reluctance to explore radical reimaginations hindered the creative aspects of the envisioning process that other members wanted to explore. Therefore, this sent the campaign down a narrow path, where opportunities to explore other options that may have been more effective were ultimately lost.

I believe the campaign would have been much more successful had we pursued the initial ideation phase further and opened up the co-design process with the local community. This work therefore highlights the importance of creating the space for dialogue and the need for tools that can better support communities to come together during the ideation process and co-create alternative imaginaries for underused spaces.

4.5 Initial Reflections

4.5.1 Fostering dialogue on urban futures

The insights from this case study illustrate - at least in the early ideation phase of the research - how the process of materialising imaginaries as a collective group can open spaces for imagination beyond the confines of what was considered realistically possible. It enabled the group to ask 'what if?', articulating their individual and shared desires for the area. This answers research question 1, in that the design provocations used were effective in provoking discussion on place futures. Whilst the design provocations didn't lead to a consensus for a shared vision, they challenged the group to think beyond their preconceived perceptions of what place can be. A reason for the differentiation of viewpoints can be explained by section 2.1.4 in that, each resident has a different notion of what makes a place (Adams, 2013; Peacock et al., 2018). Likewise O'Regan (2001) and Crivellaro et al., (2016) found that the same places that instils someone with a sense of pride can also be seen negatively by others.

In this case study, views on the blast furnace varied dramatically, as a place to be preserved and remain practically untouched to those who believed it should be radically reinvented and other groups who believed the structure should be demolished due to it becoming a symbol of economic failure. These contrasting viewpoints inevitably affected the discussion on place futures and the final outcomes of the visions the group created. This therefore highlights the need for design provocations to be designed in a way that opens space for pluralistic visions of the future as argued by Davidoff (1965), Pollastri et al. (2017) and Dunn (2018) in order for design provocations to be effective in supporting discussion on place futures, they must take in to account pluralistic possibilities.

The iterative process employed throughout of designing and redesigning the vision enabled the group to materialise their ideas at different stages by creating digital visuals and models of their ideas as they developed. The idea of producing visuals, i.e. prefiguring the future the group wanted to see, supports the arguments made by Yusoff & Gabrys (2011), and Cornelius, (1987) in that they both argue that imaginaries can be used as powerful tools to rethink what place could be and see something that doesn't yet exist. This helps to answer research question 1 in that, the design provocations provided a tool to enable citizen groups to reimagine what the use of the site could be. The act of materialising or prefiguring their visions through designed artefacts in the form of visuals and 3D models supported the group to design their vision. Design as DiSalvo (2015) argued, is concerned with the artificial, i.e. how things *might be* rather than how things *are*, the use of design activities fostered that imagination within the group and as Le Dantec (2016) argued, design enables us to think beyond what currently exists and allows us to transcend the current state of things. This approach to provoking through design has enabled non-experts to participate in envisioning processes, which would not have been possible in traditional consultation activities.

The use of photo-realistic visuals as prompts to enable imagining supports the work of Ponzini (2018) in that the argue that this type of visual can open up complex ideas of place change to non-specialists, they describe how photo-realistic renderings play a major role in communicating abstract ideas into accessible and relatable concepts are articulated during consultation process. However, whilst Ponzini (ibid) and Dunn (2008) argued that visualising potential futures can bring communities and experts of various disciplines together to co-create policies in plans, this was not achieved in this case study, as the imagining process created more frictions between communities and experts than it did bring them together. This was due to the fact that the digital visuals presented during the workshops were met with mixed reactions. While some participants appreciated the opportunity to explore the site's potential, others felt that the designs were too speculative and failed to address the immediate, practical challenges facing the site. This highlights how visual representations, while powerful, can create friction when they are perceived as disconnected from reality.

However, Ponzini argues that the ability to digitally materialise photo realistic simulations of place change, and materialise abstract ideas, can legitimise dominant imaginaries. Due to the fact that non-experts may not have the capacity nor skill set to articulate alternative ideas in such convincing ways via visual outputs. Though, it can be said that through working with a group of non-experts to produce photo realistic imaginaries, this case study demonstrated how photo-realistic renderings can be utilised by communities to challenge dominant narratives and prefigure the future they want to see.

This work enabled discussion and brought up other issues of desired futures and fostered debate around campaign members political opinions on local issues, helping the group to challenge preconceptions and reflect on their viewpoints. Therefore, the role of the future visioning process and use of imagery had a positive impact on opening debate about desired futures among the campaign group. Davoudi et al. (2018) believed that imaginaries create the space for challenging preconceived assumptions and allow for alternative ideas of what could be to come to light.

While the design provocations succeeded in drawing attention to the campaign, their influence on social media and the wider political discourse on the future of the site was limited. The entrenched positions of local politicians and conflicting agendas meant that the visuals were often dismissed or misinterpreted, indicating that design interventions alone are not always effective in shifting perceptions in contexts of political conflict. This somewhat contradicts the arguments made by the likes of Dunn (2008), Ponzini (2018) and Davoudi et al. (2018), who, take a rather optimistic view that visual design tools can universally challenge dominant narratives. In this case, the power dynamics and pre-existing tensions constrained the impact of the provocations and weren't effective in combatting these issues.

The group also saw a value in visual methods, in particular the use of imagery to articulate their proposals externally as they believed it offered the simplest way to articulate complex ideas they were hoping to get across. Alongside this, the campaign members believed that the emotive role future imaginaries can have in winning over the hearts and minds of local people was seen as something the group needed to embed into their campaign if they are

to achieve the aim of getting people to visualise that an alternative option is possible. This supports Neuman & Hull's (2009) notion that if we cannot imagine alternative possibilities of the world beyond its current state then we cannot be free nor can we manage and seek to build a better world.

While the digital photomontages helped articulate ideas, their effectiveness in fostering deeper engagement was context dependent. In a workshop setting, many participants found tangible artefacts, like sketches and printed materials, more accessible for collective discussion. This suggests that while digital tools are effective for visualising large-scale possibilities, they need to be complemented by tactile tools in group settings where hands-on collaboration is crucial. The limitations of relying solely on digital provocations align with the insights of DiSalvo (2015), who highlights the challenges posed when design tools are too abstract or remote for participants.

It also must be noted that, as the researcher facilitating these discussions and attempting to use design provocations to elicit responses, my own position as both an advocate for saving the structure within the campaign group and as a designer played a crucial role in shaping these discussions. It can be said that the friction generated by the visual provocations was partly influenced by the tension between my expertise in using designed artefacts as a strategy to support the campaign and some participants' concerns with wanting to take a less provocative approach. This highlights a key challenge in activist research—my positionality, as a researcher and with a higher level of design skills than the average participant, may have unintentionally swayed the direction of discussions, reinforcing existing power dynamics rather than dissolving them. This tension aligns with critiques in advocacy planning literature, such as Peattie's (1968) concerns about the residual paternalism in professionals speaking for communities.

4.5.2   The damaging effect of social media

Publishing the groups visuals on social media was seen as a way to garner public support and apply pressure on politicians to rethink their plans. However, as Crawford (2018) argued urban imaginaries can marginalise particular visions as they are deemed undesirable or not

taken seriously as the dominant narrative developed by those in power takes precedent as the only viable option. Likewise, Hofmeester et al. (2012) describes how the articulation of alternative futures can easily be ignored if they don't adhere to that of a top-down policy that's main goal is usually based around global economic competitiveness. This could be argued to be the case in this case study as highlighted in the social media reaction of both local politicians and residents as illustrated in section 4.4.1. There was an evident inertia to change or reluctance to allow any alternative suggestions beyond the need to demolish as this option promised the potential of industrial prosperity once again, an issue highlighted by Chapman (2011). There also appeared to be a lack of support for the area's heritage and no value placed on the role culture and tourism could play in the economy of the area's future. It could be said that the widely accepted urban imaginary of Teesside's sole existence as a place of industry seems to hinder and be a barrier to imagining the areas transformation beyond one of heavy industry (Warren, 2018).

The reactions on social media and within the campaign illustrate the presence of a deeply rooted cultural inertia. Rather than viewing this as a conclusive finding, this inertia served as an initial condition that the design provocations sought to disrupt. By visualising alternative futures, the campaign aimed to challenge the narrow imaginaries that have historically shaped perceptions of the blast furnace. Although the group encountered resistance, this context underscored the important role of design provocations in revealing the limitations of existing narratives and initiating conversations about what the site could become, addressing research question 2. Chapman discussed how a shared mind-set help by both a population and politicians can hinder the development of an area as it produces and reproduces tolerances and intolerances to change and informs people in the locality about what is possible or desirable. The reactions on social media, whilst reflective of the dominant narratives and inertia surrounding the site, highlighted the necessity of using provocative design interventions to initiate discussions on alternative possibilities. Rather than positioning this inertia as a central conclusion, the focus here is on how future imaginaries through photo simulations can work as catalysts to probe these reactions, revealing the complexity of engaging with entrenched perceptions and challenging the community to consider new futures. Likewise, the literature review discussed how certain urban imaginaries can hinder abilities to envision alternative futures. Lindner and Meissner

(2019) discussed how negative imaginaries can reproduce the socio-spatial conditions that brought them in to being, i.e. the imaginary in this case study that the blast furnace has no value and is only a symbol of economic failure, creates a barrier to reimagining. Davoudi's (2018) and Millington's (2013) work agrees with this in that they discuss how negative stigmas of a place can force out more constructive or competing imaginaries to that of the dominant narrative. As Millington discussed, the use of specific images and stories of deindustrialisation and degradation can build an imaginary that makes it hard for people to look beyond. Likewise, Dunn's (2018) work also agrees in that they argue that particular urban imaginaries that are conceptualised and disseminated across various medias can influence the way we perceive place and affect how we discuss and envision place futures. Therefore, the role of design provocations in this sense is to reconfigure the socio-spatial politics of place as opposed to attempting to reproduce them from scratch, as Lindner and Meissner (2019) argued. The design provocations used in this case study provided a mechanism to enable discussion but failed in reconfiguring the dynamics of power prevalent in the area.

However, despite the evidence of cultural inertia, the prevalence of a dominant imaginary and their effects on people's capacity to imagine alternative futures, there were also reactions on social media that demonstrated that the design provocations prompted ideation from users as people shared their aspirations for the future of the site. This case study shows that whilst cultural inertia is an evident barrier to reimagining place futures and more work is needed in order to understand how socio-spatial politics of space can be reconfigured and dominant imaginaries more effectively challenged. Design provocations do provide a mechanism to foster imagination and enables discussion on alternative futures.

The concept of prefigurative placemaking demonstrated in this case study offered insights into how it can provide a mechanism to enable change of urban voids (research question 3). Davoudi et al. (2018) discussed how new imaginaries of place can create the space to challenge preconceived assumptions of what a place is and what it could become. This case study failed to do this to some extent as evidenced by the reaction to the designed visual artefacts, the failure of the group to capture people's imagination or provoke a rethink from the mayor demonstrated that the design provocations didn't meet the aim of reversing the

decision to demolish. However, as Yusoff and Gabrys (2011) demonstrated there still is a place for digital visualisations in supporting people to materialise their ideas, whilst the group may not have been able to reverse the decision, the act of collectively bringing in to being an alternative future was made possible by the ability to materialise these visions digitally and share them digitally across social media. The process of prefigurative placemaking is a useful mechanism for informal planning participation as it enables the manifestation of current imaginaries of what will happen and what could happen, as discussed by Nalau and Cobb (2022), to be challenged.

4.5.3   Reluctance to engage as a detrimental factor

The reluctance from some members of the campaign to engage with the wider community and gain their input into what the vision could look like, hindered the campaigns' success. A successful example of engaging the public in the creation of a vision can be seen in a participatory project to reimagine a park and challenge political narratives in Hamburg as described by Rühse (2014). Park Fiction developed a vision for a community place in an underused space through scaffolding and via the creation of a participatory process. It was understood by those involved in the project that the aim was not just about creating a park in the underused space, but they were also designing the engagement activities with the aim of opening participation to garner local support for the project. Through this process, the local community could directly influence the vision and prefigure what the space could be through the actioning of interventions within the space, giving them agency over the project. In contrast, this case study, whilst having similarities to park fiction in that it saw a group challenge the future use of a space through a participatory process, it failed to truly be participatory. The heritage group initially set out with the intention of utilising their designed visuals to further engage and increase participation with the public. However, this didn't happen in reality. The groups power dynamics and the subsequent reluctance from some members to open the process, due to fear of it affecting the groups reputation, meant the group fell short of creating a truly participatory process as was seen in Park Fiction. On reflection, this meant the campaign was unable to build the ground swell of support and capture the imagination of the public that was required to challenge demolition.

Inevitably, this led to the weakening of the campaign's effectiveness. The lack of a unified vision and internal opposition meant the group couldn't assert itself and influence political change. Attempts from some members to control the process and assert their power supported the analysis of Flyvbjerg (1998) and Hillier (2000) and how power dynamics can affect planning processes. What is of interest in this case study building on their work, is how informal planning processes, and internal dynamics within a group can also be affected by these issues and ultimately affect the functioning of the group and their ability to challenge when it comes to more formal processes of influencing planning decisions.

Despite the clear understanding that the discussion amongst the campaign group was based around envisioning speculative futures and exploring what if scenarios in order to encourage wider participation, some members only saw value in discussing what they deemed "realistic" ideas. This was mainly due to practicalities around cost to implement such ideas and a lack of understanding as to the value of an open participatory process. The belief that the campaign would not be taken seriously for suggesting such unrealistic proposals hindered the creative process. Therefore, the belief that it was the campaign's role to demonstrate that the structure could be saved on a budget and within the confines of what the mayor had stated, supports arguments made by Fisher (2009) on capital realism. The belief that proposals needed to be seen as economically realistic, as argued by capital realism, can affect outcomes and people's ability to creatively imagine alternatives. This affected the heritage groups abilities to reimagine the site in radical ways and left little scope for the exploration of alternative imaginaries.

Therefore, whilst the visual provocations did spark discussion, they also generated significant friction. Many participants expressed frustration with the abstract nature of the visuals, feeling that the designs were too far removed from the practical challenges of redeveloping the site. This disconnection led to scepticism and resistance, with some participants doubting whether the designs were realistic or achievable. This friction suggests that the manifestation of speculative ideas through visuals can sometimes hinder, rather than enhance, engagement in the ideational stages of placemaking.

Similarly, the emotive response people had to change in this specific location is something that has been discussed by O'Regan (2001) and Crivellaro et al. (2016) where people's attachments to place and participatory processes of urban renewal can cause friction. It could be said that the attempts to open that space for new imaginaries in this case study exacerbated frictions as opposed to elevating them. The work of Ellery & Ellery (2019) supports this where they similarly found that attempts to remake place through interventions caused friction amongst stakeholders, leading to the narrowing of the envisioning process and further entrenching people in their beliefs, and thus making it harder to call for or enact change. This case study demonstrates a need to allow for a diversity of competing visions for place futures, enabling non-experts to create pluralistic visions as opposed to having to come to a consensus on a way forward. The plurality of viewpoints can be a strength of planning and lead to better outcomes as discussed by Davidoff (1965), a clear need evidenced in this case study.

As previously mentioned, my role as both an activist and a researcher in guiding this process introduced certain tensions. By bringing design literacy into the fold, I unintentionally shaped the direction of the discussions and the imaginaries produced. While I aimed to enable participants to materialise their ideas, my influence as a 'professional' may have led to outcomes that were more reflective of my design approach than of the community's own desires. This raises important questions about the balance of power in such co-design processes, aligning with Friedmann's (1987) critique of advocacy planners acting as intermediaries who, even with the best intentions, risk imposing their own expertise over community voices.

4.6 Conclusion

This case study illustrated how urban imaginaries could be materialised through a series of photo simulations that radically reimagined an underused site. With the aim of using these initial visuals as a tool to provoke debate and start an ideation exchange with members of the local community. The visuals were ultimately used internally within the campaign to discuss possible futures as well as being published on the campaign's social media pages to elicit response in an attempt to influence local politicians' perspectives and showcase to local residents that an alternative for the site is possible.

The internal focus of the envisioning process highlighted the tensions between maintaining a 'realistic' vision and pushing beyond the dominant narrative. Cultural inertia, while present, should not be seen as a key finding, but as a backdrop against which the design provocations attempted to push. The visuals developed for the campaign were not just about countering dominant narratives, but about using imaginative ideas to reveal the limitations of these narratives and to provoke ideas of alternative futures that might otherwise be dismissed. Therefore, this case study agreed with the arguments made by Fisher (2009) in that, the belief that developments need to fit within a capitalist idea of what is possible stifles creativity and processes of imagining alternatives outside of a capitalist model.

Likewise, this case study highlights the perils of urban imaginaries discussed in the literature review, where Millington (2013) and Dunn (2018) noted how imaginaries can be damaging to processes of collectively reimagining as ideas of what a place is and what it could be become so entrenched that citizens are unable to see beyond them.

At the same time, internal misunderstandings within the campaign group of the benefits of an open, participatory process meant the imaginaries and digital materialisation failed to challenge preconceived assumptions of the future of the site, in contrary to the work of Davoudi et al. (2018). Therefore, the inability to open the initial envisioning process to the wider public damaged the campaign's ability to mobilise support and demonstrated that in order to answer research question 3, "can prefigurative placemaking provide a mechanism to enable change of urban voids?" a more open, participatory process to imagining would be beneficial.

Whilst the visuals played a role in articulating alternative visions, they also exposed a tension between creative thinking and practical concerns. The speculative nature of the designs created friction for some participants, who struggled to connect with ideas they felt were too detached from reality. This suggests that in politically charged contexts like this, design visualisations may not always be effective in facilitating engagement, particularly

when participants are more focused on immediate, tangible outcomes such as ensuring the blast furnace isn't demolished as opposed to future thinking about what it could be.

Similarly, the way the design provocations I introduced influenced the trajectory of the campaign also raise important questions about my role as both researcher and advocate. While I aimed to empower participants through design, my own expertise in this area may have influenced the ideas and outcomes in ways that were not fully democratic. The design literacy I brought to the table carried its own authority, which, as Sandercock (1998) argues, can sometimes create a professional-led dynamic rather than a truly participatory one. This calls into question the extent to which design can function as a straightforward democratising tool in activist research.

The campaign did succeed in challenging the dominant narrative and positioned themselves as the main opposition to the mayor, gaining recognition in local media as experts on industrial heritage. The actions of the campaign enabled discussion and opened space for alternative imaginaries to materialise within the group. However, the failure to involve people outside of the campaign group in the ideation process and the lack of collaboration externally inevitably meant that the campaign emulated traditional public participation processes. The power dynamics at play led to some participants using their strength and influence to oppose group ideas and assert their own, as has been discussed in the work of Flyvbjerg (1998) and Hillier (2000). Future work needs to explore how tools that support the materialisation of place futures at the ideation phase could be created to better facilitate the ideation process, support communities to articulate visions and engage a diverse range of voices when reimagining alternative uses for underused spaces.

While the design provocations provided the campaign group with a means to articulate an alternative vision for the site, the broader political issues significantly influenced their effectiveness. The deeply entrenched positions of local politicians, coupled with the power dynamics at play, meant that the provocations were not always perceived as legitimate contributions to the debate. This case study illustrates how, in contexts of political conflict, design provocations can fall short of generating the desired influence on decision-making processes. Although the visuals succeeded in drawing attention to the campaign, they

ultimately did not shift the entrenched positions of key decision-makers. This highlights the limitations of design interventions in contexts where political tensions and power imbalances dominate discourse.

Chapter 5 – Collective community idea curation for reimagining underused spaces

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the potential for curating ideas and building shared community knowledge around the reimagination of underused spaces. Expanding on the literature review of earlier sections (2.1.9), this chapter investigates the potential of reimagining places through the use of small-scale placemaking interventions, where community groups co-design and prefigure the urban environment in line with their aspirations and desires for their neighbourhood using a 'lighter, quicker and cheaper' approach to planning and implementation.

The insights section of this chapter is split in two based off the iterative action research cycle taken. First, I explain how the appropriation of a digital platform was initially used as a curatorial tool to explore how it could support community activists visualise and ideate on new uses for underused public spaces in their communities through the use of creative interventions. Whilst, at the same time, I examine the effectiveness of the platform in facilitating discussion on the future of place and creating space for alternative urban imaginaries.

Second, as part of the iterative cycle of testing and learning from the design provocations, I detail how this case study evolved through a series of engagements with the community activists. Due to the complexities in using the digital platform and a desire amongst activists to have a physical artefact that could be used to support the envisioning process we began to explore what this could look like. Initially, a session was held with activists to discuss shared aspirations for improving their town, identify the barriers and challenges to realising these changes as well as discussing potential locations to enact them. The activists decided that they wanted to develop a card deck that would help communities identify ways in which underused spaces across the town could be rejuvenated using small-scale and low-cost interventions.

This research contributes to understanding how small-scale community-led changes can influence wider change in cities as well as providing tools to reignite debates around citizens right to the city. It explores how tools can be created to support citizens to express their desires and future aspirations for their communities, and ultimately, influence physical change in these underused spaces.

5.2 Methodology

Given the lack of existing research into the use of social media platforms to support curation of community-led urban imaginaries and the constraints of conducting research during the Covid-19 pandemic, I decided to appropriate the social media platform Pinterest as a tool for community activists to share ideas and designs of tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture interventions that they believed could be adopted within their neighbourhoods. This activity also acted as a probe to understand how the platform could be used as a tool to facilitate discussion on community desires and the envisioning of urban futures.

I utilised the collaborative group board feature of Pinterest which acted as an exploratory ideation tool to gain input from the activists on possible urban interventions to regenerate underused spaces in their local area. The board was designed to structure discussions on the different types of urban interventions and placemaking projects through the discovery of best practise and explore inspirational examples from elsewhere. It offered a platform for groups to share their own visions and encourage discussions around possible alternative urban futures for underused spaces in their neighbourhood.

Pinterest was chosen after background research revealed a lack of exploration into the use of digital platforms to enable discussion and idea-sharing on place futures, which is further explained in the following section. Whilst I was able to find papers relating to the use of Pinterest to support co-design processes in fashion and design industries (Lapolla, 2014), there were no studies on the use of this platform for co-designing places despite the large number of pins relating to the field and its common use within urban design circles.

This activity was also chosen as opposed to a more traditional co-design workshop session to explore the use of commonly used digital platforms to support collaborative working during social distancing of the covid-19 pandemic. Given the constraints of conducting action research during a pandemic and the issues I faced in being able to get participants together in one session, I decided to opt for an asynchronous approach to this case study as opposed to synchronous sessions. Using a digital platform such as Pinterest lends itself to this approach and also has advantages in removing the pressure a synchronous workshop would place on participations to produce or articulate complex ideas on the spot. Allowing participants to contribute over a large time period and when was most convenient to them removed many barriers to participation that were prevalent during the pandemic and offered the potential to explore whether this way of co-creation is more conducive to creative activities.

The resulting user-generated content would then be analysed to understand the types of interventions participants would use to transform underused spaces and the effectiveness of Pinterest for co-designing reimaginations of underused spaces. As part of an iterative action research cycle, insights from this activity would also inform the design of new tools to support the community groups efforts' to further engage the wider community in co-designing desired visions of their neighbourhood.

5.2.2 Why Pinterest?

Highly visual social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest have the potential to open new ways to engage with the public on reimagining places as well as facilitating creative collaboration in digital environments. They afford users with a visual storytelling tool, where they are able to communicate their experiences, ideas and perspectives around specific issues that can capture the imagination and emotion that more text-based forms of sharing content cannot. Pink (2007) discussed how visual storytelling can be an effective tool to enhance communication, whilst the author writes at a time before the existence of Instagram and Pinterest, her work discusses how visual media can be an effective tool to in constructing new narratives and building more effective engagement practises.

Likewise, the affordances visual social media tools can offer in inspiring and mobilising individuals to take action is something that this chapter explores. Through visually striking and shareable content, users can find ideas and fuel one another's imagination by taking inspiration from content shared on these platforms. The ability for users to also promote their own ideas and causes through these platforms, amplifies voices and enables publics to be formed around collective action. Earl & Kimport (2011) explored how digital platforms could be harnessed to drive social change, whilst again this work doesn't specifically focus on the use of Pinterest or Instagram, the author highlights how social media can inspire and mobilise publics around specific issues and initiatives.

Studies from Hall & Zarro (2012) and Scolere & Humphreys (2016) have demonstrated how Pinterest has been used as a social curation tool, they have argued that it can be a great place to find ideas, highlight new possibilities and share inspirational projects in order to facilitate collaborative design processes. Furthermore, features such as the 'collaborative group boards' feature of Pinterest offers this potential to form new publics where people are able to share ideas and plans for projects collaboratively all in one space within a digital environment.

Ricci et al. (2017) discussed how publics are formed around specific issues, however they cannot form on their own and must be assembled. In order to do so, they must form attachments that illustrate their commitment as individuals to a certain cause. In the context of this case study, whilst the activists I worked with on this project are an established group working towards the transformation of the area, the wider community of activists interested in taking action on urban change in underused spaces are a much more disparate group who have little opportunity to assemble and build a collective discussion on their aspirations for change. The use of Pinterest could be one way to achieve this assemblage amongst the group and form new publics.

Digital platforms afford many possibilities to construct new publics around issues of placemaking. They enable debate on issues of urban decay as well as provide the mechanisms for groups to collectively imagine new possibilities, challenge and be challenged as well as prefigure, albeit virtually, alternative place futures. They enable a level

playing field where experts and non-experts have the opportunity to articulate their aspirations for change. As Ricci (2017) remarks:

"While the city is the space where nature, culture, society and technology redefine each other, the web offers places to detect, visualise and interpret the dynamism and heterogeneity of this processes. Within digital platforms, smart city imaginaries are present alongside grassroots visions; amateurs and experts brush shoulders through online media, sharing a common space of information production and dissemination; start-ups propose new technologies through the same digitized and easily accessed infrastructure across which journalists report their news and research labs publicize their advancements" (p. 5).

As opposed to other commonly used social media platforms, the visual and creative nature of Pinterest enables users to inspire and be inspired by others through sharing photos of inspirational projects and best practise case studies from elsewhere. Participants are not limited to the geographical confines of projects carried out locally or nationally, but are able to explore and be inspired by projects from across the globe.

Therefore, this platform offers the ability to share ideas that may not have been thought of with other participants in order to provoke further ideation and debate. The added ability to express your opinion through functionality typical across all social media platforms such as reacting via liking or disliking content and the ability to comment on pins, means conversations can grow around these ideas and can encourage discussion. Specifically, in regards to how such interventions could be used within underused spaces thus facilitating political discourse. Members of the group have the ability to add new collaborators, copy and delete pins and re-organise the layout of the board to bring to attention particular ideas. Thus, giving users full autonomy on how the board is used. Pinterest's ability to intelligently suggest new ideas based on the groups existing pins, using the 'more ideas' feature can enable new avenues for discovery and promote fresh thinking.

5.3 Case Study

5.3.1 Context

Tees Community Connectors is a hub for grass-roots activism in Teesside. A principle aim of their work is to build tools and processes that can foster discussion around radical futures for a transformed Middlesbrough. The organisation is an informal group of volunteers, who hold regular weekly meetings in local coffee shops or via Zoom during social distancing restrictions. Attendance at informal gatherings varies from 2-15, depending on individual's ability and capacity to attend. The group consists of community development workers, local residents, artists and representatives from non-profit organisations, but is open to anyone to attend without a formal membership system or governing structure. Acting as an incubator, Tees Community Connectors aims to bring community activists together to form new publics around shared ideas that can support systematic change across the town, providing the infrastructure to enable these groups to then branch out beyond the initial formation within community connectors. One area of their work explores how residents can transform neglected alleyways through urban greening interventions. Those who can offer a skill to support an alleyway makeover project, volunteers their time to help mobilise and take action within a specific space. I worked with the Community Connectors activists to explore ways we could expand on these efforts by collaboratively identify ideas for placemaking interventions through a discovery process and design provocations that could foster solutions to deal with urban blight in central Middlesbrough. Through this process, Community Connectors had the goal of designing a set of tools to aid people in imagining a different future for their alleys and provoke the wider community to think about what could be rather than what is, through the envisioning of alternative futures for these spaces. Again, I refer to this process as prefigurative placemaking.

5.3.2 Rationale for this case study

This case study was identified as it met the criteria detailed in chapter 3. Namely, a series of small urban void spaces that were neglected or in decay. Furthermore, I identified that the current imaginary for these spaces amongst residents was negative in that they struggled to see a use for these spaces beyond a place for waste collection and as a space suffering from anti-social behaviour. Finally, an existing citizen group was already working to transform

these spaces, however they struggled with the capacity to imagine beyond the current state of the voids which opened opportunities to build understanding and knowledge of novel approaches to reimagine them and prefigure an alternative future.

5.3.3 Study Design

The aim of this chapter is to explore how the appropriation of existing platforms and the design of new tools can support communities in the envisioning processes of imagining transformational changes to underused public spaces in their communities.

This study took place almost exclusively during the lockdown restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the limitations of in-person collaboration due to the restrictions of the pandemic and the difficulties of gathering participants together at a specific time to take part in a workshop, it was decided, in collaboration with Community Connectors to design an activity that allowed participants to contribute at their convenience, in an online environment, and to open up the envisioning process for spaces in the town (see insights section for further explanation) to anyone in their online Facebook community. On discussion with community leaders of the group, we decided on the appropriation of Pinterest as a tool to conduct an initial ideation activity to explore options to tackle urban voids in the town. The visual nature and rich content available on this platform related to urban interventions was a major reason why it was chosen as opposed to using other social media platforms. The opportunity to explore how the effectiveness of an asynchronous activity in community organising could offer new insights in to conducting collaborative activities in non-traditional ways.

We put out a call to action within grassroots community groups across Middlesbrough asking them to share ideas for how they would transform unused, under-appreciated and unloved spaces in central Middlesbrough through the sharing of ideas in a collaborative Pinterest board. This was advertised via the Community Connectors weekly newsletter (Appendix K) as well as posted on local Facebook groups such as an 'urban greening' community group.

A 'how to' section was created within the Pinterest board that gave simple instructions on how to contribute and interact with others on the board.
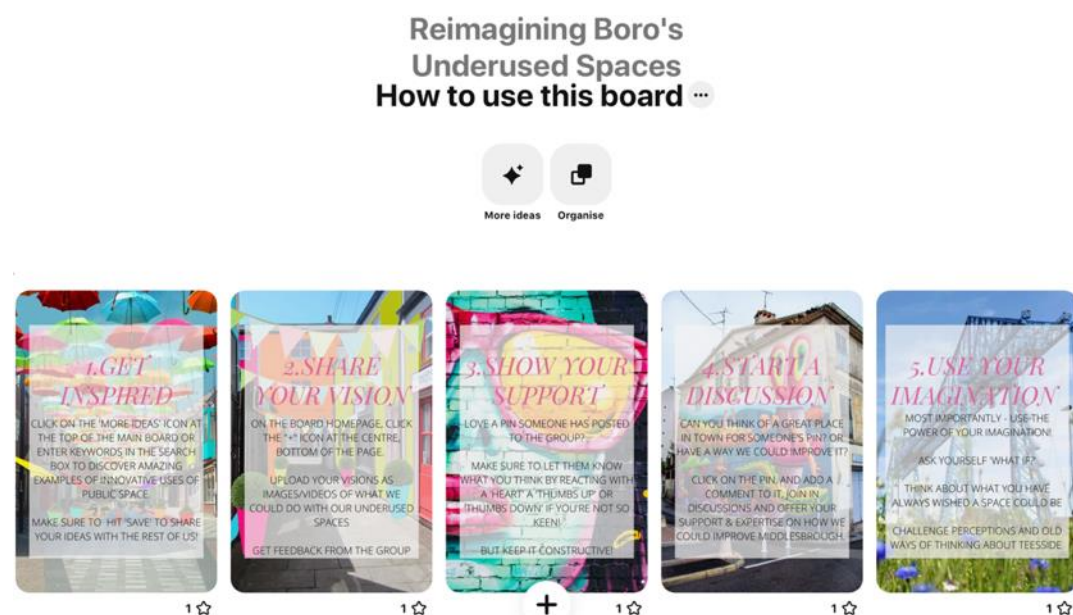
Figure 14 - "How to" section on the group Pinterest board.

The following questions were asked of participants during the sign-up and consent process:

1. *Do you have a vision for an underused space in the town but not sure how to make it happen?*
2. *Can you think of a space that is crying out for some love but you're not sure what should go there?*

5.3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were asked to upload their ideas, "re-pin" ideas from Pinterest's repository and share their opinions on each other's pins over the course of a 2-week period. The board was pre-populated with a variety of example urban interventions to act as prompts and conversation starters. In total 12 participants signed up to the board, with over 100 pins added within that time.

In order to analyse the effectiveness of the digital platform, this research used multiple data sources. First, the content uploaded by participants within the digital platform and second, the subsequent discussions that followed during workshops. The workshops explored how participants interacted with Pinterest as well as how it facilitated discussion on placemaking interventions and envisioning of place futures. Follow-up discussions, reflected on the use of the digital platform and led to discussion and design of a physical tool in the form of a card deck. This card deck was then tested out with participants in a variety of settings. Each workshop lasted approximately an hour and a half. Due to covid-19 restrictions the initial workshops took place on Zoom, with subsequent workshops taking place in-person once physical distancing restrictions were lifted. Workshops were recorded and then transcribed with pseudonyms used for participants.

The data was analysed in two separate sections, firstly all data relating to discussion on the creation of the Pinterest board, the use of Pinterest by participants and subsequent discussions and reflections with participants after using the platform. The second section of data collection relating to a follow up activity that was designed as a result of the iteration taken during this action research approach where, upon reflection, a tool was designed to aid the co-design process that built directly on the initial findings of the Pinterest board. This section of data was analysed together and includes analysis of how the tool was designed and deployed as well as reflections from participants on its usefulness to achieving the goals of the community organisation. Across both sections, as set out in the methods chapter, themes were generated using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006).

5.4 Insights on the use of a digital platform

5.4.1 Initial exploration and understanding needs

Upon beginning this research activity, a series of informal discussions took place over Zoom with the community connectors facilitators to understand how I could support them in developing tools that would foster discussion around the transformation of underused spaces amongst the communities they work with. It was clear from the early stages of this research that the facilitators felt there was already a huge wealth of knowledge amongst the community activists who had lived experience of designing and implementing

interventions in residential alleyways across the town. However, it was pointed out that the majority of these interventions were centred solely around urban greening i.e. installing plant beds, hanging baskets and plant pots around residential alleys.

The facilitators wanted to explore what other types of small scale, low-cost interventions they could implement to reimagine the ways in which these alleys were used. In turn, creating a resource where those community activists who have lived experience of implementing alley makeovers could share ideas and dream about alternative possible futures for these underused spaces. One community facilitator said:

> *"it would be great if we had a way to pool ideas and share cool projects that we have seen from other parts of the world" (Andy).*

It was clear from initial discussions with community connectors that there was no knowledge of what tactical urbanism or urban acupuncture was, despite the fact that they were implementing projects that could be defined as either one of these concepts. Whilst understanding the correct terminology for the interventions the group were implementing was not essential, it was valuable to explain to them the ethos of these concepts and how they could better harness the potential of these ideas to further their work in the community. Another community facilitator expressed:

> *"I hadn't realised that's what we were doing, but now I know, I can see how these ideas could really benefit our alleyway makeovers and they could even help us to do it better and develop new ideas for these spaces" (Zarah).*

Therefore, it was clear that one of the goals of this collaboration would be to find ways to articulate complex planning concepts to non-experts easily as well as create the space for communities to build shared knowledge of tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture concepts and interventions. A facilitator made the point that:

> *"we often discuss all of these different ideas, and our aspirations to transform the town in our own small groups, but we don't really have a way to share those*

discussions more widely and work with others in the town who have some amazing ideas…but I'm not sure how we would share that info" (Andrew).

"I think we struggle to see beyond what's in front of us and if a place looks shit now, people don't think it's worth the time to try and do something with it or can't see the potential of what it could be" (Emilia).

As Community Connectors members expressed that they didn't really have a way to involve or collaborate with the wider community in building shared visions for underused spaces, I decided to pilot the appropriation of a digital platform that would provide a visual way for community groups to discuss ideas and share knowledge about the types of interventions they would like to see. I wanted to explore if a tool that was predominantly based around visuals and inspirational examples from elsewhere could spark ideas amongst residents of what they would like to see, but also provoke them to imagine beyond the here and now.

5.4.2 Deployment of a digital platform

As described in the study design section of this chapter, a Pinterest board was used as a tool to foster discussion amongst members and support them in reimagining the underused spaces in their neighbourhoods. In the following section, I will explain several insights in to how participants used this social media platform to curate ideas as well as explore to what extent the digital platforms supported Community Connectors in building shared visions for their neighbourhoods.

Over the course of the two-week period, 16 participants signed up to the Pinterest board. Predominantly, participants added their own visions of urban interventions for specific locations within the town, rather than "re-pinning" examples from other users across the platform as shown in figure 2. This shows that, whilst participants weren't necessarily taking advantage of the wealth of ideas available on the platform, they were already expressing their desires for change and attaching that to actionable interventions at specific locations in the town.
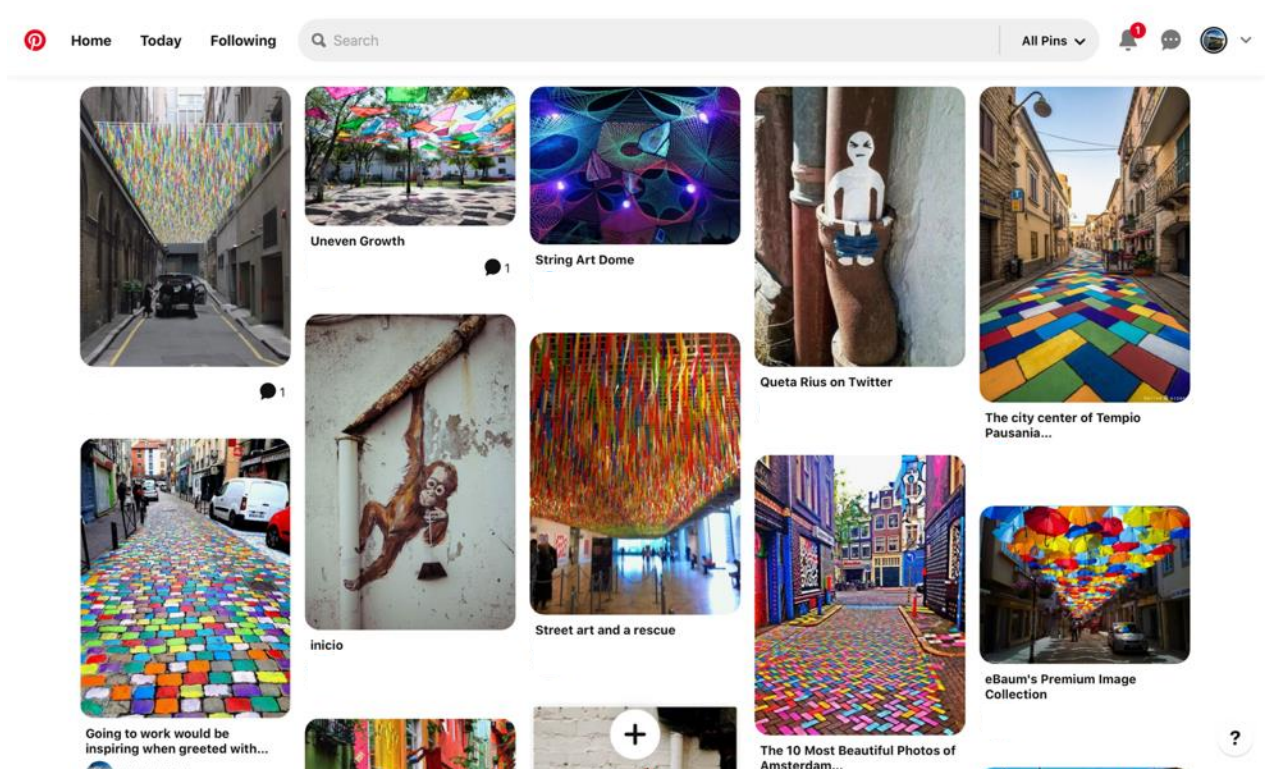
Figure 15 - Showing the collaborative group board 'global' page within Pinterest.com

Pins that were added largely centred around art murals, asphalt art, urban greening, and some form of hanging installation or canopy, with some digital interventions such as projections or light installations included. Previous discussions found that community connectors members didn't have any knowledge of tactical urbanism or urban acupuncture as concepts and had so far mainly implemented just urban greening interventions in their projects. However, the ideas and aspirations shared within the Pinterest board highlighted how they did indeed have knowledge of these concepts due to the fact that the vast majority of the interventions posted could be categorised as a form of tactical urbanism or urban acupuncture. Therefore, highlighting that, given the space, members were able to articulate in visual ways complex concepts and build shared knowledge of planning ideas amongst 'non-experts'. The technology therefore facilitated this activity and influenced the ways in which participants were able to articulate and discover new ideas, showing its effectiveness as a socio-technical process.

Many of the interventions pinned were focused around small-scale interventions in narrow streets, intimate public spaces and on decaying infrastructure such as utility pipes or electricity boxes. Given that the initial motivation for community connectors members was centred around transforming residential alleyways, it shows how the Pinterest board was able to help participants visualise similar ideas and apply them to specific locations in their communities. Furthermore, these pins also highlighted participants aspirations to see spaces improved that are often overlooked as not being worthy of transformation due to their scale, level of decay or inconspicuousness. The platform therefore helped participants to explore the hidden potential of these spaces through small-scale creative interventions and arm them with the tools to challenge the perception that these spaces have no inherent value by turning them in to usable community assets.

For the most part, there was not a lot of active conversation amongst participants within the platform, rather participants pinned their ideas and didn't engage much beyond that. However, some conversation did take place (see figure 3) between participants who pinned ideas and other users where they were able to express their hopes for the future of the underused spaces and discuss where in particular they would like to see these interventions implemented in the town.
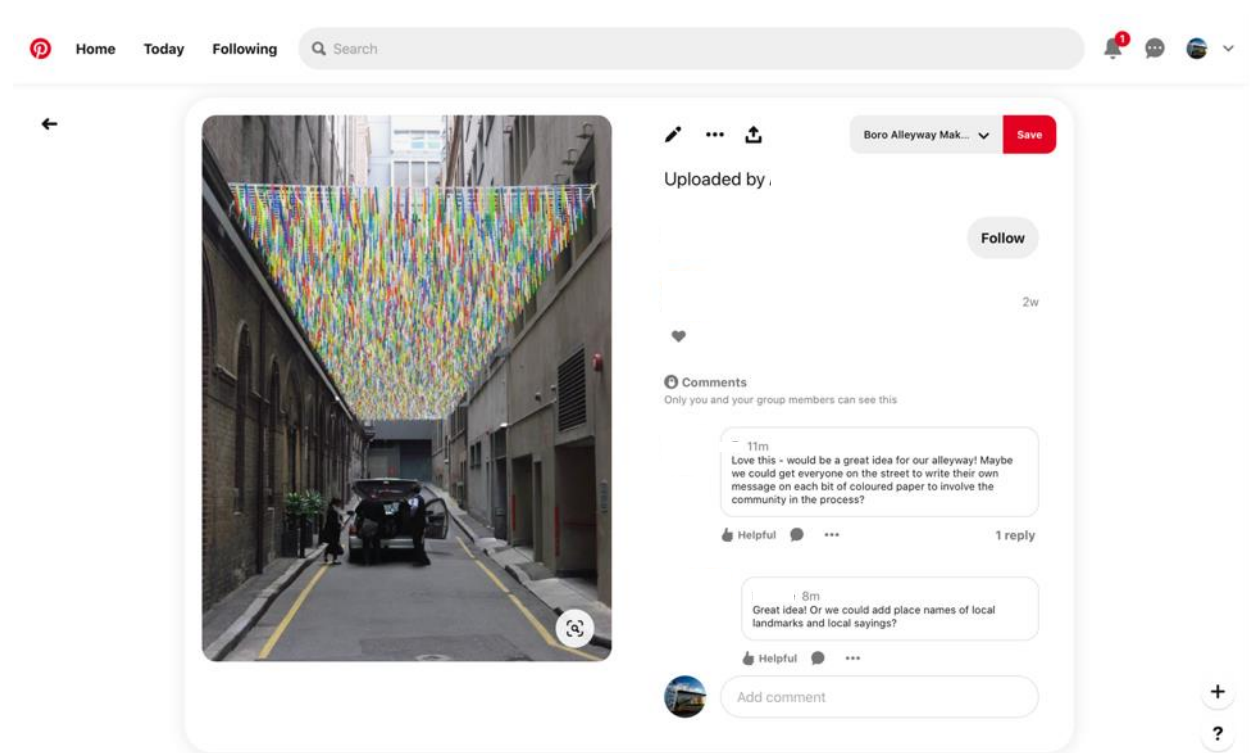
Figure 16 - Example of how people can discuss ideas within the board around how interventions could be appropriated for use in Middlesbrough.

One user in response to another who posted a pin on using multi coloured paper strung up above the street as a canopy to animate the space made a comment supporting the idea and even suggested how to personalise this intervention as to involve local members of the community in its design as well as give a sense of ownership to the local community by co-designing the installation with them through adding their own messages to the paper. This then created a conversation amongst users of the Pinterest board who all showed their support for the idea and built on the original suggestion by discussing how else the intervention could be made bespoke to the community through building on the area's uniqueness – showcasing a form of community-led placemaking. Whilst another user offered ideas of how to make the intervention environmentally friendly.

This brief online-encounter highlights how visual design provocations can foster discussion and lead to the co-design of ideas for transforming a space. Much of the discussion that took place in the comments section of each pin posted within the platform, whilst not particularly in depth, involved members of the community showing support for ideas, and offering suggestions to how they could implement the ideas shown in their own community spaces. Therefore, highlighting how a community group could use online tools to ideate on placemaking interventions and prefigure, albeit virtually, ways to transform a space.

The conversation that followed on from the suggested intervention pinned to the ideation board on Pinterest as shown in figure 3 is highlighted below:

> *"Love this – would be a great idea for our alleyway! Maybe we could get everyone on the street to write their own message on each bit of coloured paper to involve the community in the process?" (John).*

With another participant responding:

> *"Great Idea! Or we could add place names of local landmarks and local sayings?" (Robert).*

Followed by:

"Hard agree – also possible to make it a recycled material project perhaps?" (Sarah)

Whilst the platform did support these small interactions and the ideation process of how different design ideas could be appropriated to transform underused spaces, conversations weren't maintained beyond initial discussion. Of the 16 participants who signed up to the board, only 4 participants actively participated in sharing pins and contributing to discussions within the shared pins over the course of the 2-week period, with more than half of participants not contributing anything at all. In total around 150 ideas were posted to the board, however as previously noted most of these were from a small group of active participants.

5.4.3 Pinterest board facilitating the creation of new publics around diverse issues

The activities of this 'Reimagining Boro' work supported the implementation and design of other community projects. Merely having the board to refer to sparked other ideas and offered the group the structure to share ideas and provided the infrastructure for them to use for other projects they wanted to run. The two projects described in this section did not form part of this research directly, however they are worth noting to demonstrate the wider impacts of this research.

Numerous crossovers between the different projects of the Community Connectors group began to form and resulted in an intersection of ideas as well as the merger of some existing projects within the Reimagining Boro' discussions and the eventual appropriation of the Pinterest board to support these projects. Groups were able to prefigure what these spaces could look like through using the Pinterest board to materialise and manifest their aspirations for improving certain aspects of the alleyways. Broadly, the board acted simply as a visualisation tool for participants to share designs for how they would like to transform certain aspects of their neighbourhood. However, it also provided the infrastructure to

support more hyper-local interventions focused on specific issues the communities identified.

Two new publics were created as a result of the infrastructure of the reimagining Boro Pinterest board. First, a group formed around designing interventions to brighten up alley gates at the entrance of residential alleyways. The Pinterest board enabled this group to form as it provided them with a space to build a directory of designs. This group was made up of residents of one specific alleyway. This newly formed public held a design competition amongst residents of the street where they were invited to design a mural to transform alley gates in the town. The Pinterest board was used in this activity as a design resource to inspire and give ideas for how residents could design their alley gates. The board was then used to upload all entries to the competition and create a publicly accessible gallery of all entries for residents to view as shown in the figure below. Had the Pinterest board not been created, this public likely wouldn't have formed as it was through the sharing of ideas on the board that the idea to collectively design murals for the gates began. At the time of writing, one alleygate had been painted as a direct result of this design competition.
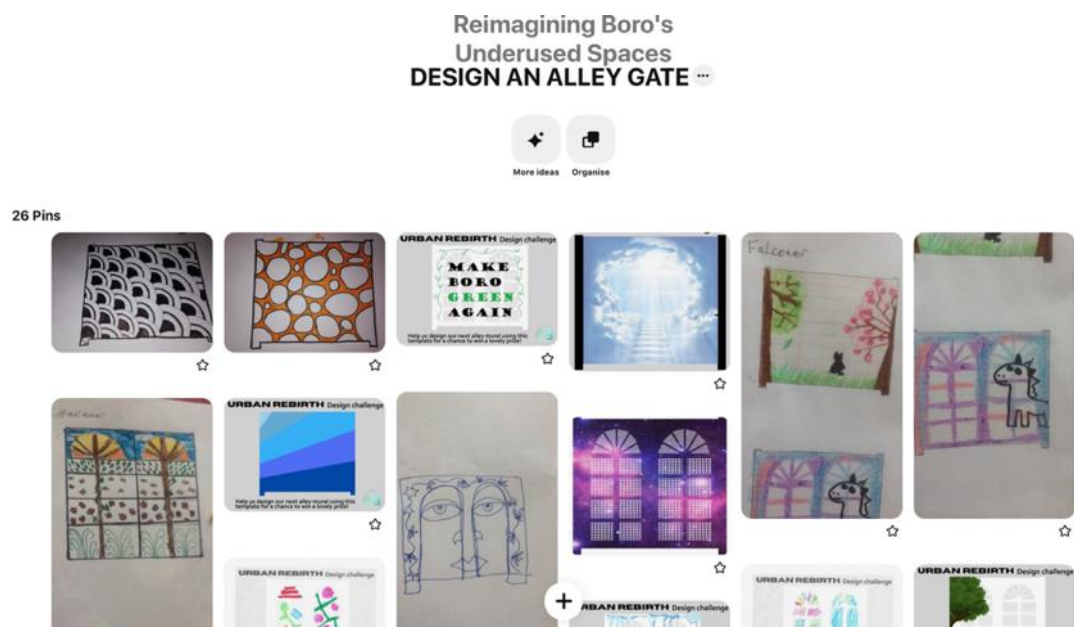
Figure 17 - Showing some of the submitted designs uploaded onto the Pinterest 'gallery'

The second 'spin-off' project, which led to the formation of a new public saw a collaboration between local councillors, residents and the Neighbourhood Watch National Network, who

were attempting to increase community cohesion and engagement in four deprived residential streets in Middlesbrough Town Centre. Due to the restrictions of the COVID pandemic and the difficulties of communicating with the neighbourhood in question which had various issues amongst residents such as low-English proficiency, mistrust of 'outsiders' and a transient population, the group decided it would be best to invite residents to engage in a way that would overcome these barriers. Engagement took place through a co-designed postcard that invited residents of the four streets to share their aspirations for the future of their street in whichever way they felt most comfortable responding (figure 5). These postcards were to be posted through neighbours' doors and a drop off point created close by. This was deemed as an appropriate way to engage residents given the issues described above as it enabled a way to engage with people whilst avoiding any physical contact during social distancing restrictions. It also allowed for feedback in visual ways for those with low-English proficiency and generally provided a hands-off approach to begin to engage with those residents who had mistrust of outsiders.

The postcard was linked directly to the wider Reimagining Boro Pinterest board where a QR code was added to the postcard (see figure 5) that enabled people to see ideas submitted by other residents. The idea was to use this repository of ideas to inspire imagination for how residents would like to see their street transformed.

Figure 18 - Front and Back of postcard created in collaboration with Neighbourhood Watch

At the time of writing, the postcards still hadn't been posted by the Neighbourhood watch team, however, the infrastructure the Pinterest board provided in acting as a tool to inspire and provoke ideas demonstrates its contribution to the formation of new publics.

Whilst these projects didn't directly contribute to the co-creation of a placemaking toolkit and I also didn't act as the main facilitator to these discussions, the activities did offer some validation to the research. The appropriation of the Pinterest board acted as a central repository of ideas to inspire change and provoke discussion amongst communities on reimagining the uses of public space. This demonstrated the potential and appetite for a toolkit that used visual provocations in order to foster discussion and support communities co-design reimaginative uses for underused spaces in their neighbourhoods. The postcards were still to be sent out to the residents of the street. Therefore, their effectiveness in supporting communities to envisioning place futures can't be deduced. However, the act of the group using the infrastructure of the digital platform to form new publics around this specific issue highlights its usefulness in supporting communities design their own interventions.

5.4.4 Reflective workshop

Upon completion of the 2-week asynchronous workshop activity on Pinterest, participants were invited to a focus group to come together and share their experiences using the board. The group were asked to use the ideas they had pinned on Pinterest as prompts for discussion around location-specific interventions in the town and discuss in more detail their ideas for transforming these spaces.

An initial warm-up activity was undertaken using Miro, a virtual collaboration platform, where participants were asked to think about the different types of underused spaces in Middlesbrough that they would like to see transformed for community uses. Participants noted their ideas on virtual post-it notes and a random selection of photos of underused spaces in the town were added next to the activity to act as examples to help participants and aid ideation. Miro was used as opposed to keeping all activities within Pinterest as it provided a structured way for participants to share ideas and answer the provocations of the workshops in one contained environment, separate from the Pinterest board. Miro lends itself to this style of workshop as it enabled participants to share post-it notes on a

virtual board, add text and images in one collaborative space, something that would not have been possible by carrying out the workshop on Pinterest.

Participants noted down a wide range of places in Middlesbrough that they felt were 'underused' and could benefit from a makeover akin to their previous work in alleyways. It could be argued that having completed the 2-week long activity on Pinterest, participants minds were more open to thinking about spaces in the town that were underused that they had not previously thought of. Only 4 post-its mentioned something specific to do with alleyways e.g. alley gates, service alleys, passageways or connecting places, alleys and access roads. Whereas some post-its mentioned large-scale infrastructures e.g. abandoned factories, "flyovers", rooftops, empty shops, roundabouts and underpasses. Predominantly, suggestions were centred around small-scale infrastructure changes which suggests that the Pinterest board did indeed spark ideation and alternative ways of thinking about the potential to transform the inconspicuous, overlooked places. For example, participants listed phone boxes, lampposts, street cabinets, school gates, gable ends, and shutters. Showing a sense of shared realisation that there are many small interventions they can implement that had not been previously thought of before undertaking the Pinterest activity.
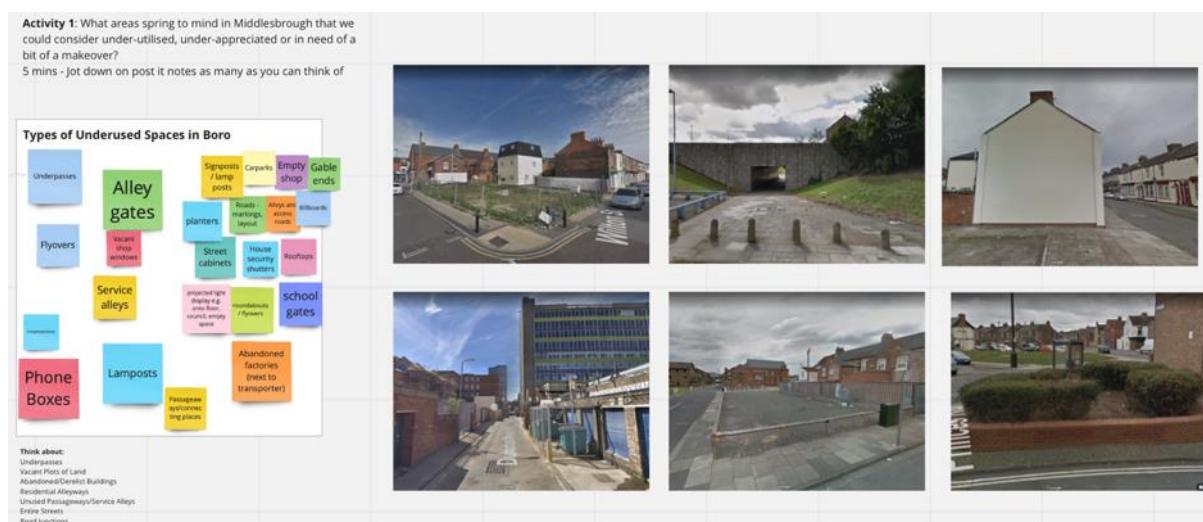
Figure 19 - Miro activity to think about what spaces in the town should be 'reimagined' through

A further activity was carried out using Miro where participants were then asked to use ideas from the Pinterest board to think about the different types of interventions they

would like to see in order to regenerate the underused spaces of activity 1. This enabled the group to think more critically and discuss in a group what they thought would work and what wouldn't and begin to shift the ideation process to a focused co-design process. Photos of interventions that were uploaded to the Pinterest board were added next to the activity to act as examples to help participants and aid ideation.
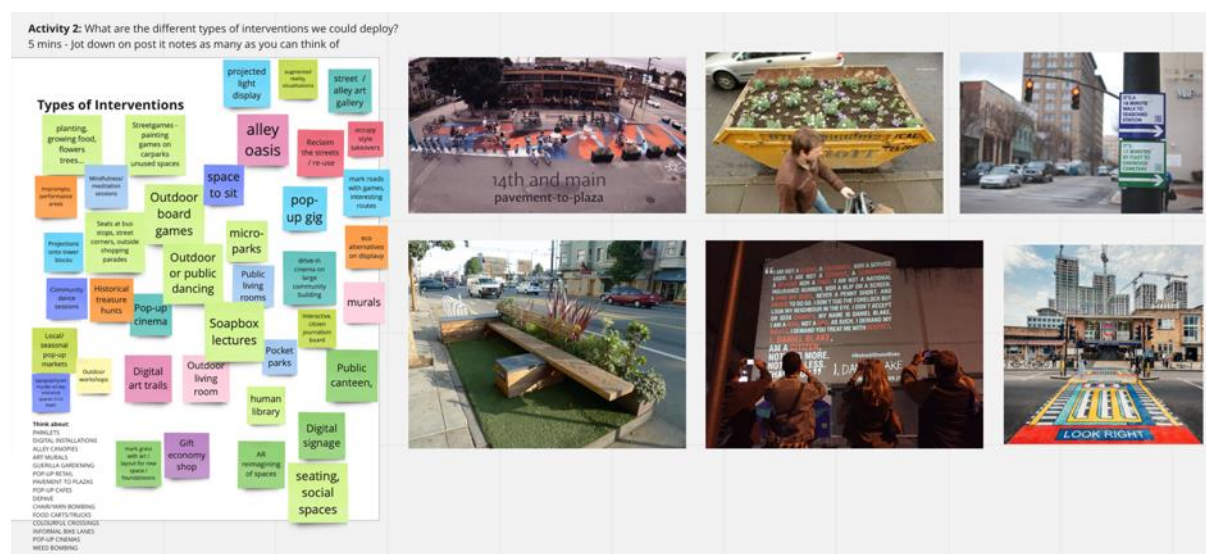
Figure 20 - Activity carried out on Miro with participants to think about types of interventions, including some visual aids as prompts

This activity inadvertently became a way for participants to synthesise and curate all of the different types of interventions that they had pinned to Pinterest and enabled them to reflect on the activity's usefulness. By discussing these place-based issues using visual ques and low-cost solutions participants were able to reimagine the potential for these spaces. However, given the fact that many board members did not contribute anything opened up the question of whether this was the best way in order to support ideation and knowledge building amongst the community.

Participants were therefore asked to give their thoughts and experiences of the usefulness of Pinterest to support collaboration and as a tool that enables them to share their vision for change in the town. There was an overriding consensus that the current layout of the Pinterest board was not conducive to collaboration and made it difficult to find ideas posted by other participants.

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"I felt like it [the Pinterest board] was really messy and everything was all over the place, and when I scrolled through other people's posts they would change position and I couldn't find them again" (Andrew).

They also felt that the Pinterest board lacked structure and therefore didn't lend itself to supporting discussion and co-design of interventions as there was 'too much going on' which made it confusing to find and discuss ideas.

"I couldn't work out what was what, there was some really good ideas but as there was no organisation in the board it was difficult to see everyone's pins" (Sarah).

Participants discussed how they felt that it would be beneficial to focus discussion on place-specific solutions that people understood and were familiar with (i.e. specific locations in the town) from now on. That way they could categories the ideas people pinned in to types of interventions that they could draw upon should they decide to co-design a project in that specific type of place. For example, one participant said:

"It would be good if we could sort the ideas people have posted in to different categories, or themes of where they would be most useful to implement. Like, I think that any of the ideas posted that would work well in an alleyway makeover should be put together and anything that doesn't should go in to a different category, that way we can easily find ideas most useful to that specific space when we come to design something again" (Andrew).

I suggested to the participants that we could utilise the 'sections' functionality that Pinterest offers as a way to categorise the pins that had been added to the global board in to thematic areas, effectively creating a repository of potential ideas for urban interventions in the town depending on the type of space or aim of why the space is being transformed. The group thought that having different ideas to transform spaces compartmentalised in to relevant categories would make it easier to visualise and discuss future place transformations.

The post-it notes curated on the Miro board by participants from activity 2 of the workshop (figure 7) were used in order to help determine the categorisation of types of interventions within Pinterest. Figure 8 shows the pins reorganised by type of intervention following the themes discussed by participants within the Miro board activity. These included grouping pins based on their most appropriate location, the activity they supported or specific interventions. For example, location groupings included alley transformations, derelict buildings/structures and pop-up parks. Whilst activity groupings included pop-up events and play spaces. Specific interventions included urban gardening, street art and digital interventions.
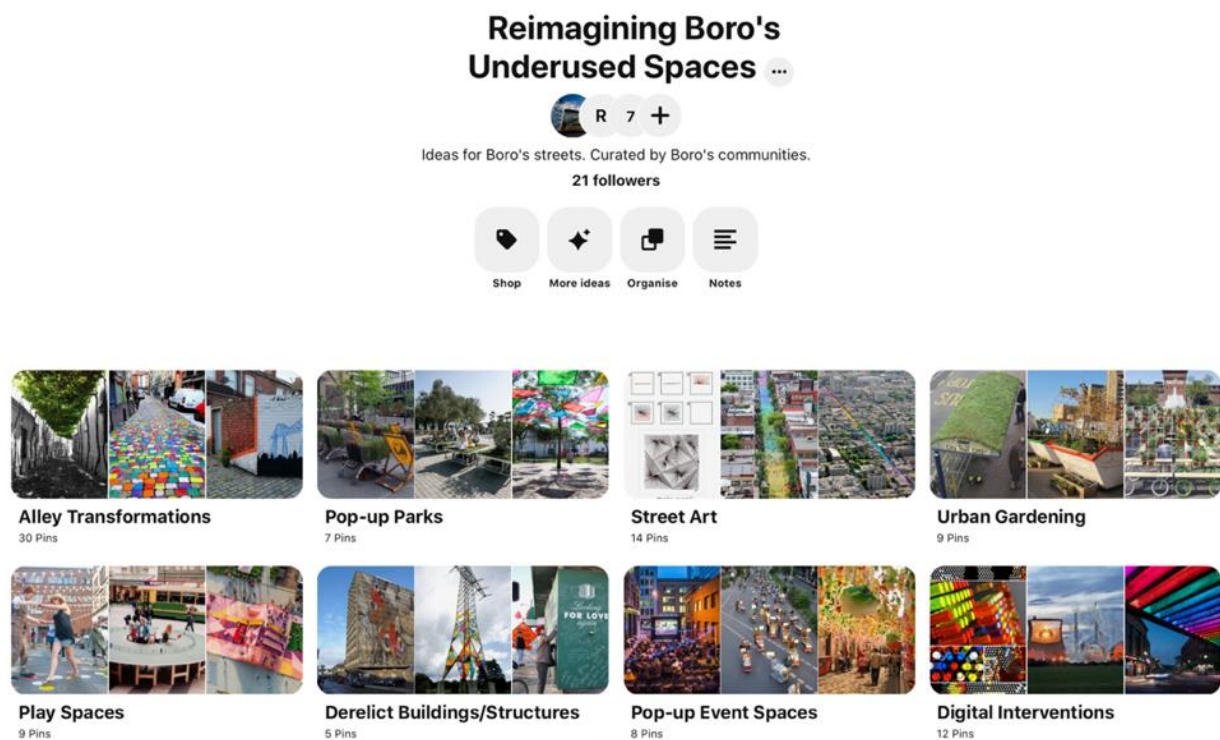
Figure 21 - Reorganisation of the Pinterest board with categories created of different types of placemaking interventions and the user-generated pins added to their relevant category

The pins from the previous 2-week asynchronous workshop that had been in one global board were then added to their relevant sub-boards. I grouped and reorganised these pins into the categories following the Miro board session due to the time constraints the group had in order to take part in this activity. However, the curation of the pins and their recategorisation came from the post-it notes participants had added to the Miro board activities.

The aim of curating these ideas into specific categories was to further aid ideation amongst the group as well as act as a reference tool for future design activities. However, whilst participants felt that having the Pinterest board available to refer too could be beneficial, they felt that some form of physical tool that articulated all of these different ideas in a digestible way would be much more beneficial to a placemaking co-design activity. As the group were planning to undertake a reimagination of an alleyway once pandemic lockdown restrictions were lifted, they believed that a physical tool that they could use together, in-situ - once lockdown restrictions were lifted - would be beneficial.

Therefore, participants decided upon converting the digital repository of ideas from Pinterest in to some form of physical toolkit that could be used with residents to co-design visions for specific places in the town would be a good idea, as having some form of tactile and visual tool would be much easier to aid discussion than a digital platform, in particular when they were able to conduct in-person group sessions again.

A final activity on Miro explored what this toolkit could look like and participants were asked to note down ideas for a tool that could support the co-design process through design challenges. The focus group decided that, as part of the toolkit, a series of design challenges could be created that would act as provocations to encourage debate and ideas sharing around alternative futures for the town. One participant had previously created prompt cards as part of a previous project to suggest ways in which specific locations in the town could be reimagined through creative interventions. These prompts were in the form of a card deck with visual aids and descriptions of what could be done in that space. The participants discussed how we could utilise this and create playful activities or challenges around reimagining alternative uses for these spaces. It was decided that the curated categories on the Pinterest board could be used to inform the design of this card deck using a similar concept suggested by one of the participants.
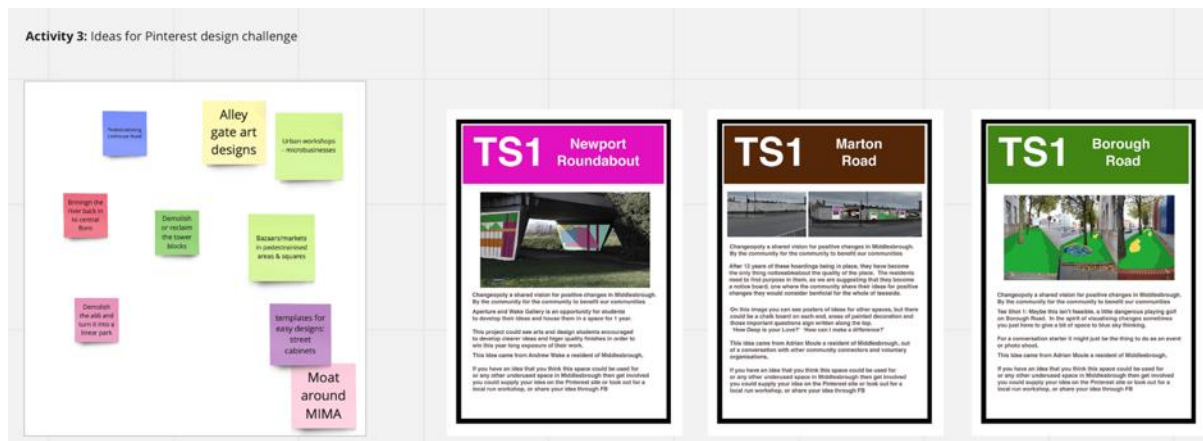
Figure 22 - Participant ideas for design challenges. Including 3 cards created by a research participant to show what these challenges could look like.

Having a physical tool that was informed by the curated ideas and shared knowledge from the community connectors group helped build shared ownership and enabled the group to build a tool that could support them articulate complex planning ideas whilst offering a way to involve non-experts in the envisioning process through visual prompts.

The subsequent sections offer insights into the design of the card deck, how groups used it to support the co-design of underused spaces as well as its effectiveness in articulating alternative place futures.

5.5 Insights on the creation of a physical tool

5.5.1 Card Deck

The following section offers insights into the creation of a physical tool that was identified as a need for the community group following on from the Pinterest board activities. In this section, I report on the design of the card deck. I also highlight how the card deck was deployed in various contexts to understand whether it could provide a useful tool in supporting the reimagination of underused spaces in the town.

5.5.2 Designing the card deck

In order to begin the process of designing the card deck, I held a workshop that invited those who had previously participated in the Pinterest board activity. The idea of this workshop was to reflect on what had been learnt so far, and to discuss what the card deck

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should look like to best facilitate communities to rethink underused spaces in their neighbourhoods.

As shown in figure 8, I conducted a series of mind mapping exercises where we reviewed the types of spaces that the communities would like to see transformed, their aspirations for how they can achieve these changes as well as the challenges they see to envisioning and implementing interventions.

Initially, the group was asked to think about the types of ideas they had posted within Pinterest and note down locations in their neighbourhood they believed could benefit from such interventions. Participants identified specific locations such as South Bank Old Market, TS4 Beck Path and Borough Road/Marton Road Hoardings. However, responses predominately were centred around general underused spaces without a specific location such as alleys, roundabouts/flyovers, rooftops, empty shops, vacant plots, blank walls and signposts. This activity helped to decide that what would be most useful for the card deck categories would be to not focus on specific locations within the town, but rather offer suggestions of interventions that could fit within a variety of settings. That way, the card deck created room for exploration and creativity rather than restricting participants to specific solutions for certain locations.

Second, participants were asked to think about their aspirations for a transformed Middlesbrough, to understand what types of interventions the card deck should focus on. Responses were again noted down as part of a mind mapping exercise and then a sense making activity took place to group these responses into themes. Participants described how they would like to see the routes into Middlesbrough beautified, have safer places to meet, play and be creative, an increase in biodiversity, more public art, increased opportunities for community healing and sharing as well as creative uses of derelict spaces.

Thinking about aspirations in this way made participants realise that much of what they hope for could be achieved through the types of tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture style interventions they had shared and learnt about in the Pinterest activity. Ensuring that these types of interventions were highlighted and reflected the Pinterest board content was

seen as an important element for Community Connectors in creating an effective tool they could use.

The final activity included mapping out the challenges participants thought could arise in engaging residents and implementing interventions. The reason for undertaking this final exercise was to understand what barriers participants felt needed to be addressed within the card deck. Whilst participants agreed that solutions to the issues raised as part of this activity could not be solved through the limited amount of information we were able to add to the card deck, nevertheless they felt it was a valuable activity in thinking about challenges that could arise beyond the initial envisioning phase of a project. Issues such as the reluctance of big organisations to embrace grassroots organisations, legal restrictions to implementing interventions, maintenance of spaces and finding funding were all raised as major barriers. However, despite these challenges' participants saw the principal value of the card deck as a tool to aid them in articulating visions and helping them to work with other members of the community to think outside of the box and reimagine underused spaces in ways that they hadn't previously thought possible. They highlighted that the importance of being involved in the conversation and co-designing the vision, regardless of ability to act, should be the main purpose of the tool.

This activity helped the group to prioritise what types of interventions should be included in the card deck and understand what Community Connectors wanted the tool to achieve in their conversations amongst residents. A prototype card deck was created using the feedback from this activity and a selection of interventions taken from those shared by participants, with the categorisation of pins based on type of intervention as previously highlighted in the 3rd activity of the reflective workshop to decide which suits the card deck should have.

Whilst the design, layout and content of the card deck was not co-designed during this session due to time constraints and setbacks brought on by new Covid restrictions, the use of the groups pins and reflections from workshop activities were used to help design the tool, ensuring that participants contributions were used as part of this process.

In total, the card deck included 7 "suits" which were categorised based on the types of intervention with 5 ideas suggested per suit. A 'how to' and introductory card were included at the beginning of each pack, as shown in figure 9 and appendix I. This ensured that the card deck could be passed on to users to run their own activities without my presence and without the need for a facilitator who had previously carried out an activity with the card deck. The how to card also included a QR code that linked back to the Pinterest board so users could explore a wider range of interventions not included in the card deck. This also created an added way for the co-curated interventions on Pinterest to be of use beyond this research, leaving space for growth and expansion of ideas as Community Connectors had full control of the Pinterest board for future projects.

The 7 suits that were included directly reflected the co-curated categorisation of interventions from Pinterest. These categories included the following:

- **Arty infrastructure** that highlighted simple ways communities could transform everyday street utilities such as bollards, electricity boxes, manhole covers and utility pipes.
- **Places for play** which focused on quick ways in which a use of a space can be transformed into fun, interactive spaces such as DIY mini golf, use of giant board games, installing community blackboards to allow communities to share their thoughts and ways to transform back alleys into basketball courts.
- **Urban Greening** offered inspiration for simple ways to add biodiversity to a street and in turn beautify underused spaces, examples such as turning skips in to mini parks, mobile urban forests that used old shopping trolleys for planting, and pothole interventions where activists turn pavement cracks into tiny green oasis that bring to attention city maintenance issues and the need to re-wild urban areas.
- **Programming** interventions included ways communities could activate a space through community uses such as urban living rooms that reclaim streets for residents to sit and talk to one another, transforming a space into a pop-up cinema or theatre and hosting community markets with local produce.

- **Overhead installations** highlighted clever ways everyday objects could be used to offer shelter as well as creating brighter and more intimate public spaces, interventions such as using old plastic folders, inflatables, lamp shades and umbrellas were all suggested as ways to achieve this.

- **Community Public Art** showed cheap ways residents could install their own art in public spaces using recycled and low-cost materials such as tape art to create a colourful display on an empty wall, using old milk crates to create a flexible seating space or art installation and yarn bombing that spontaneously promoted the unsanctioned transformation of tree trunks, bollards and posts into art works.

- **Safer Streets** which offered suggestions for how communities could make their neighbourhood streets safer and more attractive through interventions such as colourful crossings that add some colour to a street whilst also highlighting pedestrian crossing points, painted curb extensions or bump-outs which improve the aesthetics of a street butt also reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians by reclaiming spaces for people over vehicles and DIY Bike Lanes which advocates for better and more extensive cycle lanes.

After discussion with Community Connectors members, it was decided that they would like to print 2 different sizes of cards. They wanted the tool to be mobile so that they could use the decks in small workshops and team meetings as well as offering them the ability to carry the tool around with them to use in the community and hand out card decks for groups for their own use. The group also wanted to be able to use the tool in outdoor settings with larger groups of people as having the card deck visible in-situ would enable a wider and more accessible discussion with residents. Therefore, 10 sets of business size card decks were printed and 3 sets of A1 cards. Figure 12 shows an example of the size of cards produced along with the 7 suits chosen from the Pinterest board.

Figure 25 - Printed Card Decks in business card and A1 sizes

5.5.3 Deploying the card deck

In order to ensure the card deck met the needs of Community Connectors, I held three workshops with the aim of testing if the card deck could support groups to discuss placemaking interventions, build shared knowledge of what is possible and ultimately understand if the tool could support them in designing their own vision for underused space transformation.

To achieve this, the card deck was tested in 3 different settings and using 3 different underused space locations. This was done to ensure that the tool was versatile and could be adapted to different scenarios. Alongside this, card decks were handed out to other community leaders in the town who had shown an interest in testing out the card decks in their communities. Due to lockdown restrictions, it wasn't possible to gain feedback on every interaction that took place where the card deck was used.

5.5.3.1 Workshop 1 – Residential Alleyway – Off-site

A residential alleyway familiar with participants was chosen as the focus for this workshop, due to weather restrictions this session was held in a local coffee shop following COVID-19 guidelines. Whilst the original plan was to hold this session in-situ within the alleyway, the change of plans offered the opportunity to understand how a co-design session could work without being present in the space the community want to transform. To support the visualisation process when not in-situ, I opted to print several photos of the space and decrease the opacity to allow participants to visualise the space in its current state, whilst offering a canvas for them to draw their vision for a reimagined space on top as shown in the below images.
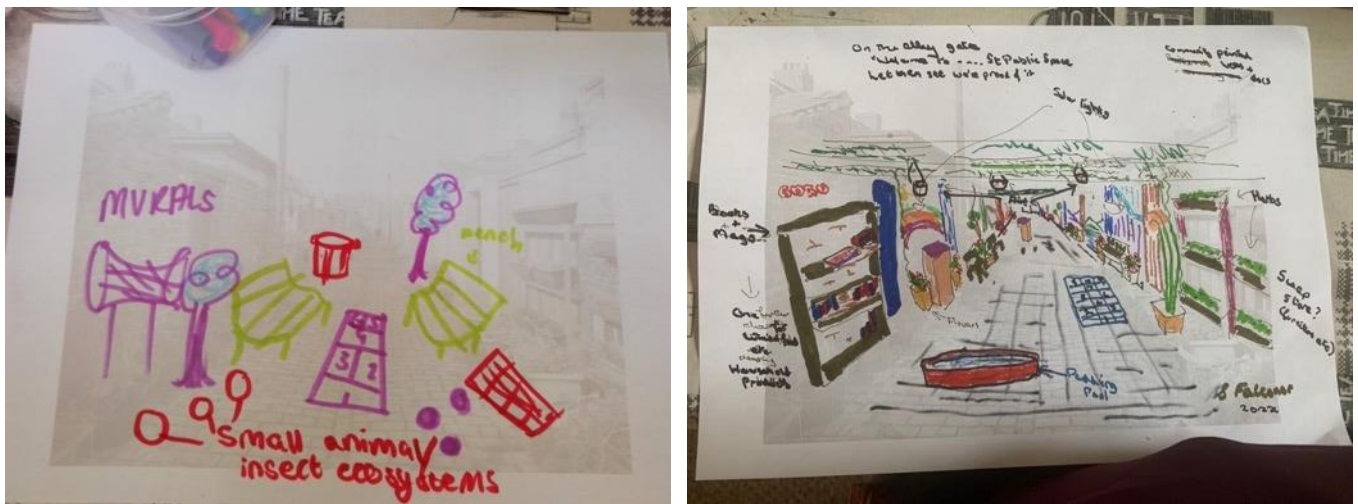
Figure 26 - Sample of visions created by participants during workshop 1

Initially, participants were asked to look at the space in its current state and discuss amongst one another the issues the space currently faces, how often they use it and how they would like to use it in the future. Participants were able to describe the problems they saw with the space from uncollected rubbish, the number of weeds in the space and their apprehension to use the space after dark. However, participants struggled to articulate the practical changes they would like to see to alleviate these issues:

"I'm struggling to see why people would want to use this space as its dirty and not an inviting space to be in" (Sam).

"I think people don't go out in the alley because of the negative perception the space has and I don't think I would use it even if we did clean it up. We don't have the money to really change it and other than knocking it all down and starting again I don't think we can make it a nice place to go to" (Arianna).

At this point, I introduced the card deck to the group and asked them to go through the cards one by one and discuss which of the interventions they believed might help them to solve some of the issues they raised. One participant, upon seeing the possibilities for transforming a space the card deck highlights, immediately expressed their frustration at how the space currently is and remarked "why aren't we doing more of these things?" (Matt), whilst another participant said, "it really makes you think about the potential" (Sam). The immediate reaction to the introduction of the card deck showed how it helped participants think beyond the current state of the space and challenge the perceptions and prejudices of the potential of this space.

The initial positive reaction of the cards amongst the group helped them to begin to think about alternative ways the space could be used. As conversation continued, I introduced the concept of tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture to the group, describing how the interventions suggested in the card deck can be described using these concepts as well as how they could be harnessed by the community to transform the underused spaces in their community and prefigure the future they want to see. However, some participants struggled with the sheer number of ideas and found the task overwhelming. With one participant saying, "I love these ideas, but I just don't know which one would work in the alley and if it would even make a difference, there's just too many issues to solve" (Sam).

In order to turn the discussion of abstract ideas into a vision, I asked participants to draw what they would like to see the alleyway become. They were asked to use the cards to help them form their ideas, but without worrying about the practicalities and feasibility of implementing the interventions. The visuals varied in detail as previously shown in the images above, however the activity of drawing out their vision helped them to articulate actual interventions they felt would really make a difference to the space. One participant said, "the cards really helped me to think outside of the box and helped me to think about

all of the different possibilities and simple ways we could change the space to make it more usable" (Tommy).

Whilst this initial workshop had to be improvised due to weather constraints, the addition of the photos that participants were able to draw their own vision on helped them to take ownership of the task and ultimately supported them in envisioning change that solved many of the issues they had raised at the beginning of the workshop.

5.5.3.2 Workshop 2 – Brunswick Street – Off-site

The next workshop took place in Community Connectors' community space in a central shopping centre within the town, again following the COVID-19 social distancing guidelines at the time. The pool of participants at this workshop came from across the area rather than one neighbourhood. Therefore, 3 centrally located urban voids were chosen that all participants were familiar with. Again, due to the time of year conducting this workshop, the activities took place off-site and a similar structure was used as the first workshop.

Initially, the plan was to split participants in to 3 groups where each would be given a different location. However, due to a smaller turn-out than expected, I decided that the activity should take place as one large group and participants were given the option of which of the 3 locations they would like to explore.

The first activity of this workshop followed a similar structure to the previous workshop where participants were shown several images of the location and asked to discuss what they believe doesn't work in this location, why it is underused, what activities currently take place here, what perception or feeling does this space give and finally, to discuss any assets or positives this space has in its current state. Given that the site sits in a centrally located area close to the railway station and close to the town's major nightlife spots, conversation centred around how the area has high footfall, however, has become a hotspot for drug use and anti-social behaviour on an evening so it is often seen as an unsafe place by many local residents and thus has a negative perception amongst many.

After participants had identified the main issues at this location, they were then asked to imagine they had been given a £1,000 budget to transform and repurpose this space. At this point, they were introduced to the card deck and asked to co-design a vision of what this space could become. Each card was given a monetary value, and participants were told they could use as many or as little cards as they wanted within the budget to transform the space. Whilst the budget and monetary value of the cards was arbitrary and was not based on any real-world cost comparison, the gamification of this task added an additional challenge for the group, forcing them to debate and think rationally about which interventions would be most effective.

Participants were also given the option to draw out their vision using a similar method to the previous workshop. However, this time photos of the site were given for reference and a stencilled outline (appendix H) of the street scene was given as a blank canvas for participants to draw their vision on.
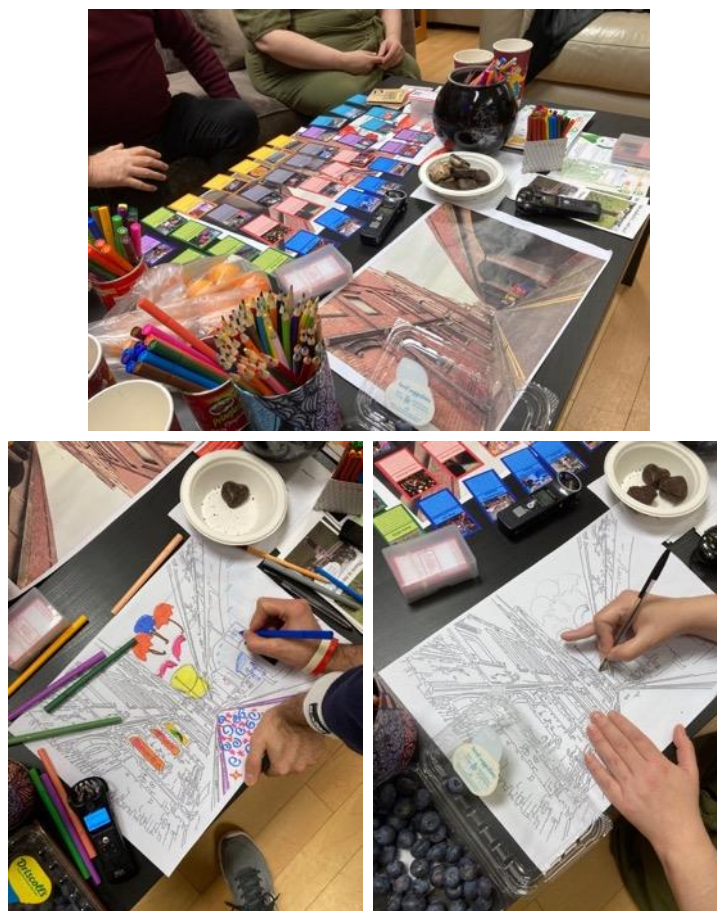
Figure 27 - Showing participants using card deck and drawing their visions on to street scene template provided

Participants were then asked to feedback their vision for that space and reflect as to what extent the card deck supported them in building their vision. One participant said that having to add up the total cost of the interventions they had chosen influenced the vision they were able to create. Whilst it did limit them in what they felt would have been best in that space, the group did remark that in a real-world setting sacrifices and restraints on resources would influence the interventions they were able to implement so this was a good exercise in understanding the realities of placemaking.

Another participant felt that whilst the card deck was thought provoking and provided them with ideas, they would not have thought of previously, choosing interventions just from the card deck was limiting. As discussion developed participants came up with ideas that weren't shown in the card deck, therefore one participant suggested including a blank card with every pack to allow participants the flexibility to add new ideas and contribute to the evolution of the tool.

Some participants found that drawing out their vision on the templates provided helped them to articulate what they would like to see in the space, whilst others preferred discussing their ideas and weren't as comfortable in translating these thoughts onto the drawing.

There was also some confusion in the group of the hypothetical nature of the activity. Whilst some participants understood the idea of the task to provoke ideas and build shared knowledge amongst the group, others struggled with how to turn these ideas in to action. Having this discussion however, helped the group identify the main barriers they would face in trying to implement a project like this. A participant described how they felt that there is no will power or interest from the council to support projects like this as they aren't interested in grassroots movements or small-scale interventions, rather they saw the council as focusing solely on large masterplans and multi-million-pound regeneration schemes. There was a consensus amongst the group that, should they pursue these types of projects, they would have to take it on themselves through unsanctioned interventions and hope when the local authority sees positive change, they will then get the political buy-in

needed. Issues of funding and planning permission were also raised as major barriers to achieving the groups visions.

5.5.3.3 Workshop 3 – Residential Alleyway – In-situ

The final workshop took place in-situ, as part of Community Connectors existing program of alleyway makeovers. The aim of these makeovers is to build connections amongst residents who share an alleyway and work together over the course of a day to clean up the space through a series of interventions. Even though several successful alleyway makeovers had previously been completed by Community Connectors without using any visualisations tools to aid the design process, organisers felt that the introduction of this tool could improve the outcome of their makeovers.

Adam, an organiser of the event, noted that whilst the group had previously run several successful makeovers, there was never a structured way to hold a conversation with residents about what they would like to change in the space. Rather, each resident would decide individually what they would like to work on such as weeding, painting a mural, creating planters or gardening without a cohesive plan for what the space could be like as a whole.

Therefore, I decided to use the card deck as part of the initial clean up activity where residents came together to weed the alley and tidy rubbish. The larger A1 cards were primarily used so they were more visible in an outdoor setting. However, it was clear to see from the outset that given the nature of conducting design activities in an outdoor setting with a large and diverse group of participants, it would be difficult for the group to collectively co-design a vision for the space. Issues such as residents not being able to hear each other across the space, windy conditions resulting in the cards blowing around the alley and the group not having a specific workspace in order to plan out their visions all contributed to the problem of trying to hold a collective conversation in this space. Therefore, I made the decision to adapt the activity and suggested that the cards would be better as an informal tool to aid conversation and provoke ideas sharing. The cards were left

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in the space for residents to view as and when they chose, with the hope that a more informal and unstructured approach to their use may be more effective in this setting.

After the initial clean up activity, residents began completing the tasks they usually undertake at every alleyway makeover. This predominantly revolved around gardening activities and some paint touch ups on the existing murals in the space. What was interesting was how the group immediately sort to transform the uses of the space from a service alley where the primary function is for the storage of waste bins, to a public living room that essentially prefigured how residents would like to see the space used in the future. The laying of artificial grass, spaces to sit and outdoor games all contributed to the reimagining of this space using small scale, low-cost and rapid interventions and shows an example of prefigurative placemaking in action. As shown in the images below over the years the group have managed to turn the alleyway in to usable community space where residents can gather.

Figure 28 - Showing before and after the interventions from the group's alleyway makeovers.

As previously discussed, there was already the knowledge in the community of tactical urbanism principles as evidenced by the way in which the group used physical interventions to reimagine the space and change its primary function. The layout of the space upon completion of this makeover provided the space for discourse amongst residents and therefore it became more conducive to hold a conversation using the card deck. To ensure the tool didn't become more of a burden than an asset to the conversations amongst

residents, they were left in the middle of the space with some blank pieces of paper and pens. This way, residents could choose to use them should they choose without forcing them into conversation.

As residents sat in the newly transformed space, conversations naturally started to centre around what residents would like to do next in the alleyway. Residents were curious about the card deck, and it became a useful prompt to give residents ideas and inspiration for the space. Without any interjection from myself, or suggestion of how to use the cards, residents began to sieve through them and discuss which interventions they liked or disliked.

One resident, whilst looking through the cards, provided a commentary on how they felt the ideas shown in the cards should be shown to the local council to encourage them to implement these interventions:

"I don't know why it takes them so long to do anything in the centre of town, it's so dull and empty yet they'll spend millions on new cycle lanes that nobody wants but could do most of these ideas here [pointing to the cards] *for a fraction of the cost and really improve things"* *(Sue).*

Whilst not directly related to the reimagination of the residents' alleyways the cards acted as a provocation that enabled political discourse and supported the resident to express their views on the state of the town as well as their aspirations for its future.

Another group formed around the cards and discussed which of the ideas they'd like to see, comments such as *"I'd love to see some bunting or lights in this space so it's not so dark on a night" (Sarah)* were followed up by another resident interjecting discussing the practicalities of implementing such an intervention: *"I'd love to see that as well but where would we get power from and who would pay for it" (Sam)*. Whilst another resident noted that they could *"just use solar lights" (Tommy)* to avoid this issue. Discussions like this highlight how the card deck can be an effective tool in not only providing the initial idea for an intervention

but support community conversations on how they can take action and overcome practical issues through discourse.

Figure 29 - Residents enjoying the space and drawing out their visions whilst using the cards as a tool to aid ideation

The image above shows residents interacting with the cards and drawing out their own ideas. The group collectively decided on three interventions from the card deck they hope to implement a future alleyway makeover. These included creating a pop-up cinema or theatre in the space with one resident remarking *"a pop-up cinema would be a great way to get more residents involved and be a great way for us to meet new people" (Aaron)* whilst another resident noted *"transforming the space in to a giant cinema would be a great use of the space and allow us to imagine beyond what it looks like at the moment" (Andrew)*. Residents also selected the electricity boxes and murals cards from the deck as potential future interventions, with one resident saying, *"I'd love for us to do more murals on the walls as they are looking a bit dull again and the idea of painting the electricity boxes at the end of the alley would be fantastic"* (Rob).

The group took this as an opportunity to draw their own ideas for what they want the next murals to look like as well as think about designs for other structures in the space. One resident said *"if we are going to paint the electricity boxes, then why not paint all of the bins, doors and things like the pipes" (Julia).* Thus, highlighting how the card deck is a useful tool to aiding further ideation beyond the interventions suggested. The image below shows the interventions the residents chose for their next alleyway makeover as well as the designs they came up for future art works in the space.

Figure 30 - Chosen interventions from this activity and designs created by the residents for murals

In conclusion, the card deck was not used as intended in this activity and did not succeed in supporting the group to implement any intervention in the space on the day of the alleyway makeover. Rather, it did support the group to plan for interventions for the next event and articulate some of their ideas for future artworks. Furthermore, the cards were a useful tool in enabling political discourse and in supporting residents to articulate their frustrations. Whilst at the same time, helping them to articulate their aspirations for the future of their local area. The cards still acted as a useful tool in the placemaking process for the community even when used in an informal manner, rather than as part of a structured workshop activity.

The flexibility and versatility in their uses across the three pilot projects, shows how they can be appropriated to different settings and needs. The first workshop showed how the

card deck can challenge people's perceptions of a space and provoke them to imagine alternative uses for a space to make it a more attractive and inviting area through community uses. The second workshop challenged residents to collectively co-design interventions for a problematic underused space in the town centre and gamified the activity to help them understand the possibilities and limitations to implementing placemaking interventions. Finally, the third workshop acted as a useful prompt to support local residents build upon the improvements already made in a space and think about ways in which they could create a more welcoming environment through co-designing interventions that encourages the community to come together in the space.

5.6 Discussion

The following section details several important themes from this work. Highlighting the importance of discovery in envisioning place futures, the way in which visual methods can support communities to articulate complex planning concepts and the opportunities co-curation can have in building shared knowledge of community-led placemaking interventions.

5.6.1 The Importance of discovery within the envisioning process

An initial observation of this work was that participants struggled with the capacity to imagine beyond the current state of the spaces they were attempting to reimagine. They struggled with seeing beyond these spaces as unsafe, dirty, and neglected which speaks to research question 2 *"What are the challenges for citizens in reimagining urban voids in post-industrial areas?".* Rather than positioning cultural inertia as a main challenge for imagining, this research used the Pinterest board and card deck to create an environment for discovery. The visual prompts and participatory activities were designed to engage participants in exploring new possibilities, helping them to move beyond initial perceptions of underused spaces. This approach highlights how the tools acted as mechanisms for fostering creative thinking and facilitated a move away from entrenched ideas about the potential of place. This supports the work of Davoudi et al. (2018) who argued that imaginaries offer space for challenging preconceived assumptions and allows for alternative

ideas of what could be to come to light. Likewise, this work agrees with Sartre (2010) and Neuman & Hull (2009) who both highlighted that if we cannot imagine alternative possibilities of the world beyond its current state then we cannot be free, nor can we manage and seek to build a better world. The Pinterest and card deck prompts facilitated participants to imagine beyond the current state of the spaces and begin to envision how these spaces could be better used in the future.

The process of discovery that took place in this case study where participants shared examples of placemaking interventions they would like to see implemented in their neighbourhoods, enabled imagination to transport participants to another reality. The design interventions therefore created a context in which participants could momentarily suspend their preconceived ideas, opening space for creative imagination. By reframing these barriers as conditions to be engaged with, rather than simply barriers to be removed, this research emphasises how visual provocations can invite participants to rethink what place could become, irrespective of the existing cultural narratives. Dunn (2018) stated that achieving this in processes of imagination can enable us to tackle the most challenging problems through the sharing of ideas and the exploration of pluralistic possibilities that can reimagine the status quo.

The initial approach taken in this work where participants were able to curate ideas in an asynchronous manner, meant they were able to discover ideas on an individual level before coming together as a wider group to collectively envision what the spaces in their neighbourhood could be. Davoudi et al. (2018) found that the pluralism inherent in imaginaries means that they are able to operate on an intersubjective level where collective understandings develop among a group of people, this was visible in this case study where the various and competing imaginaries of each participant developed through a process of discovery came together and developed into a collective vision for the group's aspirations for their community. This plurality enabled a more open and creative process, something Davidoff (1965) argued as being an essential part of any successful planning process.

The process of discovery demonstrated in this case study helps to answer research question 1, in that, by using the Pinterest board and card decks as design provocations to support

envisioning, it allowed debate to flourish and enabled the discovery of solutions to local issue, supporting DiSalvo (2015) arguments on the ability for design to contribute to public discourse and civic life. Likewise, Le Dantec (2016) described how design enables discussions about how things *might be* rather than how things *are*, which supports participants to transcend what currently exists and imagine alternative worlds.

As discussed, the tools deployed throughout this case study created the space for discovery within the envisioning process. However, during the Pinterest deployment, participants didn't utilise the platform in the way previous studies had found when co-curating ideas on Pinterest. Scolere & Humphreys (2016) had argued that Pinterest was most effective at supporting users discover ideas through the repining of content from within the platform as opposed to the creation of original content. However, whilst this deployment did show that participants utilised this feature to aid in the discovery process, predominantly participants added their own content to the platform. Placing a higher value on pinning original content as opposed to repining, highlights the agency these participants demonstrated at an early stage of the envisioning process and thus their desire to express their aspirations for alternative place futures.

The structure of the Pinterest board and the extensive bank of ideas available to participants through the platform made the discovery process easier. Participants could easily find similar ideas to those they had uploaded through the intelligence of Pinterest's algorithms. At the same time, being able to visualise ideas from elsewhere and share them amongst their community ignited feelings of optimism and hope for the future with participants able to identify specific locations they would like to implement interventions. Likewise, the simplicity in the card deck design and range of ideas chosen enabled participants to imagine how bottom-up interventions in public spaces could challenge preconceived ideas of specific spaces and how they can be used to address societal issues as previously discussed by Lindner & Meissner (2019).

5.6.2 Visual tools to articulate desired futures

Research question 1 asked how can the use of design provocations support citizen groups to articulate their aspirations for the future of place and challenge top-down decision making?

This case study demonstrates that through the use of prompts, scenarios and visualisations as tools within a co-design process, where citizens were able to imagine alternative uses for urban voids. This supports the work of Pollastri et al. (2017) as they found that design can create ways of making possible futures visible. The curatorial nature of populating the Pinterest board with contrasting visuals can create spaces for contestation and different experiences amongst citizens, something Asad (2019) argued as a positive outcome in the design process. Asad argues that stimulating dissensus through the designed 'thing' in this case, the pins shared by participants, can create more inclusive and radical ideas in public space design, it enables presumptions of what a space is and what it could be, to be challenged. This is particularly acute in relation to urban voids, spaces that citizens struggle to see beyond their current use and are widely viewed as nothingness spaces, representing an areas neglect or failure in local psyche. This in turn affects a community's ability to imagine beyond the current state of things as Chapman (2010) argued. The Pinterest activity aimed to provide the tools necessary to invite participants to consider new possibilities for their communities. The design provocations acted as vehicles for articulating aspirations that went beyond existing narratives and facilitated a space where participants could engage with more imaginative concepts for the reutilisation of underused urban spaces.

Whilst the Pinterest activity demonstrated an alternative way for participants to share ideas and express aspirations for changes to their neighbourhood, it also created problems for the group in communicating with one another. The structure of the board and the lack of organisation meant that participants found it difficult to view other users pins and weren't able to contribute as they would have liked. However, as Hall & Zarro, (2012) discussed, the curatorial experience that Pinterest offers through the ability to copy content and reconceptualise or recategorise, created opportunities to articulate and express new ideas.

Moreover, whilst the Pinterest board enabled participants to curate ideas remotely, the online platform posed challenges in fostering meaningful, sustained dialogue. Participants often noted that in-person workshops allowed for richer discussions, as tangible tools like maps and ideation cards supported more dynamic, hands-on collaboration. This highlights the importance of selecting the right tool for the right situation; while digital tools can

facilitate individual contributions, non-digital artefacts proved more effective in collective modes of working where the focus was on immediate, creative exchange.

As the group came together to collectively problem solve, they in turn curated the pins posted into categories that made sense for them. It enabled the group to move from the discovery and ideation phase to begin the process of co-designing their desired futures. This highly visual way of curating ideas offers a potential solution to the issues Wilson et al. (2019) found with encouraging residents to move beyond using technology to simply report the problems they find in their neighbourhoods to actively playing a role in shaping the future of place. In this sense, the utilisation of technology within the planning process needs to come at the initial ideation phase of a project in order to provide residents with the tools to articulate the change they want to see.

Wilson (ibid) found that formal planning processes have not yet harnessed the potential of social media in creating meaningful engagement between citizens and decision makers and that online platforms are used as a means to disseminate information and share decisions as opposed to utilising these platforms as a way to provoke discussion and canvas views on place futures. The findings demonstrated in this case study illustrate one possible way for online platforms to be used in novel ways to improve engagement processes and enable collective imagining of place futures. It also affords opportunities to materialise futures through rapidly prototyping and testing out new ideas through visual means as argued by Gordon et. al (2011). The board enabled a conversation with a wider demographic who may have felt a barrier to participate in the processes of placemaking using traditional planning tools such as technical drawings and mapping exercises, as Wilson discussed, these tools often fail to engage citizens in meaningful ways (Wilson et al., 2019).

It was found that Pinterest as a platform wasn't the perfect to solution to achieve the issues identified by Wilson et al. (2019) and Gordon et. al (2011). Mainly due to the unorganised nature of the boards and the issues participants found when contributing. The highly visual nature and curatorial possibilities it offered is something that could benefit formal planning processes, particularly at the initial ideation phase of a urban development project, as called for by Al-Kodmany (1999, 2001); Kunze et al. (2012) and Glaas et al. (2020).

Likewise, the introduction of the placemaking ideation cards to group discussions, created the platform for residents to articulate their desired futures. Having a physical prompt to refer to enabled the groups to think beyond the current state of a space, challenge what is possible and build new imaginaries for these places. Lindner et al. (2019) agreed, demonstrating how urban imaginaries can be used as tools to communicate alternative futures and articulate citizens desires for change in their local area. The playfulness the card deck afforded as part of the workshop activity offers insights into a novel approach to articulate to residents the practicalities of implementing placemaking interventions without complex planning language, alleviating the issues Baker et al. (2007) described when critiquing traditional planning processes. Introducing the complexities of the planning process in this playful way enabled residents to be involved with and build understanding of the processes required to enact place changes without prior experience of the planning system or design based visioning exercises.

Eiter and Vik (2015) argue that there is a need for more visual aids within planning processes. The lack of visual methods to engage and disseminate information on place change suppresses opportunities for local residents to engage and does little to elicit imagination. The fact that planning is usually conduced behind closed doors, where visuals are created without opportunity for citizen input and creativity restricted due to overly procedural and legalistic processes has long been argued as a failure of planning systems by Friedmann (1987) and Fainstein (2006 & 2010). Fainstein has called for more inclusive and equitable approaches, and Friedmann has criticised the limitations proceduralism has in addressing complex planning issues. This research demonstrated how participatory design tools such as digital platforms and card decks can support communities in the ideation phase of urban space renewal. Rather than presenting cultural inertia as an immovable barrier, the findings illustrate how these interventions can create opportunities for communities to collectively visualise alternative futures and explore the potential of underused spaces in new ways. The way this case study provided the tools to enable communities to co-produce their own visuals and think beyond legalistic and procedural approaches to reimagining place can alleviate the issues Friedmann and Fainstein identified.

Building on this, the design provocations used created non-technical methods to enable non-planning experts to prefigure their aspirations for transformed urban void spaces, agreeing with the work of Hope et al. (2019) who stated that non-technical methods can enable subject-matter experts, i.e. residents of a neighbourhood to become equal co-designers in the prefiguration of urban voids. Pollastri et al. (2017) also stated how the use of visualisation techniques as part of a participatory design process can enable groups to visualise worlds that don't currently exist. Ponzini (2019) highlights how the envisioning of alternative futures and the manifestation of urban imaginaries is inherently linked to the production of visual material, the use of design provocations in this case study through both Pinterest and the card deck offers potential mechanisms to support the production of this visual material.

The card deck format effectively replicated the Pinterest board. Taking the digital pins from their categories and turning them into a physical tool. The way in which participants responded to and saw more value in a physical tool rather than a digital platform to supporting them co-design visions was interesting, this supports the findings of Wilson et al. (2019) that participants prefer tangible, physical tools as a way to discuss place futures. The familiarity of the concept of cards to solving issues, building knowledge, and playing games through the likes of flash cards and board games could explain why participants responded to this as an effective placemaking tool for visualising place change over a digital platform.

The role of design as a mechanism to enable visualisation through the creation of visuals acted as a way of bringing the group together around a shared desire to transform the urban voids in their communities, an observation also noted by Le Dantec (2016). Likewise, design offered novel ways for the group to conceive of and effectively articulate their aspirations for the voids and in doing, the provocations support the shaping of new imaginaries that reshape beliefs about the potential of urban space, creating new opportunities for community-led action, building on the work of Di Salvo (2015) who explores the potential for design to create new artefacts, visuals, systems, and events.

However, whilst the visuals showed real-world examples that helped participants imagine new possibilities for their community, they also had an unintended side effect. Many

participants became fixated on replicating these examples exactly, rather than adapting the ideas to suit their specific context. This reflects the double-edged nature of using real-world examples in design visualisations, showing that they can inspire but also limit creativity by limiting participants imagination to a specific set of existing solutions.

My role in introducing these real-world visual examples through the Pinterest board reflected the dual nature of my positionality as both researcher and designer. While the examples helped participants engage with tangible concepts, the expertise I brought to selecting and framing these visuals may have inadvertently limited their capacity to think beyond replication. This echoes Ward's (1973) critique of architects speaking for communities, where the authority of the professional often leads participants to defer to existing solutions rather than explore their own.

5.6.3 Building capacity & shared knowledge through co-curation

The insights have shown that the idea of collectively curating ideas can increase participation in placemaking activities. The work of Scolere & Humphreys (2016) demonstrated how precedent images, or existing examples of design are an integral part of the ideation process. They can increase participants knowledge of the potential to transform spaces, discover inspiration and enable them to identify patterns that could solve future design problems, supporting understanding of research question 1 as it provides citizens with a sense of agency due to the added knowledge and tools available to them to enact change locally. It also offers a way to reengage communities with planning processes and rebuild capacity to imagine alternative futures, an issue explored by Chapman (2010). As participants feel more involved and build knowledge of how they can enact change, they take on a stronger sense of ownership and are more likely to stay engaged.

This case study also demonstrated alternatives to traditional engagement methods, where plans are drawn up and then presented to the public for their opinion as discussed by Baker et al. (2007). The findings also agrees with the work of Pretty (1995) who found that involving communities at the initial envisioning or ideation stage can have a major influence on the final outcome of a development, Pretty argued that involving citizens at the earliest conception stage can build community capacity through knowledge sharing. This in turn,

empowers citizens to take action as they develop a sense of agency over the future of their neighbourhood, something that was evidenced in the findings of this study.

Lapolla (2014) highlighted how participants ability to collaborate with others and to share ideas with someone else was a beneficial experience. Co-curation in this way - or in the case of the Pinterest design provocation - digital curation, as previously discussed by Scolere & Humphreys (2016), Hall (2012) and Duggan et. al (2014) can act as a form of meaning exchange. The insights show how new publics were formed around a shared activity where participants were able to disseminate and curate new knowledge (Marrtinon, 2013) around a collective aspiration to improve underused spaces in their communities. This can be said to be a form of design activism as described by Mallo et al. (2020) as the design provocations enabled citizens to find solutions to common problems and prefigure alternative possibilities for the use of urban voids.

Known as design activism, this approach as Mallo and Tardiveau argue can be the catalyst to build communities of practise, where through creativity and design, communities find solutions to common place problems and prefigure alternative futures for urban voids. Silva (2016) argued that when communities come to realise that they already have the knowledge and skill sets to make physical changes in the urban realm, they are empowered to act, removing a reliance on outside actors to make change.

This case study demonstrated how both social media and a physical tool could be used to support co-creation and knowledge sharing in community-led placemaking processes. Acting as a co-creation toolkit, these activities enabled participants to discover inspirational ideas that could inform the co-design of alternative visions for underused spaces and increase knowledge of placemaking interventions. The group were empowered though being introduced to concepts that challenged preconceived ideas that in order to enact transformation in underused spaces groups wouldn't have the technical knowledge, funds or resources to make them a reality.

The ability for participants to share their own thoughts, ideas and inspiration gave them the agency to express their aspirations (Lapolla, 2014) and initiate wider conversation about

placemaking in their communities. The spin-off projects of the alley gate competition and postcard activity show how this work provided the catalyst and built capacity within the community to create new projects and form new publics around other local place-based issues that could be solved through the implementation of these types of placemaking interventions.

The asynchronous and unstructured approach to this case study enabled an open dialogue and allowed for flexibility and change depending on the context of the situation. As Lapolla (2014) argued, many co-creative toolkits that must be carried out in a timed, structured session, don't adapt well to external changes and issues. Rather, this approach allowed for participants to use their intuitive and contribute to discussions as and when they wanted, offering them greater influence and agency throughout the design of the tools themselves and the subsequent visions for their neighbourhood spaces.

However, whilst the use of real-world examples provided concrete inspiration and help build knowledge amongst participants, it must also be said that my expertise in curating and presenting these visuals may have inadvertently swayed participants towards a tendency to replicate ideas. This suggests that my role as an expert in the use of design to support communities, even when deployed with the aim of empowerment, can lead to a kind of subtle paternalism, where participants adopt existing solutions instead of innovating. This resonates with Sandercock's (1998) critique of professional interventions in community-led processes, where the expert's presence can overshadow a communities agency.

5.7 Conclusion

The iterative process of co-curating ideas through the appropriation of Pinterest and the subsequent workshops, as well as the creation and deployment of the placemaking ideation cards, offers valuable insights into community-led envisioning of place futures. The findings also highlight opportunities to empower communities as called for by Pretty (1995) and Silva (2016). It enabled these communities to prefigure desires for place futures through the building of knowledge of complex planning concepts such as urban acupuncture. Doing so through the use of accessible, everyday language and visual provocations tackled an issue identified in the work of Baker et al. (2007) who called for less jargon in discussion on urban

change. Likewise, Fainstein (2006 & 2010) called for exploration in to approaches that removed the procedural nature inherent within planning, of which this case study demonstrated more creative ways to engage citizens in planning.

The adaption of a widely used social media tool to support a community led envisioning process was a useful activity for exploring alternative ways to communicate during the pandemic. It enabled a continued discussion amongst community members and reignited a dormant conversation on place futures, building on the work of Martinon (2013) who noted how digital curation can act as a form of meaning exchange amongst publics. The way participants utilised the Pinterest board to curate ideas and share their own aspirations for underused spaces was a valuable part of the process and, whilst participation was low, it provided the community group with the space and tools they needed to co-design their own placemaking tool.

The Pinterest board allowed participants to curate ideas and share visions for place futures, but its effectiveness varied. While some participants engaged deeply with the visual content, others found it difficult to communicate their ideas within the rigid structure of the platform. Several participants noted that it was easier to articulate their thoughts and collaboratively develop ideas using tangible tools, such as the placemaking ideation cards introduced later in the study. This suggests that digital platforms like Pinterest are useful for initial ideation but may struggle to support more nuanced, collective discussions.

Likewise, the visuals were successful in helping participants see potential for transformation, but they also led to a tendency to focus on replicating existing solutions. This reliance on real-world examples suggests that design visualisations must be carefully curated to balance inspiration with adaptability to ensure that participants are encouraged to work out what's best depending on their situation rather than replicating ideas that may not be fully suited to their context.

Moreover, the successes of using real-world examples must be critically examined considering my own role as researcher and designer. While the visuals enabled participants to see the potential for transformation, the reliance on real-world examples could suggest

that my design expertise, rather than community-driven ideation, guided much of the engagement. This raises questions about the extent to which the process was genuinely democratic, as my positionality may have shaped the direction of the interventions in ways that reinforced, rather than disrupted, existing power dynamics.

The subsequent card deck created offered the group the flexibility to test out different co-design activities in varied settings with a range of group sizes. Whilst activities were often unstructured, it meant that the tool was adaptable to the needs of the group in each session and ultimately meant that they were able to effectively articulate shared visions for urban voids in their communities and support a prefigurative placemaking process.

In summary, these activities provided useful tools that provoked a discussion amongst residents on their needs and desires for change in their community. Beginning the design process off through an initial stage of discovery and inspiration and providing the tools for participants to co-curate these ideas allowed for knowledge building and sharing. The toolkit then enabled the group to prefigure alternative futures for urban voids and empowered the various groups to challenge and change perceptions of problem spaces, whilst also helping residents to realise the power they have to make change and participate in prefigurative placemaking in their community. However, it also highlighted how an overreliance on using real-world examples to aid ideation can inadvertently cause participants to overly rely on these ideas in discussions rather than suggesting their own innovations.

Chapter 6 - Designing speculative future provocations as a tool to elicit reimaginations of urban voids

6.1 Introduction

This case study presents an iteration of a participatory design process that aimed to foster discussion on the reimagination of under-used and neglected public spaces through community-led envisioning of alternative urban futures. It explores ways in which utopian scenarios can be harnessed to facilitate discussion on people's aspirations for transforming their local area. Whilst, at the same time, experimenting with different engagement techniques to elicit envisioning, create spaces for new urban imaginaries and the prefigurement of changes to the built environment.

This work contributes to a growing body of work around the role of HCI to increase participation in placemaking, designing more inclusive and accessible public spaces and using speculative future design approaches to address issues of urban decay (Hope et al., 2019). It aims to make hypothetical and abstract place futures visible and tangible. Through the questioning and manipulation of what is possible and through the discussing of alternative ways of thinking (Dunne & Raby, 2013 & Hope et al., 2019), prefigure new uses that solve local place-based issues.

In collaboration with a local community group, this work developed a series of engagement exercises to explore alternative urban futures. The first of these involved the design of walking routes that encouraged local residents to explore community assets and provoke thinking on the future potential of underused spaces. The second, facilitated the creation of new spaces for communities to discuss aspirational futures and challenge preconceptions of what could be through provocations and prompts. This case study explores whether using a speculative design approach can support communities to articulate, design, discuss, and reimagine alternative uses for underused spaces. Whilst also offering insights into the design of tools to support communities co-design and envision place change through scenarios that explore speculative urban futures.

This chapter will explore to what extent speculative design and utopian scenarios can support publics to address complex societal issues, whilst, at the same time understand how spaces can be created to allow diverse versions of futures to exist.

6.2 Methods

6.2.1 Walking Methods

Due to the iterative approach and adaptive nature of this work, following action research principles, multiple methods were used throughout. After initial exploratory conversations with the collaborating community organisation in this case study, it was decided to employ walking methods to pilot the initial deployment of a technology.

Walking methods have been used to explore location specific research topics and better understand lived experience of local people (Facer & Buchczyk, 2018). O'Neill & Roberts (2019) found that walking interviews were an effective tool to evoke memories of place and better understand people's relationships with urban landscapes. Pierce & Lawhon (2015) argue that using walking as a research method through exploring and observing place on foot can enhance local literacy and add rigor to research findings as participants build a stronger connection to place when immersed in the subject environment.

Costa & Coles (2019) explored how self-narrated walks supported participants to associate meaning and value to environmental immersive encounters in urban green landscapes. They illustrate how walking methods, in particular where the research participant conducts their walk alone, without the researcher present, can be an effective way of capturing the unique user perspective of every participant. They go on to argue that the in-situ and mobile nature of this method facilitates 'in-the-moment' (p.6) descriptions that allow for the complex and personal attachments people have with place. In this sense, walking methods provide a useful tool to test if the combination of speculative design and walking methods can enable the diverse perspectives of urban futures as discussed by Pollastri et. al (2017). Costa & Coles (ibid) found that walking as a method was able to empower participants and provoke a connection with place whilst at the same time able to capture a variety of different views and perspectives of the same urban space. The ability for walking to give voice to every

research participant and provide their unique perspective through being immersed in an urban environment supports non-experts to articulate their aspirations for new urban futures.

6.2.2 Using digital tools in-situ

The initial activity included the deployment of technology. A smartphone app, OurPlace (Richardson et al., 2018) was selected due to its ability to be used in-situ, enabling participants to interact with their given scenario through being immersed in the environment they are exploring alternative futures for. At each location prompts or fictional scenarios were used to provoke and elicit a response from participants, as Blythe (2014) argues using fictional imaginaries of something that does not yet exist can provide the space for focused critique and development of alternative ideas.

Kramer (2022) argues that utilising digital technology in the wild provides researchers with the capability to immerse participants in the natural context being observed. Møller et al. (2019) argue that 'place-based e-tools' such as the digital tool used in this case study can effectively engage participants in reimagining urban environments and articulating their aspirations for urban futures, however they warn of alienating groups with low levels of digital literacy or access to appropriate technologies as barriers to participation. To combat this potential issue in this case study, a variety of digital and analog methods were used through the engagement process. This offered the opportunity to explore and compare as to what extent digital-based in-situ activities augmented the experience and supported participants to articulate their urban imaginaries of the future. Likewise, conducting the research in this way, offers insights into the extent to which digital and non-digital provocations can be effective in engaging residents to reimagine place.

6.2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

As part of this iterative action research approach, a co-design workshop was held to elicit ideas from participants on the potential walking route locations and ideas for speculative future scenarios. This workshop was audio recorded and transcribed for later data analysis.

Data was also collected from post-it notes and observations made during the workshop of the principal discussion points, locations and suggested scenarios.

The following cycle of the action research approach included analysis of the suggestions made in the co-design workshop, which informed the design of the walking route within the digital tool. The tool was deployed over a week-long period and any responses were then uploaded via the apps internal system for analysis. These responses were then analysed to understand how the scenarios and tool supported articulation of alternative urban futures. Alongside this, a reflective group session explored how useful the digital tool was and observation notes taken on the comments made by participants.

This led to a further iteration of the case study, informed by the reflective group session where a paper version of the walking route was created. After deployment, completed copies were then analysed to again understand the types of responses and effectiveness in supporting groups to engage in reimagining place futures.

A further iteration of this route included the adaptation of the speculative scenarios based off participants responses in the previous activity. The paper version of the route was then adapted to a workshop environment where participants engaged in a series of activities in a world café style environment to discuss the speculative scenarios. This was audio recorded and transcribed as well as reflective notes following on from the workshop.

At each stage of the iterative action research process, the data was transcribed and then analysed following Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis approach which informed the creation of themes from the data. The insights from this case study are detailed in a chronological approach, highlighting key themes that were developed at each stage of the action research approach before iteration, redesign, and redeployment of a series of activities.

6.2.4 Context

This chapter describes a collaboration with a community development organisation, Freestyle Community Projects who work with individuals and communities seeking transformation in Teesside. Freestyle hosts a wide variety of projects that respond to the opportunities and challenges local people are facing, through amplifying community voices, developing tools and services and initiating projects that improve social infrastructure. The team is made up of 5 paid staff and volunteers ranging from 2-10 depending on the specific project.

Since August 2020, Freestyle have been developing a programme of holistic wellbeing resource packs. Designed to be usable during the social distancing restrictions of covid-19 lockdowns, they aimed to support communities to be more active through encouraging participants to explore their local area on foot. A series of maps were created for various neighbourhoods in the town that combined activities that shared knowledge of the history of Middlesbrough and built appreciation of local assets through highlighting the positives aspects of the town such as hidden green spaces, community hubs and areas of local historical significance.

Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, Freestyle developed several iterations of these physical maps that included tips for staying active during lockdowns, family-friendly walking routes and ideas of how residents could better connect with their neighbourhoods through learning about the history of the area. The initial packs created included three maps around the Linthorpe and Ayresome wards of the town. This included a 'dot-to-dot' activity (see figure 1) that gamified learning of historical facts about the area. Followed by several tips on staying active and information on discovering more of the town's assets. The following questions were asked in these activity packs:

- What can you discover about the world around you?
- Can you spot something you've never seen before?
- While walking the routes, why not find moments to pause and be aware of your feelings?
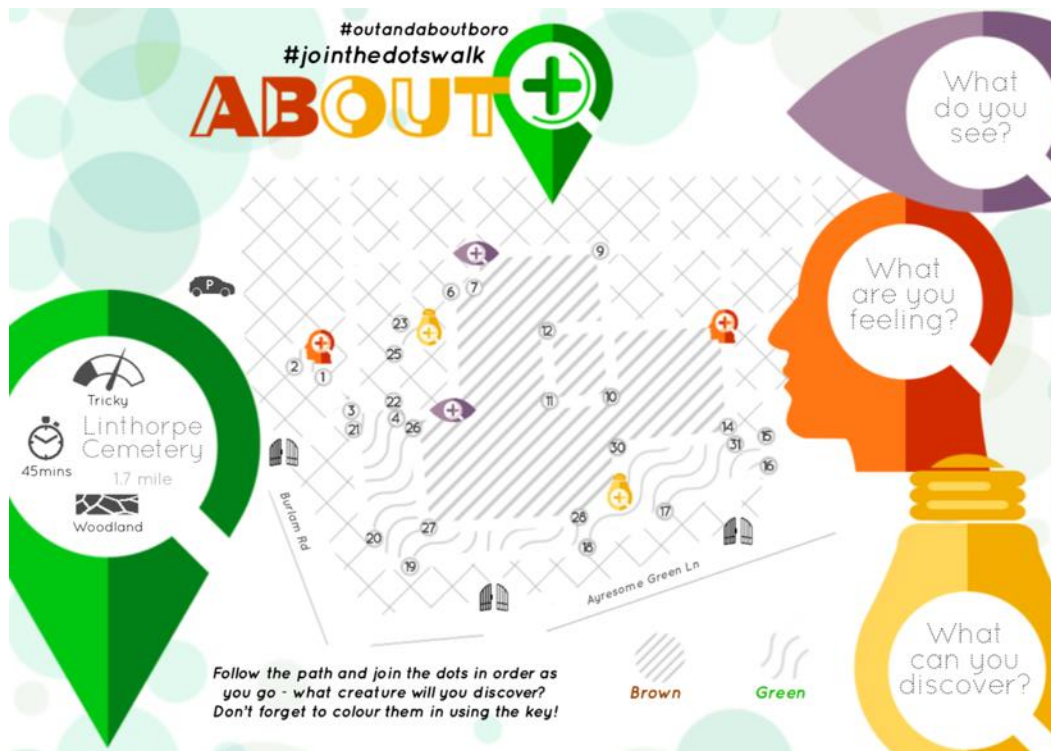
Figure 31 - Dot to dot activity included within the Out and About walking trails

The initial maps created had some limited success during lockdowns and met the aim of encouraging residents to explore their local community in the wards they covered. As restrictions began to lift and residents were able to socialise in-person once again, Freestyle believed that this would be a great opportunity to reflect on the purpose of these routes, exploring how they could benefit the community further. They decided that future iterations of these routes should focus on the future rather than the past of the town offering an opportunity to involve residents in rethinking the way they use public spaces in the town after the uncertainties brought on by the pandemic. Asking questions about what the future could look like in a radically different Middlesbrough and through understanding residents' aspirations and hopes in a post-pandemic world.

Therefore, Freestyle aimed to design a route that provoked questions of what a transformed Middlesbrough could look like to foster a community wide discussion and increase participation in the reimagining of the town's public spaces. Upon understanding the background to this project and the groups' aspirations for how they would like to see it developed in the future, I began to work with the organisation to design what these future routes could look like.

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In summary, the aim of this project was to pilot a new route that focused on the future of areas around central Middlesbrough, with a concentration on urban voids, that would be inspired by the creations of the previous Out and About routes. The aim was to rethink how people interacted with and responded to the provocations within each location. The newly designed routes were then deployed as the first iteration of this route during a community ran festival named "Blueprint: A festival of radical ideas" that explored alternative models for transforming Middlesbrough through a series of workshops, talks and practical actions.

6.2.5 Rationale for this case study

This case study was identified as it met the criteria detailed in chapter 3. Namely, key budlings and public spaces in an urban centre that were underused or neglected. Furthermore, I identified that there was a lack of debate around the future of these urban voids in the town, with more and more spaces and buildings becoming voids with little capacity amongst the population to rethink the future of their urban centre. Finally, an existing citizen group was already hosting conversations to encourage discussion about the future of the town, however, they were struggling to capture residents' imagination. This presented an opportunity to work with the group to explore ways in which we could foster discussion and imagination on alternative futures of place.

6.2.6 Study Design

In order to support the aims of Freestyle for the next iteration of their route, I suggested utilising a speculative design approach in order to elicit ideas about the future of the town. As the aim of the project was to develop a route that encouraged people to explore what local assets were of importance to them and to then think about what transformation of underused spaces would be needed in order to make their aspirations a reality, it was decided that the future scenario setting should be taken from a utopian perspective, one that concentrated on the future potential of Middlesbrough, rather than focusing on the area's deficits. This approach opens wider possibilities for thought provocation, can challenge preconceptions of what is known and encourages participants to find solutions to

wicked problems, i.e multi-faceted societal problems that have no definitive solutions (Zhang, 2016). At the same time, asking provocative and open questions allows for more flexible discourse and rejects the idea that there is one alternative future, but rather many diverse futures (Pollastri et al., 2017).

Initial questions for eliciting these open-ended responses were:

- What do you feel in this space?
- Why is this space underused?
- How could you be encouraged to use this space more?
- Whose voices/what activities are missing from this space?

These questions were chosen to elicit emotional attachment to place and better understand the needs of the community. Rather than delving straight into hypothetical future scenarios, these questions eased participants in to thinking about what they would like to see change in a place in the here and now and use their lived experience of the space to imagine what it could be. Planting the seeds to then begin to ask more provocative questions about speculative futures was seen as the most effective way of introducing participants to think beyond what they see in front of them and begin to imagine alternative imaginaries outside of conventional thinking.

In order to ensure a variety of voices had input into the design of these routes, I held a workshop with the community group to co-design the route, thinking about the different locations across the town that the group would like to see improved the most as well as understand the types of scenarios they felt would work best to elicit ideas from participants. The discussions and suggestions from this workshop would then influence the final design of the route and the scenarios that were chosen. The route would then be inputted into a digital application that could be used in-situ, enabling users to be immersed in the reimagining of the space. Subsequently a process of reflection on the first activity, iteration and redeployment would take place following an action research approach.

6.3 Insights

As discussed in the background literature, taking a speculative design approach to this work can open space for participation and provoke discussion on a variety of issues local communities face. The idea to build on the existing Out and About walking trails was seen as an important element for Freestyle, with the aim of creating a series of new trails that whilst encouraged walking and exploration of the local area, were primarily based on the principal aim of engaging residents to reimagine the everyday spaces around them and challenge existing narratives. Instead of presenting cultural inertia as a key barrier to be addressed, the research frames it as a contextual backdrop against which the speculative scenarios operate. The scenarios were designed to invite participants to imagine new possibilities for the town, expanding beyond conventional narratives and creating a platform for discussion that reframes the way residents perceive and engage with underused spaces.

Another aim for Freestyle was to explore how they could turn the physical paper copies of their existing walking trails into a digital format to reach a wider community and reduce printing costs. I suggested appropriating a location-based mobile application "OurPlace" for the speculative future walks as a pilot to assess whether it could be an option for them to digitise their existing walks. The advantage of this application was that it was free to use and enabled the whole team to design and input content without any need of technical knowledge.

OurPlace has been specifically designed to support communities in creating and sharing interactive learning activities about the places they care most about (Richardson, 2017; 2018). Utilising the extensive features of smartphones, the application easily allows communities to create a diverse range of activities and interactions with such features as video recording, photography, audio recording, map marking, drawing and location hunting. The application takes users on a journey through an urban area, with prompts at specific location whereby users are asked to input data in the form of drawings, text, voice or video recordings.

6.3.1 Initial Workshop

In order to ensure the trail included a diversity of local voices, members of the community who had previously completed an Out and About walk were invited to a workshop to co-design what the future routes could look like. Participants were asked to collectively decide on a series of locations throughout the town that they would like to see transformed in the future and then to design a series of scenarios that could provoke reimaginations of each location along the route. Participants were asked instead of discussing the historical aspects of the town as themes for the next walking trail, as had been the case for previous Out and About routes, to look at 'what could be' in the future and explore what would be improved in the town if there were no constraints on what could be achieved.

A series of visual aids were shown to participants of various underused locations across the town in order to prompt an initial discussion on the areas that people felt should be included in the route. Participants discussed various issues with the current state of public spaces in the town centre upon seeing the visual aids. However, a point made by one of the participants, George, struck accord with much of the group, he noted:

> *"Whilst there's issues with the current poor quality of public spaces in town, there's also a problem in the way we see and talk about Middlesbrough...we need to see a real transformation in how we view the town and talk up the many good things and potential beyond what currently exists in Boro [Middlesbrough]."* (George)

Another participant echoed this point, reinstating what they believed should be the purpose of this route:

> *"We need to create a positive identity for the town, people are always talking the area down and saying what's wrong with the place. We need this route to test people and get them to engage with what's great about the town...[they] need to think outside of the box of what is possible, and if we can challenge the negative perceptions they have about the town we might get some really good ideas about the future of Boro [Middlesbrough]."* (Emma)

Participants agreed that the route needed to challenge preconceptions of what Middlesbrough could be, focusing on scenarios that provoke users of the route to rethink the way in which public spaces and buildings are used across the town. There was some concern amongst the group around the blurring of public and private property, including the increasing controls placed on public spaces that had been recently sold to private entities:

"I think we need to discuss the role public space will have in town, with them [the council] buying back the shopping centres and all of the high-rise office blocks standing empty, there's an opportunity to reimagine what these huge empty spaces could be used for, but we need to make sure this stays in the hands of the community and provides a benefit to residents." (Tom)

Tom and George, both agreed that they would like to see these urban voids transformed into spaces for creativity and play, but that they needed to challenge traditional town centre uses and provide something different that doesn't exist anywhere else.

"These huge spaces could be great assets for the town and we could do something really innovative there that no other town in the country has." (Tom)

"What if we had more play spaces and areas that encouraged people to get creative, there's so many underused spaces in town that could be transformed in to really cool places." (George)

Participants were then asked to choose specific locations to include in the route and suggest scenarios that could be used to elicit responses from users. I introduced the idea of speculative design and how scenario-based questions at specific locations along the route could be used to support users to think of solutions to the issues the activists had raised during the initial activity of this workshop. It was agreed that the route should firstly, encourage community-led ideation, through providing an interactive and accessible way for users to participate and think about the future of the town through a speculative, scenario-based approach. Second, it should prompt bold thinking about Middlesbrough's future, by

provoking users to challenge pre-conceptions of what the town could become, through "out there" thinking as one participant described it.

Discussion then centred on which locations to include along this route. There was a tendency amongst participants to suggest locations that included the repurposing of existing infrastructure, empty buildings or derelict structures. Highlighting how the group wanted to integrate the idea that existing assets could be repurposed for new uses as well as retaining the connection with the town's heritage. Building on existing assets was seen as a way of building a positive identity in what already exists and offered an opportunity to attempt to transform the way residents perceive and talk about their town, as previously highlighted in discussions by George and Emma.

For example, Liam described how it would be great to see a former industrial structure which has now become a home to rare wildlife transformed into a green oasis with accessible viewing areas for visitors to view the wildlife. Another participant, Andy suggested transforming the A66 flyover into a linear park through the centre of the town, whilst Aaron wanted to see the river diverted through the centre to provide access to waterways for local residents. Emma wanted to see the high-rise empty office blocks transformed into spaces for play and creative activities and suggested turning the tallest building in town into a vertical theme park.

At the same time, groups discussed hypothetical futures for the town that could be used as a scenario to elicit responses from users. Tom suggested asking people to think about what all of the vacant shop units in the town could be transformed in to, as well as getting people to think about how we can protect the remaining green spaces in the centre. Whilst Emma wanted to explore how the town's public spaces would have to change if climate change brought about more extreme weather conditions in Middlesbrough. Whereas Mike suggested scenarios that explored ideas of wellbeing asking what services and spaces would be needed to create a happier society in the town.

Participants felt that a visual way to represent the chosen scenarios would help users of the route to visualise alternative futures and help them to see beyond the current state of

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things. For the digital version of the route using the OurPlace app, participants liked the idea of users being able to respond in creative ways and offer opportunities for groups to articulate their ideas for the future through the use of audio recordings, video and drawings as opposed to just text responses of traditional consultation processes.

Upon completion of this workshop, I analysed the various suggestions provided by participants to decide upon 6 speculative future scenarios at various underutilised sites around central Middlesbrough. Due to time constraints, the decision on which 6 scenarios to choose could not be taken by the wider group.

I also created visuals that provided a representation of the ideas for radical alternative futures for a transformed Middlesbrough from participants discussions, such as Liam's vision to turn a former industrial structure in to a wildlife sanctuary, a suggestion from Emma to transform a vacant office block into a theme park, or Andy's idea to turn the a66 into a linear park, these visions would be used as visual prompts within the OurPlace app activities.
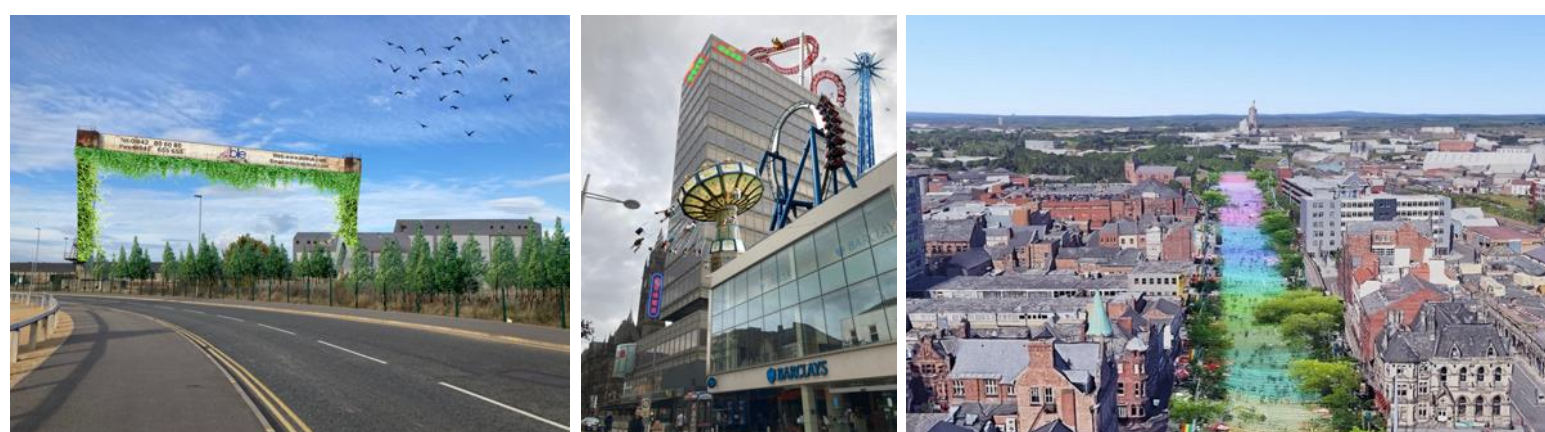
Figure 32 - Some of the visuals created for the speculative future walk

The speculative scenarios created were spread out at 6 locations across the central area of the town, all exploring a different problematic area these urban areas faced including retail, social issues and the environment. Whilst each location focused on one particular element of these issues, the scenarios were designed as to elicit responses that asked residents to think about a variety of issues town centres could face over the next 100 years, both locally and globally.

These scenarios were as follows:

Location 1: The Death of the High Street

The year is 2025 and Middlesbrough's last remaining store has closed down. The demise of the high street was catalysed by the closure of Debenhams that once sat as the beating heart of Middlesbrough. These imposing buildings have now stood empty and act as a stark reminder of a once thriving retail district. What if every store in Middlesbrough closed down? How could these giant buildings be transformed to bring vibrancy back to the Centre?

Imaginative re-uses of these buildings are popping up across the UK. How could the former Debenhams building be brought back to life in a world where High Street retail is dead?

Location 2: Happiest Town in the UK

The year is 2030 and Middlesbrough has just been voted the most exciting & happiest place to live in the UK! Wanting to capitalise on their new accolade, the owners of Middlesbrough's tallest building which has stood derelict for many years, CNE, see this as an opportunity to finally transform it into a vertical theme park to consolidate the town's new title. What if Middlesbrough was voted the most exciting place to live in the UK?

How do we get there? What spaces could we transform in town to make it a more exciting place to be?

Location 3: Rebuild the Winter Garden

The year is 1907, Middlesbrough has just opened its first winter garden for the people of Teesside to enjoy on the very spot where you are now stood. Open from 9am till 10pm daily, the facility provided warmth from harsh winters and offered the town's folk a place to come and enjoy refreshments, games, concerts, films, recitals and other forms of entertainment…admission was charged at just one penny!

What if Middlesbrough were to recreate its winter garden?

Where in Central Middlesbrough would you like to see a winter garden re-built?

Location 4: Reinvent or demolish the A66

The year is 2050, all private vehicles have been banned from central Teesside, leaving the A66 flyover obsolete. The council is now faced with a problem: demolish or reinvent? A public referendum is to be held to decide its fate.

The case to reinvent

Could it provide a sheltered place to hide from the elements? Could these intermate spaces be transformed into unexpected mini auditoriums and public places? Is the structure a blank canvas for art installations? Could it be transformed in to a New York Highline style 'park in the sky'?

The case to demolish

The A66 has effectively cut the centre in two since the 1980s! What if we demolished it? What could this space be used for? Could it become a great boulevard full of colour and vibrancy? Or what about bringing waterways back in to the centre with a grand canal?

Location 5: Saving the last public space

The year is 2075 and Teesside's population has just past 5 million. The overpopulation has eaten up every available bit of land. Fry Street Gardens is Middlesbrough's last surviving public space yet remains derelict and unused.

The council wants to ensure the space you see before you is saved, but can't decide what should remain and what needs to be added to ensure it becomes a space for all to enjoy, they are holding a competition for residents to redesign this space.

Location 6: Mediterranean Boro's climate

100 years from now, Middlesbrough's climate is now equivalent to that of Barcelona, Catalonia.

What if Middlesbrough now had a Mediterranean climate? How would Corporation Road look? Would it change the way we use this space? What types of businesses would exist? Would we have more trees for shade, more water features to cool the air or even an urban beach?

6.3.2 Use of OurPlace Smartphone App

OurPlace, an iteration upon ParkLearn, is a mobile application that has been specifically designed to support communities in creating and sharing interactive learning activities about the places they care most about (Richardson et al., 2017, 2018).

Utilising the extensive features of smartphones, the application easily allows communities to create a diverse range of activities and interactions with such features as video recording, photography, audio recording, map marking, drawing and location hunting. Once created, the application allows users to follow and input into a series of activities specifically designed to educate local residents on the heritage and assets of the town. By creating a digitally enhanced version of the walking tours, OurPlace enables local organisations to increase engagement and raise awareness through interactive and informative means in the community (Richardson et al., 2018). The appropriation of this technology was seen as an ideal way to explore how it could complement discussion on speculative futures, and the affordance it offers to use highly visual means to communicate imaginaries was seen as an ideal way to articulate possible futures and elicit responses from participants.

As previously discussed, the OurPlace app offered numerous features for users to interact with the route. The 'location hunt' feature of the app enabled the future scenario activities to be completed in-situ. Users had to be in the vicinity of the location they were being asked to reimagine to unlock a series of activities to be completed for each scenario. In doing so, it was hoped that if users were immersed in the environment, they were reimagining they would be able to visualise alternative possibilities easier than in a traditional workshop setting.

Once users had unlocked the activity through the location hunt, they were shown one of the visual prompts created from the workshop activity, plus a description of the scenario.

Following on from this, each scenario included different tasks that aimed to provoke users to imagine what the space they are currently in could look like should that scenario come to fruition.
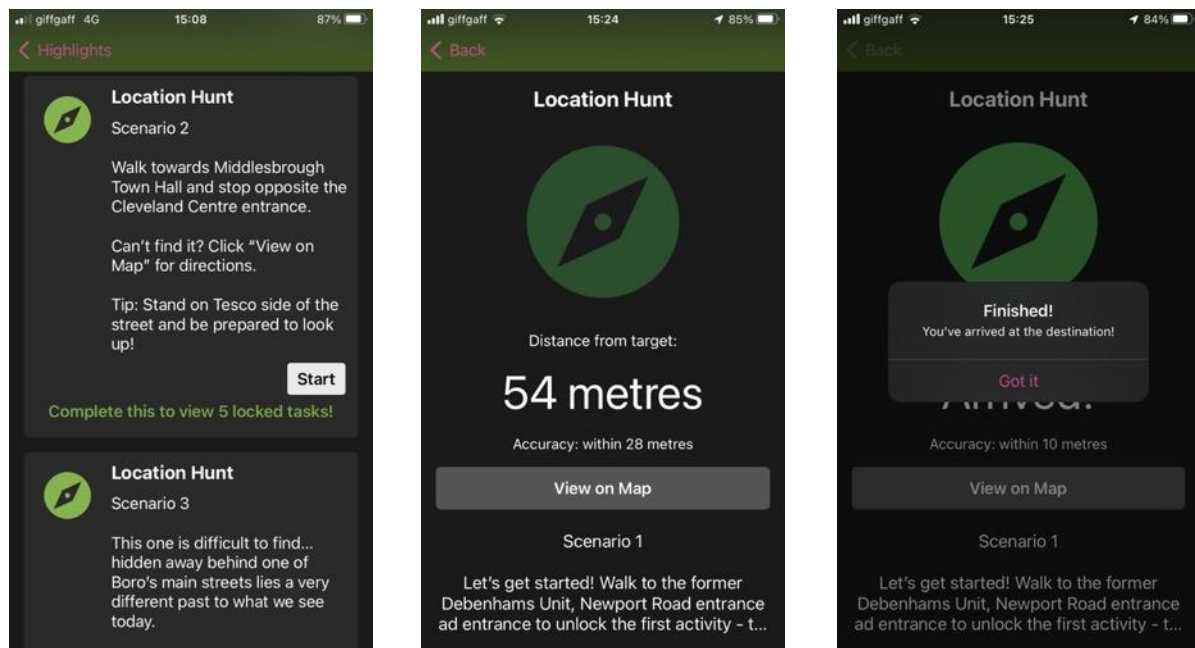
Figure 33 - In app activities showing location hunt functionality.

The activities users were asked to complete took advantage of all of the possible features afforded by the OurPlace app. For example, the photo match feature allowed users to stand in a specific location and, using the camera feature of their smartphone, overlay one of the future visuals created to visualise what this possible future could look like.

The multiple-choice feature was used in a scenario where users were asked to vote on possible future uses for vacant shop units as well as a map marking activity where users were also asked to identify appropriate locations for the recreation of the town's winter garden. Users were also invited to take a photo at a location and then draw on the photo how that underused space could be transformed, as well as being given the option to either record an audio or video of how a space would be reimagined.
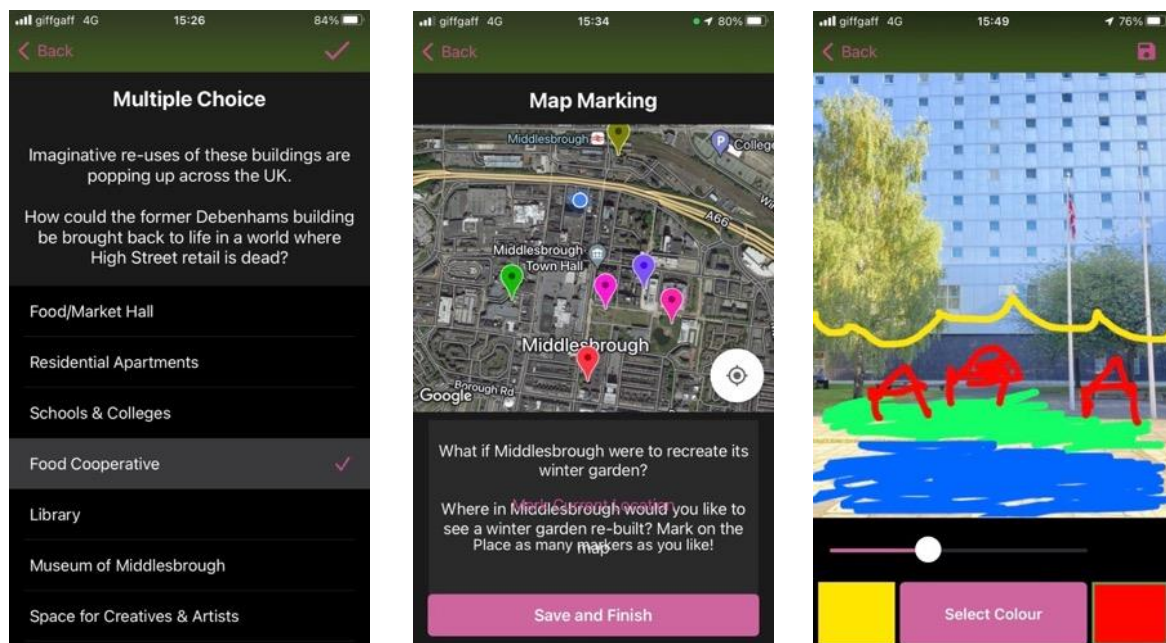
Figure 35 - Showing various functionality afforded by the app, enabled users to have their say in a variety of ways including multiple choice, map marking and drawing on a photo.

Including a variety of ways for users to engage on how they would reimagine a particular space could enable a wider array of responses and elicit ideas that might not have been able to have been articulated in traditional planning consultation process or in a co-design workshop. The ability for users to complete these activities in-situ, using a variety of creative tasks in their own time opened space for users to participate in visualising futures in ways that felt most appropriate for them. Giving users the choice of how to respond and have their say on place futures.

6.3.3 Constraints of OurPlace and In-situ Activities

Whilst the co-design of this speculative future activity fostered conversation amongst activists and creators of the Out and About maps on possible alternative futures for Middlesbrough as well as providing them with a tool to engage local people in reimagining the town through a digital application, there was many constraints and issues that arose when it came to deployment of the application.

First, in the time it took to create the activities in the application, the locations chosen by the group for this activity were no longer accessible or no longer existed. For example, the space users would have needed to be in at the a66 underpass to unlock the activity within the application was no longer publicly accessible due to the site closing for construction and maintenance work. Furthermore, the former industrial structure that had been envisioned as a wildlife sanctuary was demolished in the weeks leading up to the deployment of this activity. The nature of conducting research in-situ and in a real-world environment can be problematic, with ever changing physical conditions, where variables are out of the researcher's control. This was a major constraint of this research and resulted in the activity having to be scaled back to avoid these locations that were no longer accessible.

Second, there were many limitations with the technology itself. Various glitches when inputting activities in the app meant that work arounds had to be found and took much longer than expected to prepare. This coupled with the fact that the application would crash at the user-end meant it was difficult for anyone to effectively use it when deployed on certain devices.

The application also required users to upload their responses upon completion of every activity in order for the researcher to see the responses. This additional step added another barrier for users, and it was therefore difficult to know who had started but hadn't completed the activity or who had submitted but not uploaded their responses to the server. Therefore, the deployment of this activity yielded no responses to analyse.

6.3.4 Iteration of the activity

A small focus group was held with members of the Blueprint festival organising team who had attempted to download and complete the activities within the OurPlace app to understand what could be improved in the future. It was suggested that the need to download a specific application, create an account and then scan a QR code to take part in the activity was somewhat laboursome. The group also reiterated much of the constraints identified above in that the app would crash or wouldn't save their responses when at each location.

The group, however, did note how they found the activities engaging and the scenarios thought provoking but asked if a different way to take part could be introduced. They suggested creating a non-digital alternative that would enable a wider group to participate and remove some of the barriers that the app had created.

It was decided that an adapted route in the form of a paper artefact that people could pick up during the festival and follow in their own time would be most appropriate. This was designed in the form of several newspaper clippings 'from the future' where each scenario was told in the form of a prefigurative news story on each page of the newspaper, using the scenarios at the various locations detailed previously.
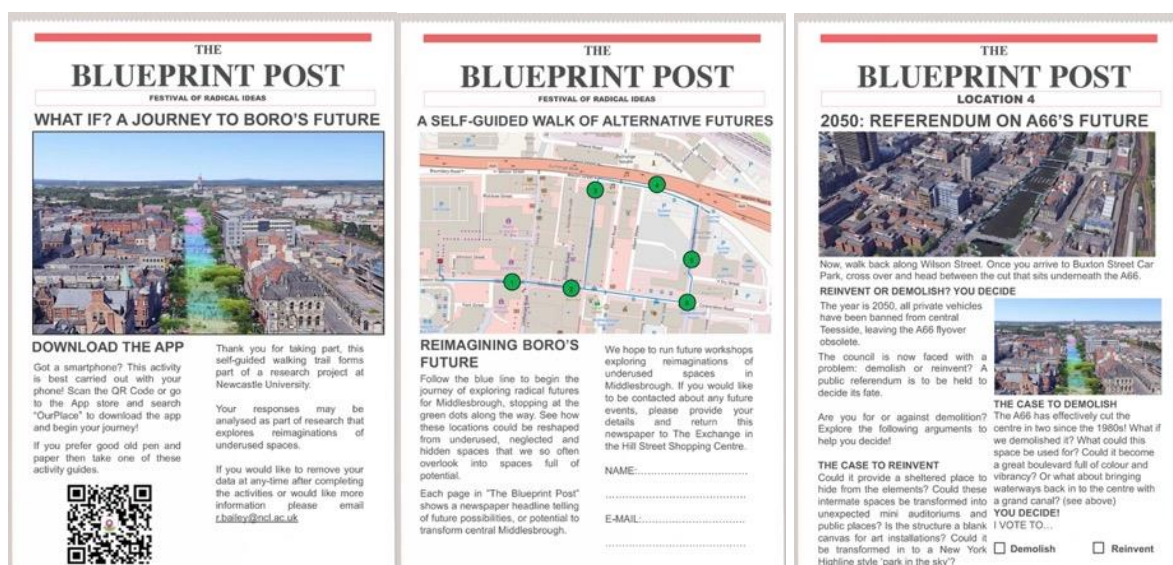
Figure 36 - Newspaper article activity as an alternative to the OurPlace application

The front page of the newspaper included a small map to guide participants around the various underused locations where the speculative scenarios from the future would take place and included a description of the activity. A QR code to the original OurPlace application was also included, should participants still wish to complete the activities digitally. Copies of the newspaper artefact were made available throughout the remainder of the festival for users to pick up and follow a self-guided walk.

This iteration of the activity had more success in eliciting responses from participants with 11 different fully completed newspapers returned by participants during the festival. The activity was successful in supporting participants to articulate their desired futures and showed how a speculative future scenario approach to eliciting people's ideas about the future of underused spaces across the town can be effective. For example, participants shared their hopes for what a reimagined high street could look like suggesting different uses in the scenario that all of the town's shops close. Ideas included co-housing facilities, emporium for small shops and workshops, a museum of Middlesbrough, people's library, dance halls, factories for new industries and skill swap spaces.

Participants discussed what would need to change if Middlesbrough was to achieve the title of happiest town in the UK. One response expressed how reinstating the tramway to link up all the zones of the town centre would contribute to a happier town. Whilst another respondent described how they believed bringing all abandoned spaces back in to use or give them to community groups to develop for community uses would make the town happier. Whilst several users expressed having more colour and art in the town would help by turning blank walls in to murals including making roof tops of buildings across the centre accessible as public spaces.

When asked about potential scenarios to demolish or reinvent the a66 flyover, overwhelmingly, respondents saw the value in reinventing it for other uses, describing things like how it could provide a nature belt through the centre or offer an opportunity to reconnect the town together through reutilise the structure as a space for public art, that could be used for small business incubators or as a sheltered performance venue.

Participants were confronted with the challenge of visualising how Middlesbrough might change should it have a Mediterranean climate in 100 years due to climate change. Participants were asked to explore how public spaces would need to change with some suggesting spaces more adapted to the new climate need to be created such as beaches and more access to waterways, whilst others pointed to the need for the creation of shaded canopies across streets and more natural shading across the town. Some visualised more opportunities for outdoor dining and street cafes, whilst one participant touched on how a new climate would change the availability of food sources and saw this as an opportunity to develop a unique cuisine for the area.

Participants were able to address the complex issues introduced by these speculative scenarios through articulating actionable interventions in underused spaces. The activities provided provocations that enabled participants to think beyond the current state of things. By challenging communities to rethink what spaces in the town could be through hypothetical and, at times, unrealistic visions of the future, enabled them to prefigure what they wanted to see by addressing issues of why spaces are underused and articulate their aspirations for a reimagined Middlesbrough.

The failure of the app-based activity to engage participants underscores the importance of selecting the right tool for the right context. While the digital platform offered flexibility for remote engagement, it lacked the collaborative potential of physical tools. The relative success of the newspaper activity when compared to the app alternative, highlights the value of tangible artefacts in fostering deeper, more interactive participation, especially in collective settings.

As stated, whilst the app version of this activity failed to engage with participants in reimagining the future of the area, the newspaper activity had some limited success in prompting participants to transition thinking from 'what is' to 'what if'. As the insights have shown, numerous ideas were elicited from these activities and, using a speculative future scenario approach to frame discussion on alternative uses for the town's underused spaces can help participants to challenge the pre-prescribed potential of a place.

Upon completion of this activity, I held a follow up discussion with the Freestyle Community Projects team to reflect on the success of these activities and understand how this work could support their future projects. Andrew, a community development worker noted how the process of co-designing the scenarios together was just as important as getting wider public input in to answering the provocations, noting:

"It was a bit of a shame that nobody used the app and we had to redesign it using the newspaper format. But, I think us being able to come to together and come up with those wild and crazy scenarios that are obviously never going to happen helped us to rethink the way we look at those dead spaces today. We had some really good chats about things like building canals and diverting the river in to the town that are never going to happen, but made us realise that there's a bigger problem of access to water which is a much bigger environmental and wellbeing issue that we may not have thought of had we not come up with crazy out there ideas".

Sarah agreed with this stating how designing the scenarios together made her realise the wider issues in the town and, whilst the ideas we came up with would never happen in reality they highlighted some issues that could potentially be addressed through identifying where smaller scale interventions could elevate some of the issues raised:

"I didn't see the point at first of coming up with ideas for changing the town that won't happen. But as we discussed these utopian ideas of being the happiest town and building theme parks or knocking down the A66 to create a giant park and stuff, it made me realise that what we are really saying is there isn't enough green spaces or a lack of leisure facilities for people to enjoy. So maybe, if we are to be a happier town then we can do some small things to help us get there like turning all those empty and ugly spaces in the town into little green spaces or have more community activities happening for people."

Therefore, the group felt that the participatory design process to envision radically different futures for the town, in turn helped them to highlight the complex social and environmental

issues the town faces and begin to think of realistic interventions that could help to address these issues.

The group decided that they would like to run a final activity that built on the previous realisation that speculative scenarios could help groups to discuss complex and multi-faceted issues and, at the same time, facilitate groups to identify interventions that could help to provide a solution to the town's problems. The group invited members of the local council to this workshop with the hope that participants aspirations for the future could provide them with solutions to the issues the town is currently facing.

6.3.5 Final Iteration

The group chose 3 scenarios from the previous newspaper activity that they felt would elicit responses to the issues the town faces. Instead of these scenarios being explored in-situ as part of a walking route, the group opted to introduce these activities as part of a co-design workshop utilising a map marking exercise. Participants would be asked to collectively identify areas of the town where interventions would be needed in order to manifest the speculative future or prefigure the future change that would be required to arrive to their utopian vision.
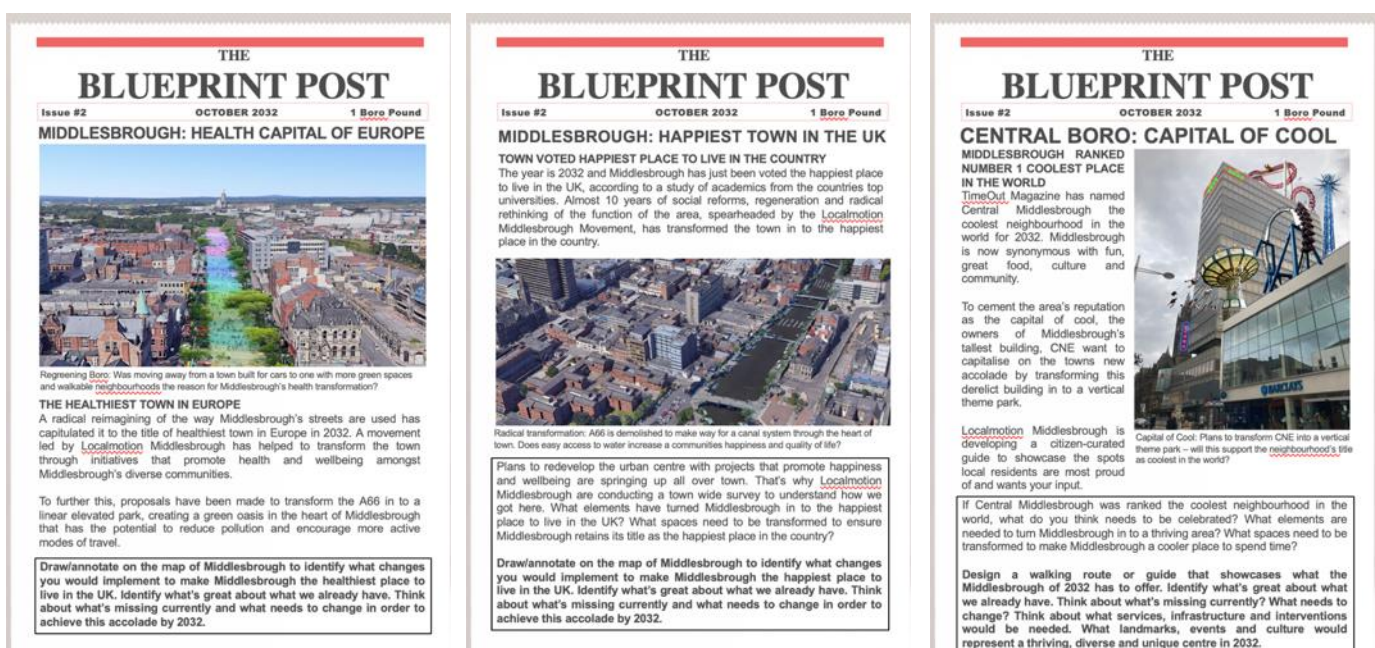
Figure 37 - Newspaper clippings of speculative future scenarios chosen for the walking activities

The mapping exercise formed a part of the following year's Blueprint Festival and was promoted as part of the programme of events. Rather than vary the timescale of the futures, as was done in the previous iteration of the activities, participants were instead offered 3 utopian scenarios to explore, set 10 years in the future. Due to time constraints during the workshop, only 2 of the scenarios were explored.

Participants were first split in to two working groups and then asked to read through the scenario, in this case, written as a newspaper article that detailed the possible future (see figure 6). Participants were then given a map of the central area of the town and asked to discuss amongst themselves what it would take to achieve the utopian scenario in 10 years' time. This included discussing what existing assets could contribute to achieving the scenario, what's currently missing and what would need to change by the year 2032. They were invited to either draw, annotate or use post-it notes to identify the locations and suggest interventions. Both groups used post-it notes to identify the interventions they would like to see and placed them at specific locations on the map provided. Responses were then analysed to understand if they supported participants to articulate ideas and aspirations for the future of the town, these were then grouped into themes based on types of interventions suggested.

Figure 38 - Map marking activity to identify areas of Middlesbrough participants would like to see change

Participants identified a variety of different interventions during the workshop, highlighting, as one participant described 'tension' areas of the town that would need to be transformed if Middlesbrough was ever to achieve the utopian visions. The responses from this workshop were grouped in to three themes, with the aim of the community groups taking on a theme in the future to address the challenges and enact change. Each of which illustrates the potential for speculative design methods to elicit responses and foster discussion amongst participants.

6.3.6 A need for more community spaces

In both discussion groups, there was a strong desire for more community spaces across the town. Much of this discussion centred around the need to concentrate on the neighbourhood level rather than focusing on large-scale projects. As one participant of the workshop, John, noted:

> "I think people are sick of seeing all of these grand masterplans that never happen, and people lose hope in politicians to change things. They [the politicians] don't think of the community when they plan for the future and hope that some outside investment will come in and save us all. But it's up to the community to make real

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change by doing the many small changes that can make a big difference in the long run".

This was reiterated by the other suggestions made by other participants, with many of the locations identified being spaces that are currently void of community life, or are public spaces that are not very well used. An example of this from Jennifer, another group participant was:

"I think people in the town would be much happier if spaces like Centre Square had more activities and things for people to do, and there's loads of ugly and dirty spaces in the town that people would never go to, but if they could be improved could be great spaces for communities to use"

Participants imagined things like using these spaces for community meals that brought the diverse communities of Middlesbrough together. They wanted to see more greenery in the future and opportunities for residents to grow their own food through turning public spaces in to allotments and edible gardens. Alongside this, participants wanted to see more of the town pedestrianised with more safer spaces where shared activities could take place such as play spaces and places for community-led events.

6.3.7 A stronger sense of collective identity

Another area of discussion centred around the importance of having a sense of collective identity if the town is to achieve the utopian visions set out in the scenarios. Rather than focus on specific interventions to implement in the town, the imaginaries suggested by participants centred around community cohesion.

Participants saw a future for the town that focused on breaking the boundaries that exist between different groups through things like knowledge and skill sharing that can transcend barriers and lead to the creation of common goals. Sarah said:

"I'd love to see a town that celebrated our differences and used them so we could all learn from each other. If we all had a shared goal to work towards we could offer our different skill sets to help improve our neighbourhoods".

Participants also expressed a desire to empower people to make the changes they want to see, through amplifying the political voice of marginalised communities and opening up opportunities for residents to be involved in shaping policy. Emma made this point by expressing:

"We need more ways for people to get involved in what's going on in the town, there's entire communities in Middlesbrough that have no say on what happens here. I want to see a town in 10 years' time that is better represented by the diverse groups of people who live here."

6.3.7 A focus on arts and culture

Many of the interventions suggested during the workshop centred around some form of additional arts and culture offering. Participants felt that, in order to become a happier or healthier town, the benefits of arts and culture to improving resident's wellbeing would be crucial.

Tom, a workshop participant noted:

"Middlesbrough will have celebrated its 200th birthday by 2032, wouldn't this be a great opportunity to celebrate everything that is good about our town? We should be proud of where we've come from but also look to the future of where we want to go. This needs to include more cultural activities in the town and would really help us achieve the scenario of being the coolest area"

Whereas, John called for more investment in to community festivals and the creation of spaces for artistic expression:

"If we want to be a happier, cooler or healthier town in 10 years' time then we need to invest in the people of the town. We should celebrate what's great about each different community through hosting of more multi-cultural events and festivals…Local artists should also be given more freedom to transform all of the derelict buildings into canvases for art or they could be turned in to low-rent artists' studios where people can showcase their work".

This activity showed that, without realising, participants were identifying tangible actions and problem-solving through the co-design of possible interventions to achieve their given speculative scenarios. They were able to turn abstract concepts into possible interventions and express their desires for the future.

6.4 Discussion

6.4.1 Speculative Design as a tool to provoke radical futures

This case study demonstrated how speculative design scenarios that focus on utopian imaginaries can support participants to imagine alternative possibilities for the betterment of their communities. The speculative design provocations created spaces for communities to identify areas in need of change and articulate their aspirations for how to transform them, something that Pollastri et al. (2017) argued is an aim of design research and Mitrović et al. (2021) believed radical thinking in design can provoke thinking, raise awareness, open discussion, and bring in to being alternative solutions and inspire action. This supports understanding of research question 1, in that design provocations were effective in opening spaces for discussion about place futures. Utopian scenarios offered one way to achieve this as they encourage positive thinking from participants and in turn, create an environment where participants are able to dream and imagine what could be. This agrees with the work of Bardzell (2018) who argues that utopianism as an activity can be used to promote democratic values and participatory design to envision and prefigure utopian scenarios.

Moreover, by focusing on utopian ideas, this removed the tendency of participants to focus on what's wrong with a place (needs citation) and work towards problem-solving through the design of interventions that could create better place futures. Mitrović & Šuran (2016)

work discussed the potential for speculative design to support participants in finding alternative solutions that are essential to transforming place. As they argue, speculative design is a discursive activity and using it in design provocations enables critical thinking, utilising participations power of imagination to create a diverse range of visions for alternative place futures, as has also been discussed in the work of Hope et al. (2019).

For context, and as mentioned in previous case studies, my role as the researcher and member of the community in framing these speculative futures may have influenced the varying responses from participants. While some found the visuals inspiring, others felt disconnected, raising questions about whether the speculative design I facilitated truly reflected the community's concerns. To some degree the scenarios themselves may have been too abstract, despite the ideas for them coming from a collaborative discussion. This highlights a broader issue with my dual positionality—while I aimed to democratise the design process, my expertise in speculative thinking may have led to visuals that were too abstract for participants to engage with meaningfully. This reflects Friedmann's (1987) critique of the limits of professional-led design processes.

6.4.2 Use of different methods to support reimagining

The map marking exercise carried out as part of this case study was a useful visual prompt and acted as a valuable way for participants to discuss specific areas of the town they would like to implement changes in, supporting the arguments made by Pollastri et al. (2017) that places can be prefigured through using techniques such as scenarios and prompts in design exercises. It offers insights to answer research question 1, demonstrating a tool that can be used in reimagining processes. However, due to the scale and legibility of the maps used, some participants found it difficult to identify areas of the town. This resulted in some post-it notes being placed randomly on the map, not relating to a specific location. Therefore, any future iterations of this activity should include alternative ways for participants to articulate changes. Mitrović et al. (2021) has also called for the need for speculative design processes to become more accessible, highlighting the necessity to develop collect strategies that enable people to rethink their social realities. However, Mitrović discussed must be flexible and create room for a variety of methods and tools depending on the scenario in question, having a flexible open process and by using mixed media as was seen

in this case study (i.e. through visuals, sound, drawing and mapping) ensures that speculative design's strength is retained as this lies in its ability to adapt to various contexts.

The use of mixed media, including digital visualisations, audio recordings, and interactive maps, did facilitate a multimodal approach to engagement. However, the effectiveness of these digital tools varied depending on the setting. Conducting research online was less conducive to activities that required deep interaction, such as co-creation or collaborative design sessions. In contrast, tangible artefacts like printed maps and physical models were more effective in workshop settings, where participants could interact physically and engage in collective discussions. These findings suggest that digital tools are better suited for in-situ and asynchronous settings, while tangible artefacts support richer, more interactive engagements in workshops.

The use of a variety of tools to engage participants in envisioning exercises demonstrated how non-technical methods to thinking about the future can make non-technical-experts equal co-designers in the design process, supporting the work of Hope et al. (2019) who stated that it is necessary to create non-technical methods to thinking about the future in order to create a truly collaborative design process. Likewise, this supports the answering of research question 1 in that the use of visualisation techniques, as called for by Pollastri et al. (2017) can enable the co-design of visions of urban futures, aiding non-experts to visualise worlds that don't currently exist. However, the effectiveness of these methods was influenced by participants' pre-existing perceptions and inertia, which shaped how they engaged with the tools. The study suggests that while these methods can create spaces for collaborative design, they operate within the constraints of existing narratives, highlighting the need for interventions that are adaptable to participants' varying levels of familiarity and comfort with speculative thinking.

In a similar vein, Pollastri's arguments that processes of reimagining place need to be flexible enough to allow for diverse visions and opinions and as also discussed by Dunn (2018) as pluralistic planning, are demonstrated in the activities of this case study. The variety of tools and methods used in mapping, mobile applications, walking tours and focus

groups provides a demonstration of how speculative design and design provocations can be combined to achieve the arguments made by Dunn and Pollastri.

Whilst the visual provocations enabled participants to express their visions, their impact varied depending on participants' familiarity with speculative thinking. While some engaged deeply with the visual scenarios, others found them too abstract and disconnected from their realities. This reflects the limitations of speculative design in engaging participants who prioritise practical and immediate outcomes or who struggle to think in abstract ways. This critique challenges the view presented by Levitas (2013) that speculative scenarios can easily disrupt conventional thinking and foster radical reimagining. In this case, speculative provocations alone were not sufficient to fully shift perceptions or generate cohesive visions for the whole group involved. This points to a key limitation of speculative design—while it can foster radical imagination, it risks alienating participants who prefer more concrete, achievable solutions.

This alienation raises questions about my role as the facilitator of these speculative scenarios—did my expertise in speculative thinking create a barrier for participants unfamiliar with these design concepts? This highlights the power dynamics inherent in design processes, where the researcher's own expertise can influence which ideas are deemed viable. Ward's (1973) critique of professionals speaking for communities is particularly relevant here, as my positionality may have inadvertently shaped which futures participants were able to imagine.

6.4.3 Articulating shared beliefs through a common vision for change

Despite the utopian scenarios varying quite considerably in the issues they were highlighting. There was a lot of commonalities in the responses given by residents for their aspirations for the future. Suggesting that, participants held a shared belief in the value of creating community spaces, building a stronger sense of collective identity and increasing the arts and culture offer to tackle complex societal issues in the town. This supports the work of Hope et al. (2019) in that, they also argue that design practises such as this create non-technical approaches to thinking about the future. Therefore, this enables a wider participation and allows for input from a variety of communities as subject-matter experts

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who can take part as equal co-designers in reimagining place futures. These statements also agree with Pollastri et al. (2017) who argued that there is a need to think about diverse futures rather than just alternative futures in an urban context.

By opening discussion and widening participants horizons about what is possible through the radical scenarios and opportunities to participate through the design provocations, participants were able to challenge conventional thinking and think beyond entrenched views about what is possible (Dunn, 2018). This helps to answer research question 2 in that using speculative futures offers opportunities to challenge cultural inertia and encourage citizens to collectively challenge what they think is possible and break down the barriers they imagine exist in their communities that are holding a place back from making progress. Levitas (2013) discussed how urban imaginaries have the potential to deconstruct commonly held ideas of what is possible. Likewise, if we consider this case study as an example of prefigurative placemaking, in that it is a way of bringing in to being possible alternative worlds through manifesting visuals of place futures, it answers research question 3 in that it gives communities the impetuous to challenge the way their communities are shaped and rethink their aspirations for the future of place.

This case study has showcased a variety of potential design methods to achieve this. Through the deployment of a digital application that provoked personal responses in-situ to rethink the built environment using a variety of different input methods. This method created multiple ways for participants to articulate their visions through text, audio, video, drawing and photography. At the same time, later iterations of this case study used scenarios as part of a co-design workshop that enabled a diverse range of voices to articulate their ideas and co-design interventions to tackle wider societal issues.

6.5 Conclusion

The various deployments throughout this case study have shown a variety of ways design provocations can be used to engage a diverse range of participants in reimagining underused places. The deployment of a technology via the OurPlace mobile application, whilst failing to achieve a high level of participation due to barriers to access and technical difficulties that arose, still highlights a method for participants to input their ideas on place

change into a wider design discussion whilst being immersed in the built environment they are reimagining McCarthy & Wright (2004) called for Urban HCI research to capture the emotional, intellectual and sensual aspects of a user's interactions with technology, thus a technology that enables design provocations to be asked in-situ can enable this. Wilson et al. (2019) called for further exploration in to how to engage residents in-situ beyond reporting existing issues and provide the tools that support them to also reimagine place futures. This research offered insights into how this is possible through in-situ design provocations. However, future work needs to develop more robust and easily accessible digital tools that enable participants to engage in reimagining place in-situ through a variety of different visual means.

The evolution of this work during the action research process meant that the goal of the case study strayed considerably from the original aim of creating walking routes to expand on the community groups Out and About project. However, this was in direct response to listening to where the community group wanted to steer conversations. The group saw the value in building new publics around the reimagination of the town's underused spaces and wanted to keep those conversations going, rather than attempting to make the natural evolution of the conversations into some form of additional walking route for the Out and About project.

The use of speculative scenarios as the main method to foster discussion amongst participants enabled this work to touch on many issues an urban area faces from the social, environmental, and physical aspects at play in making a place. The ability for the scenarios chosen throughout the case study to highlight issues in each one of these areas provoked participants to think about solutions that could tackle numerous urban issues through interventions. Participants were able to suggest potential solutions to these complex issues without necessarily realising they were tackling many different societal issues at once. These wicked problems (Zhang, 2016) were addressed by non-experts through their ability to think in non-conventional ways and imagine diverse futures that challenge existing social realities and ask what could be. This was made possible by using design-based methods and speculative scenario setting, showing their potential usefulness in engaging residents to articulate desires for the future of their area as well as to form new publics around local

issues that might not even exist yet. This builds on the work of Pollastri et al. (2017) who argued that through the use of provocative and open questions, more flexible and open discourse can occur about the future. Moreover, it rejects the idea that there is one alternative future, but rather many diverse futures for a place.

However, my role as researcher and designer in facilitating these speculative visuals needs to be taken in to account. While my intention was to enable participants to think beyond the present, the speculative nature of the visuals may have reflected my own design biases rather than the things communities' were concerned with. This raises important questions about the balance of power in participatory design—how much of the process was shaped by my own expertise, and to what extent were participants genuinely co-designing alternative futures they care about? The reflections of this research echo discussions within advocacy planning, where Friedmann (1987) has critiqued how professional-led design processes fall short of being truly democratic.

Cultural inertia, as a contextual backdrop, shaped the initial perceptions of participants and influenced how they engaged with the speculative scenarios. The findings suggest that while design provocations can prompt new ideas and discussions, they may not be sufficient to fully shift deeply entrenched narratives on their own, indicating the need for additional strategies to complement these interventions.

Similarly, the speculative scenarios supported some participants in imagining alternative futures, but for others, the abstract nature of the designs made it difficult to engage. These participants questioned how such speculative ideas could ever lead to tangible change, reflecting a broader tension in participatory design between fostering creative imagination and addressing practical concerns. This suggests that the use of speculative scenarios in this setting must be carefully balanced with more grounded, realistic elements to ensure they resonate with a wider range of participants.

This case study has shown how an iterative and flexible approach to engaging residents to discuss place futures can create the space to address complex urban issues. Through several deployments and adjusting activities based off previous learnings, this work was able to

demonstrate various ways to support the articulation of place change. Thus, speculative future scenarios, used within a collaborative design process could be a useful tool to elicit reimaginations of underused spaces and open space to co-design interventions that can prefigure alternative possibilities.

Chapter 7 – Reflections on community-led envisioning of place futures

This chapter reflects on the alternative approaches taken to facilitate communities to reimagine and envision alternative place futures for urban voids across the three case studies. Whilst a discussion section is presented at the end of each of the case study chapters that specifically reflects on the outcomes of individual projects and relates back to the specific literature review provided for the given context of each case study.

This chapter attempts to synthesise the three case studies into general reflections across this thesis. Providing three main reflections, it reflects on the effectiveness of the design provocations as well as how this supports prefigurative approaches to urban void transformations. It discusses the tools used for envisioning futures as well as the role of design provocations in supporting communities to challenge the status quo and foster future-based thinking. Before discussing the potential of design to provoke reimagination and materialise ideas participants initially thought were unimaginable. It demonstrates how this work was able to foster a community dialogue on place futures as well as how citizens can enact change to reimagine urban voids. Finally, the chapter demonstrates how participants were able to articulate their own desired futures through the design process and prefigure material change. Showing how the provocations piloted within this work can help non-planning experts articulate their hopes and aspirations and increase citizens capacity to imagine a positive future for their area.

The first two sections of this chapter provide reflections on how the provocations throughout the different case studies opened spaces for reimagination as well as challenging expectations of what is possible, whilst the third section reflects on the use of digital elements in materialising ideas on place futures.

7.1 Opening up spaces for reimagination through provocations

7.1.1 Summary

This section makes three main points. Firstly, it highlights the limitations of traditional urban planning approaches in addressing urban voids, emphasising the lack of citizen engagement and the dominance of top-down decision-making processes (Hwang and Lee, 2020; Baker et al., 2007; Brabham, 2009). It discusses how this research explored alternative methods to empower citizens to participate in the reimagining of urban spaces.

Secondly, it discusses the importance of providing tools and processes that can enable non-experts to actively contribute to the envisioning and design of place futures (Wilson et al., 2019; Bugs et al., 2010). By involving residents in the ideation phase of planning for change, there is a greater potential for communities to feel a sense of ownership in the future development of their communities.

Lastly, it emphasises the significance of using design-based methods in fostering collective imagination and addressing complex challenges in urban environments (Davidoff, 1965; Mitrović et al., 2021; Pollastri et al., 2017). Through design provocations such as speculative scenario setting and the use of the placemaking ideation cards, participants can be empowered to articulate their aspirations for the future of their communities and contribute to the creation of alternative urban imaginaries.

This section demonstrates how design provocations provided new avenues for engaging citizens in reimagining urban voids. Instead of positioning cultural inertia as a primary barrier, it is framed as a contextual condition that shapes initial perceptions of these spaces. The research emphasises how design provocations can act as tools to temporarily suspend entrenched narratives, creating opportunities for participants to explore alternative visions for their communities. The role of these provocations was not to directly counteract cultural inertia, but to create an environment that fosters creative thinking and collective engagement around alternative futures for underused spaces.

7.1.2 Challenging traditional approaches to engaging citizens in planning

One of the aims of this research was to explore how design provocations could open spaces for the reimagination of the urban, in particular when it came to the redevelopment of

urban voids. Hwang and Lee's (2020) work on urban voids highlighted how there is little planning guidance or policy on urban voids and traditional planning practises only contributes to the growth of voids rather than providing a solution to them. Moreover, these traditional methods of engaging citizens in planning are inadequate, poorly explained and tokenistic in that there is a perception that decisions on place futures happen behind closed doors no matter the outcome of consultation activities (Baker et al., 2007; Brabham, 2009). Therefore, this research set about exploring ways in which alternative approaches could be used to create new spaces for citizens to engage in the reimagination of urban voids.

The research began by exploring the root cause of urban voids and how they can contribute to the barriers of envisioning alternative futures for place futures, through theories such as the 'broken window theory' (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). However, it also highlighted how urban voids may provide the opportunities to explore how we can elevate the many problems urban areas are facing (Pagano & Bowman, 2000; Tibbalds, 2000; Aruninta, 2009; Rahmann & Jonas, 2011). The research then briefly investigated the growing shift in planning powers from experts to non-experts (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012) and efforts to create spaces that empower people to voice their opinions on planning issues (Wilson et al., 2019). It then set out how the growth of alternative, non-traditional planning approaches are attempting to re-shape place through bottom-up imaginaries. Given all of the above, the objective was to design provocations and explore novel ways of creating visions for places with citizens, to ultimately enable non-experts to challenge contentious planning decisions and provide their own counter-vision. Whilst, at the same time, provide the tools that support non-experts to dream up visions for urban voids that resonate with them and better supports their aspirations and experiences of daily life in their neighbourhoods.

The study undertaken with the steel heritage group on saving the last remaining blast furnace in Teesside, demonstrated how introducing a process of materialising various imaginaries to compete with the dominant narrative opened collective spaces for imagination. Not only this but going through this process of visualising alternative possibilities for the site created an environment where the heritage group were seen as the main opposition to the local politicians plans for the site, thus giving the group a sense of

agency in having the power to influence decision making (Pretty, 1995). The iterative co-design process and the politically charged nature of this campaign meant that the group collectively learnt how to provide a counter-narrative and articulate alternative possibilities through visual ques. These visuals materialised and helped articulate complex concepts about radically different place futures, that may not have come to being through traditional planning methods. Davidoff (1965) believed that more than just having a voice in place futures, citizens should be well informed and have the ability to understand the technical language of professional planners. Whilst this case study didn't go as far as proving that participants understood the technical language of planning, it did demonstrate how alternative ways of expressing desires of place futures can offer a reputable counter-narrative that can challenge dominant political powers.

Likewise, Davidoff's arguments for advocacy planning and ideas of planning as a form of insurgency as discussed by Courage (2017) and Hernberg & Mazé (2018) were also prevalent throughout this case study in that, through the group producing a competing plan to that of the local politician's vision, they opened up opportunities for the creation of a sounder plan, one that incorporated a wider range of local voices. Had the local politician engaged in this process it could have led to better outcomes for the final vision for the site. Whilst it could be argued that in the end, the campaign was unsuccessful in influencing any changes to the local politicians plans, Davidoff believed it is a necessity for citizens to be in opposition to planners and intuitions who are advocating for top-down proposals for place futures. The campaign group certainly achieved this and showed how there intervening in this situation opened up space for dialogue, further critique and held decision makers accountable, something that would not have happened had the campaign group not put forward counter-proposals.

The work of Wilson et al. (2019) highlighted difficulties in encouraging residents to not just report issues in places, but to work towards actively playing a role in the shaping of visions for the future of those place. Bugs et al. (2010) discusses that planning needs to move beyond simply attempting to include citizen voices in decision making but must create opportunities for those citizens to lead design processes on the future of place. Bugs et al. discuss how citizens are best placed to design solutions to urban problems such as those

seen in urban voids as they understand the problems and know the realities of places better than anyone else.

On reflection, the work with the steel heritage group didn't contribute to understanding on ways in which citizens can lead on design processes. Whilst the provocations did support the group to collectively discuss what they believe the future of the void should be, this in many ways replicated more traditional engagement and consultation processes, whereby community voices are gathered, then designs are created separately by experts. It could be said that this is an improvement on traditional design processes, whereby citizens have no input into the initial design of a concept, rather there involvement comes at the final consultation phases, however the internal issues within the group around what their collective vision should be may have been avoided if the design process been more open and collaborative. This does highlight theoretical and practical issues around how far activists can be open-ended and how inevitable differences can be held in tension and affect the outcome of the vision created by a group. This tension is the reason why the subsequent case studies took a different approach by designing tools that enabled citizen groups to design their own visions and supported knowledge building through the provocations by offering a way for participants to articulate reimaginations.

The use of Pinterest and the subsequent development of the placemaking ideation cards demonstrated how providing non-experts, i.e. citizens with the tools to be involved at the conceptual, ideation phase can address the challenges Wilson et al.(2019) faced around moving beyond citizen involvement in planning beyond reporting issues to playing an active role in the conceptual stage of plans. This work has showed that to move beyond citizen involvement from reporting issues, to becoming actively engaged in the reshaping of place, citizens need to be provided with the tools to be involved from initial ideation phases. As Baker et al. (2007) discussed, involving communities at the earliest stage of planning, such as the envisioning or ideation stage can increase the possibility of successful development. However, it is important to recognise the differentiation in power dynamics of planning processes that are initiated by experts as opposed to those created by citizens themselves and note that they will have different aims and expectations of materialising. At the same time, the process of curating ideas as a group and sharing examples of what projects inspire

them through precedents opened opportunities for collective learning and knowledge sharing. Having the knowledge of what is possible from elsewhere can broaden minds and empower citizens to take action where citizens develop a sense of agency over remaking places in their communities (Pretty, 1995).

Moreover, the ability that the Pinterest platform and card deck afforded citizens with to easily share their thoughts, ideas and inspiration without needing any technical knowledge of planning and design provided them with the agency they needed to express their aspirations (Lapolla, 2014) and start a wider conversation about placemaking projects in their communities. This, offers insights into how the de-centring of planning from experts to non-experts and the role of a planning expert is reduced (Vigar, 2012), as non-experts begin to take on the roles traditionally carried out by planning experts. This was seen in the 'spin-off' projects that were initiated by the communities worked with after engaging with the Pinterest board and their subsequent appropriation of the platform to initiate two placemaking projects. The first engaged residents in reimagining their streets through the sharing of ideas on a postcard to the future. The second involved the creation of a 'design your own alley gate' competition where the Pinterest platform provided the structure for the competition to take place. Curating ideas as a group created space for meaning exchange as well as the formation of new publics around these shared activities. Participants were able to disseminate the knowledge they had learned from these activities (Martinon, 2013) and use it to work together to lead on the transformation of urban voids in their neighbourhoods, supporting Lapolla's (2014) argument that the ability to share ideas with others can be a beneficial experience, leading to the formation of new projects and solutions to the issues seen in transforming urban voids.

The research highlighted how visualisations and scenario-based activities can support participants in engaging with place futures beyond traditional planning frameworks. Rather than framing cultural inertia as a primary obstacle, the emphasis was on how design provocations enabled participants to imagine possibilities that extend beyond existing narratives. This approach provided a platform for participants to express their aspirations and co-create new visions for urban voids, thereby questioning the status quo and encouraging a more inclusive and participatory approach to placemaking.

7.1.3 Providing tools and processes to support community-led envisioning

Baker et al. (2007), Bugs et al. (2010) and Rydin and Pennington (2010) all describe how the most important stakeholders in the design of place futures are those with lived experience of those locations, i.e., the people who inhabit those spaces on a daily basis. They understand the realities, intricacies, and complexities inherent to the make-up of place and are likely to be the ones most effected by an intervention within that space. Therefore, in order to overcome the difficulties Davidoff (1965) described in understanding the technical language that is often crucial in determining a places future, this work demonstrated how asking questions about place or what people would like to see via visual ques, helps make the language of understanding possible place futures more accessible. For example, the use of the card deck to support participants to overcome various hypothetical challenges demonstrated how it can be an effective method to support residents in articulating the types of changes they would like to see. By reducing the complexities inherent in any urban void reimagination the card deck gave residents a tangible and easy to understand way to articulate their aspirations for these spaces. The gamification of the process also enabled participants to think logically about appropriate interventions and discuss practical solutions to make them happen.

The participatory tools deployed in this research, such as the Pinterest board and placemaking ideation cards, were designed to support community-led envisioning processes by providing accessible and engaging methods for participants to articulate their ideas. Rather than focusing on challenging cultural inertia, these tools created a context for participants to co-design interventions that aligned with their lived experiences and aspirations for their neighbourhoods.

The way the Pinterest board facilitated ideation and offered insights into the types of interventions participants would like to see in urban voids demonstrated how there was a strong desire for new approaches to transforming these spaces. Participants generally shared ideas that could be described as urban acupuncture and tactical urbanism interventions. Despite not having the knowledge on the technical terminology for these

types of interventions, it can be deduced that participants saw a value in affordable and rapid approaches to transform spaces. These community-led placemaking interventions therefore may appear easier to understand and their simplicity makes them appear to be more of an achievable aim for participants. The interventions therefore afforded participants with the ability to reimagine an urban void through their relatability and perceived ease to implement. Upon reflection, the concepts that were introduced as part of these exercises challenged preconceived ideas that transformation of urban voids was achievable with little technical knowledge or skill nor the necessity to have ample funds and resources to make their vision a reality.

7.1.4 Using design-based methods in fostering collective imagination

The use of design provocations through speculative future scenarios also opened up spaces for reimagination. In particular, the approach undertaken to utilise utopian scenarios as a way to deduce what people's aspirations are for the future and broaden perspectives on what an urban void could be. Encouraging positive thinking makes participants concentrate on the existing assets of their community and in turn creates a better environment for imagining new futures. This is in contrary to the issues found by Wilson et al. (2019) whereby without the positive provocation, discussion on place issues centres around reporting issues or as a way to express discontent or as an avenue to complain about problems that need fixing. Creating an environment where participants can dream and imagine what could be agrees with the work of Bardzell (2018) in that they argue utopianism, as an activity, can promote democratic values and encourage participation in the envisioning of alternative futures.

This case study also created opportunities for participants to address complex issues around the environment, social issues and the economy. In asking participants to imagine alternative futures for a place that addresses these issues in an in-direct, yet more relatable way via scenarios set within the context of the everyday spaces they are familiar with meant people were able to provide possible solutions to complex, multifaceted problems. Davidoff (1965) argued that rather than designing one plan for a space, we need to be designing for plural and divergent plans for spaces as multiple, competing ideas for the same space can

lead to healthier and better results in addressing complex challenges of places. The speculative future scenario activities enabled this plurality by challenging participants with complex scenarios to address which led to a mix of competing ideas of how to best transform the urban voids along the walking route.

These insights are supported by the work of Kesby et al. (2007) in that, they argue action research creates opportunities for a plurality of knowledge. This is to say that it assumes that those who are often most excluded, oppressed or marginalised in society are often the ones with the most valuable insights into the history and challenges that a place faces, thus as has been shown in this case study, creating the tools that enable non-experts to participate and create their own visions of the future can amplify those community voices and offer a way for that plurality of knowledge to be materialised in the form of new urban imaginaries of place.

Mitrović et al. (2021) highlighted a need for speculative design processes to become more accessible, describing how they can be an effective tool in enabling people to rethink their social realities, however Mitrović identified that there is a necessity to develop collective strategies with communities in order to do so. The map making activities that identified the urban void locations and created the speculative scenarios to be used for the walking route offers a useful contribution to the issues Mitrović highlighted. This collaborative process of using maps and photos of the current state of various urban voids across the town as provocations enabled a discussion on the specific areas of the town the group would like to transform and enabled groups to take part in the speculative design process throughout.

Pollastri et al., 2017 discussed how places can be prefigured through using techniques such as speculative scenario setting and provocations within co-design activities, likewise Lindner et al. 2019) describes how urban imaginaries can be useful tools to communicate alternative futures and enable citizens to articulate desires for change in their neighbourhoods. The methods used within this work, specifically around the placemaking ideation cards and speculative future walks support the thinking of Pollastri et al. and Lindner. They demonstrate how design is a useful tool to engage citizens, in particular if the provocations enable participation from the initial ideation phase of placemaking processes.

In terms of the various scales used within the case studies, it demonstrates how design provocations can be an effective tool at the hyperlocal, meso and macro scales of envisioning place change. Each case study demonstrated some level of success in using design provocations to prefigure alternative imaginaries of what place could be. However, in terms of a truly collaborative approach where non-experts were able to co-design a vision from ideation to vision, the hyperlocal case study was better at achieving this than the meso and macro scales as the complexities of issues were smaller and the problems of place less abstract and more visible to see for participants.

In conclusion, design provocations can play a vital role in opening spaces for discussion on place futures. The work of Margolin (2007) argued that design activities take place within the space in between the world that is, i.e., the current state of things and the world that could be. Therefore, design can play a crucial role in supporting communities to envision alternative futures. The design provocations deployed throughout this work demonstrate how non-experts can be supported in creating and articulating complex concepts for place futures and the processes of co-designing these visions enables the prefiguration of places. As pollastri et al. (2018) discussed, the aim of design and similarly as I argue, prefigurative placemaking, is to shape, manifest and materialise new potential worlds through the design of interventions that reimagine uses for urban voids.

7.2 Challenging expectations of what is possible through provocations

Across the three case studies, the effectiveness of design provocations varied significantly. In politically charged contexts (Chapter 4), the provocations were limited by power dynamics and conflicting agendas, while in digitally mediated contexts (Chapter 5 and 6), participants' unfamiliarity with speculative thinking affected their engagement in certain circumstances. These findings challenge the claims in the design literature (e.g., Hope et al., 2019; Levitas, 2013) that design provocations are effective in opening new possibilities. This research highlights the need to critically evaluate the contextual factors that shape the impact of these interventions and suggests that they cannot be relied upon to universally generate positive outcomes.

Likewise, the three case studies illustrate the varied effectiveness of design visualisations in facilitating engagement and supporting reimagining. In Chapter 4, the speculative visuals created friction and scepticism, as participants found the designs too detached from reality. In Chapter 5, the use of real-world examples helped participants envision transformation, but also led to an overreliance on replicating existing solutions. In Chapter 6, speculative scenarios were too abstract for some, leading to disengagement and disillusionment on how this may actually change things. These differences suggest that the success of provocations in participatory design depends not only on their content but on how closely they align with participants' expectations and context in individual cases.

Moreover, the case studies highlight the varying influence of my role as a researcher, a designer and also as a member of the community across different contexts. In Chapter 4, my design expertise created friction, as the speculative visuals I introduced were seen as disconnected from participants' realities. In Chapter 5, my role in curating real-world examples may have swayed participants towards replication rather than independent thinking. Finally, in Chapter 6, the speculative scenarios I designed were effective for some, but too abstract for others, raising concerns about how my own design literacy shaped the futures that were chosen. These case studies demonstrate that my positionality as both a researcher and designer played a central role in shaping participant engagement, with my expertise sometimes creating unintended power dynamics. This reflects critiques in advocacy planning literature, particularly Peattie's (1968) and Friedmann's (1987) views that professionals, even with well-meaning intentions, can inadvertently impose their own frameworks on community-driven processes. These reflections call into question the assumption that design is inherently a democratic tool and suggest that my own role needs to be accounted for more fully in analysing the outcomes of these interventions.

7.2.1 Summary

This section encapsulates three main points around challenging expectations of what futures are possible for place. Firstly, it delves into the issues surrounding urban voids and their impact on communities, including their detrimental effects on civic pride, sense of place, and place attachment. Drawing upon literature such as that by Hwang and Lee (2020), it highlights how persistent urban voids can perpetuate a decline in surrounding areas,

leading to perceptions of unsafety and undesirability. Additionally, it discusses the concept of cultural inertia, as outlined by Carmona (2010) and Wilson and Kelling (1982), which inhibits a communities' ability to envision alternative futures for these spaces due to the entrenched negative perceptions and a perceived lack of action in addressing neglect. Rather than framing cultural inertia as a limiting factor, the research positions it as a context that shapes initial perceptions of these spaces. Design provocations are presented as tools that enable participants to question these perceptions and explore new possibilities, thereby fostering a shift from focusing on what currently exists to imagining what could be. This reframing emphasises how design can support communities in expanding their understanding of place potential without positioning cultural inertia as a primary barrier.

Secondly, the section discussed how design provocations can serve as a means to reverse these barriers and challenge expectations of what is possible for urban voids. Through the case studies, the research demonstrates how processes of envisioning radically different futures and materialising these ideas can support communities in imagining beyond the present state of the space. However, it also acknowledges the challenges, such as emotional attachments and negative mindsets toward the future can hinder participants' capacity to imagine new futures.

Lastly, it discusses the concept of prefigurative placemaking as an intentional process of bringing alternative futures into being through envisioning. By utilising design provocations, participants are encouraged to challenge preconceived assumptions and generate alternative ideas for their communities. It highlights the role of speculative design in facilitating this process and suggests that alternative planning approaches, such as tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture, offer rapid and achievable solutions to regenerate urban voids and foster collective action.

7.2.2 Overcoming the effects urban voids create on imagining alternative futures

This work has identified literature that explores the affects urban voids can have on the beliefs, perceptions, aspirations and hopes of communities when it comes to thinking about the future potential of their neighbourhoods (Hwang and Lee, 2020; Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Carmona, 2010).

Hwang and Lee (2020) identified that the persistence of urban voids in a particular locale can lead to a perpetual spiral of decline as these spaces create perceptions of unsafety and undesirability which leads to further decline in the surrounding area as property prices fall, tenants move out and these spaces often become havens for crime and anti-social behaviour. If a place is perceived as empty or devoid of life, there will be no strong attachment to that place from a community nor will it feel like an inviting place to be. This in turn effects the identity of place from one of a unique and vibrant area that serves the needs of its users to one to be avoided.

Carmona (2010) identified how urban voids are often seen as someone else's problem, sitting in the grey area between local authority and private landowner's responsibility. The damaging affects this can have on citizens civic pride who regularly inhabit these spaces and the subsequent impact on their attachment to that place can lead to a sense of hopelessness about the future and disengagement from any potential processes of place transformation. Wilson and Kelling's (1982) broken window theory supports this argument in that, as they argue, the inertia to improving a place or the lack of action in addressing small signs of neglect, such as a broken window, can be the catalyst for a spiral of decline. The visible neglect and decay in the public realm does little to alleviate citizens' lack of pride for their area and can exacerbate the issues of neglect as citizens become disillusioned and unmotivated to maintain the environment around them or lose willingness to transform the places in which they live.

These affects were prevalent across all of the case studies at their initial inception. Much of the reaction from participants when first asked their opinions on the urban voids presented were that of a sense of hopelessness and dismay that change could be made in those spaces. Often met with surprise or confusion at first, it appeared that participants struggled with the ability to imagine beyond what a space could be due to the strong negative views and poor perceptions attached to these spaces.

People hold sentimental attachments to the neighbourhoods, physical structures, and spaces they spend their daily lives in. This can lead to issues when participants are

challenged on imagining something other than what is or what has always been. When a space holds some form of positive sentimental value to people, i.e. something that represents their identify, heritage and pride in place, the suggestion of change can appear confrontational. Likewise, if a place becomes a symbol or a reminder of an area's failure, citizens can lack the ability to imagine this space as a thriving area once again. This was evident in the chapter that explored ways to save the former blast furnace from demolition and reimagine it's use. The area's history, heritage and identity are intrinsically linked to the heyday of industrial might and seeing the area fail become a politically charged issue locally. This affected participants ability to think beyond the current state of things and any attempts to reimagine what the area could be other than a site of industry was difficult. Chapman (2010) called this cultural inertia in that it is a mindset held within a locality that can hinder progress.

This research acknowledges these conditions as part of the broader context within which the use of design provocations operate but does not position them as insurmountable barriers. Instead, the research demonstrates how visualizations, scenario-setting, and participatory tools can create new entry points for participants to reimagine these spaces, expanding their capacity to envision alternative futures. This approach reframes the discussion to focus on how design can generate new imaginaries that temporarily suspend the negative associations tied to urban voids.

7.2.3 Design provocations as a tool to reverse negative barriers and expectations

The design provocations deployed within the steel heritage case study demonstrated, to an extent, how processes of envisioning radically different futures and prefiguring the change through materialising these ideas in the form of 3D models and photo simulations supported the group to imagine beyond the present state of the space. Likewise, the presentation of these created visuals to a wider audience created a discussion amongst local residents. This went someway to changing perceptions of what is possible as well as people's expectations for what the site could be used for in the future. However, this case study did also identify how the ideas of capital realism as outlined by Fisher (2009),

hindered some participants ability to imagine beyond what they deemed realistic visions - in monetary terms - and this caused friction within the heritage group. Furthermore, the negative comments on the social media platform used, whereby some comments suggested that the visions publicised shouldn't be taken seriously and this ultimately caused further friction within the campaign and may have contributed to their failure.

Upon reflection, it can therefore be deduced that the emotional attachments and mindsets - both positive and negative - that people hold about a particular place can affect citizens capacity to imagine new futures. Whilst this case study demonstrated the complexities and challenges of engaging people in reimagining an alternative future for this urban void, it did also highlight how the process of imagining is an emotive activity in itself and the power this type of activity can have on changing the hearts and minds of local people. As Neuman and Hull (2009) have stated, if we cannot imagine alternative possibilities beyond the current state of things then we cannot be free nor can we seek to build a better world. It is in this process of collectively imagining alternative possibilities that citizens build capacity to imagine beyond the neglect and decline they see in front of them.

As has been demonstrated through the work of Chapman (2010), cultural inertia can have a major effect on citizens' ability to imagine better futures for their communities, the conservativism toward the future that is often witnessed in traditional planning processes could be combatted through the co-creation of visualisations and use of urban imaginaries to prefigure alternative futures as this research has shown. The work of Levitas (2013) agrees with the insights of this work, as they argued that urban imaginaries should be used as a method to deconstruct commonly held ideas of what is possible, and (Dunn 2018) argues that imaginaries affords us with the opportunity to build capacity to sole urban challenges through collective envisioning processes, something demonstrated throughout the three case studies of this work.

Through challenging the confines of what was thought realistically possible, design provocations can be a useful tool in addressing the challenges of urban voids. Civic pride and place attachment should be considered when designing any intervention and attempts made to utilise the design process to best capture the shared meanings and aspirations of a

community (Collins, 2016). It should also build on the collective knowledge of those communities involved in the design process and as Harvey (1989) states, build on what is valued, cherished, and experienced in place.

7.2.4 Prefigurative Placemaking as a process to support alternative futuring

The term prefigurative placemaking (Dussault, 2022; Fisker et al., 2012) is used within this work to describe the intentional processes of bringing in to being alternative futures through the envisioning process. It uses the materialisation of these visions as a way to directly challenge top-down proposals for urban change through co-creating solutions that addressed issues of urban spaces and show an aspirational future of what residents want a space to become.

The design provocations used in this prefigurative placemaking process challenged ideas of what is possible amongst participants and provided the infrastructure for communities to imagine beyond the present. The role of the future visioning process within this and the highly visual approach taken to designing these alternative imaginaries throughout helped participants to question their preconceptions of the potential for places in their communities. Davoudi et al. (2018) discussed how imaginaries can create the space for challenging preconceived assumptions and allow for alternative ideas of what could be to come to light. For example, the card deck designed in the second case study provided a simple way for participants to begin to engage in reimagining a space and find inspiration. Having a physical prompt to refer to enabled the groups to think beyond the current state of a space, challenge what is possible and build new imaginaries for these places. It created a simple design provocation that was used to address societal issues inherent in public spaces (Lindner et. al, 2019) and enabled participants to imagine how bottom-up interventions in urban voids could challenge preconceived ideas of specific spaces.

The work of Mitrović & Šuran (2016) advocated for speculative design as a useful approach to support participants in finding alternative solutions that are essential to transforming place. This was demonstrated in the speculative scenario case study where the focus on utopian ideas demonstrated how this type of design provocation can remove participants

tendency to focus on the negative aspects of a place and think about what assets their community has. This approach encouraged participants to find solutions to the problems they were confronted with and the utopian scenarios encouraged people to focus on designing interventions that could lead to these aspirational place futures.

Several fundamental issues in traditional planning practise act as barriers in the reimagination process as set out by Baker et. al, (2007). The alienation communities feel with the complex language within the planning system, the tokenistic nature of many community engagement activities and the perception of stagnation and inertia to change all contribute to the issue of building community capacity to positively think about the future of their neighbourhoods. The exploration of alternative planning approaches such as tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture within the prefigurative placemaking process of this work were key to effectively challenging participants expectations of what is possible. These approaches provided the key principles to show that communities have the capacity and agency to bring in to being, i.e. prefigure, the change they want to see. They offer rapid and achievable solutions that can be implemented outside of traditional planning practises and provide the tools needed to regenerate urban voids, challenge perceptions and foster collective action.

Reflecting on the concept of prefigurative placemaking in this work reveals its value as an aspirational framework, one that provides communities with the space to imagine future possibilities for urban voids without immediate limitations. Prefigurative placemaking diverges from traditional planning in that it is not bound by current feasibility constraints; rather, it emphasises values such as radical thinking, creativity, and collective agency in the present. While not the sole focus of this thesis, prefigurative placemaking has supported a process of engaging participants in reimagining urban spaces as canvases for radical transformation, where the design provocations serve as catalysts for new community-driven narratives about their aspirations for their neighbourhoods.

Throughout the case studies presented in this work, the issue of urban voids as spaces of neglect and symbols of scars in a community were superseded by the opportunities participants saw for change. Despite the challenges, urban voids were seen as cavasses for

experimentation and enabled participants to challenge their own and the wider communities' expectations of what these voids could be. They saw them as opportunities to be reshaped in radical ways, using imaginaries that provoke new ways of designing public spaces. These insights build on the work of Hwang and Lee (2020) who described how urban voids can provide opportunities to think outside of the box when it comes to traditional ways of using public space, whilst at the same time, creating the space to reengage citizens in the transformation of their neighbourhoods.

7.3 Prefigurative placemaking through the digital

7.3.1 Summary

The integration of digital tools was instrumental in facilitating the reimagining of urban voids across the case studies. These technologies, including digital visualisations and mobile applications, provided participants with the means to materialise their ideas and express their aspirations for the future of these spaces. Digital platforms like Pinterest enabled the curation of ideas and fostered discussions, while mobile apps facilitated in-situ engagement, allowing participants to input their visions for urban voids using various media. However, the success of these initiatives often relied on the combination of digital and non-digital tools, with physical toolkits providing tangible means for co-designing interventions. This holistic approach ensured a comprehensive participatory design process, enabling active engagement in shaping the future of communities.

Moreover, the integration of digital tools empowered communities by providing platforms to express aspirations and build a renewed sense of community and civic pride. Digital technologies augmented experiences of the urban environment, supporting meaning-making and changing perceptions of everyday spaces. By enabling citizens to envision alternative futures for urban voids, these tools fostered hope and optimism about the potential for change. The participatory design process, facilitated by digital tools, not only engaged residents but also challenged traditional power dynamics in urban planning, empowering communities to take ownership of the envisioning process and provide credible alternatives to that of top-down visions.

A key lesson from the case studies is that design provocations must be carefully tailored to the context and participants' expectations. In politically charged environments, as seen in Chapter 4, speculative visuals may generate resistance rather than engagement. In contrast, real-world examples, as used in Chapter 5, can provide inspiration but risk limiting creativity by encouraging replication. Meanwhile, abstract speculative scenarios, as explored in Chapter 6, may alienate participants who are focused on practical, achievable outcomes. This suggests that provocations must strike a balance between imagination and feasibility to be effective across different contexts.

Despite these challenges, digital tools facilitated remote engagement and collaboration, enabling citizens to impact change in their local areas and form new publics despite restrictions. The combination of digital and non-digital tools ensured a robust approach to participatory design, allowing for diverse input and fostering partnerships within communities. By leveraging technology to involve citizens in the co-design and co-production of place futures, this research demonstrated the potential of digital tools in supporting grassroots placemaking efforts. Ultimately, the integration of digital tools proved essential in reimagining urban voids, providing communities with the agency to shape the future of their neighbourhoods.

7.3.2 Digital visualisations as a means to prefigure place

Yusoff & Gabrys (2011) discussed how digital visualisations can support participants to materialise their ideas. This was visible in the consistent use of imagery as a provocation across the case studies. A common theme running across all of the case studies was that participants believed that the most effective way to articulate complex ideas to a wider audience about the future of the spaces they were reimagining would be through the creation, or re-sharing of digital imagery that expressed their aspirations for the future of these urban voids.

Numerous studies within HCI research have demonstrated how technology can be deployed to support citizens express their opinions of place (Garrod, 2008; Wilson et al., 2019), build understanding of what people value in place through connecting citizens memories of the everyday to support the remaking of places (Crivellaro et al., 2016) and harnessing digital

tools to build sentimental values of place attachment and civic pride in a neighbourhood (Balestrini et al., 2014).

The affordances of new technologies to augment experiences of an urban environment through the likes of movement, touch, sound, imagery, and video can support meaning making (Freeman et al., 2019), changing citizens perceptions and interpretations of the everyday spaces they inhabit. Creating an environment for these encounters to take place, as has been seen in studies of Urban HCI, must capture the emotional, intellectual and sensual aspects of the users' interactions with a technology (McCarthy & Wright, 2004). Therefore, the design of the in-situ interactions using the OurPlace app during the speculative future scenarios case study aimed to facilitate this through providing a variety of sensory and creative ways for participants to engage with reimagining a space through the technology.

Pollastri et al. (2017) discussed the need to enable the creation of diverse place futures as opposed to alternative futures. The use of technology to enable a variety of input methods for participants to express their ideas and aspirations for a reimagined void, helped create the space for diverse futures to be prefigured. Deploying the mobile application with the aim of provoking individual responses in-situ and giving participants the choice of how they inputted this data using various media was seen as a novel way of encouraging out of the box thinking about place futures whilst participants are physically situated within the space in question. A method of engagement not often used with traditional planning practise, Wilson et al. (2019) attempted to engage citizens in providing their opinions on plans for specific sites in-situ, however this work identified a need in future research to explore ways of engaging citizens in the design of place futures as opposed to reporting existing issues users experience. The case study detailed in this work demonstrated multiple ways for participants to contribute their visions for the future of an urban voids via inputting text, audio, video, drawings, and photography.

7.3.3 Empowering citizens through a combination of digital and non-digital tools

Providing citizens with a platform to express their aspirations and capturing their emotional attachment to a place via the envisioning of alternative futures can provide a renewed sense of community and civic pride, an issue discussed by Grimsey (2018) when it comes to the detrimental effect a lack of pride and community cohesion can have on the success of a place. Furthermore, Giaccardi & Palen (2008) discussed how our sense of belonging, identity and culture is shaped over time by the experiences we have and the relationships we build with the physical and social environments of a place. The digital tools used throughout this case study began to repair participants disillusionment and lack of hope towards the future of place. By using design provocations as tools to prefigure futures that they initially thought weren't possible, the technology was a useful tool in facilitating discussion and prompting inspiration, building capacity to imagine beyond what is (Davoudi, 2018; Bardzell, 2018). Giaccardi and Palen (2008) discussed how technology can be used to enhance engagements with local communities and can support the formation of new identities, building a stronger sense of belonging to place. When citizens have a sense of hope about the future and can envision positive change in their communities as was demonstrated via the digital design provocations in this work, they are more likely to become active players in remaking place. Not only this but it can foster a sense of agency to make change in their communities as well as feeling a stronger sense of place attachment (Freeman et al., 2019).

Likewise, as Hope et al. (2019) argued, non-technical approaches to thinking about the future of place must be incorporated to ensure non planning experts are included in the design process. The digital tools used, such as the mobile application and the Pinterest ideation board, facilitated this process by enabling input from citizens without having to have the technical knowledge to materialise the visions in a visual way. They became subject-matter experts as those best placed to provide input on the most appropriate use of the space, having intrinsic knowledge of their own neighbourhood. These digital tools enabled communities to participate as equal co-designers in the reimagination of the urban voids, building agency and capacity for citizens to create their own aspirational futures and take an active role in placemaking.

For example, the use of precedent images and best practise examples of placemaking projects across the three case studies proved an integral part of the ideation process and

aided participants in beginning to rethink how they experience and perceive the problem spaces they have in their local area, a process advocated for by Scolere & Humphreys (2016).

Appropriating Pinterest as a digital tool to aid this process was a success due to the ease in which participants were able to access a bank of relevant ideas, making the discovery process easier. Pinterest's algorithms then showed participants more ideas based on their previous searches and pinned content. Likewise, the nature of this platform as a visual digital tool made it easy for participants to view saved pins and share them amongst peers. Having a go-to and easily accessible tool that required little to no technical knowledge for the groups taking part in this activity enabled them to co-design a series of interventions and identify voids they would like to transform. Having this infrastructure as a co-design tool for their projects ignited feelings of optimism and hope that they do have the skill sets and the knowledge to transform their communities' spaces. In summary, the infrastructure digital tools can provide as evidenced in this example can be a crucial tool for groups to collectively discover, share and discuss inspirational projects less abstract and as tangible, realistic interventions whilst providing the right level of provocation to enable the participants to overcome the design problems they are facing to activate these urban voids.

Champions of the placemaking movement have long called for a more participatory approach to designing place futures, one that involves communities through consultation and engagement activity (Jacobs, 1961; Campanella, 2011; Foth, 2017). This work goes one step further and sought to utilise digital tools to aid in the co-design and co-production of place futures with citizens as opposed to just consulting them on developments. Participatory design practises such as the ones demonstrated throughout these case studies, create opportunities for digital civics researchers to involve citizens in the process of designing technologies that can address issues of urban voids. By bringing to light the issue of urban voids and highlighting their existence through a series of digitally supported design exercises, citizens were involved in a reimagining process and were able to visually materialise the change they want to see. Something that would not have been possible without the aid of the technology nor the design provocations. This work afforded citizen groups with opportunities to co-design reimaginations without the support of planning

experts and enabled them to challenge who has the power to design for change and who has a right to enact it as described by Lefebvre (1968) in the right to the city and further compounded by Harvey (2012). The collaborations built through this process of reimagining with citizen groups fostered partnerships as well as the formation of new publics who co-constructed knowledge with the potential to impact change in their local area, a benefit of participatory design process described by (Gregory, 2003).

Building on this principle of participatory design, it has been argued by Foth (2017) that if HCI is to be used as an effective tool within an urban context it must address the diverse range of issues of citizens – as consumers of recourses, as residents, as participants and, specifically to this research, as co-designers of the city. This research has demonstrated how technology can be used to understand how people perceive and experience place, but also how technologies can be used within a process of co-design and co-production amongst a variety of citizens from heritage enthusiasts, activists, politicians, and local residents.

Placemaking and the principles explored within this work such as tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture have the potential to help citizens make sense of the built environment and reimagine the ways in which we use it in order to change how we feel and experience the public realm.

Previous studies have explored how placemaking processes and digital technologies can support communities to regenerate urban voids (Chapman, 2011; Clarke et al. 2014). McCarthy and Wright (2004) challenged HCI research to consider the social, personal, and emotive aspects of how we interact with technology. This research has explored some of these issues through the marrying of HCI practises via the deployment of digital tools to support social interaction and deduce a reaction through the design provocations from participants. It did so by placing these tools and provocations within an urban context filled with political, social, and culturally charged beliefs and meanings about what space is and what it could be. The result, saw a mixture of digital and non-digital tools being created to aid participants in the design process of reimagining urban voids with various levels of success. The digital tools were successful in so far as fostering debate amongst participants about the future of place, they were also successful in leading to the creation of tangible

visuals that articulated a desired future and represented the groups aspirations for their communities. However, the technologies played only a part in helping these actions and the case studies wouldn't have produced these results had non-digital provocations and tools not been used throughout the process.

For example, transferring the curated pins from the Pinterest board and turning them into a physical toolkit to act as further design provocations in co-design activities when reimagining urban voids highlighted the importance of both the digital and non-digital. Whilst the digital opened the door for wider reimagining and provided the infrastructure that led to the completed toolkit, it lacked elements that participants wanted in order to effectively collectively design interventions. Participants saw value in having a physical tool as opposed to the digital platform as the Pinterest board became increasingly difficult to organise and share ideas as it became more populated and didn't enable residents to move beyond the discovery and ideation phase. The card deck was seen as a great solution as it replicated the ideas and work of the group during the curating of pins on Pinterest, whilst being ambiguous enough to not pigeonhole people into particular set of ideas for a space, rather, it provided inspiration but didn't prescribe what should be implemented. Similarly, the familiarity of cards as a tool to solving issues resonated with the group and they responded to this as an effective placemaking tool to support them prefigure place change over the use of a digital platform.

Schneider et al. (2018) discuss how technology can be used to facilitate participation and empower communities; this has been demonstrated to some extent within the context of reimagining urban voids in this work. However, upon reflection where the case studies had the most success was when a combination of both a digital tool and a physical tool were used. The digital tools were most effective in curating ideas and for the sharing of knowledge as an initial phase of the placemaking process where participants were, in a way, able to demonstrate and prove that the spaces they at first couldn't imagine could become any better could in fact be transformed into something else through seeing real world examples elsewhere. Whereas the physical tools offered a tangible and direct way for participants to co-design their own visuals for these urban voids and produce a physical artefact to articulate their vision.

7.3.4 Using the digital to facilitate engagement during COVID-19

The use of zoom to engage with participants was more of a necessity rather than a chosen method of engagement. This was due to the fact that the restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic meant in-person engagement was not possible. The implications this had on the research was that the research approach had to be redesigned. Attempts were made to recreate in-person engagements in a digital environment using the likes of Miro boards and via the Pinterest platform, however the difficulties this presented in terms of being able to understand the nuance of conversation between participants meant that it created limitations to collecting data in a way which was initially preferred during in-person co-design workshops for example.

In summary, this chapter has detailed how the design provocations used within this research enabled participants to discover inspirational ideas that could inform the co-design of alternative visions. They also provided groups with the infrastructure to build and share knowledge of placemaking interventions and apply complex concepts normally only understood by planning experts. The combination of using digital and non-digital provocations as part of a participatory design process opened spaces for dialogue around place futures, challenged preconceptions and expectations of what a place could be and ultimately enabled citizen groups to prefigure their own reimaginations for urban voids.

7.4. Conclusion

Across the case studies, the challenges posed by urban voids were met with innovative solutions driven by collaborative efforts where new communities were formed around reimagining new possibilities for the use of urban voids in Teesside. This was facilitated by a combination of digital and non-digital tools that enabled the co-design of alternative futures for these underused spaces. These initiatives not only provided platforms for expressing aspirations and reimagining public spaces but also empowered communities to take ownership of their surroundings. By harnessing the affordances of digital and non-digital tools and design provocations, participants were able to visualise alternative futures for urban voids, fostering hope, and inspiring collective action.

Furthermore, this chapter has highlighted key insights and opportunities to further engage citizens throughout the placemaking process and in the process, tackle issues urban voids create. Firstly, the discussion on urban voids highlighted the detrimental effects of neglect and disengagement they create, emphasising the importance of civic pride and place attachment to inspire hope for better place futures. Secondly, the exploration of cultural inertia as a contextual issue and the role of design provocations to challenge this mindset underscored the need for innovative approaches to challenge preconceived notions and inspire imagination. Finally, the exploration of digital and non-digital tools demonstrated their instrumental role in facilitating participatory design processes, empowering communities to shape the future of their neighbourhoods.

The tension between my role as researcher, designer and community member were prevalent across all the case studies. In some instances, this expertise enabled participants to engage with new ideas, as in the use of real-world examples in Chapter 5. However, in other contexts, such as the speculative visuals in Chapter 4, the use of design provocations may have led to disengagement or friction. This suggests that design expertise, rather than simply empowering communities, can sometimes hinder participatory processes. As Sandercock (1998) argues, the role of professionals in participatory design needs to be critically examined, as their influence can shift the balance of power away from communities and back toward experts.

The various contexts highlighted through the case study approach demonstrates that the effectiveness of digital and non-digital tools is highly context dependent. Digital platforms, while useful for asynchronous, remote contributions, were often less effective in workshop settings, where tactile, hands-on tools such as maps and card decks facilitated more dynamic and collaborative discussions. These findings suggest that the value of digital and non-digital tools lies not in their universal applicability but in their ability to support specific types of engagement in the right environments.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

This chapter provides concluding remarks for this research, it reflects on the overall research questions and the processes undertaken to carry out this work. It discusses the most prevalent points throughout the research before detailing the contributions, limitations, and opportunities for future work.

Chapter 2 introduced why the existence of urban voids create numerous social (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Hwang and Lee, 2020) and economic (Arunita, 2009) problems for urban areas, discussing how their ambiguous status and ill-defined definition within formal planning procedures often ignores their role in making place improvements (Rahmann and Jonas, 2011). It made the case that urban voids exacerbate issues of neglect and abandonment of the public realm and create an environment of disengagement from participating in planning as the issues of improving them are seen as someone else's problem (Carmona, 2010). Building on this point, it argued that the negative perceptions surrounding urban voids and their persistent neglect leads to the development of a collective urban imaginary of cultural inertia (Chapman, 2010) and an erosion in local civic pride. Whereby, the perceived perpetual state of decline and abandonment leads to intolerances to change and affects stakeholder's capacity to imagine alternative possibilities. It briefly outlined problems with participation in planning and how traditional approaches fail to engage citizens in planning place futures where processes are often deemed tokenistic and overly complex (Wilson et al., 2019).

It then explored through placemaking processes, how the collective reimagining of urban voids and their potential to solve a myriad of urban issues provides opportunities for reengaging stakeholders in the betterment of place (Pagano & Bowman, 2000; Rahmann and Jonas, 2011; Aruninta, 2009; Tibbalds, 2000). It discussed how urban voids provide the spaces for experimentation and can be reshaped in radical ways through reimaginations that challenge traditional methods of designing public space (Hwang and Lee, 2020). It then highlighted various novel placemaking approaches that have successfully transformed urban voids through urban acupuncture (Rubió, 1999, 2008; Cutieru, 2008) and tactical urbanism (Moore-Cherry & Mccarthy, 2016; Hernberg & Mazé, 2018; Stevens & Dovey, 2019),

explaining how the principles of these approaches can provide a framework for community-led envisioning exercises.

Finally, the literature review made the case for the marrying of novel planning approaches with technology to explore how they could support citizens to articulate alternative place futures. It discussed how HCI affords opportunities to supports meaning making in place, increasing civic participation and support processes of urban renewal (Crivellaro et al., 2016; Harvey, 1989; Wood, 2006). Before exploring various digitally supported mediums for enhancing experiences of, and with, place and how these tools can support the creation of new urban imaginaries.

Chapter 3 argues for the benefits of design-based approaches (Le Dantec, 2016) such as prefigurative design (Asad, 2019) and adversarial design (DiSalvo, 2015) to support citizen groups contest ideas of place futures, challenge power dynamics and facilitate idea sharing for the reimagination of urban voids. It details how this research employed a mixed method approach and used principles of action research and research through design in the creation of design provocations in order to elicit responses from participants (Raptis et. al, 2015; Pangrazio, 2015).

The research included three case studies that deployed design provocations in various contexts to explore to what extent they can support prefigurative placemaking processes of urban voids. The first case study (chapter 4) explored the use of provocative alternative imaginaries to challenge plans to demolish industrial structures in Teesside. It found that prefiguring alternative imaginaries for the site could apply pressure on local decision makers, however, the lack of active participant involvement in the co-creation of the visuals themselves led to this work replicating traditional engagement planning processes to some extent and identified a need to design tools that enable citizen groups to lead on the design of the envisioning process.

The second case study (chapter 5) appropriated an online social media platform, Pinterest to support a community organisation curate idea for the reimagination of spaces in their neighbourhood. It found that, whilst the digital tool was useful in supporting discussion and

ideation amongst the group, introducing them to novel planning approaches, the creation of a physical tool in the form of placemaking ideation cards were most effective in supporting the group co-design visions for the spaces in their neighbourhood.

The final case study (Chapter 6) deployed a mobile smart phone application as part of a walking route that provoked users to design their own visions for urban voids in central Middlesbrough through speculative future scenarios. It found that providing participants with a variety of ways to input their visions in-situ through audio, text, drawing and video can support non-planning experts to articulate their desires and aspirations for the future of their town.

Chapter 7 provided overall reflections on the usefulness of the design provocations. It details how they demonstrated an effective method in opening the design process and building agency amongst citizen groups to create their own visions for urban voids. It also reflects on how provoking groups to rethink what is possible can elevate the issues of disengagement and cultural inertia brought about by the neglect of urban voids. The combination of digital and non-digital provocations enabled complex and novel planning approaches to be introduced to non-experts, however it was often the tangibility of the non-digital tools that were most effective in supporting citizen groups to articulate reimaginations of place.

Finally, the conclusion reflects on the contribution of this research and its limitations, before suggesting opportunities for future work. It suggests the creation of a series of digital and non-digital design provocations that are made available to citizen groups to call upon depending on the context and environment of their placemaking process. It also provides a brief overview of wider impacts of this work post-research.

8.1 Research Questions

This research aimed to understand how design provocations could facilitate citizen groups to articulate alternative visions for urban voids, taking novel approaches to challenge preconceptions of what place is, and what it could be as well as building understanding of

how the prefiguration of place in a placemaking process can lead to more effective community involvement in the design of place futures.

In summary, the design provocations deployed in case study 1 didn't actively engage people in co-designing a vision for an underused site, therefore the outcomes identified found a need to explore the development of a tool that could enable participants to be more involved in a co-design process. Case study 2 learnt from the first and developed a tool that supported communities to create their own vision for underused sites in their community, but this tool concentrated on small scale interventions and restricted discussion on macro level issues at play in reimaging place. Therefore, case study 3 explored how taking a speculative future approach could enable discussions on complex issues prevalent in envisioning alternative urban futures on a larger scale.

1. How can the use of design provocations support citizen groups to articulate their aspirations for the future of place and challenge top-down decision making?

Through the exploration of literature on urban voids it was identified that the degradation of the public realm impacted imaginaries of place, creating negative perceptions of what a place is and impacted citizen's ability to envision alternative possible futures. The decision to deploy a mixture of design provocations as methods to elicit responses on imagining alternative place futures was supported by the work of Pangrazio (2015), especially given the context of this research which involved working with participations who suffer from cultural inertia and low levels of civic pride. These design provocations were therefore able to tease out critical reflection from participants about what place could be. However, the effectiveness of these provocations varied, as some participants found the activities too abstract or disconnected from their everyday experiences. This complicates Pangrazio's claim that design provocations can enable critique, highlighting how unfamiliarity with speculative methods can hinder engagement and limit participants' ability to envision alternative futures.

Pangrazio (ibid) argued that the use of design provocations in social science research can deduce critical reflection amongst participants on issues that would normally be overlooked, obscured, or accepted as the only reality. That is to say, using design provocations as a

research method lends itself to challenging people's realities and can provoke participants to think beyond their accepted reality. As has been identified in the findings of the three case studies, to varying extents, the design provocations enabled critique of the existing state of place and provoked participants to challenge one another and collectively design, or prefigure, new realities through the envisioning process.

Likewise, the decision to use a mixture of digital and non-digital design provocations as methods to elicit discussion on reimagining place was informed by the literature review that identified several issues in the current planning system which hindered non-planning-experts opportunities to participate in the imagining process inherent in rethinking urban futures. Namely, the issues identified found traditional planning processes to be tokenistic, overly complex, failing to capture the nuance of place meaning and being detached from citizens experience of, and relationship to place (Wilson et al., 2019). Thus, showing a need for new approaches to engaging citizens in placemaking that use more provocative and non-traditional approaches to public engagement beyond consultation events.

The affordances of technologies as identified through the literature on urban HCI and digital placemaking opens opportunities to engage with the built environment in a multitude of ways. The findings of this work showed that digitally mediated activities can enable non-planning experts to discover inspiration and design without the need for technical knowledge, giving agency to citizens to articulate their desires and aspirations for place futures. At the same time, it also demonstrated a preference for using physical, tangible objects as provocations during collective envisioning activities. It can therefore be deduced that a combination of digital and non-digital tools is the most effective way of engaging non-experts in placemaking.

The ability for the design provocations to open debate amongst citizen groups and provoke a discussion on individual and collective aspirations for places highlighted their effectiveness in addressing the issues of traditional methods of engagement in planning practice. The open, intentionally provocative, and often ambiguous nature of the chosen design provocations were in stark contrast to traditional engagement methods in planning. Rather than complicating engagements with confusing, technical language, the fluid and open-

ended activities that were enabled through the design provocations, by in large, made it easier for people to dream and think outside of the box (baring some friction as described in chapter 4). However, this approach was not without its challenges. For some participants, the ambiguity and lack of structure in the activities made it difficult to engage meaningfully, as they struggled to relate the speculative scenarios to their lived experiences. This aligns with critiques of design provocations that suggest such approaches can sometimes obscure rather than clarify the issues at hand (DiSalvo, 2015). The findings suggest a need to balance open-ended provocations with more structured frameworks that can support participants in connecting abstract ideas with tangible actions.

Likewise, the freedom to communicate visions through a variety of different media and environments aided participants to articulate complex ideas and express their aspirations easier than would have been possible through traditional planning consultation exercises. The level of participant involvement in the creation of design provocations in the first case study affected how much ownership and buy-in citizen groups had for the vision created. As the design provocations were created by the researcher rather than collectively, the visions created caused friction amongst the group and didn't represent the nuance and diversity of opinions.

The subsequent case study learnt from this and took a different approach to the use of design provocations, utilising Pinterest as an initial provocation to enable discussion and support a community organisation to collectively curate ideas for how to transform urban voids. This curational process enabled knowledge sharing and sensitised participants to the variety of tools at their disposal, building capacity to reimagine. Building on this, the use of the card deck as a design provocation ensured that the learnings from the Pinterest activity were incorporated in their development but learnt from the challenges the group had in designing in a digital environment. The card deck was designed in a way as to be adaptable to a variety of different design activities and could be appropriated by participants as they desired in order to help them design their own visions. Using the card deck in a variety of ways from gamifying the activity to simply giving participants free reign to decide how they used them was a crucial intervention in ensuring they aided participants in a flexible and open way.

Also learning from the failures of the first case study, the speculative future scenarios as design provocations, detailed in chapter 6, were designed with a community organisation. The co-design of the activity enabled the group to identify locations of importance to them and raise concerns they have about the future through the designed activities. The scenarios chosen all represented a potential issue the town might face in the future as discussed by participants during the co-design workshops. While digital tools complemented the tangible artefacts by enabling remote engagement, their effectiveness depended on the context. In in-situ environments, such as walking trails, digital tools facilitated deeper individual participation. However, in workshop settings, where collective ideation was the focus, non-digital artefacts such as printed maps and ideation cards were more effective in fostering meaningful collaboration. This distinction highlights the need to carefully select tools based on the environment and the desired form of engagement.

The steel heritage case study (Chapter 4) took a different approach to the use of design provocations as their purpose in this case was to elicit responses from the wider public. This approach meant that the only opportunity for citizens to feedback was through commenting on social media and the design provocation did little to enable citizens to contribute their vision for the urban void. This somewhat replicated traditional engagement processes within the planning system where residents are presented with a vision and are only offered the opportunity to comment, rather than be involved in the actual design of the vision itself. The use of Pinterest and card deck in chapter 5 was in stark contrast to this as the design provocations built on the previous learnings of engagements with citizens and the provocations were purposefully designed to enable envisioning. Likewise, the speculative future scenarios were designed to support citizens to express their aspirations for place futures and provided the tools for non-planning experts to design their own visions for the spaces in-situ.

However, the photo simulations used within Chapter 4 to articulate complex ideas of place futures were a useful tool in structuring discussion within the heritage group itself. However, the controversy they created internally led to friction as agreeing on the vision they put forward was a contentious issue. The process of discussing this vision led to several

alternative ideas being put forward. Davidoff (1965) discussed how the creation of plural plans that have competing ideas for uses of the same site can lead to the creation of a sounder plan. The action of the group articulating their counter-vision to the public through social media posts fostered a discussion amongst the wider public and was picked up by local media outlets. Had these counter-visions not been proposed then opportunities for discussion may have been limited to discussion on the proposals put forward by the mayor and the chance to challenge this would have been much more restricted. Whilst the discussion fostered on social media was generally against the visions put forward by the heritage group, it enabled a crucial part of a democratic process of ensuring engagement in planning. However, as people were only able to comment via text and no other medium for contribution was offered, this activity did somewhat replicate that of traditional planning engagement that relies heavily on text as opposed to visual input for creating space for discussion on place futures.

The exercise of co-curation detailed in chapter 5 enabled participants to explore the breadth of options for change, whilst at the same time, the process of discovery fostered conversation amongst the group in a digital environment. The tangibility of the card deck meant that it lent well to group activities where participants would share cards of interest with others and discuss how they could implement something similar in the spaces they were hoping to transform.

The use of speculative future scenarios opened opportunities for unorthodox and imaginative thinking where discussing the possibility of an abstract and utopian futures challenged participants preconceptions of what a place could be. Deploying the provocations in the locations where the scenarios were taking place meant that the abstract nature of activities were more relatable to participants and their ability to communicate ideas of what could be was much easier. Whilst the speculative future scenarios did open opportunities for imaginative thinking, the abstract nature of the activities also posed challenges. Some participants found it difficult to engage with speculative scenarios that seemed disconnected from their immediate realities, leading to scepticism about the relevance of these visions. Therefore, it can be argued that design provocations can sometimes struggle to gain traction in communities focused on practical outcomes. The

==research suggests that speculative methods must be carefully balanced with more tangible activities to ensure broader participant engagement.==

The provocative nature of the far-fetched ideas created in chapter 4 were a useful tool in enabling imaginaries that didn't focus on industrial use as the only possible future for the site. However, despite this being a useful way to challenge this collective imaginary of the area, it did also highlight how theories such as capital realism as explained by Fisher (2009) can impact the creative process and hinder processes of prefiguring what could be. Fisher described how the inability to imagine alternatives that do not fit within capitalist systems can limit imagination as only visions that are deemed as economically realistic are proposed. This case study also highlighted how the lack of participant involvement in the design of the visuals could have hindered the design process.

Whereas the use of Pinterest and card deck as detailed in Chapter 5 was designed in a way to provoke citizens to create their own visions. It provoked a process of discovery, ideation and design that enabled the citizen group to collectively reimagine alternative uses for urban voids. The simplicity and flexibility of the card deck provides a useful tool in prompting ideas from participants where seeing examples of other projects that have been successful provoked a belief that they could also successfully transform spaces in their neighbourhoods.

The use of speculative future scenarios as a design provocation was a useful tool in challenging participants to see the current state of a place in a different way. It demonstrated a useful method for dealing with issues of cultural inertia that exist in Teesside (Chapman, 2010), where a collective imaginary of stagnation and decline hinders the potential to imagine or enact change in a place. It provoked participants to problem-solve and use design thinking as a way to create innovative solutions to complex problems. The opportunity to input responses through a variety of media including, video, audio and drawing to solve the challenges participants had to overcome offered insights as to how non-text-based approaches of engaging citizens in the reimagination of place could be more effective, enabling the articulation of complex concepts through more creative means.

The findings of chapter 4 highlight how the action of creating alternative proposals to the mayor enabled the group to be seen as the main opposition to the plans within local media circles, giving them more exposure and legitimacy. This also empowered the group with a sense of agency to speak out against the mayor's plans and apply pressure on decision makers. Had the design provocations not been used, and the photo simulations not created, the group wouldn't have been seen in this way. However, the jarring of opinions within the group and the lack of public support across social media channels didn't help the campaign in effectively challenging the mayor.

Overall, whilst a combination of digital and non-digital tools offered a more varied way for participants to engage and gave more opportunities to express their aspirations for place futures, the non-digital tools used such as the placemaking ideation cards were much more effective when citizens were actively engaged in a co-design process to materialise a shared vision for an urban void. Whereas, for example, the digital tools used such as the OurPlace mobile application did not garner much traction from participants, with technical difficulties and the barriers that this created. The use of a physical, non-digital tool in a group setting was much more conducive to supporting these citizen groups to imagine as opposed to the digital activities that participants took part in individually.

2. What are the challenges for citizens in reimagining urban voids in post-industrial areas?

This research has found that besides the fact that the existence of urban voids is considered unsightly, that they can affect social cohesion in a place and they impact the potential for investment and growth as these places are deemed undesirable, their existence can also affect a citizen's ability to imagine alternative possibilities.

It found that places with a high number of urban voids often struggle with issues and entrenched beliefs that have been explained through the likes of the broken window theory (Wilson, 1982), cultural inertia (Chapman, 2011), capital realism (Fisher, 2009) and dominant narratives that paint a negative picture of a place (Davoudi et al., 2018), its people and its future potential. The provocations in this research attempted to disrupt these entrenched beliefs and issues that were inherent in local mindsets.

To combat cultural inertia, the methods deployed attempted to challenge entrenched mindsets and stimulate alternative thinking. This was achieved through the design provocations that encouraged exploration and discovery. For example, the photo-elicitation activity detailed in chapter 4 and the use of the Pinterest board and placemaking ideation cards detailed in chapter 5 were specifically deployed to open discussion amongst participants and broaden their horizons, highlighting how other places were able to overcome adversity and improve places that have similar attributes and challenges to the spaces in their local community.

By providing real-world examples and prompting participants to challenge their preconceived ideas, these activities facilitated the exploration of alternative futures based on tangible, proven examples rather than abstract concepts. The highly visual nature of these exercises helped non-experts to overcome misconceptions about what is possible and instil a sense of confidence that they could also achieve the same. Additionally, the speculative scenarios deployed in chapter 6 created opportunities for participation and encouraged citizens to collectively challenge conventional thinking, breaking down perceived barriers on what was possible in their communities. Through these efforts, citizens were empowered to imagine beyond the status quo and envision how urban voids could be transformed. That being said, there was still some resistance to this way of dreaming up or imagining beyond the current state of things, with issues of capital realism prevalent amongst some participants with a reluctance to ideate beyond proposals that they deemed as being unrealistic.

The research was able to demonstrate how dominant and negative imaginaries that portray urban voids as symbols of economic failure and neglect with no potential to be reimagined, could be challenged. By deconstructing commonly held ideas of what was possible, citizens were encouraged to reimagine urban voids in ways that challenged prevailing narratives. This was achieved through the design provocations, where citizens were prompted to consider alternative uses and potential for urban voids, moving beyond the limitations imposed by negative perceptions and giving these groups a sense of agency to make the change they want to see.

Likewise, the resistance to change from both citizens and politicians alike was explored. Despite the initial reluctance amongst citizens, most participants were able to overcome those challenges and articulate their aspirations for change. In particular, where efforts were made to demonstrate the potential benefits of alternative strategies such as lighter, quicker, cheaper interventions through tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture approaches.

3. Can prefigurative placemaking provide a mechanism to enable change of urban voids?

The concept of prefigurative placemaking as coined in this work, can provide a mechanism to enable change of urban voids and improve citizen participation in reimagining place. Prefigurative placemaking involves materialising alternative futures for places through a collaborative co-design approach with citizen groups. Its intention is to use these visions to challenge existing perceptions and assumptions about what those spaces could become and demonstrate alternatives are possible. Doing so through the use of design provocations meant that participants were encouraged to see these urban voids not as challenges for practical planning but as canvases for collective imagination and future-oriented thinking, outside of limitations on what is most feasible.

The research found that the concentration of possible interventions around tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture approaches at the micro-scale, as demonstrated in chapter 5, was an effective way of demonstrating that change is possible. It enabled a digestible way for citizens to understand the ways in which they can influence change in their local communities.

However, this method would not have translated to meso and macro scale urban voids, therefore the approach of speculative scenarios proved more effective in order to support citizen groups to prefigure alternative possibilities for these spaces at a larger scale. It could be said that these processes enabled participants to challenge preconceived assumptions about the future of the sites and build knowledge of potential planning issues, empowering them to engage more effectively in planning processes.

However, the research also highlights challenges and limitations of prefigurative placemaking as a mechanism to bring about improvements to urban voids. Despite the efforts to envision alternative futures, there were instances, particularly in chapter 4, where the designed visual artifacts failed to capture people's imaginations and provoke them to rethink their perceptions of the urban void. Moreover, it could be argued that at times, the provocative nature of prefiguring place could cause more damage to a citizen groups ability to work together, as was demonstrated in chapter 4 where internal misunderstandings within the campaign group hindered their ability to challenge the dominant narrative of local politicians effectively.

Therefore, it can be argued, prefigurative placemaking as a planning mechanism can be effective in certain situations and can support the building of shared knowledge, reignite belief in a place's future and act as a call to arms to take action to improve an urban void, however it does come with limitations and may not be appropriate in certain circumstances and situations as was highlighted in chapter 4.

The approach taken in this research suggests that overall, prefigurative placemaking can serve as a tool for communities to articulate visionary goals and foster a sense of agency in shaping their surroundings in some circumstances more than others, as has been demonstrated through the case studies within this work. In contrast to traditional approaches, which tend to adhere to incremental, pragmatic or most feasible plan, prefigurative placemaking frames the design process as an opportunity for radical imagination and transformation. This orientation has allowed design provocations to work not only as tools for immediate planning, as evidenced in chapter 5 but as inspirations for participants to envision and aspire towards alternative urban futures, as was demonstrated in chapter 6.

To fully realise the potential of prefigurative placemaking in enabling change of urban voids across all facets of society, from citizens to landowners and local authorities, it is essential to adopt a more open and participatory process of envisioning. One where all parties involved in the reshaping of places are given the opportunity to imagine beyond the current state of things and can challenge and be challenged on conventional ways of imagining the

future of place. Through this involvement of a wider range of stakeholders, beyond just citizen groups, prefigurative placemaking can become a powerful mechanism for challenging existing narratives and rethinking the way in which urban voids are used.

8.2 Reflections on working with collaborators and post-research impacts

In general, working with community organisations and informal groups was a fruitful experience and led to interesting perspectives for this research. Considerable amounts of work went in to initially engaging with potential collaborators and ensuring that the research agenda aligned with their objectives and aspirations. Rather than being a transactional process attempts were made to make this as relational as possible. That being said, collaboration with diverse groups and individuals comes with its own challenges and opportunities as has been demonstrated throughout this work.

8.2.1 Ensuring the research added value

One of the research's major concerns was ensuring that the research outputs added value to the community organisations. Rather than simply extracting information from these groups, the research aimed to support these groups meet their objectives.

An issue prevalent throughout the case studies was around creating a purpose for the activities and actions. Given that the provocations were not directly informing policy and had limited involvement from local decision-makers, the research faced challenges in demonstrating tangible impact. Some participants struggled to see the relevance of the abstract scenarios to their everyday concerns or for their specific aspirations for the site, which limited their engagement. This highlights the limitations of speculative design in contexts where participants are more focused on immediate or practical outcomes, suggesting that design provocations must be carefully tailored to align with participants' expectations and the specific context of engagement. It could be argued that the research outputs detailed in chapter 4 created more problems for the group, however for the reasons justified in the reflections and conclusions they did still add value, in so far as the group becoming the main opposition and gaining credibility locally. The outputs from

chapters 5 and 6 gave both community groups a useful tool they could continue to use post research and the new projects and connections that came from this research certainly added value to these communities.

8.2.2 Post-research impacts

As briefly mentioned in the previous section, the outputs from the research in chapters 5 and 6, i.e. the card deck and speculative future walks were tools that it was hoped would be used by the community groups in future work. Since the research concluded, the card deck has continued to be used by the community organisation and has been shared with numerous other organisations across the town. It has been used to support the design of placemaking projects in alleyways and other underused spaces in Middlesbrough. More copies of the card deck were printed as the collaborator expressed an interest in distributing this tool to more groups. Further iterations of the card deck are planned by the group as they want to build on the research to propose new designs from their learnings.

The conversations initiated and groups convened through this research has led to the formation of new publics as described in chapter 3. Regular activist meet ups now discuss future ideas for Middlesbrough, and the Reimagining Boro work initiated in chapter 6 continues to provoke interesting discussions amongst activists. The Pinterest board detailed in chapter 5 also remains active and is used as a reference point and as a repository of ideas for community groups to call upon when initiating a new placemaking project in their neighbourhoods.

8.2.3 Appropriate use of methods

This research took a combination of action research and research through design methods. On reflection, the use of action research was appropriate for the collaboration with the community groups as it allowed flexibility and ensured that the community groups participated throughout the process. It also ensured that learnings at each stage were reflected on and interventions changed based on these learnings, which in turn helped collaborators to understand their own future actions in other work. Research through design ensured that design remained central to this work, the creative process was a crucial

factor in enabling new imaginations. Some participants found the speculative methods confusing or irrelevant to their immediate concerns, leading to disengagement during certain activities. This reflects broader critiques of design-based approaches that suggest such methods can sometimes alienate participants unfamiliar with speculative thinking (Le Dantec, 2016). The findings suggest a need to provide more structured support to bridge the gap between abstract design activities and participants' everyday experiences. However, there was limitations to these collaborations and the use of these methods did make designing research activities more challenging due to the evolving iteration of the work throughout. As previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic also affected the effective use of these methods, with the uncertainty of when research could be conducted making it difficult to conduct research.

In reflecting on the role of using design provocations across the case studies, it is important to acknowledge my own positionality as researcher, designer, and activist. The balance between facilitating and guiding the design process is delicate, and my use of speculative design and visual representation to elicit responses undoubtedly influenced the direction of discussions and outcomes. Likewise, my role as a citizen with a desire to see improvements in my local area influenced the design process and how I engaged with the research. While I aimed to democratise the design process, my professional knowledge may have at times, created a top-down dynamic that unintentionally limited participant agency. This tension echoes Ward's (1973) critique of professionals speaking for communities and raises broader questions about the assumption that design can always function as a tool for democratisation. However, my role as a citizen activist, meant that I was able to relate to participants on a deeper level and this helped to mitigate some of the issues highlighted by Ward.

8.3 Limitations of this work

8.3.1 COVID-19

As previously discussed in the Introduction (chapter 1) and at various points where relevant in data chapters, there were major impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on the ability to effectively carry out this research. Engaging and reengaging with participants during

lockdowns and social distancing created extra barriers and made the recruitment of participants difficult. Building a repour with the collaborators in each detailed case study also proved difficult, as the carrying out of all research on video calls with no opportunity to meet in person meant that relationships could not be strengthened beyond the confines of the research agenda initially, this only came at the latter stages of completing the final case study. If the groups were able to have met in person, then the social relationships that could have been built from serendipitous conversation could have strengthened this research and built trust.

There were also challenges to finding collaborators, the initial work to find collaborators took place before the pandemic, when lockdowns began the difficulties in keeping communication going and the sudden change in priorities of these groups meant that connection was lost. Therefore, all collaborators worked with throughout this research were found during the midst of lockdowns which made communication difficult, and this did somewhat effect plans for research and quality of outcomes.

Likewise, there was constraints to working with citizen groups in that many of the members were volunteers and had limited capacity to engage. Due to the groups informality, it made it difficult to convene meetings and gain an understanding of their objectives and aims as each member had their own viewpoint with consensus and decision making difficult.

Where possible, it was ensured that the research agenda matched that of the community groups aspirations. An open and transparent process was crucial and ensuring that engagements remained as informal and flexible as possible was an important step in ensuring groups remained engaged, particularly during periods of lockdowns.

Another impact of the pandemic was that, due to the lockdowns, the methods used had to constantly be adapted and, had this work been carried out under normal circumstances, the methods chosen to engage participants may have been different. Planning for data collection was also difficult as the constant changing of social distancing rules and lockdowns meant that research activities couldn't be planned more than a week or so in advance, and even when they did go ahead many participants had to drop out at the last

minute due to illness or other priorities. Future research could explore how the implications of the covid-19 pandemic changed the engagement process and suggest alternative approaches to reimaging place without the restrictions the pandemic brought about in this research.

8.3.2 Real World Impact

Assessing the real-world impact of the design provocations in supporting the future endeavours of the citizen groups was difficult due to the time constraints of this research. Had there been more time and had there been no delays brought about by COVID-19 then this work could have been strengthened by observing how groups utilised the tools created through this research to support their future projects.

The impacts of the Save Our Steel Heritage case study were visible, and were detailed in chapter 4, showing how the campaign failed to stop demolition. Since then, at the time of writing this conclusion, the group had disbanded. However, I still participate where possible in the citizen groups activities detailed in chapter 5 and this group has begun to utilise the card deck to support future alleyway makeovers. Likewise, the group detailed in chapter 6 still use speculative future scenario approaches to facilitate wider discussions amongst activists in Teesside.

8.4 Significance of Contribution

Using Max Lock's work as inspiration as an early pioneer of participatory planning in the UK, this work has built on his legacy to advocate for a more community-driven approach to envisioning the future of Teesside, challenging conventional thinking to the way the region can and should develop. It has shown how through a process of collective imagining and ideation, the methods used throughout this research were able to animate disillusioned communities and tackle apathy brought about by cultural inertia. The combination of digital and non-digital tools in supporting groups to manifest their aspirations for the future via design provocations offers a novel approach to the planning field.

Likewise, the research contributes to a growing body of work at the intersection of urban planning and HCI. Exploring how the use of digital and non-digital tools can support the

placemaking process by enabling citizens to articulate their ideas, fostering a discussion and provoking action.

The research provides a timely contribution to understand the effects of the decline and neglect of urban voids on citizen's ability to imagine alternative futures. In the wake of the death of the high street, austerity, and the global pandemic the appearance of more urban void spaces is likely to grow.

This research has highlighted several methods that could be used to support citizens reimagine place using design provocations as part of a prefigurative placemaking process. It provides a narration on how novel planning approaches such as tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture could be used to inform citizen groups on actionable ways to make change in their neighbourhoods and build agency by enabling groups to implement change through lighter, quicker, and cheaper interventions. The use of photo elicitation and speculative scenarios as methods to support non-experts to envision change and challenge dominant narratives of place futures is encapsulated in the term prefigurative placemaking as a contribution of this research.

The challenge for participatory design, therefore, lies in striking the right balance between fostering creative imagination and addressing practical concerns. Visual tools that are too abstract or speculative may fail to resonate with participants who are focused on tangible, immediate outcomes. Conversely, visuals grounded in real-world examples can inspire but may also limit innovation by encouraging participants to replicate existing solutions rather than adapting them to their unique context. These findings suggest design based activates must carefully consider the expectations and needs of participants when selecting and deploying visual tools in the ideational stages of planning and placemaking.

8.5 Future Work

As discussed throughout this work the growth in urban voids, particularly in post-industrial areas is likely to continue, with high streets struggling, lack of prospective investment and

the further loss of industry, places such as Teesside are in need of innovative novel approaches to reimagine their growing urban voids and regenerate a once thriving region.

The research provided insights into how citizen's capacity to imagine could be supported and demonstrate how certain tools could support citizen groups to go from problem, to ideation, to vision. However further work is needed to go one step further and explore the complexities inherent in moving from vision to the implementation of interventions in urban voids. This work, whilst offering valuable insights into the ideation phase, doesn't deal with the barriers and challenges at play in implementing community-led interventions.

Future work could also compare and contrast the use of different prefigurative methods and approaches taken within this case study to understand their effectiveness in transforming urban voids. Likewise, the methods used in this case study could be deployed in different geographical contexts to understand how effective they may be in supporting communities transform space, especially non-post-industrial regions where issues such as cultural inertia may not be as prevalent.

This research has demonstrated that in order to challenge the idea of what place is and what it could be, citizens need to be provided with the tools to support them prefigure an alternative in order to challenge decision makers and build a shared belief that an alternative is possible. A combination of technology-enabled participation alongside non-digital tools is suggested as one way to achieve this throughout this research, whereby non-planning experts are able to create their own visions for the future of urban voids through their interaction with digital and non-digital tools. However, this research appropriated technologies and digital platforms that have been available for a long period of time and have long been used to support design-based activity.

The development of new technology and tools in recent years, specifically around supporting alternative imaginaries of place, offers new opportunities to explore how they can support citizens reimagine urban voids. Two such examples demonstrate the potential of this technology. Transform Your City, for example, is an AI powered platform that enables users to create conceptual imagery using photo realistic simulations to reimagine cities. It

uses generative AI to recognise the elements of an urban space such as trees, cars, roads, buildings, footpaths etc. and through user input, erase and replace certain elements to reconfigure the space and visualise new uses.

Likewise, the power of other generative AI platforms to create photo realistic renders of urban imaginaries opens new opportunities to engage people in the design of the future of place through visual-based methods. The increasing ubiquity and accessibility of generative AI platforms such as DALL-E means that through inputting text into the AI, a user can generate artwork and imagery of anything, offering exciting opportunities to explore how their application can augment the prefigurative placemaking processes detailed in this work and further support non-planning-experts to articulate their visions for places as an alternative to formal, top-down planning processes. The ability to use these new tools to create design provocations offers more possibilities for applying prefigurative approaches to support communities co-design visions for alternative uses for urban voids. However, as Ponzini (2018) forewarned, the use of AI to generate such imagery for urban landscapes also throws up challenges of the ways in which visuals can be used to dominate narratives on place futures. Therefore, this research recommends the exploration of future studies into the role generative AI can play in the creation of visual material that can either supports or hinder prefigurative placemaking approaches.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Summary of research participants

Project	Who	Notes	Participated Via:
Save Our Steel Campaign	Citizen, Male	N/A	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Citizen, Male	N/A	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Citizen, Male	Only attended one session	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Former Steel Worker, Male	N/A	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Citizen, Male	Involved in local politics (not party affiliated)	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Historian, Male	N/A	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Citizen, Female	Also doing research on campaign group	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Historian, Male	N/A	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Citizen, Male	N/A	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Mayoral Candidate, Female	Local politician (party affiliated)	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Citizen, Female	Attended with husband only	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Citizen, Male	N/A	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Local Business Owner, Male	N/A	Online (Via zoom)
Save Our Steel Campaign	Local Councillor, Male	Local politician (party affiliated)	Online (Via zoom)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Female	Only took part in Pinterest activity	Online (via pinterest)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Male	Only took part in Pinterest activity	Online (via pinterest)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Male	Only took part in follow up to Pinterest activity	Online (Via zoom)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Female	N/A	Online (Via zoom + pinterest)

Pinterest + Card Deck	Local business owner, Male	N/A	Online (Via zoom + pinterest)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Community organiser, Male	N/A	Online (via pinterest)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Female	Art Student	Online (Via zoom)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Local Artists, Male	Resident of street	Online (Via zoom + pinterest)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Local Artists, Female	Resident of street	Online (Via zoom + pinterest)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Community organiser, Female	N/A	Online (Via zoom + pinterest)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Female	N/A	In person (card deck activity + online)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Male	N/A	In person (card deck activity + online)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Female	Alley makeover only, resident	In person alley makeover
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Female	Alley makeover only, resident	In person alley makeover
Pinterest + Card Deck	Community organiser, Male	N/A	In person (card deck activity + online)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Female	N/A	In person (card deck activity + online)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Male	Alley Makeover + Card Deck activity	In person (card deck activity)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Male	Alley makeover only, resident	In person alley makeover
Pinterest + Card Deck	Community organiser, Female	N/A	In person (card deck activity + online)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Community organiser, Male	Alley Makeover + Card Deck activity	In person alley makeover
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Male	N/A	In person (card deck activity + online)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Male	N/A	In person (card deck activity + online)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Community organiser, Female	Resident of street	In person (card deck activity + online)
Pinterest + Card Deck	Citizen, Female	Alley makeover only, resident	In person alley makeover
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Male	N/A	In person workshops

Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Male	Event Attendee	Walking activity (paper copy)
Speculative Future Walks	Community organiser, Female	Family of event organisers	In person workshops
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Female	Event Attendee	Walking activity (paper copy)
Speculative Future Walks	Community organiser, Male	Event Attendee	Walking activity (paper copy)
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Male	Event Attendee	Walking Activity (Mobile app)
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Female	N/A	In person workshops
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Male	N/A	In person workshops
Speculative Future Walks	Community organiser, Female	Event Organiser	Walking Activity (Mobile app)
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Male	Event Attendee	Walking Activity (Mobile app)
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Female	N/A	In person workshops
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Male	N/A	In person workshops
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Male	Event Attendee	Walking activity (paper copy)
Speculative Future Walks	Community organiser, Male	Event Organiser	Walking activity (paper copy)
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Female	Event Attendee	Walking activity (paper copy)
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Male	Event Attendee	Walking activity (paper copy)
Speculative Future Walks	Citizen, Female	Event Attendee	Walking activity (paper copy)

Appendix B - Online project information and consent form used during social distancing restrictions.

Newcastle University

Research Project Information & Consent form

Project Description: Forming part of a research study that serves to understand how communities collectively design desired urban futures your participation will contribute to the collection of data that will form part of an anonymized analysis.

In this study, you will participate in discussions around the future of unused sites and be asked to explore alternative futures of places as part of a group. The project is conducted while sitting and does not require exerting activities, it will take place entirely online through videocalls.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may choose to participate or to withdraw your participation at any time without any penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. Your individual data will be kept private.

Any data produced will be stored in an encrypted file container and stored on the university file system. You can opt to have your data removed at any time.

Please do not hesitate to let the conductor know if you have any questions, or would like to take a break at any time during sessions.

Risks and Benefits: there are no known risks involved in this procedure. However, your participation does benefit public research about placemaking and urban futures.

Duration: Your participation will normally include a weekly zoom discussion and subsequent discussions across the groups communication channels.

We sincerely appreciate your involvement and valuable feedback, and we thank you for your participation.

With my signature below, I certify that I have read the above text and I am well informed about the motivation and procedure of this research experiment on "Using digital tools to engage citizens in the reimagination of underused spaces".

I am aware that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from participation at any time without explicit reason and with no further consequences.

I agree that the data resulting from my participation in this study will be subject to anonymous scientific analysis and publication and only the relevant organisation names will be used.

Please tick the boxes if you agree: *
☐ I agree to participate in this research experiment under the conditions described above

Name *

| First | Last |

Data Protection Statement

Data will be stored in an encrypted file container and stored on the university file system. You can opt to have your data removed at any time.

Submit

Information about the Participation in a Research Experiment

Please read the following information carefully.

Study: Reimagining Underused Spaces

Conductors: ROBERT BAILEY

Organization: NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY (Open Lab)

Contact: r.bailey@newcastle.ac.uk

Description: Forming part of a research study that serves to understand how communities collectively design desired urban futures your participation will contribute to the collection of data that will form part of an anonymized analysis.

In this study, you will participate in discussions around the future of unused sites and be asked to explore alternative futures of places as part of a group. The project is conducted while sitting and does not require exerting activities, it will take place entirely online through videocalls. Participants should have good eye sight or wear adequate correction (e.g. glasses or contact lenses). The exact procedure will be explained to you in the beginning of the session.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may choose to participate or to withdraw your participation at any time without any penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. Your individual data will be kept private.

Any data produced will be stored in an encrypted file container and stored on the university file system. You can opt to have your data removed at any time.

Consent to Participate in a Research Experiment

With my signature below, I certify that I have read the attached document *"Information about the Participation in a Research Experiment" (UnderusedSpaceStudy01 V1)* and am well informed about the motivation and procedure of this research experiment on *"Using digital tools to engage citizens in the reimagination of underused spaces"*.

I am aware that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from participation at any time without explicit reason and with no further consequences.

I agree that the data resulting from my participation in this study will be subject to anonymous scientific analysis and publication and only the relevant organisation names will be used.

Please tick the boxes if you agree:

[ ]   <u>**I agree to participate**</u> **in this research experiment under the conditions described above and in the attached document.**

First and last name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix E - Sample of codes and themes during data analysis

1. Fostering debate through digital materialisation of imaginaries	2. Co-designing alternative futures as a form of political action	3. Who's vision?/Mobilising support through the envisioning process
1.3 Desire to move on and rebuild but need to remember the past	1.1 Local authorities' unwillingness to engage in debate about future engagement	1.7 Stressing the need to engage with the public on the future plans
1.4 Heritage is important but can work alongside a reimagined future engagement	1.2 Ignoring their own masterplan which called for protection of heritage and engagement	1.12 Have to apply pressure politically and get public support
1.8 Envisioning a future where culture is key	1.5 Prioritising an activist approach to stop demolition	2.2. Need to change the minds of the Mayor rather than local people
1.9 Conflicting opinions, but industrial heritage is important	1.6 Desire to build a collective alternative vision	2.3 Unwillingness to open the debate beyond the campaign group
1.14 Use of images to encourage debate on the future of the site	1.10 Need to apply political pressure to get the answers	2.4 Belief that best strategy is to challenge the mayor in order to progress
1.15 Can gain public support through enabling a discussion in the community	1.11 Need to conduct an alternative process to demonstrate value	2.5 Asking for a consultation rather than carrying out their own parallel one
1.17 Use of examples as a way of supporting the reimagination process	1.13 Groups aim to challenge the mayor's vision	2.8 Need to mobilise influential people behind the campaign), however reluctancy to open this up to the wider public.
1.20 Desire to explore alternative options to show what is possible	1.16 Apply political pressure on the mayor	2.9 Unwillingness to open up the debate to wider public and explore methods for how to engage people better
1.21 Internal group conflict on the best way forward for the campaign	1.18 Need to challenge the mayor through proposing a better alternative to his	2.12 Internally developing a vision without engaging with wider public on what is important to them
1.25 Power of imagination and people's abilities to see what could be possible needs to be explored even if this has to come directly from the campaign.	1.23 Group position itself as the 'expert' alternative to the mayor	2.21 The desire to set up the campaign as an expert group who should have their voices heard above others on the future of the site.
1.27 Engaging public through digital mediums during Covid was only viable option	1.24 Demonstrating the lack of engagement and that the narrative has already been set	2.22 Lack of understanding of processes involved in decision making and more clarity needed in order to take action
2.13 Need to stress the heritage value of these structures	1.26 Need to develop a legacy and a best practise model to ensure the campaign is effective	2.28 Passion and emotion people feel for the site and its history should help mobilise people
2.14 Enacting a desire for the future of the site to be integrated into the wider local context	2.1 Feeling that the group needs to position itself as the expert counter argument to the Mayor	3.1 Mobilising support and applying political pressure
2.16 Desire for the heritage of the structures to be saved as part of a wider regeneration process	2.6 Feeling that stopping demolition and envisioning its future are part of two separate processes	3.4 Mobilising the public through digital tools
2.18 Developing ways to engage with the public and build appreciation for the heritage value of the site	2.7 Need to produce a parallel vision as the main counter-argument to demonstrate structure has value and a future	3.15 Need to mobilise a larger demographic beyond Redcar
2.26 Importance of opening up debate to the wider public, however COVID restrictions means that it may be hard to reach off-line communities.	2.10 Belief that we need to engage with the public on why the heritage needs to be saved.	4.1 Stressing the need to engage with the public
2.29 Covid causing problems with reaching local communities, however this also opens up opportunities to reach more people online.	2.15 The group as an adversary to the local authority or as a collaborator in reimagining its past,	4.2 Group not able to mobilise beyond the campaign members
3.2 Remembering the past and reimagining sites future	2.17 Belief that the official channels set up to consult with the public are not genuine.	4.3 Understand importance of mobilising support in order to apply political pressure
3.5 Promoting the campaign to public through offline means	2.19 Develop an alternative strategy that challenges the local authority at the appropriate times	4.4 Social media not effective in mobilising people around campaign
3.4 Mobilising the public through digital tools	2.20 Building knowledge within the group of how to effectively form political actions that can have an effect on decision making	4.5 Effect of covid on mobilising support
3.6 Using social media to mobilise support	2.23 Organising digital tools in order to communicate amongst the campaign group and using these as a way to mobilise more people around the cause	4.22 Desire for the vision campaign puts forward to be realistic

Appendix F - Sample of visuals created as design provocations in the chapter 4 case study.

Appendix G - Research information and consent form used during social distancing restrictions of Covid-19 for case study detailed in Chapter 5

Community Connectors
A Teesside hub for grass-roots activism

Reimagining Boro's Underused Spaces:
A Pinterest Collaboration

We would like to invite you to join us in sharing your ideas for how we could transform unused, under-appreciated and unloved spaces in central Middlesbrough through a collaborative Pinterest board and a series of workshops.

Do you have a vision for an underused space in the town but not sure how to make it happen?

Can you think of a space that is crying out for some love but you're not sure what should go there?

Pinterest is a great tool for us to gain inspiration from around the world and start a discussion on how we could transform these spaces using creative interventions. It also is a great way for us to share our ideas, get support and begin to create a plan of action for making our visions reality whilst being physically apart during lockdown.

This collaboration forms part of a research project with PhD students at Open Lab, Newcastle University exploring how commonly used digital tools can support community-based reimaginations of underused spaces in Teesside.

If you would like to participate in this collaborative group Pinterest board and workshops, please fill out the form below. **After clicking submit, you will be automatically redirected to the group Pinterest board. If you don't yet have a Pinterest account, sign up on the next page and you will then find the board by clicking on your Pinterest profile icon in the top right after completing the sign up process.**

Got a question? Email r.bailey@ncl.ac.uk or ajf.freestyle@gmail.com

Name *

[First] [Last]
First   Last

Email *

[   ]

Checkboxes *

☐ I understand that my participation forms part of a research project. This will include the collection of data as part of this process (including the recording of any meetings, workshops and the analysis of user-generated content on the Pinterest board). However, all data will remain anonymous and I have the right to retract my information and participation from the project at anytime using the contact information detailed within the Data Protection Statement.

Data Protection Statement

This form is part of a research project by Open Lab, Newcastle University. We may collect data on how you interact with the platform and use this in research. Workshops will also be recorded. We often publish academic papers which may contain aggregated user data. Our published findings will never include information that could be used to identify users of the system. Contact Information: If you have any questions about our research in relation to this service please feel free to contact us: Email: r.bailey@newcastle.ac.uk Address: Open Lab Floor 1 Urban Sciences Building 1 Science Square Science Central Newcastle Upon Tyne NE4 5TG Phone: + 44 191 20 84642 | 84630 Effective Date: 9th November, 2020

[Submit]

Appendix H - Outline street scenes used in chapter 5 co-design activity
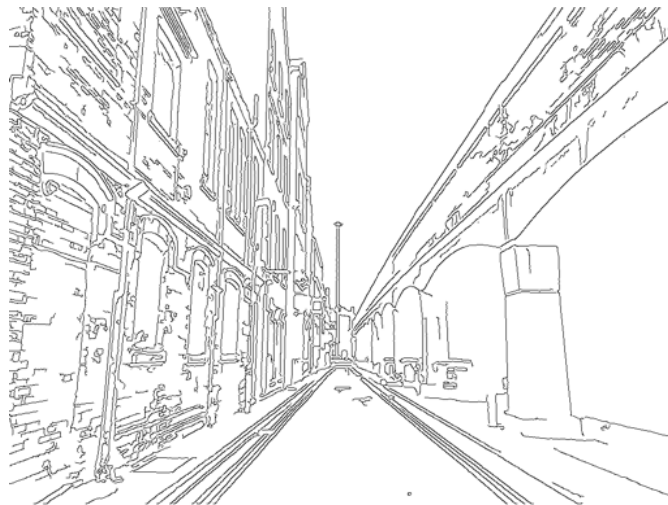
Appendix I - Sample of produced card from placemaking ideation cards used in Chapter 5
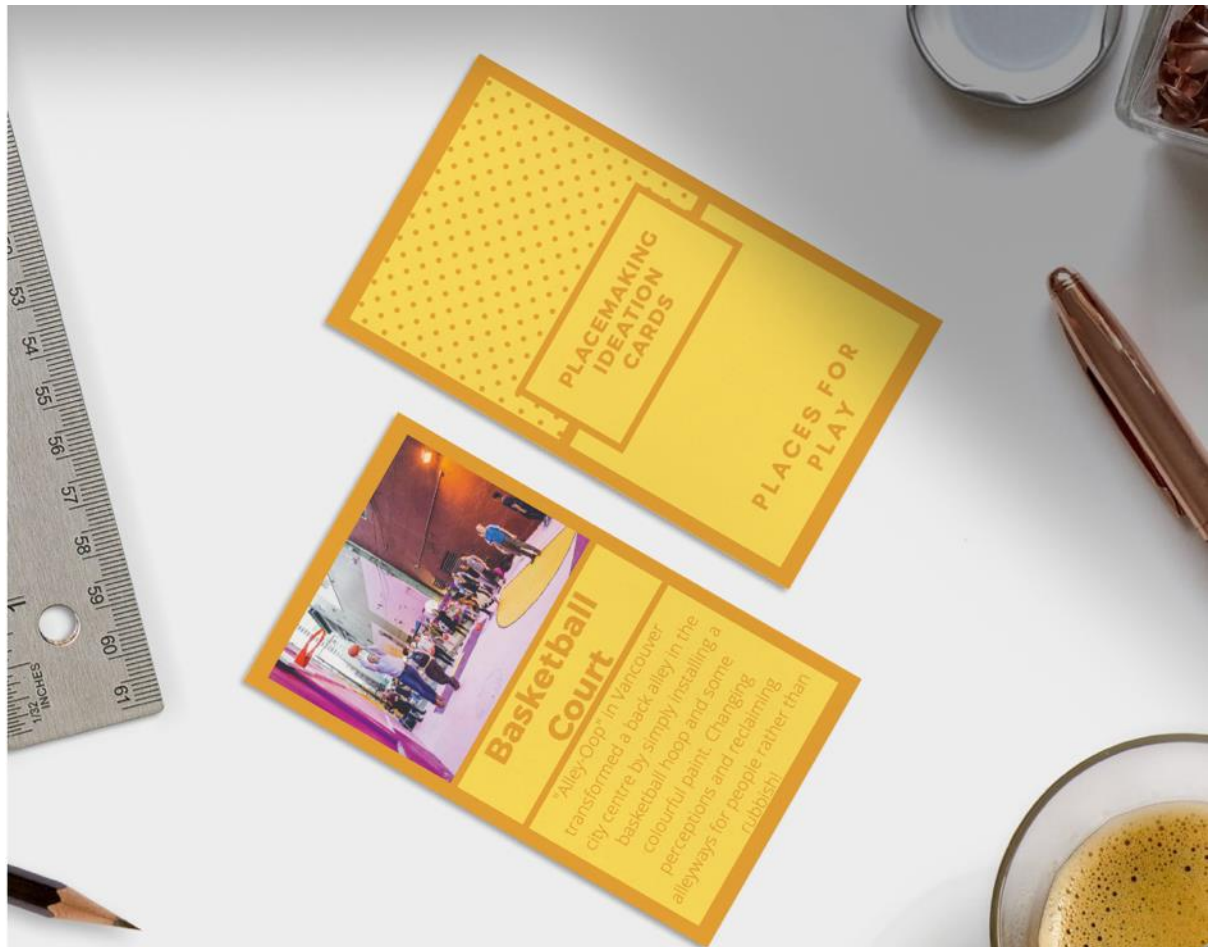
Appendix J - Sample visuals created by participants in Chapter 5

Appendix K - Example of newsletter sent out to Community Connectors Members promoting research project

⚠ External sender. Take care when opening links or attachments. Do not provide your login details.

Community Connectors
13th Dec '20 — **A Teesside hub for grass-roots activism**

2020 is finally coming to a close and many things are winding down for Christmas. How are you feeling going into the festive period? Is this your busy patch? Are you looking forward to a bit of hibernation?

This week's newsletter will be a quick summary of our shared spaces and how active they'll be over the next 3 weeks. Because Community Connectors is a space generated by each of us, there is always room for flex. However, it helps to see the essentials in one place.

In this week's newsletter:

A quick look at what's planned over the Christmas period.

And a summary of our shared spaces and spin-off projects.

Monday Huddle
Huddle is our time to simple check-in at the start of the week.
We'll keep going with our Monday, 10am Zoom slot on the 14th and 21st December. Skipping the 28th and returning on the 4th January.

'Reimagining Boro
Design challenges will run on Pinterest over Christmas with more landing early in January. There may well be ways to build a large scale community conversation from this. There's one more Zoom action meeting before a festive break: this Thursday at 10am.

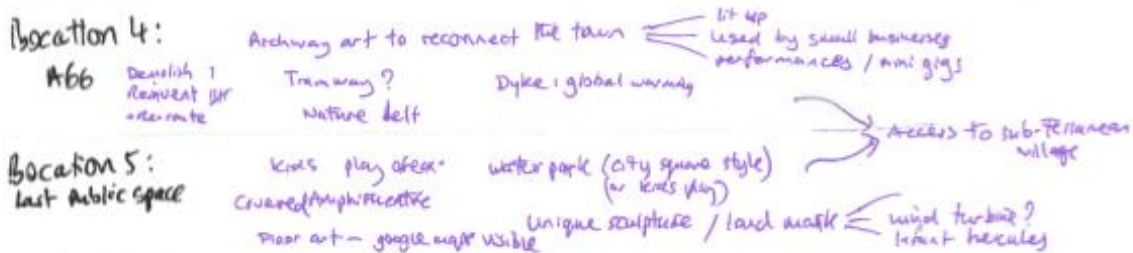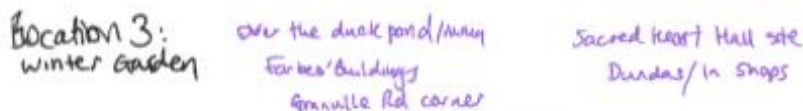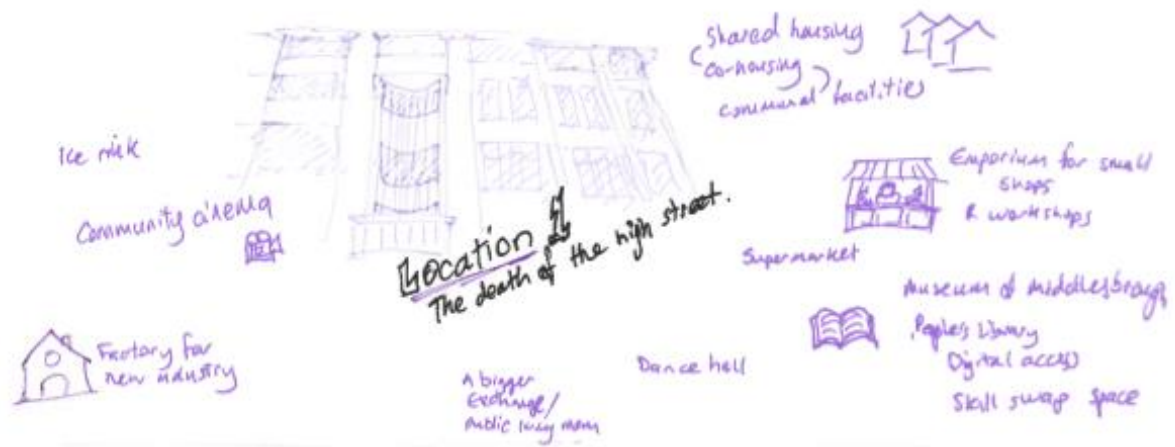**'Gresham Four Streets'** Community Organising together in Gresham. Our Zoom chats led to an action team forming. They will be initiating a community conversation in the week after New Year. Very focused on a small area, this will intersect with broader collaborations for central Boro and Reimahining Boro.
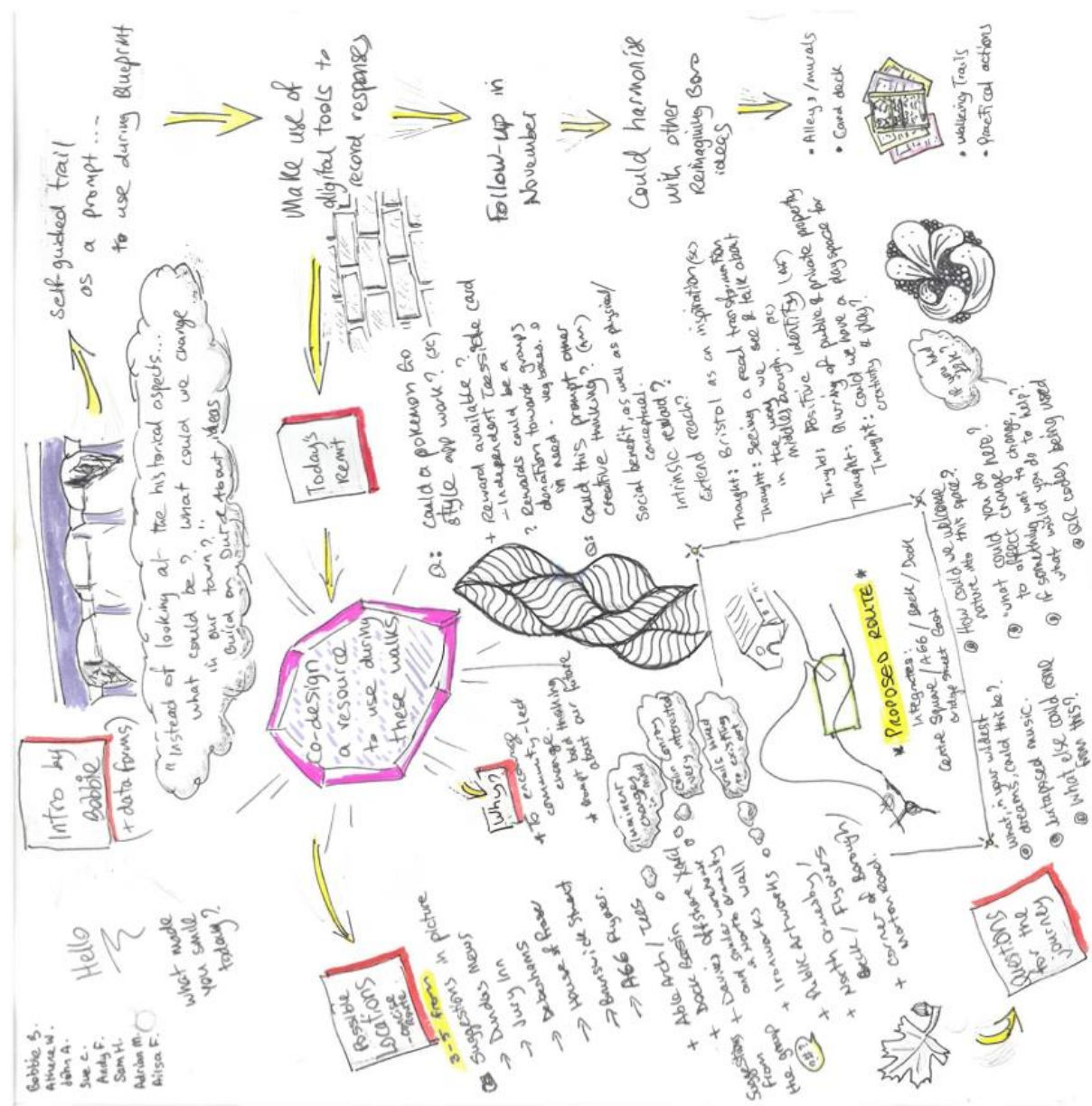
Community Action Hub in Hill Street:
A huge opportunity for our network and the wider community. It's been on the agenda for

Appendix L - Notes from initial co-design workshop of Chapter 6

Ice rink

Community cinema

Factory for new industry

Location 1
The death of the high street.

Shared housing
(co-housing)
communal facilities

Emporium for small shops & workshops

Supermarket

Museum of Middlesbrough

People's Library
Digital access

Skill swap space

Dance hall

A bigger Exchange/ Public living room

Forbes Building (Parliament Rd)
→ compulsory purchase

Church House
- even just using exterior

CNE

Corporation Road
- tramway linking all zones

All abandoned spaces used (given to groups) to play with

Location 2
Boro- happiest town in the UK

St Cuthberts / St John
↳ LS6 style art gallery/makerspace

Roof tops of central buildings

Blank walls → murals

Location 3:
winter Garden

over the duck pond/away
Forbes' Buildings
Granville Rd corner

Sacred Heart Hall site
Dundas/ In shops

Location 4:
A66
Demolish / Reinvent our own route

Archway art to reconnect the town
Tramway?
Nature delt

Dyke : global warming

lit up
used by small businesses
performances / mini gigs

Access to sub-terranean village

Location 5:
Last public space

Kids play area
Covered Amphitheatre
Floor art - google map visible

water park (city square style)
(w kids play)
Unique sculpture / land mark

Wind turbine?
Intact hercules

Location 6:
mediterranean Boro

Beach?
shaded canopy

cafes → unique cuisine /drinks
→ More Boro culture redefining *
→ celebrate happy experiences
→ fiestas

Tangent about reclaiming our own new culture.
↓
People's City of Culture!
↓
10 year plan to pitch.

THE
BLUEPRINT POST

FESTIVAL OF RADICAL IDEAS

WHAT IF? A JOURNEY TO BORO'S FUTURE

DOWNLOAD THE APP

Got a smartphone? This activity is best carried out with your phone! Scan the QR Code or go to the App store and search "OurPlace" to download the app and begin your journey!

If you prefer good old pen and paper then take one of these activity guides.

Thank you for taking part, this self-guided walking trail forms part of a research project at Newcastle University.

Your responses may be analysed as part of research that explores reimaginations of underused spaces.

If you would like to remove your data at any-time after completing the activities or would like more information please email r.bailey@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix O - Example of promoting the walking activity of chapter 6 in a local community space