

Create-Connect-Sustain:

Community sustainability through making and trade

Executive Summary

Working with creative social enterprises who are actively exploring ways of using local making and trade to challenge un-sustainable and exploitative production and consumption systems, this research seeks to investigate how community-based projects use making to enable more connected communities and to support more sustainable economic practices. The research looks for ways in which engaging in new forms of production and trade relates to thinking about broader issues of sustainability, wellbeing, community and consumption. Community partners have identified a need to evidence ways in which their activities affect the people that they work with, and particularly the effect of making as a transformative process for communities as well as individuals. Drawing on arts and humanities methods to elicit and analyse complex stories this project will set up a series of interventions that use making as a research method to explore how project participants relate their engagement in local making and trade to broader environmental and social concerns. The focus will be on creating a deep understanding of the two research partner organisations whilst relating this understanding to a wider community of related and comparable projects, developing a community of practice and sense of a 'sector' around this type of organisation.

Researchers

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Keywords

Sustainability, creativity, making, consumption, social enterprise, transformation, networks

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Progress, learning and planning

[Progress and key learning points from Phase 1 and how this has shaped plans for phase 2]

The objective of phase 1 was to build a shared research agenda and to co-design a plan for co-research on the interactions of social enterprise, creative practice and sustainability. Activities in phase 1 followed the 'Double Diamond' model of design (Design Council, 2005) which suggests progression through four major stages, namely: discover, define, develop, and deliver. In keeping with our focus on creative practice, we employed 'making as enquiry' as a tool in a variety of ways.

Discover: We began with exploratory visits to each community partner (Remade in Leeds / Makerhood). To introduce the partners to each other and to scope possible research questions, we then held an initial workshop (hosted by Remade in Leeds). Prior to the workshop each participant was asked to "Make a tool that addresses a question that you are thinking about in relation to this project. A tool is something that you can actively use to enable things to happen". At the workshop we then talked through what we had made. This enabled us to show how we were thinking about the project; revealed things about our attitudes to making, enterprise and sustainability; and showed partners the kind of skills, processes and materials that shaped our own creative practice. Within this workshop, we also employed making as enquiry as a means to support a different kind of conversation. One of



Figure 1: Tools created for the workshop

our community partners showed us a craft technique that we then experimented with. We talked whilst experimenting with the technique and materials. This mix of making and talking changed the intensity and focus of the discussion. Through this discovery phase we arrived at a set of 14 questions in three general thematic areas: The economies and the systems in which we work; the value of making as a political, economic, social and creative act; sustaining making as a social enterprise. We took these ideas and themes forward into the next stage.

Define: Our second workshop was hosted in Brixton by Makerhood, and involved practitioners who were members of the Makerhood network. In the workshop, we explained the project and presented the 14 ideas. We provided a range of craft materials and asked participants to make something as a personal response to any or all of the questions (or any questions that were 'missing'). We created a Venn diagram of our three themes, and asked people to talk about what they had made and to relate it to the diagram. We then discussed the findings. Interestingly, all the participants chose issues from the categories of 'Value of making' and 'Economies and Systems' rather than pragmatic themes about sustaining their own businesses. This might reflect a desire for research on the meaning and impact of what was being done, however it could be that participants found making better suited for responding to certain types of question. Key issues included:

Figure 2: Making responses



- The relationships between making and personal transformation and learning
- Involvement in making and local trade affecting other consumption and production habits
- The radical aspect of making and trading in challenging norms of consumption
- Deep impact of making on wellbeing, mental health and connectedness

Figure 1: The venn diagram



Develop: We then took these findings forwards into a third workshop (hosted at Sheffield Hallam) where the team defined a narrower range of research questions, and discussed the methods that we could use to address them. We also discussed how the timeline of activities could be interleaved with the planned activities of the two community partners.

Deliver: Following the third workshop, we conducted on-line discussions (via skype), and collaboratively wrote this report and project plan, using Dropbox to share the documents.

1.1 Key learning points

- Our experience has strengthened our confidence in ‘making as enquiry’ for co-research in this domain. At each of the events, we found general agreement that making allowed participants to express and reveal ideas and feelings that they might not have communicated through a purely verbal interaction. We are keen to explore this research approach further in phase 2.
- A second point was the dynamic, fluid, and organic nature of the interactions surrounding these creative communities. People engage in different ways (e.g. purchasing made products, participating in learning events, making for themselves, selling goods, facilitating the network, etc.) and people change their engagement over time. Our research must reflect this dynamic.
- Thirdly, the challenges faced by many of these networks and initiatives when they are starting up are often best addressed through discussions and visits to those who have ‘done it before’, thus being able to link into networks is critical for successful and sustainable models.
- Finally, participants in these networks believe that their actions have very positive impacts for people and communities, but they feel they have a shortage of evidence to back up their claims.

2 Research aims, objectives, focus and questions for Phase 2

Building on our experiences in Phase 1, Phase 2 uses collaborative research and continues to experiment with making as a research method for pursuing the following aims and objectives:

Our aim is to explore practices and impacts in community-based creative projects that aim to connect communities to more sustainable economic and trade practices. These projects are developing practices that support rethinking of consumption patterns and deepening people’s engagement with the ‘stuff’ that they consume and their connections to the people that make, sell, mend and dispose of that stuff. However, they want to build up evidence and understandings about how they operate and the impact they are having.

Our objectives are to:

1. Review and articulate the aims and practices of community partner organisations through reflexive design research approaches;

2. Explore the networks and communities within which they work and other comparable or related projects within the UK;
3. Make research interventions to understand how and why people engage with these projects and how this relates to their experiences of sustainability, community, wellbeing and consumption.
4. Bring together a network of organisations to share understanding and to document practices in a way that evidences the role of the 'sector' in community based sustainability education.

Our central research questions are:

- How are community based [re/making] enterprises stimulating change in consumption and production practices?
- How can encounters with these practices contribute to people's connectedness to communities and the planet?

3 Research methodology for Phase 2

[Research methodology for Phase 2, including process for research co-production]

To address the aim and objectives, an exploratory, embedded and iterative methodology has been devised. Research with busy community projects has to be synchronised with the working calendar of those projects, taking into account periods of higher and lower workloads for the community partners (Dearden, Rizvi & Gupta, 2010). Our process has been designed around the calendar of our partner projects and has been divided into four quarters of the year.

Stage 1 (July, August, September) will address objectives 1 and 2. Activities will include in-depth interviews and making as enquiry activities with the two community partners to create detailed narratives of their work, combined with visits by the research team to other related/comparable projects. Related projects will be identified by the community partners and through desk research. Project profiles will be created for each project, including short multimedia presentations of the projects' activities. This will help to locate Remade in Leeds and Makerhood in relation to other projects, and triangulate findings against a wider 'sector'. Knowledge from this quarter will be shared via project profiles on-line and at a face to face meeting with the research team and members of partner organisations in October where we will review and plan the next stage.

Stage 2 (October, November, December) happens during a busy time for both community partner organisations in the run up to Christmas. This presents an opportunity to work with customers of these projects. Interventions at events will use making as a tool to articulate and record the responses of people who engage with the projects in relation to questions about sustainability, wellbeing, community and consumption. Combined with outputs of Stage 1, this stage would help us identify strong themes and tentative findings to answer our research questions.

Stage 3 (January, February, March) will develop the body of knowledge around the research questions and turn them into outputs that are usable for the sector. This will be done through a workshop in January/February where we will invite representatives from related projects to reflect on the initial findings and explore ways that the evidence might be used by other projects. This will contribute towards building a practice network of related projects and help identify what further field research is appropriate. By agreeing this as at a workshop with project participants and peers we are continuing to co-development of research and ensuring the relevance as a contribution to practice as well as research.

Stage 4 will be used for reflection on the learning from the project and the co-production of project outputs and publications. We will bring together practitioners for one last event to finalise the project outputs which will enable us to make sure that the product of the research process is something that is owned by and of use to the community of projects that have worked on it.

4 Phase 2 research partnerships

(with a clear statement and/or attached letters of support confirming community co-ownership of the proposed plans and community collaborators' commitments to the focus for phase 2 and to the approach to research co-production)

Antiform/Remade in Leeds mobilises local skills and under-used resources to create high-quality, locally produced fashion clothing, encourages the creative re-use of clothing, and develops creative networks around local making and re-making of textiles. Our consultant Lizzie Harrison set up Antiform and Remade in Leeds 2010.

Makerhood is a social enterprise supporting local making and skills in South London. The team of founders and volunteers run online and physical world activities to promote local goods, help people acquire new skills, encourage links in the community, and support local makers businesses. Kristina Glushkova is a co-founder of Makerhood, with technology, business and community-building skills.

Andy Dearden is an expert in participatory design and co-production, particularly for Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) to support social change.

Ann Light is an expert in participatory research, especially digital interdependence;

Katie Hill works across academia and third sector using design processes to enable communities to realise ambitions for socially and environmentally sustainable change.

All the partners have participated in all three workshops, the shaping of the research plan and budgets, and the writing of this document. Please see attached letters of support.

5 Ethical considerations in phase 2

The primary ethical challenges that we have already identified in the work will be around confidentiality of data such as interview recordings, video recordings and transcripts. This may be particularly important because both community partners are social enterprises operating in competitive markets. Verbal briefing and consent forms will make clear who is undertaking the research, and that it is a collaborative project with practitioners and this may have implications in terms of competition when community project partners have access to data about other projects in their own field. Individuals will be given the choice to share their views anonymously or not, however it may not always be possible to anonymise projects or organisations, and they may want acknowledgement of their work. We also need to consider welfare of researchers and protocols for data handling and publications. Because of these complexities, our first action will be a steering group workshop to explore the detailed ethical considerations for co-delivery, and formalise these in a collaboration agreement. We will use connected communities CBPR ethics guide (Banks et al., . 2012) as a resource to inform this discussion. Research protocols will be subject to the ethical governance procedures of Sheffield Hallam University.

6 Management, project team and delivery

The project will be led and co-ordinated by Dearden. A steering group consisting of Dearden, Light, Hill, Glushkova & Harrison will meet face to face (quarterly) and on-line (monthly) to review progress and adjust plans. Katie Hill will be the primary researcher, planning & executing the day-to-day research. Dearden will be Hill's line manager. Directors and members of Makerhood, and key collaborators of Remade in Leeds will be invited to participate in the reflective learning and planning events, and all key documents will be shared with them for comment and input. Glushkova & Harrison will also provide expert input into event design and facilitation, as well as each hosting research activities at their events. Glushkova will also work on the co-delivery of the research with Hill by undertaking project visits, interviews analysis and reporting. All partners will collaborate to promote the project on-line and through their (extensive) social networks.

7 Collaborative reflection and learning

Arrangements for critically reflecting with communities and learning from the processes employed within the project from co-creation through to co-production and co-delivery

Collaborative reflection and learning will be supported through the workshops that punctuate the research design. By engaging with other projects and inviting them to co-develop the research at workshops, we hope that representatives of these external projects will act as critical friends.

The research method design draws upon iterative action research principles so that co-production continues as workshop cycles inform progress and permit reflection, to plan next stages of action.

Community partners will also act as researchers in their own right, responsible for elements of the field research as well as planning and management. This will help build the research capacity of their organisations. Collaborators and members from the community partners will be invited to join reflective learning events.

8 Outputs, outcomes and legacy

The primary *outputs* of the project will be:

- a) The design and demonstration of a practical approach to gathering and managing evidence about the operation and impact of creative practice communities such as those exemplified by Makerhood and ReMade in Leeds;
- b) A series of reflective learning events for members of creative practice communities to explore and share experiences;
- c) A set of case studies on-line mapping out creative practice communities promoting sustainability
- d) A network of networks of such creative practice communities sharing their ideas and experience;

These outputs will be supplemented by documents including:

- e) A report describing the value of sustainable creative practice networks for individual, community and planetary wellbeing;
- f) At least one academic research paper describing the findings about the impact of these organisations;
- g) At least one academic research output exploring the different approaches to making an enquiry in community co-research.

The major *outcomes* of the project will be:

- a) Greater recognition of this sector and its value, for both policy makers and for new communities who may wish to develop similar initiatives;
- b) Closer collaboration and connection between existing community initiatives in an evolving community of practice.

Our primary legacy will be deeper and stronger connections forming a community of practice around sustainable creative practice.

9 Bibliography

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