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Being Maker-Centric: Making as Method for Self-organising & Achieving Craft Impact in Local Communities & Economies

Craft, community, and economy

Urban planner Susan Silberberg (2012: 19), writing about making as a means to collectively imagine public space, observed that ‘In making, we learn, mentor, design, question, act. Making involves a community of individuals, spaces, organisations and institutions over a length of time; it requires a higher level of human contact, a higher level of intent, community awareness and connectedness’. The result, in her view, is a ‘deeply inclusive approach’ and a ‘community that is nurtured, that builds social and political capital, through a process that engenders trust’. This chapter explores making, and its associated values, through the lens of Maker-Centric, an Arts & Humanities Research Council funded project that works with stakeholders and community groups to explore how arts and crafts, hand-making and digital fabrication methods might build community, social and cultural change, and, longer term, economic assets and agencies. The project was funded through the Connected Communities programme, designed to respond to non-academic user and stakeholder needs, extending findings from existing research to new audiences and building capacity through public engagement and knowledge exchange (<https://connected-communities.org/>). Understanding craft affordances within a broadly conceived notion of craft in an ‘expanded field’ (Shales 2017), valuing anonymous and amateur crafting, and making as a mode of engagement are central concerns.

Maker-Centric builds on learning from the project Co-Producing CARE: Community Asset-based Research & Enterprise (CARE) (<https://cocreatingcare.wordpress.com/the-project/>), which was led by Professor Fiona Hackney and Deirdre Figueiredo, Director of Craftspace in

Birmingham. While CARE examined how collaborative community crafting might serve as a means to resolve differences, raise consciousness, and build affective relationships, Maker-Centric applies this work with stakeholders, community groups, small businesses, and creative organisations in a specific region, the English Midlands and the Black Country. The geographical focus responds to Craftspace's location and its remit to employ craft to strengthen and revitalise communities (<http://craftspace.co.uk/>). New stakeholder Creative Black Country joined, building on their work with the 100 Masters initiative that showcases the range and quality of creative practice in the region (<http://www.creativeblackcountry.co.uk/>). The English Midlands is a highly diverse multi-cultural region; working with crafting groups and crafts related entrepreneurs and small businesses recognises the skills, knowledge, expertise, competencies and capabilities embedded in these communities (Hackney 2013b). The region also has a long history of industrial innovation and radical thinking in arts, sciences and manufacture, manifest in the work in metal and enamels showcased at the Bilston Craft Gallery, ironwork at Ironbridge, Staffordshire ceramics, and textiles in Nottingham and Hereford, for instance. Engaging diverse communities with this rich heritage through creative making activities provides space to imaginatively inhabit, respond to, interpret, and develop contemporary perspectives on the past, as a catalyst for future thinking about who we are, how we live, work, and relate to one another in prescribed place-based communities.

The conceptual framework underpinning Maker-Centric was prototyped at the Connected Communities Research Festival: Community Futures and Utopias (2016) (<https://cocreatingcare.wordpress.com/maker-centric-2016/>). Ruth Levitas's (2013) conceptualization of utopia as method to imagine alternative ways of living through the Imaginary Reconstruction of Society (IRS) was central. We examined how co-creative

making might provide a platform for community co-speculation as a form of 'living heritage', broadly defined as heritage driven by activities rather than simply the possession of assets. A group of participants, many of whom had contributed to CARE, met for a series of workshops at Soho House Museum in Handsworth, Birmingham. This building was the home of industrialist Matthew Boulton and site of his Soho Manufactory, which employed the latest 18th century technology to produce decorative metalwork such as ormolu and silver plate. It also served as a meeting place for the Lunar Society: men such as Erasmus Darwin, James Watt and Josiah Wedgwood who laid the groundwork for the industrial revolution. Soho House is an ideal place in which to conduct speculative future thinking informed by the consequences of the industrial past.

The project team worked with storyteller Gauri Rajee and artist Melanie Tomlinson, who manipulates sheet metal - draws into, prints on, cuts and shapes it as a central component of her work. The group used artefacts from Boulton's house: an ormolu mirror, a silver plate sugar spoon, and an engraving depicting a balloon flight, as inspiration for telling their own utopian and dystopian stories of remembered pasts and imagined futures of making and craft. Emerging themes of migration, health, and ecology, among others, formed the basis of a process of collaborative making that translated into work with Fab Lab West Bromwich and a collectively crafted Praxinoscope (**Figure 1**). Based on an early form of moving image technology this object serves as a catalyst to provoke conversations about craft, migration, health, ecology, heritage, agency, place and community futures.

We also brought together participants from three projects under the Utopia as Method rubric (Making Centric, Life Chances, and Prototyping Utopias), which foregrounded differences and commonalities in projects that, as Katerina Alexiou observed, approached the subject of

utopia from different disciplinary lenses: heritage and making, design and dreaming, social science and creative disruption. All involved a re-examination of the past, paid attention to place and the specificity of local context, and focused methodologically on processes of making and acting as a means to engage people from diverse communities in utopian thinking (Figueiredo 2018). The past (heritage), along with place and creative process (craft and making), shaped the Maker-Centric focus on taking a material placed-based approach to prototyping a method and toolkit for community agency and future thinking. This is based on the premise that 'making in place' with all the historical, geographical, cultural, political and economic specificities that entails, and critically re-imagining place through creative 'place-making', is vital to engaging and connecting communities to develop and build on existing assets, abilities, and agencies.

Partnership working is at the heart of this. It is essential to embedding research in communities, gaining trust, minimizing risk, and building legacy. Internationally, Maker-Centric also involves knowledge exchange with the Terra Vera Association, in Kostanjevica na Krki, Slovenia, a grassroots initiative dedicated to creating opportunities for interpersonal solidarity, anthropological research, environmental care and ethical economy. Working with refugees, Terra Vera supports community resilience and sustainable development through praxis, especially a network supporting women handcrafters as local entrepreneurs. The organisation's remit to work with low-income communities, encourage intergenerational dialogue, provide new opportunities for vulnerable social groups, and promote creative re-use of material and clothes, parallels our research with place-making, making exchanges and maker spaces. We report on all of this work here, in a way that is consistent with our collaborative ethos: this chapter has been written by a number of those involved in Maker-Centric and represents a range of voices and perspectives on the aims, experiences, and

outcomes that shaped and were shaped by the project. Hackney has written the framing and contextual sections, Figueiredo details research activities conducted in Birmingham from a Craftspace perspective, and project artists Laura Onions and Gavin Rogers discuss working with groups Petals of Hope and Gatis Community Space in the Black Country reflecting on how the experience of community engagement might inform arts courses in Higher Education. Finally, Jana Milovanović from Terra Vera describes some of this organization's activities, setting the scene for future collaborations to disseminate and develop a collaborative Maker-Centric method. In that sense, the chapter shows how the approach we've developed can also be applied to academic work as a craft.

Craft and the Creative Industries: A 'bottom-up' approach through co-produced community engagement

Susan Luckman (2012: 9-10; see also this volume) cited Katherine Gibson's call for a return to 'the grass-roots work of engaging the community and being open to developing new economies'. In this she advocated that creative industries reconnect with cultural workers in rural, regional, and remote locations. Such a shift, she argues, offers a way to see 'vernacular creativity, local strengths, and community wishes' and the affective relationship with, and affordances of, place or 'edge-places of creativity', as she terms them. While Luckman's focus is non-urban localities, her thesis about paying attention to overlooked creative places, craft heritage and activities that involve the 'affective messiness of trying to live well' (Luckman 2012: 1-2) is equally applicable to the amateur craft groups, community organisations, and independent businesspeople that Maker-Centric works with in deprived inner city areas with a rich cultural heritage of decorative arts and crafts in an industrial context (Adamson 2013).

Critical engagement with ‘living heritage’ as a means of place-making – heritage driven by activities rather than simply the possession of assets - is a central discursive thread of our Maker-Centric work. This can take the form of heritage: a walking tour of the Black Country enamel trail run by craftsperson John Grayson, uses the visual and material language of the decorative arts to comment on contemporary news stories and, ending in the Bilston Craft Gallery, showcases his political satirical pieces alongside the eighteenth century enamels that inspired them. The importance of this, living heritage in fostering identity, well-being, and revitalising civic agency, is underscored by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Heritage Index, a digital tool that maps the use of heritage in local areas, and is purposely inclusive and future-focused: ‘anything that is inherited from the past, which helps us interpret the present and plan for the future’ (Schifferes 2015: 10).

These conceptions of cultural work and workers are very different from the clusters of technologically savvy, networked professionals, and urban creatives who conventionally populate creative industries discourse (Florida 2003). Operating on smaller, more individual scales, these groups and individuals are freer to experiment and explore alternative modes of production. At a time when the structures of capitalism are under severe strain and alternative, countercultural values and ways of living move into the mainstream, a new breed of amateur makers unburdened by professional demarcations, but connected through social media, resourced and informed, might be in a position to challenge, reassess and re-imagine cultural work, how it operates, its meanings and rewards (Hackney 2013a: 171-6; 2016b). Such thinking shifts the focus away from considerations of how governments and other key local agencies can introduce ‘top-down’ strategies to develop local creative industries, and towards the ‘bottom-up’, co-produced initiatives which inform the creative ecology of the

Maker Movement (Levine and Heimerl 2008). It is an approach that, working alongside partner community organisations, is driven by arts research and teaching in higher education.

The revival of craft production amongst amateurs, artisans, small firms and enterprises as a ‘prominent feature of late-modern life’ invites us to pay attention to the ‘enigmas of experiential variation, personal subjectivity and human agency in everyday work contexts’, something that has been largely ignored in academic debate on cultural work (Banks 2007: 123, 28). Craft provides a rich source for exploring the experiential, subjectivity, and agency at work. Researching user experiences on the digital craft platform Etsy, the RSA identified social connection and a sense of emotional fulfilment as major motivations for those selling and buying over the site (Dellot 2014). Exploring affect and emotion particularly with regard to the value of place within the creative process, at the point of making as well as consumption, is central to Luckman’s research with cultural workers, and underpins her more recent work on craft and the creative economy (2015). Questions of experience, emotion, subjectivity, and agency were also fundamental to the CARE project, in our examination of the sewing circle as a model of reflexive, affective labour which supports distinct forms of engagement, and communication (Hackney and Maughan 2016a). The affective values of making emerged again in relation to caring for a parent with early stage Alzheimer’s in research conducted with the artist and researcher Mah Rana (Hackney and Rana 2018).

Being attentive to the experiences of making, the affective relationships involved, and spaces and places occupied is essential to any understanding of the organisation and value of craft work. Capturing these elements, however, like working with craft and community, is an inherently untidy, sometimes difficult, and always challenging process. Methodologically, Luckman underlines the importance of hearing the voices of participants. Maker-Centric

sought to capture the conversation and interaction involved in collaborative making through photography, film and the artefacts produced. Our methodological framework is informed by two key theoretical approaches that address the complexities of community cooperation and creative practice. Alison Gilchrist (2009), an expert in community development and advisor to our project, draws on complexity theory to argue for a model of ‘community’ as an integrated and evolving system of networks comprising diverse and dynamic connections. She extrapolates an ‘edge of chaos’ model where communities occupy an intermediate zone between rigidity and randomness, in which what she terms ‘untidy creativity’ operates (2000). Her insights help us think about the messy process of interaction and engagement within groups, and how they might better operate in relation to wider infrastructures, networks, processes of knowledge construction and identity formation. In *Together: the Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (2012) sociologist Richard Sennett, meanwhile, argues for creative practice as a powerful means of cooperation because it enables people to respond to others on their own terms. Involving such skills as the ability to listen well, behave tactfully, find points of agreement, manage disagreement, and avoid frustration, cooperative making can achieve interactions that are ‘knitted together’ through exchanges of difference (dialogic cooperation) or the location of common ground (dialectic cooperation) or, most often, a combination of the two.

Ezra Shales, exploring the value of craft in our daily lives, writes about what he terms ‘anonymous craft’, ‘craft commons’, ‘collated’, ‘multihanded’ or ‘commonplace craft’ where ‘human necessity and empathy for materials flow together’ to help us cope with everyday challenges such as earning or managing fear and anxiety (Shales 2017: 20, 16). Invoking the wood turner and educator David Pye, he describes craft as ‘types of workmanship’, replacing nostalgic notions of the hand as the defining value with a version of craft that is located in

quotidian making, something that applies equally to industrial manufacture and amateur practice (Adamson 2013; Knott 2015). This understanding of the everyday affectiveness of craft work and the craft worker suggests a version of cultural work that, grounded in the messiness of everyday life, has the potential to critically respond to it and shape a better future. As Alexiou put it in her reflections after our ‘Utopia as Method’ workshop, ‘we dream the same dreams of peace, equality, diversity, opportunity and respect for each other and for the planet but we strive to realise them differently in our locations and contexts through, mostly, small steps’.

A Toolkit for Deviation: Making method from mess in the Black Country

Drawing on social design theory (Armstrong et al. 2014), Levitas’s concept of IRS, and the heritage of the West Midlands metalwork industry, Maker-Centric aimed to develop a flexible process of connected *doing* activities: walking, mapping, talking, exploring, researching, making, sharing, reflecting, and applying, that together constituted an imaginative reconstruction of society from the shared perspectives of the groups. Discussions with collaborator Creative Black Country (CBC) helped establish the project framework: to fabricate ‘stamps’ and stencils inspired by the decorative heritage of metalwork manufacturing in the Midlands, and put researchers in touch with groups linked to the Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council (WVSC). Representatives attended a taster session at the Wolverhampton School of Art to find out about the project, participate in mapping and printing activities, and share stories about their histories of making. Two groups Petals of Hope, facilitated by Michelle, and Gatis Community Space, facilitated by Maria, agreed to participate in the project. They worked with the project artists and a group of students to devise weekly idea development workshops over a three month period, with key points of

interchange where the groups come together to fabricate their ideas, and share their work and experience at a knowledge exchange event at Soho House Museum.

From the start of their ‘making journeys’ the groups responded with very different place-based mapping activities that resulted in two distinct sets of artefacts, framed by the interests, enthusiasms, and skills of their members. Gatis Community Space, showing interest in the ecology of place and environment, looked outside to the fabric of the surrounding community in Whitmore Reans, finding faces in the urban landscape that inspired emoji stamps; stamps for T-shirts and telephone cases based on street signage; and a branded logo which, fixed to the base of a boot or employed as a graffiti stencil, could be stamped (in an environmentally friendly manner) into the surrounding landscape to direct people to their community space. Arun Bector and his colleague Nick from the Asian Men’s Mental Health group joined Gatis to create stamps from photographs of Wolverhampton high rise council flats, which Arun vividly remembered from childhood, but were torn down to make way for new housing. This resulted in a set of digitally fabricated stamps with grips made from 1960s style door-handles that Arun will use to engage communities in discussions about housing and the environment, raising funds for a community Fab Lab in Wolverhampton. Petals, in contrast, focused on stitching and home crafts, making stamps that reflected the diversity of the group and its shared identity as a women’s sewing group. Whilst participants have impressive craft skills, at least one had little English. Crafting became a shared language to facilitate communication and early discussions about food, place, home, and families explored commonalities and differences, resulting in the decision to collectively make a tablecloth with embroidered place settings displaying flowers from each woman’s country of origin.

The knowledge sharing event was an important moment for reflecting on, synthesising, and prototyping a ‘Maker-Centric Method’ with common elements and a shared ethos that could be customised by other groups and organisations. The ‘messiness’ of the Maker-Centric process reflected inherent complexities in communities and community working, and became the defining aspect of the project.

We sought to chart a journey through and unravel a method from the ‘mess’, establishing a series of propositions, proposals and situations for making and thinking, and thinking through making, which have a sense of repetition and alterity. Finding key words and images that emerged during Maker-Centric, researchers noticed that words such as ‘invite’, ‘map’, ‘place’, ‘support’ can be read as verbs and nouns: doing *and* naming words, something that nicely encapsulates a method that is grounded in process (making/doing) and results in identifying (naming/understanding) new knowledge about participants and groups. Designed on a grid like a board-game the tool-kit can be cut-up, rearranged, and customised. It is intended to be playful, open-ended, and adaptable, to reflect the fact that working with and in communities is not linear, nor should it be.

Following Grant Kester (2005: 2), researchers were mindful that conversation can serve as an important tool if ‘reframed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities and official discourse’. For Maker-Centric participants and researchers ‘making in place’, with all its associated activities and experiences, served as the reframing process that helped imagine alternative futures and identities in the community. In one participant’s words, ‘I come to be with others, they are like my family, we chat, make, gossip’. The series of iterations described below and pictured (**Figure 2**) aims to move towards a community practice that builds upon rich, local, everyday

practices, that can be adopted and adapted by those looking to foster projects in their communities. It provides a model for further reflexive work to be undertaken with the project groups, partners, researchers, and participants to use, modify, adapt and contribute to, in an ongoing iterative process of community knowledge generation.

Invite: *find, locate and connect with communities*

Groups meet face-to-face to gauge interests and expectations, and ensure project will be of benefit. Identify key contacts who already coordinate community initiatives, invite them to taster sessions to spark their imagination and catalyse involvement. Be clear about intentions, ideas, and processes.

Share: *facilities, resources, time and knowledge.*

Gifting and sharing of ideas, materials, and companionship is key. To share is to give, to give is to actively participate. The momentum of sharing keeps a project moving forwards, and can be a major catalyst for knowledge acquisition.

Place: *ground the project in a location*

Situating a project in a location that is already part of a group's core identity and activities makes it easier for people to take part. Existing community groups often have their own safe spaces; take time to understand these settings and how their activities shape them.

Map: *exploring groups and participants.*

Mapping exercises and activities enable participants to physically and conceptually explore the terrain of their community in terms of place, needs, skills, expectations, and most of all potentials.

Exchange: *knowledge and experience.*

Enable time and space for conversations where unexpected connections, shared experiences, knowledge, and skills could emerge. Exchange can become the foundation for moving a project forward, in an empowering approach led by the community.

Reveal: *participant values and virtues*

Unveiling your practice can allow participants to connect with you and encourage them to reveal things about themselves, their abilities, and aspirations. This should be done in an inspiring, non-threatening, and enabling way. Project facilitators should become the ambassadors of knowledge and discovery.

React: *to needs, history, politics, and ideas*

Flexibility is essential to allow a group to formulate ideas and decide how they wish to develop and resolve them. Keep time free for reaction based events and activities such as accessing research materials, trying a different process, or walking. Reacting keeps the project live and responsive.

Connect: *people, opportunities, ideas, processes, skills, problems.*

Connecting people, things, ideas, skills, processes, and problems will create a ‘circuit board’ of potentialities for making, thinking, and reflecting, and spark engagement. Also connect with stakeholders to ensure legacy.

Play: *allow time for play and failure.*

Time in a safe space to tinker, explore, experiment, deviate, and make mistakes is crucial for learning because it promotes chance and risk. The opportunities that craft offers to engage with textures, colours, and processes is a great way to give permission to play.

Reflect: *iterative feedback and reflection.*

Form creative strategies for gathering ongoing reflection about participants' experience: what they think and how they feel, to gauge project affect as a process of ongoing (self) evaluation. This should be embedded in project ethics.

Translate: *materials, experience, and language*

While making involves handicraft skills, it also encompasses associated skills that can be translated into problem solving in a range of settings. Working with a multilingual group where English might be a second, third, or even fourth language we found that making together enabled the acquisition of language skills in an informal, everyday environment.

Realise: *process, outcome, and potential*

The process of becoming cognisant (to realise) is bound up with the process of giving of material formation (realisation). Realisation through making can result in a process of wider realisation about self, other, situation, potential, agency, among other things.

Apply: *skills, knowledge, and legacy*

The application of craft, from process to outcome, provides a model for approaching other challenges in the community. Self-realisation strengthens the wider application of skills, aptitudes, and abilities, to apply for funds, run a group, teach skills, develop a business or community initiative, and build project legacy.

Craftspace: Mapping craft-assets and agencies in Handsworth, Birmingham

Craftspace is a craft development organization based in Birmingham with a thirty year track record. It curates, produces, and researches, devising projects which actively demonstrate the progressive role of makers and craft in civil society. Its programme is underpinned by socially engaged, participatory, collaborative and co-created approaches to engaging communities through craft and making. It works in the belief that craft is not just a commodity, but has an important role to play in building social, cultural, economic and human capital as well as strengthening and revitalising communities.

Maker-Centric enables Craftspace to take an enquiry-based approach to work towards its strategic goals. Soho House Museum was an ideal setting to explore industrial and material heritage as a site for innovation and engagement with alternative forms of craft entrepreneurship. Surrounding the house, the district of Handsworth is a very ethnically diverse community that has been shaped by generations of inward migration. As an organisation, Craftspace is interested in the idea of situated research through practice – the importance of craft in place-making and testing hyper-local methodologies. Craft and the act of making together as a means to produce knowledge and experience - including unique forms of embodied knowledge – also feeds into and is of benefit to the wider ecology, a concern that framed the CARE project and continues to inform Maker-Centric.

Place-based heritage as an inspiration, and sometimes a provocation, was central to the creative work undertaken by one specific group of participants. Aged 50+, this group used craft as a vehicle and lens to investigate the idea of purposeful work in later life as a means to take stock, reskill, plan ahead, connect with others, and live more healthy and enjoyable lives.

Making prototype souvenir products for the Soho House shop in Birmingham and bespoke banners in Dublin Castle, groups learnt skills that transitioned them from hand-making to digital production (see Hackney & Figueiredo forthcoming). The project demonstrated how purposeful and collectively practiced craft work offers real benefits of social interaction, wellbeing, connectivity and emotional and cognitive stimulus, combating the negative effects of isolation. Taken further it can have economic benefits; one member of the group now runs a successful independent business, while others have taken up further training, set up an informal making group, and are regular attendees and volunteers at the Fab Lab. The stability of the group and the process of collective making were essential elements in this process. In these community contexts craft enterprise facilitated a range of things through democratic forms of making: skills exchange, collective or co-operative making, co-created and authored methods of production, all providing a different ‘return on investment’. Profits or benefits based on a holistic accrual of agency and social capital resulted in productive, connected, resilient and healthy communities. Participants were enacting a valuable contribution through cultural citizenship and stewardship of skills after they were no longer fully economically active. This is a generative way of working that challenges some of the dominant notions and modes of craft production, commerce and consumption. If we view these participants as cultural workers, not laboring for immediate financial gain, this process begins to encompass and articulate a collective, community driven form of ‘social work’ and ‘cultural responsibility’.

Maker-Centric Birmingham takes this learning about materializing craft as a community asset through purposeful, connected working to another stage, by using it to uncover and potentially support otherwise ‘hidden’ cultural workers: craft communities, individual makers, and small businesses, which operate in what might be considered ‘edge-places of

creativity' (Luckman 2012:1). Furthermore, it aims to employ this method to raise consciousness about such creative community and interrogate the extent to which local decision, policy makers, and other agencies take them into account. A number of seasoned community participants from the CARE and Utopias projects took on the role of creative ambassadors to apply and further realise their skills as community researchers (Facer & Enright 2016). Together with professional maker Melanie Tomlinson, and equipped with a materials-based, creative toolkit that was developed from the Utopia praxinoscope, they went out to groups and public spaces to map the craft skills of people in and around Handsworth. The group visualised the collected data and stories into a co-created artwork that will form the basis of the Birmingham Maker-Centric toolkit and act as a catalyst to engage stakeholders in discussions about how to mobilise these assets for social and economic good in the locality, and beyond.



Maker-Centric: creative asset mapping in the community. Professor Black carnival costume workshop in Handsworth, Birmingham. Copyright Craftspace 2017.

The mapping revealed many stories and assets. Some craft activists had a long term anchoring effect within the community. The Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church craft group comprising African Caribbean women of different generations has been active for several decades. They meet weekly to make knitted and embroidered products which they sell at local events. Whilst gaining from the social connection and mutual support, the economic purpose is to fundraise for the church to maintain its beautiful historic building and charitable activities, thereby ensuring continuity of a vital community facility, resource, and network. Although unpaid, putting their skills and resourcefulness to purposeful and organised use identifies these women as cultural workers engaged in ‘work’ that has mutually beneficial outcomes that need to be recognised.

Individuals are also asset hubs around which a flow of exchange and productivity takes place. Professor Black has run a Caribbean carnival workshop in a community centre for over thirty years (**Figure 3**). His embodied skill of specialist making and an incredible archive have kept this craft alive. His mission has been to teach young people skills and their associated cultural traditions. This work also involved a retired blacksmith with very specialist skills such as arc welding, who worked peripatetically with his mobile anvil and equipment. The range of work included repairing balustrades on the motorway, repairing cannons and guns on army tanks, and making the 30 foot ornamental gates for Kensington Palace. His father was a farmer; from the age of 11 he was helping to weld and repair trailers. He still tinkers with metal in his shed and fixes things for people locally.

Other traders like Kamal Sewing Machine Ltd were hubs of knowledge and interwoven connections. They sold all manner of materials and tools, and ran a workshop that mended domestic and industrial machines enmeshing the world of hobbyists and manufacturers. The Perry Common Shed project, inspired by the national men's shed movement, is a volunteer run community resource where people can learn woodwork skills. They keep costs down by having a partnership to get free pallets which are re-purposed by members for their projects. Financial donations help to sustain the group in a socio-economically deprived area, enabling a learning project for older people to learn new woodwork skills – perhaps equipping them to take on other work in the future.

This project revealed groups looking to extend, increase or formalise their craft activities, such as a Somali women's sewing group who practice dress making and were looking for space to rent in Handsworth, and a group of volunteers restoring a historic building who wanted to build craft activity into the life of their community space. There were individuals who expressed a desire to learn a new craft skill but wanted to access it locally, and others who had been practising that skill privately for years who were willing to share it more widely. Part of this work in the future will be to build a toolkit to help realise these cultural workers' aspirations by connecting groups with each other, external agencies, resources such as the Fab Lab, and other means of support. Our creative ambassadors and new participants have enhanced their skills, both in terms of fabrication and social agency, gaining in confidence to go out into the community, facilitate conversations, learn new skills and pass on existing ones. One ambassador has become motivated to set up a creative enterprise and two have become regular volunteers at the Fab Lab helping to develop it as a community resource. The premise and outcomes of this research also allows us to reflect on the ways in

which we as a development agency might link micro-assets to the macro-environment for greater impact.

Spaces of Welcome: The value of craft for migrants and refugees in Slovenia

I would like to run a workshop. I have so many ideas for making handmade goods. Not only from leather, but also from wood. I would like to live and work in the same place, have a room to sleep in and a workshop nearby. I would like to make everything myself, from the toilet to the kitchen. I would like to create mosaics, wire up the electricity, make my own bicycle.

(Erfan, 25, Iran)

Invention in craft and responsiveness to social need cannot be taught; it must be found. Responsibility to social needs can be taught – and should be more often.

(Shales 2017: 95)

The village of Kostanjevica na Krki is located in the Schengen region on the border with Croatia, an area that witnessed a regular flow of refugees and asylum seekers through the 'Balkan Route' between September 2015 and March 2016. For a large majority Slovenia was, and remains, a transit country yet new enterprises started to appear. Terra Vera is a grass roots initiative in this area. Consisting initially of cultural anthropologists, it has grown as an informal network of young creatives, hand crafters, artists, artisans, designers, startup entrepreneurs, hubs, and art institutions looking for ways to address the situation. Shales observes how historically craft has 'developed in response to demand, inventing itself anew wherever and whenever there was patronage' (2017: 95). Terra Vera identified a demand and

a social need and saw craft as an important means to frame a response to migration in ways that build on individual and collective skills and resources, so that people might better locate themselves, build resilience, and find ways to visualize and ‘make’ a future (sometimes literally twenty five year old Erfan suggests).

Members undertook scoping activities, visiting camps and detention centers, talking to people and gauging their knowledge and talents, formal and informal. Professional achievements were less important than skills, potential, experience and enthusiasm. Weekly social gatherings at Ziferblat - a homely social venue in the heart of town, in stark contrast to the asylum center – involved ten participants: a poet, cook, economics student and musician from Syria, an electrician, carpenter, construction worker, and student of marketing from Cameroon, a henna painter and a hand crafter from Iran, and an Afghanistani boy with artistic skills. Beginning with art therapy and storytelling, the workshops progressed to hand crafts as the group grew and became even more diverse. Local independent creatives and organisations joined from the Fashion Department at Ljubljana University, jewellery designer Martina Obid Mlakar, ceramic artists Dragica Čadež and Hana Karim, young interior design team Prostor Vmes , and visual artist Samira Kentrić, as well as film makers. Social networks were established alongside the training and workshops.

Palmas, who became a mainstay of the workshops, emphasized the importance of creative making for integration and knowledge exchange through a reciprocal gifting process between cultures and societies:

It has to do with integration. Finding yourself in a new society, learning new ideas ...

From the workshops I have learned that the deeper you go, the more creative you are

and you become increasingly integrated ... there is an exchange of cultures. The ideas I consider come from within me, they are a part of my culture. My design or idea grows and enriches the society. (Palmas, 34, Cameroon)

For forty two year old Houda from Syria, the benefits of the workshops were more basic and fundamental than that: 'Today's workshop made me like Slovenia, for this was the first time I felt like a human being'. For others, it was the material properties and collective processes involved in craft that had the most memorable affect. The experience of working in clay motivated Sveta from Russia to take an educational route:

As we held hands in clay I felt that the barriers were washed away. We played, joked and laughed in the most universal language, we were connected as humans from a single planet, a single earth, now creating together out of this earth. It was a beautiful experience, which inspired me to enroll into a research program in the psychology of cultural diversity and inclusion, which I am studying at right now. (Sveta, 25, Russia)

The experience of creative making and skills exchange built trust in the group and personal stories were exchanged. Uncovering the human narratives of migrants, particularly refugees, provides counter narratives to prevailing migration discourse, even if 'stereotypes are obviously present and cannot be ignored and this can cause a problem within the community' (Janža, 24, Slovenia).

Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2010: 340) developed the twin concepts of 'worlding' and 'bloom spaces' to explain how we can operate affectually in the world. Worlding refers to the condition of being in the world, something that is understood and lived through the senses

and is particularly sharp at times of individual and communal tension and transition. It involves the emergence of bloom spaces where the senses come to the surface, new lessons are learnt, different priorities emerge, connections, and adjustments are made, and where we can understand ourselves and others with new depth, clarity and calm, despite the circumstances. More than other groups, refugees and migrants habitually forced into unknown and often terrifying situations experience ‘worlding’ intensely. In such circumstances craft workshops can become bloom spaces in which life becomes a series of daily, lived minute adjustments as participants draw on their resources, learn new skills, address challenges, survive and even thrive, despite the circumstances. The workshops became a means of promoting solidarity models built on participatory work as a method for collective empowerment and social cohesion. The group designed a social inclusion program where people could meet on equal terms in ‘Spaces of Welcome’, spaces of co-creation, knowledge sharing and skill transfer, where identities could be explored and formed in collaboration and in a safe place, as an immediate response to the current needs. The group explored a hybrid mix of traditional, contemporary, technical, and professional skills developed through synergies between newcomers and local creatives. Co-designing and skills exchange enabled the development of a shared purpose, common values, and respectful intercultural dialogue as participants paid attention to one another and listened purposefully. Taking advantage of the fashion for buying local, Terra Vera are currently developing a craft-entrepreneurship initiative leading to the creation of an ethical marketing brand, from idea to the final product, for ethical, sustainable crafts.

In October 2017 the group curated ‘Living Room’ in collaboration with the Slovene Museum of Architecture, an exhibition of their products including decorative items, jewelry, graphic design, and furniture. Like Maker-Centric, ‘Spaces of Welcome’ develops personal contacts,

enables new co-operations to emerge, and provides a space in which existing assets can be optimized through education, employment and business start-ups, something that can inform policies in these areas in the context of migration. Focusing on collaborative making, it fosters aptitudes and affordances that come to the fore as a consequence of migration. Less than two years after the project launch, the Terre Vera team now involves Palmas and Erfan as two of their most active members. They and many others who reached the country as refugees and were mobilized as trainees are now becoming trainers and mentors with the ability to link traditional technologies to contemporary design approaches. Optimism is high; as Moutez from Syria's says, 'I hope to do so much more. I want to make bags from waste material. I am a person who truly likes his job and products. I hope we meet soon'.

The thinking that informs Maker-Centric is grounded and embedded in the history and practice of craft work. Silberberg details the value of creative making for individuals, organizations, and institutions in forging spaces, connections, raising levels of intent, and awareness: a version of community craft in an 'expanded field'. Luckman, in her critique of creative industries discourse focuses on cultural workers, paying attention to vernacular creativity, local strengths, community wishes, and the affordances of 'edge-places of creativity'. Levitas's utopian method draws on the history of the Arts and Crafts Movement to critique and reimagine the social, political, and economic structures of society, while Sennett argues that the processes involved in *doing* art and craft cooperatively can help us put this reimagining into practice in small, incremental, yet fundamental ways. Together these ideas, coupled with the team's learning from the CARE project, lay the foundation for a co-produced Maker-Centric method (or methods) that builds on the affordances and agencies of craft working but can be shaped by communities *in* communities and, as such, responds to their needs.

Maker-Centric, to date, has supported two very different place-based community craft journeys with Gatis Community Space and Petals of Hope in Wolverhampton; unearthed and mapped an unexpected, and largely hidden, group of cultural workers in and around Handsworth, Birmingham, including Professor Black, the Somali women's sewing group, and the Perry Common Shed project; examined the value of Fab Labs for connecting people and building community assets; and undertaken knowledge exchange with Terra Vera in Slovenia, learning about their work with Erfan, Palmas and their colleagues. Working with partners Craftspace and Creative Black Country, the project will continue to build resources based on the value of place-based craft work to optimize community assets and the organization of cultural work in communities. Making, for instance, might provide a means for re-imagining work in a future society funded by universal basic income. Craft, however, is no magic panacea. Petals of Hope is located on the Heath Town estate in Wolverhampton, which houses 700 asylum seekers and refugees from 46 nations in a city that voted overwhelming for Brexit. While the women cooperated to sew their tablecloth, tensions in the form of entrenched views from local residents, on occasion, emerged. Signaling the underlying challenges and contradictions that those living in such complex circumstances face on a daily basis, future research will consider how 'being Maker-Centric' might enable craft and cultural workers to go at least some way towards addressing and alleviating these.

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