Co-creating the Future: A Digital Placemaking Journey from Strategic Augmented Reality Development to Community Engagement via Transmedia Storytelling for Local Town Centre Revitalisation

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Contents

Abstract

This research project represents a practice-oriented exploration centred on the revitalisation of Huyton town centre in Knowsley, an area in need of rejuvenation. Its primary focus is on placemaking, viewed as a collaborative approach that harmonises the top-down strategic planning of the local Council, the initiator and sponsor of this project, with the creative involvement of the community. The main aim is to derive insights for a participatory digital placemaking strategy that revitalises local areas in line with societal needs.

To attain this objective, the project began by closely working with officials from the Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council to review digital prototypes and create a streetscape experience for the town centre. This joint effort culminated in an external creative company's procurement for developing a Mobile AR app. Concurrently, another facet of the research involved community workshops. These workshops employed a storytelling approach to envision the future of the town centre, allowing residents to participate as both designers and visionary storytellers. These sessions led to the creation of a transmedia storytelling experience named "Future Huyton", a digital narrative that integrates with key town centre locations via the AR app. It encourages locals and visitors to interact with imagined future scenarios specific to these sites and to contribute their own narratives and viewpoints.

The research navigates through various phases of exploration, trials, and achievements to discover how collaborations among different stakeholders can be enhanced and coordinated for maximum effectiveness in joint efforts aimed at local rejuvenation. Most importantly, it outlines a digital strategy for placemaking that encourages the active involvement of local communities in creative endeavours and innovative co-creation processes and articulates technology, creativity, and growth opportunities. These contributions aim to foster the establishment of an inclusive environment for placemaking in the region, underpinned by strong creative and technological bases.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

Dedication

Dedicated to Andromachi

Acknowledgement

Introduction

Placemaking, a concept tracing its origins to the mid-20th century, has emerged as a multifaceted approach to urban development, emphasising the cultivation of vibrant public spaces. This research undertakes an exploration of the digital and creative dimensions of Placemaking, focusing specifically on the Knowsley Borough in Northwest England, with particular attention to Huyton's town centre, affectionately termed "The Village" by its residents. This initiative arises from a strategic partnership between the Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (KMBC) and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), culminating in the selection and funding of a dedicated PhD student to spearhead the investigation.

A historical examination of Huyton reveals its evolution from a modest agricultural village to a prominent suburban town, spurred by the industrial revolution and its proximity to Liverpool. However, the latter half of the 20th century witnessed a decline mirroring the UK's industrial downturn, resulting in challenges such as unemployment, social disparities, and economic stagnation. These challenges have left a lasting socio-economic imprint, prompting local authorities to embark on various regeneration endeavours aimed at addressing these issues and rejuvenating the town centre, leveraging Huyton's position as a civic nucleus and retail focal point for the Borough.

The research commences with a pertinent inquiry into the potential contributions of digital placemaking to local regeneration strategies, thus laying the groundwork for a comprehensive literature review. This review traces the evolution of placemaking discourse from its inception in the mid-20th century to its contemporary significance, with particular emphasis on the role of public administration frameworks and the pervasive influence of information and communication technologies. Despite being widely embraced and adorned with descriptors such as digital, creative, strategic, and organic, the term "Placemaking" remains nebulous, encompassing a spectrum of approaches and strategies aimed at shaping lively public spaces, fostering economic vitality, enhancing community cohesion, and promoting sustainability. Its versatility

enables it to accommodate diverse agendas and perspectives, stimulating discourse on public life and averting hegemony in the Placemaking discourse.

Reflecting this diversity, collaboration and dialogue have been underscored since the inception of this research initiative. In addition to collaboration with the public sector, the project has benefitted from involvement by a private digital agency, academia, and the creative engagement of local community stakeholders. The participation of these varied actors has provided a comprehensive empirical framework for exploring the dynamics of such collaborations. Furthermore, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic concurrent with the project's commencement has influenced its trajectory, unveiling nuanced pathways for broader reactivation with the objective of participatory local Placemaking.

In this context, the researcher explores a viewpoint on Digital Placemaking based on the integration of storytelling, design, and Augmented Reality to digitally enhance local spaces, fostering distinctive grassroots narratives and open dialogues about the town's future to align with the objectives of the local government, thereby reinforcing the nexus between digital placemaking and innovative community involvement in public spaces and decision-making processes.

Grounded in pragmatic application and collective endeavours, this research initiative generates empirical data and insights aimed at bolstering an inclusive, placed-based strategy that supports the growth and prosperity aspirations of the local community. The primary contribution of this study lies in elucidating the effective utilisation of Digital Placemaking by local government bodies, with Huyton serving as a focal case study. The thesis delineates a transformative approach to placemaking, accentuating community empowerment through active co-creation and narrative-driven processes. It probes into Digital Placemaking, elucidating how storytelling and immersive digital experiences foster inclusivity and engagement. The study underscores the imperative of continuous learning and collaborative capabilities, particularly in navigating evolving technological landscapes. The integration of immersive technology into public spaces is perceived as a conduit for fostering community discourse and catalysing open and social innovation. Practical insights underscore co-creation strategies and cross-sector

partnerships in transformative placemaking endeavours, offering pertinent guidance for local government leadership in advancing participatory cultural agendas. Furthermore, it advocates for the adoption of digital placemaking technologies that seamlessly intersect with social, cultural, and economic dynamics, thereby affording communities opportunities to actively engage as digital placemakers, notably through the development of Augmented Reality platforms.

Readers are invited to delve into the subsequent sections, which offer a comprehensive analysis of key findings and insights. The thesis consists of nine chapters, each serving a specific purpose in exploring Digital Placemaking in Knowsley.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Chapter 1 initiates the journey with a comprehensive literature review. It starts by examining the role of public administration in managing public life, producing services, and instigating transformative changes that influence socio-economic activities and attitudes. The narrative then turns to Placemaking, exploring its theoretical foundations and tracing its historical evolution, ultimately delving into contemporary strategies and objectives. Finally, the chapter explores technological advancements from the late 20th century onwards, highlighting their impact on creating hybrid spaces, fostering playful urban exploration, enabling identity expression, encouraging collective actions, and introducing new experiences in urban public spaces. These three narrative strands collectively trace the research journey, starting from its inception to its practical application. They are unified by a central theme of co-creation and collaboration, which holds significant interest for the research endeavour. The chapter concludes by introducing the four research questions that will guide the subsequent exploration.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

Chapter 2 outlines the research methodology, starting with the presentation of pragmatic philosophical foundations that emphasise the value of people's actions and experiences as sources of knowledge and drivers of change. These principles also extend to inform the design of research methods and practical interventions. The

chapter introduces the theoretical framework associated with action-oriented studies, serving as the basis for the conducted practice-led research that generates narrative data. The primary research method, the "Future Workshop," is presented, involving collaboration with community members as creative practitioners envisioning local futures. Autoethnography is introduced as a complementary method for documenting and analysing the research process. The chapter also discusses deliberate sampling strategies and the narrative analysis process leading to study findings. It concludes by reflecting on efforts to maintain rigour in line with qualitative research criteria and addressing encountered challenges.

Chapter 3: Mapping the Practice

Chapter 3 offers a deeply immersive account of the research journey, drawing from the researcher's nuanced autoethnographic records. The narrative begins in late 2019, preceding the official research launch, and extends to the culmination of the practice in October 2022 with the presentation of a community project as a digital intervention in Huyton. The chapter details significant collaborations with various stakeholders, including local government representatives, community creative practitioners, university students, and a private creative company specialising in immersive storytelling. It outlines the trials, manoeuvres, and epiphanies that marked the research, leading to the development of prototypes, the realisation of a futures community project, and experimentation in digital placemaking.

Chapter 4: The Collaborative Condition

Chapter 4 addresses the first research question, aiming to inform the collaborative aspects of a future-oriented, locally rooted Digital Placemaking strategy and focuses on insights and lessons derived from collaboration among diverse stakeholders involved in the research practice. A comparative analysis of the collaborations provides strategic guidance for enhancing the public body's co-creation capacity, highlighting:

- Early engagement of local stakeholders and communities to foster collective ownership, relevance, and acceptance of outcomes.

- Collaboration with academia to embrace modern techniques of interactive collaboration and facilitate cost-effective experimentation in high-risk technological domains.

- Involvement of the private sector in the development of innovative products only when a solid understanding of local needs has been attained.

Through a focus on the collaborative experience with involved stakeholders, it uncovers challenges to align long-term strategic goals within the project with short-term actions, leading to fragmentation, and hindering integrated strategies and interactive relationships. Moreover, the findings advocate for a collaborative model characterised by clear roles, equitable power dynamics, integrative leadership, and agile frameworks, utilising action research to merge diverse workflows and align goals. These insights contribute both theoretically and practically to Digital Placemaking, furnishing a roadmap for future collaborative endeavours.

Chapter 5: Future Huyton

Chapter 5 introduces "Future Huyton," a creative project embodying future narratives crafted by local practitioners during workshops. The chapter begins by providing an extensive reference to various types of narrative digital experiences found in contemporary literature. It then illustrates how "Future Huyton" emerged as a transmedia storytelling endeavour, intricately connected to both fictional stories and tangible places within Huyton Village. Additionally, readers are presented with the opportunity to immerse themselves in a segment of the digital intervention "Future Huyton", a transmedia experience representing the culmination of the research project. This provides a concrete understanding of the participants' creative endeavours, beginning with the articulation of local visions for the town's future and culminating in their visualisation within an Augmented Reality (AR) dome situated in the town centre.

Chapter 6: Narrations about a good town centre

Chapter 6 explores factors that can encourage and inspire diverse individuals to be present in the town centre, addressing the second research question. Insights for this

inquiry are drawn from qualitative data sources, including workshop information, narratives produced by practitioners, feedback from the audience engaging with the "Future Huyton" transmedia experience, and the researcher's meticulously documented field notes. Within these narratives, the need for local downtown regeneration is widely acknowledged emphasising accessibility, safety, and well-being. However, underlying social complexities complicate this endeavour. Issues such as safety perceptions and community cohesion intersect with broader themes of local identity and intergenerational perspectives on the high street. Despite differing viewpoints, there is consensus on the Town Centre's pivotal role as a hub for community interaction, blending historical charm with contemporary relevance. However, tensions arise between this vision and regeneration efforts that prioritise new businesses, sparking debates on inclusivity, gentrification, and the balance between economic growth and social cohesion.

Chapter 7: Community participation- Exploring the potential role of social clusters in placemaking

Chapter 7 examines how community participation can be effectively encouraged and harnessed for meaningful placemaking interventions, aligning with the third research question. Drawing upon the narratives of workshop participants, three key elements crucial for developing a successful local placemaking strategy emerge: vernacular creativity, community-focused events, and structured partnerships with organisations.

- Vernacular creativity, particularly involving youth, drives social innovation and strengthens local identity.

- Event organisation fosters community interaction, activates spaces, and supports communal values, serving as an incubator for local groups.

- Partnering with structured organisations, notably the local government and third sector, provides essential resources and empowers communities through participatory approaches.

Together, these components form a framework for constructing a participatory creative placemaking strategy, highlighting the importance of collaboration, local empowerment, and cultural identity in comprehensive community development.

Chapter 8: From Tech Fiction to Digital Placemaking

Chapter 8 centres on the digital aspect of Placemaking, focusing on how individuals' experiences and viewpoints regarding technology can influence the potential trajectories of forthcoming digital placemaking initiatives; the fourth research question. The chapter explores the integration of digital enhancements into public spaces, considering regional concerns like safety and global trends such as increased reliance on technology due to pandemic restrictions. Opportunities arise in IoT automation and wearable devices, suggesting strategies for engaging older demographics. Additionally, creative expression and familiarity with cutting-edge technologies in local daily life indicate a pathway for transforming community members into active contributors, essentially digital placemakers. This concept suggests that innovative solutions can become ingrained in local culture, making Digital Creative Placemaking a key local feature. Finally, the analysis recommends intertwining digital placemaking technologies with social, cultural, and economic dynamics, advocating for an organic approach to the development of these platforms and their content, fostering connections, opportunities, and activities in a participatory fashion.

Chapter 9: Discussion- Reflection and Prospects

Chapter 9 offers a reflective discussion, inviting readers to explore the researcher's final thoughts and contemplations regarding the research, its practical applications, and the broader horizons it has unveiled. In this chapter, the researcher engages in a more informal and contemplative narrative, addressing both the limitations encountered during the research process and the potential opportunities and possibilities that have emerged. The researcher also looks forward, discussing prospective research avenues and their contribution to advancing knowledge in the field. Practical insights concerning the future of Knowsley's placemaking initiatives, particularly within the context of increased community involvement and technological enhancements, are shared.

Conclusion

The conclusion chapter offers a comprehensive policy document and guide for practitioners engaged in digital placemaking initiatives, drawing insights from the Huyton experience. It synthesises key findings and recommendations to provide practical guidance for navigating the complexities of placemaking. A short epilogue serves as the thesis's final statement, reflecting on the transformative journey of the research and leaving the reader with a thoughtful reflection.
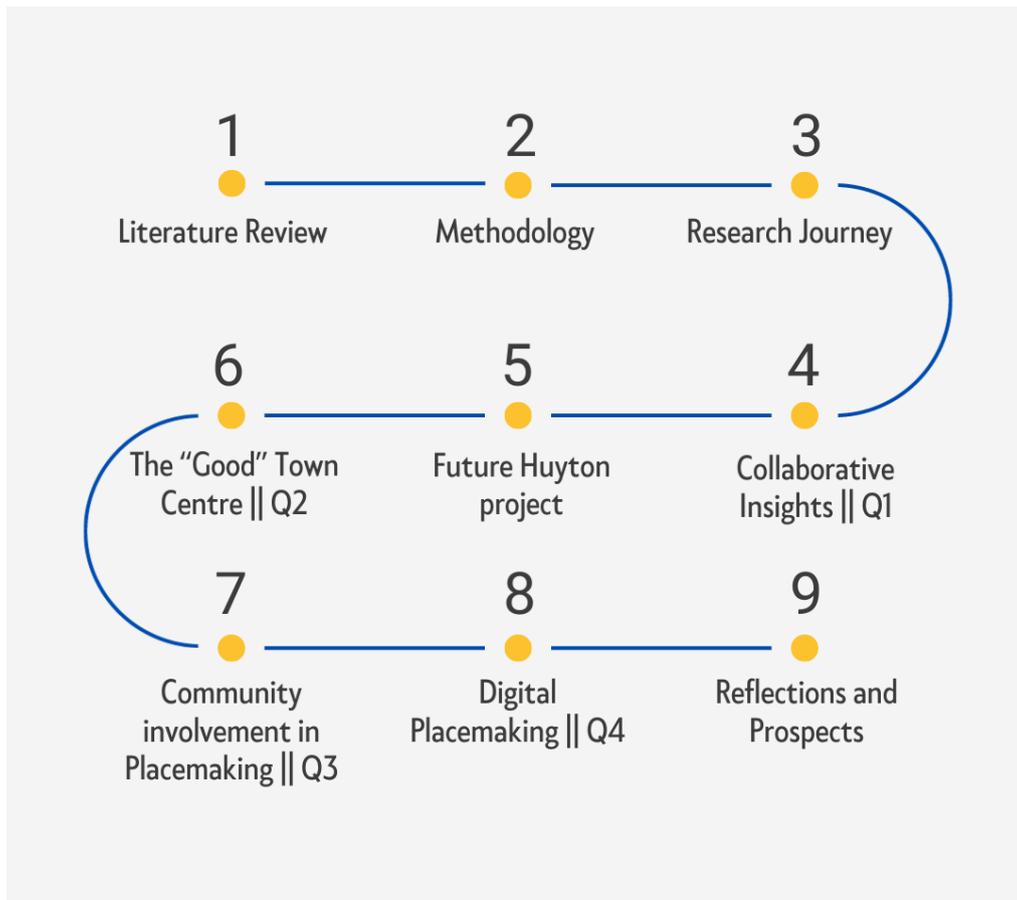
Figure 1: Flowchart depicting the progression of each thesis chapter and the specific chapters addressing each research question (Q1-Q4)

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The literature review will be divided into three sections, commencing with a peripheral and abstract perspective of partnership and collaboration with the public sector. The next section will investigate placemaking as a collaborative process centred on the formation of public space, and the final section will examine digital placemaking, emphasising the utilisation of digital technologies. This structural approach emphasises the research's origins and objectives, gradually narrowing down to the thematic area and the focus of the practice. In a final fourth section, the research questions will be presented, closely connected to the preceding discussions.

1.1 Partnership and collaboration facilitated by public administration

In this opening section of the literature review, the aim is to introduce readers to a broader perspective on governance, decision-making, planning, and implementation by the public sector, which is a significant stakeholder in shaping public life. Depending on the democratic environment of each state, different procedures and logics are employed. The focus here is specifically on the public administration model in the UK and the subsequent comparison with other models. The examination will thoroughly explore collaborative processes encompassing the private sector, non-profit organisations, research, and educational institutions to arrive at collaboration with citizens. This knowledge will facilitate a deeper understanding of the subsequent reviews of placemaking processes, which are shaped through similar collaborations, processes, and dynamics.

1.1.1 A brief introduction to public administration archetype models

New public management (NPM) was a doctrine developed in the 1980s-1990s and constituted the paradigm according to which the public sector was reformed in Anglo-Saxon states to increase government efficiency by adopting principles, management tools and market logics of the private sector. The reformed public sector prioritised

'cost efficiency' by outsourcing, organising activities based on outputs, closely monitoring and measuring performance to allocate funding, and placing a strong emphasis on achieving tangible results. (Aucoin, 1990; Hood, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1993). Since the 1980s, the United Kingdom, the pioneer of NPM in Europe, has assumed an approach of privatisations, partnerships and outsourcing based on competitive tendering, decentralising its responsibilities to achieve efficiency, and transferring part of public services to private companies and the third sector (McMullin, 2021).

The classic public bureaucracy paradigm that pre-existed, also known as the Weberian model, emphasised the role of the state as a primary actor in public life and the public sector as a legal authority that exercised power, collected taxes, controlled citizens' access to services and from a position of scientific and practical expertise provided prudential instructions to citizens and indicated obligatory actions (Weber, 1922). In counterpoint to this authoritarian model, NPM developed close cooperation between the public and the private sector based on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and strengthened the role of citizens who, as end-users of services, could freely choose between alternative public and private services providers and evaluate them as consumers (Pierre and Røiseland, 2016). An emerging common field of public and private economic activity redefined public life.

After the year 2000, NPM faced severe criticism from scholars in public administration who highlighted its practical limitations and the emergence of alternative models (Drechsler, 2005; Levy, 2010; Hood and Dixon, 2015; Trischler and Scott, 2016). According to some commentaries, NPM deriving from manufacturing and production literature introduced assembly line techniques to service provision, which had undesirable consequences regarding the interpersonal dimensions of services (Cipolla and Manzini, 2009) and failed to respond to the complex problems that service management was called to address in the fragmented but interdependent society (Osborne et al., 2013). Other academics emphasise that the different public, political and democratic aspects of the public sector were lost through its equation with the private and the myopic focus on efficiency overlooked critical actors of society that could strengthen the public sector (Torfing et al., 2016). Some critiques question the

economic efficiency of contracting out, as the gain appears to fall short of the cost of preparing and monitoring contracts and outcomes (Petersen et al., 2015) or because PPPs can lead to excessive profits for private firms, through generous public funding (Radcliffe, 2011). Remarks even refer to a new status quo of managerial roles in public organisations affecting productivity and instigating a demotivation of public employees (Jacobsen et al., 2014). Similar is the criticism that strengthening the position of citizens as consumers cultivated an alienating effect on their civic role and potential interest in contributing to public life (Torfing et al., 2016).

These critical views of NPM allude to alternative models of public administration and new modes of problem-solving and decision-making, signifying the renowned shift from government to governance (Buser et al., 2013; Wachhaus, 2017). The most seminal theoretical framework of the emerging paradigm is that of New Public Governance (NPG), proposed by Stephen Osborne (2006). Recognising the complexity of public issues, NPG promotes the involvement of multiple state and non-state actors, including government agencies, civil society organisations, and private firms, in addressing public problems. It emphasises collaboration, networked relationships, and citizen engagement in public service delivery. The public sector becomes an "arena for co-creation" (Torfing et al., 2016) among multiple stakeholders contributing with their experience, expertise, and resources.

In another response to the shortcomings of NPM, Osborne et al. (2013; 2016) introduced the Public Service-Dominant Logic (PSDL). Initially inspired by the work of Lusch and Vargo (2006, 2014) in their development of service-dominant logic (SDL) in the service management literature, the theory later evolved into the Public Service Logic (PSL) theory (Osborne, 2018), cutting the connection to its marketing origins. PSDL emphasises the service-dominant nature of public services and the value co-creation with users in service delivery. In its PSL succession, it underlines that value for service-users is co-created dynamically and interactively within the context of their broader life experience and not linearly in a product-centric conception of service production. Service firms cannot create value, only make service offerings; it is the use that the customer makes of a service offering that creates value. Thus, PSL theory shifts the perspective from a provider-centric to a citizen-centric approach,

emphasising a new focus away from cost performance as the critical metric of successful services to value co-creation as the key metric and purpose of services.

An analogous response to the limitations of traditional public administration models has been the New Public Service (NPS) model proposed by Denhardt and Denhardt (2000). The NPS model advocates for a shift from a hierarchical and bureaucratic approach to the perspective of involved citizenship. It emphasises the role of public managers as public servants, working collaboratively with citizens and communities to address public problems and benefit society. Under its lens, public officials prioritise involving citizens in decision-making processes, and citizens are perceived as collaborators that prioritise the greater good rather than individual gain, diverging from the market-oriented framing of their relationship in NPM.

The preceding narrative suggests a linear progression in public administration evolution, moving from centralised and bureaucratic structures to market-oriented public services, and finally transitioning to collaborative, network-based approaches that incorporate citizen participation in decision-making. However, this linear view is overly simplistic and lacks precision.

For instance, McMullin (2021) demonstrates the successful implementation of co-production, involving the third sector and citizen engagement in service delivery, in three distinct countries: the United Kingdom, France, and Quebec/Canada. Interestingly, these countries correspond to the three models previously mentioned - NPM, (neo)Weberian, and NPG, respectively. This challenges the conventional notion that co-production can solely be achieved by transitioning to the NPG model. In her analysis, the author illustrates how citizen involvement in the NPG model proves notably effective and well-supported when compared to the other two administrative configurations. In contrast, the latter configurations must rely on creativity and tactics (McMullin, 2021; Sara, Jones, and Rice, 2021) to address their inherent limitations.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognise that forming partnerships and collaborations with various stakeholders and involving citizens in governance activities has been widely acknowledged as beneficial in public administrations with diverse historical, cultural, and institutional contexts.

In the UK, empowering communities has been a key government strategy and rhetoric for several years. The government white paper Communities in Control: real people, real power (2008) proposes giving people new rights to participate in decision-making processes, such as petitioning, participatory budgeting, neighbourhood management, and measuring customer satisfaction. It also suggests empowering citizens in the planning system through participatory consultation events and involving young people in decision-making. Similarly, the "Planning Together" guide (2009) directs local governments to adopt place-specific approaches and work in partnership with various agencies and sectors while promoting a solid citizen-led democratic process. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) acknowledges locals as experts in their places and emphasises the importance of "a significant and substantive shift towards local community empowerment". It aims at effective community engagement by providing community bodies with ownership and stewardship of land and buildings. These strategies did not introduce radical reforms in the UK but were intended to graft the prevailing administrative culture renewing many of the practices of public administration and challenging underlying institutional logics. This naturally makes us interested and receptive to different types of partnerships and collaborative environments aiming to address local problems and involve different actors in planning and delivery.

1.1.2 From Outsourcing to Co-production- to Co-creation

Partnerships refer to an organisational configuration that promotes the pursuit of mutual interests between two or more organisations. Public sector organisations can engage in partnerships in various ways, depending on their objectives and aspirations. These range from informal networks to jointly delivering public services, collaborating on specific projects with predefined targets, to establishing environments that encourage innovation and experimentation. For instance, Gravesham Borough Council emphasises in its partnership framework document (2021) its consideration of collaborations to fulfil statutory duties or corporate goals, enhance resilience and resource efficiency, or address urgent matters. This section will begin by examining partnerships between public and private entities and then explore partnerships

involving third-sector organisations and even citizens themselves in the role of service users.

Referring to data from the Treasury's Whole of Government Accounts, it becomes evident that roughly one-third (32%) of the UK's public sector spending is directed toward procuring goods and services from private sector entities (House of Commons Library, 2022). This percentage is notably higher than that observed in the European Union, where more than 250,000 public authorities collectively allocate approximately 14% of their GDP each year for the acquisition of services, works, and supplies (European Commission, n.d.).

Nevertheless, it is essential to note that public authorities remain the primary purchasers in critical sectors such as energy, transport, waste management, social protection, education, and healthcare services provision. Through the establishment of long-term partnerships with private entities via mechanisms like Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) or short-term contractual agreements, the public sector can bolster employment, stimulate economic growth and investment, foster innovation, enhance the efficient utilisation of resources and energy, and promote a socially inclusive economy.

In the realm of public services, there exists a well-organised system that operates according to specific rules dictating how public agencies carry out their tasks and interact with one another. One of the primary rules that govern these agencies, particularly under the NPM model, is efficiency, which involves using resources, time, and money in the most productive ways possible. As a result, outsourcing has become increasingly popular, as it involves delegating certain internal functions to external private entities. The goal of outsourcing is to harness market forces to promote efficiency and shift away from traditional hierarchical management towards a more market-driven approach (Håkansson and Axelsson, 2020). By inviting multiple suppliers to compete for outsourced production, there is increased pressure to reduce costs. This process typically involves the public agency specifying their needs, inviting suppliers, evaluating offers, and selecting the best one, usually based on price. The partnership allows the public sector to benefit from the private sector's strong

specialisation and resources to provide high-quality, long-lasting, and cost-effective public services, and much of the improved value for money comes from private sector capital being deployed and at risk (Gerrard, 2001).

Collaborating with non-profit organisations and social enterprises, also known as the third sector, is another way the public sector can decentralise services. In Europe, the third sector played a significant role in constructing the post-war welfare state, while in the UK, it emerged in the 1990s mainly due to outsourcing and the New Public Management model (Vamstad 2004). However, these partnerships offer more than just outsourcing opportunities. Collaborating with the third sector allows public organisations to leverage their insights, extensive networks, and community groups, enabling them to co-produce public services. This approach also involves citizens and users in service provision, taking an individualised approach (Nabatchi et al., 2017. As envisaged by Brandsen and Pestoff (2006), such collaborations hold the potential for transformative impacts on all involved parties.

In 2011, the Scottish Government's Guide to Forming and Operating Public-Social Partnerships (2011) defined a PSP as "A strategic partnering arrangement which involves the Third Sector earlier and more deeply in the design and commissioning of public services". In 2018, the government introduced a Strategic Public Social Partnership model based on pilot projects through which third-sector organisations participated in redesigning services rather than just delivering them. In addition, in these projects, the involvement of service users was sought through processes such as consultation- events and surveys and by facilitating ongoing communication between beneficiaries and frontline staff (Mazzei et al., 2018). The same study suggests that involving users in more participatory processes was rarely attempted and thus remains an area to be explored.

Co-production, which involves partnerships with citizens or clients in the production of public or private services, was first developed as a concept in the USA during the 1970s and 80s (Parks et al., 1981). The idea of collaboration between professionals and citizens in the design and delivery of public services originated from the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006).

Co-production has been widely discussed in public administration literature, with different conceptualisations emerging from various disciplinary traditions. In countries where governance-oriented approaches are not prevalent, co-production has gained renewed attention at the community level, as a means of mobilising additional resources to address mounting challenges and cuts in public expenditure. Austerity measures provided an opportunity for local people to shape their own processes, redistributing decision-making power and becoming a catalyst for governance. (Bartlett, 2009; Nesti, 2017; Thorpe and Rhodes, 2018).

Most definitions of co-production converge in the perception of public professionals as the standard producers of public services and suggest that service users can be introduced into the service production workflow to contribute with their resources in a predefined manner to improve the design and delivery of a predetermined public service. (Lusch and Vargo, 2006; Bovaird, 2007; Osborne et al., 2016). It is from the same perspective that the third sector is also involved as a co-producer of public services (Osborne and McLaughlin 2004). In this case, co-production varies depending on who plans and who delivers public services. Thus, co-production in a public–third sector partnership can be distinguished as co-management when delivery is performed through inter-organisational interactions with or without the voluntary involvement of service users, co-governance when the third sector and possibly its service-users participate in policy-making and full co-production when all actors participate both in planning and delivery (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006; Mazzei et al., 2018).

In most cases, the public service co-production reflects a strategic top-down approach, where the public agency predefines the desired service, collaborating actors, objectives and collaboration framework. Additionally, from an NPM perspective, the third sector is primarily seen as a potential contractor that must compete with private businesses for service provision. Thus, third-sector organisations need to adjust their processes to contract requirements and prioritise performance measurement to ensure their sustainability; involving service users meaningfully in co-design processes is not always a priority (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006; Torfing, Sorensen, Roiseland, 2016; McMullin 2021). This partnership dynamic is related to many of the complexities involved in co-production. According to the analysis of the Scottish strategic PSPs

(Mazzei et al., 2020), co-production is most meaningful when third-sector organisations assume a leading role in service design and involve their members or service users in the organisation's governance. Conversely, co-production often falls short when third-sector organisations are not meaningfully engaged, service users' views are poorly represented, or decision-making is restricted to a pre-set of alternatives. Tokenistic motivations from authorities or third-sector organisations can also undermine the representation of service users' views.

A different conception of involving citizens in public services and problem-solving is through the notion of co-creation. When differentiating between the two concepts, co-production involves citizens as co-implementers in the execution or delivery of specific services, while co-creation views citizens as co-designers or initiators of initiatives (Hilton and Hughes, 2013). Other definitions, such as Osborne et al.'s (2016), give co-creation the character of a superset that includes co-production along with other shared processes like planning, designing, financing, prioritisation, managing, delivery, and assessment. What all definitions of co-creation have in common is that citizens or their representatives are perceived as active partners in the production process and, most importantly, co-creators of value (Hilton and Hughes, 2013). This emphasises an interactive and dynamic relationship between the citizen and public organisation that is not reduced to one stage in a linear service production workflow but rather encompasses multiple occurrences within the context of the service user's broader life experience (Grönroos, 2011). Public sector organisations and public service users actively interact and exchange resources, knowledge, competences, and ideas to enhance the production of value (Baptista, Alves and Matos, 2020) at a personal and collective level (Osborne, 2018), bringing about an increase in well-being in their lives (Grönroos and Voima, 2013).

A more comprehensive definition of co-creation in the public sector, as defined by Torfing, Røiseland, and Sørensen (2016), involves the collaboration of two or more public actors like politicians, public managers, or frontline staff and private actors like service users and their relatives, voluntary groups of citizens, civil society organisations, social enterprises, or private corporations to solve a shared problem or challenge. In this context, the process is characterised by a constructive exchange of

knowledge, resources, competencies, and ideas to enhance public value regarding visions, plans, policies, strategies, regulatory frameworks, or services. Co-creation can lead to continuous improvement of outputs, outcomes or innovative changes that transform the understanding of a problem or task at hand, resulting in new ways of solving it. For Baptista, Alves and Matos (2020), co-creation describes the core of NPG and contradicts the NPM doctrine. Although this perspective is understandable, it encourages us to explore collaborative spaces and partnerships that can provide more opportunities for systemic facilitation of value co-creation and open innovation under the NPM model. Identifying efforts that do not conflict with the UK public administrative environment is crucial for implementing positive changes.

1.1.3 Local innovation and citizen participation supported by the public sector

Modern societies are faced with a multitude of interconnected challenges that require innovative solutions. These challenges include but are not limited to climate and sustainability concerns, demographic shifts, the need to build resilience and respond to crises, and increasing social issues. (European Commission, 2022; European Commission, 2023). Innovation, according to Mulgan and Albury (2003), refers to the successful creation and execution of novel processes, products, services, and delivery methods that significantly enhance efficiency, effectiveness, or quality of outcomes. Driving innovation in the public sector requires collaboration and partnerships that will allow for the pooling of resources, expertise, and knowledge from various stakeholders to address complex challenges and deliver better outcomes.

Many of these synergies can be described through models of Research and Development (R&D) Partnerships (Sperling, 2001), the Triple Helix Model (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 1997), Cross-Sectoral Collaborations (Jones et al., 2005) and Innovation Partnerships (Iossa, Biagi and Valbonesi, 2018). An excellent example is the Manchester Urban Observatory in the UK. This initiative brought together the University of Manchester with the Manchester City Council, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and various industry partners to address urban challenges and promote positive change, with a focus on sensing technologies and data analysis.

Through their efforts, the Manchester Urban Observatory worked towards making the city smarter and more environmentally sustainable (Manchester Urban Institute, n.d.).

The models mentioned emphasise the importance of collaboration between the public sector, academia, research institutions, and industry for innovation. However, other models highlight the significance of societal engagement and democratising the innovation process. For example, the Open Innovation approach involves opening up to external knowledge and ideas to complement the organisation's internal resources, leading to faster internal innovation and new market opportunities (Chesbrough, 2006). Another model, the Quadruple Helix, builds on the Triple Helix concept, which describes a collaboration between academia, industry, and government and adds a fourth helix represented by civil society or the public (Arnkil et al., 2010). These models recognise that citizens and communities possess valuable expertise about their lives and surroundings, making them essential contributors to the innovation process. Both of these models can be found in Living Labs.

Living Labs (LLs) are open innovation ecosystems, where researchers, businesses, public organisations, and citizens work together to create and test new products, services, and solutions. These spaces were originally created to give ICT companies immediate feedback from end-users who would test innovative technology products in real-world scenarios. (Ballon, Pierson, and Delaere, 2005; Fosltad, 2008). Furthermore, Urban living labs have become essential innovation hubs in the European Union and the UK, playing a pivotal role in "smart city" initiatives. Through partnerships between public administrations, research institutions, and small to medium-sized enterprises, co-production has been facilitated, leveraging the urban environment for testing with the involvement of citizens and the potential for local smartification. (Nesti, 2017). Since its establishment in 2006, the European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL, n.d.) has identified over 440 Living Labs. Within its broad deployment, the living lab model demonstrates diversity, encompassing varying practices, thematic goals, strategic partnerships, and demographic involvement.

The Living Lab as a methodology is a qualitative process focusing on specifying user needs, participatory design, evaluation and feedback in subsequent stages (Følstad,

2008; Almirall et al., 2012). It starts with identifying key issues and contextualising research and actions within a specific domain and location. A sample of citizens is involved and collaborative processes between groups of citizens and experts are used to analyse people's daily practices and needs through rich narratives that describe the "what is" and "what could be" of the context (Almirall et al., 2012). For this reason, ethnographic techniques such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, context mapping, storytelling, and scenario building are commonly employed (Nesti, 2015). These processes lead to the formation of design concepts. Participatory design methods are then used to create prototypes or mock-ups. Subsequently, the outcomes are tested and evaluated by users in real-world conditions to obtain feedback, which allows for reflection on the designed solution/product/service. This can lead to new iterations based on refined user needs or rescaling (Almirall et al., 2012, Marrades et al., 2021) that can further test and reshape the product/ service in a broader context. While this methodology reflects the general trajectory in numerous LLs executions, particular instances can vary significantly, depending on the labs' aims, ideals and the value they generate for different stakeholders.

The lab model can be particularly beneficial in addressing local place-related challenges, informing the related public officials and heads of services and even promoting innovation in public policies. For instance, the collaboration between the University of the Arts London (UAL DESIS Lab) and a London Borough Council resulted in establishing a prototype public social innovation lab, as described by Thorpe and Rhodes (2018). The lab employed design-led approaches designed by academics and students to tackle local challenges defined by the local government, like overcrowded living and the support of young people. The partnership led to a series of projects, which enabled public engagement and interaction with the community on the issues at hand. As a result, the qualitative insights gathered could aid in decision-making and priority-setting by local government officials and politicians, eventually leading to newly configured youth hubs.

The Placemaking Living Lab (PLL) is an example of how a LL variation can benefit a local community, as described by Marrades et al. (2021). The PLL served as the hub of experimentation for the place-based regeneration of the València Waterfront site and

was managed by a redevelopment consortium with shareholders from the municipal, regional, and Spanish state governments. From 2017 to 2019, the PLL undertook intervention projects based on the needs of local stakeholders, with a particular focus on end-users of the area. These stakeholders were involved in the planning, creation, and evaluation of small-scale placemaking interventions. The authors report that the PLL's activities resulted in the successful establishment of new uses for the site, obtaining grants for redevelopment, and developing significant in-house expertise in participatory place-making, which reshaped the consortium's policy and how they collaborate with other stakeholders.

The previous examples demonstrate how place-based strategies benefit from the contribution of lab settings, while the subsequent cases illustrate how the public sector promotes participatory culture and invests in digital creativity in networked environments, as discussed by Jenkins (2006) and Townsend (2010). Such examples of Living Labs are the Athenaeums in Barcelona and the Citilab in Cornellà, which operate like civic hubs connected to different urban districts. They promote collaboration among residents in creating bottom-up interventions based on ICT and digital fabrication to improve their neighbourhoods. These Living Lab cases rely on the local government's social policy and investment - making them vulnerable to austerity policies and budget cuts. (Gascó, 2017).

Stemming from a different configuration is the example of the Bristol Living Lab, provided by the Knowle West Media Centre, a digital arts charity. The Bristol LL follows an approach that was brought together with the support of the Bristol City Council. It emphasises local knowledge, skills, and resources to involve citizens in shaping and enhancing their communities through digital technology projects for social change (The Bristol Approach, 2023). The Bristol LLs were initially a five-year EU-funded initiative to improve quality of life and reduce CO2 emissions by teaching citizens to analyse air quality data collected from portable sensors. Nowadays, these LLs are only present through commissioned collaborations with local authorities, academic organisations, artists, and communities, giving them an ephemeral presence in public life (Knowle West Media Centre, 2021).

The selection of these case studies in the above comparisons was intentional. Thematically, they provide a foretaste of our following explorations. Moreover, the two countries, the UK and Spain, represent two public administration cultures that differ without being diametrically opposed. Spain has a strong bureaucratic tradition but has also implemented NPM-inspired reforms. In conclusion, as presented and confirmed in the literature (Manzini and Staszowski, 2013), LLs facilitate two symmetrical opportunities. One is the production of immediately useful knowledge, the faster transition from prototypes to products/services, and their local integration. The other is the collaboration among organisations and citizens, which enables public organisations to experiment with new policies, governance and collaboration frameworks.

Also, despite similar goals and motivations, the case studies presented highlight a fundamental difference in the involvement of the public sector, which has been a recurring theme throughout this review. In the UK, public organisations take on a secondary role in involving citizens in co-production or co-creation initiatives, often outsourcing the process to external partners rather than embracing a more integrated approach. So, while innovation manifests as both products and processes, there is a nuanced need for a better understanding of participatory processes and their potential, even for the strategic formation of partnerships and collaboration frameworks.

1.1.4 Concluding remarks

The UK administrative model allows flexibility in establishing beneficial partnerships that have the potential to promote the meaningful involvement of citizens. A conceptual framework frequently employed by scholars to describe citizen participation in decision-making is the ladder of participation, originally developed by Sherry Arnstein (1969). This ladder depicts various levels of citizen participation, spanning from tokenism to citizen power. Influenced by a more recent version proposed by Torfing, Røiseland, and Sørensen (2016) called the ladder of co-creation, the above literature review can be summarised through the following classification.

In the UK, at the first level of citizen participation, service users are empowered as consumers who can choose their service providers. Users' needs motivate different service adaptations by various providers. This level involves informing and training citizens to utilise the resources offered and, in this way, co-produce the services through selection and consumption.

Next, there is a level of substantial participation that differentiates itself from the previous ones by acknowledging citizens' expertise. The major aspect of this is the participation of service users in the governance of community organisations with which the public sector cooperates; the key distinction is that involvement is not mediated by experts.

At the ultimate level, the focus is on environments that promote open innovation by inviting citizens to contribute to the process of defining their needs, co-designing solutions, and testing them in real-life situations to develop new products, services, and tools. This corresponds to the partnership rung of the original Arnstein ladder and is a recognised area for improvement, with identified challenges and opportunities for exploration.

This review investigated how the public sector can effectively collaborate with other sectors in co-production, foster local innovations, and co-create with citizens. This provided an introduction to our primary focus, placemaking– a collaborative process involving all of the above. This topic will be explored next.

1.2 Place making

In this section, the focus shifts towards the creation of public spaces, which are central to public life and action. The discussion explores the historical factors that have moulded communal areas and, consequently, have impacted the broader urban landscape. Building upon prior discussions about administrative models, development of public services, and collaborative problem-solving, the exploration will encompass modern approaches and methods that can facilitate the formation of "good places" through experimentation with interventions and implementation of upgrade projects

under the direction and cooperation of various stakeholders and place experts with different perspectives on the subject.

1.2.1 Reviewing theories of place

The concept of place has been studied through different theories and in various disciplines, including geography, urban planning, media and art studies. This section aims to explore some of these perspectives to provide a better understanding of the multiplicity of placemaking.

Starting with Marxist philosopher and urban theorist Henri Lefebvre, his work "The Production of Space" (1991), originally published in 1974, is a seminal work with his conception of social production of space providing a "framework guiding urban and political critique" (Pierce & Martin, 2015, p. 1280) for anglophone geography. Lefebvre does not refer directly to the term Place; he distinguishes between three different forms of space: perceived or lived, conceived, and abstract. Perceived space is based on our individual experiences and emotions and involves how we interact with the world around us. It is personal and subjective, shaped by our cultural background and personal history. Conversely, conceived space refers to how space is represented and conceptualised in urban plans, architectural designs, zoning regulations, and other spatial representations created by experts and authorities. Conceived space reflects a given society's dominant social, political, and economic interests. Finally, abstract space is the kind of space that is associated with capitalist production and exchange. It is quantified and standardised, emphasising efficiency and productivity over the individual experience. Abstract space can be disconnected from the social and cultural aspects of space and lead to the domination of economic forces.

Lefebvre argued in 1968 that there is a fundamental "right to the city," an assertion against the top-down management of space that he felt restricted social interactions and relationships in society. Geographer and social theorist David Harvey underlines this right to the city as a collective rather than an individual right; he wrote, "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a

collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights" (Harvey,2008). These theorists assuming a structuralist point of view, examined how social structures, power relations, and cultural meanings shape places.

Yi-Fu Tuan, one of the most important originators of humanistic geography, advocates another very influential theory, making a clear distinction between "space" and "place" and relating the two concepts to different characteristics and unique interactions and activities (Tuan, 1979). Space refers to the physical or conceptual extent or area that lacks meaning, identity or human attachment. It is an objective and homogeneous entity that can be analysed in terms of distance, direction, and geometry. In a way, this view is the notion of a neutral backdrop space that Lefebvre challenges. On the other hand, place refers to spaces that have acquired personal or cultural importance through human experiences and interactions; place "incarnates the experiences and aspirations of people" (Tuan, 1979, p. 387). In contrast to the spatial emptiness, places are enriched with a sense of identity, intimacy, memories, and stories; places are encountered, experienced, and appreciated by individuals and communities. Tuan also introduces the concept of topophilia (Tuan, 2012), which refers to the emotional and affective bonds between individuals and specific places, encompassing the feelings of attachment, love, and affection that people develop towards particular places.

Paul Dourish and Steve Harrison (1996), focusing on HCI and interested in embodied interactions within media spaces, have also embraced the concept of spatial separation. For them, space is a three-dimensional environment defined by its locative features, mechanical elements and capacity to provide the opportunity for place to happen. In contrast, place is the event, the action, the social meaning, conventions and cultural understandings that develop through mutually constituted practices and behavioural norms. The researchers discuss the concept of "re-placing" space in computer-supported cooperative work environments, which refers to the process of using technology to create a sense of place- an idea foreshadowing digital place-making.

Both of the above perceptions of place draw from phenomenology, a philosophical approach that emphasises individuals' embodied and lived experiences. Key thinker associated with this approach is Edward Casey. He describes space as an encompassing reality that allows for things to be located within it, underlining its locatory capacity, while place becomes "the immediate ambience of my lived body and its history, including the whole sedimented history of cultural and social influences and personal interests that compose my life-history" (Casey, 2001, p. 404). Casey highlighted the embodied, experiential, and subjective aspects of engaging with the spatial world and explored the role of spatial imagination and language in shaping people's understanding and communicating their interpretations and meanings of space and place.

The prominent geographer and feminist scholar Doreen Massey also provides an interpretation of space and place, emphasising the relational and dynamic nature of these concepts. For Massey, space is not a pre-existing container but a social product, and it reflects the multiple and contested meanings and interests present within society. Places are viewed as meeting points where different social groups, cultures, and economic activities intersect and interact (Massey, 1994). Massey highlights the importance of recognising the diversity and multiplicity of voices and experiences that contribute to the making of places. She emphasises the spatial practices such as everyday activities, movements, and social interactions that contribute to the production of space. These practices are embedded in power relations and political processes and can potentially challenge or reproduce existing social inequalities. Massey also highlights the diversity of spatial imaginaries, which are collective and shared representations, visions, and narratives of space emerging from interactions and experiences of individuals and communities within specific contexts. In "For Space" (2005), Massey argues for the need to challenge fixed and exclusionary conceptions of space, emphasising the potential for creating more inclusive and just spaces through the imagination and contestation of spatial imaginaries.

In the work of Tim Cresswell, a geographer known for his work on mobility and place, the concepts of place, space, and mobility are interconnected and mutually influencing. Like previous theorists, he connects place to specific locations with

personal, cultural, and social significance and attributes to space, a more abstract and conceptual notion lacking specific attributes or human attachment (Cresswell, 2004). Cresswell's work emphasises the role of mobility in shaping and defining places. Movement and flows of people, objects, and ideas contribute to the transformation and reconfiguration of places. It examines how different forms of mobility, such as commuting, migration, and tourism, influence the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of places (Cresswell, 2006).

Finally, the polymath Michel de Certeau inspired by Baudelaire's notions of voyeur and flaneur, describes the city experienced by either "voyeurs" or "walkers", pointing to mobility (San Cornelio and Ardevol, 2011). The voyeur's point of view is defined as gazing at the city from above. From this vantage point, the city is offered up to the voyeur as a whole, an abstract vision of space. In contrast, the walker is the anonymous person walking and experiencing the city down below. In this sense, de Certeau separates relevant spatial practices known as "strategies" and "tactics" (Certeau, 2011). Corporate, military, governmental, or scientific actors implement strategies having the power to construct a space through a top-down perspective that serves their purposes. On the other hand, everyday people apply tactical practices often in creative, fluid, and sometimes temporary ways shaping and transforming the identity and significance of places, negotiating power relations and creating alternative spatial narratives and experiences (Halegoua, 2020). In his view, the strategic space and the tactical place coexist as top-down and bottom-up forces in the city, a site of contestation and multiple meanings.

While not exhaustive, the discussion of place and space theories above covers a range of perspectives, from structuralist to phenomenological to post-structuralist, as categorised by Derek Gregory (1994). These perspectives offer valuable insights into the various placemaking approaches and their relation to the research at hand. This research is founded on post-structuralist theories, which recognise place as a site of multiple meanings and ongoing negotiation processes. This thesis is particularly interested in the strategic planning regarding place, as the study was initiated through a similar process. However, the focus is on valuing people's topophilia and exploring their interpretations, visions, and narrations of place. It relies on their embodied

experiences and mobilities, ultimately advocating their right to remake the city and attach meaning to it.

1.2.2 Place making- organically and strategically

In the history of human settlement, we see how the ancient communities naturally organised their lives around gathering places, ceremonial spaces, burial grounds and meeting places, which reflected their cultural, social, physical and technological contexts. Through pivotal inventions and the exploitation of natural resources, some communities successfully turned their settlements into archaic cities that enabled their civilisations to thrive. The city-states emerged in ancient Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), around 2000 BCE, with centralised political systems and classified social structures. They established the foundation for urban planning, developing transportation networks and monumental architecture (Hafford, 2018). In ancient Athens, the Agora served as the central marketplace and civic gathering place. Originating in the 6th century BCE, it evolved into a bustling hub of commercial, religious, political, and social activities, influencing the modern concept of a city centre where the public and private spheres were divided through fine lines (Sadek, 2020). Similarly, the Roman Forum, ancient Rome's political, social, and commercial centre, influenced subsequent urban planning principles, particularly in creating central gathering spaces for civic life (History.com Editors, 2018). Moreover, the Roman Empire was known for its extensive network of roads, which laid the groundwork for the growth and connectivity of cities within their vast territory (Songer, n.d.).

These references are only a tiny sample of the historical genome of modern cities, which have evolved rapidly since then. Contemporary cities are part of an intricate, interconnected world; they are influenced by complex local and global economic and political factors, they are planned under the activities of decision-makers and science-informed professionals and come into life through the organic and systematic social, commercial and even creative practices of groups and individuals that may or may not be permanent residents of the area. The above influences become most visible in public space, which in the majority of countries is defined through a modern perspective of democratic ideals, referring to an area that is open to everyone,

regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, or socioeconomic status (Efroymson et al., 2009) and extends beyond state dominion, including places intended for public use, whose ownership or management also involves private interests (Loudier and DuBois, 2003). As multiple forces engage in public places and shape the experiences they offer, their making can be conceptualised in alternative ways.

Alan Lew (2017) identifies the organic and strategic process of making places, which he refers to as "place-making" and "placemaking", respectively. The concept of place-making originates from cultural geography tradition and refers to a natural, bottom-up activity that humans naturally do across the globe as individuals and in social groups in the areas they reside in (Pink, 2008a). Through place-making, a place is claimed, and a 'sense of place' is formed through everyday social practices, even in the absence of conscious intentionality. A sense of place denotes how people imprint values, personal histories, relationships and shared events on a landscape, creating a sense of identity and belonging (Butterworth, 2000; Cilliers and Timmermans, 2014). On the other hand, placemaking (in one word and without the hyphen) is a planned and often top-down effort to (re)shape a place and influence people's perceptions of it (Lew, 2012). This deliberate and purposeful approach to place creation is typical of urban and tourism destination planning and can be government-funded and controlled.

Place making (we will utilise the spelling 'place making' as an all-inclusive term) is occupied with tangible and intangible aspects of place (Lew, 2017). The term "tangible" pertains to a location's physical structure, appearance, and usability. It is achieved through deliberate design and planning to create specific destinations and features within a given space. The "intangible" aspect refers to the mental images and perceptions that can be formed about an area; this essentially refers to the sense of place. Still, these mental associations can also occur through place-branding, marketing, and advertising that create new visions of the place or strategically utilise its local history, heritage and myths. Similarly, perceptions of place are formed from social media users' activity, news reports, and word-of-mouth communication. Another intangible aspect of place making relates to the experiences and everyday practices of people occupying these places, which can inspire new perspectives and activities within the locality. This aspect emphasises the embodied experience within

an area that can become a source of affective connections to the place. Strategically, this can be controlled by programming various events, services, and activities, which foster a sense of place and encourage social interaction.

The discussion of tangible and intangible aspects of place insinuates that all relevant processes of "making" that can be the focal point of strategic operations may also be based on the deliberate and purposeful involvement of the population. In this case, there is potential for a possibly less organic but still participatory place making process. In this context, Lew perceives the two notions of "place-making" and "placemaking" as two ends of a continuum of options on which different tourism destination development processes can be defined. As Basaraba (2021) confirms, this continuum is a helpful way to categorise different place making projects, placing them closer to either the top-down or bottom-up end, depending on how much they rely on the involvement of people or the strategic planning of an influential initiator (For a visual representation of the two concepts, please refer to Appendix 2, Figure 2.) Furthermore, in relation to the preceding section, the place making continuum shares significant similarities with Arnstein's ladder and the notions of co-production and co-creation in the public sector. This leads us to contemplate local authorities' place making strategies and initiatives using both frameworks.

Top-down and bottom-up influences in place making can be traced back as contending forces in the 1960s. The modern city's ideals of progress and efficiency directed a perspective of urban renewal based on modernist architecture, infrastructure projects, automobile-centric development and large-scale clearance to eradicate slums, alleviate overcrowding and promote suburban home ownership. The prevailing notion was that demolishing deteriorated areas and replacing them with modern buildings, highways, and public spaces would foster economic growth and enhance the overall quality of life (Sudjic, 2016). Robert Moses is a historical representative of this dominant big-picture planning perspective during the mid-20th century, and assuming a position analogous to de Certeau's "voyeur", he had a vision for transforming New York City.

Activists, preservationists, and community advocates challenged his top-down decision-making, calling for greater public input in urban planning. The campaign of Jane Jacobs, a journalist turned activist, prevented his plan to drive a highway through Washington Squat Park and Greenwich Village, which he attempted to have designated as a slum, and build a ten-lane expressway through Lower Manhattan (Sudjic, 2016). In The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961), Jacobs highlights the organically arising character of diverse neighbourhoods in post-World War II Manhattan. Jacobs celebrates the unique cultural features, cuisines, festivals, and street life of areas such as Little Italy, Greenwich Village, and Chinatown, which welcome residents and visitors to shop, enjoy, and learn. Other urban thinkers, such as Kevin Lynch (1960) and William Whyte (1980), also promoted a people-centred approach to public space design and planning, revolutionising the field. Their ideas prioritised community participation, preservation, and a holistic approach to building sustainable and inclusive cities, laying the foundation for current-day perceptions about city planning and the concept of place-making itself.

Today the mid-20th century tabula rasa approach is widely considered a poor strategy. However, prior to adopting the more place-sensitive approaches associated with place-making today, top-down approaches were prevalent around the turn of the millennium, centred on impressive architectural statements and flagship developments. Regional governments pursued this strategy to attract visitors, promote real estate development, and build infrastructure. Characteristic examples are the construction of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the Olympic projects in cities hosting the athletic events. In line with a neo-liberal development model, this strategy was influential in re-visioning stale places but simultaneously exacerbated existing inequalities and divisions in the city (Jones and Evans, 2012; Marrades et al., 2021).

Place making evolved through the influences of previous' place rectification' strategies and their recognised limitations. Today, through its many definitions, place making is understood as a deliberate, collaborative approach that involves multiple stakeholders, with the intention to make liveable and meaningful places, maximise shared value and emphasise the existing social realities (Qabshoqa, 2018; Wetzer, 2020; Basaraba, 2021). Although collaboration and partnership are often promoted as

essential components of place making, the struggle between top-down and bottom-up influences persists even in contemporary instances; place making is primarily focused on local regeneration but combined with diverse agendas and perspectives on what regeneration means.

In certain projects, placemaking becomes the vehicle aiming at the development of tourism destinations (Lew, 2017), creative cities with a rejuvenated economy (Courage and McKeown, 2018), knowledge and innovation spaces attracting talented and knowledgeable workforce (Pancholi et al., 2015) etc. On the other end of the continuum, place-making can involve various grassroots initiatives such as DIY, guerrilla, and pop-up movements that involve community groups taking over public spaces in a collaborative manner (Caldwell and Foth, 2014). It can also emphasise place governance and local transformation with the intention to not only alter the physicality but also develop social capital and promote civic engagement and foster people's well-being (Silberg et al., 2013; Project for Public Spaces, 2018). The general goal of transforming spaces into qualitative places is present in all agendas. However, there are varying perspectives on the role of locals and the importance placed on "place" versus "making" as a product-process duality. These viewpoints reflect critical issues of the previous review about why and how the public sector forms partnerships and collaborates with stakeholders and citizens in diverse cultural and political settings. Relevant issues of objectives and processes within place making frameworks will be analysed next.

1.2.3 Placemaking ideals, practices and opportunities

In 1975, Fred Kent founded Project for Public Spaces (PPS) in New York City, inspired by the Street Life Project of William "Holly" Whyte. Over the past 50 years, the organisation has become a prominent figure in the field of place-making, setting a high standard of practice and having a significant global impact. At PPS, place-making is regarded as a continual, cooperative effort that draws on the knowledge and involvement of the community. Through the place-making process, PPS aims to enhance collaborative, community, and management capabilities (Project for Public Spaces, 2018). The MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning's white paper,

authored by Silberg et al. (2013), also advocates this perspective. The paper analyses 13 case studies from the United States to demonstrate that successful place-making initiatives go beyond simply creating a place and instead prioritise "making"- the process of collaboration between various partnering stakeholders with a focus on community empowerment. The authors foresee the emergence of a participatory approach that is non-hierarchical, community-centred, and fundamentally democratic. In essence, they speak of a new paradigm that deviates from previous approaches - such as top-down development-based and market-led strategies, which became popular globally in the late 1970s (Parker, Street and Wargent, 2018), as well as design-based schemes that arose due to the cultural economy and creative industries in the early 2000s (Marrades et al., 2021). Even more place-sensitive approaches, where design professionals translate community input into plans (Project for Public Spaces, 2018), are being surpassed by this new approach.

Participatory place-making is in line with the most innovative nuances of the partnership rung of the Arnstein ladder (1969), where cross-sector stakeholders and citizens collaborate to explore, experiment and introduce solutions to address local issues, as discussed in the previous section. Besides the professional stakeholders, including managers, designers, engineers, planners, developers and workers, citizens are the main focus of this approach. Citizens' participation in the planning process can benefit from their experience in the locality; they can provide valuable insights into critical issues, local needs, values, and historical perspectives (Project for Public Spaces, 2018). This helps in understanding different local views, especially since public spaces host a wide range of sectors, interest fields, and groups, some of which may not even be familiar with each other (Cilliers and Timmermans, 2014). Participatory planning can bring together this diversity of views, leveraging environments like the already mentioned (Placemaking) Living Labs (Gascó, 2017; Marrades et al., 2021), participatory design-led workshops (DiSalvo et al., 2013;Al Waer et al., 2017) and creative participation tools (Cilliers and Timmermans, 2014) that motivate involvement and sensitise participants' values, needs, and future visions in creative outcomes.

A similar conception of co-creation and place flexibility is reflected in PPS's "lighter, quicker, cheaper" (LQC) approach. This philosophy involves temporary projects that

encourage experimentation and allow for mistakes. By using inexpensive, temporary streetscape elements and utilising local resources and knowledge, LQC embraces incremental changes and offers a less risky alternative to capital-heavy projects, securing political support and community buy-in (Silberberg, 2013). This process is associated with tactical urbanism and event-based initiatives, which can be highly effective in quickly and affordably transforming public spaces and drawing attention to the need for redevelopments on a larger scale (Marrades et al., 2021).

These initiatives' experimental and temporary-to-permanent qualities allow community members to become "co-designers" and even "makers", contributing their creative works to public spaces, thus informing professionals about essential design considerations and providing the broader community with something tangible to react to and experience. They can energise communities, promote community outreach and inclusion, and even allow previously unnoticed communities to self-identify (Silberberg, 2013; Candy and Kornet, 2019). Getting the public's perspectives into the planning process can validate decision-making and foster a strategy that garners local support, which is vital for the sustainability of the project in the long run.

This is essential as place is not a static issue, and making is never finished. PPS uses the term "place governance" to describe the place-making approach that extends from the initial design and creation of places to their ongoing maintenance and programming of activities, even after some professional stakeholders disengage from the process (Project for Public Spaces, 2018). Building a community around a physical location and organising new opportunities for engagement via programming allows places to be continuously tweaked to maintain their relevance to local needs (Silberberg, 2013). This idea highlights enhanced local ownership and reflects the organic place-making notion where people are the originators of place, not consumers of an offered product.

To contrast with the participatory practices discussed above, the examination now shifts to Creative Placemaking, which is also a collaborative approach but leans more towards the top-down (placemaking) end of the place making continuum. The term

"Creative Placemaking" was coined by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus in a white paper commissioned by the US federal agency National Endowment for the Arts and the Mayors' Institute on City Design. According to the authors, creative placemaking is a process where "partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities." (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010, p. 3) This approach addresses urban areas, suburbs, and small towns facing structural changes and displacement by utilising creative initiatives to enhance places, stimulate economic growth, and create fertile ground for cultural industries. It is a creative rebranding based on the establishment of cultural and entertainment destinations that will attract visitors and serve as cultural industry incubators, fostering local workforce development. (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010)

Similar to the participatory model, creative placemaking is rooted in the ideas of urban theorists like Jacobs and Whyte, who prioritise locally informed and human-centric development. Creativity is an additional common element of the two approaches but with a different purpose and meaning (Richards, 2011). In participatory and tactical initiatives, creativity offers a way to involve the public in decision-making and experiment with new understandings and experiences of public space. On the other hand, creative placemaking strategically uses creative projects to attract visitors and increase foot traffic and economic development. This approach celebrates the unique qualities and vibrancy of neighbourhoods, as described by Jane Jacobs, but primarily focuses on appealing to tourists rather than residents (Halegoua,2020). Consequently, the role of professionals such as artists, designers, architects, and planners become more important than cultivating the community's place-making capacity, although the contributions of local cultural resources are also valued as assets.

The creative placemaking approach indeed prioritises place production and seeks visible and tangible spatial upgrades in the areas where the effort is focused. However, its hierarchical structure also carries certain risks. Markusen and Gadwa refer to them as challenges to counter community scepticism, and Halegoua (2020) summarises them as critiques of exclusion. One critique is that experts invited to work in the area and along locals have been silencing or ignoring diverse communities' desires, needs,

and input (Glasstire, 2014; Project for Public Spaces, 2015). Additionally, community arts can be exploited as a rhetorical tool rather than a genuine investment (Satinsky, 2013). Perhaps most importantly, there is a significant risk of gentrification because of commercial arts industries, which can cause displacement of current residents and small businesses (Grodach et al., 2014). In response, some communities have organised "place guarding" protests to prevent such displacement (Pritchard, 2018).

What the different perspectives to place making seem to converge on, whether they involve citizens in planning activities and experimental interventions or are based on strategic plans, is the importance of partnerships. These are cross-agency, cross-sector, and intergovernmental collaborations. In the first scenario, collaboration between offices can yield greater leverage in securing funding or offering in-kind contributions such as staffing and equipment (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). Similarly, alliances across public, commercial, non-profit, academic/ research, and community sectors can be highly beneficial. These partnerships can take various forms that combine regulatory power and public ownership with private resources, expertise, and efficient management to create and maintain well-run places that would not be possible otherwise (Silberberg, 2013; Pancholi et al., 2015). Non-profit corporations can also be incredibly effective in providing funding and management. Lastly, intergovernmental partnerships are critical for project sustainability, as they can provide initial funding during the experimental stage or subsidies for continuation (Marrades, 2021).

As partnerships are a common focal point of diverse place making models, there are also recognised challenges regarding building and maintaining them. Closer to the place-making end of the continuum, these challenges focus primarily on community engagement. These initiatives need to involve individuals representative of the larger community, build community capacity, and find supporting local organisations. Overcoming mistrust of authority is also a hurdle, especially in disadvantaged communities (Silberberg, 2013; Al Waer et al., 2017). Thus, it is particularly critical to find community experts- allies, advisers, and activists connected to the community at the grassroots level and facilitators that can work towards an open and inclusive engagement.

On the other hand, strategic cross-sectoral partnerships need to overcome obstacles linked to power dynamics, conflicting agendas, diverse organisational structures and internal processes. To overcome these challenges, partners should identify areas where their interests, missions, and resources align and work together to develop collaborative capacity. This requires practitioners to invest time, be flexible, share information, and demonstrate adaptability and willingness to learn. A diverse skillset is also necessary for interdisciplinary practices. (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010; Al Waer et al., 2017; Courage and McKeown, 2018).

1.2.4 Closing Remarks and Additional Insights

In this section, the discussion began by addressing the theoretical concepts of space and place and reflected on the contending influences that shaped public space in the past. The analysis of the different place making models that prevailed in the literature after 2010 shows a clear mitigation of the contrast between archetypical top-down and bottom-up conceptualisations with more than few points of convergence. The involvement of communities is now recognised as an opportunity, while strategic partnerships, management and programming are decisive in maintaining vibrant spaces.

Current research on place making is shifting towards a more pragmatic focus on the intermediate collaborative spectrum between the bottom-up and the top-down ends. For instance, researchers are interested in exploring how participatory design processes can effectively engage diverse communities (Al Waer et al., 2017); how local community groups' small-scale projects can be supported by small financial grants from local and national governments (Sara et al., 2021); how the strategic shift to a place-led approach and the collaboration with locals in the design process can ultimately lead to better places and establish locally derived practices to involve stakeholders (Marrades, 2021). With the increasingly participatory nature of place-making, there is a growing need to facilitate collaboration among diverse stakeholders, which is also a key focus of this study and its practice.

The following section presents a literature review on digital placemaking, which introduces a new dimension to the collaborative place making spectrum based on the unique characteristics of digital media.

Note: In section 1.2, deliberate use was made of various forms of the term "placemaking": "place making," "place-making," and "placemaking." Each variant subtly alludes to different nuances of meaning. "Place making" serves as a neutral term, while "place-making" and "placemaking" are each associated with participatory, bottom-up approaches and structured, top-down processes in the creation of places, respectively. It is important to note that this distinction is primarily a conceptual framework.

Over time, the literature has shown a preference for the term "placemaking," which has absorbed the other variants, aligning with its conceptual direction towards the middle ground. Therefore, in the forthcoming sections and chapters, the author will adopt "placemaking" as the standard term, without implying any bias towards top-down methodologies.

1.3 Digital placemaking

Beginning the previous section, the discussion explored conceptualisations of space and place that interpret their qualities and elucidate organic and strategic processes of placemaking that focus on tangible and intangible qualities of place. In this section, the examination shifts toward the concept of space through a technological prism. The development of communication technologies, mass media, and the Internet has long been associated with a sort of annihilation of space and limitations of geography. However, as will be presented, new digital technologies brought back the importance of locality, introducing technological augmentations and digital practices that enriched places with computational capabilities, location-based content, and meaning co-created both virtually and onsite.

1.3.1 From cyber to real

In 1868, when Samuel Morse developed his telegraph system, his contemporaries celebrated what they saw as a victory of intelligence over space and time (Kerr, 2016). Almost a century later, Marshal McLuhan, one of the fathers of media theory, popularised the concept of the "global village", introducing a paradigm of simultaneity describing human affairs under the "electro-magnetic discoveries" (McLuhan, 1962, p. 31). The paradigm refers to the technological advancements in communication technologies and the resulting mass media that would collapse the boundaries of time and space. But while the old media were inherently one-directional and centrally controlled, the emergence of the Internet in its most recognisable form in 1990 marked a new period in human history. The new media it facilitated were based on a bi-directional connective interface combining top-down and bottom-up energies and allowing dialogue instead of the monologue of the old media (Ratti and Claudel, 2016). This was when a global village was created, with everyday people opening bi-directional communication portals. All that was needed was a computer and an Internet connection that took up the phone line.

In this historical moment, prophecies about the "death of distance" (Cairncross, 2002) emerged. In his 1995 book "Being Digital," Nicholas Negroponte writes in a subchapter called "Place without Space": "Digital living will include less and less dependence upon being in a specific place at a specific time, and the transmission of place itself will start to become possible" (p.165). The assumption was that if information could become present instantaneously anywhere, all places would be equivalent and neutral. This perspective was strengthened by the cyborg theory that emerged in the 1980s, positing the cyborg condition as a new paradigm of human-machine hybrid existence that reconceptualised identity and embodiment (Picon 2015). Similarly, the notion of cyberspace, a term coined by sci-fi author William Gibson in 1982, which influenced the perception of the digital and virtual in the 1990s, saw the Internet as the vehicle to a "specific elsewhere" (Gibson, 2010), entirely disconnected from physical reality, and detached from place. Based on these visions, tech users would overcome not only the geographical constraints but also the materiality of their surroundings and their bodies. The cyborg headsets would enable them to escape the physical realm for a virtual reality of digital potentiality that simulated physicality but also surpassed its

inherent limitations, becoming what French philosopher Jean Baudrillard describes as a simulacrum, a detached self-referential world (1994).

Despite their significance, physical space neutralisation was eventually refuted by a shift in computing models from desktop to mobile. The introduction of geolocation and mobile computing enabled the real-time tracking of stationary and moving objects, thereby restoring the importance of space as a three-dimensional container of contextual electronic content and opportunities for (inter)action. Throughout the 2000s, mobile computing practices gained prominence with descriptions like "geo", "location-based", "location-aware", and "locative", replacing the previously popular "cyber" buzzword. In 2010, Gibson himself noted, "Now cyberspace has everted. Turned itself inside out. Colonised the physical". Manuel Castells (1996) and Adriana de Souza e Silva (2006) refer to the blending of physical and virtual environments through the use of digital technologies and networked communication with the term "hybrid space". Hybrid space encompasses various forms of (inter)action, mobility, communication, and social relationships in both physical and digital domains.

Another conceptual tool describing physical-digital convergence is the tech vision of ubiquitous computing, also known as ambient intelligence or pervasive computing. This concept, originating from the future-forward writings of Mark Weiser, former head of the IT research centre at Xerox Palo Alto in California, refers to omnipresent and imperceptible computing. Weiser believed that "the most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it." (1991, p. 94) He described the ideal of technologies that were still in their infancy at the time but later became prevalent in the public space. Wireless communications, electronic interfaces and urban screens became structural elements of media architecture. This has been followed by the introduction of surveillance technologies, data trackers, embedded sensors and actuators, all aimed at realising the concept of the smart city.

Finally, another influential new media-spawned concept is that of augmented reality. Augmented reality displacing the earlier ideal of virtual reality and cyberspace, allowed mobile devices to "combine geolocation and enhanced imagery in a layered, site-

specific presentation of events and interpretations" (Burdick et al., 2012, p.59). Its importance goes beyond the overlay of physical space with digital information. Manovich (2006) theorises augmented space through the dynamic interplay of physical and digital layers. Data are extracted and analysed from physical environments to create digital augmentations that provide new ways to perceive and utilise these spaces. (San Cornelio and Ardevol, 2011).

The wide adoption of mobile computing and the integration of interconnected computational infrastructure in public space has been more than "a spatial turn of digital technologies" (Picon, 2015). Within the last two decades, new digital cultures and urban development strategies have emerged, reflecting the capacity of new digital media. Next, a review of some resulting practices will help in defining and understanding digital placemaking.

1.3.2 Playful Explorations and Personal Narratives

Engagement with digital media enables us to place ourselves in new ways- symbolically, virtually, or through co-located physical presence. This has opened up new avenues for experiencing locations, continuously shaping our relationship with them and contributing to a collective narrative that brings a sense of place to life (Halegoua and Polson, 2021).

Modern urban experience has been uniquely defined by the pervasiveness of digital media within cities. People navigate public spaces directed by location-aware devices and motivated by spatial-related information on the social networks and platforms they participate in while feeding digital analyses of their online and onsite activities without necessarily being aware of this (Bauman and Lyon, 2013; Ratti and Claudel, 2016). The reality of this condition has been described in different ways, with early scholarship adopting a critical view of public media usage. For Robert Luke (2006), mobile technologies engage users as conduits for commercial information flows. In correspondence with the 19th-century flaneur that explored and consumed post- industrial urbanity, he refers to the "phoneur", confined to commercial grids and communication vectors, unable to break free from the capitalist system. Other scholars focused on personal screens' alienating and disembedding effect and the

quality of mediated experiences. For instance, Paul Adams (2001) argued that primarily visual and mediated experiences, such as those found in games, screens, computers, or the web, were "thinner" than unmediated experiences like walking.

However, later scholarly perspectives emphasised positive associations between digital media and the experience of place. These can be traced back to the emergence of location-based games and the locative art movement in the early 2000s. Location-based games, which fall under a broader category, also involving urban and hybrid-reality mobile games aimed to transform urban space into a playground. They leveraged game mechanics that encouraged players to approach the more or less familiar urban realm with renewed enthusiasm. Guided by game narratives and competitive interactions with other players, they experienced public space through tactics of playfulness and exploration, took part in a radical re-imagining of the city and challenged social norms, blurring play and seriousness (de Souza e Silva and Hjorth, 2009). Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson recognise in this playful engagement a mode of placemaking they refer to as "ludic place-making" (2014, p. 8).

Locative art utilises technologies to engage audiences in events, performances, and interventions within urban spaces and outside the confinement and conventions of art galleries; this allowed for broader participation, authorship and a reclaiming of public space (Zarzycki, 2011; Leorke, 2014). Much of the formative works in locative media art involved adding alternative narratives to a place, following the principles of participatory culture in networked environments, as described by Jenkins (2006). In these cartographic projects, spatial traces involving images and texts reflected as much the participants who created them as they did the places they were tagged to (Halegoua, 2020; Frith and Richter, 2021). Individual memories and subjective experiences became part of articulated and networked annotations, indicating a performative practice of placemaking and collaborative production through digital technologies (Pink, 2008b; San Cornelio and Ardevol, 2011).

Locative art and games were experimental projects based on creative re-purposing of technologies with military origins. These projects, including Urban Tapestries (UK), Yellow Arrow (USA), Murmur (Canada), Social Light (USA), Mogi (Japan), Pac-

Manhattan (USA), Alien Revolt (Brazil), and those from the UK's Blast Theory collective, were created by technologically savvy artists, game developers, researchers, and commercial groups. They introduced participatory practices that encouraged playful exploration of the urban environment and deep representation of personal narratives of place, which could influence how people lived in the city and attribute meaning to its places through collective and individual performances (Halegoua, 2020). These projects were the foundation of the "playable city" concept, which integrates play into the design of smart public spaces, as proposed by Nijholt (2016), and subsequent projects of spatial narratives such as mobile storytelling (Frith and Richter, 2021). In 2008, Apple's release of the GPS-enabled iPhone 3G and the introduction of the App Store and Google Market marked a significant technological advancement towards the future. This allowed for the development and instant distribution of a plethora of location-aware apps to millions of users (Leorke, 2014), resulting in the adoption of new onsite and online digital practices.

1.3.3 Social Performances and Interactions

Smartphones had become nearly prevalent by 2009, introducing a fresh way of interacting with urban space, indicative of the second wave of locative media projects, which focused on real-time location sharing through check-ins. By visiting specific locations, users could earn points, rankings, and virtual rewards. One notable example of this is Foursquare, which was launched in 2009 by Dennis Crowley. According to Schwartz (2014), the integrated engagement mechanics encouraged users to develop an attachment to the places they frequented by sharing their check-ins with their social circle and adjusting their mobility patterns to earn in-game rewards. These playful location-based services transformed socialising and place into a networked game, foreshadowing the social media cultures that would follow.

In 2009, Twitter introduced the "Tweet with a location" feature, followed by Facebook in 2010, incorporating "check-in" and "geo-coded status updates". Location announcements in social media became a way to add context and value to the interactions that these platforms facilitated. Verbal check-ins allowed users to share where they were and how they felt while being in a specific place, narrating in words

their spatial selves. Another way to represent oneself spatially was through geo-coded photos and videos, such as landscapes, cityscapes, and self-portraits. These visual representations documented memories and mobilities and served as a performative enaction of identity and belonging (Georgalou, 2015). Particularly on Instagram, the camera became an essential tool to curate representations of bodily experience in place and stage the visual dimensions of space, experience and location (Zimmerman, 2015; Maldonado and Psarra, 2020). The platform is known for its popular practice of taking selfies, which became widespread with the advent of smartphones with front-facing cameras, like the iPhone 4 in 2010. Selfies rely on digital representations of places to convey meaning but also contribute to the meaning of the settings in which they are taken. Overall, these practices, which became native in social media, accommodated the simultaneous creation of a sense of place and self both online and in real life. This constitutes a distinct mode of mobile placemaking that fosters ownership and agency of place distributed among a diverse population of users that act as placemakers within a given location (Halegoua, 2020).

If the above describes the "organic" mobile behaviours of social media users, then one can observe various instances of social media-related placemaking on the schematic continuum of Lew (2017). With the ability of social media platforms to connect people and encourage the formation of communities based on interests and causes, they have also facilitated collective actions and movements in public spaces over the past decade. The Arab Spring (2010-2014) serves as a historical example, with pro-democracy uprisings and protests taking place across several Middle Eastern and North African countries. Social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, played a crucial role in organising and mobilising people for these protests, demonstrations, and other collective actions. Antoine Piccon (2015) notes that smart mobs and the more artistically inclined flash mobs demonstrate the great potential of mobile social networks in mobilising participants for events and activities in real space and even suggests encouraging the authentic spontaneity of users to energise public spaces. Exactly this unregulated, bottom-up energy is described by Breek et al. (2018) in a study focusing on how the online interaction of residents in an Amsterdam district within local social media groups allowed the co-creation of new, positive

neighbourhood narratives and the development of a community, leading to offline interactions and events.

In the context of their communicative dynamics, social media can be utilised as tools in strategic placemaking efforts like those described in the previous section. Daniel Latorre set up in 2010 a "Digital Placemaking" program for Project for Public Spaces, which integrates social media into their community-centred practices. This approach encouraged public participation, collaboration, and transparency, making social media a way to engage with people and foster authentic civic engagement (Latorre, 2011). Accordingly, in Creative Placemaking reports such as that of the Urban Land Institute (McCormick et al.,2020), other modes of social media use are emphasised: social media platforms offer valuable marketing data and insights into users' interests and visits; Instagram, in particular, is acknowledged as a popular platform for capturing daily experiences, making it crucial to create visually appealing spaces that can attract residents and visitors; positive comments on social media can significantly enhance a project's image and increase its potential for success. In the same context of strategic communication, the Mayor of London launched the #LondonIsOpen campaign (2022) to promote the city's welcoming and inclusive nature. This initiative encouraged residents, businesses, and visitors to use the hashtag to share their stories and experiences of London, especially in light of Brexit and concerns about the city's future.

The above review reflects briefly on the placemaking effect and potential of social media applications. Their practices, whether spontaneous or guided, play a central role in co-creating a sense of place and supporting placemaking projects. Nevertheless, mobile phones carry a plethora of other applications and technologies, and digital placemaking is a spatial concept with multiple modes of embodied interaction, communication and agency.

1.3.4 Media City and Smart City

The rise of spatial technology was not limited to mobile devices and online interactions - it also marked the era of media architecture. In urban areas, interactive displays and installations were integrated into architectural structures, with media facades

becoming a prominent feature. While some were geared towards pervasive advertising, others were more artistic and playful, serving as social catalysts that fostered interaction, collective experiences, and transformed the atmosphere of an area (Weiner, 2010). One prime example is the "Blinkenlights" project in Berlin in 2001, which used a building facade as an interactive tool in a public space, allowing attendees to control the building's light shape, send personal messages, and collaborate by playing games via mobiles (Project Blinkenlights, 2010). Another example of this media paradigm is projection mapping, where technology is used to project virtual video or patterns onto the surface of buildings, which also emerged in the late 1990s (Jones and Sohdi, 2012).

Although architectural media interventions have encouraged public spectacles and social interplay, technology's impact on the tangible aspects of public space has gone beyond that. Objects and physical structures have been imbued with computational and connective capabilities, creating a physical network of sensors and actuators. This quiet technology has become deeply assimilated into urban space, operating in parallel and in junction with personal mobile devices. As a result, a vast amount of information flows through this ecosystem, creating the potential for finding patterns and predicting future scenarios about the life of places (Ratti and Claudel, 2016). The concept of a smart city has emerged from this potential, and its relationship with placemaking depends on how this information is utilised.

Technological augmentation can mean that the public space becomes a harvesting data landscape demonstrating a great interactive and adaptive capacity to make the city more liveable. This could facilitate the technocratic and centralised management of crucial aspects of urban life, maintaining order and possibly pervasive surveillance; Piccon (2015) sees in this a neo-cybernetic temptation indicative of the 1950s and 1960s urban modelling. From a different point of view, technological augmentation also conveys knowledge and insight that could allow residents-users to make informed decisions about urban systems (Ratti and Claudel, 2016) and even allow them to make other uses based on their own designs (Townsend, 2013). Highlighting city data as a central resource leads to understanding the city as an application programming interface (API) and encourages models of data-driven and open-source placemaking

(Halegoua, 2020). The Bristol Living Lab and the Citilab in Cornellà, both of which are based on ICT education and described in section 1.1.2, exemplify this perspective of smartifying not only the city but its communities.

The shift from interactive digital displays and media facades towards digital platforms and smart technologies has been recorded at the Media Architecture Biennale through the years (Media Architecture Biennale, 2020). At the same time, while the concept of "smart" has been a popular buzzword and a topic of debate over the last decade, the evolution towards smart cities is not a one-way technocratic journey. In the post-coronavirus era, cities like Toronto, which ended its partnership with Google's Sidewalk Labs, are moving away from the cybernetic city idea (Cecco, 2021). This does not diminish the potential of a quantitative approach to placemaking, guided by data from large information and communications technology firms or independent initiatives that provide access to urban data for fostering collaborative practices. However, it underscores the importance of adopting a more human-centred approach in urban media.

1.3.5 Envisioning Places and Media

A definition of digital placemaking would now be appropriate. Morrison (2018) describes it as the use of location-specific digital services, products, or experiences to enhance physical places and make them more attractive while increasing their social, cultural, environmental, and economic value. Urban development professionals, heritage organisations, and local government officials will probably resonate with the practical character of this definition. However, the issue of "value" provides a starting point for reflection and debate.

A good example comes from the noticeable trend towards creating digital services that provide visitors with immersive experiences (Kidd, 2018; Basaraba et al., 2019). This particular narrative turn in digital placemaking is primarily associated with cultural heritage sites and tourism (Basaraba, 2021), oriented towards places of interest that can economically benefit from high traffic and targeting a demographic privileged with digital literacy (Larsen, 2023). As previously discussed in relation to creative placemaking, solely focusing on preexisting meanings and experiences with an external

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perspective can become exclusionary to local demographics and fail to recognise existing projects, assets and needs within a region. The same concern against overemphasising the needs of tourists and neglecting the role of residents is also expressed by Her (2021) in relation to tourism-oriented digital placemaking. In fact, he points out that while Mobile Augmented Reality apps constitute a promising technology, they are often unsuccessful in their implementations as they do not invest in the involvement of the residents and do not generate value for their welfare.

It is essential at this point to acknowledge the participatory nature of new media, whose standards have been forged by the active involvement of the community of users. Various milestones, such as Web 2.0, the open-source movement, open data initiatives, crowdsourcing, citizen journalism, the maker movement, hackathons, as well as participatory design, which precedes the digital era, have all played a significant role in this progress. The bottom-up activity in the digital realm is the very reason for its expansion. Furthermore, these energies have led to digital placemaking endeavours, where groups of citizen-creators have addressed existing imbalances and critical needs and creatively "hacked the city" with interventions that appropriate and modify their urban surroundings (Zarzycki, 2011; Björgvinsson et al., 2012), co-created innovative public space interventions (Gascó, 2017) and brought to light counter-narratives and memories of place (Stokes et al. 2021, Frith and Richter, 2021) in projects that can surpass the placemaking potential of tourist applications. These works emphasise values like civic agency, communality, coping, resistance, and memory. However, these activities also highlight digital inequality, presupposing the existence of conditions for developing technological skills; otherwise, these opportunities become exclusive to specific clusters (Nesti, 2015; Larsen, 2023).

The descriptions provided above guide us toward a middle ground that integrates aspects of both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Fredericks et al. (2016) refer to this as a "middle-out" approach, while Her (2021) terms it Placemaking 2.5, with a particular emphasis on the creation of value for all stakeholders. In preceding sections, the emphasis has been placed on this intermediary space, with a thorough review of co-creation, living labs, and the place-led approach. These discussions have illuminated the associated challenges, best practices, and benefits.

However, when it comes to digital placemaking, it becomes imperative to underscore community involvement at a different level. Digital placemaking encompasses a wide array of new media and technologies, the impact of which on the experience and configuration of space is undeniable. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these technologies are not neutral or impartial. In the context of the Media Architecture Biennale 20, Martijn De Waal (2021) has called for a value-based discourse surrounding these media. In response to this call, the researcher seeks to draw attention to the implications inherent in today's technologies. Beyond critically evaluating prevailing visions, there is a call to imaginatively construct alternative scenarios that are designed to contribute to social sustainability.

Effectively addressing this call, participatory design processes can prioritise local needs and desires and guide participants to reflect on media and scenarios that illuminate associated practices, their accessibility, and the potential augmentations to the experience of space and even users themselves. Ultimately, the approach can illustrate visions of future possibilities built around values (Forlano and Mathew, 2014; Baumann et al., 2017; Zaidi, 2019; Candy and Weber, 2019.) This viewpoint draws from research on participatory design in communities and combines the goal of placemaking with the value-centric design of urban media as an integrated endeavour to facilitate the desired changes. It remains to be investigated where design polyphony converges and how it can pragmatically contribute to (digital) placemaking as a collaborative process that is called upon to satisfy different agendas and produce value for all involved.

1.3.6 In conclusion

Following the review of placemaking as a process that takes shape under the tension of top-down and bottom-up dynamics, this section began by focusing on how the convergence of digital and physical worlds inaugurated an era of digital placemaking. With the help of technology, users can engage in various placemaking modes and practices, such as playful and exploratory scenarios, personal narratives and subjective impressions of the meaning of settings, twofold performances of the place and the self within it, online social interactions, collective mobilisations that exemplify "the right to

the city", embodied experiences in spaces augmented with digital spectacles, actions and decisions informed by the quantitative data of urban metabolism. The technological means and their practices are imbued with values that indicate archetypes of cities and ways of being in public space and experiencing it. This urges us towards participatory processes where citizens as digital placemakers, negotiate the places they want to live in and the digital media that will mediate the making of those places.

In the following section, observations from the literature review will be combined to provide context for the research questions.

1.4 Research Questions

Creating spaces for public life is a multifaceted process where the spontaneous and organised efforts of community members intersect with the strategic planning of local government, as well as the activities of private bodies and non-profit organisations operating in the area. However, historically, especially in urban areas, this participatory process has been skewed. The development of places has often been dominated by top-down, development-focused, and design-led methods, disrupting the balance of multi-stakeholder participation and relegating citizens to mere end-users and beneficiaries of these spaces. This trend demonstrates a systemic bias towards economic objectives and efficiency, overlooking the broader spectrum of individual and communal needs in a locality. This oversight not only fails to meet these needs but also falls short in fulfilling the very economic prosperity goals it aims to achieve. Against this backdrop, the movement towards broader collaborations and including community members in the placemaking process emerged as a remedy to the flaws inherent in the top-down methodologies.

Clearly the convergence of public administration and community involvement is a key focus in this study and the literature review spotlighted successful cases in diverse cultural environments. The discussions in previous sections showcased various examples of participation and collaboration in public life. In particular, engaging citizens in co-producing public services and collaborative problem-solving is

increasingly seen as a positive step within the context of current global challenges and economic conditions. Moreover, the influence of collective wisdom and horizontal participation is most apparent in the digital media sphere. Digital platforms have evolved beyond simple technological tools, creating a digital space for activity and interaction that significantly alters our engagement with the physical world. This shift is largely propelled by the active involvement, expression, and experimentation fostered by these platforms. These two areas—public sector-citizen collaboration and the impact of digital media—also form the foundational framework for this research project.

However, the literature review also highlighted that collaboration with various stakeholders, such as authorities, private entities, and citizens, is far from a straightforward process. It involves forming partnerships characterised by novelty and innovation and requires creative approaches to overcome inherent challenges. These challenges can arise from various sources such as political decisions, strategic choices, and administrative practices, as well as differing needs, values, priorities, existing relationships, and capabilities of the involved parties. Therefore, these challenges should be examined with a focus on the specific local context, while drawing upon existing knowledge and learning from comparable situations in different regions.

The necessity to develop new knowledge was also recognised in the other thematic pillar. Digital media hold immense potential in enriching public spaces by enabling novel interactions and experiences, as well as acting as drivers of a participatory culture. Yet, understanding how to integrate these dynamics in the visioning and planning of digital enhancements, which are not driven by unilateral interests but truly embody the balanced, multi-participant collaboration at the heart of modern placemaking, is undeniably a current research area. This field calls for empirical studies that are tailored to specific local contexts.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this research is to explore and navigate this intricate terrain, with the goal of producing knowledge that is locally relevant and emerges from engaging in collaborative efforts within the region. The research was a priori aimed at a practical objective: to develop a digital project that enhances the local

centre of Huyton. This provides an opportunity to investigate the dynamics of cooperation, co-production, and co-creation among different sector stakeholders in a project initiated by the local government but aimed at engaging the local community. This approach allows for empirical exploration of challenges and opportunities regarding collaboration, as well as the discovery of new avenues to insights and knowledge through creative processes that involve citizens in imagining and shaping a digitally advanced future for the region and taking active steps towards this vision. Such participation aims to gain a deeper comprehension of the actual needs and opportunities, which could be utilised to rejuvenate the local centre through digital placemaking strategies.

As a result, the issues illuminated in the literature review—such as establishing active collaborations, fostering greater civic engagement that transcends rigid structures and one-dimensional methods, and co-creating value in digital placemaking to develop "good places" and impactful digital augmentations, gain practical relevance through this research's applied efforts. Within this framework, the following questions have been formulated:

Building upon the researcher's forthcoming experience with a strategically initiated collaborative project set to introduce a digital streetscape experience in the local town centre:

1. What key insights and lessons can be learned from the collaboration between different stakeholders? How might these insights influence and guide the development of a collaborative approach in future digital placemaking strategies?

Drawing from the narratives that will be captured through the active engagement of community members in a participatory practice:

2. What factors, motivations, attractions, and barriers could influence and shape the diverse presence of individuals in the town centre, both presently and in the future?

3. How can community participation be motivated and leveraged for future meaningful interventions in placemaking? What are the emerging values that can inform a placemaking strategy?

4. How can people's experiences and perspectives of technology guide the potential directions of upcoming digital placemaking initiatives?

Addressing these questions could significantly impact the sustainable regeneration of local towns, improve community well-being, and aid in the development of local placemaking through processes that engage the local community as active participants in shaping their environment in both the physical and digital realms, moving beyond their role as mere consumers of spaces that have been pre-designed for them.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

The starting point of the chapter is the philosophical foundation and the research fields on the basis of which the study and its methodology were developed. The reader will be enlightened on the study's nature and informed on the research methods for collecting data to address the research questions. Sampling, ethics and analysis issues will then be considered. The chapter will conclude by reflecting on the evaluative criteria of research rigour.

2.1 The philosophical foundations of the Pragmatic Paradigm

The term paradigm or worldview refers to the philosophical assumptions, abstract beliefs, and principles that shape how researchers see the world, guiding their actions within research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a paradigm comprises four elements, ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Ontology refers to the study of existence and reality and answers questions like "what is" and "what exists." Epistemology is the study of "what knowledge is" and how it is produced. Axiology refers to the role of value in research, "what values guide and influence inquiry", and "what values emerge from it". Methodology is the research approach to data collection and knowledge generation. Based on these elements, one can recognise two diametrically opposed worldviews and research approaches, the positivist/ interpretative dichotomy. At one extreme stands the notion of a singular reality, objective knowledge, deductive reasoning, and quantitative methodological approaches. On the other end, realities are multiple and complex, knowledge is constructed and subjective, shaped from the bottom up, and the methodological approaches are qualitative (Creswell and Clark, 2011).

The Pragmatic Paradigm that this research refers to rejects this dichotomy and incompatibility of the two extremes and moves away from metaphysical questions regarding the nature of reality and truth (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Instead, it emphasises the nature of human experience, through which people approach the

world and instigate change in their environments. Elaborating on Morgan's (2014) identification of the widely shared pragmatic core ideas, Kaushik and Walsh (2019) explain that embedded in people's experiences are justified beliefs formed through repeated past actions and outcomes to which people attach meaning. Repetition of actions and predictability of results establish these beliefs and even create habits. Different people may have their personal experiences, but these share similarities with those of other people. Thus, residing beliefs are, to a large extent, socially shared. Consequently, people often have similar habits, act similarly in a similar situation and attach similar meanings to the outcome. However, beliefs are not immutable but provisional. Since the contexts in which people operate change, their actions may have different results and lead to the formation of new beliefs - so future courses of action are also open to change. The above enlightens us about the nature of existence and knowledge in pragmatism. The world and its perception are constantly reshaped through people's actions, whether conscious or habitual, and knowledge is based on personal experiences but is, ultimately, socially constructed.

One of the central figures of pragmatism, the philosopher, educator and social reformer John Dewey (1931), perceives research as a process of understanding a part of reality to produce knowledge and attempt a practical improvement in it through conscious actions which can bring about desired results. Based on their personal experiences and shaped perceptions, researchers are asked to choose their actions within the framework of the methodology purposefully (Morgan, 2014), focusing primarily on the research questions and research objectives. Therefore, pragmatism gives the freedom to choose quantitative or qualitative methods to collect the data and produce knowledge that will best serve the purpose, regardless of the philosophical worldview associated with the methods (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

The Pragmatic paradigm provides a theoretical foundation for the practical nature of this study, its different fields of action and the objectives it wants to accomplish. Experience and action are central concepts of the inquiry. By leveraging the locals' experiences and beliefs, the study seeks to envision and plan changes in the local reality of Knowsley that would facilitate new experiences for the town centre visitors. Another field of action that interests the study is the operational environment of the

local authority, within which knowledge can be produced based on alternating planned actions and reflection with regard to its collaborative placemaking endeavour, ultimately benefiting its future tactics and processes.

Dowey's organism-in-environment perspective views people as organisms in an environment and knowledge emerging from the organisms' adaptation and interaction within the various contexts they participate in- geographical, social, cultural, and political (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Collaborative in its nature, the study is established on the researcher's, participants', and stakeholders' potential to act intentionally and reshape their environments. In this context, the study can benefit from a multitude of views and methods as part of the research plan.

2.2 Defining the theoretical framework

Based on a pragmatic worldview, the research is defined within the tradition of action-oriented studies. Its theoretical framework will be described through notions of action research, participatory design, community engaged studies, science fiction and foresight-practices.

In action-oriented inquiries, knowledge is created through practice grounded in the needs of a specific context or community. The emerging knowledge generates solutions to practical problems or improves operations that are contextually applied (Koshy et al.,2010).

Action research is an action-oriented approach used for improving practice (Koshy et al 2010). According to Kurt Lewin (1946) originator of Action Research it is an approach where the researcher is trying to change the system while generating knowledge about it. According to Lewin the key steps in the approach involved "a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action". The approach does not have a prescribed methodology- research takes place as practical interventionistic investigations interchange with theoretical reflection (Ehn, 1989), and those who may benefit from this knowledge are involved in either action or reflection. Koshy (2010) explains in his definition that Action Research can involve problem solving if the solution to the problem can lead to the

improvement of the practice. Finally, Small (1995) explains a unique aspect of Action Research that both the research focus and the methodology may change as the inquiry proceeds. The above descriptions outline an ideal framework in relation to the researcher's collaboration with the KMBC Teams. The partnership started with the practical goal to design a "Streetscape Project"- a public space creative-technology intervention for Huyton town centre, but also in a broader context to explore a Digital Place strategy that would emerge through the Council's existing processes, needs and aspirations, aligned with the Huyton centre regeneration plan.

Participatory design (PD) has many similarities with action research, reflecting a focus in the design of a specific product for a particular setting (Foth and Axup, 2006). The beginnings of Participatory Design lie among the various social, political and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s. More well-known is its origin in Scandinavian software development traditions, where the partnership of researchers with labour unions allowed workers to get involved in the design of new technologies that were introduced into the workplace, allowing them to retain control over their work and defend their shared values and interests (Spinuzzi, 2005). PD ensures that the users of technological systems are involved in their design as co-designers. Moreover, PD introduces a more horizontal relationship between designer and users. As such, the designer is no longer the expert but rather the facilitator of and a participant in a process.

Almost every participatory design research involves three basic stages that are usually iterated: an initial exploration of the workplace, the workflow, routines, procedures etc., the discovery of goals, values, and the desired outcome, and prototyping, which is performed by designers and users to shape technological artefacts to fit in the workplace environment (Spinuzzi, 2016). Prototyping as a process was of particular interest to the research and its collaborators, as it would allow the gradual formation of the "Streetscape Project". However, it is essential not to forget that this project aims at Digital Placemaking in the public realm and is addressed primarily to the community and visitors of the area and secondarily to the employees of the Council who are associated with it as organisers. It is, therefore, appropriate to mention as a participatory design technique the 'Future Workshops' developed in the 1970s through

which community groups in Germany and Austria were experimenting with ways to actively involve citizens in local issues (Jungk and Müllert, 1987). The ethos behind these processes is that people have a democratic right to be involved in the design of what affects their lives and that including them will result in a more efficient and usable product/ system/ experience.

Including the local community in the research is indicative of community-engaged studies. These inquiries value the contribution of average citizens as research participants and even research partners. The community has the insight and skills to understand local issues, identify strengths and possible solutions, and ground research with its members' significant experiences and perspectives (Peralta, 2017). The degree of community engagement in the research process falls along a continuum from acquiring information and responses, to engaging community members in co-creation processes, to involving them as co-researchers in all aspects of the research, including problem identification, planning and evaluation (Breu and Peppard, 2003). However, participatory design as a process for practice and connection with the community could only partially support this study. PD is an approach that can produce solutions relevant to users' existing wants and needs but could be less effective at producing innovative ideas that answer users' future or latent needs (Bowen, 2010). As the study integrates a near-future design goal with long-term strategic objectives, involving the community calls for research and practice approaches with an orientation towards a more generative and future-oriented space of future possibilities.

Design research and practices exploring speculative futures that can be shaped through technologies draw on science fiction. One such method is Science Fiction Prototyping (SFP), introduced by Brian D. Johnson in 2010. The method suggests using short fiction pieces in the form of stories, movies, or comics to explore the potential future development of tech applications grounded in present science and engineering research and their implications in society (Johnson, 2011). The method's product is a diegetic prototype. This is not the prototype of a tech product but a narrative about a future reality structured around possible emerging technology applications. A successful SF prototype will transcend the technological and scientific focus and, like

good science fiction, visualise connections to cultural, social, moral and environmental aspects of human existence into a multidimensional vision (Lombardo, 2018, p.3).

Another approach, quite similar in nature, is that of Design Fiction (DF).The term was originally coined by Julian Bleecker of Near Future Laboratory, but its prominent definition comes from sci-fi author Bruce Sterling: "the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change" (Bosch, 2012). Design fictions can take the form of narratives, short stories, films but also objects and semi-functional prototypes (Blythe, 2014). Thus, design fiction can refer to fictional futures and alternate realities both through diegesis or mimesis. The practice does not aspire to tell a story; instead, it is a worldbuilding activity, and the design fiction prototype offers an entry point to this world (Coulton et al., 2017). The inevitable association of this fictional world with the real one fosters a debate about our societies' present and potential futures.

The anticipation of the future is the research area of futures studies which explore the factors that could give rise to possible and probable future characteristics, events, and behaviours. Applying specific tools and methods for conducting futures work is described as foresight (Government Office for Science, 2021). An example of foresight is the generation of scenarios. Scenarios describe an anticipated world based on assumptions about drivers shaping that world; they may be brief and descriptive or include narratives, similar to storytelling, which represent the point of view of personas in the future (Institute for the Future, 2017). As narrative prototypes, they illustrate snapshots of anticipated or desired futures; their significant difference from science fiction prototypes is that their stories are not necessarily structured around technology.

Commenting on their goals and purpose, SF prototypes aim at product development and innovation, design fictions seek to challenge, provoke, and sensitise, while futures scenarios suggest a more strategic rhetoric about future conditions. However, all of them demonstrate substantial potential as means of reflection, inspiration, and innovation for local policymakers and stakeholders, as well as for the involvement of a wider audience. In this potential, the research found significant value in mobilising

these processes in a creative, generative practice for community members. In the 'Future Huyton Workshops' section (2.4.1.1) the two research fields of design and futures will be revisited to review and combine relevant participatory, ethnographic practices that can guide a community-engaged practice based on science fiction and foresight for the conception and diegesis of local visions.

2.3 From practice to research

This study is fundamentally linked to practice, manifesting in diverse interactions. The project initially commenced as a collaborative initiative spearheaded by Knowsley Council, with the objective of exploring the realm of digital placemaking within the Knowsley area. As the practice unfolded, specific research questions naturally emerged. This method of inquiry is known as practice research, (Nelson, 2013), where practice is integral to the research methodology, emphasising the examination and comprehension of the practice itself. The relationship between practice and research is further elucidated through the specific research questions addressed.

The first research question, which centres on drawing lessons from the ongoing collaboration to inform future collaborative approaches in digital placemaking strategies, prominently embodies a practice-led approach often associated with action research (Skains, 2018). Through this focal point, the study aims to foster fresh insights into the collaborative facets of practice, ultimately enhancing its operational efficiency and making a valuable contribution to the broader knowledge base in the field (ibid). Therefore, through this collaborative initiative focused on shaping a digital placemaking project, the researcher seeks to enrich the participatory elements of an evolving placemaking strategy.

The subsequent research questions aim to uncover insights via community-engaged creative practices, which serve as a distinctive inquiry method, generating fresh knowledge through both the practice itself and the outcomes it produces (Candy, 2006). In this participatory approach, individuals involved are guided to produce content for a digital experience in central Huyton. The process and especially the creative products become a means of creating data (Sullivan, 2009), intended to

contribute to shaping the digital placemaking strategy. Notably, the insights from the last two questions aim to enrich policies for community engagement in Digital Placemaking. The understandings gleaned from these community-centred practices are intended to benefit the local context and offer valuable perspectives applicable to various digital placemaking efforts.

In its entirety and using an action research methodological lens (Koshy et al., 2010), the research practice can be presented as twelve episodes of planning, action, and reflection. The subjects involved in this practice are:

- The KMBC Teams- IT Exploitation, Culture, Town Centre Management, Major Development and Communities. These are predefined partners, represented by Council officials.

- Third parties who contribute to the project: The creative company that implements the technical infrastructure for the Streetscape experience and the LJMU MA students who participate in designing a Virtual Streetscape prototype project.

- Community members involved as creative practitioners- producing content for the experience and creating the research data.

In the subsequent table, readers can navigate an overview of the processes involved. Following this, the next figure presents a timeline, illustrating the execution of these processes over approximately two and a half years.

1	Initiating Collaborative Foundations
	The project commences with three primary objectives to stimulate dialogue:
	- Understanding Knowsley using quantitative data. - Exploring central elements in the KMBC strategic plan for 2016-2020. - Discovering cases of digital interventions in public spaces.
2	Evaluating Digital Placemaking Initiatives
	The researcher conducts a comparative analysis of 47 cases involving technology-driven interventions and experiences in public spaces. This examination highlights various opportunities and approaches to placemaking, linking them to the KMBC strategic plan and well-being statistics. Findings are presented to, discussed with and provided as reports to KMBC partners.

3	**Horizon-scan possibilities** KMBC partners begin to cultivate insights into the potential of Digital Placemaking and its interconnectedness with the evolving regeneration strategy.
1	**Aligning digital placemaking to Huyton masterplan and Knowsley 2030 strategy** KMBC partners share evidence-based reports detailing life in the Borough, future planning for Knowsley from 2020 to 2030, and the Huyton Masterplan. The researcher becomes part of the Huyton regeneration Steering Group to contribute to the strategic alignment.
2	**Foresight Scenarios and Place Branding** The researcher develops foresight scenarios utilising the provided data, goals, and prospective digital initiatives. Using these prototype scenarios, he proposes a method to link Digital Placemaking with the regeneration strategy, aiming to direct the creation of impactful interventions. Concurrently, the researcher suggests marketing and branding strategies to effectively communicate a cohesive future vision externally.
3	**Opportunity in a story-based approach to involve the community.** The foresight scenarios are considered a chance to engage the local community in the project via a story-based approach, soliciting their perspectives on possible future scenarios.
1	**The Streetscape Project** Council partners launch the Streetscape Project as a tangible objective of this collaboration. Aimed to reflect on Huyton's history, current state, and future, it will be executed by an external entity, with the researcher providing direction for its design.
2	**"Prototype Projects"** The researcher outlines and submits an action plan for Prototype Projects. This plan includes various small-scale public space digital interventions or events, alongside digital creativity workshops engaging the community. These projects will serve as prototypes, offering insights into various design elements for the "Streetscape Project."
3	**Reviewing the plan- brainstorming ideas for Borough of Culture Events** The plan receives a favourable reception. Members of the Culture team review the detailed event and workshop proposals, discussing the specific technical needs. Additionally, there is enthusiasm for conducting some of the events in Prescot.

1	Preparing online prototypes
	A timeline is established for the development of prototypes and workshops, setting the commencement of the plan's execution for post-February 2021.
2	Development of prototypes
	The researcher develops two prototypes for community workshops:
	• An Instagram AR filter that can be used in a town centre game- event.
	• A video editing project done with social media users.
3	Prototype Projects plan cancelled
	Social distancing requirements render the original Prototype Projects action plan unfeasible. In response, the researcher suggests shifting to online prototype projects to explore alternative methods of audience engagement. The Council partners agree to this new approach.
1	The Project Brief
	Council partners focus on creating a detailed brief for the Streetscape Project, revisiting and summarising the desires and decisions made to date.
2	Delineating a placemaking platform
	The researcher prepares an initial draft of the brief, outlining the identity and objectives of the Streetscape Project. In it, he advocates for the creation of a lasting digital placemaking infrastructure in Huyton aimed at providing various engagement opportunities for the audience rather than an ephemeral event.
3	Approval of the Brief
	The partners agree that the brief effectively articulates their collective aspirations, perspectives, and goals. Together, they continue to refine and enhance the document.
1	Virtual Streetscape Project
	The researcher engages LJMU MA students in a digital project, investigating different scenarios for a digital placemaking infrastructure in Huyton, with the support and endorsement of Council collaborators.
2	"Huyton:Digital"
	The researcher presents an adapted brief and leads the students through a cooperative design journey. The result is a conceptual design of a versatile virtual environment that allows online users to populate a virtual town centre with their content and narratives. This prototype, developed and implemented by the MA students, is named "Huyton:Digital."

3	Technical Reflection	Community Engagement
	Trials conducted by the design team lead to the discovery of extra specifications needed for the Streetscape Brief.	At this time, "Huyton:Digital" is not eligible for promotion on the Council's networks as a live interactive space for locals, which means its story-based methodology remains untested. As a result, the project continues to exist solely as a technical prototype.
1	Social media placemaking	
	The researcher engages in discussions with Council partners about utilising social media as a tool in digital placemaking. The focus is on engaging the local community in the project by increasing awareness and establishing online activities and participation methods.	
2	Social media prototypes	
	The researcher produces and shares social media content prototypes and submits a new proposal about relevant campaigns and activities.	
3	Digital Placemakers	
	At the time, the Council's social media channels are unavailable for the project. As a result, the researcher creates distinct social media accounts under the "Digital Placemakers" profile to share research results and encourage public involvement in the study.	
1	Mobile AR storytelling platform	
	The design and evaluation of "Huyton:Digital" yield fresh insights for the "Streetscape Project" brief, centring on a mobile augmented reality (AR) storytelling platform while pinpointing necessary technical specifications and requirements. Subsequently, the researcher and Council collaborators in IT and Culture refine the initial brief documents, facilitating a procurement process to select the creative studio tasked with executing the project.	
2	Implementing Knowsley Domes	
	Following the selection of the winning proposal, the creative studio proceeds to develop alpha and beta versions of a mobile AR platform. Throughout this process, Council partners and the researcher offer feedback and conduct tests. The completed platform allows for the publication of visual materials as location-specific content. Users of the app can then access these collections within virtual domes that	

	materialise via augmented reality at designated spots throughout Knowsley.
3	Exploring Narrative Potential
	In assessing the final product's usability and storytelling capabilities, the researcher determines its key features that guide optimal usage and outlines potential enhancements for the future.
1	Sci-fi Storytelling Workshop
	The inception and organisation of the sci-fi workshop reflect dedicated efforts to involve the local community in crafting a forward-thinking experience within Huyton Centre. The primary objective is to create a storytelling-based activity that assists local participants in envisioning the town's future and purposefully incorporating technology concepts into their vision. Following the finalisation of the format, the researcher promotes the activity through the Digital Placemakers accounts, while Council partners disseminate activity details to local community groups via mailing lists.
2	Conducting a Pilot
	The workshop unfolds in an online setting, with two separate groups: one serving as a pilot group comprising participants from Manchester and Liverpool, and the other affiliated specifically with Huyton. This initiative results in the creation of three distinct stories.
3	Reflecting on the format
	The researcher-facilitator engages in a reflective assessment of the workshops and their creative outputs, alongside the participants. Together, they identify the strengths and weaknesses of the process.
1	Future Huyton Workshop
	Under a fresh name, the workshop enters its second iteration. The valuable support and input from both previous and new participants, as well as local community representatives from civic groups, played a pivotal role in the planning process. Consequently, this planning-action-reflection cycle is repeated multiple times until the project reaches its conclusion.
2	Conducting "Future Huyton"
	The workshop is carried out over a span of 6 iterations, encompassing both online and in-person formats, resulting in the creation of 12 new stories.
3	Analysing the Workshop Approach
	By means of reflection, the researcher refines the fundamental framework of the

	workshop. A significant portion of this review revolves around community outreach and enhancing their involvement in the project.
1	A transmedia experience The development of a transmedia experience involves the fusion of Future Huyton stories with the Knowsley Domes app. In order to plan this unique experience, a comprehensive analysis of both components is conducted. Subsequently, an initial schedule is established through pertinent discussions and the exchange of materials with Council partners.
2	Content Creation by the Researcher: • Conducting an initial analysis of stories. • Illustrating story instances. • Crafting questionnaires for audience engagement. • Planning a comprehensive promotional campaign strategy, including tailored materials for diverse audiences and locations. • Recording voice-over narrations to facilitate accessibility. • Developing a dedicated website to host stories and voice-overs. • Setting up AR domes featuring story illustrations and questionnaires.
3	Authorisation The Knowsley Domes, featuring sample material from Future Huyton, is presented to and granted approval by two of Knowsley's Councillors. Council communications promote the forthcoming event through a pertinent article on their online networks.
1	Future Huyton Event The event's initial organisation is facilitated in collaboration with Council partners, who secure a space in the town centre for the launch of the "Future Huyton" experience. The researcher takes charge of online promotion, informing participants and local stakeholders to visit "Future Huyton."
2	Future Huyton in the Village The experience continues to be available in Huyton centre for a duration of one month, with three new domes becoming active on a weekly basis. The researcher serves as the host, introducing visitors to the digital experience.
3	Conclusion The culmination of the experience allows for the gathering of the last set of research data, which can be cross-referenced with data obtained from the workshops (triangulation). This marks the beginning of the final analysis phase.

Table 1: An Overview of the 12-episode Cycle Involving Planning, Action, and Reflection in Research Practice
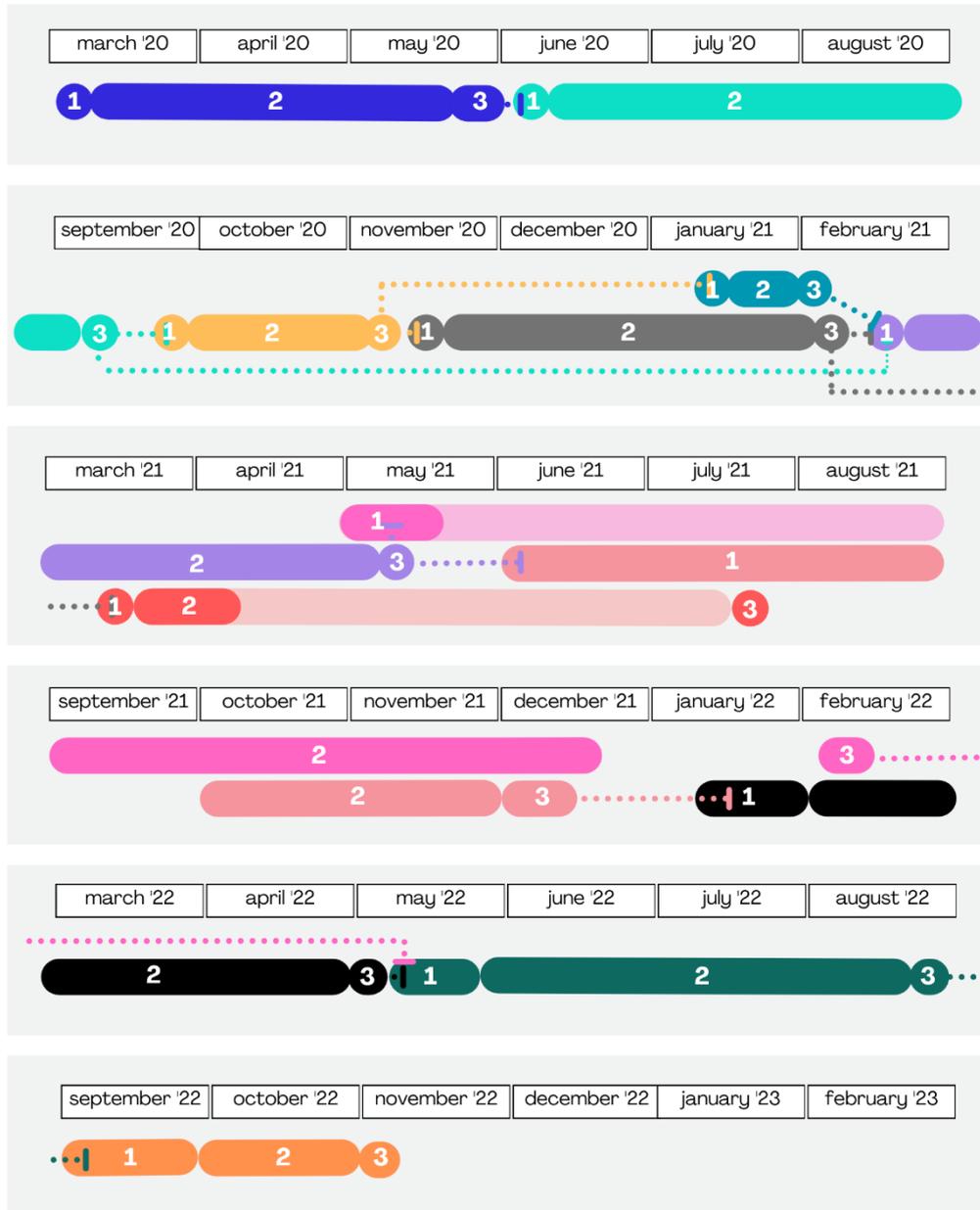
Figure 3: Timeline of practice in semesters

Theoretically, the iterative model of action research implies that the completion of each episode/cycle informs the practice and refines its operations in light of the understanding developed. In the brief description of the practice in the table and in the timeline above, the reader will quickly realise that the process was, in reality, quite fluid and open, with different episodes overlapping over time.

Furthermore, the episodes or cycles lack interconnection within an integrated practice shared among the same collaborators, context, and objectives. Consequently, the "action" planned and reflected upon in each episode encompasses a range of distinct activities, spanning from analytical to creative endeavours (Skains, 2018). In the first year, these activities aimed at information exchange, mutual learning, project analysis, and goal setting. It represented a path of internal cooperation between the researcher and the Council Teams. Within this context, the activities involved conducting a comparative analysis of case studies, demonstrating methods and potential outcomes, and sharing reports and proposals – essentially, an analytical practice. While this continued into the third semester, different trajectories began to emerge.

Working alongside MA students exemplifies one way the practice expanded. Within this new context, the primary aim was to develop a design concept and create a digital prototype. The culmination of this practice branch not only informed the collaboration with the Council but also initiated the community-engaged practice, which constitutes the leading research process.

The community-engaged practice involved a series of successive iterations, aligning more closely with the theoretical framework of action research. Each workshop run was meticulously planned, facilitated, and reflected upon before the commencement of a new one. The reflection after each run informed a refined approach for the subsequent run, thus enabling iterative improvements to both the sampling processes and the method itself.

In conclusion, it is essential to explicitly state that this study was intertwined with a collaborative venture that lacked a research intent and did not adhere to academic protocols. Aside from community members, most collaborators were not research participants but rather stakeholders in a digital placemaking initiative of the local authority. For them, this initiative was not a research project but rather a part of their professional responsibilities. This significantly influenced the research design and its ability to conform to a predetermined model. In this context, the organisation of the practice through interlinked processes of planning, action, and reflection played a crucial role in providing the research with a causal structure that supported decision-

making and allowed for reflection on the top-down operations that led to the implementation of a mobile AR platform and the engagement of the local community, resulting in a streetscape experience.

2.4 Generating and collecting narrative data

In accordance with the previously delineated framework, collaborative episodes were employed to exert influence on the formulation of plans, prototypes, and content. However, the predominant form of research data largely assumes the format of narratives. These narratives encompass both the researcher's accounts of the collaborative processes and the narratives shared by the community. These community narratives detail their current experiences within the spatial context where placemaking would be introduced, in addition to articulating their aspirations for transformative impacts in future interventions. While the methodologies employed for data collection exhibited some variance, they fundamentally originated within the broader domain of autobiography. This methodological approach facilitates the generation of comprehensive narrative data that capitalises on personal cultural connections, thereby shedding light on various facets of placemaking from a multitude of perspectives and with a forward-looking orientation.

The following components are presented:

• "Future Huyton," delineating a series of procedures that involve the local community in the research project, transforming them into research participants who assume roles as creative practitioners or audience members in a digital experience within the town centre.

• An autoethnography, conducted by the researcher, which encapsulates his personal experiences as he immerses himself in the diverse landscapes of Knowsley and collaborates with the local authority, external stakeholders, and the local community.

2.4.1 "Future Huyton"

The primary research method aligns with participatory and community-based practices in design, futures, and media. It allows participants to express themselves, generate novel ideas, engage in civic participation, and impact local policy. Referred to as 'Future Huyton Workshops,' this participatory creative practice builds upon existing methodologies and projects, involving the local population in content creation and data production processes.

A fundamental methodological pattern is provided by the Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF) method, which comes from the field of futures studies and is based on the Ethnographic Futures Research (EFR) and the Experiential Futures (XF) approaches (Candy and Kornet, 2019). In this approach, the researcher collaborates with members of an existing community to explore their hoped-for, feared and expected futures so that they become visible, tangible, interactive and explorable in various forms and modes (Kornet, 2015).

Candy and Kornet (2019) describe the method as four stages of an EXF Cycle. Initially, the researcher maps participants' projections through a semi-structured interview format. In the next optional stage, the researcher can expand the initial data with new ones, thus multiplying the scenarios. Then the ideas described in the futures are mediated in a concrete experiential expression. The experiential expression represents futures in different forms -diegetic, mimetic, embodied or performative. This is usually performed by the researcher; however, participants or third parties might be involved too. The last step is what makes the method particularly attractive for this study. The experiential scenario that refers to the future is mounted into the real world, making it accessible to people (Zaidi, 2019). Through this encounter, the project attempts to gauge impact. The researcher can once again map feedback and responses from the intervention. The fact that the process starts and ends again in some mapping stage also explains the description of the method as a cycle.

The Ethnographic Experiential Futures essentially proposes a protocol for futures action research (Ramos, 2017, p.825) where each cycle is an iteration. The method allows communities a critical and participatory foresight that loops from an interior register to an exterior. The public's reaction is a form of collective reflection and can

motivate the repetition of a new EXF cycle with other groups or communities or other processes.

Similar procedures are described from the field of Participatory Design augmented with fictional future-oriented components, for example, the 'Infrastructures of the Imagination' method by Baumann et al. (2017) in their "Sankofa City" project. The project was a three-month Community-University collaboration and engaged local populations in envisioning applications of emerging technologies in their own cultural terms that could benefit the community and reinforce local identity. The method involved four phases with clear analogies to those of the EXF Cycle. The first consists of brainstorming based on what-if questions that function as provocations to reimagine the local neighbourhoods- a repeated process with multiple groups rotating weekly. Then groups created personas inspired by local people and prototypes of urban objects relevant to their reimagined spaces. For public presentation, personas and prototypes were synthesised in scenarios to create design fiction collages and a video, which were later presented to a local planning committee of stakeholders.

What is of particular value in the above method is that it utilises the ability of participatory design to bring together a heterogeneous audience (Forlano and Mathew, 2014) so as to include co-organisers, students and community members in the groups. As a long-term project, it even seeks to develop a common vocabulary and empower the less technical participants to allow community involvement in creating prototypes and scenarios.

Another participatory method from the design fiction field is one presented by Markussen and Knutz (2013) in a project envisioning the dystopian future of "The Civil War in Denmark". The method relies on a strong coupling between literacy practice and design practice. Participants were presented with a fictional short story about the civil war in the future. Then, they were asked to produce mini scenarios placed in this world, which would be based on strange personal memories. Based on these scenarios the researchers created a series of "rules of fiction" that enabled participants to envision more specific aspects of the imaginary world. Then participants were asked to generate multiple design ideas for this world and finally transfer one of those ideas to

a prototype. The method's particularity is using writing as a process that aids worldbuilding- the creation of a speculative world, to then create prototypes for it.

In the above two methods that involve design fiction, there is a dimension of personal narrative- one will find it in the local personas of "Sankofa City" and in the personal memories that bring to life "The Civil War in Denmark". Personal storytelling allows participants to unlock their creativity and create relatable scenarios for the audience. However, the weight of personal narration in the context of a participatory practice is more evident in Digital Storytelling.

Digital Storytelling is a participatory media practice that enables ordinary people to produce media content to tell meaningful stories. The process also relies on structured, facilitated workshops but emphasises creating and sharing personal stories. Although the stories are individualistic, the process can be targeted at specific communities to address local problems (Juppi, 2017). The significant advantages of digital storytelling are self-representation and agency. As in previous community-engaged practices described, ordinary people are empowered to speak for themselves, have a voice and be listened to while having the opportunity to self-define their identities and present their lives. What is unique in digital storytelling is that it is a process that demands effort and a considerable amount of time - creating stories and putting together the words and images is something that participants carry out on their own. This makes the process empowering and reflective and self-representation carefully constructed and intentional (Juppi, 2017).

In the examples above, the researcher found the basic structure of the method and recognised the value of personal storytelling and literary fiction in creating narrative visions for the future of the town, which could be created to be strategically utilised (Jensen and Vistisen, 2017)- to immerse and to engage local audiences and produce research data.

2.4.1.1 The "Future Huyton workshop"- "Futures workshop"

The workshop is a creative community practice based on storytelling, with discussion, reflection and learning playing an essential role. It is the leading process for research data generation through which community members from the Knowsley area were

involved in the dual role of research participants and creative practitioners. The activity took place from October 2021 to April 2022 and was aimed at people over 16 years old who were members of the local community. The workshop was carried out in eight iterations. Three took place online through the video conference platforms Zoom and Microsoft Teams and with the support of the visual collaborative platform Miro. The other five took place in person in Knowsley community hubs. Next, the workshop activities will be presented grouped into three distinct stages(Please also refer to Appendix 2, Figure 4 for reference.)

Ideation.

The workshop starts with the Ideation stage, during which participants discuss their connection to Huyton and their experiences in the town centre. The role of the researcher is to elicit detailed narratives through a process that resembles a semi-structured one-to-one interview or a focus group discussion, depending on the number of participants. In similar methods in the literature, the process is described as mapping the participants' views (Candy and Kornet, 2019) or contextualising the discussion in a specific neighbourhood (Forlano and Mathew, 2014). In this method, the term "Ideation" emphasises the process from the participants' points of view. They assume the active role of creative practitioners and research collaborators working to construct a renewed vision of the town centre based on their needs and perspectives, with the process acting as a maieutic method. It goes as follows:

- Starting, practitioners are asked to focus on the town centre and identify on a map their familiar destinations and foci of activity. They are then given some time to present one or more of these places in writing, explaining exactly where these places are, why they are going there, how they access the area, and who they interact with when on-site or on their route. By producing this short, integrated text, practitioners deliver a first-person narrative with which they essentially present some of the places. Most importantly, these narratives lay the foundation to develop a character-based fiction throughout the stages.

- Reading- sharing these short excerpts initiates a first discussion about the present-day town centre. Depending on the narrated activities, this discussion is organically directed to other places that they visit in their daily lives for the purpose of

recreation, work, education, socialising, etc. These places may be outside Huyton or Knowsley and even refer to past times when the town differed. This discussion highlights practitioners' lifestyles and brings back important memories. A brief written narration is again requested for one of these other places, preferably one for which positive feelings have been expressed. Practitioners will explain how they relate to the place and the needs it successfully satisfies.

- The final topic of the Ideation stage focuses on unfulfilled needs associated with Huyton's centre- something they find problematic or worrying, something that is missing or not being sufficiently exploited. Practitioners are asked to write their final short text about places that make them feel unsatisfied, frustrated, or concerned, with an emphasis on their personal unmet needs. Sharing these views leads to discussing broader difficulties about life in the region and more individualistic desires related to local life.

Throughout this stage, practitioners are engaged in conversations that reveal their routines and suggest their values. Part of these discussions is consciously acknowledging these values and documenting them as references they can later resume. At the end of this stage, organised notes will have emerged that provide ideas about destinations, interests and activities, places of positive experiences and places associated with unfulfilled needs; relevant values will be associated with these descriptions. Furthermore, the notes have the form of personal narratives and allude to well-rounded characters. In this way, the method makes clear a significant advantage over future scenarios where the characters are one-dimensional personas without desires and life outside the theme of the scenario (Nielsen, 2002).

- Based on the Ideation stage, a reflective exercise is assigned to practitioners to identify possible areas of intervention and change, based on their narratives. The outcomes of this process are potential themes and directions of placemaking, e.g., green spaces and social activities that bring people closer to nature and each other.

Digital Placemaking Fiction
In the stage of Placemaking Fiction, the focus is transferred from the town's present to its speculated future. The process envisions local life reshaped around new places,

public interventions, and activities. In these scenarios, emerging technology and community participation are interrelated and play a crucial role. 'Digital Placemaking fiction' alludes to design fiction, but it mostly resembles Science Fiction Prototyping (Johnson, 2011), while the worldbuilding of the method is also present (Zaidi, 2019). The following steps take place:

1.   The stage begins with a learning and reflecting process on the potential of technologies and community action. Two concepts with indicative titles, 'Emerging Tech in Public Space' and 'Community-Sourcing the Town', are presented to the practitioners. These themes are initially presented as 'what-if' statements that hint at a potential town transformed under the influence of technological interventions and services and the collective action and participation of community members:

•   What if innovative technology would become integrated into our familiar objects, devices, and public places to cater for people's needs and facilitate new experiences in the public realm?

•   What if the local community would come together (online or in-person) to make decisions, shape local projects, organise activities and give solutions to local problems?

Concerning these two speculations, participants are presented with relevant scenarios that involve:

•   real-life projects from other regions of the UK or the world,

•   prototypes developed by the researcher and collaborating third parties in the research practice context, and

•   design fictions about emerging technology products and applications.

These scenarios reflect subthemes that have emerged from the collaboration with the Council partners aiming to horizon scan Digital Placemaking possibilities for the area. Regarding the emerging tech concept, the subthemes are linked to augmented and virtual reality, automation and technological installations in public spaces and wearable devices. Concerning community sourcing, the subthemes refer to local

creativity and well-being, local economy and tourism, local social networks, civic engagement, and sustainability.

While these subthemes have been determined in advance, the scenarios presented to each group are loosely connected to the general area of intervention identified in the concluding assignment of the Ideation stage. Each scenario presented is followed by a discussion that invites participants' views and possibly relevant personal experiences. This process aims to provide information and expand practitioners' assumptions of what is possible, enabling them to explore a broader space for digital placemaking ideas relevant to their existing and projected future needs.

2.   As a next more creative step, practitioners are asked to create and note some placemaking fictions grounded in Huyton centre with a perspective of 20 to 30 years into the future. Initially, they will modify and narrow down the two original what-if statements to combine emerging tech concepts and community engagement scenarios to serve one or more of their desires for new places, interventions and activities in the town, e.g. What if a local digital platform could help locals with gardening interests set up and preserve pocket gardens in available town centre corners?

•   The new what-if statements will indicate unripe fictional placemaking scenarios that will further develop through discussion. It is a discussion that the researcher directs around the implications of these scenarios in local life and participants' documented values. This will help practitioners shape and expand their own scenarios with intentionality.

•   As the final product of the stage, the fictional Placemaking scenarios are documented as verbal descriptions that refer to technological developments and collective actions connected to a transformed town centre that facilitates new experiences and interactions for locals and visitors. In these future-forward digital placemaking scenarios, practitioners inductively expand the scope of their placemaking fiction, revealing some of the broader conditions in the town's speculative future.

This stage has a clear, empowering and educational objective, aspiring to take the emerging tech out of the "black box" for the community members to see and reflect according to their values and the implicit social, cultural, political and economic

implications for local life (Kafai et al., 2007; Forlano and Mathew, 2014; Karasti, 2014). This can foster end-users' inclusion in the local adaptation and adoption of relevant tech applications.

The other objective is to facilitate agency in a design-related process. In this context, the initial what-if concepts and subthemes provide a thematic framework (Baumann et al., 2017), and the scenarios presented are used instrumentally to ignite practitioners' own design thinking (Bowen, 2010). The process's futuristic orientation is also a strategic measure to suspend disbelief about local change. While many digital placemaking scenarios conceived could take place even in present-day Huyton, referring to a fictional future encourages creativity and openness to new ideas (Forlano and Mathew, 2014).

All of the above enable practitioners to construct what-if statements as rules of fiction (Markussen and Knutz, 2013), leading to digital placemaking scenarios. Eventually, placemaking fictions as complexes of technology, human (inter)activity and new sites become seeds for re-imagined Huytons that appear as boldly rejuvenated townscapes, not too far from current concerns nor too close to what already exists (Grand and Wiedmer, 2010).

Storybuilding

The final stage of the process directs participants to create speculative fictions- stories that take place in a Future Huyton and present a digital placemaking concept through the experiences of a character in the town centre. This stage reviews previous discussions and notes to help practitioners identify the story elements leading them to their final creative product. The story building stage refers to the following:

• Main character: The story's main character is a persona based on the practitioner's characteristics (Baumann et al., 2017). This fictional character shares their interests, habits and values; however, they live in a speculative future town. Allowing readers to get to know these characters is vital so that the audience can empathise and relate.

• Plot: The plot is built around the main character's activity in Huyton centre. It involves interrelated events, interactions, and experiences. The main character's

presence and activity in the area provide the opportunity to present the digital placemaking concept previously devised.

- Places: The places where the story unfolds must be familiar but also different. Familiarity is a perceptual bridge (Auger, 2012) that allows readers to identify the story setting as Huyton. What is preserved becomes emphasised, so familiar places and features must be intentionally selected. At the same time, practitioners will introduce new destinations or features. These are scenic expressions of placemaking.

- Other characters: Who are the other characters in the story, and how are they connected to the main character? These figures facilitate social experiences, interactions and events serving the plot (Vogler, 2007).

- Technologies: Invented and imagined tech applications might be unfamiliar to the readers but are probably mundane elements of life in the story world. Ideally, they will appear in the stories organically and through neologisms (Blythe, 2014) that insinuate their use and purpose instead of being presented explicitly in an unnatural way that will disrupt the flow of the story.

- Conflict: What makes a story instead of a scenery description or a narration of sequential events is conflict. Conflict can be an obstacle to what the hero wants-something that disturbs the balance and calls for restoration and resolution (Schechner, 1988). This has the most immersive effect on readers.

- Purpose- Rhetoric appeal: The story aims to inspire readers about the possibility of a regenerated town centre that demonstrates new possible aspects of local life aligned with the writer's values. In this context, writers are asked to make conscious and transparent choices about the values they project and the emotions they want to evoke (Jensen and Vistisen, 2017).

- Narrator: Authors can take advantage of the immediacy and liveliness of first-person narrations or choose third-person narration from an omniscient narrator who can provide information across and beyond what the hero knows, sees and thinks.

The above combines elements from design fiction and storytelling archetypes from Christopher Vogler's (2007) "The Hero's Journey". They are explained through a presentation and a worksheet to which practitioners' written response is requested. As a supplementary activity, they are asked to draw a non-geographically accurate map

corresponding to the hero's imaginary route through the town, noting the places, the people they meet, and the main events. By the end of the session, practitioners have a basic story structure that can help them create their final fiction. Story writing is a process that practitioners carry out on their own in their own time and space

Literary fiction offers significant advantages (Jensen and Vistisen, 2017) in presenting the capacity of technologies and its interrelated social aspects. This is because the plot is driven by real human needs that are eventually satisfied through relationships and social interactions that come before and go beyond automations and digital spectacles. Placemaking fiction becomes a catalyst and a facilitator, but the people in the stories retain the leading role.

Reading the stories, the reader can find out that not all authors followed the narrative curve of the hero's journey, nor did they all underline a conflict. But what can be successfully recognised in the stories can be explained by the Aristotelian terms of ethos and pathos associated with rhetoric. Ethos is connected to the orator's values, and the authors make their ethical stance explicit (Jensen and Vistisen, 2017)- it is perceptible in how people in the story relate to each other and the town, in the kind of problems the technologies address, and in the community's coming together. Pathos refers to the emotions evoked in the readers but starts with the feelings of the protagonists and, ultimately, the writers themselves.

Combining the above, writers construct a Future Huyton story imbued with rhetoric intentionality (Coulton and Lindley, 2016) that goes beyond the narrative of futuristic propaganda and underlines the timelessness of local identity based on the people.

2.4.1.2 Online surveys through the "Future Huyton" experience

The digital streetscape experience in Huyton centre resulted from an extensive planning and content creation process. The last phase of the research practice aimed to involve visitors to Huyton centre, who used a mobile AR application to engage with "Future Huyton." They were invited to participate in an online survey by accessing a link within the AR platform. The sole requirement for participation was being 16 years of age or older.

Methodologically, the experience served the mounting of the futuristic visions in the present-day reality (Candy and Kornet, 2019) of Huyton centre. This engagement allowed the public to express their opinions and perspectives through an online survey. The survey questions were designed to address the second, third, and fourth research inquiries, serving as a means to validate or challenge the viewpoints of practitioners, thereby ensuring "credibility triangulation" (Patton, 2015, p. 969) in the emergence of findings. Moreover, these responses offered insights into the demographic profiles of the experience's audience. Consequently, a portion of the survey was dedicated to collecting essential demographic information.

Decisive in creating the survey was conducting a draft analysis (Patton, 2015) to the narrative data from the workshops. As previously described, this process started with practitioners reflecting on their own work and narratives, which the researcher continued across the whole body of stories. Based on shared concepts and individual plotlines within these narratives, the survey questions were meticulously crafted.

The "Future Huyton" experience was based on twelve of the stories, and each one was linked to its own questionnaire. All questionnaires adhered to a standardized format, including:

- A concise introductory reflection on the story
- Inquiries regarding participants' postal code and age bracket
- Three to four questions exploring connections to the story's perspective, encompassing preferences, requirements, and experiences in familiar high streets and urban centres, as well as the integration of technological advancements introducing novel local potentials.

Completing the questionnaire would take five to ten minutes, providing an epilogue to the experience. The reader can access the individual questionnaires in the Appendix 1.

2.4.2 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an approach based on descriptions of personal experiences derived from the researcher to extrapolate sociological understandings about a broader culture (Sparkes, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011). The method fosters a personal point

of view and emphasises reflexivity and personal voice (Wall, 2006) in a scholarly account that immerses the reader in stories that reveal tacit understandings and enable discoveries (Duncan, 2004).

Autoethnography's reliance on the researcher's voice has been criticised by a positivistic standpoint that invalidates the use of self as source of data for being individualised and introspective (Sparkes, 2000), separated from the social context (Atkinson, 1997), also questioning the method's methodological rigour (Holt, 2003) as compared against traditional scientific practices. By analogy, the method's advocators emphasise its "auto- (self), -ethno- (connection to culture), and -graphy (methodological application in research)" aspects (Reed-Danahary, 1997, p.2, as cited in Ellis and Bochner, 2000). So, the researcher is described as an informed insider (Reed-Danahary, 1997) representing a multi-layered lifeworld who can provide thick descriptions of the meaning of events and relationships (Wall, 2006) and who has the most significant motivation, being "consumed by wanting to figure it all out" (Ellis 1991, p. 30–31), while also being called upon to overcome inhibitions about demonstrating vulnerability (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Some advocators also emphasise that the process is based on systematic reflection and can offer justifiable interpretations that triangulate the researcher's opinions with other data and ground findings in theory, resulting in the acceptability of autoethnography by the broader research community (Wall, 2006).

For the researcher, his personal records began with to-do lists of daily tasks and coded notes of ideas that quickly gave way to a handwritten research diary, not consciously, with the aim of developing an autoethnography. What influenced the passing from rough notes to more organised field notes and, finally, diary entries with first-person narratives was the pandemic that determined collaboration through frequent online meetings. In these narratives, collaborators and research participants appear as interacting subjects that demonstrate behaviours and contribute with opinions, suggestions, and ideas, while the narrator's voice seems reflective in relation to what is planned, assessed, or negotiated. Thus, the research diary captures the collaborative practice and describes how the researcher perceives and experiences it. At the same time, its entries refer to digital documents exchanged, such as presentations, reports,

briefs, emails, meeting agendas, agreements, worksheets etc., as well as prototypes and boards that constitute collaborative design outcomes. Overall, these digital artefacts augment and validate (Duncan, 2004) documented interactions and reflections.

Diary entries were not recorded only to document and reflect on interactions with partners or when some other external event manifested, determining directions and actions. Written narratives often externalised an internal dialogue of the researcher to crystallise new ideas and foster design thinking (Duncan, 2004). Characteristic examples are the narratives with which the researcher revised and redesigned his practices based on feedback he received or observations he made himself. Often in these more internal narratives, he reflects on vague and enigmatic perceptions or, on the contrary, when understanding and revelations emerge that remove the ambiguity and indicate solutions, ideas and directions.

These recordings served an immediate purpose during practice. The researcher recorded interactions and internal and external decision-making, which he interpreted to develop an understanding to direct the practice. This process was part of the action research cycle and was connected to the goal of bringing about change in the research setting. However, having completed the practice, he revisited the multitude of narratives, and through an analytical process of retelling and re-storying the narratives, he interpreted them from his current position (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). His aim was to uncover tacit knowledge and suggest both practical and theoretical implications (Duncan, 2004) that could enhance the project's ongoing trajectory or provide insights for comparable practices and ventures. These stories, found in Chapter 3, invite readers to accompany the researcher as he revisits pivotal moments of the practice.

2.5 Purposeful Sampling

The research comprises various branches of practice, each with its distinct objectives, which are reflected in the research questions and the nature of the collected and analysed data. Sampling plays a pivotal role in this context as it involves identifying a suitable sample that can furnish the required data. In this research, purposeful

sampling was employed, eschewing random or representative sampling in favour of strategically selected cases.

2.5.1 Single-case

The first research question is connected to the researcher's experience within a culture, becoming the source for insights about how collaboration manifests in the context of a multi-participatory placemaking practice, which takes place through online meetings during the pandemic. This practice research branch is connected to a self-study conducted through autoethnography, indicating a single-case purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 2015).

2.5.2 Selecting practitioners

The data relating to the remaining questions are primarily linked to the Future Huyton workshops. This branch of the study is place-based and community-engaged aiming to involve locals as co-creators of a public space intervention. In this context, a sampling strategy was structured to involve members of the local community of Knowsley aged over 16, familiar with Huyton centre that had experience participating in local interest groups or would be interested in committing to a creative community project. These criteria delineate a purposeful sampling process so that research participants are "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2015, p. 401) that can best address the research purpose. Selecting members of the local community who are demonstrating a spirit of civic engagement and express an interest in becoming co-creators of a creative intervention would ground the research in their unique perspectives and experiences (Burns et al., 2011) and lead to insights and in-depth findings for establishing a participatory digital placemaking practice.

However, beyond the primary participation criteria, supplementary criteria were established to ensure sample heterogeneity, with a focus on "diverse characteristics" (Patton, 2015, p. 428), including participants' residential postal codes and age. Preliminary analysis of available statistical data on well-being indicated economic disparities within the borough, evident in significant deviations in average income across different postal codes. The borough comprises both affluent and disadvantaged

neighbourhoods, making it desirable to achieve relative variation in the sample by including practitioners residing in different areas and likely belonging to diverse economic strata. While age was not initially a predetermined criterion, its significance became apparent as the initial participants all fell within the same age group.

Consequently, sampling was conducted as a dynamic strategy to involve participants who meet the selection criteria and demonstrate heterogeneity. Approaching potential participants did not resemble a filtering process to recruit the few with a specific skill set but an exploratory process where iterations of planning, action and reflection enabled the researcher to (re)adjust his tactics to be able to successfully approach and invite potential participants representing different social identities that would have the interest to commit to a creative community project. The search focused on local organisations and groups as well as local community centres, colleges and libraries. The above represents clusters (Leavy, 2017, p. 98) of the local population in which individuals with the desired characteristics would be active. The researcher visited and presented the study to some of these clusters. He also addressed an open invitation to the local population by conducting social media campaigns, posting on local Facebook groups and email campaigns within the LJMU community. The Council's Communications Team also issued an open call through an article on its news site. In all the above cases, potential participants could express interest by filling out an online screening survey which allowed the selection and diversity criteria to be established.

Approaching potential participants and running the workshop was completed when an adequate representation of different demographics in the sample was achieved based on the heterogeneity criteria. This ensured that diverse perspectives and experiences were captured, thus increasing the likelihood of reaching saturation within each demographic bracket represented in the sample. Readers can observe how participants engage with the diverse characteristics in Figures 5 and 6 included in Appendix 2.

2.5.3 Advertising the experience

Participants in online surveys were members of the digital experience's audience; from the perspective of the mobile AR app, they were app users. Their involvement aimed

to triangulate (Patton, 2015) the data generated in the workshops by comparing them against views expressed by people outside the practice. This was essential as the purposeful sampling strategy applied to select practitioners restricted the sample to a subset of the town centre visitors' population, notably excluding non-locals. Thus, a different sampling strategy was attempted to augment the data, especially with narrations that indicate what could encourage presence and participation in town centre life- the focus of the second research question. It was legitimate for the experience to attract as many people as possible- a heterogeneous audience visiting the town centre, possibly even for the first time. Unlike the practitioners, their narrations would not necessarily reflect local experiences and comprehensive views but could indicate what would motivate their return to the area. These findings could indicate the transferability of workshops' findings or indicate future directions in research as, for example, trying to engage other demographics in a similar practice (Candy and Kornet, 2019), even involving people from outside the borough.

Instead of sampling, an advertising strategy was attempted to raise awareness about the experience. The researcher disseminated "Future Huyton's" launch at local community hubs, groups and organisations. Benefiting from his developed familiarity and networking within the area, he approached a much larger number of local organisations and hubs compared to the initial process of searching for practitioners. He also disseminated the invitation through social media campaigns and cultural newsletters visible to the wider Merseyside region, conducted an email campaign at LJMU, and put-up information material in Liverpool creative hubs. The KMBC's Communications Team also announced the experience and the launch of the AR app on its news site. Of particular importance and effectiveness were the promotional actions of the practitioners themselves in their social networks. Finally, the researcher attended a community engagement event organised by the Council for local organisations and promoted the experience in-person to town-centre visitors.

All the above actions were aimed at attracting an audience for the experience. Which of the audience members would become participants would be determined by whether they would respond to the in-app prompt for the users' contribution. In conclusion, while the promotional actions indicated an open process with almost no

criteria and restrictions, the final participants would be strictly people over 16 who read one or more stories online and came into the town centre to access the AR part of the experience through the mobile app "Knowsley Domes".

2.6 Ethics approval

An ethics application was submitted to the University Research Committee (UREC) (Ref No: 20/LSS/012).

Potential workshop participants were provided with an information sheet and a consent form in printed or electronic versions, depending on whether the workshop occurred in-person or online. The information sheet explained, among others, the conditions for participation, the research purpose, workshop activities, participants' right to withdraw at any time, the use of creative results, the pseudonymisation of research data and the inherent limits in confidentiality resulting from group activities.

Potential online survey participants were presented with a landing page following an outbound link from the mobile AR app. This webpage provided information about the study's purpose, participation conditions, estimated survey duration, and the fact that the study was not collecting personal data and identifiers. Potential participants were also informed that they could withdraw at any point until the survey was submitted by closing the relevant tab on the browser's window. It was highlighted that clicking the "Next" button was considered informed consent.

2.7 Narrative Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis in qualitative research is usually described as examining raw data to identify concepts through multiple coding processes, linking codes to make a category, identifying repeated patterns in each category and creating themes that represent similar patterns (Creswell, 2007). These stages are not serial and involve revisions and recursions before the data can be presented as narratives, figures and arrays in a research document. The description of the analysis through these essential elements is more evident in thematic analysis. Narrative analysis, in contrast, has a less structured

and predetermined way in terms of the methods it relies on and legitimises a "flirtation" with the data (Kim, 2016, p. 187).

Important in narrative analysis is that hermeneutic reasoning is involved throughout the process and that interpretation does not follow an "objective" analysis but already exists from the conceptualisation of the research (Chase, 2003; Josselson, 2006).Thus, narrative analysis and interpretation work in tandem as an articulated meaning-finding act that seeks to determine the meaning that participants project to their lives and their lived experiences through their narrations and stories (Kim, 2016, p. 189). These meanings are concurrently analysed and interpreted and can be drawn from various forms of representation, such as perception, remembrance, and imagination (Polkinghorne, 1988), by delving into their plotlines and social and cultural references.

The combination of analysis-interpretation provides a framework with a double function: it allows the understanding of the phenomenon under study as it manifests in past events of human life and experience that inform present-day actions and future-oriented planning actions, but it also facilitates the understanding of the phenomenon from the reader, through "focus, omission, addition, appropriation and transposition tactics" that create a more communicative product (Kim, 2016, p. 193). In this context, the researcher becomes a storyteller, reshaping a story to render it more engaging, coherent, and accessible to the reader, a process described as "narrative smoothing" (Kim, 2016, p. 192), which, inevitably, also raises ethical questions about the legitimacy of the "better" story.

In the current study, analysis and interpretation were initiated as part of the futures workshops' practice. Practitioners themselves applied many of the interpretation tactics mentioned above to produce their stories; they identified the values behind their documented narrations, chose to focus on particular topics they talked about while omitting others, appropriated and remixed intervention scenarios to propose solutions, and planned their rhetorical appeal with intentionality. Thus, the community practice allowed the researcher to carry on with the already-commenced analysis in a subjective but not arbitrary manner and with accountable interpretations both "in faith and suspicion" (Josselson, 2006) to the narrative data.

Referring more clearly to the method of analysis followed, two parallel approaches can be distinguished. The first is mainly related to the second research question. It is based on Polkinghorne's (1995) Analysis of Narratives, where the researcher examines the narrative data to discover evidence of common themes to organise them under categories and concepts that move across participants and contexts. It is the classic approach to qualitative research, where findings are derived from organised concepts shared across the research data. In the futures workshop method, these concepts were initially determined by predefined foci of interest that initiated participants' storytelling but, ultimately, were derived from the emerging narrative data in an inductive manner. For example, the discussions in the first session of the workshop focused on needs that were successfully served in the town centre and others that remained unmet, setting the direction for relevant narratives from which common themes and concepts could arise.

At the same time, another analytical approach was carried out that concerned the remaining research questions. This approach employed a process of retelling or re-storying the narrative data to highlight narrative meanings and connotations unique in each story that would be lost with its thematic fragmentation (Polkinghorne, 1995). The relevant approach on which the study analysis was based is linked to Mishler's typology, as presented and modified by Kim (2016). Mishler recognises the order of the "told", which refers to the narration of events and actions by the participants and the order of the "telling", referring to narratives produced by the researcher. The methods of his typology constitute the development of a relationship between the two "temporal orders" (Kim, 2016, p. 199).

In the Appendix 1, the reader will find out that for each story in the collection, the researcher performed a "Recapitulation of the told in the telling" by writing his own interpretive story that highlights its uniqueness (McCormack, 2004). This was based on the first method of the Mishler's typology (based on William Labov's model) (Kim, 2016, p. 201) and allowed, through the detection of core elements in the told, to reveal what the practitioner wanted to communicate and what their story was about, in order to structure an interpretive telling. Of course, in the study, this interpretation was not based merely on the story elements but as already mentioned, on the

interpretations and intentions that the practitioners explicitly stated during the workshop. However, the writing and interrelation or nesting of the final interpretive stories were products of the researcher's work to detect the axes on which the final narratives of the analysis would be structured.

Similar was the re-storying performed for the first research question. These data did not derive from the practitioners or the audience but constitute autoethnography. The field notes and diary entries recorded by the researcher during the practice are a large volume of narratives concerning episodes of collaborative practice that occurred in parallel and narrate incidents, actions, reflections and epiphanies without having a fixed thematic focus as they were written chronologically. The second analytical method of Mishler's typology was applied to "Reconstruct the told from the telling" (Kim, 2016, p. 203). Through this process, thirteen stories emerged, which have thematic coherence and internal order thanks to the applied narrative smoothing. The stories allow readers to follow the researcher's lived experience in different episodes within the practice. Furthermore, their further analysis allowed the detection of the principal axes on which the final analytical narratives were produced.

Overall, it is essential to point out that the analysis and the collection/ generation of data constitute an integrated process based on the re-telling and re-writing of stories with the aim of knowledge production. The participants, starting from their first narratives about their current experiences, devised new fictional stories that crystallised the future directions they were interested in into temporally meaningful episodes. The researcher continued the re-storying process horizontally across the set of these storied data. Both in the case of interpreting future visions and mapping his own practice, his stories infer strategic directions that can lead to "Future Huyton". The following chapters will introduce the reader to the final level of the analysis leading to the study findings.

2.8 Judging scientific rigour

The research methodology is based on a multi-participatory practice combining top-down collaborations with a creative, social method. The novelty it presents implies

particularities that translate into challenges concerning how scientific rigour can be ensured. Since the research is qualitative, the methodology can be assessed based on four criteria: credibility, applicability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which are connected with and differentiated from counterparts of quantitative research.

Credibility is equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research. It examines whether the analysis captures the realities of the sample and whether other people would relate to these findings, or the context described (Öhman, 2005). In the methodology, credibility is ensured by the participation of practitioners in the analysis to produce shared interpretations (Breu and Peppard, 2003), the prolonged engagement of the researcher in the social context under study (Öhman, 2005), which is documented through auto-ethnography and triangulation that takes place mainly through the final online survey (Patton, 2015).

Applicability or transferability is equivalent to generalizability in quantitative research. The selection of practitioners in the creative practice was based on purposeful sampling and their views cannot be presented as statistical representations. However, through the pragmatic lens that was presented the experiences and realities they convey inevitably share similarities to the beliefs of their social context (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019) allowing generalisations in theoretical propositions -analytic generalisations (Yin, 2010), so that the resulting theories can be applied to similar situations and social contexts. The triangulation between stories and survey responses also proved that the findings reflected local social contexts without projecting claims about generalizable results based on statistical inference.

Dependability is equivalent to reliability and consistency in quantitative research. However, unlike quantitative research, where there is interest in whether a research instrument is reliable and the results can be reproduced (Joppe, 2000), qualitative research is essentially an emerging process, and the researcher is asked to be flexible (Öhman, 2005). While the results cannot consistently be reproduced, the researcher can apply an "audit trail technique" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 317) so that the

research process is documented, and all steps and decisions can be tracked back. Relevant decisions have been documented as part of the auto-ethnography.

Confirmability is equivalent to neutrality in quantitative research. In the study, the researcher's ability to be as neutral as possible to the data is based on transparency about how he grounds the analysis results to the narrative data.

Below are presented the main challenges that occupied the research concerning dependability, credibility and applicability and how the researcher attempted to address these issues.

2.8.1 A challenge to strike a balance between flexibility and rigour

"Futures workshops" represent the primary research method. As described in section 2.4.1.1, they were based on three successive stages (Ideation - Digital Placemaking Fiction – Story building). In subsequent runs, these stages were performed with a different number of participants and in a different number of sessions. Also, the first three runs took place online as people were still hesitant to meet in person in the first period of the pandemic's subsiding. However, the most particular variation was that of the last two runs. Unlike previous runs, where participants worked individually, documenting their ideas in a personal worksheet, in these concluding runs, participants worked as a team recording their views on a joint design board and building a story collectively. As a result, they delivered a descriptive plot-storyboard and not a written text. The table below represents these variations through numerical data.

Workshops	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Location	Online			In-person				
				Huyton Library	Old Schoolhouse Community Project	Tower Hill Community Centre	Old Schoolhouse Community Project	Westvale Community Centre
Period	October- November 2021			February 2022		March 2022	April 2022	
Number of Participants	2	2	2	3	2	5	4	5
(Limited engagement)		1	1	1				
Number of Sessions	4	4	3	3	3	2	1	1
Number of stories generated	2	1	1	2	2	5	1	1

Table 2: Workshop Details (Sessions, Dates, Locations, Number of Participants, Outcomes)

The necessity for adaptability and flexibility within the workshop became evident following an evaluation of the initial two iterations. The original format proved challenging, as not all participants could allocate the required time or articulate their vision into a written narrative. Given that the workshop was integral to a research branch centred on community involvement, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity was not only justified but essential for maintaining authenticity (Peralta, 2017). Without such measures, there was a risk of erecting barriers that could potentially introduce the availability of practitioners and their writing abilities as "confounding variables" (a term typically associated with influencing both independent and dependent variables in quantitative studies, but here signifies a threat to credibility). Fortunately, these limitations were identified early in the process.

In the following runs, the researcher held discussions with the interested potential participants before the process started to establish their expectations from the process and how they felt about different activities. This allowed the method to retain a definite structure regarding the focus and goal of each stage but demonstrate flexibility regarding the processes that would take place and the tools that would be used. Adaptations ensured that the study would be responsive to practitioners' needs and increased the likelihood that creative outcomes could emerge that would be relevant and meaningful to the broader community- a benefit to applicability.

Overall, practitioners generated data through similar processes of storytelling, discussions, new stimuli, reflection, and creative expression. It was clear to the researcher as the facilitator of the workshops how adaptations influenced creative outcomes and what type of biases they could introduce. Knowing the above, he approached the narrative data as derivatives of different workshop variations and based his analysis on the values and interpretations expressed by the practitioners.

2.8.2 Triangulating for credibility in the analysis

Of the 15 stories produced in the 'Futures Workshops', 13 were written by members of the Knowsley community and the rest by residents of the neighbouring cities of Manchester and Liverpool. The "Future Huyton" experience that followed was based exclusively on the locals' work. Experiencing the stories in AR, visitors to the Huyton centre were called to contribute with their views through online surveys. The two stories concerning the urban centres and the online survey responses constitute complementary data that could strengthen confidence in whatever conclusions would be drawn from the locals' stories.

The stories of the "outsiders" demonstrated exciting perspectives into the future of their cities. One story illuminates youth anti-social behaviour, framing it uniquely; this was a common topic in workshop discussions and local practitioners all presented it one-sidedly (the reader will read about it in Chapter 6). The other story highlights the differentiation of the town setting and community feeling from the urban space and its disconnected population, which locals also describe from their point of view. Generalising research findings to urban environments was not the goal; on the contrary, the study was aimed at place-specific knowledge. However, the pilot inclusion of participants from neighbouring urban centres allowed for a "triangulation of qualitative sources" (Patton, 2015, p. 956) that supports the interpretation of local phenomena through contrast, within the same method. Although the relevant sample of external data was limited, it demonstrated that the research findings were not disconnected from the broader reality. However, comprehensive findings based on strategic comparisons with samples from the wider area could not be conducted in the context of this study.

The data from the online questionnaires had a more purposeful methodological function in exploring how a wider population relates to the findings that emerged from the workshops' sample. The method combines two of the approaches to supporting credibility and validation in qualitative research described by Patton (2015). One is triangulation with different qualitative methods- at different times and with different media (p. 957), and the other is audience review (p. 969), which can provide additional data from a different sample regarding the initial findings. The method was employed not solely to confirm alignment but also to explore potential deviations, as these could provide insights into the suitable population groups for potential future workshop iterations (Candy and Kornet, 2019).

The 50 responses elicited from visitors to the Huyton centre aligned with and positively augmented the practitioners' narratives. Although no deviation was expressed in narrative data, the age group (20-30) absent from the workshop participants was also poorly represented in the audience. These findings will be analysed in the following chapters but indicate both the results' credibility and the limitations derived from the project's difficulty in activating and relating to the younger population.

2.9 Epilogue

The chapter started with a presentation of the Pragmatic paradigm, which constitutes the philosophical foundation of the research and is reflected in its methodology and goals. Then a research reference framework was presented, connecting the study with action research, participatory design, community-engaged studies, science fiction and foresight practices. The different research trajectories linked to collaborative practices with various stakeholders and participants were then presented, interpreting the role of practice in research. Then, the data collection methods were explained- the futures workshops, the online survey and the autoethnography, and how the generated data were linked to research questions. For the above methods, the sampling strategy through which research participants were involved was explained. This was followed by a brief description of how the rights of research participants were safeguarded. Just before the end, the narrative analysis and interpretation approach was presented. The

chapter concluded with a reflection that illustrated how rigour was attempted in relation to the evaluative criteria of qualitative research and the difficulties that emerged.

The subsequent chapter endeavours to provide a narrative account of the research journey, which will subsequently facilitate the exploration of the research questions.

Chapter 3: Mapping the Practice

In this chapter, the narrative shifts from third to first person, merging the roles of narrator and researcher. My intention is to immerse readers in a richly detailed account of my research journey, drawing from the nuance of personal narratives and field notes. Drawing from a rich palette of field notes, I unfold thirteen stories that serve as windows into my on-the-ground interactions, negotiations, and friction points, all meticulously chronicled in my research diary.

I did not initially gravitate towards auto-ethnography, seeing it paradoxical for collaborative research. Yet, the unforeseen challenges of Covid-19 reshaped the landscape, turning adversity into an opportunity for a different lens on collaboration. As a budding researcher at the heart of a project diverging from its planned path, autoethnography surfaced as the most apt tool. It unearthed insights that went unnoticed in shared documents and shed light on unspoken understandings often missed in virtual interactions. Auto-ethnography became my compass, helping me make sense of, reflect upon, and analyse my collaborative experiences in a unique cultural and organisational milieu.

This narrative endeavour serves as both a microscope and a telescope, scrutinising the minutiae of collaborative dynamics while also zooming out to conceptualise broader implications. Through this self-reflective lens, I aim to unearth insights about the mechanics of collaboration in projects that meld local governance, academia, and community—in particular, though not exclusively, in the Knowsley area. The stories oscillate between moments of obscurity and clarity, culminating in lessons that transcend my personal journey and contribute to broader theoretical discussions surrounding digital placemaking endeavours.

Note: I would like to preface by informing the reader that the subsequent narrative segments, corresponding to pivotal chapters within the research practice, do not follow a strict chronological sequence and may frequently intersect. This can potentially pose challenges in terms of temporal comprehension. However, readers can find assistance in Table 1 and Figure 3 of Appendix 2 to facilitate their

understanding. Furthermore, referring to Table 2 in the same Appendix would be advantageous, as it offers a summary of data collection components presented in the latter sections of the current chapter.

3.1 Hopeful Beginnings

In the autumn of 2019, I discovered an online post while looking for opportunities for a PhD program in my field of interest. The findaphd.com ad was from Liverpool John Moores University and titled "Collaborative Practice-based PhD in Creative Technology for Placemaking in the Future High Street". The description explained that it was a partnership of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (KMBC), Liverpool Screen School (LSS), Liverpool School of Art and Design (LSAD) and the Faculty of Engineering and Technology (FET) at LJMU. "Focusing on the town centres of Huyton, Prescot and Kirkby and working alongside key teams in KMBC (Culture, IT, Development and Communities Team), the project will research and develop creative interventions that put technology at the heart of regeneration and placemaking. It will explore and test the use of the creative applications of interactive media and immersive technologies (AR, Mixed Reality, Sensor-based Media) with the aim of enhancing place and community through innovative approaches to the use of emerging platforms" (Find a PhD, 2019). The research aimed at new approaches to creating community and experiences that will encourage significant improvements in footfall, community building and economic activity. It was a fully funded three-year collaborative PhD and, according to the description, perfectly aligned with my interests.

Since 2007 I had worked in Greece as an IT teacher in the country's urban, suburban and rural areas. Frequent geographical movements were a normal part of the job for young teachers in my country, and although uncomfortable, they had given me empirical knowledge about social particularities and unevenness in terms of residents' needs, desires and values. This sociological reflection was fuelled by my annual relocations. In 2015 I completed my master's degree in multimedia and, based on my thesis on motion sensing technologies and interfaces, I started delving into applications of creative technologies. Over the next three years, I carried out various

individual and collaborative projects related to interactive installations, wearable technologies, video gaming platforms and interactive performance. The call from the English University seemed to be the opportunity I was looking for. I prepared and submitted the relevant application, and a few days later, I received an email invitation for an online interview.

The interviewers were three academic members of LJMU and later the original supervisors- two from the Screen School and one from the School of Computer Science and Mathematics, and three managers from KMBC related to Town Centre Management, IT and Culture. A few days after the interview, I was offered a journey to Liverpool to meet some of the people in the Council and get a foretaste of the area. They had arranged through a few speed meetings for me to meet the key figures with whom I would be collaborating, and also walks through the centres of Huyton and Prescot. The IT Exploitation Manager was with me in most of the meetings, and we had the opportunity to discuss a prototype-based approach to the project, which would allow the testing of different small-scale interventions. We took a walk in the Huyton centre.

My initial perceptions of the town centre resonated with concepts articulated by Kevin Lynch (1960) concerning mental maps and imageability. As we walked around, I was examining its pathways, boundaries, landmarks, intersections, and distinct sections— all integral to wayfinding—it became evident that the area exuded a sense of disarray and disconnection. Many structures showcased deteriorating exteriors, vacant retail spaces were prevalent, and there was a palpable aura of abandonment, evidenced by the sparse crowds in public areas. However, amidst this urban ambiguity, a medieval church stood prominently, serving as both a guiding landmark and a contrasting beacon in an otherwise nondescript townscape.

As we made our way, Huyton's Chief Regeneration Officer greeted us. He shared insights about the town centre's rejuvenation efforts, emphasising architectural innovations and diversified functions aiming to revitalise the area. Drawing my attention to some retail spaces boasting refurbished exteriors and others still undergoing facelifts, we paused before a Boots pharmacy. There, he reminisced about

the historic Mayfair cinema that previously stood at that spot. A renovation of the building could restore some elements of the old facade- maybe a light installation or projections; we brainstormed ideas casually. The regeneration strategy was broached once more during a subsequent meeting with the Executive Director inside a Council office conference room. He highlighted upcoming shifts in urban design, technological advancements, and, importantly, the digital initiatives I was on board to contribute to. He referred to digital experiences in a way that showed me that there was no clear idea or preference yet, but an interest to what could emerge from our collaboration.

My meeting with the Principal Culture Development and Events Officer was the longest and most informative. Throughout our conversation, she pointed me to numerous public art initiatives emblematic of the locale and events that have knitted the community closer. Notably, she spoke of the Lambananas and the Giant Puppets in Liverpool, and on a local scale, cited projects like Huyton's recent constellation artwork, the train underpass mural, and initiatives themed around Edward Lear's limericks, which are steeped in local heritage. She also introduced me to the forthcoming 2022 Borough of Culture event, where Knowsley Borough was set to transform into a beacon of creativity and culture. There was a marked emphasis on storytelling as a central motif for the anticipated events. My discussions with the KMBC team wrapped up by evening, leaving behind an air of optimism. The palpable enthusiasm signalled the pioneering nature of our collaboration. The candidness of our exchanges hinted at promising prospects ahead.

My final selection for the position was announced at the end of my visit by my primary supervisor from LJMU, and within the next month, I moved to Liverpool. The agreement between the University and the Council was signed soon and confirmed in writing a 3-year collaborative PhD program in the context of which I would conduct relevant research alongside critical departments in the Metropolitan Borough Council and under the support of a cross-disciplinary team of experts in LJMU.

The project officially started in March 2020 with excitement and anticipation. In the same period, however, a new reality began for me and everyone on the planet.

3.2 Building common ground

In March 2020, the global spread of COVID-19 posed a significant threat to life. Lockdown measures were implemented throughout the United Kingdom, leading to a cessation of normal life and business activities. The pandemic had determined the way we would collaborate. I managed to have an in-person induction meeting with my supervisors in an empty Redmonds Building one day before it was closed for months. However, our collaboration with the Council and University would continue through virtual platforms like Zoom and Teams. While this modus operandi was initially a by-product of the pandemic, it became our standard mode of communication throughout the project. This online shift was perceived positively at the time, as it seemed that the project would not be hindered and that the contracting parties had the necessary resilience to support the process.

The initial phase was earmarked by two priorities: acclimating to the organisational environment and laying the groundwork for a digital place strategy. Key stakeholders from the IT Exploitation Team, Culture Team, and Town Centre Management became my main collaborators, with whom I convened virtually on an almost weekly basis.

The momentum to craft a Digital Place Strategy was evident right from the project's onset. As my first research activity, I embarked on a comprehensive exploration, analysing and showcasing a diverse array of cases where digital tools, innovative media, and creative technologies had a placemaking effect, facilitating activities, interactions and experiences in public space. This analysis not only set the stage for my literature review but also introduced me to an array of projects spanning the gamut from creative industries and tourism to urban planning and media art. My focus lay in understanding the interplay between these digital solutions and their physical environments, examining their technical underpinnings, potential for community engagement, thematic essence, and broader impacts on local life. The essence of this endeavour was to familiarise my partners with the vast technological possibilities and their potential in revitalising local spaces. The compiled report would serve as a foundational reference in our collective journey to envision and implement future initiatives.

My collaborators reacted positively to my efforts. As our conversations progressed, we began to foster a shared vocabulary and expanded our discussions on potential avenues for development. Our brainstorming still exploratory leaned into augmented reality, projection mapping, making projects intertwining traditional crafts with digital flair, and immersive performance experiences. One of the focal points of my analysis was the lifespan of different projects and interventions, and what emerged was the call for a digital strategy that would seek projects that would leave a legacy in the region and not be one-time spectacles. The horizon brimmed with possibilities, and my objective was to discern priorities in our discussions, focusing on existing local initiatives or plans that might guide us towards a preferred direction.

As my collaborators incorporated me into some of their teams' immediate and future plans and operational actions, my comprehension deepened, guiding my project further. Concurrently, I engaged in conversations that went beyond just digital placemaking. I consistently attended the "Steering Group" meetings, which were integral to the Huyton Centre regeneration action plan, comprising key stakeholders. Their decision to integrate me into their core processes showcased a commitment to open innovation (Chesbrough, 2006) and indicated leadership that fosters collaborative production (Baptista et al., 2020). These meetings provided insights into the advancements of different workstreams, offering a panoramic view of overarching strategies and their unfolding trajectories.

In general, the respective projects were linked to the strategic objectives described in the Huyton Masterplan (Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners, 2015) and its Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners, 2017), focusing on four primary areas:

• Enhancing connectivity by improving pedestrian pathways, transport links, and traffic flow.

• Revitalising key streets, aiming to create a dynamic community hub through repurposed spaces, innovative venues, and modern technologies.

- Elevating environmental quality, encapsulated by the introduction of signature streetscape schemes, a contemporary 'Village Green', and distinctive gateway features.

- Bolstering the local economy through the establishment of a premium commercial district, fostering independent culinary ventures, and augmenting the hospitality and residential sectors.

Combined with the above, I delved into public data sources, statistical insights and analyses of the region, gaining a comprehensive view of life in the Borough. Knowsley and Huyton face a complex array of socioeconomic challenges. Despite a growing overall population, the area is witnessing a decline in its working-age demographic and a rise in its elderly population, which has implications for healthcare and social services. Knowsley stands as the second most deprived borough in England with high rates of unemployment, low average earnings, and a greater dependency on welfare support including food banks (Office for National Statistics, 2021). These economic disparities are mirrored in the education sector, where performance in GCSEs lags behind national averages, and a high percentage of children are eligible for free school meals or live in poverty. Health metrics are similarly concerning; life expectancy is below the national average, rates of preventable deaths are high, and lifestyle-related health issues like obesity and smoking prevail. While there are indications of community cohesion and increasing employment, these are set against a backdrop of considerable inequality, both within the borough and compared to national standards. Overall, the wellbeing indices for the area appear troublingly low (Centre of Thriving Places, 2020; Knowsley Knowledge, 2020; Nomis, 2020; Office for National Statistics, 2019; Office for National Statistics, 2020; Office for National Statistics, 2023).

This situation exemplifies a "wicked problem" (Rittel and Weber, 1973) faced by the community. Wicked problems are inherently complex and tangled, making them hard to decipher. Often, they present intertwined challenges, with disputes arising over which components constitute the main issue and what solutions effectively address it (Hillier, 2013). Hoppe (2010) compellingly suggests a need to invest more in precisely identifying the core problem that demands attention. As I delved further into understanding Huyton and Knowsley's socio-economic landscape through various

studies and documents, my literature review underwent a transformation. Initially a theoretical exploration of the nexus between place and technology, it gradually pivoted to a place-focused investigation. Specifically, it recognised that rejuvenating the local High Street with advanced technologies and experiences is a nuanced endeavour, intrinsically linked to the local milieu.

This new direction embraced a spectrum of placemaking projects, from strategic regeneration initiatives to grassroots efforts addressing local challenges with a restorative intent. Consequently, a preliminary (research) question emerged, simple in formulation and still unfocused: What role should technology play in the development of the local vision for the region, and how could it practically address core problems and bring about meaningful experiences? Based on that, I started working on a prototype project.

3.3 Finding Pathways in the face of Adversity

The first work sample I presented to my partners was not a technological prototype but foresight scenarios. These scenarios consisted of narrative stories that incorporated various local personas and depicted digital innovations aligned with the future vision outlined in the provided reports. Additionally, these narratives addressed the identified issues within the town centre and the broader region. My inspiration for these came from different fields that use a story-based process regarding the future and its technological developments. The approach was familiar because of my previous experience with speculative design and design fiction (Bleecker, 2009; Dunne and Raby, 2013; Kirby, 2010; Sterling, 2005), but also influenced by more specific examples such as foresight projects of The Government Office for Science (2016), the article by Fletcher et al. (2016) about creative prototyping for the future high street, and Daniel Granatta's online course on Generating Ideas Through Technology and Storytelling (2020).

These sample stories were produced not to propose specific tech interventions but to introduce partners to a possible method for exploring and crystallising how digital placemaking could fit into the town centre regeneration strategy. The

discussion/reflection that followed recognised an opportunity to use a story-based approach to include the local community in shaping the digital placemaking interventions and the contextual strategy. Thus, the practice could develop under the influence of two forces: the local authority, who initiated the project and the community, which were the occupiers of space and the consumers of experiences that manifested. Within this field, the research would take shape.

A few weeks later, during a routine meeting, I was introduced to the "Streetscape Project"—a project that came with dedicated funding and which would lay at the epicentre of my collaboration with the Council. It was unclear what it would be, however the goal was to portray Huyton's history, current status, and future aspirations. The Council envisioned it to be developed and delivered by an external entity, while I played a facilitative, guiding role. This was fresh information for me and seemed to recast my role from primarily development to a more analytical and collaborative design position with external partners.

Based on the following discussions, I compiled an action plan in October 2020 that delineated my practice. My intention was to develop and deliver throughout the year 2021 a series of "Prototype Projects", which would produce knowledge and material and inform the design of the "Streetscape Project" and my collaboration with the creative company that would implement it. The "Prototype Projects" consisted of combining small-scale digital events/interventions in public spaces with related digital creativity workshops. These workshops either set the stage for or built upon the event, actively incorporating community participation in the respective projects. This approach reflects the tried-and-true Placemaking Living Lab concept (Marrades et al., 2021), which emphasises involving end-users in the co-design of small-scale interventions.

The pairs of interventions and participatory activities would allow me to implement the story-based approach, produce content and draw data from the community's involvement while also testing technologies like augmented reality, projection mapping, making projects, and immersive experiences in prototypes. Methodologically, the individual projects would function as interconnected prototypes

producing the necessary information to inform the "Streetscape Project". It was a clear plan, based on which I drafted my initial PhD study ethics application before the end of the year.

Nonetheless, the "Prototype Projects" plan, which was pivotal in determining the design of the "Streetscape Project," was rendered null and void as a consequence of the pandemic. During a meeting held in February 2021, the IT Exploitation Manager communicated that on-site public activities would be discouraged, citing concerns pertaining to public health amid the pandemic. The Council's position was clear almost a year after the pandemic outbreak: they could not risk holding any public events for the rest of 2021 that would invite people into the town centre or encourage gatherings. This condition impacted my research, deflecting it from its initially planned trajectory, and the "Prototype Projects" remained an almost unrealised blueprint.

Nevertheless, I had already factored in the potential for online placemaking in my planning, allowing me to come back with a counterproposal promptly. My exploration of the literature revealed the value of bottom-up place-branding (Evans, 2015) and placemaking occurring online (Halegoua, 2020; Norum and Polson, 2021; Ruberg and Lark, 2021), emphasising the engagement of local stakeholders, including residents and individual digital users, in these exercises. So, I suggested pivoting towards online community engagements that would reference the local centre without necessitating physical presence, promoting digital social interactions. The online realm further offered an opportunity to experiment with a narrative-driven approach to community engagement, bypassing the need for physical attendance in communal spaces.

3.4 Crafting Community Spaces beyond Physical Boundaries

Before March 2021, I presented to my collaborators two avenues for online placemaking.

The one was social media centred. I started by presenting compelling data showcasing Huyton's sparse digital footprint on social platforms. Then I introduced a forward-

thinking proposal: to ride the current digital wave with engaging, community-centric social media initiatives that could amplify our project's reach. I advocated for a deeper partnership encompassing the Council's Communications Team, with the intent of a communication strategy emphasising the local Cultural agenda. Launching a dedicated social media account would facilitate campaigns beckoning locals to contribute content referencing the area—aligned with our project's vision, and also provide a conduit for the Culture Team to broadcast events tied to the forthcoming Borough of Culture festivities. In that period, my project also had the greatest affiliation with the Culture Team.

To enrich my pitch, I displayed pertinent prototypes I had previously created under my "Prototype Projects." These included an interactive AR filter spotlighting various identities and uses of the town centre, a video montage capturing actual social media users indulging in their quarantine hobbies, and region-centric animated stickers available on IG and Facebook stories via Giphy (See Appendix 2, Figure 7.) These were functional examples, but not finalised products. I aimed to set up virtual content creation sessions for locals and to feature this content on the Council's digital platforms, promoting a sense of community and connection during safety restrictions. During the pandemic, the ways in which placemaking practices and experiences of place unfolded underwent a transformation, and the way everyday users leveraged social media emphasised new opportunities for generating locational value (Halegoua and Polson, 2021). Given the rampant popularity of AR filters, animated GIFs, and video edits in the digital zeitgeist, this strategy represented a golden opportunity for the community to converge under the umbrella of the Council's digital channels. My proposal was promised deliberation.

The other direction was the development of a "Virtual Streetscape Project" in collaboration with MA students of LJMU Screen School. The goal was to develop the "Streetscape Project," but online, eschewing the physical public spaces of the centre. This idea aligned with the growing interest in using immersive technologies to enhance cultural and educational experiences. Particularly amid lockdowns, digital innovations were surfacing as artists and institutions explored new methods to connect with their audiences. This had signalled a trend of embracing immersive technologies as a means

of adapting to evolving circumstances, a trend that had the potential to persist beyond the pandemic (Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2021).

With my supervisor as the principal tutor and me as a co-tutor, we would involve the Collaborative Module's MA students in a digital endeavour spotlighting Huyton Centre. Involving University students and staff in such experimental projects has the potential to benefit the local community through diverse skillsets, fresh perspectives, resource efficiency, collaborative engagement, rapid prototyping and knowledge sharing that can lead to innovative solutions and design-led approaches to governance while enriching the students' educational experience (Thorpe and Rhodes, 2018). It is a mutually beneficial model where both the community and the educational institution grow and learn from each other.

Representing the Council, I could act as the Creative Director, taking part in weekly digital design consultations. My collaboration with the students would be an opportunity not only for collaborative prototyping but also for experimentation in relation to the design process I expected to have with the creative company in the upcoming months. This endeavour saw immediate approval, with two Council Team managers even participating as speakers in two sessions. To initiate the project, I handed the students a "Virtual Streetscape Project" brief tailored to the social distancing constraints we faced. My interest in the project was evaluating technical requirements, gauging functionalities, and exploring engagement scenarios that could invigorate the town's regeneration vision.

Early brainstorming sessions revealed that students' ideas diverged from the envisioned regeneration storyline. Recognising this, I reshaped the brief, aligning it with the four regeneration goals of Huyton's Masterplan and the local challenges identified during my demographic analysis. This led to virtual thematic rooms, allowing diverse narrations and interpretations to be grounded in specific thematic domains. We opted for Mozilla Hubs as our platform, enabling the development and distribution of collaborative 3D environments accessible via VR or desktop interfaces.

Under the title "Huyton:Digital", the students crafted eight thematic spaces. These mirrored Huyton's historic landmarks (the train station, St. Michael's church, the

Mayfair Cinema), and proposed regeneration sites (the library, the high street, a maker space, a Village Green etc.). However, instead of merely replicating these sites, students were encouraged to infuse a blend of reality and imagination, serving as a launchpad for tales spanning Huyton's past, present, and potential future. The community was perceived as the pivotal force in shaping this digital terrain. The spaces were moulded to serve as canvases for content from Huyton's denizens. Anticipating community-derived stories, we refrained from introducing original content.

"Huyton:Digital" was the first comprehensive technical prototype, which was a success for the research course. It explicitly demonstrated a digital placemaking platform functionality since content could be changed, and different activities could be organised and tested in virtual spaces. Through this, we discerned technical requisites for the "Streetscape Project", experimented with content integration possibilities, identified navigational challenges in 3D spaces, and realised the limitations in re-usability and authoring these spaces for Council staff with rudimentary digital proficiency.

The lessons learned about working collaboratively with a group of creative professionals were also fundamental. The collaborative dynamics of this venture offered both rewards and challenges. The multifaceted insights and shared workload accelerated the implementation. On the other hand, certain project aspects misaligned with some participants' skill sets or interests, leading to unbalanced group dynamics. Reflecting upon this, a clearer collaboration framework could be established in future endeavours, especially once the project identity has solidified and team roles had become apparent.

Nevertheless, polyphony is not a condition in need of order but possibly the essential benefit of the collaborative environment. While it was difficult to agree on one of the various ideas regarding concepts and directions, this ultimately shaped the project into a multiuse space open to different narrations- much like public space. This collaborative journey also refined my story-based community engagement strategy, creating more room for personal experiences, views, and interests that could contribute to the shared vision.

3.5 From perceived failure to identifying the major gap

The second year of the project and my collaboration with the Council made evident difficulties that I did not expect and limitations that were not apparent.

The "Virtual Streetscape Project", which the LJMU MA students were working on, was completed in mid-May2021, according to the pre-determined timetable set by the University module and was presented online to representatives of the Council. My intention for this project was for the virtual spaces to be colonised with material from the community. In this, I had requested the Council's help during its design phase so that the project would be delivered with some content produced by local youth. Specifically, my plan was to engage a nearby secondary school, encouraging students to craft visual content reflecting their views on the future high street, which would subsequently feature in the relevant thematic room. This could be an opportunity for the adoption of digital placemaking techniques in the classroom and pedagogical interventions to understand and negotiate the places they inhabit (Frith and Richter, 2021).

While the Culture Team extended a helping hand— facilitating a connection to the school through a personal contact— plans faltered. The ongoing pandemic and ensuing challenges of distance learning disrupted our collaboration with the school. Attempts to rekindle communication remained unanswered. Separately, the MA students made commendable community outreach efforts, securing two collaborations: one via a local student's personal network, and another through an Instagram outreach, leading to contributions from local fitness and wellbeing experts.

Prior to the project's culmination, I had also petitioned for its Council-backed promotion, aspiring to collate community feedback. My hope was for a joint effort with the Council's Communications Team for a broad outreach via social media. In response to this proposal, I was tasked with composing an introductory article for their website. Regrettably, despite my submission, the article remained in the editorial process without publication. Similar challenges were encountered when suggesting social media promotion strategies.

During this period, the Council faced significant workloads due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19, and concerns were raised about potential risks and unfamiliarity with the project's objectives. It became apparent that my project's online outreach did not align with the Council's current priorities. Moreover, a disparity became evident between the swift, community-driven dynamics of social media and the Council's methodical and reflective approach, which I had not initially considered. This realisation provided significant insights for the prospective development of online communication strategies, underscoring the importance of adopting a more extended time frame to foster deeper comprehension and wider consensus when engaging with the public body.

I established a dedicated research account under the name "digitalplacemakers" on Facebook and Instagram, where I actively promoted "Huyton:Digital" through posts and advertisements (refer to Appendix 2, Figure 8). However, these efforts proved to be unsuccessful. Perhaps the project lost momentum as people returned to public space in the summer of 2021; maybe its promotion needed more time and persistence. The site remained an empty virtual Village visited only by its creators and served purely as a technical proof of concept. Gradually, this space began to disintegrate as students disengaged from the course and did not maintain a connection with the project, instead focusing their attention on their final MA projects.

Once more, unforeseen challenges threw my plans off course, obstructing the data gathering crucial for my research and causing delays in my academic timeline. This hiccup highlighted the intricacies of collaboration, the clash of differing priorities, and divergent commitments (Garrett-Jones et al., 2005; Rycroft-Malone et al., 2016). The situation's disappointment illuminated the inherent challenges of co-creation, underscoring that top-down technical prototypes do not necessarily ensure community participation. As we explored technological enhancements for the centre, the community's voice, a crucial element, seemed notably subdued. This realisation significantly shifted my research direction, propelling me toward a more profound grasp of community involvement in the sphere of Digital Placemaking. I felt a pressing need to grasp community sentiments about the town centre, their stories, and visions

that could guide technological innovations to enhance engagement and construct inviting spaces.

This revelation felt akin to a research reboot, compelling me to shift my attention to community engagement and co-creation and establish a foundation for a narrative-driven design approach. Intent on fostering this renewed angle, I strategized to host workshops, distinct from the technical "Streetscape Project," with both initiatives eventually merging to shape a comprehensive town centre experience. This change recalibrated the study's objectives, processes, and participants, emphasising efforts to excavate the affective ties and forward-looking aspirations between community and place. Methodologies involving end-users have made strides in disrupting established hierarchical dynamics and traditional power dichotomies, promoting more open channels for dialogue and interconnectivity between administrative actors and community (Marrades et al., 2021). I was inclined to explore this methodology more actively.

3.6 Speculating a workshop

In the summer of 2021, I began planning a storytelling and creative writing workshop aimed at involving the Knowsley community in our digital placemaking endeavours. The experience with "Huyton:Digital" had refocused my interest from centrally produced visions, which I was, to a certain extent, familiar with by working with the Council Teams, to more organic community stories about the town and its potential future. This seemed especially pertinent given that the upcoming Borough of Culture 2022 theme was set to be storytelling, fiction, and fantasy.

This was a favourable coincidence, as storytelling, fiction, and fantasy are pivotal in placemaking from a tourism viewpoint. They transcend the mere physical attributes of a place, weaving together its reality and fantasy, its history and myths, and the intentional and spontaneous events that have shaped it (Wortham- Galvin, 2008; Ma and Lew, 2011; Amaomo, 2012). These narratives craft the destination's image and experience and foster emotional connections with visitors. While urban planners emphasise physical design, tourism professionals often harness storytelling and image

creation to curate and market distinctive place identities, enhancing the overall allure and resonance of a location (Lew, 2017).

Simultaneously, contemplating a non-existent potential reality and critically evaluating it with the aim of making it a reality can be perceived as a form of design (Resnick, 2019). This perspective encapsulates the fundamental essence of design, which is to imagine and then bring to fruition something novel. In this context, every participant who adopts this visionary approach is essentially taking on the role of a designer, while professional designers play a pivotal role as enablers in this process, leveraging their specialised skills to enhance the design capabilities of all involved.

By employing a participatory design approach, the workshop aspired to actively involve the community, providing them with a platform to express their experiences, highlight concerns, and voice their aspirations for the town centre's future. This engagement could not only aid in pinpointing and ranking potential areas of intervention but also encourage the exploration of diverse solutions for improved outcomes through technological augmentations like AR, IoT, urban automations etc. This process would contribute to innovative and transformative methodologies to engage with the community and conduct placemaking. The results of these activities could yield invaluable qualitative data, offering guidance and clarity for local administrative officials and policymakers in their decision-making endeavours (Thorpe and Rhodes, 2018).

During the summer of 2021, I explored design fiction, sci-fi prototyping, and related fields inspired by the works of Dunne and Raby (2001), Brian Johnson (2010), and Bruce Sterling (Bosch, 2012), particularly within the 2010-2020 decade. While I had a prior understanding of these domains from past projects, I was keen to see how fiction could mirror contemporary perspectives and capture something of the affective connections that exist in relation to the target area (Jones and Evans, 2012). Centred on conceptualising a speculative future town centre, the workshop was divided into four sessions. It was a mix of ambition, ideas, and exploratory methods, awaiting validation from a local demographic.

Promotionally, I tied the workshop's speculative theme to science fiction, imagining a future influenced by emerging technology. This, I believed, would resonate more with locals than the term "digital placemaking." My recruitment drive began at the Huyton library, where I had been informed by the faculty programme leader for Creative Writing that there was a creative writing group. I also reached out to LJMU members based in Knowsley and sought guidance from the Culture Team, which was staffed with new members working in community management to connect with local groups. Embracing the digital landscape, I advertised extensively on the project's social media channels, even integrating pop culture sci-fi characters into playful promotional collages set in Huyton (see Appendix 2, Figure 9).

Engagement metrics indicated a decent interest, with around 100 people exploring the event's details per ad. However, conversions were low, with only eight registrations and only three active responses. Pivoting, I considered mixing community members with creative professionals from major cities connected to Knowsley, hypothesising that professionals would enrich the narrative diversity, stimulate creativity and augment the co-design process (Resnick, 2019). Expanding the outreach, I extended invitations to creative individuals from the wider Northwest region, with a specific emphasis on Liverpool and Manchester. The response was prompt and favourable, but the Culture Team expressed relevance concerns as the activity extended beyond the local population.

Ultimately, I decided to run separate workshops for locals and professionals. Spanning October 2021, these sessions, lasting about 90-100 minutes each, were comprehensive. While the level of engagement and post-session activities suited creative professionals, it was evident that the format was possibly too demanding for the general community. Participants not only crafted stories but also engaged in reflective analysis, which, although insightful, was time intensive.

In hindsight, the declining response rates from social media campaigns made more sense; the workshop's time commitment and specialised character likely deterred the target community audience. Therefore, the need for a more accessible, less time-intensive workshop format was evident for future engagement efforts.

3.7 The Streetscape Project: from brief to procurement

Back in the beginning of 2021, I had commenced the conceptualisation of the "Streetscape Project" alongside "Huyton:Digital." My initial proposal was to pursue the development of a digital placemaking infrastructure for Knowsley Council- a digital capital resource (Barney, 1991) that would enable multiple opportunities for audience engagement and not an ephemeral event. Initial analysis of tech innovations fuelled this vision and garnered encouragement from my collaborators at the Council. The undertakings in "Huyton:Digital" also imparted shape to the "Streetscape Project." Augmented Reality (AR) was pinpointed as the preferred medium to support storytelling experiences as people returned to public space, supplemented by interactive installations and social media mechanisms to diversify audience engagement avenues.

I earmarked two primary criteria. First, the platform's reusability to permit the Council to publish diverse experiences using the established tech infrastructure. Secondly, it was essential to ensure inclusivity, making sure that users of all levels of digital skill and types of devices could participate with ease; experiences should not rely on advanced technologies and equipment but instead be accessible to the average resident and visitor. Collaborative dialogues with my primary partners in IT and Culture streamlined our focus on three critical elements:

User Interaction: Through their mobile devices, users would access AR experiences in predefined areas of the centre augmented with images, narrative text, sound, video and 3d models combined to tell a story connected to the site or a route. Engaging with this content in AR would be similar to entering a thematic space in "Huyton:Digital" but in the context of the physical Village.

User engagement features that were initially contemplated, including installations in the town centre, in-platform polls, and game mechanics within the AR environment, were deprioritised due to budget constraints. We instead preserved two pivotal components:

- Users would be able to generate and share social media content directly from the application, boosting online awareness.
- The platform would support external links, nudging users to explore related online resources. This multifaceted approach extended the experience beyond just AR.

These functionalities would allow the platform to be used in projects with different objectives and enable transmedia experiences which extend beyond AR.

Content Management: Our vision was a dynamic platform for Huyton, allowing for content updates and fresh narrative deployments. The design should ensure ease-of-use for Council staff, without dependency on the creative company. In this context, the company should provide training and documentation to the Council employees. The requirement for a simple content management system and independence in creating experiences arose from "Huyton:Digital", as we had encountered relative difficulties in collaboratively producing the virtual spaces and making changes.

My technical suggestions included a lightweight backend for streamlined content upload and the merits of integrating third-party media assets—a feature we leveraged heavily in "Huyton:Digital."

Community involvement: The platform's narrative had to resonate with Huyton's essence and emphasise the community's role in its progression from the past to the future. The chosen creative company would be tasked with ensuring the involvement of the community in shaping this first experience that would be published on the platform.

Some of the above requirements did not arise from testing out previous prototypes. The need for user-generated social media content from within the app was based on my previous recommendations for increasing the town's online presence through the audience's involvement. Similarly, the inclusion of the community in shaping the first experience was influenced by my calls for community outreach during the development of "Huyton:Digital", which had not been successful. These were integral, though previously unmet, facets of our vision. Acknowledging their significance, we made it incumbent upon the selected creative company to integrate them.

Following my detailed brief presentation, I expressed an aspiration to be actively involved in the design phase. Though unfamiliar with the collaboration dynamics, I yearned for an engagement akin to the MA student initiative.

Once we wrapped up talks with our IT and Culture partners, the Council teams took over to manage the project's next steps. A competitive bidding process was initiated in the summer of 2021, culminating in the contract being awarded to a creative company with a reputation for immersive storytelling by the end of August. When the process was completed, I was able to delve deeper into the procurement details, discerning that the procurement followed a "translation interface model," a modern approach where the buyer sketches out the expected function of a product or service, and then, it is up to the supplier, considering their production prowess, to determine how to fulfil these demands (Håkansson and Axelsson, 2020). By offering functional specifications, the model ensures an even ground, especially in public sector procurement where equity and transparency are paramount. Furthermore, it capitalises on the expertise of the supplier, granting them the flexibility to innovate and enhance processes. Overall, the model places trust in the supplier to deliver, fostering potential for long-term relationships and ongoing innovation.

The winning pitch revolved around an AR portal concept termed "AR domes." Users could engage with virtual experiences strategically positioned throughout the town. Upon arriving at a designated spot, they could enter virtual domes, immersing themselves in content enveloping them from all sides. Echoing the thematic spaces of "Huyton:Digital", these domes would provide Council Teams with the agility to design and infuse these immersive spaces, morphing them into storytelling focal points.

3.8 Collaborating on the Streetscape Project

Officially the project kicked off at the close of September 2021, initiated by a collaborative workshop that included the company, representatives from Culture and IT departments, and me. This session was designed to introduce the AR domes concept, diving into potential themes, community engagement strategies, and various project considerations. Post-introduction, the company's timeline was ambitious: they

aimed to debut an Alpha prototype by early November, refine it into a Beta version by month's end, and finalise the product by the year's close.

Following our inaugural workshop, I organised additional sessions with the company's software developer to explore technical intricacies and design strategies in greater depth. It became apparent during these discussions that our collaboration would not afford the same extended interactions we had with the MA students. This limitation stemmed from the procurement's translation interface model, which presented a significant challenge.

I observed that a wealth of information and insights from our preliminary discussions with the Council partners could not be included in the procurement document, which necessarily follows a standard leaner structure of predefining specifications and questions. As I later discovered from the literature (Gerrard, 2001; Håkansson and Axelsson, 2020), this issue is a recognised problem in public sector efforts to establish flexible agreements with the private sector. Given the project's small scale, the choice of the specific procurement model is a fixed tactic. However, this approach meant that the company was proceeding based solely on the general specifications outlined in the tender, with no formal nod to co-creation interactions and community engagement aspects, which had emerged as crucial and the core direction of study.

The company essentially had the freedom to implement its proposal, as detailed in its procurement response, without a formal commitment to an extensive co-design process for the application. While they were set to collaborate with Council Teams, this collaboration was not intended as a co-design effort. Our role primarily involved providing content and direction for the initial experience to be published in the AR domes, offering feedback on the aesthetic aspects of the dome's 3D model, and assisting with debugging; the platform's design would be exclusively their responsibility. This is not to diminish the quality of the collaboration; it was a fruitful and mutually beneficial partnership, aligned with the established agreement.

However, this situation highlights the necessity for a reimagined procurement strategy that emphasises intensive interaction and joint-venture dynamics between the client and service provider, rather than a sole focus on output specifications. Such an

approach would mitigate the risk of overlooking critical requirements that may not be easily defined as specifications while also allowing for greater flexibility and collaborative decision-making during the design phase.

Besides technical development, content production became the company's primary focus post-launch. While the Culture Group leaned towards celebrating local heritage, I advocated for incorporating content from the regeneration plan, aligning with my digital place strategy research. The company then adopted a quasi-journalistic method for community involvement, interviewing locals during an event. These interviews were then edited into thematic videos for each AR dome, offering a rapid, narration method that included the community's voice.

Engaging with the Communication Team was another significant project phase. As was highlighted earlier, leveraging social channels would be vital to bolster our mission. With a representative from "Coms" on board, we co-created press releases that showcased our digital placemaking endeavour to the community for the first time. This partnership proved invaluable for subsequent community outreach efforts.

By the close of 2021, the project culminated in the creation of an app designed to uniquely merge storytelling with placemaking via "spatial annotations" (Frith, 2015). The app allows for geotagged AR experiences accessible only when a user is at the designated geotagged location and the annotations are an assortment of images and short clips, with clickable pictures revealing associated textual information and links within the virtual dome. The app also enabled users to capture and disseminate images of these domes on social media platforms. Moreover, the streamlined backend allowed Council staff to easily construct new domes by entering essential content, coordinates, and multimedia links, and then geotagging them to specific locations (See Appendix 2, Figure 10). The finalised app, named "Knowsley Dome," became publicly accessible through the Apple Store and Google Play Store in the summer of 2022.

3.9 Towards a Digital Placemaking Platform

The collaboration with the creative company resulted in a functional AR platform that bore a collection of content in the theme "Past, Present, Future" according to the

original plan. When this collaboration started everyone thought of the "Streetscape Project" as the ultimate goal, in reality, "Knowsley Dome" represents a pioneering first step in Digital Placemaking.

We were always cognisant that the product had to be completed by the end of the year 2021 according to the terms of the fund, so priorities were set, focusing on the consistency of the AR functionality and the reusability of the platform so that we could release and test multiple AR experiences. These goals also defined the nature of our collaboration with the creative studio. The Alpha version focused on implementing the AR functionality by embedding the AR dome in the image of the physical world. The Beta version connected this function with a simple user interface that allowed the supervision of the different domes on a map, which evolved into the user app and a backend through which we could set up new domes. We provided directions on content and feedback on the dome's skin. We facilitated testing to confirm that the domes we were setting up from the backend appeared in the specified areas and the content was displayed as it should.

However, it is worth noting that the aspect of experience design was not as prominently emphasised. The app's design process primarily revolved around meeting the technical specifications outlined in the procurement document rather than focusing on user scenarios or exploring desired engagement techniques. This is how the priority of geolocated access to visual content within a 3D environment was met under the imposed budget and time constraints, while the introduction of dynamic elements and improvements that will naturally lend itself to the creation of more compelling storytelling experiences was recognised as a potential future expansion by the entire team.

Upon the project's completion, I ventured into personal explorations with the app to uncover potential usage scenarios. It became evident that the user experience would be predominantly visual. The AR dome feels akin to a museum space where visuals and captions dominate. The arrangement within this circular space does not naturally guide linear engagement. The experience that the creative studio developed was

aligned to these specifications; it comprised visual material that correlated under a more general narrative, e.g., historical snapshots from the town's past.

Finally, another important remark is related to AR as an emerging technology. The AR dome is a 3d object positioned on the floor plane, a function based on the software's ability to recognise surfaces and depends on the image received by the camera. Technical consistency is influenced by how the user engages bodily with their device in the physical environment. For instance, if the user spends more time reading the text of an image and during this time changes position or orientation in how they hold their device, the placement of the 3d dome in the image of the physical space may become glitchy. Through trials, it became clear that optimal engagement durations should not exceed 5 minutes. Longer durations tend to give rise to technical hiccups. These limitations are to be expected and do not render the app technically inadequate, but they impose restrictions that need to be understood so that experiences are designed accordingly.

The platform's future evolution holds significant promise, driven by an exploratory process that focuses on enhancing the overall user experience. This process encompasses the application's design and presents opportunities for further enhancements regarding content, including animated images, the integration of 3D models as content, and the seamless addition of sound. To enhance engagement, the application can be improved to enable essential user interaction with this content. This rekindles discussions regarding gameplay and in-game events, which were initially part of the project's integrated vision but had to be deferred for future developments.

The ongoing discussion about expanding the product can benefit from insights gained in this study, particularly regarding community involvement. Involving the community can help identify the value the app can offer its users and the activities and behaviours the Council aims to promote beyond its storytelling function. With these exciting possibilities ahead, the platform's potential appears quite promising.

3.10 Getting to know the people

(Back to the community workshops) By the conclusion of the inaugural storytelling workshop series in October 2021, an evaluative process set off a cascade of decisions aiming to refine the workshop format and enhance participant outreach.

Initially, I had envisioned a workshop comprising a diverse audience. I saw value in blending the insights of Knowsley community members with those of external contributors, thinking it might lead to richer dialogues. Nevertheless, in line with the preferences of my collaborators, I transitioned towards a more localised approach, in harmony with their aim to exclusively showcase Knowsley-related content on the "Knowsley Dome" app, a Council-owned platform specifically funded for local utilisation.

In response to feedback about the workshop's length and demanding assignments, I truncated it to three sessions. Additionally, I introduced a monetary incentive, seeking the University ethics committee's approval for the same. I also recalibrated the workshop's branding, moving away from the sci-fi angle, which seemed to alienate older demographics, as gleaned from online interactions, and framed it as an opportunity to shape the future of the town creatively (See Appendix 2, Figure 11).

An early proposal involved collaborating with Huyton Library for a creative writing contest, a suggestion from LJMU's Creative Writing Programme Leader. I conveyed the idea to my collaborators in the Council, who mediated by discussing it with the library managers. The discussion helped to facilitate the workshops and it was agreed they could be hosted at the library. Additionally, leveraging prior interactions with the Communications Team, I managed to gain some promotional traction on the Council's website, supplemented by my separate advertising efforts on Instagram and Facebook. However, despite these promotional efforts, participation was low.

Unfortunately, the digital promotion followed a path similar to the initial attempt. Initially, there were 31 registrations, and I promptly sent out a comprehensive Information Page explaining the workshop's activities. However, only 11 individuals responded with their availability for specific groups and sessions. Among them, three consistently participated in the workshops and related activities. On the other hand, some scheduled participants did not show up for their sessions. Additionally, during

online workshops, there were participants who seemed more interested in collecting easy rewards without actively engaging, and they quickly became disheartened by the participatory workshop format and logged off.

The challenges encountered in recruiting participants and the significant drop-off rate from initial contact to actual attendance parallel the findings of Hillier (2013), who also pursued research involving deeper community participation. Although Hillier advocates for the potential of online social networks as a tool for engagement, my experience indicated its ineffectiveness in this context.

Yet, invaluable insights emerged from the initial attendees. One of my participants pointed me towards the Knowsley branch of their affiliated charity. On visiting them, their manager not only showed enthusiasm but also connected me with another organisation's manager sharing their space. Though these ventures did not culminate in collaborations, the reception was heartening. Another participant introduced me to the Old Schoolhouse Community Project near Huyton's heart, highlighting its potential as a haven for groups that might benefit from my workshop. I paid a visit to this hub. The welcoming manager not only showcased my poster but actively shared my workshop details on their Facebook page. Concurrently, he encouraged me to return for a direct pitch to the resident groups. This led to collaboration with a local writing group, leading to two committed participants. One of these participants further expanded the workshop's reach by sharing it with her local parish and a charity where she was volunteering, and a new participant was approached through these networks.

Interestingly, as I directly engaged with potential participants, I found that affiliation with a Council did not necessarily confer an advantage. Many individuals expressed scepticism towards projects associated with official authorities. This resistance among citizens is recognised concerning various public management models that have not fostered cooperative relationships with the community (Baptista et al., 2020), emphasising the importance of mutual dialogue and encounter (Cipolla and Manzini, 2009). Given the Council's own reluctance to actively promote community participation in the research, this situation may indicate a self-perpetuating cycle that hampers collaboration.

During a subsequent visit to the Old Schoolhouse, I learned about a session designed to help local groups apply for the National Lottery Community Fund. Participating expanded my network, enabling an interview with a local radio station, a feature in an online newspaper, and a mention in Liverpool's cultural newsletter. Despite the limited impact of digital promotions, I came to appreciate the diverse tapestry of community organisations in Knowsley. This realisation propelled me to delve into the online registry of charities in the area, resulting in outreach to numerous institutions, schools, and parishes.

This exploration led me to a Kirkby-based creative writing group with members from all over Knowsley who met in a community centre in Kirkby. The group's facilitator showed interest in the project and invited me to join one of their sessions and present it to the members in person. I attended their meeting, observing their process of reflecting and discussing. Before the end, I presented the workshop topic. Five members showed interest, including the facilitator. Attending their meeting I even introduced some adaptations, taking into account the format of their collaboration.

Finally, an addition to my collaborative efforts was made by a local youth organisation. Though initial contacts were unfruitful, a breakthrough came via a Steering group meeting on Huyton's regeneration initiatives. Subsequently, a manager from the youth organisation reached out. This culminated in two distinct workshop sessions, each tailor-made for the group's composition and limited time.

I concluded the workshops with participation from 25 individuals, yielding worksheet notes and stories about the local town centre (See Appendix 2, Table 2). At the outset of my planning for these workshops, my primary focus was on content and methodology. However, the actual execution demonstrated that the paramount challenge lay in connecting with the community and motivating them to actively participate in a locally rooted project. It underscored the significance of getting to know the locality, taking the message to the places where communities are active (Al Waer et al., 2017) and engaging with pivotal figures who, while not necessarily in prominent roles, have deep community connections and a genuine interest in championing local causes. Their motivation often stemmed from personal

relationships, highlighting the value of interpersonal ties in driving community endeavours.

3.11 Learning from practitioners

After concluding the second series of workshops in April 2022, I paused for a profound reflection on this innovative journey. I commenced the planning of these workshops in June 2021, orchestrating a balanced blend of probing questions, semi-structured discussion plans, presentations, design activities, storytelling, creative writing, and moments of introspection. At the outset, these workshops were conceived through an idealistic perspective, significantly shaped by my educational background. The objective was straightforward: to promote a dynamic, creative, and participatory approach.

The feedback from the inaugural run was instrumental. Participants appreciated the enlightening nature of the process, especially in understanding the interplay between technology and public spaces. For some, it was a chance to venture into uncharted writing territories; others saw the potential for innovative urban art themes, aligning closely with my vision. However, the participants also highlighted the demanding nature of the workshop. These first two groups had to write a biographical fiction that takes place in their familiar town/city centre after the first session, come up with alternative scenarios for technological interventions after the second and finally draft a speculative fiction about the town of the future based on the initial story and their tech interventions. Little did I know that no other group would be as active and engaged. It was both fortunate and unfortunate that my first participants could respond to this workshop so well. The feedback I received led me to streamline the assignments, narrowing the focus to the final story. This adjustment also allowed me to compress the workshop into three sessions.

The second iteration started with a pair of participants in a library setting, offering new insights. While the participants were keen to engage, their narratives frequently digressed from the main topic. They had a desire for connection and conversation on other issues of local life. The first session seemed exhausting to me. It was probably my

attempt to keep the discussion in context. But upon reviewing the session transcript, I recognised the hidden gems in their off-topic musings. While they did not answer what I was asking or even what I expected them to answer, they gave me much more critical information. It was a lesson for me in staying more present in the conversation, more flexible and less stuck on the protocol I had planned. This freed me, and in my subsequent sessions with this and following groups, I was much more open to what the practitioners had to say as unknown until then personalities who were introducing themselves to me not only through their answers but also through the questions they addressed to me and the personal stories they willingly shared through our contact. Nothing that was said proved superfluous. In fact, this more personalised approach enabled me to carefully curate the stories they produced. Some of these stories were somewhat dry in written form, in contrast to the vividness and enthusiasm with which they were orally narrated.

In the second cycle, I discovered that even having three weekly sessions seemed too much of a commitment for potential participants. This became apparent as we frequently had to reschedule meetings to accommodate their availability. Many participants were already engaged in creative groups and communities, making the workshop a lower priority since it was a short-term opportunity rather than a regular part of their creative practice. I think that if the workshop were integrated into an ongoing creative routine, it would likely attract a larger attendance, as those interested could sample it and potentially view it as both a creative and social investment.

This was precisely the nature of the creative writing team I ended up collaborating with. My workshop was included in their program, and the group participated as part of their weekly meeting. The fact that they were experienced in creative writing even allowed me to condense the workshop into two sessions, which was the time they could devote to me. My collaboration with them was another lesson concerning participation. These authors created more free texts and were not bound by my specifications. So, while our collaboration lacked the deep engagement in analysis and reflection I had in my original run, they inadvertently demonstrated that the collaborative framework and the creative outcomes depend on how practitioners wish

to participate. Without conscious negotiation, our collaboration combined what I had brought to them and what I had found there. A local creative practice could not be based on a predetermined plan but gradually be co-created by the participants.

The youth teams were the final participants. Informed by my background in education and guidance from literature on youth engagement in workshops (Al Waer et al., 2017), I decided to implement a customised workshop format tailored for this younger demographic. This revised format incorporated tasks they could relate to, discussions about topics relevant to them, and utilised more interactive tools. Rather than having each participant fill out individual activity sheets, they collaboratively contributed ideas to a shared board using post-it notes. This fostered a shared narrative experience. This method seemed particularly effective with this group who were already familiar with each other, and their common interests shone through in the shared story. By the workshop's end, they had crafted a vision for the town's future, developed story characters, and outlined a plot. However, the prospect of penning down a full story, even with financial incentives, did not appeal to them. I deduced from their behaviour that, much like the characters in their stories, they leaned towards expression forms akin to social media and role-playing. This once again highlighted that expecting a written narrative as the end product might be restrictive, underscoring the need for a localised approach that aligns with the interests of the target audience.

Overall, flexibility proved more important than adherence to a rigid protocol. Reflecting upon this entire process, I value the chasm between my starting point and the concluding lessons. Each challenge was a learning curve, fine-tuning my approach. While I may not have derived a foolproof blueprint for a participatory creative placemaking practice, the journey provided invaluable lessons on bridging the gap between design practice and public engagement.

Furthermore, my experience revealed the nuances of my role as a researcher within the process. With my background in technology, design, and pedagogy, I approached the public armed with domain-specific insights and expertise (Al Waer et al., 2017). However, I lacked a strong foundation in facilitation and a deep empirical

understanding of the area. Yet, when I interacted with participants, there was a mutual and enriching exchange. This interaction seemed to strike a balance, as both sides engaged in a significant dialogue, sharing and contributing to the process.

3.12 Making "Future Huyton"

By April 2021, the workshops had wrapped up, laying the foundation for the "Future Huyton" initiative, marking the finale of my practice in Knowsley Borough. The workshops yielded two key resources: content for the envisioned experience and analytical data. As the architect of the final experience, my intent was dual-faceted: to offer the stories as a community-centred fictional narrative and to elicit public reflections and feedback on the issues each story spotlighted.

Even before my workshops concluded, the planning wheels were in motion. My experiments with "Knowsley Dome" gave me valuable insights into the scope and limitations of the technology at hand. Given that the app was geared towards visual interaction, integrating textual stories was out of the question. However, the app was well-suited for a site-specific digital gallery where visual elements related to the stories could resonate with real-world contexts.

I was captivated by the idea of an experience that would blend storytelling with placemaking (Frith and Richter, 2021), seamlessly merging the real with the aspirational, and forging a connection between creators and town centre visitors. Such an experience would birth a participatory space that, though intangible and unseen like the AR domes, would start to take shape in people's minds as they engage with and through it. Echoing the thoughts of de Souza e Silva and Frith (2014), as people start to add and shape the narrative associated with distinct environments, they evolve into architects of these places- a potentially organic digital placemaking process.

I imagined a multi-platform journey starting in intimate settings such as people's homes and also the community hubs I had identified during my search for practitioners. Here, stories would be accessed either online or in printed formats like posters, foldable leaflets, and cards. Each narrative would conclude with an invitation,

guiding the audience to the town centre. Upon arrival, Augmented Reality would enhance their immersion. For each narrative, an AR dome would be strategically placed at the real-life location the story referenced. Within these domes, audiences would find illustrative vignettes from the stories accompanied by thought-provoking snippets. A link would then lead them to a brief survey to gather their viewpoints. This plan was also a testament to the AR platform's potential to host a long-term project that continually refreshed its content.

My next step was refining the narratives. Some authors had deviated from guidelines, creating lengthy texts, while the younger participants' inputs needed synthesis. My edits aimed for brevity and coherence without distorting the original tone. Discussions with my Council partners resulted in a September 2022 deadline for all preparations, ensuring the app's availability on mobile platforms. This deadline necessitated a tight schedule. Each narrative would require 5-8 illustrations featuring compelling visuals that juxtapose the speculative future with the current-day environment (see Appendix 3 for reference).These images needed accompanying captions and questionnaires. By summer's end, the AR domes were set up but kept unpublished. My focus then shifted to the experience's entry points. Along with uploading stories to a website(see Appendix 2, Figure 12) and designing print material (see Appendix 2, Figure 13), I introduced voiceovers for accessibility (see Appendix 2, Figure 14). A casting call for voiceover artists, prioritising Knowsley-based students, culminated in the selection of four young creatives, two of whom were locals. One author even chose to voice her narrative. All recordings were completed by mid-September. I finished the recordings and the related audio post-production work by mid-September. The material was ready.

September also marked the promotional phase for the upcoming event. Leveraging my prior promotional experiences, I sought the Council's support. Their Communications Team released an official announcement for "Future Huyton" and the official launch of Knowsley Domes. I coordinated with the Town Centre Manager about the potential of setting up a welcoming booth at the centre post-launch. This resulted in us scheduling my presence there for the initial week of October, utilising a temporary tent established for that month's events.

Subsequently, I made rounds to the actual workshop venues, including community centres and the town library, distributing printed promotional materials. Outreach efforts extended to sending emails to educational institutions in the vicinity, detailing the project and emphasising my on-site availability for tailored tours for their relevant program staff. I shared the press release with all the people I had personally met who directed me in promoting the workshop and approaching potential practitioners. I did not forget the original storytellers; they were updated about the live experience via email, and I extended an invitation to join me in October for a hands-on demonstration. I presented the project to LJMU students, and with the Council's consent, I installed two AR domes on the University campus. Additionally, I displayed posters at local art venues and the University's buildings in Liverpool. Throughout October, my consistent social media presence ensured updates about active stories in the Huyton centre and directed audiences to our website.

The above proved a very demanding process and essential in collecting observations and expressing final conclusions for my practice.

3.13 "Future Huyton" in review

A critical analysis of this work should commence by scrutinising the structure of the experience itself. The decision to present individual stories in distinct AR domes on a rotating weekly schedule may not have been the most judicious choice in retrospect. The approach generated an overwhelming workload and created a fragmented user engagement. Each of the 12 distinct story themes was subjected to unequal exposure opportunities. I had intentionally compiled this plan to create a prototype project that indicated the potential of an experience with a longer lifespan and renewed content, but the one-month timeline proved too brief to effectively present all 12 stories.

On reflection, it might have been more effective to present in each AR Dome a distinct thematic collection of illustrations, each drawing inspiration from the entire collection of stories. For instance, one theme could be young people engaged in activities at a future centre. These thematic domes would serve as entry points for the audience, guiding them through individual visual elements that act as portals into the diverse

worlds and events depicted in the authors' stories. In this way, the process is inverted: AR transforms into a mystical gateway to the future, ultimately guiding the audience to the written texts. This approach aligns more closely with the structure used in the thematic rooms of Huyton:Digital.

Another critical concern is how a digital experience with almost no indication of existence in physical space can be promoted. While the initial plans with my collaborators included a launch event, it could not take place within the preferred timescale. Instead, I took on the role of an on-site promoter and served as the physical anchor of the virtual experience. I engaged with visitors through various means, such as wearing branded T-shirts and distributing informational flyers. Additionally, I offered on-site tours. (see Appendix 2, Figure 15).

I gathered 50 completed questionnaires, a figure that indicates only the number of respondents, not the total visitor engagement (see Appendix 2, Figure 16). During my on-site promotion, I discovered some technical hitches in users' devices. For instance, survey outbound links within the app were sometimes unresponsive, frustrating users and deterring participation. Ideally, user feedback would be integrated directly into the app's AR interface. Still, even with the existing app, I consider improving the user interface necessary to be usable and functional.

In promoting the experience, the pivotal role of personal social networks was underscored yet again. Those I had met during the workshop's promotion and facilitation were keen, visiting me at the centre to try out the AR experience. An even more compelling promotional strategy was inviting the story authors. The post-workshop engagement promoted an ownership of the process and the outcomes (Al Waer et al., 2017). While not all heeded my invitation, those who did appeared to champion the project within their circles. This advocacy was evident in the questionnaire feedback; stories from engaged authors garnered up to 11 audience interactions, whereas those from unresponsive authors received a maximum of just 4 responses.

The theme of a story also had a significant influence on audience reactions. It was not coincidental that the story recounting a racist incident garnered the most significant

response, along with deeply personal audience reflections. Even though the issue directly pertained to a local minority, I surmise the author's network mobilised, leading visitors to resonate and share their personal experiences.

It was also evident that AR technology was foreign to many of the visitors, particularly among the older demographic, who made up the majority. While my presence helped bridge this gap, the technology's unfamiliarity was a barrier to entry for some (Avasant, 2022).

While the experience was fully realised and completed, it is essential to note that by some measures, it did not achieve the anticipated outcomes. It might be overly optimistic to assume that the average local resident has the Knowsley Dome app on their phone, or that Future Huyton left a significant mark on the community's collective consciousness as a transformative initiative. Nonetheless, the methodologies employed provide valuable insights for administrative stakeholders to harness the collective wisdom derived from cooperative and co-creative efforts. This continuous process was geared towards creating rich, location-specific experiences while enhancing public participation throughout the project's lifecycle. Echoing Marrades' et al. (2021) perspective on the evaluation of collaborative placemaking projects, setbacks are redefined as continuous learning opportunities, and success is perceived as an ongoing dedication to uncovering the shared values forged among different stakeholders, spatial uses, creative initiatives, and technological tools.

Upon the conclusion of the final auto-ethnographic account, the narrative will transition back to the third person and re-assume a more formal tone. Nonetheless, drawing from the insights garnered in the preceding narratives, the subsequent chapter will deliver a comprehensive analysis concentrated on the collaborative process, serving to address the first research question.

Chapter 4: The Collaborative Condition

The research and its associated practice were situated within a context of multi-stakeholder engagement, involving representatives from local government, academia, the private sector, and the community. These collaborations not only yielded fruitful outcomes but also provided invaluable insights into the complexities of cross-sector partnerships, particularly within a project tasked with balancing diverse expectations while revitalising local public spaces.

This chapter addresses the research question: "What key insights and lessons can be gleaned from stakeholder collaboration? How might these insights influence and guide future strategies in Digital Placemaking?" This question is explored in two sections, each examining different facets of the collaborative efforts. The initial section focuses on the structures and agreements established among stakeholders, influenced by the characteristics, motivations, and goals of those involved. The second section leverages challenges and setbacks encountered during the research to identify both limitations and opportunities essential for enhancing the success of any local participatory project.

The conclusions drawn from these sections are synthesised in a third segment. Furthermore, the theme of cooperation, taking into account the identified limitations, will be revisited in the subsequent Discussion chapter, providing further insights into potential strategies for Digital Placemaking.

4.1 The Symbiosis of Structure and Flexibility in Partnership Dynamics

This section focuses on the joint ventures linked to the research project and its underlying practice that, when analysed, offer insights into collaborative dynamics that can potentially aid in the development of local placemaking projects.

4.1.1 Concerted Progress in Cross-Sector Alliances

In prior chapters, the pivotal alliance between KMBC and LJMU, which spearheaded this initiative, was emphasised. Both institutions, originating from different sectors, bring their staff's diverse professional expertise to the table. Their collaboration centres on bolstering a PhD research endeavour, each contributing their distinct perspective. The researcher, originating from another professional background, has been deemed competent with his selection in generating work in line with the partnering institutions- melding the academic rigour of the University with the pragmatic digital consultancy endeavours sought by the local authority. In essence, the researcher's practice-driven insights become the cornerstone of this joint mission.

The synergy between the two entities was cemented through a sponsorship accord, providing the legal parameters, delineating the project's broader scope, annual targets, and the individuals from both sides dedicated to support the researcher. The agreement was crafted to ensure the research retained its essential flexibility, refraining from pinning down specific outcomes or methodologies.

Spanning over three years, the collaborative journey, when traced back to the sponsorship agreement, reveals particular nuances. While the accord outlines the liaison between KMBC and LJMU, it remains ambiguous about their respective engagements with the researcher, termed "the student" within the document. This "student" tag aptly captures his association with the University, aligning with a predefined setup that elucidates the mentorship he would garner from University supervisors. Yet, there is vagueness concerning the Council's role in the researcher's endeavours and the nature of its support. It is important to acknowledge that having a PhD student collaborating with a local authority is a commendable initiative that reflects KMBC's forward-thinking approach. The Council has committed to facilitating "appropriate access and realization for research, prototyping, and testing," but the document maintains a general, more open approach, with less emphasis on structure regarding distinct roles, resources, duties, or collaborative methods.

Nevertheless, collaboration can become intricate when it is underpinned by a broad and ambiguous contract, especially if one of the parties is a public organisation operating under the UK's New Public Management model. As McMullin (2021) notes,

in this model, co-production is not clearly defined or formalised, nor is it consistently structured for public participation. Instead, the terms must be defined case-by-case and anchored in contracts.

The autoethnographic narratives shed light on a notable transition. The project's infancy was marked by mutual enthusiasm, mirrored in proactive discussions, presentations, and report exchanges – a golden period perceived as full of potential. Yet, as the journey progressed, the cooperative foundation weakened. The research diary entries reveal a divergence between the academic pursuit of practice-related research and the project workflow of the public body. The academic endeavour places a primary emphasis on the development of a theoretical framework that informs and is shaped by practical application. This approach seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the body of knowledge through comprehensive data collection and analysis, which includes more extensive testing, findings exploration, comparisons, and the iterative refinement of actions. In contrast, the Council's workflow is rooted in pragmatic principles, with a focus on project planning, execution, and the timely delivery of the final digital intervention for the town centre.

Consequently, achieving an alignment of these objectives presents a considerable challenge. The narrative concludes with the acknowledgment that each partner's goals can be attained through distinct, parallel paths, which were previously discussed as parallel narratives in the preceding chapter, possibly causing temporal confusion for the reader. Undoubtedly, the unforeseen constraints imposed by COVID-19 have contributed to the divergence of these trajectories and heightened the time constraints. Ultimately, this experience imparts a valuable lesson regarding the significance of flexibility in institutional synergy for the purpose of recalibrating their collaborative efforts, ensuring that short-term actions remain in sync with their overarching ambitions.

Fundamentally, the research project operated within a hybrid setting and was tasked with harmonising often diverging objectives, values, duties, and identities associated with different institutional logics, as highlighted by Caperchione et al. (2017). This challenge is recognised in cross-sector R&D programs (Garrett-Jones et al., 2005),

where the variance in expectations and priorities between industry and the academic research community often hinders the seamless fusion of distinct cultural mindsets from organisations driven by different motivations, making it a challenge to align towards a shared vision.

Certainly, this dynamic also underscores valuable lessons for the institutions themselves. It emphasises the necessity for versatile yet premeditated contracts and the advantages they can gain from the osmosis of their respective objectives.

The alliance with the creative company is enlightening from a different point of view. As the project unfolded, the Council initiated a structured collaboration with an external firm to devise the "Knowsley Dome" Augmented Reality application. This venture was inaugurated via a procurement process. The Council disseminated a public directive, articulating the project's objectives and the necessary technical specifications. Creative agencies responded by showcasing their proposed methodologies, focusing on the tech solutions they envisioned and their prowess in involving the community. This exercise culminated in the endorsement of a superior bid, which was subsequently cemented in a formal contract. In this setup, the creative firm charted the collaboration's course and moulded the app's design blueprint. Consequently, after a promising foundational workshop where key insights were shared, the creative organisation took over the leadership and the public body's primary role pivoted towards troubleshooting. Such a mode of operation mirrors conventional norms, where the contracted company principally navigates the design path based on their initial proposal. This dynamic exemplifies the typical interface between public institutions and third-party firms, capturing the essence of an outsourcing model driven by realising deliverables consistent with prior agreements.

The close collaboration of this partnership was relatively brief, spanning approximately five months. The creative company delineated the end-product and strategized on extracting requisite data from Council departments. Essentially, it executed a near-precise blueprint, showcasing its prowess in translating plans into tangible deliverables. However, such a structured workflow does not accommodate the

exploration of alternative design avenues. While the final output adheres to the procurement's stipulations and can thus be deemed a success, it does not necessarily fulfil broader anticipations. This is attributed to the fact that a digitally crafted asset, though adeptly constructed, might not always hit the mark in terms of efficacy. Time and budgetary constraints notwithstanding, a more fundamental challenge loomed.

In the realm of innovation, predetermining the exact specifications of a groundbreaking product might be a tall order. Genuine insights typically surface when prototypes undergo real-world testing. Only then can a product's value be truly assessed, identifying possible improvements beyond technical tweaks. This indicates a requirement for collaboration centred on iterative exploration, adjustments based on feedback, and continuous recalibration.

On buyer-seller relationships, Araujo et al., in (1999), highlighted the potential of interactive interfaces built on deep collaboration and continuous engagement. While such interfaces can be resource-intensive, they often yield innovation and productivity rewards surpassing traditional contract-based models. However, as Håkansson and Axelsson (2020) note, such dynamic interfaces, favouring agility and adaptability, clash with standard public procurement practices, which usually do not involve continuous dialogue and frequent adjustments. Adopting such an approach would need a more flexible legal framework. Some recent provisions, like the Innovation-Related procurement (European Commission, 2018), do cater to this paradigm, but businesses must still meet stringent criteria to legally implement them.

4.1.2 Research companionship: from classroom to community

In a different collaborative setting, the researcher partnered with LJMU MA students for a prototype initiative. Here, the researcher adopted the mantle of a co-tutor within a University module, emulating the role of a creative director on behalf of the Council. Students stepped into the shoes of an external creative cadre, undertaking design assignments under the researcher's stewardship. The collaboration's only formal tether was a contract, enlisting the researcher's expertise for approximately 50 hours throughout the Spring term. The module's syllabus underpinned the collaborative dynamics. With the "Collaborative module" unfolding weekly, both tutors and

students' sustained engagement was imperative. Each had tasks to showcase, reviewed at intervals to ensure alignment with the dual aspirations of catering to the 'client' and achieving academic milestones. Within this milieu, participants navigated two parallel tracks: the pedagogic and the hypothetical professional. This twofold structure underpinned methodical mentoring, dialogues, implementations, evaluations, and iterative tweaks. The culmination mirrored the diverse directional inputs and the collective creative resonance of the journey.

In this academic module, the collaborative framework holds a pivotal role, intertwined with the ethos of the educational establishment. Regular meetings are held among involved parties, where the plan for cooperation and involvement is clearly outlined, including defined roles and responsibilities. Such clarity furnishes reassurances to all stakeholders, influencing the efficacy of the resultant product. The University module's collaborative scaffold ensures students can bank on requisite supports, such as routine interactions, discourses, report submissions, and a terminal evaluation. While this structure does not serve as an infallible assurance of course success, it lays the groundwork conducive to its fruition. In this context, efficacy relates to the outcome's alignment with stakeholders' objectives, exemplifying the assimilation of newfound expertise and competencies. Undoubtedly, given the emphasis on the journey over the destination, there's no ironclad assurance that outcomes will mimic commercial product standards. Nonetheless, a distinct edge is the environment that fosters exploration of varied avenues, constructive negotiations, and synergetic engagements.

Collaborating with the community unveiled another unique approach. The researcher approached local residents, encouraging them to become part of his study and actively engage in a storytelling project. The comprehensive Information Page, in compliance with University guidelines, granted potential participants a clear glimpse into what would be expected of them: deliberations, workflows, and assignments. The onus also fell on the researcher to elucidate the planned activities and provide any additional context as needed. While the act of signing the consent form did not saddle participants with responsibilities, it ensured their rights were protected. Their

feedback was pivotal, allowing the researcher to adapt the collaboration method to ensure it remained appealing for future collaborators.

Engaging community members in a creative role underscores a collaborative ethos rooted in participation. Here, the journey itself becomes a prototype, subject to testing, enhancement, and augmentation with input from participants. In this scenario, the creative fruits of collaboration are not just artifacts to be admired, but reflections of the participants themselves. Their contributions, both in process and product, are evaluated as extensions of their identities. The end product not only stands as a testament to the collective creativity but also as validation of the method employed— a distinct research asset in its own right. Notably, among all collaborations discussed, it was the community-centric partnership that stood out in its ability to foster reflections on the balance between structure and flexibility, allowing for periodic recalibrations and novel directions. This emphasises its iterative nature, underscoring the importance of successive refinements in shaping a truly collaborative paradigm. By adopting an iterative approach and introspecting after each phase, akin to the principles of action research, the researcher was equipped to mould the process to cater to evolving requirements.

The workshops were strongly influenced by a participatory research framework where attendees also act as co-researchers. This not only empowers those involved but enhances the credibility of the study's findings, methods, and analyses (Peralta, 2017). However, it is important to note that this was not a fully realised participatory research endeavour. Still, the engagement of the community marks a shift from focusing on 'throughput legitimacy' to prioritising 'input legitimacy.' The latter places value on active citizen involvement in shaping public solutions, a notion supported by Torfing et al. (2016).

4.1.3 Conclusion: Reshaping Collaborations

The unfolding collaborations involving a local authority, an academic institution, a creative company, and the community represent a compelling case study, shedding light on the complexities and opportunities inherent in cross-sector ventures. This initiative exemplifies the intricate dynamics of establishing effective partnerships, each

brimming with its unique aspirations, responsibilities, and imperatives. While collaboration frameworks may vary, certain common themes consistently emerge: the importance of striking a balance between structure and flexibility, the necessity of shared goals and mutual benefits, and the critical role of adaptability in navigating evolving needs and unforeseen challenges.

In an ever-changing world, characterised by technological advancements and unexpected disruptions like the recent pandemic, the ability to swiftly adjust, adapt, and harmonise visions becomes paramount.

A closer examination of these collaboration frameworks reveals significant opportunities and insights. The local public body carries extensive responsibilities and operates with a results-oriented approach, largely influenced by the New Public Management model (Baptista et al., 2020). While the paradigm may not inherently favour co-creation and interactive collaborations, there is a crucial need for transformation from being mere sponsors or administrators to becoming proactive collaborators (Cohen et al., 2016), particularly in the context of Placemaking (Marrades et al., 2021).

In this context, forging a partnership with a University is a particularly apt approach. Universities, with their deep understanding of collaborative dynamics, provide an opportunity not only to ground emerging technologies but also to reshape the collaboration methodologies of public institutions, ushering in groundbreaking systemic changes, as articulated by Alves (2013). These changes introduce new and improved methods for various sectors of the public domain to operate and engage with their stakeholders. The ambition extends beyond supporting a research endeavour; it aims to nurture strong collaborative bonds where innovative, region-centric initiatives can flourish.

The United Kingdom has been a stage for such transformative partnerships, with models like the triple and quadruple helix (Arnkil et al., 2010) emphasising extensive alliances and substantial funding. However, it is worth noting the significance of smaller initiatives, such as the Public Collaboration Lab highlighted by Thorpe and Rhodes (2018). In this case, a collaboration between an art and design University and a

London Borough Council team paved the way for jointly crafting design-led techniques to engage the community, aligning with local concerns. The standout feature of this venture was its commitment to prioritising participatory design from the outset, especially when addressing complex issues like dense housing cases, bearing clear parallels to Placemaking in Huyton.

However, even with the guidance of the University, the experience in community collaboration within Knowsley highlighted the potential limitations of an overly standardised approach. The introduced framework required adaptability to resonate with participants' abilities and aspirations. Striking the right balance became imperative: ensuring adaptability while retaining a fundamental structure, reshaped based on collective consensus. This iterative negotiation ensures that the core needs of participants are met, a crucial element given the inherent disparities in any partnership. It also underscores the importance of tailoring collaborations to align with stakeholders' diverse objectives and desires, which, in turn, mirror their motivations for engaging in such partnerships.

4.2 Adversity as a catalyst to identify barriers, assets and opportunities

Setbacks and challenges played a pivotal role in shaping the project, which appears to be an acknowledged trend in placemaking literature (Loewenstein, 2021; Marrades et al., 2021). Embracing failure as a part of the experimental process is crucial for innovation and effective implementation. This should be accommodated without causing significant harm to the system, particularly in the context of the public sector, where the scope for experimentation is limited (Thorpe and Rhodes, 2018).

In the case of the research project, the period coinciding with the pandemic and its aftermath created conditions of disruption and a continuous need for adaptation. This experience taught resilience but, more importantly, revealed crucial insights. The study started as a practice-based endeavour, aiming to utilise immersive and creative technologies to enhance the local high street, enriching its ambiance and potentially increasing visitor numbers. However, as it progressed, the approach shifted towards

practice-led research, where the emphasis was not solely on tangible outcomes but also on developing new insights within the practice (Candy, 2006; Sullivan, 2009;Skains, 2018). Even though these research approaches seem closely aligned, they highlight different priorities in terms of results and methodology. This evolution from one approach to another emerged due to multiple challenges encountered.

From the outset of this study, integrating the community into digital placemaking emerged as a prominent interest for the researcher. An initial exploration of cutting-edge digital interventions in public spaces, alongside demographic insights from the area, underscored the importance of a community-focused approach. Consequently, the researcher suggested a narrative-driven methodology to actively engage local residents. However, this was just one facet of the broader practice. Concurrently, alternative tech-driven experiences were planned for trial within the town's public spaces. These endeavours were envisioned as a series of prototypes, experimenting with varied tech solutions and narrative methods, operating within a Living Lab framework. This means actively engaging a segment of the community in these digital placemaking trials. The anticipated results would generate valuable data, contributing insights for a subsequent Streetscape Project, which held a prominent position on the Council's agenda and priorities due to its distinct funding. Yet, this comprehensive plan was thwarted by the pandemic. While the practice-based research plan was undeniably ambitious, its feasibility, even in the absence of pandemic-related constraints, remains uncertain for reasons elaborated upon below.

The following phase saw the cancellation of the previously outlined trajectory due to social distancing measures. Instead, it shifted towards the creation and testing of an online prototype, co-designed with LJMU MA students. Initial design input was provided by Council associates, who later participated in the final presentation. Once developed, the Huyton community would be invited to populate the platform with their content. The adoption of online community outreach emerged as the proposed strategy to cultivate engagement and participation. This juncture was pivotal, marking the project's first genuine connection with the local community. However, the researcher identified challenges within the local authority's capacity to back community outreach activities and public space experiments at that timeframe.

Additionally, independent promotional efforts demonstrated that connecting with the local populace was neither straightforward nor intuitive, indicating a joint learning opportunity. While this stage suggested setbacks, it also marked a crucial learning curve and a defining 'eureka' moment for the project.

This phase underscored a notable omission: from its inception, the project lacked a well-defined plan for community engagement, as well as an appreciation for its vital importance in the context of placemaking. The approach to Digital Placemaking was largely technical, echoing a laboratory experiment reliant on quantitative metrics and broad urban renewal plans. This perspective highlights the systemic transformation that Torfing et al. (2016) discuss regarding public sector changes: the need to "foster collaboration and innovation at the 'front office,' where interactions with citizens occur," thereby enabling "crowdsourced input from community members and facilitate online discussions between engaged citizens and public leaders." Such interactive engagement is central to both placemaking and its underlying ethos of community involvement.

Naturally, the pandemic significantly contributed to these challenges faced. One of the Council's primary collaborators had to withdraw from the project to lead the pandemic response. Council communications were primarily focused on disseminating essential information to citizens, introducing a steep learning curve for all involved. Simultaneously, this new situation underscored the importance of connecting with citizens through digital channels, as traditional in-person interactions became impractical.

Regarding the project itself, it highlighted vague objectives, conflicting priorities, and uncertain limitations, which became evident during conflicts of interest among various stakeholders. These issues were consistently present in the researcher's autoethnographic narratives, reflecting a continuous struggle to adapt to evolving circumstances and developments, lacking the ability to foresee long-term outcomes and make strategic decisions. This manifested as challenges in strategic planning, transparent communication, and establishing a common understanding among all parties involved.

Navigating the complexities of community outreach illuminated a knowledge gap and an avenue for further research, which refocused the project around engaging the community through a story-based design process. The researcher's attempts to involve local residents as both study subjects and creative contributors were not without challenges either. The outreach to potential workshop participants proved difficult and required an ongoing, iterative process of planning, execution, evaluation, and course-correction.

Gradually immersing in the local community, the researcher discovered that it was far from a homogeneous entity readily invested in collective concerns. The initial digital invitations for creative involvement linked to the Borough of Culture's events proved ineffective, encountering a surprising initial reluctance to participate in co-creation. (Dutu & Diaconu, 2017). However, the community did possess dynamic subgroups that were strongholds of local solidarity, largely shaped by the area's socio-economic challenges. These pockets of community activity became significant allies.

Engaging face-to-face, building trust, and allowing these groups to participate on their own terms proved more effective than broad outreach strategies. These interactions significantly propelled the research forward, even among those who did not become active practitioners in the project. Most of those who did participate were members of these local clusters, bringing their unique community perspectives to the workshop and fictional scenarios. Beyond contributing data and creative content, they became champions of the study within their own social circles. They also leveraged their social networks to generate an audience for the culminating "Future Huyton" experience.

The involvement of the community shed light on diverse views regarding the town centre, collective initiatives, and technological enhancements to public spaces. These insights will be further explored in forthcoming chapters. What stands out and merits emphasis is the significance of their input, despite not being experts in the field. Unlike other collaborators in this project, community members lacked specialised technical know-how relevant to digital placemaking. Yet, their dedication during the workshop sessions led to the generation of insightful and valuable suggestions. They showcased their deep understanding of their town and aptly engaged in tech and design

dialogues. In the realm of digital placemaking, they can take on roles such as co-designers, content developers, testers, and ultimately, validators. Their stakeholder status has the potential to be elevated in this framework. Importantly, even without technical expertise, they demonstrated that with the right guidance, local residents can make informed technical judgments, negating the need to always defer to external specialists.

Tapping into this invaluable community resource necessitates strategic planning from the local authority. Collaborating with the Council teams highlighted that they too were making strides and realising objectives, largely due to the personal ties and relationships they had fostered within the community. This was evident in the efforts of the Culture Group, which connected with community factions, and Town Centre Management, which liaised with local businesses. Consequently, the significance of local ecosystems is both acknowledged and harnessed in existing operational frameworks. Yet, the challenge persists: how to amplify these connections and utilise them as a versatile asset in innovative cross-functional initiatives like digital placemaking.

The community's craving for inclusion and social engagement, coupled with local organisations' interest in advancing their community-building goals, emerged as clear opportunities for establishing deeper roots within the community. While this research had a finite timeline, these local networks can be engaged within a long-term, mutually beneficial partnership aimed at achieving specific strategic objectives. This potential became apparent even during the "Future Huyton" presentation, which was held in the same venue that the Council had allocated for local groups and organisations for their community outreach efforts. Sharing the space with these groups fostered an unexpected and organic networking setting, paving the way for dialogues about the project's objectives and prospective paths.

At its core, while the project embodies the primary principles of effective Placemaking, especially seen through its cross-sector collaborations and partnerships (Hughes, 2021) that added distinct value, the full potential of these collaborations was hindered by an absence of a commonly shared foundational strategy. In this context, the iterative

approach of action research—with its cyclical nature of planning, action, and reflection—appears more as a researcher-suggested interpretive framework than a collective agreement among participants. It is crucial to note that, given the project did not start with this principle in mind, this is not a point of critique. However, the journey underscores the significance of such an integrated approach, paving the way for future collaborations grounded in a cohesive foundation. This would encompass integrative leadership, rallying and engaging pertinent stakeholders, fostering mutual trust, and establishing common points of reference. It would also involve balancing power dynamics, navigating the uncertainties of innovation, and instituting systems of accountability to monitor the entire spectrum of collaborative efforts, from inputs to outcomes (Crosby & Bryson, 2010; Page, 2010; Torfing et al. 2016).

The pandemic, often seen as a disruptor, coupled with coordination challenges, served as a catalyst that shifted the project's emphasis away from solely technologically driven outcomes that would have been disconnected from local needs. Instead, it refocused on what is truly pertinent and required at the local level for digital interventions to be not just innovative but also meaningful. This reorientation was something that the practice-led research was able to achieve successfully, making it a triumph that was essentially built on a foundation of challenges.

4.3 Conclusions: Addressing the research question

The examination of diverse collaborative frameworks provides a nuanced view into the complexities, opportunities, and limitations associated with cross-sector partnerships. Each collaboration model—from the local authority to the university, from the creative company to community members—reveals unique dynamics that can either facilitate or hinder effective collaboration and innovation. Here is a summary of key takeaways from each:

• Local Authority (KMBC) and University (LJMU): The relationship between the two entities was contractually formalised, yet it remained practically ambiguous during the project concerning delineated roles and precise expectations. This ambiguity underscores the constraints inherent in broad contractual agreements and the

challenges stemming from divergent sectoral logics. Nevertheless, engaging with academia presents avenues for accessing modern cooperation and coordination methodologies, alongside opportunities for conducting cost-effective experimentation in technologically risky and innovative domains. Furthermore, collaborating with a University to experiment and co-create an interactive collaboration interface model holds significant potential for enhancing the effectiveness of a public organisation.

• Collaboration with Creative Company: This partnership operated within a translation interface procurement model, characterized by its efficiency in delivering tangible outcomes but constrained in its capacity for iterative, feedback-driven innovation. The nature of engagement is transactional rather than truly collaborative. Despite these limitations, the private sector retains its pivotal role as a collaborator adept at translating validated concepts into tangible products. The strategic advantage of possessing a prototype prior to procurement procedures is underscored, particularly in scenarios where implementing an interactive interface model proves economically unfeasible.

• Collaboration with LJMU MA Students: The structured academic setting offers clear roles and expectations, fostering a supportive environment for exploration and learning. However, the focus remains more pedagogical than professional, limiting the commercial applicability of the outcomes. Nonetheless, this collaboration has the potential to generate prototypes both in terms of process and outcomes.

• Collaboration with Community Members: This model affords the highest degree of flexibility and iterative potential, albeit necessitating ongoing negotiation and recalibration. It embodies a participatory research approach that underscores the importance of both "input legitimacy" and "throughput legitimacy." While it imposes considerable responsibility on the organiser, it also offers substantial benefits, particularly in the realm of Placemaking, which inherently relies on social dynamics and community acceptance for success.

The analysis insights underscore the need for a more dynamic, adaptable collaborative framework that can balance formalised structure with room for iterative, feedback-driven development. Essentially, an ideal framework should:

- Clarify Roles and Responsibilities: A lack of specificity can hinder effective collaboration. Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities can set the stage for a more productive partnership.

- Prioritise Genuine Collaboration Over Transactional Relationships: Beyond mere contractual engagements, collaborations should aim for a deeper, interactive interface that allows room for ongoing dialogue and adjustments. Specifically, there is a need for cultivating interactive partnerships that avoid fragmenting projects into disjointed tasks managed by disengaged groups. Instead, collaboration should demonstrate nuances of mutual transformation, an osmosis among the different engaged stakeholders.

- Balance Structure with Flexibility: While a basic structure is necessary for any project, it should be adaptive enough to accommodate unforeseen changes and challenges, including those emerging from external factors like COVID-19.

- Foster Participatory Design and Research: Engaging local stakeholders, including community members, not just as passive participants but as co-creators can enhance both the legitimacy and relevance of the project.

- Accommodate Multiple Logics and Objectives: An ideal collaboration framework should be versatile enough to address openly the different motivations, expectations, and limitations inherent in any multi-stakeholder partnership.

Furthermore, the project's trajectory as practice-led research was shaped by challenges and transformations encountered while dealing with multiple actors, shifting priorities and unanticipated external factors like the pandemic. These experiences culminated in key insights, outlined below:

- Utilising Action Research as a Collaborative Framework: Embracing action research's reflective and adaptable essence proved pivotal in addressing the complex dynamics involving various stakeholders within the research project. Incorporating this approach as a formal framework from the start for future placemaking projects could greatly enhance the establishment of collaborative structures, easing the alignment and coordination of diverse stakeholder workflows.

- The Power of Cross-Sector Collaborations: The initiative, with its multi-faceted collaborations, exemplifies the richness that cross-sector partnerships can bring to placemaking projects. Such collaborations, however, must be rooted in an integrative strategy and shared understanding to harness their full potential.

- Community-Centric Approach: A standout lesson was the paramount importance of community engagement from the start. Plans conceived without thorough community consultation lead to missteps and misaligned goals. Active community participation not only offers pertinent insights but also cultivates trust, encourages a sense of ownership, and ensures the developed solutions resonate with the end-users. The non-technical but contextually rich contributions from locals accentuated that sometimes, a profound understanding of a place can surpass technical knowledge, prompting a shift in traditional approaches towards more inclusive co-design processes. These processes can significantly impact the expansion of local digital capabilities.

- Pandemic Challenges: The COVID-19 pandemic posed unforeseen challenges, adding a layer of complexity to the initiative. However, it also magnified the significance of digital channels that operate as front desk interface for community engagement.

- Collaboration Dynamics: The dynamics between different stakeholders—whether they be Council officials, community groups, academics or the researcher—was a central theme throughout the project. The experience emphasised the importance of establishing a foundational strategy, clear communication, mutual trust, equitable power dynamics, and transparent accountability systems.

- Embracing Setbacks, Changes and Failures: Often, research and initiatives of this magnitude come with an array of challenges. Rather than viewing these as roadblocks, the project evolved pragmatically, treating these setbacks as learning opportunities. The change in focus, from being purely technology-driven to seeking genuine community engagement and ensuring local relevance, is a testament to the project's flexibility and adaptability. The project's shift from a tech-centric mindset to prioritising genuine local engagement speaks volumes of its resilience and adaptiveness. This narrative, painting success on a canvas of setbacks, underlines the

cyclical nature of innovative processes. Embracing failures can lead to deeper insights and a final product that resonates on multiple levels.

In essence, the project illuminated the profound insights that arise from diverse collaborations while highlighting the need for methodologies that marry structure with flexibility. Setting the tone for future Digital Placemaking ventures and more, it offers a holistic view on topics such as community engagement, joint research, and nimble planning. It advocates for genuine community ties and iterative research, underscoring a placemaking vision where technology meets the distinct needs and aspirations of both the community and governance.

Following the examination of the initial research question and the formulation of conclusions pertaining to the collaboration, the narrative will subsequently pivot its focus toward the central aspect of the research practice—engaging with the local population in the creation of the "Future Huyton" experience and the knowledge generated in response to the remaining research queries.

Chapter 5: Future Huyton

This chapter will explore the evolution of the Future Huyton experience, a creative project that encapsulates the future narratives crafted by local practitioners during workshops. The project actively invites both visitors and residents to explore the town centre and engage with virtual glimpses of the envisioned future set against the backdrop of ongoing local regeneration efforts. Furthermore, it encourages individuals to actively contribute their own ideas and unique perspectives to the initiative.

Subsequently, the account unfolds how this creative initiative was conceived, executed, and brought to fruition, tracing its journey from theoretical underpinnings to practical realisation and public presentation.

5.1 Locative Narratives: Bridging the Gap between Storytelling and Place

This section will explore the intricate relationship between storytelling, place, and the media employed to convey these narratives. These three components harmoniously interact, giving rise to significant opportunities and dynamics that contribute to the concept of placemaking.

Storytelling, an enduring human practice deeply embedded in our historical and evolutionary fabric, plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of human communication. Its influence as a tool for disseminating information and shaping behaviours is profound. From a neuroscientific perspective, stories are shown to be central in processing, retaining, transmitting, and recalling information, emphasising their cognitive significance (Glaser, Garsoffky and Schwan, 2009). Stories possess a unique ability to engage our attention, stimulate critical thinking, and boost memory retention. Whether found in ancient indigenous traditions or contemporary settings, stories act as vital conduits that bridge personal experiences with collective societal understanding. Drawing upon a wide array of fields, including psychology, behavioural economics, and practical applications in policy, health, and science communication, the work of Walsh et al. (2022) underscores the multifaceted potential of storytelling.

They highlight storytelling's potential to facilitate learning, persuasion, and collective action, advocating for policymakers to leverage its power to enhance existing policies and explore innovative approaches.

As extensively discussed in the literature review, defining "place" proves to be a multifaceted endeavour, involving the distinction between "space," a more abstract and geographical concept, and "place," which embodies notions of meaning, attachment, and personal experiences. Transforming a mere space into a meaningful place requires a personal touch, evoking emotions, memories, and, to a significant extent, stories and myths fulfil this role (Wortham-Galvin, 2008; Lew, 2017). In the interplay of stories and place, the meaning of a story evolves in accordance with its setting, and conversely, a place derives its significance from the tales woven around it. However, the challenge remains: how do these stories endure and remain accessible beyond the ephemeral recounting of everyday occurrences that often fade into oblivion, replaced by new narratives? Oral tradition can preserve some, but not all.

Physical spaces have long been intertwined with stories, evident through street names, plaques, statues, murals, and museum exhibits across diverse cultures. These serve as formidable tools for propagating grand narratives (Farman, 2015). Nevertheless, many of these physical mediums, such as statues and plaques, while durable, come with inherent limitations. They can be expensive, subject to property laws and zoning restrictions, and offer finite space. Moreover, they tend to highlight the narratives of those in positions of authority, often glossing over alternative perspectives. Echoing the wisdom of Marshall McLuhan, the medium significantly shapes the message and its propagation. Regrettably, not everyone enjoys equal access to these mediums. Essentially, these historical markers shape a place's narrative, reinforcing the stories sanctioned by those in power.

The advent of digital technologies and the Internet heralds a democratisation of narration, information dissemination, and authorship. Simultaneously, mobile technology and electronic positioning systems like GPS have enabled the connection of stories and messages to precise geographical locations, facilitating their sharing on the Internet. Initially, this led to a surge of what could be termed as "digital graffiti" (Ryan

et al., 2016, p. 127). However, it has also paved the way for more systematic and curated connections between stories and places through location-based storytelling experiences. These locative narratives, deeply rooted in specific real-world locations, offer immersive storytelling potential. Within them lies the opportunity for both commercial ventures, especially within the realms of tourism and entertainment, and the amplification of local voices and underrepresented demographics, allowing them to share their diverse and distinctive stories, thereby showcasing their unique experiences and shared humanity.

A notable example of a locative narrative project is [murmur], originating in Toronto. This initiative collects stories from ordinary people about specific places and makes them accessible through mobile technology, both on-site and online. Utilising a paper map, [murmur] users can navigate Toronto and pinpoint locations associated with these stories. Upon reaching a designated spot, a sign prompts them to dial a number and listen to the narrative, creating an experience that combines city-wide exploration with a treasure hunt. These narratives breathe life into seemingly ordinary places, transforming them into something extraordinary and fostering a sense of belonging. Notably, the stories may vary in style. In the context of Grange Park in Toronto, Marie-Laure Ryan et al. (2016) contrasts two stories. The first, from a recent immigrant, portrays empathy and altruism without embellishments as she encounters an injured elderly woman, emphasising societal outsiders. The second story, by Todd Harrison of Spacing Magazine, explores the magazine's inception and its connection to Grange Park. His narrative is self-referential, evaluative, and employs on-site storytelling techniques. Despite featuring different characters, these stories ultimately converge in portraying the region's identity and its diverse demographic identities.

Location-based storytelling represents, however, just one instance of the broader potential within technology-mediated storytelling to establish meaningful connections with specific places in public spaces. This not only creates opportunities for polyvocality but also invites audience participation in shaping the narrative and potentially influencing the very process of placemaking. These experiences will be presented in more detail below.

5.2 Transmedia Storytelling

Transmedia storytelling is a narrative approach that spans multiple platforms, with each platform contributing distinct elements to craft a cohesive entertainment experience. This concept, popularised by Henry Jenkins in his (2006) work "Convergence Culture," underscores various crucial aspects. It underscores the importance of providing multiple entry points for diverse audiences, the creation of intricate and immersive fictional worlds, the development of layered narratives tailored for various audience segments, and the emergence of collective intelligence as fans collaborate to analyse and piece together the story. In the context of convergence culture, where content seamlessly moves between platforms and different media industries form new partnerships, Jenkins uses case studies like "The Matrix" to illustrate how transmedia storytelling offers more engaging and immersive narratives compared to traditional single-medium methods, ultimately recognising it as a powerful new art form. In this evolving landscape, traditional boundaries between media forms become fluid, and audiences gain greater control over how, when, and where they consume content. Jenkins sees this as a dynamic interplay between top-down corporate influences and bottom-up consumer interactions, although the expected influence of audiences over media corporations fell short of expectations. Consequently, a few tech giants, such as social media corporations, now wield significant control over the media landscape.

Donna Hancox, in her (2021) book, redefines Transmedia Storytelling in a contemporary context, taking into account modern needs and the backdrop of global crises. Her proposal suggests that "transmedia storytelling" should serve as a comprehensive term encompassing all storytelling forms emerging from technological advancements, similar to the term "transdisciplinary." This shift signifies a departure from media-specific commercial concepts towards adaptable, hybrid formats suitable for diverse projects with broader potential. While acknowledging the commercial origins of transmedia storytelling, where audience involvement often equates to revenue, Hancox underscores its inherent possibilities for fostering participation, representation, and meaningful dialogue, aligning with the research's goals regarding community involvement in local placemaking. She advocates a perspective that

positions audiences as active participants engaged in a dialogue with creators, promoting an innovative narrative approach that melds design thinking, user experience, and collaboration while also decentring authorship. This multifaceted approach holds particular promise for social change initiatives, particularly those rooted in personal or community stories.

Furthermore, Hancox (2021) also underscores the importance of space in three distinct categories of Transmedia storytelling: pervasive, ambient, and situated narratives. These form a spectrum from which the Future Huyton experience is derived.

Pervasive storytelling challenges the boundaries between fiction and reality, creating a dynamic where the story feels omnipresent. These stories may employ multiple platforms, including real-world interactions, and can occur at any time, making the audience feel the story is unfolding all around them. It is about immersion and often requires audience participation. A prime example is Alternate Reality Games (ARGs), which weave fictional tales into real locations, diverging from location-centric narratives that resonate more emotionally. ARGs meld the game world with reality, constantly engaging players in their day-to-day lives through diverse mediums like websites, real-world clues, phone calls, and more (Ryan et al., 2016). These intersections, where reality and fiction intertwine, function as "rabbit holes" (ibid, p.135), captivating users and driving them to advance the narrative. This synthesis between real-world spaces and narration is engaging but does not necessarily foster a deep connection to these places.

Ambient storytelling is a subtle form of transmedia narrative that integrates seamlessly into our daily experiences, providing an ongoing narrative presence without demanding continuous attention. Instead of direct engagement, it uses elements like soundscapes to set a mood or tone. This storytelling approach refers to narratives built through subtle, accumulative details that over time create a sophisticated understanding or experience for the user. Ambient storytelling is deeply intertwined with mobile technologies, enriching our spatial and temporal awareness. A prime example is Speakman's "It Must Have Been Dark By Then," an interactive audio walk paired with a physical book. Participants, through a mobile app, experience overlaid

sounds and stories from places impacted by climate change as they navigate their city. By leveraging sound's immersive quality, the project fosters a deep connection between participants and their environment, emphasising global interconnectedness and encouraging a heightened sense of embodiment within one's surroundings (DCRC, 2017).

Situated storytelling immerses its audience into distinct locations or contexts, leveraging mobile technology and digital media to bridge narratives and real-word environments. Beyond merely using settings as geographical backdrops, it focuses on the socio-cultural and historical intricacies of a place, giving voice to the insider's viewpoint. This approach merges the realms of documentary filmmaking and digital storytelling. While the past saw expert outsiders often at the helm of documentaries, situated transmedia storytelling centres around local voices (Hancox, 2021). Taking cues from early 2000s digital storytelling initiatives like "Capture Wales," sponsored by BBC Wales (BBC, n.d.), this style encourages user-driven engagement, turning personal non-fiction stories into shared experiences. When rooted in community projects, such stories not only link the narrative to the location but also foster connections between storytellers and the public, turning individual tales into communal narratives.

An exemplary instance of situated storytelling is "Hollow," an interactive documentary created by Elaine McMillion in 2013, which explores the lives and narratives of McDowell County, West Virginia (Tames, 2014). Moving beyond the traditional documentary format, McMillion employs a participatory approach, combining multimedia elements like personal digital narratives, photos, sound, and interactive data to paint a comprehensive picture of the region's challenges, stereotypes, and potential. With about 30 resident-crafted stories, "Hollow" offers an authentic glimpse into McDowell County, emphasising the significance of place and community. It stands out by not only giving the community control over their narrative but also by presenting future-oriented, community-sourced solutions, reflecting the wider struggles of regional towns globally.

The strength of transmedia storytelling lies in its capacity to highlight connections between people, places, and actions. This can catalyse local change by emphasising

participant impact and narratives rooted in specific places. These stories range from fiction to reality, personal anecdotes to shared stories, and from lived experience to future ambitions.

Practice-based research in the creative field of Transmedia Storytelling offers a unique opportunity for concurrent advancement in theoretical discourse, the exploration of emerging artistic genres, and innovation within creative industries. A prime illustration is the "Ambient Literature" project, a two-year collaborative research endeavour involving UWE Bristol, Bath Spa University, and the University of Birmingham, supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Ambient Literature, n.d.). Launched in 2016, this initiative grappled with fundamental questions concerning the evolution of digital literary forms within the context of the surrounding environment and the pervasive influence of ubiquitous computing. The project not only produced a series of valuable research papers but also commissioned three noteworthy creative works: "It Must Have Been Dark by Then," "Cartographer's Confession," and "Breathe." These creative outputs serve a dual role, encapsulating theoretical insights while functioning as experimental platforms, exemplifying a harmonious fusion of theory and practice.

5.3 Structuring Future Huyton

In this research project, a transmedia storytelling experience called Future Huyton was crafted and employed systematically for placemaking purposes.

Future Huyton commenced as a civic design initiative, firmly rooted in the profound recognition of the value inherent in creative participation and storytelling as potent drivers of community engagement. Its fundamental objectives revolved around sparking the community's interest, nurturing their design capabilities, and cultivating an environment conducive to critical and constructive exploration of emerging technologies.

The workshops played a pivotal role as a platform for unveiling the collective experiences, challenges, and aspirations of the local community in relation to the town centre. They served as a catalyst for identifying crucial areas of focus and potential

interventions. Introducing a creative methodology within these sessions encouraged practitioners to actively engage, sensitising their values, needs, and future visions. This approach spurred practitioners to explore technology-driven solutions for placemaking, actively contributing to the innovation and transformation of the locality. The collaborative sessions culminated in the creation of future scenarios, which provided invaluable qualitative insights capable of guiding local officials and policymakers in making informed decisions and setting strategic priorities.

Furthermore, these workshops were carefully designed to instil a deeper sense of agency and investment among practitioners, thereby fostering stronger connections to the project's outcomes. Consistent with Dahlgren's and Hill's (2020) definition of engagement as a "subjective disposition that can propel us to do things," the project's emphasis extended beyond mere participation. It centred on nurturing a genuine feeling of inclusion and empowerment in driving positive change, coupled with a sincere interest in the social dimensions of town centre regeneration. This engagement transcends individual or group boundaries, aiming to enhance and protect the interests of the broader community and its sense of place.

However, the research's objective extended beyond collaborative design fiction; it aimed to facilitate placemaking. The aim was to achieve, or at least explore, the digital activation of new places within the town centre, bringing these visions to life, albeit temporarily. This goal would be achieved through the mobile AR application, which creates virtual domes that are activated ephemerally, serving as a form of tactical digital intervention. The nature of these domes is contingent on their content, their relationship with the physical environment in which they are situated and which they augment, and the type of user engagement and reaction they seek. The intentionally open-ended, lean design of the application allowed for diverse possibilities.

The researcher's aim was to skilfully orchestrate a transmedia storytelling project at the intersection of digital placemaking, community-driven design fiction, and creativity, seamlessly weaving these elements into the spaces set to come to life. Naturally, the idea emerged to regard the AR domes as hubs for community-engaged planning, strategically positioned at the town's core. This approach provided a means

to share the design concepts and literacy efforts of local practitioners with the wider public, fostering open dialogue and soliciting valuable feedback.

Each story within this project embodied a unique vision for the town's future, intricately linked to its own distinct storyworld. In unison, these narratives alluded to various local needs and potential solutions. However, the true depth of the narrative would come to fruition through the juxtaposition of these stories with the town's actual reality and the perspectives of its residents. The ultimate goal was for the audience's engagement with this creative amalgamation to transcend mere interaction with digital environments for entertainment, actively contributing to the shaping of the overarching narrative.

After the foundational phase of community workshops, a comprehensive analysis of the workshop discussions and narratives was undertaken. This analysis was complemented by an assessment of the technical capabilities and limitations of the Knowsley Dome application, serving as a guiding framework for the decisions regarding the organisation and spatialisation of the material within the experience.

Interestingly, practitioners frequently portrayed the actual town centre as a destination that might not necessarily hold widespread popularity or be integral to their daily lives, despite gradual improvements. In stark contrast, their stories followed a centre-entry pattern, with the Future Village appearing as a compelling attraction for their protagonists. By analogy, the experience should encourage a similar flow with the audience entering the centre to visit the creativity domes strategically placed at the focal points of each narrative's unfolding action. Additionally, it is worth noting, as detailed in the autoethnography, that the application primarily emphasised visual engagement, with limited use of short text and video formats as auxiliary elements.

As a result, the choice was made to access these stories not exclusively through the AR application but also through a traditional website. This decision aimed to broaden accessibility and outreach, enabling users to engage with the narratives in diverse settings beyond the on-site experience, including the comfort of their homes, local gathering places and hubs beyond the town centre, or even during their commutes. Additionally, to further enhance accessibility, preparations were underway to record

these stories as audio narrations, catering to different preferences and needs. Each story would culminate with an invitation to visit the town centre, where the AR experience would seamlessly continue. Naturally, this raises the question of what would await participants there.

While the stories were narrating a well-rounded speculated future, the AR experience would present illustrations of the key design concepts of tech augmentations and social moments in envisioned social hubs as highlighted by each story and framed against the canvas of physical reality. Their captions would focus on points of analysis or verbatim testimonies from practitioners themselves, originating from the workshops. These behind-the-scenes analytic commentaries would interpret the design concept and the author's or researcher's thoughts about it, with the expectation that users would contemplate and form their own opinions. Concurrently, users would be encouraged to share their thoughts through a form linked to each dome and story. Consequently, the completion of the experience could amass additional texts from the audience, reflecting their considerations and views regarding the creators' concerns and key themes.

The researcher single-handedly orchestrated the experience, developed digital illustrations, created reflective texts, and designed on-site questionnaires. Involving practitioners in these tasks would be immensely valuable, adding depth to the participatory aspect of the study and enhancing the development of crucial digital and creative skills, which are vital for grassroots digital media projects (Stokes et al., 2021). Nevertheless, teaching media production skills is a time-consuming endeavour, as supported by the findings of Frith and Richter (2021). Future iterations of this project could explore more extensive participatory elements during this phase. Nonetheless, practitioners did have the opportunity to contribute to voice-over productions in recording studios, offering local residents a unique and unprecedented experience.

The culmination of the project into a transmedia storytelling experience harnessed all the aforementioned productions and disseminated them through various digital platforms, including websites, social media, and printed media. The centrepiece of this dissemination was naturally the innovative mobile AR application, which facilitated

meaningful embodied interactions between the virtual and the physical realms. As Farman (2015) elucidates, in this context, embodiment does not hinge on the technology's capacity to generate simulations or fabricate illusions of reality, but rather on how digital media engender sensory experiences characterised by intricate layering. In the context of Future Huyton, layering embodies the coexistence of the speculative and the real, reshaping affordances and experiences of public spaces. Engagement in this context signifies the audience's commitment to immersing themselves in speculative storyworlds and actively contributing their views to shaping the local future, aligning with Scott McQuire's (2016) insights on digital public art's potential to foster multifaceted understandings of place and ignite curiosity and engagement within urban communities.

As the creative work unfolded in the heart of the town and under the auspices of the Council, it highlighted the concept of co-creation. Participants could visibly discern the impact of their contributions both within the project itself and in its broader integration into the public sphere (Langley et al., 2016), which fostered their zeal in its promotion, which worked more effectively than the online campaign. The experience not only invited audiences to re-imagine their neighbourhoods and public spaces more freely but also broadened their perspectives on the roles that users and technologies can play in shaping these places. Following their immersion in fictional stories, this engagement prompted on-site contributions, an approach that bears resemblance to Sara, Jones and Rice's (2021) notion of participatory placemaking based on introducing incomplete spaces, which community groups are encouraged to shape and adapt according to their desires, fostering spontaneous activities. In this manner, placemaking takes root, creating a space for participation, visioning, and dialogue.

In terms of the previously mentioned transmedia storytelling types, this experience found its closest affinity with situated storytelling, while also incorporating elements from the other narrative forms. It is crucial to emphasise that these stories were fictional, bearing a nuanced blend of mystery and familiarity reminiscent of pervasive storytelling. However, they were expertly crafted to interweave autobiographical elements, effectively conveying personal perspectives, desires, and rhetorical nuances that encapsulated the socio-cultural intricacies of local life. The process involved

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narrating an alternate local reality through an intimate, personal lens, skilfully contrasting imaginative embellishments with specific elements of the built environment in the surrounding reality. These elements acted as imaginative wormholes, facilitating user immersion by inviting them to traverse between the fictional and tangible realms. Ultimately, the experience aimed for immersion through the audience's investment, reflection, and analytical contemplation, rather than taking it for granted due to the use of AR technology.

The project's narrative essence seamlessly aligns with the evolving trend observed in both creative and digital placemaking, as well as the burgeoning expansion of location-based mobile storytelling within the realm of fictional narrative genres, as articulated by Basaraba (2021). However, it is crucial to emphasise the civic nature of this endeavour, prioritising community agency over economic outcomes, in contrast to traditional implementations of creative placemaking programs and the commercialisation of digital and mobile media tools, as discussed by Halegoua (2020). The project underscores multi-stakeholder collaboration in designing a flexible, adaptable mobile AR app and emphasises community involvement in shaping a creative endeavour that will become part of the local public art landscape. Through this experiment, the researcher crafted a transmedia storytelling experience, employed it systematically, and put forth a compelling case for considering it as part of a noteworthy practice in civic-digital-creative placemaking, warranting further exploration and experimentation.

This vision paints a future where technology serves as a catalyst for fostering widespread participation and unity among community members through creative expression in the co-creation of their environment. The subsequent analysis of the stories and audience responses further illuminates this promising trajectory.

Note: Readers are invited to experience a demonstration of "Future Huyton", which encompasses a journey from an initial narrative to the presentation of illustrations within an Augmented Reality (AR) dome. Detailed instructions for this engagement are provided in Appendix 4.

Chapter 6: Narrations about a good town centre

This chapter explores the second research question: "What factors, motivations, attractions, and barriers could influence and shape the diverse presence of individuals in the town centre, both presently and in the future?" Drawing on a rich mix of qualitative data, including findings from workshops, the stories from practitioners in "Future Huyton" (detailed in the Appendix 1), reactions from the "Future Huyton" transmedia experience, and extensive field notes from research diaries, the essence of a thriving local town centre is explored. The analysis weaves together stories from the past, present observations, and future ambitions to dissect this complex topic in three comprehensive sections.

Each section sheds light on distinct yet interconnected aspects of an ideal town centre. The journey begins by examining the centre's integration with its broader surroundings and its accessibility features. The next section portrays the centre as an inviting, safe, and inclusive hub. In the third segment, the focus shifts to the centre's role as a communal nexus that caters to a spectrum of needs and interests, reflecting the community's diverse demographics. This part pays special attention to the central high street, symbolising the local economic pulse and its role in community life.

Each section not only identifies the key attributes and opportunities for drawing a varied crowd but also addresses the challenges and complexities inherent in creating a space that resonates with everyone. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive analysis, pinpointing where these narratives intersect and diverge and underscoring the importance of coexistence and collaboration in cultivating a town centre that truly belongs to all.

6.1 Interconnected and Accessible

Residents who do not live within walking distance from the town centre and do not drive pointed out connectivity problems. In a workshop, Vera, 77, the author of "Back

to the Future," emphasised the challenges due to weak connectivity between the town's heart and certain residential areas. She stated, "The bus doesn't run on a Sunday, and the road there is like that" (she positions her hand diagonally insinuating slope), "you can't walk to the Village. This means if there is nobody to drive you, you get stuck at home on a Sunday." In Vera's fictional story, she conceptualised a consistent transit system that operates around the clock, linking the central hub with nearby regions: "Return transport to The Round was provided by a network of brightly coloured pods which ran on rails 24 hours a day, seven days a week". Audience feedback resonated with Vera's observations, revealing dissatisfaction with the current bus service: "The bus system needs improvement; its routes are limited."; "It wraps up its operations too soon,"; "There are very few on a Sunday."

In other stories, characters use different means of transportation; they ride the bus, uber self-driving pods, or drive their own car to reach the town centre. These descriptions enabled the audience to point out several cases of interconnection issues with social implications. One issue was the poor connectivity between different town centres and regions within the Borough. Some areas are better connected to the centre of Liverpool than to each other, making the centre of Huyton a destination that some people in Knowsley Borough will not care to visit. Even some locals from the neighbouring Knowsley towns of Halewood and Kirkby who attended the "Future Huyton" event had never been to Huyton Centre before. People who drive their own vehicles pointed out that poor connectivity within the Borough also affected peoples' employment opportunities: "Transport from Kirkby to Huyton is difficult and takes a long time. If I had no car, it would be difficult to work in the Borough." Another audience response states, "Mersey travel used to provide a bus service you booked in advance for people who, due to disability, could not use the public transport. Now people have to use expensive taxis even for short journeys locally, so they are isolated from the local community."

The ability of a visitor to access destinations and remain in public space is touched upon in various stories and commented upon by the audience. Having worked with special needs children, Vera chose to highlight the issue of accessibility by centring her "Back to the Future" story on Alfie, a boy who uses a wheelchair and controls

automations of the built environment through a wearable technology. In "Walk the Walk," Madge, 67, highlighted accessibility as a problem which does not only concern people with reduced mobility but is related to the poor design of the built environment, a problem also confirmed by the audience. In her story, Madge upgrades the townscape with pervasive technologies, making it adaptable to different needs and abilities. Both of these stories present flexibility and personalisation as ideals in urban design and explain that accessibility is not only about reaching a destination but fundamentally translates to accessing experiences of self-fulfilment.

Many responses from the audience complement the above with their suggestions for urban design improvements related to lighting dark areas, installation of handrails, traffic and pedestrian control, and placement of accessible parking spaces closer to key amenities. In particular, many authors and visitors cited the absence of sufficient parking spaces as a critical barrier preventing access to the centre. Some of them, residents of the nearby neighbourhoods, reported that this problem even affected the surrounding areas, requiring an ameliorative parking project.

Overall, the way Huyton town centre is linked to outlying neighbourhoods and other town centres within the Borough has ramifications beyond the apparent limitations on footfall. The absence of a shared identity in the Borough, inequality and social isolation are local phenomena discussed in relation to constraints on interconnection and accessibility, ultimately influencing how the population relates to local places and each other.

6.2 Welcoming, Safe and Diverse

Accessibility to the centre is also interrelated with the issue of public space hosting capacity. A public seating area is Madge's main proposition in "Walk the Walk". Vera and Howard also refer to this concept in their stories. These three are the oldest of the authors. Members of the audience in the 65+ age group point to the same problem. They refer to it explicitly by suggesting the building of a sheltered seating area or indirectly by praising other destinations that offer the possibility of a free stay. Accompanying comments refer to the absence of complimentary amenities like public

toilets and free drinking water. These concepts indicate a perception of public space as a standalone destination rather than just a pathway to food and beverage businesses. It is worth mentioning that whenever the researcher found himself in Huyton centre, this age group represented the majority of passers-by, which suggests that these requests reflect the needs of the current place consumers.

The feeling of insecurity and fear is another significant limitation to the access and experience of public space- mainly when it gets dark. This was a significant issue discussed by many writers and audience members living in Knowsley. They expressed concerns about poorly lit areas, groups of young people congregating and behaving in intimidating ways towards others, suspicious activity, vandalism, and harassment. Although these descriptions often involve vagueness as to what the illegal activities are, the common thread among these narratives is a shared feeling of insecurity and fear while in public spaces. These discussions centred on two topics: anti-social behaviour by local youth and experiences of bullying and racism.

Madge refers in her story to vandalising public property: The crowd blames young Tommy for breaking a "token machine", and a security robot intervenes. Guilt is not assigned or admitted, but the scene was relatable for the audience who referred to young people with different accusations: "they are up to no good"; "either stay in their rooms on computers or wander the streets"; "they throw stones at the bus, and the bus stopped going to that part of the town"; they are "Northface Ninjas", referring to their black attire and the full-face hoods that render them unidentifiable through the recently installed CCTV system; "they congregate" and "smoke weed"; they are "gangs of lads and girls with large dogs." One of the writers refers to the phenomenon as a local youth culture: "You know, we've got a real youth culture where they go around, and they all look the same. They wear black north face coats. They have bandanas across their mouths, ride bikes, and whiz past you. There are quite a lot of youths like that." What makes these narratives concerning is that they also come from people their own age who talk about bullying at school, "cheeky chavs" in the town centre, and "kids are horrors in the McD's" by the town centre. These narrations of anti-social behaviour and delinquency appear as a mix of blame, concern and prejudice for the

"other" young people and place them outside the community and against society, an attitude that is in itself problematic.

The story "Urban guerrilla tale" unveils an exciting perspective on the subject. The story's author is a young resident of Liverpool who does not know the area of Huyton. His story is not part of Future Huyton but emerged from a pilot workshop aimed at creative professionals from Manchester and Liverpool. The story imagines Liverpool as a future city that remains a magnet for young audiences, offering experiences facilitated by the entertainment economy. Due to the overdevelopment of this market, the city's public space is transformed into an immersive environment of luminous images, holograms and sounds that advertise and highlight places, claim attention, call for activity and consumption. It is an environment where media and advertising technologies are overused, overwhelming the senses. This story's main character, Jack, is on an urban guerrilla mission. He devises his plan to turn off the beaming facades of the city's buildings. He crosses the city on his bike, acting stealthily like a ninja. In his mission, he will come across law enforcement but escape its iron clutch, leaving a message of resistance in the city. The author had no desire to glorify vandalism; he declared that explicitly. He created a scenario where the young anti-hero has no voice in public life, while his needs are not reflected in the city's plans and shape. Coincidentally or not, the main character seems to bear a certain resemblance to the "anti-social youths" of Huyton, and perhaps the story, although not written by them, highlights something from their point of view. There is a possibility that their centre has no place for them, and their behaviour, although described with suspicion and fear, involves a rebellious claim and repurposing of public space, possibly an act of placemaking locally that is bottom-up but not inclusive of everyone.

Other narratives of insecurity in public space concern a different other of the locality. The issue is the premise of Mandy's story "What difference a year makes." The protagonist is racially harassed while in the town centre to visit her doctor- this attack is not an unexpected incident. Moments after, she will take refuge in a "Privacy Pod" to report the incident. Accordingly, in the story "Local Legends", Bella refers to an actual racial hate crime that shook the area in 2005 when the black teenager Anthony Walker was murdered. The audience endorsed and enriched these narratives, referring

to the sense of uncertainty and insecurity that comes from everyday incidents of discrimination and micro-aggression, as well as "tales of rampant hate crimes based on so many differences (ethnicity, sexuality...)." An audience member responded with a description that aptly sums up similar ones: "Being an ethnic minority in Liverpool and having worked and previously lived in Knowsley for a long time, I completely resonated with this powerful story. The most problematic aspect for me has been encountering racism and daily micro-aggressions from people in the local community. This has impacted my well-being and has increased my hyper-vigilance about living as a woman of colour. Being 'othered' has often left me feeling isolated, anxious and marginalised. It has affected the choices I make, such as avoiding going for a walk on a particular route for fear of racism, getting on public transport or walking in spaces where there are a lot of people, e.g., local shopping centres. Sadly, learning to live in a hostile, unsafe environment is something that I feel I have had to 'train' myself to deal with, despite being born in the UK."

The problem of feeling unsafe in public spaces is arguably one of the most restricting, leading to profound societal impacts beyond just physical infrastructure or city planning. The town seems to serve its purpose for only certain times and a subset of its residents, and sometimes not even that. Intriguingly, a few writers alluded to this issue subtly, taking it as an assumed state. Even though they did not directly address this during the workshop, while scheduling subsequent sessions, they mentioned their preferences, noting that they prefer not to venture out after dark unless accompanied. Mandy, Howard, and Bella directly tackled this issue in their writings. Each introduced both proactive and reactive security technological solutions, yet they also emphasised the importance of community-based social interventions. This theme will be further explored in the next chapter, emphasising the potential role of groups in reestablishing unity and harmony within the community.

6.3 Versatile and Effective

The main character of each story is involved in an activity in the town centre that reflects the habits and desires of the authors; this was the direction workshop

participants were given. Madge catches up with her friend in the square, reading and doing light exercises in the public seating area. Alfie paints with the help of probes in the art section of the futuristic creative hub, while his grandmother goes shopping in the local market, and his grandfather is busy at his allotment nearby. Howard goes to the square to watch the football game on the big screen. The young dancers present their dance routines at a street party they organised with the town's events manager. Cleo's group of teenagers present the interactive posters they have worked on. Adeline walks around the park, experiencing an exhibition of locals' memories of the past. Dave is on his way to open his shop at the far end of the high street. Mandy visits her doctor and, not far from the same area, joins a vibrant open-air folklife festival celebrating equality and diversity. Eve meets her friends at the local vegan cafe. Leo performs at the annual summer music festival for a large crowd. Kate presents an innovative intervention for the charity she works for. Will visits the town centre in the metaverse to run errands since he cannot leave the house. Sarah and Bella go to the community hub, where they volunteer to set up a celebration. Accordingly, the audience members refer to activities in their familiar public destinations and reflect on how these places live up to the needs and interests that motivate their presence there. These places can be categorised as follows:

- the high street with retail businesses and open markets
- food and drink businesses
- multi-purpose venues that support creative activities, community meetings, events etc.
- landscaped green areas- parks and gardens that give the possibility to relax, exercise, socialise
- outdoor social spaces and technical infrastructure that allows outdoor performances, theatre, music, and cinema
- pedestrian areas linked to the local heritage that can support relevant tourist experiences

When practitioners and audiences refer to their favourite places, they provide a narrative beyond the function or form of a place. Instead, they tell a story about its historical significance, the communities that gather there, its impact on their well-

being, and their interests in things like theatre, music, and sports. They might also narrate their everyday routine of going to work, school, shopping, commuting, and values like diversity, volunteering, community, ecology etc. Through this narration, they express their identity, connecting it to the historical, physical, and social aspects of a "good town centre."

6.3.1 Social, Active and Animated

Many workshop discussions and story concepts focus on social and collective experiences in the town centre. In social spaces, people should be able to meet, interact informally, and connect without knowing each other personally; they show up, participate or interact spontaneously under a flexible social framework defined by some activity, event or quality of the place, and co-create an atmosphere that brings them together.

Howard, 78, mentioned in our first workshop session in relation to the social opportunities of the local community in the past: "People mixed in two-three places. They mixed in church, they mixed in the pubs, and they mixed it the local shops." And then he explained, "Community pubs no longer exist the same way as they did. Not many go to church now. The personal aspect of shopping is gone from the Village." Other popular social spaces very active in the past were also recalled by others: the Mayfair cinema, also known as the Ranch, The Huyton Suite that hosted dances and functions, the labour and conservative clubs, the Bingo, et al. However, youth centres and destinations for children seem to be the most important social spaces that have shrunk.

For the two groups of young people, aged 16-19, involved in the writing of the stories "The Events Manager" and "Set up for Success," it seems that the town centre is not really considered a social place. During the workshop session, both groups referred to very few public destinations within the Borough, as most of their activities and social gatherings took place in the safety of controlled private spaces such as their homes, youth centres located outside Huyton, schools and the Knowsley College campus, little shops by the College, shops and venues in Liverpool centre. The only places they mentioned visiting in the centre of Huyton were restaurants and supermarkets where

they would go with their parents. Their presence and experiences in the area's public space seemed very limited, and the only open places they frequented in the Borough with friends were parks not associated with the centre. It is important to emphasise that the voice of the "other" young people of the town, who like to spend their time in the centre after dark and are "loud and anti-social," is not heard- they are not included as writers, nor do they participate as part of the audience, which is an obvious limitation of this study.

Overall, all the authors referred to social spaces, events and collective experiences they would like to have in the town centre. Some stories emphasise vivacious spaces and events that bring the community together. In "Outside," Howard is on his way to a public screening event; young and old gather to watch the match on a giant screen installed in Sherbourne Square. In "The Events Manager," the town's event manager coordinates the setting up of a street party for local youth; the party will take place in the beginning of the high street where the necessary technical infrastructure facilitates the setting up of outdoor events. In "Local Legends," Sarah and Bella are on their way to the community hub. There, in an event space the community will come together to honour the work of a local artist. In "Luminous," Leo performs in the summer festival that takes place in the music stage and the yard of the creative hub for locals and visitors to have a good time.

Other stories use digital interventions as leverage for collective experiences and social interaction. In "Walk the Walk," attendees in the busy square watch a local street performer from the past appear in a media facade and spontaneously react with excitement. In "Set up for Success," visitors playfully pose and upload their snaps on an interactive display. In "Digital Futures," the intervention triggers discussions on social issues and motivates locals and visitors on the high street to contribute monetarily on the spot for a charitable cause.

It is also essential that almost all the authors involve local youth in their visions, suggesting a hopeful feeling for the future. Young Tommy in "Walk the Walk" visits a local amusement arcade with his girlfriend; the boys Adeline comes across in "Growing" play immersive virtual reality games outside the cinema; the children in

"Local Legends" play at the Sherbourne Piazza playground and run around at the pathway that surrounds the centre etc.

In these stories, the sociability of the town centre is narrated through a zoom-out that starts from the personal experience of the main character and reaches the extent of the broader community. Somewhere between the individual and the collective, there are references to smaller social and creative clusters, which activate the social aspects of place and trigger the production of a shared sense of place.

6.3.2 Green, Healthful and Creative

Well-being is a significant reference connected to destinations and social groups. In "Growing," looking for headspace and stimulation, Adeline visits the town centre park. She is inspired by a green area with old trees that exists by the actual town centre but is not currently utilised. The story describing a mental health issue linked to loss and grief allowed a large portion of the audience to point out how landscaped public spaces have helped them with their mental health. Their responses involve descriptions of the natural environment, water features, and the presence of fauna. In some audience responses, people proposed green spaces designed to support relaxation, reflection and grounding with relevant activities: "a quiet place in nature with water features, wind chimes, like a Zen Garden, relaxing music, prompts for grounding techniques"; "yoga for everyone in the park" etc. Similar references to landscaped green spaces in the centre are made in "Back to the Future," "Local Legends," and "Business Hub" stories. Living walls and pocket parks are even presented as complementary to the busy, noisy high street, functioning as a haven from the overwhelming stimuli that can become a source of anxiety.

Another reference to green spaces in the stories is that of community gardens and allotments. The concept is mentioned in the stories "Back to the Future," "Business Hub," and "Knowsley Pound," and is also found in audience responses referring to local community gardens in Merseyside, such as those of the "Old Schoolhouse Community Project in Huyton," "Tower Hill in Kirkby," and "Secret Garden in Stoneycroft". In the stories, community gardens are presented as the town centre's green satellites, based not inside but neither very far from it. In contrast to the references to parks and

landscaped areas, these are small-scale farming parcels preserved by community groups. The activity is presented as an opportunity for fresh fruit and vegetable production, indicating a relevant lifestyle, but the audience emphasised its beneficial effect on mental health and well-being. Finally, two writers cite allotments as a post-war measure that could be revived to battle food poverty, an actual issue in the area. In the "Business Hub" Dave describes: "On its other end started the path that led to Huyton's garden allotments where people grew their own fruit and veg. Any surplus was shared among the local community or bartered for other goods and services. This was the latest concept piloted by the local business community in partnership with local charities."

Other references to wellness in the stories focus on physical exercise. The topic was raised both in "Local Legends," where a cycling-running path flanks the centre to support sports activities and in "Walk the Walk," where the central square hosts exercise equipment. The two writers referred in workshop discussions to statistics describing the local population's physical and mental health problems. The writers purposefully introduced physical exercise interventions, recognising that there is a need for relevant spaces that will be central and safe and, unlike existing indoor exercise spaces, will not involve financial barriers for low-income people.

The well-being theme also seems to partially coincide with the concept of creativity. For some authors and members of the public, their participation in social prescribing groups centred around creative pursuits aimed at socialisation, healthfulness, and healing. Thus, they express the desire for a "Well-Being Hub" where they will engage in creative writing, music, drama and gardening through small groups and be supported through meditation, mindfulness, yoga and spirituality programs.

The same time another portion of writers and audience members focus on creative and educational activities as a past-time activity, an opportunity for self-expression, or skill development that would open doors to creative professions. They too refer to creative outlets that could be supported through interest groups and educational workshops/courses naming the potential place that houses these activities as a "Creative Hub". They are interested in visual arts - painting and photography, plastic

arts- pottery, performing arts- dance and acting, filmmaking, music- singing, song writing, joining a band, digital content production and creative writing - short stories and poetry. There is also interest in knitting, embroidery, gardening and flower arranging. Others prefer thought and discussion-based groups around local history, foreign film, and literature. Finally, there is an interest in acquiring or expanding digital skills, which could enhance people's employability and participation in contemporary society.

Whether framed as a "Well-Being" hub or a "Creative Hub," the stories underscore the societal backdrop of these endeavours, suggesting the formation of social groupings. These could take the form of support groups fostering connections among members or networks of local artisans and creators. Notably, these creative pursuits are not confined within community centres. Through cultural festivities and events, writers champion the idea of showcasing community creativity in open spaces. Tales like "Back to the Future," "Luminous," "The Events Manager," and "The Business Hub" depict spaces for indoor and outdoor activities, while narratives such as "Set up for Success," "Back to the Future," and "Growing" spotlight interactions and experiences in public areas. In these stories, the concepts of well-being and creativity invariably connect to the town centre's social vibe. Some of these activities are already ongoing in places beyond the centre, facilitated by charitable organisations, community hubs, and interest groups. The forthcoming chapter will explore how the town can leverage these cores to enhance its creative and wellness facets, boost visitor numbers, and cultivate a deeper bond with the locality.

6.3.3 Prosperous but Inclusive

The local high street is the central theme of the "Business Hub" story and is also described in "Back to the Future", while "Knowsley Pound" and "Local Legends" place greater emphasis in food and drinks businesses. These two uses and functions of the town centre are linked to a shared aspiration for economic regeneration. However, the relative visions are shaped by conflicting perspectives and diverse financial possibilities.

The function of the town centre as a commercial nexus is related to the area's identity and how it relates to the neighbouring regions. This becomes obvious in the narrations of senior writers who have lived in the area for over 40 or 50 years. Huyton used to be different from Liverpool. "We had people from Liverpool and thought of them then as outsiders. It was very much parochial back then, and now it is gone", says Howard, 78. Similarly, Vera, 77, native in Huyton, says, recalling her childhood, "We didn't go to Liverpool, we didn't have the money, and there was no reason". This indicates that the local centre was much more of an independent core, which is reinforced by the fact that very few owned their own vehicle at the time.

The older writers talk nostalgically for the local market of the past. It was made up of small family businesses, and interactions between customers and shopkeepers were part of a daily routine for the community. Nostalgic recollections during workshop discussions were sometimes accompanied by resentment towards corporate stores and large supermarkets. The main reason for disapproval of mass markets is their impersonal character and the alienating effect on the area, which contrasts with the old market's communal and social function. Some related descriptions relate to automatic payments and efficiency targets that prevent employees from being social. Others associate the large supermarket with the decline of the town centre altogether. "I've lived in Huyton many many years. The whole of Huyton is dominated by one thing and one thing only and that's Asda. Everyone goes to Asda.", Howard claimed during the workshop, explaining that he no longer has many reasons to go to the town centre. Both of the above anti-corporate positions are found in the older population. Many of them also perceive negatively the new restaurants that have opened in the area and possibly anything that takes the centre away from its original character. In "Back to the Future," Vera envisions a modernised version of the archetype old-fashioned market, with good-quality independent shops that create a destination with distinct character. Part of the audience, not only the senior ones, expresses similar views and nostalgic considerations, even praising the neighbouring town of Prescot that invested in the revival of its past: "Prescot is reviving a lot of its history with the new theatre and Eccleston street being revived, so I think it's going in the right direction. The precinct could do with investment in smaller shops."

The young writers, 16- 19, did not experience the old Village or its original market. In the workshop discussions about possible destinations, they would like to have locally, they primarily mentioned corporate stores such as Primark and Home Bargains; these places are familiar and financially accessible. Shopping malls are the destinations they associate with international consumer trends; it is where they meet peers and where they hope to find a part-time job. Turning the centre into an open mall, similar to Liverpool One, would be an upgrading transformation for them. In their descriptions, it is the corporate stores that foster connection to their own community.

Individuals aged 30-60 emphasize the town's strong connectivity to Liverpool's center and draw pertinent comparisons. They acknowledge the town's self-reliance in fulfilling basic commercial requirements through its supermarkets, a factor notably significant during the pandemic. Simultaneously, conversations about their preferred retail, food, and beverage establishments revolve around topics such as veganism, artisanal products, a range of cultural cuisines, and independent shops across different areas within Merseyside. While the nostalgic narrative of the old markets speaks of communalism, these narratives tell a different story, presenting the conduct, ideology, and practices of the individual who is not just a consumer of goods but a shareholder of a lifestyle.

The above manifest in the stories through fictional businesses with which their personas relate. Eve in "Local Currency" visits the fine vegan bistro and pays with the local currency that supports projects like community gardens. Dave and the hub entrepreneurs in "Business Hub" attract visitors to the area through international culinary experiences they introduce from tourist destinations. This is how the protagonist of "Local Legends" will confirm that the town's restaurants give out the feeling like "you can be anywhere in the world"; the writer even renamed the local Sherbourne Square to Sherbourne Piazza. For the author of "Luminous", his favourite retail and entertainment destinations in Liverpool center are connected to music and nightlife subcultures that are absent from the local life of Knowsley, therefore the bar that the protagonist, Leo, frequents is associated with the music scene and the creative hub that the author introduces. Analogous is the description of a member of the audience that describes one of their favourite places: "A favourite place is Lodge

Lane in Liverpool, a multicultural area with lots of ethnicities. The shops have a wide variety of goods and food that the big supermarkets or shops in Knowsley do not sell, the restaurants and food are amazing. People in Lodge Lane are very friendly, smile, say hello and have a conversation."

While many of the above descriptions express a preference for independent local businesses, when it comes to some of the existing independently owned retail businesses of the centre, critical views have been expressed about the quality of products and services provided. Even among the authors, there was disappointment that the compensation provided for their involvement in the workshop activities was in Knowsley Town Centre gift cards rather than ones they could cash in Liverpool because they would like to buy "something of better quality" for themselves. It appears that rejuvenating the local high street requires a blend of distinctiveness and quality, keeping pace with modern trends and aligning with consumers' sense of individuality.

Cate's story "Digital Futures" illuminates however another aspect of local consuming needs. The story is the only one that refers directly to the issue of food poverty that concerns a large portion of the local population and refers to the local food banks active in Knowsley. The topic raised in this story is not about branding the local market but ensuring subsistence needs of low-income locals. In the same context, another writer referred to charity shops in the workshop discussions as essential destinations in the current high street of Huyton centre. "There are coffee shops in the Village where you can sit if you want and drink very expensive coffee and eat very expensive food, and it's just a commercial venture- keeping people in jobs admittedly and putting money in the pockets of rich people. The church's shop I used to coordinate is a mixture of all the Christian denominations in Huyton that come together to staff the shop voluntarily. They sell food and coffee at rock-bottom prices because it's a non-profit venture. So that's an important element with a big presence in the Village because you can sit for 49 years if you want with one cup of coffee, and there's no one going to move you out. So, people go to that shop because they're lonely or worried or they ain't got any money, and they want a drink, and they want company. So, I tend to favour the local charity shops like the Fourth Dimension, the Big Help, Barnardo's and the British Heart Foundation. As a customer, but in the first two as a supporter as well.

What's the point of having disposable income if we can't make sure that that income is used for somebody that hasn't got the income through no fault of their own?" The description intertwines the issue of local poverty with the need for financially accessible social hubs and the value of solidarity as a shaping parameter of the local high street. The subject is touched upon indirectly in other workshop discussions. Still, in their stories, these writers masked existing problems of inequality and poverty behind their vision of a financially robust town centre.

The proliferation of restaurants and cafes in Huyton centre, mirroring the aesthetic and economic standards of Liverpool's commercial districts, can be attributed to a successful local initiative spanning the past four years, aimed at attracting businesses and targeting demographics capable of stimulating economic growth. The challenge lies in establishing a distinct identity for the local high street that encompasses diversity and caters to the varied financial capacities of its patrons, ensuring no segment of the community feels marginalised or displaced. Narratives that delve into collaborations between the local authority, private entities, and the community's third sector might shed light on a comprehensive strategy for the local high street, one that embraces diverse perspectives, aspirations, and requirements. This topic will be further explored in Chapter 7.

6.4 Convergences, Divergences and Complexities

The narratives above discuss essential features and qualities of local public spaces that encourage and enable various individuals to visit them. These concepts align with established placemaking ideas, such as those of the Project for Public Spaces. The organisation defines "Great places" as having four key attributes: "They are accessible and well connected to other important places in the area; they are comfortable and project a good image; they attract people to participate in activities there; they are sociable environments in which people want to gather and visit again and again" (PPS, 2018, p. 4). In addition, the organisation has another conceptual tool known as "The Power of 10", which states that every place should have a range of available activities - "at least 10 things to do" (PPS, 2018, p. 2), connected with each other and with other

similar places on the broader region. The stories of "Future Huyton" describe visions of a "good town centre" that converge to existing conceptualisations of a "great place."

In this context, many of the desires expressed concern the physical space of the centre, such as the need for green spaces, better lighting, and improvements to the physical image and structure. These are common needs, already identified and part of the Council's ongoing improvement projects in the context of town centre regeneration (Allies and Morrison, 2017). Furthermore, many of the stories align with the new urbanism movement that emerged in the 1990s. There are visions for developments that draw inspiration from the area's history and culture, as well as a strong environmental perspective, a mix of commercial and recreational uses, various transportation options and pedestrian accessibility (Khalil, 2010). Additionally, practitioners envision village-like communities where the population and its actions play a central role in shaping the town's environment. Even tech-forward ideas seem to support these visions of close-knit communities.

However, there are also deeper aspects to these narratives that reveal more complex dynamics. A typical example is the issue of interconnection and accessibility. Although Huyton Station is part of the Liverpool-Manchester Railway line and there is a network of bus routes connecting the town centre with surrounding neighbourhoods and the rest of the borough (Allies and Morrison, 2015), the effectiveness of these connections has been questioned. People who need to move around the borough for work often find it necessary to use cars. Additionally, good links to the urban centres are seen more as an opportunity for locals to access the city centres rather than for visitors to come. Moreover, older people and individuals with reduced mobility do not seem to benefit enough from the internal connectivity options available. The authors and audience of Future Huyton share the view that mobility is not just about physical movement but also about access to opportunities, resources, and quality of life. This perspective is highlighted in Cresswell's book "On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World" (2006), which encourages us to reflect on how spatial mobility and immobility are intertwined with social and economic structures and existing dynamics, and how these processes shape the lived experiences of individuals and communities.

In the case of the Huyton Centre, disparities in mobility access and flows can be detected, acting as a deterrent to a shared sense of place.

This issue is intriguing as some authors link it to a lack of shared identity and homogeneity within the Borough dating back to 1974. This was when the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley was established, incorporating areas that had previously been part of the southern parts of Lancashire. According to these views, the distinct regions within the Borough remain disconnected both in the consciousness of its inhabitants and in their physical connectivity. While the region could benefit from a polycentric complex of regional towns with a certain degree of distinction and good connectivity (Evans, 2015), allowing them to work cooperatively and complementarily for visitors and residents, this possibility appears weak. The question of why and how someone would visit Huyton Centre is complemented by the question of who the place consumers and community are for the envisioned regenerated centre.

Another complexity issue arising from the preceding narratives, which leads to similar questions, can be traced to security and generation gap issues. It is not unusual for the youth of an area to be seen as a problem. Various Placemaking projects attempt to shift negative perceptions about young people and consider their needs and ideas while involving them in experiences of learning and empowerment (see Björgvinsson et al., 2012; Marrades et al., 2021). This need was recognised by all authors and appears as the central theme of four stories. What is most interesting is that young people are a typical example where a division appears between public service payer and public service recipient. The focus here is not on services per se, but on public spaces. One senior practitioner articulated, "They do not pay taxes, but I do", hinting at an underlying sentiment that often influences many placemaking initiatives that lean heavily towards economic growth. If the formation of a centre is based on the demographic that has the purchasing power or yields (higher) taxes, then it will be directed to certain types of improvement projects and prioritise specific needs. This has been recognised as the weakness of many UK regeneration schemes that transform places to attract new populations, changing both the environments and the residents (Jones and Evans, 2012). It is plausible that the present-day issues related to the disruptive behaviour of the youth are repercussions of such past imbalances.

Present challenges underscore the imperative for collaborative development that recognises and harmonises the diverse, and at times conflicting, requirements of the community.

The divergence of needs, wants, and perspectives were most evident when discussing the high street. This was a particular point of interest in the conversations with the practitioners as the high street of the future was central to the initial call of the Council regarding this research project. The narratives presented indicate a polysemic perception of the ideal high street, reflecting consecutive changes in the service model approach and emerging retail trends. The traditional, locally owned shops, once a daily meeting spot for the community, have been replaced by supermarkets focusing on self-service and automation. Many services became delocalised due to the rise of the internet and smartphones. Additionally, since the late 1990s, there has been a trend towards personalisation, listening to customers and adapting to their needs, building social connections, and creating memorable in-store experiences for them (Cipolla and Manzini, 2009; Pine II and Gilmore, 2019). Trends related to sustainable and ethical consumption (Ozdamar, Ertekin and Atik, 2015) and flexible mobile retail units followed, as did the integration of physical stores with online platforms, creating an omni-channel shopping experience for customers and data-driven commercial interactions (Ford, 2020).

The above developments are presented in the stories as tiles in an all-encompassing mosaic of high-street life, modern and traditional, analogue and digital. Still, the only point of convergence is the perception of the high street as a place to foster human connection and interaction with both familiar and unfamiliar faces. All references to the commercial street underline its status as a "third place" (Oldenburg, 2009), an area that allows the occurrence of social friction (Sennett, 2012) and the development of social capital (Putnam, 2001) and civic trust (Jacobs, 1961). These perceptions do not conclude to specific types of businesses or service model approaches that should be employed but highlight the accessibility and diversity of place that allows for mixing and meeting different groups.

The diverse values highlighted in this analysis might come across as attractive ideals, simpler said than executed, and could entail contradictions in any implementation endeavour, particularly when the goal is a focused regeneration of a place with clearly defined territorial boundaries. Increased mobility and communications technologies to which a large percentage of the population in the Western world has access facilitate the creation of networks and centres according to shared interests, abilities and worldviews without the need to rally around a geographical area that has to keep everyone satisfied. This was clear from the daily experiences of most study participants that provided narrations about their various familiar destinations and activities. However, this should not discourage the placemaking effort. As Massey (1994) states, places change dynamically based on constantly shifting social relations. Their multiple identities shift and overlap, creating conflict and richness. By investing in the dynamic nature of a place through promoting interactions, participation, and activity of different groups and demographics, its making and growth can be facilitated. The next chapter will provide a more in-depth exploration of this topic.

Chapter 7: Community participation- Exploring the potential role of social clusters in placemaking

Communities and groups as foci of participation and action in the public sphere are centrally featured in many workshop discussions, resulting stories, and audience responses. The authors of these stories have often conceived scenarios of citizen participation based mainly on small groups, personal social networks, shared interests, and goals, drawing inspiration from their real-life experiences in various community settings.

The chapter addresses the research questions: "How can community participation be motivated and leveraged for future meaningful interventions in placemaking?" and "What are the emerging values that can inform a placemaking strategy?" These questions are explored through five sections.

Narratives pertaining to engagement in social conglomerates and participation in public affairs are examined, starting with a contemplation of the shared identity possessed by locals and the deviations from it, which are indicative of the broader framework forming the local community.

Subsequently, three central topics tied to the axis of community engagement are examined. Initially, vernacular creativity, with a particular emphasis on the involvement of the region's youth, is highlighted as a promising untapped asset. This narrative reinforces the potential for a local inclusive Creative Placemaking approach. Attention is then given to public happenings, indicative of an Event-based Placemaking strategy that extends beyond public spectacles. This strategy aims to support the population and facilitate innovative partnerships, among other objectives. Then, the focus shifts to synergies crucial for local regeneration projects, where the local government and the Third Sector are identified as key stakeholders. The former is recognised for its comprehensive understanding of the region and strategic

capabilities, while the latter is valued for its deep connection with the locality's grassroots.

The final section summarises the chapter as an epilogue recapitulating the values emerging from the narrational vision of Huyton's Future. These values delineate a participatory model of placemaking, aligning with contemporary trends and case studies while also indicating local areas needing fortification.

7.1 Local place identity

Place identity pertains to acknowledging one's belonging to a particular community based on a specific location and recognising the emotional and evaluative significance of this belonging (Tajfel, 1978). In Knowsley Borough, residents identify strongly with their hometowns, such as Kirkby, Huyton, Halewood, Prescot, or Whiston, rather than the Borough itself. The Borough was formed in the early 1970s, and some writers argue that bringing these separate entities together under one roof was a wrong decision and the root of various issues. Residents often compare the services and projects offered in each town, indicating some level of competition between regions. However, outsiders would likely see more similarities than differences, as locals express similar concerns and desires. Identity is a complex issue that arises naturally in conversations, with residents themselves often bringing it up; there seems to be a wound in the community's pride and cohesion that they wish to address.

Aligned with May (2017), many participants communicated a sense of belonging to the area based on their ties to the past. This was particularly noticeable among senior members of the community who were over 65 years old, as they took pride in their heritage and identity rooted in the old towns and the old times. They refer to their towns' Viking origins, the old churches that have stood for centuries as beacons of their communities, the period houses- vestiges of the old affluence and their childhood memories of places and events that no longer exist. They enjoy talking about these nostalgic memories of their once close-knit communities, whether speaking to strangers or each other. Historical societies in the area are active with senior community members, and heritage projects will definitely find an audience there. For

the current form of their towns, they experience certain ambivalence. They express dissatisfaction with issues such as the weakening of community ties, the decline of the town centre, safety concerns, and the possibility of a local regeneration that might take the town further away from its original character. On the other hand, they appreciate not living in a large and impersonal city, and they still have stable, friendly, and kinship connections, which make them experience a sense of belonging to a community. According to Belanche et al. (2021) age has a positive influence on place identity. The above narrative is aligned with their study's findings, demonstrating that individuals over the age of 65 exhibit the greatest affective commitment with the place and its social community and place more significance on their membership in terms of self-worth and related connotations.

A more present-focused narrative around local identity comes from study participants in their prime working life (30-54) or approaching retirement (55-64). For some of them, living in Huyton or Kirkby is an option that combines quick access to Liverpool with lower house prices; it is, therefore, a regional Liverpool postcode and potential narratives about local identity are made about the Liverpool region, being Scouse, being from the Northwest, and less about the narrow identity of the town. Others living in the Borough for years have developed a stronger sense of belonging to the area. These groups often spoke positively, advocating for their town and neighbourhoods. Although aware of various local challenges, they went beyond unequivocal negative characterisations of the region that prevail in the press perpetuating stereotypes around deprivation. They highlighted local assets, expressing expectations for the area's regeneration that will raise the standard of living, attract businesses, and advance welfare.

Within this narrative, stereotypical divisions between closed homogeneous rural communities and heterogeneous urban societies (Christenson, 1984) seem to blur. This results from modern mobilities and infrastructures (Gustafson, 2009; Terman, 2020), which bring new people to the area, connecting it to other social and economic worlds. It is also recognised that even newcomers develop place attachment and interest in the area's prosperity (Gieling et al., 2017; Breek et al., 2018), which indicates opposition to a perception of the local town as a "dormitory town" (Atkinson,

2019) with residents working, shopping and using leisure facilities of urban Liverpool. Furthermore, the focus on potential and aspirations rather than existing adversities appears to be an attitude familiar to localities that experience similar characteristics in the Northwest of England (Symons, 2017) and, in combination with the above, suggests the potential for local development based on an emerging civic culture and the development of social capital (Fertner et al., 2015; Atkinson, 2019;Breek et al., 2018).

However, there is another viewpoint that highlights an indifference towards the community and is linked to divisive perceptions surrounding local social identities. "People do not care about the community, they only care about themselves and their families." These opinions are often shared in informal settings where people feel comfortable expressing their views. They might also make critical remarks about other local individuals who are vastly dissimilar to them, like a wealthy individual who has "never worked a single day" or someone who "chooses to rely on benefits instead of working," or even "rough characters in the area" who participate in questionable or illegal activities. These narratives that suggest a breakdown in social unity are linked to perceptions connected to income and security. Van Dedem (2021) identifies key factors influencing social cohesion: social participation, natural environment, quality of life, safety, health and economy. Among these, the economic aspect is particularly relevant at the local level. In 2019, Knowsley was the second most income-deprived local authority in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Economic deprivation is a well-established negative factor for social cohesion (Goubin, 2018;Arant et al., 2021). On the other hand, as Bauman (2013) observes, "We all need to mark the enemies of security in order to avoid being counted among them…We need to accuse in order to be absolved; to exclude in order to avoid exclusion."(p. 104).

The two narratives of "united advocates" and "dismissive individualists" reflect ambivalence without being mutually exclusive. When discussing the "community" as an abstract concept that encompasses the wider population, there is often dissatisfaction and an urge to brush off a bad reputation. Still, the term is resumed when focused on a specific group of individuals with similar interests, objectives or values.

For local youth, the experiences and places that shape their identity are not limited to their residential areas but also include the places where they attend school, socialise, and have fun. These places are not limited to Huyton or any specific location in the Borough. The youngest in the study describe their usual destinations as their own and their friends' houses, safe indoor venues, nearby beaches in the Sefton Borough, and places in Liverpool centre that reflected their youth subcultures. They are especially drawn to exploring diverse social settings and new experiences in other areas. However, they feel disconnected from the local public spaces due to deterrence caused by other young individuals gathering in town centre and engaging in behaviours that are not inclusive or safe.

Furthermore, some of the young people have to travel outside the area to do their A-levels or for vocational training. For those leaving the area entirely to go to University or seeking greater opportunities to develop professionally, the change of environment becomes a great achievement and a forming experience that enriches their identity and outlook with new understandings of cultural diversity: "When I lived as a student in Leeds for three years- I was more exposed to different cultural backgrounds, ages and sexuality," "three-year degree at drama school, where I'm making new connections with people not just from different corners of the UK, but from around the world too all of them with their own unique cultural backgrounds." When/if they return, these experiences will impact how the place and community are reformed and perceived.

In part, these narratives reflect common attitudes of young people and adolescents becoming naturally more critical about their residential places as they explore and develop new attachments to other areas. As summarised by Belanche and colleagues (2021), adolescents often orient towards entertainment facilities, such as movie theatres, shops and services that do not exist locally, and growing up as young adults, they seek more significant opportunities to develop their professional careers. While the above appears natural and familiar, what is concerning about the young participants' narrations is the perceived lack of safety in the areas they live in. Studies have shown that place attachment is closely associated with feelings of safety (Skogan, 1990; LaGrange et al. 1992; Austin et al. 2002; Raudenbush, 2003, as cited in Dallago et

al., 2009) and is also seen as a predictor of future involvement and civic activity (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Jessor, 1993; Manzo and Perkins, 2006). Based on that, some local young people may be discouraged from developing attachments to their place, whether they stay in the area or not. It is even worth noting how these considerations are also connected to the ambivalence in the narratives of the older generation.

Another aspect of local identity is the perception of outsiders within the region. According to the official strategy of Knowsley Partnership 2016- 2020 (2016, p. 8), "The majority of Knowsley residents are White British with a comparatively small Non-White Ethnic population, representing only around 3% of residents." An audience member similarly argued, "Liverpool is the nearest area you can experience ethnic diversity." However, under the UK's Resettlement Programs, new populations of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds have settled in the Knowsley area, subverting what is expected. Different faces and languages will surprise a resident, more accustomed to uniformity than diversity.

Within practitioners and audiences, some volunteers and professionals reported experiences of getting to know newcomers when working with refugees and asylum seekers based in the area. Indicative is the work of the local charitable organisation SHARe Knowsley (n.d.). Words of empathy and solidarity were expressed about these populations' challenges when adapting to a new reality and culture. However, there were also concerns about how the presence of a foreign population would impact the availability of free public services related to health, education, and state benefits; concerns that were expressed with the reassurance of a non-offensive intent. Reflective of these views are also newspaper publications that underline that Knowsley remains one of the most deprived areas of the country while receiving a disproportionately large number of asylum seekers (Ehsan, 2023), a problem linked to a broader policy, according to earlier research which explains that indigent asylum seekers live in the poorest third of the country compared to the wealthiest third (The Guardian, 2017).

However, another body of narrations coming forthrightly from the "other" residents of Knowsley that have lived in the area for years talk about experiencing racism and

discrimination. These experiences have left them traumatised and feeling like they do not belong. It is clear that part of the local population demonstrates hostile attitudes not resulting from a recent change they are struggling to digest. Interestingly this narrative also came from white British Huyton locals narrating disruptions in community cohesion. Historically, British identity was forged by distinguishing it from the colonial "other" and associating it with racial whiteness, as noted by Lentin (2008). According to Clarke (2021), despite attempts to promote multiculturalism and shared British values, contemporary politics in Britain often promotes these values specifically to migrants and minorities while ignoring racism and discrimination against these groups. As a result, ethnically minoritised Britons often experience discomfort and a sense of not belonging in national spaces (Noble, 2005; Tufail and Poynting, 2013; Isakjee, 2016; Nayak, 2017 as cited in Clarke, 2021).

The four sets of narratives exhibit regression and ambivalence in various aspects. These include the struggle between pride and resentment, advocating for regeneration with similar individuals versus breaking away from community ties, embracing new possibilities beyond the region or resorting to anti-social behaviour within the locality, and demonstrating solidarity versus promoting otherness. The sense of belonging is linked to one's identity and place, but the two do not align completely (Anderson et al., 2019).

Nowadays, towns are more open to change, and their residents cannot be perceived as a homogenous group. People belong to different groups and communities and relate to various places, where they form new social identities that coexist with the local identity but carry different significance. Highlighting these particularities within the local context is essential.

As a sample of the region, workshop practitioners demonstrated diversity in relation to elements such as age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, economic potential, race, and religion. With their diverse backgrounds and experiences, the authors incorporate their unique qualities and identities in the town centre and write a renewed sense of place into being. These narratives will be examined next.

7.2 Youth Creativity as a Local Asset

The stories extensively refer to local groups and communities producing creative work, which becomes the central element of a public space intervention, attraction or event. For some authors, the starting point of these narratives was their personal interest in music, dance and performing, but all of them saw in it an opportunity for self-realisation and experiences that can empower and motivate a broader group of people.

In "Back to the Future," the artistic work of the citizens in the creative hub becomes the object of public exhibition and feedback from the public through an interactive media façade in the town centre. The story presents the creative engagement as an activity of well-being for vulnerable groups and emphasises inclusivity in the infrastructure and programs. The idea comes from the author's professional experiences working with children with special needs and recognising their need for inclusion, visibility and participation in the public sphere.

In "Luminous," young Leo learns to play music at the youth centre of the creative hub. This is based on a real-life memory of the author from his youth in one of the youth centres that no longer exists. However, in his story, his persona has the opportunity to attend musical gigs, become a member of a creative community and finally perform on the local stage himself. The public authority organises an annual music festival, invites and selects local talent to participate as performers giving them the opportunity for further development. The show becomes a magnet for locals and visitors alike. The public referred to such events, which once took place in the different towns of the Borough but no longer exist.

In "The Events Manager," the motivation of the writers is similar. They like to dance and perform; they already do it on social media platforms for online audiences and want to do it with a live audience. But the story also has the idea of collaboration between different creative groups. Three imaginary local groups are mentioned- Huyton's dance group, the maker space community, and the audio-visual group from Kirkby, who get to collaborate for the street party, a collaboration the local authority supervises and facilitates. The outcome is an event that creates space for young

people. The fascinating element of this scenario is that the event is an initiative that comes directly from young people and is embraced by the local authority. Instead of planning events independently, the town management facilitates the creative agency of people in public space.

In "Set up for Success," the creative core once again revolves around teenagers from a fictional youth centre. Here, creativity flourishes with the support of local organisations, authorities, and a nearby college, all offering resources and guidance to nurture a new digital project by the town's youth. The idea of "interactive posters" originates from one of the story's creators, who was inspired by an Instagram filter that caught his attention and sparked his motivation to craft his own version. This scenario illustrates an informal learning initiative, taking place outside the conventional educational environment, emphasising the collaborative learning journey of young people on contemporary online cultures.

These stories share many common themes. Firstly, their main characters are local youth portrayed as creative individuals who find fulfilment in creative pursuits. Even writers who were not young adults intentionally chose to put young characters in this role to empower them and build resilience. Studies validate that involvement in art activities can boost self-confidence, self-esteem, social connections, and a sense of belonging, all of which are linked to resilience and mental well-being (Hart et al. 2012; Zarobe and Bungay, 2017).

Furthermore, the stories depict creative incubators that embody the three factors that enhance self-motivation and mental health according to self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000). They foster autonomy in diverse creative pursuits and modes of expression, competence in mastering specialised skills, and social connections within creative communities. Indeed, these qualities have guided various endeavours, such as utilising music learning to aid troubled youth (Noise Solution, 2022).

In this context, fostering youth creativity can be perceived as local social innovation. Sociologists define social innovation as creating and implementing ideas that lead to social change. Cajaiba-Santana (2014) explains it as "new ideas manifested in social

actions leading to social change and proposing new alternatives and new social practices for social groups" (p.44).

On the flip side, vernacular creativity is perceived as a means of placemaking. In this context, the town is interested in what people have to say and show. Their creativity begins with but goes beyond self-expression, skill-acquisition and personal well-being. It is a cause that the town supports, cultivates, displays and celebrates through its policies and infrastructure. Creative projects lead to public interventions and events, which become collective experiences and opportunities for interaction and reflection. These projects are about supporting the development of a local asset that creates a renewed sense of place, gives young people a voice, while boosting foot traffic. It is a process of place-based learning that leads to an arts-led co-production of place (McKeown, 2021).

Thus, no clear dividing lines exist between amateurs and professional artists. Creativity is an asset that is cultivated, internally validated and reinforces a sense of belonging. The view expressed here reflects the definition of placemaking in which the community is regarded as an important stakeholder and is placed at the forefront (Courage, 2021). Furthermore, it emphasises that local talent and cultural assets that already exist in communities are a premise for good creative placemaking (Alvarez, 2021), a condition that, when violated, leads to feelings of exclusion and alienation with the process, as raised by Kovacs and Park (2021) and Halegoua (2020).

For the authors to turn personal desires around creativity into creative placemaking scenarios, they designated local organisations with resources and authority as patrons of creativity. In the stories these patrons were responsible for creating and maintaining inclusive spaces for creativity, fostering creative communities, coordinating partnerships for creative projects, organising and curating cultural events that exhibit community creativity, supporting education in contemporary creative fields, and being stakeholders in local partnerships that align with these goals. Writers' experiences as creators and performers, educators and facilitators, members of creative groups and audiences guided them to involve these institutions in a way that could help them overcome barriers they had experienced in real life.

Nevertheless, this is an aspiration insinuating a systemic change. During workshop discussions practitioners stated: "Organisations are only open when they want something themselves. They are not open to proposals," "I had won the local creative writing competition in [name of local town], and then nothing happened," "we used to have events and entertainments of our own. I would like to see the shows re-enacted and brought back to life, many local groups participated …like dance groups," "I like videogames and creating in-game stuff by watching videos. Would be nice to learn these things in a local club". "The Council", "the precinct", and "the state" appeared to be impersonal institutions detached from their creative aspirations, while "art charities" and "youth centres" that could support these interests were more familiar incubators that, however, were missed from the area. The central idea of the related discussions was that the patrons were hard to reach, as Symons (2017) ascertains in her own research in an area not too different from Knowsley; community creativity requires institutional support through open bi-directional channels to foster growth for both parties.

The stories presented here explore various aspects of vernacular creativity. They advocate for a multi-layered platform for progress, bringing together societal needs with a participatory approach to creative placemaking, producing innovative outcomes that transform ideas, systems, and services (van der Have and Rubalcaba, 2016). These narratives are aligned with contemporary policy directives such as the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015), which aims to empower local communities and give young people a greater voice in decision-making and highlight the need for collaboration across organisational boundaries (Voorberg et. al, 2014).

7.3 Events for Unity and Collaboration

Community festivals, fairs, celebrations, open days, and other events are important for re-igniting community spirit (Gilchrist, 2009); they provide opportunities for the community to meet, have fun, renew bonds and establish values. Also, cultural displays attract visitors and present the town to the broader region and even the global community. A successful event will become a joyful memory, part of local

heritage, an opportunity for significant profit for local businesses, and ultimately an instance in the narrative that counts up to the place brand (Richards, 2011; Lew, 2017). In "Outside," the community watches together a sports event; in "Luminous" and "The Events Manager", the theme of celebrations is centred around music and dance performances; in "Growing" and "Local Legends," the events are connected to local heritage, and in "What a difference a year makes" the celebration promotes emerging values of diversity and equality. In all of the different events the role of local clusters is decisive.

In his story "Outside," Howard focused on two interlinked issues that concern him the most: the diminishing of local identity and weakened community ties. With the sports viewing event, he is trying to foster a community around a physical location in the town centre and create connections between separate demographics. He chose football; it is the most popular attraction for residents in the greater Liverpool area, and it "appeals to everyone regardless of ethnic background or financial status." He did, however, devise a local sports club that would differentiate Huyton from neighbouring areas and could draw together the town's diverse demographics. So young Kyrylo, a sports club member who is implied to have an ethnic background of a different country, will exclaim at some point in the story, "first Huyton, then Liverpool." The popular event of the story is therefore linked to a sports culture that develops around the activities of a local athletic society and has a unifying effect on the region.

Music and dance performing events like those of Leo and the young dancers are connected to the writers' artistic interests and promote their creative development. In Leo's story, "Luminous," the event is a long-planned summer festival that the local authority implements and becomes a magnet for locals and visitors. In the story of the dancers, "The Events Manager," a more informal street party for the local youth is presented. It is born from their own desire, to which the local authority responds positively and supports with technical means, networking and communication. As previously discussed in both cases, the event depends on the involvement of local creative nuclei. Especially in the case of "The Events Manager," another cluster is presented that can contribute and benefit from a festive event, the town's food and

drink businesses. In fact, their participation is facilitated through their collaboration with the maker space community that provides stalls that they built themselves for outdoor shows.

In "Local Legends," the event is honouring a local artist who has created murals in the town centre depicting local heroes- "murals of Stephen Gerard and other famous Huytonians adorn the walls including Anthony Walker and his mother, Gee." These murals are part of the town's local heritage, identity and values. They talk about triumphant and challenging times. The name of the story refers to the faces of the murals, the artist, and indirectly to members of the community, such as the two protagonists. In the story, the two ladies cross the town centre to a fictional community hub, where they volunteer to organise the event. Upon arrival, they meet the volunteer manager and head to the event hall within the hub named after the historic "Huyton Suite" space, which was recently demolished. The event relies on the dedication of a group of volunteers, the town thrives on their commitment, and the celebration honours that very dedication and patriotism.

In "Growing," the event is a digital experience based on real memories and stories from the town's past. The experience is a set of time capsules that bring to life storytellers from the past who share meaningful moments. Their narrations are spread along the paths for visitors to discover. The creative project was done many years ago so that another generation could experience it, a form of programmed heritage. It is a community creativity project aiming to empower the area's people by nurturing the idea of belonging, shared identity and continuity. The group of storytellers from the past is perhaps similar to the grief group that the protagonist is a part of and from which she learns about the event. One could easily assume that the event's content is stories like those shared by residents in local self-help groups that offer safety, acceptance but also opportunities for networking.

In "What a Difference a Year Makes," a multicultural, celebratory festival is presented that prioritises education regarding social equity, diversity, and the elimination of discrimination. This is also the story's broader theme, describing an existing problem in the region. The folklife festival comes as a happy ending in a narration that describes a

year beginning with an incident of racial harassment. Song, dance, food connected to other cultures and a photo exhibition set a tone of unity and hope. The celebration serves to achieve a local change and to enrich the local identity with new values. The author placed the reformed young offender among the event's organisers. A community service program changed how he sees different people, and with the celebration, he tries to bring about a similar change in his town. The event also mobilises another cluster, that of local influencers. The photo exhibition presents well-known faces of the region that locals look up to, who are positioned in favour of the cause and raise their voices over equality.

The narratives presented here are interconnected with established strategies around programming, event-based and creative placemaking. Through programming, spaces can be created that are adaptable over time to better cater to the needs of their communities. This approach helps break down barriers related to age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Vitiello and Willcocks, 2021). Diverse activities encourage various uses, lifestyles, financial capacities, reasons for visiting, and length of stay. Furthermore, event-based placemaking is acknowledged as a means to achieve positive social impacts beyond the conventional objectives of placemaking (Silberberg et al., 2013). Participation in local festivals and celebrations indicative of creative placemaking offers an excellent opportunity for people to connect and have a good time. These cultural events constitute a call for community building, by bringing together individuals from different backgrounds who might otherwise lead parallel lives without interacting (Cantle, 2001; 2008).

Through the range of placemaking events depicted in the stories, the writers imbued the town with a deliberate character: one that is supportive of sports, music and creative expression, inclusive of various generations, welcoming to both natives and newcomers, celebratory of the local heritage, and embracing change that will propel it into the future. These locally oriented approaches to placemaking, go beyond mere spectacles and "festivalisation" processes, and seem to educate the community, restore cultural democracy (Alvarez, 2021) and even align with advocacy planning to empower and safeguard demographics that require visibility and inclusion (Lew, 2007). The narratives around community festivals reflect existing local worldviews beyond

tourism, footfall and economic outcomes (Lew, 2017) that have the potential to sediment shared community values and reinvigorate local identities (Skelly and Edensor, 2021). They exhibit polyphony, wherein the community assumes a leading role in shaping the events of the local calendar.

Themes, supporters, partners, performers, professionals, and volunteers are all drawn from existing groups and clusters. Civic investments in placemaking lead to sentiments of sociability and belonging (Alvarez, 2021). These events are reliant on and also contribute to the development of local groups. As Gilchrist (2009) elucidates, collaborating in the setting up of community events allows individuals from various organisations and groups to reinforce trust and connections among them. Engagement in group activities helps people establish networks, which can lead to fresh partnerships, influencing local decisions and perceptions and, according to Torfing et al. (2016), creating a fertile ground for co-creation.

However, this narrative of events that function more than attractions, as labs, incubators (Alvarez, 2021) and networking mechanisms (Pancholi et al., 2015) is underpinned by a strategic framework, which once again fosters competence, autonomy, and interconnectedness, as mentioned in the preceding section. The objective of this visionary strategy appears to be the cultivation of an ethos that becomes particularly evident in the story "Local Legends". Within this vision of Huyton, the town recognises that its prosperity hinges on its residents acting as advocates. Therefore, the town's public art, the event designed to pay tribute to the local mural artist, and the team of volunteers assisting in its organisation all serve as signifiers of this culture of advocating for the town. While this might sound quite idealistic, the stories also furnish us with more pragmatic evidence regarding this strategy, which will be explored in the following discussion.

7.4 Partnerships of empowerment

Collaborations among local entities constitute an additional narrative layer, operating discreetly within the stories but implied as catalysts for placemaking and comprehensive strategies benefiting the community. This examination will centre on

two prominent actors: the local governing body and non-profit organisations. The analysis will shed light on their inherent and prospective roles in public life, positioning them as catalysts for local advancement.

7.4.1 Under the Authority's wing

A local authority plays a crucial role in overseeing and making decisions across a wide range of local issues. During workshop discussions, the Knowsley Council was frequently mentioned, though the specifics of its operations and practices were not always clear to practitioners. Despite this, there was a consensus that the Council's decisions and policies have a significant impact on local life, acting as an unseen force that provides an institutional foundation for the authors' interventions.

The "Business Hub" is the story that has as its central theme local partnerships- it is the partnership of local businesses. Dave and Tom, businessmen of the centre, exchange ideas and try experimentations that lead up to a "networking and peer mentoring program developed by the Council that connected the local town centre business community with peers from tourist markets such as Spain, France, Greece and Turkey." For the author, who used to own a travel agency, this innovative idea was inspired by his travels, as well as cooperation programs with other countries that he recalls. Under the guidance of the Council, the local businesses become part of an international business network, which implements a horizontal interconnection and consulting program. As a result, the town centre becomes a destination for new products and experiences for visitors and locals alike.

In "The Events Manager," community groups and food and drink businesses in the centre will come together to set up a street party for local young people. This is the only story that invents and refers to specific local authority functions without using the word "Council" abstractly. Thus, a very innovative and humane virtual Events Manager of the authority puts their services to the local groups, coordinating their efforts and facilitating their cooperation. Similar to "Business Hub," where an international peer mentoring network is enabled, the Events Manager seeks to emancipate and train the teams to collaborate; the help focuses on bridging different groups and providing specialised technical solutions.

In "Set up for success," the partnership involves the local youth centre, the Council and the local College. The leading role in the story is played by the young members who co-create content for interactive displays and the community leader coordinating them. The other two bodies co-shape a framework of learning, creativity and extroversion. The local College has the know-how and provides workshops and resources to educate and support the creativity of youth. On the other hand, the local authority finances the project and brings their creative results to the town centre with technological equipment installed and a launch event that introduces the project to the public realm. The result is playful digital installations that create foci of social interaction for locals and visitors.

"Local Currency" presents a very interesting partnership. The region is developing the Knowsley Pound, a local currency that encourages consumers to spend locally. Something similar is suggested in "Local Legends," where the app used by the protagonist gives her offers and rewards in the local high street. In both cases, these endeavours require the participation of local businesses. However, what is implied in "Local Currency" is that the initiative is controlled by an entity with broader interests in order to finance other local projects for which other bodies are usually responsible; using the Knowsley Pound, consumers support community gardens and food banks. The story lacks a specific Council reference, yet it suggests broader partnerships and a comprehensive strategy that integrates diverse needs and opportunities that may underpin the innovative project.

"Back to the Future" presents the most remarkable town centre. In its epicentre, there is a highly futuristic "citadel" that indicates technological development. However, peripherally the traditional high street of the past still remains and thrives, with small businesses for local shoppers. Moreover, on the outskirts of the traditional zone, people still cultivate the land and transform its gifts into food. From the periphery to the epicentre, the coexistence of "Huytons" from different eras is made possible thanks to the state grant. Although it is not directly described, one could assume that the local authority implements this strategy. The coexistence of different eras in the town centre is aimed at social resilience and well-being. Any misstep of the new town

can be fixed thanks to the preservation of its older instances that serve as a stable back-up version.

The authors place the local government in various synergies with local bodies like the Community College, third sector organisations, the business community, but also less established creative clusters that show potential for growth. They narrated these scenarios, unaware of the fundamental position that cross-sector partnerships hold in creative placemaking and how placemaking can be employed to complement a holistic local approach (Hughes, 2021). The partnerships in the stories suggest strategies that serve and often combine multiple objectives of regional development and prosperity. As the city of Glen Eira describes in their placemaking 2023-2027 strategy, "Council can use placemaking as a mechanism for working towards strategic goals across a variety of areas including sustainability, economic prosperity, public safety, community health, culture and inclusion." (2023, p.5) In a sense, the Council appears as the same character throughout the body of texts; it has a clear vision for the town's needs and, with its partnerships, seeks to realise a holistic policy by involving purposefully multiple stakeholders and leveraging cross-sector opportunities and funding.

Using the "hero's journey" concept by Campbell (1949) as an interpretative lens, the local authority serves as "The Mentor". This character appears in the hero's journey to offer guidance, knowledge, and help. It supports the hero without being the main focus or magically solving every problem and fulfilling every requirement. In most stories, the Council and its partnerships create the conditions for growth. This can be seen in the new infrastructures and destinations with which the authors augmented Future Huyton e.g., traditional market, equipped community hub, allotment area etc. And indeed, the clustering of businesses or other groups in different corners of the centre can encourage the attendance of visitors, and also cooperation and competitiveness leading to productivity and innovation (Pancholi et al., 2015).

Moreover, some narratives underscore the crucial role of public organisations in establishing communication pathways among the community grassroots, spotlighting the interpersonal relationships that play a pivotal role in the innovation journey. Cipolla and Manzini (2009) describe this aspect as "relational qualities of services." In

these scenarios, the Council takes on the role of a mediator, nurturing connections and facilitating interactions among peers, while also providing the necessary tools and resources to pave the way for growth. This approach is reminiscent of urban living labs and incubators that champion grassroots initiatives. However, as Mila (2017) observed, for local authorities to evolve from the primary initiators of civic projects to platforms that enable and support, a significant paradigm shift is required. Regrettably, many public entities are not yet equipped for this transition, as it demands an investment in building relationships to gather community feedback, ideas, and needs.

The previous narratives intriguingly reflect creative placemaking, as advocated by US federal agencies. These case studies leveraged public and philanthropic funding, received institutional backing for knowledge development, fostered unforeseen local partnerships, and yielded substantial systemic impact by incorporating arts and culture into community-strengthening strategies (National Endowment for the Arts, 2019). Nevertheless, it is important to note that these initiatives were not initiated by a local authority but rather supported by extensive national-level partnerships and networks.

7.4.2 Leveraging the roots of the third sector

The third sector is comprised of various groups such as community organisations, voluntary groups, faith and equality groups, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives, community interest companies, and housing associations. The Improvement and Development Agency for local government (2008) outline these organisations as value-driven, reinvesting any surpluses to further social, environmental, or cultural objectives. They are self-governed, independent, and rely heavily on volunteers. They advocate for community causes, engage with hard-to-reach groups, and contribute to social capital.

Each organisation has a network of beneficiaries or service users, professionals, volunteers, advocates, and donors. In fact, out of 25 workshop participants, only three were not connected to any such cluster as an employee, volunteer, or beneficiary. Thus, the local contribution of these organisations was organically featured in workshop discussions, stories, but also audience responses.

"Digital Futures of Solidarity" is a story that has a theme specifically focused on the contribution of charities to local life. It highlights the importance of their presence in the town centre, providing information and mobilising community members to address local issues. The story follows a local charity worker who introduces a tech intervention that changes how her organisation interacts with the community and offers support. The project is a collaborative effort between various organisations, including the Council, the local third sector, and the business community of Knowsley. Although the story does not provide many details about their partnership, it is evident that the writer, a charity manager herself, pinpoints concrete goals for the particular service, reflecting her expertise and her knowledge of community's needs.

Members of the audience and other practitioners have expressed how working or volunteering for non-profit organisations has given them the opportunity to meet diverse individuals in places, such as the "St. Anne Street Refugee Centre in Toxteth," "a CenterPoint for Ukrainian Refugees," "Share Knowsley, where I teach English," and "a social prescribing organisation where I facilitate a choir and a drama group." They have shared that participating in these groups has allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of different people's lives and the challenges they face. Accordingly, service users refer to the support they receive and the welcoming environment that they find in these settings. "The people that are there are lovely all the time thinking to help people. I love it, the English class is funny, and the teacher makes me feel at home. I now have friends from more countries. I learned to speak English more than I arrived to England [sic]".

Some writers even saw in these organisations the potential for restoring or forging new community ties. In "Outside," young Kyrylo, a member of Huyton Athletic, a fictional local athletic club, volunteers as part of the club's programs to help the elderly Howard during his recovery from a health issue that kept him inside and disconnected from public life. The sense of friendship in the scene where they meet by chance in the outside world after Howard's recovery is characteristic of the wished-for neighbourliness. The writer built the plot as the polar opposite of a real-life experience when a young cyclist whizzed by, knocked him down and carried on laughing.

In "What a Difference a Year Makes," young coevals Paul and Ali, the first native in Knowsley and the second a refugee, meet at the refuge centre and become friends. Paul's presence there is part of a fictional community correction program but became an opportunity to develop a friendship that proved reformative for him. The words of young Paul, "I got nothin' like that in school", even underline the author's view that these activities have a significant educational value that is absent from formal education. A few months later Paul becomes a volunteer in an anti-racism festival.

However, it is not just an experience of mutuality and empathy that is described as educational or empowering. In "Set Up for Success," a committed youth worker supervises a digital creativity after-school program at the nearby youth centre. Through this program, local youth acquire STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) skills for place-based interventions. The project provides an opportunity for teenagers to showcase their creative outcomes to visitors of the town centre and contribute to the activation of their familiar environments.

Finally, narratives from the members themselves also refer to collaborative processes as part of group activities. For example, an audience member reports about an activity of a local faith-based organisation: "Discussions on specific topics in small groups with a facilitator were held. The facilitator ensured everybody's voice and opinion were heard, and it was great to hear different opinions and ideas from people of different backgrounds. All ideas were collated, and themes were identified. The diversity of views led to a wonderful plan being created that suits the needs of the parish community by consulting with them directly."

Within this broader narrative, there are two aspects to the capacity that third-sector organisations hold in relation to placemaking. The first aspect is the specialised knowledge and expertise of charity workers and their direct connection to the local population. Both authors of "Digital Futures of Solidarity" and "Back to the Future" proposed placemaking concepts based on their professional experience with a vulnerable section of the population and advocating for their needs. By engaging with service users, professionals gain a deep understanding of the community's root problems, pain points, needs, and desires. Thus, they can provide visibility into the

world of specific groups in the community and instigate relevant discussions. This insight into the locality and its demographics is a widely acknowledged strength of the third sector (Scottish Government, 2011). However, there is also substantial debate around the assumption that third-sector organisations can effectively represent the views and needs of service users and whether they can be a substitute for meaningful engagement with them (Mazzei et al., 2019) in the design of public services.

The other aspect can probably inform this debate. The narratives around third sector organisations refer to community settings that contribute to the capacity-building of individuals and benefit the broader community. Study participants referred to environments that support adults' well-being through social prescribing and mutual help groups, help young people to develop and accomplish, foster cultural adaptation and aid citizens in impoverished and disadvantaged communities. Their descriptions relate to Maton's view of empowerment as "a group-based, participatory, developmental process through which marginalised or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire valued resources and basic rights, and achieve important life goals and reduced societal marginalisation" (2008, p. 5).

Furthermore, Maton (ibid), conducting a comprehensive literature review on various community domains, identified six key characteristics of empowering community settings that provide valuable insights for this overall analysis. These environments nurture group-based values and ideologies that shape culture, determine behaviours, and produce desired outcomes. They involve core activities to accomplish their core missions, which develop skills and self-efficacy. They foster a relational environment in which interpersonal and intergroup relationships are formed. They offer multiple roles for members and opportunities for participation, learning, and development, regardless of their background, interests, skills, or prior experience. Effective leadership inspires and motivates members, while organisational mechanisms demonstrate flexibility, responsiveness, and adaptation to internal and external challenges. Furthermore, these nuclei have a substantial external impact increasing the number of empowered citizens in the locality and their influence through the networks in which they participate. Ultimately, they positively impact the broader community,

with potential for model dissemination, community actions, community services, resource mobilisation, and policy advocacy.

This conceptualisation shares significant similarities with narratives presented in the preceding sections. Notions regarding vernacular creativity that supports competence, autonomy and interconnection, the participatory organisation of community events guided by an ethos of local advocacy and social equity, and even the inspiring leadership demonstrating deep knowledge of local needs reflect empowering experiences in environments where the non-profit sector is extensively active. While Future Huyton appears free from adversity, it is evident that the imagined placemaking that shaped it is rooted in real experiences that writers had in various empowering community settings throughout their lives.

Third sector organisations serve as a vital link to the local community. While the local government may be seen as a higher power, these groups are anchors that connect to the region's foundation. As described in the literature review, government policies in the UK have increasingly encouraged partnerships with these third sector organisations in the design and delivery of public services (Saunders et al., 2007). Indeed, they possess expertise and understanding of the needs and wants of the people they serve, but what emerges as their most important feature is the empowering processes and outcomes they involve. Their ability to foster vital relational communities is illuminated as a valuable asset that can facilitate more participatory efforts in placemaking, where regeneration involves a long-lasting impact on communities and their places.

7.5 Concluding on a value-guided placemaking

Many of the ideas presented in the stories reflect an actual shift in Creative Placemaking over the past decade. Initially focused on liveability and economic benefits, the practice has evolved towards a broader vision of community development aimed at fostering social change and civic engagement at the local level, as highlighted by Hughes (2021). This transformation, mirrored in the Future Huyton

stories, also resonates with creative initiatives found in the Northwest of England, particularly in areas facing similar challenges and community dynamics as Knowsley.

For instance, Skelly and Edensor (2020) document the placemaking activities of a group of local citizens in Ordsall Salford, about 37 km from Knowsley, who sustain a community light festival to strengthen communal bonds. Likewise, Symons (2017) details an experimental project of shaping a cultural activities plan with the participation of the local community. These grassroots efforts, occurring in a context similar to Knowsley regarding socioeconomic challenges and disadvantaged reputation, exemplify the potential of participatory Creative Placemaking. They also highlight the often-overlooked need for systematic support in such endeavours.

In this study, the Future Huyton concept emerges as an imaginative blueprint, crafted from the experiences, aspirations, and needs of local practitioners. Before materialising into a tangible placemaking project, it sketches out an ambitious, albeit feasible, vision for the future. Even its more speculative elements shed light on real-life values that serve as a guide for the region's rejuvenation.

This envisioned scenario paints the town centre as a mosaic of collaborative creativity, buoyed by daily social opportunities. The local government plays a crucial role, catalysing community engagement organised into creative collectives and non-profit organisations. Such teamwork paves the way for all-encompassing strategies that address varied needs and encourage innovation. Skills, values, and initiatives flourish within these community nuclei, enhancing empowerment, unity, and joint shaping of the local environment.

In this context, placemaking builds on a participatory foundation. A diverse array of artistic expressions, including visual and performing arts, digital media, and STEAM education, empowers local youth to engage actively in civic life. Community events and festivals not only entertain but also affirm and celebrate the local identity, melding enjoyment with the recognition and appreciation of regional culture. This aspirational narrative yields valuable insights for actual placemaking strategies, emphasising co-creation over mere plan introduction.

Undoubtedly, the most salient value woven through these stories is community empowerment, intricately linked to placemaking in a synergistic cycle that blurs the lines between the two. Every spatial enhancement, destination, event, and intervention either emerges from or offers a chance to realise communal objectives. Concepts of participation, innovation, unity, inclusivity, and pride are not just theoretical ideals but practical steps in this empowering journey. However, these bright values also address underlying challenges, indicating areas needing fortification.

Placemaking is therefore called upon to cover a double distance, which makes it clear that the outcomes may take some time to materialise. It is important to note that the solutions proposed are found in the problems themselves. For example, the creativity of young people and the celebrated outcomes are things for which there is no place currently in the town centre; place, referring not only to the idealised creative hubs, with specialised infrastructure and programs as described in the stories, but also to a practical and acceptable way of using public space and intervening in it. In this context, one could argue that the most organic placemaking energy in real Huyton was the natural gathering of local youth in the centre and the nearby parks. However, as their attitudes often contradict proper conduct, this was consistently highlighted in everyday discussions as an obstacle and not an untapped asset for revitalising the area. Placemaking is called to challenge established mental models. Trust constitutes a hidden value within the process, which needs to be nurtured and earned between all parties involved- the Council, the Community and the various organised local bodies.

Chapter 8: From Tech Fiction to Digital Placemaking

The concept of technology in public space, aiming to address problems and support new activities, was an unusual and unexpected topic of discussion for the workshop practitioners; they had fewer formulated opinions about the concept. Thus, the workshop naturally evolved into an educational and informative session, focusing on current technological applications and future trends. It fostered meaningful discussions about opportunities and challenges, ethics, and the importance of accessibility and inclusion.

Younger participants, as expected, demonstrated greater familiarity with existing applications and emerging developments often depicted in sci-fi films and video games. Their confidence in creating scenarios reflects this familiarity. On the other side, senior writers, initially hesitant, gradually surpassed their reservations about exploring speculative technology and adeptly employed science fiction elements into their stories with clarity and intent.

The emerging tech scenarios appear as variations of familiar design concepts, blending both practical and fictional elements. However, their use in the stories demonstrates intention in relation to real local problems and desired changes. The following pages will explore narratives of speculated tech applications and reflect on overarching concepts indicating the meaningful use of technologies to reactivate the local town centre.

The chapter is linked to the research question: "How do local experiences and perspectives of technology direct potential digital placemaking initiatives?" The text comprises three narrative segments. The first part highlights the concept of public spaces extending private ones, with indoor technologies increasingly impacting the public sphere. This shift may transform urban centres into communal areas, managed by citizens much like their smart homes.

The second part explores creative technological applications influenced by advertising, and spectacle in urban areas. It also touches upon emerging immersive technologies, which generate considerable interest despite limited familiarity. This section highlights the importance of skill development and participation in content creation.

Finally, the third part explores diverse uses, ideologies, and values within technological environments, advocating for varied opportunities and autonomous engagement to promote productive connections for local development.

8.1 Outdoors as Indoors, Public through Personal

Many of the fictional technologies featured in the speculative town centres of the stories draw inspiration from places and technological products that are part of the writers' everyday lives. The fact that these media appear in the town centre becomes an opportunity for reflection in relation to their purpose and the repercussions of their potential establishment.

Security in the town centre was the most common issue raised in the initial discussions. This is a topic that people often discuss and refer to readily. When it was time to reflect on tech-related solutions, many writers turned to surveillance and monitoring concepts. The CCTV system installed at the town centre was described with approval, and writers' suggestions aimed at extending its effectiveness. In "What a difference a year makes," cameras monitor the public space, and the surveillance material is processed through forensic technologies and crossed with criminal record databases. The surveillance technology is so effective and immediate that the perpetrator is identified shortly after the incident report. Similar, albeit more concise, is the description of "Local Legends," where drones fly and supervise the town from above. The reference to the security swarm is made on the occasion of an infamous race crime that happened in the area long ago but remains impossible to forget. In the context of "Walk the Walk," a police robot responds to vandalism incidents, which are frequently discussed by local residents concerning adverse events in the town centre. These notions of surveillance and intervention align with contemporary research trends, such as the application of deep learning models for the detection of antisocial

conduct in surveillance monitoring, as demonstrated in the work of Tuannurisan et al. (2023).

Discussions regarding the safeguarding of privacy and potential infringements on personal data, arose organically. The authors unequivocally advocated for surveillance, displaying no adverse sentiments toward the notion of invading privacy, which they perceived as an elusive, abstract condition. Their response rested on the premise that having nothing to hide equated to having nothing to fear. Conversely, apprehension and insecurity in public spaces were acknowledged as genuine concerns.

Notably, the author of "What a Difference a Year Makes" conceived a "Privacy Pod" as an amenity within the local centre. This pod serves as a panic room, offering isolation from the unpredictable external environment and providing a space for both grounding and communication with authorities without stigmatisation. The concept drew inspiration from the cylindrical toilet pods found on trains. The potential need for an individual to seek refuge in a secure cubicle while visiting the centre elucidates why, in the hypothetical dichotomy between safeguarding privacy and supervising public life, people would unequivocally favour the normalisation of surveillance and monitoring.

Since the mid-1990s, the UK government has endeavoured to restrict and regulate antisocial behaviour in the interest of community safety (Labour Party, 1995). Initially, surveillance was proposed as a key tool in achieving this goal; however, its efficacy has been called into question in both government and police reports (Connor and Huggins, 2010). Within the anxiety prevalent in public spaces, one can also discern what Minton (2011) characterises as fear begetting fear. She notes that "the need for security can become addictive, with people finding that however much they have, it can never be enough and that rather like an addictive drug, once they have got used to it, they can't do without it" (ibid, p.171). It is plausible to assume that the persistence of insecurity perceptions significantly influenced the adoption of viewpoints that normalise surveillance and reflect the internal divisions within the community previously discussed, where certain social identities are considered justifiably subject to surveillance without impinging on the sensitivities of those who consider themselves

innocent. However, beyond the security objective, alternative interpretations regarding public space monitoring suggest a shift in how 'public' is perceived.

Many tech augmentations aim at improving safety. In "Local Legends," solar panel lighting along a path that is a sports destination allows people doing sports to remain in the area safely even when it gets dark. In "Setup for Success," a siren beeps and Cleo's hover board automatically slows down and immobilises when she exceeds the speed limit. The idea comes from the security function of the carts at the nearby supermarket that prevents them from being stolen. In "Outside," the drones give safety instructions to the people in the square, an invention based on the remembrance of the Hillsborough disaster in 1989 combined with the recent social distancing instructions during the pandemic. In "Walk the Walk," the traffic lights adjust to Marge's walking pace, so she can safely cross a busy road and enter the town centre. As she walks through the town, her presence will instigate a series of other interactions with the town's infrastructure. These descriptions refer to the automation and intelligent handling of digital infrastructure that is associated with private spaces that are open to the public.

To support accessibility in the town centre, the authors were inspired by the personal technologies they possessed and used. "Back to the Future" describes smart home automations, which a young person with mobility problems operates through his headband so that he can self-service and navigate comfortably in the closed spaces of his house, but also in "The Round"- a modern indoor town centre. In "Walk the Walk", the author brings these technologies to the open public space so that the senior protagonist can personalise public infrastructure and services through an ecosystem of wearable personal technologies. One of them is also connected to an NHS platform that encourages her to exercise. In "Village in the Metaverse," the housebound protagonist accesses the virtual town centre through his immersion set, that consists of high-definition contact lenses, hearing devices implanted into the inner ear, sensors layering his skin and a battery implanted into his armpit. Interestingly, these concepts were invented by writers based on familiar health-related technology that was wearable or incorporated into their bodies. Their inventions allow their story personas to access and participate in the public sphere.

Similarly, other design concepts simulate interconnected smart home devices, which participants brought up in design activities. In the "Business Hub", with a tap on his watch, Dave opened the electric blind and entered his store, just as he would at home. In "Growing," visitors put on their hologlasses to access holographic content in different corners of the park. In "Setup for Success," people create stories through their phones and send them to a public smart monitor. In "Walk the Walk," Madge connects her kindle to the public seating area furniture to access recommendations of new book titles and later activates a public workout apparatus that connects to her personalised well-being plan. In "The Events Manager," the town appears to have an AI that converses with people to provide information and operate specialised equipment, just like a virtual home assistant. All scenarios describe a personal device-public space interface, which in its first half is already familiar.

The descriptions of speculative technology ecosystems above suggest public places that simulate private indoor spaces, incorporate smart home automation and support personal device interfaces. The authors of the related stories appear familiar with security technologies, assistive technologies and interconnected smart devices. Their design concepts diminish the partition between public and private spaces and even suggest osmosis between the body and the public realm to render public space safe, accessible and accommodating.

In this analytical review, it's crucial to understand the subtleties of cyborg-type assemblages, as Picon (2015) outlines. This concept involves people being enhanced with digital technologies, living in a reality defined by both physical objects and data, including artifacts and their analogue and digital representations, all connected in networked relationships (Jones, 2014). These scenarios, while seemingly familiar, are actually far more integrated than our current reality. This viewpoint stems from the methodological approach adopted here, which, similar to design fiction, uses speculated future technologies to illuminate present-day needs and values. Given this context, it is important not to take these narratives as direct suggestions for transforming our town centres into futuristic cyborg campuses.

When pondering the practical utilisation of technology to revitalise public life, it becomes imperative to account for the influence of the pandemic and the resulting transformations it enabled. The Covid-19 crisis led to increased adoption of digital technologies in advanced economies. The necessity for social distancing prompted companies to accelerate their digitalisation efforts. Consumers moved dramatically towards online channels, and companies and industries responded in turn, accelerating their digitalisation efforts and swiftly advancing their digital product and service offerings (Simões et al., 2021). This transformation varied across sectors, with certain industries experiencing more pronounced changes in their digital-product portfolios. Healthcare, pharma, financial services, and professional services reported significant growth (LaBerge et al., 2020). Furthermore, a significant outcome of increased digitalisation has been the remote work revolution. Before the crisis, only 5 percent of workers typically worked from home in Europe, but by 2021 that had reached 16 percent (Jaumotte et al., 2023). It is worth mentioning that the workshops also started through online channels. Nevertheless, these were not the only digital experiences that the pandemic facilitated.

During the workshop, the practitioners' design concepts were heavily influenced by their experiences with digital technologies, notably within two specific areas. One key area is digital health, which encompasses the use of digital technologies to enhance healthcare systems, services, and individual health outcomes. The pandemic has significantly transformed the digital health landscape, especially within the NHS in the UK. This period saw patients adopting new habits and reducing their resistance to behavioural change, evident in the widespread acceptance of digital health solutions such as remote consultations, electronic prescriptions, and wearable health monitors (Ta and Au, 2021; Geifman et al., 2023). Notably, the adoption of wearable devices surged globally between 2019 and 2022, driven largely by the sales of smartwatches and ear-worn devices (Laricchia, 2023). This significant influence of health-related wearable technology concepts is evident in the storylines and character development within the stories, where health issues and the corresponding technological responses are a central theme.

The other area of influence is smart home technologies. The State of the Connected Home (2022) report underscores the substantial surge in both consumer awareness of and engagement with smart home technologies, ignited by the pandemic. In 2022, a noteworthy 81% of respondents indicated possessing some level of familiarity with smart home technology, marking a one percent rise from 2021 and further progress from 2020. This marks a significant leap from 2016 when merely 66% of UK adults were acquainted with smart homes. Pertaining to adoption rates, the report accentuates that a substantial 77% of UK adults currently possess at least one connected home device, showcasing an increase from the 67% prior to the pandemic. Remarkably, the data portrays the embracement of connected home technologies across diverse age brackets, with the 25-45 age group displaying the highest adoption rates. Additionally, individuals aged 65 and above align with national averages, indicating their engagement with these technologies. Moreover, a standout trend is the diversification of product categories, where consumers exhibit heightened interest and confidence in procuring smart devices that go beyond entertainment, particularly in spheres like home security and energy management.

Grounded in these two areas, the practitioners' design concepts illustrate the town centre as a communal living space that resembles a private space. The stories are not an appeal to privatise the functions of public space but rather suggest that the imperative of social distancing and the trend of smartifying their fortresses of solitude influenced citizens' awareness of technologies and shaped their perspectives on the qualities of public space, especially since many of its traditional functions had faded. In their employment of smart home automations and wearable technology they prioritise security, safety, and accessibility, while demonstrating trust regarding the providers of these services, the networks they participate in and the possible effects of producing a constant digital footprint.

In "Walk the Walk," the protagonist explicitly expresses this trustful ignorance: "Drifting through the air, a tinny tinkle vibration of an old-fashioned accordion enveloped the square. At once, they both cried out, "Stan, Stan, the Music Man", his image floating on the giant screens of the plaza. Madge often wondered how this

always happened but did not fuss too much. She thought to herself, somebody in that great control box in the sky likes me."

8.2 Immersive Futures: Navigating Digital Creativity in Public Spaces

During workshop sessions, various examples and applications of creative technologies were presented and discussed based on participants' own experiences from events and places. The intention was to stimulate their imagination for crafting concepts related to celebrations, artistic ventures, cultural initiatives, and creative endeavours that resonated with their visions. The narratives that emerged skilfully intertwined technology with entertainment and performance, local heritage, and playful interventions. These scenarios featured captivating tales of hologram storytellers, immersive and vibrant ambiences, virtual painting with probes, and interactive posters. Within these narratives, community members transitioned from mere observers to active creators, performers, and audiences, forging deeper bonds. As previously discussed, creativity was proven to be a valuable asset, fostering skills, nurturing connections, reshaping a shared identity, and magnetising visitors.

One of these stories, titled "Luminous," vividly describes an audiovisual spectacle set in a central performance space, all based on the concept of mixed reality. The fusion of optical holograms and music crafts a captivating experience for the audience, requiring special spectacles for optimal engagement. Similarly, the story "Growing" hints at mixed reality and holograms. In this context, visitors to a park witness the apparition of storytellers from the past through the aid of wearable AR glasses. As they stroll along designated paths, an audio cue alerts them to activate the glasses and indulge in the content. This personalised experience caters to individual exploration rather than collective engagement. Moreover, a group of young boys, each wearing similar glasses, participates in a game that remains concealed from onlookers. These distinct scenarios illustrate three potential modes of immersive engagement: collective, personal, and group experiences. The depiction of specialised eyewear, akin to the ubiquity of smartphones, hint at the evolving role of mobile computing as more visually oriented.

From the outset, the study was motivated and intrigued by immersive environments, acknowledging their burgeoning presence in the market, contemporary research, and the artistic innovation tied to Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR). Notably, the UK stands as a focal point for immersive tech advancement fuelled by its gaming expertise (Geospatial Commission, 2019). Brands are integrating these technologies for virtual fitting rooms and enhanced remote shopping, responding to shifts in consumer behaviour due to the pandemic (Skeldon, 2021). R&D in the creative industries aims to converge AR and VR with live performance to revolutionise storytelling and theatre and reshape audience participation and engagement (Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2021). Meanwhile, Meta, Amazon, and Google are capturing attention with their ambitious endeavours to deploy these technologies on a large scale.

However, despite their significant potential and impressive innovations, these technologies are yet to attain a mainstream status, with relatively low adoption and satisfaction rates (Avasant, 2022). The authors of the relevant stories drew inspiration from diverse sources they were familiar with, including Pokémon hunts, virtual reality gaming, and other AR applications. While the notion of immersion captivated many practitioners, only a handful possessed firsthand familiarity with the technology. For most writers, their exposure was limited to promotional videos and science fiction, often presenting an idealised portrayal of mixed reality rather than an accurate user experience. In in-person workshops, participants also experimented with AR filters, which seemed more accessible due to their integration in social media platforms.

In another story, "Back to the Future", a young character named Alfie engages in virtual painting through the use of probes and a headband. The virtual artwork is then showcased in the high street "thanks to an active media facade known as The Chat Back Zone. Outdoor shoppers were able to comment on the exhibits and often added a squiggle or two of their own in lieu of a signature." A similar design concept is the media façade in "Walk the Walk" where the local street performer appears as a response to the digital footprint of the protagonists as they enter the town square; this is their favourite local performer from the past and the town seems to know it. "Set Up for Success" also involves interactive screens enabling town visitors to share their social media content they have created on-site. In all three stories, the screen has a

mediating role, oscillating between the personal(ised) and the communal and creating opportunities for expression and playful interaction that allows people to get to know each other.

The incorporation of displays and interactive installations into architectural frameworks, like media facades and urban screens, mirrors the original emphasis of Media Architecture during the early 2000s. These media were signifiers of innovation at that time; however, their significance has shifted today, influenced by diverse factors that include technological progress such as smart city technologies, as well as design methodologies more oriented to socially and ecologically sustainable urban environments (De Waal, 2021). Nevertheless, practitioners invented design concepts of this type, drawing inspiration from various familiar applications. The Chat Back Zone concept was inspired by interactive screens in GLAM spaces (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums), but also publishing creative work online. The automatic emergence of the busker was based on busy urban centre billboards and the personalised/localised ads that appeared in the author's browser. Finally, young practitioners drew from social media filters, TikTok trends and the photo-booth in Lime Street Station.

In the wide array of scenarios exploring digital creativity as a catalyst for revitalising town centres, a notable observation is the absence of a clear distinction between emerging and established technologies. Instead, a recurring theme is observed: practitioners naturally lean towards design concepts that resonate with their experiences, whether as users or creators. These narratives, projected 10 to 20 years into the future, depict immersive technologies as seamlessly integrated into daily life, mirroring the ubiquity of current technologies like public displays and smartphones. For instance, in the story "Growing," an elderly character comments on the bulkiness of her holo-glasses compared to the more refined versions preferred by the youth. This detail reflects the present-day scenario where smartphone models vary across generations, underscoring the broad integration and generation-specific adoption of technology. Similarly, "Back to the Future" illustrates a future where tools for virtual painting are made accessible to everyone in the community hub's art section, showcasing the envisioned inclusivity in the use of future technologies.

Furthermore, both "Set up for Success" and "Luminous" underscored the integration of digital creativity within learning environments, introducing local youth to relevant digital media and creative projects. The stories emphasise the expansion of people's capabilities to lead the kind of lives they value (Resnick, 2019). Authors consistently emphasised the need for accessible experiences that familiarise individuals with digital media, facilitating their expressive exploitation. This sentiment was echoed when the researcher presented "Future Huyton" and the "Knowsley Domes" app in the town centre. Many passersby encountered an AR application for the first time and struggled to grasp the concept until experiencing it firsthand. The physical presence of the researcher helped, but it was evident that these experiences were not intuitively accessible. Furthermore, some passersby expressed an interest in independently using the "Knowsley Domes" app to set up their own virtual domes with their children, as this would be something that would appeal to them.

In conclusion, the stories skilfully weave together both established and emerging technologies with creative pursuits, merging them effortlessly into the fabric of everyday life. This integration signifies a smooth and organic progression, anchored in the principles of accessibility, comprehension, and inventive exploration. Building on the insights from the preceding sections, it is highlighted that numerous immersive technologies have yet to become commonplace within local communities. Engaging the local populace creatively in their everyday environments could play a crucial role in harnessing these technologies effectively for digital placemaking, marking a pivotal step towards their substantial integration and utilisation.

8.3 Articulating the Future: Smart Towns, Engaged Citizens, Public Digital Media

The concept of facilitating activities and promoting desired behaviours within the town centre through digital services is woven into various narratives. These narratives portray digital applications, streams of information, and technological infrastructure engaging citizens who use digital media in different capacities. Macroscopically, these services embody distinct ideologies of town archetypes, forming a spectrum from

centralised to participatory and autonomous. Notably, none of these narratives paint a grim or dystopian picture of life in the future town centre. Instead, each author emphasises the advantages of their ideas, crafting vibrant local communities that retain their identity and prioritise the well-being of their residents.

In "Walk the Walk," the town centre is depicted as a convergence of physical, digital and virtual elements linked by personal and public data streams. The very structure of the built environment adapts based on the profiles shared by its inhabitants through their devices, often without full awareness. At the same time, the human components of this system also respond to digital alerts and guidelines that aim at supporting their welfare, safety and mobility within public spaces. "Hurry-up! Get going! You need the credits," says one friend to the other to motivate her to finish her exercise and "complete the NHS-prescribed weekly objective of twenty-six minutes". Later, "their assigned day of 'personal connection' will complete precisely at the stated time of 15:55". The town is a system that operates under algorithms to achieve goals that constitute the common good. This does not mean everyone complies, but following protocols and meeting goals becomes a currency of exchange, with technology serving as the means to guide public existence towards sustainability. This story, which drew inspiration from COVID-19 pandemic safety regulations, emphasises the need to re-invent normality even within constrained frameworks that might become necessary in the future due to various global challenges.

"Local Legends" presents an alternate form of technological mediation to shape public life. Here, technology is not orchestrating a cybernetic town, but instead acts as a tool to harness community loyalty by incentivising and rewarding favourable behaviours. The protagonist in this story interacts with a gamified app that bestows both virtual and material rewards in the local high street, along with valuable information. The author of "Local Legends" is the sole one to recognise and harness the power of digital media in influencing human behaviour through gamified engagement. This insight stems from her familiarity with fitness apps that offer badges based on real-world activities and presence in localities. The story highlights technology's role in training citizens in the art of local advocacy.

"Digital Futures of Solidarity" sheds light on another facet of the town centre, often overlooked by most writers – the civic centre. Huyton is the town of Knowsley, where the Council offices are located, but the story extends this capacity to the streets, where digital displays inform citizens about local life issues and projects. Dynamic infographics make passersby aware of issues and encourage their contribution towards resolutions. While this contribution is financial in the story, focusing on charitable activities, it marks a form of involvement in communal matters. Notably, the author emphasises a characteristic of the technological intervention: "The interactive screens are one of the new ways people can make donations, but they are more than payment terminals. People can witness the tally of all donations rising, and the screen is a visual expression of their contributions to the less fortunate in their community. This transparency regarding our organisation's funds and goals will help us keep people involved." Transparency about organisational actions ensures community support and involvement. Technology does not train participation but serves as an avenue for informing and building trust.

In "Village in the Metaverse," the protagonist, confined to his home, enters a digital twin of the town centre featuring virtual counterparts of its key destinations. The author, experienced in pandemic-induced online services, envisions merging traditional online utilities (electronic shops, online banking, eBook and audiobook collections, social media platforms and communication apps) with co-op video games and virtual reality. The resulting digital doppelgänger of the town centre serves as a localised extension of public space, blending utility with nostalgic notions of identity and preservation: "I turn back time in the virtual calendar, and all destinations change to how they looked in the early 2000s when I was a boy. It is strange to see these places as they used to be. I enter the bank where my father used to work. It looks almost identical, but he's not there. I can still do all my transactions". Moreover, the story, clearly affected by quarantine restrictions, brings the town centre into the Metaverse as an online social space. This portrayal raises questions about the potential for serendipity within this digital space. Nonetheless, the story underscores the importance of maintaining social bonds within this digital realm: "So easy to jump from

a personal encounter to a group assembly to a crowded concert. Places with no in-between, convenience versus physical contact. The social tribe should always win out."

"The Events Manager" introduces a distinct form of citizen engagement and motivation for desired actions. In a unique twist, the technology is embodied by an Artificial Intelligence, yet citizens retain prominence as decision-makers. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that the young originators of the story got the idea from "Jarvis from Iron-man," the AI of the fictional Marvel hero produced by him to facilitate his heroic missions. So, they portray the AI not fearfully or cautiously but as a service with specialised expertise and potential for good, connecting the public with authority and facilitating connections among local groups. In this narrative, the AI aids in educating and inspiring the community, rather than monopolising power. Importantly, it prepares characters for a collaborative placemaking initiative, presenting a story where human resources are being nurtured and developed.

A more common type of digital service that enables autonomous collaboration is that of social platforms and networks. Although the topic was part of workshop discussions, online interactions are absent from the interventions narrated by the authors. The younger team behind "The Events Manager" makes a superficial reference to social media and online cores but relies primarily on their AI-based service. Similarly, "Business Hub" introduces the concept of digital peer-to-peer mentoring for local businesses, yet interactions between businesspeople in the story occur in person. Bridging local business clusters with counterparts from other regions digitally would be innovative, but the author's background lacks relevant online experience, drawing from trade shows and business clubs of the past.

In essence, as delineated in the methodology, the narratives of Future Huyton were crafted to sketch out a possibility space and present it vividly to the readers, not to convince but, as Kenneth Burke (1950) elucidates, to offer a deeper understanding of human motives and perceptions and to foster identification between individuals and groups. Inherently, the fabricated technological solutions seem to be saturated with assertions and conceptions about the world. Their underlying ideologies might not entirely align, but what is evident is that such technological solutions incorporate what

Ian Bogost (2008) terms as procedural rhetoric in videogames, embodying cultural and societal norms via computational processes.

With a touch of creative liberty, the portrayals of these digital services and town centre technologies can be inferred as analogous to a video game-like ecosystems. In this imaginative framework, users log in, take action, access resources, form groups, collaborate, network, or independently champion local causes that capture their interest, all while achieving goals and reaping rewards. Local stakeholders integrate into this environment, their roles and connections depicted within the game's dynamics, proposing a model of participatory digital placemaking that straddles both the virtual and physical worlds. This vision suggests that the architects behind this platform would design an environment conducive to engagement, motivation, and enjoyment, encoding desirable user behaviours into the platform's design—a task that demands meticulous planning. Yet, this portrayal, hinting at a top-down model only captures part of the broader narratives.

A more nuanced perspective reveals the essence of these stories: the process of articulation as a dynamic force that weaves together varied elements, ultimately giving rise to a digital placemaking assemblage. This network intertwines algorithms, data, personal devices, public infrastructure, individuals, communities, and broader stakeholders, transforming the identities and purposes of the elements involved. This interconnection fosters the emergence of new social practices, relationships, groups, subcultures, and vibrant places.

This concept of articulation finds its roots in social and political theory, particularly in Antonio Gramsci's exploration of hegemony, which posits that ideologies are constructed through the interactions of diverse cultural, political, and economic components. Expanding upon the groundwork laid by Gramsci, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), in their discourse and radical democracy theory further, refine the concept of articulation. Their work centres on the potential of articulation to facilitate democratic engagement by weaving together distinct political, social and cultural elements. Building upon these theoretical foundations, DiSalvo (2012) delves into the pragmatic implications of articulation within the realm of design and

technology. His exploration extends to physical and digital systems, with a specific focus on the domain of ubiquitous computing (ubicomp), where articulation involves human and non-human entities to shape open spaces for contestation. Therefore, while technology has given capacities, it does not lead to single-minded outcomes but can instead foster polyphony. In proportion, Bogost (2008) and Jenkins, Ito and Boyd (2016) recognise that apart from the in-game activity and the cultural values represented in a video game, communities develop around and beyond the game with their distinct values and social, cultural and political practices.

At its core, the concept of articulation mirrors placemaking, where designing digital services is akin to shaping physical spaces. Just as physical environments are crafted to attract people and encourage activity and interaction, digital platforms are designed to facilitate connections, opportunities, and behaviours without prescribing specific outcomes. Articulation promotes an organic approach to digital placemaking, where technology serves as an enabler, leading to transformative uses and the creation of new, active spaces. Through this lens, digital placemaking platforms and the experiences they offer become integral to the public sphere, resonating with traditional principles that define the essence of meaningful public places.

8.4 Conclusions

The transformative power of digital technologies in the urban landscape is not solely a function of the technologies themselves but a complex interplay between multiple factors—ranging from global to local societal conditions, the inherent features and functionalities of the technologies, and the human elements of familiarity, trust, creativity, and education.

In the opening section, the evolving perceptions of the digital town centre are moulded by the fusion of contemporary technologies breaching the mainstream and the prevailing societal conditions at both global and local scales. This dynamic ushers in a notable blend of personal gadgets and public infrastructure. As individuals navigate the changing landscape, there is a heightened emphasis on security and a growing appreciation for the conveniences smart technology offers in public arenas. This

comfort and reliance on digital oversight amplifies the pivotal role of familiarity with specific platforms, ensuring their broader acceptance and catalysing societal shifts. Such a familiarity-driven approach points towards the merit of endorsing technologies for urban growth that resonate with users or witness burgeoning popularity. However, it is equally imperative to vouch for the reliability and credibility of these innovations.

Delving into the next segment, the narrative pivots back to the importance of familiarity. As technology breakthroughs become staples in our daily grind, their ubiquitous nature empowers user autonomy and their creative exploitation. This backdrop sets the stage for two intertwined themes. Firstly, creativity bursts forth, driving familiar platforms into realms of expansive expression. This surge of innovation is not restricted to the tools themselves; it is emblematic of their prowess in bolstering community bonds, reshaping collective identities, and captivating wider audiences, morphing residents from mere spectators to proactive participants. Running parallel is the indispensable function of education. It acts as the conduit introducing the general populace to these tech marvels and cultivating their inventive potentials. By championing both familiarity and creativity, education ensures these tech marvels are not just revolutionary but also accessible and metamorphic. These themes, rather than being standalone, are deeply interconnected, working in harmony to foster a cohesive integration of immersive technologies and more conventional media into communal spaces.

The third section underscores the dynamic nature of digital applications, highlighting their potential to fluctuate between authoritarian control, centralised oversight, incentives, personalisation, and a spectrum of collaboration and autonomy embedded within their functionality. Yet, these innate characteristics do not inherently establish places. Instead, they represent pieces in a broader puzzle of interactions. Such a view brings to light the requirement for flexibility and the formation of connections that can stimulate different local clusters. The crux lies in a holistic placemaking strategy, which is influenced not just by the inherent ideology of a tool, but also by its capacity to interweave varied economic, social, and cultural facets, which interact both within and outside the boundaries of the digital platform.

Thus, moving further into an era of increasing digital integration, our approach to digital placemaking is called to be equally multifaceted. The amalgamation of technological prowess, societal nuances, and human-centric facets like familiarity, creativity, and education should steer our progressive trajectory. Instead of focusing solely on technical advancements, our vision should encompass conceptual innovations and fresh viewpoints that cultivate and harness digital cultures to craft media that are captivating, inclusive, safe, and flexible, just like the places we aspire to animate.

Chapter 9: Discussion- Reflection and Prospects

9. 1 Shaping Urban Futures: Bridging Theory and Practice for Sustainable Town Centre Regeneration

The literature review undertaken in this thesis delineated three interconnected trajectories: the evolution of public administration, the nuances of placemaking practices, and the transformative impact of technology on urban environments.

Beginning with an examination of public administration paradigms, the narrative traversed through historical developments, from centralised bureaucratic structures to the emergence of the New Public Management (NPM) framework, and eventually to the more citizen-centric models epitomised by New Public Governance. Illustrated through the lens of the United Kingdom's experience, where NPM initially took root, the review illuminated a discernible shift towards inter-sectoral collaborations and an increasing discourse on community involvement in decision-making processes. Emphasising collaboration and innovation, this evaluation underscored the contemporary imperative for proactive experimentation and co-creation, with citizens positioned as essential participants in governance processes.

Transitioning into an exploration of placemaking, the review delved into its multifaceted history and theoretical underpinnings, drawing insights from scholars such as Lefebvre, Harvey, and Massey. It highlighted the evolving nature of urban landscapes, shaped by a blend of spontaneous community-driven growth and deliberate planning strategies. From past conflicts arising from top-down planning approaches to contemporary efforts centred around collaboration, the ethos of placemaking underscores the delicate balance between community involvement and strategic partnerships. This dynamic equilibrium, constantly in flux, reflects the ongoing evolution of urban environments and the lessons learned from past endeavours.

Finally, the review examined the intersection of placemaking with the evolution of technology, particularly communication technologies. Contrary to initial beliefs that technology would render physical space irrelevant, the advent of mobile computing, especially with geolocation, emphasised the continued significance of physical spaces, leading to the emergence of hybrid spaces that integrate digital and physical realms. The proliferation of smartphones and social media platforms has transformed urban interactions, fostering virtual and real-world communities. Additionally, advancements in media architecture, incorporating sensors and interactive technologies, have given rise to the concept of smart cities, where public spaces are transformed into data-rich environments, facilitating both centralised management and citizen empowerment.

As digital placemaking continues to evolve, it confronts questions about its guiding principles and priorities. Will it prioritise tourism, data-centric governance, or human-centric values? The crafting of public-space technologies is challenged to embody the collaborative spirit of placemaking, striking a harmonious balance amidst diverse interests and forces shaping urban environments.

Continuing from the triptych literature review, the research progressed by delineating the methodological approach, strategically designed to explore collaboration dynamics, the characteristics of local centres, citizen involvement in local reforms, and the impact of technology. This methodological framework was further enriched by the inclusion of narrative rhapsodies, offering nuanced accounts of the research journey. Subsequent to the comprehensive analysis and contextual interpretation of the acquired data, juxtaposed with existing scholarly works, a series of insightful conclusions emerged, echoing the inception point of the literature review:

1. Relevance of Established Literature: Long-standing scholarly discourse remains pertinent in contemporary local contexts, reflecting topics from academic discourse over the past two decades in current local manifestations.
2. Challenges in Authentic Community Engagement: Despite theoretical support for participatory methodologies and digital innovations in placemaking, translating them into tangible actions faces challenges influenced by societal

norms and institutional dynamics within public administration and local governance.

3. Key Insights from Co-Creation Barriers: Systemic limitations in co-creation present challenges but also opportunities for nuanced exploration. The study identifies practical strategies to overcome these barriers while maintaining positive collaboration with public administration partners.

4. Foundation for Future Digital Placemaking Strategy: Although digital placemaking initiatives are not yet part of an established strategy, the research lays the groundwork for inclusive, collaborative approaches that prioritise community engagement and collective decision-making.

5. Empowering Community Voices: This study's engagement with the community facilitated deep involvement, adhering to participatory research principles. Insights from community members emphasised human experiences, historical contexts, and aspirations, highlighting issues such as social exclusion, isolation, perceived inequality, disruption in social cohesion, and the need for active communication channels with local authorities. This approach underscored the importance of addressing social well-being in Placemaking, laying the foundation for inclusive, community-driven solutions.

6. Personal and Communal Benefits of Digital Placemaking: Digital placemaking's success hinges upon delivering tangible benefits to individuals and communities, aligning with user skills, and resonating with the intended audience. Neglecting the values and priorities of local stakeholders may result in public apathy and rejection of technological interventions, especially those less visible.

7. Main Contribution: Enhancing Local Governance through Digital Placemaking: The primary contribution of this study lies in its exploration of how digital placemaking can effectively complement local governance efforts. In essence, this thesis serves as a valuable source of knowledge for local governments, offering actionable insights and strategies to strengthen partnerships between public administration, local communities, and researchers for sustainable urban regeneration.

Upcoming sections will explore the research's constraints, propose avenues for further studies, and outline potential routes for crafting a bespoke digital strategy for Knowsley.

9.2 Beyond Limitations: Reflections on Community Engagement and Collaborative Research in Digital Placemaking

As extensively detailed in the narration of the research journey, the advent of Covid and the ensuing restrictions triggered a cascade of alterations, diverting the practice from its anticipated path. While the original trajectory was not rigidly defined, it was inherently linked to a practice-based, outcome-driven technological investigation, with substantial synergy anticipated. The reshaped path embraced a practice-led research approach, prioritising community involvement. The transformed objective, focusing on "making place" for community-driven design, aimed at conceptualising a vision for the town's future, integrating technology augmentations and fostering participatory placemaking.

The practice unfolded through meticulously planned actions, each with defined focuses and objectives. These actions were executed, reviewed, and allowed for revisions and the formulation of new plans and actions. Despite the depiction of these phases as interconnected and consecutive, the project encountered significant challenges in establishing a solid foundation and orchestrating a clear vision for its structure. In contrast to idealised models of action research, the extensive participation in the project did not lead to a mutual commitment where different stakeholders functioned as co-researchers. This aspect of the project, intertwined with Council strategies, a University module, a community design project, and a third-party developed application, operating in a realm lacking clear definitions of roles, responsibilities, and constraints. This situation deviated from the norm in research endeavours, where the lead researcher typically maintains control over procedures and protocols. Consequently, the researcher found himself in a situation akin to

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assembling a complex puzzle, navigating through various levels of contributions and engagements.

In addition to these challenges, the researcher's chosen methodological approach also presented its own set of difficulties and complexities.

Engaging with the community was facilitated through design workshops, framed as a creative community project. Most of these sessions employed discussion and creative writing formats. While this approach resonated with older participants, it posed challenges for the younger demographic. Though they actively contributed to discussions, they struggled with crafting written texts, even brief ones. Consequently, this prompted an adaptation to incorporate alternative storyboarding techniques. This shift underscored a methodological limitation: the unintentional introduction of a skill barrier that might deter participation. Indeed, the mention of written activities in the information page might have dissuaded some from partaking. While this issue was addressed in practice through methodological adaptability, it underscores a design flaw with substantial scope for enhancement.

The research aimed to engage various sections of the local community, with a particular emphasis on the local youth. Yet, this endeavour encountered significant hurdles. Numerous comments and opinions were voiced concerning a notorious segment of this age group. Capturing the authentic voices and viewpoints of these youngsters would have been invaluable, shedding light on their perceptions and possible contributions to the transformation of the region, but this facet remained unexplored, leaving the insights about this demographic to be primarily inferred from secondary sources.

Furthermore, a significant vulnerability surfaced within the concluding phase of the research process, specifically in the Future Huyton AR experience. From a research perspective, this was designed to gather audience responses, employing triangulation concerning the stories' concepts. Consequently, 50 responses were collected from the 12 stories showcased. However, the feedback was not evenly distributed across these narratives. Some stories received limited attention, while others were more popular. Therefore, while the public's responses aligned with the writers' narratives, there

exists a methodological flaw regarding maintaining research rigour in the context of the audience's involvement.

As outlined in the autoethnography, this inconsistency and the overall limited participation can be partially attributed to the technical glitches within the application, where the link to the online survey was not consistently active, thus some opportunities for response were missed. Additionally, the experience would have benefited from visible markers providing information about active storytelling spots and the Knowsley Domes app. To the general public, the project was unfamiliar, and would have benefited from increased promotional activities. Given these insights, it is clear that the experience would have been more effective with reduced thematic variation and a singular, streamlined questionnaire to ensure more uniform and consistent feedback.

The entire procedure underscored a significant feature of both placemaking and research involving diverse stakeholders. Creating a design vision centred around the community's perspective for the town's future, and then translating it into a transmedia experience for broader community engagement in public space, demands immense commitment, time, and personal investment. While this project was rooted in research practice, there are inherent challenges to its ongoing implementation and potential replication beyond this context. A venture of this sort requires extensive time, focus, production, and orchestration, necessitating organisers to collaboratively dissect issues, strategize, experiment, contemplate, and potentially develop alternative solutions. Provided that such collaboration is substantive rather than just procedural, the pertinent prerequisites can be readily met. Accordingly, meticulous attention is essential regarding the motivation behind community participation to align it as closely as possible with their personal motivations and to make it appealing and accessible. For the researcher, this evoked complex emotions, underscoring the need to deeply understand the community and their aspirations before integrating them into the research.

This research journey, underlined by a series of disruptions and alterations due to unforeseen global events, has illuminated the complexities and nuances of multi-stakeholder collaboration and community involvement within a framework of digital placemaking. It has emphasised the intricacies of integrating diverse community voices, especially the younger generation, and underscored the necessity for adaptable methodologies to facilitate inclusive participatory processes. The exploration has brought to the forefront significant challenges in upholding research integrity when incorporating external resources and collaborators from non-research backgrounds, revealing the complex interplay between collaborative frameworks, community contributions, and digital implementations. It emphasises the ongoing need for refinement and adaptability in methodological strategies and champions a steadfast dedication to inclusivity and coherence in integrating diverse community aspirations and organisational goals within the sphere of participatory digital placemaking.

9.3 Prospective Research Avenues

The numerous constraints and untapped possibilities identified earlier, paired with the insights acquired, delineate the scope for future research endeavours. The proposals that arise are steeped in the collaborative ethos of the investigation, mirroring the diverse spheres in which Placemaking is conceptualised.

A research initiative firmly grounded in practical applications may consider the development of Community Events for Creative Digital Placemaking. These events entail the collaboration of tech experts with local groups to devise technical prototypes aimed at catalysing creative digital placemaking efforts. Although this specific research approach was not viable in the current study, it presents a promising avenue for future exploration. The insights garnered from the study regarding technologies indicate their potential to empower grassroots creativity, facilitate the inception of community-centred events, and nurture potential in related domains, which holds considerable promise. Moreover, on the technical front, this endeavour could capitalise on the increasing local familiarity with IoT automation and the growing demand for knowledge of immersive technologies.

This line of inquiry holds the promise to explore methodologies for creative community participation in developing technology-based enhancements to public spaces. Although this was pursued in the present study, participants predominantly involved themselves in design and storytelling processes. These processes unveiled participants' needs, desires and values, but they did not offer extensive cooperative opportunities for direct interaction with the discussed technologies as part of the experiences facilitated by the research. This area of research is more than a potential path; it is an evolving necessity and interest validated by current evaluations. Indeed, if prototypes are developed, refined, and assessed by research participants rather than by external experts, it guarantees comprehensive oversight of both design and technical elements—a condition lacking in the present study.

Another promising direction is to embark on participatory research focusing on the development of a digital placemaking platform. This platform should integrate harmoniously with local settings, encouraging synergies among varied local organised bodies. The research envisioned here would be grounded in mutually agreed collaborations across different sectors and organisations, a hallmark of Placemaking projects. It necessitates a commitment to contribute to the research, positioning the stakeholders as essential co-researchers rather than mere participants or abstract contributors. This approach could guide the research beyond developing a digital placemaking platform to addressing optimal leadership and seamless collaboration in co-creative arenas, with an emphasis on deep engagement and participation.

Such a research path would also be conducive to the enhancement of the Knowsley Dome app. At present, the app functions primarily as a straightforward content management system, dedicated to publishing geolocated AR experiences. There is a substantial need to broaden the spectrum of content, moving beyond the plain integration of images and videos. Additionally, the current configuration of the platform restricts access and publication capabilities to specified Council employees, thereby precluding utilisation by other local stakeholders and consolidating control and resource allocation exclusively within KMBC. Future collaborative investigations hold the potential to amalgamate value creation and utilisation by a diverse array of accredited local collaborators.

The two proposals distinctly highlight the importance of inclusive participation while offering differing perspectives on the involvement of collaborators, whether from the community or formal entities, and their roles as participants or co-researchers. However, it's apparent that meaningful engagement from local individuals and entities is pivotal in any investigative initiative.

On one hand, community involvement offers an opportunity to tap into their creativity, communal experiences, and enhance their capabilities. On the other hand, engaging formal entities necessitates articulating their resources, knowledge, and interests. Combining elements from both propositions could enrich research endeavours, yielding findings and solutions with high local relevance and applicability, thereby enhancing the region's context.

Inspired by the study's findings, both proposals advocate for providing hands-on technological experiences to acquaint the public with emerging technologies and developing interactive frameworks that align with local economic and social interests. The Future Huyton narratives underscore the practical exploration of how placemaking can significantly influence local life through social initiatives.

Finally, the study findings emphasise the exploration of the role of local government and the third sector as facilitators in co-creative processes. Although the research has identified potential pathways and challenges for such collaboration, the actual implementation of a structured and consensual project remains pending. Further exploration of this aspect would mark a highly compelling and advantageous progression.

9.4 Innovative Approaches: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Insights

Embedded within this research is a transformative methodological approach meticulously crafted to empower participants and reshape their perceptions of public life. Departing from traditional methods that view communities as passive recipients,

this approach positions them as active co-creators, deeply engaged in learning design processes before embarking on creative endeavours. Central to this methodology is a story-based approach, a vehicle for generating both data and communicative content simultaneously, fostering meaningful connections with a broader audience. Drawing inspiration from literary sources and established techniques like sci-fi prototyping and design fiction, this narrative-driven process accentuates the biographical elements of local individuals, their design concepts, and rhetorical intentions. Its unique blend of ethnographic and design methodologies, coupled with community art processes, nurtures urban dialogues about the future, thus presenting an innovative utilisation of storytelling within public sector endeavours.

This research embarks on an exploration aimed at expanding the conceptual boundaries of Placemaking, shedding light on transformative practices that invigorate communities and rejuvenate public spaces. With a focused examination on Digital Placemaking, the study celebrates the profound impact of storytelling, design, and immersive digital experiences in fostering community engagement and inclusivity. By championing the values of learning and creativity, it opens up new avenues for seamlessly integrating technology into public spaces, thereby enhancing accessibility and enjoyment for all.

Moreover, the research underscores the importance of enhancing collaborative capabilities across the spectrum of local placemaking—a deeply participatory and collective process that requires diverse stakeholders to interact. Especially within the context of digital placemaking, beyond foundational collaborative skills, there exists an intrinsic need to comprehend and adapt to emerging technological landscapes. Consequently, continuous learning becomes paramount for effectively designing, collaborating, and creatively utilising technology for sustainable interventions.

Furthermore, the utilisation of immersive technology in public spaces highlights the potential to create flexible environments and events conducive to expression, involvement, and meaningful community conversations. This transformative approach turns the internal activities and ideas of small groups outward, bringing them into the public domain for celebration, discussion, and reflection. These synergistic blends of

creative and digital placemaking contribute richly to theoretical frameworks centred around participatory and civic placemaking, aligning seamlessly with the vision of Placemaking Living Labs aimed at fostering local regeneration.

The practical insights derived from this research underscore the critical importance of co-creation strategies in placemaking initiatives. Integrative cross-sector partnerships, aligned agendas, and interactive collaborations emerge as vital components for nurturing transformative endeavours. Embracing failure emerges as a fundamental principle, as setbacks often serve as catalysts for innovation, leading to new directions, insights, and pivotal discoveries. Even when challenges do not immediately yield success, they shed light on areas ripe for future exploration, ensuring that genuine obstacles in placemaking are addressed comprehensively. These insights and lessons are invaluable for leadership roles within local government.

Moreover, a practical implication surfaces concerning the pivotal role of the Council's Culture and Communities groups in spearheading placemaking efforts. Initiatives like Future Huyton serve as prime examples of the power of advocating for a participatory local cultural agenda, transcending mere heritage celebration to actively shape the community's future. By positioning these groups as protagonists in placemaking endeavours, there exists a unique opportunity to foster inclusive and community-driven initiatives that deeply resonate with local stakeholders.

Furthermore, insights regarding perceptions of technology advocate for the development of digital placemaking technologies that intricately intertwine with social, cultural, and economic dynamics. Such initiatives offer opportunities for local communities to become familiar with technology, potentially transforming them into digital placemakers. This necessitates a holistic approach that encompasses the diverse dimensions of community life within digital platforms. For example, the development of Augmented Reality (AR) platforms holds promise as sophisticated tools capable of reshaping the local digital landscape, creating immersive spaces that can be autonomously utilised by various local entities to facilitate connections, opportunities, and activities.

In conclusion, this research contributes significantly to the discourse on local regeneration by presenting innovative methodologies, expanding theoretical boundaries, and providing practical insights for sustainable placemaking. By emphasising the importance of community engagement, enhancing collaborative capabilities, embracing failure, and fostering inclusive partnerships, this study advocates for a paradigm shift in Placemaking practice. Through innovative narrative and media practices, supported by public administration, this approach envisions the rejuvenation of both public spaces and the operational environments of public bodies, fostering a renewed sense of community pride and collective ownership in urban development initiatives.

9.5 Navigating the Future of Local Placemaking Initiatives

In this section, efforts will be made to interconnect and integrate the findings, fostering a holistic perspective that paves the way for future prospects and potential trajectories.

Exploring the future of local digital placemaking strategies underscores the pivotal role of top-down support from informed and influential stakeholders. These stakeholders possess the capacity to instigate substantial systemic changes and ignite social innovation. Despite many bibliographical accounts often correlating top-down planning with a commercialised approach to public spaces, this research demonstrates that initiatives backed and funded by local government have the potential to challenge prevailing power structures, forging new partnerships and collaborative creations with citizens and local entities.

The proposed strategy should harmonise place-based and experimental design methodologies, evolving through iterative cycles to promote civic engagement and rejuvenate local environments. Diverse recommendations embody this approach.

One facet focuses on initiating or strengthening independent local projects, deeply rooted in local nuances. These projects should maximise the use of current physical,

digital, and social assets, proposing manageable, small-scale prototypes and social innovations that encourage low-risk trials. Methodology is pivotal in these initiatives, emphasising collaborative identification of challenges, contextual understanding, plan formulation, promotion, and action synchronisation. Documenting the process is essential for assessing effectiveness, skills acquired, tangible outcomes, challenges faced, resource utilisation, and emerging opportunities. Implementing these projects offers the potential for controlled growth—allowing for modifications and scaling over time and iterations, following an action research methodology that prioritises data-driven decision-making.

While the core conversation centres around digital placemaking strategies, these individual endeavours should align with broader agendas, such as education, healthcare, and cultural goals. This ensures they cater to diverse objectives and retain local significance beyond just a technical perspective. This alignment enables the restructuring or combining of various assets, yielding benefits and fostering the development of new skills, knowledge, and networks in pertinent domains. Nevertheless, a synergising strategy involves more than just macro-level visions and objectives; it also reaches down to the grassroots level of the projects, emphasising participatory elements. Although these projects commence as isolated endeavours, their evolution involves the potential amalgamation of initiatives, the collaboration among groups and networks, and the integration of their outputs, enriching the whole ecosystem.

The primary focus of these projects lies in nurturing extensive civic involvement, which necessitates the establishment of robust connections with local communities. It becomes apparent that structured groups and organisations, alongside proactive hubs serving as intermediaries for community interactions, play a pivotal role. Consequently, the formation of meaningful partnerships that cater to the specific objectives of these stakeholders while aligning with strategic local interests—such as social welfare, skill development, economic growth, environmental conservation, and service provision—becomes of paramount importance. Additionally, many of these groups, organisations, and hubs not only serve as gateways to the community but also

possess expertise in technologies, creative practices, and collaborative processes that can exert significant influence on the chosen methodology.

Diving into the matter of stakeholders, (digital) placemaking stimulates the emergence of a diverse stakeholder network. This network encompasses everyday individuals such as residents, workers, and visitors connected to a place, local entities like businesses and community groups within that area, and experts including designers, developers, planners, digital specialists, local government bodies, private enterprises, third sector organisations, educational institutions, and more. The involvement of intermediate contributors, such as university students and volunteers, is particularly noteworthy. They bridge the gap between seasoned experts and regular users, epitomising the shift from the conventional top-down planning to more inclusive approaches, emphasising collective ideation and synergies between experts and the wider community.

From the research, it is evident that creativity and public events resonate with the local audience, making them central components of individual projects. However, in this setting, it is critical to engage participants in a variety of social processes, from the conceptualisation to the execution of the project, presenting opportunities for genuine decision-making, collaborative creation, artistic expression, and practical interaction and acquaintance with modern digital media and technologies, thus enhancing their skills and independence. This approach entails providing a comprehensive experience where participants can find numerous incentives for involvement and chances to meet their needs beyond the tactical objectives of the project. Organisers, therefore, need to foresee and cater to these needs from the project's inception.

Moreover, it is deemed essential for local decision-makers to be involved in many of the participatory endeavours. This not only fosters a more collaborative rapport among stakeholders but also addresses certain challenges associated with digital placemaking. Individuals in leadership roles may lack exposure to innovative technological applications, hindering their engagement and comprehension of pertinent topics. While municipal authorities may not possess in-house expertise in these areas, actively participating in these processes, alongside community members, offers a valuable learning experience and establishes shared points of reference.

In these initiatives, the private sector plays varied roles. They can serve as experts in areas like design, technology, and creativity or act as facilitators, offering guidance to local participants and decision-makers. However, the private sector's primary significance lies in delivering a final outcome, ensuring it meets quality and safety criteria, especially when the outcome is a product or service for public use. Private companies excel in achieving results with optimal efficiency, leveraging resources to meet established standards.

Although efficiency is crucial, implementing it prematurely may not always benefit the project's efficacy. Typically, the involvement of private entities is formalised through outsourcing contracts. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate them at a stage where the projects have undergone sufficient iterations and have derived clear conclusions and identified needs that can be articulated with contractual precision. If decision-making within a project is solely relegated to private expertise, the provided solutions are likely to adhere to specifications in the most cost-effective and expedient manner, leaving little room for further negotiations. Consequently, initiating a contract at an inopportune moment might nullify the benefits derived from private expertise. It is crucial to ensure that the timing of private sector involvement is strategic to leverage their expertise effectively while maintaining the integrity and objectives of the project.

The academic and educational sector is distinguished by its deep roots in specialisation and experimentation. A hallmark of this sector is its emphasis on the journey—the process—arising from its educational mission. This process-driven approach becomes a significant asset, especially when juxtaposed with the public sector's prevalent focus on efficiency and management. As the trend of outsourcing to the private sector grows among public entities, there's an emerging gap in expertise. This creates an environment where the collaborative and co-creative essence of placemaking becomes not just valuable but also challenging for the public sector. Collaboration with the academic sector can foster mutually advantageous partnerships. Academic institutions are constantly on the lookout for opportunities that provide their students with practical, real-world experiences. Through such collaborations, public entities can expand and enrich the repertoire of public processes, paving the way for co-created, customised strategies. It is worth noting that the motivations behind these

partnerships often transcend financial incentives or formal contracts. However, to truly harness their potential, a considerable dedication of time and personal engagement is paramount.

In conclusion, each participant, hailing from varied sectors and having distinct interests, brings their unique perspectives, assets, and stakes to the table. In this paradigm, the essence of leadership surpasses formal capacities and conventional organisational relationships. Effective leadership is about harnessing this diverse array of motivations and skills and channelling them towards a common objective. Rather than relying solely on traditional contracts or legal obligations, success in these collaborative networks depends on well-designed institutional frameworks of collaboration. These frameworks should encourage active participation, foster mutual trust, balance power dynamics, manage innovation-related risks, and institute transparent systems for accountability. A central proposal of this research is to utilise individual small projects not only for the development of prototypes but also for the formation of these frameworks. As placemaking continues to evolve as a field, studying these unique leadership challenges becomes an increasingly vital focus for future research.

Subsequently, a more pragmatic suggestion will be formulated, building upon the aforementioned points and articulated as a speculative scenario for the future development of the Knowsley Dome app.

9.6 The Evolution of Knowsley Domes: A Confluence of Creativity and Learning

The digital asset, Knowsley Dome, possesses a fundamental simplicity, devoid of intricate built-in functionalities. This simplicity can facilitate its potential enhancement and utilisation through extensive experimentation and testing.

A particular area of interest for this research is its potential use by student communities within Borough schools. As such, fostering collaboration with local schools is suggested. Schools, akin to third sector organisations and local groups,

anchor deeply within communities, connecting directly with students—the primary beneficiaries of educational services—and their families. Furthermore, educators excel in orchestrating student-driven co-creation tasks and team projects. This scenario offers not just a bridge to a segment of the population but also the chance to co-develop a meaningful venture with professionals.

One conceivable approach involves engaging student communities in researching Knowsley's historical points of interest and creating visual content, such as collages and illustrations. This content can then be shared on Knowsley Domes as part of new transmedia storytelling projects. Notably, focusing on storytelling related to the past offers significant opportunities for fostering intergenerational collaboration in the region, thereby nurturing meaningful connections. The inspiration for this proposal is directly drawn from one of the stories, namely "Outside". The research findings and the themes explored in the stories can guide the development of further transmedia storytelling projects. These projects may encompass various themes, including but not limited to racism, equality, young people's visions for the region's future, environmental sustainability, and beyond. Collaboration with local entities like Knowsley Archive Services (The Ark) and local libraries could further enrich the project by promoting the region's rich heritage and supporting the innovative work of young creators, celebrated as a communal creative asset.

Another exciting possibility lies in exploring the future evolution of Knowsley Domes through the creation of playful scenarios akin to Alternate Reality Games (ARGs). This approach aligns closely with the concept of ludic placemaking and can draw upon the imaginative and creative input of both local students and professionals with expertise in city games or pervasive storytelling.

Essentially, digital placemaking offers a pedagogic opportunity for local students to foster and define a connection to their environment. This inclusive participation will ensure thorough platform testing across diverse devices and ignite conversations about improvements, fuelled by feedback from a wide community of creators-users. This overarching proposal serves multiple objectives. Firstly, it ensures diverse user testing, helping the application evolve as a prominent digital placemaking instrument.

Concurrently, by involving educational entities, it addresses their modernisation goals and broadens the experiential learning horizon. Supporting local education aligns with the broader goal of social sustainability, especially since additional support is required.

Given resource constraints, realising digital placemaking as an organisational function with dedicated departments and specialists may be challenging. However, this strategy presents a unique opportunity for decentralised approaches, shared governance, and collective creation, key tenets for successful placemaking, facilitating its digital evolution across diverse platforms—be it online, on-site, networked, or within intimate cohorts. In this light, the proposal accentuates a model akin to Living Labs, but without focusing on creating specialised spaces but on establishing collaborative programs utilising various existing infrastructures and assets from different bodies. With proper coordination and organisation, such collaborations can yield new, meaningful outcomes.

This proposal reinstates the significance of learning at the core of Digital Placemaking. Essentially, the application's current state presents a unique opportunity for organic growth and refinement. To cultivate localised knowledge around the placemaking process and the immersive tech platform, a synergistic approach is suggested. This strategy aims to nurture knowledge development and encourage solution exploration within the local youth demographic. The hope is that this approach will lead to bottom-up solutions that are not confined to current needs but are reflective of the community's evolving aptitudes. The ambition extends beyond creating digital spaces and AR domes, but to make places of learning, creativity, and local innovation, thus reflecting the community's growing competencies and inventive potentials.

Conclusion

This conclusion chapter serves as a culmination of the thesis, offering key insights and practical recommendations to enhance participatory digital placemaking. Drawing upon thematic findings, it provides a comprehensive policy document and guide for practitioners navigating digital placemaking initiatives, based on the Huyton experience. Delving into various themes underscores the multifaceted nature of participatory digital placemaking, offering valuable perspectives on dynamics, challenges, and opportunities inherent in the creation of vibrant and inclusive public spaces. Distilling these insights into actionable recommendations aims to equip policymakers and practitioners with a comprehensive framework for enhancing digital placemaking initiatives.

1. Establishing Synergistic Cross-Sector Partnerships and Holistic Approaches

Placemaking thrives within a multifaceted network of stakeholders, each driven by distinct motivations and expectations. Grasping these intricacies is paramount for project success. Strategic partnerships between local government and diverse stakeholders create opportunities for local innovation infrastructure development, community engagement, and economic revitalisation, contributing to the creation of vibrant and inclusive public spaces. These partnerships serve as catalysts for regional development and prosperity, combining multiple objectives across various domains. While local government plays a central role in facilitating growth and strategising broader objectives for local well-being, it should embrace a platform of co-creation rather than adopting a top-down approach. Partnerships with academia offer innovative methodologies and cost-effective experimentation, thus, clarity in roles and objectives is indispensable to pragmatically integrate its contributions. Conversely, private sector collaborations excel in efficiency but may lack interactive depth. Engaging community stakeholders is pivotal, emphasising genuine participation and alignment with local needs, albeit demanding agility and resilience Establishing

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collaborative partnerships enriches projects with diverse viewpoints, necessitating effective communication and interactive collaboration.

Policy Recommendations:

Proactively Identify and Engage Key Stakeholders: Establish mechanisms for ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders to leverage resources, expertise, and funding for placemaking initiatives.

Recognise Diversity of Collaborative Frameworks: Foster inclusivity and flexibility to tailor integrative approaches that serve the motivations, values and objectives of involved actors.

Establish Clear Communication and Role Delineation: Clarify expectations, responsibilities, and decision-making processes to ensure effective collaboration and minimise conflicts.

Prioritize Mutual Respect, Trust, and Shared Goals: Foster a culture of transparency, openness, and accountability to ensure the success and sustainability of digital placemaking projects.

Practical Implications:

Engage in Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis: Identify key stakeholders and develop strategies for engaging them based on their level of influence and resources.

Facilitate Collaborative Workshops and Forums: Provide opportunities for stakeholders to share perspectives, exchange knowledge, and co-create innovative practices and solutions.

Establish Formalised Partnership Agreements: Outline roles, responsibilities, expectations, and accountability mechanisms, allowing for iterative refinement and adjustment.

Promote Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building: Facilitate training sessions and mentorship programs to enhance the skills and capabilities of all partners involved.

Evaluate and Monitor Partnership Effectiveness: Solicit feedback from stakeholders, assess progress against predefined metrics, and make adjustments as needed to optimise partnership performance.

2. Community Engagement as a Central Placemaking Practice

Community engagement forms the cornerstone of Digital Placemaking, facilitating project ownership and invaluable insights. Active participation fosters trust and ensures project relevance, while inclusive strategies ensure diverse voices are heard. Engaging community members as co-creators enriches projects with local knowledge and priorities, enhancing legitimacy and effectiveness. To succeed, Digital Placemaking initiatives must prioritise inclusive, accessible, and culturally sensitive engagement strategies, empowering communities to shape their spaces. Public organisations can act as mediators, nurturing connections and facilitating interactions among community members to foster grassroots initiatives and innovative solutions.

Policy Recommendations:

Position Local Government as Facilitators and Enablers: Create mechanisms for community-led placemaking projects, empowering residents to take ownership of public spaces.

Advocate for a Paradigm Shift in Public Entities: Invest in relationships, trust, and collaboration with community members, recognising their expertise and knowledge as valuable assets.

Embrace Participatory Approaches: Ensure community perspectives and priorities are incorporated into placemaking projects through meaningful engagement and co-creation.

Develop Tailored Strategies for Community Engagement: Utilise a mix of online and offline channels to address local concerns, bridge generational divides, and promote a shared sense of identity and belonging within public space.

Practical Implications:

Empower Communities to Lead: Provide resources, support, and autonomy for implementing projects that reflect their vision and values, while enhancing capacity building and skill development.

Foster Collaboration and Innovation: Encourage residents to work together to identify shared goals, address challenges, and co-create solutions, fostering networking and knowledge sharing.

Emphasise Continuous Feedback and Communication: Solicit input, address concerns, and share updates transparently, ensuring accessible channels for community participation and decision-making.

Promote Inclusivity and Diversity: Proactively reach out to marginalised groups, ensuring all voices are heard and valued, while building trust and relationships over time through genuine commitment and responsiveness.

3. Youth Creativity

Incorporating vernacular creativity into Digital Placemaking initiatives amplifies their relevance and impact, particularly when engaging local youth as pivotal stakeholders. Recognising creativity's role in nurturing resilience and well-being is fundamental for crafting inclusive projects, fostering autonomy, competence, and social connections. Creative hubs catalyse self-motivation and mental health improvement, sparking local social innovation and transformative community development. Cultivating a sense of place and fostering community connections substantially contributes to placemaking efforts. The involvement of local organisations as patrons of creativity is indispensable for surmounting barriers within Digital Placemaking initiatives.

Policy Recommendations:

Promote Youth Creativity and Empowerment: Prioritise youth as pivotal stakeholders, creating opportunities for their active participation in placemaking projects to shape their spaces.

Collaborate with Local Entities: Partner with art charities, youth centres, and educational institutions to support and perpetuate creative placemaking initiatives.

Establish Bi-directional Communication Channels: Nurture advancement and innovation by facilitating dialogue and collaboration between youth and decision-makers.

Harmonise Project Objectives with Policy Mandates: Align placemaking efforts with broader goals of youth development and well-being, advocating for policy changes and investments supporting youth-led initiatives.

Practical Implications:

Facilitate Creative Expression and Community Involvement: Organise workshops and events to encourage youth exploration of new technologies and co-creation of innovative solutions.

Integrate Immersive Technologies into Education: Promote digital literacy and creative expression by incorporating immersive technologies into educational settings.

Promote Collaboration and Mentorship: Foster intergenerational learning and knowledge exchange through mentorship programs.

Invest in Digital Literacy and Skills Development: Equip youth with technical, creative, and critical thinking skills needed for effective participation in digital placemaking.

Create Safe and Inclusive Spaces: Designate areas or platforms where youth can gather, collaborate, and express themselves freely.

Promote Youth Leadership and Agency: Empower young people to take ownership of projects, identify issues, propose solutions, and advocate for change in their communities.

4. Community Events

Creative Placemaking, through its event-based activities, shapes the identity and character of a town, fostering social connections, celebrating local heritage, and

empowering residents. Inclusive programming breaks down barriers, fostering social cohesion and inclusivity by encouraging diverse community participation. Community festivals serve as vital platforms for community building, bridging individuals from varied backgrounds to celebrate shared values and traditions. Locally oriented placemaking endeavours transcend mere spectacle, serving as educational tools, restoring cultural democracy, and empowering underrepresented demographics. These community festivals and events reflect existing local worldviews, strengthening shared community values and revitalising local identities.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Embrace Diverse Cultural Events and Inclusive Programming: Support initiatives that highlight the diversity of cultures, traditions, and perspectives within the community, fostering social cohesion and mutual understanding.

2. Develop Strategic Frameworks for Competence, Autonomy, and Interconnectedness: Design events that encourage active participation, collaboration, and co-creation, empowering participants to develop new skills and connect with others

3. Invest in Civic Infrastructure and Resources: Provide incentives and grants for individuals and organisations to organise events that contribute to the vibrancy and inclusivity of public spaces, fostering a culture of civic engagement and pride.

4. Utilise Events as Opportunities for Networking and Collaboration, and Co-Creation: Facilitate connections between community members, local businesses, cultural organisations, and government agencies, fostering a sense of community and collective responsibility for placemaking.

Practical Implications:

1. Curate Diverse and Inclusive Programming: Ensure that events reflect the interests, values, and aspirations of the community, incorporating input and feedback from residents throughout the planning process.

2. Promote Competence, Autonomy, and Interconnectedness: Design interactive and hands-on activities that empower attendees to contribute their talents, ideas, and perspectives to the event experience, fostering a sense of agency and belonging.

3. Leverage Technology: Incorporate immersive technologies to captivate attendees, but also more traditional digital channels and platforms to facilitate event registration, communication, and feedback, making it easier for participants to connect with each other and stay informed about upcoming activities.

4 Facilitate Networking Opportunities: Host sessions that bring together stakeholders to discuss placemaking strategies, challenges, and opportunities, promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange.

5. Promote Accessibility and Inclusivity: Design events with the needs of diverse communities in mind, ensuring venues are physically accessible, information is available in multiple languages and formats, and accommodations are made for individuals with disabilities or special needs.

5. Empowering Third-Sector Organisations

Third-sector organisations occupy a central position in nurturing community empowerment and contributing to placemaking endeavours by leveraging their specialised knowledge, direct ties to the local populace, and capacity-building initiatives. Serving as vital conduits, these organisations bridge the gap between governmental bodies and grassroots movements, anchoring themselves within the community's fabric. Testimonies from both service users and practitioners underscore the educational and empowering nature of community-based activities, fostering bonds, skills, and mutual understanding. Their unique expertise provides invaluable insights into community needs, aspirations, and challenges, advocating effectively within placemaking initiatives. Furthermore, community settings facilitated by third-sector organisations cultivate group values, interpersonal bonds, and leadership competencies, nurturing resilience and empowerment, particularly among marginalised demographics.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Recognise the Invaluable Role of Third-Sector Organisations: Acknowledge their unique contributions and capacity-building potential in placemaking efforts, including advocacy for community needs and aspirations.

2. Foster Collaborative Partnerships: Create mechanisms for ongoing dialogue, coordination, and resource-sharing among stakeholders, facilitating joint decision-making and collective action in pursuit of shared goals and objectives.

3. Empower Individuals and Groups: Allow for skill development, leadership opportunities, and meaningful engagement through participatory placemaking initiatives, providing training, capacity-building workshops, and mentorship programs.

Practical Implications:

1. Facilitate Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing: Organise joint workshops, forums, and working groups providing opportunities for networking, information exchange, and best practice sharing.

2. Provide Funding and Resources: Allocate dedicated funding streams for community-led placemaking initiatives, ensuring that third-sector organisations have access to the financial support they need to implement projects that reflect community priorities and aspirations.

3. Promote Inclusivity and Diversity within third-sector organisations: Create opportunities for emerging organisations and marginalised groups to participate in placemaking activities, amplifying their voices in the design and implementation of projects.

4. Advocate for Policy Changes : Work collaboratively with government agencies, elected officials, and other stakeholders to develop policies and programs that promote community empowerment, social equity, and sustainable development through placemaking initiatives.

6. Urban Tech Integration

In the realm of urban development and digital innovation, recognising the pivotal role of familiarity and trust in fostering acceptance of digital technologies is imperative. Investment in public education, awareness campaigns, and co-design processes is essential to cultivate familiarity and build trust in the reliability, safety, and benefits of these technologies for public spaces. Engaging communities in the design of technological augmentations is not only feasible but advantageous, as evidenced by narratives elucidating speculative technologies that simulate private indoor spaces within public realms. This trust contributes to a distinct blurring of public and private boundaries in communal spaces that can potentially lead to a renewed sense of collective ownership of communal spaces, reflecting a paradigm shift engendered by post-pandemic digital transformation.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Acknowledge the Role of Familiarity and Trust: Invest in public education and awareness campaigns to familiarise residents with new technologies and build trust in their reliability, safety, and benefits for public spaces.

2. Integrate Smart Home Automation And Wearable Technologies: Collaborate with technology companies, urban planners, and community stakeholders to co-design and implement smart infrastructure solutions that enhance security, safety, and accessibility in public spheres.

3. Prioritise Harmonious Fusion of Public Infrastructure with Personal Devices: Develop user-friendly interfaces and interoperable systems that allow individuals to seamlessly interact with digital technologies in public spaces, enhancing their overall experience and satisfaction.

4. Capitalise on Digital Transformation: Seize the opportunity presented by the COVID-19 pandemic to harness heightened consumer involvement in digital health technologies and involvement with smart home technologies, thereby advancing well-being and services in public domains.

Practical Implications:

1. Promote User Education and Training: Offer workshops, demonstrations, and tutorials on how to use smart devices and applications in public spaces, addressing common concerns and misconceptions about privacy, security, and usability.

2. Facilitate Seamless Integration of Personal Devices With Public Infrastructure: Develop mobile apps and digital platforms that allow users to access information, services, and amenities in real-time, enhancing their convenience and comfort while navigating public spaces.

3. Engage Residents in Co-Creation of Urban Tech Solutions: Encourage community contributions through participatory design workshops, focus groups, and crowdsourcing initiatives to advance the planning and implementation of digital technologies for public spaces.

4. Ensure Accessibility and Inclusivity: Design digital solutions that are user-friendly, intuitive, and culturally sensitive, taking into account the needs of diverse populations, including seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income communities.

7. Organic Digital Placemaking

Digital services in placemaking serve as vibrant expressions, intricately blending the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of local towns. They hold the capacity to reshape local culture, provide incentives, enhance economic activity, and empower individuals. By interweaving the multifaceted aspects of local life and promoting inclusive participation, practitioners can facilitate dynamic digital spaces that reflect the diverse needs, values, and aspirations of local communities without pre-describing exhaustive plans and functionalities.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Foster Local Involvement and Polyphonic Engagement: Create opportunities for residents, businesses, artists, and community organisations to collaborate on digital projects that reflect the unique character, identity and interests of their places.

2. Embrace an Organic Approach to Digital Placemaking: Support iterative processes and responsive interventions that allow for continuous learning, feedback, and improvement over time, rather than imposing rigid plans or pre-defined outcomes.

3. Encourage The Integration Of Local Life Aspects Into Digital Placemaking: Advocate for autonomy in both the utilisation and advancement of emerging digital platforms.

Practical Implications:

1. Encourage Experimentation and Adaptation: Create opportunities for temporary installations, pop-up events, and pilot projects that test innovative approaches to enhancing public spaces through digital technologies.

2. Support Iterative Approaches and Responsive Interventions: Establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and monitoring of project outcomes, soliciting feedback from stakeholders and making adjustments as needed to ensure effectiveness and relevance.

3. Facilitate Locally-Led Initiatives: Provide technical assistance, mentorship, and funding opportunities for grassroots efforts that leverage digital tools and platforms to enhance public spaces and promote community well-being.

8. Experiential Futures

In envisioning the future of town centres, speculative narratives offer profound insights into the intersection of technology, public space, and societal values. Furthermore, transmedia storytelling can be used to systematically engage the community, explore emerging technologies for placemaking, and experiment with tactical interventions that create new experiences, influencing local perceptions and realities.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Collaborate with the Community to Develop Future Scenarios: Use participatory methods such as scenario planning, visioning workshops, and storytelling sessions to

engage residents in imagining alternative futures for their neighbourhoods and public spaces.

2. Employ Community Workshops as Mechanisms for Engagement: Organise workshops that bring together diverse individuals to explore placemaking challenges, co-create solutions, and build consensus around shared goals and priorities, while cultivating design proficiencies and enabling avenues for creative expression

Practical Implications:

1. Cultivate a Heightened Sense of Agency and Investment: Exhibit flexibility and willingness to respect local preferences and choices, emphasising participatory involvement and acknowledging community engagement as a valuable opportunity for gaining insights into the community.

2. Investigate Opportunities for Digital Activation within Local Hubs: Facilitate audience involvement in immersive experiences that juxtapose fictional narratives with tangible urban realities, thereby prompting reflection and active contributions from participants.

As we conclude this thesis by reviewing key insights and practical implications for policymakers and practitioners, a profound realisation emerges: successful placemaking transcends mere physical transformation; it demands the embrace of new perspectives while shedding old biases that obstruct collaboration and self-belief.

The visionaries of "Future Huyton" embarked on their journey amidst shadows of social marginalisation, perceived disparities, and ruptures in societal unity. Confronting the immovable facade of heteronomous structures, they embarked on a journey of self-discovery and narrative redefinition. In their quest, they harnessed the imaginative potential of technology, envisioning a future where communal agency thrives in public life. Their aspirations, deeply rooted in the soil of prosperity and community-centric objectives, signify a pursuit of community transformation, birthing spaces that echo its

collective dreams. These aspirational echoes resonate in harmony with the philosophical symphony of Cornelius Castoriades' theory of autonomy.

At the heart of Castoriades' philosophical tapestry lies the profound conviction that a truly autonomous society is self-aware, perpetually reevaluating and reshaping its frameworks (Tasis, 2022). His vision mirrors the contemplations on "place" woven throughout these chapters, presenting locales not merely as geographical coordinates, but as emblematic arenas imbued with narratives, legacies, and communal aspirations.

This journey through the landscape of placemaking illuminates the catalytic role of imaginary significations in urban planning. Communities, whether through innate creativity or digital innovation, continually mold and are molded by the narratives they weave for their regions. The transition from heteronomy to autonomy and participation demands the recognition and redefinition of these narratives. Policymakers and practitioners have opportunities and responsibilities to facilitate these ferments, by prioritising new local experiences.

In conclusion, the intricate dance of placemaking underscores the vital importance of collaborations, communal participation, and the profound impact of societal imagination. By embracing these principles, we inch closer to a world where every locale serves as a reflection of the hopes and dreams of its inhabitants. Placemaking emerges as a symphony to the essence of humanity, beckoning us to craft spaces not merely for existence but for life, connection, and prosperity. Amidst the interplay of the material and the virtual, the real and the fictional, let us always cherish the enduring power of the human spirit—the paramount guardian of place and aspiration.

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Appendix 1: Stories and preliminary analysis

The first section of the appendix features the fictional stories submitted by the practitioners, accompanied by their initial analyses. These analyses entail the researcher retelling the stories, with a focus on highlighting the central theme of the post-narrative, emphasising the conveyed values, identifying newly proposed locations and destinations for the town centre, as well as enhancements to public infrastructure. They also touch upon actions and events referenced within the narratives and outline the digital resources involved. Additionally, this section explores ideas related to strategies and collaborations designed to facilitate these transformations. In relation to the 12 stories presented at the Future Huyton experience, each story reference includes the respective survey through which the public was invited to participate.

1. Back to the Future

Accessible online at:	https://www.future-huyton.uk/backtothefuture
Author info	age group: 65+ gender: female

The Story

Twelve-year-old Alfie loved Saturdays. His grandparents, Nana and Pops, came to look after him while his parents were at work.

Alfie has cerebral palsy and is partially sighted with minimal fine motor movement in both hands. He uses a lightweight wheelchair most of the time.

He is very independent, however, as his bungalow home has been designed so he can move through it freely. He can shower himself thanks to a fully adapted wet room. Getting dry is easy, too, as he simply positions himself in front of a nearby drying tunnel and the sensors on the coloured arm pad activate the flow of thermostatically controlled air.

All doors are automatically opened and closed by sensors connected to the headband set he wore throughout the day.

Today, Nana said, they would be going to the town centre, known as The Village, a huge area dominated by a magnificent circular building known as The Round.

Alfie thought this was a magical place, filled with opportunities for people of any age to enjoy all available services and activities at the touch of buttons on their mobile phones. Interactive sports centres, libraries, art galleries and glass domed exhibition areas abounded. Virtual shops, cafes and restaurants catered for all tastes with a range of international cuisine condensed into various shaped coloured tablets.

There was no time-consuming washing up or unnecessary burning of fuel here. Nana said she sometimes longed for the old days back in 2022 when she used to enjoy cooking and baking delicious cakes. None of this bothered her or Pops, though, as he still had his allotment where he grew fresh vegetables which Nan made into tasty soups and stews on her solar-powered cooker.

The Round was accessible to everybody, even those living on the edge of the sprawling Village Centre. It was designed as a modern version of Stratford's Globe. All community groups have a base there with performances ranging from Panto to Shakespearean comedy and everything in between.

Return transport to The Round was provided by a network of brightly coloured pods which ran on rails 24 hours a day, seven days a week, thanks to the investment in, and convenience of, solar energy combined with state funded, well-insulated buildings.

Alfie always made a bee-line for the arts section in The Round. He loved to paint, using a series of probes connected to his headband to operate a virtual paintbox. With a single nod of his head, he could load up his 'brush' and fill the entire screen with his abstract patterns. There were several consoles in the art arena that other people used to paint more structured work.

What delighted him was that all their efforts could be seen by the people walking about outside The Round, thanks to an active media facade known as The Chat Back Zone.

Outdoor shoppers were able to comment on the exhibits and often added a squiggle or two of their own in lieu of a signature.

Nana, of course, still preferred what she described as "real shopping" as they did in the old days when the shops were staffed with humans and real money changed hands.

No problem with that, though, as outside The Round, as a result of a national consultation, the Government introduced the Independent Retailers Act 2030, encouraging, through generous tax concessions, the re-introduction of single shopping units within which small businesses could be introduced and thrive again.

Nana was in her element.

On either side of The Village's pedestrianised area, Derby Road, there were separate shops for the butcher, baker and greengrocer alongside the shoe and clothing shops and pharmacy, hairdressers, barbers, sweetshops, newsagents and tobacconists. These businesses were all staffed by an owner and an assistant, often family members.

Each shop had a distinctive smell of its own taking Nana back to her youth. No plastic cards here; all trading was done in cash, something which seemed to Alfie to be an overcomplicated system, not to mention time-consuming, but then Nana, at almost seventy, was, he thought, very old.

Still dominating this retail renaissance from its lofty position of Huyton-On-The-Hill was Huyton Parish Church, dating back to the Norman period, lovingly preserved and embracing technology. The Parish Church Council offered a Living History Experience tracing the history of Huyton in general and the church in particular.

While Nana did her shopping, Granddad took a pod ride to his allotment area. He was able to access advice on his crops to ensure maximum yield thanks to the voice-activated technology installed on the perimeter of the vast allotment site.

In the centre of the allotment, there was a huge 'Man-Shed' fitted out to resemble Pop's other favourite hideaway, which used to be known as The Pub. After keying in their personal identification code, eligible adult customers could concoct their particular drink in a specialist section of the building, and their account would be charged automatically. Being a regular visitor to this facility, Granddad had become something of a connoisseur in what he called Real Ales and Fine Wines!

All buildings and facilities within The Village's boundaries were interlinked through a series of open parkland. This was a huge cultivated green space with trees, spectacular lakes, waterfalls, and a fountain, providing contrast to the brick-built functional environment.

Lightweight, adaptable seating placed strategically throughout this open campus ensured maximum opportunities for rest and relaxation. Of course, things went wrong occasionally. Bad weather, with little sunshine, especially in winter, affected the running of major installations, public or otherwise. The expansion of wind turbines in the outlying fields of The Village was a sore point; nothing is perfect.

Pops still collected wood and paper and stored them in his shed at home, ready to build a real fire if necessary. He'd even dug an underground ice pit where Nana kept fresh food 'just in case!

Alfie just smiled. He loved all the technology, having been born into it. He was glad, though, that as far as he knew, there was not as yet any machine which hugged him or made him feel better when he was ill. Nana and Pops told him once that human beings did this best, and that was good enough for him!

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The story is structured around a grandson and his grandparents. The author, a grandmother herself, uses family as a point of reference and a prism through which

she sees the Village; Future Huyton becomes a union of two archetype places that co-exist and bond just like different generations within a family.

The grandson is a young person with special needs who enjoys the care and love of his grandparents. Despite the limitations imposed by his condition, he lives an independent, happy life. Technology plays a key role in this - it becomes the tool that allows him to express himself, participate, and exist within society. Grandparents come from a time less dependent on technology, a society forged through the interdependence between community members that honours solidarity.

The town centre macroscopically resembles this family. In the centre lies a "futuristic tower". It is presented idealistically and proudly; it is smart, creative and expressive; it does not burden the environment; has everything the future world could desire. The tower is perfect and hopeful, just like a grandson. The young hero's disability plays a decisive role in the exegesis of technology. Technology is not an ideal in itself but takes different shapes to become the right tool for each person to use on their journey of life discovery. In the same way, it becomes a tool that helps the community to empower its members, maintain its ties and keep its heritage alive.

Around the town centre of the future is the town centre of the past—the place where grandma and grandpa are active. Although old, this place is not decayed. Small businesses are still there for local shoppers, and the exchange of physical money is performed as a ritual of human interdependence. And on the outskirts of the traditional town, people still cultivate the land and transform its gifts into food.

From the periphery to the epicentre, one can see a stratification of the town centre structure analogous to the route of human civilisations - we depend on nature, we progress through cooperation, we utilise technology to excel. The different generations of people and places co-exist and thrive as distinct instances of humanity within the natural world. The old centre protectively surrounds the "young" one, ready to support it in the event of some misstep, which is only expected and natural. State intervention and welfare are vital to maintaining this stratification, ensuring social resilience and well-being.

Meta-narrative

The past is a source of tested knowledge that provides foundation and ensures resilience.

Technology represents emerging knowledge and new tools that open up new potentials, empowering people on their journey into the future.

Past and future go hand-by-hand and their interconnection can result in local prosperity, just like it is a source of happiness within a family.

Values

- family
- solidarity
- accessibility and inclusivity
- cultivation of creativity
- nature and nourishing of people's relationship with it
- local economy

Proposed new places in and around the town centre

- The Round: a fictional smart community hub that houses local groups and involves sports centre, library, art section, exhibition area, shops, cafes, and restaurants.
- Small independent businesses in a traditional high street.
- Allotment area close to the town centre
- The town centre is imagined as an open campus where old and new features co-exist.

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

- Automations that improve accessibility for people with mobility difficulties
- The Chat Back Zone: A media façade intervention that showcases local creativity projects produced in the Round and enables feedback from town centre visitors.
- Green architecture and building insulation
- Green energy for the town centre

- Preservation of local heritage

- Public means of fixed orbit to support the interconnection of Knowsley town centres and enable access to Huyton centre every day- especially on Sundays.

- Technological support of farming activities in allotment area

- Public seating area

(Placemaking) events/ activities

- Performing arts and digital creativity in the Round

- Digital experiences to showcase local heritage

Digital resources (APIs, services, other immaterial infrastructure)

Online expert advice to assist farming activities in allotments.

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story envisions a future Huyton centre where the past and the future coexist harmoniously. This is illustrated through the description of a futuristic inclusive community hub that houses local groups and promotes community creativity and the local market that is linked to the traditional markets of the past. The story refers directly to relevant state policies that support both the old [Independent Retailers Act 2030] and the new elements [solar energy combined with state funded, well-insulated buildings] and have resulted in this hybrid town centre.

Survey

1.	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+	2.	Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)

3.	Imagine a specific familiar public place or destination, transformed to be more accessible, appealing or aligned to your lifestyle. Please describe this re-imagined place. (This scenario doesn't have to be realistic; try to highlight your specific need that will be fulfilled.)
4.	What place, event, community activity or ritual from your town's/ city's past would you revive to benefit the local welfare today?
5.	Imagine the communal spaces in your ideal future town centre, where arts, culture, and community flourish together. How would you creatively use technology to enrich these spaces, making them more engaging and inclusivewithout altering their historical character?

2. The Events Manager

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/theeventsmanager
Author info	age group: <18 gender: female group of 4 individuals

The Story

The sunny days have started, and the young people of our town asked me to organise a street party in the Village. What a lovely idea! This requires some preparation, but that's what I do. An open-air party will be a delight for the young residents and a beneficial learning experience for the local groups that will get involved in setting up the event.

The idea came from the dance group of our local youth centre. The group is very active on Tik Tok, and one of their dance routines went viral a few months ago. They want to show the dances they've been practising to a live audience, and they thought why not do it at a party? Jamie, who represents them, contacted me and told me about their idea. I asked him who they wanted to invite, which place they preferred, and many other things they had not thought about. I gave them time to discuss and think about it. If they came back with answers, it would mean they had taken the matter seriously.

Jamie came back with a complete proposal.

He told me they want the party to take place in the pedestrian area of Derby Road in about a month.

They asked to do it on a Saturday after the shops in the Village centre are closed, because some of them, including Jamie, work part-time in the numerous businesses of the shopping area.

They suggested that the party be advertised on the Council's social media accounts and podcasts, targeting the young audience- up to 23 years old. They ideally want about 1000 people! I'll see how people respond to the invitation, and if we have such a big crowd, I'll take the necessary security measures.

They aim to do three performances during the evening at the Star, where the pedestrian area begins. That was a great choice from a technical and safety point of view.

I was also very pleased to hear their suggestion to invite other local Knowsley youth groups to participate and show their latest projects.

Finally, he told me they would like to have soft drinks but wasn't sure how this would be arranged. I assured him I would process his requests and come back with proposals and solutions.

A few days later, we had answers from other groups.

An art group from Kirkby suggested that they take over the music and lights and asked my permission to operate the relevant media equipment installed around the Star. I was happy to assure them that I would be there for any technical support.

The Makerspace group suggested setting up the modular stalls they had built for this year's Spring Fair. They are so talented!

I also addressed the F&B businesses of the Village. Some of them were interested in selling their products at the stalls, and we agreed on a list of soft drinks and snacks.

There are a few more pending issues, but I will sort everything out in time. I hope the kids have fun and remember that night years later when they are adults. Being an Artificial Intelligence myself, I have never had a childhood. But through the events and celebrations of the people in my town, I feel like I'm growing and learning more with them.

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The story's central figure is a town event manager who collaborates with a local youth group to organise a street party. The dynamic is similar to that of student and teacher. The story exudes a sense of friendliness, immediacy and ease with which community members come into contact with the local authority.

The event is built around community talent and aims to showcase, celebrate, and create fond collective memories. At the same time, the preparation has educational value for community members. By involving them in the organisation, the events manager allows them to collaborate with their peers, expand their skills and gain agency over public life.

The town centre space seems to be designed to support the community's initiatives. It has the necessary equipment, which people can freely utilise and expands its infrastructure through the residents' creative work. It is a town open to experimentation that trusts and believes in its citizens and evolves through the community's emancipation.

Technology is not presented fearfully or cautiously. It facilitates the linking of the authority with the public. The authors understand the power of social media in connecting with the right audience and portray the AI with sobriety as a service with specialised expertise and potential for good. Assigning an AI, the character of a "teacher", they emphasise its use for empowering and educating the community rather than transferring power and control to it.

Meta-narrative

The expert- the holder of knowledge and power should put themselves at the service of the public to support and elevate them. In fact, through their service, the expert also becomes wiser-it is a process of mutual expansion.

Values

- Young people respected and involved in local life
- Emancipation, empowerment, public engagement
- Entertainment, celebration
- Online cultures (social media, online trends)
- Creativity

Proposed Places in and around the centre

- Youth Centre where young people can pass their time creatively and participate in different clubs (dance group).
- Makerspace where people can involve in local projects, building things (e.g., modular stalls) for the town centre.
- Village shopping centre where young people can work part time.

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

- Sound and light infrastructure for public space events
- DIY public furniture made by locals at maker space

(Place making) Events/ Activities

Street Party for local youth

Digital Resources (APIs, Services, other immaterial infrastructure)

- A local authority service that facilitates events and community initiatives
- Local authority owned social media channels and podcasts for different audiences and interests.

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The town centre is described through a local authority service that provides support for community events. The scheme involves consulting/ mentoring, infrastructure provision, partnership and networking opportunities. What is essential about this service is its accessibility and the fact that it is inclusive to young people lacking qualities associated with adulthood.

Survey

1.	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+	2.	Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)

3.	Please share an idea for a potential public space event that local groups and communities could easily set up to promote local talent or other local initiatives.

4.	Would you be interested in participating in such an event as a(n) o ideator o organiser o volunteer o performer o sponsor o business partner o member of the audience o ……………………………………

5.	Consider the unique viewpoint of an AI, which grows and evolves through its involvement in community events. Can you refer to any experience of participating in a community gathering that functioned more than a social occasion, as a pivotal ritual for communal learning and interaction?

3. Village in the Metaverse

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/villageinthemetaverse

Author info	age group: 55-64
	gender: male

The Story

My name is Will; I live in the borough of Knowsley, in a town of Viking origin. But how will it appear in the future?

28 -March -2050

I rise from my hypogenic tank after an eight-hour oxygenated induced sleep. While resting, all my personal cleaning needs have been catered for, and biometric sensors have layered my skin, leaving it anointed to face a new day.

I'm refreshed, cleansed, and fed by injection during the night. I could have chosen food in pellet form during the day with a host of supplements on request.

All my vitals are constantly monitored and recorded; all required medical pills are 3d printed as needed, well-being counsellors are available on call for personal coaching or just a chat.

As for leaving the house, I have a portable wrist computer that looks like a regular watch, monitors all my movements and vital organs, and is geotagged in case of an emergency. For now, I'm advised to choose the metaverse walks- around my local areas or further afield. I prefer to walk outside with the wind... the trees rustling, the feel of the leaves, but I understand what an invaluable asset this is for the housebound and disabled.

Gone are the bulky virtual reality headsets. Now, we just pop in high-definition contact lenses, which give us the effect of 100" screens right in front of our face and activate the hearing devices implanted straight into our inner ear to experience top-quality sound from all sources of media. The sensors layering my skin and the battery implanted in my armpit, with a hundred-year guarantee that will outlast me, complete the immersion set.

I sit comfortably to take my virtual walk. I could start at the 1000-year-old church, the cornerstone of our community, or all the other places that bring memories of my distant youth, but I have a few errands to run.

"Take me to the town centre", I mutter and then focus my gaze on the large supermarket as my starting point. I am transported inside the foyer. I browse along aisles filled with all my shopping needs. I tap on them and add them to my cart; payment is auto-taken, and they are delivered the same day to my front door.

A few more things to do. I turn back time in the virtual calendar, and all destinations change to how they looked in the early 2000s when I was a boy. It's strange to see these places as they used to be. I enter the bank where my father used to work. It looks almost identical, but he's not there. I can still do all my transactions.

Next stop, the library, I turn the year back to 2050. Our library is much better than the ones that used to exist. Our librarians have curated and published a new list. I choose this week's virtual reads and magazines.

I hover along the long high street where all destinations face and send everyone on my friends' list a wave just to let them know I'm here. You can't expect just to meet people by chance. If they fancy a chat, we can meet up in the pub to talk about old times, friends, and hobbies. Sam responds; his avatar looks hale, just like mine. We chat and watch the world go by through the beers; it's not quite the same.

When it's time to go, we only have to press return, and back home we are.

So easy to jump from a personal encounter to a group assembly to a crowded concert. Places with no in-between, convenience versus physical contact.

The social tribe should always win out.

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The hero appears as a housebound patient, framed by medical technologies, who enters the public sphere through the metaverse. This virtual reality space mimics the town with virtual functional destinations. The hero visits the supermarket, the bank, the library, the pub. Within this space, he has the opportunity to live "normally", run errands and socialise.

Technology is constantly present in the user's daily activities to support his health by acting proactively and responding to his every need. It monitors his vitals, ensures his body is preserved, tags him in the physical world, facilitates his activities and fosters social interactions. Its presence is discreet in terms of form, operating in and on the body almost invisibly; however, it defines how life is performed and experienced, ensuring the satisfaction of clearly defined functions and needs associated with human life.

A sense of local identity derives from the historical past, the local landmark and places that remain the same throughout the person's lifetime. In its virtual counterpart, the town can change its skin to revive its older look. That serves a need for nostalgic walks in memory lane, recalling events and people from the past. However, new features and destinations become a different source of contentment and possibly the new anchors of memory and identity for residents.

Life in the (virtual) town is different from what is familiar to the reader. The story has a pervasive melancholy that stems from technology's amazing capacity to cater for, mediate, maximise efficiency, and which leaves no room for sickness, delay, incidental events, longing for human connection, and "rustling leaves" in empty routes between destinations. The story insinuates the desire for a town experience beyond the activities that operational town destinations facilitate, and which leaves space for incidental and serendipitous events that carry a sense of potential, a housebound person might be missing out.

Meta-narrative

People often perceive their lives through jobs, errands, obligations and pursuits of their daily lives. These reflect cultural constructs that change over time. People's true

nature is social - they need to live and connect with others. Equally instinctive and organic is their need to exist in the natural world. When deprived of these two fundamental connections, they realise life's priorities.

Values

- Health, Well-being
- Healthcare, medical technology
- Reading
- Sociability
- Heritage
- Technology

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

Wearable medical technology for remote healthcare

(Place making) Events/ Activities

- Online activities in the town's local Metaverse that have to do with business, education, healthcare, social events, entertainment and celebrations.
- Old versions of the town can be revived and experienced immersively as part of a heritage project.

Digital Resources (APIs, Services, other immaterial infrastructure)

- remote healthcare services
- a digital twin of the town centre in the Metaverse with selected spaces and support of activities

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story describes the town centre in the Metaverse, as an assembly of digital destinations with a look and feel that mimics reality. However, developing a strategy aiming at this emerging culture does not only involve the development of accessible, immersive online spaces. The virtual centre is a familiar destination for the main character, who visits it with intention, knowing how to fulfil different needs. Turning

the metaverse into a familiar realm and producing local value from it is a field of inquiry.

Survey

1.	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+	2.	Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)
3.	Can you describe a random/spontaneous incident in your local centre that left you with a happy memory that could not have happened in a virtual centre?		
4.	Can you imagine and briefly present an idea of a virtual destination in an online duplicate of the town/city centre that could be useful and beneficial to local life?		
5	With the protagonist's movements and vitals constantly monitored, what concerns do you have about privacy and surveillance in future public spaces? How can society ensure that technological advancements do not infringe upon individual freedoms?		
6	Considering the story's portrayal of technology aiding those who are housebound or disabled, how important do you think technological advancements are in making public spaces more accessible and inclusive? What additional steps should be taken to ensure no one is left behind?		

4. Walk the Walk

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/walkthewalk
Author info	age group: 65+ gender: female

The Story

The transport pod that Madge 'Ubered' arrived at her domicile unit at the stated time; 10:25, precisely. She entered the cabin and declared her destination "Blue Bell Junction". "Yes, certainly Madge. Take your seat and fasten the safety belt", echoed

from the overhead speakers. The outside weather forecasters predicted "a grievously chilly day"; she was glad of her new Themo coat and boots. They did exactly as promised, regulating body temperature with the dial of a button. Madge being Madge often mixed up right and left, resulting in wide variations of hot and cold. Her grandson sorted out the problem, programming constant output.

The narrow pavements of the junction, which once had terrified her, no longer had the power to make her shake. Upon placing her right arm on the crossing beacon, permission to scan her data was granted. The pavement adjusted to her personal needs; a wider pathway appeared and crossing time extended; one minute and eleven seconds displayed on the beacon in a bright orange neon glow. The beeping sound of the countdown activated as Madge stepped out into the junction. Correctly following the specified path, for any deviation caused a high-pitched alarm to call out, 'danger, danger!'.

Cathy Nolan, a comrade of forty years, was waiting near the shopping depot. Madge tried to attract her attention to no avail. Cathy distracted by a ruckus between a youngster and Civil Defence Pods, did not respond. The boy called out, "It was dead when I got here!" Madge sent her Obvo-Pod down into the crowd, and a vague recollection of this boy, flashed in her memory capsule. Recognising the voice, she instructed her personal interface patch to trawl her remembrance function.

As the friends reached the assigned meeting point, their security badges pulsating bright green indicated known connexion. Greeting each other, they linked arms and strolled towards the plaza. Drifting through the air, a tinny tinkle vibration of an old-fashioned accordion enveloped the square. At once, they both cried out, "Stan, Stan, the Music Man", his image floating on the giant screens of the plaza. Madge often wondered how this always happened but did not fuss too much. She thought to herself, "Somebody in that great control box in the sky likes me."

Cathy was overly excited when the new gravity chairs appeared from the sub-pavement. Delighted, she listed their super qualities: "eases spines, revitalises muscles... You can even reload your Kindle!" Reminded of her own library cache,

Madge placed her Kindle on the chair. With a bleep, a new selection of titles appeared. She sat with Cathy, agreeing that the gravity chairs were faultless. A joyful moment.

Madge's exercise icon displayed the compulsory minutes she needed to achieve this week, 'five more clicks to reach my target'. She made the decision to complete the NHS prescribed weekly objective of twenty-six minutes. A purple mist sanitised the air around her as her gravity chair morphed into fitness apparatus. Meanwhile, Cathy languidly surveyed the crowd; the mood in the plaza was buoyant and cheerful. Sighing with satisfaction, she relaxed into her chair, humming along to her favourite tune. Using her Virtual Purchase Purse, she ordered coffees and cakes at their favourite café. "Hurry-up! Get going! You need the credits. I've got us buttered tea cakes", she exclaimed. Madge laughed at her friend and concluded her weekly regime. The plaza became busy as a crowd of working young rushed through on twelve breaks. The individuals crossing the plaza caused the display and audio to re-programme. A different environment was set up catering to the new crowd. The friends, alert to the change, left the plaza, turned right, and continued their promenade along the high street.

They followed their designated illuminated path, avoiding self-cleaning jets, random pop-up obstacles and wheelie e-chairs. The whoop of childish delight caused them to stop and observe. A troupe of pre-schoolers climbed and scaled colourful frames around the statue of "Harold, our glorious leader". Approaching Joe's market stall, they reflected on his merchandise. Items, once for sale in the not-so-distant history of the high street; red and white flags, fluttering, clacking like Tibetan prayers, noisy mechanical playthings forever turning in circles. Stationary for a moment, Cathy began reminiscing about the old market, long-gone shops, old companions, and her proverbial rant about the price of bread. Madge reminded her friend of the weekly treat waiting just for them. They hurried along.

Arriving at the café, 'Halo Elton' appeared at the same time as their coffee and cakes. 'Enjoy, enjoy my dear friends!', his hologram erratic and disjointed.

An older man rushed past, speaking angrily to a young boy. He turned his irate face to the friends. Their badges pulsated green and his identity card 'Thomas Doran'

displayed on her media screen. Madge called out his name and Tommy approached the table stating, "Just come to get Laddo here out of the cop shop". He gave the boy a playful clip about the ears.

"Grandad, stop that! It's not my fault. It was dead when I got there!" Tommy explained that the Plod-Bots had rescued the boy from an angry crowd, who'd accused him of breaking the credit token machine. "I needed the credits. Me and Mandy are going to the new Hypermedia near MacDs" the boy clarified.

The boy scuttled away as the oldies began that familiar phrase, "Back in the day…" There was no way he was staying to listen to the tales of olden days, of dirty streets and smelly air, and grandad's hard mucky manual labour.

A notification of the transport app appeared on Madge's media screen and in a very efficient manner, stated: "Your assigned T-Pods have arrived at dock seven, transport hub L36"

Madge called out to Cathy, 'Come on. Your pod's here too. Time to walk the walk'.

The friends once again linked arms, as only good friends can do. They waved a quick goodbye to 'Halo Elton', and called out to Tommy, "See you soon".

They followed their designated path, avoiding cleaning jets, float-boards, noisy children, and the general paraphernalia of the High Street. Their assigned day of 'personal connection' completed precisely at the stated time of 15:55.

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The story's main character is a citizen/user of a cybernetic town. In the story, she visits the town centre to meet her friend for a scheduled social gathering and engages in a series of activities and interactions, all regulated through technology.

The story alludes to social values related to accessibility, safety, health, public order, pleasant stay in public places, support of interpersonal relationships, assistance to

older people, and entertainment. All of the above are values of today's society; in the story, however, they are measurable goals that are achieved through technological mediation and protocols of social behaviour.

The town is a complex of physical, virtual and technological interactants connected through streams of personal and public data. The form and infrastructure of the built environment change in response to the needs of the people within. Organic entities-people also engage in activities, following instructions. Digital and organic seem to speak a common language. The town is a system that operates under programs to achieve goals that constitute the common good.

There is a sense that the old world of uncertainty, toil and hope has died and in its place is a new world of comfort, security and determinism, which has the necessary regulatory system to sustain itself forever. In this context, nostalgia and local heritage are possibly escapism or a preference. What matters is maintaining and achieving goals. People do not seem to be uncomfortable under this framework. Expressions of turmoil and tensions manifest as expected and manageable; they are part of the system.

In the cybernetic town (and possibly world), participation in society is ensured by compliance with protocols and achieving goals. This is the currency that is exchanged, and technology is the means that controls and sustains the status quo. The story, influenced by the period of restrictive measures that followed the Covid-16 pandemic, narrates a future possibility where life will be considered fragile and in need of regulation.

Meta-narrative

Old generations give way to new ones. People will continue to walk their walk through the route of life and the passage of time. What matters is the preservation of life and the access and integration into the public sphere of all individuals.

Values

- accessibility

- safety

- diversity

- public order and regulation

- pleasant stay in public places

- health

- assistance to older people

- opportunities for entertainment

Proposed Places in and around the centre

The "Hypermedia", a digital entertainment hub for young people.

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

- Modern free public seating area

- Public supervision/ public order technology

- Adaptive architecture, responsive public infrastructure: traffic lights, pedestrian zone and public furniture adapt to people's needs.

- Workout equipment that connects to personal (fitness) devices

- Media facades that show diverse entertainment content in public places

- Personalised transit drops off and picks up people in allocated public platforms without having to park

Digital Resources (APIs, Services, other immaterial infrastructure)

Personal data that describe the needs and preferences of users that people carry on their devices and transmit to automatically configure service provision in public spaces.

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story describes a smart town centre that is technologically monitored and regulated to preserve the area's operation and the community's wellbeing. Local policy directs people to desirable activities by providing social credit when they meet assigned goals; the credit can be redeemed in local amenities. These goals relate even to people's personal wellbeing e.g., NHS-prescribed weekly fitness goals.

Survey

	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+		Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)
1.		2.	
3.	What destinations or amenities are missing from your local centre for a person of your age group?		
4.	The story describes a fictional perfectly regulated town. What real-life local issues require drastic regulatory interventions to promote local welfare?		
5.	Reflect on subjects like public space surveillance, digital literacy, technology-enabled convenience and lasting community values in the story. How do you respond to these issues with regard to the development of the future town centre?		

5. Setup for Success

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/setupforsuccess
Author info	age group: <18 group of 5 individuals

The Story

Cleo wrote on the group chat:

Team 4, you need to be at your station. We'll start testing in a minute.

Team 4 responded: Yes Cleooo! We just arrived, can't you see us?

The two youngsters standing next to the vertical screen turned to the nearest security camera and excitedly posed and danced, knowing she could see them from the closed circuit.

On the other side of the connection, Cleo looked more serious than usual with the Town Centre Events Manager, who seemed to enjoy the carefree spirit of the youth centre members who behaved sometimes childishly and sometimes as grown-ups.

These local young people have been working on the "My Huyton" project for three months under the guidance of the local College. Cleo had been organising all relevant activities and took care of every detail of today's event. She was anxious that something would go wrong. The installations would remain active for a month in the Village, but she was most stressed about this opening night. Everyone would be here: her manager, the people from the Council, tutors from the College and of course, the parents and friends of the young members, who have been working with great dedication on this project.

The project made the children feel pride in themselves and their town, giving Cleo the greatest motivation to work hard.

In these last months, the members of Huyton youth centre were introduced to the world of graphic design and multimedia. The College provided workshops and resources, and the kids learned to design Interactive animated posters.

The ten animated posters that emerged from their work would encourage residents and visitors to engage with local activities, support the local economy, adopt habits beneficial to their health, and live according to the ideals of their community: kindness, solidarity, and courage. This seemed very timely under the current difficulties the world was facing.

Furthermore, the posters were interactive and could be enriched with videos that people uploaded to any of their social media accounts, as long as they used each poster's labelled hashtag or checked-in on its location.

At precisely 6 p.m., the control centre emitted the signal, and the posters appeared on the screens. The pairs, now looking serious, were ready to welcome the guests and present their work. Cleo, who was watching from the control centre, sent a message on the group chat: "Can you please confirm the social media function?"

One of each pair opened a social media app on the tablet they were given for the presentation and posted their designated sample picture without forgetting to use the right hashtag and geo-tag.

Each team reported on the group chat:

Team 1: We just posted and waiting for it to appear

Team 2: post is up

Team 4: Something's wrong... Did someone else post with our hashtag?

Team 2: Ours shows an irrelevant picture. It's not what we posted!!

Team 1: Cleo I think something is wrong...

Team 3: Cleo .. we have the wellness centre and the image that appeared has people playing Bingo!!

Team 4: We should have the Bingo nights poster, and a picture from the local market appeared on our screen

Cleo was reading in terror ... "Oh God, what is happening?" ... and then it hit her. She typed:

"You all get the footage of the next station... I think I know where the bug is... Will reboot in 5' "

She sprang out of her chair, saying to the guy, "I have to go to the youth centre".

She came out of the Council building, and even though the youth centre was on the opposite side of the park, she jumped on her parked hoverboard and crossed the green space with prohibitive speed.

Sirens started whistling, and the security system decelerated and immobilised the board just before the entrance, charging her a speed fine. She stepped inside and ran to her workstation, which lit up the moment her face reflected on the screen.

Tapped and typed for a minute and then gave the verbal command "reboot Stations".

She went out and ran to team 4, which was closer. A group of visitors was already there. The woman in the group posted a Meta story she had just recorded. The short video with the four friends posing and pointing to the Bingo building behind them appeared on the poster.

Cleo and the young pair looked at each other with relief. The visitors were laughing unsuspectingly, seeing themselves on the poster and started plotting a video with a choreography.

She returned to the control centre. The gentleman, who had no idea what had happened, smiled at her. Cleo sank into her chair.

On the group chat teams reported:

Team1: Works perfect

Team 2: Ok it's restored

Team 4: All sorted

Team 5: it's ok now Cleo

..

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The central figure of the story is Cleo, the project manager/ community leader who supports the creative project of the young members of Huyton's youth centre. The project is a venture supported by the local authority and the local college and focuses on local young people as creators.

The project provides the opportunity to young people to acquire advanced digital skills and develop their creativity and expression within digital media. It is an open education experience that draws resources from the local college but takes place within the more relaxed environment of a youth centre. Through their guided creative

engagement, young people produce new media (interactive posters) linked to the digital cultures in which they are already natives. Meanwhile, the opportunity is created for the town to participate in these influential spheres and promote its values regarding local life.

The collaboration between local authorities and the youth centre is an investment for the region; the town prioritises the education of young people and benefits from the emerging youth innovation and the "relevance" of the outcomes. The result of this partnership in the story is a set of digital installations in the centre. With a sense of ownership, young creators may experience through their achievements, meaningful moments that will become part of their life story and the town's heritage. In addition, the town centre is augmented with digital artefacts that attract visitors to both its physical and digital manifestation.

Utilising local youth as experts of the digital zeitgeist is the most innovative, but hardly the only expression of technology in the story. The town centre is filled with technological interfaces and digital media. This ensures safety, efficiency, entertainment. The story, however, does not idealise technology- an unexpected malfunction lies at the epicentre of the narration. Behind the technology, the authors see human ability, intent and potential. This is why they choose to render young people the tech experts of their hometown.

Meta-narrative

Young people are the future. The strengthening of their abilities, the formation of meaningful experiences for them, and their involvement in local life are self-nourishment processes for the community and investment for the area.

Values

- Learning, education, creativity
- Youth
- Social media, digital cultures
- Community involvement
- Local innovation

Proposed Places in and around the centre

Youth centre within the civic campus

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

Media Screens showing interactive posters visitors can engage with

(Place making) Events/ Activities

- Young people learn to develop interactive projects as part of a youth centre activity- workshop
- Creative outcomes are exhibited in the town centre as a local youth project

Digital Resources (APIs, Services, other immaterial infrastructure)

Digital content that gets renewed with people's involvement

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story suggests a policy aimed at modern digital skills and creativity putting local youth in the foreground. This approach would have an important personal impact on each person's educational performance and future career prospects. However, it would also develop a regional capital linked to digital presence and innovation, starting with engaging future citizens in relevant experiences.

Survey

	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 1. 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+		Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are 2. local in Knowsley Borough or not)
3.	How do you think the young people of the area could be involved in the re-development of the town centre, as bearers of the modern spirit in the area?		

4.	Can you describe any digital or creative skills you would like to develop in a non-formal learning environment?	
5.	Would you be interested to introduce other community members to a particular skill or project? (This could be a skill / a hobby / an area of knowledge that you would be willing to initiate other people to)	
(If yes)		6. What would that skill/project be?
7.	The story highlights the empowerment of young people through acquiring digital skills. How important do you think it is for young individuals to be fluent in digital technologies? (Reflect on the impact this could have on their future and the future of their communities.)	

6. Growing

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/growing
Author info	age group: 55- 64
	gender: female

The Story

It's Sunday. I got dressed, fixed my hair and now I'm having a light breakfast. I turned on the radio the minute I got out of bed- we didn't like music in the morning, but now I am on my own in this house. It's strange to keep our daily habits without Jeff around. I won't spend the day at home; it is sunny and warm, I will take the bus and go to the park in the Villy. Jonathan running the grief support group suggested an exhibition called "Stories of the Past" that takes place in the park close to the train station.

I am waiting at the bus stop. I used to ride my e-bike everywhere as a child, but now I enjoy the comfort of the bus. It's easy for me to attend the different interest groups I recently joined all over the Borough and these bus rides make me very nostalgic. My mind drifts, I am recalling how these places used to be in my youth. The towns changed through the years, many places were restored, others were modernised, but on a Sunday morning, children still come out to play.

The bus arrives at the Village's bus station, I carefully get off and go up Derby Road along with other people that arrived moments ago by train. It is somewhat crowded, many had the same idea and the Village looks alive and festive. There's a group of loud children near me coming out of the cinema. They have haircuts like the ones I used to give my sons when they were that age. It seems they have synced their goggles and are immersed in a shared bubble. I wish they would invite me in their bubble too.

It's been a while since I used my hologlasses. I used to enjoy revisiting our family vacation, but it feels impossible at the moment. I keep the experience files safe in my cloud but never open them.

I arrive at the park. It's a virtual exhibition, so I take out my holos, they are bulky not like the ones the kids were wearing. I walk around, and virtual people appear telling stories from the past. Young kids from the 2020s appear in their old-fashioned clothes telling stories about how they like to spend time in Crocky and Boody. These kids will be middle-aged people now. Some of these people could be dead. The idea makes me nervous. Maybe he's here too. He couldn't be.

I take off my holos and walk around the park ignoring the notification of content that beeps from time to time.

I walk to a cluster of trees; they look like a small gang sitting on their own. As I approach, my holos beep again. I put them on to join their gang. A glowing female figure appears. Her image gradually forms, and now I see her as she used to be. She's my age; she introduces herself, before telling her story. She's called Trisha. "Hi, Trisha" I mutter in response.

"Near my house, a lot of trees have been cut down because of the building that is going on. When I saw them, this saddened me deeply, and I cried at their sight. I was delighted to hear there would be a tree planting day in the new park in the Village. I joined with my three grandchildren. It was a fantastic day, the four of us had a great time, and we made new friends. I am joining a garden club with one of them soon. I hope these trees will grow tall and that my grandchildren will grow old and that they remember our day together when they visit this park."

I am waiting for Trish to finish her story, take off my glasses and put them in my bag. I take another look at how tall Trisha's trees have grown. They look beautiful.

I do not have any special memories of this park, but we always liked walking in nature, so I walk some more.

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

Personal loss puts the heroine in a position of searching for meaning and courage in a world that inevitably changes with the passage of time. Just as generations of people come and go, the town is subject to the same temporal alteration and renewal. What survives the passage of time? How can we continue forward when the familiar and safe are irretrievably lost?

The technology in the story provides a time-bending capability that allows for immersive experiences and re-enacted memories. However, for the heroine, comfort does not come from her own memory files. Through a "magical" portal, an important message from the past comes through: an everyday story of a fellow community member that informs the heroine and the reader about something that survives the passage of time.

It is a legacy, running through time, as people and places give way to new ones. It was planted one beautiful day by a grandmother with her grandchildren, and from a small shoot, it became a tall tree years later. Happy moments with loved ones plant the seeds that will become a garden that will comfort them and instil in them a zest for life in their darkest times. Immersed in nature, immersed in a virtual narration, the heroine is inspired to become more careless and more present, just like the playing children she notices throughout her walk.

The park in the town centre is a place of care, inspiration and hope for people. Beyond practical destinations, it caters to people's complex mental and spiritual needs by

creating space and opportunities for reflection, grounding and re- connection with the self.

Meta-narrative

The antidote to the futility of time is to connect with humanity, a value that permeates and unites us. Within the timelessness of nature, outside of transitory human constructs, we can reconnect with ourselves and others.

Values

- Family
- Familiarity, security
- Mental health, support
- Nature, Greenery
- tranquillity

Proposed Places in and around the centre

- park in town centre
- cinema

(Place making) Events/ Activities

- Virtual exhibition in the park
- Time capsule as a heritage- community project
- Involve the community in shaping the park (tree planting day)

Digital Resources (APIs, Services, other immaterial infrastructure)

Augmented reality content that can be experienced in the town centre

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story suggests creating spaces and developing an action plan that aims at the psychological and emotional support of residents. Part of this plan is to create areas of relaxation and grounding, involve local support groups in organising activities and implement cultural projects that give courage and highlight the value of life.

Survey

1.	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+	2.	Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)
3.	What story/experience of yours would you put in a time capsule to share with future generations living in the area to inspire and comfort them in their difficult times?		
4.	Trisha's story within the virtual exhibition emphasises the importance of nature and tree planting. How do you envision the future integration of green spaces in urban centres?		
5.	The heroine's journey from isolation to a connection with Trisha's story through technology suggests the transformative power of shared experiences. How can future public spaces be designed to facilitate these types of meaningful connections among strangers?		
6.	The virtual exhibition in the town-centre park serves as a bridge between past and present generations. What potential do you see in such applications for enhancing local education and cultural preservation?		

7. The Business Hub

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/thebusinesshub
Author info	age group: 55- 64 gender: male

The Story

Dave wasn't born in Knowsley but had arrived as a child from Liverpool when his family relocated to the "New Neighbourhood". In his late forties, he was an active member of the local business community and a recognizable face for those who frequented the town centre.

Alighting from the water-powered, carbon-neutral shuttle bus connecting Knowsley town centres, the High Street opened up before him, tree-lined and cared for. He loved the architecture of the shops and buildings and felt blessed his own business was part of this cluster. It was early morning, and calm prevailed before employees and visitors arrived.

He proceeded past the Health and Well-being hub before strolling past the Library and Media building. The older market, a sterile, featureless uniform area devoid of character, had been reconstructed into a shopping area based on the market that used to exist almost a century ago and was then the heart of the community. Everybody used to know the shop owners; bread, meat, clothing, fruit and veg all on display to be bargained over. People met on market days; news, gossip and local happenings were discussed over a cup of tea.

Of course, things happened differently today, but there was still an atmosphere that felt parochial, relaxing and eclectic. There were lots of independent shops, and the influx of immigrants to Merseyside had greatly benefited the town, with artisan goods, coffee shops, bakeries and cafes serving the delicious food and recipes the people had brought with them from their homeland. A real browsers' paradise.

"Good morning Tom!" he called out at his friend, who was writing the day's goodies on the outdoor chalkboard. The smell of freshly-baked bread coming out of his small bakery was heavenly.

Tom waved back, holding the chalk marker. "Morning, mate! I'll come to see you shortly."

"Bring a couple of these bagels", Dave replied cheerfully, pointing at the writing on the chalkboard.

The two of them used to have a quick coffee and chat in the morning at Dave's before work started. They shared a genuine interest in the local market's well-being and often exchanged ideas and tips that could help their businesses stand out.

The idea of introducing goods from countries that locals used to visit on their holiday emerged from such a discussion after one of Dave's trips to Italy." They have a new type of coffee there, and we all loved it, you know."

Their experimentations didn't go unnoticed by customers. This was the starting point for a digital networking and peer mentoring program developed by the Council that connected the local town centre business community with peers from tourist markets such as those of Spain, France, Greece and Turkey. Soon, the Village had become a regional destination for new products and experiences that reminded people of places they had visited.

Dave arrived at his shop bearing his name in red lettering. His shop offered cool refreshments and snacks catering to the guests of the small family-friendly park. This corner of the centre was forested, cool and calming. It contained an outdoor stage which, on warm summer nights, showed films and plays. On its other end started the path that led to Huyton's garden allotments where people grew their own fruit and veg. Any surplus was shared among the local community or bartered for other goods and services. This was the latest concept piloted by the local business community in partnership with local charities.

With a tap on his watch, Dave opened the electric blind and entered his store that looked drowsy until he turned on the lights. Before starting the morning preparations, he performed his opening ritual. He stood at the door and watched the early risers arriving at the Village. He voicelessly expressed gratitude for one more day and wished for the fulfilment of the social, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of the townspeople, both old and young.

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The hero of the story is a shop owner in the town centre. Through his thoughts, he presents to the reader a centre that is reborn through the demographic changes of the

region, the business partnerships, local innovation, and the search for solutions in the historical past of the region.

Local heritage correlated to modern consumer trends contributes to the re-establishment of a local brand. The new high street revives a certain period of the town's past, that of small family businesses that bring back a picturesque environment of local colour and interpersonal relationships. The new "old high street" also creates space for similar products, services and experiences that come from other cultural environments and are associated with flows of immigrants in the area or are familiar to the local public through their travels. The town's market thus develops into a competitive shopping hub linked to artisan goods and the food economy and becomes a destination in the broader region.

The cooperation of entrepreneurs is presented as decisive in the regeneration of the local economy. Both their fellowship and their involvement in international business networks seem like a revival of guilds and international trade fairs. Similar is the restoration of post-war allotments and the exchange economy program. However, the story does not imply any radical shift from the wider economic system. These models from the past are reinvented in the future centre, and their restoration is part of a local strategy.

The town is not trying to return to the past. It's not a story about nostalgia or rejection of the new ways. In its heritage, the town finds ideas and inspiration that relate to current market needs and with the support of digital tools and social media local innovation is achieved. It is an innovation that involves all local sectors- public authority, private sector, and charities, and targets not only economic development but also the simultaneous activation of social ties within the community. It is a holistic strategy that aims to cover a wider set of needs within the locality.

Meta-narrative

Local Identity is performed as synergy and through a desire for progress and success in the place we call home. Local prosperity is the result of cooperative networks in which shareholders recognise the importance of collective success.

Fixation to the past and rejection of change does not defend identity and is a deterrent to prosperity.

Values

- Ecology
- Renewal of local identity through the influx of immigrants
- Entrepreneurship
- Strong local economy
- Peer collaboration and partnerships
- Local innovation
- Desire for progress

Proposed Places in and around the centre:

- Health and Well-being hub
- Library and Media building
- Independent shops
- Outdoor stage
- Allotment area

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

- Environmentally friendly means of transportation
- Greening of the town centre
- Security automations within the shopping area

(Place making) Events/ Activities

Theatrical plays and cinema in outdoor stage in summer

Digital Resources (APIs, Services, other immaterial infrastructure)

An online platform about allotment activities that brings together suppliers, customers and people who want to be involved in this activity. This platform can provide support to beginners, create opportunities for interconnections with other members, and support trade, charities, or bartering. It could also be connected to an open-air market

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story focuses on strategies to support the local economy, re-energise businesses and build a brand for the town centre. The author suggests:

- Developing a digital networking and peer mentoring program and partnerships with businesses from countries that have tourist economy
- Supporting the development of a local f&b and artisan economy
- Reinstating the old market character
- Experimenting with a small-scale barter economy linked to farming activities in allotments. This project could involve partnerships with businesses and local charities.

Survey

1.	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+	2.	Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)
3.	Can you describe the qualities of high streets and markets you regularly visit that make them appealing destinations for you?		
4.	Can you think of a trend or experience that you have enjoyed in different high streets, markets, town or city centres you have visited lately?		
5.	Can you think of an old-time practice or experience that you used to enjoy in the markets of the past and which could be revived in the contemporary local high street?		
6.	In the story, the local Council, downtown businesses, and charities are depicted collaborating. Have you encountered similar instances of cross-sector collaborations that have fostered local prosperity and well-being?		
7.	Consider the balance between tech-driven solutions and the human element in creating a thriving local economy and community. How can towns ensure that technology serves to enhance rather than diminish local character and human connections?		

8. Luminous

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/thebusinesshub
Author info	age group: 25-34
	gender: male

The Story

Sound and light emerged as twins every time Leo hit the keys. Deep hits and ripples of soft, colourful light filled the room. Sharp taps and luminous shapes appeared hovering over peoples' stretched-up hands. The audience, thrilled with the audiovisual spectacle, was rocking in the musical atmosphere Leo was erecting.

And how amazing it was to perform in this place. Leo had always been a regular in "The Round". As a teenager, he went to the youth centre based here. Here he learned to play music and experienced his first mixed reality musical performance. Years later, he had remained a regular visitor. He would hang out at the bar in the lobby after work from time to time and rarely missed a Thursday's Gig in the Music Room.

Although Leo had been part of the local creative community since he was a teenager, being more reserved, he usually was on the audience's side. This time he mustered the courage and swiped on the open call for local talent to perform at this year's Knowsley Summer Performance Festival. A few auditions and about a dozen rehearsals later, he was in the line-up for the opening night.

The performing event attracted people from Knowsley and visitors from nearby areas who gathered at the courtyard of the Round this last Friday of June. Being able to experience music together on this summer night felt so liberating. People felt carefree and optimistic, like they were on holiday, temporarily leaving behind personal struggles and shared anxieties.

Leo, on the other hand, was feeling restless. He had never played for such a large audience, and now he would do it with a piece he produced himself. He started somewhat anxiously, but everyone seemed to enjoy the ambience he created on the

small stage. The vibe coming from the audience uplifted him. More confident, he began to soak the entire room in an atmosphere of sound and light. Soon his audience was mesmerised.

The piece was completed - he woke up his immersed audience with soft sounds and an almost imperceptible breath of light and left the stage before the room was flooded with frantic likes.

It was a good night for him. In the yard, he found Greg and Patrick waiting for him. His friends applauded him the old-fashioned way and lifted their glasses; Leo grinned awkwardly. He was feeling thrilled but couldn't express it.

"Put the specs back on; the next show is about to begin", he urged them, so they would lift their attention from him, and they obeyed, turning to watch an animated wallpaper crawling up the walls of the building.

"You were amazing in there" he heard a familiar, deep voice behind him and took off his glasses. The holograms were lost. In front of him was the dimly lit face of Alex Smith. He lost his words for a moment but managed to say, "Thank you". He actually said it three times, which made Greg take off his specs to see what caused this awkward tension. Alex Smith's face said, "nice to see you again," and a crooked smile formed. Before thinking of something to respond, Leo heard, "I'll see you around", and Alex's rugged face was no longer there.

Leo felt a bit short of breath. He hadn't seen Alex in so long, and now he didn't even manage to speak. His blissfulness had subsided. He looked performatively at his luminous wrist to act out an excuse and go home.

Likes from the performance flashed triumphantly on his wrist. The good vibes uplifted him once more. In a moment, he brought his hand close to his mouth and uttered:

"Message Alex Smith".

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The hero of the story alternates between two identities: the shy talented young man and the celebrated luminous performer. The protagonist's duality is parallel to the duality of his art that combines visuals and music and to the duality of the performance that takes place in a mixed reality of the physical world and digital holograms.

The story follows the "hero's journey" pattern. The hero's talent is nurtured in the incubator of the local community, which provides the experiences and conditions to reach his maximum potential. Technology has a transformative, magical effect: enchanting colours, animated settings, the hero turns into a star and dazzles the audience. However, the hero has not won the final battle with insecurity and fear that want to keep him trapped and small. Love provides the triggering event for the final battle that will find the hero stepping on his feet.

It is a story of empowerment and realising one's potential. The town nurtures the community with infrastructure, experiences and opportunities and is rewarded with prosperity. Meanwhile, technology empowers by revealing an expanded reality of possibilities. Digital experiences may have elements of fantasy, but they are not illusory. They have a real impact on our consciousness and the way we perceive the world and ourselves.

Meta-narrative

Experiences of success have great impact on people's sense of self-worth, which ultimately defines their potential. For a community/town, nurturing local talent could be the lever to expanding its own potential.

Values

- Creativity and culture
- Supporting young people with places, programs, opportunities
- Queer visibility, representation
- Romance, Friendship, Community

- Community celebrations

Proposed Places in and around the centre

Community hub that includes:

- youth centre

- events space (Music Room)

- open social space (cafeteria/bar)

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

Lights and sound systems in events space

(Place making) Events/ Activities

- Thursday's Gig, a regular music night in the hub's events space

- Knowsley Summer Performance Festival that invites local talent through open call

- Audiovisual performances and mixed reality experiences

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

In the story, local policy focuses on developing music learning in local youth centres. In this way, it supports the area's young people by providing them with experiences that strengthen their self-esteem and involve them in socially healthy activities. This policy also aims to establish a local asset around music performance that can put Huyton on the regional cultural map.

Survey

1.	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+	2.	Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)
3.	What type of activity would motivate you to join an interest group in a modern community hub?		
4.	Reflect on how the local community and technology synergise to nurture and showcase talent like Leo's. In light of this synergy, please share an idea for a potential regular event that the town centre could host to promote local talent or showcase community projects, further leveraging technology to support local artists and creatives.		
5.	The story depicts a traditional gathering (a music performance) enhanced by modern technology. How can future town centres balance the preservation of traditional community events while embracing technological advancements?		

9. Local Legends

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/locallegends
Author info	age group: 55-64 gender: female

The Story

No matter how busy my day might be, I always make sure to have some time for a relaxing stroll down the Village. The sense of community Huyton provides me with, keeps me motivated to offer a large part of my time to giving back as a volunteer to the local events. We have been organising tonight's event in "Huyton Hub" for quite some time, so I pick up my stuff and leave the house. My neighbour Sarah awaits right down the corner with a handbag filled with ornaments, and we take off together.

As we enter the Village from the main road, I can't help but think about previous villagers who also looked in awe at Huyton Parish Church, standing tall as it has since been mentioned in the Doomsday book. It's a tourist attraction, but also a

characteristic landmark! A vibration alerts me that I am still the local legend for the 1Km segment to the Beatle Gravestone. "Why is it always you?", Sarah exclaims with frustration. It's only because I walk this path daily!

When turning down Derby Road, we're met with the familiar sounds and smells of a village garden. Children playing, coffee and freshly baked bread wafting. The noise of chattering voices, clinking cups and wheels rotating.

Path users are making full use of the Pathrun, which is an all-weather 2.5Km path meandering around the perimeter of the Village. "I heard that starting this Sunday, a Junior Parkrun, marshalled by a team of volunteers, will be taking place!" Sarah informs me. "Solar panels will be positioned so that when night falls, it is well lit. It seems that it will become the place to be for all ages!"

Our journey continues down Derby Road, where murals of famous Huytonians adorn the walls, including Anthony Walker and his mother, Gee. "If only the technology that we have today could have saved Anthony from that infamous hate crime", Sarah points out, and she's right. The 'drone alert' would have responded; his libre (medical device) could have been activated to help; his attackers would have been apprehended. Technology now provides invisible security, making us feel safe and secure in our communities.

Huyton has become a multi-cultural place – most of the racial tensions elders of the village remember have become a thing of the past. The Peace walls (living walls filled with plants) are dedicated to those who have suffered inequality and racism and provide a beautiful backdrop in what was a concrete jungle, now known as Sherbourne Piazza.

We walk into the Sherbourne Piazza, which is filled with cafes, a play area and seasonal street food vendors.

Local Legend pop-up alerts us of current deals available in the shops and restaurants. We stop by Marcos' and pick a couple of fruit squeezes. This is the best place to be on a sunny day like this; to just sit and soak up the sun. We stay still for a while and look

around. The living walls camouflage the 1970s concrete walls; they seem to enjoy the sunshine just as much. We still need to get going, though. We leave with a smile.

I quickly pick up my local legend trophies from the shoe repair shop, and we make our way to the furthest end of Derby Road.

Upon passing the local restaurants, we see diners enjoying the El fresco atmosphere. I remind myself to make reservations for Friday. I have a favourite, but we should try another one this time. So many options, it feels like you could be anywhere in the world.

As we approach the greenery of the railway station garden, Stevenson's Rocket stands out as people are drawn to it having their photograph taken. For special events, the steam train passes through, picking up passengers for an elegant trip to Liverpool City Centre.

"Welcome to Huyton! Home of the first passenger railway station in the world – be sure to visit our outdoor railway museum and see the first passenger railway carriage". The inviting sign sits right next to our newest transport resources: Huyton's public self-driving pods. Had we ridden a pod, we would have saved much time – though we would have missed a very much-needed sunny walk.

We finally approach our destination, the "Huyton Hub". Final preparations are being set up to reward local legends and heroes for their commitment to the community including John Culshaw – the artist who has created so many of the stunning murals in and around the village. He will see the unveiling of his own mural created by another upcoming young artist. We are volunteering to set up the event tonight, and we are decorating "The Suite" space on the second floor.

Sam, the volunteer coordinator greets us at the front door. "What took you girls so long?", he asks, and Sarah looks at me with a smirk. "It's easy to lose track of time on days like this Sammy", I respond playfully, and we take the elevator up. Our team has already kicked off the initial cleaning, and we quickly get down to work, delighted by our community's vibe.

Throughout my many walks, I feel deep gratitude for the place I live in. The Village can provide everything from food to clothes and household goods galore. Most importantly, Huytonians have managed to build a strong sense of community and collaboration. Supporting the local economy and community is important to me.

The Village is a thriving area with a strong beating heart, and I am a part of it!

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The story's central figure is a community member who embodies an advocate of a prosperous town. The heroine demonstrates behaviour wholly aligned with the values of the town. The sense is created in the reader that the town is indeed the sum of its members, and its prosperity coincides with the well-being of its inhabitants. In this narrative, the town has achieved its utopian completion. But how did it find its way to the light?

The public spaces, as described, are destinations for international food, family entertainment, sports and tourist activities. The Village is a town centre with a coherent place brand. This western utopia narrative alludes to familiar cases of gentrification projects that attract the desired demographic and displace those who cannot participate but could also be the result of a robust local, regional or national economy that eliminates inequalities and promotes the standard of living. The story highlights, however, another resource, that of civic participation. Volunteering is leveraged to promote the activities that cultivate the desired values; the town celebrates its advocates and encourages the idealistic connection with the "hometown". One could assume there is a strategic policy investing in human resources.

The story is also a narrative of values and identity. The past provides symbols of unity like the old church and the local train station, one of the firsts worldwide that can be branded and leveraged as regional assets. The past is also the source of valuable

lessons, even derived from dark moments. A racial hate crime in recent history is not concealed and left to oblivion but becomes the starting point for new values that expand the local identity. Strategic is both the safety interventions and the town centre's murals honouring an enriched local identity which embraces diversity and equality.

The town maintains these roots in the past, but its connective tissue is continually developed in the present through a feedback loop between community loyalty and town prosperity. Technology appears to be the tool to harness community loyalty by training and rewarding favourable behaviours. Throughout the story, the heroine interacts with a gamified app that gives her virtual and material rewards and information that provides value. While the app develops favourable habits, collective social experiences and events shape the local mentality. This is where the city's identity lies. Its prosperity would not be possible if its citizens were not advocates.

Meta-narrative

The story narrates a prosperous city and a model citizen. Which came first is not essential. The importance lies in the realisation that people are the fundamental structural elements of a town, while its physical image is a manifestation of people's relationship with it.

Values

- Local pride and loyalty
- Heritage and identity
- Sense of Community, volunteering
- Personal responsibility (of locals to support local businesses and of youths to understand the impact of their behaviour on others)
- Community Events and celebration
- Honouring local heroes
- Neighbourliness
- Affordable activities
- Safety, anti-violence, social behaviour

- Equality, anti-racism

- Exercise and wellbeing

- Green spaces- parks and gardens

- Prosperity

- Consuming experiences

Proposed Places in and around the centre

- Public gardens with path meandering the Village for running and cycling

- Community hub with indoor event space called "The Suite"

- Museum related to local heritage (railway, parish church)

- Play area (in Sherbourne Square)

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

- Solar panels providing energy and keeping centre paths well lit

- Security drones

- Greening concrete buildings with living walls

- Murals with local heroes

- Self-driving vehicles

- Seasonal street food vendors

(Place making) Events/ Activities

- Parkrun- weekly running activity

- Events to honour/ celebrate local heroes, advocates of the area

- Volunteering opportunities in local events that are connected to the community hub

Digital Resources (APIs, Services, other immaterial infrastructure)

A mobile app that quantifies activity in the centre, loyalty in the town, participation in local projects and rewards with points, discounts, trophies that relate to the local businesses and events.

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story presents an ideal town centre and implies that community loyalty and pride are key resources that can bring about change. It insinuates a local policy that aims at developing experiences that render citizens advocates of their town ambitious about becoming local legends.

This policy could establish volunteering programs connected to the town centre events while also quantifying and rewarding involvement and activity in the area.

Survey

1.	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+	2.	Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)
3.	Can you describe landscaped spaces and amenities in different town and city centres that you regularly visit and constitute appealing destinations? (What exactly is it that you like most in your favourite destinations?)		
4.	What makes you most proud of your local town/ city?		
5.	The narrative introduces the concept of a town that rewards its citizens for positive behaviours and community engagement. If an app was to be developed in your area to support local life, what behaviours and habits would you suggest it should encourage and reward?		
6.	How do you perceive the integration of technology, such as the use of gamified apps and drone alerts, in enhancing community safety and participation? Can you think of any potential drawbacks or ethical considerations?		

10.   Digital Futures of Solidarity

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/digitalfutures
Author info	age group: 35-44 gender: female

The Story

I stand patiently next to the reporter waiting for him to turn to me. He is looking into the camera and says:

"Knowsley Borough is an area where the third sector activity has historically been decisive in supporting the community during the worst period of austerity and in the critical periods of the pandemic and environmental crisis that followed.

Today, on National Giving Day, in different spots around the civic campus and high street of Huyton centre, large interactive screens have been installed. Their content informs passersby about local charitable activities and enables them to donate on-site through contactless payments.

The interactive screens are part of a digital donations scheme co-developed by the Council and the local third sector with the collaboration of the business community of Knowsley.

Kate Connor, coordinator of Mersey Help in Huyton, explains how this new fundraising service launched today will change how the charity will support its service users."

He turns to me. I smile modestly and start:

"Mersey Help" is a charity that aims to alleviate food poverty in Knowsley. The organisation has been running a food bank for the past 40 years, open to residents of the Borough who need it.

Our collection points in the local supermarkets are well-known in the area. I fondly remember the local community's kindness and generosity from our weekly collection events. We would gather as a team to collect tins of fruit, beans and other vegetables, dried goods, boxes of tea, jars of coffee and toiletries, and other non-perishable donations.

These have been worthwhile activities that really demonstrate the solidarity of the community. However, people who needed the food bank had choices limited to the

dry foods on offer and stigma was also a huge barrier to those who were 'in work' poverty and did not want to have to admit using a Foodbank.

Today in the year 2030, it is a privilege to attend the launch of this new digital scheme that will transform how we support our community.

Our service users will be able to use a digital wallet in the local supermarkets. This will give them access to a greater variety of products, and the process ensures discretion removing the stigma associated with needing and receiving support.

The interactive screens are one of the new ways people can make donations, but they are more than payment terminals. People can witness the tally of all donations rising, and the screen is a visual expression of their contributions to the less fortunate in their community. This transparency regarding our organisation's funds and goals will help us keep people involved.

Lastly, let's not forget that the new scheme helps reduce food waste and is more environmentally friendly!

"Thank you very much, Mrs Conor; it looks like a bold experiment for the local charities."

..I nod in agreement and think, "bold"… indeed it is.

The cameraman packs the equipment and prepares to take shots from the other screens. They politely thank me and leave. I'm ready to leave our screen and observe from afar if anyone will stop to read the lively Infographics. Before I can get away, a lady in a wheelchair stops by me.

- 'Hiya love, when I make my donation where will my money go? How do I know the people who need it will benefit from it?'

- 'Well - your money will fund a digital top-up for people to go directly into any local supermarket and shop for themselves, including getting access to fresh food and bread and milk. '

- 'How much will they get on each top-up'? The lady asks.

- 'Well depending on the size of their household it will be between £20 and £50.'

The lady taps her phone on the screen and makes a donation of £50, and we watch together as the screen total rises, and I thank her for her kindness.

I hope the screens will make a big difference. With the new fundraising programme, we will be able to reallocate resources to run employability skills workshops, support groups and even celebrations.

As the day progresses, our Team have seen over 1000 customers chip in and donate and the Huge Digital Screen's total amounts to £10000.

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The story refers to the contribution of charities to local life. It highlights the importance of their presence in the town centre as a means of information about local problems and for the involvement of community members in problem-solving. Local charities are the sector of local life through which solidarity and support are expressed within the community.

The story's central figure is a local charity worker who presents an innovative tech intervention that redefines how an organisation engages with the community and provides support. Technology appears to transform the interactions within the charity workflow. It hides certain exchanges to remove the social stigma while also turning resource management transparent, which renders donors informed contributors. However, some important community events cease as a side-effect of technological mediation.

The project appears as an innovative participatory effort based on the collaboration of different bodies (local authorities, businesses and charities). We do not learn much about their cooperation, but it is evident that it produces deep knowledge of pain points in the particular service provision. These points are the need for discretion in

receiving help, the need for trust towards the provider, and the need for less food waste which can all be improved through technological intervention. There is also knowledge of the adverse effects of transforming the service. A solution is also planned: savings from technological mediation will be channelled into restoring the social gatherings technology has replaced, focusing on events that can bring aid recipients out of their need.

The author presents innovation as a multifaceted endeavour that can bring about change and understands the uncertainty and risk involved but estimates that the community will respond positively and reward the project.

Meta-narrative

Transformation is a process that requires a deep understanding of root problems, pain points, needs and values. The above knowledge will lead to innovative ideas and steer the use of tools, but even then, success is not guaranteed.

The story illustrates the characteristics of innovation and highlights the importance of transparency and recipients' lived experience in any transformative venture or project.

Values

- Charity
- Solidarity
- Discreet support
- Addressing food poverty
- Digital transformation
- Local innovation
- Transparency and trust
- Involvement and participation in local transformation

Proposed Places in and around the centre

The civic campus and the high street become places where visitors and shoppers get informed about the local life, the challenges and achievements while they go through the town centre

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

Interactive Screens in the town centre with infographics dedicated to local charitable activities and other projects.

(Place making) Events/ Activities

Social events and skill development activities are organised for people in need of support.

Digital Resources (APIs, Services, other immaterial infrastructure)

Data, statistics and funding goals are shared transparently in an accessible form through the interactive screens to inform people and encourage them to contribute, get involved and take action.

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story suggests a partnership with the local third sector to assist them in more effective community engagement and service provision through digital means. The innovative idea proposed underlines transparency as a requirement to build trust within the community.

Survey

	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 1. 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+		Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are 2. local in Knowsley Borough or not)
3.	Are you familiar with the work of any of the charities that aim to tackle a local issue?		
	(If yes)	4. Please refer briefly to this charity/ies?	

		How are you associated with this organisation?
	5.	○ As a support recipient ○ As a volunteer ○ As an employee ○ As a donor ○ ……………..
6.		How can interactive technologies and digital platforms in a town centre act as catalysts for community engagement and collaboration in local projects? Reflect on the potential for these technologies to facilitate a co-creation process between local authorities, businesses, charities, and residents.

11. What a Difference a Year Makes

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/whatadifferenceayearmakes
Author info	age group: 35-44 gender: female

The Story

Location 1: Mandy travels by car to the town centre and parks in the car park. She is visiting her doctor.

My stomach churned as I approached the Health Centre. He stood with his hood up, hands inside the top of his trackie bottoms and legs in a wide stance like an iron pylon. I glanced up, straight into his icy grey-blue eyes. He sneered. I was just metres away. A trickle of sweat ran down my back. There was no other way in. I'd have to walk past him. I gripped my handbag tighter, my hand hot and slippy on the leather handle. Inches away. He still didn't budge.

"Scuse me, please," I said in the most Scouse accent I could muster.

" I most definitely won't! Why do not you go back to where you came from?" he barked and uttered an old familiar slur.

I could feel the heat rising from my belly. "I was born here"

"Well, it certainly doesn't look like it! Brexit happened ages ago. You need to get lost. I'm sick of you people taking our jobs!"

I shook my head. He sniffed, groaned in his throat and spat on the floor. He then walked past, shoving me with his shoulder.

The heat in my stomach grew into a rageful fire. After forty years of being a Scouser, I'm still dealing with this nonsense.

Instead of turning left to the doctor's, I turned right, walked into a PP (Privacy Pod), sat in front of the screen, waited for the door to lock securely, and then tapped the red rectangle to connect to 'Law Enforcement', then 'Report a Racist Incident/Hate Crime'. Swiftly, I selected from the options, when and where the incident happened, what the perpetrator looked like and what he said etc. Finally, I jabbed my finger on 'Submit'.

The report Mandy submitted in the PP is sent to the Police, where they check the Police National Computer (PNC) for details of the perpetrator. Police access address details, CCTV footage, facial recognition software and criminal history. Details of the perpetrator are shown on the screen: "Paul Rimmer, white, male aged 22, lives at ********* Road.

Location 2: In an interview room at the police station.

Two officers sit at a table opposite Paul Rimmer. They explain that Paul must attend a six-week Race Awareness course and complete a test at the end. If failed, Paul will have to pay a £150 fine and re-sit the six-week course. Also, Paul must do 100 hours of community service within a diverse community to understand why what he did is a crime and learn about people who are different.

The aim is to educate and engage to bring about social behavioural change.

Three months later

Location 3: Knowsley Refugee Centre

Paul has completed the six-week Race Awareness course and has passed it. He is now serving his 100 hours of community service in a Refugee Centre. While working there, Paul met a young man called Ali. Ali is exactly the same age as Paul as their birthdays are both in September. Ali's mum, dad and little sister died on the sea crossing to the

UK. Ali arrived in Liverpool, both an orphan and homeless. It dawned on Paul that Ali's circumstances could quite easily have been his.

Location 4: Community living room

Paul is playing FIFA 2050 with Ali. They both love playing FIFA and are massive football fans too. Paul feels remorseful and confesses to Ali the real reason why he's volunteering.

Ali is very supportive. With his help, Paul writes a letter to Mandy which he sends via his probation officer, to apologise, explain and invite her to the "Voices for Action Against Racism" event.

Nine months later

Location 5: Town Centre Pedestrian zone

Contractors and volunteers prepare a public exhibition. They install large frames with faces of famous people from Knowsley and Liverpool. There are quotes next to their faces showing their support for the campaign "Voices for Action Against Racism", which is the theme for this year's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Paul, who has matured into an active advocate for anti-racism in Knowsley, is one of the event's volunteers and is fully committed to its meaningful celebration.

21 March 2050

The local community gathers to celebrate. The town centre's main axis has been transformed for the event from one end to the other. People in the exhibition go through their role models' quotes and chat. They eat and drink at the pop-up food stalls that offer the most delicious international cuisine, akin to Duke Street Food and Drink Market. They dance to the live international music played on the stage at the other end of the road.

Amongst the revelry, Mandy approaches Paul, who had asked her to meet in person. This time she approaches without anxiety. She sees Paul dressed in a white t-shirt with

the slogan "Voices for Action Against Racism". His ice-blue eyes are shining; he greets Mandy with a warm smile.

"Hi, Mandy! Thanks so much for coming. I wouldn't have blamed you if you'd told me where to go, to be honest!" Paul said, laughing.

Mandy smiled.

Paul continued: "I do not want to repeat everything I said in my letter, but I just wanted to say how sorry I am, face-to-face. And also to say Thank You."

Puzzled, Mandy enquires: "Thank you for what?"

"You reporting me, changed my life. That course on race awareness was the best thing I'd ever been on. I got nothin' like that in school. I thought doing Community Service in a Refugee Centre would be a nightmare, but I've found me best mate, Ali and I've actually found my purpose in life too."

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The story begins with a racist attack in the town centre's public space. Through the experiences of the perpetrator and the victim, the author narrates problems of racism and anti-social behaviour in the area, but also of reformative interventions that can instil values of respect and empathy at individual and collective levels.

Racist behaviour is not something the brown woman in the story does not expect. The presence, appearance, and body language of the young man foreshadow what follows. This is not an isolated incident but a phenomenon in the region. Even if it is associated with a "bad" minority in relation to the broader population, it is a dangerous deviation capable of endangering all aspects of local public life. How can public space support any need and function when people are afraid to be there? Fear is described by the physical reactions of the victim before, during and after the racist attack. Even more characteristic is the invention of the Privacy Pod as an amenity in the local centre. It is

a panic room, a haven that allows isolation from the uncertain external condition, a space for grounding and connection with authorities without the possibility of stigmatisation. The town is not a social space for meeting and participation; it is an uncertain environment.

The author has a very clear view regarding the protection of public life. Public space is being surveilled by digital media. This material is processed through forensic technologies and crossed with criminal record databases. The surveillance technology is so effective and immediate that the perpetrator is identified shortly after the report of the incident. In the hypothetical dichotomy of protection of privacy and supervision of public life, the author positions herself clearly in favour of the maximum intervention that will ensure safety. However, while the tech eye is vigilant in the public space, what follows for the perpetrator is not punitive but reformative.

The perpetrator, as a social deviation, is obliged to participate in reformative programs and experiences adapted to his crime. There is no punishment but education, which however is mandatory. It seems that he is immersed in an environment similar to that of the school years, where the child is asked to study courses and interact with the school community, in order to be experientially educated in the values of the wider community. This is what happens to the perpetrator while volunteering at the refugee centre: through his personal relationship with a peer foreigner (refugee/asylum seeker), he gets to know the "different", overcomes his limiting perceptions and reforms into a new person. The author intentionally or not narrates reformation as education and shifts the blame for antisocial behaviour to formal education that has failed in its role to provide these experiences and opportunities to the individual.

The catharsis in the story comes with the last act. The protagonists meet again in a festive atmosphere at a town celebration against racism. The festival is essential because it shows how the town can educate the community through events. The celebration includes an exhibition- campaign with local Influencers that the public looks up to, food, music and dancing. The festival aims at a collective experience with mass appeal, which will also be influential in terms of the behaviours and perceptions that the region wishes to instil in the community. Volunteerism seems to be a tool the

local authority can utilise both in organising these events and maximising their impact. Volunteers can evolve into campaigners, local advocates, and professionals that create their own networks within the community and promote the desired cause. By establishing these regular events and networks the town can reshape the local mentality and establish safety and respect in local public life.

Meta-narrative

Limitations in people's lives can make them anti-social, insecure, and hostile to others. In order to achieve equality, inclusion, and respect for human life as ideals shared by the community, society needs to provide the experiences and opportunities that ignite humanitarianism in individuals.

Values

- Equality, anti-racism, empathy
- Reformation, Education, positive change
- Surveillance, public order, justice
- Community feeling, celebration
- Community work, volunteerism

Proposed Places in and around the centre

Community social space

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

- Privacy Pod is a safe room that provides shelter in public spaces. It allows a person to isolate themselves for a while, ground themselves and connect with services that can support them in the case of unexpected problems. In the story, this service is the police.
- Technology that surveils public space and analyses visual information to ensure safety.

(Place making) Events/ Activities

Annual local festival against racism, a celebration of equality and racial inclusivity: This event involves music performances and street food from different areas of the world, connected to the local cultural communities in Knowsley. From a marketing point of view, it leverages the influence of local influencers- heroes.

Digital Resources (APIs, Services, other immaterial infrastructure)

The analysis of information from public space enables the fast identification of perpetrators.

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story raises issues of antisocial behaviour and racism, taking a position on intervention and prevention policies.

Antisocial behaviour is addressed by identifying perpetrators and providing experiences that combine compulsory theoretical education and practical community work. This allows the individuals instigating these incidents to reconsider their attitude towards society and cultivate pertinent social values and empathy; it is a policy of reformation and reintegration that requires the collaboration of different local bodies in identifying the right places and community work that can foster a different perception.

At the same time, the story underlines the need to establish a prevention strategy based on organising events and facilitating experiences in the town's public space to celebrate diversity and create opportunities for people of different cultures to meet and mix.

Survey

1.	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+	2.	Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)
3.	Do local public places present any barriers or problematic aspects for an individual of your characteristics? (These characteristics could be your age, gender, sexuality, cultural background, family status, health problems, disabilities, income- anything that is particular to a segment of the population)		
4.	How can local towns ensure that the technology used for public safety is accessible and beneficial to all members of the community, regardless of their tech-savvy?		
5.	Can you describe a setting/ event/ situation where you had the opportunity to mix and get to know people of different demographics?		
6.	What do you think could help people of diverse characteristics to interact meaningfully?		

12.   Outside

Accessible online at:	www.future-huyton.uk/outside
Author info	age group: 65+ gender: male

The Story

Howard finished his coffee and went to put on his shoes. He used a long shoehorn for his left shoe; he was fine now but still had difficulty controlling his left side. Dolly watched his every move without getting in the way; she was such a good girl.

"Bye now", he said and closed the door behind him, leaving her disappointed she wouldn't accompany him.

It was another warm Sunday morning. A few years back, this sunshine would be a rare sight in February, but now it was the norm. Reaching the Coffin Path, he turned left

towards the Village. A young boy on a bike drove passed him and braked. He put one foot down and turned to face him. His helmet unfolded and revealed his smiling face. "Hello, Mr Shears," he said enthusiastically.

"Hello, Young Man" Howard found it difficult to pronounce Kyrylo's name. "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I will meet friends in the Square. We'll watch the match on the big screen. Glad to see you outside!"

"I'm going there too ... You picked the wrong outfit for the day," Howard said, pointing to Kyrylo's jacket; Huyton Athletic logo on his chest.

Kyrylo laughed, as he always did with ease, saying, "first Huyton, then Liverpool".

Howard was very grateful for Kyrylo's help. The "Young Man" participated in the youth volunteering program of Huyton's Sports and Culture society and has been helping Howard ever since he had the stroke, mainly taking Dolly for a walk and having a cup of tea with Howard from time to time.

This acquaintance was beneficial for all three of them.

Within minutes Howard arrived in Sherborne Square. The plaza was about to get much busier. The security swarm had gathered there because of Sunday's match. Flying over peoples' heads, drones kept the security exits open and annoyed people with lively messages about following security measures.

Howard looked for his friend with his eyes before sending him a voice. He saw a hand waving at him in the crowd.

There he was. Pablo was saving him a seat. Howard sat down, and the two gentlemen exchanged their usual greeting. The blinds on the building facade began to rotate. Fully aligned, they formed a wide seamless screen.

"Is it starting already?" Howard asked in surprise.

"The match is starting in 45 '. Maybe they will show some ads", Pablo said and proceeded to ask, "How do you feel, Howard?"

"It's good to be outside again, Pablo… And how was your trip to your homeland? "

Pablo responded, "Things seemed better, but we hardly ever went outside. The weather was unpredictable and extreme" His face looked worried. He tried to say something about Liverpool's football match, but the local charity ad for the victims of climate change caught their attention, and Pablo never finished his sentence.

Howard saw the anxious expression on Pablo's face. "Let's have a pint," he said, holding his finger on his watch, and two flying waiters were instantly deployed.

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The hero is an elderly gentleman returning to public life after an illness that kept him indoors. The return to normality is optimistic and social as he meets friendly faces and participates in one of the community's social events.

The story refers to the town's public life as a field of mixing, connecting, experiencing, informing and developing a shared identity. Volunteering is how different community members develop social empathy and personal ties that surpass barriers of difference. Sports contribute to creating a common local identity inclusive of new members. Regular downtown events facilitate collective experiences that bond the area's diverse demographics. Informative campaigns raise awareness and mobilise community members. The sectors that coordinate these functions of public life are the local government, sports organisations and charities.

Technology appears with the suit of urban infrastructure that facilitates the organisation of regular events. The town centre incorporates everything needed for the community to come together as one.

The story ends with a sense that local public life macroscopically reflects the country within the global community. The faces and relationships of the story provide a vehicle

for the narrative of both local life and international affairs and calls upon the demonstration of the same spirit of community solidarity.

Meta-narrative

We share the world with different people and it is important to get to know them, understand their needs and perspectives.

In the context of a town this social meeting can happen in central public places and through events and themes that are appealing to and inclusive of everyone.

Values

- Sports
- Support of older people
- Animals
- Getting to know people of different demographics (culture and age groups)
- Sports- football
- Volunteering
- Community coherence
- Concern regarding global issues- climate change

Proposed Places in and around the Centre

Outdoor space that can easily be set up for events- transformation of Sherbourne Square into a place that allows the assembly of big audiences.

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

Automations in buildings that facilitate securely setting up events: blinds turn into a screen

(Place making) Events/ Activities

- Regular events related to sports in the town centre (Sherbourne square) that allow locals to mix and get to know each other- e.g., watching a football match on a large screen outdoors.

- Youth volunteering program connected to local sports society that provides opportunities for different generations to interact.

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The story narrates how an old local community member interacts with people of different demographics in the Centre. The story suggests a strategy where sports are leveraged to renew the local identity, improve community participation and create opportunities for people to build bonds. Within this context, a sports society (Huyton athletic) has been founded, and regular sporting events take place to bring locals together.

Survey

1.	Age group: <18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+	2.	Your Postal Code is: (We want to know if you are local in Knowsley Borough or not)
3.	Sherborne Square is portrayed as the community's dynamic core, merging social, cultural, and technological aspects. When imagining the future of public spaces—like squares, parks, and community centres—consider how technology could both enrich and possibly challenge their role as inclusive and communal hubs.		
4.	Local events allow people to come together as a community to renew their ties. Can you describe a regular event that could take place in the town centre and become an opportunity for people to mix and have a good time? (You can draw inspiration from any event you have experienced that left you with great memories)		
5.	How do you think volunteer programs, like the one Kyrylo participates in, impact the social fabric of a community? Can you think of examples from your own life or community where volunteerism has played a crucial role in building relationships across different demographic groups? (Think of a meaningful experience where you provided volunteer work or benefited from other people's volunteering)		
6.	The story expresses an obvious concern regarding climate change and how it could affect life in the near future. Can you refer to any worries you have about international or global issues that could impact local life?		

13.   Knowsley Pound

Author info	age group: 55-64
	gender: female

The Story

The 3 friends had met up on Friday at 11 am for almost 20 years. They each came with a weekly digest excitedly told with lots of hand gesturing and laughter. They cackled loudly like witches over a brew and rarely missed their catch-ups.

Today was to be no different, but they were going to try out the new Vegan cafe that was to open that very day.

"See you soon", said Evie as she got on the tram toward the Villy. She sat down and watched out the window and minutes later she alighted at the Town Centre tram terminal.

The town centre has changed over many years and had become a bustling market town once again.

An old-fashioned bell rang as Evie opened the door to 'The Cauldron Cafe' and walked towards the owner dressed in purple velvet.

"Good Morning," she said as she gestured to Evie to sit down handing her a menu.

"2 friends will be joining me" Evie replied as she sat down and inspected the lavender bunch placed in a white vase on the table.

Carol arrived soon after and flustered she laid down her shopping bags heaving with fruit and veg and out of breath said "I hope they have cake?", looking over at the display counter hopefully.

Anna arrived quietly, the bell on the door announced her arrival but she sat down and waited patiently for a chance to get a word in.

They had caught up over oat milk lattes and vegan chocolate cupcakes and celebrated the announcement of Evie's granddaughter expecting twins.

It was now time to pay, and as decided long ago turns were taken by the friends to pay, and this week it was Evie's turn.

She rose from her seat and slowly approached the till. Willow James smiled as she saw more customers coming in, finding seats and studying the menu.

"I hope you enjoyed your cupcakes ladies?" she asked as she tried to hand over the latest, top-of-the-range holographic card reader.

"That will be £17.40 please" Willow stated as Evie hunted for her purse hidden in the depths of her handbag.

Evie offered two £10 notes.

"What are these, monopoly money?" she said with a laugh.

"They're Knowsley pounds lovely...erm you are a Knowsley business?"

"What are you on about?" the cafe owner asked and Evie could feel her face redden as other customers looked over at her.

"It's a community currency...the Knowsley Pound. I thought it was accepted in all the shops...oh dear it's the only money I have on me it helps promote shopping local, being loyal to our towns and helps fund the community garden and food bank....it also helps with preventing a cashless society to help prevent poverty" she spoke nervously and fast until her friend Anna came to her rescue and paid by bank card.

Evie kept apologising and felt awful, but Anna, Carol and the cafe owner reassured her - sit back down ladies, and I will make you some rose tea" the cafe waitress collected a tray with a rose-covered tea pot and China cups and saucers as Willow sat down with the 3 friends and asked for more information about the Knowsley Pound.

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The story narrates how three local ladies meet for their weekly catch-up in the town centre. The social meeting is a joyful ritual through which the bonds of their friendship are renewed. It's like a gathering of good witches in a room of flavours, colours, sounds and textures, all earthy, grounding and appealing to the senses. The scene refers to an old, slower, analogue, interpersonal era. The town, as narrated by the author, seems to resist the modern globalised world, and maintain its local character. Interpersonal ties are the cell of the local community. This is how news spreads, people get involved, and the community is formed. This is how the future is envisioned- heavily relying on community cohesion.

Despite the romanticisation of the past, innovation is not absent. The town has a local currency that, as expected, is not digital. The initiative encourages community members to support the local market by spending at businesses in the town and simultaneously support other regional initiatives such as the food bank and community gardens that are funded by the same project. This initiative seems to have emerged from a holistic strategy of interconnected goals. Furthermore, it relies on the support of residents, who are expected to get mobilised through the established community network that is built on shared values of solidarity and preservation of the local well-being.

Meta-narrative

People are the most critical actors in any reform project. Their will, motivation and natural social activity within their networks are vital assets to instigating change.

Values

- Local identity, the past
- Local market/ businesses
- Veganism, connection with nature
- Local innovation
- Charity

Proposed Places in and around the centre

- Food options that reflect contemporary values of ethical consumption and relevant lifestyles e.g., veganism.
- Community garden- allotment area

Public infrastructure (equipment, amenities, interventions)

A local currency to promote shopping locally (Knowsley Pound)

(Place making) Events/ Activities

- Food bank
- Community garden farming activities

Strategy/ Policy/ Partnerships

The local currency (Knowsley Pound) is part of a broader strategy that helps funding local projects (food bank, local garden) thus providing additional incentives for people to use the currency and spend locally. This approach requires the partnership with local businesses, charities and community groups.

(The Future Huyton experience did not include the story, therefore no survey was attached.)

14.   Future Normal

Author info	age group: 35-44
	gender: non-binary

The Story

Alex was running late for work, again. Living so close to work made for a convenient commute but that extra forty winks always more alluring than getting up and facing the day.

Fortunately, these days Paw5 was there to motivate them to get up and out of bed. Paw5 meowed as he weaved between Alex's legs, his holographic fur shimmering in the early morning glow. For a feline replicant he was convincing, except when you caught him in a certain light plus he was no less demanding than a IRL cat. Alex topped up the digi-kibble and H20 by tapping the order into the keypad embedded into the fridge, keeping him powered up for the day would make him extra playful when Alex returned home later.

Alex gave Paw5' ears a final tickle, which released a contented purr, and headed out. With a hiss the apartment door slid closed and Alex swiped to lock it behind them, the reassuring sound of the bolts engaging into place.

In the corridor Alex encountered one of their neighbours, their eyes not meeting from behind their visors and they silently slipped by with no acknowledgement. When had we stopped greeting each other with a neighbourly "Good morning" or even enquired "How are you?"

Bleep, bleep... the sound chimed in Alex's ear, shaking them out of that melancholic thought. Alex tapped their cheekbone as they set off at pace, the smoke was already drifting in from another forest fire already a blaze on the city's outskirts turning the sky a strange orange hue.

Alex ignored the audio commentary advising of the 53 unread updates. Where had they all come from overnight? Double tapping instead to skip to the most recent message, it was Susan.

"Morning Alex. You're currently running 7 minutes late."

Susan was Alex's assistant at the farm, they'd been paired together on Alex's first day two years ago. Susan was systematic, efficient and a bit too over confident, but she was developed to be like that after all. Quite the opposite of Alex's introverted, anxious and slightly disorganised persona. Yet they worked well together as a unit, even if they couldn't share a post-work pint on a Friday night.

Alex narrated a response, "Susan. On route. Set tracker to live."

Susan, "Request received. Tracker to live."

Alex blinked to switch off any further updates, Susan knew exactly where they were and would take care of anything until they arrived at work.

They turned down towards the canal towpath, the uneven cobbles were one of the remainders of this area's history. Alex imagined the ghosts of all those that walked this route before, the worn stone acting as shadow of their presence from long before.

Despite the shortness of the walk Alex was always thankful to get these moments outdoors each day, even if smoke irritated the back of their throat. It gave them the chance to watch the seasons change, whilst moving in parallel on the canal the S.W.A.N.S. floated by buzzing and chirping as they traversed the waterways autonomously making their deliveries.

Alex picked up speed, crossing the bridge that they remembered being built in the mid-1990s which now felt like another lifetime ago. Overhead the monorail silently glided by, each pod carrying workers to the factories that had returned to the city centre once the service workers had moved away with the flexibility to operate from anywhere.

The viaduct that ran alongside where they travelled was an artefact of the area's industrial heritage. There had once plans to transform the unused space into a 'park in the sky', brimming with plants and trees. However, a theme park had been more commercially viable, now clad in oversized screens it was a place the local families went to play their games at the weekend. Although Alex mourned the memory of the potential park in sky, they still found pleasure in knowing it was a place that brought people together in this technology loaded society.

Almost there and a little out of breath Alex turned left, the camera at the entrance to the estate pivoted towards them. The small red light blinked in recognition and Alex knew they were being watched. They never knew whether to feel safe or unnerved by these ever-present digital eyes.

The doors automatically opened sensing Alex's presence, inside the farmhouse hummed, the white heat from the lighting making them start to perspire.

"Alex, hydration issue detected on Row A7," Susan announced.

"Give me a minute," Alex grumbled to themselves.

"Unable to process action."

"Susan, run hydration system audit report… please," Alex instructed as they walked over towards the coffee machine, the flat white sat there freshly poured. I'm going to need this today Alex thought as they stared out across the towers of vegetation that filled the farm floor in front of them.

"Let's do this Susan."

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The story presents a technology-loaded future world inspired by the author's present experiences towards the end of the pandemic. This speculative world is built on their current mood and concerns; through a familiar but slightly dystopian city, they highlight their values through the expression of absence and longing.

Technology dominates life. The story creates a feeling that "the technological" expands and "the natural" shrinks. Technology, however, develops with reference to the natural, like a parasite taking over a host. Artificial fauna simulates real animals' anatomy and behaviour, augmented with functions that serve contemporary human needs. Indoor farming units use cultivation technologies that maximise harvest while the natural forest is burned. Human-machine interaction is no longer based on the materiality of the machine but on the human body. Video game parks are becoming the destinations of sociability and connection. The protagonist's colleague is a robot that counterbalances human particularities resulting in a perfectly efficient working

unit. In all instances, technology appears to serve human needs, but in reality, it perpetuates a lifestyle. It seems technology is the cause, the effect and the medium.

This criticism of technology's dominance is complemented by references to fundamental human needs that are not fulfilled. The city lacks a sense of neighbourhood and community. People live fortified in their homes and monitored in the workplace. There is no bond between strangers, no acknowledgement of their coexistence. Everyone minds their own business. The mediation of technology aids the shrinking of sociability into interactions. Eye contact is lost behind augmented reality specs. Automation removes the opportunity for interaction. Collaboration with machines deprives people of developing bonds. The efficiency of communication interfaces advocates linguistic parsimony that limits the function of speech in the exchange of information.

Under technology's heavy impact, the city is reborn- a new city on the ruins of an older city and another era. What survives from the past is reused as a shell for contemporary activities and new values. In the story, the city's human resource is also changing due to technological means. Much of the tertiary sector is leaving the centre, as work can be done remotely. Its place is taken by the primary and secondary industries that attract a different workforce, the new inhabitants.

The story can be perceived as more than a tech dystopia. Technology serves as a medium to comment on contemporary lifestyle- what we perceive as self-evident and normal because it has been shaped according to our needs, and now its preservation is an end in itself. The author calls our attention to the innate human need for connection with others, which the contemporary lifestyle disrupts. This desire of people to connect and their co-dependency is the genetic information that forms the community and even the city itself. The city should maintain an awareness of its stem cell so that it prioritises nurturing this essential human need and not focus on preserving structures and standards that can be abandoned when they cease being beneficial.

Meta-narrative

Human interconnection and community are the lifeblood of societies. Alienation can lead to degenerated, impersonal, mechanical cities that transform and change, serving an external development framework that is not reflected in citizens' everyday experiences.

(The story comes from the Pilot workshop and was not included in the Future Huyton experience.)

15. Urban guerilla tale

Author info	age group: 18-25
	gender: male

The Story

Jack paused for a breath as he tentatively placed the last item inside the black duffle bag. Sitting back to admire his handiwork, he took a long sip of the now stone-cold black coffee. The bag bulged and clinked as it moved reminding Jack of a burglar's tool kit. Well, it wasn't too far off.

Jack checked his person one last time: Torch, keys, bag… but… Jack frantically searched the pockets of his black waterproof jacket and pants. Nothing. He began to worry. He quickened his nervous searching now standing, he surveyed the room until he saw a small speck of light emanating from slightly behind the duffle bag. Swiftly, he extended his arm and snatched up the object. His breathing calmed as he turned it in his hand. Feeling the cool, sharp smoothness of the metal and the slightly worn roughness of the leather. Juxtaposing each other's essence. Jack firmly fastened the piece and checked it. 11:00pm. Fuck. Time to head.

Grabbing the bag, Jack turned for the door and sprinted down. Arriving at the interior he paused, took a sharp breath, then opened the door. It was a cool January night. Small particles of frost hung in the air; raindrops suspended in time. The cold bit at his nose and lips like an angry beast and he could already feel the numbness creeping into his fingers. He turned and locked the door. Checking twice to ensure its security was

confirmed. Then, pulling up his collar, tightening his scarf and placing his thermal gloves with integrated heat pack, he set off into the night.

Jack turned the corner, away from the small alcove his studio was situated, above the tacky student bar now already beginning to fill with young adults eager for a night in the city. He moved to cross the road but was stopped as a highlight beam suddenly penetrated the night. He immediately backed away as a hover-car silently moved through the night air. The frictionless vehicle slowly disengaged its engines and parked itself beside the bar. Jack turned to cross the road as the giggles of the occupants exiting faded behind him and continued his way.

After around 5 minutes of walking, Jack found himself at the large, metropolitan cathedral. The "wigwam" as the locals referred to it. However, far from its colloquial origins, the sight now presented before Jack hardly formed any resemblances to the humble origins. The building's neon lighting penetrated the air; forcing anyone in the vicinity to notice the obnoxious fluorescent images and colours swirling upon its walls. Jack raised his head and looked into the sky. It seemed the light went on forever. A barrage of photonic noise, overpowering in the otherwise cool night air. Jack took a second and ventured to the edge of the surrounding walkway to observe the city. Even from here, the lights and sounds of the city interrupted the still darkness like a war drum. High beams and neon laser cannons fought across the sky for dominance. All set to an undercurrent of white noise, the product of a thousand different speaky-billboards competing in a decibel measured free-for-all. Jack stared out into the night and flexed his fingers on his right hand. They were limber now. Flexible and purposeful. Jack looked at his watch- 11:10. Almost time.

Bounding down the stone steps, Jack's pace began to quicken. He darted round the large theatre and proceeded past various bars. Noise emanated from their interiors, but Jack kept walking. Pulling his hood tighter as a gust of wind attempted to throw it off. His heart was pounding now. So close. His fingers flexed in their fabric casings. Flex. Release. Flex. Release. The ritual calming him slightly as he turned his last corner towards the university.

It was a quiet night here. Several complaints from the few students who frequent the library at night had ensured the billboards muted their speakers. But they didn't shut off completely. Still blurting out soundless light, they continued their barrage of content.

Jack surveyed the area, it was quiet. He looked to the left, right, and behind him. He was alone. He brought out the small torch from his pocket and slowly began to survey the area below the holographic billboard.

"Come on…" he thought, the search seemingly lasting an eternity until… finally. It was there. Just as the forum said it would be… A small light bead embedded into the brickwork from which the image was projected from. Jack checked his watch. 11:20. He was early.

"Oi" a voice called from the distance "what the hell you doing with that?!"

Fuck fuck fuck. He frantically glanced around. His eyes suddenly catching the ray-torch pointed in his face. Behind it stood the familiar black figure with the white stripe. Police. Jack froze.

"Stay right there, kid" the figure called. As they began to quicken their stride toward him.

Thoughts raced through Jack's head… suddenly becoming fixated on the duffle bag and its content… adrenalin flew though his system… god knows what would happen to him if they caught him with that… before Jack even knew what was happening, his legs extended from their kneel and suddenly began pounding across the cobbles.

"Stop! Get fucking back here! The voice called as they too joined the chase.

Jack looked at his watch… 11:22. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. He looked back and saw the figure slowly gaining. As it was cold, jack's thermals did little to ensure his muscles were prepared for this kind of physical activity and his motion was compromised.

Nonetheless, Jack continued his stride. Clutching the bag at his side, he turned back onto the main road. Light and noise suddenly bombarded his senses. The various

billboards and motion-surfaces called for acknowledgement but fell on deaf extremities.

Dodging through crowds of people, Jack nimbly slalomed between torsos all the while keeping the duffle bag tucked to his chest. He heard grunts behind him. Daring to look back, he glanced his head quickly. The guy was almost right on top of him. The police issue exoskeleton cut through the pedestrians like a knife through butter.

Jack was seriously panicking now… desperately he turned into the road only to catch the sight of those familiar high beams. An idea crossed his mind….

Jack stopped suddenly. His mind not having time to rationalise the plan. He turned. The figure was on top of him now. An enormous man of around 50 stood before him. Encased in that terrible exoskeleton with severe spikes and mechanical augmentations protruding viciously.

"I've fucking got you…" the man snarled through gritted teeth. His artificial claw extending in Jack's direction. Jack paused. Wait for it… wait for it… NOW! He quickly jumped from the safety of the pavement into the road, narrowly evading the clutches of the talon.

With visible frustration, the man leapt forward just as Jack took another step back…

There was almighty crunch as metal collided with metal. Metallic screeching pierced the evening with a call so loud the buzz of the billboards even seemed to dim out of respect. Jack acknowledged the pieces of metal before him. The husk of the hover-car seemingly enveloping the exoskeleton in a furious embrace. Within the wreckage, Jack could make out the snarling face of the officer, gritted teeth and furious eyes looked out at him. The man was injured, certainly. But alive.

By now pedestrians and partygoers began to start paying attention to the phenomena which interrupted their night and started gathering round in a voyeuristic circle. Jack checked his watch. 11:27! He took one last look at the twisted wreckage and sprinted away.

11:29. Jack stood panting. Now, back in front of the university billboard, he frantically resumed his search for the bead…

Pawing desperately over stone and mortar, his nimble hands suddenly felt the tell-tale metallic coolness and he smirked. Opening the duffle bag, he delicately drew out the precious object inside. Wrapped in bubble wrap, the luminous gadget greeted him with glowing delight. Jack peaked at his watch again. The second hand showed 11:29.45. Not much time now. He quickly but carefully positioned the device at the base of the bead. One eye on the device and its activation button, the other on the watch. 11:29.50… Jack's fingers brushed the button tentatively. He looked back at the duffle bag, now on the floor in front of him and gave it a gentle tap with his foot. The remaining cargo was still intact and present. 11:29.55. 5..4…3..2..1. Jack's thumb pushed the button in and, with a satisfying click the device emitted its electrical charge, disabling the billboard.

Jack breathed for a second then let out of a hoot of relief. He turned to the night, to the city. Slowly but surely, lights across the city began blinking out. One by one. Until, blackness. Jack took a moment to embrace the stillness. Feeling the cooling wash of the lack of noise and light. He took another breath and opened the duffle bag to produce a small cylindrical object. Giving it a quick shake, he turned to work.

NEWS REPORT POST

THIS JUST IN. LIVERPOOL CITY CENTRE WAS SUBJECT TO VANDALISM DURING WHAT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS THE MOST SEVERE BLACKOUT IN THE CITY'S HISTORY. AT 11:30 LAST NIGHT MESSAGE BOARD ACROSS THE CITY PLUNGED INTO DARKNESS. AUTHORITIES AND THE ACME GROUP ARE STILL ATTEMPTING TO RESTORE THEM.

DURING THE NIGHT SEVERAL VANDALS TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION OF PAINT OBSCENE IMAGES THROUGHTOUT OUR CITY. A WARNING TO OUR VIEWERS, SOME MAY FIND THE NEXT IMAGES SLIGHTLY DISTURBING

Preliminary Analysis

Retelling

The hero of the story devises his plan to turn off the beaming facades of the city's buildings. In his mission, he will come across law enforcement but will escape its iron clutch, leaving a message of resistance in the city.

The story imagines Liverpool in the future as a city that is still a magnet for young audiences, offering experiences facilitated by the entertainment economy. Due to the overdevelopment of this market, the city's public space is transformed into an immersive environment of luminous images, holograms and sounds that advertise and highlight places, claim attention, call for activity and consumption. It is an environment where media and advertising technologies are overused, overwhelming the senses.

The hero is on an urban guerilla mission. He does not act spontaneously. He has studied, planned and prepared his mission. He will act stealthily like a Ninja. Accomplishing his plan will not solve the problem. This is an act of resistance that aspires to give a message to people and authorities. On the other side is the local government, the private entities that exploit the public space, and the police authorities that defend the maintenance of a status quo, which carries the confirmation of legitimacy.

The author presents a city that is distorted to serve the tourist night economy. The investment in this market turns the city into an amusement park that does not want residents but visitors. The phenomenon is presented extreme through a fictional dystopic city centre and probably wins the reader's support. The narrative, however, raises questions in relation to contemporary phenomena of vandalism of public and private property. Can we be empathetic and reflect on these actions as acts of resistance to the status quo? Does the contemporary public space demonstrate justice to the citizens? What kind of frustrations does destruction hide? What information can antisocial behaviour provide in relation to unmet local needs beyond the automatic urge to condemn and suppress them? The young anti-hero of the story does not seem to have a voice in public life, and the middle-aged police officer has a job to protect public and private property, the obvious capstone of society.

Meta-narrative

The prosperity of a city is often not measured by the well-being of the people who live in it. But the city belongs to its people. When those in power make decisions that do not serve the population, the expressions of reaction and resistance will send a resounding message reminding them of their duty to serve the public.

(The Future Huyton experience did not include the story; therefore, no survey is attached.)

Appendix 2: Visual Material

Visual Material Appendix Index

Figure 1: Flowchart depicting the progression of each thesis chapter and the specific chapters addressing each research question (presented in the Prologue)

Figure 2: Visual Representation of 'place making' as a Spectrum (referred in Section 1.2.2)

Figure 3: Timeline of practice in semesters (presented in Section 2.3 and referred in the introduction of Chapter 3)

Figure 4: Indicative Worksheets for Workshop Activities (referred in Section 2.4.1.1)

Figure 5: Workshop Participants' Placement on Income Distribution Curve (referred in Section 2.5.2)

Figure 6: Demographics of Workshop Participants (referred in Section 2.5.2)

Figure 7: Prototypes of AR Filters and Social Media Content (referred in Section 3.4)

Figure 8: Instagram Posts from digitalplacemakers (@digitalplacemakers) for Huyton: Digital (referred in Section 3.5)

Figure 9: Instagram Collages on digitalplacemakers (@digitalplacemakers) (referred in Section 3.6)

Figure 10: Knowsley Dome App and Backend Screenshots (referred in Section 3.8)

Figure 11: Social Media Campaigns for "Future Huyton" Workshop (referred in Section 3.10)

Figure 12: Screenshots of "Future Huyton" website (referred in Section 3.12)

Figure 13: Promotional Print Media for the "Future Huyton Experience" (referred in Section 3.12)

Figure 1: Flowchart depicting the progression of each thesis chapter and the specific chapters addressing each research question (Q1-Q4)

Figure 2: Visual Representation of 'placemaking' as a Spectrum, Ranging from Strategic Top-Down Initiatives Led by Policymakers and Economic Stakeholders to Organic, Bottom-Up Processes Driven by the Community. The Continuum Encompasses the Concepts of 'Placemaking' and 'Place-Making' at Opposite Ends.
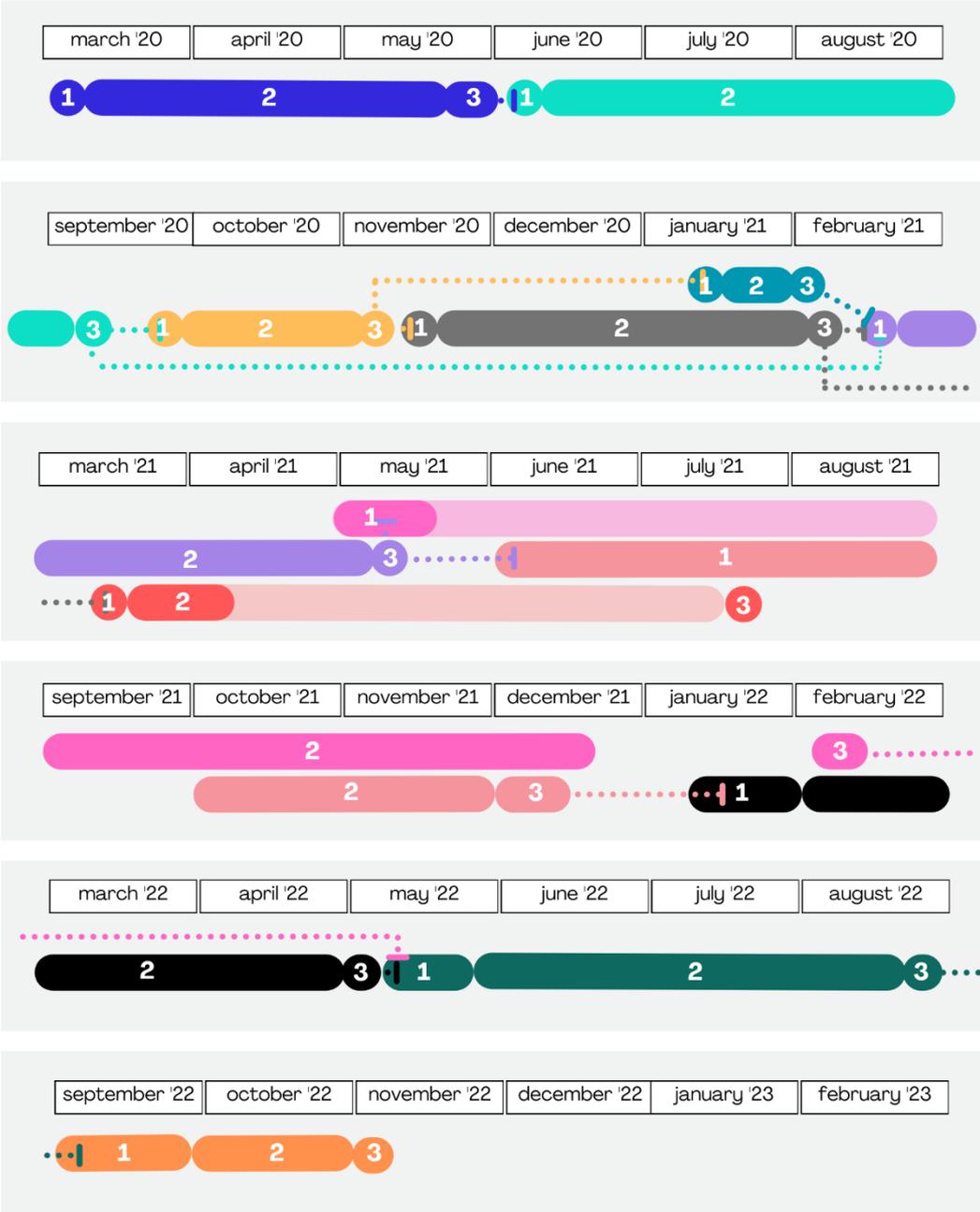
Figure 3: Timeline of practice in semesters

Envisioning the Future of the local town centre

ACQUAINTANCE AND IDEATION

Let's explore the well-trodden paths and favorite destinations you frequent regularly. Consider the places that mirror your lifestyle, those where you're often spotted. This exploration will provide insights into the potential for new locations, activities, or interventions that could be introduced in the town center.

Destinations in the local town centre/ high street

Other familiar destinations in Knowsley Borough

Places in town centres of the past (memories)

Familiar destinations in other town/city centres

Questions about places, activities, needs and values

Which of these places do you visit or did you visit every week?
Where is your work?
Where do you shop usually?

Which of these places are more social?
Where would you interact with people?
Where would you be with a friend?

Are you involved in any leisure activities? Where do they take place?
Were you involved in other leisure activities/ sports/ hobbies in the past? Where did those take place?

Would you consider any of these places great? Which of their qualities do you find appealing?
Do you think there is an asset in these destinations that could be highlighted?
Are there any places that you associate with a happy memory or an important personal experience?

Does any of these places have something problematic or dysfunctional?
Do you associate any of these places with adversity?
Is there a place you avoid on a specific day or time?

Is there a destination missing from the area that you wish you could visit regularly?
Is there an activity that you wish you would be able to engage with in any of these destinations?

Desire for Intervention, Activity or a new Place

Based on our discussion about
- your familiar places,
- the activities you engage with in your local town centre and other locations, and
- your values and unfulfilled needs

express a desire for an intervention, activity or place that could be set up in the town centre.

" "I am interested in outdoor activities that bring people closer to nature and to each other, even in the town centre. This could be setting up community gardens and parks in public parcels." "

Envisioning the Future of the local town centre

WORLD BUILDING

You will conjure up a fictional portrayal of your familiar Knowsley town centre in the year 2050. While it remains the same location, envision certain alterations that have taken place. In this section, we aim to speculate about the various elements that will seamlessly integrate into daily life in the future.

How could (fictional) Technology advance my idea?

desire for intervention/ activity/ place

technology

vision of the town centre's future
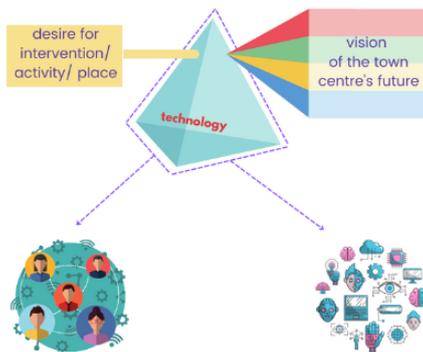
Crowdsourcing the Town

What if
people would use digital platforms and media to collectively make decisions, shape local projects, organize activities and give solutions to local problems?

Ubiquitous Technology

What if
innovative technology became integrated into our familiar objects and places, so ingrained with our day-to-day we wouldn't even reflect we were using it?

Fictional Technology scenario

Think about your desire as an active project that takes place in the future.
- How could people coordinate and get mobilized to contribute to this project?
- How could smart technology benefit this project?

Come up with a fictional scenario about a project that has the desired regenerative effect on the future town centre.

" "Imagine an online platform that connects people with similar interests and supports them to set up new places. Through the platform, users could also operate smart infrastructure and get experts' advice. Community members would easily set up community gardens and parks in public parcels and install humidity and temperature sensors to get information and get notifications from the about duties and activities to preserve them." "

Share your scenario with other people. Let them ask questions. Give them answers that meet your values and desires.
Note down your answers to expand your scenario.

Figure 4: Indicative Worksheets for Workshop Activities. These exemplar worksheets provide a preview of the structured activities that were carried out.

Figure 2: Enter a postcode to see where the local area falls in the income distribution

Mean average equivalised disposable annual household income, before housing costs, for local areas (MSOAs), financial year ending March 2018, England and Wales

Source: Office for National Statistics

Embed code

Figure 5: Workshop Participants' Placement on Income Distribution Curve. This graph illustrates the positioning of workshop participants within the income distribution curve, serving as a key component of purposeful sampling during the recruitment process. Participants were sourced from various Knowsley neighbourhoods, each representing distinct segments of the income distribution curve. The original interactive graph was sourced from the Office for National Statistics' "Income estimates for small areas, England and Wales: financial year ending 2018," released in March 2020 and is available at
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/smallareamodelbasedincomeestimates/financialyearending2018

383

	13 female	8 male	1 non-binary
65<	L36 L36	L36	
55-64	L36 L36 L36	L36 L32	
35-44	L32 L26		M15
26-34		L32	
18-25	L36	L15	
<18	L36 L36 L36 L33	L36 L36 L35	

13 female   8 male   1 non-binary

■ 20 participants from Knowsley Borough areas
☐ 2 participants from pilot workshop

Figure 6: Demographics of Workshop Participants. This diagrammatic representation provides a comprehensive visual overview of the 22 workshop participants who took part in all the sessions and activities. It illustrates their distribution based on postal codes, age groups, and gender identification.
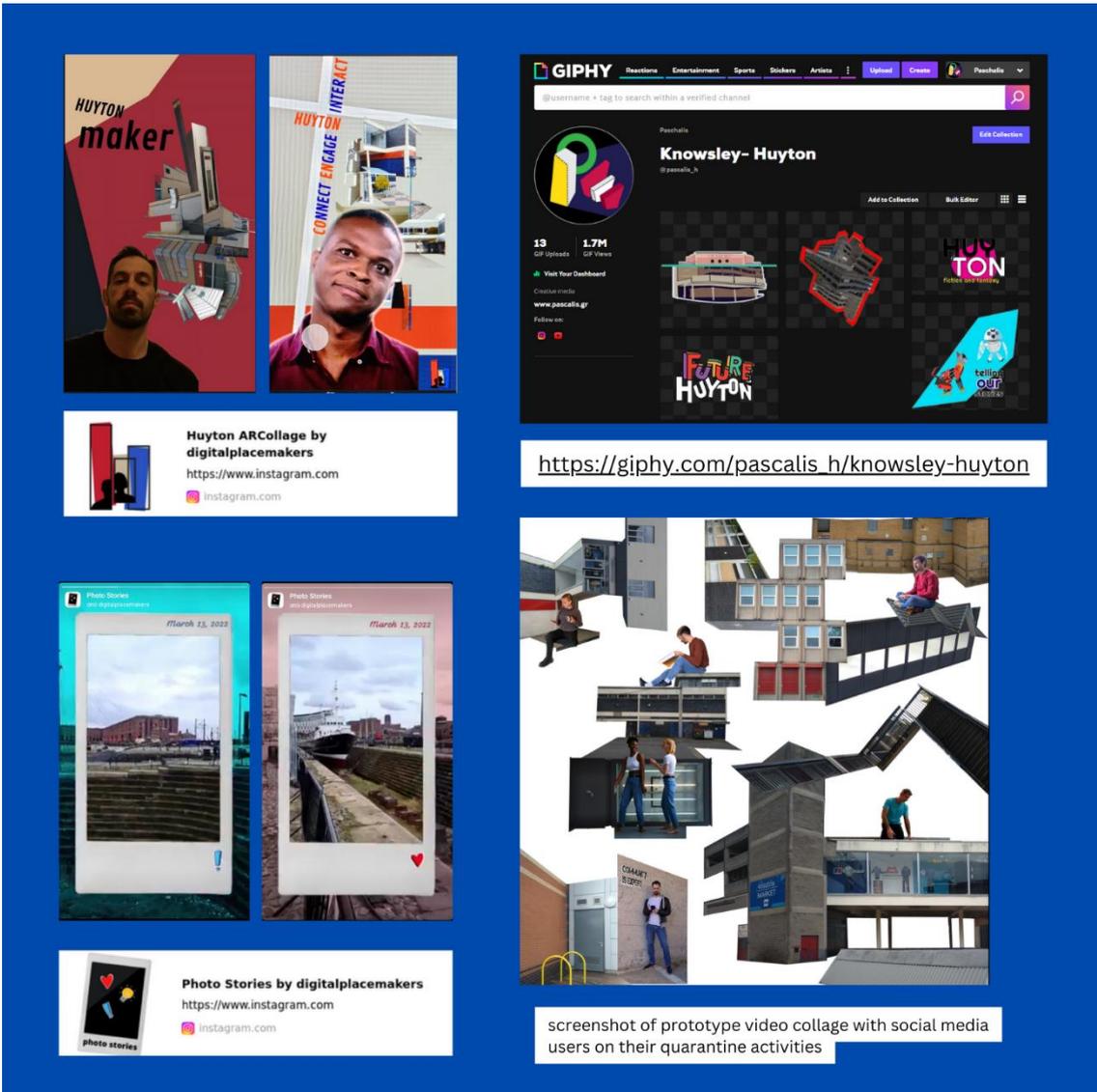
Figure 7: Prototypes of AR Filters and Social Media Content. These prototypes were designed with the aim of engaging local users in creative content creation workshops and facilitating local mobilisation across diverse social media platforms.

Figure 8: Instagram Posts from digitalplacemakers (@digitalplacemakers). This figure showcases a collection of Instagram posts, offering insights into the thematic rooms designed as part of the "Huyton:Digital" project. The interactive project, created on Mozilla Hubs, is accessible at https://hub-map.glitch.me .
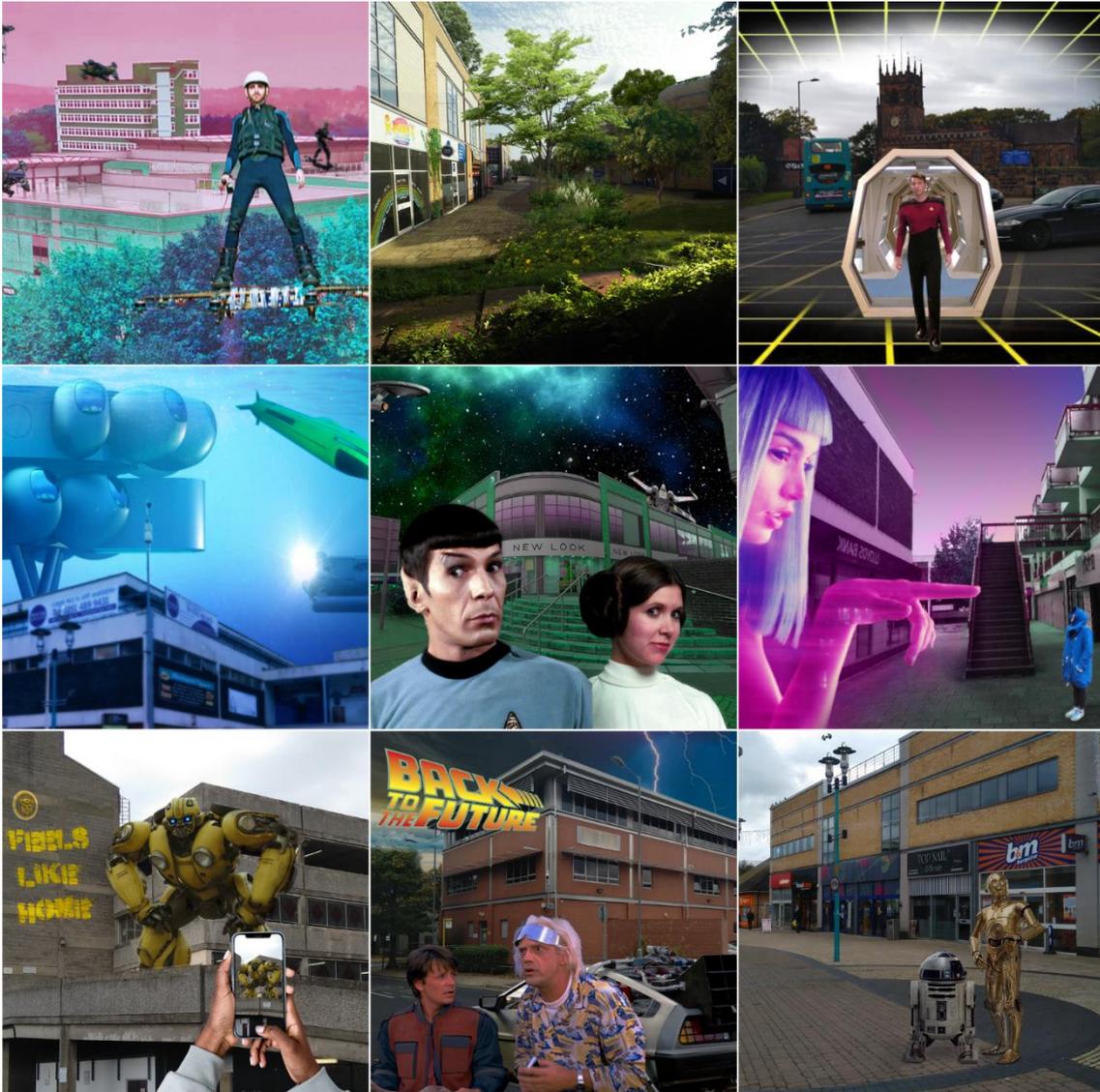
Figure 9: Instagram Collages on digitalplacemakers (@digitalplacemakers) This figure showcases a collection of Instagram collages, skilfully blending iconic pop culture sci-fi concepts with the local town centre to promote the upcoming "Sci-Fi Storytelling" workshop.

Figure 10: Knowsley Dome App and Backend Screenshots. This figure provides a glimpse into the technological underpinnings of the Knowsley Dome project, featuring screenshots from both the Knowsley Dome App and its backend infrastructure, offering insights into the project's intricate technical components.

Figure 11: Social Media Campaigns for "Future Huyton" Workshop. This figure features screenshots of various social media campaigns meticulously crafted to heighten awareness and encourage active participation in the upcoming "Future Huyton" workshop.

Figure 12: Screenshots of "Future Huyton" Website (www.future-huyton.uk/). These screenshots capture the essence of the "Future Huyton" project, introducing its vision and announcing the activation of unique stories in the town center every week. The website serves as an entry point to explore the Futures stories, offering a glimpse into the future before audiences experience these narratives on-site through the Knowsley Domes AR app.

Figure 13: Promotional Print Media for the "Future Huyton Experience". This figure presents a collection of print media materials meticulously designed to attract participants and strategically placed in community hubs both

within and outside Huyton. These promotional materials serve as a key component of the outreach campaign for the "Future Huyton Experience," fostering engagement in the project's final outcome.
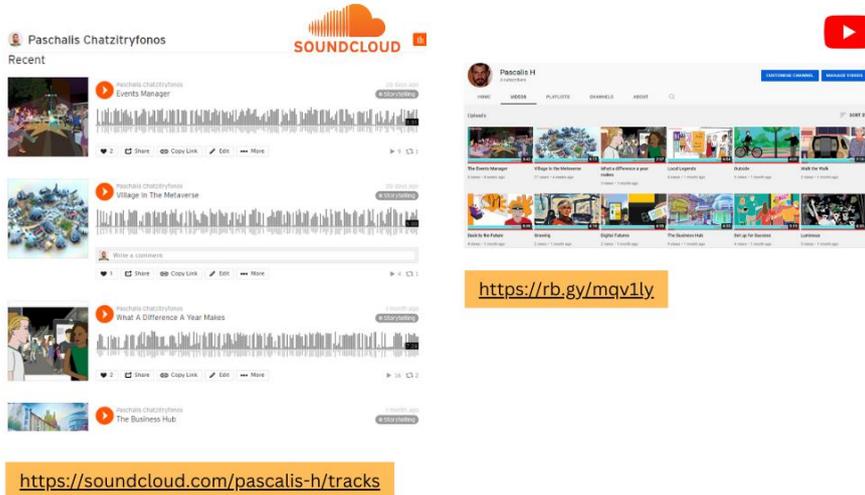
Figure 14: Audio Narration Recordings for Enhanced Accessibility. These screenshots capture the audio narration recordings created to enhance accessibility. The recordings can be accessed on Soundcloud at https://soundcloud.com/pascalis-h/tracks and on YouTube at https://rb.gy/mqv1ly , providing an inclusive and immersive experience for all audiences.
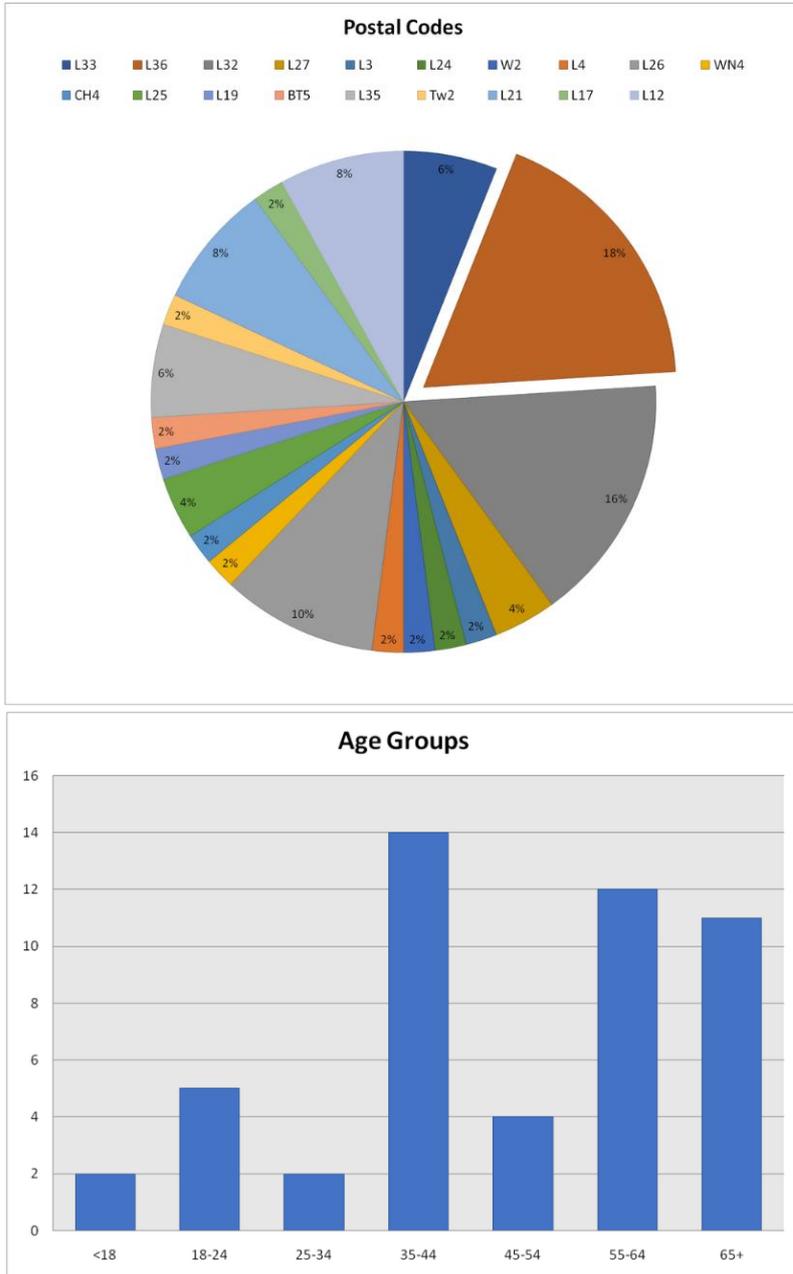
Figure 16: Demographics of Survey Participants. This figure consists of two graphs illustrating the demographics of the survey audience. The first is a pie diagram depicting the distribution of participants by postal codes, offering a geographic perspective. The second is a bar graph detailing the distribution of participants across different age groups, providing valuable insights into the diversity of the surveyed audience.

1	Initiating Collaborative Foundations
	The project commences with three primary objectives to stimulate dialogue:
	• Understanding Knowsley using quantitative data.
	• Exploring central elements in the KMBC strategic plan for 2016-2020.
	• Discovering cases of digital interventions in public spaces.
2	Evaluating Digital Placemaking Initiatives
	The researcher conducts a comparative analysis of 47 cases involving technology-driven interventions and experiences in public spaces. This examination highlights various opportunities and approaches to placemaking, linking them to the KMBC strategic plan and well-being statistics. Findings are presented to, discussed with and provided as reports to KMBC partners.
3	Horizon-scan possibilities
	KMBC partners begin to cultivate insights into the potential of Digital Placemaking and its interconnectedness with the evolving regeneration strategy.
1	Aligning digital placemaking to Huyton masterplan and Knowsley 2030 strategy
	KMBC partners share evidence-based reports detailing life in the Borough, future planning for Knowsley from 2020 to 2030, and the Huyton Masterplan. The researcher becomes part of the Huyton regeneration Steering Group to contribute to the strategic alignment.
2	Foresight Scenarios and Place Branding
	The researcher develops foresight scenarios utilising the provided data, goals, and prospective digital initiatives. Using these prototype scenarios, he proposes a method to link Digital Placemaking with the regeneration strategy, aiming to direct the creation of impactful interventions. Concurrently, the researcher suggests marketing and branding strategies to effectively communicate a cohesive future vision externally.
3	Opportunity in a story-based approach to involve the community.
	The foresight scenarios are considered a chance to engage the local community in the project via a story-based approach, soliciting their perspectives on possible future scenarios.
1	The Streetscape Project
	Council partners launch the Streetscape Project as a tangible objective of this collaboration. Aimed to reflect on Huyton's history, current state, and future, it will be executed by an external entity, with the researcher providing direction for its

	design.
2	"Prototype Projects"

The researcher outlines and submits an action plan for Prototype Projects. This plan includes various small-scale public space digital interventions or events, alongside digital creativity workshops engaging the community. These projects will serve as prototypes, offering insights into various design elements for the "Streetscape Project." |
| 3 | **Reviewing the plan- brainstorming ideas for Borough of Culture Events**

The plan receives a favourable reception. Members of the Culture team review the detailed event and workshop proposals, discussing the specific technical needs. Additionally, there is enthusiasm for conducting some of the events in Prescot. |
| 1 | Preparing online prototypes

A timeline is established for the development of prototypes and workshops, setting the commencement of the plan's execution for post-February 2021. |
| 2 | Development of prototypes

The researcher develops two prototypes for community workshops:

- An Instagram AR filter that can be used in a town centre game- event.
- A video editing project done with social media users. |
| 3 | Prototype Projects plan cancelled

Social distancing requirements render the original Prototype Projects action plan unfeasible. In response, the researcher suggests shifting to online prototype projects to explore alternative methods of audience engagement. The Council partners agree to this new approach. |
| 1 | The Project Brief

Council partners focus on creating a detailed brief for the Streetscape Project, revisiting and summarising the desires and decisions made to date. |
| 2 | Delineating a placemaking platform

The researcher prepares an initial draft of the brief, outlining the identity and objectives of the Streetscape Project. In it, he advocates for the creation of a lasting digital placemaking infrastructure in Huyton aimed at providing various engagement opportunities for the audience rather than an ephemeral event. |
| 3 | Approval of the Brief

The partners agree that the brief effectively articulates their collective aspirations, perspectives, and goals. Together, they continue to refine and enhance the |

	document.
1	Virtual Streetscape Project
	The researcher engages LJMU MA students in a digital project, investigating different scenarios for a digital placemaking infrastructure in Huyton, with the support and endorsement of Council collaborators.
2	"Huyton:Digital"
	The researcher presents an adapted brief and leads the students through a cooperative design journey. The result is a conceptual design of a versatile virtual environment that allows online users to populate a virtual town centre with their content and narratives. This prototype, developed and implemented by the MA students, is named "Huyton:Digital."

3	Technical Reflection	Community Engagement
	Trials conducted by the design team lead to the discovery of extra specifications needed for the Streetscape Brief.	At this time, "Huyton: Digital" is not eligible for promotion on the Council's networks as a live interactive space for locals, which means its story-based methodology remains untested. As a result, the project continues to exist solely as a technical prototype.

1	Social media placemaking
	The researcher engages in discussions with Council partners about utilising social media as a tool in digital placemaking. The focus is on engaging the local community in the project by increasing awareness and establishing online activities and participation methods.
2	Social media prototypes
	The researcher produces and shares social media content prototypes and submits a new proposal about relevant campaigns and activities.
3	Digital Placemakers
	At the time, the Council's social media channels are unavailable for the project. As a result, the researcher creates distinct social media accounts under the "Digital Placemakers" profile to share research results and encourage public involvement in the study.
1	Mobile AR storytelling platform
	The design and evaluation of "Huyton: Digital" yield fresh insights for the

	"Streetscape Project" brief, centring on a mobile augmented reality (AR) storytelling platform while pinpointing necessary technical specifications and requirements. Subsequently, the researcher and Council collaborators in IT and Culture refine the initial brief documents, facilitating a procurement process to select the creative studio tasked with executing the project.
2	**Implementing Knowsley Domes** Following the selection of the winning proposal, the creative studio proceeds to develop alpha and beta versions of a mobile AR platform. Throughout this process, Council partners and the researcher offer feedback and conduct tests. The completed platform allows for the publication of visual materials as location-specific content. Users of the app can then access these collections within virtual domes that materialise via augmented reality at designated spots throughout Knowsley.
3	**Exploring Narrative Potential** In assessing the final product's usability and storytelling capabilities, the researcher determines its key features that guide optimal usage and outlines potential enhancements for the future..
1	**Sci-fi Storytelling Workshop** The inception and organisation of the sci-fi workshop reflect dedicated efforts to involve the local community in crafting a forward-thinking experience within Huyton Centre. The primary objective is to create a creative storytelling-based activity that assists local participants in envisioning the town's future and purposefully incorporating technology concepts into their vision. Following the finalisation of the format, the researcher promotes the activity through the Digital Placemakers accounts, while Council partners disseminate activity details to local community groups via mailing lists.
2	**Conducting a Pilot** The workshop unfolds in an online setting, with two separate groups: one serving as a pilot group comprising participants from Manchester and Liverpool, and the other affiliated specifically with Huyton. This initiative results in the creation of three distinct stories.
3	**Reflecting on the format** The researcher-facilitator engages in a reflective assessment of the workshops and their creative outputs, alongside the participants. Together, they identify the strengths and weaknesses of the process.

1	Future Huyton Workshop Under a fresh name, the workshop enters its second iteration. The valuable support and input from both previous and new participants, as well as local community representatives from civic groups, played a pivotal role in the planning process. Consequently, this planning-action-reflection cycle is repeated multiple times until the project reaches its conclusion.
2	Conducting "Future Huyton" The workshop is carried out over a span of 7 iterations, encompassing both online and in-person formats, resulting in the creation of 12 new stories.
3	Analysing the Workshop Approach By means of reflection, the researcher refines the fundamental framework of the workshop. A significant portion of this review revolves around community outreach and enhancing their involvement in the project.
1	A transmedia experience The development of a transmedia experience involves the fusion of Future Huyton stories with the Knowsley Domes app. In order to plan this unique experience, a comprehensive analysis of both components is conducted. Subsequently, an initial schedule is established through pertinent discussions and the exchange of materials with Council partners.
2	Content Creation by the Researcher: • Conducting an initial analysis of stories. • Illustrating story instances. • Crafting questionnaires for audience engagement. • Planning a comprehensive promotional campaign strategy, including tailored materials for diverse audiences and locations. • Recording voice-over narrations to facilitate accessibility. • Developing a dedicated website to host stories and voice-overs. • Setting up AR domes featuring story illustrations and questionnaires.
3	Authorisation The Knowsley Domes, featuring sample material from Future Huyton, is presented to and granted approval by two of Knowsley's Councillors. Council communications promote the forthcoming event through a pertinent article on their online networks.
1	Future Huyton Event The event's initial organisation is facilitated in collaboration with Council partners,

		who secure a space in the town centre for the launch of the "Future Huyton" experience. The researcher takes charge of online promotion, informing participants and local stakeholders to visit "Future Huyton."
2		Future Huyton in the Village The experience continues to be available in Huyton centre for a duration of one month, with three new domes becoming active on a weekly basis. The researcher serves as the host, introducing visitors to the digital experience.
3		Conclusion The culmination of the experience allows for the gathering of the last set of research data, which can be cross-referenced with data obtained from the workshops (triangulation). This marks the beginning of the final analysis phase.

Table 2: An Overview of the 12-episode Cycle Involving Planning, Action, and Reflection in Research Practice

Workshops	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
				In-person				
Location	Online			Huyton Library	Old Schoolhouse Community Project	Tower Hill Community Centre	Old Schoolhouse Community Project	Westvale Community Centre
Period	October-November 2021			February 2022		March 2022		April 2022
Number of Participants	2	2	2	3	2	5	4	5
(Limited engagement)		1	1	1				

Number of Sessions	4	4	3	3	3	2	1	1
Number of stories generated	2	1	1	2	2	5	1	1

Table 2: Workshop Details (Sessions, Dates, Locations, Number of Participants, Outcomes)

Appendix 3: Illustrations for Participant Stories

The researcher created these illustrations based on the narratives provided by the participants. As visual references he used Huyton areas indicated and, in some instances, photographed by the participants themselves. The primary software tools employed were Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. In three particular instances (Village in the Metaverse, Growing, and the Business Hub), the researcher integrated into his workflow the automated generation of images derived from preliminary sketches and verbal descriptions. This was achieved using dall-e and starryai, both of which became publicly available during the illustration phase, allowing for experimentation and subsequent integration into the project. The resulting illustrations are presented in the following pages alongside reference photographs, some of which were also incorporated into the AR domes.

BACK TO THE FUTURE
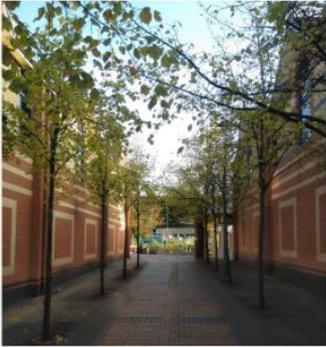
THE EVENTS MANAGER
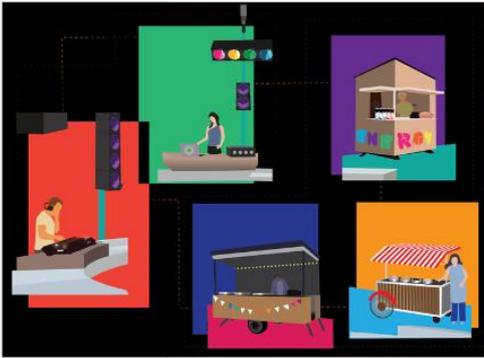
VILLAGE IN THE METAVERSE

WALK
THE
WALK
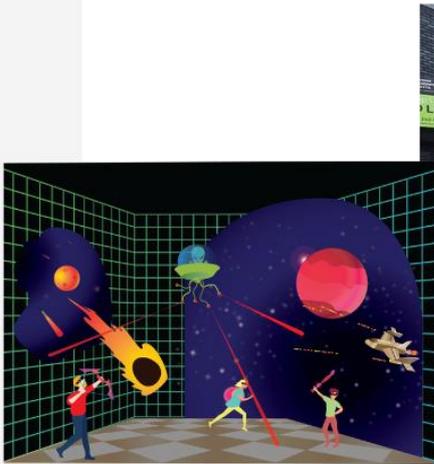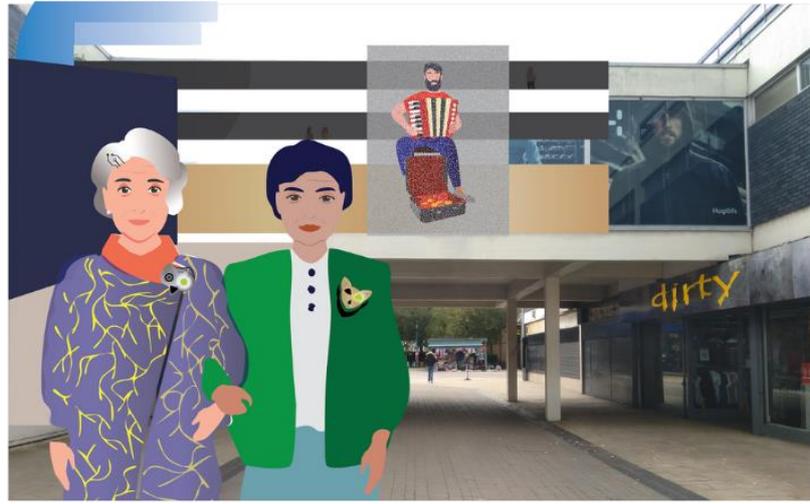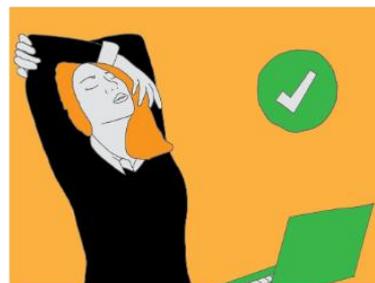
SETUP FOR SUCESS

GROWING
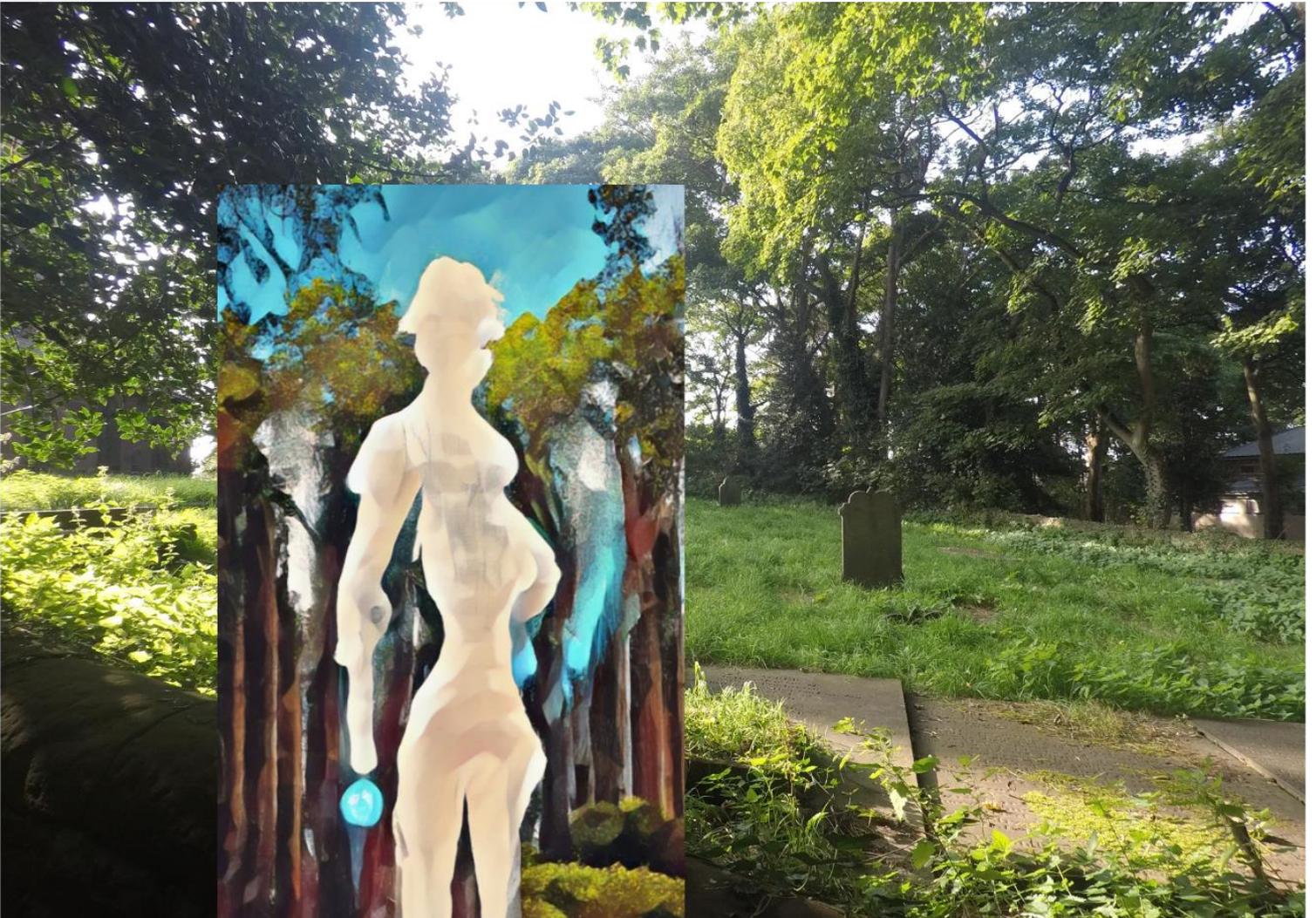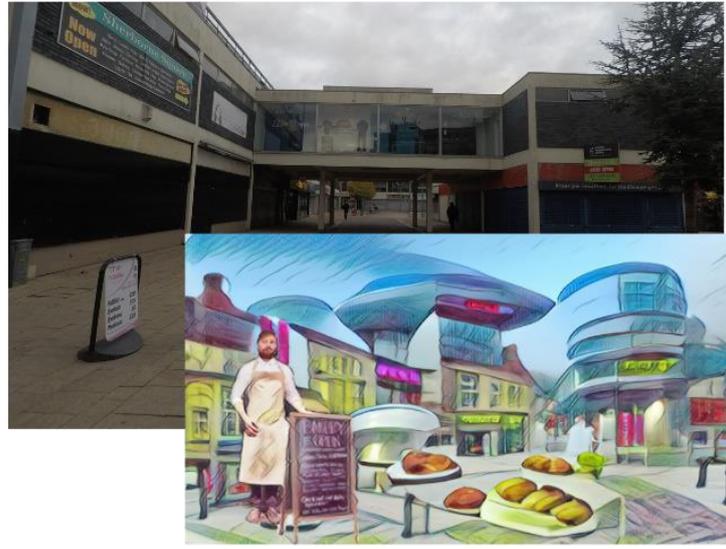
THE BUSINESS HUB

OUTSIDE

LUMINOUS

415

417
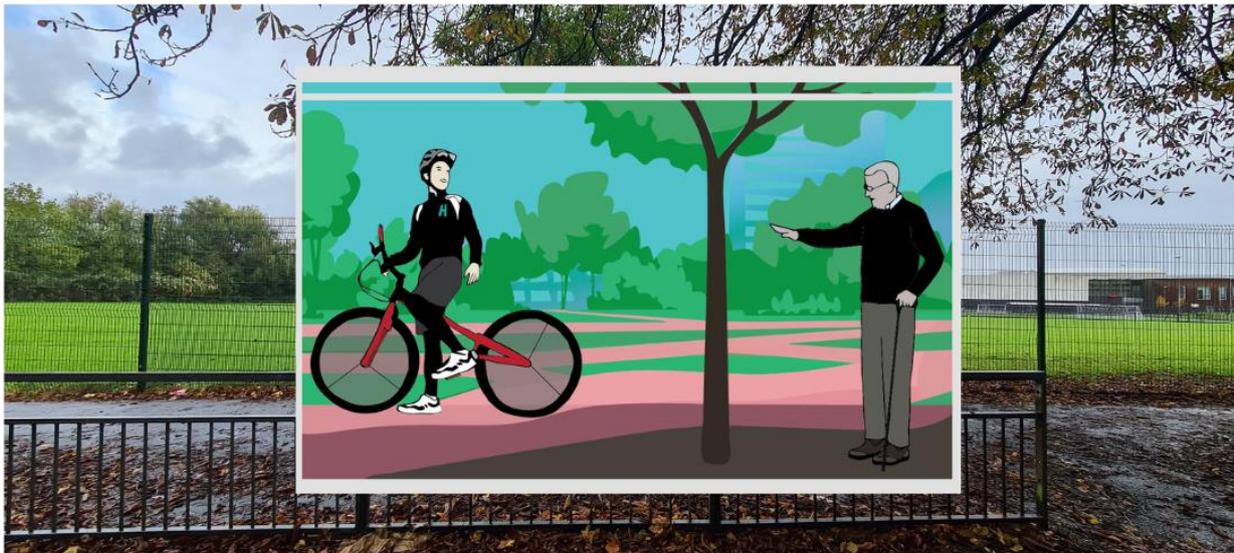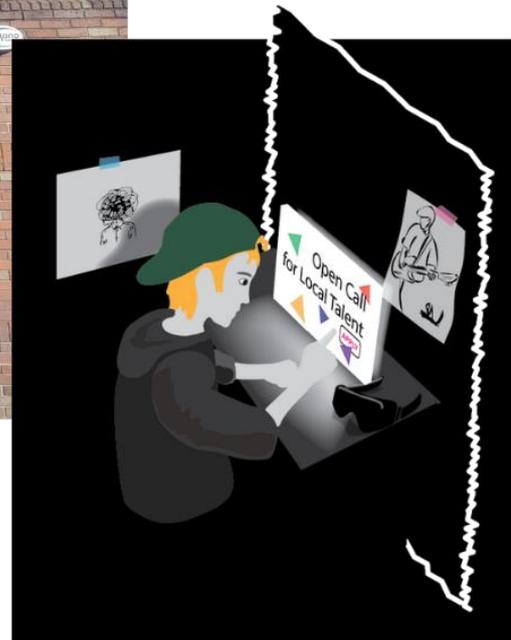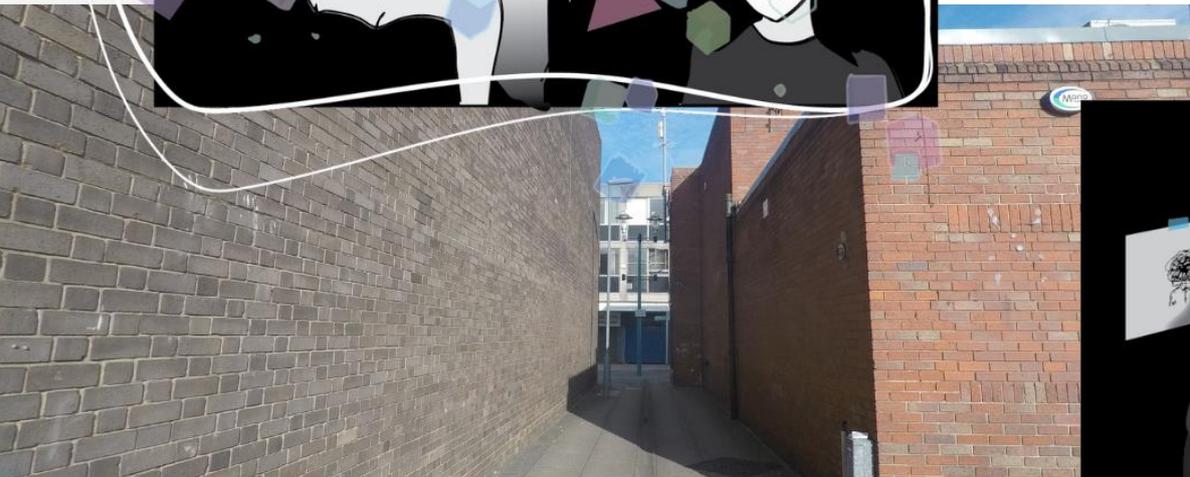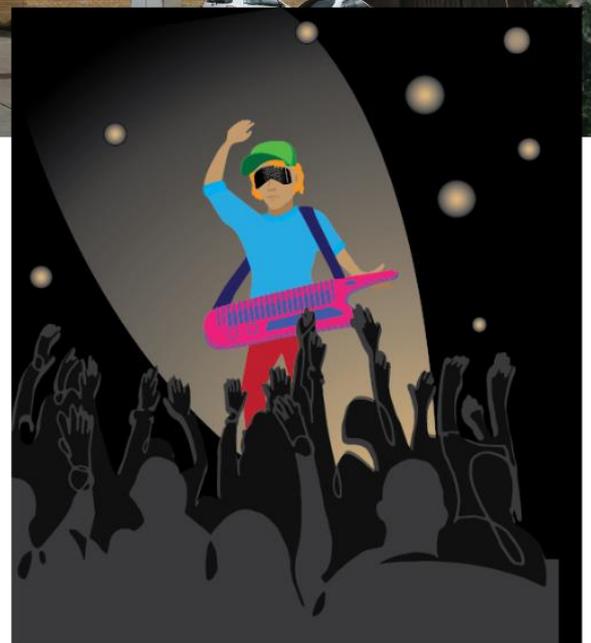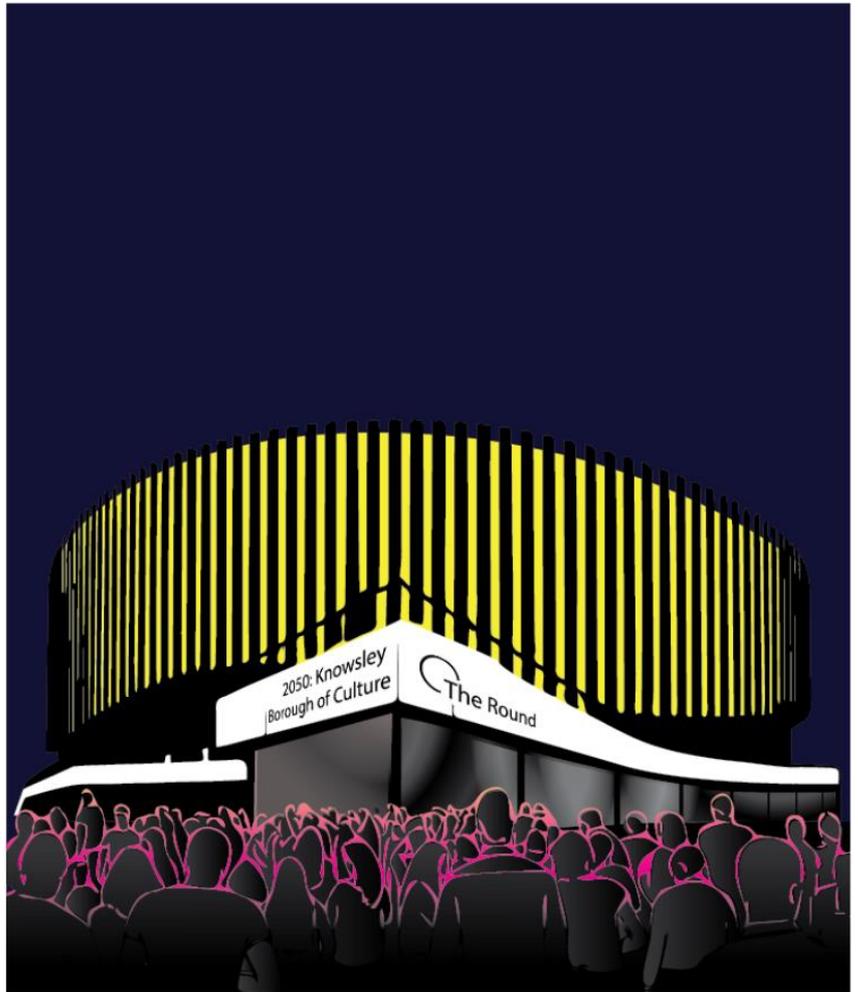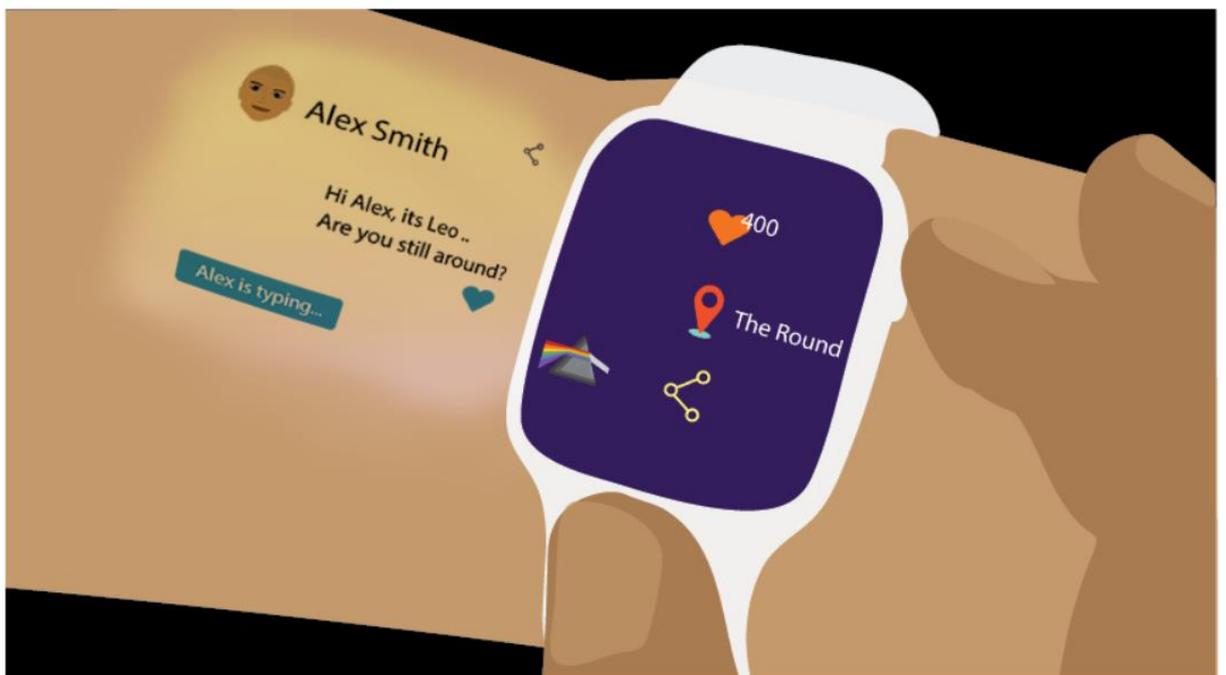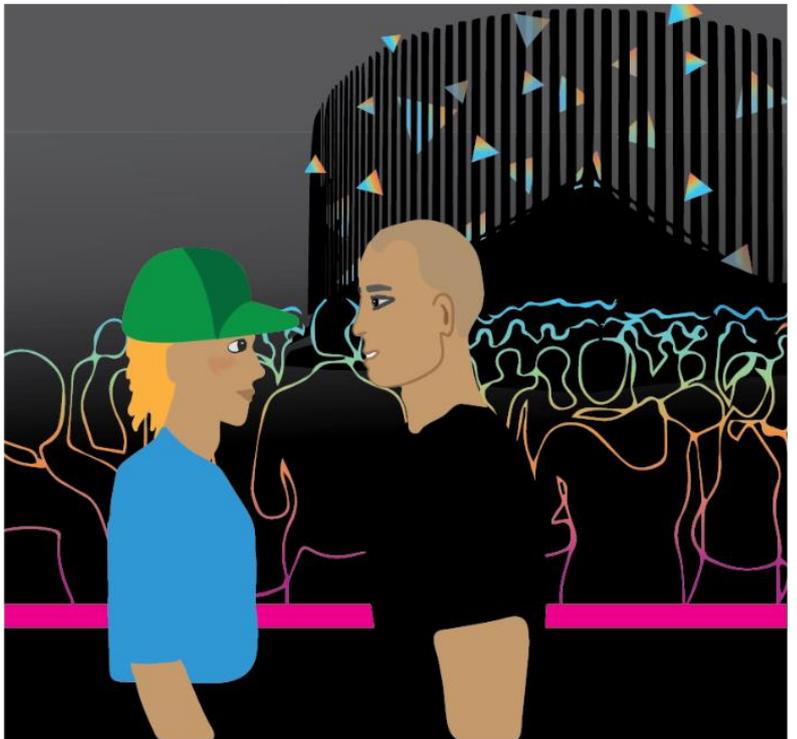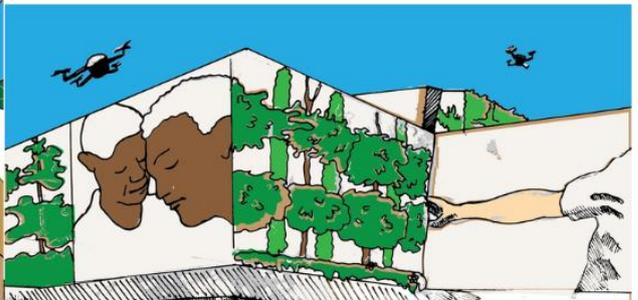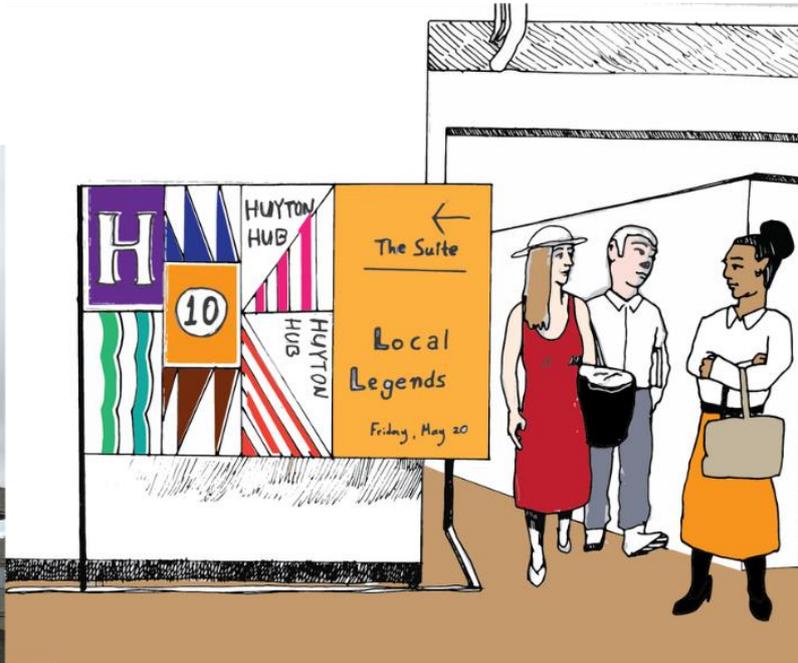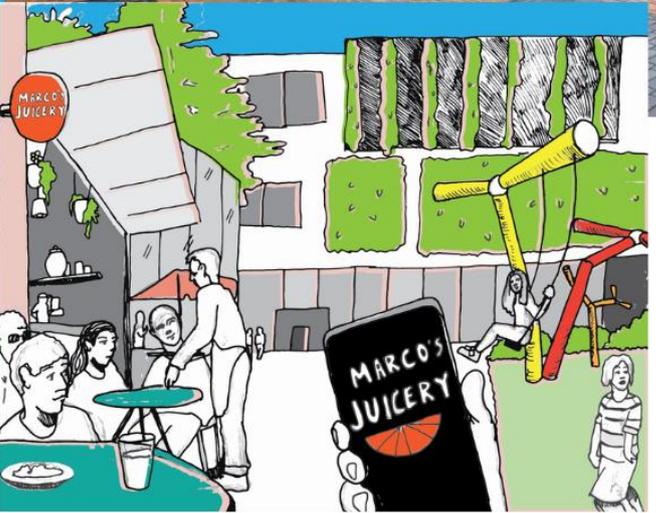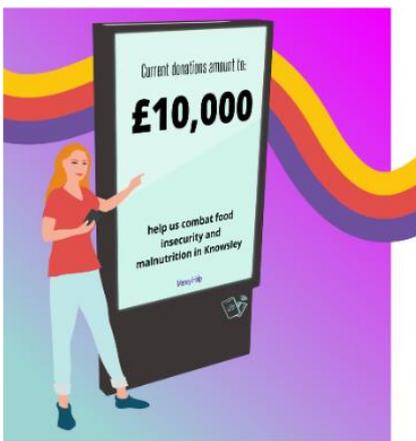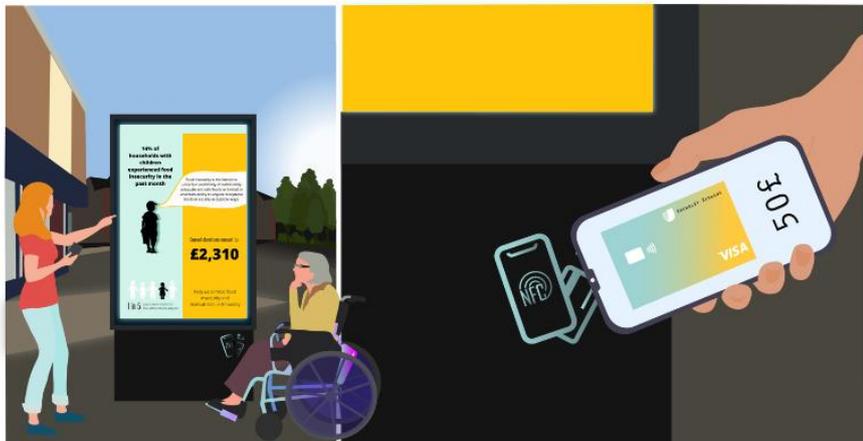
WHAT DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES

Appendix 4: Engaging with Knowsley Dome

To partake in the augmented reality experience of the "Knowsley Dome," interested individuals are advised to follow these formal instructions:

1. Obtain the "Knowsley Dome" Augmented Reality application by downloading it from either the Apple Store or Google Play Store, depending on the compatibility with your device.

2. Visit the official website at https://sites.google.com/view/future-huyton/walkthewalk. On this platform, you will have the opportunity to either read or listen to the narrative associated with "Walk the Walk."

3. The geographical coordinates of the dome central to the "Walk the Walk" narrative are specifically located at latitude 53.408 and longitude -2.838. This site is positioned within McGoldrick Park, near the centre of Huyton. It is pertinent to note that the dome was initially located on Derby Road in Huyton Centre and has been relocated to not hinder future iterations of the application by KMBC. Furthermore, it is permissible to employ a fake GPS application for a virtual experience in the specified area. It is of utmost importance to emphasise that users must prioritise their physical safety by remaining in a secure and unobstructed environment to avoid any potential risks that may arise from a diminished awareness of their immediate surroundings.

4. Upon locating the dome participants will be able to engage fully in the augmented reality experience connected with the story "Walk the Walk," replicating the experience of the original audience in October 2022. (A concise video presentation showcasing the appearance of the dome is available for viewing. This video can be accessed via the provided hyperlink, which directs to the Instagram account of DigitalPlacemakers. The specific link to the video is: https://www.instagram.com/tv/CkBziQLgw0U/?igshid=enZjZHQ2MTV5d3Ax)

5. It is important to note that the illustrations within the dome are interactive. Participants are encouraged to engage with these elements for a more immersive

experience, which includes accessing textual commentary and the online survey at the conclusion of the experience.