

## **Exploring engaged spaces in community-university partnership**

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### **Abstract**

The Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) has been operating at the University of Brighton for the past 10 years. This article explores the different types of space we think need to exist to support a variety of partnership and engaged work. We therefore explore our understandings of shared or ‘engaged’ spaces as a physical, virtual and relational phenomenon in this context.

### **Keywords:**

Placemaking; Public engagement; Participation; Knowledge exchange;

### **Introduction**

The Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) has been operating at the University of Brighton since 2003. During this time, we have developed a mature understanding of the place and purpose of partnerships between staff, students and local, national and international communities. We support such partnerships to combine resources that make a tangible difference to the effectiveness of the community sectors, the quality of university education and research and the lives of local people. These are underpinned by our values of knowledge exchange, reciprocity and mutual benefit. For example, we have:

- Developed student projects whereby students work for part of their curriculum time with community organisations, reflecting on their experiences and values in end of year assessments;
- Supported academics to form long term partnerships with local groups who can benefit from their research and offer a practitioner and community perspective on areas of shared concern;
- Supported other universities throughout the UK and in other parts of the world to develop strategies for working within their own local communities, matching their local resources to key local priorities.

We have continually contended with issues of space over this time and considerations of physical space have been important. Questions of accessibility (can people find one of our different campus buildings, spread over five different localities?), familiarity (should we meet with partners inside our campus buildings or in spaces they ‘own’?), and practicality (how do university timescales and budget differ from community resources?), have all been significant.

However, the range and scale of our activities has also taught us that there are some pitfalls in being distracted by these questions alone. We think different types of space need to exist to support a variety of partnership and engaged work, physical yes, but also virtual and relational. In this article we expand on our thinking on this topic by using examples of the work for which CUPP is responsible. We introduce the main functions of our team - the helpdesk, community knowledge exchange and student community engagement and highlight the spaces and spatial considerations we associate with each of them. We also introduce findings from a piece of research CUPP conducted in 2013 that looked ahead to the future of community-university partnerships. One of the main findings of this research was the need to imagine and create new kinds of space that could support changing collaborative practices between those involved.

On the basis of these empirical examples, this article takes on the challenge of thinking about collaborative spaces of the future. We draw on theories of placemaking, public engagement and power and highlight how our collaborations with designers and design thinking can support us to imagine these spaces of the future. We conclude by considering what we have learnt so far about our mixture of experiences and look also to the future, to try to develop some principles of engaged space that can reflect different characteristics and pay attention to how the spatial practices they contain can support our community-university partnership ambitions into the future.

Throughout this article we interchangeably use the language of public engagement, social and/or community engagement but do not suggest these mean the same thing. We are aware of different nuances behind the terms, but it is beyond the scope of this article to explore them fully. (A more complete explanation of this in the UK context can be found in Wolff et al, 2012 and NCCPE n.d).

### **CUPP at the University of Brighton**

CUPP at the University of Brighton was initially set up as an externally funded project, to explore what an engaged university might look like in a UK context. Early encouragement from our Deputy Vice Chancellor and chair of our original Steering Group was ‘define in the doing’ rather than spending too much time on definition in advance. This led us to explore, through a series of pilot projects, different ways of working, around the core principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit and ‘defining in the doing’ became a title for one of our later publications (CUPP, 2013).

Learning from the work of other universities in the US and some early projects in the UK the project started by consulting with local voluntary organisations and community groups and forming a steering committee from local stakeholders. Three years later and after responding to more than 500 local enquiries, the project was taken into core funding by the university, with community engagement written into the University’s mission statement and strategic plan. The resulting programme operates across the whole of the university, taking into account the different campus locations and working with academics from every discipline, through its three main functions. These are:

- The Community Helpdesk as a single point of entry or access for external enquires, staffed by a development manager who can then broker requests and connect them to relevant personnel or other strands of CUPP's work;
- Community Knowledge Exchange (CKE) which provides support to new partnerships in the early stages, bringing together different types of knowledge on an equal basis and overseeing the development of longer term communities of practice;
- Student Community Engagement (SCE) which introduces experiential learning into the curriculum providing students with a practice based opportunity while making a contribution to a local organisation.

*Helpdesk.* The Helpdesk was part of the original vision of CUPP and was established within a year of the programme's inception. It is a service, an access point and resource offered to those interested in developing community-university partnerships, and it is also a role, undertaking engagement activities and managing supporting processes and development (Hart et al, 2009). As a simple function, it is an entry point for external enquiries from local community/voluntary, statutory and social enterprise organisations who wish to access the resources of the university – whether that be knowledge/expertise, research, funding, staff, students or facilities. However, the variety of enquirers, enquiries, myriad pathways and possible collaborations render its spatial dimensions complex, cutting across the physical, virtual and relational. Universities increasingly have these entry points but the Helpdesk is a particular model and approach to entering into engaged spaces. Its closest equivalents include University of Technology Sydney Shopfront (Australia) and York University Knowledge Mobilisation Service (Canada). The Helpdesk has developed from its early stages as Research Helpdesk, through to its current format as a Community Helpdesk offering 'exchange, collaboration & partnership with staff & students' (CUPP, 2015). Throughout, its operational approach has been driven by CUPP's values: it is responsive to local community need, strives to be accessible to all, guided by community engagement principles and aims for mutual benefit and exchange. This value-led approach influences the engaged spaces the Helpdesk occupies, creates and is associated with. It has a pivotal role in CUPP as the initial broker into engaged spaces and connects enquirers to the other strands of SCE and CKE. Starting with often tentative and messy ideas, the Helpdesk allows for an exploratory space that can be envisaged as a journey that encompasses multiple spatial aspects. The role of the 'third space professional' described by Whitchurch (2008) is useful here in illustrating the role played by the Helpdesk Manager in brokering or mediating projects, supporting and managing the challenges and intricacies of these movements through the physical, virtual and relational. It is this 'third space' that CUPP often find itself occupying.

*Community Knowledge Exchange.* Community Knowledge Exchange (CKE) activities bring together the knowledge of local communities, voluntary organisations, practitioners and university academics to share their different understandings and perspectives on issues of common interest. We do this by focusing on developing and supporting partnership projects and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 2000) between staff, students, and local communities. Working together in this way means contributions can be made to meeting local community needs and bringing real issues into teaching and research.

The principles behind Community Knowledge Exchange include:

- The equal status of different types of knowledge;
- Working together to identify and meet community needs in a sustainable way;
- Addressing inequalities and disadvantage;
- Building enduring relationships between local communities and the university.

By encouraging academics, practitioners, and community members to work together our projects aim to share knowledge in ways that enhance the understanding of each partner and make a positive difference to the areas in which we live and work.

A sample of some of these projects that demonstrate these aims includes a project that used campus green space to develop raised beds for vegetable growing. These beds were shared between staff, students and local residents in high rise flats with no access to a garden. This made the campus a physical space on which to gather and be productive. We have also supported work that has engaged with policy spaces, such as an action research project with Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender & Queer (LGBTQ) people working with public service on better access and provision. And finally, recent work between researchers and practitioners on issues of monitoring & evaluation has developed a growing set of relationships to exchange knowledge on the theory and practice of capturing and using data.

*Student Community Engagement.* Student Community Engagement (SCE) is the term we use in CUPP to denote engaged spaces within curricula that enable students to work on live projects with community partners (Millican and Bourner, 2011). Referred to in the US as 'Service Learning' and in some UK institutions as Community Based Learning we feel the notion of service does not fit well with a UK audience, while community based learning has other meanings for community partners.

SCE for undergraduates generally takes the form of a period of practical work within a community setting carrying out a task designated by a community partner with some form of reflective evaluation submitted for assessment. As such SCE extends the spaces for learning outside of the lecture hall or seminar room to a community setting, in which service users and community partners also have a role as teachers. Taylor and Franssen (2004) describe a shift in educator relationships in which practitioner, student, tutor and community member all become learners, doers and teachers.

A key challenge within SCE comes from the changing cultural practices, dress codes, language, and norms of behaviour that exist within these different spaces, and the ways in which these can be communicated to students in order for them to respond effectively. Different spaces demand different levels of formality and professionalism, will have their own power dynamics and may be perceived differently by different partners. Students who are asked to act as mentors to pupils in secondary schools, for example, can find themselves 'feeling' like children as they return to a school environment, while they are perceived as 'grown ups' by the pupils they work with. At post-graduate level where students are more likely to take on live research projects for a community group, misunderstandings can arise over the nature of research. To a community partner a research project could mean a positive evaluation rather than a piece of critical enquiry, and their time frames for completing these are invariably looser than the tight deadlines of the academic calendar. For 'third space professionals', challenges in brokering SCE projects include

mediating between the different spaces, facilitating a closer understanding of the practices of each partner and managing what are often unrealistic expectations.

## **Theorising Space**

In this section we offer a brief overview of how we have thought about ‘spaces’ in our work to date. Community-university partnerships are spaces of participation and thus we cannot discuss space as a neutral grid on to which such activity takes place (Massey, 1992). Rather we have to be alert to what Cornwall (2002) reminds us, that spaces for participation are not neutral but are shaped themselves by power relations, and that the concept of power and the concept of space are deeply linked. In this section we briefly highlight four ideas that we have drawn out at different times to reflect on the space in which we do our engagement work

*Dimensions of Public Engagement.* Spatial concepts in the community-university engagement literature have not been given a great deal of attention in and of themselves. However, different types of space are implied in the seven ‘dimensions’ of public engagement identified by Hart, Northmore & Gerhardt (2009, 14). The dimensions are:

- Public access to facilities;
- Public access to knowledge;
- Student engagement;
- Faculty engagement;
- Widening participation;
- Encouraging economic regeneration and enterprise in social engagement;
- Institutional relationship and partnership building.

What these suggest are types of activity that relate to different aspects of the functions of a university. These alert us to the possibility that engaged spaces can take different forms. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the dimensions in depth, but we include them here as they help us demarcate the aspects of our CUPP work within this broad field. As third space professionals we are negotiating and supporting activities in all of these different fields. However, within each of them power relationships are at play, and if knowledge is to be brought together on an equal basis an understanding of how power operates differently in different places is important. John Gaventa’s (2005) work on types of participative space is useful in helping to deconstruct this.

*Participative Spaces.* Gaventa is interested in the workings of citizen democracy, the spaces for participation and the inter-relationships of spaces for engagement: “the places and levels where engagement might occur and the forms of power found within and across them” (Gaventa, 2005, 9). He acknowledges the importance of space as a concept in the literature on power, policy, and citizen action, as well as its use to denote institutional channels or political discourse and social and political practices, (which he sees as “*closed spaces*”). He identifies policy spaces (moments and opportunities where citizens and policy makers might come together) as “*invited spaces*,” and those democratic spaces, (where citizens claim citizenship and take direct action) as “*claimed or created spaces*.” He sees spaces as “opportunities, moments and channels where

citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests” (Gaventa, 2005, 11).

Gaventa quotes Cornwall to illustrate how the concept of space and the concept of power are deeply linked. “Space is a social product... it is not simply ‘there’, a neutral container waiting to be filled, but is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (Lefebvre, 1991, 24, in Cornwall, 2002). Within the notion of space or place boundaries also become significant, determining who might enter and participate effectively within these and the social as well as the actual boundaries that delimit action. Gaventa’s “Powercube” suggests that within closed, invited and claimed spaces, a kind of invisible power operates.

Gaventa uses Lukes (1974) to explain these as (a) pluralist, where contests are assumed to be visible and open; (b) hidden, where the views of certain interests and actors are privileged over others; and (c) invisible, where powerlessness is internalised and certain forms and ideologies are taken for granted. Using the model of a Rubik’s cube, his powercube becomes three dimensional, with different forms of space cross cut but different forms of power, which each operate within a third, broader spatial dimension that of the local, global or national sphere.

Gaventa's Powercube provides a framework or a tool for analysis in looking at the workings of power and the spaces for engagement and as such is useful in understanding the dynamics of partnership working. Like any framework, it is not definitive, the categories it cites can be cut differently and the interrelationship between them challenged. Its value is in drawing attention to the spaces in which we might meet, the tensions that exist within the relationships we form and the different spheres within which a unit such as CUPP might operate. It also reminds us that despite our focus on local partnerships, some of our work takes place on a national or global level. If we are concerned to change the culture of universities to facilitate a more effective response to the local environment, we become drawn into national and global debate and capacity building with other institutions. So it is to these spaces too that we have to pay attention. Our ability to influence policy, to change working cultures or to prioritise different forms of knowledge, cannot happen within the locality alone. Networks provide virtual spaces to facilitate national and international co-working. We we can choose to operate within them, but these are also subject to different power dynamics. The spaces in which we arrange our meetings, (community or university based, cafeteria or board room, virtual or involving travel) frame the behaviour that may take place there, and the different forms of power, particularly hidden, or internalised notions of power or powerlessness, can have a profound effect on the ability of different partners to participate. A partnership that brings together different forms of knowledge may be able to blur the boundaries between different spaces, bringing academics into claimed or created spaces, opening up formerly closed spaces to community members or co-creating new spaces where power might operate differently.

*Communities of Practice.* A further way in which the notion of space becomes significant in community-university engagement is through work CUPP and colleagues at the University of Brighton have done in theorising Communities of Practice (CoPs) (See: Hart & Wolff 2006; Hart, Ntung et al., 2011; Hart Davies et al., 2013; Davies, Hart et al., forthcoming). We understand CoPs to be “groups of people informally bound together by shared experience and a

passion for a joint enterprise” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, 139-140). This idea is located in the principle that learning takes place in the context it is applied and that knowledge is a co-constructed social process in cultivating social learning spaces (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Given that our community-university engagement activities happen across different cultural, social, political and knowledge domains, we find CoPs a useful way to reflect on collaborative activity. It is an idea that is able to absorb more than one type of ‘expertise’ and provides physical and virtual spaces that people can come together. The CoP literature draws attention to the different roles individuals might play in such a community at different times, as core or peripheral members as they move in and out of central involvement in the task. It is however the co-location of different practitioners, in physical or virtual space, that enables them to develop a more rounded understanding of an issue of shared concern.

We expand further on how we have put CoPs into practice in the section on ‘Exploring Spaces’ below, however essentially CoPs are concerned with the opening up of shared spaces for learning between individuals with different forms of knowledge. The notion of place making, discussed below, brings together different groups in a shared learning process, but conceptually is more concerned with the way in which individuals might transform their physical environment in ways that are meaningful and democratic.

*Placemaking.* This now-pervasive term encapsulates broad practices relating to how people and communities transform the environments in which they find themselves, into the places in which they live (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995), and is a further useful theoretical perspective on the use of space in community-university partnerships. Johnson (2015, 25) discusses “placemaking as community engagement” where “place is produced through social, and socially contested, processes...is involved in the construction of social meaning and identification, and is part of — and constituted by — social and discursive practices” (Røe, 2014, 501). She highlights how demarcation, the use and separation of spaces for engagement, can mark them out as symbols of struggle for power and resources. She quotes Moore (2013) in stressing how “Place – the geographic, cultural, social, and historic context – matters a great deal...when considering how and with whom a university partners in any type of community development activity” (76).

The University of Brighton has worked with the concept of placemaking to develop mechanisms to encourage people to become active (Martin, 2003) in defining and determining the spaces they live in, using affordances offered by localism agendas and planning systems. Significant changes in planning legislation (NPPF 2000) and continued political devolution initiatives in the UK (DCLG 2011) have sought to involve citizens in shaping the places in which they live, but until recently there have been few tools available to help them do this (Cornwall, 2008; Wates, 2014). There are a number of significant, composite issues facing the resilience and self-sustainability of local communities and the notion of placemaking highlights the importance of linking and connecting the different initiatives taking place in a particular area (Franklin & Marsden, 2015). The intention of these new policy initiatives is to introduce local residents to these issues and encourage them to engage with them in ways that are both locally and globally meaningful (Manzini, 2009).

Community21, <http://community21.org/> is a set of digital and non-digital tools for imagining physical space developed at the University of Brighton using the work of academics, students and the public and community sector. As such it is a real university/community initiative and one example of placemaking in practice. It was built using a constructive design research approach (Koskinen, Zimmerman et al 2011) that situates objects, interfaces and spaces at the forefront of the processes of design research. Working collaboratively on design (Stappers & Saunders, 2008; Yong Park, 2012) with community partners and stakeholders it provided an opportunity to co-create tools for neighborhood planning. Using a loosely based Communities of Practice approach enabled a range of stakeholders to become involved in designing tools and methods and in identifying their own research questions and priorities. The Community21 digital platform is a virtual space which supports communities to engage with their role ‘as the architects and planners of their neighborhoods under localism’ (Gant & Gittins 2010). Core CUPP principles of co-design and co-production enabled the access of locally authenticated knowledge as well as visions and data relating to self-defined concerns. The tools that have been developed can now be made available for use by other activists and stakeholders while the data gathered has been significant in engaging the community (Walters et al., 2011) and supporting self-organisation and networked action (Sawhney, De Klerk & Malhotra, 2015). Although Community21 began as a set of digital tools, useable in a virtual space, this has since evolved into an additional physical, placemaker space which we explore in the case study examples below.

Gaventa’s Powercube, Wenger’s notion of Communities of Practice and these more recent theories of placemaking provide three different ways in which to think about spaces within community-university engagement and the ways in which we work within them. While upholding values of knowledge exchange, co-creation, reciprocity, and mutual benefit, it is important to recognise how the dynamics of power impact on bringing these into being. As third space professionals we often describe ourselves as “boundary spanners” (Wenger, 2000) able to straddle the boundaries of both community and university spaces. However in doing so our work does not stop there. It is also important to ensure that those we are working with are also able to operate on an equal basis within the different spaces in which we choose to meet, are able to understand the significance of closed, invited or claimed spaces, and the dynamics of hidden or invisible power in the relationships we develop together.

The following section looks at how our understanding of the importance of power, places and spaces plays out in three examples of our work.

## **Exploring Spaces**

*The CUPP Helpdesk.* The Helpdesk service deals with around 350 enquiries a year and processes have been developed to meet the volume, diversity and complexity of this need. A snapshot of 2014/15 shows that the majority of enquiries come from community/voluntary/charity sector/ (44 percent), but a significant amount are also from social enterprises (17 percent) and statutory bodies (10 percent). As a catch-all Community Helpdesk, enquiries also come from businesses (9 percent), individuals (13 percent) and internally from academics and staff seeking support around community engagement (7 percent). In terms of operational processes, an enquiry pathway shows how the Helpdesk Manager will take an enquiry through triage, signposting, investigating, brokerage and early partnership development. This could suggest that the

Helpdesk's spatial practice follows a linear and binary conception, whereby a request is responded to by bringing two separate entities into a relationship - a contained solution-focused space (Laing, 2015) . This may occur for simple one-off requests that require signposting or a tangible time-bound conclusion, however the range, diversity and changing nature of enquiries can also move us into multi-dimensional communities of practice that have very different spatial dimensions (*ibid*). A good example of this is an enquiry that came from three closely connected mental health peer support groups who wanted to find an academic who would partner on a funding bid that could help them gain an evidence base for their specific model and practice and ultimately gain future funding. This cut across disciplines of social sciences and health, as well as into an existing social mentoring research network and therefore led to a series of large meetings attended by peer support practitioners and academics interested in mental health/wellbeing, social mentoring, peer support and organisational models. Here three separate enquiries that could each have resulted in single, binary relationships were brought together in one broader community of practice with the potential for a range of different relationships and future research projects.

This example enquiry helps to illustrate the role of the 'third space professional' and the exploratory space opened up and held by the Helpdesk. Ideas for partnership, especially when related to research and knowledge exchange, can be messy, tentative and require interpreting and shaping in relation to the university's offer and resources available. Although, the service aims to be needs-led, interpretation and shaping by the Helpdesk Manager is required and expectations and misperceptions have to be managed. The Helpdesk gives community partners the opportunity and position to ask. However the task is to also get them to think about what they can offer in a mutually beneficial partnership. This all has implications for the power dynamics at play in these brokered spaces. An academic interested in helping an enquirer also has to be supported to think through how this connects and can be embedded into their research and teaching. These are complex process for all to manage and can pose challenges around power, equity and influence as well as practical questions over the available time and resources to be invested. Thus in the above example, the need expressed for evidence to secure funding has not yet been directly met and it has been difficult to identify funding that could satisfy both the community and academic outcomes desired. Within this context, the third space professional attempts to facilitate co-exploration and exchange in ways that can be physical (creating accessible meeting places, sharing useful material resources), virtual (translation of jargon, avoiding miscommunication, starting to structure ideas as well as use of digital communications e.g. Skype meetings) and relational (holding the space and relationships to keep the dialogue going, acting as a go-between). Some of this spatial practice can include "taken for granted" tasks that stem from CUPP's values and community engagement principles and can range from as small as making cups of tea to not assuming any prior knowledge, valuing everyone's contribution and asking facilitative questions in meetings. This spatial practice aims at creating next steps and actions that can sustain the engaged space further into the form of a sustainable community-university partnership.

The engaged space that the Helpdesk holds open reveals interesting spatial issues around time, action and the relational phenomenon of space. As touched on, a Helpdesk enquiry may open up

an engaged space for a specific time-bound purpose. This could be for an event such as academic or student involvement in a one-off conference or the use of a university room/facility to host a community event. Issues over access to university facilities and resources are a good example of how the exploratory nature of the Helpdesk can open up and shape new spaces for engagement. The university's room policy has been shaped in response to the requests that come through therefore in this way, the Helpdesk allows for a question to be asked: can this space be used? Can this part of the university become engaged? One enquirer asked could a social enterprise arm of a local youth charity that employs young apprentices take on painting and decorating contracts in the university; therefore this opened up the area of procurement as a potential engaged space. Or it may be that an initial enquiry changes and transforms over time into a wholly new proposition for collaboration. The spatial aspects of the engaged space created through the enquiry therefore change over this continuum over time. With the latter, the Helpdesk usually holds this relationship with the community partner as different forms of engagement (student/staff volunteering, SCE, research, CKE) and different areas of the university (schools/disciplines, support services) are explored. CUPP has developed good ongoing relationships with the local sector and the majority of enquiries come from existing contacts. These relational spaces are developed and sustained in part through engagement activities undertaken by the Helpdesk development role. These activities include physical presence at community events and celebratory showcase events that bring community and university partners together to better understand what is possible and trigger future possibilities.

#### *On Our Doorsteps, a Seed Fund*

Within the strand of our work that focuses on Community Knowledge Exchange, we have since 2010 been running a small seed fund, which supports the early stages of partnership working between academics and community organisations. The fund was originally known as On Our Doorsteps but was renamed the CUPP Seed Fund in 2015. The programme is based on three main ideas: being a good neighbour; realising the mutual benefit achievable through community-university partnerships; and focusing on activities within the immediate localities of University of Brighton campus buildings. Bids are invited annually from partnerships of university staff and community organisations for a sum of £5000 to fund projects which could meet these aims. The bids are considered against six criteria: the equality of the partnership; the degree of locality; the identification of genuine community need; the realisation of mutual benefit; the likelihood of a longer term partnership being established; and the volunteer opportunities involved. We are currently conducting a study of the 19 projects funded in the years 2010-12 which includes consideration of the significance of the physical locations of the projects and the related issues of the diverse roles of the participants

One of the key defining features of this particular community engagement programme is already implied in its original title, "On Our Doorsteps." More particularly a core aim of the programme is to focus on activities very close to the university campuses. This aim needs a little contextualising. The significance of this is not (as it might at first seem) so much an attempt to overcome any issues of the University of Brighton being an ivory tower or a separate "castle in a swamp" (Watson, 2007) as it is a reflection of the (now relatively unusual in the UK) mixed multi-campus nature of this particular university. Brighton has five campuses spread across three separate coastal urban areas. The campuses are each very differently placed with regard to their physically adjacent communities. In the city of Brighton and Hove there are: a city centre Grand

Parade campus – opposite the Royal Pavilion and at the heart of the city’s cultural quarter; the Moulsecoomb campus set in a mixed residential and light industrial area; and the Falmer greenfield campus on the edge of the city, but close to some of its least affluent areas. In Eastbourne the university buildings are situated in a ribbon cluster among some of the wealthiest residential parts of the town, while in Hastings a new campus is being developed in the very heart of the centre of a town undergoing regeneration. Brighton then is a university very much physically intertwined with a range of diverse residential and commercial communities. On every campus practical issues of getting on with the neighbours on big issues and small ones are therefore the stuff of daily life. The university has very high permeability. The seed funding programme was developed for a university with that particular characteristic.

In practice the potential restriction of the requirement to work in close physical proximity to the university campuses has proved no inhibitor to enabling a wide range of types and subject matter of projects. This may, however, be a different matter if the university was on a single campus or less immediately adjacent to such a considerable diversity of residential and commercial districts. Given the emphasis of the programme on physical proximity to the university campuses and the patterns of housing in the three coastal towns it is also not surprising that in about a third of the projects evaluated, university members involved were also local residents of the streets and districts which were the focus of the projects. This further blurred the distinctions as to what we might otherwise think of in terms of a binary partnership of two separate entities.

Many seed fund projects are concerned with physical proximity and represent permeability between different constituents. We also include here an example of a project which perhaps creates a “third space,” between academics, practitioners and community members this is the Resilience Forum, which had been running on one of our campuses since 2010 and became established in Hastings through a seed funded project in 2014 and is also now run with YoungMinds, a national charity at their London headquarters. Resilience in this context is the idea that people facing adversity can overcome it, whilst also potentially subtly altering, or even dramatically transforming, (aspects of) that adversity. Jointly run by the University of Brighton and a local community interest company BoingBoing (see <http://www.boingboing.org.uk>), Resilience Forums are Communities of Practice (CoPs) that are open to anybody with an interest in resilience research and practice. Forums are free to attend and topics for discussion to date have included child protection, sociological critiques of resilience, hope, inequalities, reoffending, collective resilience and building resilience in practice. The forum is beginning to experiment with online participation and have had people skypeing in. And after each session, forum materials are uploaded on the BoingBoing website ([www.boingboing.org.uk](http://www.boingboing.org.uk)) so that participants who couldn’t be there in person (either in the room or online) can access some of the learning. Sometimes the forums are filmed and then the entire film is uploaded on the BoingBoing website. Twitter feeds, Facebook posts and blogs on the BoingBoing website distribute the learning in these other spaces.

Davies, Hart et al. (forthcoming) give further consideration to how Communities of Practice are a useful approach to community-university activity. They note how CoP theory offers some ideas and a language for trying things out in spaces where people are coming from lots of different backgrounds and experiences. In particular, how knowledge can be co-constructed, questioning

assumptions about what is legitimate knowledge and making us aware of the participative dynamics of the CoP space.

In the Forum in Hastings, the university in partnership with BoingBoing has been a key convener of people and services interested in the idea of resilience, which has included for example, academics, young people, youth offending teams and parent carers. The forums provide a space where different types of people are encouraged to exchange ideas and develop dialogue. On a pragmatic note, the university provision of physical space is a key factor here. Resources and availability in the wider sector are often constrained. CoPs also often include individuals who can span different “worlds”, who are known as boundary spanners (see Wenger 2000). They are those people who can broker and translate across different practice settings. We have previously identified the important role that these boundary spanners have in CoP work (Hart & Wolff 2006; Hart et al. 2013). In a more relational sense, this boundary spanning can also help to challenge notions of who has expertise as it is not always coming from the professional in the room. This is in contrast to other experiences those same individuals may have outside of the CoP space. Davies, Hart et al (forthcoming) highlight that often, parent-carers and young people themselves may also hold expert views on what it means to work with the resilience concept in particular, which they may or may not realize they hold.

As we introduced in the section on theorising space, this for us is an example that gives weight to the view that projects of this kind may be more usefully viewed as constituting a multi-dimensional community of practice. This not only brings together individuals and groups with different interests and skills but which also enables individuals to bring together their own separate roles and identities into a new unity.

### **Imagining the Future and the Place Maker Space Initiative**

In 2013, to mark CUPP’s 10 year anniversary, we initiated a small research project (10 down 10 to go) into the characteristics of the future of community university partnership working. This involved interviews with community partners and community engagement managers and practitioners, a half day symposium with focus groups for students, managers and academics and a literature review that took in a range of future scenario building exercises. The intention was to construct a vision of what community university engagement might look like for a university or community partner on a day in 2023. This could then be used to assess where we have got to, and what else we need to do to take things forward.

Certainly, that vision included an increased use of technology, and a blurring of boundaries between community and university as practitioners played different roles. Still, four out of the five groups we consulted highlighted the importance of physical spaces inside and outside the university to promote exchange. This emphasised the need for flexible spaces that could offer accessible learning “like a public library” or a community café that could be owned by communities and university practitioners alike. People spoke about the need for “Secure spaces,” “Regular days for our neighbours where the university is opened up to the people in our community,” a “Regular festival/conference focused on social justice and which moves between our site towns/cities, developed by an array of community people” (Wolff et al., 2013, 10).

This did not come as a huge surprise. As this article has already illustrated, space has always been a key consideration for CUPP, with constant debate about whether activity should take place inside or outside the institution, should take in claimed or invited spaces, or be a first opportunity to encourage people into our existing campuses (hopefully breaking down barriers for the future). However this study confirmed that space, both physical and “how it feels”, is likely to remain a crucial factor in successful community university partnerships and needs very careful consideration.

Since then, there have been a number of moves to create such a flexible, co-designed space in the different locations within which the university operates. Among these is the Community21 Place-Maker-Space initiative—a physical room, in a central city location, specifically intended to generate collaborative debate and creative interaction between universities, the public and private sector and communities (Farrell Review, 2014). While the specification of such a space is still evolving, it will be used by university academics, students, graduate groups, planning officials, private companies and community members. Along with Community21’s practice based researchers, two new graduate enterprises who are working directly with communities to envision and design specific local environments using different digital tools and gaming software and local planners have already booked a range of consultation activities from this space. As a physical extension of the Community 21 digital website it also forms part of a broader “Maker-Space” movement which offer communal craft and technology workshops which help form social bonds and develop new skills within communities through acts of making (Hatch, 2014; Halse et al., 2010).

Our work on the Community21 digital platform demonstrated the role making can have in engaging different groups and communities (Gant & Duggan, 2013) through the fabrication of tools, objects and products. The Place-Maker-Space provides the physical space and relevant software to enable groups to come together to develop collective visions for places making community and neighbourhood planning a more democratic process (DCLG 2015). As such the university plays a significant role in engaging local communities and helping them to engage with and shape their locality in a way that is both creative and informed. (see Making Futures, 2015). Examples of the methods we have used include:

- The production of augmented reality techno-town-tapestries where “hard-to-reach” or disenfranchised groups can use animation apps to “characterise” problems or ideas in anonymous ways and communicate them back to the community through a publically accessible, intelligent interface;
- Minecraft (a popular computer game) which engages young people in the co-production of highly interactive, ‘gamified’ and realistic virtual simulations of their lived or imagined spaces that can be shared locally or globally (Reckien & Eisenack, 2010);
- Ageing apps and role play apps that visually illustrate someone’s own ageing process to elicit empathy in disconnected community members and enable the making of new maps and plans for greater cohesion.

The Community21 initiative with its digital and physical spaces provides an opportunity to co-define the challenges and concerns for research and practice with different urban and rural communities. From a university perspective, this process is invaluable in helping to ensure the continued relevance of our teaching and research in subjects such as design, planning, urbanism,

social science, geography etc. Moreover it is also helping to redefine these subject areas away from static notions of disciplinary distinction, into inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary engaged activity that involves stakeholders, transcends boundaries and is responsive to changing contexts. Through co-production and co-defined spaces we are able to make meaningful and useful applied place-based interventions, connecting communities (Sawhney et al., 2015) for sustainability and resilience (Manzini, 2015; Horlings, 2015; Frankin & Marsden, 2015). Together they illustrate how virtual and physical spaces both play a role in meaningful engagement.

## **Conclusion**

In more than 10 years of CUPP's work, we have learned to pay attention to the importance of space, virtual, physical and digital. We also ascribe importance to the relational: the way that power operates within different spaces and to the role we play as "third space professionals" or boundary spanners in creating tools and spaces in which collaboration can take place and mediating relationships within them. While we dispute the notion of a binary division between community and university, and recognise that students and academics are also community members, delivering and using community services, we acknowledge that culture and norms operate differently in community and university environments, and each has its jargon and ways of working.

The nature and location of these spaces may vary, depending on the proximity of the campus to the city and the needs of the local area. However our research has indicated that spaces for engagement, both physical and virtual, are important; we need permeable boundaries though which different forms of knowledge might be exchanged (Wolff et al., 2013). We argue that key characteristics for such space centre on three main considerations. These are location, participation and the digital. The first of these relates to whether activity should happen inside or outside of the university. Bringing community members onto campus might be ideal for one event, whilst taking researchers into the community might be a preference for another, while we are looking to develop new permeable spaces no single location is ideal and a variety of spaces may be required to promote participation of variable location and size. In addition to this, each location has symbolic meaning and power implications that need to be acknowledged. A lecture theatre, for example, suggests the primacy of the expert and the relative passivity of the participants and would inhibit any attempt at collaboration or co-design. A university building is an invited space and its relative formality can inhibit the equal involvement of certain participants.

With respect to participation, different engagement techniques are required. The Place Maker space for example, is specifically equipped with a range of hands on tools and software to maximize different learning styles. Designers working across disciplines can help in the creative design of tools for engagement. This also leads us to emphasise the value of co-production in engaged spaces and this this aspiration is often a useful 'test' for accessible such spaces are to those who are normally excluded from the conversation.

Finally, our experiences point to the usefulness and importance of virtual spaces such as social networks, group conferencing, or interactive on line working spaces. We find this diversity offers

invaluable spaces for distance and international working. But the availability of individuals across time zones, connective reliability and people's familiarity with technology all impact on a sense of power and agency. In our experience virtual spaces work best when blended with real meetings in physical spaces in which personal relationships have been allowed to build.

By looking more deeply into theories of power and the interaction between space and power, into learning and the development of learning through Communities of Practice and into placemaking and the tools and processes that enable communities to influence the spaces they live in, we are able to appreciate the complexities of partnership working. This has enhanced our understanding of the spaces in which we work and made us mindful of the need to open up the more formal environments a university traditionally offers if partnership working is to thrive. We feel a key feature of our future work will be to develop new flexible spaces within which Communities of Practice can meet and learn together, in a way that combines the different forms of knowledge that reside in practitioner, academic and local communities. While the advancement and continued use of technology will provide us with more virtual tools and environments within which to collaborate we continue to think that new forms of physical space will also be important.

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