



‘CREATIVE PLACEMAKING’: The Role of Creative Arts in Place

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dumfries and Galloway works in a collaborative place-based way with its local communities and partners. The creative sector, led by [The Stove Network](#) (an award-winning arts and community project based in the heart of Dumfries High Street) is a key partner in linking the work of creative practitioners with the region's local partners and communities. The Stove has received national and international recognition for their unique place-based arts projects that utilise creativity, resourcefulness, and imagination as tools in transforming the look and feel of local communities. The Stove refers to their work towards this goal under the banner of 'Creative Placemaking.'

In 2021, The Stove launched '[What We Do Now](#)' (WWDN), a participatory arts project which the [Culture Collective](#) calls a 'pioneering experiment in 'Creative Placemaking.'" WWDN, funded by Scottish Government emergency COVID-19 funds through [Creative Scotland](#), supported creative freelancers/artists to work in five towns across Dumfries and Galloway to co-create new projects which promote economic wellbeing, social enterprise, and community development.

'Creative Placemaking' is a different way of working with communities. It is an approach that breaks away from traditional top-down engagement methods. It puts the community at the centre of the planning process and ensures they are the driving force behind it. It does not always have a set final goal or ambition allowing the community to shape it and mold it as it progresses. 'Creative Placemaking', through its combination of artistic workshops and consultation, encourages participation by appealing to people's interests and curiosity. Such workshops and sessions help to stimulate ambitious ideas and ultimately led to the transformation of underused community spaces into imaginative and vibrant spaces to be shared and enjoyed by all. But above all, 'Creative Placemaking' empowers those involved in the process, enabling each individual to release their inner community activist.



The Place Planning Partnership, a subgroup of Dumfries & Galloway's Community Planning Partnership Board, is working with WWDN and The Stove Network to better understand the 'Creative Placemaking' approach. This research project was designed collaboratively with The Stove Network to explore current views on 'Creative Placemaking' from a variety of stakeholder perspectives and through extrapolation to lay out a series of recommendations as to how local authorities, place partners and creatives can work together to contribute to community-led place planning.

The conclusions drawn, informed primarily through an evaluation of the WWDN project, represent the views of Caitlin Wallace, the author, in consultation with the participants in the study, Dumfries & Galloway Council and The Stove Network.



INTRODUCTION

Place is both a physical location and a social construct. While referring to a particular space or area of ground, it can also relate to network of people tied together by a sense of identity or belonging, otherwise known as a community.

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on place in Scottish Government policy and an emphasis on giving the power back to the communities who inhabit these places.¹ The legislative framework supporting this movement is the [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act \(2015\)](#). The Act, designed to help communities to do more for themselves and to have more say in decisions that affect them, has significantly increased the focus into collaborative place-based working and firmly placed it on the national agenda.

The overarching context for this place-based working in Scotland is defined by [The Place Principle](#), adopted by the Scottish Government in 2019. The Place Principle, a formal commitment to support place-based working, recognises that ‘places are shaped by the way resources, services and assets are directed and used by the people who live in and invest in them’, finding that a ‘more joined-up, collaborative, and participative approach to services[...]enables better outcomes for everyone and increased opportunities for people and communities to shape their own lives.’ The Act concludes that, in order to ‘create more successful places,’ ‘all those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in a place need to work and plan together,’ with local communities at the heart of the decision-making process.

[Local Place Plans](#) reflect the Scottish Government’s policy intent, underpinned by the [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#). Local Place Plans give communities the opportunity to come together to shape the look and feel of the places where they live and the right to have these plans registered by the local authority for consideration within Local Development Plans. They are a place-based, community-led, and collaborative approach to planning.

Dumfries and Galloway works in a collaborative place-based way with its local communities and partners. This is particularly evident in the growing number and prominence of community-

¹ See a summary of this [here](#).

centred arts initiatives and projects underway in our region. An anchor organisation in this movement has been [The Stove Network](#), an artist led community hub and Development Trust in Dumfries. The Stove has received national and international recognition for their unique place-based arts projects that utilise creativity as a tool for transforming communities and places. These types of community-based arts projects are praised in The Scottish Government's '[A Cultural Strategy for Scotland](#)'. Outlining a vision for Scotland's cultural future, the strategy recognises the intrinsic value of culture 'to inspire, enrich and transform people's lives, our communities and the places where we live, work and have fun.' In March 2022, Dumfries & Galloway Council's Communities Committee agreed the publication of [a Cultural Strategy for Dumfries and Galloway 2022-2030](#) which echoes this vision. Created through a collaboration between the Council and its partners, the strategy seeks 'to create a region where doors are open, barriers are removed and there's a clear pathway for creative, cultural and heritage sector to grow, develop and help make our region a better place to live, work, or visit.'

In their 2020 [Embers Report](#) led by Katharine Wheeler, The Stove Network refers to this culture-led work with communities as 'Creative Placemaking.' Though a relatively new term at the time of the report's publication, The Stove felt the term was a fitting label for the wide spread of place-based, creative activities underway in Dumfries and Galloway with a recent [South of Scotland Enterprise report](#) identifying 'Creative Placemaking' to be a priority and a future opportunity to grow and support the creative sector within the South of Scotland. Wheeler, one of the core team members of The Stove Network and a socially engaged artist in her own right, has played a role in a number of these community-focused participatory arts projects in the last 3 years. Through reflecting upon her own experiences and in conversation with similarly engaged community organisations, Wheeler sought to define the concept:

'Effective Creative Placemaking engages communities at grassroots level, building on the existing culture, activity, and relationships in each place. It brings people, communities, groups, and organisations, public and third sector agencies and supporting bodies together to co-develop better strategies for our places. It is a collaborative framework that allows communities to take a lead role in local planning, design of services and local polices.'

Building on the momentum of the Embers Report, The Stove Network launched the '[What We Do Now](#)' (WWDN) project coordinated by Wheeler. WWDN is one of 26 regional projects within the Culture Collective, a programme funded by Scottish Government emergency COVID-19

funds coordinated by [Creative Scotland](#). WWDN supports Scottish-based creative freelancers/artists, both established and emerging, to work with communities in the region to co-create new projects which promote economic wellbeing, social enterprise, and community development. Each practitioner is hosted by a community anchor group, referred to by the Stove Network as a Place Hub, to support and facilitate their work in each place:

- ❖ [‘The Millennium Centre’](#) in Stranraer
- ❖ [‘LIFT’](#) in Northwest Dumfries
- ❖ [‘A’ The Airts’](#) in Sanquhar
- ❖ [‘Castle Douglas Development Forum’](#) in Castle Douglas; and
- ❖ [‘Outpost Arts’](#) in Langholm

The Place Planning Partnership, a subgroup of Dumfries & Galloway’s Community Planning Partnership Board, is working with WWDN and The Stove Network to better understand this ‘Creative Placemaking’ approach. This research project was designed collaboratively with The Stove Network to explore current views on ‘Creative Placemaking’ from a variety of stakeholder perspectives and through extrapolation to lay out a series of recommendations as to how local authorities, place partners and creatives can work together to contribute to community-led place planning.

This report is split into two halves. The first half of the research projects sets out to establish what ‘Creative Placemaking’ is and who can do it, with the conclusions based on the views and experiences of creatives, local authority representatives and place partners with a stake in ‘Creative Placemaking’. The second half provides a case study of WWDN, looking into the strengths of the project as identified by the creatives working within the communities, community workers facilitating the project and local authority representatives based in each of the areas. As WWDN progresses to its second stage, this report suggests areas for development going forward, including laying out a series of recommendations for how local authorities and creatives can continue to work together and contribute to community-led planning and development.

SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY

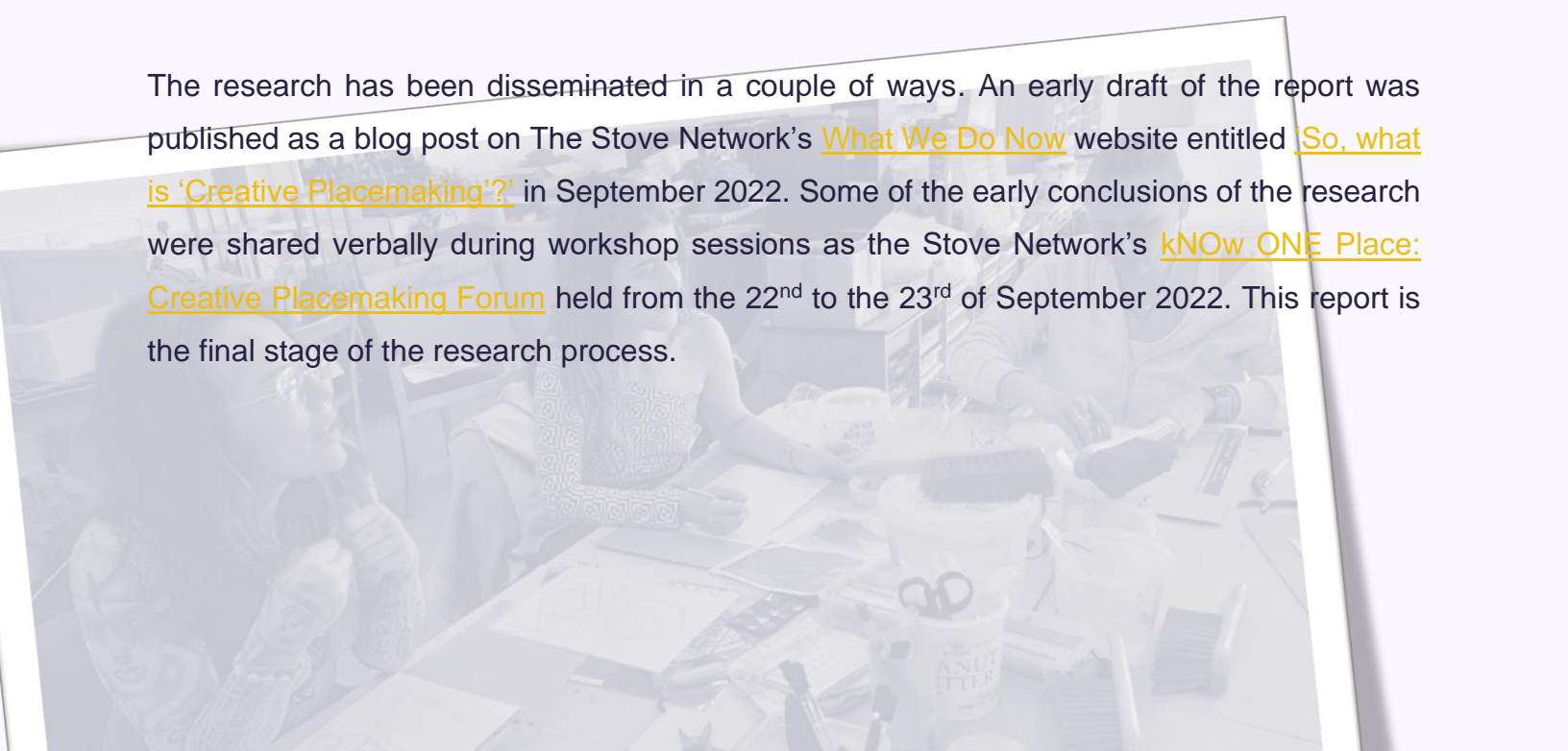
This research project has been developed through a partnership between Dumfries & Galloway Council, The Place Planning Partnership and The Stove Network.

The conclusions drawn, informed primarily through an evaluation of the WWDN project, represent the views of Caitlin Wallace, the author, in consultation with the participants in the study, Dumfries & Galloway Council and The Stove Network.

The initial research stage involved identifying key contacts with experience of community-led regeneration and a specific interest in WWDN including, creative practitioners, community workers and local authority workers. Participants were invited to an approximate 1 hour-long interview where they addressed a series of free-flowing questions exploring what creative placemaking means to them and their experience of community-led cultural regeneration. Interviews were designed to be conversational and informal. 16 interviews were conducted in total and 17 people participated in these discussions.

The emerging thinking drawn from these interviews was shared and discussed with colleagues supporting the research; Dumfries & Galloway Council's Community Development and Empowerment Manager and The Stove Network's Katharine Wheeler (Partnership and Project Development) and Matt Baker (Orchestrator). Their thoughts and views also informed the angle and direction of the research as it was developing.

The research has been disseminated in a couple of ways. An early draft of the report was published as a blog post on The Stove Network's [What We Do Now](#) website entitled [So, what is 'Creative Placemaking'?](#) in September 2022. Some of the early conclusions of the research were shared verbally during workshop sessions as the Stove Network's [kNOw ONE Place: Creative Placemaking Forum](#) held from the 22nd to the 23rd of September 2022. This report is the final stage of the research process.



‘CREATIVE PLACEMAKING’: WHAT IS IT AND WHO CAN DO IT?

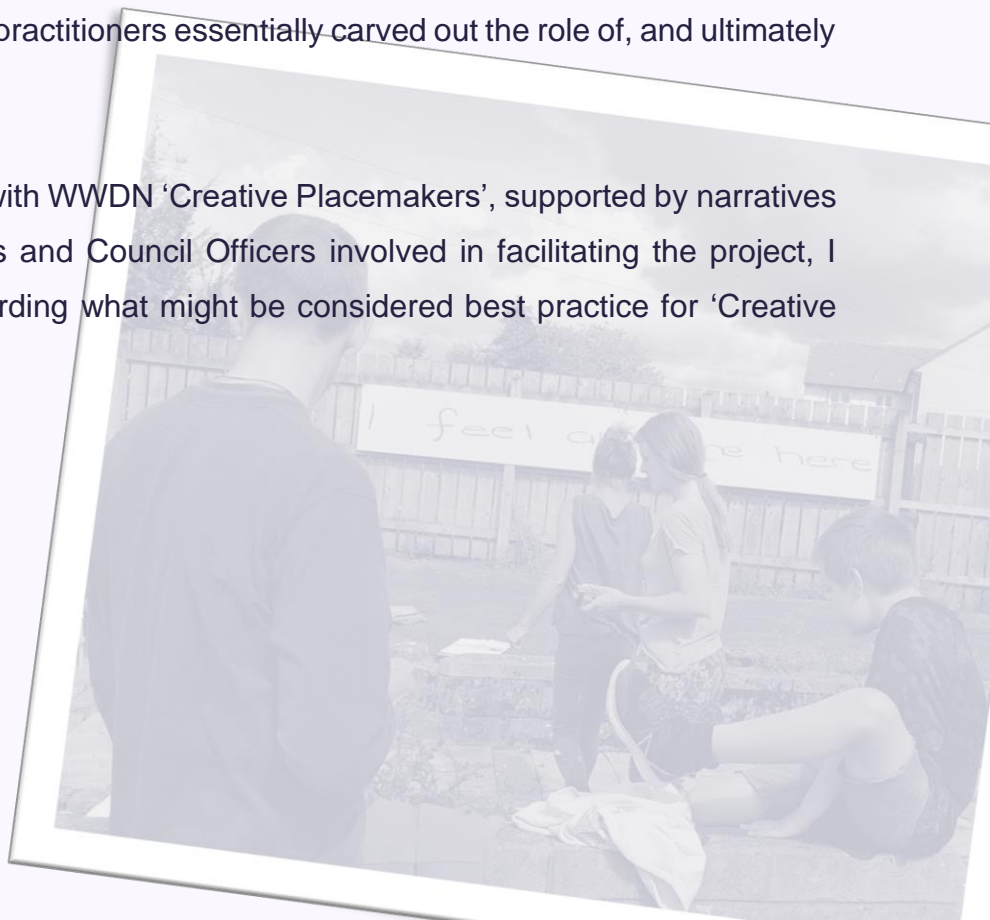
So, what is ‘Creative Placemaking’?

Before I attempt to lay out my recommendations as to how local authorities, place partners and creatives can work together to contribute to community-led planning and development in Dumfries and Galloway, it is first important to establish what we mean when we use the term ‘Creative Placemaking’.

‘Creative Placemaking’ is something of a ‘fuzzy concept’ with variable definitions. While elements of it may be recognisable to many through their previous community engagement and development work, the term itself is relatively new. Reading it literally, you may glean that it involves the participation of a person whose job involves creative work or, more plainly speaking, the involvement of an artist. Unfortunately, due to ‘Creative Placemaking’ being a recent phenomenon, there is a lack of established artists working under the title of ‘Creative Placemakers’ to consult on the topic.

The Stove Network, through the WWDN, supported artists and creative practitioners to work with communities in 5 settlements in Dumfries & Galloway to explore new possibilities for their places and to establish practical projects in their neighbourhoods. Though not self-identifying as such, these artists and creative practitioners essentially carved out the role of, and ultimately became, ‘Creative Placemakers’.

Extrapolating from conversations with WWDN ‘Creative Placemakers’, supported by narratives gathered from community workers and Council Officers involved in facilitating the project, I came to several conclusions regarding what might be considered best practice for ‘Creative Placemaking’...



CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IS...

❖ COMMUNITY-LED

In each conversation, interviewees stressed that it was crucial for the local community to be at the centre of 'Creative Placemaking'. Though artists can emerge themselves in an unfamiliar community by spending time in the space and chatting with the local people, interviewees explained that it is ultimately 'their place, not my place,' adding 'they know it, they're experts.' Therefore, when it comes to any kind of placemaking, 'creative' or otherwise, for a community to believe in and invest in a project, it must reflect each community's individual needs and aspirations. The role of the artist is to creatively facilitate to enable the wider community to lead the charge.

❖ REACTIVE AND RESPONSIVE

'It's very process-led when you're working with the community,' a participant told me, 'you have to react to things and respond to things a lot as well as be proactive.' 'Creative Placemaking' is adaptable and flexible, whether this is through holding events outside of traditional working hours, changing venues so that it is somewhere accessible via public transport or by completely refiguring the focus of the project after a conversation with the community. Instead of working towards a pre-established end goal or brief, 'Creative Placemaking' reacts and responds to the voices of the community. It is much more fluid in its ambitions than traditional community projects.

❖ ENGAGING

'Creative Placemaking' differs from standard methods of engagement. Though online and paper surveys can be an effective means of engagement, they can often be dull and uninspiring. Though drop-in sessions can be a good way to engage people face-to-face, some people find such events to be intimidating. 'Creative Placemaking' brings fun into community engagement, breaking down barriers and drawing people in with arty activities like printing workshops, ceramic classes, and photography lessons. One artist explained how these workshops/classes act as 'icebreakers' in order to give the community an opportunity 'to interact and meet you.'

❖ AMBITIOUS

‘Creative Placemaking’ is an ambitious way of thinking. It encourages people to look beyond what is in front of them and to seek out possibilities for change in their community. One community worker voiced how in a small town oftentimes the overall vision can be much smaller in its goals. They went on to explain how an external influence can bring a new perspective to a community and help them ‘to see what is possible.’ Artists play a key role in this process, using their experience, creativity and expertise to encourage communities to be ambitious in their future plans and goals for their place.

❖ TRANSFORMATIVE

A good ‘Creative Placemaking’ project should drive lasting change in the community, whether this be physical change through creating new community spaces or social change by growing capacity within the community through the teaching and passing on of valuable skills. Though it is difficult to say what lasting influence WWDN has had on the 5 places at this early stage, one artist explained how even over the past couple of months, they have ‘seen significant changes in the lives and the outputs’ of the young people they are supporting: ‘there were individuals who came to us with no confidence whatsoever’ and now they are applying to Universities and Colleges with ambitions to become creative professionals.

❖ IMAGINATIVE

Oftentimes, when ‘placemaking’, a barrier will come up that might prevent the intended change from happening. Instead of accepting this, ‘Creative Placemaking’ encourages communities to think outside of the box and explore alternative possibilities. A community worker explained to me how, when faced with an obstacle or a barrier, people in their community are now asking ‘how do we get past this?’ and are looking for creative solutions in partnership with the artists working in their place.

‘so, if we can’t do that...what if we do this?’

❖ VIBRANT

Unexciting and dull spaces can be brought to life through 'Creative Placemaking'. With a bit of imagination, ordinary places can be transformed into an exciting and vibrant community spaces: a field can become an outdoor cinema, a shipping container can become an arts centre, or an old warehouse can become an indoor playground. A good 'Creative Placemaking' project should combine the culture and history of a place with the wants and needs of the local community to make, transform, or improve an underutilised space into something that people want to use.

❖ EMPOWERING

A community worker voiced how the 'Creative Placemakers' in their community have 'provoked the inner activist in people.' The local people are beginning to see the effects of the 'Creative Placemaking' project and are motivated and excited to continue working and co-creating with the artists. The community feels empowered to promote and drive the changes happening in their place.

And so, to answer what is 'Creative Placemaking'...?'

The eagle-eyed among you might have realised that the first letters of each of the 8 good practice examples spell out the word 'CREATIVE'. This is perhaps a somewhat obvious conclusion, but an important one, nonetheless. 'Creative Placemaking' is designed to be 'creative'. It's a different way of working with communities, an approach that goes against the status quo and breaks away from traditional top-down engagement methods. With 'Creative Placemaking', it is the community who are at the centre of the process and the driving force behind it. It doesn't have a set final goal or ambition and is instead shaped by the community as the project progresses. People are more engaged through 'Creative Placemaking' with its clever combination of fun workshops and consultation. Such sessions stimulate ambitious ideas in community members, transforming boring, underused community spaces into imaginative and vibrant spaces to be shared and enjoyed by everyone. But above all, 'Creative Placemaking' empowers those involved, releasing the inner activist within each individual.

WHO CAN DO 'CREATIVE PLACEMAKING'?

What is a 'Creative Placemaker'? Do they have to identify as a 'creative' or an 'artist'? What sort of skill set should they have? Do they need any formal qualifications? Is there even a degree in 'Creative Placemaking'?

What I've learned throughout the course of my research is that simply working under the title of 'artist' does not qualify someone to be a 'Creative Placemaker'... nor is being an artist even part of the necessary criteria. A 'Creative Placemaker requires a particular skill set. The term artist is too generic,' explained one interviewee, it 'covers everything from a still life painter through to people that are very socially engaged'. Thus, according to this line of thought, a social worker could be a 'Creative Placemaker', a planner could be a 'Creative Placemaker' or a teacher could be a 'Creative Placemaker'. The definition extends much wider than simply artists and creative practitioners, encompassing all those who are working or volunteering with a community to create lasting change in their place.

Is it important for a 'Creative Placemaker' to be local to the area they are working in? Before embarking on this research, I thought the answer to this question was obvious as surely the ideal would be for a local person to be driving community regeneration because they know their community the best. Though it might not always be possible to hire a local artist due to a lack of capacity or specific skills in a community, it is surely best to look inward prior to opening a 'Creative Placemaking' opportunity to external applications. However, through conversations with the interviewees, my point of view on this question has changed drastically. It is by no means essential to be local to the area you are working in, in fact...shock horror...it might be better to be a total outsider.

Why is this, you might ask? Well, while many interviewees noted that while it was important to have some awareness of a community prior to getting to work, all agreed that knowledge about an area can be learned on the job and through research and conversation.

'if someone is local, they will have more local knowledge, but knowledge can be learned'

Interviewees recommended desk-based research to be a good method for ‘Creative Placemakers’ who are unfamiliar with an area to understand the wider issues affecting the community. Then to build on this statistical snapshot of the community, they advised that ‘Creative Placemakers’ should go out into the community and get to know the locals.

In this circumstance, it was noted that a ‘Creative Placemaker’ is entering a community as a sort of blank canvas. In having no previous knowledge or experience of a place, a ‘Creative Placemaker’ is enabled to work in a community without being clouded by previously established views and ideas. Instead, an external ‘Creative Placemaker’ can come in with fresh eyes and open ears – a quality that participants regarded as being particularly important.

It is important to note that fully understanding a community will take a considerable amount of time. Most participants agreed that it can take multiple years to truly know a place and even then, there will still be more to learn! Hence, an external or non-local ‘Creative Placemaker’ cannot expect to just go into a community, quickly do a piece of work, and then move on. A ‘Creative Placemaker’ must first spend time building relationships with local people to show the community they are committed to the placemaking process.

‘For me, I don’t suppose it matters where they came from as long as they can develop a rapport with the local community and work with them.’

However, while non-local artists may need to spend time getting to know an area which can eat into limited project time, local artists have the advantage of already being established in the community. A local artist has lived experience of that community and can draw on this knowledge to help inform and drive their project. Similarly, due to their community links and established networks, local artists tend to move quicker with projects, knowing the right people to contact for advice, resources, space, etc.

‘A local artist is able to quickly join up the dots between different people and different opportunities.’

Participants noted, however, that working in your home community might prove to be a challenge for some. A community may have pre-formed opinions of said artist that could affect

their ability to complete their project successfully. A positive community view of a local artist may prove to be advantageous while a negative view might result in difficulties for said artist in working with certain groups.

And so, to sum up...

A 'Creative Placemaker' is not a role exclusive to creative professionals, but rather a title reserved for those looking to make a lasting impact on a community. Neither do 'Creative Placemakers' have to be a member of the community they are working in. Though in certain circumstances, it may prove useful to have experience of living and working in that community, knowledge can ultimately be learned, and local connections can be made. Interviewees agreed with these conclusions, finding 'Creative Placemaking' to be a wide topic, encompassing a variety of different styles community work, including artist-led community development. Likewise, interviewees did not rate the locality of a 'Creative Placemaker' as being particularly important for working with communities. Instead, interviewees determined that the following characteristics were integral to achieving success in 'creative placemaking' no matter what your profession or background:

❖ A 'Creative Placemaker' is down to earth

Though artists have proven to do fantastic things for society, there are several negative stereotypes that they struggle to shake off. The portrayal of artists in the media is not always favourable, reflecting preconceived ideas of artists as upper-class perfectionists who live in a dream world. Therefore, the first step to 'Creative Placemaking' is to change perspectives through connecting with people. As one artist explained, 'sometimes using terms like 'art' and 'artist' puts people off immediately' and when you are working on the ground, it is best to 'stay clear of that sort of language'. Instead, a 'Creative Placemaker' should bring people in through discussion and conversation, drawing them in through common interests and passions.

❖ A 'Creative Placemaker' is inclusive

A community is made of many different types of people. A 'Creative Placemaker' must adapt their methods to engage the young the old and everyone in between. As previously established, 'Creative Placemakers' must be flexible in when they work, where they work and even how

they work. As such, it is essential for a 'Creative Placemaker' to adapt their approaches and methods to fit the group or community they are working with.

❖ **A 'Creative Placemaker' is open and transparent**

A community might question the purpose or motivation of the 'Creative Placemaker' working in their place. To avoid getting off on the wrong foot with a community, a 'Creative Placemaker' must be honest and transparent through each stage of the process. This could look like keeping open channels of communication with community using social media or newsletter updates, by putting notices up in public buildings or simply by going around door to door and letting people know what is going on and how they can get involved.

❖ **A 'Creative Placemaker' is realistic**

Though 'Creative Placemaking' encourages wild and creative ideas, it is important for 'Creative Placemakers' to manage the expectations of the community. A good 'Creative Placemaker' is realistic about what they are able to achieve within the time frame set and in what they can achieve with their skills and capacity. Oftentimes, 'Creative Placemaking' projects are set to a tight contract/schedule and 'Creative Placemakers' have a finite number of days to achieve their ambition. As a result, the projects cannot always be dramatic as initially hoped. Instead, it is essential to take a long-term view and recognise that change will not happen overnight.

❖ **A 'Creative Placemaker' is inspiring**

A 'Creative Placemaker' does not have to have all the answers nor do they have to single-handedly solve unemployment, crime, anti-social behaviour, or world peace! Instead, a 'Creative Placemaker' is able to stimulate conversations and to inspire people to think about the challenges facing their community and how they can collectively solve them.

❖ **A 'Creative Placemaker' is trusted**

To be successful in a community, a 'Creative Placemaker' must have the buy in and trust of the local people. It was noted by interviewees that gaining the trust of a community can take a considerable amount of time. Communities may have had previous negative experiences of artists being 'parachuted' in, engaging with the community, and then moving onto the next

project before any real change happens. A 'Creative Placemaker' needs to be prepared to spend time building up a relationship with the community and must be careful not to lose this trust.

❖ **A 'Creative Placemaker' is collaborative**

'Creative Placemaking' is ultimately co-creation with the aim of change and, as a result, a 'Creative Placemaker' recognises that limitations of working in isolation. Interviewees advocated for a cross-disciplined approach, with partners from the public and private sector, community groups, arts organisations, local schools, etc. all coming together to support and share resources to enable 'Creative Placemaking' to happen.

❖ **A 'Creative Placemaker' is present**

To establish trust with and gain the confidence of the community, a good 'Creative Placemaker' will make themselves a consistent presence in the community. They should endeavour to become a friendly face that people that local people will recognise and feel comfortable to come to with their thoughts and ideas.



CASE STUDY – THE STOVE NETWORK’S ‘WHAT WE DO NOW’ PROJECT

‘What We Do Now’ (WWDN) is a pilot project in ‘Creative Placemaking’ led by the Stove Network in partnership with creative practitioners, communities and organisations from across Dumfries and Galloway. WWDN is one of 26 regional projects within the Scottish Government’s Culture Collective programme, co-ordinated by Creative Scotland. Acting as an ‘anchor organisation’, the Stove Network supported five ‘Place Hubs’ across the region;

- ❖ [‘The Millennium Centre’](#) in Stranraer
- ❖ [‘LIFT’](#) in Northwest Dumfries
- ❖ [‘A’ The Airts’](#) in Sanquhar
- ❖ [‘Castle Douglas Development Forum’](#) in Castle Douglas; and
- ❖ [‘Outpost Arts’](#) in Langholm

to employ both established and emerging creative freelancers to work in the five communities for 18-months to co-create and develop long-term social art projects with local people. Each ‘Place Hub’ also had a dedicated ‘Place Lead’ whose role was to act as a bridge between the artists and the community. Throughout this time, the creative practitioners used a diverse range of media and methods to engage people in conversations, including, photography classes, willow-weaving workshops, acting, stain glass window making and juggling.

The artists came from a variety of creative backgrounds. Some fresh out of university and keen to put their newfound knowledge into practice, and others working for years as teachers, architects, photographers, and filmmakers. With such a wide spread of creative backgrounds, the artists each had varying levels of experience with community-engaged art. To address this disparity, The Stove Network ran a 6-week training programme for the artists. The quality of the training received was said to be ‘very good’, however, it was noted by some that the transition from ‘theory to practice’ of ‘creative placemaking’ was ‘difficult’ and, at times, they were left feeling a bit ‘lost’:

‘At the beginning, I really didn’t know what to expect and for the first few months, I was almost lost by what is actually happening apart from meetings with people I already know and theoretical discussions. Making that transition from theory to something actually happening that was a kind of challenging period but after three or four months, I could start to understand the picture starting to focus a bit and see where it could be going’

For a few artists, WWDN was a ‘completely different’ way of working than they were used to. While conventional artist commissions tend to see creatives ‘coming in, making something and then going away’, ‘Creative Placemaking’ ‘involves the community in a genuine way’ and this takes a considerable amount of ‘time to build up’. Many felt the 18-month contract to be too short, finding it to be enough time to embed themselves within the community but too little to make real lasting physical changes to the place. Time taken up by essential paperwork for monitoring and administration purposes also ate into project time and some artists felt this inhibited them by limiting their ability to have ‘face to face interactions on the ground.’

‘It takes time to build up. It couldn’t have been done any other way. Which is why we didn’t want it to stop after a year’

Initially, some artists found it difficult to engage with the people within the communities they were working in. It was speculated that this could be due to a variety of factors, particularly pre-conceived ideas of what an artist is and the stereotypes that come with that. To change this perspective, several of the artists chose to present themselves according to their skillset, opting to use titles like photographers or filmmakers as opposed to artists. The role of the Place Lead was found to be ‘key’ in breaking down barriers between the artists and the community. As one community explained, ‘you’ve got to have embedded people in your community to bring these [artists] in. People trust us and trust what we are doing. When we were introducing the artists, people were like it is only because you are saying that the artists are okay that we are going to talk to them.’

‘That first pop-up event the artists had...nobody was coming near them, we had to bring people in. They thought they were coming to an arty farty thing.’

Other factors which participants felt effected participation and engagement levels were post-COVID related fears of large groups coming together, emotional barriers such as shyness or anxiety, perceived class barriers and the notion that ‘this stuff isn’t for me.’

Once embedded within the communities, many of the artists built strong bonds with local people. Most artists began the process as external figures but, by the end of the project, had earned the status of mentors and even as friends to the community. Due to these positive relationships built, a few of the artists found themselves in high demand for additional

opportunities within the community outside of the initial brief but had to turn these down due to limited capacity and time.

'We are adults sharing skills with them, in a different way to a teacher. It is different to a classroom, there is more freedom and any artwork they do is rewarded and encouraged and seen as important.'

Young people in particular benefited from the presence of the artists. The creative practitioners, acting more as mentors/friends as opposed to teachers or authority figures, created safe spaces for young people to creatively experiment while guiding and supporting them to reach their full potential. Though mainly working with small groups of around 4-8 young people, the artists emphasised that 'it is really about the quality of their experience rather than the number we are getting through the door.' Many commented on how young people came to the workshops lacking confidence in themselves and their own ability and, by the end of the project, had found a newfound spirit and passion. Some local young people also gained paid employment opportunities with the artists, assisting with the running of workshops and events.

'We have seen the significant changes in the lives and the outputs of these young people, and I think it is about seeing a total transformation and changing the trajectory of someone's life' 'it's brilliant that our project has given some young people a safe creative space and built links across the queer community'

Many artists felt it was important to incorporate the local culture and heritage of the communities into their placemaking work. This was done through a variety of methods. For example, through using the community's culture as a project stimulus, utilising the place's natural, readily available resources, and gathering the views and voices of local people through audio and video recordings. Some invited local artists/creatives to hold workshop sessions further linking their placemaking work with local culture.

Several found creative placemaking to be a more adaptive/flexible approach to working with communities than traditional fixed engagement activities such as online questionnaires or paper surveys. Instead of a 'one size fits all' approach, consultation activities and events were tailored to attract specific age brackets or groups of people. Participants noted that who you want to engage with may not have the ability to 'verbalise something' or 'they might have no

capacity to fill out a form or go online.’ The very design of ‘Creative Placemaking’ creates more accessible opportunities for people to get involved.

Activities the artists used as part of their consultation process included leading photography workshops to encourage the community to show their place through their eyes, creating screen printed self-portraits of community members and co-creating music to capture the feeling of the place. This was found to be more laid back and friendly approach to engagement than traditional methods with many participants agreeing that the responses gathered were more useful and insightful.

‘I think the positive thing about this approach is that it makes us question traditional ways of doing things and it lets us come up with much more creative ways of engaging with people in a way that they feel more comfortable with.’

As of August 2022, the first phase of the WWDN project was officially completed. Many of the artists, however, have expressed a strong desire to continue with the project as it enters its second stage.

Shortly following the completion of this initial stage, Jenny Elliott, Urban Designer (CMLI) and Visual Communication and Shawn Bodden, Geographer and Evaluation Researcher, published a report entitled: *The What We Do Now – Evaluation Snapshot Sept. 2022*. The report highlights the key findings from the first 15 months of the project and gives a more in-depth look at the work of the artists in each of the communities. The report is available to access [here](#)..

EVALUATION OF 'WHAT WE DO NOW'

Strengths

- *Increases access to arts opportunities in rural areas*

Though Dumfries, specifically the town centre, offers a range of educational and work-based creative opportunities, many of the more rural-based communities in our region find these difficult to access. This is largely due to a lack of accessible transport and costs associated with travelling long distances.

The five towns chosen for WWDN were evenly spread throughout the region, with the artists being based in 'Place Hubs', arts organisations, and centres, well known to the community. These 'Place Hubs' were within walking distance of the groups the artists were working with. The WWDN artists each had a unique skillset which they were able to share with their respective communities through workshops and classes. These activities in mediums from portrait drawing to stain glass making were provided free of charge allowing all members of the community to participate.

- *Encourages participation and engagement*

Though some of the artists initially had trouble connecting with and bringing people in to engage with their activities, human curiosity ultimately won out. Locals were drawn in by the artists, intrigued by curiosities such as a large circus looking tent or the promise of free cake.

'What are you doing? Why are you doing that? What do you want?'

Such informal and exciting settings created an inquisitive but relaxing atmosphere where participants felt they were able to openly share their thoughts. Artists also reported that conversations with the community 'improved' over the course of WWDN as discussions about how they felt about their place became 'deeper.'

- *Builds confidence and skills in community*

The WWDN pilot was designed to encourage skill building and to increase capacity within the 5 communities it was based. Despite the short-term nature of the project, visible progress has been made towards this goal.

Artists worked with members of the community to develop their employability skills, providing opportunities for skill building and paid work experience.

‘The skills that they are getting and the confidence they are gaining will elevate them and their contribution to that community.’

The artists have also had an empowering impact on the communities they are working with. Place Hub Leads noted how local people have been invigorated by the artists, actively seeking out ways to participate in community regeneration projects and to work together to overcome any barriers that might come up.

- *Can be adapted to fit community*

One of the greatest benefits of the ‘creative placemaking’ approach is the ability to quickly adapt and change the methodology based on needs and responses of the community. Many of the WWDN artists explained how they let the community drive the direction of the project, shifting and re-working their initial ideas to match the interests of local people.

‘[‘Creative Placemaking’] removes us from having a standard way of doing things, it means you can adapt the approach to the particular community that you are working with’



Areas for Development:

The following lists several potential areas for development with the project that were stressed during conversations with the creative practitioners, community workers and Council Officers:

- *Length of contract*

A particular challenge experienced by most of the creative practitioners was the short-term nature of the contract. As previously established, 'Creative Placemaking' is a gradual process. Relationships and trust take time to build up and transformation does not happen overnight. Originally contracted to 18 months, the artists felt this short period of time inhibited their ability to plan for the long-term and forced them to refocus their ambitions to complete what was achievable in the time frame.

- *Confidence of funding*

The WWDN project, alongside 25 other participatory arts projects, was made possible through Scottish Government's emergency COVID-19 funds. These projects were limited to a set timescale, however, and ongoing financial support was not guaranteed.

'It is very easy to gloss over the question of funding, but it is fundamental to us being able to do this stuff because we cannot expect our local artists and creatives to do this for nothing...I wouldn't do what I do voluntarily so why should we expect someone else to do that?'

With the ambitious nature of the projects, the defined end point, and the uncertainty of extension, the confidence of funding would have given the creative practitioners more scope to try things out i.e., to explore different methods of engagement, to interact with an additional sector of the community, etc.

'The regularity of funding means you can plan ahead for the future, so you don't just get it on a yearly basis. If you know you have a long-term plan that would be great and creative people could make use of that, plan ahead, and do even better things.'

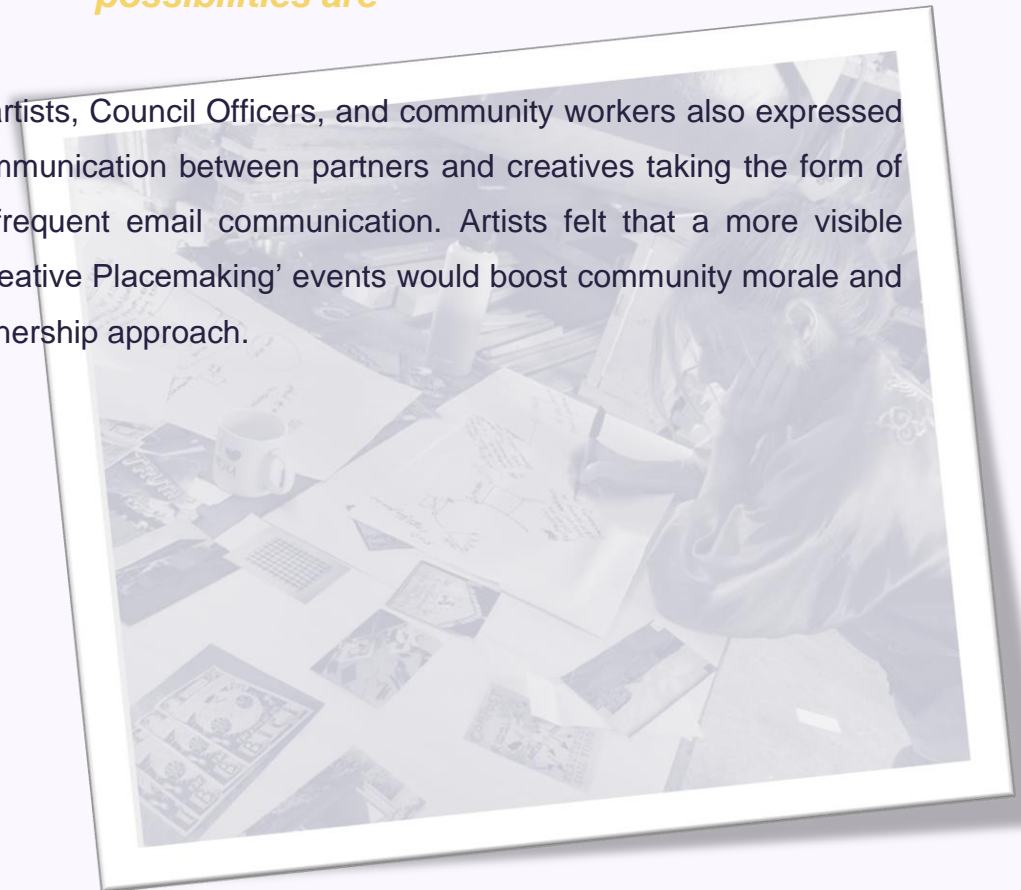
- *The role of partners*

Although the Council is listed as a partner on the WWDN, it was felt at times the relationships between the various organisations and creative practitioners became disjointed which possibly negatively effected elements of the projects.

Participants raised that the role of partners within the project needed to be clearer and more defined, particularly in terms of what support and advice they were expected to provide. While some partners opted for a more 'light touch' approach, offering help and advice to creative practitioners and Place Leads on an ad hoc basis, others were keen to play a larger role in the project and felt they were not utilised to their full potential. For future iterations of the project, it was noted that a conversation regarding clarity of expectations for partners would be beneficial in ensuring that partners were clear and fully briefed on how to support.

'Working with a local authority requires a bit more consideration and understanding both ways so we understand the apparatus and what the possibilities are'

Many participants, including artists, Council Officers, and community workers also expressed a desire for more regular communication between partners and creatives taking the form of routine MS Teams calls or frequent email communication. Artists felt that a more visible presence from partners at 'Creative Placemaking' events would boost community morale and solidify the message of a partnership approach.



Recommendations:

Based on the evidence gathered throughout my research process, there are several recommendations that I wish to propose to improve how Community Planning Partners and creatives work together in community-led planning and development as the WWDN project starts to look towards its second stage.

The following series of recommendations outline a suggested approach as to what collaborative 'Creative Placemaking' work could look like between Community Planning Partners and The Stove Network going forward:

- *Partnership Working Agreement between Community Planning Partners and The Stove Network*

The 5 projects contained within WWDN have provided an opportunity to trial run collaborative community planning work between Community Planning Partners and creative practitioners employed by The Stove Network on a relatively small and focused scale. The long-term ambition of The Stove Network, however, is to progress this 'creative placemaking' work to a regional level through the creation of a 'Creative Placemaking Network' which would see 'Creative Placemakers' working in locations across the region.

To ensure the successful continuation of this partnership approach to community planning as it progresses to a larger scale, a stable source of ongoing funding will be required. This funding would support The Stove Network to help communities to develop Local Place Plans as well as to develop initiatives for improving the areas that they live.

- *'Creative Placemaking' Champions within Community Planning Partners*

A champion is an individual within an organisation who is selected to advocate for and facilitate change. Put simply, they act as a bridge between traditional ways of doing things and new ways of thinking. As 'Creative Placemaking' is a relatively new concept and a different way of working for most organisations, a workplace champion may help to promote and gather support for the method.

The role of a 'Creative Placemaking' champion within the Community Planning Partners would be:

- ❖ to keep up to date and informed on 'Creative Placemaking' projects and activities within the local authority
- ❖ to share progress on local arts initiatives and projects with their wider organisation
- ❖ to advocate for more resources and funding to be put into this way of working
- ❖ to build and maintain a close relationship with the arts and community organisations in the area like The Stove Network to support them in facilitating current and future projects

- *Graduate/Training Scheme for Future 'Creative Placemakers'*

Many graduates fresh out of art school are used to an independent way of working and can struggle adapting to a collaborative way of working. This conflicts with the ethos of 'Creative Placemaking' which is designed to be co-creative by involving the community in a genuine way. Many art graduates have limited experience of working directly with communities and can find the transition to 'Creative Placemaking' to be difficult.

In order to build the confidence of recently graduated arts practitioners looking to engage in community embedded work, Community Planning Partners could come together to develop a form of 'Creative Placemaking' training or graduate scheme. This would see graduates placed within a community organisation, or Place Hub part of the WWDN network, for a set period with support and training being provided by the local authority and partners. Graduates may also be able to complete short-term placements within the Council and partner organisations, assisting with community engagement activities or facilitating small projects. This would allow graduates to build up frontline experience in 'Creative Placemaking', but in a safe and supportive environment designed to upskill enthusiastic creatives.

- *Measuring the Social Value of 'Creative Placemaking' Projects*

Throughout the research process, the benefits of 'Creative Placemaking' projects, and in particular WWDN, have been exalted by artists, community organisations and artists alike. This evidence is largely anecdotal, however, which, while valuable, is based on a limited context and is prone to bias.

For future iterations of the WWDN project, and 'Creative Placemaking' projects in general, another method of collecting impact data could be through determining social value. Social value looks at measuring the outcomes achieved by a project or initiative and, thus, proves its value to stakeholders and potential investors. A high social value would suggest a good return on investment and, therefore, a successful project.



CONCLUSION

The Stove Network's 'What We Do Now' project is the latest initiative in a string of 'Creative Placemaking' projects for the South of Scotland. Though 'Creative Placemaking' was a relatively new term only a few years ago, the concept has been gaining traction as place becomes higher up on the national agenda. Reading the term literally, one might assume 'Creative Placemaking' to be an expression to denote the role of an artist in transforming and creating places, but it is far more nuanced than that.

The Stove's 'Creative Placemaking' approach, exemplified through the 5 artist placements within WWDN, uses artists and creative facilitators to inspire and, ultimately empower, communities to actively engage in conversations and decisions about the future of their place. As a pioneering experiment in 'Creative Placemaking', WWDN achieved several big wins throughout the 18-month run of Phase 1 including bringing arts and culture opportunities to rural areas, creating informal and relaxed settings for engagement as well as building skills and creating work experience for local people.

As The Stove moves into the second phase of the WWDN project, there were several areas for development flagged via conversations with study participants, particularly regarding the short-term nature of the contract, the lack of confidence in funding and the role of partners, which would enhance future iterations of the project. The following series of recommendations outline a suggested approach as to what collaborative 'Creative Placemaking' work, like the WWDN project, could look like between Community Planning Partners and The Stove Network going forward:

- ❖ **Partnership Working Agreement between Community Planning Partners and The Stove Network**
- ❖ **'Creative Placemaking' Champions within Community Planning Partners**
- ❖ **Graduate/Training Scheme for Future 'Creative Placemakers'**
- ❖ **Measuring the Social Value of 'Creative Placemaking' Projects**

GLOSSARY

- ‘Artist’, ‘creative’ and ‘creative practitioner’ are used interchangeably throughout this document to refer to a person who uses various mediums including, but not limited to, drawing, painting, sculpture, acting, writing, filmmaking, photography to music, to create art.
- ‘Local artist’ is used in this document to refer to an artist who has lived or worked within one community or area for a period of 5 or more years.