Designing Distributed Community Participation

Knowledge Exchange Report

Designing Distributed Community Engagement
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Project Website: www.DDCP2021.org

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SCHOOL OF ART

Executive Summary

This document reports on the Designing Distributed Community Participation (DDCP) research project, led by a team of five researchers at The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) from March – July 2021. Framed around three Knowledge Exchange workshops, DDCP brought together a cross-section of experience and insights from design and public health researchers and community engagement professionals from the public and third sectors. These explored distributed engagement through the lenses of processes, practices, and partnerships, and in relation to themes of youth engagement, community development, and health and wellbeing.
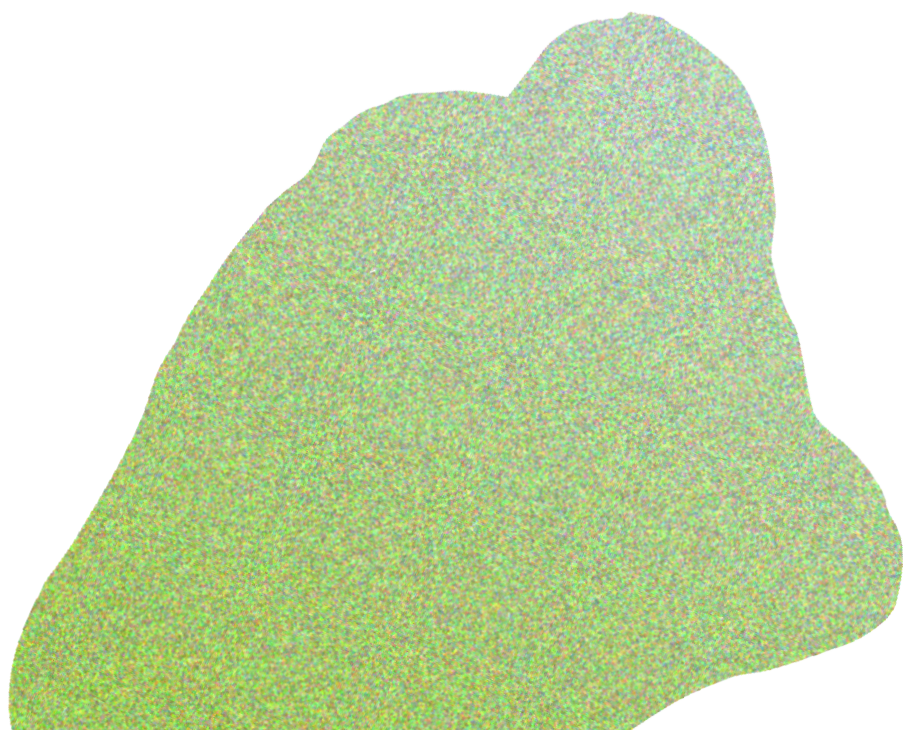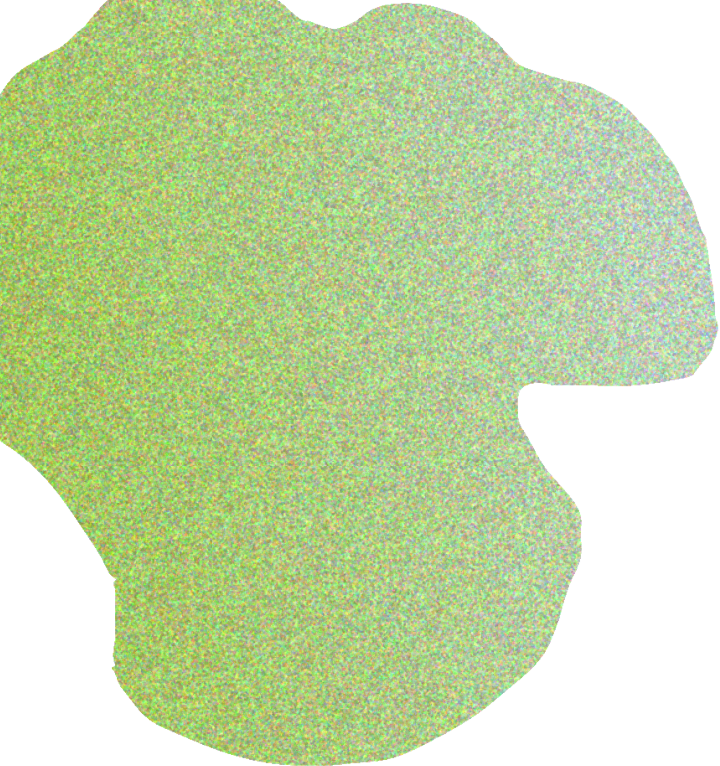
Through this, DDCP has shared best practice surrounding distributed and digital participation by capturing and evaluating examples of adapted and innovative methods, tools and techniques. These approaches are drawn from blended research and pedagogical practices, reflecting how researchers, PGR students, and organisations have re-positioned participatory research methods in response to the uncertain circumstances that the pandemic has presented. Across the three workshops key challenges and constraints, new and emergent approaches to participation, and opportunities for future hybrid ways of working were foregrounded. This led to the identification of three overarching themes to frame discussions around practical case study examples, and explore engagement approaches that are transferable in distinct contexts :

Theme 1: Storytelling and Communicating (recruitment and marketing);
Theme 2: Ethical/inclusive participation (supporting accessibility, inclusivity and safeguarding);
Theme 3: Expanding Engagement (designing digital/hybrid experiences, capacity building, and the value of creativity).

As our own research progresses, the DDCP team will identify opportunities to understand how hybrid spaces and places can be effectively designed to positively influence the relational dynamics of distributed community engagement; define the specific properties and purposes of material artefacts and the ways in which they can support creative expression and mutual learning; and to explore the extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a further shift in what people and communities are invited to contribute, their roles and responsibilities, and how a further recalibration of power and control can lead to meaningful outcomes and impact on the ground.

Contents

Introduction

In light of the Coronavirus outbreak in early 2020 and the constraints imposed by social distancing, unique and complex challenges have emerged in participatory research and community engagement practices. In response to these restrictions and a corresponding redistribution of people and place, and the attendant health, socio-economic and cultural impacts of the pandemic, there has been a rapid development of hybrid digital and analogue approaches to re-orientate methods and interventions that would have previously taken place in person. Whilst these methodological imperatives have 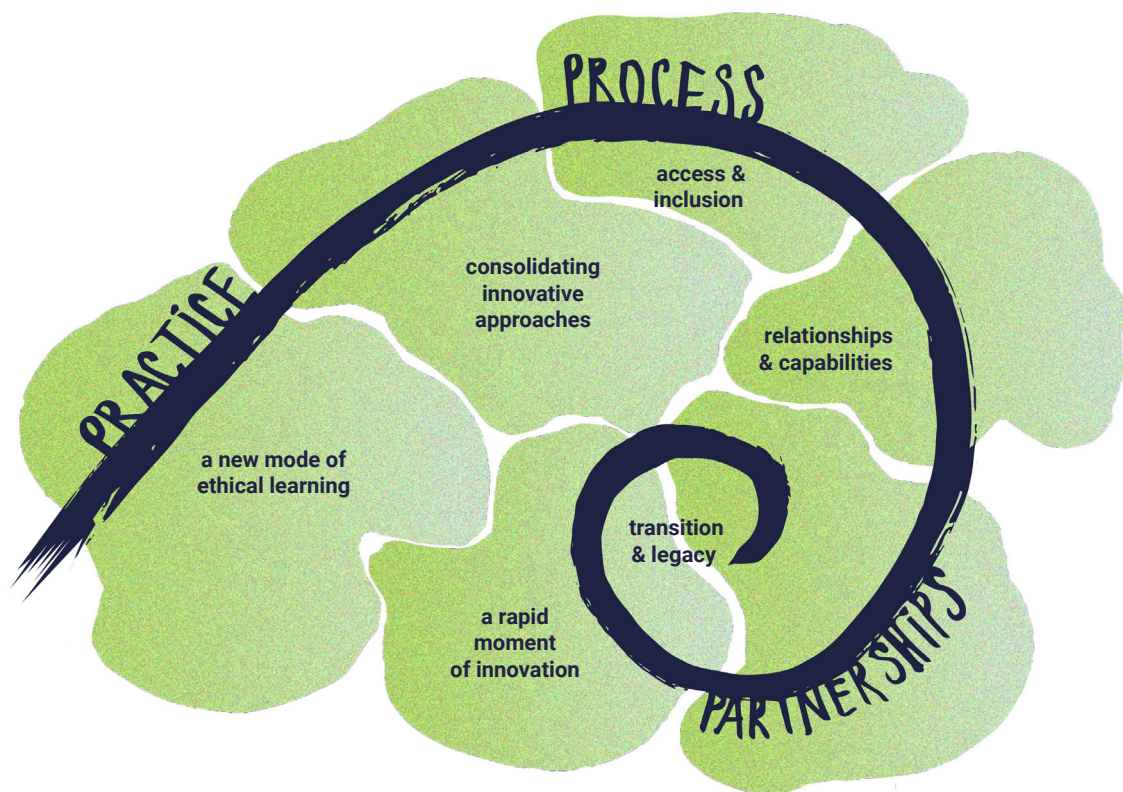brought into sharp focus acute participation divides and barriers surrounding inclusivity, accessibility and digital poverty; stories of community resilience, creative innovation and enhanced ways of supporting ethical engagement and collaboration have emerged during a period of distribution and uncertainty.

With the aim of foregrounding and critically reflecting on these stories, the Designing Distributed Community Participation (DDCP) project facilitated knowledge exchange across design, public health, and community engagement professionals from the public and third sector and academia. Over three workshops, this newly assembled community of practice explored distributed participation through the lenses of practice, process and partnerships; collectively identifying common themes, challenges and characteristics of participation across our work; sharing our adapted approaches, key learning and practical skills; as well as prototyping what the future legacies are for practice as we incrementally transition back into in-person contexts post-Covid.

PROCESS

PRACTICE

PARTNERSHIPS

access &
inclusion

consolidating
innovative
approaches

relationships
& capabilities

a new mode of
ethical learning

transition
& legacy

a rapid
moment
of innovation

Project Team

The DDCP team is a group of five design researchers based at the Innovation School at The Glasgow School of Art (GSA). What unites the team is a collective interest in community engagement practices, explored in a range of contexts such as community development, youth engagement, health and wellbeing, and civic participation at different levels. With a core focus on understanding how distributed methods can enhance appropriate and sustainable community engagement practices and their capacity to have positive social impact at local, regional, and national scales; the team were equally motivated to consolidate collective learning to inform and enhance future learning and teaching and research student supervision.

Marianne McAra is a Research Fellow in the areas of participatory design, youth engagement and creative education. Marianne is interested in exploring community participation through a youth-focused lens (widely characterised by the 'Generation Covid' rhetoric), where challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic for many young people to participate in education and disrupted transitions in the context of declining employment opportunities.

"During this project, I am keen to reflect on the unanticipated ethical dimensions of designing distributed participation in research. From a period of rapid methodological innovation, what assumptions have been challenged; and in what ways have the conditions of the pandemic augmented practices to support inclusion and accessibility through re-modelling participation processes and policies?"

Cara Broadley is a Research Fellow working at the intersection of design for social innovation and participatory design, set against the context of public service reform, local democracy, and community empowerment in Scotland. Through this she explores the implications of developing and applying creative methods and tools to support the participation of people and communities; and how such approaches can forge stronger connections between academia, practice, and policy.

"I am interested in exploring how creative methods are being adapted and applied by organisations across the public, private, and third sector and the value that these add to distributed participation. How can we develop engagement approaches that simultaneously respond to the specific circumstances and preferences of people and communities, are inclusive and accessible, and capable of supporting meaningful dialogue and deliberation?"

Harriet Simms is the Community Engagement Officer at the Glasgow School of Art. Her work is focused on exploring ways for the school to better connect, partner and work with the surrounding areas of Garnethill and Blythswood through creative initiatives. As a researcher she is interested in exploring equity and value based participatory approaches informed by accessibility, mutual learning and partnership.

"With the impact of Covid, I want to investigate how place-based and embodied methods have been developed within remote/distributed participation contexts and what future opportunities there are in using hybrid methods of distributed and in-person engagement post pandemic."

Zoe Prosser is a Lecturer in Social Design and Research Associate at the GSA. She is also a designer at Snook and works with public sector organisations, local authorities and governments in the field of service design, with a focus on design for participatory democracy and systems change. Zoë's research centres on social design methods for democratic community participation in decision-making, particularly within sustainable land use.

"Throughout this project, I am keen to understand if/how new forms of distributed engagement are elevating certain voices and engaging new audiences. Combined with principles of accessibility and inclusion, I seek to question the appropriateness of participation methods, the balance of power between facilitators and participants, and future opportunities for truly equitable hybrid ways of engaging."

Gemma Teal is a Research Fellow in the areas of health and wellbeing and specialises in creative engagement, participatory design and visual methods. Her work focuses on opening up the design process to include academic researchers from other disciplines, industry partners, health professionals, people living with health conditions, carers and members of the general public.

"I am keen to explore how visual methods can be both translated onto online platforms such as Miro and Padlet as well as adapted for offline distributed participation; and ways in which this can support and enable communication, relationship-building and rapport with participants. How can we design safe and reflective spaces for distributed participation for people who do not have access to online tools?"

Project Background

To prepare for the workshops, the DDCP team reviewed recent literature published between 2020 and 2021, which has captured insight and learning for distributed community participation in a variety of contexts. For this, and building on Broadley's 'Methodological Typology for Distributed Research' (2020), a review framework constructed around common attributes was created as criteria through which to explore, select and compare the literature against (see Figure 1). Sorting through a range of case study examples of adaptations, methodological innovations and entirely new practices that have emerged in response to working in distributed ways, this framework supported the team to identify cross-cutting themes that would later be explored and unpacked in the knowledge exchange workshops.
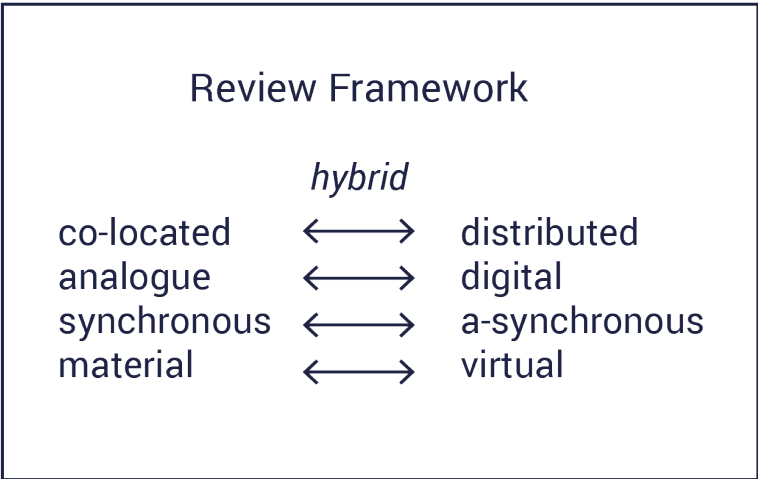
Fig 1. Broadley C. (2020) Methodological Typology for Distributed Research. Diagram.

Notably, drawing on experience from across the Arts and Humanities and beyond, a series of crowd-sourced publications were produced – such as *Doing Arts Research in a Pandemic* compiled by Midegelow (2020), *Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic* (2020) compiled by Lupton (2020), *Knowledge Exchange in a Pandemic* (2020) complied by Wilson; as well as a community focused guides such as Fedorowicz, Arena and Burrowes (2020) and Farrington and Fal Dutra Santos (2020); collated case study examples in the context of health and social care edited by Williams and Tembo (2021) and Langley et al. (2021). Common across these publications are insights into the enhancements made for community engagement practices,
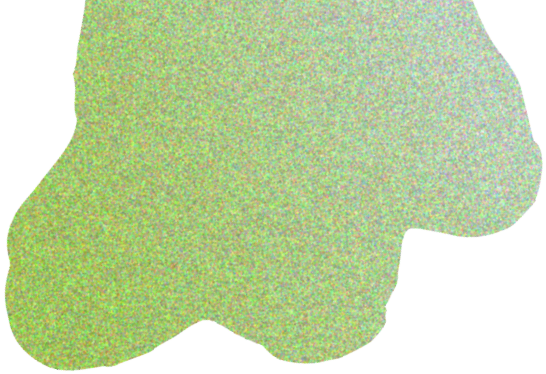
which have, in many cases, been in direct response to participation challenges surrounding inclusivity and accessibility. The restrictions imposed by social distancing during the pandemic, and the rapid expansion of digital services and technologies to support connectivity on a global scale has arguably widened the scope of participation (Constantin et al. 2021; Khlusova 2020; Kucirkova et al. 2020) – both in terms of geographical reach and affordance, and flexibility of time. This has, however, brought factors surrounding digital inclusion into sharp focus and has accelerated a range of complex participation challenges (Darmody et al. 2020; Halliday 2020; Holmes and Burgess 2020; Lucas et al. 2020; Settersten 2020). This includes sociotechnical divides surrounding access, digital literacy and adoption, capabilities and efficiency (Vassilakopoulou and Hustad 2021: 1) that have been amplified in light of the digital demands engendered by the pandemic and which are reflective of wider more systemic socioeconomic inequalities (Baxter et al. 2020; Holmes and Burgess 2020).

In response to this context, community engagement researchers and practitioners have had to develop agile approaches and often re-allocate funding to support participation needs such as providing data top-ups, access to hard/software, and facilitating digital up-skilling. Furthermore, the savings that have been made in areas such as travel, accommodation and in the incidental costs of in-person interventions (such as venue hire, catering, compensating participants for their time/ travel etc) have implications for the future of project budgeting as we move forward with the adoption of more hybrid models of working. A key area this project will explore are ways in which financial and temporal savings can be re-appropriated and allocated for alternative means and priorities in the future.

Underpinning adaptations to practice and process have further illuminated the ethics surrounding participation – both practically in how procedural ethics have been strengthened to address participation challenges surrounding accessibility and inclusivity (Calia et al. 2020); and relationally in terms of designing online experiences and virtual spaces for engagement and collaboration. This can be seen in Kinnula et al. (2021) who considered a range of digital divides in the process of adapting physical makerspaces for children into distributed and hybrid participation experiences during the pandemic. The authors reflect on the challenges of translating and transporting the activities, culture and materiality of makerspaces into the participants' homes; reflecting on ways in which to scaffold participants' learning through technology (such as AI), and ways of mediating power imbalances when recruiting proxy facilitators (in this case family members and teachers). Constantin et al. (2021) also reflect on the challenges of facilitating distributed and virtual

participatory design interventions with children during a pandemic and relational ethics; framing their insights by considering key themes around 'present and non-present' designers. The authors describe ways in which new virtual environments for creative engagement were established and reflect on how this process led to new cultures of participation and redefined roles in collaboration (2021: 35). This was particularly evident when testing different participant-facilitator ratios; the increased flexibility digital tools afford and how ownership in a process of collective ideation can be more easily traced and made visible. The authors suggest that virtual spaces for collaboration can help to remove barriers and support the widening of participation (2021: 35) but identify a need to consider how roles in online collaboration and co-production are negotiated and redefined.

A key tenet underpinning the work of the Innovation School at GSA is developing a deep understanding of the sociocultural contexts and communities within which we work and collaborate with, and to craft bespoke design-led approaches accordingly. Reflecting on the challenges outlined above and given the place-based nature of our work, the overarching aim of this project was to not only to share and collate examples of best practice through establishing a cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral network, but to critically engage with and enrich our understanding of meaningful participation by taking a more reflexive approach. This led to co-developing person-centred principles that seek to (re)calibrate the design of hybrid virtual and artefactual tools, techniques and methods, and which are transferable across academic, public and third sectors. In the next section, we describe the design of each knowledge exchange workshop in more detail before setting out our key insights and reflections.

Knowledge Exchange Workshops:

Assembling a multi-disciplinary community

The knowledge exchange workshops took place between May and June 2021, where the DDCP team recruited members (a total of 21) to the project through initially drawing on their own networks and then encouraging members to engage in their own project recruitment by having the option to invite 'a plus 1' to subsequent workshops. The workshops were designed to each explore distributed community participation through a complementary lens: practice (reflecting on community engagement practice and ways of enabling participation and collaboration before and after the pandemic); process (sharing re-imagined tools, techniques and platforms that have supported synchronous and asynchronous processes of distributed community participation); and partnerships (identifying future opportunities and partnerships, and ways of sustaining positive legacies as we move towards a transition back to in-person contexts).

Workshop 01: Reflecting on Practice

The first workshop brought together a diverse group of practitioners and researchers from across the public and third sectors, education and academia – including NHS 24, Widening Participation at GSA, The Children's and Young People's Centre for Justice, Scottish Care, The Centre for Civic Innovation, Central and West Integration Network, and The Glasgow City Council. The aim of this first session was to collectively reflect on the last 12 months, share key challenges that have been faced, and the ways in which these were overcome. To prepare for this, we asked participants to bring with them an insightful moment of community participation that took place either before or during the Covid-19 pandemic and to bring an image or artefact that helps to tell their story.

The workshop began with a group conversation, which was facilitated through an approach the DDCP team developed called the Conga Method. Instead of a facilitator chairing the discussion, this approach encourages participants to draw connections between and across their experiences themselves by 'joining the conga'. The participants generously shared their stories as well as reflected back their insights and key learnings to the group, which were captured by the DDCP team in real-time on Miro (Figure 2).

Underpinning many of the stories was an ethical sensibility (particularly surrounding participation challenges such as inclusivity, accessibility, appropriateness, and digital divides), and an emphasis on the positive legacies that can be deduced from the pandemic. The group discussed the ways in which both our engagement (methods, tools and techniques) and organisational (in how we communicate, recruit participants, collaborate and connect to audiences) practices have been augmented over the last year. In parallel to this, themes and opportunities for action were synthesised, which included:

- the difference in how we dialogue online – broadcasting that can feel mono-directional as opposed to a more dialogical exchange when using platforms such as Zoom or Teams, and feeling comfortable with silences;

- designing effective non-verbal communication – reflecting on ways of simplifying this and making it more visual;

- ways to support the more informal and organic interactions – providing people with space to think and reflect, being able to follow up on tangents, nuances and picking up on body language, which can be challenging in virtual environments;

- the importance of supporting capacity-building and ownership, and in examples of digital upskilling;

- recalibrating ways we can provide emotional support and enabling connections;

- how we 'market' projects in recruitment processes, the importance of story-telling and the role of social media.

Following on from the conga conversation, the DDCP team used the map to highlight a range of issues and questions to explore in the second workshop – examples of which include how can we recreate tactile, creative activities when not engaging in person; ways to future-proof hybrid approaches that support a widening of participation as we transition back into co-located contexts; the future of project budgets when freeing up and redirecting what would have previously been spent on travel; and how we can balance ethics with creativity, responsiveness, and risk taking (Figure 3.)

Digital Exclusion

Gail
- NHS as a national health board requires engagement locally but that depends on travel
- Particularly this was difficult for those on islands
- DP has allowed for richer conversations with residents, particularly in islands
- prevents the need for them to travel

What's been miss[ed] from physical engagement

Ian
- Found it harder to hear and follow up on tangents with lack of F2F
- Digital regeneration framework - trying to reach out to an audience they had no connection to
- trying to create a new audience - 'cold calling' - a big challenge
- ongoing challenge to make those connections and be heard above covid media

Francesca (non NHS project)
- Young children eating practices and socialisation in nursery
- Recognising that young people are being left behind due to digital engagement
- Highlights how young peoples voices have been missed from discourse and childcare as a contentious issue.

Rickie Widening Participation
- Recruiting through stats about deprivation areas
- How do we engage young people from underrepresented and hard to reach areas?
- Doing things digitally prevented need for 6 hr journey
- Also work was locally specific for the young person and she could directly bring her local personal experiences into that call
- Intend to keep working with people in that way going forwards, taking 'WP' beyond Glasgow engagement

young children not being left behind

can engage wherever they are

Heathe[r]
- previous[ly] space a[nd] mapping
- initially [with] physical
- Collab fu[n] clay and through blend ph[ysical]
- Was a su[...] digital n[...]

daunting initially but there are opportunities

Harriet
- Embracing a lack of organisation
- examples of young people dropping in and out of sessions, not needing to participate but just listen in
- young people joining in to listen just from the bus, offering choice

Marianne
- Digital has helped to widen geographical participation
- In collab with Ruth, codesigning socially just justice for young people
- Physical tools were posted to maintaining material aspect of creative engagement and zoom conversations to bring people together around that
- thought it would be a barrier but has lead to spending budget on innovating materials, not on travel etc.

Informal engagement pre covid

Youth Justice
- Similar in that young people are in ownership of the project.
- Giving young people space to discuss how their feeling by ducking in and out of the main session
- 'hand over' facilitation to the participant

tie dye!

Youth Justice
- Being able to meet young people who would have never engaged F2F (also because of distance
- When young person needs a break from the group they can
- Being able to drop in and out of the group when it suits them

Chris
- with the after the pandemic project, they set briefs for participants to help them visualise future
- tweaked it to make it very simple and visual but this meant it was then picked up by
- digitally, your not there to explain things or maintain control
- you have to reframe your 'marketing' to suit twitter, imagery and limited characters - onboarding people without a chance to speak to them directly

participant ownership of format

An unexpected call from a participant (while painting a wall)
- Designed a companion workbook for participants to support synchronous and asynchronous participation
- Lines between personal and professional are becoming blurred - how do we make ourselves available for this?

Marianne
- its challenged our assumptions about what is the most engaging or accessible way to engage people
- its made us need to be better communicators
- also having to be much more knowledgable with GDPR and data privacy requirements.
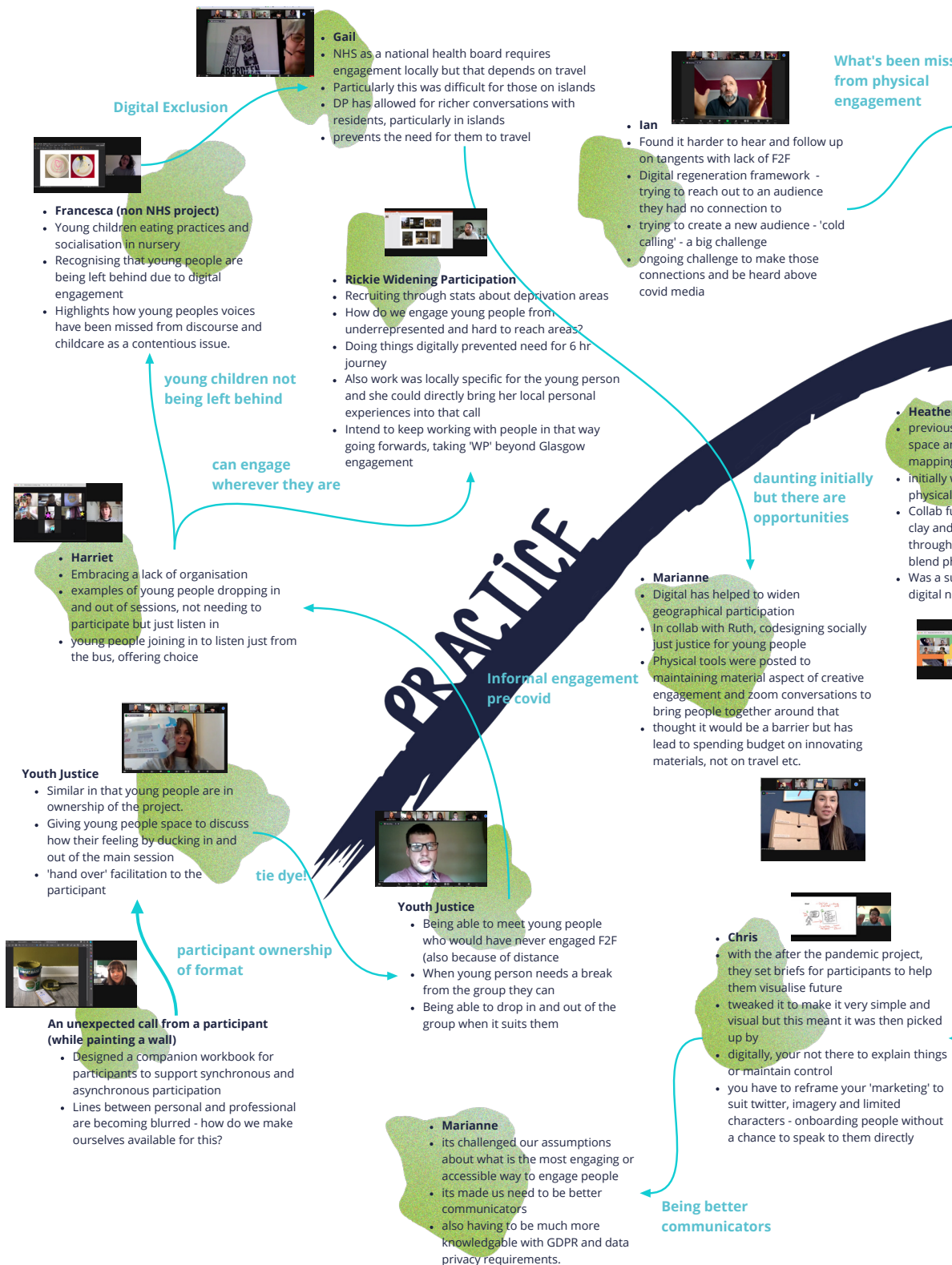
Being better communicators

Fig 2. DDCP (2020) Workshop 01 'Moments of Community Participation' Conga. Miro Board.

Tara
- Engagement across social care (future of social care) - in line with the independent care review
- Benefit for social care staff having online engagement - hard for them normally having to travel to meet people and attend meetings
- this does limit who can join and the accessibility of that - e.g. care homes don't have connectivity or tools to support that
- Invited people to share postcards of their future visions - that they could post in to the conversations without digital connection - creating a digital and physical channel for engagements

What's been missed from physical engagement
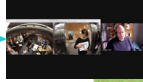
Digger
- Final year students have just submitted work online and said goodbye to 4 years of education
- previously used to create extreme physical moments - elevator pitch in a real elevator - which is unreplicable in a digital capacity, but some students found things with digital engagement to be equally as stressful and high intensity
- being online, you might not be able to see what tensions people are feeling ()

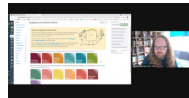**Kev**
- using padlet and zoom to collect peoples ideas, visualise them and make decisions together
- Padlet as a great visualising tool

Padlet as a tool

Marianne
- trying to create a studio culture around engagement - across days
- making and not talking, but doing that over zoom it feels different - awkward silences on zoom?
- feels more like broadcasting than being dialogical
- ended up putting on music to set the environment and scene
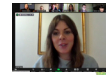
Ruth
- Speaking to people with their cameras off makes it very hard
- Getting people to express themselves and then share these images via camera

embracing whats been lost as an opportunity

...sly would get people down to events ...nd use creative methods like ...g and drawing ...went all digital and didn't consider ... methods ...utures with GSA - sent out kits with ... sticks etc and then led people ... a physical making workshop to ...hysical with digital ...uccessful approach - considering ...ot as a physical replacement

post-able creative materials

Gemma
- was working with people living with frailty and had to redesign approach and methods around not being able to have F2F. Redesigned everything to operate over the phone
- Extremely emotional and shareable moments with people over the phone.
- being careful on how to end the call - making sure it ends on a high and is a really positive future-facing note

Mark
- its like sitting in a room with the world falling down around you and pretending its all ok
- was helping staff find a way through this journey to develop and adapt a suite of resources that are meaningful and flexible
- biggest message - this wasn't a choice - it happened to us and forced our hand (thats uncomfortable for many people)

recognising what can't be replaced

Ian Elder
- finding ways to engage people during calls
- we used to go to where people but how do we turn the thoughts to use what we have learned and apply it in a hybrid sense
- missing the ability to send people out into communities to meet with people who haven't been recruited or brought online.
- we would lose a huge amount if we just flipped back
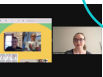
Opportunities to expand offers
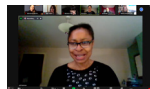
Florence (CWIN)
- recruited food bank drivers who were going into peoples homes. We had 'survivors skills project' and had to take this online
- Arts and craft, mental health training etc all online but wouldn't have been able to take them online and reach as many people. More people accessing the services (school holiday programme etc)
- using this as an opportunity to expand and a demonstration that more people want to access these services

Mafalda
- personal practice is based on informal engagement
- but digital is invitation led and structure focused
- very frustrating that moments of serendipity and relationship building cant take place digitally
- digital is conducive only to planned engagements and in real life we can have much more

digital need for clearer messaging

informal engagement is lost

making use of time and space in between formal 'engagement'

giving support out with the group while keeping people connected

seeing people's confidence grow and enabling them to shape the direction of engagement

experiencing different levels of engagement – providing multiple opportunities for engagement to be tailored

new ways to engage students who are geographically removed from campus – recalibrating the level of support that can be given

experiencing place-based work remotely

designing engagement widen access develop inno approaches – workshop in

supporting people experiencing mental health challenges

Less space for coincidence and chance interaction

different forms of in-person work were initially seen as being impossible

ensuring that young people are not left behind and developing ways to amplify their voices

facilitating creative engagement as a digital experience felt like a significant obstacle at first

lack of fac contact difficu follow up o

Fig 3. DDCP (2020) Workshop 01 Challenges, Opportunities and Questions. Miro Board.

to
and
vative

a box

creative, hand-on methods to connect with young people

opening the doors to make contact on the islands – richer connections and changed conversations

enabling people to contribute to decisions 'from their homes'

broadening the scope of participation and finding time to connect

breaking down the interview – posting activities

working with advisors as mediators to create comfortable spaces

physical materials can help people to express complex feelings and ambitions

ce-to-face
makes it
ult to
n tangents

barriers around 'creating an audience' that we have no connection to – striving to be heard over the noise of Covid-19

little opportunity to take someone quiet aside and get to a deeper level or conversation

different technological capabilities and preferences can limit participation

challenges providing emotional support

difficult to recreate nuanced social interactions over Zoom – the 'elevator pitch' – consolidating a body of work into 30 seconds

Workshop 02: Sharing Processes

In the second workshop, the DDCP team were joined by new members to the network, which included representation from the University of Glasgow, Glasgow Centre for Population Health, The Scottish Community Development Centre, Alliance Scotland, Dartington Service Design Lab and New Practice. Building on insights from the previous workshop where the group collectively reflected upon and shared re-orientated approaches and methods, the focus of the second workshop was to unpack practical processes further with a focus on problematising the how of distributed participation. To prepare for this, the team spent time synthesising these key reflections into the following three core thematics:

1. Communication & Storytelling
- recruitment
- marketing
- making projects more social

2. Inclusive Participation
- supporting ethical participation
- accessibility
- safeguarding

3. Expanding Participation
- designing digital/ hybrid experiences
- new forms of participation
- capacity building
- the value of creativity

Participants were asked to pick one of these areas that resonated with their own experiences, and to reflect on an approach, process or technique (theirs or someone else's that has been particularity inspiring) that could help deepen our understanding of participation challenges and potential responses; structuring their presentations by the following questions:

1. What was the challenge?
2. How did you respond?
(what worked/ what didn't?/ what did you need?)
3. What can we learn from this?

Adopting the Conga Method as before led participants to build upon each other's examples and insights; exploring these thematics through multiple lenses. This included questions around acknowledging that there are different levels of crisis for different people experiencing the same thing and being conscious of this; negotiating the bureaucracy (the 'red tape') and the institutionalisation of participation; the ways in which boundaries and barriers can, in fact, make us more innovative and creative; within participation what are the nuances between consultation, participation and collaboration; the future of research ethics, project budgets and participation spaces; and ways to embed hospitality into our approaches and tools so to sustain a more human touch (Figure 4).

Towards the end of the workshop, the group were able to collectively identify a range of additional dimensions to consider and calibrate in processes of designing distributed community participation:
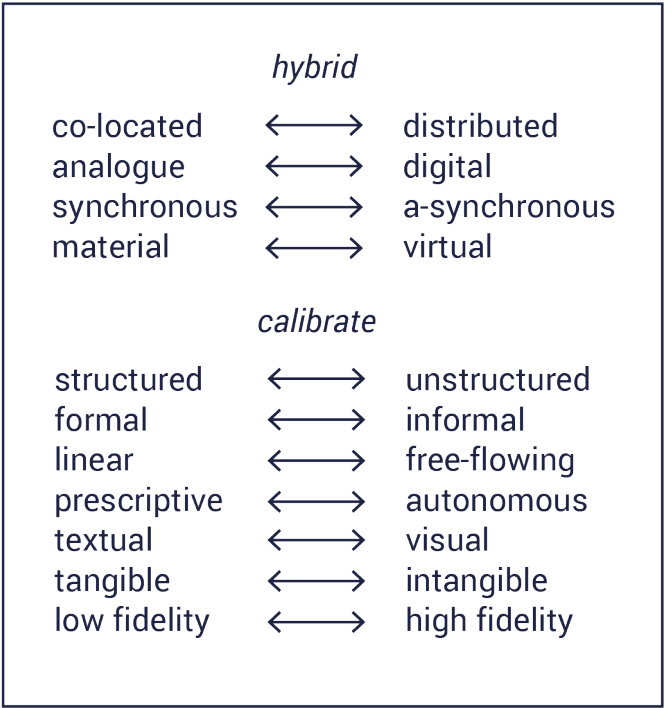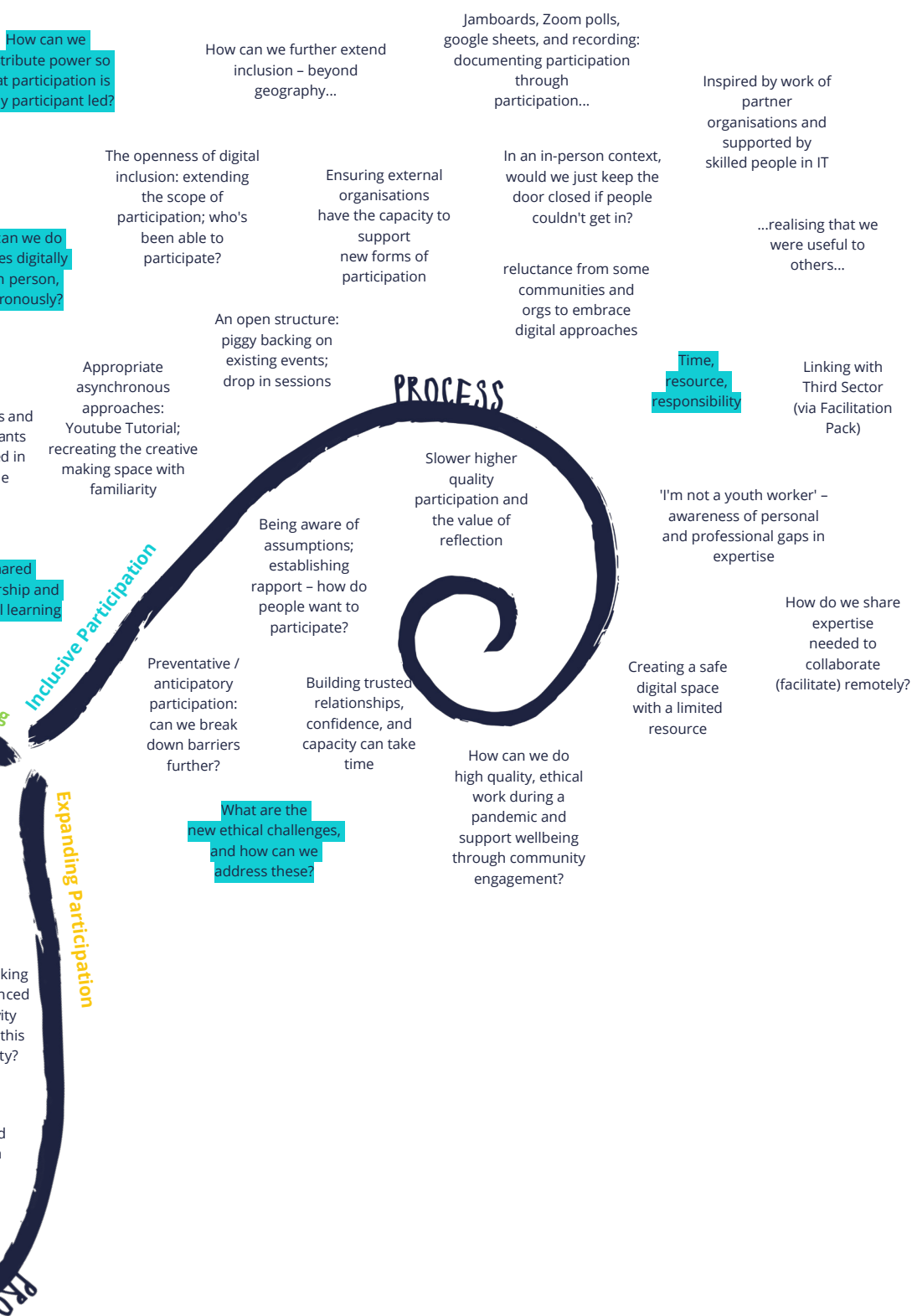
hybrid

co-located	⟷	distributed
analogue	⟷	digital
synchronous	⟷	a-synchronous
material	⟷	virtual

calibrate

structured	⟷	unstructured
formal	⟷	informal
linear	⟷	free-flowing
prescriptive	⟷	autonomous
textual	⟷	visual
tangible	⟷	intangible
low fidelity	⟷	high fidelity

dis...
tha...
trul...

Layers within a spectrum of engagement: formal / informal; linearity / free-form...

How ...
activitie...
and in...
synch...

Creating new distributed communities

Embedding Hospitality: what is the impact of these human approaches?

'cold-calling' and reaching out: increasingly important to be language friendly

Balancing openness...
structure: participa...
want to be involve...
co-producing th...
approach

PROCESS

Making engagement easy and sense-checking with broad range of partners

Communication & Storytelling

The Welcome Box and the Group Charter

Co-design principles: acknowledging personal circumstances

Sh...
Owner...
mutua...

How can we re-distribute budgets to enhance participation?

Being responsive to understanding priorities at all levels

Do we always need crises? How much does choice play into this?

Enabling peer-to-peer process-learning

Asset-based approach to engagement

Recreating a studio environment online: reorienting the spaces and activities that we shared

The push and pull factors of participation – crises can be beneficial for change

Creativity for Crisis

Negotiating the bureaucracy and the institutionalisation of participation

Skewer morphism – translating physical qualities and functions into an online context

Creativity at the back end: How can we harness that creativity for constructive dialogue?

Acknowledging crises at different levels

Nuances of participation – good and bad. Dealing with people synchronously and asynchronously

Will physical wor...
be digitally enhan...
and will creativ...
enhance it? Will...
change creativi...

Which spaces will be left, and what can we use them for?

Familiarity with each other; familiarity with approaches

Participation isn't always explicit. Where are people at, and where do they want to be?

Community led: being flexible and comfortable with risk enabling young people to lead the work

When we go back to 'in-person', how will expectations be recalibrated?

What and where are the boundaries of participation?

Participation is now higher up the agenda

Communicating what meaningful participation looks like from the ground up.

When will we reach saturation point? How do we know what's immediately useful to us?

How do we sustain this conversation and action?

Fig 4. DDCP (2020) Workshop 02 Themes. Miro Board.

How can we distribute power so that participation is by participant led?

How can we further extend inclusion – beyond geography...

Jamboards, Zoom polls, google sheets, and recording: documenting participation through participation...

Inspired by work of partner organisations and supported by skilled people in IT

The openness of digital inclusion: extending the scope of participation; who's been able to participate?

Ensuring external organisations have the capacity to support new forms of participation

In an in-person context, would we just keep the door closed if people couldn't get in?

...realising that we were useful to others...

an we do es digitally n person, ronously?

reluctance from some communities and orgs to embrace digital approaches

An open structure: piggy backing on existing events; drop in sessions

PROCESS

Time, resource, responsibility

Linking with Third Sector (via Facilitation Pack)

Appropriate asynchronous approaches: Youtube Tutorial; recreating the creative making space with familiarity

s and nts d in e

Slower higher quality participation and the value of reflection

'I'm not a youth worker' – awareness of personal and professional gaps in expertise

Being aware of assumptions; establishing rapport – how do people want to participate?

Inclusive Participation

ared rship and l learning

How do we share expertise needed to collaborate (facilitate) remotely?

g

Preventative / anticipatory participation: can we break down barriers further?

Building trusted relationships, confidence, and capacity can take time

Creating a safe digital space with a limited resource

Expanding Participation

What are the new ethical challenges, and how can we address these?

How can we do high quality, ethical work during a pandemic and support wellbeing through community engagement?

king nced ity this ty?

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Workshop 03: Planning Partnerships

Reflecting on the future-focused questions and scenarios developed in Workshop 02, the DDCP team consolidated these insights into the design of the final knowledge exchange workshop. To explore ways of future-proofing our collective learnings, a team-based design sprint activity was designed and framed around the following themes and questions:

- The future of ethics (how does hybrid future engagement shape our ethical considerations?)

- The future of resources, roles and values (how do we use future budgets to value hybrid participation in a different way?)

- The future of (hybrid) engagement methods (how do we design future hybrid engagement methods to benefit participation?)

- The future of communication (how does hybrid future engagement shape our communication for participation?)

The workshop began with theme-based warm-up discussions, which were captured by the facilitators on Miro. Insights from across the workshops were then returned to and built upon, including exploring new forms of working relationships with project partners, gatekeepers, and participants; ways to support the more informal aspects of (synchronous and asynchronous) participation when working in online spaces; how to plan and prepare participants during the lead-in time for distributed projects; how to support choice and accessibility for participants as well as embed capacity-building; and re-examining the value of co-located creative methods and how adaptable these can be when used for online engagement (Figure 5).

Following this, the group was split into three sub teams and given the design sprint brief to respond to as hypothetical creative research teams, with the aim of implementing insights gleaned from the entire knowledge exchange workshop series.

The Future of Resources, Roles and Values

- Challenging procurement and changing to local or similar valued supplies
- How can we reimburse participants time and knowledge?
- Who's capacity are we developing?

The Future of Ethics

- Rapid learning and inequalities coming to the fore
- Building relationships of trust in digital spaces
- What different resources and support do participants need to participate online and hybrid equitably and safely?

The Future of Engagement Methods

- Balancing benefits/access for participants and for facilitators
- The choice of tool and space will always include and exclude different audiences
- Balancing choice and accessibility with workload and capacity

The Future of Communication

- Opportunities and challenges of the 'ease' online engagement offers
- Slower and softer forms of relationship building and recruitment through online formats
- Online facilitation changes how we communicate, how do we address this?

Fig 5. DDCP (2020) Workshop 03 Warm Up Discussions. Diagram.

The teams spent time prototyping mock project proposals, approaches and the time frame using a simple template created on Miro, were encouraged to reflect on the key ethical dimensions to create a project budget, and to consider a recruitment and communication strategy. Commonalities across the teams' proposals demonstrated emerging approaches and underpinning values within a future of hybrid participation, which included:

- **Participants as co-creators.** All three groups prioritised involving participants as co-researchers and co-reporters on the project. This would allow them to co-define the project challenges, priorities, approach and methods, together with intended outcomes. Through the brief's example of young people as participants, this was also intended to ensure they were able to outline and design-in what they would like to get out of the process (e.g. new skills/ capacity building/ employment/ certification).The formation of collaborative project teams within each example relied upon non-hierarchical project cultures through co-design and hybrid approaches and the creation of structures that would enable the participants to lead, whilst retaining safeguarding and trust-building measures.

- **Bespoke and accessible.** To remove barriers to participation, it was proposed that recruitment and application processes should be developed to support participants to identify their own needs and accessibility requirements.

- **Mechanisms to support equitable participation.** Key mechanisms to support equitable participation throughout projects were proposed, such as allocating project budget to individual participants to develop their own ideas, matching participants with mentors (e.g. local business owners, community champions, grassroots organisations) to support in the development of their own proposals, and establishing participant-led panels to evaluate their proposals and make decisions about funding allocation.

- **The ethics of remuneration.** A key ethical consideration problematised by the teams were ways in which participants could be remunerated for their time – both financially, as well as the opportunity to provide some form of an award or accreditation that formally acknowledges their project contributions.

- **Diverse knowledge exchange.** Each proposal crossed urban and rural boundaries through a blend of place-based and distributed, and physical and digital, engagement methods. It was recognised that diverse formats and platforms would be required to disseminate knowledge across these channels. To enable this hybrid way of working, project resources would be redirected towards satellite workshops and participant access to collaborative digital platforms such as Miro and WhatsApp.

- **Co-produced and diverse dissemination materials.** To ensure accessibility of project materials, each of the teams recommended diverse and co-produced creative outputs, such as vlogs, films, and creative artefacts. It was important also for digital repositories to be translated into material non-digital versions.

Workshop Findings: Key Insights and Recommendations

Drawing on experiences and reflections shared by the participants from across the three workshops, the DDCP team synthesised common challenges and constraints, new and emergent approaches to participation, and opportunities for future hybrid ways of working. Between each workshop, a summary of the findings was circulated to all participants to be validated and built upon via a shared Padlet board. The key insights identified have been captured within three overarching themes, and have been framed as replicable approaches and practical recommendations and strategies for engagement.

Theme 1: Storytelling and Communicating (recruitment and marketing)

Particularly within remote engagement, the marketing and communication of projects requires accessible strategies due to the constraints of digital and distributed formats. Online communication must be clear and visual, and meet accessibility standards since this has become a key mechanism to recruit new and diverse audiences.

Key insights:

Involve participants, gatekeepers and recruiters in the storytelling of projects.
When recruiting and socialising projects, this allows for multi-stakeholder ownership and investment in the recruitment process. Story-telling supports gatekeepers to communicate the project effectively to different audiences due to their participation in the shaping of communication. Building on this, the group reflected on communication methods for different channels and audiences, and in particular the efficacy and value of visual communication materials with simple, short text.

Slow and softer forms of communication establish trust and extended engagement.
Informal digital communication platforms like WhatsApp can be used to build relationships and trust before more formal engagement takes place. With informal digital communication however, there must be additional safeguarding to support practitioners and facilitators, and participants must be enabled to 'opt-out'.

Digital platforms can allow for better data capture and sharing.
During recruitment, digital platforms can allow for more effective and safe data sharing, for example when providing personal information such as contact details. During synchronous and asynchronous engagement, digital platforms such as Live Documents and collaboration platforms such as Miro allow facilitators to make copies and take time-stamped 'snapshots' of information to document interactions and the development of thinking over time. Outputs and findings can be disseminated with further reach via online and video distribution. This can, however, also exclude place-based and non-digital communities.

'Internet noise' can make it difficult for communication materials to be recognised.
While digital communication materials can reach wider audiences, online recruitment approaches receive much lower levels of feedback and are less able to target specific audiences due to competing 'internet noise'. Online recruitment strategies lack the trust and relationship-building that longer-term embedded recruitment approaches are able to support. Therefore it has been recommended that digital recruitment and dissemination of findings should be delivered via gatekeepers, such as third sector and community support groups, who are supported to communicate the material appropriately for specific audiences.

Digital engagement does not support serendipitous and chance encounters.
Due to the constraints of digital communication platforms (such as the mono-directional nature of video conferencing), multiple voices and more organic conversations are less supported. This means that the serendipitous and emergent discussions that exist predominantly during in-person events are reduced (such as group and informal conversations during and in-between engagement activities). In virtual spaces, as the dialogue is often guided from the facilitator's perspective, rapport with participants as well as the depth of findings can inadvertently be affected. Therefore, within digital engagement it is vital to recognise the positionality of facilitators and introduce mechanisms that can enable participants to steer and lead conversations, and adopt deliberative methods that support collaboration.

Theme 2: Ethical participation (supporting accessibility, inclusivity and safeguarding)

Remote and online engagement has broadened the scope of participatory practices and allows new audiences to be reached. However, this widened horizon brings new ethical considerations around accessibility and inclusivity; recognising that these approaches can contribute towards digital exclusion.

Key insights:

Use asynchronous and remote engagement to offer flexibility and choice.
Remote and synchronous engagement (for example, video conferencing and phone calls) offer participants more flexibility to attend sessions due to reduced travel requirements and increased ability to negotiate schedules. However, this also relies on the flexibility of the facilitator and their ability to dialogue with participants in advance and adapt activities to meet individual needs. Remote and asynchronous engagement (for example, physical workbooks and shared digital spaces like Miro or Google Docs), enables people to participate in their own time, which is more accessible for those with scheduling commitments during traditional working hours (such as caring responsibilities).

Supporting accessibility.
Accessibility requires designing forms of engagement that meet participants' individual needs. As accessibility needs can greatly vary however, an engagement approach or method designed for one person may be less accessible for another. The attributes and benefits of distributed engagement include providing extended time for people to engage asynchronously; providing flexibility to engage around individual time commitments; and being able to tailor approaches. This can be described as 'meeting people on their own terms' or becoming 'participant-centred'. Time should be factored in to mediate potential barriers to participation. The individualised nature of accessibility requirements means that to design for everyone requires plurality and the creation of multiple options (for example, running multiple sessions in different formats, having varying levels of participation within the same activity, or providing different variety in methods and resources for participants to choose from). Tailored remote and asynchronous engagement approaches can also provide participants with more time to prepare, digest information and contribute their thoughts and ideas (which is not always afforded in synchronous online engagement).

Shifting perceptions around 'communities of place'.
Asynchronous and distributed engagement has brought people from diverse geographical areas together in novel ways. This could be shaping how we (re)consider communities and who we recruit for participation; rethinking recruitment frameworks and our definitions of 'place' altogether. Cultural biases and assumptions could still be preventing truly broad inclusion despite increased remote access for distributed geographical locations. For example, this might involve excluding people from rural or remote locations due to historic low awareness and limited access to appropriate recruitment networks. This poses the questions around what support is needed to involve new and diverse audiences and how do we ethically search for the previously unknown? With this comes a need for increased sensitivities when bringing together multi-cultural and multi-locational perspectives. Additionally, as perspectives have been shifted to distributed communities, it is important not to completely replace place-based audiences and local engagement that benefits from on-the-ground and co-located methods.

Embedding principles of hospitality within virtual engagement.
Hospitality principles, typically adopted for in-person participatory events, have also been applied during virtual engagement to emulate safe, comfortable, and welcoming online environments. In some cases, this has involved creating a 'group charter' to establish boundaries and recreate the benefits of co-located engagement, such as posting refreshments out to participants alongside paper-based welcome packs. In other cases, facilitators have attempted to recreate literal representations of physical places within a digital platform. There are opportunities to further question what a comfortable digital or hybrid space looks and feels like, and invite health and wellbeing experts to explore this alongside participatory practitioners.

Engaging from home creates new ethical considerations.
There is a need to recognise that not everyone's home space is as safe, comfortable, or appropriate to work from as others, and often it is unclear what additional responsibilities or constraints this creates for participants (for example, if a participant is caring for someone at home or experiencing mental health difficulties). It is important to recognise that not everyone has had the same experience of distributed engagement throughout the course of the pandemic or previous to that. This includes their cultural and technical experience, and introduction to digital tools or etiquette. Acknowledging the discomfort of the pandemic as a context and recognising this as a new way of working is recommended to create safe spaces that foster empathy and human connection.

More time needs to be offered to get people 'on the same page'.
When engaging digitally, participants may have varying levels of experience and knowledge. This means that more time should be factored in at the start for participants to set-up and become familiar with any new digital tools and resources and be supported with any project 'onboarding' or upskilling processes. However this must be balanced with people's desire and capacity to participate digitally. Capacity-building, when sought, is best delivered through extended and slow engagement over longer periods of time with attention paid to the participants' desired pace.

Fostering dialogue, deliberation and feedback within engagement.
To ensure facilitators of distributed synchronous engagement do not become digital gatekeepers, methods that combat the mono-directional nature of video conferencing conversations should be developed. This can include using breakout rooms and parallel asynchronous tools to allow participants to engage at their own pace and support multiple diverse conversations simultaneously. Regardless of the methods used, some participants feel less able to speak openly via digital platforms than in physical environments and this should be recognised and addressed to ensure equal representation. Facilitators using synchronous digital platforms such as video conferencing tools often struggle to 'read the room' or assess the live needs of participants due to 'digital silence': when cameras and mics are turned off and participant feedback is not recognised. This can make it particularly difficult for facilitators to know the level of engagement that is being achieved and adapt to people's needs in-the-moment.

Theme 3: Expanding Engagement (designing digital/hybrid experiences and the value of creativity)

As in-person participation slowly becomes more available to us, those who design and facilitate engagement activities are faced with yet more options, methods, platforms, and tools to support participation. With this ever-changing context also comes the ability to develop new blended and hybrid models of engagement. By reflecting back upon the lessons learned from distributed engagement and the accessibility gaps still to be filled, considerations about how to continue expanding engagement for the future have been identified.

Key insights:

Connections between participants and facilitators may become less formal.
Slower and more informal ways of connecting with and between participants has been favoured by participants throughout this research, such as providing 'drop in' conversations, phone calls, or online chat spaces such as WhatsApp. This way of engaging creates more space to foster trust and longer-term relationships, and to develop an understanding of participants' needs to inform subsequent bespoke participatory methods. However, the ethics of this approach must provide participants with space and opportunities to opt out. Informal engagement therefore needs to be effectively safeguarded and have expectations managed of both researchers and participants roles.

Prioritising participant ownership and agency.
Digital engagement can reduce participants' sense of agency and ownership within participatory processes and the directions taken. This is often because, as well as reducing opportunities for live feedback and therefore live adaption, remote methods can remain rigidly bound to the constraints of the platforms used. The amount of time required to prepare for remote participatory engagement can lead to methods becoming rigid and over-designed. When expanding engagement towards hybridity, there is an opportunity to further enable and expand participant ownership and involvement within the design of engagement mechanisms. Approaches that reduce the barriers to co-ownership include involving participants in co-investigator/ researcher roles, establishing ethical considerations together, and moving beyond transactional and extractive engagement altogether. The desire for participant co-ownership has been accelerated by remote and distributed engagement and should be considered as a fundamental principle towards supporting inclusivity, capacity-building and impact.

Remote and distributed engagement has questioned how we value resources.
Project budgets that were typically assigned to catering, venue hiring, and travel during in-person engagements have been reallocated throughout the pandemic. At times, distributed engagement has proven to be more affordable and cost effective. However, this way of valuing the resources required to conduct participation should be carefully considered. As we continue to seek high quality, diverse and accessible participation, there is an opportunity to reassign value. For example, diverse and hybrid participation has demonstrated that the following activities should be more highly valued and resourced:

- Longer lead-in times are needed to develop nuanced and context-led tools.

- The ways in which we reimburse or pay for participants' time should be re-evaluated.

- More resources can be allocated to support accessibility through providing appropriate tools and training.

- Slower and extended engagements that suit the schedules of participants may require increased time allocation.

Hybrid engagement presents increased complexity and a need for increased capacity.
As we move towards hybrid participation (analogue and digital, synchronous and asynchronous, distributed and local), it is likely that a plurality of engagement methods and formats will be required to meet the preferences and accessibility needs of diverse participants. This way of working may increase workloads for facilitators, particularly as they return to co-located workplace environments. There are opportunities to further investigate what preparations are required to support participatory practitioners during this transition and as they begin re-engaging in increasingly hybrid ways. Likewise, frameworks that analyse the impact and value of engagement methods and their qualities, such as Broadley's 'Methodological Typology for Distributed Research' (2020), may be used in the future to support practitioners with decision-making in the design and delivery of participation.

The value of creativity within participation remains evident but undefined.
Whilst a majority of those involved in the DDCP project had successfully designed creative engagement with digital tools, these often went beyond digital and synchronous-only mechanisms. In these instances, physical tools, asynchronous space and time and preparation materials were also offered. In parallel, the majority also believed that creativity fuelled more open participation, encouraged divergent thinking, and established trust between participants and facilitators. This suggests that hybridity may increase creative engagement. However more research is required to understand this relationship, how we maintain and create space for hybrid creativity going forwards, and how the value of creativity within participation might be evidenced, measured and evaluated.

Project Reflections for Designing Distributed Participation

These insights and recommendation have interesting implications for future participatory practice as we begin to incrementally transition back into co-located ways of working post-pandemic, and will continue to inform our design research and support our ongoing development of the 'Methodological Typology for Distributed Research' (Broadley, 2020).

Space and Places for Participation

Much of our research was focused on the nuances and intricacies that lie at the intersection of people and place, and whilst in previous work we have emphasised the need for design researchers to dedicate time and resources to immersion and scoping within each unique design context (Broadley, 2013; Broadley and Smith, 2018), Covid-19 presented us with fundamental questions concerning how to orient ourselves and engage authentically with places that are to us, temporarily geographically unreachable. Yet due to the increasing uptake and acceptance of video conferencing technology, with these limitations have come opportunities to connect with distributed, dispersed and diverse communities of place and of interest. Reconsiderations of the concepts and roles of place and space were topics of discussion in the workshops, and are an area of much attention in place-based design research. Within this, interventions that seek to strengthen community resilience at the hyperlocal scale can lead to immediate impact, and as Manzini (2020) unpacks, there is a need to actively 'cultivate[ing] a network of relationships that, after the crisis, could evolve into hybrid communities of place, that is, communities capable of living in both the physical and the digital space' (2020). Exploring ways that onsite placemaking methods and approaches can be reframed for distributed engagement, Cipolla (2020) highlights that digital approaches have the capacity to 'progressively include the connections and relations between residents and nurture a sense of place', but that 'there is much to be learned on nurturing interpersonal relationships and a sense of place in a contactless way' (2020: 681). As our own research progresses, the DDCP team will identify opportunities to investigate places and spaces for participation, and the qualities and characteristics that can positively influence the relational dynamics of community engagement .

Engagement through Artefacts

In parallel to DDCP, the team have been designing artefacts as tools to support creative engagement in both synchronous and asynchronous settings. Since March 2020, there has been a notable resurgence in such approaches to design research, explicitly recalling relationships to the 'cultural probe' as packages of creative materials such as disposable cameras, postcards, diaries, and maps that are sent to people and communities to support them to self-report and document aspects of their daily lives (Gaver et al. 1999; Mattelmäki 2006). Whilst proposing that such artefactual approaches can enhance accessible and inclusive participation, Davis et al. (2021) highlight issues of expense and sustainability as well as concerns that 'a significant risk in a dis-located Low-Contact Co-Design process (the 'different time, different space' model) is the removal of live communication opportunities between participants and the serendipitous discoveries that can emerge from this process' (2020: 134). DDCP has opened up discussions surrounding workbooks to promote asynchronous priming and reflection; kits and packs to support ideation; and community-led making activities as outlets for creative expression and mutual learning. The properties and purposes of material artefacts within distributed participation present an ongoing area of research for the team.

Creativity and Beyond

Developing ideas around *co-design at a distance* (Broadley and Smith, 2018) and reimagining preferable scenarios with people and communities in distributed environments, DDCP's use of offline, individual activities and group sharing and discussion promoted engagement that was based on reflection and dialogue. Whilst developed as a means of exploring shared engagement principles and future areas of enquiry, the design sprint brief activity in workshop 03 changed the tone and dynamic of the group by introducing elements of creativity, ideation, and evaluation. As with situated, in-person workshops, careful consideration of this shift is needed to ensure that all participants are comfortable and equipped to engage in generative, future-focused activities. The DDCP team are adept in Miro and applied this in the workshops to capture insights as they emerged, yet the platform's strengths and shortcomings must be critically evaluated in response to the engagement context. Developing Harrington, Erete, and Piper's discussions of equity and ownership in participatory design (2019: 2−3), the format, content, and facilitation of such methods can inadvertently foster exclusive and elitist creative processes that promote unconstrained ideation and propose solutions misaligned to community experiences, and in the distributed context, there is a need to develop bespoke methods and tools with

people and communities. Davis et al. maintain that 'what researchers and designers ask of participants (that is, to participate) does not necessarily change, however, the way the tools of participation are used does' (2020: page). However, there is an imperative to explore the extent to which the methodological innovation that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a further shift in *what* people and communities are invited to contribute, their roles and responsibilities, and how a further recalibration of power and control can lead to meaningful outcomes and impact on the ground.

Next Steps

Returning to our original aims underpinning the DDCP project, we sought to establish a new, multidisciplinary network of practitioners, researchers, educators and academics, and to design and deliver a series of knowledge exchange workshops to collectively capture and reflect on the current and future challenges and opportunities of distributed participation through sharing, documenting and aggregating innovative approaches and transferable insights, and consolidate our collective learning. Following each workshop, feedback was gathered from the participants, which was shared on the project Padlet and through guest blog posts (which can be found on the project website). As the project itself was an example of distributed participation, this feedback provided the DDCP team with valuable insight that informed the design of each subsequent workshop and enabled us to evaluate the knowledge exchange process as it unfolded.

This report will be made publicly available and shared across the network and beyond to benefit a range of audiences to support processes of designing effective and ethical community-based participation. Our next steps are to identify further opportunities to expand the network and to later reconnect to reflect on challenges surrounding transitions back into co-located and in-person working spaces post-pandemic that are yet to emerge, and to evaluate what the longer-term implications will be for embedding blended and hybrid approaches into our everyday practices. In the short-term, the DDCP team are keen to further disseminate the project findings both internally at GSA (to inform and enhance future learning and teaching and research student supervision), as well as externally to contribute to practice and policy, to develop more ethical processes of participation, and to explore future collaborations with newly formed partnerships in the network.
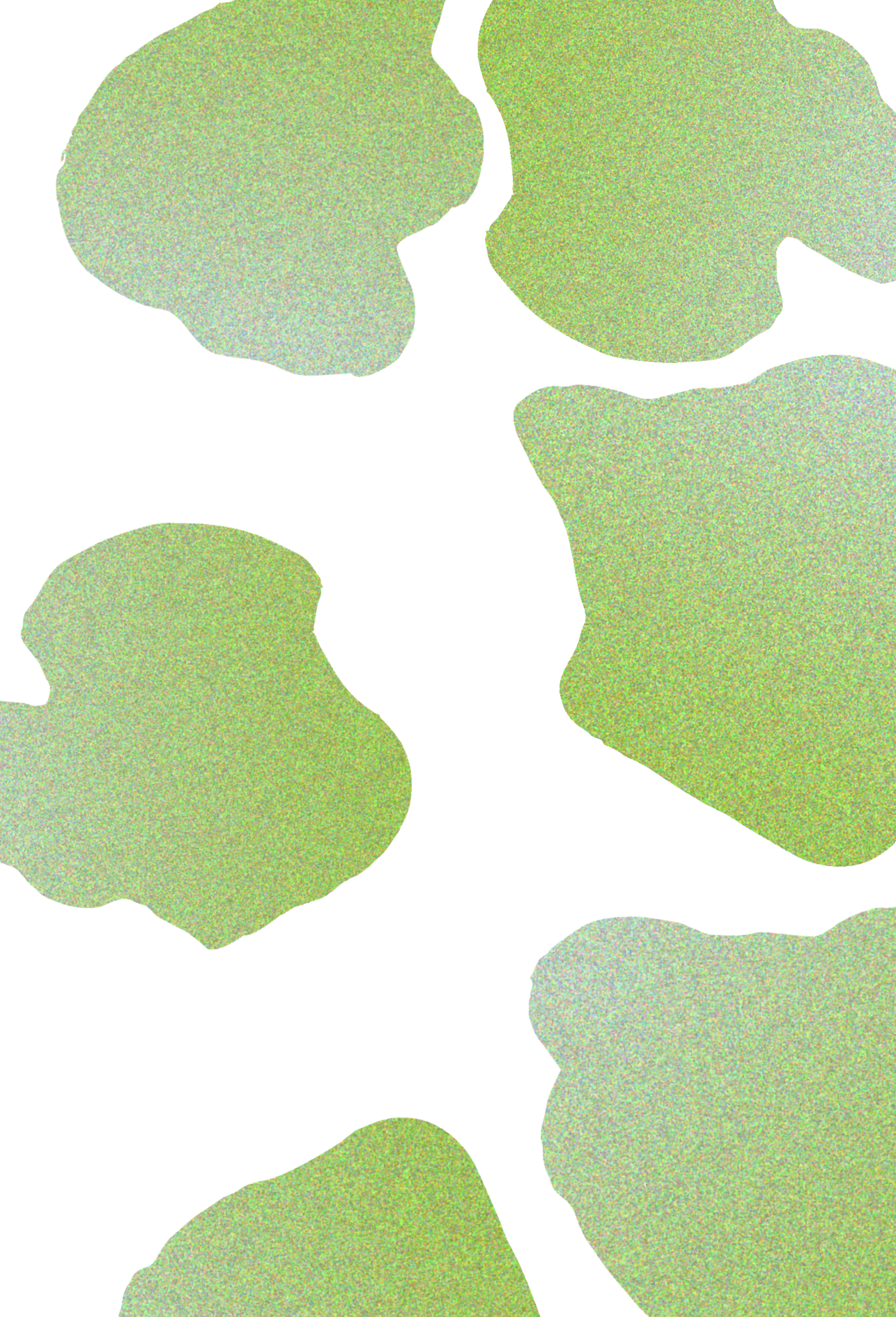
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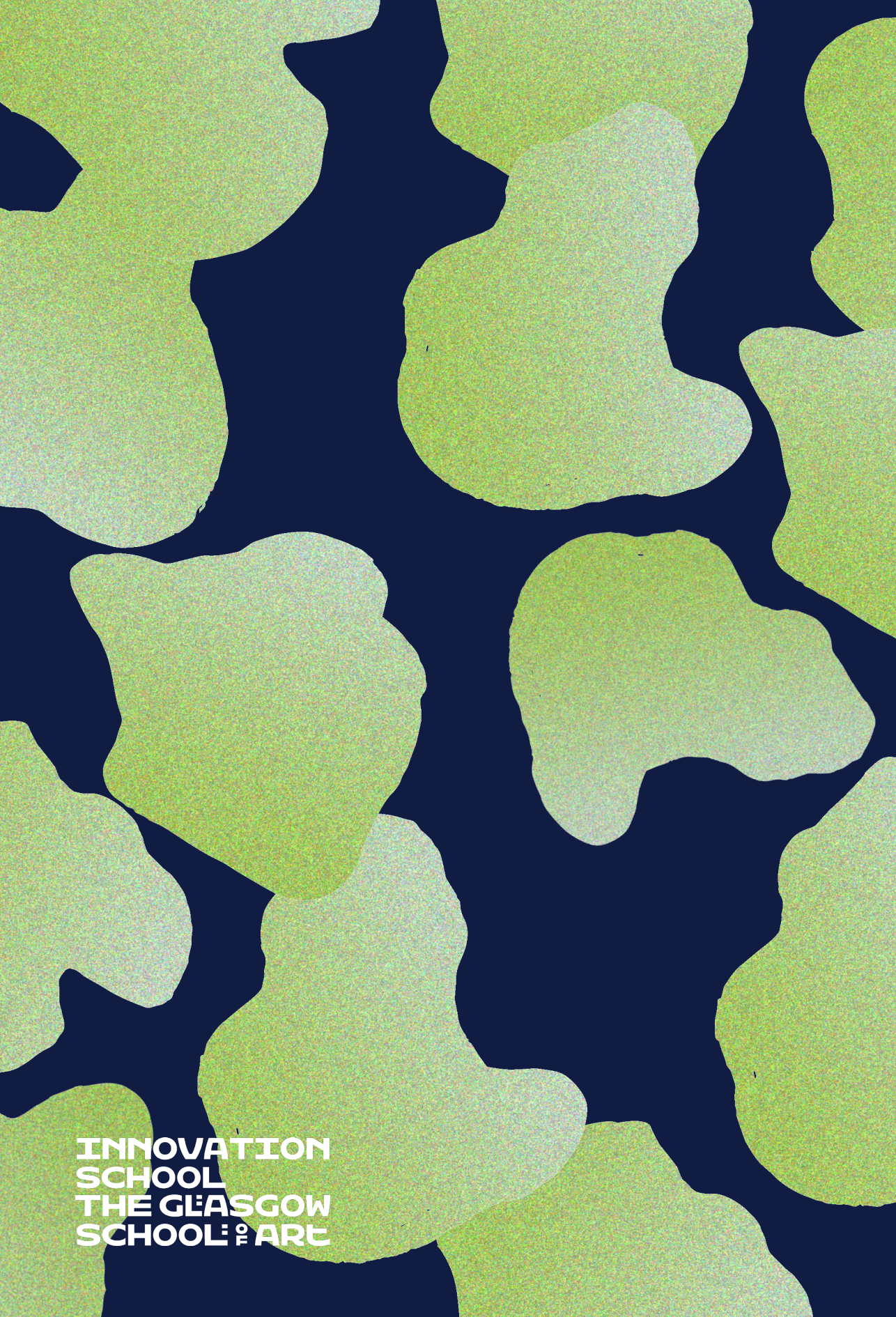
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