

# Placemaking : Spirit@Work?

<http://eicsp.org/events/event-details/869-online-zoom-forum-place-making-12-may-2021>

A summary/overview, *and commentary*, by  
Ian Wight, Forum Convenor  
May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021

[ NB A full, essentially verbatim, transcript – with all the images from illustrated presentations – is available upon request from [ianwight1949@gmail.com](mailto:ianwight1949@gmail.com) ]

*What comes to mind when contemplating placemaking? Oftentimes it feels like it's possibly all about 'place' – with its making secondary, and its makers tertiary. But might we try to equally privilege the making and the makers? To not simply settling for a general sensing of place, but to reach for a fuller presencing that engages us in its making? For some, like Rebecca Solnit, place merits the status of a sixth sense; it is located within us, enlarging our sense-making, en route to meaning-making with others. Place is ultimately self-referential – it is for us to make; it is in us, and we are in it.*

*So, what scope are you willing to entertain where placemaking is concerned? Is it easier to keep it as something 'out there' (rather than 'in here')? An improvement on space or geography or locality – but still at arms-length? Might we envelop it, entangle with it, own it - as part and parcel of life itself? David Seamon, a phenomenologist, offers the perspective 'Life Takes Place', which can be considered on several levels: life 'requires' place; life 'acquires' place; life 'makes' place. Perhaps Patrick Geddes, known in his day for his maxim 'by leaves we live', would allow today for the possibility that 'by place-making we live'. Or is this all a little too much 're-purposing' of place?*

*We contemplated 're-purposing' in our first forum, on April 14<sup>th</sup>, and discovered the possibility of re-purposing not only our 'outer environment', such as the physical and functional aspects of place, but also our 'inner environment' – such as an old, perhaps smaller, self that is calling for a 'make-over', a re-making, a re-fitting for a newer higher purpose. This allowed for the possibility of re-purposing being conceived as part of a larger re-set, as manifestation of spirit@work. Might place-making be similarly regarded? Especially, getting in touch with our interior territory, individually and collectively, that might often seem 'beyond our ken'- until we choose to acknowledge. This is territory beyond the physical and the functional, in the realms of the convivial and the spiritual.*

EICSP is currently exploring such possible manifestations of Spirit@Work in a series of on-line forums, aiming for a conversation that values a mix of reflective and generative dialogue. Placemaking is one of three inter-related themes being actively explored – along with re-purposing and wellbeing. Can we connect these themes? For example, might planning be repurposed as placemaking, as wellbeing by design? What other interconnection might be

identified, building on the possibility of their individual and collective representation as spirit @work?

Each conversation spans a combined, sequenced concern with divergence, emergence and convergence: divergence in terms of first welcoming a diverse range of perspectives and experiences; emergence in terms of new perspectives and new experiences generated in-the-moment, through intimate small-group discussions; and finally some deliberative convergence, in terms of co-created, co-generated new insights and new meaning.

On May 12<sup>th</sup> 2021 a small group of folks with a common curiosity around placemaking engaged in some conversation. They had been invited to explore ‘the territory beyond ordinary everyday place, its grounding of our lives, and especially its making’. What and who is involved in the making of place? What about the act of placemaking, by placemakers? Might this – like repurposing and wellbeing – be another arena of manifestation of Spirit@Work?

*The forum was inclusively open to a range of perspectives and contexts, based on the lived experience of participants ‘feeling into the territory between the personal and the universal’. Initial conversation possibilities were identified, such as placemaking as a progression of our sense-making and meaning-making, as ‘making places we might all call home’. Or as various forms of work like ‘heart-and-soul’ work, or ‘community spirit’ at work, or as ‘whole-making’ work – opening into the realms of wellbeing, the focus of the next forum.*

Some offered ‘mini-keynote presentations’, to help start the conversation; others offered up some ‘key-note listening’, to help extend the conversation. We aimed to make the conversation more than the usual ‘talking nice’ and ‘talking tough’, and to pitch into above-the-line ‘dialogue’ territory – notably reflective dialogue and generative dialogue (see [4 types of conversation](#)). *There was much story-telling; what follows is more story-telling, by this story-teller, for those interested in learning about what emerged in the conversation about placemaking.* The forum was launched with three ‘mini-keynote’ presentations, styled as ‘conversation starters’, by Kate Carter, Nick Walker and Diarmaid Lawlor: a diversity of perspectives:

**[Kate Carter](#)**: (University of Edinburgh, School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture) led off the conversation with an image (below) of ‘young place-makers’ from Fort William, who took part in some research she conducted for the Scottish Government on ‘[Housing the Future \(Housing2040\)](#)’ in 2019 – in collaboration with [Collective Architecture](#). This work was the basis for her remarks, based on views gathered from folks around Scotland.

*When I first saw the image I commented that: ‘It’s great to see this bunch of young place-makers in action’.* They were being asked how they saw their future – a future they will be living in 2040, the operative time-horizon. As Kate indicated: ‘We got them to think about what place meant to them, and how they imagined they would live’. The process incorporated the [Place Standard](#) tool, and although it was specifically re-purposed for younger placemakers, this was found to be unnecessary: ‘the responses of the young people indicated they were already well-

equipped and really well-informed, and really engaged with the idea of place'. *This certainly augurs well for the progression in emphasis - from place, to placemaking, to placemakers.*



Kate commented – from her experience - that ‘place is often not well understood’; she also referenced a colleague who had surprised her by asking ‘What on earth is placemaking?’. Kate’s initial response was ‘it’s a ‘sort-of’ in vogue term for what designers are doing in terms of designing places’ but then, upon further reflection she added – ‘but actually it’s not just about designers – it is about engaging with everybody to understand what makes a good place’. *Placemaking implicating everyone, not simply those with specialist or professional expertise.*

She settled upon two main elements as her key message as a conversation starter. The first: ‘young people are absolutely vital in terms of placemaking’, mainly on account that ‘they’ve got an amazingly diverse set of ideas and ways of viewing the world which can be really helpful to us. They see things in maybe a slightly different way, and they can imagine things in a way that is perhaps broader than many adults (especially those who have been trained as designers)’. This has implications for ‘how place is defined, and how (it) is going to evolve and change’.

Her second key message element was around ‘what is place, and how is it used; and how do we engage with place’. She set this in the context of the Covid pandemic experience ‘because place for many of us over the last year has been a very different one from the year before, where socializing has been in front of a computer, and those walks we all did through lockdown in a very private way around our own domains. And those of us working in our gardens had re-embraced that place that we had’. She suggested that ‘the public places took on quite a different guise – quite often those empty voids in the city that we had not been using before’.

Her main point: ‘place changes through history, and places that were designed for one thing change or evolve over time’. *I sometimes observe that there is a primacy and a potency to place that is there to be positively harnessed via placemaking endeavours.*

Kate was seeing ‘two ends of a really messy spectrum. There’s the idea of young people and their ability to look through time going forward, and the fact that time does not stand still, and place is changing’. For her, as far as place is concerned: ‘it’s got different meanings, and different uses, and (there are) different evolutions of what we think of place going forward’.

*Place implicates meaning-making, and whole-making, as well as sense-making; it is a making in itself, and this opens the door to implicating the makers, like the young placemakers in Fort William. It feels like there might have been an elemental spirit at work in their placemaking.*

[Nick Walker](#) presented as an architect with [Collective Architecture](#) drawing on experience from recent projects, with a particular interest in ‘the people who live there... it’s about somewhere you’d want to live, and you want to live for a long time’. This entails working with ‘a lot of technical items and planning guidance’, informing their placemaking – (see examples, below):



For Nick, placemaking ‘is really to do with the perception of place and about what it is that makes somewhere ‘some-where’, and somewhere you want to be, and somewhere you want to live’. He discussed some of the context for their Glasgow projects, using some historical images, some of which conveyed ‘a very bad impression of Glasgow at the time’. While indicative of issues around poverty and multiple deprivation he also offered that ‘the photos themselves don’t tell the true story of the city and the great communities that make Glasgow - that make Glasgow an extraordinarily resilient city’. *He seemed to be tuning into a real spirit about the city: ‘With all the hardship and all the difficulties that are being thrown at it, Glasgow still gets back up and gets off its knees and addresses the world – and reinvents itself’.*

He pointed especially to The Barras', where he has been engaged with some student work, that has highlighted how new meaning can be achieved by carefully considered interventions, or by provocative suggestions – such as an opera house in the Barras. Acknowledging this as 'a contentious building typology' in that context, he drew on the design proposal to show 'how we try to make places by putting things like opera houses into cities'. His main wondering though was around 'what do they really have to do with the people there? Are they token gestures of regeneration?' *Or might they help open a larger dialogue that might better serve the people in/of/around the place – such as the Barras?*



For Nick, what 'The Barras' (above) are really about is the 'community and people, and buildings as backdrop – and that backdrop is what facilitates people to be able to come together as friends, as work colleagues'. From his perspective it is 'the city' – the corporate, civic entity - that is providing 'the infrastructure, and that fabric, to allow communities to gather and form a place'. But essentially - People Make Glasgow! (see below) Nick stresses: 'This is really true. If it weren't for the people in Glasgow it would be a very different city, and everybody who ever comes to Glasgow, despite the rain and the cold and what have you – there is always this incredibly friendly city'. For him, people make 'everywhere'.



As architects 'we engage with people; it's incredibly important to find out from people what it is that they enjoy about the places they live'. In their social housing projects Nick maintains that

‘to (really) understand a place you’ve got to talk to a lot of people who live there. They are incredible resources in terms of life experience, and knowing about the history of the place, and the lives of the people who live there, and the traditions that go on in the place, and the change that the place has had to deal with, and the culture of the place and the community. And all of these are important in making a place’.

Other projects referenced included the former Victoria Hospital site on the south side of Glasgow. Still ‘well known’ by many ‘The Victoria’, and its three Nightingale Pavilions, still contribute to the creation of ‘a real sense of place in the area of Langside. The buildings are more than just the ‘bricks and mortar’. They are a real essence of what it is to be in Langside’. It became obvious that the redevelopment would have to retain those three Nightingale Pavilions, ‘the most recognizable part of the townscape, and which really, tangibly, gives the place a sense of ‘place’.

Nick ended by referencing a recently completed Anderston Regeneration project. Formerly ‘tremendous Victorian infrastructure’ involving considerable hustle and bustle in its day, much of the area was cleared for ‘motorway infrastructure’. Consequently, in Nick’s words: ‘No sense of place, no sense of belonging; it could be anywhere in the world... And what we tried to do in this project was again to engage with the local residents, find out about the history, find out about the people who live there’. The project was really about ‘stitching the roads back together again and making it very legible as part of the city’ and ‘trying to build things that were of a tenemental scale’. Pedestrianization was featured, improving visual connection, but also achieving ‘that strong sense of connection to what was there before’.

Upon completion, when the scaffolding came down, Nick couldn’t resist posting pictures of the redevelopment on Instagram, commenting about being super-excited, and hash-tagging it ‘placemaking’. Someone from the Social Life Project messaged him back, observing ‘This is not a place’. *An exchange developed - they were seeking ‘more photos with people and programming’, effectively highlighting the ‘placemaking’ to come, when folks move in.* Nick’s last words: ‘And that’s what I’d like to finish with’.

**Diarmaid Lawlor** rooted his remarks in a story about his father’s encounters with remote, often snow-covered, areas in Canada, as a young man - emigrating when he was 17, from a very rural area of Ireland.



When his father returned, after working for the US Air Force: ‘he bought a pub in a field’, which always struck Diarmaid as ‘almost like a green version of a white landscape’ that his father may have been seeking to reproduce, to ‘make’, from his Canadian (northern/Arctic) experiences. It also struck him that this was ‘about a man searching for meaning. So, he left Ireland looking for something and he came back with a bag of money looking for something, *for equivalents in the two different locations*; his whole life was about searching for meaning’.

For Diarmaid then, perhaps not surprisingly, the definition of place is ‘location with meaning... its somewhere that gives us meaning, and where we find meaning, and the purpose of a location with meaning is to help people live well’. He also stresses this should embrace ‘a principle of equity – regardless of who you are, what you look like, what your background is, what your interests are’. *Perhaps with ‘professional’ placemakers in mind*, Diarmaid maintains that ‘the purpose of place is to construct the conditions to afford people the opportunity and right to live well’. *Constructing conditions... affording opportunities, for the ‘lay’ placemakers on the ground, dwelling in the place, inhabiting it.*

He observed that sometimes ‘place gets pulled’ into different forms and appearances, but to him: ‘it doesn’t really matter; to me it matters that the person in that place finds the conditions to live well, and - more importantly – (the) people who are shaping places through relationships and actions have a responsibility to afford people the opportunity to live well’. *Here Diarmaid is again apparently thinking especially of the professionals (such as Nick Walker and his colleagues), engaged in the place-shaping - prior to the place-making, when the full meaning emerges.*

There are three key dimensions for Diarmaid around the ‘living well’ purpose he associates with authentic placemaking: ‘the first key dimension is **relationship**’. When his father went over to Canada he was surrounded by peers on an American air force base. He built friendships, and then he built relationships with the Inuit, and then he came back; ‘his entire ‘thing’ was about relationships. Relationships are at the heart – are a key part – of place’. In some recent work in Edinburgh, with the [Commission of Prevention and Early Intervention](#), Diarmaid discovered four strands to relationship: ‘The first is that, for everyone, everywhere – everyone should have a safe space - that might be a relationship, that might be a discussion, it might be a spiritual part, it might be a building, it might be somewhere else - a safe space; voices heard; meaningful relationships; and real choices. These (four) elements should be available to everybody, everywhere, in every context’.

The second key dimension: ‘once we have built the relationship thing around people - we need to build **scaffolding**. So, if we think about somebody who’s been in addiction, returning out of that, or someone who has had trauma problems, or someone who has maybe just had tough times – if we push people too far too quick, they’ll push back. But if we’re able to provide scaffolding so you’re able to make – on your own terms – the first next choice, and then from that the next choice, and then the next choice – there is a scaffolding for going at your own pace; but there’s always a way’. *So, a location with meaning, for relationship and with scaffolding, and then...*

For Diarmaid, the final bit is **resilience**: ‘I think the Covid bit has demonstrated – in our localities and relationships, in our families and places – that it is the relationships with the scaffolding that give the resilience’. He closed by pointing folks back to his two opening images:

‘Sometimes, when you look at an empty image of an empty place you just see the emptiness. This emptiness was the place that attracted my father, and this place (this pub in a field) was the place that attracted other folks, and it is full of meaning for many people. That meaning gives the opportunity for relationships; the opportunity of relationships builds the structure for scaffolding; and the structure for scaffolding gives resilience. So, for me, place is location with meaning – and how we build that and how we shape that is to do with how we see each other in the world’.

At this point forum participants were asked if there were any other perspectives that they would like to ‘table’ - before we moved into the breakout groups? *We were still explicitly welcoming a divergence, or diversity, of perspectives.*

**Kate Carter** thought there might be cause for some questioning of a point around - what she had picked up in the foregoing - namely, ‘the idea of place being an obvious outcome’, as something inevitable, but not necessarily so: ‘when we went to twelve different locations around Scotland and spoke to primarily teenaged young folk there was quite a different dimension’. What she had noticed was that, in those places where those young folks were worried about getting jobs ‘the reality is they were thinking about their particular concern, when they were thinking about a good place, or what a place they would like to live would be’. *That such a place as they currently enjoyed might not be available to them.* For Kate this translated into an appreciation that ‘the place and the people that live in that place have got to be thought of as unique’. This could be ‘down to the granular scale of individuals’, but there were also implications ‘due to the pressures that communities and/or individuals are facing’.

She was helped to see place better through the young people’s eyes: ‘they see that maybe through their parents’ experience, if they’re not already thinking about whether they’re going to have a job, and therefore be able to live (in their place)’. She found the young folk in Fort William ‘amazingly well-informed’. They were really worried about sea-level rise, because they lived beside the sea; they were thinking of ‘big-picture’ issues that might confront them ‘as to where they are going to live, and how they would change their place to deal with that’. For Kate this highlighted ‘just how complex place-making or places are’. In particular they are not about meeting certain standards, such as might be implied by the Place Standard for example. While appreciating the tool’s positives she suggested ‘it could be guilty of oversimplifying things, and that’s something we should always be aware of. It is more that it is a complex messy world out there – and that’s what makes it interesting’. *Placemaking as complex, and messy – and interesting.*

**Nick Walker** noted ‘a lot of common themes’ coming up and wanted to expand on this by noting that ‘to fully understand a place you’ve got to speak to everybody, and not take anything

for granted'. He recalled some experiences in Woodside, Glasgow – a rather dense, crowded neighbourhood in the past, with pretty significant deprivation... 'but if you speak to some of the older residents who live in Woodside, they were glad to see the back of what was there before, because of all the problems they'd had'. He and his colleagues took a different, regretful, view of the demolition: 'To us it was like a terrible disaster, because that Victorian infrastructure has gone, and been replaced by blocks of multi-storey flats' but this was certainly not the view of the old-timers. Nick advised: 'don't always expect everybody to have the same perspective as yourself'.

As regards community consultations, Nick observed that although invariably 'very interesting' they are only one way of finding out what people think of a place. His experience was that they often tend to involve the same sort of people who always go along, and they tend to be educated, retired people, who have particular 'axes to grind'; 'they are not always truly reflective of the whole reading of a place'. For Nick, 'it's a tricky thing to do to engage with people to find out what the true story is. And the only real way to do that is to embed yourself within a community, and try and gain its trust, and find out as much as you can'. He cautioned against 'drop-in' approaches - with some outsider 'flown in, doing a workshop, leaving an art piece, and then disappearing - and think that that's going to solve everyone's problems... People are not going to be happy'.

*For myself (Ian Wight) such commentary was 'very provocative'. I have a major interest in placemaking, as part of my city planning professor background. As a planning educator I arrived at the position that I was trying to repurpose planning as placemaking, as wellbeing by design. I encouraged my planning students to plan, and design, with placemaking in mind – that is place-making by the people in/of the place in question (especially if they were not of the place). I was also being reminded of aspects of our previous forum on re-purposing, where place definitely came up as a major theme, as grounding context for repurposing efforts. My abiding interest has become not just/simply 'place', but moving this to more of a focus on the 'place-making' – i.e. to the making of place, and then – more specifically – to an interest in the makers of place. I sense that, while often seemingly still pre-occupied with place, we might gradually be moving the focus of our attention along this spectrum to some extent; we're slowly connecting better with the place-makers in/of the place. But we still have some ways to go to really 'land' here naturally.*

*For another perspective to add to the mix I invited a participant, with whom I've had many conversations about placemaking, to possibly speak to her place-caring perspective. **Marilyn Hamilton** indicated that her background is 'not architecture – it's really human systems... learning how to see the city as a complex adaptive system'. She has written several books in her *Integral City* series. In her second one she framed her work as looking at [an integral city, as a whole living system](#): 'I looked at it through inquiry and action, looking for how to 'design in' impact in the 'human hive' as a living system'.*

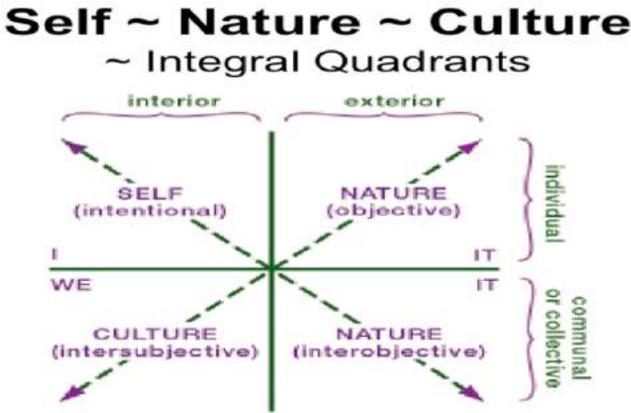
She began to develop a distinction between what she saw as place-making, and what she regarded as complementarily important – [place-caring](#). The first eight book chapters are about

place-caring, and the last eight are about place-making. *For myself, placemaking included place-caring – and much more besides (but basically, ‘it’s all one thing’), and I was not comfortable with Marilyn’s differentiation (although I later came to better understand where she was coming from).* Marilyn’s justification was ‘right now people must be able to see the importance of place-caring as a special aspect of creating cities through consciousness and culture’ (see diagram below).



<http://integralleadershipreview.com/3249-generational-cycles-saecula-and-cities/>

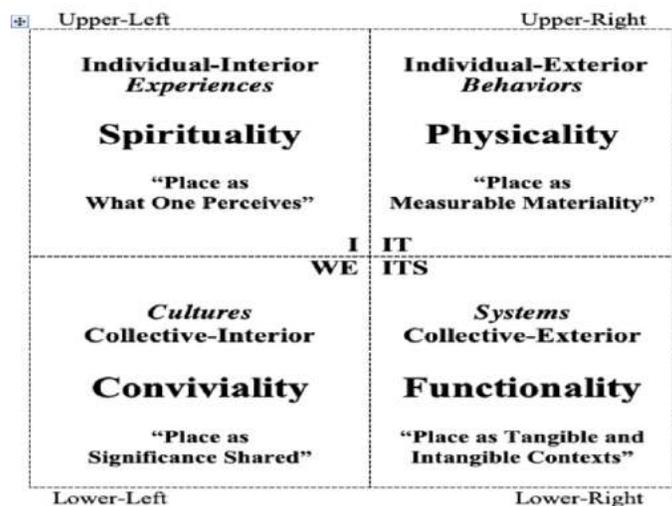
For Marilyn, ‘placemaking... is around the actions and the infrastructures, and the systems; it’s the exterior, the visible part of the city, and I’m really interested in bringing in the invisible – the interior. So, I decided I’m going to privilege it in this (second) book’. She suggests: ‘there’s a wholeness when we can stand back and embrace both - ‘place-caring’ that represents the internal, invisible life of cities as a complement to ‘place-making’ that holds the external, visible life of cities’. This has led to generative conversations between us, where both Marilyn and I are ‘each holding the city as a whole’ within a common ‘integral’ framing (see below).



Marilyn has gone on to ‘parse the wholeness’ into the four Integral City Quadrants, while I have continued to focus on my ‘[integral placemaking](#)’, where place and placemaking are both, in essence, integrations in the process of integrating, within our common whole living system outlook. Her differentiation is testimony to the colonisation of placemaking by elements of conventional planning and design by professionals who have essentially appropriated ‘placemaking’ for their purposes, without taking on board the full implications of an authentic placemaking. And in Marilyn’s case, downplaying the aspects she describes as place-caring.

I also believe that a wholistic or integral placemaking needs to equally privilege the ‘interior’ dimensions, and not only the exterior aspects. The latter emphasise what I refer to as the physicality and the functionality involved with place and placemaking; the interior dimensions meriting more attention – caring intention in Marilyn’s terms – are spirituality and conviviality (see below). This is the territory where signs of ‘spirit@work’ may be anticipated; its comparative absence may indicate an undue emphasis on the physical and the functional (the actions and the infrastructure and the systems in Marilyn terms).

Place and placemaking, in integral terms, may be conceived as an integration of I, We, and It/Its perspectives. The integration is central, at the intersection/inter-face, and the integrators, ultimately are the persons embodying and enacting the integration. For some, like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, these are essentially spiritual beings having a material existence. This is where it is possible, for myself, to hypothesise placemaking as a manifestation of Spirit@Work.



<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350103229> Integral Placemaking A Poiesis of Sophrosynes

Meanwhile, back in the forum, we began to transition from a divergence focus to an emergence interest; what might be emerging for us, coming out of the presentations and commentary to that point (We had about half an hour or so in break-out, and then came back together for our third plenary segment, focusing on convergence – or common-meaning-making). We were in four break-out groups for around 35 minutes, following which the designated ‘listeners’ led off with their reflections [Some groups took longer to return to the plenary; one group – Judy, Nick,

Ian and Karen - returned early, and had the end of their conversation picked up in the session recording – see immediately below]

*In my break-out group, following up on Judy Wilkinson's comments about [Local Place Plans](#), I (Ian Wight) heard some enthusiasm around them, and also some qualifications. I commented: 'It may be that the local authorities are OK with 'place' but they are not necessarily into the 'placemaking' yet, and especially the engagement of the regular ordinary folk – as 'place-makers', because they (the local authority) would have to give up some of their power and authority, and that may stymie some of the ideals of the local place planning'. This was just a hypothesis on my part (but it did build on some of my earlier commentary).*

**Judy Wilkinson** was particularly interested in hearing from Karen about [the Croft, in Leith](#): 'I wish that had been around when they were drafting the legislation for the [Community Empowerment Act](#) and the allotments legislation, because – again - they've given the local authority the right to write rules and regulations'. In her experience local authorities were challenged to engage well with local people on such matters 'and place plans are just the same; it's this mixture, this complexity – but it's also the experiences people have. And if they don't experience something like The Croft, then they don't believe that it's possible'. For Judy, what was important was: 'How we get people to visit each other, and actually talk'; and for her that's the basis of initiating placemaking – 'people have to visit and talk and listen; listen to all the stories'. *Place-making arises through stories shared, stories told – yearnings surfaced, meanings made, relationships cultivated.*

For **Karen Lawson**, building on Judy's comments, she found it interesting that it was [a local person in Leith \(Evie Murray\)](#) that saw the loop-hole in the crofting legislation, and recognized that there was a building on this land – the old changing rooms for the football team. A croft – normally associated with remote rural Highland and Island regions - has to have a building and has to have a family or a community 'and they made a case for the people (of Leith) being the family for the croft'. *Here we see lay place-makers in action - people in and of the place, seeing a loophole in the crofting legislation: 'it was never something by design'.*

Karen attributed the initiative to someone – Evie Murray - who had a passion about 'growing it': 'she called it ['crops in pots'](#) at first, because that's what she did in a tenement. She wanted everybody else to be able to feel that they could make their pots into crops. And then saw these (old) tennis courts, and the changing rooms, and looked and saw it (the opportunity)'. For Karen – 'I think that sometimes it's the imagination and the creative genius of people to see something; a croft could be in a city – you have to grow something and have a building. I'm sure there's lots of other things (you have to do) - but actually hooking up with those other creative people too'. *All-in-all, the Croft in Leith yielded a wonderful example of authentic placemaking at its best, coming out of some rich break-out conversation.*

**Judy Wilkinson** followed up with some additional reflections: 'The stories that emerged in the break-out session touched the heart-mind. Karen's two allotments stories (of the Italian's allotments site, and then the new Croft in Leith) were examples of place and how different

people need different kinds of green infrastructure that they can look after, and where they find a community. Nick’s story of living in his tenement with eight neighbours, and then how the block of 48 dwellings came together in the shared garden during Covid, highlighted the importance of tenement living as a model for place’.

**Ian Wight** observed that ‘we wanted to put the emphasis on the conversation, and therefore do justice to the break-out groups segment. This seems very appropriate in a placemaking context’. He also connected with the point earlier, when Diarmaid was talking about ‘living well’, triggering his interest in conviviality: ‘Certainly, I associate placemaking with very convivial situations, which, essentially, is ‘living well together’, which was on display in spades with the case of the Croft in Leith. I was also moved to suggest that ‘sometimes I think that conviviality is as needed if not more needed than sustainability’ in this day and age. *It is probably a much more conducive container for a broader placemaking, with much caring in the making.*

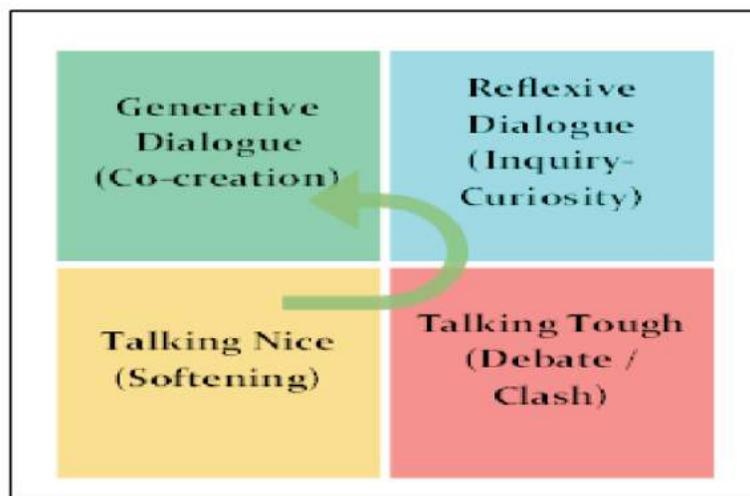
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**Ian Wight** welcomed everyone back to final forum segment – after the divergence, and emergence segments – focusing on **convergence**. We opened with a diversity of views, and then the hope was that we might start to emerge some new views in our break-outs. Now the curiosity had become what we might converge around.

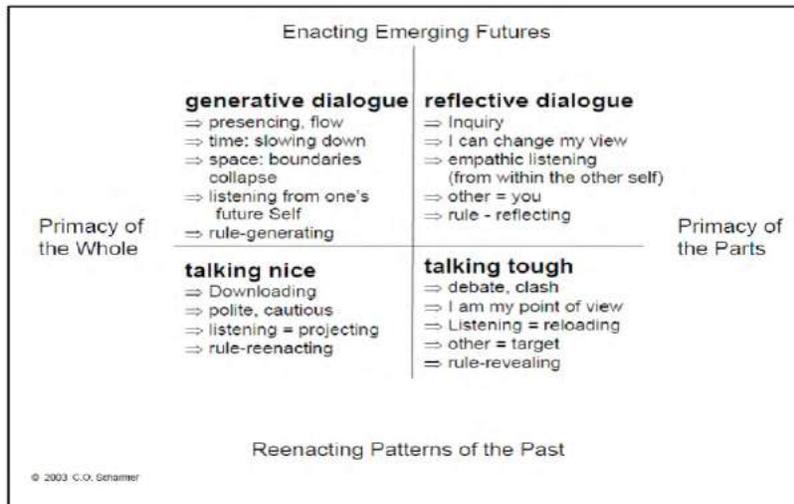
Diarmaid, in his ‘conversation starter remarks’, placed emphasis on ‘meaning’, and I wondered to what extent there is some common-meaning-making to be made here – that can especially help launch us into our next forum, on wellbeing. I invited folks to have this at the back of their minds (in this segment), along with giving themselves permission to be very reflective and generative in their dialogue (*thinking especially of the aspect of ‘parts and wholes’ and ‘pasts and futures’ – in the forum orientation power-point – see below*).

## 4 Types of Conversation

<http://www.mspguide.org/tool/4-types-conversations>



## Parts and Wholes : Pasts and Futures



*I also noted 'the other curiosity'. We've been trying to string the three themes (re-purposing, place-making, and well-being) together as interconnected explorations. And we have this 'Spirit@Work?' as an underlying curiosity, that people were welcomed to weave into any reporting.*

**John Howie** (keynote-listener) relayed his experience of a break-out group with Gavin Thomson, David Adams and Diarmaid Lawlor – 'a great experience for myself – first-time ever as a keynote listener'. He summed it up as 'story-telling at its best' and observed 'a certain demographic profile' at work – 'a sort of 'men's shed' session for us'. John noted 'so many things that came up for us' essenced in 'the nature of (the) story-telling', fluidly moving from one field to another, but all incredibly well-connected.

Gavin Thomson led off with a story about 'creating places that give the opportunity for people to experience the spontaneity of living well', where 'you're in a place that allows you to make these choices, and you benefit from that. It might be conscious or unconscious, but it's having that in place'. There was also commentary around 'what we use as imagery in place, and really emphasizing the importance of one's person, and the physical infrastructure – but it is also the other inhabitants'. This led to 'talking about nature - both in terms of trees and birds and animals and so on'. It also got them into looking at 'rural isolation', and the viewpoints of some people who may think that 'there is nothing much going on here' - *but really underestimating that there is actually so much going on in that area.*

There was more follow-up on Diarmaid's opening story about his father – 'why choose the middle of nowhere to set up a public bar'. It was realized that the bar 'became a focal point', a place that 'grew through time', as people recognized it as 'more than just a place to buy a pint'. Rather, it was more 'a place to connect, to come together, a place to share advice' essencing the 'scaffolding' that Diarmaid touched on earlier. It seemed that 'creating places doesn't need to get 'over-technical'; the bar was set up to provide hospitality – it wasn't necessarily there to

provide a scaffolding of support for local community folk that passed by'. *But there was that 'dividend' - from the community capital accumulation.*

This break-out group also explored the pace at which place is created via David Adams' story about his own experience of setting up a farm in Fife. He identified 'a two-pronged business approach' at work, where 'yes – the farm is there to rear animals and to conduct agriculture, but at the same time it became obvious that there was a need to create these 'other business sides as well'. This involved 'really experimenting with the design of your physical place, to make it a really successful and happy place to bring up a family'. It was also something about – 'going into a place and not necessarily feeling it's your own right from the start, but by pacing yourself the place does become part of you, and you do feel your own part of that, and are able to influence it'. *A complex making; a mutual influencing.*

There was conversation around 'a whole other thing - what places might mean for outsiders, in criticizing an environment, especially within some of our most deprived inner-city communities'. The group felt that 'we must not forget what they hold in terms of meaningful relationships, and memories, and a real loyalty to that area'. The conclusion? – 'it's really thinking about the context'.

Gavin contributed a story in terms of someone from a poorer background who was an architecture student, who not only had the technical expertise but had the feeling of what a place was all about. The main learning? – 'in many ways, it may be down to 'the lived experiences' of that individual, and it really underlined the need for both this technical and emotional aspect of design'.

Somehow The Dubliners entered the conversation. For John this 'really showed – in terms of how we teach – irrespective of the subject, we have to think broadly of how we communicate what we want to say; in this case about place'. One of the Dubliners' songs became the medium for considering how something might be best communicated through song. For John, 'I think we should really think the same thing when we are teaching about place - and trying to find a mechanism to deal with the complexity that everyone can understand about what place is really all about, what creates it, and what is required to improve that for the people who live, learn, who work in those areas'.

John ended his listening report with a couple of points - around a personal memory of demolished buildings: 'when you cut these buildings away, and when you see the façade of whose lives were there previously; the fire-place, the wall-paper etc'. This underlined the importance of memory, exemplified for him by the Apollo Theatre in Glasgow, when it got demolished. This 'brought back 'tons of memories' of the concerts I'd been at' and helped him better relate to other similar situations, such as around 'the shame of the Highland Clearances'. He was attracted to 'just trying to relive that time, by spending time in those places'.

In my own break-out group (Judy, Nick and Ian) **Karen Lawson** was listening in there. She confessed that she was probably talking as much as anyone, naturally drawn in to contributing

to the conversation - as much as listening and documenting: 'It was such a good conversation. We all kind of came from different perspectives but quickly found there was quite a lot of similarities'. Karen observed that we talked a lot about the collective dimension of placemaking (she works in the Scottish Government for a group called Collective Leadership): 'so that started a curiosity about what is the collective, and what does that mean in terms of how we create spaces, and meaning-making in places?' What was that sense of this collective dimension especially? *Placemaking in company, convivially - acting out some common-meaning-making.*

Karen noted especially Judy Wilkinson bringing in 'a really interesting conversation around history, land and heritage – and a collective sense of what a place meant to people over time'. This implicated 'the heritage that is there', wondering 'how do we understand that, and how do we take time to understand what the land has meant to people, and how it is changed, and how it's shaped'. Deeper queries: 'What do we inherit from the place? What do we take from that place? What is brought in?' This linked to some conversation about participation of refugees (*comparative newcomers to a place, from a very different home-place of their own*). Karen referred to 'the amazing examples of where refugees have come in, and really shaped a place, and gave it different meaning'. And then beginning to generate what she described as a 'merge' of histories, 'and what can emerge from that'. For Karen this involved 'a kind of relational aspect' and an effort to really understand what a place means to different people: 'It may have a history, but it's always changing. People bring stuff in'.

Karen lives in Leith and this triggered a long conversation about a really interesting thing that's happened (there), around allotments (also touched on by Judy): 'When I first came to live in Leith, about 25 years ago, I was lucky enough to get an allotment – and it was mainly elderly Italian people who had been there from the (second world) war, and they grew produce that some of the Italian restaurants used. And there was this amazing kind of Leith/Italian connection. The allotments (also) looked to me incredibly disorganized but this wasn't at all the case; it was a kind of quiet 'private' space, and really lovely – but lots of rules and regulations'.

Her Leith experience story continued: 'And then recently there's been [a 'croft' developed on the other side of the Links](#), which is a very open space. Somebody ([Edie Murray](#)) was creative enough to find a loophole that they could make a croft, on Leith Links – because it had a building, and make the case that Leith is 'a family', and a community – and that has meaning, and it becomes a 'croft'. But (unlike allotments) it's got no rules (or I haven't found them). And it's open; it's never locked – and so when you are in there - I've got a little plot there, but they're all open'. What Karen stressed was: 'The thing is it's used by lots of different people, all through the 24 hours. And so, the place means something different, to different people at different times of the day – but it is created by the people of Leith, and that's many different people from different cultures and background. And homeless people overnight, and people coming to have a quiet drink; children in the trees – it's very unstructured'. She summed it up as having 'two different kinds of heritages almost, in one place' – the older allotments and the newer 'croft': 'And they live together happily. It's not that one is right, and one is wrong; it's about place having enough to offer for everybody there, without it being a kind of dogma – this is the type of place it is'.

The conversation around allotments and heritage and urban crofting led into consideration of 'the whole role of architect as facilitator, (and) the questions that we ask, the way we ask them'. This developed into 'a discussion around imagination, and how - if you ask people 'what do they want?' - do they have a fixed notion of what that can mean. Is that a good question to ask? Or, is it a little bit about - 'what is important for you?', 'what has meaning for you?', 'what is it that you need from your community?' - and then start to build around that, rather than 'the difficulties'?

*Questions about dialogue, rather than simply discussion; about dreams, rather than simply difficulties; about possibilities, rather than problems; about deliberation, rather than consultation. Perhaps there is also a discernment disposition to be enacted, to harness whatever spirit may be at work in and among the placemakers.*

We concluded with some wondering around imagination in relation to children's participation, 'and how kids can be - as [Ken Robinson](#) has said - almost 'schooled out' of imagination'. It was felt that 'we're much more imaginative when we're younger'. So, how might we support people to be imaginative in their place-making, and that's policymakers, government, architects, everybody - but also people who live there'. The reigning sentiment seemed to be: 'we cannot be constrained by what we know, but rather be inspired by the possibilities of what can be'. This brought up consideration of the 'human systems' context including the importance of 'inner and outer work', as persons (rather than simply individuals). Karen concluded: 'Placemaking is not just an outer thing that we do to people, but the whole sense of the connection between the inner and outer'. *Perhaps this is the manifestation of a spirit of sorts at work.*

**Ian Wight** Marilyn Hamilton (one of our keynote listeners) indicated that she was having sound problems and had therefore opted to contribute by posting quite a bit in 'the chat', mostly responding to what she was able to hear in the final segment of the forum (See **Appendix** at end).

**Russell McLarty** listened in to another breakout (with Kate and Marilyn). He registered particular interest in what Kate had said about her working with youngsters. He sensed that 'a lot of their ambition was just to have an ordinary house', and he recalled his own early experiences (in Royston, Glasgow) 'when the old tenements were there; they were damp, folk were living with depression and respiratory problems, but they wanted to live there; they didn't want to be moved from there. The replacement houses were wee boxes full of 'tickey-tackey' and garden gnomes'. He related this to the questions that might be asked around placemaking, suggesting 'what do you think you might live in?' or 'what do you dream you might live in?' The latter question especially, for him, 'taps into (another) theme I heard, namely - do folks have an imagination?'

Russell also registered interest in Marilyn's place-caring concept, partly because his own experience has been 'in trying to create story-rich people - a lovely phrase from a

theologian/sociologist called [Ann Morrisey](#). Russell explained that ‘people may be story-thin, or story-rich; if people are story-thin, and – if you like – lacking that experience and knowledge of what might be, then there’s a sense in which the placemaking may not be such a rich experience’ (for them). *A good place will value story-telling, and its story-tellers – to deepen, or elevate, the placemaking.*

His own involvement ‘through a good many years has been to try what I would call arts-led community development’, helping establish rooted groups, engaging with creatives in the community, rather than parachuting outsiders in (essentially not casually assembling any group, and blithely imagining that that group will be creative and engaging). For him, ‘it’s almost the need to be able to work with a number of long-established groups, who have themselves enjoyed creative experiences, and are thus ‘story-rich’ – to use that phrase as a short-hand’.

The other theme that came out for him, building again on Kate’s experience of working with the youngsters, ‘I run an after-school story-telling club, and I find that youngsters are incredibly anxious about the future and the environment’. For Russell, ‘that question around anxiety is almost an umbrella over everything. If that anxiety is something pronounced, and very real for youngsters, it’s all-embracing in some ways – and to work to counter that is a big challenge’. *Perhaps calling for major ‘scaffolding’ considerations – in Diarmaid Lawlor’s terms.*

He concluded by ‘chipping in’ some recent experience, not very far away from Leith – in Abbeyhill, where he’s working at present. ‘Basically, folks are having the urban environment ‘done to them’. Housing is going up on every spare bit of land’. His church was the location for [‘Save Meadowbank’](#), which was a public campaign: ‘we discovered that nothing could be done, because the decisions had been made by the previous regime. And the present regime couldn’t change earlier decisions made about the development of a huge tract of land (which would shred the council’s environment policy, and also its recreation policy – all because of the over-riding need for more houses’.

*This was very much property development by others, for others – rather than placemaking by the people in/of the place. There is a sense of a much-dented spirit among community members, of a comparative absence of care for their sense of the place. Something has been ‘done to’ them, rather than for them, or by them – generating anger and frustration, at not being listened to.*

Russell acknowledged that this has led to a [Meadowbank site master-plan](#) initiative – ‘with good architects – but the mix had already been decided. There will be 500 new homes on the site, and it may be better designed through the master-plan but the ambitions of the community were totally ignored (at appeal)’. *The case seems more about housing volume development (rather than placemaking).* Perhaps this is inevitable given what Russell identifies as the ‘big pressures in Edinburgh, which is supposed to be growing by 50% by 2050’. However, this is being experienced as ‘just cramming people in’ and the development ‘happening ‘to’ people. People are not really being given the opportunity to fashion stuff’. *It feels like authentic placemaking struggles to get a ‘look-in’ in such a pressured property development climate.*

[Sue Cooper](#) - keynote listener for a breakout including Lesley and Heather – reported on ‘a very engaging conversation’. Lesley talked about living in [‘localities’](#) in Edinburgh - and what Sue noticed was how big these localities are (four covering the whole city). The one Lesley lives in is bigger than Dundee – which seemed ‘quite a big place’ to Sue. Her view would be that ‘localities usually should be smaller so that there is interconnectivity there’. *The ‘locality’ in localities appears to be relation to the city as a whole, for its administrative purposes; ‘places’ would seem to be located within/under the localities, grounding smaller communities of interest, or communities of geography – such as neighbourhoods, or street blocks.*

Sue reported that Heather Monteith talked about her charity, [Trust Your Breath](#), and the differences in setting they encounter between Edinburgh and Glasgow. From Sue’s perspective, living in Nottingham (and as a recent student of Marilyn Hamilton’s Integral City/Beyond Resilience work) she becomes interested in the interplay of the various city ‘voices’ that make a city distinctive: ‘This whole essence of place-making and place-caring is really at the heart of the work in the Nottingham area. And we’re doing that through the voice of the children at this moment in time; the children’s voices, that Kate actually mentioned’ (complemented by the second-year college students are working with architects, that Lesley mentioned). For Sue, ‘it’s this interconnectivity of so many voices coming together, to share from their own perspective’.

In Sue’s experience, and listening to Kate, the young people being engaged ‘are still pretty uncluttered from all the different aspects that we are trained in; they’ve still got these pure eyes, pure consciousness’. It is therefore important ‘to be able to listen to them, not only because they are our future – we know they are our future – but because they bring beauty, they bring kindness, they bring care. They know – they kind of know what they want. So, listening to the children’s voice is very important’.

Sue alluded to Diarmaid’s point about ‘searching for meaning’. Her personal belief is – ‘I totally believe in this search for meaning... meaning and purpose - and finding a safe space in which to express that’. In her city-setting, the concern post-Covid in her Nottingham region, is that ‘it was a very vibrant city-centre and massive university town, predominantly young people - and the heart has been kicked out of it because of what has happened. So many of the shops have shut, and that’s where the people came together. What’s going to happen in the future is slightly alarming but also incredibly exciting because this is an ideal opportunity for people to have their voices heard, and this is what we’re attempting’. This involves: ‘finding out what people want and asking those question from [the four voices](#): the voice of engaged citizens, the voices of governance – the purse-holders, the budgetary people in town halls etc., the voice of business – ideally conscious business, who are interested in not only their own business but in what is occurring within their community; and the voices of the third sector – the people who have been working in place, in the voluntary sector so long. All these voices – when people from those voices come together and co-create what is needed in that community - the potential for magic happens’.

Having heard from the designated break-out 'listeners', the interest shifted to inviting any individual contributions, towards potential common-meaning-making. What might others have heard, to further the dialogue? *This where the interest came in terms of the quality of the dialogue that might be emerged – especially the 'above-the-line' reflective dialogue on particular aspects (parts), and also potential generative dialogue reaching for more whole-system perspectives (around wholes, and enacting the future).*

**John Howie** observed that 'this is a complex discussion' – similar to ones he has with some of his public health colleagues – revolving 'around determinants of health, or whole systems', or 'how the system of development goals comes together – and how we create programs that will deliver on those'. His experience is that the complexity lies in 'trying to find a way that makes that an easy read, or an easy listen for all parties within the system'. Acknowledging some of Russell's points, that – despite the fact of very intensive engagement processes, and people feeding in their views and ideas – 'it just doesn't reflect what actually happens on the ground'. For John, 'that has in many ways got to do with how we communicate the views and opinions and the wishes of communities, to forums and committees that make the big decisions, in terms of where the investment should go'.

*There may be governance gaps and deficiencies - poor civic infrastructure - that needs to be tackled before better placemaking can be achieved, especially in the eyes of local communities; localities may have been one part of an effort by one player to tackle such problems, but it sounds as if much more needs to be tried, to centre the meaningful action and interaction and deliberation closer to the communities of people on the ground, having the lived experiences.*

John also picked up on some of the earlier conversation around something he has been closely associated with, the [Place Standard Tool](#), especially the observation that it might 'over-simplify things'. Again, he sought to more fully engage the associated complexity being negotiated, in part through such a tool: 'I think we need to make sure that we take this conversation to a level that allows people to understand the complexity'. This might entail having 'to go down a linear route of explaining that A creates B and B creates C and so on; thus, in public health terms, power and policy create environments, and environments create opportunity for lifestyles, and those lifestyles have an impact on the wellbeing (of the involved individuals)'. In John's experience 'we have to deal with, and live with, that simple explanation for big decision-makers, to just get a grasp of what their investments mean for future communities'.

*Perhaps complementary tools or methods need to be developed, such as has been the case with the [Place Principle](#) and '[place-based work](#)' approaches in relation to the Place Standard, or perhaps a more all-embracing suite of policies is required – spanning all the dimensions of placemaking being entertained here – such as a Placemaking Manifesto and a Placemakers' Charter. Might this better match the complexity John and Russell experience, and help with its navigation?*

Based on what he'd been hearing, John also suggested that 'there is something here in terms of creating a language that we feel comfortable with but also (that) communities feel comfortable

with, so at least we've got some degree of evidence-based thinking when it comes to investing the big monies in our place'. Without this, he was concerned that 'the richness of our discussion this evening will always play secondary to the sign-offs of the big budget deals'. As examples he mentioned: 'we've seen it with the M8, we've seen it with other motorways, we've seen it with housing – and yeah, that's why we have to live with the sort of reports we get in terms of impacts on the environment and human health'. For him, 'Covid has been a prime example of this – if you get it wrong – the most vulnerable people in our society are affected most'.

*There appear to be 'levels of government', and 'qualities of governance', issues in play here – with sometimes questionable alignments and 'fits', especially when a civic or community arena is engaged. Good place-making can be a casualty, or a non-starter, in such contexts – no matter the efforts of those on the ground closest to the issue; what Heather, below, refers to as those at 'ground zero'.*

**Heather Monteith** picked up on some of John's points: 'I'm very interested as someone - not in any of these disciplines, like public health or architecture - just being an ordinary person in a way'. She expressed it as 'this idea of ground zero', relating to policy-makers and budgets. For Heather it seemed that 'budgets are decreasing, and a lot of the onus is on the community now to try to improve the environment or create a network within the community'. She was wondering how much impact these ideas being raised might have 'on the money that's available to help improve things?'

**John Howie** responded: 'It's a big question. The money within the system doesn't change; the money's always going to be there – it doesn't disappear; it's the decisions as to where you want to spend that money, and it's 'what's the compelling argument?' – that says we have to invest in these areas'. He acknowledged that, in terms of what we've experienced in the last year, certainly, 'a lot of money has gone on the prevention and treatment, and now the recovery, of/from Covid; that's something that's shared globally. But yes, you're right Heather in terms of how do we create a mechanism where the views and opinions of the people who are going to have to live with the big investment decisions – how are their ideas to be fed in? And yes, we have the systems to allow that to happen - but there's an inconsistency in terms of how the ideas are generated and fed into the system, and then responded to. And there are so many things/parts that play in that outcome'.

*The decision-making system may not always be place-friendly – being more about functions and projects, in ways that are disempowering rather than empowering for folks on the ground, like Russell's constituencies or Heather's circle/network. While it may be a token response in some cases, 'participatory budgeting' is being experimented with on a small scale in some contexts. Perhaps it's that kind of idea that merits some creative development, 'exploding' it to a larger scale in other situations. Might it be worth teasing out more?*

**Nick Walker**, thinking about finance and budgets, indicated that 'one of the issues that we always experience as architects is about short-term thinking, as opposed to long-term thinking, and about budgets and how much can be afforded'. For him, 'purely from a sustainable point of

view, we're still designing projects that are not anywhere near the standards for us to meet climate change requirements. And that's not because we don't want to, but it's because the funding isn't there'. Essentially, in his experience, 'there's a lot of aspiration but the reality of it is that 'it can't be done'. That's one of the issues – even something as simple as 'phasing out boilers in 2024'; we should not be putting boilers into houses now, but we still are, because it's a cheaper alternative'. Nick wondered 'how do we deal with that?'

Nick also raised a point that was 'really about the system – the whole planning system is geared towards money as well, in some respects' yet his concern was 'how do you keep it in such a way that quality and things that are slightly more expensive are favoured or promoted, over things that are more economic but don't necessarily make for better places'. For him the first aspiration is 'kind of obvious', but the latter 'economic' argument often seems to win out; hence his exasperation - 'it's all the wrong way round; but how do we do something about it? Everything seems to be the wrong way round'.

*This feels like powerful paradigms at work, that merit changing/replacing, if our politics can muster the resolve. There are some signs of possible movement in the questioning of now dubious measures (such as gross domestic product) and consideration of other thrusts, such as towards a [well-being economy](#), or advocacy by some of 'degrowth' – favouring sentiments around '[less](#)' (rather than more) of the same), and settling for 'enough'. Placemaking may also be a new paradigm, or alternative paradigm, perspective.*

**Lesley Reid** pointed out that 'in Scotland, we've had the [Community Empowerment Act](#) for the last few years, and what difference do people feel that's made?' Part of her own assessment: 'It feels to me that quite a bit of the planning has to be about capturing why people like where they live' yet 'a lot of the newbuilds are going to affect the communities that are already established – because there is no additional health, education or associated infrastructure being put up; it's just housing'. So, for her, around community empowerment, 'there is something about capturing why people love living in certain areas, and what they value'. This means, for her, planners more consciously taking active account of 'something that's not being done – because something is going to be imposed; it's something that has to be taken account of – because local people have come together and said: 'this is why we like to live here'. This includes people who have chosen to work in an area. Lesley wondered 'what people thought about that?'

*Perhaps this is a call for planners, especially those taking on the role of [professional placemakers](#), to more consciously and compassionately plan with placemaking in mind - by the placemakers already in the place, or soon to become its placemakers. Professional placemaking can be ethically tricky, unless the professionals are actually from the place in question – and can 'profess' from being in/of the place themselves. Nick would have faced this challenge, for example, in the Anderston case he mentioned in his presentation. New buildings and new street layouts had been 'afforded' to prospective residents and businesses – but the placemaking, by them, was still 'to come' (the people and the programming mentioned in the Instagram post). Perhaps what Nick and his colleagues were contributing was some [place-shaping](#), some laying*

*in of the fabric, possibly borne out of considerable place-caring (in Marilyn's terms) - but not actually place-making at that point. Might these distinctions be embraced by community empowerment approaches?*

In response to Lesley's point around the empowerment act, **Diarmaid Lawlor** suggested: 'it is helpful to have a legislative framework to remind everybody about the starting point of most conversations; it should seek to empower'. For him, 'it's a useful tool, but in itself is not enough'. He went on: 'I think there's something around the starting point of how we talk about people's lives and development – not that point about housing, and not the infrastructures – that seems to me to be really important'. He invited us to consider: 'Wouldn't it be interesting if instead of thinking about 'how many houses can we pile into this location?' we look at, 'how can we change learning?' or 'how can we enable different community relationships?'. And then, on that basis ask: 'how does the housing fit in?'. Diarmaid commented: 'But often what we do is – we put in the houses – and hope there is a school after'. He offered the insight: 'I think there's something about the order of the conversation, which is about peer-to-peer service redesign stuff, rethinking a lot of these things, around which we still need to accommodate housing need – off course we do – and get that sorted'. A clear implication: 'I think one of the problems here is that the planning system is not, is not, the mechanism to start a discussion about lives and services. It is the mechanism to distribute physical bits of housing; it's the wrong mechanism for an important job'.

*For myself, there is much wisdom, probably from hard-won first-hand experience, in what Diarmaid is saying here. I have advocated for a reframing, a re-purposing, of modern, conventional planning, as placemaking, as wellbeing by design. It certainly needs to emerge from, be preceded by, the considerable dialogue and deliberation Diarmaid alludes to – in well-designed spaces for dialogue, that anticipate the 'places' being yearned for, that give form to the common-meaning-making that good processes can confer. The 'planning' we often experience – such as Russell in Abbeyhill/Meadowbank – is very much 'front-end', 'from above', leached of all local place nuance, in service of higher political imperatives (property-development over place-making). As Nick might say – it's all the wrong way round. These contributions to our dialogue, were particularly generative for myself – as I've tried to indicate (in the italicized commentary especially).*

**Ian Wight** indicated he was being reminded of 'how I basically define place; it partly has to do with how Marilyn was speaking earlier about how I have this focus on placemaking, and she adds place-caring. The placemaking I have in mind – a place is the integration of the physicality and the functionality, which planners and especially administrators deal with. But it's also the integration of those two with conviviality and spirituality' (see earlier quadrant diagramming). He finds he is 'always trying to squeeze especially the conviviality and the spirituality into the discussion'. This is 'what I would love to see, say, as part of this budget discussion we've been having. But I accept that it's a big framing; it's going to take time to come, to bring it home'.

*Again, for myself, the [Place Standard](#), the [Place Principle](#), are a good start – but I'm looking for a larger suite of policies that would involve something like a Placemaking Manifesto, and a*

*Placemakers' Charter. And if that could be bound into the implementation of any new or amended legislation, for example, then I would be happier. Again, though, this is probably just me, dreaming and ranting.*

Moving to some closing offerings, as the forum wound down, **Kate Carter**: (in the 'chat') commented that 'NHS integrated care is doing an interesting job of connecting the needs of individuals with the range of services'. Kate wondered: 'Is this a template for how we start thinking about places?' *And for myself the 'integrated' could be a good step towards the 'integral' that I advocate.*

**Russell McLarty**, speaking from his experience of having worked in half-a-dozen communities, commented that politicians can sometimes be perceived as 'very removed – and the size of political units are just so-so big', but 'the best I've ever seen is where a local politician really engages with the process – and therefore can really be an advocate for the community'. Russell wanted to make the point that: 'Folk have been speaking of policymakers, and planners and administrators – but surely the politicians and the local politicians are absolutely key?'

For him, 'they need to be involved creatively and enjoined convivially in the whole experience of life in a place, rather than being seen - the local politicians that is - as being much too remote (to do with the size of the political units)'. Russell also noted 'the fact that the community councils don't really hack it; they don't really work'. He suggested that 'it needs to be budget locally, and local politicians engaging convivially and creatively in the processes – to my mind anyway. That's an absolutely key component for what this co-creative process is about'. He wondered if others had any related thoughts on 'the role of the politician'.

*Listening to Russell, for myself, what I would like to see is a future forum on [civics](#), or what I would call a 'neo-civics' that would complement some of this discussion. I'm thinking especially of building on the initial ideas of [Patrick Geddes](#) on the civics that he envisaged as complementing his influential town planning ideas, over a hundred years ago. He was then advocating for a planning system embedded in a civics, a form of applied sociology; instead we have a planning system in thrall to economics. We need a neo-civics for our time, that could be a context for what I have termed a Placemaking Manifesto and a Placemakers' Charter. At the very least this would take up Russell's call for clarity on the role of the local politician vis-à-vis the other players, the other makers, when it comes to placemaking.*

**Nick Walker** commented: 'I'm thinking about some of this from first-hand experience. The idea of the politicians is interesting because it is a scale issue. Because if it is a small project, the politicians aren't interested, but if it's a large project they are interested – but only if they can get votes out of it. So, it does become very divisive and it's not really dealing with the issues. It's more just about gathering your tribe together and making sure you can get into government'.

Nick also agreed with Diarmaid that 'planning is just the wrong mechanism. There's nothing more frustrating than going along to community consultations, and hearing everyone say 'that's great about the houses' but where are all the people going to take their kids to school? Or

who's going to pay for new schools? Evidently, with the new houses you'll get more taxes – which means you can build more schools, or improve the schools, but then again, it's the wrong way round'.

**David Adams** commented that he'd 'enjoyed the break-out we had, and the different perspectives that came from that. But I was really glad to hear about the [Pattern Language \(Christopher Alexander\)](#) – his sense of what is important for making a place so vital and alive. I wish that was much more alive in the planners' minds. So much of the planning one sees – talk about housing and not community...'. He really enjoyed the discussion 'and I'm not in any way specialist to it, but it was fascinating to be a kind of participant in this'.

**Sara** commented 'I'm just here as an enthusiastic amateur' (*Ian – 'we all are' – where placemaking is concerned*). What she had noticed in terms of 'my own placemaking and situatedness – I've really missed the (EICSP) events, because I associate these with the church (Augustine) in Edinburgh, so it was my way of reconnecting again, by attending. Yeah – feeling like I'm 'in place' again in some way'.

**Judy Wilkinson:** What place means emerged from experiences told in the stories. I think in many groups these had resonated in hearts. Then part of the (closing) plenary seemed to be a release of the anger because of the barriers to realising those places that had been described with such love. Our minds articulated the difficulties faced in obtaining change. The destruction of the means of creating convivial societies in the current developments, and the pressures we are facing, was heart breaking.

What next? While listening and engaging children is good, as is consulting people, for Judy, 'we need to start with our relationship with the land and mother earth. People have to experience the place where they live or where they may live'. Judy also noted – thinking also of her experience of the re-purposing forum – that, 'again, the participants did not talk about spirituality'. Judy revisited Hina Hirani's's presentation in the re-purposing forum – and Hina 'drawing on the energy that connects us'. However, for Judy, her sense is that 'often the images from words create barriers and cause embarrassment'. She is 'not sure how this can be addressed, believing there to be more interest in the scientific research into trees communicating - through fungal webs and insect behaviour; so perhaps this is a way in?'

**Spirit@Work?** *What might 'it' say for itself, as two of the planned three forums culminate? The main, underlying curiosity has been around the possibility that all three themes – re-purposing, place-making and wellbeing – might be interpreted as forms of, as manifestations of, 'spirit@work'. Perhaps the best that 'it' might say is that it has been in the background, some of the time, occasionally surfacing – but mostly in implicit rather than clear explicit terms. It does not come up, or come out, easily for most folks. But it is there to be drawn upon, by those who might be so inclined, and it could well fortify them, or fuel, them to more fully enact the agency, and the communion, that may be being called for – whenever re-purposing, place-making, and well-being may be in play. It is part and parcel of bringing our whole person to our work in the world; whole in body, mind, heart, soul - and spirit.*

**Ian Wight** closed the forum by reminding people of the third forum to come on wellbeing (on Wednesday May 26<sup>th</sup>). He thanked everyone for being so generous with their time in participating, and particularly appreciated the interaction: 'We really have had a rich conversation that has morphed into – sounds like – some pretty rich dialogue. Especially in the break-outs, and we've all been the beneficiaries. I'm hoping we can do more of that. The one we had on re-purposing set this up nicely I think; and you have complemented that. And now the curiosity is around the wellbeing, and I'm pretty confident – especially with Diarmaid's point about 'living well' - that wellbeing will be well dialogued about then.

## Appendix:

### EICSP Placemaking Forum – May 12, 2021: ‘Chat’ – Marilyn Hamilton

Wholeness for me includes both consciousness and culture; (p.12 MH comments supplement)

I didn't used to think so - but I agree conviviality outranks sustainability now; (p. 14, in response to IW remark)

Storytelling ... creating places allows spontaneity; (p.14 – in response to John Howie listening remark)

Imagery of place .... Nature, trees, birds, animals, rural isolation .... BUT LOTS going on; Bar at the End of the Universe??; (p.14 – in response to a John Howie listening remark)

Hospitality/scaffolding; (p.14/15 – i.r.t John Howie listening remark)

Pace of Place - this is really relevant to Findhorn right now - we have 3-4 sub-communities recovering from fires in very different ways and paces - so each has a different story about this experience; (p.15 – i.r.t John Howie listening remark – on a David Adams story]

Inner cities - meaningful stories .... when I saw the Anderston highways (after Victorian houses) I had a Jane Jacobs (gulp) moment; (p.15 – i.r.t John Howie listening remark)

Technical and emotional aspects of design - both needed (my place-making and place-caring?); (p.15 – i.r.t John Howie listening remark – on a Gavin Thomson story)

Memory of demolished buildings - reveals old stories (both historically and how in the war photos .... not to mention clearances); (p.15/16 – i.r.t John Howie personal story)

Collective dimension of placemaking - what is collective (could it be what I call 4 Voices? Citizens, Civic Managers, Biz/Innovators, 3rd sector); (p.16 Karen Lawson listening comment)

What do we inherit from place? I have an architect colleague in Australia who considers the Land as her first client - and does major deep Earth Architecture analysis as first stage of design (p.16 Karen Lawson listening comment)

Croft created by people of Leith who occupy it - v unstructured ... place has enough to offer for many; (p.16/17 irt Karen Lawson listening comment)

Architect as facilitator/imaginator?; (p.17 irt Karen Lawson listening comment)

Story thin/story rich? Place-caring to add to Place-making - to make a Whole; (p.17/18 irt Russell McLarty listening comment)

Work with a diversity of groups who are story-rich – story-telling; (p.18 irt Russell McLarty listening comment)

Youngsters worried about future - speaks to me of how place-caring and place-making are both needed for whole community participation; (p.18 irt Russell McLarty listening comment)

Don't have "place" done to people - Master Plans ignore people - THAT creates anger and disconnection; (p.18 irt Russell McLarty listening comment)

Localities can be very big - need to be smaller for inter-connectivity; (p.18 irt Sue Cooper listening comment)

Children's voices interconnect for a whole story ...listen to our future ... and because they bring kindness, care;  
(p.18/19 irt Sue Cooper listening comment)

Search for meaning and purpose and find safe space ... pandemic has kicked heart out of Nottingham .... now time to hear what people want; (p.19 irt Sue Cooper listening comment)

4 Voices - Citizens, Civic Managers, Business/Innovators, 3rd Sector; (p.19 irt Sue Cooper listening comment)

How to find a way that makes a system an easy read .... how do we communicate where investments should go?;  
(p.19 irt John Howie comment)

How to explain complexity? I use stories from Biomimicry - eg. the honey bee; (p.20 irt John Howie comment)

Even conscious investors want to know how they can both reward and impact; (p.20 irt John Howie comment)

How are kids wired with complexity and maybe that impacts their perspectives of community?; (p.20 irt John Howie comment)

Ground Zero ... from centre of disaster?; (p.20 irt John Howie/Heather Monteith comment)

Or centre of greatest possibility/potential?; (p.20 irt John Howie comment)

How has pandemic redefined the size/scale/interconnectivity of place?; (p.20 irt John Howie comment)

Aspiration vs reality .... planning system - is it geared toward money? Why not Life? Why not what Greta Thunberg demands of us?; (p.21 irt Nick Walker comment)

Appreciative Inquiry to capture why you like where you live?; (p.21 irt Lesley Reid comment)

Empowerment Act @ legislative framework - useful too but not enough?; (p.21 irt Diarmaid Lawlor comment)

How can we change learning/relationships? Maybe listen to 4 voices as Thought Leaders, Citizens, Policy Makers?;  
(p.21-22 irt Diarmaid Lawlor comment)

Place includes conviviality and spirituality - not just functionality; (p.22 irt Ian Wight comment)

Placemakers' Charter / Placemaking Manifesto - how can we design that together?; (p.22 irt Ian Wight comment)

Local politicians must engage with process - must enjoy conviviality; (p.22 irt Russell McLarty comment)

With politicians I had to offer to create safe spaces for them to step outside the adversarial role they are stuck in;  
(p.22 irt Russell McLarty comment)

Don't leave Patrick Geddes out ... He was faced in his time with the same scale of challenges we face.... didn't he?;  
(p.22 irt Ian Wight comment)

That's like building city for houses (cars) instead of people (thinking of Curitiba); (p.23 irt David Adams comment)

Chris Alexander *Pattern Language* - he used "wholeness" as a basic pattern that he believed everyone could discern ... maybe hope for Whole Place??? (p.23 irt David Adams comment)