

# The 'Diverse Economies' of Participation

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## Introduction: practices and economies of participation

This paper critically examines the relationship between the practices of participation and participation as economy. In recent years, and particularly in response to the global market failure of 2008 and subsequent global recession, the UK government, in line with those of the US and many in Europe, has told citizens that resources are scarce in order to pursue the neoliberal policy of 'austerity'.<sup>1</sup> In this context, where we, as citizens, must 'do more with less', rather than address the unequal distribution of resources, participation becomes a way to 'make do and mend' the urban fabric, both spatial and social. Participation is diverted from its development as a radical 'redistribution of power'.<sup>2</sup>

The authors of this paper are two women trained in architecture and planning, who write, teach and practice in Sheffield, a post-industrial city in the north of England. Currently, as part of two doctoral research projects, we are following separate lines of enquiry into the 'how and why' of participation in the production and appropriation of the built environment in the UK. In this paper, we draw on and explore the resultant empirical work.<sup>3</sup>

Participation, understood as citizen power in the processes of decision-making moving towards 'significant social reform ... [enabling those currently excluded] to share in the benefits of the affluent society' is still as diverse in its methods,<sup>4</sup> means and outcomes as when Arnstein first categorised

her 'ladder' of levels of participation in 1969. We are concerned with 'participation' as a means for citizens to have real power to shape their environment, recognising that, depending on each specific case, this may be through citizen control, through delegated power, or through working in partnership with local government. We seek to practice participation with the stated political and ethical aim of striving for justice and equity. Drawing on the recent 'Spatial Agency' project,<sup>5</sup> and discussions of the 'production of desires' by Petrescu,<sup>6</sup> we consider participation in its diverse forms to be an empowering, transformative force. Participation, in this conception, is a set of practices that seeks to develop and explore the desires of communities as well as address diverse needs, and through this process to contribute to the productive and reproductive work of spatial justice. It therefore includes such varied activities as brief writing, creating networks, protesting, claiming, disputing, proposing, repairing, managing, co-researching, governing, caring and building (to name but a few).

In accounting for participation according to the logic of austerity, with the imperative to 'create something out of nothing', representations are made where on the 'cost' side the only thing that is accounted for is the 'real work' of waged labour. The outcomes that are considered to be of value are those things that contribute to the market economy, perhaps in the form of gentrification, vision report, or local service. The authors of this paper contend that this framing obscures the actions, knowledge

and social relations of participation which generate resources and transformation, and are operating within other forms of economy, such as care, gifts, co-operatives, volunteering, exchange, lending, borrowing and gathering.

We draw on JK Gibson-Graham's critique of the stabilising effect of representations of the capitalist economy as singular, homogeneous and enveloping, in order to focus attention on the performative effects of representing participatory practices as being part of the market economy.<sup>7</sup> In this paper, by looking at both the shift over time in policies and trends in the UK, and closely examining two current instances of participation, we propose to represent participation as a constituent of a heterogeneous landscape of diverse economies. Through exploring this 'landscape of diverse economies', we aim to draw out the complex relational position of the unrepresented economies of participation. These run counter to the market economy, but are also interdependent within it.

In this paper we ask: What are the marginalised, hidden and alternative economic activities taking place, constituted by participatory practices? How have these practices evolved in relation to the Participatory Turn in Urbanism, and how are they accounted for as economic activity? How might accounting for participatory practices as constitutive of a diverse economy empower people to fight against their co-option or exploitation and make these practices more real and credible as objects of policy and activism?

In asking these questions, we seek to address some of the challenges posed by JK Gibson-Graham in their 2006 book, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*,<sup>8</sup> which, in order to imagine a world beyond capitalism, invites us to engage in the process of articulation (making links between activities and enterprises of a diverse economy),

and re-signification (convening activities under the signifier of community economies).

### **Methodology and structure of the paper**

This paper consists of five parts. Firstly, we position ourselves as researchers and practitioners, and define participation according to this experience and positionality. Secondly, we outline an understanding of practice theory as a model for understanding participation as an element of human action, and as an impetus for social change. Thirdly, we explore the economies constituted by the production of the built environment, questioning how participation is accounted for, and what is marginalised or hidden in relation to Gibson-Graham's conception of a diverse economy. The subsequent section looks at the evolution of the practices of the Participatory Turn in architecture and urban design, and how they are accounted for as economic activity, drawing attention to the inequalities inherent in how participation is practised. Finally, we detail participatory practices, observed in two cases of contemporary participation, as constitutive of a diverse economy. By answering the questions regarding participation, by whom, where, and to do what in these instances, we draw attention to the shifting inequalities and the possibilities for equality that these participatory practices, represented otherwise, can offer.

The collective voice, the 'we' used in this paper, is a reflection of our collaborative process, a culmination of spoken and written conversations. Throughout this paper, we deliberately choose to express different forms of our voices. Inspired by JK Gibson-Graham, we write to tell stories of other ways of acting, of other economies coexisting within and alongside dominant practices and economy. We write as a performative action, naming and drawing attention to these economies, not as alternatives but as part of multiple, heterogeneous economic ways of acting and interacting that make up the built environment.

In presenting the cases, in which our understanding of theories of practice and economy are played out, we speak in the singular first person. 'I, Anna' and 'I, Julia', our personal voices that reflect the engaged and situated role we take as researchers personally involved with projects and people, and constructing knowledge relationally through this involvement. By 'telling the story' in the first person, we present the role of the researcher as an influence, a voice and a prompt, and in Julia's case, as an actor and catalyst in the project being studied. Allowing ourselves to have both individual and collective voices in the paper reflects a view of knowledge which incorporates reflective storytelling as an aid to learning through practise, but one which also wishes to query the researcher role as the dominant voice, the storyteller, and so we move to a dialogical position, where separate voices can be raised, together and independently.

In the concluding section of this paper, the use of 'we' positions us within a community of practitioners and activists, who resist the co-option of participative work or exploitation and working towards goals of social justice. 'We' add our voices to a conversation about collective responsibility and ethical practice.

### **Conceptualising participation as practices**

'This economy is not simply an ideological concept, susceptible to intellectual debunking, but a materialization that participates in organizing the practices and processes that surround it.'<sup>9</sup>

Economies shape, but are also shaped by participatory practices. Economies are not abstract entities where money flows as numbers separate from the 'real world', but are instead interrelationships between materials, relations and concepts that govern production, exchange, transactions and distribution. The intention, therefore, in conceptualising participation as constituted of various and

interconnected practices is threefold. Firstly, to couple actions and activities that make up routine ways of 'participating' with the types of knowledge that enable them, such as motivations, know-how and understanding. Secondly, to disassociate actions and activities from being understood only in terms of individual actors or projects, and instead see the repetition of 'performances' as practices which, through their multiple instances perpetuate the practice across time and space. Thirdly, to recognise that many of the practices that constitute ways of participating politically in decision-making and the production of built environment are routine, and are repetitious within and across projects.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau draws attention to 'everyday practices', 'ways of operating' or 'doing things' in order that they 'no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity' but are instead articulated.<sup>10</sup> In relation to participation, our aim in articulating practices is to move away from a discussion of levels of participation and legitimacy within individual projects and towards an understanding of the organising, productive and reproductive work that is done when participating in the production of the built environment as part of an ongoing process of social change. We wish to attend to the 'obscure background' of participation: the objects, motivations, spaces, skills and access to resources that make up participatory practices.

Practice theory, according to Bourdieu, offers us a way of seeing human activity that pays attention to everyday, individual and collective action. It suggests an understanding of structure and agency, not as the dualism of social norms and free will, but as interconnected and recursively reproduced. In Bourdieu's conception, the objects of knowledge are constructed through an active engagement and 'practical relation to the world'.<sup>11</sup> Elements of human activity are bundled with knowledge in terms of

ways of operating, reasons for acting, and particular 'know-how' which relate to interacting with people, objects, and spaces – these are practices.

All practices have an economic logic and are constitutive of an economy in the way that they enact and maintain both social relations and the circulation and redistribution of goods.<sup>12</sup> A 'second wave' of practice theory emphasises its use as a model for better understanding the everyday processes through which social change occurs<sup>13</sup> as practices emerge, are perpetuated, or disappear. Our purpose in looking at practices as a way to better understand participation is to recognise the possibilities of participation as a force for social change towards the democratic and equitable distribution of resources, and access to social, spatial, and economic goods. Recognising a 'participatory turn' in urban planning as a return to the post-WWII efforts towards democracy and the redistribution of wealth carries with it a realisation that change has been slow in coming. Conceptualising participation through practices gives us a way of understanding processes of change, not as individual intentions or social norms, but as enacted social and economic relations.

'Participatory practices' may overlap with many other practices, but at their core is citizen involvement in some form of influence over common goods or resources that were not previously under citizen control. Participatory practices operate at and between different spatial scales and timescales, from the family home, through places of education and work, to the neighbourhood and the state. They exist in many times, from daily life, through to the life of a project, and through political and generational cycles. We contend that these often-diverse practices of citizen action constitute the 'participatory turn'. Our next step is to articulate the economic concern in relation to these participatory practices.

### **Economies: what is the concern?**

We speculate that diverse participatory practices can be seen to constitute diverse economic systems. At present, however, because space itself is increasingly considered primarily as a financial 'asset', the practices that seek to shape them are also conceived as being part of the market economy. The dominance of this intertwined understanding of capitalist economic policies in the production of the built environment is emphasised by Schneider and Till:

Today, building activity in modern capitalist societies, along with the labour of architects and building workers are either transformed into, or are produced as commodities. That is, they become things that are created primarily to be bought and sold in the marketplace. This produces a fundamental shift in the functional and social objectives of building production.<sup>14</sup>

This is a value system based on market growth as an unquestionable good, espousing the idea that promoting capitalist enterprise will bring economic dividends to the whole community. As the built environment becomes predominantly viewed as quantity, not quality or relation, and is represented in terms of its ability to make money for banks, land developers and construction companies, the desires and needs of those who use the built environment are understood only in terms of how they contribute to this market value. The result of this is that buildings become discussed and valued in terms of finance, cost, wage labour and financial return on investment, and those resources and practices that fall outside of this framework become invisible.

Post-2008 financial crisis accounts and representations of architecture and urbanism that rely heavily on participation emphasise its 'value' determined by an equation of what is spent in monetary terms divided by what is produced as market value,

yet say little, almost nothing, of the people, practices and resources these projects depend upon. Participatory work is often framed as a way to draw 'something out of nothing', and operate in times of scarcity, or in places where budgets are minimal.

### **What is a 'diverse economies' way of seeing?**

In their 2006 book, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, economic geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham argue that the way in which we represent the economy has tangible effects on our own ability and that of others to act ethically.<sup>15</sup> Drawing on Latour, they warn that we must be more careful about how we multiply, populate, stabilise and discipline the world.

By presenting Bill Philip's Monetary National Income Analogue Computer as one of the most familiar and powerful of these representations, Gibson-Graham show that capitalism here is hegemonic: a closed-loop perpetual motion machine in which people are positioned primarily as consumers, growth is the driving force and the market is an all-encompassing force. These and other familiar representations portray economic relations as generalisable, and define citizens as having little or no agency. In Gibson-Graham's alternative representation, the diverse economies are represented as an iceberg, with capitalism, wage labour and the market sitting above the waterline, highly visible, yet representing only a fraction of what constitutes the ways in which we sustain ourselves and how society is reproduced:

Over the past 20 years, feminist analysts have demonstrated that non-market transactions and unpaid household work (both by definition, non-capitalist) constitute 30–50% of economic activity in both rich and poor countries. [...] Such quantitative representations exposed the discursive violence entailed in speaking of 'capitalist' economies, and lent credibility to projects of representing economy differently.<sup>16</sup>

If, drawing on feminist and Marxist critiques, we define 'work' as 'the social process of shaping and transforming the material and social worlds, creating people as social beings as they create value',<sup>17</sup> we can start to cut the 'market economy' down to size. The policies of austerity are revealed as being possible only by relying on hidden work and the value that this creates in terms of the needs of society. The powerful implication of Gibson-Graham's alternative 'iceberg' representation of economies is that the market economy is 'kept afloat' by many other forms of economy: black market, emotional work, slave labour, care, childbirth, photosynthesis, volunteerism and gifts. Though perhaps not consciously conceived as economic activities by their everyday practitioners, if we reflect, we find we can recognise ourselves taking part in many of these 'diverse economies' on a regular basis in order to sustain our lives. We can start to ask questions about who carries out this work, how they meet our needs, how surplus is distributed, and therefore create opportunities to act. Through an ontological reframing of economies as diverse, and our roles and relations within them as multiple, JK Gibson-Graham propose that we multiply our opportunities and the potential for ethical actions and transformation.

### **Enclosure and capitalism**

What one person has done becomes the precondition of the doing of others [...] there are no clear dividing lines. What happens then, under capitalism, is that this flow of doing is broken, because the capitalist comes along and says, 'That which you have done is mine, I appropriate that, that is my property.'<sup>18</sup>

In his entreaty to 'change the world without taking power', philosopher John Holloway reminds us of the affect on enclosure and co-option on our practices. We too, do not claim that the co-option of work produced through participatory practices is a unique occurrence; its roots lie in the types of enclosure that have dogged other forms of common

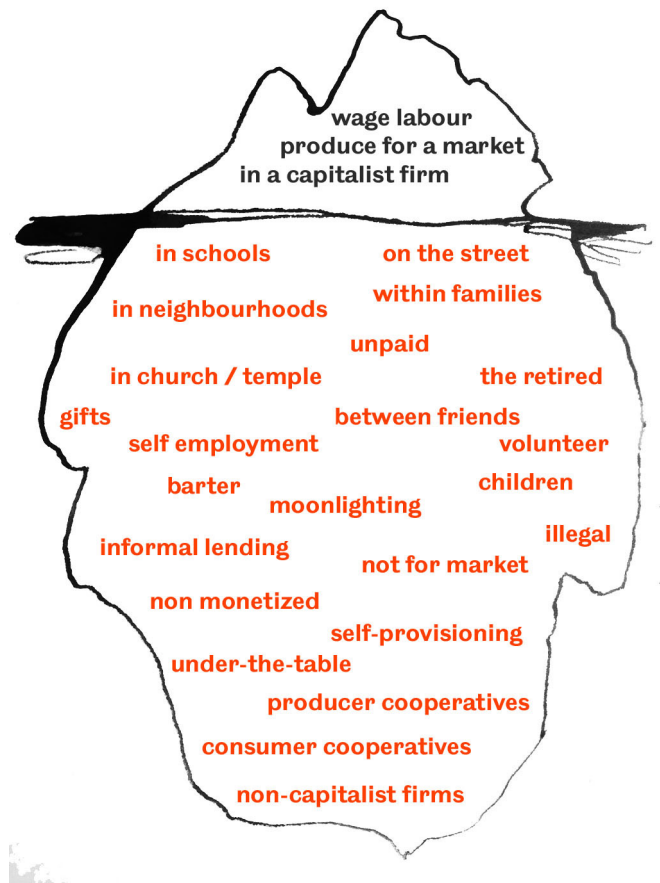


Fig. 1: Illustration of the economic iceberg. Illustration: author.



Fig. 2: Illustration of practices of participation as the hidden supports of building as capitalist accumulation. Illustration: author.



resources. Historically, in England, Commons were private spaces over which 'the commoner' had certain rights and access to resources: to gather wood, to fish, to harvest fruit and to graze animals. This enabled human survival and regulated relationships between the community and nature. The rules of the commons evolved from a form of collective self-governance and management based on regular meetings where knowledge and experience of using the resources of a place were shared. This was to ensure sustainability of resources, because if too much was taken, or it was taken at the wrong time of year, the resource would become scarce and there would be nothing to eat the following year. The enclosure of much of this shared land, and resultant control of resources led to poverty and the criminalisation of people who had previously relied on what was enclosed for food, fuel or other resources. In his discussions of 'commoning', Massimo Angelis attests that this process of enclosure of the commons is not limited to the period of the 'birth of capitalism' but happens repeatedly.<sup>19</sup> He states that this is because people keep working to reweave the social fabric, (destroyed by the enclosure of shared resources), thus capital, which relies on perpetual growth, must find new things to enclose.

### **The evolution of participatory practices in architecture and urban planning**

In addressing the current state of the participatory turn in architecture and planning, we recognise a legacy of the reproduction of participatory practices throughout the fifty or so years since participation first became a concern in the built environment disciplines. This brief account of the period from post-WWII to the present day shows the ways in which participatory practices have been introduced, how they are 'performed' within contemporary processes of production in the built environment, and how their meanings change through repetitions across time and space, or through 'enclosure' by the market economy. Our account is partial, but we propose it as a starting place for elucidating the

different kinds of practices that make-up the way participation is performed. This account concerns the fields of architecture and planning, particularly professional and citizen forms of action. This reflects our interests as engaged professionals and active citizens. We understand these to be loosely gathered as *communicative practices, organisational practices, and productive practices*.

### **Communicative participatory practices**

With the development and introduction in 1947 of a comprehensive system for planning in the UK, the possibility for members of the public to participate in decision-making processes that affect the built environment (beyond their own private property) was initially offered through official Planning Inquiries and Public Meetings organised by Local Authorities.<sup>20</sup> They typically occurred late in the process of developing plans or projects, and were designed to facilitate information provision through one-way communication or limited and controlled consultation.<sup>21</sup> The planning professionals who orchestrated these opportunities for participation in decision-making operated within a rationalist epistemology: local authority planning could not favour the interests of any specific group, but should advise those in power to make decisions based on impartial, reasoned analysis of overall public interest. The practices of public meetings and planning enquiries have clearly defined roles for participants, including rules of conduct regarding who can speak and when, and what type of evidence may be allowed to influence proceedings. As Arnstein notes, when informing and consultation are 'proffered by power-holders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard, but under these conditions they lack the power to ensure that their views will be heeded by the powerful'.<sup>22</sup> Participation is invited according to the terms of the professionals acting on behalf of the state, and communicative practices of attending inquiries or public meetings are restricted in the way they may be creatively or productively used by the participants.<sup>23</sup> Inequality is



inherent in the limitations that govern discussions and processes, which members of the public are either permitted or not permitted to access.

### **Organisational participatory practices**

The 1969 'Skeffington Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning' drew critical attention to how much of decision-making in planning procedures went on 'behind closed doors' and pointed out the inequalities inherent in who could participate in decision-making and how.<sup>24</sup>

In the US in the late 1960s, an alternative model for participation in built environment decision-making was developing through advocacy organisations set up in inner cities (which later became the Community Design Centers or CDCs).<sup>25</sup> This non-state, non-profit model provided a locus for tenants of poor-quality housing, or housing threatened with demolition for new development, where citizens could access the professional knowledge necessary to exert influence through legal channels, or work with professionals to organise and communicate in order to effect change through consciousness-raising and resistance.<sup>26</sup> Participating in this form of organisation had creative and productive potential, which involved developing consciousness-raising politics through meetings not controlled by state actors and, importantly, organisational practices that established articulated forms of social relations with which to act collectively, and forms which were able to be propagated by participants. These practices spread across Europe during the early 1970s, predominantly through networks of professional knowledge. The sites of participation shifted away from the established locus of decision-making, such as the town hall or government offices, and instead occupied either the locations in contention for development or change, or locations more easily accessible to those participating, where advice was provided about how to operate from within and influence the planning system.<sup>27</sup>

### **Productive participatory practices**

These established, communicative and organisational participatory practices were supplemented by actions that moved into productive work.<sup>28</sup> By the end of the 1970s there was increased local authority recognition within the UK of citizens' capacity for self-supported action, and attempts were made to support this – either financially, through the funding of many small schemes, or bureaucratically, through the beginnings of devolved, decision-making power.<sup>29</sup>

The self-supported action first established as an effective model for addressing spatial inequalities has, under a neo-liberal political regime, been co-opted with an onus on 'co-production', led by creative consultants commissioned by local authorities or development bodies. The resources produced through these productive participatory practices, such as mapping and storytelling, are enclosed through the reporting process required from the consultants. The activities are edited and re-presented according to the requirements of the consultants for their commission. These enclosing practices can fix the identities of communities by solidifying a moment in time and identifying a small number of people as being representative of what might actually be a very diverse community.

### **Limitations, inequalities**

Critically, the shift from participating through practices of deliberation and communication to undertaking productive practices at the local neighbourhood level (from involvement in design work on urban schemes and individual projects, through to constructing and mending practices) leaves in place clear inequalities. Design consultants invite and organise participation according to the terms dictated by their commissioning bodies, to produce legitimacy, local ownership or market-valued activity. The work of those participating (producers of unwaged work) is limited in terms of the replication or growth of productive practices, reliant as it is

on the in-built relations of consultants and commissioners. The move from localised and area-based participatory practices to a widespread adaptation of the practices of decision-making, organisation, and the production of the built environment, has been limited. Although public participation 'exercises' became legally required as part of local plan preparation in the 1980s, it became colonised by NIMBYist oppositional practices motivated in defence of the value of private property. The legal requirements for an element of citizen participation, without changes in social relations or a distribution of resources, made participation ' [...] another box among many to tick in order to get approval and funding [...] an organised (and potentially manipulated) part of any regeneration project, in which users are meant to be given a voice, but the process stifles the sound coming out'.<sup>30</sup>

By the late 1990s and early 2000s participation was accepted as another commodified element of the consultant's work package, as a legitimisation of design decisions, or as a demonstration of 'procedural probity' on behalf of a developer or local authority.<sup>31</sup> In England, much participation 'work' was done as part of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme, targeting localised deprivation through thirty-nine, area-based regeneration initiatives. One element of the programme was the funding of activities to build 'community'. Alongside involvement in neighbourhood decision-making fora, art and design consultants were contracted to involve local participants in creative exercises focusing on identity, branding, and public art projects. This approach was predicated on an understanding of areas acting in competition to be more 'vibrant', so as to offer greater opportunities for market transactions.

### **A diverse economies account of the practices of participation**

In trying to understand what kinds of practices might occur in these diverse economies, we wish to look

more closely at two current cases of participatory action in the UK. Our intention in doing so is to try to represent in more detail some of the participatory practices in terms of their social, material and spatial form.

### **Participation as practised (at home, in the park, in the city)**

The interview on which this account is based is part of a wider case study taken from Anna Holder's 'Initiating Architecture' doctoral research project into processes of conceiving, commissioning, organising and funding participative spatial projects. The study uses a multiple-case methodology to describe and learn from four instances of user-initiated spatial change across the UK.

The following account details the practices undertaken by one citizen participating in a park improvement scheme.<sup>32</sup> The improvement work for the park, Lordship Rec, was catalysed by a self-organised user group, 'The Friends of Lordship Rec', which developed the project in partnership with the local authority, the London Borough of Haringey:

The photocopier sits to one side of the small, low window. The sort of photocopier you have in an office. It takes up space. The pale, wan gleams of daylight filter in through the curtains, partly blocked by the large computer monitor. This, along with the keyboard, and piles of paperwork, occupies much of the small dining table-cum-desk. To one side, a plate of toast and beans balances: Dave is eating lunch while telling me about the Lordship Rec project. Over a decade ago, Dave organised a meeting that led to the founding of a 'Friends of' group in his local park.<sup>33</sup> He describes the recent changes they have undertaken: a skatepark built, a hard court for ball games laid out, the construction of a building housing a café and space for community groups, weeds and overgrown plants pulled out from around the lake, trees thinned from the woodland, earth moved to expose the

underground river.

My dictaphone is balanced on the arm of the sofa where I sit; Dave's cat has curled up on my knees. When I arranged this interview, I had planned to talk to Dave in the local community centre: now I am in his home, which is also his office, the centre of the organising and communicating work he does with the Friends group. The domestic space of Dave's home is encroached on, by participating. His living space is shared with documents that would not be out of place in the offices of the Local Authority Planning Department, or in an architect's project folder.

A grid of rectangular wooden storage 'pigeon-holes' takes over one wall of the room. Opposite is a sort of display-stand for brochures, of the type you might see in a public library. Each storage structure is filled with papers, neatly categorised. Newsletters produced by the Friends group to keep local residents informed of the decisions and processes surrounding the works to the park and the public events – these will be delivered by hand to flats and terraces, as well as pinned on the dedicated noticeboard in the park. Printed copies of the surveys done by the Friends – a visual survey, with annotated photographs of the dilapidation of the park, recorded during their first years of trying to care for it; a written survey of wildlife species seen in the woodland, undertaken by a knowledgeable amateur; photocopied flyers of other volunteer-built environment projects in the area; a campaign to save a local shopping arcade from residential development – all these opened channels for the learning and knowledge exchange of participative practices.

My exhaustive interest in how this work happens, coupled with Dave's deep knowledge and enthusiasm for what he and others are doing, means that we talk for over an hour. Feeling I have trespassed too much on Dave's time, I wind up the interview, but ask, finally, if there is anything important that my questions have not covered.

'The photocopier'.

It is important to the work of the Friends that they can keep people informed, that they extend the knowledge and opportunities to participate in the politics of the local environment, that a piece of paper goes through as many doors as possible. So the photocopier takes up a lot of space.

The above account describes an interview undertaken as research into a particular project involving a self-constituted user group working collaboratively with a local authority department to initiate, raise funds and undertake a range of environmental improvements and building projects. The organisations and enterprises Dave is involved in, although requiring initial catalysing and organising, exist through a rhythm of meetings, minute-taking, agreeing on actions, forming subgroups, and reporting back. These participative practices are not confined to one time and space, one 'project', but exist at different scales within the neighbourhood and the city, and are 'carried' by practitioners between different contexts. The know-how, physical activities, mental activities, understanding, motivational and emotional knowledge involved in the practice of 'chairing a meeting', for example, is performed weekly in meetings of the 'Friends' park user group. Elements will be learned and passed on from observing other performances of 'chairing a meeting'; for instance, from experiences on a Tenants and Residents Association committee. Other elements again will inform how this practice is performed within the wider group of stakeholders in the park. When chairing a meeting with the city-wide network of 'Friends' groups involved in working with/caring for green spaces, the practice will inform and be informed by performances of the same practice in other contexts.

By paying attention to a specific practice Dave performs in one spatial location and as a single actor, we can look at the paperwork storage relating to the Friends group, the Users Forum, and the

citywide Green Spaces Friends Groups network. This practice is a key part of Dave's participation in the decision-making process for the production of the built environment. Although located in a domestic setting, the material elements involved in the practice of storing paperwork – the pigeonholes and leaflet display stand – suggest the performance of this practice 'crossing over' from other locations, the office or the library. Again, this practice is related to participation in more than one project: storing minutes from the various organisations and materials produced by them, such as surveys and newsletters, but also flyers or information about other projects similar in terms of spatial area or type of enterprise.

Some of the work of participating lies in the recording of knowledge and the use of know-how that emerge from day-to-day practices. For example, the 'knowledgeable amateur' who produces the wildlife survey gains his understanding and know-how about where and how to look for wildlife, and with what equipment (binoculars, camouflaged clothing, reference books) through the regular performance of practices such as bird watching or nature spotting, undertaken for enjoyment. In undertaking a wildlife survey for the Friends of the Park, this practice becomes productive and involves dedicating time, codifying knowledge and recording it. The wildlife survey is used as a resource, as evidence of a certain use value of the park.

The critical point we wish to make from this detailed representation of participative practices, is that the physical and mental activities, equipment and know-how involved in participating are often indistinguishable from practices people undertake in their leisure time, or practices people undertake as waged labour. The difference lies in undertaking the practices as participation, as time dedicated to building resources for common goals, as tending or caring for space that is not private property, or as domestic and personal space given over to work for

common goals. Participants do not receive a wage for their time, nor rent for their space. The practices of participation are undertaken outside the market economy. The purpose, therefore, of representing Dave's activities as part of a landscape of diverse economies is to draw attention to the opportunities for ethical choices, especially around the distribution of surplus. Dave is situated in his home, surrounded by the reports and products of the project he has produced. Because of this unique access, he can choose to share these resources with others, through taking part in other meetings and offering advice.

Dave's motivation seems to combine both a love for and interest in his environment: a desire to improve it for himself and others, together with broader desires to change the structures of local decision-making in order to make them more equitable and reflective of the society he wants to produce. His contribution raises question for practitioners and researchers alike, such as how to value contributions that are not officially remunerated? And what kinds of representations we need to help conceptualise other value systems and acknowledge other people?

### **Valuing Portland Works**

Portland Works, the subject of Udall's PhD study,<sup>34</sup> is a Grade II\* listed metalwork factory, home to a range of craftsmen, artists and musicians. Under threat from closure and conversion into residential accommodation, campaigners sought to retain it as a place of making and to develop it for wider community benefit. In early 2013, over 500 people came together to become shareholders and enable the purchase of the Works. Portland Works Industrial and Provident Society (PW IPS) is managed by the shareholders through the election of a Board of Directors.

This account is a sense-making description of events, thoughts, conversations and activities that

happened over the period of a few days, collaged together as a 'recollection' of a single day and place:

I walk into the courtyard of Portland Works, stepping over an oily puddle forming as Richard jet-washes motors on the threshold of his workshop, falling into step with the rhythmic bass of Andy working the nineteenth-century drop hammer as he makes tools in the forge, and expertly avoiding the sheets of metal lying over a hole in the ground: I've been here before. Today we are meeting the surveyor to get a valuation of this Grade II\* listed cutlery works building. This figure will then be our target: the finance we need to raise in order to purchase the building and have enough to run it and make the most urgent of urgent repairs. [Not enough, we are sure, to replace the dangerous wiring, or fix the leaky roof, but we hope for a little bit more than the capital costs – perhaps enough to cover propping up a dangerous column, or reconnecting the fire alarm.]

Stu, a knife maker and shareholder [in the community enterprise we have founded for the purchase], appears around a corner. He is pointing up at a dislodged gutter with buddleia sprouting from it, drawing the gaze of a man with a clipboard. What he is saying is drowned out by the tinkle of windowpanes rattling and electric guitars grinding into the first bars of a well-rehearsed line. This man with the clipboard, now nodding his head, must be the surveyor, soon to pronounce a value for this place. I hesitate before I go over: what he has to say will determine how many evenings and weekends I have to invest over the next year. Each pound of the valuation price means work for our group of volunteers: selling shares, applying for loans and grants. Hundreds of hours at meetings and filling-in forms instead of being out in the sunshine, walking in the Peaks.

We are introduced to Mark, the surveyor, and we guide him round, warning him to take care on the wobbly step, not to grab that handrail as it hasn't been connected for years, pointing out the bowed walls

and the leaks. We talk about the project, our aim to fix the factory up and to keep it as a place of making for another 100 years, and he tells us how great this is and wishes us luck. We all smile.

At the end of our tour, Stu invites us all into the workshop he rents, and over filter-coffee, Mark tells us, '... Well, by one measure, this building is worth zero. It's in such poor condition...'

'Yes,' we say, 'our conditional survey says there is over £800,000 of urgent work...'

'But by another, the rental income, well... it's a 10x multiplier... so, £450,000.'

'But,' (I almost shout), 'that income, surely it's dependent on the building not collapsing, not setting on fire, that we can keep tenants in here? Without urgent repairs, replacing felt and slates before the damp roof structure gives up, these workshops won't be in rentable condition much longer.'

'Yes,' he says, 'but your business plan shows that you have a waiting list of tenants, that as a community benefit organisation you can put together good, solid, funding bids for money to make it wind and watertight, you can manage it for a reasonable sum of money... It's convincing as a viable business... So it's reasonable to suppose the value is around £450,000...'

We say our goodbyes, and I head back to work, drifting through the housing estate opposite the Works, thinking about the next steps. As I walk, nagging away at the back of my mind is a thought, one I first hold in, but then can't help but let burst forth, texting as I go: 'Without us doing all this work, the building would be worth zero! This is work we haven't even done yet, but each bit we do makes us have to pay more, and then work more to pay more. Can't we just offer him [the owner] £200k and say that's fair enough?'

In my head, more belligerent thoughts keep coming.

Why should the owner gain financially from the hard work of tens of volunteers? But with this comes the dawning realisation that he could just hold onto it, keep collecting rents, let the holes in the roof get bigger, see the tenants slowly leave until the only answer is flats or demolition ...

### How to resist exploitation?

To understand that our practices of giving our time freely in order to learn together and develop resources such as business plans, proposals for bringing out-of-use workshops into use and increasing the demand for space, could be used purely in terms of the value they created for the landlord, was momentarily paralysing. Each practice, including the thinking, the emotional output and the work itself, was likely to tie us into more work and more hours of fund-raising in the future: our care was giving value to a building the owner had neglected. Should we then stop our practices of care and creativity as the only way of avoiding exploitation and the co-opting of this value into the market? Yet, as Manuela Zechner suggests in her essay 'Caring for the Network Creatively', although we cannot ignore capital, we can understand these self-organised, often informal practices as creating other kinds of relationships and adding positively to our lives:

[...] care and creativity keep us from being bored, hungry, uninspired, depressed, lonely and sick. They help sustain our life and make it meaningful [...] if we take it in our hands to organise them. Networks of informal labour may be the worst for exploitation, yet they may also be the most exciting for inventing ways of sustaining life collectively.<sup>35</sup>

The question is how to take control of the way surpluses are distributed in these participatory ways of working. Although the landlord could make a profit from the many hours of voluntary work, which had inadvertently driven up the market value of the building, the Portland Works Industrial and

Provident Society had also actively made decisions about how we would share what we were doing in ways that were outside the market. The most critical of these actions was that when the purchase of the building went through, an asset lock was implemented, which prevented it being 'demutualised' and took the building out of the market as a commodity. Future plans also actively engage with questions of surplus and the production and reproduction of the site; co-learning in 'repair cafes' and open days will be given freely for community benefit, and programmes of education and training will follow social enterprise models. The organisation will work within the city towards frameworks for setting up other similar organisations as collaborators rather than competitors.

The project could not have existed without non-capitalist transactions: often one person would offer a gift, (frequently of time) to the project as a whole, and reciprocity would be indirect. Someone from within the group would also 'give back', sometimes as part of another activist commitment, but also by contributing to people's businesses (within the market) or their personal lives (non-capitalist). Then again, a gift given outside the project might result in a reciprocal action of time contributed towards the collective goals of the Portland Works team. Our work contributed to developing 'bonds' between one another,<sup>36</sup> and in doing so, created a community around a concern.

### Conclusions

Articulating (as a practice of reformulating) the multiple, heterogeneous sites of struggle, (we) could re-signify all economic transactions and relations, capitalist and non-capitalist, in terms of their *sociality and interdependence, and their ethical participation in being-in-common as part of a 'community economy'*.<sup>37</sup>

As participation has become a more common part of urban design, architecture and planning



processes, many different kinds of practice have evolved. These include organising practices, productive practices and reproductive practices. Though often hidden, we contend that they constitute work, and the outputs these practices produce are frequently represented as contributing to the capitalist economy. This 're-presenting' is carried out by developers, landowners and councils in order to produce greater 'outputs' for smaller financial investment.

Through representing our practices of participation as part of a diverse landscape of economies, we can draw attention to the diverse participatory practices that happen in people's homes as a 'second' or 'third shift' after a working day – by drawing on personal and emotional resources and by using networks built through years of care. We can question their role as inevitably being a support for scarcity (constructed by the market and policies of austerity), and propose instead that they can be a space for making an ethical choice to create different ways of being together.

There is a complex, relational position between economies of participation and the market economy, as they have an interdependent relationship, yet hold the promise of being counter, or non-capitalist. We therefore carry out this re-presenting work to try to produce new economic realities, not to claim that this landscape already 'exists' out there, but rather to try to understand the potential for joining in and developing these other 'non-capitalist' economies. By reframing the capacity of individuals, communities and collectives to contribute to our needs as a society, we can begin to find potential opportunities for resisting, or developing and proposing alternatives. This reframing enables us to proceed from an assumption of plenitude not scarcity, asking the question how we can distribute these resources, not how much we have and can accumulate. However, in order to do so, we must understand that this is an active process and not something to be taken

for granted. How we use our resources must be constantly renegotiated. The question might be how to articulate individual interests in such a way as to constitute common interests.

## Notes

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3. The doctoral research projects referred to here are Julia Udall's 'Tools to Create Agency', 2010-14, funded by the University of Sheffield, and Anna Holder's 'Initiating Architecture', 2009-13, funded by The Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK.
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9. J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Post-Capitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. xxxiv.
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18. John Holloway, 'Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today' (Transcription of a video by O. Ressler, recorded in Vienna, Austria, 23 min., 2004)
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Dan Bloomfield, Kevin Collins, Charlotte Fry and Richard Munton, 'Deliberation and Inclusion: Vehicles for Increasing Trust in UK Public Governance?', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 19, 4 (2001), pp. 501-13.
22. Sherry R. Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', p. 217.
23. This account refers to the common performance of communicative practices as participation at a late stage in planning processes and within the adversarial atmosphere of the Public Inquiry. Forester demonstrates that communicative and deliberative practices at earlier stages and in different forms can be effective and transformational in planning processes.
24. Dan Bloomfield, Kevin Collins, Charlotte Fry and Richard Munton, 'Deliberation and inclusion: vehicles for increasing trust in UK public governance?', pp. 501-13.
25. Graham Towers, *Building Democracy: Community Architecture in the Inner Cities* (London: UCL Press, 1995), pp. 103-4.
26. Ibid.
27. In 1979, the Town and Country Planning Association founded Community Technical Aid in Manchester, the beginning of the 'Planning Aid' approach, which made professional knowledge available to citizens regarding how to challenge or work with the planning system.
28. Examples of this include the Lewisham Borough Council, Walter Segal's self-build scheme, and the GLC Primary Support Housing Assembly Kit.
29. Graham Towers, *Building Democracy*, pp. 110-11.
30. Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till, 'Introduction', in *Architecture & Participation*, pp. xiii – xiv.
31. Dan Bloomfield, Kevin Collins, Charlotte Fry and Richard Munton, 'Deliberation and Inclusion: Vehicles for Increasing Trust in UK Public Governance?', pp. 501-13.
32. See note 3 above.
33. Dave is chairperson of the Friends group, a founding member of the Users Forum and former secretary for the Tenants and Residents Association of the estate where he lives.
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## Biographies

Anna Holder holds qualifications in architecture and planning and has practised in the UK and the Netherlands. She is completing her doctoral research on ways in which architecture and spatial projects are initiated, focusing on designer and community-led processes. She is a director of the social-enterprise architectural practice, Studio Polpo, and a member of the Sheffield School of Architecture (SSoA) research centre 'Agency'.

Julia Udall studied architecture in Glasgow and Sheffield and is a Design Tutor at Sheffield School of Architecture, where she is completing her doctoral research. She has worked in architectural and community organisations, researching and acting with people to create change in the urban landscape. She is a director of the social-enterprise architectural practice, Studio Polpo, and a member of the SSoA research centre 'Agency'.

