

Disconnected Bodies

# PLACE, PEOPLE, POSSIBILITY

A COMMUNITY-LED  
PLACEMAKING FRAMEWORK



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# ART WITHOUT DISCOVERY MOVES NOBODY

Disconnected Bodies: A social enterprise working to improve access to the arts, culture and heritage.

**Supporting innovative people and projects:** we help people choose, create, or take part in bold and brilliant arts experiences.

**Widening cultural access and democratising the arts:** the arts must remain a force for public good.

**Advising on cultural audience engagement and securing funding:** we work for those who most require the help; tackling industry gate-keeping and discriminatory practices to amplify voices.



## 19 years

Changing the face of cultural audience engagement and contributing our expertise to enabling more people to choose, create and participate in brilliant cultural experiences.



## 15 countries

Improving access to the arts and culture in 15 countries across the United Kingdom, Europe and Africa.



## 720,000 audiences

Reached in 2024. 375,000 being first time attenders.



## 2.1 million people

Engaged digitally in 2024.



## 8 national research projects

5 international research projects.



## 764 hours

Free advice provided in 2024.



“At DisconnectedBodies, we champion inclusive cultural access—empowering communities through bold engagement, free expert guidance, and equitable arts participation. Join us in transforming who the arts serve and how they connect us”.

- Pablo Colella, Founder

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# CULTURE: A CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATION

At Disconnected Bodies, we believe in the power of arts and culture to catalyse real, lasting transformation in towns and cities.

This isn't just about regeneration; it's about unlocking the potential of place and people through a deeply rooted, locally led cultural strategy.

As an organisation that supports councils and cultural ecosystems across the UK, we help towns embed creativity at the heart of their development strategies.

Our approach recognises what we champion: that cultural participation fosters stronger, more connected communities, improves wellbeing, supports educational outcomes, and builds inclusive economies. With the creative industries contributing over £111 billion annually to the UK economy, investment in this sector isn't a luxury—it's a necessity for future resilience.

This kind of transformation isn't theoretical—it's happening. And at Disconnected Bodies, we exist to support councils to design, implement, and sustain similar cultural strategies. Whether through co-created public art, reimagined public spaces, or cultural programmes that reflect local identity and tackle inequality, we work side-by-side with local authorities to turn vision into action.

But we also understand the challenges.

COVID-19 reshaped the creative landscape, exposing systemic vulnerabilities—especially for freelancers, emerging artists, and underrepresented communities.

Our strategic advice doesn't shy away from these realities. It acknowledges deep inequities, and outlines a path forward that is both inclusive and justice-focused; mirroring our commitment to co-designing systems that elevate marginalised voices and redistribute creative power.

We've been able to demonstrate what's possible when a town embraces arts and culture not as an add-on, but as a foundation for change.

We're here to activate local potential, build cultural infrastructure, and centre communities in the stories they tell about who they are—and who they want to become.

Let's reimagine together.

# PLACEMAKING: A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

Creative placemaking is a culturally led approach to developing places and communities. It uses arts and creative practice to support community-led change, building local capacity, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and addressing social, economic, and environmental needs. By embedding creativity into place-based development, communities can co-create solutions that are tailored to their unique context, amplify voices often unheard, and promote sustainable, long-term benefits.

This report outlines a framework for creative placemaking that is applicable across diverse contexts, from small-scale neighbourhood initiatives to regional strategies. It presents principles, processes, values, and elements of practice, alongside guidance for measuring impact and maximising opportunities. Its aim is to provide a structured methodology for local authorities, community organisations, creative practitioners, and other stakeholders seeking to embed creativity at the heart of place development.

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# INTRODUCTION

Placemaking is the practice of shaping spaces to strengthen community identity, connection, and wellbeing. Traditionally, it has focused on urban design, public space, and planning; however, modern approaches recognise that successful placemaking also encompasses social, cultural, and economic dimensions. Creative placemaking extends this concept by positioning arts and culture as central to these processes, using creativity as a tool for engagement, problem-solving, and innovation.

Unlike top-down strategies, creative placemaking emphasises community-led decision-making, encouraging residents to define their needs, imagine possibilities, and lead initiatives. By integrating creative activity into place-based development, communities can achieve more inclusive and sustainable outcomes that reflect local priorities. The approach is flexible, scalable, and capable of addressing both immediate challenges and long-term ambitions in social cohesion, economic resilience, and environmental stewardship.

## THEMES

Creative placemaking is underpinned by several key themes. Firstly, it provides opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, allowing diverse stakeholders, including health, education, economic development, and civic organisations, to work toward shared objectives. By positioning creative projects as neutral spaces for collaboration, communities can develop innovative solutions while building lasting partnerships. Secondly, inclusivity is a central theme. Creative placemaking aims to remove barriers to participation, ensuring all members of a community, particularly those underrepresented in decision-making, can engage meaningfully. Thirdly, creative placemaking strengthens connections within the creative and cultural sector itself, enabling local artists and practitioners to collaborate effectively while contributing to broader social and economic goals. Finally, it aligns with community wealth building principles, empowering local organisations to grow capacity, develop sustainable initiatives, and retain resources locally.

## PRINCIPLES

The ethos of creative placemaking rests on three interlinked principles. The first is community leadership: residents are experts in their own contexts and are best placed to determine priorities, identify solutions, and guide projects. The second principle is creative engagement, which recognises the value of arts-based methods for eliciting authentic participation, particularly from individuals and groups whose voices are often marginalised. Creative activities, workshops, and participatory projects provide ways to engage people in dialogue and exploration that are both accessible and inspiring. The third principle is capacity building. Creative placemaking aims to develop skills, knowledge, networks, and infrastructure within communities so they can continue to lead and sustain initiatives over time. By combining these principles, creative placemaking strengthens both the social fabric and economic potential of communities while fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation.

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# DEFINING PLACEMAKING

## Placemaking

Placemaking is the process of shaping public and community spaces to foster identity, connection, and wellbeing. Contemporary approaches extend beyond urban design to incorporate social, economic, and environmental considerations. Effective placemaking recognises the interdependency of community identity, civic structures, built environments, and local economies, emphasising holistic strategies rather than isolated interventions.

## Creative Placemaking

Creative placemaking is an extension of this concept that positions culture and the arts as central drivers of community development. It enables residents to engage creatively with local challenges, explore potential solutions, and participate in decision-making. Creative placemaking strengthens local economies, encourages socially beneficial outcomes, and enhances the vibrancy and identity of a place.

Within this approach, communities work collaboratively with creative practitioners and other partners to co-create initiatives that are specific to their context, culturally relevant, and sustainable. Creative placemaking aligns with broader principles of community wealth building, including equitable ownership, fair work, progressive use of local resources, and inclusive economic strategies.

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# PRINCIPLES FOR PRACTICE

Creative placemaking is guided by a set of operational principles that support effective engagement and outcomes. Grassroots engagement is critical: initiatives must build on existing activity, networks, and local knowledge while including people who are often excluded from traditional decision-making. Cross-sector collaboration is another foundational principle; creative projects provide an accessible and neutral platform for agencies and organisations to connect and work toward shared goals.

Innovation is central to creative placemaking. Unlike top-down approaches that replicate previous models, this approach encourages experimentation and locally led problem-solving. Transparent communication ensures all participants remain informed, connected, and able to contribute meaningfully throughout the process. Furthermore, projects prioritise community benefit, encompassing improved wellbeing, employability, and the generation of new social and economic opportunities. Finally, creative placemaking fosters development within the creative sector, opening pathways for practitioners, building local skills, and promoting inclusive participation.

## CORE ELEMENTS

Creative placemaking involves five core elements that interact dynamically:

### Community

The people, places, and identities that form the foundation of any initiative. Communities provide insight into local needs and serve as active participants in shaping outcomes.

### Community Base

Local organisations or hubs act as focal points for activity, providing continuity, trust, and access to networks. This can include community centres, youth groups, or informal collectives.

### Working Process

Flexible, process-led structures guide the development of projects, ensuring collaboration, inclusivity, and adaptation to local needs.

### Creative Practice

Facilitated by professional or non-professional creatives, these practices enable co-creation, engagement, and the exploration of ideas.

### Other Partners

Collaborating agencies, groups, or institutions help support projects, providing expertise, resources, or infrastructure while aligning shared objectives.

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# A PROCESS-LED APPROACH

Creative placemaking emphasises process over predetermined outcomes. Projects begin with community-led exploration of local needs, challenges, and opportunities. Ideas emerge through cycles of engagement, reflection, and experimentation, allowing projects to evolve organically.

A process-led approach encourages collaboration, shared learning, and flexibility. It builds trust among participants and partners while enabling locally relevant solutions to emerge. By embedding values at the outset and developing structures that support ongoing participation and decision-making, creative placemaking fosters sustainable, long-term impact.

## CORE VALUES

Values guide all aspects of creative placemaking. Co-creation ensures shared leadership and responsibility. Reflection supports open documentation and learning throughout the process. Capacity-building prioritises skills development and sustainable practices. Exploration allows flexibility in outcomes, while collaboration ensures joint ownership and equal contribution. Inclusivity guarantees participation across demographics and social groups. Transparency ensures open communication, and shared accountability reinforces collective responsibility for long-term outcomes.

## CREATIVE PRACTICE

Creative practice in placemaking is central to engagement, facilitation, and co-creation. Practitioners can include artists, cultural workers, or anyone using creative methods to foster dialogue, problem-solving, and participation. The aim is not to deliver a predefined artistic product, but to support communities in expressing ideas, exploring possibilities, and shaping the direction of projects.

Approaches include community art, participatory art, and socially engaged practice. Each prioritises collaboration, shared ownership, and engagement with social issues, creating spaces where communities can experiment, reflect, and actively participate in shaping their environment.

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# MEASURING IMPACT

Evaluating creative placemaking requires a multifaceted approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Immediate outcomes may include increased wellbeing, confidence, agency, and skill development. Longer-term effects may involve enhanced social cohesion, local enterprise, and sustainable community capacity.

Frameworks for monitoring and evaluation should be co-created with participants and partners, grounded in shared values and goals. Documentation, storytelling, and creative outputs provide evidence of engagement and impact, while collaboration with research partners can strengthen analysis and inform future initiatives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To embed creative placemaking effectively, it is recommended to:

- Develop cross-sector collaborations using creative projects as neutral platforms for dialogue and shared action.
- Build networks to share knowledge, resources, and capacity across communities.
- Establish consultative groups to guide strategy, decision-making, and regional coordination.
- Document and communicate case studies to illustrate impact and support advocacy.
- Integrate creative placemaking into local and regional planning, economic development, and cultural strategies.
- Invest in capacity-building for practitioners, community organisations, and residents to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Partner with research institutions to collect data, evaluate outcomes, and inform continuous improvement.

## CONCLUSIONS

Creative placemaking is a values-driven, process-oriented methodology that empowers communities to take ownership of their development. By embedding arts and culture into place-based strategies, communities can co-create solutions that are innovative, inclusive, and sustainable. This approach builds local capacity, fosters cross-sector collaboration, and generates social, economic, and environmental benefits. When applied at scale, creative placemaking supports communities in taking the lead in shaping their futures while providing a framework for long-term regional and national impact.



## BOOK A FREE 30-MINUTE VIDEO CONSULTATION

Book a free 30-minute consultancy call and speak with Disconnected Bodies' Founder Pablo Colella.

We pride ourselves on offering free, no strings attached advice. Book a day and time that suits you then leave it to us to get you moving past sticking points and towards your goals.

**Don't want to wait? Give our team a call on 020 3633 7617**

