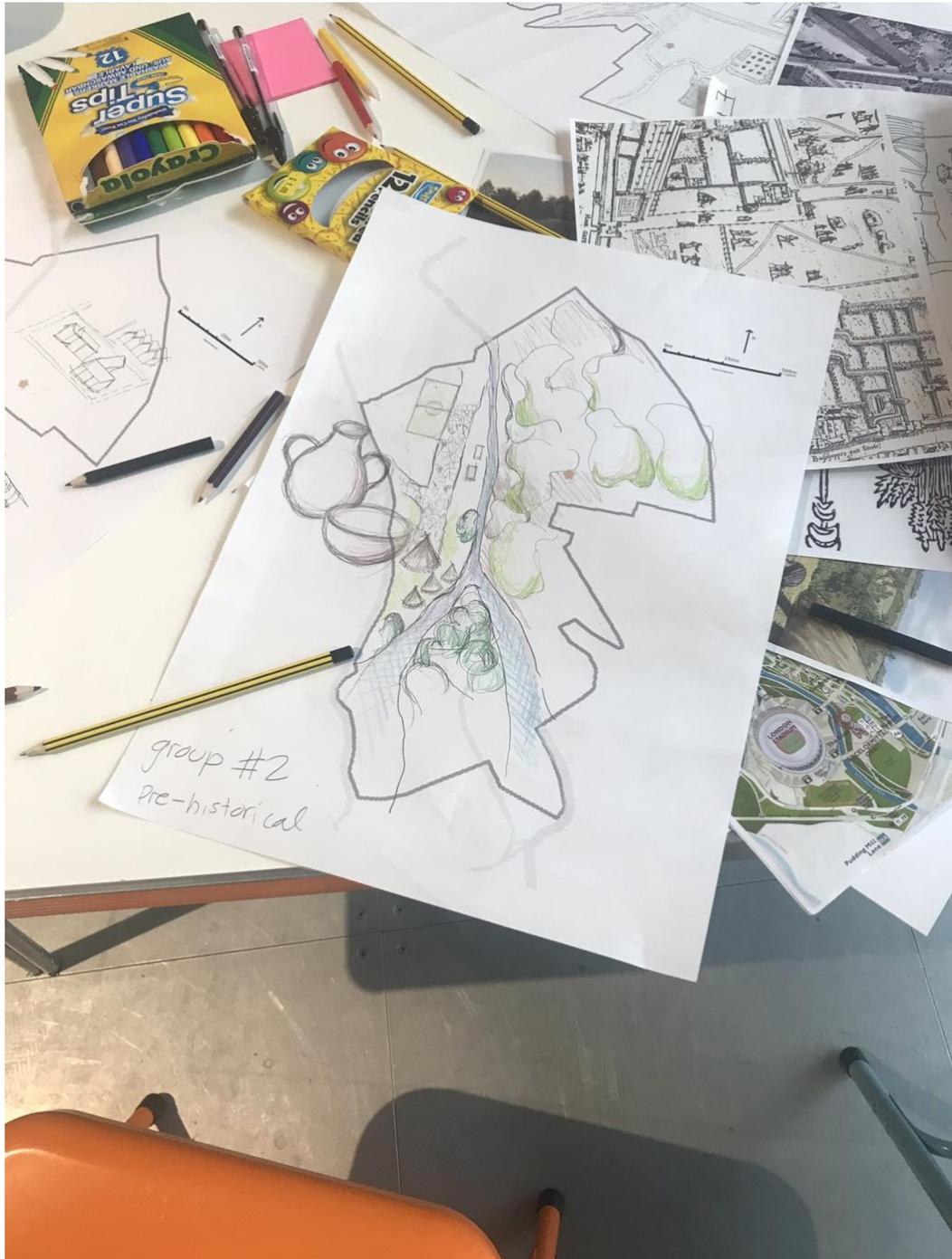


Be Your Own Groundbreaker: Community Mapping Workshops on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park



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Cover image: Participant map
from Workshop 2

Introduction

Be Your Own Groundbreaker was a series of two participatory mapping workshops exploring people's relationships with the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The workshops took place during July 2019 with UCL East Community Engagement Seed Funding. The aim of the workshops was to pilot the types of community partnerships, audiences and activities that might be developed as part of the Urban Room and Memory Workshop programme at UCL East when it opens. This document summarises the activities that took place, outlines their effectiveness and highlights issues for consideration in future UCL East /Urban Room public engagement work.

Project overview

The workshops were run in partnership with local community practitioners, Nicole Crockett (project coordination) and John Wallett (Livingmaps Network), on behalf of UCL Urban Laboratory. They took responsibility for identifying workshop leaders (JW), recruiting audience members (JW/NC), overseeing logistics (NC) and project evaluation (NC). The project developed and tested two participatory mapping workshops exploring ideas around heritage, memory and the future, in the changing urban landscape of east London, specifically the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (the Park) and the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Aims

The initiative sought to pilot community learning activities that could be delivered by the Urban Room and Memory Workshop at UCL East. The two workshops engaged loosely with The Groundbreakers, a heritage engagement project by Livingmaps Network, which is seeking to create two audio trails presenting the rich and varied heritage of the Park. The workshops aimed to engage local people in journeys around the Park, visiting heritage hotspots on the Groundbreakers trail, uncovering the hidden history of the site, and working together to create maps, which captured audience members experiences and responses to the area.

Intended outcomes

The project aimed to have the following impact:

- Participants develop new and better connections with each other;
- Participants learn about heritage and develop an understanding of how it shapes the development of an area undergoing radical change;
- Participants learn new skills around observation, mapping and recording heritage;
- Participants gain an understanding of the types of activities, events and partnerships which will be offered by the Urban Room and Memory Workshop at UCL East;
- The heritage of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is better documented and shared.

Workshop 1: Remapping the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

The first workshop was devised and delivered by artist Kimbal Bumstead on Saturday 6 July 2019.

Kimbal's workshop sought to explore and document people's relationship with the Park and the connections they have to the area around it. Using drawing to create new personal and group maps, he helped participants to document the way they use the Park and what they feel about it.



Images from Workshop 1

Workshop activities

Kimbal led participants through the following process:

1. With their eyes closed, participants were asked to draw their journey, using their drawing hand as their mind's eye as they moved through a route to or through the Park. As they went, participants considered the difference between an aerial view of their journey and a street view perspective, marking down both the route itself and the visual, emotional and experiential elements that stood out to them on their journey. This process of mapping was essentially about making marks, rather than drawing, as a means to connect to a place in the participants' minds in a visceral rather than cerebral way, and to open up possibilities for a conversation about the place and their journeys.
2. Once the drawings were complete, participants talked about them with the rest of the group; each had the opportunity to describe their drawing and the various elements, particularly focusing on their emotional and personal attachments to the area. They discussed observed changes in the area, the positive and negative impact of redevelopment, the importance of green space and the space to breathe.
3. We then divided into two groups, cut our drawings into eight pieces and shuffled the pieces. We collated random pieces of the drawings together to make abstract 'non-sensical maps' to guide us on new journeys around the Park.
4. Each group chose spots on their 'map' that they wanted to visit. Participants took turns to read the map, correlating the lines and marks on the drawing to features and landmarks they found on the ground. When the map reader decided that the group had reached a designated spot, everyone stopped to identify and document what they found. At each spot, participants considered what they knew about the place either in the past, or present, and imagined how it might look in the future. These observations were noted or drawn onto another sheet of paper.

The point of the exercise was to consider an alternative way to explore and capture the many

layers of reality that overlap in any given place, and also to show how an apparently absurd activity can lead to a focused discussion about a place from a group perspective, stimulating emotional responses as well as responses to the physical world.

Evaluation and feedback

Ten people came to the first workshop, mixed in age from 11 to 70 years and including two family groups. Though we hoped for 20 participants, recruitment was hampered by venue changes and the availability of the artist. We used word of mouth and local community networks and newsletters to attract people, including families and the Senior BEEs, a local group of older people who were invited to attend. Given the untested and experimental nature of the workshop, ten people was an ideal number to work with in piloting the activities.

Feedback confirmed that participants enjoyed the workshop and agreed that Kimbal was a very knowledgeable and supportive workshop leader. They enjoyed meeting each other and working together on the activities and they felt that they had learned something about themselves and about the Park:

'I learned a lot even though I know the park quite well. I went to places I hadn't been before and I enjoyed the green spaces and the place with the mirrors. It was good for taking photos.'

Most participants agreed that the explanation at the beginning of the workshop was too long and that more time out exploring the Park would have been preferred. They did not really understand what they were meant to be doing once they got into the Park and felt that: 'We should have just got on with it.'

Despite not knowing what was required, participants were happy to try out using, what was a very strange and 'incoherent' map, as a guide for exploring the Park. On the whole, this was a very successful, enjoyable and educational workshop, which could certainly be refined and further developed for use by a wide range of audience groups.



Images from Workshop 1

Workshop 2: A New Archaeology of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

The second workshop was devised and delivered by researcher Jonathan Gardner (UCL Institute of Archaeology) and took place on Saturday 27 July 2019.

The workshop invited participants to use their memories, knowledge and experiences of the Park, in tandem with archaeological methods, to build up a picture of the Park's history and to think about its future.

The workshop sought to engage people in searching for and recording physical remnants of the Park in order that they better understand its history and former uses. Jonathan led participants on a search for objects, materials and landscapes, and demonstrated that the methods used by archaeologists can help everyone explore and understand the past for themselves. He focused on questions such as:

- What materials, objects and landscapes are visible from the past today? Which are hidden?
- Can we imagine what this place was like before the park existed?

Participants were encouraged to think about how the Park might change in the future and what archaeologists would make of the objects being created today.



Jonathan Gardner presenting at Workshop 2

Workshop activities

Jonathan began the workshop with a talk covering key points in the history of the Park, followed by an introduction to the methods used by archaeologists to investigate the past. This provided participants with a timeline that helped to locate the activities that followed:

1. Handling archaeological finds

In small groups, participants examined a bag of archaeological finds covering two millennia of the Park area and the group talked about:

- the age, use, value and what should happen to the finds;
- whether they should they be kept in a museum or discarded;
- the meaning of any words or symbols inscribed upon the objects;
- the chance survival and discovery of objects and how they should therefore be treated.

The activity prompted discussion about how we interpret the past, the need to consider the context (when things happen and what life is like at the time), where an object is found and the history of the area. It also provided an understanding of the tools and training that equip archaeologists with the ability to identify and interpret the things they find and it highlighted the huge amount, and varied types of, material that is of interest to archaeologists, from bones and implements, to plastic beer glasses.

2. Mapping the past

Next, participants were asked to draw a map of the Park focussing on the historical period or story that most appealed to them. This resulted in a series of individual maps that revealed participants' personal concerns and the connections they made. Some thought about what it was like in the past, focussing on a particular point of the history - industrial past, prehistoric past - whilst others focussed on what it might be like in the future, what they would like it to become – “wilder”, “not just another part of the city”.

3. Fieldwork in the Park

In the final activity, participants went out into the Park in small groups of two or three equipped with a camera and a notepad for documenting their finds: remnants of the past or items of interest that might intrigue future generations. They were tasked with identifying objects, recording them (size, materials, look and uses) and with attempting to age them. Participants found an interesting array of objects including play and fitness equipment, park infrastructure, and public art. They recorded them using proformas typically used by archaeologists that had been adapted by Jonathan.

4. Reflection

On return to the workshop venue, participants had a chance to briefly discuss their fieldwork findings. This established that the workshop resulted in them thinking differently about the Park, looking more closely at its components, the wider context and about it as a place with a continuum that would continue to change and develop.

Evaluation and feedback

Twelve people came to the second workshop. A different approach to recruiting participants was taken, using Eventbrite and circulating information to Livingmaps Network's mailing list, in addition to local networks and newsletters. Though 22 people booked using Eventbrite, ten people did not turn up on the day. The audience was very different to that of the first workshop, the majority of participants were students and professionals rather than the local audience we anticipated.



Participants maps from Workshop 2

The workshop was extremely well researched and planned in advance by Jonathan. Feedback shows that participants enjoyed the session and considered Jonathan to be a knowledgeable and fascinating workshop leader. They reported that they had learned new things about the Park as well as developing new skills and perspectives. Participants specifically valued learning about the work of archaeologists and how their techniques can equip all of us to think about places differently and help us to engage more meaningfully with them:

'I like hearing different narratives of the Park and the good mix of listening and activity.'

'It made me think about history as a continuum and the importance of the past being remembered and reflected in the future.'

Participants agreed that too much time was spent on the introduction to the Park and explanations of its historical development, which left too little time for the fieldwork.

Most thought that the fieldwork was quite complicated and that it should be refined and simplified if the workshop was run again. As with the first workshop, it was felt that more time was needed for reflection at the end.

Despite these minor misgivings, participants thoroughly enjoyed the workshop and some were reluctant to leave. The benefit most frequently stated was developing an understanding of the work of an archaeologist, and specifically the fact that the tools of observation and documentation can be used by all of us to explore and understand our surroundings. Further revelations included the fact that archaeologists are interested in the everyday and that the things we create today will become the strange and intriguing objects of tomorrow's researchers.

Project outcomes

The two workshops strongly delivered the outcomes sought during the design of the project, though the emphasis of each differed as outlined below:

1. Participants develop new and better connections with each other

Both workshops were sociable events requiring interaction and teamwork, and people clearly enjoyed being together and getting to know each other. The Remapping workshop delivered more strongly on this outcome because participants were required to share their personal journeys and stories with the group which made it a more personally revealing and therefore emotionally engaging session.

'I enjoyed seeing how other people presented their journeys using drawings and how different they were to the way I presented mine. They seemed to reflect people's personalities and the focus of their lives. It said something about who they were.'

2. Participants learn about heritage, and develop an understanding of how it can shape future development

In contrast, participants learnt more about heritage and its role in shaping the present from the New Archaeology workshop. Their understanding of the history of the Park and its unfinished journey was clearly appreciated by the group, while learning about the role of archaeologists in documenting the past and the present clearly led to an appreciation of how change is shaped.

'It gave me a chance to link the latest development to the history and previous uses of the place.'

'It made me think about the heritage behind it.'

'I can now identify and relate some objects and landscapes to the past.'

3. Participants learn new skills - observation, mapping and recording heritage

Both workshops delivered strongly on this outcome, with participants learning that drawing maps can be a useful way to document their emotional as well as their physical journeys and interests, and that the tools used by archaeologists can be useful for all of us in connecting to places. It seemed clear from the sessions that participants would use these new skills in their everyday observations.

'I really enjoyed learning about how to collect archaeological information. I will definitely be more observant going forward.'

4. Participants gain an understanding of the types of activities, events and partnerships which will be offered by the Urban Room and Memory Workshop at UCL East

At the beginning of each workshop, participants were introduced to the Urban Room concept. Questions about what they would like to see delivered through the initiative were included in the written evaluation. Those taking part, clearly understood the types of audiences which UCL seeks to attract and thought that the workshops would be relevant to them.

'Ones which engage more directly with local residents and reflect/connect to activity within the university. This is a chance to facilitate learning amongst local people.'

'More like this! Perhaps doing this with an existing cohort e.g. a local library group would be interesting.'

5. The heritage of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is better documented and shared.

The workshops did not seek to provide primary documentation of the Park's heritage, but certainly to share it, and both excelled at informing participants, allowing them to share their knowledge and actively engage in thinking about the future. People were concerned about sustainability in this regard:

'I'm very interested to see where it will go and what it will become. I'm worried about the approach to sustaining green places. I would like to see rewilding beyond the Park.'



Map of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Conclusions and recommendations for the Urban Room and Memory Workshop

The following are some conclusions about the workshops and recommendations for consideration by UCL Urban Laboratory, should it pursue community engagement activity at UCL East.

Venue

The workshops were held in The Hall, a community venue on the edge of the Park run by The Yard Theatre. It consists of one large bright room and an ancillary space with a kitchen area, quiet space and disabled toilet. It is accessible, well equipped and reasonably priced (compared to the intended venue Timber Lodge), and well situated on the edge of the Park.

Recommendation: The Hall was an ideal space, it has a nice community feel, it is accessible, affordable, well-resourced and is a bright and inclusive space. The Urban Room should ideally be designed to emulate the qualities of this type of space if it wishes to attract community audiences.

Audiences and recruitment

The workshops did not really attract the audiences intended, but as they were pilot sessions this was not particularly problematic. The delay in starting the project and the urgency to complete it by the end of July 2019 meant that the recruitment window was curtailed. Different approaches to recruitment were tested: word of mouth, outreach to local groups and individuals including the Senior BEEs, social media and online platforms.

Recommendations: In order for the Urban Room to attract local, under-represented audiences, it should:

- *Work with local community organisations and build groups over time. It can take two to three years, in my experience, to build a robust group, a considerable investment and requiring a skilled engagement approach.*
- *Hold sessions at times when people can make it, weekends are good for those in work, but not so good for older people.*
- *Be realistic about the success of intergenerational work, try working with existing groups as a starting point rather than working from scratch.*

Workshop leaders

The workshops were led by experienced cartographic artist Kimbal Bumstead and by UCL archaeologist Jonathan Gardner. Both were excellent and exactly the type of people audiences respect and enjoy meeting. That is, experts in their field who have good communication skills, a willingness to share those skills with others, and who see the benefits that arise from all of us developing our knowledge and expertise.

Recommendation: Bringing in experts helps to keep programmes dynamic and varied and crucially it helps in the building of relationships with communities and groups. It emphasises the fact that you people are worthy of time with experts and are interested in hearing about their expertise. This results in people feeling valued and motivated and ensures their ongoing commitment.

Content and structure of workshops

On the whole the content was well pitched for the audience. Neither had been tested previously and some key lessons were learned, which should be borne in mind if they are to run again. Both

sets of activities could do with some modification in order to provide a more coherent learning experience. The range of activities and the constrained timeframe of a workshop requires time testing so that activities can be successfully completed.

Recommendations: Accurate and detailed timing should be imposed and stuck to by workshop leaders. This would allow:

- *Time to reflect on outcomes - both our workshops lacked time for the group to properly reflect on our finished maps and fieldwork.*
- *More time to execute the fieldwork.*

Content should be clear and logical:

- *Activities should be refined to ensure they are systematic and achievable.*
- *It would help with community buy in if community activity delivered at the Urban Room was directly related to research and activity taking place at UCL Urban Lab and the wider UCL community.*

Group size

The group sizes of 10 and 12 for our workshops were perfect for piloting the mapping and heritage activities. The intense, interactive nature of the activity requires a relatively intimate atmosphere where the instructor can take time to engage directly with each participant.

Recommendation: Larger groups would require additional resource, including more well-briefed group leaders. It would be difficult to deliver workshops like this for groups of more than 20 people. Smaller groups ensure the informal feel and encourage a forum in which everyone's opinion counts.

Outcomes

In addition to delivering the intended outcomes, workshops can also deliver more widely to social and community cohesion and sense of place. The following stand out from the workshops as things that could be uniquely built upon:

- Everyone's story is equal and important, people listen to each other and this helps to increase confidence in presenting views.
- We learn things about our presentation style and how it differs from others
- When we go out, we observe more, our senses are heightened we feel better connected.

