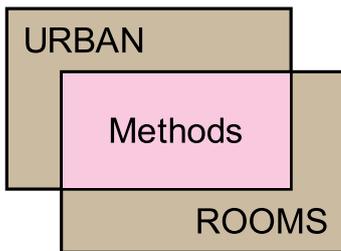


**This section of the UR Toolkit is a collection of methods, i.e. the activities and techniques that you might use in your Urban Room to engage people creatively in exploring the past, present and future of their local area. These methods have been tried and tested in past and current Urban Rooms and here we reflect upon their effectiveness and give advice on how to make them as engaging, accessible and inclusive as possible.**

**The Urban Rooms Methods included in this section are grouped as follows:**

- **Walks:** trails, heritage tours, themed walks, expert guides
- **Drawings:** urban sketching, what if?, collective drawings
- **Maps and Mapping:** collective mapping, collective photography, historic maps, mapping senses, digital mapping
- **Models:** interactive models, playful models, collective models, digital models
- **Art Methods:** installation, storytelling, performance, writing
- **Conversational:** local expert presentations, themed debates, shared meals
- **Action:** activism, 1:1 transformation
- **Play:** games, competitions, digital games

This document is a section of the Urban Rooms Toolkit which can be found at [urbanroomstoolkit.org](http://urbanroomstoolkit.org)



**In deciding on the methods in your Urban Room you should consider the following:**

**What are you trying to achieve?**

Be clear about your aims to help you find the methods that will work for you. Are you aiming to understand and develop a sense of place? Foster community cohesion, capacity and skills? Reveal and share diverse histories, knowledge and experiences? Develop new design ideas for place futures? Some methods suit one-off engagement events, others suit longer-term engagement that can accumulate over time.

**How will you support these activities?**

Do you have facilitators with the skills to guide people or do you need to engage others to contribute specific expertise, e.g artists, photographers, tour guides, built environment professionals etc.?

**Can you offer multiple activities at the same time?**

This broadens the appeal of the Urban Room and helps to build a rich context for engagement.

**Can you exhibit the results of the activities?**

A public exhibition of the maps, drawings, photographs, archive material, objects that are collected and produced in the Urban Room can be a really effective way of demonstrating the rich history and potential of an area, to build communal ownership of the room and to catalyse new conversations and ideas.

**How can your activities widen participation to groups and individuals who tend to be marginalised in traditional engagement?**

Encourage wherever possible opening up conversations to include diverse voices, stories, histories and futures.

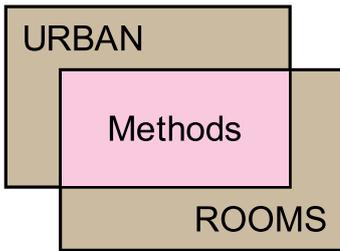
**Can you enhance the activities in the Urban Room with digital methods of engagement, e.g. website, social media, interactive mapping tools?**

This will widen the reach of your engagement, bring in new audiences and potentially create a digital resource to act as a useful advocacy tool.

**How will you document thoroughly, both the processes and the outputs of the activities?**

This can be done through photography, film and audio. However, this needs sensitivity and you should make it clear to participants that they could be recorded, giving them a chance to opt out.

**For further advice on how to set up, run and make the most of your Urban Room, go to the Knowhow section.**



# Trails

## Description of Method:

Self-led exploration of an urban environment using a trail or route accessed via an Urban Room. The trail may be a digital resource or a printed version. Trails suggest a walking route to highlight points of interest in the local area: historic sites, development opportunities, artworks, local food etc.

## Purpose of Method:

Trails encourage and support an individual exploration of place, without necessitating a pre-organised tour. They aim to heighten the individual's experience of the built environment, revealing new places or observations of a neighbourhood, town or city.

## Suitable Audience:

Suitable for a wide audience of all ages: residents, visitors, school classes. Consideration needs to be given to accessibility for people with limited abilities. Think about how you might gather suggestions for additions to the trail or for new types of trail.

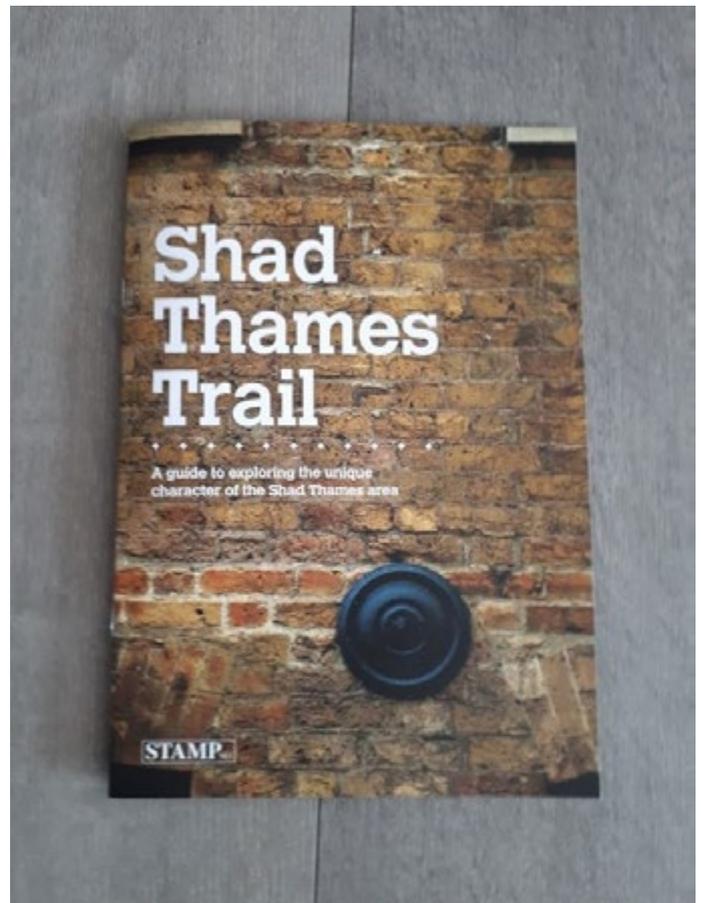
## Shad Thames Area Management Partnership

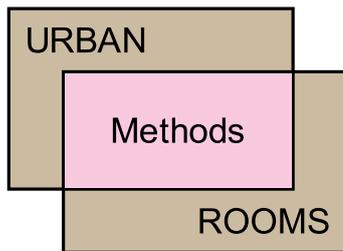
The Shad Thames Trail is a self-guided walk to explore the 'unique character of the Shad Thames area'. The Trail was written by a local resident and supported by a local historian and photographer. It can be [downloaded for free from STAMP's website](#).

### Image:

Shad Thames Trail

Credit: STAMP (Shad Thames Area Management Partnership)





## Heritage Tours

### Description of Method:

Collective walking through an urban environment observing places of specific historical and heritage value. Often led by a local expert.

### Purpose of Method:

Using shared interests in heritage to open up conversations and debate about the past, present and future of a local area. An opportunity to reflect on the heritage of a place and reveal hidden stories and assets in the local environment and also to highlight the contemporary relevance of heritage in placemaking. This helps to cultivate a sense of pride, stewardship and identity with a place that can then form the basis of meaningful conversations about the future. Heritage walks can be fun and accessible, opening up opportunities for local people to share knowledge and the diversity of lived experience, and for children and young people to engage with the histories of their place and contribute new stories.

### Suitable Audience:

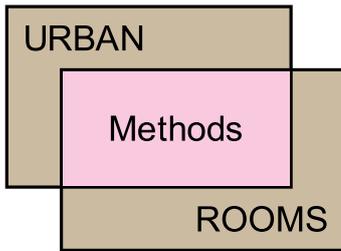
Suitable for a wide audience of all ages. Consideration needs to be given to accessibility for people with limited abilities.

**Shad Thames Area Management Partnership**  
STAMP offers walks on local heritage themes, e.g. a “brewing walk” of the Courage Yard brewery, including a visit from dray horses and talks from entrepreneurs involved in nearby microbreweries.

### Image:

Drayhorses Shad Thames  
Credit: STAMP (Shad Thames Area Management Partnership)





## Themed Walks

### Description of Method:

Guided group walks that are organised around a theme to highlight valuable physical, social and cultural assets in the urban environment.

### Purpose of Method:

A themed walk can connect different types of urban assets: buildings, natural features, social history, artworks, viewpoints etc. They can celebrate the richness of the urban environment, local knowledge and lived experience, and raise aspirations for new development. They can be curated and led by local community groups, experts and enthusiasts, academics and artists.

### Suitable Audience:

Suitable for a wide audience of all ages. Consideration needs to be given to accessibility for people with limited abilities.

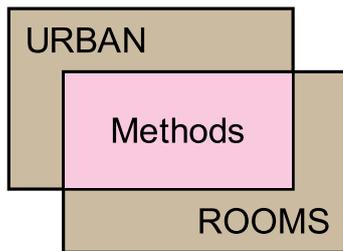
### Wealthy City Walks

A series of walking tours, starting from Live Works UR, that presented six themed routes through Sheffield; independent trade, street art, social activity, art and culture, nature and history. Created in partnership with [Ruskin in Sheffield](#), the tours aimed to reveal the multiple 'wealths' of the city.

### Image:

Wealthy City Walks  
Credit: University of Sheffield





## Expert Guides

### Description of Method:

Walks that are curated and hosted by a local expert, enthusiast, historian, writer, maker, artist, academic etc. These walks reveal the rich knowledge and expertise within local communities about their places.

### Purpose of Method:

Championing the valuable, but often hidden, existing knowledge of a place that is held by local people. Forming connections and networks between individuals and groups who share specific interests in their local area, and in so doing building local capacity to initiate projects and campaigns.

### Suitable Audience:

Generally suitable for a wide audience of all ages. Specific themes will attract individuals and groups who share a similar interest. Consider how you can reach individuals who share this interest but aren't already connected through established groups. Consideration also needs to be given to accessibility for people with limited abilities.

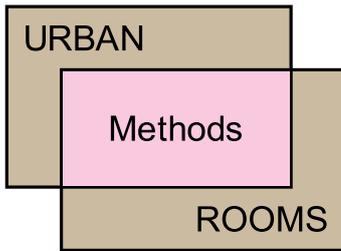
### Poetry Navigation

A walk along the Sheffield and Tinsley canal system, interspersed with performances by local poets, curated and led by Longbarrow Press as part of The Arrival Zone project 2012 (a proto-Urban Room!)

### Image:

Poetry Navigation  
Credit: University of Sheffield





# Urban Sketching

## Description of Method:

Drawing activity documenting existing features (buildings, architectural details, natural features, artworks, views etc.) of an area. Taking place in the Urban Room using photographs of existing, or through on-site sketching during a walk. Can be produced through the use of multiple media: pencil sketches, painting, collage of photos, printing, silhouette and contribute to an accumulating exhibition throughout the period of the Urban Room. Consider offering artist-led workshops where people can learn specific skills, media and techniques while also exploring their urban environment.

## Purpose of Method:

Spending time drawing the existing townscape, buildings, and views of a place can help to celebrate and valorise local heritage, design quality, craftsmanship and vernacular. Accumulating exhibitions can make evident the richness of a place, seen through many eyes. Conversations flow easily while people focus on drawing, prompting further sharing of stories, memories of a place's past, and ideas for its future.

## Suitable Audience:

Drawing activities are engaging for many people, especially children and young people - individually or in groups. Some people lack confidence in their drawing skills so aim to create a supportive, informal environment with a broad range of media and techniques available for people to try out, with encouragement from facilitators/artists.

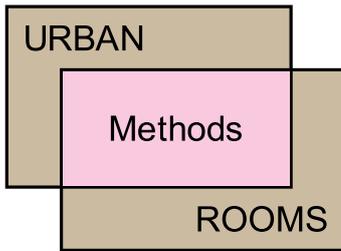
## ReMake Castlegate

In the project 'ReMake Castlegate' a collective model created over two weeks by visitors included many drawings and models of existing buildings by local people.

### Image :

ReMake Castlegate  
Credit: University of Sheffield





## 'What if?' Drawings

### Description of Method:

Drawings can describe a place in the past, as it currently exists and in its possible futures. Within public engagement we often see drawings that are produced by professionals to illustrate a proposed scheme and invite feedback. However, in Urban Room practice we often use drawings differently to this - instead, drawings become tools to prompt discussion between people, to share ideas and to raise aspirations for a place. Rather than the conventional types of computer or technical drawings of plans, sections and elevations that professionals employ you can use the following to open up conversation:

- collage, printing, hand drawing, sketching, reuse of existing images
- views, storyboards, narrative-based drawings
- drawing collectively - simultaneously or taking turns

### Purpose of Method:

This method encourages people to visualise and share their hopes and dreams for local buildings, streets and neighbourhoods. These drawings are sometimes called 'What If?' drawings because they pose questions about potential futures for a place. They open up possibilities, form connections between people with shared values and become advocacy tools to campaign for positive change.

### Suitable Audience:

Drawing activities are engaging for many people, especially children and young people. Since some people may lack confidence in their drawing skills you should aim to create a supportive, informal environment with a broad range of media and techniques available for people to try out, with encouragement from facilitators/artists. When leading a drawing activity about the future of a place try to use informal and engaging techniques that invite conversation and speculation.

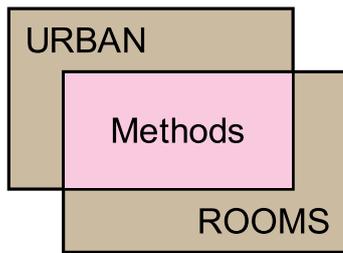
### Portland Works

Working with architecture students, local school children make 'what if' collages for the future of a historic building, using photographs and images from magazines.

#### Image :

Portland Works Live Project  
Credit: University of Sheffield





# Collective Drawings

## Description of Method:

The production of a drawing collectively by a group of people. These drawings can be large in scale, combine multiple media and types of drawing. They can be produced by the group simultaneously or through taking turns. They can be drawings of places as they are now or they can illustrate ideas for the future of a place. They can present an overall vision or multiple overlapping and maybe contradictory viewpoints.

## Purpose of Method:

This method encourages people to visualise collectively and share freely their knowledge of their place and their ideas for local buildings, streets and neighbourhoods. Drawing as a collective act brings people together around a table and encourages conversation and sharing of ideas and stories. Collective drawing is a tool to both represent and cultivate ideas. It can be a celebratory and playful experience that can build connections within a group of people.

## Suitable Audience:

Drawing activities are engaging for many people, especially children and young people. Some people may lack confidence in their drawing skills so collective drawing can help to create a supportive, informal environment for people to take part in.

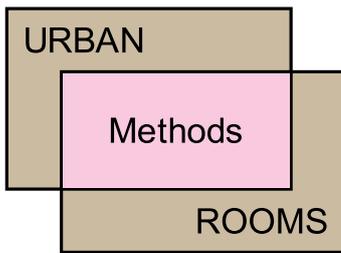
## Encounter Arts and Live Works

This collective mapping was produced by young people of the Wybourn estate in Sheffield, working with Encounters Arts and architecture students.

### Image:

Wybourn Drawing  
Credit: University of Sheffield





# Collective Mapping

## Description of Method:

Mapping is a broad term to cover the observation, revealing and recording of both physical and intangible aspects of the built environment. Mapping as a method can open up a wide range of creative possibilities and questions such as - What information should be mapped? Who makes the maps? What are maps for? Information can be gathered individually or collectively, through walks, archival research, conversations and can be communicated via many different means, e.g. photography, writing, drawing, film, found objects. Activities can add new knowledge to existing maps or create new, personal and communal maps. These maps can become key features within an Urban Room, growing over time as new participants contribute and acting as starting points for conversation with first-time visitors.

## Purpose of Method:

When produced as a collective endeavour mapping can share and promote the understanding of different lived experiences, stories, memories and knowledges. While mapping tends to focus on the past and present context of a local area, the mapping process can be a useful catalyst for the development of new ideas and visualisation of possibilities for the future of an area. Maps can demonstrate the richness and complexity of an area, showing common agreement about the value of some aspects of the built environment, while revealing differences in opinion about others. Collective mapping can highlight how groups experience the built environment differently according to gender, race, ability and age.

## Suitable Audience:

People find maps, in all their variety, very engaging - from traditional cartography to hand-drawn memory maps. The wide variety of mapping techniques means that this is a method that many people can take part in with encouragement and support from on-site Urban Room facilitators.

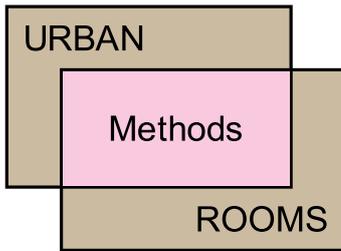
## Urban Room Rochdale

Visitors were invited to contribute their experiences and impressions about the town to a 'Psychogeography of Rochdale'. This collective map developed over the duration of the Urban Room, revealing the quality of the place.

## Image:

Urban Room Rochdale  
Credit: Urban Room Rochdale / Local





# Collective Photography

## Description of Method:

Engaging with the urban environment through film and photography - using cameras, smart phones or disposable cameras. Groups walk around the local area recording the features, views and moments they are interested in and drawn to. Returning to the Urban Room they share these recordings, discuss and reflect upon them, and work with Urban Room facilitators to exhibit them in the Urban Room. Consider offering photographer-led workshops where people can learn specific photography skills and techniques while also mapping their urban environment.

## Purpose of Method:

For local people to record what they value in their local area and to share this with others. To reveal information that can otherwise be ignored or undervalued yet has significance for individuals or specific groups. To create a living archive of an area that can accumulate over time in an Urban Room and communicate the diversity and richness of a place.

## Suitable Audience:

Suitable for a wide audience of all ages. Consideration needs to be given to accessibility for people with limited abilities and to inclusion for people who need support to use the cameras.

## Blackburn is Open

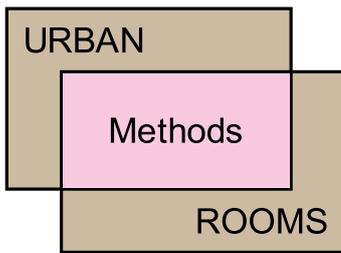
This exhibition 'Hidden Blackburn' showcased photography of the town as part of the Blackburn is Open Urban Room programme.

### Image:

Hidden Blackburn

Credit: Blackburn is Open





## Historic Maps

### Description of Method:

A display of historic maps and other archive material in the Urban Room itself or as part of a digital engagement platform. This exhibition could include historic maps from different eras, highlighting specific buildings or features of interest, complemented by historic photos and archive material from local papers, registers, census data etc.

### Purpose of Method:

To engage people in the history of their place and how it has changed over time. This method supports reflection on the built environment and opens up conversations about the ever-changing nature of the urban environment. The display can draw upon historical/heritage knowledge to inform future ambitions and to encourage a site-specific and locally relevant response in any future developments.

### Suitable Audience:

People tend to be fascinated by the history of their place and the differences between then and now. There are many heritage-focussed 'Friends of' groups across the country who hold an enormous amount of information, material and knowledge about their local areas. These groups could help you support the Urban Room activities through Heritage Walks, Expert Guides and Trails. A heritage-focussed exhibition can also prompt the question 'whose heritage?' and open up new readings of heritage from under-represented groups in the local area to include stories and knowledge that is often overlooked.

### Nottingham Broadmarsh

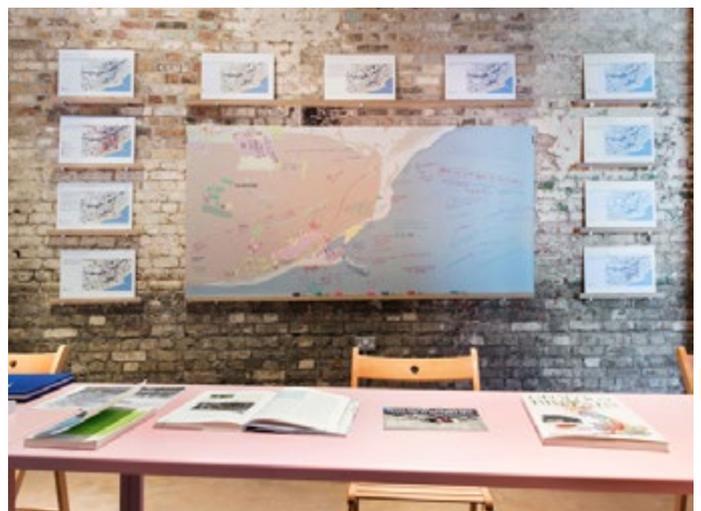
In 2020 Nottingham City Council engaged a wide range of local people in the future of the Broadmarsh shopping centre through an extensive digital platform '[Big Conversation](#)' which featured a large amount of historic maps and information in order to set the context for the conversation about the area's future.

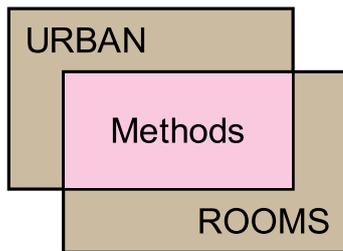
### Urban Analysis, Folkestone

UR Folkestone hosts a permanent exhibition of the 'Urban Analysis', a geographical and historical analysis of the town, showing its development from 10,000BC-Present.

### Image:

UR Folkestone  
Credit: UR Folkestone, Thierry Bal





# Mapping Senses

## Description of Method:

Using the senses (Sight, Sound, Smell, Taste, and Touch) to explore our relationship to a place and how we may develop ideas to heighten our human senses or create sensory experiences. The sixth sense is linked to our emotional response to a place - what we like and dislike, where we feel safe or inspired. Designing a range of participatory activities and experiences, and asking questions to gain a deeper understanding of how we want to engage with place. For example, for taste you can ask about your favourite restaurant, or where does the participant recommend you go for lunch. What recipes or ingredients are associated with the place - are these linked to heritage or cultural associations, or an established, award winning, family-run business.

## Purpose of Method:

Provides an alternative approach to researching how we engage with or interact within a space or place. Invites local residents, businesses and young people to explore the town through a series of different interactive activities using their senses to contribute ideas, engage in conversation, tell stories and share their visions of the town centre, neighbourhood, a new building or public space.

## Suitable Audience:

Everyone! This method provides an accessible and inclusive approach to engaging a wide audience.

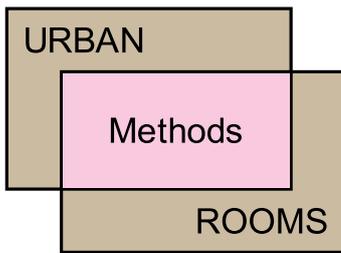
## Urban Room Rochdale

Creative engagement tools were used at Urban Room Rochdale to facilitate conversations with residents about the local urban environment. Smell, colour, and sounds associated with the area were collated and mapped, documenting the experience of place. Imagine a future Rochdale... What do you hear? What are the tastes? What does it look like? How does it smell? What can you feel?

### Image:

Urban Room Rochdale  
Credit: Urban Room Rochdale / Local





## Digital Mapping

### Description of Method:

Digital platforms can offer an alternative to the physical mapping methods described previously. These can be off-the-shelf or bespoke digital platforms to collectively map physical, cultural or social aspects of a place. Some platforms such as Commonplace and Mapping for Change are well established and work predominantly with local authorities, development groups and larger civic institutions. They offer a mapping interface that can be stand alone or embedded within a client's project website.

### Purpose of Method:

Digital mapping can widen participation in community engagement. It moves the mapping beyond the physical confines of the Urban Room and makes it accessible remotely and outside Urban Room opening times. It bypasses any physical accessibility barriers the Urban Room may present and opens up opportunities for participation to those who would struggle to reach the Urban Room due to disabilities, transport challenges etc. The accumulation of data on an online map is a clear demonstration of engagement and it immediately creates an archive of the mapping that remains once the Urban Room is closed.

### Suitable Audience:

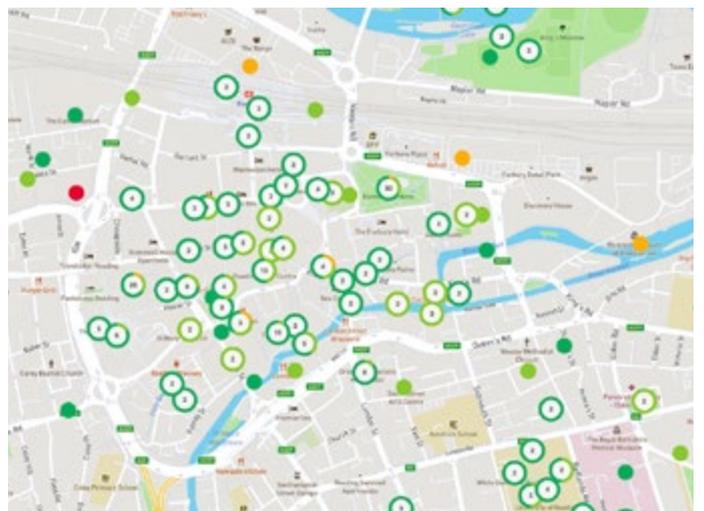
Anyone with access to the internet, computer or smartphone. Digital methods, although widely thought of as 'accessible' still cannot readily be used by the 1 in 20 households who don't have access to the internet in the UK.

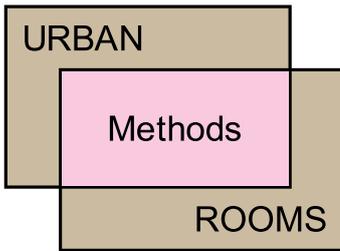
### Your Place Our Place

Public engagement continued beyond the space of the [Reading UR](#) through the online mapping service Commonplace. Residents mapped areas according to specific criteria e.g. 'connect to nature', 'sense of belonging', 'sense of wonder', 'easy to get around'.

### Image and Credit:

Your Place Our Place, Reading Urban Room





# Interactive Models

## Description of Method:

Model making is a creative and engaging process that visualises in 3D ideas for new structures and potential transformations of existing buildings and spaces. There are a wide range of types of models from quick concept models to highly detailed design models and they can be made from many different materials including card, clay, wood, cardboard and waste or recycled materials. Digital fabrication technology, if available, can also be used to create models with 3D printers and laser cutters.

## Purpose of Method:

In an Urban Room setting interactive models are an effective and tactile method to engage people in a dynamic conversation about a design. Interactive models can be altered, changed and adapted as an immediate and engaging way to visualise the development of design ideas.

## Suitable Audience:

Model making activities can be very popular across all age groups. However, thought should be given to supporting those who may feel they don't have the skills or creativity to join in. This can be a good opportunity to offer skills training in handmade and digital methods.

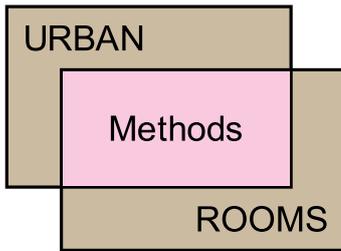
## Live Works

This model was co-designed with the local community and produced by architecture students. It shows a vision for Meersbrook Hall in Sheffield and has removable internal walls to demonstrate the phased remodelling of the building.

### Image:

Making Meersbrook Live Project  
Credit: University of Sheffield





## Playful Models

### Description of Method:

Not all models need to be to scale and precise. In fact some of the most engaging and creative models are made of unexpected and playful materials. Making models can be a messy and fun process using anything to hand such as junk materials, textiles, building waste...or cake!

### Purpose of Method:

Within public engagement we often see models that are produced by professionals to illustrate a proposed scheme and invite feedback. However, in Urban Room practice we often use models as active tools to engage people more directly - to prompt discussion, to share ideas and to raise aspirations for a place. Playful modelling breaks down conventional barriers and invites people to explore their place and its future in 3D.

### Suitable Audience:

Modelmaking is engaging for many people of all ages. Since some people may lack confidence in their modelling skills you should aim to create a supportive, informal environment with a broad range of media and techniques available for people to try out, with encouragement from facilitators/artists.

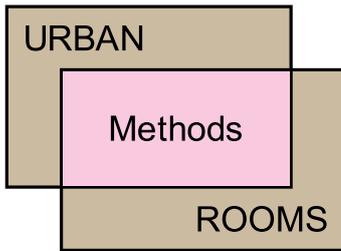
### Portland Works

Here are two models of Portland Works in Sheffield, one is to scale and very precisely made from laser-cut timber, the other is made of cake!

#### Image :

Portland Works Live Project  
Credit: University of Sheffield





## Collective Models

### Description of Method:

Making a model through collaboration with other people is a very engaging way to both to visualise design ideas and to open up conversations about place. Collective models can be large in format, accumulate and change over time and provide a centrepiece to the Urban Room.

### Purpose of Method:

In collaborative model making the process of construction is just as important as the end product. The activity can prompt diverse participants to share ideas, opinions and experiences, alongside the creation of the model itself, and a documentation of these conversations can add richness to the display. Large scale collective modelling can be a very direct and playful method that engages people on a physical level to explore their surroundings and relationship with their built environment.

### Suitable Audience:

Model making activities can be very popular across all age groups. However, thought should be given to supporting those who may feel they don't have the skills or creativity to join in. The choice of scale and materials is important in making the model as inclusive as possible - simple materials such as card, cardboard and junk modelling materials are useful here.

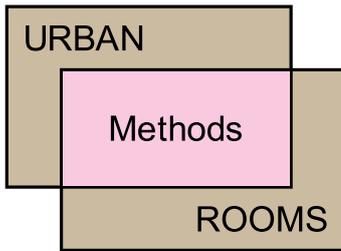
### Live Works

For the project ReMake Castlegate Live Works UR worked with people to produce a 1:200 model of Castlegate, Sheffield showing existing and future buildings, while collecting stories, memories and opinions about the area.

### Image:

ReMake Castlegate  
Credit: Live Works





## Digital Models

### Description of Method:

Digital models can offer an alternative to the physical modelling methods described previously. These can be off-the-shelf or bespoke digital models that visualise in 3D the topography, buildings and infrastructure of a place. These digital models can be accessed via immersive technologies such as AR (augmented reality) and VR (virtual reality), or via a more conventional display screen.

Some Urban Rooms have used established platforms such as VU City and Digital Urban that offer the opportunity to test new developments in the context of an existing city digital model. Other Urban Rooms have created their own digital city models, often in collaboration with local Universities.

Another type of digital model is of the Urban Room itself - giving remote visitors an opportunity to enter a simulation of the space and explore the exhibits within it.

### Purpose of Method:

Digital models offer a quick and engaging way to visualise the development of design ideas. They often allow options to be tested in digital city space and designs to be rapidly iterated. A digital model can also take its place amongst the physical exhibits in the Urban Room, enhancing the activities offered and creating a rich hybrid experience.

A digital Urban Room model communicates the existence of the physical space more widely and offers and type of Urban Room experience for those who cannot access the Urban Room itself or after the Urban Room has closed.

### Suitable Audience:

Similar to other digital methods, digital models can enable wider participation, beyond the physical space of the Urban Room, although not everyone has the capacity to access this sophisticated data online.

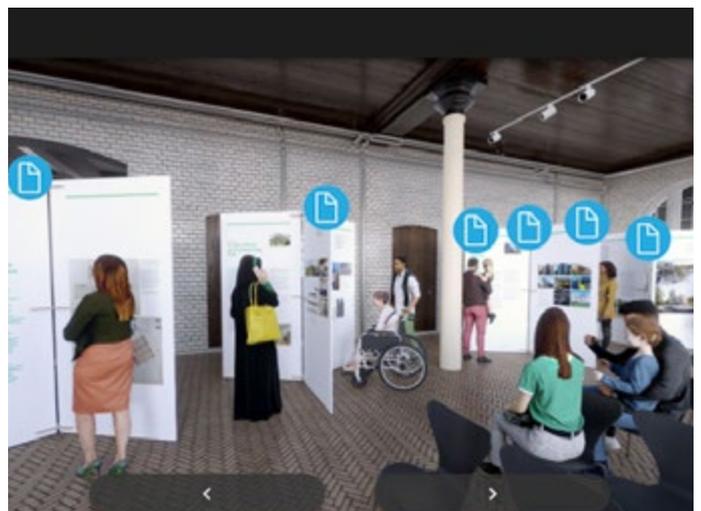
### Space for Architecture, Carbon and Environment

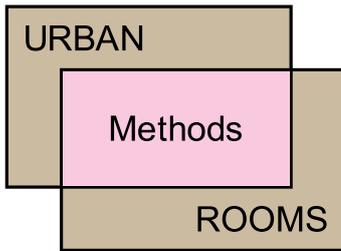
SpACE (Space for Architecture, Carbon and Environment) held discussions and events that addressed the climate emergency. Following its completion after a 5-week period the exhibition at SpACE was replicated digitally, creating a 'Virtual Engage' room on their website. Devised by Arup, the virtual room visualises the physical space, and allows users to navigate the room, clicking on exhibition boards to reveal information that had been presented at the venue.

### Image:

SpACE Virtual Room

Credit: SpACE Urban Room, Edinburgh





# Installation

## Description of Method:

The creation of site-specific installations in, or in association with, the Urban Room. These can be permanent features of the Urban Room or temporary pieces that are part of specific events or activities. They can be physical or digital, or hybrid combinations of the two. They can be constructed of a huge range of materials and media and often integrate data, audio and video display. Installations can be interactive and playful - inviting active engagement from visitors.

## Purpose of Method:

Installations can inject energy into an Urban Room, if they are well conceived and engaging. They can be very successful in drawing visitors to the space and engaging them in active participation with the themes of the Urban Room. Good installations can bring a different perspective to everyday spaces and artefacts in the local area. Commissioning installations can be an effective way of engaging artists and creatives, from both the local area and beyond, to introduce new perspectives on the built environment and its social, political and cultural contexts. Installations can prompt new questions about the nature, accessibility and purpose of public spaces and buildings.

## Suitable Audience:

Installations can engage a wide audience through their playfulness and experimental nature. They can draw in people who wouldn't otherwise engage in more conventional Urban Room activities. Consider issues of accessibility and have facilitators on hand to encourage participation.

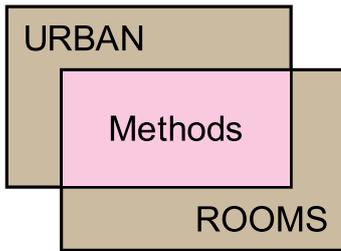
## Urban Room Folkestone

Urban Room Folkestone commissioned an installation 'Fortune Here' by artist genuinefake on the seafront, as part of the Folkestone Triennial 2021. The playful spaces created aimed to "reflect on how the development of the urban environment can keep up with concurrent and entangled societal change and evolving global norms."

### Image:

Folkestone Triennial  
Credit: Urban Room Folkestone





# Storytelling

## Description of Method:

Storytelling is an engaging activity to situate in an Urban Room and can be done in person or via the display of films or audio within the space. This method complements the more conventional methods of presentations and can offer insight into the stories and lived experiences of groups and individuals within the community. Stories can be told by members of the community themselves or narrated by professional storytellers.

## Purpose of Method:

Storytelling can reveal the hidden experiences and interests of the local community in its connection to place. Whether it's in the narrating of the stories of people's lives, past and present, or in the more speculative stories of possible futures, storytelling can reveal the richness and potential of a place in multiple and varied ways.

## Suitable Audience:

This method is engaging for a wide audience and stories can be tailored to appeal to specific age groups or interests. If displaying video stories within the Urban Room consider using subtitles for the hard of hearing or if in a space with other activities going on simultaneously.

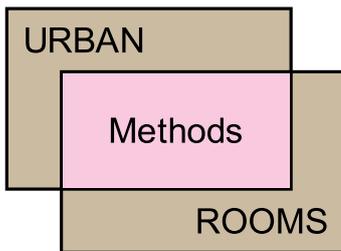
## Language Location and Me

A programme of activities at UR Folkestone in 2017 that explored the boundaries of speech and how language affects our perceptions of ourselves and others. This included performance readings from local and national poets to explore cultural identity and heritage, and what it means to declare one's home and nationhood.

### Image:

Urban Room Folkestone  
Credit: Urban Room Folkestone /  
Susanna Howard





## Performance

### Description of Method:

Performance can bring vitality to the Urban Room through the spoken word, music, comedy and drama. It can be done in person or through the display of films or audio within the space.

This method can enhance the space, engage new and diverse audiences and can offer insight into the interests, challenges, stories and lived experiences of groups and individuals within the community.

Performance can be done by local people, schools, local drama groups and professional performers.

### Purpose of Method:

Hosting performance within the Urban Room space can create moments of intensity and focus around specific themes and issues in the local area.

Performances can bring a sense of occasion and create structure within an Urban Room programme.

These one-off events within the ongoing Urban Room activity can bring new audiences into the space, to then engage them in conversations about their place. Performances need not be directly connected to Urban Room themes - hosting a local band or spoken word performer is a great way to support local talent, create a sense of community around the Urban Room and raise awareness of issues that can be followed up later.

### Suitable Audience:

Performance can attract a wide range of audiences - consider inviting specific performers to reach out to under-represented groups in your area. Children are especially drawn to performance and so consider making connections with schools and holiday clubs for supervised visits to the Urban Room.

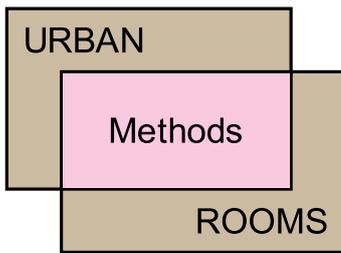
### Pop-Up Climate Hub

Madame Zucchini performing to children outside Live Works UR as part of the South Yorkshire Climate Alliance pop-up Climate Hub, raising awareness about food and the climate.

#### Image:

Madame Zucchini  
Credit: Live Works





## Writing

### Description of Method:

Writing is often overlooked as an engagement technique and yet the written word features in a wide range of engagement activities. Post-it notes are commonplace in public engagement and they are clearly useful to gather short comments, keywords and prompts. However, the written word can be more consciously present in the Urban Room as a creative technique that can reveal deeper insight. Written accounts of individual stories of place can be very powerful testimonies of the importance of place in people's lives - stories of family, work, childhood, migration, social events and upheaval, all play out in the context of our buildings, streets and neighbourhoods. Collective writing, whether poetry or prose, can help to formulate and express shared values and visions for the future of a place - capturing the mood in the room, whether it be hope, anxiety, anger or optimism.

### Purpose of Method:

Focusing on writing within the Urban Room adds another layer of insights, experiences and qualities to those revealed by other activities such as drawing, model making, conversation etc. Both the process and the outputs of writing activities are valuable within engagement. The act of writing individually can prompt reflection and tap into the detail of personal experience. The act of writing collectively prompts discussion and the sharing of ideas. An Urban Room can act as a community archive of these stories and ideas, valuing and displaying them, to build a sense of identity and communality.

### Suitable Audience:

Most people will be happy to engage with writing in some way, according to their confidence and availability. However, some people may be nervous about writing in public or cannot write - in these

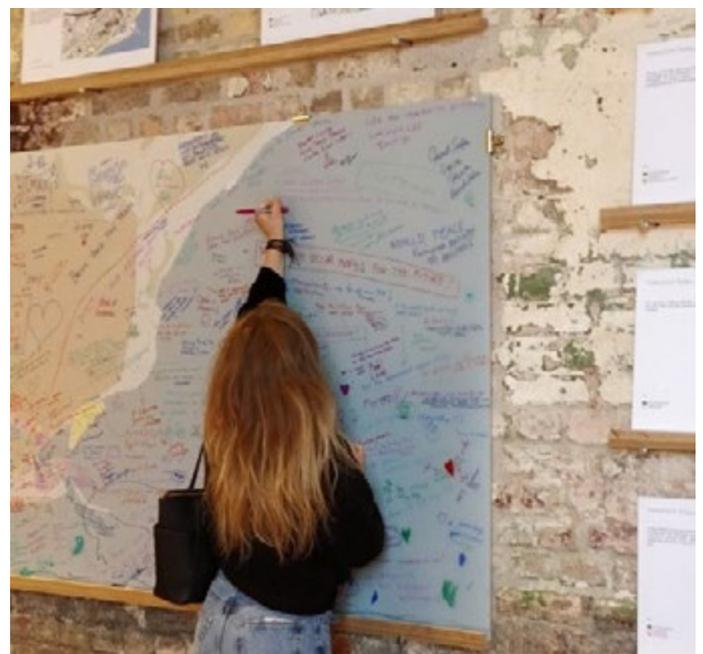
cases they may be happy to tell you their thoughts and stories while you write for them. Including writing in different languages in the Urban Room can celebrate the diversity of a local area. Make these writing activities as enjoyable and engaging as possible - big sheets of paper, colourful pens, playful prompts and intriguing questions all help. Consider working with storytellers, poets and writers to help facilitate these exercises.

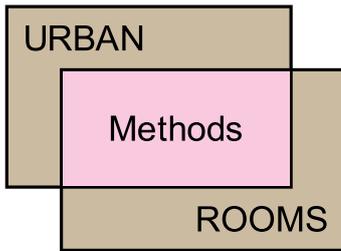
### Folkestone Urban Room

Alongside its 'Urban Analysis' permanent exhibition, UR Folkestone invited visitors to write their recollections, stories and ideas on an accumulating wall display.

### Image and Credit:

Urban Room Folkestone





# Local Expert Presentations

## Description of Method:

A talk, lecture or class offered by an invited guest to the Urban Room, often a local resident or professional who has a specific area of expertise or knowledge. These presentations can be held as on-off events or form part of a series of talks through the Urban Room programme.

## Purpose of Method:

Local experts can contribute knowledge, skills and experience on a wide range of issues and aspects of the local built environment, e.g. heritage, social history, archaeology, architecture, local craft & traditions, transport, ecology. A series of such talks can reveal the richness and diversity of an area, giving a greater understanding from which to discuss the future of that place. Inviting local experts into the Urban Room can help to build a sense of community stewardship around the Urban Room which can lead to volunteering and other support. Many people are interested in local issues and many places already have 'Friends of' groups that share and campaign around these issues. Inviting these groups to the Urban Room to give talks will support them to share their knowledge and to widen their membership.

## Suitable Audience:

Themed presentations from local experts can be very engaging for a wide range of audiences. Inviting local experts from marginalised groups in the community will broaden your audience and open up discussions to include more diverse ideas and experiences.

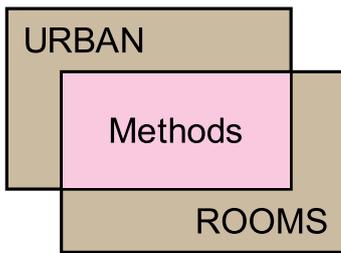
## Play/Grounds

A series of talks hosted by Live Works UR about the role of adventure playgrounds in the city included a presentation from local playworker Yanina Koszalinski on the history of Sheffield playgrounds.

### Image:

Play/Grounds, Live Works  
Credit: University of Sheffield





## Themed Debates

### Description of Method:

An event or series of events within an Urban Room programme where a specific theme is explored collectively. This usually comprises presentations from local experts, professionals in the field and campaigners advocating for a particular approach or action. After listening to the presentations participants will discuss the theme to reach a consensus, or at least a deeper understanding of the issues at stake. The theme could be a specific local issue or it could be about exploring how a global issue impacts on a local scale. It's important to consider how you will disseminate and follow up the findings of the debate e.g. displayed in the Urban Room, advocacy to policy-makers, covered in the local press etc.

### Purpose of Method:

Holding a themed debate creates a focus of attention in the Urban Room upon a specific issue, challenge or opportunity. It allows diverse and potentially conflicting opinions, ideas and voices to be heard and discussed within a safe, structured context. It reveals local knowledge on important issues and can help to develop support networks for campaigning, advocacy and action. There are few spaces in the city for people to come together to debate issues that impact upon their place and the Urban Room can fulfil an important role in offering such a space.

### Suitable Audience:

These debates should be disseminated widely so that as diverse a group of people can take part as possible. The invited speakers should also be diverse and drawn from community groups, local authority, academia, business and the public sector to present a broad range of opinions. Specific facilitation skills are required to organise, moderate and mediate these debates so that they are safe, respectful and constructive.

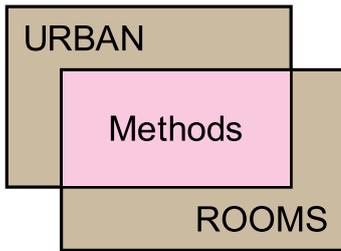
### SpACE

SpACE (Space for Architecture, Carbon and Environment), Edinburgh, led a series of exhibitions and events over 5 weeks that addressed 'the climate emergency - and how the built environment affects it'. SpACE coincided with the COP26 summit in Glasgow, with public debates hosted at the pop-up Urban Room.

### Image:

SpACE  
Credit: Rab Bennetts /  
Maverick Photo Agency





## Shared Meals

### Description of Method:

Sitting round a table, sharing food and conversation as an activity in itself or as part of a larger event or programme.

### Purpose of Method:

Eating together in the Urban Room is an enjoyable and informal way to get to know others, share ideas and form networks. The food itself can celebrate the produce, traditions and diverse cultures of a local area. The food could be catered by local independent businesses, thus supporting the local economy. Or you could organise a 'food fuddle' where guests bring their own contributions to the collective meal, thus creating a shared sense of ownership of the event. A collective meal can be a useful activity to consolidate connections that have started to form in earlier events or to break the ice at the start of a session.

### Suitable Audience:

This is an inclusive activity that most people can enjoy. Be aware, however, of allergies and dietary preferences and make sure that the ingredients of the food are clearly made available.

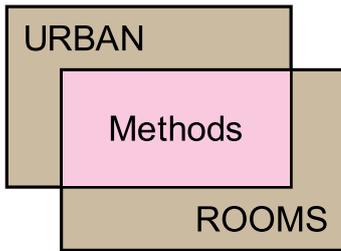
### Nottingham Urban Room

A 'social eating' event where participants prepare and share a meal together, as a tool to collect data and to generate and strengthen social networks. Local growing networks provided the produce and catered for informal meals that helped to generate a relaxed and communal atmosphere where participants felt confident and at ease to discuss potentially sensitive issues.

### Image and Credit:

Nottingham Urban Room





# Activism

## Description of Method:

Displays, walks, performances or events staged to support or oppose specific issues or proposals in the local area. Activism can occur inside or in the windows of the Urban Room, or can spill out into the surrounding area.

## Purpose of Method:

The Urban Room methodology is to create a space for open and transparent exploration of issues in the local area. Specific areas of concern may emerge from this exploration that participants in the Urban Room feel motivated to directly support or oppose. Activism crystallises this concern into an action that brings the issue into the public realm, communicates it more widely in the hope of gaining further support, and calls for a response from decision-makers. Ultimately activism aims to build enough campaigning strength to lead to changes that benefit local communities and their place.

## Suitable Audience:

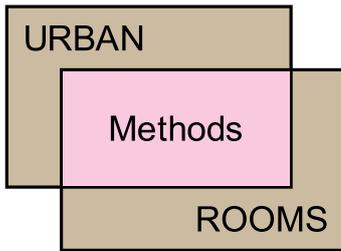
This is a method that involves a high level of engagement from participants. Not everyone will feel comfortable engaging in direct action and all participation should be entirely voluntary. Aim for buy-in for activism from as wide a range of local people as possible to ensure that it is as representative as possible and not in danger of being hijacked by a small but vocal group that doesn't represent the wider community. The audience for this activism will be local people more widely, the press and decision-makers.

## Empowerment / Mythologies / Climate

A display in the windows of Live Works UR, Sheffield celebrating the radical traditions of the city and calling for Climate Action.



Image and Credit:  
Live Works



# 1:1 Transformation

## Description of Method:

Spatial changes at 1:1 scale including remodelling of existing spaces and the transformation of public space through the construction of installations, props, sets and apparatus.

## Purpose of Method:

The Urban Room offers a useful space to prototype design ideas for the future of the local area - whether in the Urban Room itself or in other public spaces and buildings in the local area. The process of designing and constructing the 1:1 transformation can be a useful way to reveal skills, form connections and share ideas between the people involved. Once in-situ the 1:1 transformation acts as a pilot project to map out and test potential scenarios or designs in real time and in the locations that are under consideration. The choice and use of materials can help to raise issues around design, heritage and sustainability. The 1:1 transformation can form the catalyst or centrepiece of an event or performance that draws in wider public engagement.

## Suitable Audience:

Many people of all ages will find 1:1 transformations very engaging to contribute to and interact with. Since some people will lack confidence in their design and construction skills you will need to mentor and support them carefully if you wish them to participate. Consider partnering with a local design school or vocational college who can offer these skills. When carrying out any form of construction health and safety must be a priority and all risks to people's well being mitigated against as much as possible through careful assessment and following safe practices on site.

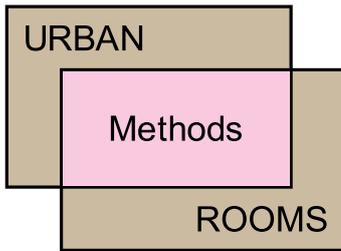
## Blackburn Open Walls

Over 3 years, in association with UR Blackburn, artist Hayley Welsh initiated and delivered a large-scale street art exhibition, [Blackburn Open Walls](#), featuring work from local and international artists.

### Image:

Blackburn Street Art  
Credit: Blackburn is Open / Hayley Walsh





## Games

### Description of Method:

These can be physical or digital and involve interactive, fun and playful activities either in or outside the Urban Room.

### Purpose of Method:

The Urban Room approach should embrace playfulness to create an informal and welcoming atmosphere that encourages participation. Offering games for people of all ages to play can break the ice, create social connections and draw out conversations about people and place along the way. The games can be about the local area and its issues and opportunities (e.g. I-spy trails, neighbourhood monopoly, development role-playing etc) or they can have nothing to do with the built environment but are still useful because of the sense of creativity and playfulness that they help to promote in the Urban Room.

### Suitable Audience:

Children are naturally drawn to games, of course, but it's surprising how many adults are happy to get involved. Some people will be very hesitant and will respond to a bit of encouragement, others will not be interested, and that's fine too.

### Fortune Here

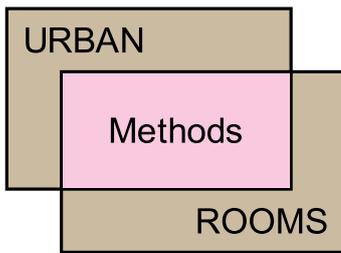
A collaboration between UR Folkestone and artist genuinefake, this pavilion explored Folkestone's 'fortunes' past, present and potential future through the use of themed arcade games and a crazy golf course.

#### Image:

UR Folkestone

Credit: UR Folkestone, Thierry Bal





# Competition

## Description of Method:

A more formal version of the Games method where people are invited to contribute their ideas for the future of their place. In design competitions ideas can be written, drawn or modelled to suit the criteria of the competition. Contributions can range from the pragmatic to the wildly fantastical. The contributions can form an engaging display in the Urban Room. Winners can be chosen in a variety of ways, e.g. voting by the participants, a panel of 'experts', or a public vote. Other forms of competition could involve people submitting their own creative outputs or stories inspired by their place. Winners can have pride of place in the display and maybe awarded a small prize donated by a local business perhaps, and/or a certificate.

## Purpose of Method:

This can be an engaging method to draw out multiple insights and ideas about a specific building or the local area more generally. It is also an effective way of showcasing the creativity and imagination of local people and creating engaging displays within the Urban Room.

## Suitable Audience:

Design competitions in particular are great for school groups to engage in the built environment if facilitated in collaboration with teaching staff. The competition can be launched with presentations and site visits by local experts and followed by a group or individual activity in the Urban Room.

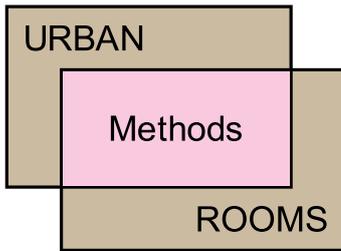
## Build a New Doncaster

In the 'Build a New Doncaster' project Live Works worked with Doncaster Civic Trust on a design competition for schools - here the children are drawing their ideas for the future of their town centre.

### Image :

Build a Better Doncaster  
Credit: University of Sheffield





# Digital Games

## Description of Method:

The use of bespoke or off the shelf digital platforms and technologies to engage in a playful manner with the environment of the local area. Existing and future scenarios can be modelled and explored in platforms such as Roblox and Minecraft. AR (augmented reality) and VR (virtual reality) immersive technologies can engage people in exploring buildings and spaces that no longer exist or future design ideas that have been proposed. Some projects use bespoke platforms to create their own games e.g. [this place \[of mine\]](#) where young people in Greater Manchester were supported in co-imagining the future of highstreets, learning digital skills that enabled the production of digital artworks and an 'immersive online world'.

## Purpose of Method:

Digital games can offer an engaging and sometimes immersive level of interactivity. They can present a virtual environment freed from real life constraints that can allow freedom to explore and creative ideas to flow.

## Suitable Audience:

We think of children and young people as being the audience with the most affinity to digital games. However more and more people of all ages are becoming used to digital interfaces and, perhaps with some support, a large number of visitors will be able to participate. Digital engagement is also inclusive to those who may face challenges to engaging in person or have limited access to transport or mobility.

## Experience Castlegate

An AR installation bringing Sheffield Castle to life within a physical model of contemporary Castlegate.

### Image :

Experience Castlegate  
Credit: University of Sheffield



## Acknowledgements:

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Website design by [Ross Bennett](#)

The Urban Rooms Toolkit is a public resource to be used, downloaded and shared by anyone interested in situated creative community engagement in placemaking. If you have any ideas or experience you would like to share and potentially contribute to the Toolkit please join the [Urban Rooms Network](#)!

This document is a downloadable, printer friendly version of the Urban Rooms Toolkit which can be found at [urbanroomstoolkit.org](http://urbanroomstoolkit.org)

