

Dudley Creates | Cultural Collaborators Navigation Guide

CoLab
DUDLEY

You are invited to be part of Dudley Creates: Dudley's 100 Year Cultural Strategy in Action.

Through long-term thinking, we can create the conditions for transformational change towards a flourishing cultural ecosystem.

This navigation guide contains tools to help us talk, design and plan together by:

- + **Discovering roles**
- + **Exploring practices**
- + **Paying attention to vital signs**
- + **Cultivating imagination**
- + **Nurturing patterns**
- + **Navigating with principles**

You could use this Navigation Guide:

- + To spark ideas
- + For self-reflection
- + With teams you are part of
- + During Cultural Collaborators gatherings
- + For peer learning, or simply over a cuppa
- + In designing creative or cultural projects or

You could share how you are using or adaptin,

- + Tagging [@colabdudley](#)  
- + Emailing colabdudley@gmail.com
- + Bringing them along to
Cultural Collaborators gatherings

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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



To think ecologically is to embrace being always 'in the middle of things'.

This doesn't mean giving up on leadership, strategy or clarity of mission. Quite the opposite: it opens new approaches to each of these... explicitly committed not just to a cultural programme, nor even to a 'place', per se, but to nurturing the interconnections and interdependencies within a cultural system.

Gross and Wilson, *Creating the Environment*, 2019

Roles

There are a multitude of roles people play in cultural ecosystems.

Cultural Collaborators is an emerging network (part of Dudley's cultural ecosystem) that makes collective imagining, long-term thinking, a practice of questioning, and taking cultural action by local people much more possible.

What's your niche in this network, or ecosystem?

Who else do you know in the network and what roles do they play?

Who would you like to introduce to the network across these roles?



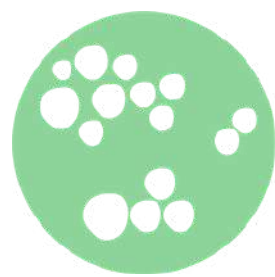
Time Rebels

Local people who care for future generations **putting long-term thinking into action** in creative collaborations.

People I recognise in Dudley borough who currently play or could play this role:



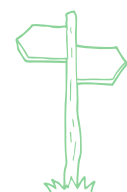
meet Dudley's Time Rebels at Cultural Collaborators Seasonal Gatherings



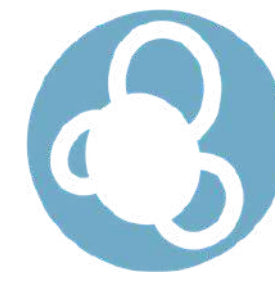
Co-creators

People who **host or co-host** activities as part of wider enquiries and experiments initiated by Time Rebels.

People I recognise in Dudley borough who currently play or could play this role:



signpost potential co-creators to dudleycreates.net to see current activity



Guardians

People who look after our cultural resources, places and stories, actively **making them available to all**.

People I recognise in Dudley borough who currently play or could play this role:



signpost guardians to dudleycreates.net to find out more about this work



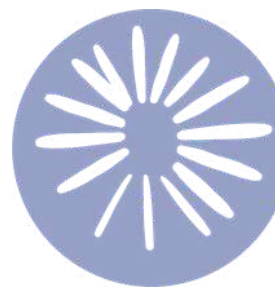
Connectors

Those **weaving people and resources together**, moving energy around our cultural ecosystem.

People I recognise in Dudley borough who currently play or could play this role:



signpost connectors to dudleycreates.net to help them weave into this work



Doers and Friends

People who **participate in hands on making and creating** and/or would like connect as Cultural Collaborators.

People I recognise in Dudley borough who currently play or could play this role:



signpost doers to doingindudley.net for upcoming activities led by Time Rebels



Ecosystem stewards

People and teams focused on **nurturing the diversity, health and adaptive capacity** of our cultural ecosystem.

People I recognise in Dudley borough who currently play or could play this role:



the CoLab Dudley team do this and would love to meet you

Practices (1 of 2)

These are examples of flourishing cultural ecosystem practices and a few prompts to help explore them. These practices have been revealed through collective learning and cultural action in Dudley borough with hundreds of people.

Practices of collaboration

How might I be open to creative collaboration and co-creation across boundaries of discipline, organisation, geography, time and community?

What does a healthy collaboration mean to me?

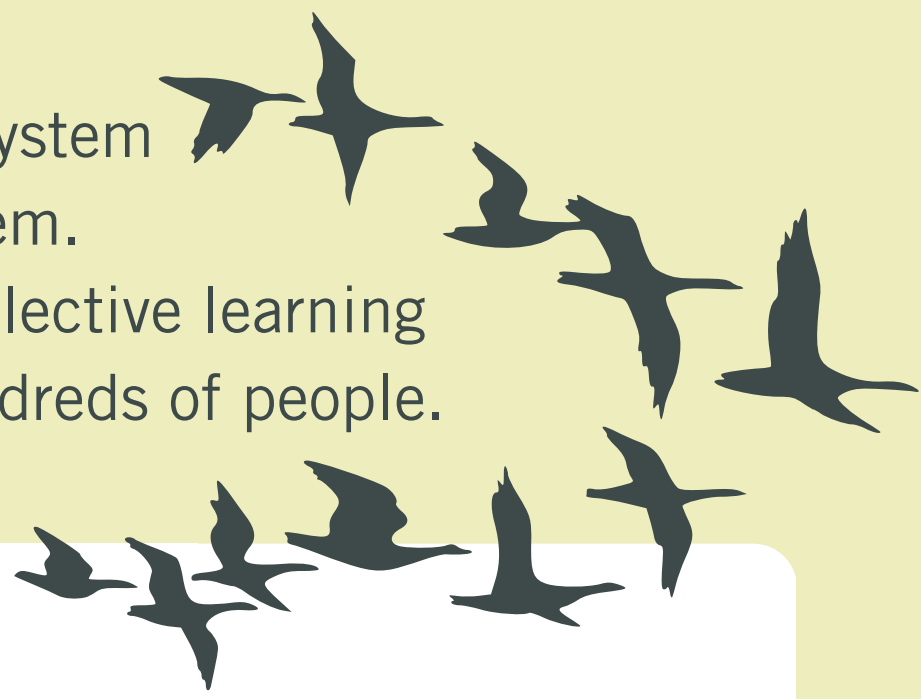
How might my existing and future collaborations be better designed to encourage creativity, reciprocity, shared learning and deeper long-term thinking?

Developing a deeper place based practice

How might I centre the stories, histories and future dreaming that are unique to this place?

How might I explore and disrupt stuck, limiting or incomplete narratives of place to reimagine who/ what gets to create and where?

How might I help reimagine forgotten spaces as places of cultural activity and energy?



Collective sense-making

How might I create spaces of shared learning and experimentation where it is safe to take creative risks?

How could this learning inform my future design, planning and cultural action / activity?

How might I generously share that learning widely across the ecosystem for everyone to use and build upon?



Working out loud and creative documentation

How might I explore and grow creative documentation with other local creatives, artists and creative communities?

How might creative documentation inform and inspire cultural action for flourishing futures?

Creative documentation is the application of artistic and/or cultural practice to the purpose of describing or representing information... creative documentation produces an artwork or cultural product that is a form of knowledge. It has "the potential to shift power by offering a better understanding of creative and cultural practice in communities."

from **Making Sense of Meaning: How Creative Documentation Enhances Our Understanding of Community Development** by Jeremy Liu



Practices (2 of 2)

These are examples of flourishing cultural ecosystem practices and a few prompts to help explore them.

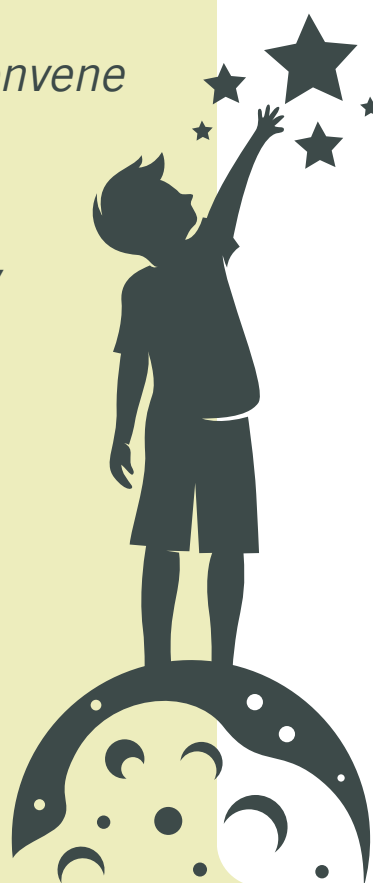
These practices have been revealed through collective learning and cultural action in Dudley borough with hundreds of people.

Use these practices canvases to consider HOW you work.

Cultural programming and convening practice for cultural democracy

How might I convene with purpose in order to erode barriers to who gets to imagine our futures?

How might the way we convene support creatives and creative communities to navigate and creatively respond to the growing risks, vulnerability and uncertainty caused by living in a time of multiple crises?



Socially engaged (arts) practice in response to social and ecological crises

How can I work with local creatives and artists to support cultural capabilities and regenerative resilience in my community?

How might I work with local creatives to create conditions for communities to lead creative discovery and cultural action to explore the issues that are most important to them, to the health of the places they care for, and to future generations?



Understanding Community Resilience

Regenerative resilience focuses on adaptation, repair, and renewal. It is resilience as... a forest. Growing and evolving through change, rather than withstanding shock like a dam, or bouncing back like a spring.

from **Towards Regenerative Resilience**,
a playbook by **Common Vision**

Ecological governance practices

This is about developing and encouraging connections to be made, experiences to be shared, skills developed, diverse practices of culture-making to flourish, and open structures and spaces of cultural governance to be sustained.

from **Creating the Environment**, Jonathan Gross and Nick Wilson, 2019

How might I support spaces, practices and experiences that nurture and celebrate the reciprocal interdependency and interconnectedness across all parts of the ecosystem?

What work practices might I adopt to help distribute power more evenly across the cultural ecosystem?



Vital signs

How might I support or pay attention to these vital signs in my work?

These are just some of the indicators that we believe signal a flourishing cultural ecosystem.

Use these to reflect on your work.



Our gratitude to Jonathan Gross and Nick Wilson for their work on ecological approaches to culture which we have taken as inspiration.

An ecological approach

Ecological approach to cultural sector stewardship including practices that encourage connection across cultural programmes, resource streams, and diverse cultural practices.

Experiment and design

An explicit valuing of experimentation and iterative design approaches to create space for the evolution of project ideas.

Artist to artist collaborations

New artist to artist collaborations resulting in sharing of skills, knowledge, and co-creation of new creative initiatives and enterprises.



Greater cultural capability focus

Greater cultural capability focus means communities across the borough have increased freedom and opportunity to co-create culture in a diversity of forms.

Artist to non-arts collaborations

New artist to non-arts collaborator relationships (e.g. librarians, teachers, wardens, council officers) that are critical to quality social practice and wider cultural participation.

Trusted connections

New trusted connections woven between local artists and creative communities resulting in greater community and artist cultural co-production activity and cultural capability.

Shared learning in the open

People in the ecosystem learning together and making what they discover available widely.

Celebrating cultural activity and opportunities as a way to make the ecosystem visible to itself.

Recognise potential

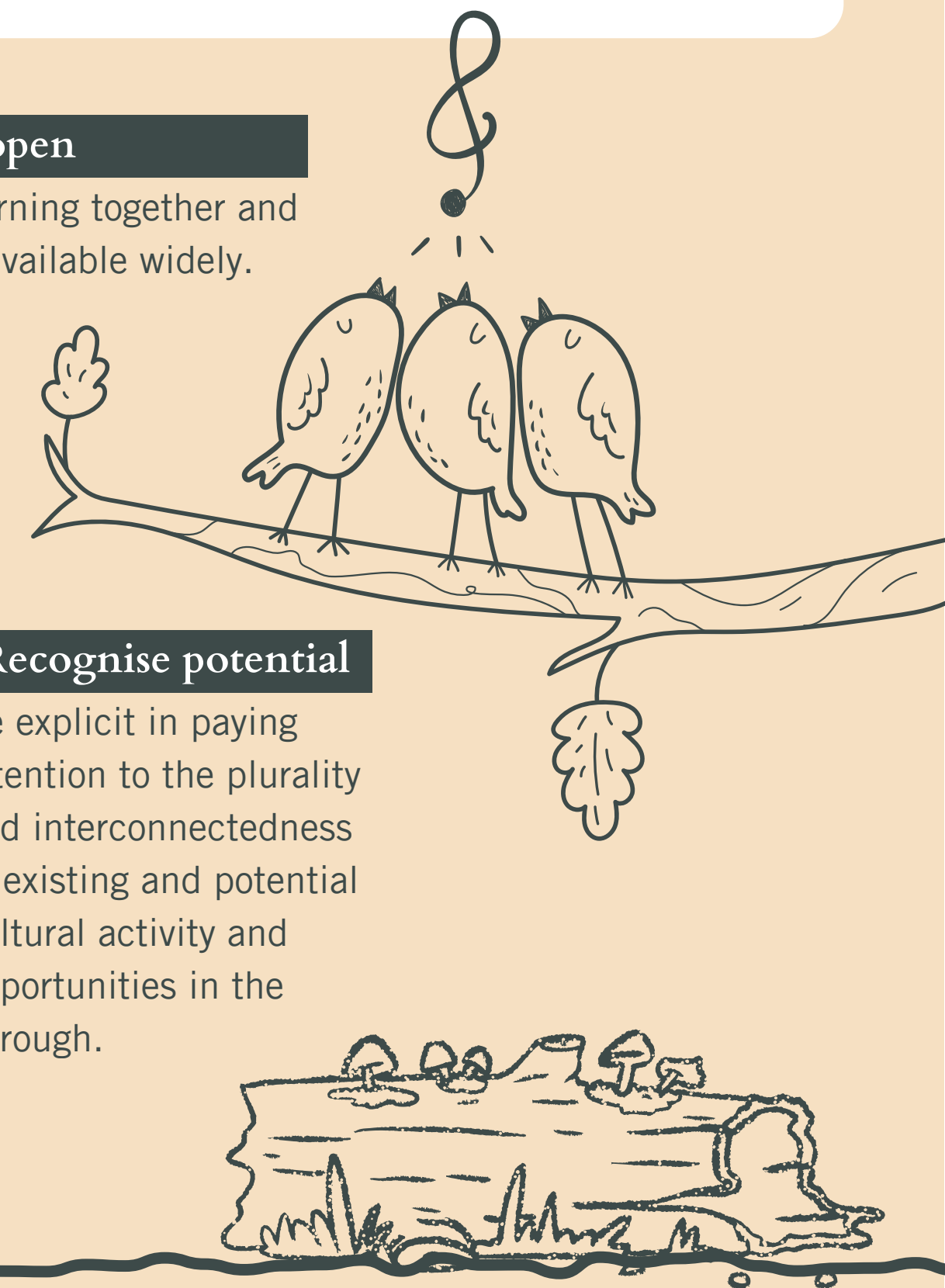
Be explicit in paying attention to the plurality and interconnectedness of existing and potential cultural activity and opportunities in the borough.

Non arts spaces as arts spaces

Non arts spaces as places of cultural production and local assets 'reframed' as valuable cultural resources.

Place based focus

Place based practice building trusting relationships with local collaborators and communities, convening informed by local knowledges, stories, cultural spaces, cultural artefacts, histories and futures.



Imagination Sundial

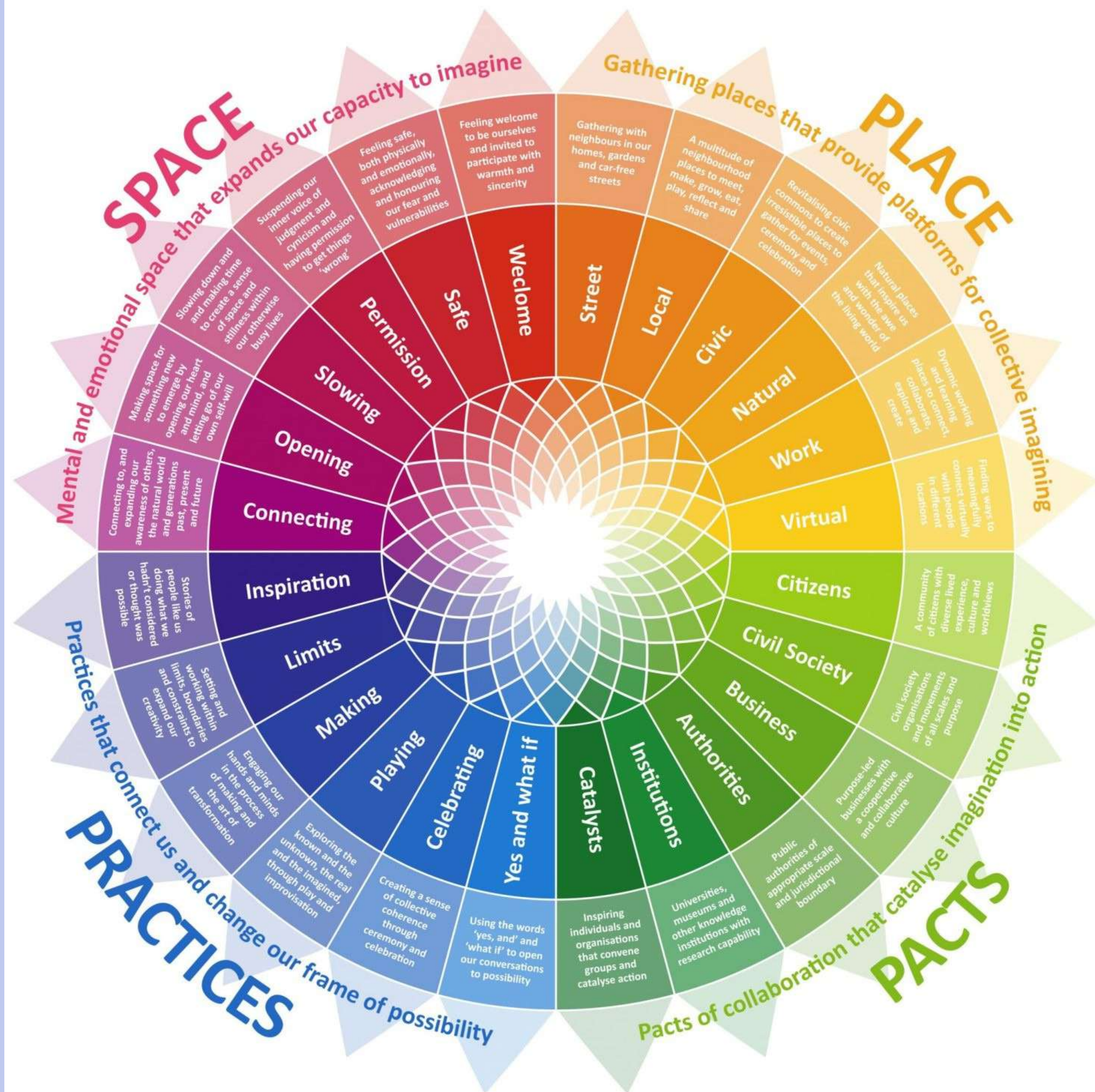
This design tool developed by Rob Shorter helps us to be intentional about the conditions we might need to rebuild, or reveal and animate our collective imaginative capacity.

Underpinning the Sundial is the shocking and saddening fact that we are living in a time of imaginative decline. Most worryingly we are experiencing this decline just at the moment when we most need our imaginations in order to respond to major challenges, such as the climate emergency, systemic racism and extractive economies. The need to nurture the conditions for our collective imagination has never been so urgent.

The Imagination Sundial was inspired by the work of Rob Hopkins in his book **From What Is to What If**. You can read more about the Imagination Sundial on his blog: robhopkins.net/2020/06/30/introducing-the-imagination-sundial



Our gratitude to Rob Shorter and Rob Hopkins for inspiring us to take action rooted in collective imagination, and to work with What If... questions.



Patterns



An ecological understanding of culture draws lessons from healthy living systems patterns. These patterns can encourage our cultural actions to be regenerative.

Try designing from patterns to details. Use this canvas to zoom out before you create detailed plans.

Interdependency

All parts of a living system are interconnected. This means different sectors, roles, disciplines, organisations, places and communities within a cultural ecosystem are all interdependent.

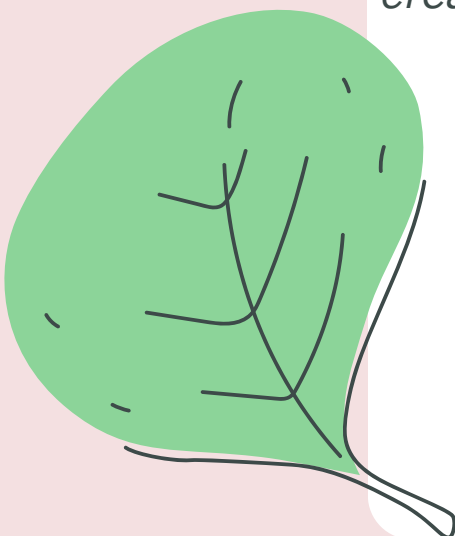
If we understand this, we can encourage networked and reciprocal relationships across these edges.

How might I encourage healthy relationships that enable creative collaborations across different boundaries and edges?

Emergent

All living systems are constantly changing.

Like natural ecosystems, culture is in constant formation as it adapts, changes and evolves.



How might I hold space for evolution of cultural activity and the potential for new creative action and cultural capabilities?

Porous boundaries

We can find inspiration from outside the local ecosystem to help new ideas to flow. We can experiment with how we can interact with existing cultural values and activity.

Flow prevents stagnation. It encourages adaptation and supports regenerative community resilience.

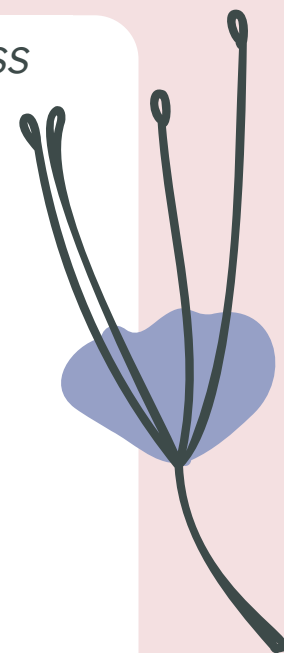
How might I draw inspiration from outside the local ecosystem in a way that supports local cultural potential while still being true to the uniqueness of this place?

Non-hierarchical

All parts are of the ecosystem are of equal value. Culture is a communal phenomenon meaning no one element is more important.

This means that we can share responsibility for cultural action and a healthy ecosystem.

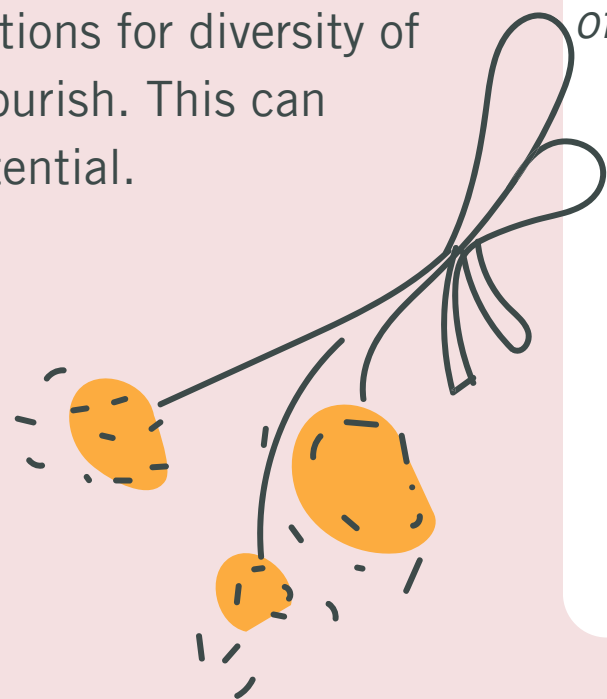
How might I help distribute power across the ecosystem?



Living systems favour diversity

We can create conditions for diversity of culture-making to flourish. This can increase cultural potential.

How might I create conditions for diversity of culture-making to flourish?



Unique to place

While we borrow tools and ideas from outside the ecosystem these are always tailored to be place specific.

Above all we prioritise co-creating in alignment and harmony with the unique potential of Dudley's cultural ecosystem.

How might I align with the unique cultural potential of Dudley? How am I informed by local place based knowledge and local creative and cultural knowledge stewards?



Principles

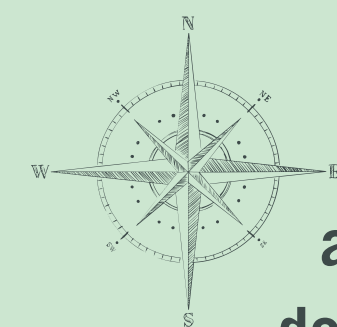
Principles to help us meet the needs of all people within the means of the living planet. They are from Doughnut Economics doughnuteconomics.org



Embrace the 21st century goal

Aim to meet the needs of all people within the means of the planet. Seek to align your purpose, networks, governance, ownership and finance with this goal. Expect the work to be challenging, innovative and transformative.

How might I align my actions to meet the needs of all life?



Use this canvas to think through your everyday actions, and when you are developing, co-designing or reflecting on experiments, projects or plans.

How might I connect with and invite enthusiastic supporters and creative talents?

Be strategic in practice

Go where the energy is - but always ask whose voice is left out. Balance openness with integrity, so that the work spreads without capture. Share back learning and innovation to unleash the power of peer-to-peer inspiration.

How might I sow seeds or generate ripples for others in Dudley's cultural ecosystem?

Aim to thrive rather than to grow

Don't let growth become a goal in itself. Know when to let the work spread out via others rather than scale up in size.

How might I support stewardship of place, people, and the rest of nature?

Be regenerative

Aim to work with and within the cycles of the living world. Be a sharer, repairer, regenerator, steward. Reduce travel, minimise flights, be climate and energy smart.

Be distributive

Work in the spirit of open design and share the value created with all who co-created it. Be aware of power and seek to redistribute it to improve equity amongst stakeholders.

How might I share value in ways that improves equity of cultural opportunity?

See the big picture

Recognise the potential roles of the household, the commons, the market and the state – and their many synergies – in transforming economies. Ensure that finance serves the work rather than drives it.

How might I contribute to a cultural ecosystem that supports all life?

Nurture human nature

Promote diversity, participation, collaboration and reciprocity. Strengthen community networks and work with a spirit of high trust. Care for the wellbeing of the team.

How might I increase who gets to imagine futures in the borough?

Think in systems

Experiment, learn, adapt, evolve and aim for continuous improvement. Be alert to dynamic effects, feedback loops and tipping points.

How might I design in learning? What do I know about the system I'm in?