

Open dataset of UK makerspaces: a user's guide

 www.nesta.org.uk/report/open-dataset-of-uk-makerspaces-a-users-guide/

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Key Findings

- We found 97 makerspaces across the UK. Makerspaces can be found in every region, with most of the UK's cities having at least one makerspace.
- Digital and manual tools are both found in the majority of spaces. Digital fabrication tools were the most commonly reported, followed by general hand tools, electronics, and woodwork tools. Half of spaces also had computing tools.
- Learning and support are fundamental feature of UK makerspaces: over half of makerspaces provide tool inductions, formal courses, and informal help, while only 8 percent offered no form of training. A smaller number also reported offering additional educational opportunities like school programmes, affiliated programmes, and qualification opportunities.
- Many makerspaces are active within wider communities. Nearly two thirds collaborate with other makerspaces and 42 percent contributing to open hardware or open source projects. More than 80 percent also host

or have a presence at off-site events, while approximately 40 percent have relationships with their local council.

- Along with prevailing types of UK makerspaces, we found several features which are helpful for comparing makerspaces more generally. These included: *Inward ↔ outward facing*, *Prototyping ↔ tinkering*, *Rooted ↔ ephemeral*, *Digital ↔ material*, and *Independent ↔ codependent*. These features could be used as individual measures for comparison, or taken together to give get a more rounded of view.

The UK has witnessed an explosion of makerspaces, fablabs, hackerspaces and community workshops, growing from a handful to nearly 100 in the last decade. Recognised as sites of civic and social innovation, creativity and learning, makerspaces are increasingly held up as potential game changers for design, entrepreneurship, fabrication, manufacturing, and technological innovation. Yet amidst this growth and promise, it can be difficult to understand the many different forms they take; to get a sense of the scale at which they are operating and the size of the movement in general.

To gain a deeper understanding of what's happening, Nesta has commissioned researchers Andrew Sleight and Hannah Stewart to create an open dataset of UK makerspaces. At the simplest level, this dataset gives a snapshot of UK makerspaces in 2014/15 and can be used by anyone for a variety of purposes - such as a baseline for future research or to build interactive maps.

We've also published infographics and a user's guide to summarise top-line findings within the dataset. The user's guide also sets out other opportunities to make use of the dataset, and proposes a set of categories and comparative features for making sense of the variety of makerspaces in the UK.

This dataset provides a basis for developing a deeper understanding of UK makerspaces. However, a number of questions remain:

- What communities, knowledge, and content are emerging from these spaces?
- Do makerspaces fulfil the promise attributed to them?
- How are they influencing wider trends in consumption and production, civic engagement and transitions to sustainability?
- Are they making collaboration and innovation easier?
- How are UK makerspaces evolving compared to other contexts?

Going forward, we look forward to exploring the dynamics and potential of makerspaces (in their various forms) further, and coordinating with others who are undertaking research in this area.

Nesta has a long-standing interest in makerspaces. Over the years, we have supported several makerspaces through practical programmes - including the UK's first FabLab in Manchester, as well as Fab Lab Devon, Makerversity and Black Country Atelier through our [Digital Makers fund](#)². Makerspaces have featured across our research on the [collaborative economy](#)³, [digital social innovation](#)⁴, [digital education](#)⁵ and [smart cities](#)⁶. Our [Hot Topics](#)⁷ events have also previously explored complementary topics like [personal manufacturing](#)⁸ and [local bioeconomies](#)⁹.

Authors

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Appendix of Links

1. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/node/17556>
2. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/node/27>
3. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/node/10729>
4. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/node/2185>
5. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/node/2178>
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