

Hyperreal Enterprises: Notes on Bristol Workshop

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Abstract

This document is an initial analysis of our Open Future Design workshop on January 23rd 2023 at Watershed in Bristol. Among the 18 attendees, there were three who had previously participated in a pilot:

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These folks helped with facilitation of small group activities.

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I (Inter-)Personal Doughnut

I.1 Problem

Informed by [BROKEN LINK: 56ce8d31-d3d6-4493-bb41-bo7d810afbcc], at the workshop we were ready to work across levels — but did we have the *correct* set of levels for the ‘public space & public health’ setting front-of-mind?

I.2 Solution Strategy

Something that came up in the discussions around the workshop and PLACARD method was our prominent focus on *the wellbeing of participants*. We could frame this in a rough analogy with Doughnut Economics, HOWEVER the framing would be different in this small-scale format.

BECAUSE ‘health’ is inherently a complex topic — e.g., considering a “bio-psycho-social” or “bio-psycho-social-eco” model — there are multiple moving parts. If we want to talk about health effectively in future versions of the workshop, we might want to rethink aspects of the workshop itself using *these* components; e.g., the “roles” that we use in Phase II could potentially be rethought this way.

Since we cannot be guaranteed to have teams of participants with expertise evenly divided along the bio/psycho/social/eco components of health, THEREFORE, it could be useful to survey some of the other frameworks that are out there that could be relevant to this reframing, so that we could get creative about reconfiguring them. Examples might include Manfred Max-Neef’s Fundamental human needs, Schwartz’s Theory of Basic Human Values.

/According to Schwartz, individual values are responses to three universal requirements of human existence, namely needs of people as biological organisms, of agreement in social actions, and of survival and well-being of groups./

SPECIFICALLY, the axes and dimensions that were used to organise scenarios (in-balance vs out-of-balance, scarcity, aliveness, availability of knowledge commons, etc.) provide a very rough framework that was generated by participants. How would we analyse our workshop’s framework in terms of the bio-psycho-social-eco model of health? Does it have natural ‘habitable zones’ similar to the Kate Raworth doughnut? One limiting factor that was drawn into the diagram was based on language/access/education. Since many of our solutions were related to *communication*, these do seem to be relevant factors. How do these limiting factors show up around active participation in (both) [BROKEN LINK: 57f06710-a96c-4cbc-bcc7-57d3d3e550c4]?

I.3 Partial Validation

In the full Bristol workshop, we continued to use the CLA levels, but we presented them as a set of concentric circles, both in our framing presentation, and in visual templates that we distributed to participants (see images below).

This reframing of the suggests an analysis of the layers in this order of descent:

Psycho-	Litany	Observables
Social-	System	Factors and actors
Bio-	Worldview	Attitudes
Eco-	Myth	Shared values

I.3.1 Further comments unpacking that

It makes sense that *observables* would be top of mind in our psychological make-up. We’re also able to perceive aspects of the social world, though without reflection, we can be more driven by immediate sense perceptions than the more complex relations which give rise to those perceptions. We also bring many well-documented biases to our cognition and emotion, based on the long history of human evolution. Nevertheless, we are now also aware, at least in the back of our minds, of ourselves as part of an ecological system (cf. *Nouvelles du monde*, by Serres).

Workshop overview

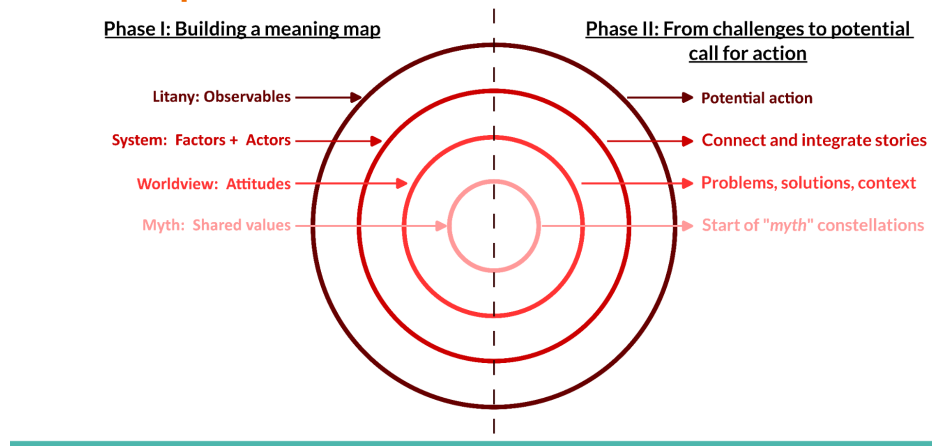


Figure 1: Our pictorial framing of the workshop design

1.3.2 Further links with the design pattern format

The table above can be extended directly to incorporate our four-part pattern format:

Psycho-	Litany	Observables	HOWEVER
Social-	System	Factors and actors	BECAUSE
Bio-	Worldview	Attitudes	THEREFORE
Eco-	Myth	Shared values	SPECIFICALLY

Again, some brief remarks to narrate this extension.

Conflicts exist at the observable layer. They may be well-known blockers or simply annoyances.

Causal relations are typically derived from social relationships. Here it may be useful to recall George Mead's reframing of 'sociality' in terms co-evolution or change (which is then reflected in our awareness).¹

Our *dispositions* to action are filtered through our consciousness, with reference to our existing repertoires of action.

Lastly, although our *values* are not always top of mind, they are not ephemeral, but are, rather, among the most concrete things that we perceive when, to use a turn of phrase, we see with our eyes closed. Specific actions which are not already-programmed by our existing *patterns of action* are likely to relate to these values. (Here we could refer to, e.g., Spinoza's ethics.)

1.3.3 More specific relationship to the Raworth doughnut

With these comments in mind, the relationship to the Raworth doughnut becomes clearer. 'Eco' is at the core of the CLA model, but the periphery of the Raworth doughnut. An **overshoot** of the *ecological ceiling* corresponds, here, to living a life not in line with our values, or even more fundamentally to values which underspecified. Similarly, a **shortfall** relative to *social foundation* relates to the underprovision of public goods and to the *fragmentation* of the ecosphere in individual minds (often, themselves, fragmented by craving). We can do something about this in local communities if we REBALANCE SOCIAL SERVICES.

This also suggests a strategy for 'patternizing' materials from the workshop. During the workshop itself, we already began to IDENTIFY CORE CONCEPTS. This gives us a picture of the 'myth' layer. From there, we should be able to work back to new and possibly quite different social relationships.

1.3.4 But! the 4 parts of Psycho- Social- Bio- Eco- are meant to be integrated parts

- Maybe the 4 Psycho- Social- Bio- Eco- things cut across each of the layers
- So, what are the practical implications for our method?

¹George H. Mead, *The philosophy of the present*, Open Court, 1932.

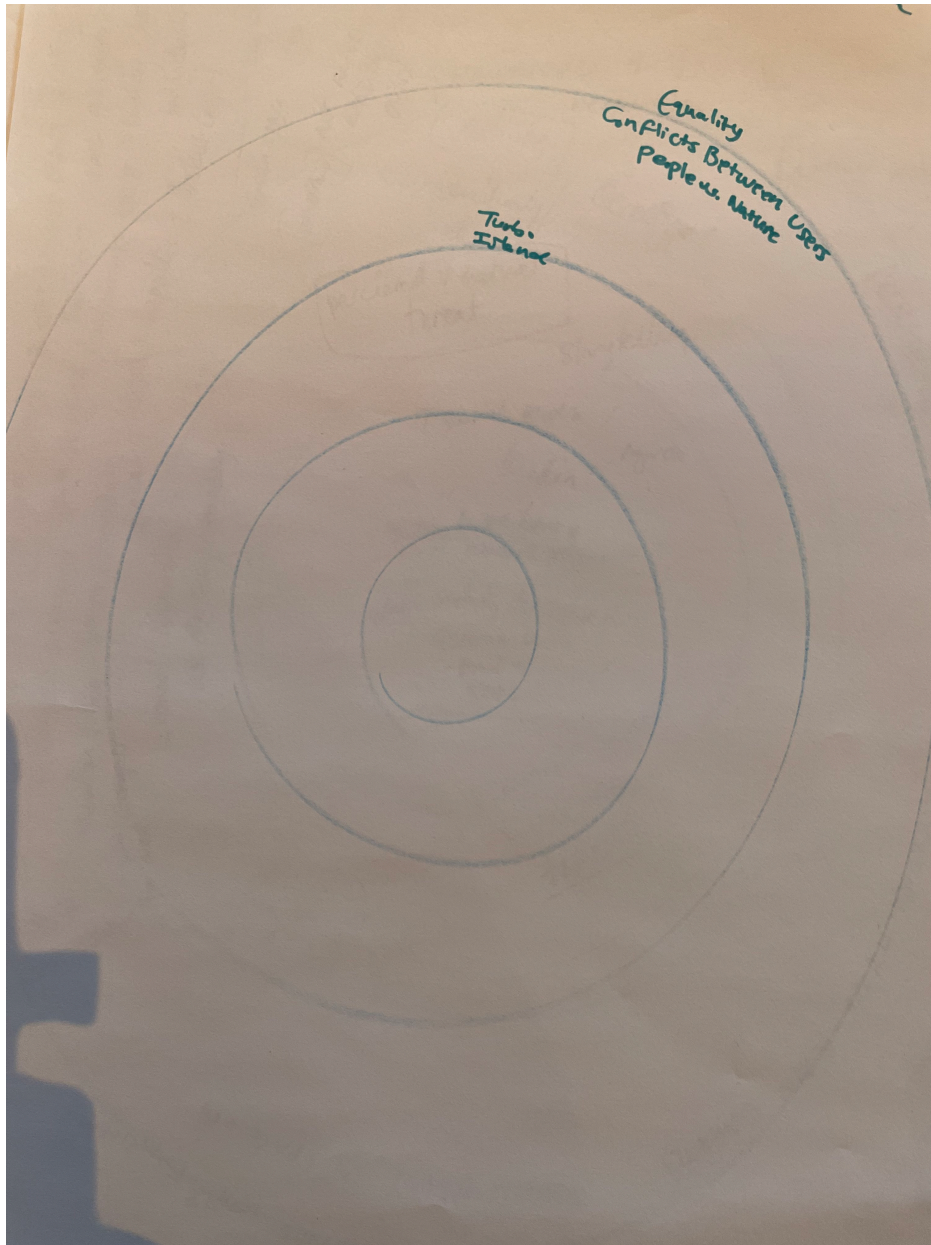


Figure 2: 'Grid' distributed to participants, partially filled in

2 Measures of complexity as indicative of health

2.1 Problem

We envisioned healthy public spaces as complex and multi-use but didn't (yet) have related tangible measures that could give us direct feedback on urban health.

2.2 Solution Strategy

In various examples, we talked about public spaces as multi-use or transformable. For example, a cycle path has different properties at rush hour and other times of day. From a traditional design pattern standpoint, design is useful for minimising conflict. (E.g., bike lanes might be installed in the first place following a pattern like "Build protected bike lanes where motor vehicle speed consistently exceeds 25 mph.") HOWEVER, sometimes the multiple uses are going to be in conflict, or the design solution itself will create new conflicts (e.g., a four-lane bicycle highway might help with speed issues — but it would have a bigger environmental footprint and a two-lane path). Sometimes the multiple uses are inconsistent (e.g., a given space cannot straightforwardly be both a football pitch and a hill). A metaphor that we used in our discussion was that the city's structure should be "like organs" and "not mashed up". (A similar body metaphor was used to describe the design of Paris's sewer system!)

BECAUSE we are thinking in terms of 'health' we may want to switch from 'minimising conflict' to 'increasing complexity' as our overall goal. Natural systems may contain lots of conflict (e.g., between the wishes of wildebeests and lions) and still be complex and vital. A eutrophic pond *reduces* conflict by creating the conditions for a monoculture of algae: that's probably not what we want. Maybe even more specifically we want patterns "at the edge of chaos", which exhibit both organisation and instability (cf. the Interactive Architecture lab at UCL — they might be worth talking to as part of an interactive-everything consortium).

One area in which greater transparency can be useful is *funding* of public space (from various sources): see FUNDING OF PUBLIC SPACE. Even if such data is available, we will need an appropriate analysis protocol. THEREFORE, let's look around for some design principles that take the "edge of chaos" into account. There are some related ideas in Psychology Today that connect this model with *elite performance*. There's another a paper that draws on the edge-of-chaos concept to critique applications of 'sustainability'. Doyne Farmer, who coined the term, is now at the Oxford Martin school, and has contributed to a 1988 volume on 'The Economy As An Evolving Complex System'. How has this thinking been taken up since then? Note that there are various approaches to measuring urban health which aren't specifically informed by complexity theory, but which could be brought into a new complexity-informed synthesis:

In the 1960s, a social indicator movement flourished in the United States: agencies ranging from the USDA to NASA advocated for a national social accounting body, cities regularly published data-driven reports on urban wellbeing, and academics assembled comprehensive social progress indices for cities, counties, and states. — Making urban progress legible : the role of territorial social indicators in the new economy by Sarah Oz Johnson, 2018

SPECIFICALLY, Farmer has worked on agent simulations in recent years. This is something we looked into in an adjacent effort. How might we revive the central ideas within future interactive experiments? Would this relate to what we might do within an "Ecodisc 2.0" type of project, perhaps rethought as an interactive game-based platform (e.g., here thinking of SimEarth or SimCity).

("The BBC Ecodisc offers a unique opportunity to manage a real nature reserve at your desk. The project which was 2 years in the making includes 4000 photographs, 150 video sequences and over 1000 kilobytes of software. It is about a real nature reserve at Slapton Ley in Devon, you have the opportunity to explore the reserve and its inhabitants and to manage it.")

Might we want to connect future experiments with other local experiments like the Bristol Pound, perhaps making an "Ecodisc of Bristol's Urban Ecosystem"? (Any such team up would depend on how their plans are developing.)

All of this is relevant to thinking about how we move forward [BROKEN LINK: 3doacf49-0c87-4aaa-94b3-84e5d926d58d], and what might distinguish our approach to [BROKEN LINK: 2b1cao6d-486e-4398-a2c9-a4a9e303ea3] from a generic communication platform.

3 Sharing our stories

3.1 Problem

We only had a relatively small amount of time during the pilot.

3.2 Solution Strategy

One of the proposals that we talked about was a “Listening project 2.0” HOWEVER we only had time to go in depth into one person’s personal history during our workshop.

BECAUSE of limitations of the workshop, as to time and scale, getting even one story written down is an achievement! Nevertheless, we all might have stories somewhat similar to Judith’s (with plenty differences as well) about how we got interested in the things we are now doing professionally. If we were to share these stories we’d have completed a solid get-to-know-you round, and might then have an even better ‘springboard’ for further dialogue.

THEREFORE, we could develop a small-scale pilot of our “Listening Project 2.0” that follows Judith’s example and each tell some story about how we got into the work we are doing now. The original Listening Project is itself well documented, and we could borrow some of their ideas. This might then put us in a good position to return to the roles from the workshop, with various attendees sitting in the “[BROKEN LINK: 57d46961-a056-435e-85d2-27ab6e0de7f6]” seat, and others taking on the other roles to think about how their work might relate to the trajectory traced by each Historian. Note that similar ideas apply not only of workshop attendees, but to other members of our communities as well. The Interactive Documentary methods that we’ve been learning about can apply beyond the workshop, in “Phase III” activities: see Contested space.

SPECIFICALLY, we might do the initial information gathering in a series of online interviews with attendees, circulate the materials, and then return to a suitable space for group dialogue.

4 Contested space

4.1 Problem summary

So-called public space doesn’t always necessarily feel welcoming to all members of the public. It can be overrun with antisocial behaviour. It can feel exclusionary, or uninviting. It can be the site of conflict. When we enter public space, we may see others there only in terms of their stereotypes.

4.2 Solution summary

Public space can feel uninviting: it may be an “only” space; it may be “only space”. HOWEVER, we should not see this as inevitable.

The history of public space should be read alongside the history of private spaces. BECAUSE privatisation has had the upper hand in many historical turns (e.g., in agendas of enclosure and austerity), public goods of various kinds suffer. This can be seen not only in attested public ‘spaces’, but in offerings like council housing, which in current times is often degraded as well as having decreased availability.

This history is not unknown, but responses which aim to assert agency over space often amount to a descent into protest. The People’s Republic of Stoke’s Croft is one local history, in which protest is paired with other forms of activism. Protest alone may prove ineffective at achieving its goals. THEREFORE, forms of activism that directly enhance public space should be preferred.

SPECIFICALLY, the iDocumentary methods ([BROKEN LINK: 31430561-7338-4b02-8abe-83b651067665]) can be brought into activist settings in a way that gives recognition, builds awareness, and links stories together.

- [BROKEN LINK: e83d48ca-47dd-4a20-9928-8fcc1c4348b9] is an example of a space in Bristol that may not feel friendly to all potential users, and which could be an interesting site for such documentary work.
- In other locales, specific spaces that are friendly to those who wish to drink in public have been designated, partly to allow drinkers not to bother others. The need for complex uses of space does not mean that each space needs to support every use equally; cf. our pattern MEASURES OF COMPLEXITY AS INDICATIVE OF HEALTH.
- Recent research in Oxford points out that women may use public space less than men, not because of concerns about safety, but rather due to design flaws like missing toilets. Public space may be designed with hidden biases built in. This shows the value of designing public spaces together with the potential users.

5 Rebalance social services

5.1 Problem summary

Some behaviours require policing, however, if the balance is incorrect, then self-expression suffers. Similarly, other welfare-related services should be supplied in balance with local needs, though they often are not.

5.2 Solution strategy

Police and other social services exist to deal with problems which are not addressed on their own, HOWEVER in the right environment, criminality, disease, etc., either go away entirely or shrink to a minimum.

BECAUSE there is a limited amount of funding for public services, communities are now faced with dilemmas like closing the library to pay for the park, or removing bus services to pay for police, etc.; and, in fact, the police are already having to deal with a range of social problems which aren't strictly within their remit, as are teachers and other service providers. Whereas there used to be a *community policeman* who could act with discretion, police officers now are oftentimes not members of the communities they are meant to serve. Other service provision can feel similarly remote and disconnected.

THEREFORE, what's needed are more people in the community who provide good examples of — and paradigms for — action, more immediately and directly. One strategy to pursue would be to arrange it so that the organisations that provide welfare services are connected with each other. Much in the way that food co-ops can serve the alimentary needs of a community, other more integrated systems could be devised to tackle the structural issues that made apparent by current regimes of underfunding and disorganisation. For example, Houston, Texas, significantly reduced homelessness by developing a continuum of care approach. Other societal challenges might be addressed similarly.

SPECIFICALLY, it may be possible, in Bristol, to create a *radical public space* that is taken care of by local people, which provides a range of relevant services. Some good examples of community centres already exist, though they aren't yet widespread into all of the communities that need them. This could be an example of [BROKEN LINK: 570f3d11-d1f6-4ffb-87ed-c815e7efe624]. However, there's more than just a 'space' aspect to such a place. Organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières show that experts are willing to activate around identified needs: can varied expertise be integrated in a similar way to address complex local challenges?

5.3 Further comments

JC: This strategy relates to the concept of *facilitator load* that Abby talked about in the Bristol workshop. As such we have an experience inside the workshop of (potentially) too many things to think about and an over-extended service provision. This relates to the concept of [BROKEN LINK: 80a6488b-af62-4340-b542-eeeb6b922343].

6 Funding of public space

6.1 Problem summary

Even though public space is known to increase wellness in the population, well-being priorities that would lead to increased funding for public space aren't universally adopted.

6.2 Solution summary

Funders typically need to show some 'return on investment' HOWEVER, in the UK funding often goes to projects for digital innovation and other perceived economic growth areas, rather than towards investments in a well-being agenda.

BECAUSE the values upheld by the current UK government (and some devolved governments) lean towards enterprise, it may be possible in these constituencies to develop a well-being agenda within a 'social enterprise' framework, investing locally while integrating community into the design process. There are many examples to learn from, i.e., both in terms of their successes and failures. These include the Bristol Pound, which aimed to keep cash in the local economy (and which in its latest iteration might have provided a nice open data set around local investments) and Fromm social enterprise efforts which built nice social housing and schools.

In Wales, there is legislation, in the form of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, which enshrines a well-being agenda into law, and which has been monitored according to national indicators, in "Wellbeing of Wales" reports. THEREFORE, a similar level of transparency around social enterprise investments could show where money is going, and help negotiate a well-being agenda that isn't legislated.

Historically, investment in public space and community has come from different places and aligned with different value systems (e.g. medieval churches were often at the centre of local communities, now many are unused and available for sale); Kew was up to get in via the turnstile; modern architecture had a long phase in which public space was an afterthought at best. Now, contemporary architecture and urban planning initiatives are rediscovering these social values and, SPECIFICALLY, this may provide a niche for social enterprise to engage. MEASURES OF COMPLEXITY AS INDICATIVE OF HEALTH describes one potential way to source relevant data (modelled on the “Bristol Pound”).

7 Identify core concepts

7.1 Problem summary

We risk being awash in data and going over the same topics and issues endlessly.

7.2 Solution summary

We see things as complex and interconnected HOWEVER we also need to make sense of things by teasing apart details.

BECAUSE we have potential for overwhelm, we have evolved language tools that work ‘digitally’ to give us structure and grammar.

We can use these tools at various levels, ranging from language to written words to digital tools. THEREFORE if we want to make sense of a complex situation it is useful to have all of these tools at our disposal.

SPECIFICALLY in the Bristol workshop, we used mind-maps, cards, and Org Roam to start to digitize the maps.

- Concepts at the ‘Psycho-’ level may be, usefully, related to [BROKEN LINK: 59798017-boaf-473e-bdcd-108a8ef1e06d], though they will not always start out that way.
- Some of the core concepts will exist at the ‘Bio-’ level, and correspond to [BROKEN LINK: 827ae14c-27d3-4483-93a9-d4005c5231a8].
- Some will exist at the ‘Social-’ level, particularly those corresponding to [BROKEN LINK: 26ffbc6f-7955-41bd-8c91-99be46847e72].
- ‘Eco-’ concepts may be perceived as a conflict, e.g., [BROKEN LINK: 9574546b-4e65-4f40-89e0-95bf41b7eb87], however in a more positive story the concepts could relate to people living in harmony with nature.

8 Building at the boundaries

8.1 Problem summary

If we take it as given that “Bristol needs to grow” (a debateable point), then it can either grow *intensively* with higher-density housing, or it can grow *extensively* by building at the boundaries. Both of these have some associated challenges. Here we consider strategies for building at the boundaries.

8.2 Solution summary

This relates to the discussion of [BROKEN LINK: 33201035-52ec-4662-a99c-88d26a992ab3] as a potential site for future development. More broadly, it relates to the concept of [BROKEN LINK: 4ed30e8c-784a-401e-9631-add816f8c2be]. It also relates to both the [BROKEN LINK: 86d1669e-bd6c-487b-a8f1-3ca8a211817f], and [BROKEN LINK: 9574546b-4e65-4f40-89e0-95bf41b7eb87], insofar as the ‘edges’ may be (or may be perceived to be) closer to wild space, and as such may be conceptualised as ‘external’ and ‘public by default’.

9 Different narratives dissolve in a non-linear narrative

9.1 Problem

Since we have different ways of thinking about things and make sense of things in different ways, the stories we tell can be a repository of conflict.

9.2 Solution Strategy

We live in the same world HOWEVER we don't always agree.

BECAUSE we have different ways of thinking about things, and would like to put different things to different uses, the opportunity for conflict arises. Examples are bound to be readily available, e.g., one person wants something to happen, and others agree it's a good idea, but don't have the resources to help right now. Sometimes this is resolved through patience; sometimes when waiting around, nothing happens and it's better to find an alternative. It may or may not be necessary to keep everyone in the loop. Sometimes, actions speak louder than words. But, when we do need to communicate or interact with each other, this can come with an added layer of meaning, which brings the old conflicts back to the surface. This relates to the way we've been thinking about [BROKEN LINK: 2d692e15-ob5f-4d98-87a1-bb99d1eae579], as a somewhat more brittle system (that aims to predict or change the future) than systems that grow organically.

THEREFORE use techniques like [BROKEN LINK: 31430561-7338-4b02-8abe-83b651067665] to allow the conflicts to come to the surface and be made explicit — but without being violent. Often, the hidden conflict is scarier than the explicit tension!

We've gotten a start with this by exploring worldviews. SPECIFICALLY we talked about [BROKEN LINK: 33201035-52ec-4662-a99c-88d26a992ab3] as a place where some (ongoing) documentary work may be interesting, to gather different stories about the place. This may or may not then be related to development initiatives in the region; it could also help inform some new initiatives. Another strategy would be to (continue to) map the policy landscape in Bristol, contextualising perspectives like [BROKEN LINK: b540d93f-0aac-4951-8252-a45f100cb997] with other narratives.