

## ARTICLE

# Things we hold dear: Mapping immaterial value in the context of urban regeneration

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This paper reflects on *Common-places* (2019), a project that was developed in Sheffield on the invitation of Site Gallery to participate in their 'City of Ideas' programme. Amidst the urban regeneration processes that are reshaping the city, this programme offered the opportunity to think about novel approaches that art and interdisciplinary practices could bring to processes of urban change. *Common-places* was proposed as a participatory workshop that engaged the local community, by inviting them to recognise the things they 'hold dear' about the areas in which they live or work. The premise was to identify forms of material and immaterial value that would reveal the 'character' of a place and its forms of use-value that are important to a local community. The intention was to develop a set of tools to highlight, map, commemorate and ultimately protect this intangible heritage in the context of urban regeneration in Sheffield. The project addressed some of the existing challenges of integrating an expanded notion of heritage in urban planning. Moreover, it reflects on the importance of identifying the use-value of intangible heritage and embraces a more integral and holistic approach to city planning.

Keywords: urban regeneration, use-value, intangible heritage, community mapping, critical play

Patrick Geddes, the Scottish polymath recognised for his innovations in town planning, posited that the past was a vital part of our social inheritance and offered opportunities - as well as impediments - to advancing the city of life. He insisted that the 'living city' could not be achieved solely through dead capital. What was required, he argued, was to mobilise the living energies and vital culture of cities and their surrounding regions (Young and Clavel 2017). Geddes argued that this was not only possible through imagination and utopian projection, but also through 'reality-vision', looking towards the creation of an *Eutopia* (Mcfadyen 2015). Geddes' concerns are still part of present-day urban planning challenges. How does one understand not just the 'characteristics' of a place, but also its 'character' – both the material and immaterial qualities that make a place distinctive and particular – so that processes of regeneration and change “avoid[s] the risk of getting urbanity without urbanness” (Karlström 2014, 7542).

UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape approach (2011), among other UNESCO's charters that address heritage aspects, have expanded the scope of urban heritage from the protection of physical remains toward less tangible social and holistic concerns. As defined by the 2011 Convention, this approach foregrounds the identification, conservation and management of historic areas, within the broad urban context, by considering the

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interrelationships of their physical form, their spatial organisation and connection, their natural features and, crucially, the “social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity” (UNESCO 2011). UNESCO’s definition reflects the ever-increasing emphasis on the intangible aspects of heritage. As Harrison (2012, 115) reflects, critical heritage studies seem to be moving away from “a concern with the materiality of heritage to a concern with heritage as a discourse and a system of values”<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, it delivers an expanded notion of urban heritage which incorporates both the tangible and intangible elements that inform how planning practices should focus on conserving the authenticity and integrity of the built environment. Unfortunately, however, most urban planning systems fail to recognise and protect intangible aspects of heritage by considering urban heritage exclusively as physical elements with architectural and historical value (Jigyasu 2014). For Jigyasu (2014, 129), this failure reflects “a lack of understanding of the complexity and pervasiveness of intangible values and of their direct relationship with the physical structure of the city”. As he suggests, part of the problem is the lack of documentation of intangible value, as the emphasis is placed on recording physical attributes and aesthetic values of the urban fabric.

It could be said that at the heart of these failures to incorporate intangible or immaterial values lies the challenge of identifying this ‘character of place’; its identity and the way such identity is maintained, or as Kalström (2014, 7542) frames it, as “looking at the relationships between how the urban area is seen and how it wants to be seen”. UNESCO’s approach suggests a series of tools and capacity-building strategies towards this end – for example, “enabling processes for civic engagement towards involving different stakeholders in decision making, and the incorporation of ways of mapping cultural and natural characteristics as planning tools to identify values and understand their meaning for the communities”. Jigyasu (2014, 143) reinforces this last point by arguing for a more “holistic territorial approach that seeks to recognise multiple relationships that tie residents to their environment both in materialistic as well as non-materialistic terms”.

Participation and community engagement processes in planning and urban development are nothing new. Since their radical emancipatory origin back in the 1960s, participatory processes today have become mainstream in many planning systems, most commonly taking the form of public consultations whereby local people have their say within planning processes. These top-down approaches, however, have been heavily criticised for serving to reproduce the dominant hegemonic agenda (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Cahill 2007; Leal 2007). By contrast, bottom-up experiments that continue to engage communities with forms of participation at grass-root level have proven useful to unearth the ‘reality vision’ that Geddes speaks about, by incorporating a community’s understanding of a given place. The use of community mapping, for example, as a methodology for revealing situated knowledges has been long explored within participatory planning, development practices, in community arts projects and, lately, through civic engagement experiments with digital crowdsourcing technologies. My contention, however, is that the potential of participatory mapping as ‘embodied place-wisdom’ has not been stretched far enough to capture the more intangible dynamics underpinning the character of a place, our social inheritance and living heritage. Moreover, in doing so, questions arise about how these aspects can be incorporated within planning strategies: what actually constitutes use-value<sup>2</sup> for a specific community in a given place? And is it possible to negotiate the protection of use-value in the context of urban change?

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<sup>1</sup> English Heritage (2013), for example, has recognised four different forms heritage value: evidential, historical, aesthetic or communal. This last one accounting for the more intangible aspects of heritage.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Use-value’ is a concept in economics that refers to the pleasure a commodity - as a good or service- generates to its owner or user. It differs from ‘exchange-value’ which refers to the money a commodity can be swapped for ‘use-value’ in the built environment accounts for concepts such as social and aesthetic value and other non-market values that are usually very difficult to quantify since these are considered as externalities. However, their true value can be much greater than the supply price or the cost incurred in making them available (CABE 2001).

My own research explores ‘play’ as a participatory methodology for critical engagement. It understands the autotelic nature of play as an aesthetic act of appropriation that opens new possibilities and interpretations of the world. I explore how this transformative dimension of play can be rationalised towards enhancing critical engagement and novel forms of civic participation. Underlying this research agenda is the intention to advance participation as a praxis that has to be simultaneously thought of as spatial, critical, aesthetic and a political form of collective action, calling therefore for the need to bridge the different epistemologies by which agonistic forms of participation are practiced and theorised: from the arts and design-related disciplines, to the social and political sciences spectrum. The invitation from Site Gallery to engage with the ‘City of Ideas’<sup>3</sup> project offered the opportunity to explore these ideas in the context of Sheffield’s urban regeneration strategy.

Sheffield’s history, similar to most other post-industrial cities in the north of England, has been one of reinvention after the decline of the manufacturing sector in the 1980s. Sheffield was one of the first city councils to use culture as a basis for economic regeneration, turning to the cultural industries as an alternative source of employment creation and urban regeneration (Holmes and Beebeejaun 2007). The Cultural Industries Quarter (CIQ) for example – where Site Gallery is located – was a pioneering renewal project promoting a creative city. The current urban regeneration strategy builds upon an urban regeneration partnership that followed. It was launched by the council in 2000 with the aim of implementing a city centre masterplan to improve the city’s economy. Yet, according to Holmes and Beebeejaun (2007), as the masterplan progressed, there were apparent concerns with the semi-privatisation of public space that contrasted with Sheffield’s cultural policy about creating inclusive, quality cultural spaces for residents. Sheffield’s uncomfortable relationship with urban renewal processes and privatisation is exemplified by the controversial ‘Urban Splash’ redevelopment project of the iconic brutalist Park Hill Estate, which was nominated for the prestigious Stirling Prize for architecture, while being condemned for capital speculation, inner-city gentrification, “class cleansing” and exclusion (Hatherley 2011).

Sheffield’s long term urban strategy as presented in “This is Sheffield: Our City Centre Plan 2018–28”<sup>4</sup> has been designed on a model of economic growth and sustainability, raising questions around the use-value of space and the quality of such places. As Minton (2006, 30) has argued, “creating place purely as a consumer product contradicts the [very] creation of a sense of place”. Is the regeneration process missing out on other aspects essential to creating successful places? Is it considering the ‘character’ of place? How does the local community perceive the past, present and future changes happening in Sheffield?

## Common Places

*Common-places* was conceived as a participatory workshop to identify forms of material and immaterial value that would reveal the ‘character’ of place. The premise was to develop a set of formal and conceptual tools to highlight, map, commemorate and, ultimately, protect this “expanded notion of heritage”; a heritage to convey the material legacy of the built environment, alongside the intangible elements resulting from the interaction between people, places and things. The project was structured as a three-part intervention and designed using different

<sup>3</sup> ‘City of Ideas’ (2018-2020) was a partnership between Site Gallery and other major cultural organisations in the Cultural Industries Quarter area of Sheffield. The programme aimed to promote a critical exploration of the value of public space in the context of Sheffield’s radical regeneration strategy (Site Gallery, n.d.). The program was funded through the Arts Council’s Ambition for Excellence fund.

<sup>4</sup> “This is Sheffield: the city centre regeneration plan (2018-2028)” is a document that sets the vision of the city’s future, which - as the document testifies - was developed through extensive public consultation. It is a complex and ambitious plan to recover the city and turn it into a thriving place for people to live and work. The vision, according to the leader of Sheffield City Council (2018), is one of “conveying the essence of the place, our past and our future, that authenticity and distinctiveness alongside the new and diverse”. Whilst the declaration of intentions refers to ‘conveying the essence of the place’ there is little in the document that reflects this vision. The plan is designed on a “model of economic growth and sustainability” laid over eight pillars: 21<sup>st</sup> Century High St, the business city, knowledge city, sustainable city, accessible city, green and connected city, creative city, and living city (Sheffield City Council 2018). The recovery of the city center is framed in terms of economic growth through densification, connectivity and commercial/public spaces.

methodological approaches. The first part was conceived as a collective walk to unearth situated knowledges of the area through the recollection of the everyday experience of place, and to recognise and highlight forms of value by using analogue and digital forms of mapping. The second part involved categorising these findings in order to build a collective memory of place, so as to identify and define its 'character'. The third part of the project involved communicating this outcome by sharing it with the wider community when inviting them to participate in a collective action: the production of a symbolic sculpture to commemorate the local heritage and celebrate the beauty of the imperfect. Engaging the wider community and city councillors was conceived as a necessary stage in bringing visibility and legitimacy to these findings. Ultimately, the project involved delivering these principles through the drafting of a 'Community Use-Value Strategy (CUVS)'.



Figure 1: collective walk through the Cultural Industries Quarter while mapping forms of immaterial value. *Common-places*, Sheffield, 2019.  
Source: generated by the author.

### Highlighting value: mapping 'à la Banksy'

Michel de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) argues that exploring and analysing the city at ground level allows for the "capture [of] experiences and events that maps and images of the city always miss in their quest for totality and spectacle" (Lavery 2005). For de Certeau, as for Geddes, the best way to learn about a place is by capturing ground level 'reality vision'. This simple idea has been extensively explored across many disciplinary fields: from experiments in psychogeography that hark back to Situationist legacies of *dérive* and *detournement*, to 'transect participatory mapping walks' in community-led practices. Walking as a methodology for analysing and mapping a place has provided a useful tool for unearthing situated knowledges. As it has been acknowledged, this has the potential of revealing not only what one *understands* about a place, but what can be *experienced* of it: the intangible nature of sounds, smells, views, memories, proximities, intensities and rhythms. Furthermore, this includes the apprehension of Lefebvre's 'lived space' (1991): the space of people's sense-making, imagination and feelings.

*Common-places* was planned as a collective walk through the centre of Sheffield, with particular focus on the Cultural Industries Quarter (CIQ) and the Castlegate Quarter. The project was run with a group of local participants reached through Site Gallery's local network, including local artists, creative entrepreneurs, charity and NGO workers, and small business owners. The premise was to conduct a mapping exercise to identify and highlight forms of material and immaterial value that would reveal the character of the place. Participants were asked to highlight those things they 'hold dear' during the walk by physically tagging them with colourful hi-vis PVC stickers inscribed with a simple description of what had been highlighted (Figures 2-3). The sentence 'things we hold dear' was coined to help connect the embodied knowledge of the everyday to an idea of care, of sense-making, by revealing an affective bonding to place – be it a personal memory or experience, an object or event, a physical space, or a particular phenomenon. In short, to reveal the use-value of space. The exercise also asked participants to take a picture of each highlighted tag, using a GPS enabled mobile device. These data would be used to build a digital archive and later 'pulled' into a collective Google map to understand the spatial locations of the different tags.

The exercise of mapping by highlighting the identified use-values in physical form recognised that "intangible heritage is somehow not separate from the 'material' world" (Harrison 2012, 14). As Harrison (2012, 14) reflects, intangible heritage manifests as a set of practices that are "thoroughly embedded in a set of physical relationships with objects, places and other people". Mapping, therefore, was conceived not just as a recollection act, but as a subversive form of inscription to mark, communicate – by giving a name (a material dimension) to the immaterial, and leave a trace in the public realm. The act of mapping 'à la Banksy' (using graffiti-like tags), invited both a form of playful and subversive appropriation of the urban by making those forms of use-value recognisable to all passers-by. In other words, it meant bringing visibility to those 'things held dear' by the local community; turning those personal subjectivities – of one's own lived experience of the city – into collective knowledge: a collection of disconnected tags revealing a collective memory of place.



Figures 2-3: Highlighting forms of immaterial value. *Common-places*, Sheffield, 2019.  
Source: generated by the author



Figures 6-14: Documented tags highlighting 'things hold dear' by participants. *Common-places, Sheffield, 2019.*  
Source: generated by the author

### Defining the ‘character’ of place: operationalising Lefebvre’s spatial triad through Geddes’ “notation of life”

Harrison (2012, 14) coined the phrase “objects, places and practices” to describe the range of different ways in which official forms of heritage might be recognised in contemporary societies. Harrison’s triad seeks to capture both tangible and intangible forms of value as different dimensions of heritage. However, it fails to reflect the relational quality of the intangible. That is to say, it fails to express how people, things and their environments interconnect.

The exercise of identifying the ‘character’ of Sheffield’s city centre implied categorising the collection of ‘things we hold dear’ highlighted by participants according to certain concepts that could capture an “expanded notion of urban heritage”. Heritage was taken as the interconnectedness between “experience, space and phenomena”, a triad which resulted from juxtaposing Harrison’s definition with Lefebvre’s forms of space production: the lived, the perceived, and conceived space<sup>5</sup>. This happens when one expands the concept of ‘practices’ to incorporate ‘experience’ (lived space); translates the concept of ‘place’ into the abstract notion of ‘space’ (conceived space); and interprets the concept of ‘objects’ to ‘phenomena’ (perceived space).

Three analogue slides allowed participants to locate a printed image of each one of their tags within the range given between two variables. For example, a participant that highlighted “the sounds of radio and metal work” over a disused cutlery factory building, would display the tag in the slide somewhere between space and phenomena. Therefore, each tag was categorised according to its degree of relevance or the attributes it held in relation to a particular set of relational variables and shared collectively with the rest of the participants. The act of sharing and classifying these personal subjectivities as ‘materialised immaterialities’ brought into visibility hidden relations that were not possible to capture during the walk; opening new identifications and connections amongst them. As a backdrop, the digital archive with its sum of geo-located ‘tags’ in the form of a collective Google map became a useful tool to recognise the spatial intensities of the area’s spaces of use-value. Regardless, a further step was necessary to make the ‘character’ of place legible: to translate the relational model into a diagram that could nest specific categories and give material denomination to the identity of place.



Figure 4: Debriefing session with participant in the Castlegate Quarter. *Common-places*, Sheffield, 2019.  
Source: generated by the author

<sup>5</sup> Henri Lefebvre in his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1991) describes space through three overlapping forms of space production: the ‘conceived space’ as the abstract space of planners to create exchange values; the ‘perceived space’ as those spatial practices defined by the flows of labour, money, information; and the ‘lived space’ as the space of people’s sense-making, imagination, and feelings – that is, their local knowledge (Lefebvre 1991).

Geddes’ approach to planning and the tools he invented to explore theories on cities were grounded in interdisciplinarity and visual thinking, and produced enduring conceptual tools that he referred to as ‘thinking machines’. One of these was the ‘notation of life’, a diagram that manifests Geddes’ theory of social evolution and utilitarian ethics. Developed as an ever-improving evolutionary spiral that worked both at an individual and communal level, it incorporated multiple layers of meaning in psychology, politics, sociology and the arts (Welter 2000). The appropriation of Geddes’ diagram made visible the interrelation of the three analytical concepts explored and give material denomination to those tensions. The outcome was six different categories derived from the potential combinations between the concepts of experience, space and phenomena (see Figure 5): spatial phenomena / phenomenal space; experiential phenomena / phenomenal experience; experiential space / spatial experience. Finally, by analysing all tags associated with each category, it was possible to recognise different types of ‘character’ and give denomination to six concept-cities: City of use-value, Experimental City, City of Memory, City of Diversity, City of Surprise, and City of Nature.

PHENOMENA [Beyond things]	Spatial phenomena <i>City of Diversity</i>	Experiential phenomena <i>City of experimentation</i>
Phenomenal space <i>City of nature</i>	SPACE [Beyond place]	Experiential space <i>City of use value</i>
Phenomenal experience <i>City of surprise</i>	Spatial experience <i>City of memory</i>	EXPERIENCE [Beyond people]

Figure 5: relational diagram using Patrick Geddes ‘Notation of Life’ structure. *Common-places*, Sheffield, 2019.  
Source: generated by the author

The following description of each category was taken from the analysis performed by the participants on their collected tags<sup>6</sup>. These were:

**Experiential Space > City of Use-Value:** The recognition of the city of use-value was a critical counterpoint to Sheffield’s urban renovation strategy with its economic-based model. Elements that were recognised were: a city that allows for experimentation and appropriation; one that embraces cultural and economic diversity as a positive and dynamic force; a city respectful of its material and immaterial heritages; one that negotiates nature without

<sup>6</sup> The full collection of tags that build up these concepts can be accessed in the project’s website: <https://catalinapollak.wixsite.com/common-places>



domesticating it; a city where complexity in both spatial and social forms makes the experience of the urban rich and diverse.

**Experiential Phenomena** > *City of experimentation*: There was a strong recognition of the importance of creativity as a form of experimentation in the city. Contrary to the notion of ‘creative city’ defined by Sheffield’s urban regeneration strategy, the city of experimentation was perceived as a space that invites creative forms of appropriation by its citizens. Creativity is seen as a city that is planned over flexible frameworks to allow experimentation – both at the level of low rents and of public spaces that give space to its users to experiment with. A city that allows for creativity *with* the city instead of *in* the city.

**Spatial Phenomena** > *City of Diversity*: There was evident concern about gentrification and the displacement of local communities as a result of the urban renovation process. Cultural and economic diversity was considered an important value that needed to be maintained. Participants saw a value in keeping spaces socially complex and engaging with that richness and diversity.

**Spatial Experience** > *City of Memory*: The prevailing perception was that Sheffield’s future should be built from its past, keeping its distinct historical layers and temporalities as opposed to super-modernity with its monolithic aesthetics/culture. Sheffield’s past was described as written in the walls of buildings; in the forgotten sounds of metalworks; in the traditional skills that have been lost or displaced.

**Phenomenal Space** > *City of Nature*: The common view was that Sheffield should recover its connection to nature and be made part of the city’s everyday experience, especially in relation to its neglected waterways. There was a strong sentiment that planning should consider uncovering the waterways and integrate them to the city and its public spaces - something that the future plan is taking forward.

### **Commemorating value: From urban *kintsugi* to evidence-based digital tools**

Public art or community art in the context of urban regeneration generally tends towards contrary positions: either it operates as a form of ‘art-washing’ that obscures the conflictual character of urban development “neutralizing the political character of both art and the city” (Deutsche 1996, 13), or it develops as a mode of antagonistic contestation in the form of community activism. Through ‘common-places’ I wanted to explore a third-way: to leverage participation and art’s symbolic capital towards the production of an alternative public sphere; an event that would bring people together to critically deal with the conflictual nature of the regeneration process in a constructive way, moving from opposition to proposition.

The final part of this project was conceived to reach out to the wider community; to share the knowledge gained during the workshops by inviting them to take part in a collective action: the production of a collective sculpture, which would be unveiled together with the ‘Community Use-Value Strategy’ – the instrument that would communicate the project’s findings. The sculpture was conceived as a way of commemorating Sheffield’s industrial past as a steel manufacturing powerhouse, while recognising forms of use-value through the celebration of the beauty of the imperfect. Using the metaphor of the biblical ‘golden calf’, where a community melts their possessions to produce an icon made of gold, the last part of the project invited the local community to gift metal objects to be melted and used in the production of a collaborative public sculpture. Embracing the same philosophy of the Japanese art of *Kintsugi* (‘golden joinery’), which is a traditional form of pottery mending that repairs cracks in broken objects with gold, the public sculpture was conceived as a symbolic mending of an urban tear by pouring the melted steel of the donated objects to fill an existing void, gap or crack in a selected site chosen by the

participants. The public sculpture therefore was understood as a symbolic form of ‘urban kintsugi’ to commemorate the local heritage and celebrate the beauty of the imperfect.

The collective sculpture in the form of a commemorative event, however, did not happen as originally planned. Due to budget restrictions, Site Gallery were forced reluctantly to cancel the delivery of the last part of the project. This meant a missed opportunity to scale the project by sharing it with the rest of the local community, and therefore legitimising the findings through the signing of the ‘Community Use-Value Strategy’. The question then was: how could one transform the explored methodology into a participatory tool to scale-up the project and enable broader engagement?

GPS (Global Positioning System) is a geolocation system that determines the position of an object in space. Modern digital photographic devices (including smart phones) that have GPS activated, store this information as part of a data-file for each picture, saving the location of where it was taken. This particular attribute makes it possible to visualise images embedded onto a single Google map. It also allows for combining images of multiple users into a joint collective map, as was done in the *Common-places* workshop. An open-source crowdsourcing platform would feed this feature and allow anyone to highlight aspects of value of a place and to contribute to the building of a collective map.

A pilot version of this PPGIS (public participation geographical information system) gathers data from existing social media platforms -such as Instagram-grabbing hash-tagged images and linking those GIS data points into a collective map. Further organisational layers build on top to allow for the information to be categorised according to the developed analytical framework. This participatory digital tool will allow the crowdsourcing of evidence on ‘things we hold dear’ at a broader scale, aiming to capture the complexity of that ‘reality vision’ to understand what constitutes use-value in a given particular space to a particular community of “networked publics” (de Lange and de Wall 2013). So far, the effectivity of this tool has still to be explored.

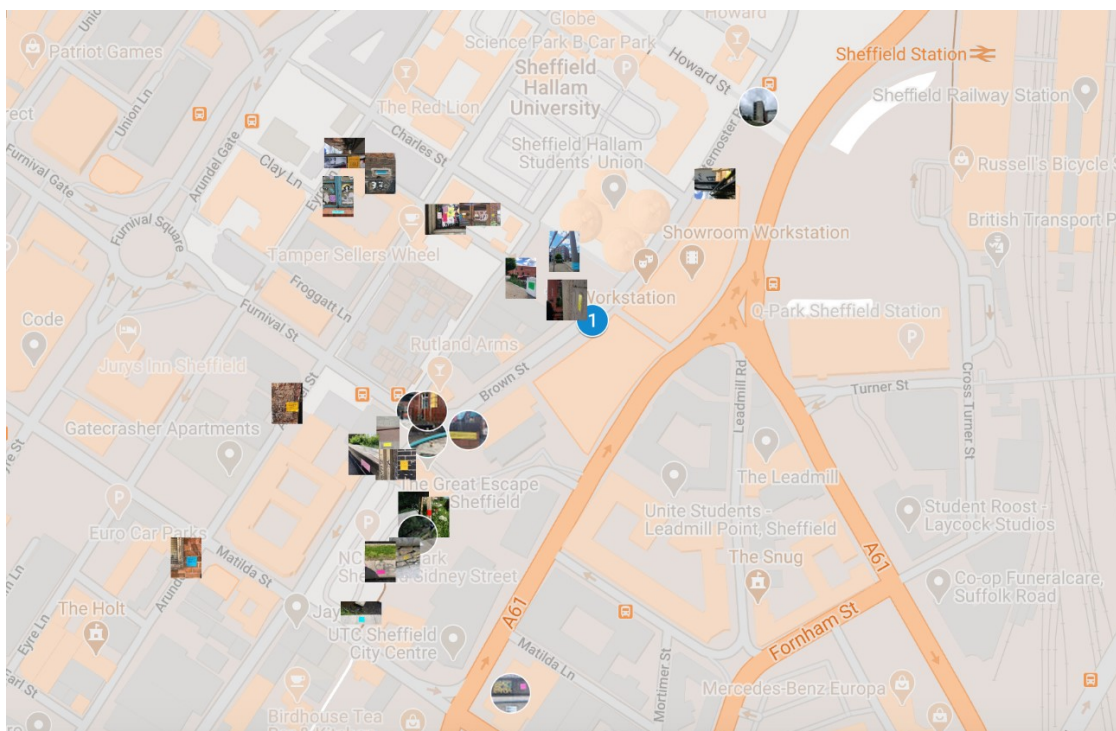


Figure 15: *Common-places* tags embedded into a collective google map of the Cultural Industries Quarter, Sheffield, 2019.

Source: generated by the author

## Conclusions

Extant approaches to urban heritage have expanded to embrace both tangible and intangible values of place. It is, however, a particular challenge to include 'the intangible' in urban planning, with concomitant limitations to identify use-value for a given community. The interdisciplinary strategy used in *Common-places* explored a diverse set of methodologies to address the use-value of heritage and challenge how urban regeneration processes can consider the intangible dimensions of heritage as the ongoing production of shared social and cultural fabric. First, by testing analogue and digital forms of subversive mapping to recognise and highlight the embodied knowledge of 'lived space'. Second, by developing a conceptual framework to capture an expanded notion of heritage in relation to the 'urban intangible' and help categorise the subjectivity of the experiential by qualifying the immaterial into a quantifiable form: the 'character' of a place. Third, by scaling-up the process through PPGIS and developing a crowdsourced digital tool to conquer legitimacy through evidence. The methods explored in this paper have aimed to capture and layer the embodied place-wisdom of a community to address the present-day challenges surrounding urban planning. However, more needs to be done to understand how the subjectivity of 'lived space' can be interpreted and built into planning law, by turning the immaterial into a material legal framework. Only then it will be possible to address the way urban regeneration strategies can balance growth – and its forms of exchange-value – while embracing an expanded notion of heritage that will protect aspects of use-value to local communities.

## Acknowledgements

The project was possible thanks to Site Gallery's 'City of Ideas' project. The conceptual framework was developed with the insightful advice of Dr. Andy Inch from the Urban Planning Department at the University of Sheffield. The project was made possible thanks to all the valued participants who gave their time and local knowledge to the project, and especially Kisha Bradly from Brightbox, who offered the space to run the second workshop in the Castlegate Quarter.

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