



Eat-Make-Play: A community enterprise that promotes participation and local trading for the benefit of the community.





The foundations for EAT+MAKE+PLAY were laid alongside the development of the mediation function in the community. This is a new concept for Birmingham. Traditionally, we see mediators as people/organisations external to the conflict. This paper presents conclusions after testing the role of mediator placed in the community. This product outlines our journey experimenting with this function and shows the benefits of this approach as well as the potential for replicability.

Foundations:

Alongside the formation of the Urbact Local Group in Birmingham, a decision was taken to choose a local ULG Coordinator from the group of residents working actively in B16. This was an unusual decision given ULG Coordinations are usually employed by cities who are URBACT's main beneficiaries. In order to progress, we had to follow a competitive procurement process to select the ULG Coordinator. This was a challenge because of the public procurement rules that require service providers to have track record and offer competitive prices. Social value in Birmingham public procurement is

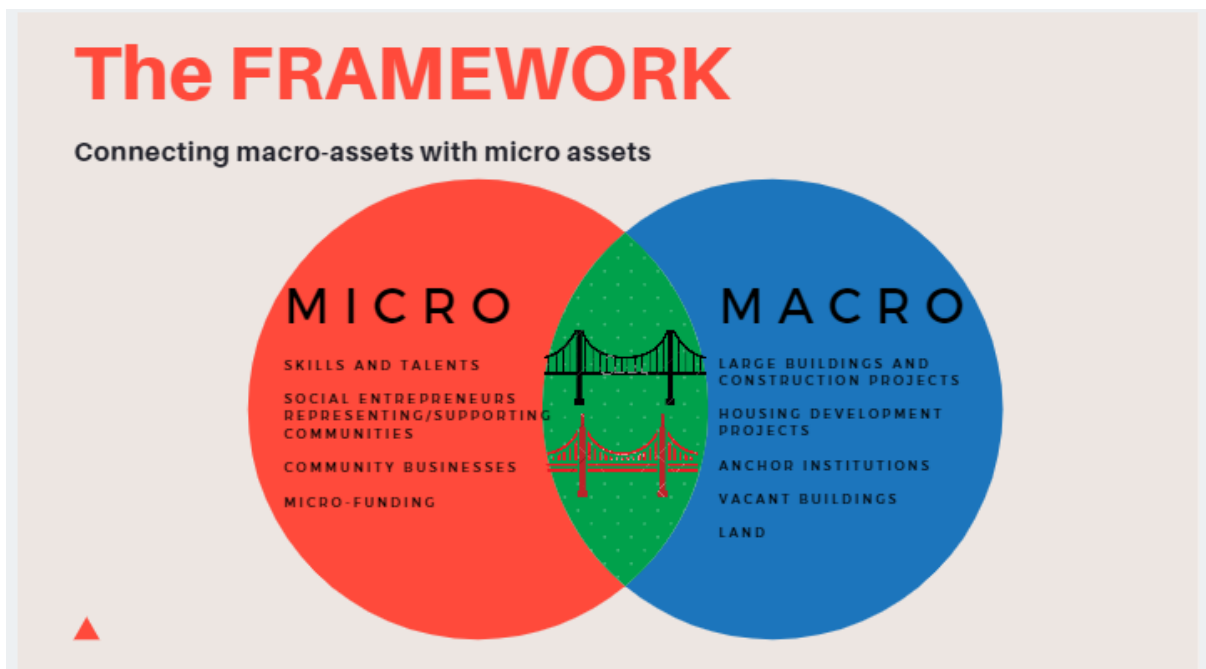
considered only in contracts exceeding £200,000. Therefore, this selection had to be made on the basis of quality and price.

Companions for Hope, submitted a bid that got selected and we were able to appoint Sam Ewell as the ULG Coordinator. This was a break-through but it didn't solve all the problems.

Selecting a community-based ULG Coordinator presented a number of other challenges. Members of the community rarely have an ability to inform internal or political decisions. Communities are consulted and can protest decisions but there is very little space for co-creation and joint decision making. Therefore, early in the process, we realised we had to incorporate the **MEDIATION** function into the ULG Coordination.

1. Mediator - the concept of investing in an individual from the community to be able to navigate between the community and the City Council.
2. approaching community mediation in terms of design (not as a static job description, but as a mediator of a design process).

This work was also linked to the theoretical framework of macro and micro relationships tested by the USE-IT project:



Main learning points in 2018 – potential transfer points:

- ❖ 2018 was about learning to work with the framework developed by the UIA funded USE-IT project – connecting macro-assets with micro-assets (see chart below).
- ❖ What the residents see in situations like this is a continuation of the same story they have been a part of for the last 30 years and welcomed the project with cynicism;

- ❖ ULG Coordinator (Sam) had to adapt his role from outside expert who happens to be a resident into a community connector.
- ❖ The City Council representative (Karolina) adapted her role and blended into the community – attended local events, didn't lead, instead participated, listened and supported what needed supporting;
- ❖ Learning to "role play" (to become aware of harmful, unhelpful patterns and to disrupt them by introduce a new dynamic, or a new patterns like Place of Welcome, Neighbour Nights, etc.)
- ❖ **Key:** Building trust and new relationships is what the mediation function enables.
 - Trust is most vital currency for building bridges "horizontally" (across the various tribes of a place, like B16) and "vertically" (between local community and public sector officials), only by trust can we tend the "edges" of different neighbourhoods (e.g., Port Loop vis-a-vis Ladywood/B16) or different operational cultures (e.g., informal associations of civic groups vis-à-vis the bureaucracy of a City Council).

Exploring the "Edge Effect" referred to in permaculture design (use edges and value the marginal) that is an incredible analogy to working on the edge of formal relationship with the City Council and informal with communities.



The incorporation of these concepts made it possible for the work of our ULG to focus on cultivating beneficial relationships among residents and across sectors. And it is in this space that the concept of creating an organisation that would continue this work beyond the project end-date was born.

From extraordinary event to everyday participation:

The EAT MAKE PLAY events took place in the summer of 2018 and 2019 on the playing field by the Edgbaston Reservoir. These were community-led events with the city administration providing support but this support was nearly invisible. This is a very important point – for any cities wanting to replicate this approach. There is a strong case for the City Administration to be supportive without pushing the officially approved vision over what the communities want and are capable to deliver.

This approach allowed us to dive deep and understand neighbourhoods and build resilience. We focused on building capacity in the communities to enable them to take greater ownership of their local assets and shape the local economy. As a result, we have become the bridge between communities and the large-scale assets.

What started as a one-off event needed to be transformed into an everyday participation. Events opened the underutilised space for meanwhile uses but the main outcome was yet to come – people wanted to build a stronger community and wanted to create spaces and activities together. There was a need for better organising.



There were several important milestones that determined our success:

- ❖ **Milestone 1: Maintaining participation.** The first event in 2018 attracted over 200 people and the events in 2019 brought together over 500 people (Eat Make Play) and 1000 people respectively (Play Out Til Tea),
- ❖ **Milestone 2: Constituting as a community business/social enterprise**
- ❖ **Milestone 3: Partnership with a local organisation that provided funding for the first community based everyday participation project a "library of things" on a B16 "high street"**

The company was established in August 2019 as the community benefit society – a community business for profit that recycles profit into the company's mission.



An empty shop located in the middle of a housing estate earmarked for demolition and badged by Birmingham Mail as „crime hit estate“ was transformed into a real community hub.



Eat Make Play where are we now:



EAT MAKE PLAY retained strong links with the Playing Field and runs a community garden there connecting both the new neighbourhood (Port Loop) with the „crime hit“ Ladywood Estate with growing and cooking activities. Growing and sharing food has been the first value of EAT MAKE PLAY from the start. Small planters have even been revived in front of the shop and are being looked after by the local residents.



Currently we operate a "share library" (aka, "Library of Things" [https://www.libraryofthings.co.uk /](https://www.libraryofthings.co.uk/)) and during COVID-19, we have developed into a mutual support groups/resilience hub. Eventually, we will develop the trading side of our community business (in order to remain a sustainable, viable presence in B16 beyond the REMIX project), but at the moment, that is secondary to our primary function of building community

participation.

- Sam Ewell, ULG Coordinator, Director of Eat Make Play

