# The Small Change Forum:
## Ingenious people make better places

# Conference report



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One day conference held at Oxford Brookes University, 7 October 2011, hosted by the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP) and community arts organisation, Multistory.

## Summary

CENDEP and Multistory's conference 'The Small Change Forum: ingenious people make better places' brought together 80 academics, practitioners, consultants and students from NGOs, universities, and the private and public sectors to engage in plenary sessions, seminars and thematic discussions which shared lessons and research for achieving community development through Small Change initiatives.

The conference examined the Small Change philosophy with specific focus on the role of culture and participatory arts as tools for development. It was agreed that the Small Change approach has the potential to challenge and change how we think, do and organise in order to sustain community development initiatives; the aim of which is to work more successfully with people so as to improve where they live and their life opportunities.

**Reports, presentations and podcasts from the conference are available at:**
http://oisd.brookes.ac.uk/architecture/cendep/ OR www.multistory.org.uk
**For more information please contact Jeni Burnell, Chair, The Small Change Forum:**
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## The conference

The conference marked the launch of The Small Change Forum (The Forum). The Small Change approach to community development starts with a common sense assumption: to achieve something big, you need to start with something small and start where it counts. Projects as part of this initiative explore how small, practical and mostly low budget interventions, if carefully targeted, act as catalysts for bigger long-lasting change; change that is designed to improve people's lives and their life opportunities.

The Forum is a research and practice initiative that has been developed by CENDEP and Multistory in association with Emeritus Professor Nabeel Hamdi. Its aim is to promote Small Change learning and practice, in the UK and internationally, with events, as part of this initiative, designed to share new ideas, tools, methods, practical wisdoms and principles that inform teaching and practice, and to create a policy environment conducive to change.

The conference was organised into keynote presentations, thematic presentations, afternoon break out discussion sessions, and final plenary discussions. Thematic presentations were organised into the following themes: Thinking; Doing; and Sustaining.

This report[1] therefore seeks to record some key points made in the sessions, and to serve as an 'invitation' to download presentations and podcasts made by presenters.

## Keynote presentations

Nabeel Hamdi and François Matarasso[2] delivered the keynote presentations, which were entitled 'The Resourceful Practitioner' and 'Another Perspective: how art remakes the world'. These topics explored the key themes and characteristics of Small Change and role of culture and participatory arts as a catalyst for small change. Key principles include:

- **Small Change themes** include; start by playing to your strengths, but have ambition; act and then reflect on your actions; intelligent practice builds on local 'grass-roots' knowledge.
- **Small Change characteristics** are; problem- and needs-based; participatory, organic and evolving; engage local skills, assets and knowledge; are based on achievable action and often not 'best' practice; require a level of 'optimal ignorance'.
- **Small Change assumes** that your own knowledge and assumptions should not result in harm being done (i.e. undermining local networks); don't get distracted by the symptoms, instead deal with the causes.
- **Being resourceful** includes; crossing boundaries; dealing with primary causes; rethinking processes; integrating design with improvisation.
- **Educating the resourceful practitioner** requires challenging the potential held within people. To do this includes requires using the 'so what' challenge and remembering PEAS (provide, enable, adapt and sustain).
- **There is a need to challenge** the perception that art is unconnected to development. This is because art and culture, like development, aims to express dreams, hopes and desires.
- **Art as a process** not just a product is about communication and aspiration
- **Art can be;** safe; creative; empowering; a resource; inspiring; FUN!

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[1] Report compiled by Jeni Burnell in collaboration with Emma Chetcuti, Karl Greenwood, Laura Howlett, Caroline Dewast, Daniela Mota, Nabeel Hamdi, François Matarasso and David Sanderson.
[2] Nabeel Hamdi is a development practitioner and author of several books including 'Small Change: About the Art of Practice and the Limits of Planning in Cities' (Earthscan, 2004). François Matarasso is a writer, researcher and consultant interested in community cultural practice.

- **Outcomes of art** cannot be guaranteed as there is nothing inevitable about the action of art on human beings or their societies.
- **Principles common to development that place art at the heart** of their objectives and values include; sustainable development; valuing diversity; imaginative curiosity; shared and open leadership; valuing volunteers, working for excellence, making friends with the media, and 'dig where you stand' (– whatever you do in terms of cultural development, do it with the resources that are your own).

## Thematic presentations

The thematic presentations explored Small Change: thinking (concepts), doing (practice) and sustaining (frameworks which support small change initiatives). Speakers within these sessions were invited to present; a short narrative outlining the main issues or events which prompted their intervention or thinking; an outline of their project or concept; a brief analysis of their approach highlighting key principles that could influence future learning and practice; and, to provide a short summary outlining the ingenious qualities that makes up their approach.

### 1. Small Change: Thinking

These sessions were aimed at challenging established norms and assumptions about how places, objects, programmes, and even policies, are made. Key issues and points include:

- **Creative tools**, such as drama, have the ability to educate and enable children and young people.
- **Digital media** in an era of globalisation is a powerful tool to link adolescents around the globe and cultures art, language, skills and common experiences.
- **The Small is beautiful ethos** helps us to think and diagnose, but it doesn't tell us what to do.
- **Meta-economics** gives value to the 'whole' person. As practitioners, it is our role to respond to the lives and needs of the people that we are working with. In order to do this successfully, one needs to understand all of the assets that a person brings to the process.
- **Liberate** by providing interventions that are useful and appropriate to context.
- **Ingenuity** is when practical problems are solved by combining few resources in a surprising way. Ingenious people are consistently good at devising these solutions.
- **If contemporary society is going to become better equipped** to tackle challenges, then it needs to become more engaged, pro-social and resourceful.[3]

### 2. Small Change: Doing

The role of the community artist or development professional working within this sector requires that they facilitate a process with the aim of discovering local knowledge, aspirations and dreams. These sessions were aimed at understanding how these professionals and others can support communities. Key issues and points include:

- **Physically changing places**, such as through painting, has the potential to act as a catalyst for positive change.
- **The role of the outsider** (individual or company) is a delicate balance of providing while enabling local people input and ownership of the process.

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[3] Information abour ingenuity and rescourcefulness taken from: Young, J. (2011) *How to be ingenious: comedians, engineers and survivalists*. RSA: London. Available online at: http://www.thersa.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/395475/How-to-be-Ingenious.pdf. Accessed: 18 October 2011.

- **Knowledge is often difficult to self-identify.** The arts has the ability to show people how much knowledge they have, both as an individual and as a collective.
- **Participatory arts** has the potential to connect people within communities through which small changes can occur.
- **Projects end**, however, to achieve small change it is important that the networks, relationships and collaborations, that formed during the project period, continue in one form or another.

## 3. Small Change: Sustaining

The Small Change ideal demands significant changes to the way we think, do and organise in order to sustain, community development. This session explores the frameworks within which small change can occur. Key issues/points include:

- **Creative collaborations** (both professional and within communities) are essential in exploring new ideas and ways of working and in challenging consensus to existing approaches to community development.
- **Education** has the potential to turn the intangible into tanglibe and ideas into action.
- **Co-production** means delivering services in equal and reciprocol relationships between professionals and users of these services.
- **The core economy** 'is made up of all the resources embedded in people's everyday lives – time, energy wisdom, experience, knowledge and skills'.[4]
- **Time banking** is a way of giving value to the core economy by establishing time as a unit of exchange for providing services etc.
- **A small change in practice**, such as giving value within a programme to people's assets, can lead to enormous changes in social impact.
- **Housing** can provide stability and security for excluded people, and in doing so, can encourage and enable people the opportunity to better their lives.
- **To achieve small change** it is important to engage with external factors, such as governance, in order to help sustain small initiatives.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** methods needs to be improved in order to better evaluate the long-term impacts of small change initiatives.



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[4] Information on the core economy taken from: nef (new economics foundation). Available at: http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/core-economy

## Breakout Sessions

The breakout Sessions asked participates to explore: 'what are the steps need in order to begin Small Change: thinking, doing and sustaining?' Issues and themes from the sessions include:

- **Doing Small Change requires;** finding the least you need in order to get started; being open to new ways of doing and willing to engage in the unknown; having big ambitions, but starting small; and to cultivate connections through existing and new relationships and / or partnerships.

- **Thinking Small Change requires;** developing rigour in our thinking by creating space (real and virtual) for shared debate and discussion; to better understand what happens through a range of practices and how this learning can inform our practice; and to be aware of the language so that we can use language as a tool to think our practice and values.

- **Sustaining Small Change requires;** leadership; learning and knowledge transfer; change and impact; ownership (empowerment, control and responsibly); non-dependency on external funding (economic self-sufficiency). Remember what should be sustained. This is not the project but the outcomes or the change process which keeps adapting as it goes.



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## Plenary sessions

**Issues and themes** discussed include:

- **Doing rather than talking** including live and virtual events, projects and publications.
- **Establishing the Small Change initiative** as its own entity and as an active resource for Small Change thinking, doing and sustaining.
- **Keep the clarity of the idea simple** – 'small change' – and open to everyone.
- **Strength in numbers** using the Small Change initiative to advocate for policy change and as a networking resource in order to collaborate in practice.
- **Freedom and order** shouldn't be seen as contradictory terms as it is important to strike the right balance between the two.
- **Leadership** is essential to the success and sustainability of a project.

**Next steps** include:

- **Establish the Small Change initiative**: including formalising the name, setting up the website and online forums, and exploring funding opportunities.
- **Continuing events:** including regional forums and networking events along with working sessions so as to 'set ourselves a *small change* problem and workshop a solution.'
- **Publications:** ranging from 'fanzine' style Small Change case files through to academic published papers, special journal editions and a book series.



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## Further contact information:

Reports, presentations and podcasts from the conference are available at:
CENDEP: http://oisd.brookes.ac.uk/architecture/cendep/
&
Multistory: www.multistory.org.uk

The Small Change Forum Facebook page:
http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/The-Small-Change-Forum/297499833594987

The Small Change movie on YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enp0H3nyoKg

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# Annex One: Programme

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9:00 - 9:30 | **Arrival / registration and coffee / tea** | | |
| 9:30 - 11:00 | **Welcome and keynote presentations**<br><br>**Jeni Burnell:** General introduction<br><br>**Paul Inman**: Dean/Pro Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment - Welcome address<br><br>**Nabeel Hamdi**: Emeritus Professor, Oxford Brookes University - *The Resourceful Practitioner*<br><br>**François Matarasso**: *Another Perspective: how art remakes the world*<br><br>Discussion | | |
| 11:00 - 11:30 | **Break** | | |
| | **SMALL CHANGE:** | | |
| | *THINKING* | *DOING* | *SUSTAINING* |
| 11:30 - 12:00 | **Paul Sutton**, C&T<br><br>*C&T: Using Drama and Digital Media for Education and Development in an age of Globalisation* | **Mukul Dhawan**, Akzonobel<br><br>*Let's Colour Project* | **Sunil Collett, Oliver Hamdi & Karl Greenwood**, Multistory<br><br>*Building Resilient Communities: the art of contextualising learning in schools. A case study from Leh, Ladakh.* |
| 12:00 - 12:30 | **Barbara Wood**, Biographer of E. F. Schumacher<br><br>*E.F. Schumacher: a guide to sustainable thinking and action* | **Danielle Smith**, Sandblast<br><br>*The role of the arts in human rights and conflict* | **Julia Slay**, New Economics Foundation (nef)<br><br>*Co-production: turning public services inside out* |
| 12:30 - 13:00 | **Jamie Young**, RSA<br><br>*How to be ingenious?* | **Penny Evans**, Knowle West Media Centre<br><br>*The University of Local Knowledge* | **Liljana Alcheva**, Habitat for Humanity Macedonia<br><br>*Housing and sustainable livelihood in Roma communities in Macedonia* |
| 13:00 - 14:00 | **Lunch** | | |
| 14:00 - 15:15 | **Breakout Session One**<br><br>Thinking small change | **Breakout Session Two**<br><br>Doing small change | **Breakout Session Three**<br><br>Sustaining small change |
| 15:15 - 15:30 | Breakout sessions feedback | | |
| 15:30 - 16:00 | **Break** | | |
| 16:00 - 17:00 | **Panel discussion**<br><br>*What are the next steps to achieving Small Change through cultural action?* | | |
| 17.00 | Close | | |

# Annex Two: Participants

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