



# Welcome to My Place: Subjective Maps Workshop Manual

By Christophe Bruchansky, James Thomson and Marianne Berglund, May 2010

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## *Aim*

This workshop is to encourage people to discuss their neighbourhood. It can be used as:

- a. A tool to better understand the identity of an area (in the context of an ethnographic study for example).
- b. An Introduction to a collective urban planning effort (e.g. design charrette, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charrette>) or in combination with a community mapping exercise (see for example <http://www.mappingforchange.org.uk>).
- c. An Introduction to subjective mapping.

The concept of drawing subjective maps in groups is not new but here are some tips based on our experience, along with a description of the techniques we used to facilitate the creative process.

## *Case study: Welcome to Finsbury Park*

This manual is based on the March 2010 workshop organised at the green lens studios for the Transition Finsbury Park association. We would like to thank the people from Faith, Football and Falafel for the photos shown in this document.



transition  
Finsbury Park

<http://greenlenstudios.com/>  
<http://transitionfinsburypark.org.uk/>  
<http://www.faihandfootball.info/>

Read here more about the workshop and the conclusions we drove from it:  
<http://curatedmatter.org/2010/05/09/welcome-to-finsbury-park/>



## Concept

Participants are invited to draw subjective maps of their neighbourhood. Subjective maps don't have to be geographically accurate; but they should communicate how a territory is perceived.

Anyone is welcome to draw a subjective map. It is an excellent method to share different perceptions about an area, and to identify its cultural characteristics.



- N4 Map by Gen Chou, Alex Head, 23rd March 2010



## *Execution of the workshop*

Total time: 2 hours

1. Preparation of the material:
  - *A1 or A2 sized paper sheets (1 per group)*
  - *A4 paper sheets (one per participant)*
  - *Sharpened pencils (1 per participant)*
  - *colour pencils, wax crayons or pastels (one set per group)*
  - *erasers (a few per group)*
2. Introduction to the workshop: Participants need to first hear the objectives of the workshop and a description of the area they are going to draw. One way of doing this is to screen the videos shot in the local area prior to the map making workshop, as described here: <http://curatedmatter.org/2010/05/09/welcome-to-my-place-workshop-manuals/>. Alternatively, photographs of the local area could also be used. The purpose of this is by no means to impose a theme, but to illustrate all the potential an area can hide and to open up peoples perspectives before drawing. The screening can be followed by a short discussion for participants to warm up and exchange first impressions.
3. Split the participants into groups of 3 to 5 people. We recommend using a random method such as distributing group numbers at the entrance (by handing bits of paper with group numbers on). We want to avoid people who already know each other well, to stay together during the workshop, as this might narrow down their perspectives and diminish the value of the exercise. Each group needs a facilitator and will all follow the steps presented by the workshop presenter.
4. The workshop is cut into a series of mini-sessions in order to facilitate the creation of the subjective maps.





- a. Warm up improvisation (10 minutes): Participants have one minute to draw their own subjective maps of the area on an A4 piece of paper. After which they show and explain their personal drawings to the rest of the group and introduce themselves.
- b. Dice session by turns (15 minutes):
  - i. Each participant is given a number from 1 to 6.
  - ii. The facilitator rolls the dice and asks the participant with the dice number to draw in 30 seconds a first element on the map (roll again the dice if the number is higher than the numbers of people in the group).
  - iii. The participant then rolls the dice again at the end of their 30 seconds to select the next participant to draw. Pencils should be used at this stage and participants have the option to erase elements previously drawn on the map during their turn.
  - iv. Repeat the same process for 15 minutes

Participants are welcomed to discuss the drawings at this stage. After several turns the participants might struggle to add new things and will need to think more about the area to find something new to add. This is where discussion comes in.

- c. Drawing together without talking (5 minutes): For 5 minutes, the group has the opportunity to refine in silence the map they are creating, to add a little more depth and detail – in the absence of small talk.
- d. Free drawing session (30 minutes): At this stage, the maps are looking quite busy and the groups will have time to improve, edit and add colour to their maps for the next 30 minutes. The first mini-sessions prevented the groups from elaborating unifying strategies for their maps. They also avoided any paralyzing distress that can often happen in front of a large blank piece of paper. The mini-sessions brought a level of random playfulness and often a lack of structure to the maps. But this hopefully leads on to interesting discussions in the groups – as they attempt to make sense of it, and by the same occasion elaborate a narrative for the area. The facilitator will be busy with the group so it's a good idea to get someone to take notes on what people are saying.



5. At the end of the workshop, each group presents its map to the other groups (around 5 minutes each), which will naturally lead to a discussion or debate about what has been created. It's a nice way to softly close the workshop.





## ***What to do with the maps***

The usage of the maps depends on your communities objectives. They can:

- Be exhibited to drive further public discussions about the area, its history and cultural components.
- Serve as documentation for the area, to be used for further cultural studies.
- Inform the design of a consolidated subjective map – perhaps collaborating with other surrounding communities

We hope that this manual will be useful. If you plan to use it for one of your activities, please let us know how it goes: [info@curatedmatter.org](mailto:info@curatedmatter.org).

Thanks for reading, Christophe Bruchansky, James Thomson and Marianne Berglund