

## **Create & Connect : wearable stories**

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## **RGS-IBS Annual International Conference 2014**

### **Geographies of co-production**

**Strand: Geographies of Making / Making Geographies**

**Workshop Title: Create & Connect: Wearable Stories**

## **CONTEXT - MEANING - CRAFT**

Welcome to the 'Wearable stories' workshop  
We would like to invite you to sit with us and make.  
What you make is yours to instil with meaning and yours to keep.

We appreciate being part of your meaning making and maybe we can share a few thoughts on why we value the making process as a catalyst for creativity and design thinking processes that can transcend the object.

As we navigate through our lives we often collect and keep mementoes, souvenirs and found objects that remind us of significant moments, times, places and experiences. However for the vast majority of people, making and material knowledge is limited and a sense of agency with our 'stuff' is missing. In his book 'The case for working with your hands' Matthew Crawford (2009) suggests that in order to be responsible for the world and our sense of being within it we need to feel that it is intelligible and the provenance of our things need to be brought closer to home.

This session is based on a recent research project with female artisan craft producers in Zanzibar, which used participatory action research and design thinking methodologies. Geographies of making are complex and any achievements or insights are often small. The main thing we have learned is that meaning making through craft can give people space to think and ownership of the craft making process is paramount. Otherwise it is just another exercise in reproduction.

In this workshop we will explore how different material objects can be used as cultural probes in order to articulate cultural identities and values. It will use contemporary studio jewellery making as a device to engage participants in a dialogue about the everyday and will explore how sensory experiences with the material world define who we are.

The aim is to combine design thinking and craft knowledge in a practical co-creative way to interrogate the emotional connections between people, materials and body adornment. It will use life experiences, storytelling and narrative structures to inform the making of a wearable jewel.

We would like to focus on the following two questions:

- How can the intrinsic preciousness of 'things' often discarded (but kept) be re-appropriated through creative making?
- How can objects, fragments and materials be beautified and re-contextualised through design thinking and processes of craft (reclaiming, reworking, transforming and relocating)?

**To contextualise this workshop the following positioning text / field notes and images from the research undertaken with female artisan craft makers in Zanzibar documents initial outcomes.**

**Create & Connect:** Connecting female artisan craft producers in Zanzibar with tourist markets.

**Create and Connect** is a multidisciplinary research project that brings together researchers from tourism, craft practice, visual communication and service design. Focusing on female artisan craft producers and the tourist market in Zanzibar (Tanzania) it aims to understand the socio-cultural links and identity of crafted souvenirs and the practices of production, identifies barriers and opportunities and explores ways to increase links between maker and market. This pilot project took place between January – July 2014 and was funded through the Sheffield Hallam University IMAGINE funding scheme.

Zanzibar, a LEDC, is heavily dependent on tourism (44% of GDP; 75% of Export Earnings). While tourists buy souvenirs to retain affective connectivity to the place and the people they visited, the majority of souvenirs sold in Zanzibar are currently imported - often mass-produced in Kenya with no link to Zanzibar's rich and very distinct Swahili cultural heritage. Although the sharing with visitors of local traditions of craft-making can be an important source of social and economic empowerment for women, many Zanzibar women are excluded due to socio-cultural and socio-economic barriers.

**Create & Connect** uses a range of service design methodologies and toolkits in order to capture viewpoints of all stakeholders involved in the product chain from maker to market. This includes working with Zanzibar artisans through practical co-creation strategies, and by sequencing the experiences of producers, consumers and other stakeholders. By combining perspectives of human geography, sustainable tourism, participatory action research, design thinking and jewellery making this projects main aim is to offer the Zanzibar woman a practical way to situate themselves and their craft in relation to their culture and target markets.

Following an initial scoping trip to Zanzibar in March 2014 and the development and testing of design thinking workshops in Sheffield a second field trip was undertaken during June and July where a series of workshop activities were undertaken with a specific craft making Community. The findings of the initial scoping trip and test workshops are not detailed here but form the context and background of a journal article currently being written by Researchers Hanson and Levick-Parkin. The following text and images documents the co-creative design thinking workshops with the CHAKO recycle workplace in Zanzibar Town and will be used as the key case study within the forthcoming paper.

### **Field trip - June 25<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2014**

Maria Hanson worked with the **Chako Recycle Workplace** just outside of Stone town, Zanzibar, Tanzania

#### **Objectives**

To deliver a series of co-creative design thinking workshops alongside product awareness activities that relate to both the global souvenir market and possible opportunities for how reclaimed / recycled materials can be used more broadly within design.

These workshops were instigated and organised by Maria Hanson and Melanie Levick-Parkin. They were delivered collaboratively with Ann Ndeke, a Masters student (SHU) from Kenya whose dissertation is based on female empowerment in Zanzibar.

#### **Design Thinking activities:**

Day 1 - Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> June

##### **Activity:**

Maria and Ann visited the local markets to buy visual / material resources for the co-creative workshop.

What things give a sense of identity?

Of the place?

Of the culture?



Day 2 - Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> June

**Activity:**

Presentation – Introduction to myself:

Images - Showing me as a mother / wife / craft-maker / teacher / exhibition curator etc...



**Activity:** We spent the rest of the time on Day 1 at CHAKO - working with the women - Making beads – being taught by them. Sharing knowledge and Building confidence. Watching / participating in (if appropriate) glass making - assisting in finishing?

It was important for both Ann Ndeke and I to become immersed in the workshop activities. To understand how the women work – how much they achieve in a day – what their capabilities were.



Day 3 - Friday 27<sup>th</sup> June

**Activity: What is design thinking?**

Using Participatory action research and Design thinking was a strategy to empower the women to think for themselves. Sharing knowledge is an important aspect in this.

THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS IN THIS PROCESS.

ALL THE THINGS WE DO WE WILL DO TOGETHER



**Activity: Drawing - Ice breaker**

The circle task – All participants were given a sheet of paper with a series of squares with a circle inside. All circles were the same size and positioned in the same place within the square. The task was to create drawings of as many different things as possible incorporating the circle. The 'SUN' was given as an example.

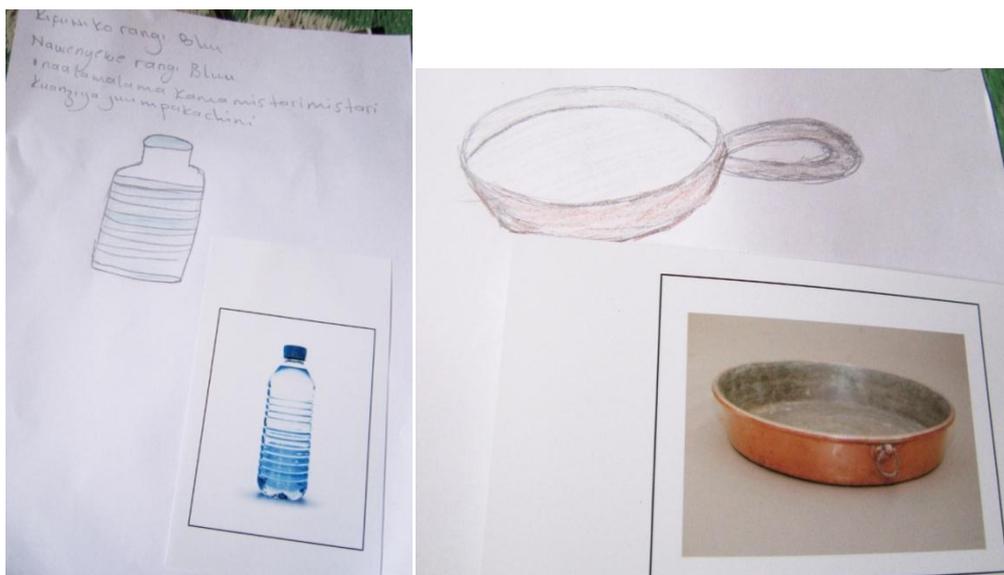


The circle drawing task was a great ice breaker. At first when explained there were some audible sounds of anxiety. It was important to reinforce that there were no right or wrong answers and emphasise that drawing skills were not important. I was amazed by the quiet contemplation and concentration within the room for the period of this activity. I had specified a time for this activity of 10 minutes but this was insufficient and we spent closer to 20.

#### Activity: Pictures - Describing - Drawing

For this activity participants were required to work in pairs. Each pair was given a pack of picture cards with images of universally recognisable 'Things'. These included flowers, baskets, spoons, bottles etc.....

- One person had to describe the picture without saying what it was.
- The other person had to draw what they thought it was from the description.
- They then swapped role.
- The results were then shared with the rest of the group.



#### Activity: Sharing - Exploring - Understanding personal objects:

The women craft workers at Chako who participated in the design thinking workshops had been asked to bring 3 small personal items from their homes

- something useful
- something special
- something they identify as being a Zanzibar thing

Format:

- Participants to place items on the floor / table
- walk around and look at objects
- write a word that comes to mind on a post-it note and place next to object
- Discuss - The response of objects communicates without a specific context. when discussing further does it change the meaning of the object (verbal context)
- The items were photographed.



**Activity: Creating meaning - Changing the way an object is viewed**

Maria to set up a series of visual / material contexts

- The contexts utilised things brought from the UK alongside things bought in Zanzibar.
- each context was numbered
- Participants were asked to choose one object from the CHAKO product range and place in the mini contexts - write a word or phrase based on impression of object in its new environment / what does it look like - how does it make you feel?
- The group then discussed ideas and photographed the objects in context.



Day 4 – Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> June

**Activity: Visual Presentation**

## Zanzibar - A Western View

This visual presentation had been created whilst in the UK and used images that had been taken during the first scoping visit alongside images sourced through the web.

- Feeding the brain with visual sensory stimulus - why is this important
- Is this western view their view?
- What is their sense of identity - Culture?
- How might this western view help them to think creatively?



## Activity: Creating own contexts and meaning

- Participants worked in pairs
- Each pair selected a CHAKO product (This could be different from one chosen earlier)
- From the materials available they were asked to create their own visual contexts - assemble - create a composition - place the objects in the context.
- We then photographed the objects in context and had a discussion about their creative decisions. Why they chosen certain materials, the colour, symbolism, composition, textures. Did it change the way they viewed the product and why.



## Activity: Visual Presentation

We had undertaken a test workshop in Sheffield with a mixed group of participants (cultures and backgrounds) and created a visual presentation of the outcomes to share with the group in Zanzibar. The test workshop had used some of the same material resource and products brought back from the initial scoping trip to Zanzibar.



### Activity: Interactive sharing session

Sharing products brought from the UK

- things made by Maria
- some jewellery made by others

This was an opportunity to handle / feel / wear / discuss. The important thing about design thinking is dialogue - sharing - feeling confident that you can have an opinion.



### Activity: Visual Presentation

Jewellery and products that use waste / recycled materials



This visual presentation was going to come later in the day but based on observations and reflections from the previous day it had become apparent that providing visual stimulus was a powerful tool that was enabling the women to think and connect. The jewellery and products shown in this presentation were varied and quite radical in places and I was surprised at how excited and well received this was. There were many exclamations and much intrigue regarding both the materials, forms and structures. The women were amazed that items perceived as waste could be made into such beautiful things.

**Activity: Beauty and value of waste.....and found objects**

- Participants were asked to spend 15 minutes in the local environment and bring back 3 items of waste materials / found objects.
- We then laid them out on the table on white sheets of paper.
- The women were asked to discuss why they had picked the things up, what was interesting about them? To identify materials / forms / surfaces / patterns / printed images
- How could these characteristics be used - exploited?
- What methods could be used to change the materials and their forms - if glass was smashed into crystals could they be melted into a mould to create a new form?
- Maria used post-it note system to record discussion.





This collecting activity was amazing, but would not have worked as well without the previous presentation. Fuelled with ideas and possibilities the women embraced this activity and responded with enthusiasm and laughter. However they also recognised that without the knowledge of making skills and the right tools transforming the waste materials would be difficult. There was a real sense on desire to learn new things and the women stated that they already felt more empowered by the visual presentations and the activities they had participated in.

Day 5 – Monday 30<sup>th</sup> June

**Activity: Visual Presentation**

Made in Zanzibar - Presentation:

This presentation showed images from:

- Other craft making groups / organisations on the island of Zanzibar visited during my first field trip.
- It presented their products, Indicate where they are based
- The aim was to find out if the Chako women were aware of these groups / products? And would they like to share knowledge with them? Learn from each other's experience?





**Activity: Working with glass and wine bottle caps**

Maria spent a few hours working with the materials, tools and resources available within the Chako workplace and then shared findings with the group, talking about the approach and thinking.





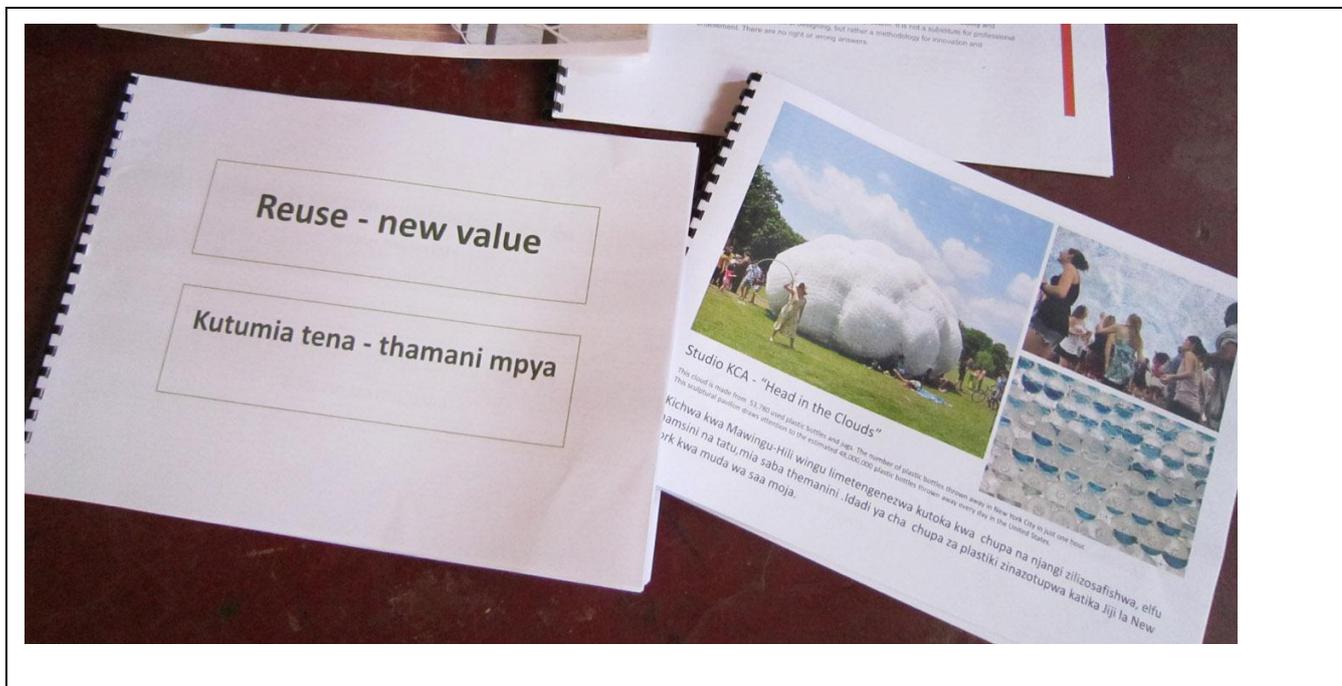
**Activity: Visual Presentation**

Public Art that uses waste / recycled materials - RAISING AWARENESS

Could this be done in Zanzibar?

How could waste be collected? Mobilising lots of communities around the island.

Creating art work together in the middle of stone town



The following texts are important points of reference that underpin thinking within this research enquiry.

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