PILOT STUDY

JUMP TO THE WATER

The pilot study consisted of an experiment conducted on the Isle of Mull with participants drawn from five different non-profit organisations operating on the island.

GRAPHIC NOVEL: VOLUME I
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Volume I discloses the practical element of this doctoral study, complementing chapter 4. With focus on the socio-emotional interactions among the participants and their interaction with the social environment supporting the research situations. The reflective drawings are displayed entangled with my own reflections and the participants' reflections and insights.

Legend for the different type of bubbles used in this document:

General explanation, fact narration and contextual reflexions from my point of view.

My own feelings and reflexions

My own voice and questions

Participant's voice

Insights, relevant participant's voices

Find the full transcripts from where the quotes in this document have been extracted in Appendix 5.2

Pilot Study. Jump to the water

This graphic novel illustrates the practice element of the study:

Getting Together: A Context-based Study on Informal-Mutual Learning and Community Co-design with Cultural-Historical Activity Theory.

Mirian Rodriguez Calvo

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of The Glasgow School of Art for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The foundations for conducting an early pilot study lay in the nature of the doctoral project, which follows a design research approach. Therefore, the theoretical and practical components aim for balance and the establishing of a reciprocal feedback-loop, enabling one to inform the other and vice versa. In the same way this graphic novel complements and expands the content of the thesis.

My commitment has been social, gathering insights around the value of co-design processes within the communities involved, and therefore, advancing a sense of the impact of community co-design upon these communities. On this matter, my research question has been reframing itself alongside the development of the pilot case. It began with the idea of measuring (after analysing) the impact, and lately, its focus is on identifying the benefits and meaningful values that community co-design brings about to the participants and to their communities. From the evidence gathered in the pilot study, this involves the co-construction of knowledge and communal meanings in some universals (social commitments and beliefs) through the development of an informal learning process, which co-design has the means to ignite.

Likewise, with the pilot study I wanted to familiarise myself with the dynamics of Leapfrog, gaining a deeper and descriptive account about the co-design process and aiming to understand the participants' lives we collaborate with – their motivations and contextual factors.

It consisted of an experiment seeking to put the PhD research project and myself, as a researcher, in touch with one of the Leapfrog major projects called Peer-To-Peer community Engagement. It focused on co-designing distinctive ways to conduct community engagement across sociocultural and geographic nuances in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The project brought about a series of co-design workshops with a wide range of non-profit organisations and the voluntary sector to develop engagement tools with the intention of assisting remote rural communities to carry out quality citizenship participation that covers a broad demographic – particularly working with communities on two islands: the Isle of Bute and the Isle of Mull.
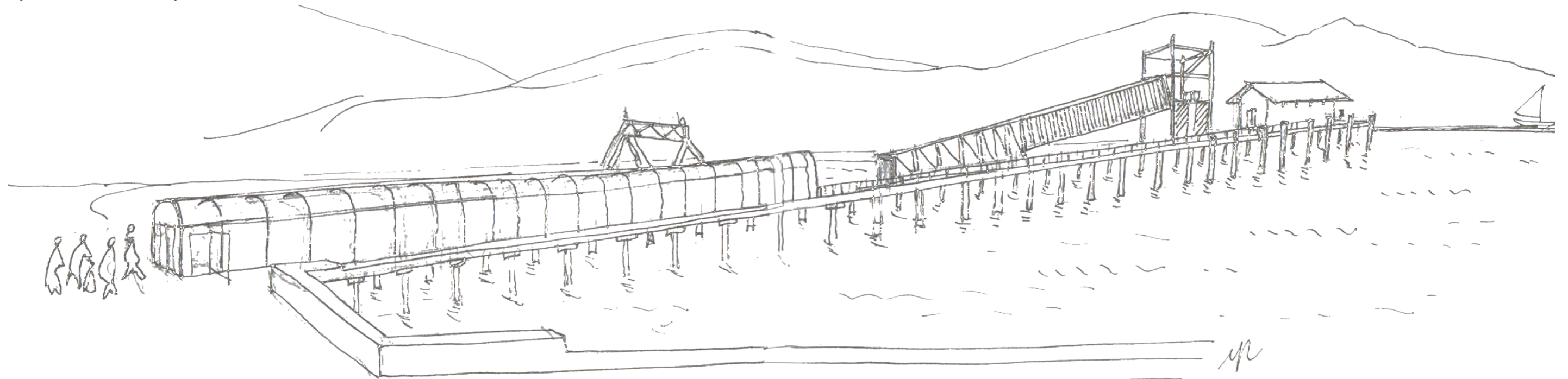
CRAIGNURE MULL FERRY TERMINAL 02/2016

In this case, the doctoral research used a strand of this major project as a platform to set up and conduct a practice-led pilot study. This allowed me to introduce myself in a real-life scenario - in an experiential learning environment that enabled me to gather a better understanding about the context of research. This comprised a process in which I gradually was able to gain access to the human dynamics of some participants engaging in the community co-design workshops on the Isle of Mull. At the beginning, the main motivation for people to come along and take part in this creative and collaborative process was to learn and improve their community engagement skills and resources.
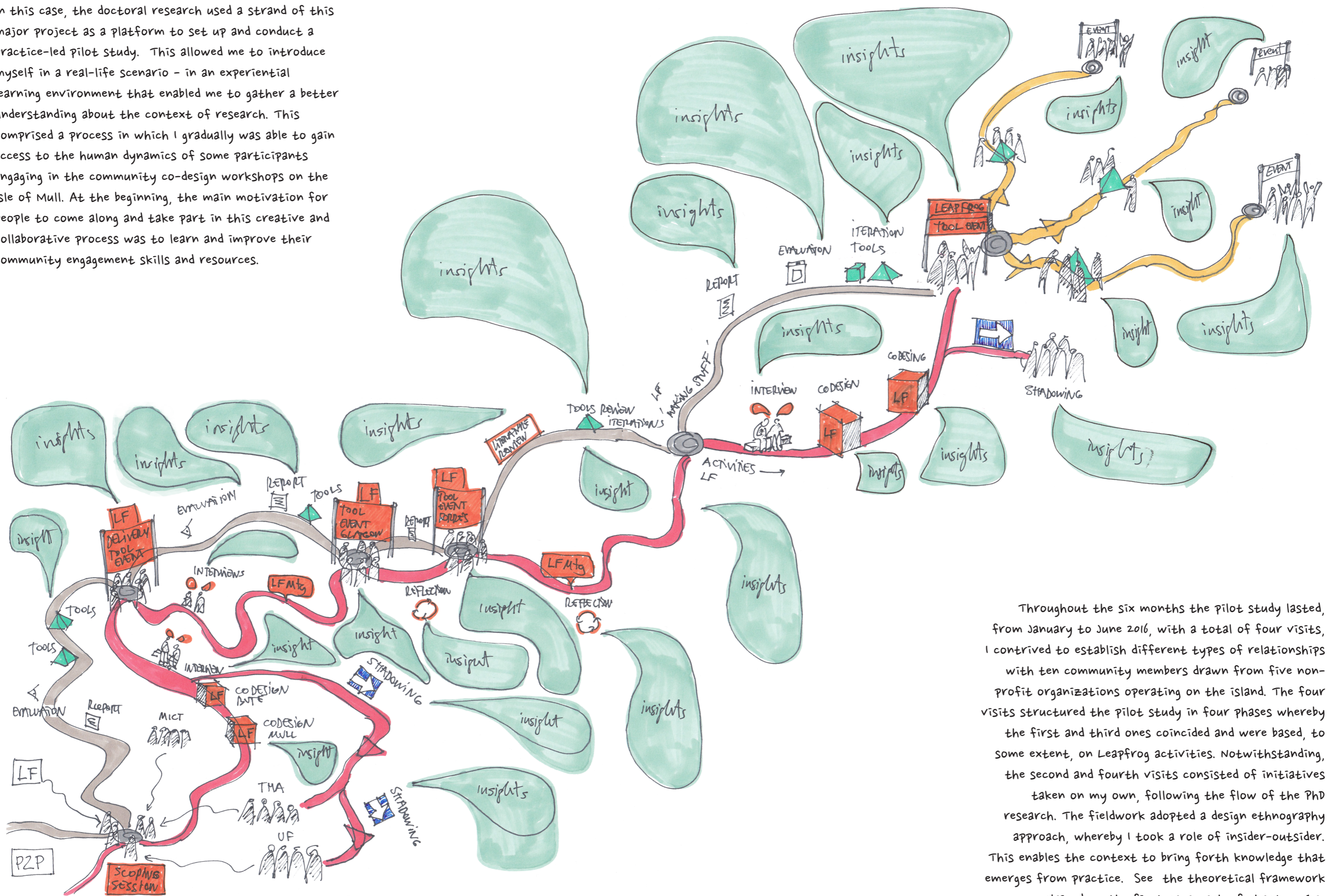

Throughout the six months the pilot study lasted, from January to June 2016, with a total of four visits, I contrived to establish different types of relationships with ten community members drawn from five non-profit organizations operating on the island. The four visits structured the pilot study in four phases whereby the first and third ones coincided and were based, to some extent, on Leapfrog activities. Notwithstanding, the second and fourth visits consisted of initiatives taken on my own, following the flow of the PhD research. The fieldwork adopted a design ethnography approach, whereby I took a role of insider-outsider. This enables the context to bring forth knowledge that emerges from practice. See the theoretical framework explained on the first paragraph of chapter 4.2.

Preparation for Co-design

The first time I went to the Isle of Mull was to take part in two co-design workshops facilitated by the Leapfrog team in which I adopted a participant-observer role. I arrived on the Isle of Mull after taking a train from Glasgow to Oban, which took me about three hours, and then a ferry to Craignure, another forty-five minutes. The journey was wonderful, with a grey sky and white mist among the mountains blurring the landscape. On the train, I was angry with myself because I had missed the first train to Oban. This meant that I would be late for the first co-design workshop. Yet I was also aware that I had to change my attitude – I needed to recover my enthusiasm and good mood in order to be able to fully engage with participants. To change this, I adopted peripheral vision, the one that embraces the world. I drew and wrote on my notebook what I saw through the window reflecting on my readings and clarifying my mind.
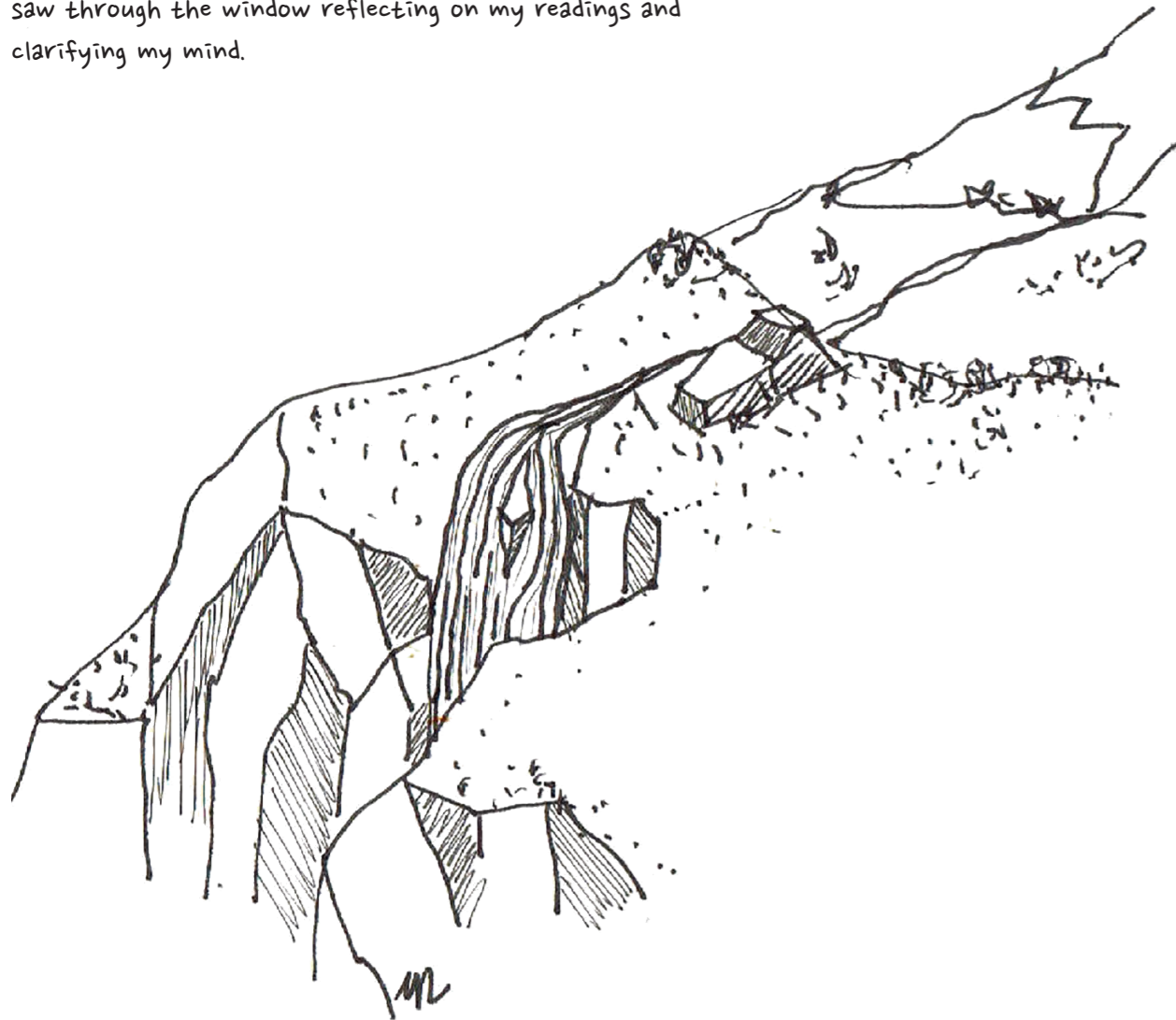
My emotions at that point were similar to when a child is on the edge of the swimming pool, just about to jump to the water. The child has attended many swimming lessons and has learnt how to swim. Yet this time she is self-aware about the experience she is living. Developing this self-awareness helped me to build, upon my skills and knowledge, a notion of self-confidence, which became stronger little by little through my participation during the pilot study.
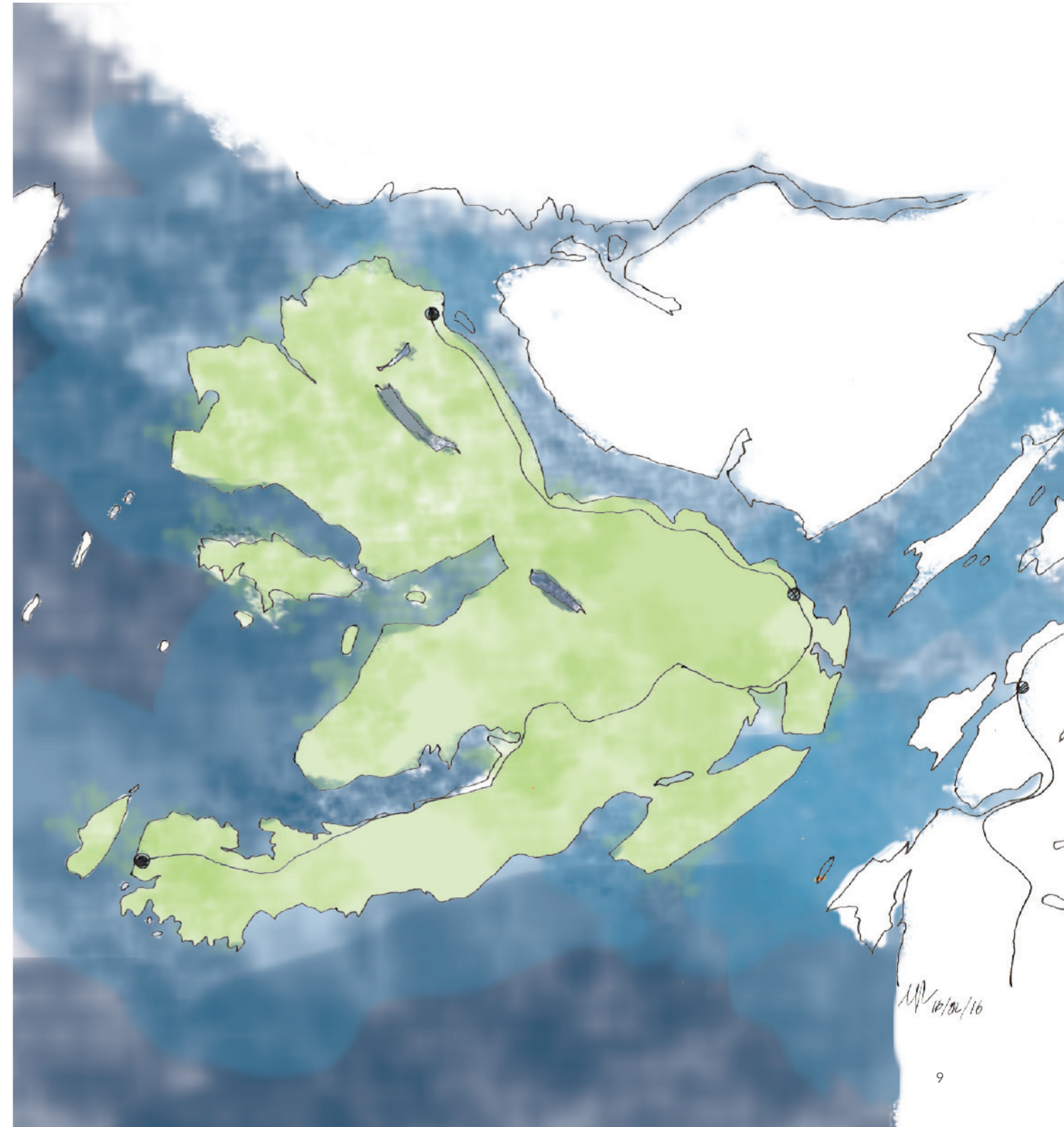
Co-design situations

co-design workshop 1

When I arrived at Craignure, I quickly found the building where the workshop had already begun about half an hour before. I felt happy when I saw myself inside. The building was a detached house, almost in front of the Ferry Gate, just opposite the main road, with blue and white facades and a sign saying 'An Roth community Enterprise centre'. I asked at reception where the workshop was and a girl kindly told me to take the stairs and go to the first floor, so I did.

The door was closed but it had a little window through which I could see my peers. I waited outside the room for two minutes before entering. I was concerned about the impressions that participants might form about me. Often first impressions are crucial in gaining trust because, in my experience, when one meets another person, a reaction happens, which may be friendship or rejection, like poles that attract or repel. Obviously, this is not enough to build trust, but establishing a good starting connection certainly helps. I went in quietly and sat on the first empty chair I saw within reach, joining one of the groups.

The workshop was held in a small room with two tables. On each table there was a designer facilitating the conversation with three participants. The third designer adopted a passive role. It was this last one who firstly realised I was there. She greeted me and introduced me to the group of people.
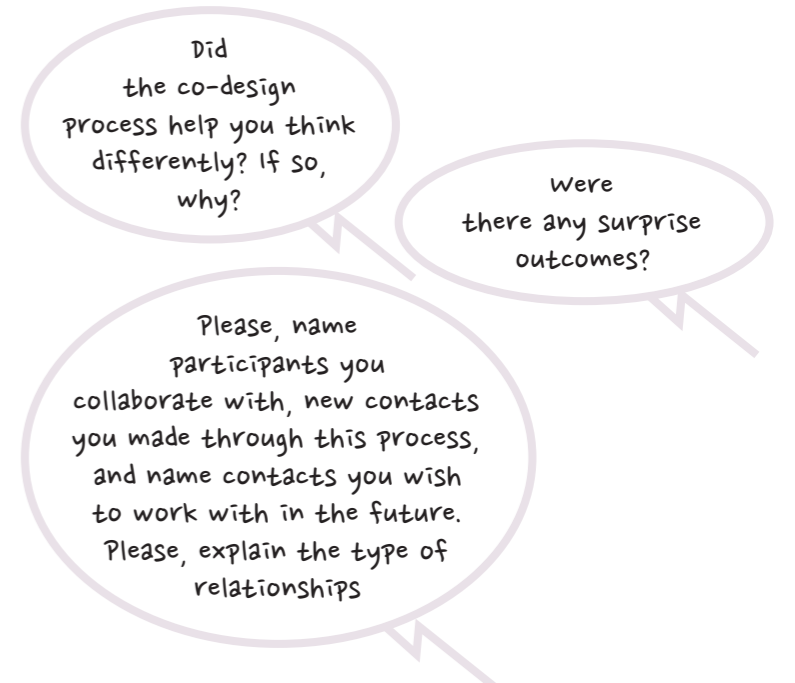
The first thing I noticed was that the physical space was too small to accommodate collective and creative activities regarding the number of people in the room.

(See more about the physical realm in section 4.2.1 co-design workshop 1)

At that moment, people were discussing barriers and opportunities experienced in their communities. One of them was the conflict between newcomers and locals:

Newcomers come looking for confinement and tranquillity. Yet locals aim to break the isolation, bringing new job opportunities particularly oriented to the young population, thereby invigorating the local economy.

The problem is that younger people leave the island to study or find jobs and then, few come back. The island is increasingly ageing.

It takes a long time to be accepted as a 'local'.

Ok, you can engage but how to make it sustainable?

Some residents feel intimidated to share their opinions in public because everyone knows each other and they are afraid to disapoint their bosses.

Newcomers are reluctant to engage in community matters.

People are busy and cannot engage!

Although we spent little time analysing possible opportunities, I had the impression that participants felt more comfortable pointing out the problems, rather than viewing them as opportunities to improve their situation.

In preparation for my trip, I had designed an engagement tool consisting of a small folding leaflet, which sought to gather information based on the thoughts and reflections of participants. Made of paper as a triptych, the leaflet contained three questions:

Did the co-design process help you think differently? If so, why?

Were there any surprise outcomes?

Please, name participants you collaborate with, new contacts you made through this process, and name contacts you wish to work with in the future. Please, explain the type of relationships

The front part had a drawing of the island and on the back it contained the Leapfrog website and digital links to social media. This one could be detached from the others and given to participants as a reminder of the event, but also as a gesture of our mutual commitment.

At that moment I interacted with Participant 4 showing her the tool and encouraging her to have a look at it and, at some point, answer the questions. She looked at the tool and curtly replied:

The digital information on the back was useless on Mull because there is no broadband connection. We can't use digital tools to enhance community engagement.

I felt that my first approach to her had failed and decided to take some distance and try to approach her more empathically the next time.

At the break people were glad to stop, they looked tired, hence they stood up and gathered in the food-drink area, creating a bottleneck and a long wait for getting coffee. People kept talking about barriers. This happened unnoticed to my eyes, but after dinner, one of the designers highlighted this behaviour.

This made me think that this collective dynamic is in itself a barrier in order to transforming their activities.

This first workshop aimed at analysing participants' conflicts in their local activity (community engagement) and searching for opportunities to transform their practices through co-designing engagement tools the following day.
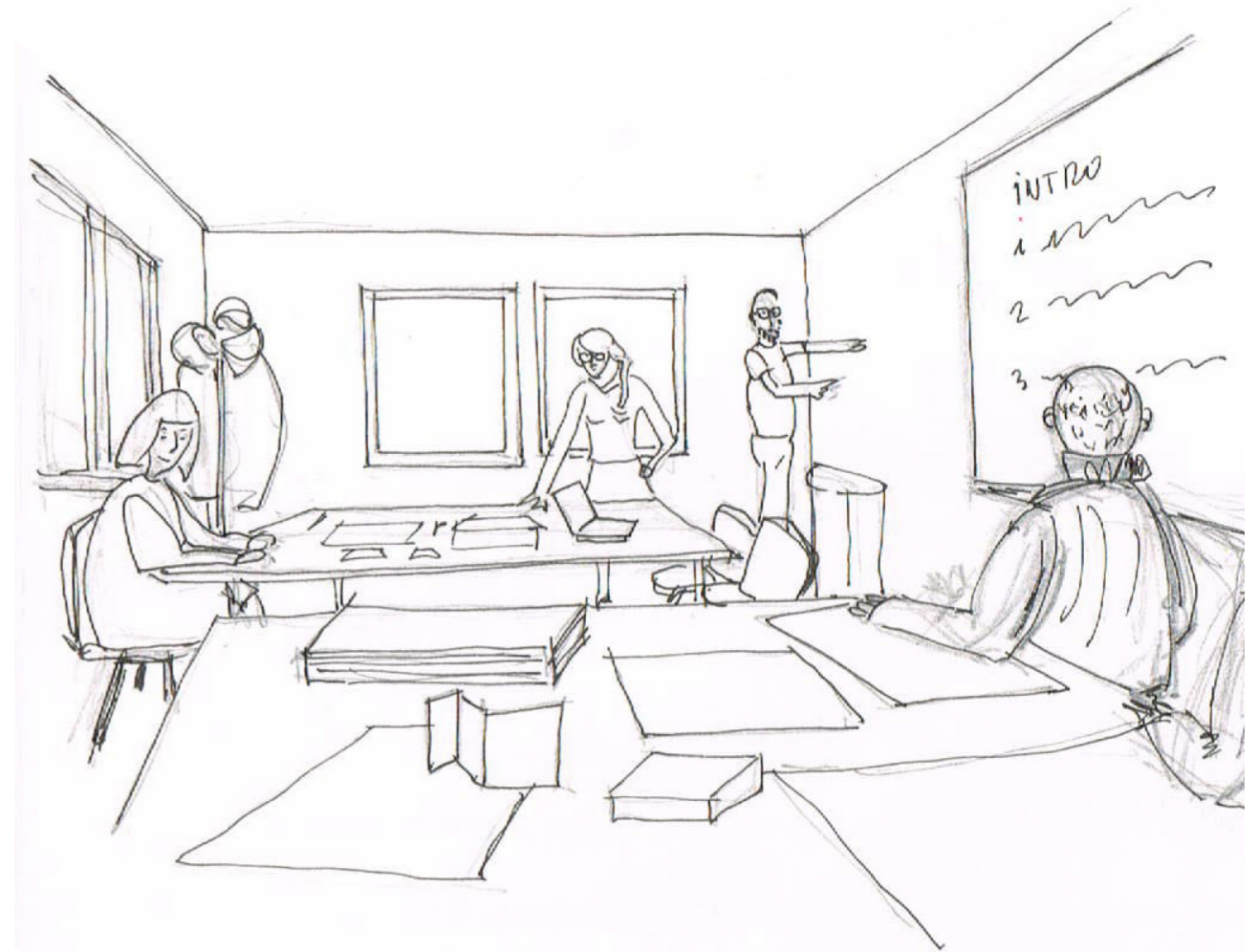
we resumed the workshop by sharing the barriers identified by both groups and afterwards, we returned to work in small groups. My group still had the same people sitting exactly in the same place as before the break. Yet on the other table two participants left. We talked a little about how such barriers or challenges could become opportunities. This task was tedious and not very fruitful, from my understanding, because they kept a complaining attitude.

Afterwards, one of the designers took the initiative and directed us to a negotiation phase. To agree was easy since the barriers of one group and the other were practically the same. To some extent, all participants agreed to focus on improving community engagement, on how to reach more people – people who do not engage in their communities. Therefore, the themes for the second workshop were: young locals, rapid tools and planning event tools.

I noticed that almost every conversation, any barrier identified, was somehow related to a particular geographic location. I realised I did not know much about the participants' contexts (settings, background, culture, what community they belong or what they do for a living). I also realised that those interwoven conversations were also the vehicle for sharing knowledge. In a way, they were learning from each other but they were not aware, indeed, that I was learning too.

Leapfrog

Challenges

Opportunities

ML 22/01/16
isle of Mull

Is it worth coming tomorrow?

Well, yes! I would be very grateful if you could come because tomorrow we will conceptualise ideas all together based on today's workshop.

I formed the impression that Participant 4 had a sceptical perspective of the world. She spoke little with the group and I observed her scrutinising us (the outsiders). She mainly talked to Participant 3. I thought she was not coming any more. Obviously, I was mistaken, for the following day she came.

Reflective session

After dinner, I started writing up what happened and I began drawing the participants and some moments of the workshop. In this session, I noticed that in theory, things are clearer as I describe on chapter 4.2.1 Reflective Session (2).

Additionally, observing was difficult because there were a larger number of variables interacting simultaneously. For instance, there were parallel conversations happening at the same time which were also intertwined. In fact, the main conversation, which was proposing ideas, sparked Participants 3 and 4 to relate an idea with a concrete case of their own practice. In other words, there were different levels of conversations, and this could be related with the levels of participation. People belonged to different organisations and they thought of their own issues, working separately without knowing they could work together.

co-design workshop 2

The following day I went to the second co-design workshop with the research team, which was in the same room. We arrived early and surprisingly a new participant was already sitting there and working with her computer.

> She transmitted energy and enthusiasm, but I recalled my first one-to-one contact with Participant 4, so I decided that before talking to anyone, I would take some time to observe the participant's behaviour. I felt that we all needed time to acclimatise to the environment. People need some time to feel comfortable.

The workshop started with a brief recap about the agreed findings from the last session. Participant 4 also turned out. Her attitude was the opposite of the day before. She was friendly and enthusiastic, laughing and actively participating in the construction of ideas.

> I could appreciate that people's circumstances change. Suddenly, what troubles you have one day can disappear the next and your mood changes. We ended up talking about our personal lives. It was then when we built the trust.

One of the designers initiated a conversation with the newcomer around the Leapfrog project and what we had done in the first workshop. At that point, I decided to approach her. To do it, I used what I call the 'stand beside' technique, which I have developed over my life as a way to establish contact with acquaintances. It basically consists of positioning oneself within the physical scope of the other person, increasing the chances of spontaneously and subtly starting a conversation. Thus, I sat next to her and the conversation naturally emerged.

> I'm living in Mull because my partner is a local. Although we'd met while studying on the mainland, we recently decided to move to the island. I'm volunteering in community engagement within an organisation working around conservation.

We were divided into three groups (each group with a designer) to co-design together 'engagement tools' based on the last workshop findings. In this sense, engagement tools are means that mediate in community engagement activities. I formed a group with the newcomer. She understood what the activity was about after I presented a few examples of how it could be an engagement tool. After that, we began conceptualising ideas together. I realised that she used her previous experience to generate new ideas. At that moment, we could be considered the first people conceptualising these 'new tools' by sharing our knowledge and past experience.

Therefore we were, somehow, co-constructing new meanings which we were allocating to these concept-ideas. It was a productive session and after the break, we all shared our ideas on the wall. Some of the concepts were similar and other ones were combined into one more structured tool, such as the planning event tool. At the end, I talked to all the participants and asked them if they would like to keep in touch.

> I am about to come back and it would be helpful for my project to visit and interview you.


MR 16

Reflective session

In my subsequent reflection session, I identified a strong component of informal learning. People attended for various reasons, some personal and some collective. They came with different levels of social commitment. Yet all of them shared one motivation: learning how to engage better in their community. They participated collectively, sharing their creativity to shape new ideas, which are not owned by one, but by all of us.

I realised that one of the challenges in community co-design lies in understanding holisticly the context in which we intervene. I reached the Isle of Mull with no time to form sound ideas of what the socio-cultural was like. Some members perceived the designers from different perspectives: some celebrated, others didn't want to know about the project, some might not be happy and others didn't care.
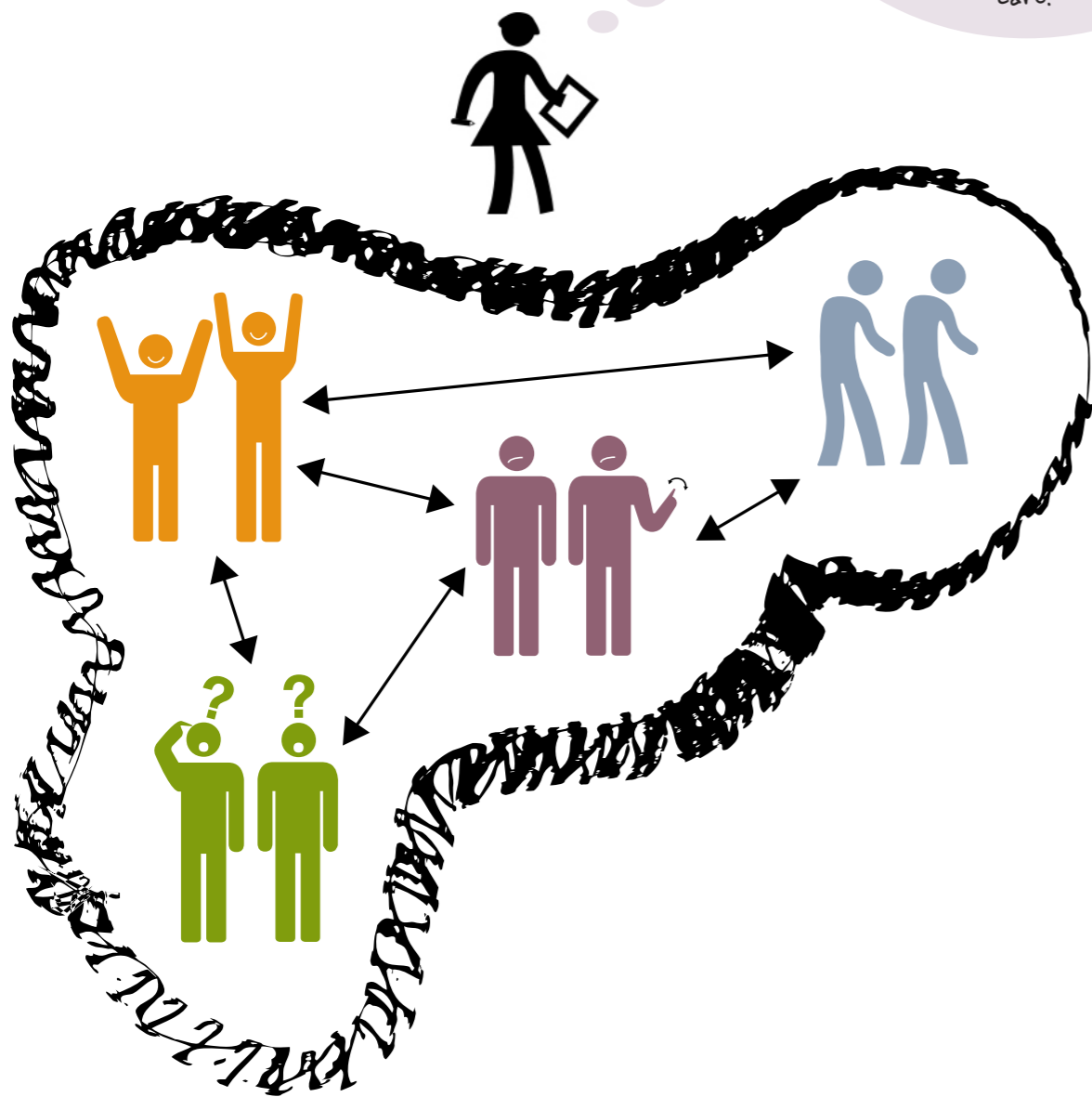
In fact, an individual belongs to more than one community, such as family, friends, hobbies, describing a landscape of practices which influence one to each other and shape our identity.

Learning from the context

My second visit came after two months. The motive that brought me to the Isle again was the insight from my first visit in which I had felt out of context. It was as if I were a person who suddenly appears in an unknown place and needs to interact with people and understand them without prior knowledge about their context. The conversations I listened to were geographically referenced. Hence, it was important for me to understand such territory where the different communities live. Therefore, this time the trip was on my own in which I adopted the role of a tourist-explorer. This took me two days in which I had the chance to experience at first hand the isolation amongst communities.
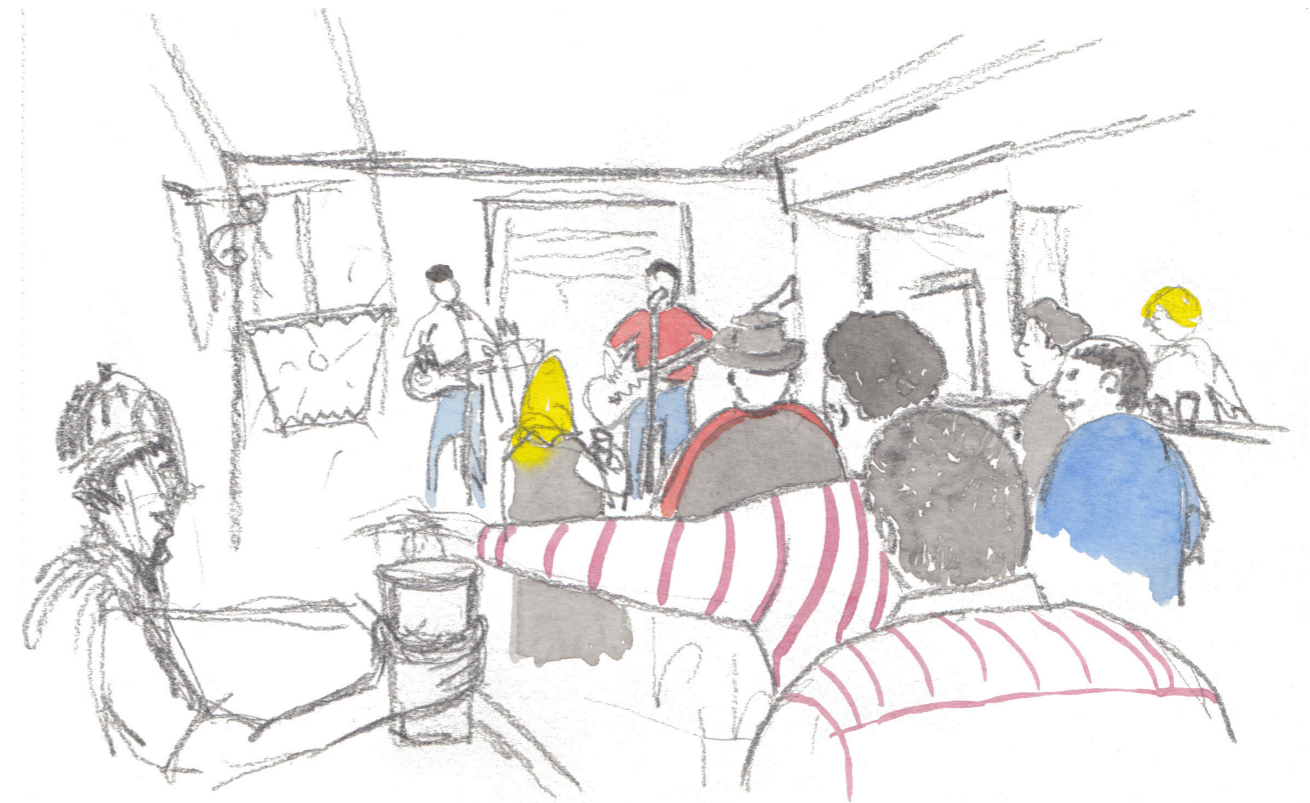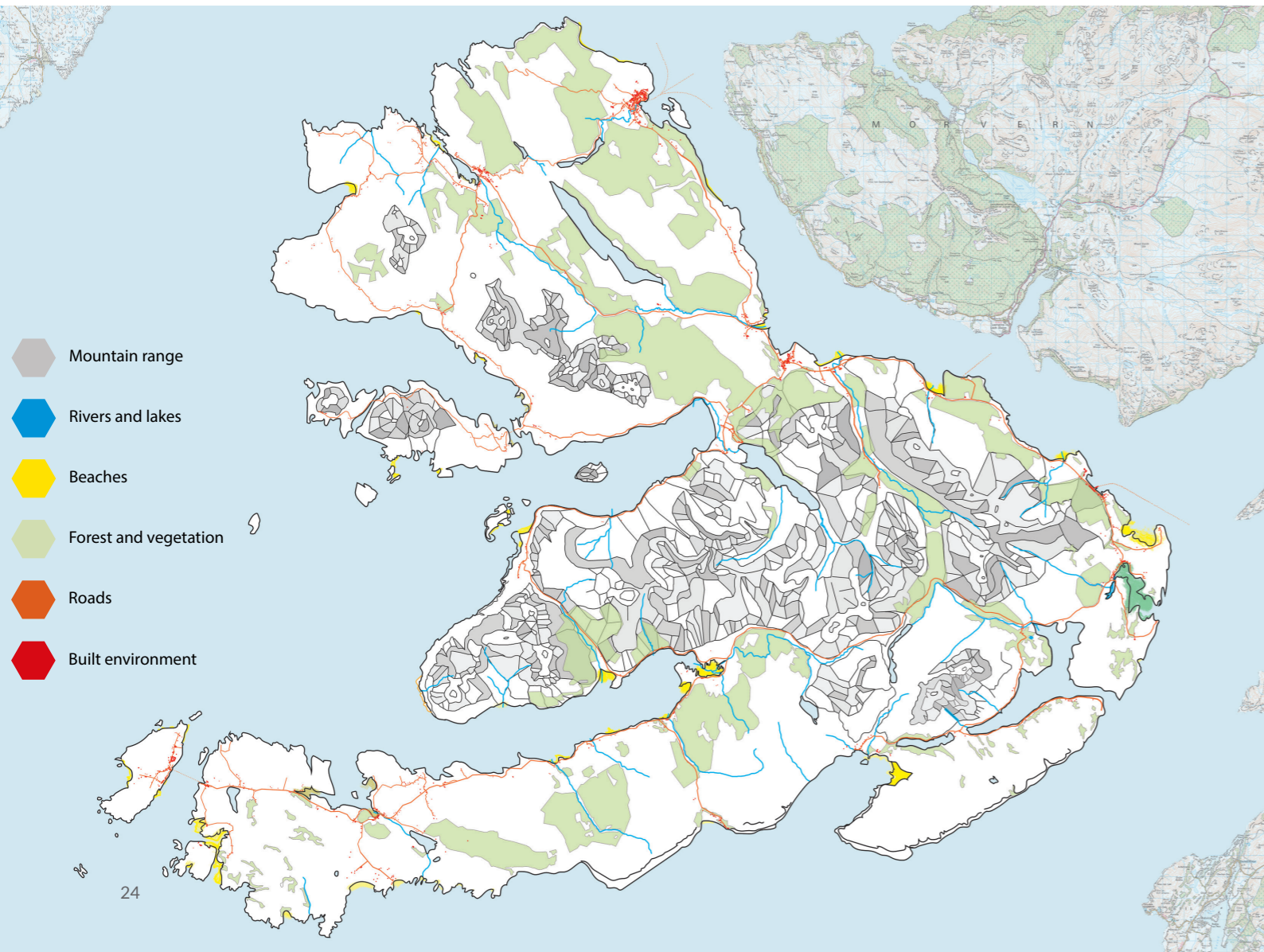
I went to the pub I was in last time with the research team, but it was too late to have dinner. Thus I ended up in the Irish pub. Surprisingly the music festival was also on there and so were most of the people. I sat on a table alone, away from the clutter where the concert was. The pub was crowded. I could observe people from my table, so I could gather a sense of what kind of people were there, how they interacted with each other and the like. On this matter, there were more men than women. The age range was varied but mostly from thirty-year-old people and over, although there were also a few younger people between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. I also noticed that people went to the bar in a group. For example, while I was there a woman of about fifty entered the pub accompanied by a man, who appeared to be her partner, and an eighteen-year-old girl. They greeted a lot of people and went to a group of people who danced next to the band. The lady was the one who took the initiative and went to the bar to ask for drinks. After, the young girl approached a group of younger men playing pool. In fact, it seemed that the women were the ones who took the initiative in terms of social interaction, while the men seemed to adopt a more passive role in this environment.

(See more in section 4.2.2 Ethnographic tour).

Mountain range

Rivers and lakes

Beaches

Forest and vegetation

Roads

Built environment

Interview with P5

I went back to Craignure, the main entrance, where the Ferry Station is sited. There, I met P5 to conduct a semi-structured interview with a focus on the following themes: cultural-historical backgrounds of participants, opinions about community engagement, informal learning, division of roles within communities, individual and collective motivations and distribution of power.

> They tend to be almost a separate community. (···) This community trust is developing a community plan for the Northern part, while the South has its own community plan and they are not connected somehow

> To me the issue is that there is not an overarching community to which people subscribe. As you say, people pursue their own interests, working separately addressing different areas but there isn't anything to me that seems to hold all together. That is my impression.

> People don't want to feel that they being told how to run their lives. They have their own view of their lives and their community. (···) Indeed, it is a big barrier! Particularly in a small community (···) People get their opinion from a lot of different perspectives: people, circumstances··· And it is not clear where this community (...) It is not very clear what the key influences are that persuade people to look at our ideas.

> I could appreciate in his words a sense of persuasion as a motive behind the fact of participating in our workshops. Persuasion is a social influence on values, attitudes, motivations and behaviour.
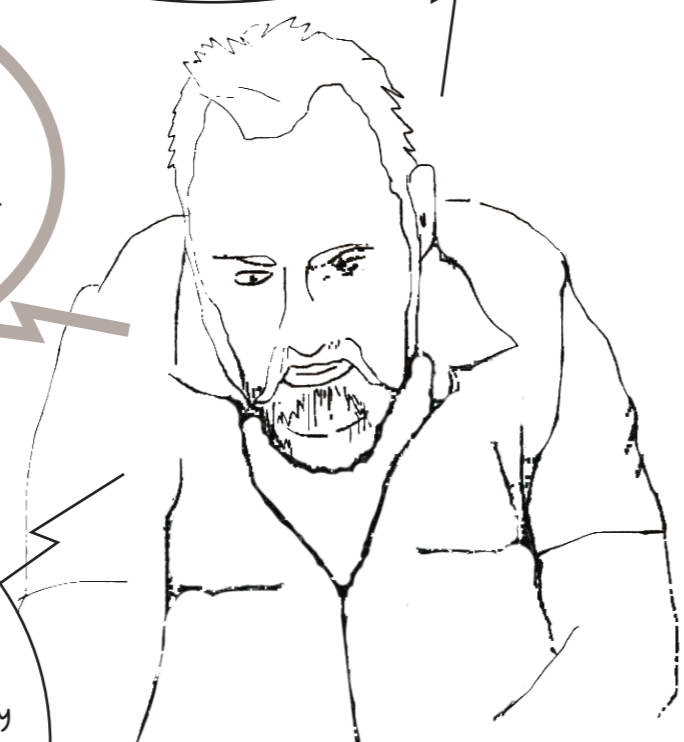
Tool delivery event

Beginning the event, one designer introduced me and explained my role as a passive-observer. Although I had planned to keep in that role for the whole session, I ended up participating in the talks. Seven people turned out from four different communities with two designers and myself. Five of the participants had attended all the previous workshops but there were two newcomers. The event took place in the same room, yet there were three tables joined together with ten chairs around. This time round, the space was better accommodated to the purpose of the event, even though I found it difficult to move around in order to observe from different angles. The table functioned well as a hinge connecting all the participants, creating a central space where the prototypes were shown while one of the designers explained how they could be used.

> I found it difficult to detach myself from the people, the project and the conversations. I also felt at times uncomfortable, out of context, since almost all the people knew me, and those who did not observed me, wondering what I was doing. My impression was that some of them were at times discomforted too. However, I stayed in the passive role during the first hour taking notes and drawing what was happening, aiming to gather information about personal and collective motivations, as well as grasping better understanding about the informal learning process.
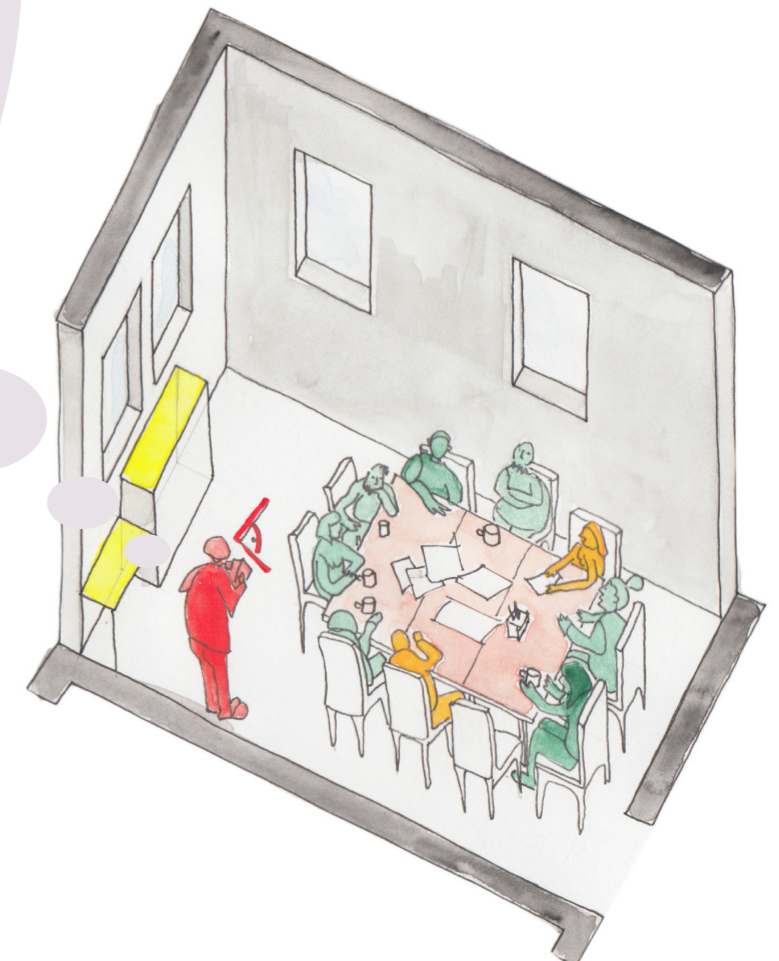
In this first part, the designers talked and the participants listened. Slowly but steadily, the participants started interacting with the designers, firstly by asking questions.

How much will it cost – this tool?

This tool could be made in mass production and reduce costs

Well, we are not consultants, we do research, so all our tools are free and also you can download from our website anytime

P9 was a strong voice. He paid attention all the session, although l he was a busy man because from time to time he looked at his mobile and wrote texts.

P2 and P6 had been at all the events, however they usually were quiet and it was unusual to hear their opinions. They were both taking notes in their notebooks and seemed interested.

P5 sat on the same chair at the three workshops, he was the only one keeping the same location. Was it a mechanism for controlling the situation?

He was one of the most challenging participants since he was always questioning the co-design process. This is a good asset within the group dynamic because he invited everyone, both designers and participants, to reflect and articulate a rationale for the activities we did.

The first two prototypes introduced, to judge by some people's expressions, seemed to be not well understood. Then the conversation began. (See more about learning in Section 4.2.3 Tool Delivery Event).

After a short break, we split into two groups. Three participants, a designer and I went to another room with a round table that was next door. In the second part, the conversation was already fluid and participants felt comfortable. P3 and P8 were motivated and active in the conversations, in an open and receptive attitude. They asked a lot of questions because they wanted to know more. They were also able to envision some prototypes into concrete situations of their work as facilitators of public engagement. Conversely, P5 kept a sceptical attitude and asked for a specific example of how to use the planning event tool. P8 was delighted with this tool, as she told me at the interview, after the session:

I like anything that can be a plan. I like to have a thought process and then an evidence trail that backs it up

She was keen on trying some of the prototypes in a consultation event she was about to facilitate in two days time. We talked together about how some of the tools could be used in her event. P5 changed his attitude when we talked about the raffle tool. He was smiling and actively thinking ideas up about when and how to use it. They were focused on simultaneously understanding and imagining how they could use and adapt the tools, but also in which situations they might use one tool or another. To some extent, they were co-constructing new meanings and transferring them to the tools (the tools accumulated new knowledge).

we talked about her motivations to come to the co-design workshops

It is just to get more tools or experience on how to increase the participation in the community. Things happen in Mull because community groups and community members make them happen because we don't have infrastructure of services. That is the way it works! So in any rural community you cannot rely on the council services

This is a very isolated place, you need space in a house because if it's raining outside and you have a one hour drive to the nearest shop, you need to be comfortable and happy in your own home

Just getting people more confident in themselves, I think. So: 'this is what you really want to do? Yes! Well, I can help you with it'. You know, I am a very positive person. My glass is always half full. I am always thinking in the next step but not everybody thinks in the same way. I think it is very appreciated that not everybody thinks like that. It is quite difficult sometimes. So I am always being very enthusiastic

I could appreciate her frustration, which was already present at the first workshops, because the members of that community were not responding to her engagement. Simultaneously, she mentioned self-confidence as another dimension of the impact that community co-design affords to the participants. Self-confidence could be understood as an attitude about future behaviour.

17/02/2016

we talked about her event, which consisted of the inauguration of a coastal path developed by her organisation.

It's going to be a really good community event, and I thought it was going to be the right moment to start consultation (···) I have got display boards, I can show them what the area is like at the moment, the ideas that we have got for development, a few visuals of what it could look like.

I was keen on experiencing first-hand her context so I asked if I could be a participant-observer, a volunteer collaborating with her.

Participant observation 1

This experience involved me closely helping P8 for about three hours while she was setting up her stand and during the event. This enabled me to holistically observe her moods, body language, her pace and the way she interacted with other people.

The objective was to become an insider-outsider in order to truly understand the individual and collective contextual factors which play simultaneously. However, I needed to build a rapport of trust with her beforehand.

I noticed she was in a defensive mood. It seemed to me that she was uncomfortable with my presence. I could interpret from her body language that she was wondering what were my true reasons to be there. So, I decided to offer my help to set up the stand and for anything she might need. My strategy was to adopt a relaxed attitude and keep some distance in order to give her a sentient space – enough space in which she did not feel intimidated or overwhelmed. The idea was to protect the person above the investigation hoping that, at some point, she would approach me. Then, the rapport of trust would naturally emerge.

Don't feel intimidated, I'm here to learn from you! The reasons I'm here is understanding the context by participating in it. Thank you for offering me the opportunity to be 'one of you'

Yes, at the beginning I was intimidated because I thought you were here to assess me, assess how I do consultation. To be honest, this is the first time I do, so I was nervous. But now that I see you helping me out, I am glad you came

TOBERMORY HARBOUR ASSOCIATION

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TOBERMORY 7/2/2016
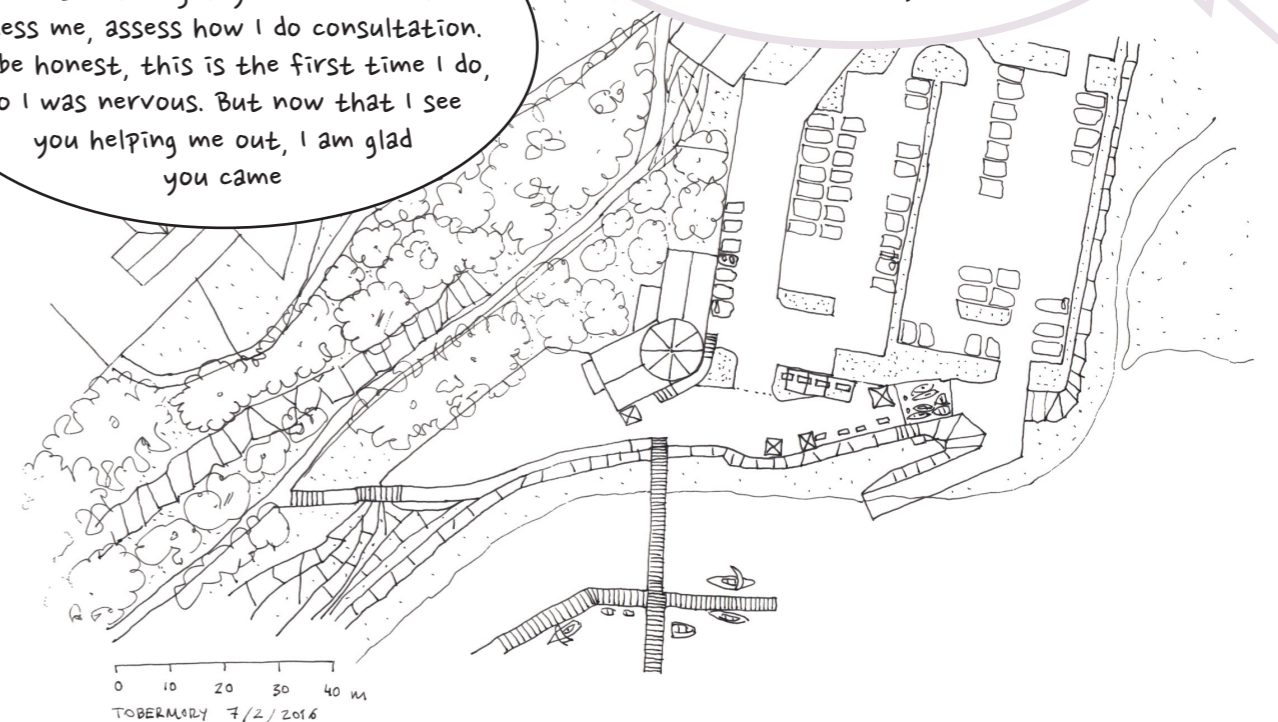
More than one hundred people turned out. I started participating as one of them. I had lunch and I talked to people about their motivations to engage in community and about the learning process through community events. Finally, I gathered deeper understanding of the community that happily embraced me and enabled me to know them better.

This community is strongly tight; nearly everybody participates in the community. They understand the sense of community and because, in that way they embrace you when you arrive, suddenly you are involved in the community doing things for the others, as well as the others do for you. They know that they cannot survive in this place without the others. They need each other
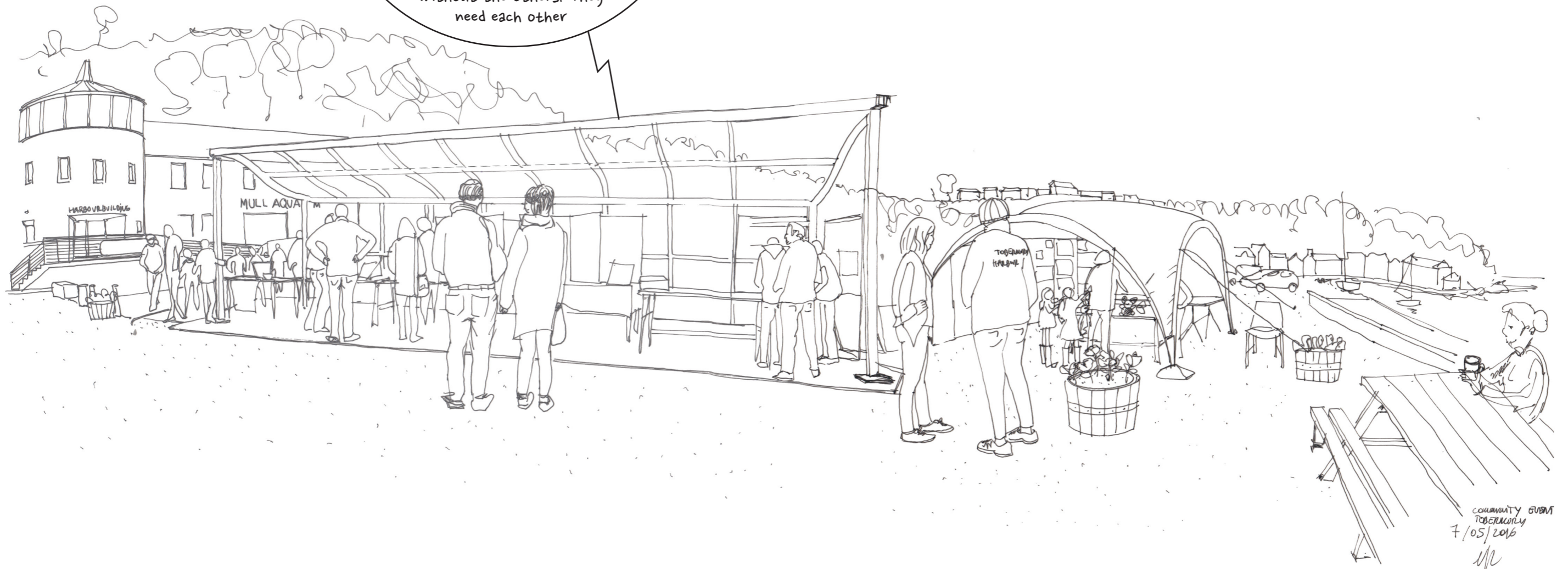
COMMUNITY EVENT
TOBERMORY
7/05/2016

A little before finishing, I was able to interview Participant 10, the project officer in charge of the development of the seafront which we were celebrating that day.

> I think that what we achieved here, with particularly the shelter and the path, is it allows more events to happen in and around the town. This just increases the tourism on the island and I think this is a big impact in the whole community economically.

> We use this area as a hub for all the events that we run throughout the year it is a great hub here for bringing people together and just enjoy.

> There is a very important learning behind these events. All the schools on the island are very used to community events, helping to put their efforts into entertaining other people as well. So there is a lot of exchange between different organisations - like the Boy Scouts and the Guides. They are also in the schools, so they know each other. Same with the piping band, which is mainly made by the Tobermory high school. The children learn from a very young age about being part of the community and helping in these sorts of events. And they have this memory thing of what it is like when the events all come together and the impact that has is on the community.

My last visit consisted of an invitation to P4's house. We were in touch since February and finally she invited me to shadow her. She was collaborating in a community association that emerged in 2011 in response to the local authority's threat to close the local school. She knew about the Leapfrog co-design workshops through P3, who was also collaborating with that community. The community has around 110 inhabitants spread over a coastline of 12 miles. The majority of the houses are holiday homes – which are unoccupied over the year except in the summer. When we met, I felt welcome.

> We wanted to attract young people to come and live here and try to create jobs to keep the school open because the school has about eight people. If the school goes, it will just become holiday homes. If you have time, I can just take you to see... we have now raised money to put two very sustainable houses, very well isolated and for rent, for a reasonable rent. So it is for people that they cannot buy a house. They will be starting in September, possibly

She seemed enthusiastic about the project and looked different, like rejuvenated and relaxed. She told me that when we first met, she had a terrible pain in her knee and had surgery. So after a long rest, she could already move freely and the pain was gone. We also talked about individuals taking their own initiatives in order to energise the area, such as the young girl who set up her food van at the car park.

We took her car and went to see the projects. Our first stop was at the pontoon, at the harbour that crosses to the Isle of Ulva.

Another thing we are doing is putting into the water a pontoon for the boats to come and tie up. So if we get visiting tours, nowadays they want a pontoon. (···) We will need somebody to be a pontoon manager to collect the money, so this is another job
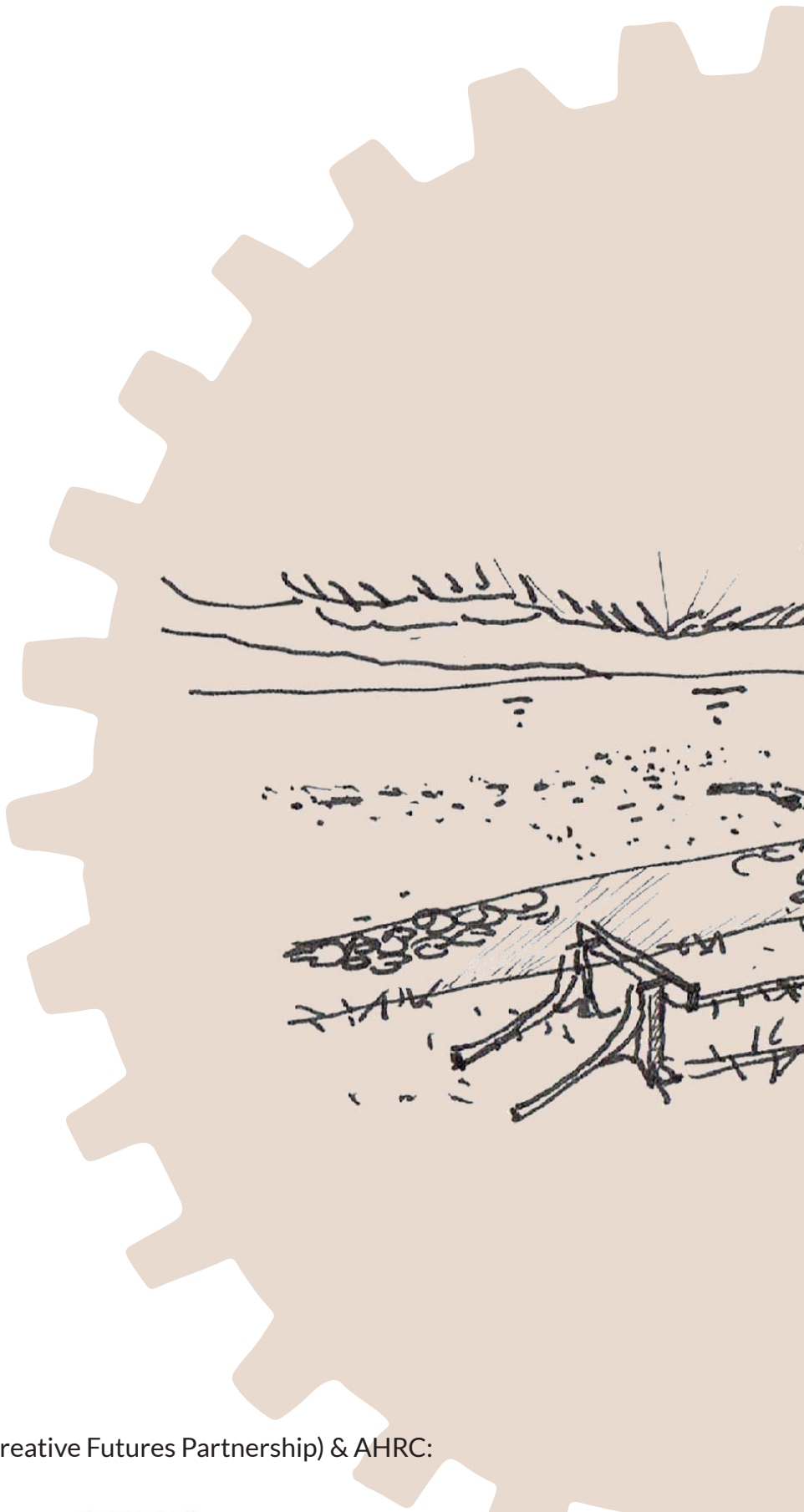
Afterwards, we went to see the school and the area where they were about to build the two houses and finally we drove up to the lady's garden. There, she introduced me to some members of the community. The lady used to be deeply involved in the community but at some point left. I realised that the issue was not one of engaging people; it was more about re-engaging them. Most of the people I met during that day had been involved in the past, but they became exasperated and disaffected. People, like them, lost interest over time because, in their view, they didn't see their objectives translate into outcomes. I also detected a sort of apathy. Such attitudes hide a perception of community engagement as an endeavour that consumes time and effort, and it is complex and slow. Besides, many of them did not see the effects of the community problems on their daily lives, and therefore were reluctant to change.

Thanks to all the people involved in the project!

To delve deeper into the items and patterns discovered after the exploratory and experimental analysis see Section two: systematising learning, chapter 4.3.