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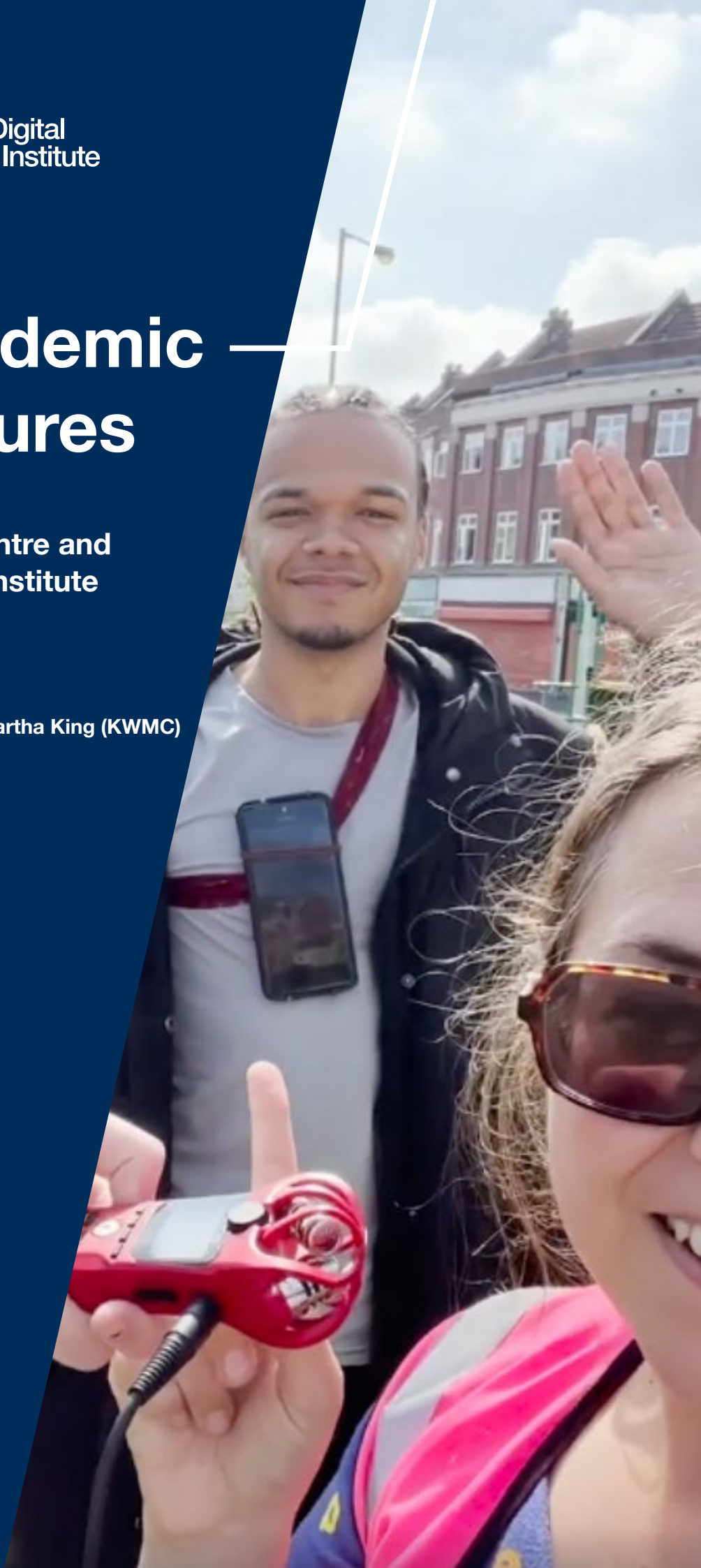
Bristol Digital  
Futures Institute

# ‘Post’-pandemic hybrid futures

Knowle West Media Centre and  
Bristol Digital Futures Institute  
collaboration 2022

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**KWMC**★  
KNOWLE WEST MEDIA CENTRE





Filwood Community Centre, KWfest22

## Project overview

For many people, the Covid-19 pandemic involved a rapid and large-scale shift from in-person to digital encounters across work, education, medicine, shopping and socialising. As lockdowns lifted and the government dropped pandemic measures, hybrid spaces which brought together in-person and online elements, became increasingly common. Today, a time in-between the days of strict pandemic restrictions and the 'return to normal', is a moment to reflect on how hybrid futures might be shaped. What have we learnt from spending so much time online as producers, audiences, and facilitators of digital technologies? What have our experiences of hybrid spaces been? What would we like to keep doing, and what do we definitely never want to do again? How can we ensure that questions of accessibility and inclusion raised by doing things online are not lost in a rush to return to in-person ways of doing things?

This collaboration builds on a number of hybrid tools and methods that KWMC developed with communities in 2020 and 2021, including hybrid workshops, live broadcasts of community events and festivals and posted packs. In particular, the 2021 KWMC Come Together programme explored how we could connect through a mix of digital and physical spaces and produced resources, tips and pointers for those interested in organising accessible, sensory and enjoyable hybrid spaces. Working with BDFI and its aim to create more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous digital futures, KWMC want to make sure the learnings from the pandemic are not forgotten, that they keep experimenting with hybrid and find sustainable accessible solutions for long-term engagement, and access to culture and creativity that don't just disappear.

# What we did

The project had four main stages, which we discuss in more detail in the sections below:

- 1. Reflecting and reviewing** of KWMC past hybrid activities as well as what and how staff currently aimed and wished to develop hybrid initiatives.
- 2. Co-designing** a series of potential hybrid activities for Knowle West Fest 2022, an annual community festival hosted this year by KWMC.
- 3. Experimenting and testing** a variety of hybrid activities at KW Fest 2022.
- 4. Evaluating and sharing** the strengths and weaknesses of these hybrid experiments and how they might be further developed.

## 1. Reflecting and reviewing

In the first stage, we took stock of the [Come Together](#) programme and other KWMC hybrid projects, focusing on what we'd learnt as organisers and audiences and on feedback from participants. This included revisiting the [tips and learnings on how to create hybrid spaces](#) produced immediately after Come Together. It also included conducting short interviews with KWMC staff and members of the local community who had been involved in putting on hybrid events on what they had learnt, enjoyed, disliked and wanted to continue doing.

We asked people to think about a project, workshop or event they were part of through the pandemic and to respond to the following questions:

- What ways did you find to engage people?
- What were the most challenging things about this?
- Were there any unexpected joys from projects like this or things you'd love to keep doing?
- Were there any aspects of them that you would not like to repeat?
- What excites you about bringing people together 'face to face' and what excites you about 'online'?
- Do you have a hope or wish you'd like to share for a post pandemic future?

We also asked them to reflect on hybrid events that they had experienced and to respond to these questions:

- Do you have examples of something you experienced which was successfully hybrid? What made it successful?
- Do you have any advice or ideas for future hybrid events? Or anything else you'd like to share?

During this stage we identified the Knowle West Festival as an opportunity to try out some hybrid elements.

## 2. Co-designing

We held a co-design workshop with members of KWMC staff to collectively imagine a hybrid future and come up with practical ideas for hybrid aspects of the Knowle West festival. We explored what 'hybrid' meant to us and the responses people had to the questions asked in Stage 1. We then worked in pairs to map a user experience of the festival with a different person, identifying and imagining that person's wants, needs and barriers. We worked with the following persons but they are not exhaustive and this method is not a replacement for developing and testing ideas with people with a wide range of lived experience:

- Mum from Knowle (33) with two children (7+10)
- Man from South Bristol (42)
- Woman from South Bristol (40)
- Transgender person from Centre of Bristol (29)
- Boy from Knowle (19) with friends (18+19)
- Couple from Hengrove (71+74)

We used this user experience scenario to identify when and how hybrid can be most valuable and fun. Based on the co-design workshop, we came up with a list of hybrid activities to try out before, during and after the festival, and decided on the best digital platforms for them to take place on. We noticed that thinking through the three phases of before, during and after provided novel ideas and insights, as often most energy is devoted only to what happens 'during' an event. This led us to think about how we could 'stretch' or distribute a hybrid activity beyond the event itself.

## 3. Experimenting and testing

We experimented with a number of different hybrid aspects.

*Before* the festival, staff at KWMC made two short videos, focused on accessibility and travel, to introduce people to the venue – Filton Community Centre. The videos were shared with the KWMC Facebook group, the social media platform with the most community users and engagement, the KW Fest Facebook group and the KWMC Instagram account. The idea for the videos came from identifying some of the wants, needs and barriers that might be important to visitors to the festival in Stage 2, including concrete questions about accessibility (for example, will there be parking and chairs to sit on?) and less tangible issues about what the site looks like, what will it be like and so on. The videos are hosted by Claudia Collins, KWMC Creative Community Engagement Officer who lives and is well-known in the area. They have a friendly, accessible and rough-and-ready tone, are captioned and invite people to get in touch with any questions via email or phone.

*During* the festival we experimented with three primary hybrid elements. We held two live streams, one on Facebook at the beginning of the festival to show people what was happening and to encourage those able to make it to come in person, and the other mid-way through the afternoon on Zoom, to give people a sense of the festival activities as they were in full flow. During both live streams we asked people to let us know if there were particular activities they would like to participate in at home, so we could send them either a pack to have a go themselves or something that had been made by someone who was there.

We also left specially designed postcards around the festival for people to send to friends and family who weren't able to be there in person. People wrote the postcards and posted them in a 'postbox' in the cafe for us to stamp and send on after the festival. We also put together a playlist, hosted on Youtube, of some of the acts playing at the festival – a link to this was on the back of the postcards.

Also during the festival, photographs and videos were taken.

After the festival, we shared, on the KWMC Facebook page and the Knowle West Community Website, photographs of the event and an edited film of the festival.

We also sent a personalised at-home pack to Zoom Live Stream attendees. One person was particularly sad to be missing the Creative Wellbeing Collaging Workshop and Macrame Workshop, so we sent them items to complete these activities at home. The pack included a link to the Knowle West Fest 2022 music playlist, a hand-written Knowle West postcard from a member of the community, plus a postcard to post back to us with feedback.

#### 4. Evaluating and Sharing

In this stage of the research, we reflected on what we had learnt through our hybrid experiments and shared these reflections. This report is one of the ways in which we share the research; others include sharing via the BDFI website and events sharing learnings from the research with KWMC staff and community and wider academic and creative sectors.

## What we learnt

### Stage 1: Reflecting on hybrid activities

In reflecting on the hybrid activities they had run and participated in during the pandemic, KWMC staff noted the importance of multiple access points; hybrid activities rarely took place in isolation or on only one platform, but required facilitation and promotion across different mediums, including Zoom, Teams, Live stream Youtube, social media such as Twitter and Instagram, specific features on social media platforms, such as Facebook games, and websites created by artists, and personal invitations via email and/or phone, and follow-up phone calls.

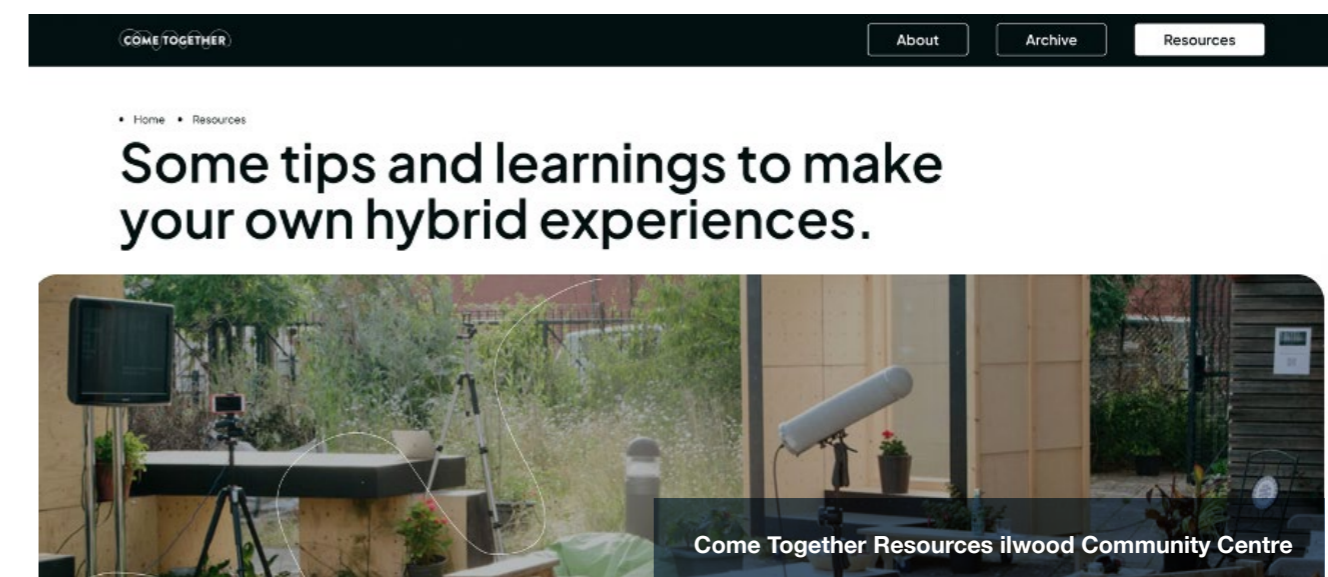
#### Modes of engagement

Interviewees also reflected upon the different modes of engagement they had worked with, including grounding exercises, meditations and ways of setting the tone of the activity, with introductions, room tours and lots of breaks. They also noted how KWMC had created guides to support communities with hybrid and online activities, and that for some activities, activity packs had been sent to people's homes for them to engage with during the hybrid event.

### Challenges

Diverse challenges of online activities were raised, from questions of how to judge participant engagement to Zoom fatigue to technical issues to the labour required for the pivot to digital technologies.

In many ways, these resonate with challenges well-documented throughout the pandemic, where online, digital tools had to be adapted to at short notice and often without adequate time for training and learning. For KWMC, this rapid pivot also raised challenges in relation to the communities they engage with, where there are inequalities in relation to access to and knowledge about digital technologies ([KWMC and University of Bristol Digital Divide Policy Paper, 2021](#)). However, at the same time, greater mapping and understanding of the community occurred through this time – for example, surveys on people's access to and understanding of digital technologies were carried out, activities about supporting and connecting people to devices took place and online workshops were held. KWMC have learnt a lot about who prefers online and who prefers in person activities, and what each one affords.







Imagining hybrid futures workshop

**Before: 'A more accessible future': digital content to help you access the event in-person**

- » Two reel/tiktok style videos about: (i) how to access KW Fest22 and what to expect; (ii) travel to KW Fest22.

**During: 'A more connected future' so you don't miss out at home if you can't go in person.**

- » Live streams: Facebook and Zoom
- » Postcards: Bridging gap between during/after.
- Postcard with QR code/short url which links to a KW Fest webpage where we can continue to upload content like playlists.
- People can write a postcard to a friend who couldn't make it. Friends connecting.
- During workshops, give people the options to make something for a stranger. We can then post this alongside a postcard after. Strangers connecting.
- Those who can't make it can sign up to receive a postcard / item made by a stranger during workshop
- Playlist on Youtube: of acts playing at the festival to incorporate into at least one of the live streams but also to stay on Youtube after the festival.

**After: 'A more sustainable future' considering ongoing connections and space for development**

- At home packs for anyone who requests one in the live streams.
- Sharing photos and a film of the festival.
- Socials (hashtags/comments and shares of live streams.

### Stage 3: What happened?

**Before: 'A more accessible future': digital content to help you access the event in-person**

We made two informal videos that were shared on KWMC Instagram and Facebook and KW Fest Facebook before the festival. As part of the filming, KWMC staff tested out a DIY 'Proxy Protest' harness after learning how to create one during the Come Together programme. The team enjoyed the filming and editing stages and reported that the videos were efficient to make although some aspects could be streamlined further.

Both videos performed well on social media, with the video focused on accessibility performing best. In particular, the accessibility video shared on KWMC Instagram significantly out-performed above average in terms of reach and engagement, with the KW Fest Facebook page performing better than the KWMC Facebook page. The video focused on travel performed less well than the accessibility video on Instagram, but better than the accessibility video on Facebook.



Filming the video



Facebook live stream

Although we cannot speculate on the reasons for this, perhaps the more technical/practical focus of the travel video meant that it was not as interesting to viewers. The Travel video was posted on Monday and the Access video was posted on Wednesday, both in the afternoon. Since the Travel video on Monday got far more engagement than usual, this may be why the algorithm pushed Wednesday's video further, showing it to more non-followers.

**During: 'A more connected future' so you don't miss out at home if you can't go in person.**

- » Live streams: Facebook Live (on the KWMC page) and Zoom

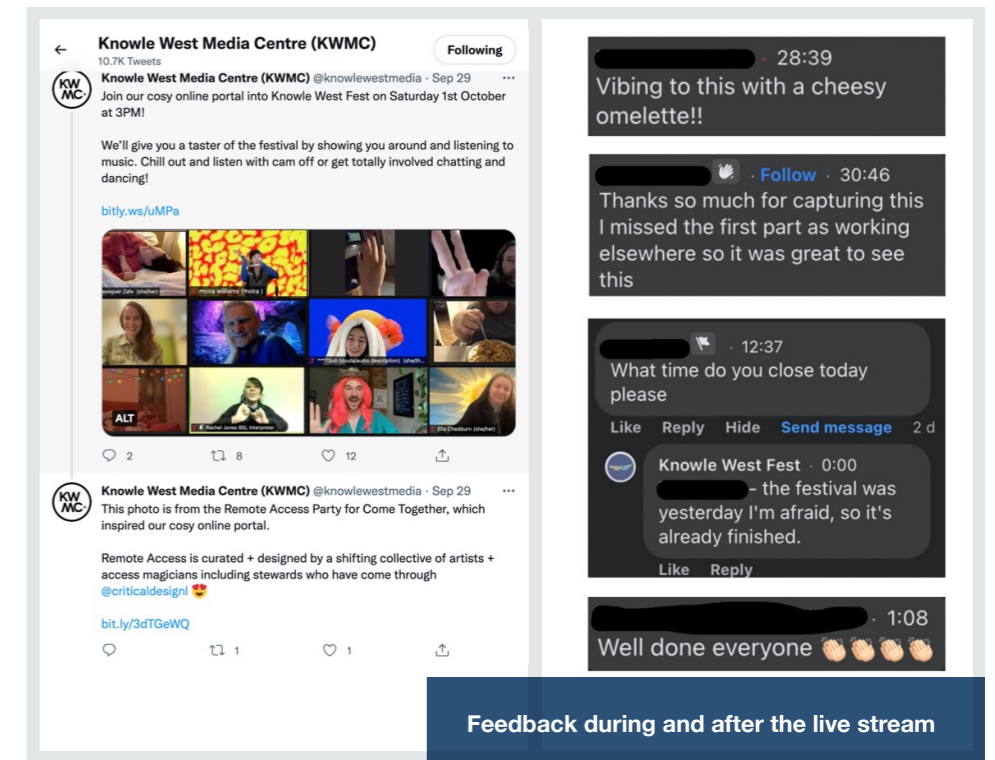
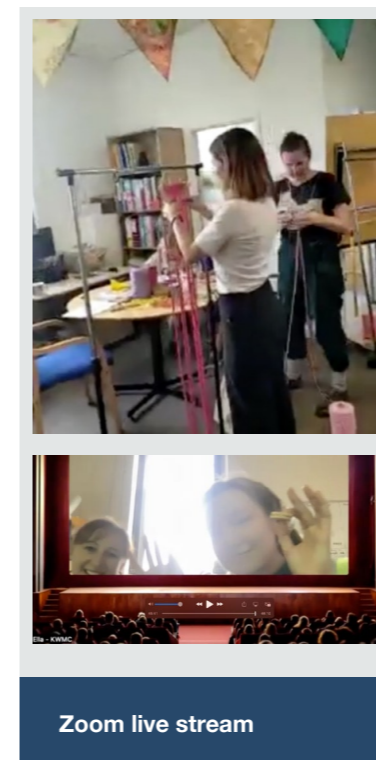
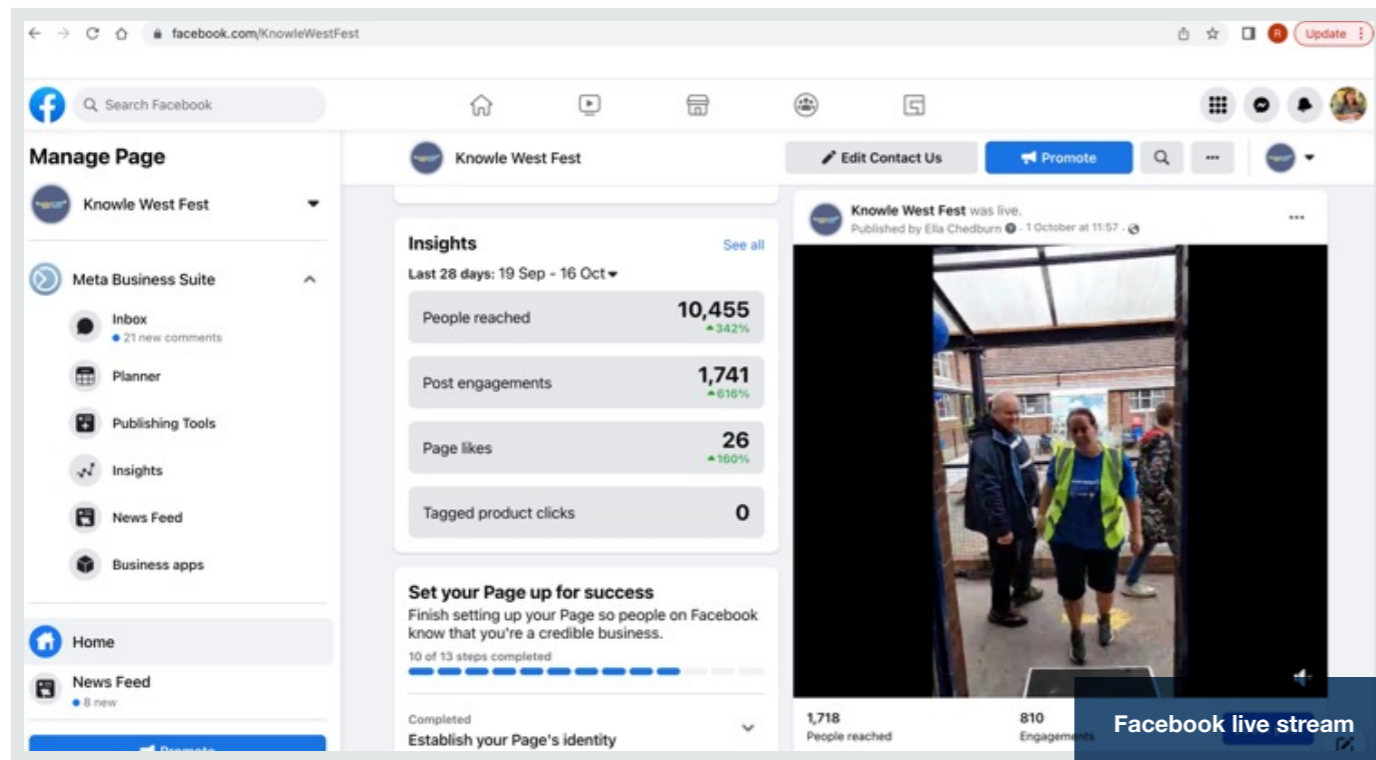
Both live streams took a good deal of planning and preparation before they took place and were relatively labour-intensive while they took place.

### What went well?

The aims of the Facebook live stream were both to give people unable to come to the festival a tour and to encourage the local community who were able to make it to come later.

We planned the live stream with these two aims in mind, plotting out which activities to feature (including shout-outs to people on the main stage between acts and an interview on BBC Radio Bristol), the tone to take and how many people would need to be involved and in what role. We had decided on a friendly, casual, authentic, style which we thought suited the platform and the festival. We found this style worked well in a number of ways. In terms of engaging people at the festival, with only one exception, everyone we asked was happy to talk on camera with many seeming to relish the opportunity to be videoed.

In terms of the quality of the internet connection, and despite our earlier tests of the strength of the wifi signal, the rough-and-ready style was also appropriate as there were a number of occasions where the image and sound were buffering. We felt the occasional poor image and sound quality was to be expected with this platform (see below re: Zoom). Where the wifi connection was strong in the main room, the sound quality was excellent and meant that we could spend some time streaming one of the music acts. The casual style of the video also seemed to work well in terms of the tour itself which, while carefully planned, involved catching people who happened to be available as well as those had been briefed.



There was a sense of serendipity in chatting to people who were passing and catching acts, such as a juggler, while they were happening.

It's fair to say that we enjoyed the Facebook live stream and got a buzz from doing it. This experience was supported by a telephone call from a viewer who said how much they enjoyed it on their newly working iPad.

### What have we learnt?

One aspect that we hadn't thought through well-enough was what happens to the video after the live stream had finished. We had selected for it to remain on the KWMC page, and we were surprised at how much engagement the video got after the live stream was over, with most of the comments and likes being made then. This made us reflect on whether the rough-and-ready style worked for people watching the recorded version, whether there were occasions when we should have been more professional (for example, being careful about speaking about technical issues off camera but in range of the microphone), and who would monitor the chat post-live stream.

As we enjoyed this hybrid activity, we reflected on what we had learnt for future live streams. We agreed that more and better joined-up promotion would have been helpful, especially sending reminders nearer the time of the live stream (e.g. 30 minutes before) and working across other channels and platforms. In future, we could also schedule the live stream so it has a 'waiting room' before starting, rather than people trickling into the live stream and missing the introduction. We also reflected on the moderation of the chat. Although we had no issues on or after the live stream, more planning on how to moderate and/or eject people posting comments that do not fit with community standards would have been helpful, including having pre-prepared text to shut down hostile posters.

### Engagement

The live stream had great reach for KWMC social media. While people dropped off generally at 1:23 minutes into the video, this audience retention is to be expected, but could potentially be improved with a stronger introduction.

### What worked well?

We scheduled the Zoom live stream mid-way through the afternoon. Rather than see it as a means to encourage people to come to the festival, building on successful hybrid activities as part of the Come Together programme, we framed it as a 'cozy portal' so that people could share in the experience if they were not able to make it. Again, the schedule for the live stream was meticulously planned and people leading activities were briefed in advance.

During the live stream, we asked participants to let us know if they were interested in any of the activities so we could send them a pack to do at home, or something that someone had made. One participant said they had wanted to come to the collaging workshop; we posted her a pack of materials from this workshop and also from the macrame workshop.

### What have we learnt?

Again, we faced some issues with internet connection, and while these were not as frequent as with the Facebook live stream, they felt more significant in terms of interrupting the flow of the video. This led us to reflect on our and others' associations and expectations of Zoom as a platform. We felt we had higher expectations of a Zoom live stream because we associated it with work and professional activities; we also had potential

viewers saying that they were immediately turned off of this live stream because Zoom reminds them of work and lockdown.

Our other, related, main reflection was whether the cozy vibe we'd promoted matched the platform and the tour. We consider that the Zoom space felt more intimate than the tour we'd set up, and would have been better suited to taking people into a particular activity rather than showing them a range. In this way, it would have been more suitable to giving people who couldn't be there a chance to engage in an activity at home, by asking them to sign up, sending pre-made packs and/or asking them to find and use materials at home. For example, we called into collaging and macrame workshops that were taking place during the live stream. Selecting one of these and asking the leader – with adequate interest and preparation time – to design a hybrid workshop might well have worked better.

As with the Facebook live stream, we agreed that in future, more and more-coordinated promotion would be helpful. We also learnt from this experiment that the Zoom live stream used much more data than the Facebook one, and that it would also have been helpful to have used headphones to check the sound quality from the perspective of the online participants.



## Postcards

### What worked well

We all really liked the idea of the postcards, seeing them as stretching what hybrid might be beyond live, digital events. The postcards were placed around the festival alongside a brief instruction page on what they were for and where the postbox could be found. There was reasonable engagement with this activity, increasing when workshop leaders had introduced them to participants, and especially when the workshops were held in the room where the postbox was. We printed 100 postcards and 12 were posted. The postcards were mainly sent to older people, grandparents in particular, and were mainly written by young people. Each postcard had a QR code and Bitly link on it, which takes recipients directly to the YouTube playlist and acts as a lasting legacy and memory of the festival. The remaining postcards are still able to be used for other KWMC and local events.

### What we learnt

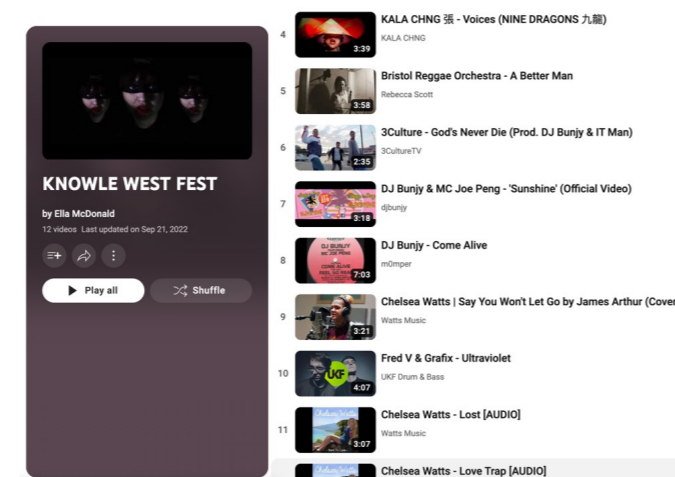
We hadn't anticipated the activity being so popular with children, and so discussed whether they should be a target audience, and whether this could and should be an activity in itself (a 'wish you were here' activity or workshop where people could make postcards included on the schedule). We reflected on how the live streams took up a good deal of time and energy, and putting someone in charge of this activity may have helped to engage more people.

We discussed whether there are further ways in which engagement with this particular activity could be encouraged and/or monitored. For example, mail art,

where people send postcards to recipients who then add to, or make a new postcard, and send it back to the original sender or on to a new recipient, might be a practice to experiment further with. This could be framed in terms of sending postcards to KW residents, or ways of broadening communities and connections, as with some of the comments on the possibilities of digital hybrid activities to form global networks. We also discussed follow-up calls with festival attendees and/or those who participated in the live stream.

### Playlist

We created a Youtube playlist of acts performing at KWfest2022. We initially made this to incorporate into the Zoom live stream – participants were played 'in' and 'out' with it – and for the postcard activity. However, it resides still on YouTube and so we also understand it as itself a hybrid activity.



## At home pack

We sent an activity pack to one of the Zoom attendees with a macramé kit, mindfulness collage kit, hand-written postcard from another member of the community, a blank postcard, and playlist link. Unfortunately, we have not been able to measure engagement with this pack as they didn't post feedback. However, building on the success of at-home packs for hybrid events held during the pandemic, we reflected that this activity has a lot of potential to be developed further to give people a sense of what is happening in face-to-face events if they are not able to be there and to provide participants online and in physical spaces with a shared activity to do together (whether live or synchronously).



## Stage 4: Evaluating and sharing

We did a 'quick-fire' evaluation of the hybrid activities tried out at KWfest2022 at the end of day, with another round of reviews and reflections within five days. These notes became the basis of a longer discussion about what we had learnt and with whom we should share the reflections and evaluations. This report is one of our methods of evaluating and sharing the research. Other modes of evaluating and sharing include a session in 2023 that reports back to KWMC staff and feeds directly into planning for the 2023 KWfest as well as other activities KWMC are involved in. We are keen to ensure KWMC as an organisation and Knowle West communities continue to benefit from the research and experiments that they have participated in. To share the research more broadly, a workshop on methodologies for imagining post-pandemic digital futures, led by the project team, will be held in spring 2023 in BDFI facilities. This will be open to those working in the education, community, creative and charity sectors.



## Acknowledgements

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We would like to acknowledge and thank the following people for their participation in and support for the research: Claudia Collins, Cashell Smith, Scott Piggott, Jozef Clark, Lewis Campbell, Ella McDonald, Hayley Shaw, Julia Walton, Carolyn Hassan.

We would also like to thank Filwood Community Centre and the wider KW-Fest team.

The research was funded by BDFI and University of Bristol Policy and Impact Funding 2022.