

We Are Here to Stay

One of the beauties of the project is the people, and the richness the different perspectives give to understanding how to reach the goals of the main idea. The perspectives may vary and may well be opposed to your own, but they all relate to achieving the same, and shape the whole.

– Fred Brown, co-producer of Homebaked

Telling the story

Telling the story of *2Up2Down/Homebaked* has always been a big part of the project's process. We tell it to visitors, journalists, students, politicians and customers. We tell it at conferences, in front of a camera, behind the counter, over Skype and in the pub. We have our storytellers, ambassadors and writers. Sue is a one-take wonder, Jayne is passionate and funny, Fred is a poet, Maria writes funding speak, Jeanne offers a wider picture and so on.

I didn't experience the beginnings of Homebaked personally. Most of us didn't. 'These were the times', I once heard someone saying: 'when "we" was just two people and a dog'.

There are written versions of an overall narrative. Different people have cut-and-pasted it together over the years, told and retold it time and again, from place to place, often misquoting those who have said something very beautiful or funny or intelligent. And some of us have knowingly thrown in some fiction (and fictional characters) from time to time, because we think this world could do with a couple more inspiring urban myths.

Throughout this process, we've simplified things in order to make sense of complex situations. I'm talking lightly about something that, as someone who co-authors those texts or presentations on a regular basis, I've actually often find very difficult. Being part of the day-to-day running of Homebaked, I yearn to capture its mad complexity and give the reader a sense of the furious depth of detail and personal struggle that's swirling around in the broad container of – for example – the term 'community-led'.

I'm fully aware how necessary it is to tell the story: to achieve visibility, attract funding or simply because I believe that even while we simplify the multi-layered process that is Homebaked and its complex context, we're telling a story that just isn't told enough. At the same time, if we want to find new ways of organising ourselves collectively we need to find fitting formats to tell our story and to experiment with them.

Cut-and-pasted just for you

Anfield is a classic Northern English working-class neighbourhood, famously the home of Liverpool Football Club. Visitors are often shocked at the outer appearance of the area. Streets upon streets contain only boarded-up houses. Many other houses have been demolished, leaving temporary grassed areas. The high street consists mainly of fast-food outlets, catering to match-day visitors only.

This neighbourhood has been one of the pathfinder areas of the Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI), originally conceived to get money flowing through nine northern English areas; places identified as 'market failures' where, unlike anywhere else in Britain, house prizes have stagnated. Alone in the Anfield/Breckfield area, where the programme was implemented in 2001, several thousand homes were emptied of their occupants in order to build new housing estates. Many people who owned their terraced houses outright couldn't afford the new homes with the compensation given to them by the city. Many were either pushed into debt or had to start renting.

In 2008 The Housing Market Renewal Initiative was completely pulled due to the economic crisis. As a result, the remaining residents were left waiting, as new solutions were slow to manifest. Behind the Stadium where Liverpool Football Club is planning to build a new stand, residents are stranded between 'tinned up' houses owned by the city or the club.

When Anfield was designated part of the HMRI, Mitchell's, the neighbourhood bakery founded in 1903 and known as 'The Pie Shop' by football fans from all over the world, was among the buildings earmarked for demolition. The sisters who owned it and ran the bakery were then in their seventies and considering retirement. Unable to sell a business whose building was threatened with demolition, they

waited for the local council to buy them out. While they waited, they were losing customers as the surrounding streets were emptied. When the renewal programme was frozen but the demarcation for demolition wasn't lifted, they had little choice but to close the bakery and retire without compensation.

At the beginning of 2011 the vacant building became the base for *2Up2Down*, a project proposing a small-scale community-led alternative to large planning schemes. *2Up2Down* was initiated and supported over the years by Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk and Liverpool Biennial. Both the artist and representatives of Liverpool Biennial still work alongside the group today.

The bakery building became the site for public discussion and debate, as well as for weekly design workshops and planning sessions focusing on its transformation. Over the first year, a group of around twenty young people worked with URBED architects to remodel the building to accommodate a community bakery with a training kitchen alongside a small housing scheme for two to four households, taking the community as their client. Other people of all ages joined them and together they're developing a new model for community-owned housing and enterprise. It's now called Homebaked.

The group established a Community Land Trust, which enables the community to collectively own and manage land and buildings. Inspired by CLTs in East London, Cumbria and Boston, it's run by a board of volunteers, including people from the local area and professionals from the fields of law, architecture, accountancy and housing.

Another group passionate about reopening the bakery and creating a successful co-operatively run business that would provide employment, training and learning opportunities in the neighbourhood incorporated Homebaked, becoming Homebaked Co-operative Anfield.

Where did I come from to get here?

When we were invited to be one of the Expeditions as part of *Future City* we considered which format would be best to tell the story of Homebaked. Rather than having one of the ambassadors re-tell the narrative, we wondered if it would be possible to give the audience a taste of the complexity of the process by telling it together, each of us a protagonist and each offering a very personal trajectory. A hosted talk show was a format that would allow us to tell a biography of Homebaked through personal contributions of some of the people who've been shaping it. The questions we asked in preparation were simple:

Where did I come from to get here? What was my first point of arrival? Why did I stay (or leave)? What do I bring?

As is often the case with performance, the very first improvisation can be the most powerful. In preparation for the event, we organised a workshop at which many people who'd been part of Homebaked over the years turned up. Most of us didn't know each other, or didn't know how the other had been involved. The only task I gave as the facilitator of the event was for participants to introduce themselves in chronological order of appearance in the Homebaked time line. I asked them to keep in mind the questions above.

For me, that evening was Homebaked at its best. While we were telling each other the story, picking out particular catalysing events, individual contributions and key encounters, giving personal anecdotes and describing each moment from our very personal and very different perspectives, a clear narrative arc evolved – one driven by our values, needs and urgencies, that although made up out of so many little parts, made perfect sense as a whole.

The story ended in the present of that particular day with someone telling the very last chapter. This resulted in a new development that not many in the room had heard until then.

We're here to stay

The expedition to Homebaked happened to fall at a very precarious time for us. We were on the home stretch towards the opening of the bakery: the architectural plans were about to be handed in for planning permission and we'd just been offered two government grants to put the housing part of the scheme in motion. With this as a backdrop, the city council then decided, as part of its new Regeneration proposal

'The Anfield Project', that it still wanted to demolish the buildings on our stretch, which had never officially been alleviated of the demolition order sanctioned under HMRI.

We decided to open the bakery nonetheless. Along the way of the Homebaked trajectory, we've learned that it's important to manifest physically and to stick (softly) to our guns (skills and passions). Action is part of telling the story and 'If we don't author our story, others will. And they may tell our story in ways that we may not like.'¹ The bakery is going well. We haven't been demolished yet. The CLT is adjusting its plans to the new situation. And we've started negotiations with the city council.

If there's a next time to tell the story collectively, I do hope someone from the council will be amongst the people presenting themselves and their trajectory within the narrative of Homebaked.

1. Marshall Ganz, Public narrative, Collective Action and Power