

The Felt Experiences of Place Resource Kit



Aim: This Resource Kit is designed to support individuals and organisations to follow a people-centred approach to place-based work by developing a better understanding of people's felt experiences of place. This understanding can be used to support project delivery and secure improved socio-economic outcomes.

Context: The Arts and Humanities Research Council's [Place Programme](#) based at the University of Glasgow is working in partnership with The National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic Environment Scotland to advance people-centred, place-based approaches within the heritage sector. The work focuses on the ways in which the felt experiences of place can be incorporated into both the structures that support place-based heritage strategy and within the day-to-day practices involved in delivering place-based heritage-led projects.

The Pilot explores two key questions:

1. how can we collect information about felt experiences and in particular what methods/tools can be helpful?
2. how can this information be used to shape decision making at both a strategic and operational level

Outcomes: We hope that by using this Resource Kit individuals and organisations can collect information about felt experiences, use this information to shape people-centred decision making, and secure improved socio-economic outcomes. The Resource Kit can be read alongside organisational guidelines for conducting community engagement exercises and is not a substitute for this but rather helps to focus on felt experiences within this work.

Key Definitions

- ✓ People-centred refers to the need to centre the meanings, feelings, and experiences of individuals and communities through equitable partnerships and inclusive decision-making processes.
- ✓ Place is a meaningful geographic location
- ✓ Place-based approaches recognise the need to respect existing and nurture new meanings in place and require “collaborative work that takes account of the unique blend of characteristics that exist in every place” (Improvement Service, nd)
- ✓ Felt Experiences produce the reasons why places matter to people and are strongly related to “the ways we feel in and about places and the felt relationships we have to and within place” (Madgin, 2022).

Key Areas

- What are Felt Experiences?
- How to Explore Felt Experiences
- The Felt Experiences Collection
- The Felt Experiences Framework
- Using the Collection and Framework
- Further Information

Key Takeaway

How we can collect, understand, and nurture people's felt experiences of historic places



What are Felt Experiences?

“The way we feel in and about places and the felt relationships we have to and within place”

A bingo hall is not just a Category B listed building that was built by a renowned architect in the nineteenth century. The hall is also the site of social connection, mental stimulation, a marker in the rhythms and routines of the week, and a repository of memory. For all these reasons the hall is meaningful to people. However, we cannot truly understand why it matters to people unless we explore how people feel about the hall.

The fact that we visit the hall on a regular basis ensures it is part of our lived experience. However, it's meaning doesn't stop with its use... it is the way those experiences make us feel that stay with us and ensure the hall can continue to be a centre of meaning. The hall cannot be separated from the joy, sadness, anxiety, or anticipation the games produce; it cannot be divorced from the sense of social connection or disconnection from filling out your own card in the company of others; and those memories are not just of the Thursday night routine but rather of how those memories recall how we felt when we won or lost, how they bring a smile or frown to our face, and leave us with a desire to return, to replay, or to retreat.

Within one geographic location there will be lots of places that matter to people. Using the lens of felt experiences enables us to identify them and then use this information to shape decision making from development to delivery.

Working with Felt Experiences 1

- Meanings, feelings, and experiences are not static, they change over time and differ between people. Understanding how different feelings are expressed, evaluating the impacts of place-based interventions on feelings and on how feelings impact places calls for flexible, creative approaches and close attention to the complex histories and uses of heritage places. This can take time and can often require more than one 'encounter' to track changes over time and ensuring that you are engaging with as many diverse voices as possible.
- Creative methods enable us to understand this complexity of place meanings and enable people to express themselves in lots of different ways. The methods we suggest here are designed to be fun, creative, inclusive, and accessible and can involve speaking, drawing, using stickers, and playing with photographs. Facilitating creative activities in an open and sensitive way is vital for allowing people to feel safe and express their feelings and experiences. We don't want to be prescriptive, and our methods are suggested starting points for you to adapt in the ways that work best for your place and project.

Working with Felt Experiences 2

- This kind of work could surface some challenging feelings, and we suggest being attuned to this throughout and make sure that relevant safeguards, protocols, and information/services are signposted as standard. Processes can be adapted as suitable, e.g., face-to-face, in-person research means that some participants might feel uncomfortable disclosing personal and potentially sensitive information. In these cases, think of supporting your study with a remote option—such as an online or configuring activities in ways that provide anonymity.
- We have included some key resources concerning how to conduct a project about people's relationships to place at the end of the Resource Kit. These cover ethical and logistical issues in more depth and use case studies to show how this kind of work can take place. We suggest reading these alongside adhering to your organisation's policies and procedures.

How to Explore Felt Experiences?

We suggest following the 5 stage 'Felt Experience Process' on the next page...

1. Frame the questions



2. Use emoji prompts



3. Choose methods (Felt Experience Collection)



4. Look for feelings and experiences (Felt Experience Framework)



5. Use information to shape decision making

1. Frame the questions

Here we suggest developing a set of overarching questions that can explore feelings, experiences, and meanings such as...

How do you feel
about your
place?

Why does your
place matter to
you?

Which places
matter to you?

How important is
history and
heritage to you?

What would
make me feel
better about my
places?

How do you
feel about
changes to
your place?

2. Use Emoji Prompts

Alongside asking questions, we can also use emojis to help us focus on feelings and experiences. For example...

When I see
this building,
I feel...

The changes
to this place
make me....

The history
of this place
makes me...

 Happy

 Very Happy

 Sad

 Very Sad

 Angry

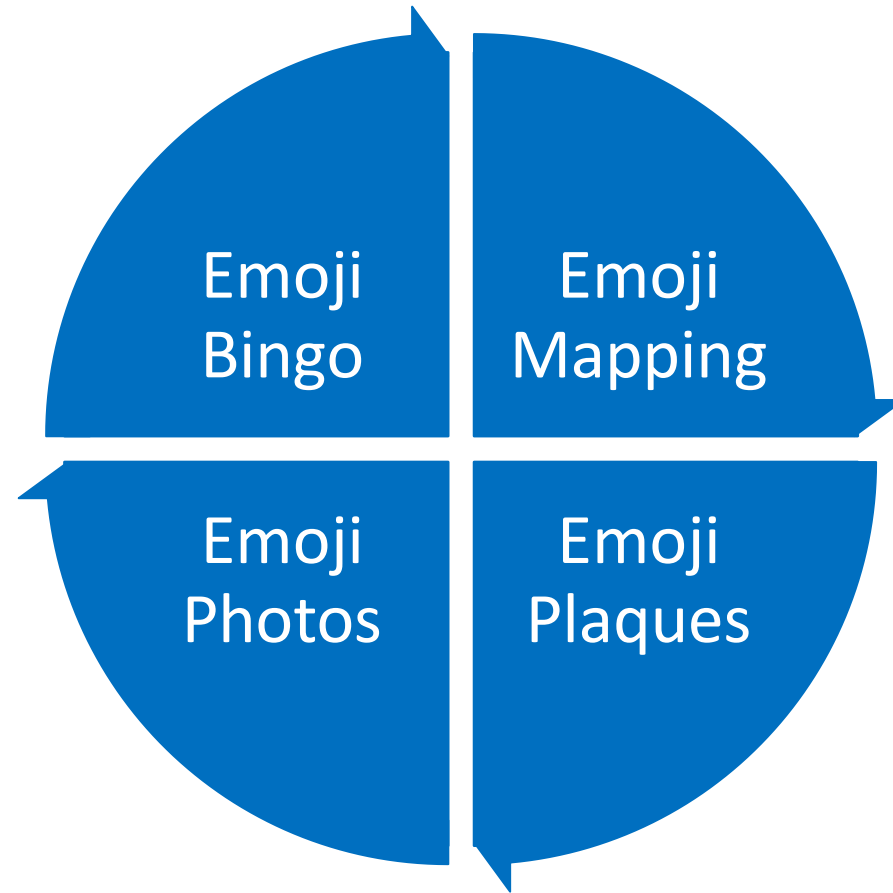
 Furious

 Neutral

3. Choose Methods

Here we suggest using and adapting some of the methods in The Felt Experiences Collection. These methods use some of the sample questions and emoji prompts...

The Felt Experiences Collection



Emoji Maps

1. Choose a map – can be historical or contemporary
2. Ask people to choose emojis that denote how they feel about places on the map
3. Place the emojis onto the map
4. Optional use of post it notes to enable people to further express why they chose the emojis
5. Optional group discussion of the map



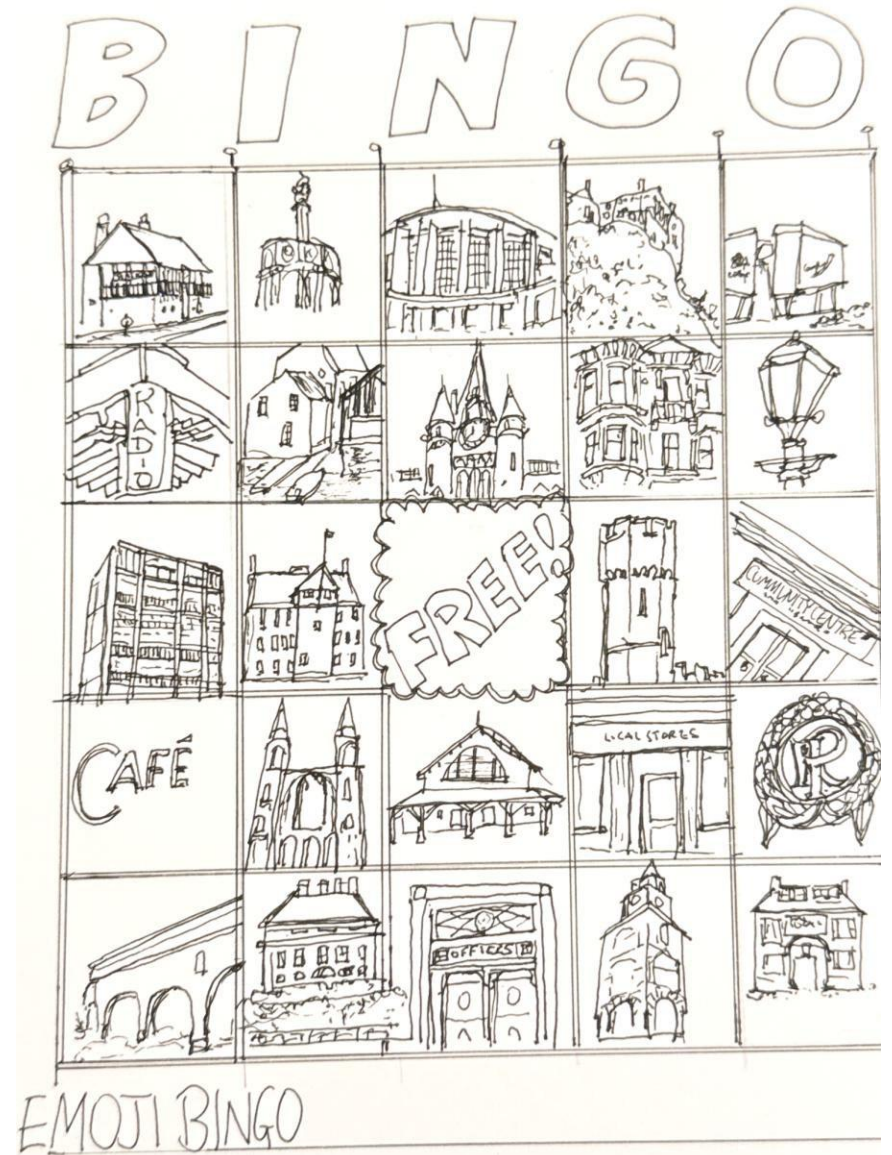
Emoji Plaques

1. Hand out blank pieces of paper
2. Ask people to select a place that matters to them
3. Ask people to write 1-2 lines about why their place matters to them
4. Add in emojis to express how they feel about their place



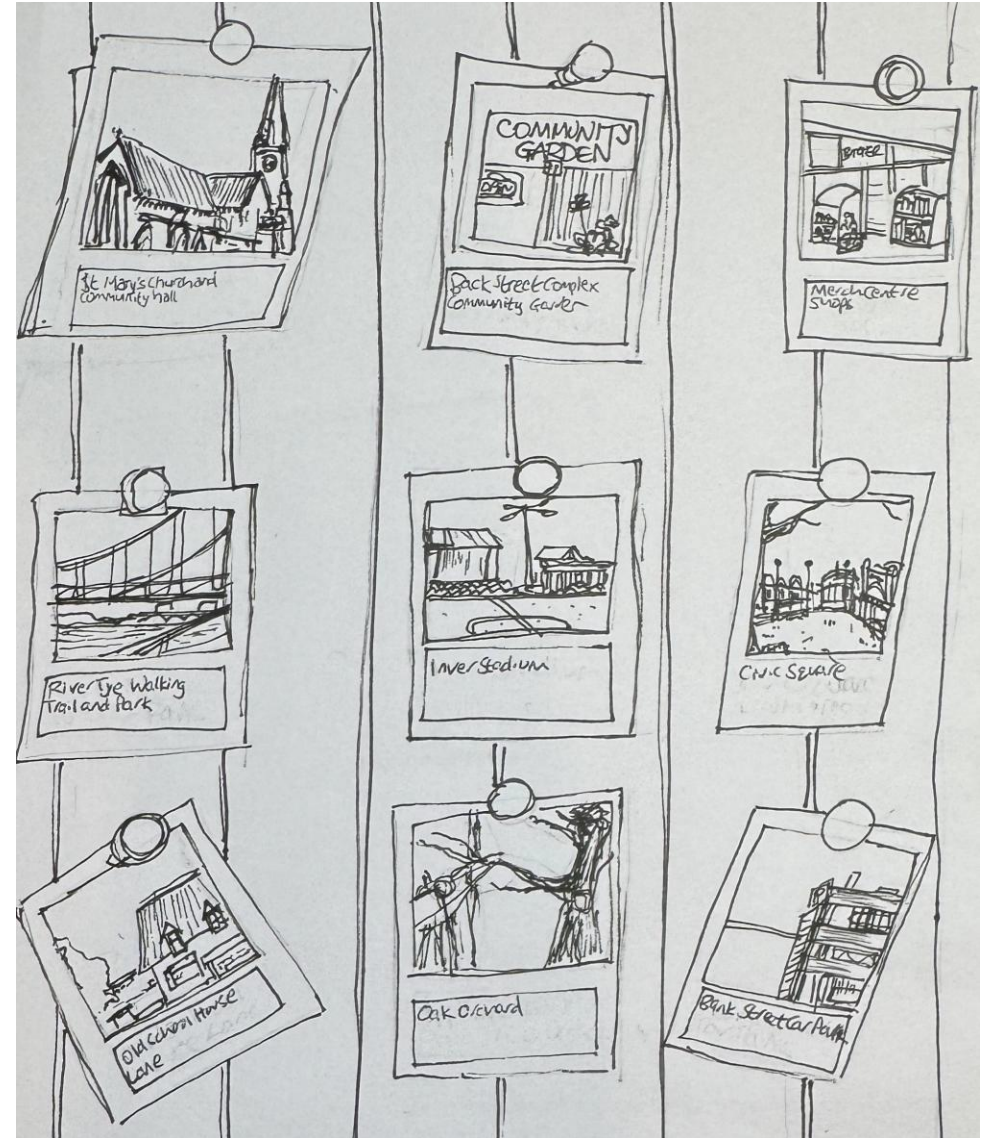
Emoji Bingo

1. Call out places of local importance which the audience will recognise
2. Ask people to place the emoji that best matches how they feel about the place onto the bingo card
3. Complete and keep card
4. Keep digital record and track changes over time
5. Optional follow- up discussion in groups



Emoji Photos

1. Ask people to respond to a question, e.g. 'When I see this building/place I feel...' with an emoji that best fits their response e.g. 😊 = happy.
2. People then discuss both their individual and collective responses to the image.
3. See if/how individual emoji responses change through collective discussion



Benefits

- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✓ Quick
- ✓ Inclusive
- ✓ Don't need a lot of equipment
- ✓ Provide an insight into why places matter to people and the feelings that they provoke.

However, as numerical exercises they can only tell us so much. As such we suggest that these methods are all used to stimulate conversations and discussions. Here we would use prompts such as

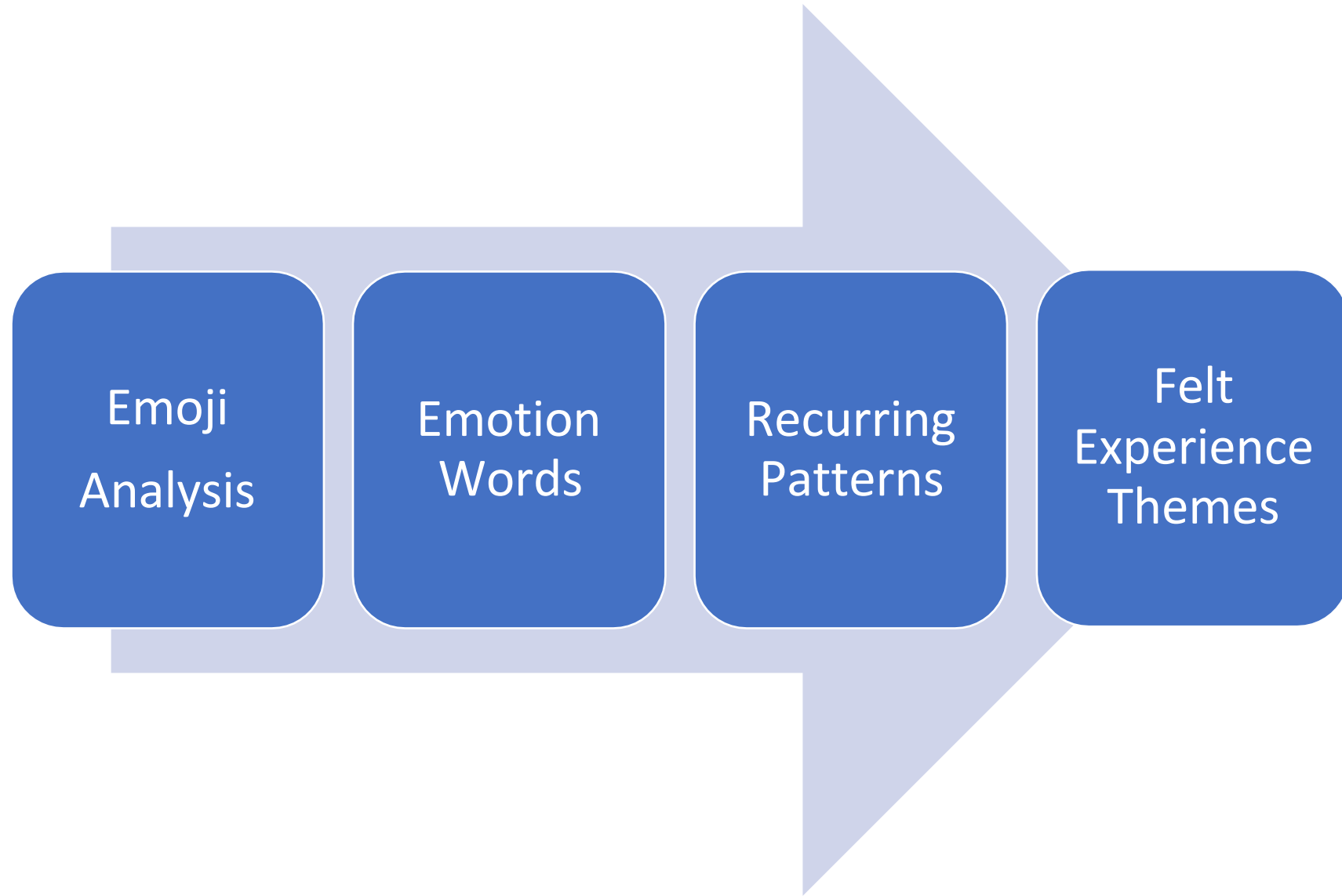
- why did you choose this emoji?
- what other emoji could you have chosen and why?
- would you change your choice of emoji having listened to other people's choices?

This ensures that people can express why their places matter to them and how they use them and feel about them in their everyday lives.

This material from the conversations enables richer understandings of place and we suggest following the Felt Experiences Framework to be able to use this information to shape decision making.

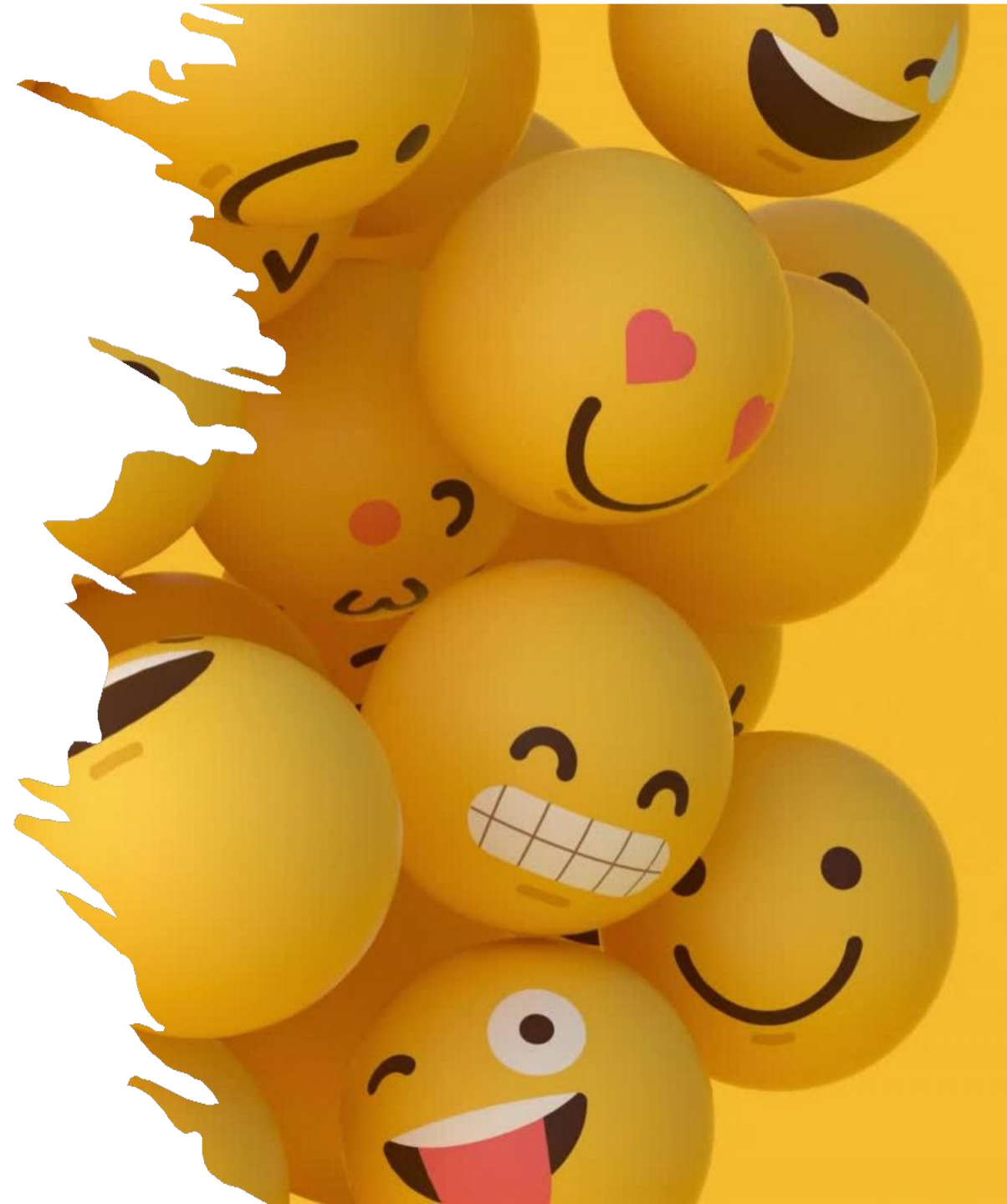
4. Look for feelings and experiences

The Felt Experiences Framework can help us to understand different types of feelings and experiences



Emoji Analysis

- Which emoji appeared most frequently?
 - Which place has the most positive emoji?
 - Which place had the most negative emoji?
 - Did anywhere have only positive emoji?
 - Did anywhere have only negative emoji?
 - Where are the neutral emoji?
-
- Are there commonalities between emoji used by different people?
 - Did people make any additional notes?
 - What were the main reasons behind the choice of the emoji?
 - How do the choice of emoji change over time?
 - What are the recurring themes?



Emotion Words

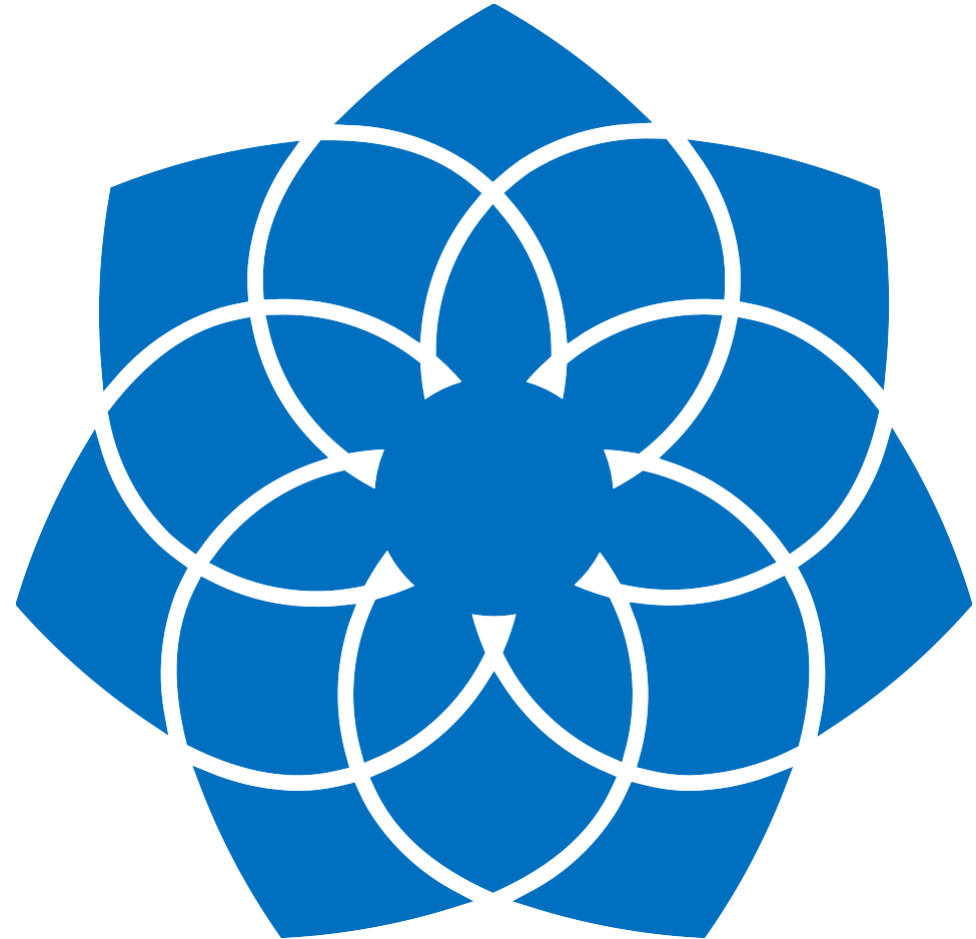
- Which emotion/feeling words appeared most frequently?
- Which place has the most positive words?
- Which place had the most negative words?
- Did anywhere have only positive words?
- Did anywhere have only negative words?

- Are there differences and similarities between words used by different people?
- Can you produce a word cloud of feelings and emotions?



Recurring Patterns

- What were the main reasons behind the positive words/emojis?
- What were the main reasons behind the negative words/emojis?
- What were the main reasons behind the places that didn't have any strongly positive or negative words/emojis?
- What are the main reasons why places matter to people?

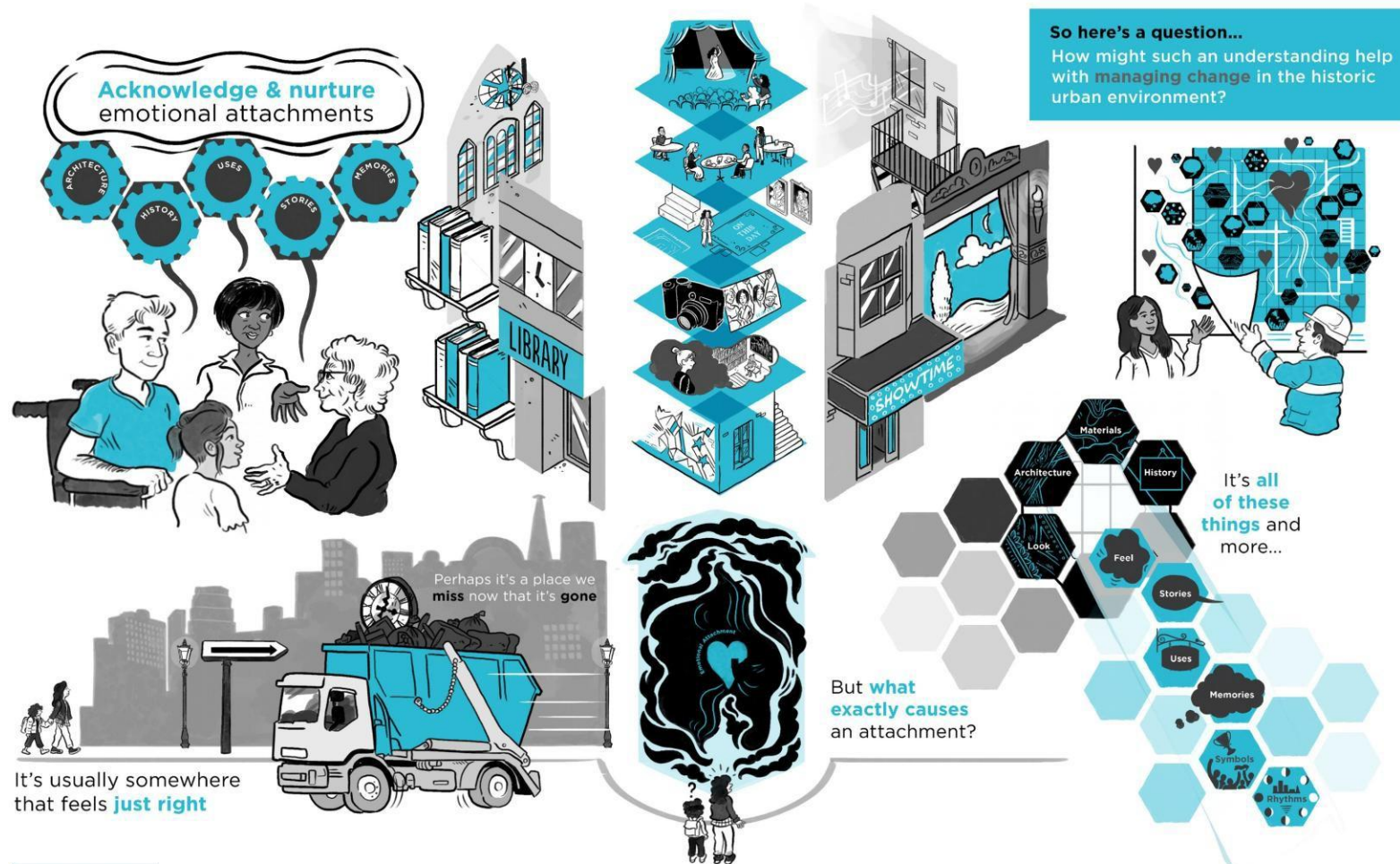


Felt Experience Themes

- Together the emojis/words/patterns should be able to tell us the kinds of places that matter to people and why.
- We can find out that it might be the way a building looks, the restorative qualities of a place, the social history of an area, the ongoing use of a space, and/or reveal a desire for the community to take on ownership of specific places.
- We can use this information to ensure that any changes we make to places can nurture positive felt experiences in the future.



Patterns and themes that explain why people form emotional attachments to historic places



5. Using the Collection and Framework

We suggest there are 5 key areas where information about felt experiences could help to shape decision making across the development and delivery cycle.

Developing an Understanding of Place

- *Use the methods in the 'Felt Experience Collection' to co-produce an understanding of the unique characteristics of place. For example, this could provide baseline data about which places matter to people and why. This could then be tracked across the development and delivery cycle.*

Receiving Applications

- *Use the 'Felt Experience Framework' to validate felt experiences within guidelines and criteria. For example, look at the ways in which people-centred approaches have produced different understandings of place and see how this information has informed the decisions within the development and delivery phases.*

Engaging with Communities

- *Use the methods in the 'Felt Experience Collection' to generate an activity plan that can nurture positive felt experiences and therefore secure improved socio-economic outcomes. For example, providing opportunities for people to come together, make, and create is evidenced to improve a sense of belonging and increase attachment to place. As such not everything has to produce 'data' to be collected and analysed as the process of creating together is as important as the outcome.*

Delivering Capital Projects

- *Use the methods in the 'Felt Experience Collection' to empower people to become proactive place-shapers. For example, by using their stories and meanings to shape interpretation plans, inform new uses for buildings and guide prioritisation based on the places that matter most to people.*

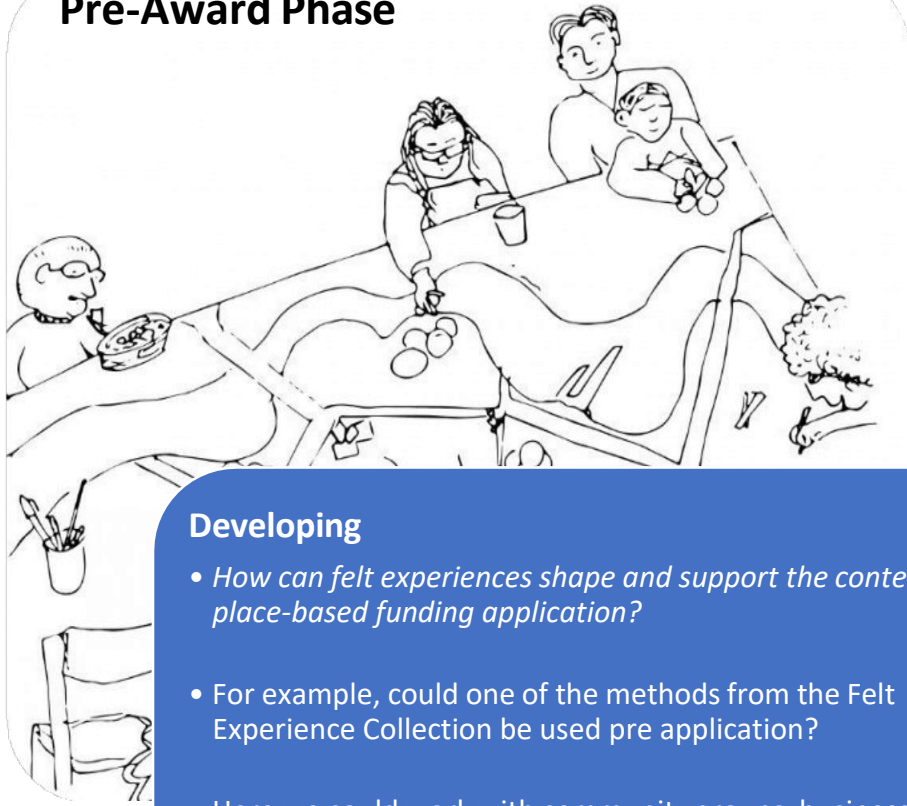
Evaluating Projects

- *Use the approach in the Felt Experience Collection and Framework to generate meaningful data that is produced and owned by people in place. This can become part of continuous evaluation to demonstrate how project funding has changed people's feelings about their places.*

Worked Example

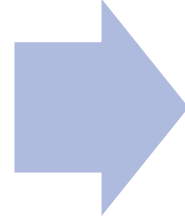
Suggestion for how to integrate the “Felt Experiences Process”
within and across pre- and post award decision making

Pre-Award Phase



Developing

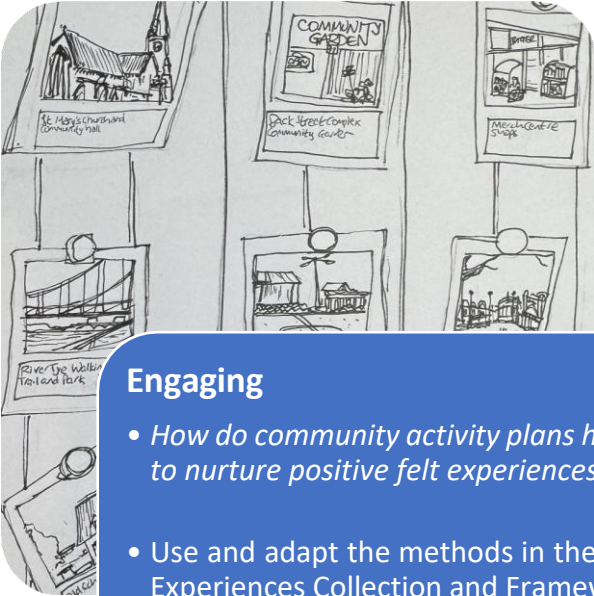
- *How can felt experiences shape and support the content of a place-based funding application?*
- For example, could one of the methods from the Felt Experience Collection be used pre application?
- Here we could work with community groups, business, workers, visitors and residents to crowd-source a felt experiences map.
- This can inform understanding selection of priority places by identifying the places that matter to people ahead of submitting a funding application.



Applying

- *How can felt experiences be validated within the process of successful funding applications?*
- For example, could felt experiences be one of the criteria upon which funding applications are assessed?
- Demonstrate the ways in which the crowd sourced felt experiences map has been generated and how it has shaped the activities in the development and delivery phases.
- Validate the process of generating the felt experiences map and assess based on the ways in which the map has informed the development and delivery phase applications.

Post Award Development and Delivery Phases



Engaging

- How do community activity plans help to nurture positive felt experiences?
- Use and adapt the methods in the Felt Experiences Collection and Framework to track this information over time.
- Example: can community-generated films, plays, novels etc showcase the area's heritage in ways that nurture a sense of attachment and belonging to place?



Delivering

- How can funding changes to place help to nurture positive felt experiences?
- Use and adapt the methods in the Felt Experiences Collection and Framework to track this information over time.
- Example: can plaques that represent the felt experiences of the place be included in capital projects, or can people's existing felt experiences shape the end use(s) of the place to reflect the needs and desires of the community?



Evaluating

- How does place change support positive felt experiences?
- Example: Can the felt experience map be repeated, e.g. every 1-2 years? Could this be supplemented by in-depth analysis showing how funding improvements to individual elements of place (buildings, public realm, green/blue spaces etc) have improved people's felt experiences of place and therefore supported improvements in health, well-being, sense of belonging and attachment to place.



Further Information

Key Resources

- [Feeling Towns Think Kit](#)
- [Roots and Futures Tool Kit](#)
- [Social Value Tool Kit – Guidance for Heritage Practitioners](#)
- [The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Good Practice Guidance](#)

Each of these resources contains information about how to conduct a project ethically and in line with GDPR requirements. Included are sample consent forms, advice on how to store and use data, and examples from other projects across the UK that explore people-centred approaches to place-based work.

Working with felt experiences can reveal positive, negative, and mixed feelings. We suggest engaging with the work of the Trauma-Informed Placemaking Community of Practice:

- [About — Trauma-Informed Placemaking](#)

In addition, there are also a range of other guidance documents that can support community engagement.

- [Planning Advice Note 3/2010](#)
- [National Standards for Community Engagement](#)
- [IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation](#)
- [Planning Aid Scotland Practical Guide to Engagement \(SP=EED\)](#)



References

- Place Programme: www.gla.ac.uk/place and Madgin, R., and Howcroft, M. (2024) *Advancing People-Centred, Place-Based Approaches*, University of Glasgow. <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/342111/>
- Improvement Service (no date): <https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/productsand-services/planning-and-placebased-approaches/planning-for-placeprogramme/place-based-approaches.lpu>
- Madgin, R. (2022) 'Place Based Policies', Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA), *The Protagonist*, July, 10-11. https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_870285_smxx.pdf
- Animation for patterns and themes: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/socialpolitical/research/research-projects/why-do-historic-places-matter/>
- Feeling Towns Think Kit: andtowns.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Feeling-Towns-Think-Kit.pdf
- Roots and Future Tool Kit: <https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/roots-and-futures/toolkit>
- Social Value Tool Kit: <https://socialvalue.stir.ac.uk/>
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Good Practice Guidance: <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/good-practice-guidance>
- Trauma-Informed Placemaking: <https://www.traumainformed.place/about>
- Planning Advice Note 3/2010: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/planning-advice-note-3-2010-community-engagement/>
- National Standards for Community Engagement: <https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards>
- IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation: https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf
- Planning Aid Scotland Practical Guide to Engagement (SP=EED): <https://www.pas.org.uk/what-we-do/speed/>
- Ethics Guidance: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics-guidance/>
- The Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth (ASA) Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice: <https://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.html>

Thanks

Resource Kit prepared by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Place Programme team with support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic Environment Scotland, and the (2022) Thriving Places/Heritage and Place Development Phase Grantees.

**To Cite: Madgin, R., Howcroft, M. and McCandlish, A. (2025) *The Felt Experiences of Place Resource Kit*, University of Glasgow.
<https://doi.org/10.36399/gla.pubs.371694>**