

# Patternmaking as Vehicle for Social Change: A Participatory Practice Research with Diverse Women's Communities in London

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## Abstract

Often criticised for its negative social impacts, fashion can also be a powerful tool to improve people's lives. Many companies, research and community projects are creating a counter-narrative to the mainstream fashion system by including the voices and practices of marginalised communities. In community-based research, many fashion and textile techniques are used to engage people and foster social change, but there are limited examples of patternmaking being used in a participatory way for this purpose. Patternmaking is commonly considered a technical and uncreative step in the fashion design process. This research however presents patternmaking as a creative practice of fashion design and explores it through the lens of fashion design for social innovation. The aim is to explore how patternmaking and garment making can foster social change within diverse women's communities in London. The project employs participatory practice research as research strategy and the approach consists in a series of participatory making workshops, that progressively lead the participants to develop their own creative practice. Two series of workshops with women living in a deprived area of London have shown that participating in the workshops has led to skill acquisition, creativity development, community engagement and the improvement of wellbeing and self-confidence.

**Keywords:** Patternmaking; Garment Making; Social Change; Design for Social Innovation; Participatory Practice Research.

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## Introduction

This article reports on the first two years of an ongoing research project that focuses on empowering women in a deprived area of London through fashion design. The choice of working exclusively with women is driven not only by the researcher's personal preference and family history but is informed by evidence that suggests that empowering women and giving them access to the labour market contributes to reducing poverty, improving the health, nutrition and education of children and is essential to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>1</sup> However, according to UN Women, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified gender-based violence, deprived many women from their livelihoods due to job loss and increased domestic burdens, and pushed even more women and girls into extreme poverty.<sup>2</sup> These are the reasons why UN Women advocates to focus on giving women and girls the tools to build resilience. Within this broad context, the research<sup>3</sup> seeks to contribute to that goal at its modest and micro level. It aims to explore patternmaking through the lens of design for social innovation and investigate the potential of patternmaking and garment making as a vehicle for social change. This project intends to answer the following research question: In what ways can patternmaking and garment making be used to foster social change within diverse women's communities in London? To answer this question, three research objectives were set: to map the field of patternmaking and analyse its potential as a method of fashion design for social innovation; to develop a participatory approach to patternmaking and garment making; to test the approach with groups of women and assess its immediate social impact.

## Fashion Design for Social Innovation

This research sits within the field of fashion design for social innovation and more precisely within research that uses the practice of 'fashion making' as a research method and as a tool to foster social change with communities.

## Social Impacts of Fashion

The current unsustainable fast fashion system based on "over-production and over-consumption"<sup>4</sup> has a destructive impact on people. Forced or underpaid labour, poor working conditions, labour rights violations, discriminations, work insecurity are still a reality, inflicted by the fashion industry, in many parts of the world.<sup>5</sup> Over the last few years, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and aggravated these issues, making lives even more challenging for many fashion workers, especially women who make up most of the factories' workforce.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, fashion can also act as a powerful tool for the building of more sustainable ways of living, creating a counter-narrative to the mainstream fashion system by including the voices and

1. "Leaving No One Behind: The Imperative of Inclusive Development," United Nations, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/full-report.pdf>.
2. "COVID-19: Rebuilding for Resilience," *UnWomen*, accessed September 29, 2022, [https://www.unwomen.org/en/hq-complex-page/covid-19-rebuilding-for-resilience?gclid=cjwkcajwjzmtbhb4eiwaynrm-d-fqu525eq3gr2hntlyb3mb5rlfsbcz\\_in1vv-lsiubtn4nod3arrocwj8qavd\\_bwe](https://www.unwomen.org/en/hq-complex-page/covid-19-rebuilding-for-resilience?gclid=cjwkcajwjzmtbhb4eiwaynrm-d-fqu525eq3gr2hntlyb3mb5rlfsbcz_in1vv-lsiubtn4nod3arrocwj8qavd_bwe).
3. This article presents partial results of an ongoing research project.
4. Sandy Black et al., *Final Report — Rethinking Fashion Design Entrepreneurship: Fostering Sustainable Practices* (London: Centre for Sustainable Fashion, no date), 4.
5. Safia Minney, *Slave to Fashion* (Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd, 2017); Anthony Sullivan, "Britain's 'Dark Factories': Specters of Racial Capitalism Today," *Fashion Theory*, 26.4 (2022): 493–508, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2022.2046861>.
6. Christophe Hansen, Jafar Iqbal, Maansi Parpiani, Ridhi Sahai, Vaiddehi Bansal, Mithila Iyer, Michelle Davis and Kareem Kysia, "Ripped at the Seams: RMG Sector Workers During a Global Pandemic," *Journal of Modern Slavery*, 6.2 (2021): 79–105, [https://slavfreetoday.org/journal\\_of\\_modern\\_slavery/v6i2a04\\_RippedattheSeamsRMGSectorWorkersDuringaGlobalPandemic.pdf](https://slavfreetoday.org/journal_of_modern_slavery/v6i2a04_RippedattheSeamsRMGSectorWorkersDuringaGlobalPandemic.pdf); "Boohoo & COVID-19 — The People Behind the Profits," Labour Behind the Label, <https://labourbehindthelabel.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LBL-Boohoo-WEB.pdf>.

practices of marginalised communities. Organisations and research centres such as Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL and Fashion Revolution are crucial to expose, research, advise and educate on social issues in the industry. Some brands promote sustainable and social justice values (e.g. London-based brands Bethany Williams, Lovebird, Raeburn), listening to the needs and aspirations of marginalised minorities, paying a living wage and giving training and work opportunities to more vulnerable people. UK-based project ‘Fostering Sustainable Practices’ shows that such purpose-led and sustainability-driven design-led fashion MSEs have the potential to bring radical change to the fashion industry.<sup>7</sup> Fashion crafts can also be used as a tool for empowerment, activism, and community engagement within marginalised communities.<sup>8</sup>

## Design for Social Innovation

Within this broader research context, design for social innovation was deemed as a suitable approach to this project. The review of various definitions has led to the identification of the many elements that constitute design for social innovation: the definition of ‘social’, and ‘innovation’, the roles of design and the designer, its participative nature. This led to formulating a definition of design for social innovation appropriate for this research. Design for social innovation is anything that designers can do to support the development of innovative approaches that address social needs of vulnerable groups of people. Innovative approaches use existing methods or a combination of methods in new ways or in new contexts. Social innovation is intrinsically participatory and engages the beneficiaries in the development of their own voices, agencies, and practices. This definition builds on Manzini’s<sup>9</sup> and TEPSIE’s<sup>10</sup> definitions of design for social innovation. It also follows Thorpe and Gamman’s maternalistic approach to co-design where the designer and other actors share the responsibility and agency in the co-design process of social innovation.<sup>11</sup> It also emphasises the multiple roles that design can play in addressing the social needs of vulnerable groups of people and their participation in the process of design.

## Patternmaking and Fashion Design for Social Innovation

Keeping in mind the above definition of design for social innovation, we can investigate how fashion design can be used as a tool to engage non-expert actors and foster the development of their own voices and practices. This research builds on the work of other researchers, Storey’s ‘Love coats’ project,<sup>12</sup> Orta’s work at HMP Downview,<sup>13</sup> Hirscher’s making spaces,<sup>14</sup> Mazzarella’s ‘Forest Coats’ project,<sup>15</sup> among others, that have used participatory methodologies and fashion design practices to engage vulnerable people and foster social change. Fashion co-creation and collective making is a useful participatory method to engage people in fashion design practices. Collective making can bring about many benefits, including:<sup>16</sup>

7. MSEs stand for Medium and Small Enterprises. Black et al., *Final Report*.
8. See Francesco Mazzarella and Sandy Black, “Fashioning Change: Fashion Activism and its Outcomes on Local Communities,” *Fashion Practice*, 15.2 (2023): 230–255, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17569370.2022.2095729>.
9. Enzo Manzini, “Making Things Happen: Social Innovation and Design,” *Design Issues*, 30 (2014): 57.
10. TEPSIE, “Social Innovation Theory and Research. A Guide for Researchers,” *TIPSIE*, 4 (2014), <https://www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/publications/social-innovation-theory-and-research-a-guide-for-researchers/>.
11. Adam Thorpe and Lorraine Gamman, “Design with Society: Why Socially Responsive Design is Good Enough,” *CoDesign*, 7.4 (2011): 217–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2011.630477>.
12. Loukia, “Story LOVECOATS at Za’atari Refugee Camp,” accessed October 13, 2022, <https://www.arts.ac.uk/colleges/london-college-of-fashion/stories/lovecoats-at-zaatari-refugee-camp>.
13. “Procession Banners 1918–2018,” Studio Orta, accessed September 29, 2022, <https://www.studio-orta.com/en/artwork/689/procession-banners-1918-2018>.
14. Anja L. Hirscher, *When Skillful Participation Becomes Design: Making Clothes Together*, PhD dissertation (Finland: Aalto University School of Arts. Department of Art, Design and Architecture, 2020).
15. Mazzarella and Black, “Fashioning Change”.
16. Laura Caulfield, Kerry Curtis and Ella Simpson, *Making for Change. An Independent Evaluation of Making for Change: Skills in a Fashion Training & Manufacturing Workshop* (London: London College of Fashion, 2018), <http://artsevidence>.

- Skill acquisition and skill improvement.
- Improvement of mental-health and personal well-being.
- Development of life and social skills.
- Improvement of self-confidence and agency.
- Community engagement.
- Empowerment and hope for the future.

The review of the above-mentioned projects reveals that many fashion design activities and crafts are used during participatory making workshops, including sewing, embroidery, crochet, knitting. But patternmaking does not seem to have been considered as a participatory activity, while I suggest that, as the knowledge and practice of garment construction, patternmaking has the potential to empower people to create their own garment designs. That is the reason why this research suggests opening to ‘non-design experts’ an area of fashion design that has been reserved to expert pattern cutters until now.

## Patternmaking

### Metric and Creative Pattern Cutting

In the Global North, the pattern cutting field is split into two main schools of thoughts: metric pattern cutting and creative pattern cutting.<sup>17</sup>

Metric pattern cutting is the “drafting [of] the paper pattern ‘flat’, relying on the measurements of the human body as a guide.”<sup>18</sup> This process creates “a set of flat paper or cardboard pattern pieces that, when cut in fabric and sequentially stitched together, creates the garment.”<sup>19</sup> This is the most common method employed in the fashion industry,<sup>20</sup> and also the “near-universally dominant” method taught today.<sup>21</sup> Metric pattern cutting has been described as “a methodical and mathematically complex discipline, divorced from creativity.”<sup>22</sup> Pattern cutting has traditionally been the step following the design of a garment, translating the designer’s sketches into patterns, and preceding to manufacturing. Its role is then to “realise the vision of the designer, transforming a 2D design into a 3D garment.”<sup>23</sup> The designer is thus commonly seen as the predominant owner of creativity and as the only one worthy of recognition and esteem.<sup>24</sup>

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org.uk/media/uploads/181030-making-for-change-min.pdf; Francesco Mazzarella, *Making for Change: Waltham Forest. Project Report* (London: University of the Arts London, 2020); Patrycja Kaszynska, Adam Thorpe and Samuel Mitchell, *MAKE (E)Valuation Report* (London: University of The Arts, 2022), [https://www.arts.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/332033/Final\\_Clean\\_MAKE\\_EvaluationReport\\_070222.pdf](https://www.arts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/332033/Final_Clean_MAKE_EvaluationReport_070222.pdf).

17. I choose to use the term “metric pattern cutting”, in line with Aldrich’s books. See: Winifred Aldrich, *Metric Pattern Cutting* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2004).
18. Dennic Chunman Lo, *Pattern Cutting* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2014), 6.
19. Laura A. Hardingham, “How Can a Box Become a Garment,” *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education*, 9.2 (2016): 97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17543266.2016.1167254>.
20. Timo Rissanen, *Zero-Waste Fashion Design: A Study at the Intersection of Cloth, Fashion Design and Pattern Cutting*, PhD Dissertation (Sydney: University of Technology, 2013), <http://hdl.handle.net/10453/23384>; Inês Simões, *Contributions for a New Body Representation Paradigm in Pattern Design*, PhD Dissertation (Lisboa: Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, 2012).
21. Rickard Lindqvist, *Kinetic Garment Construction Remarks on The Foundations of Pattern Cutting*, PhD Dissertation (Sweden: University of Borås, 2015), 69, [https://www.academia.edu/11973607/kinetic\\_garment\\_construction\\_remarks\\_on\\_the\\_foundations\\_of\\_pattern\\_cutting](https://www.academia.edu/11973607/kinetic_garment_construction_remarks_on_the_foundations_of_pattern_cutting).
22. Kevin Almond and Jess Power, “Breaking the Rules in Pattern Cutting: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Promote Creativity in Pedagogy,” *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education*, 17 (2018): 34.
23. Anna Kuznia, Alana James and Bruce M. Roberts, “Transforming the Sequential Process of Fashion Production: Where Zero-Waste Pattern Cutting Takes the Lead in Creative Design,” *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education*, 9.2 (2016): 149.
24. James and Roberts, “Transforming the Sequential Process”; Rissanen, *Zero-Waste Fashion Design*; Minna Shim, “Credit For Creativity: Fine Line Production,” in *Just Fashion Critical Cases on Social Justice in Fashion*, ed. Otto Von Busch (New York: Selfpassage, 2012).

This hierarchical conception of fashion design and this definition of pattern cutting, deprived of creativity, is criticised by several designers, pattern cutters and researchers. They promote a more equitable distribution of the creative role and ask for more recognition of the crucial role and creative potential of pattern cutting within fashion design.<sup>25</sup> In the industry and in educational settings, we talk about creative pattern cutting. Beyond draping on the stand, creative pattern cutting involves researching and developing new ways of designing where pattern cutting takes the lead.<sup>26</sup> By placing pattern cutting at the centre of design, those new design approaches challenge traditional methods and take more creative risks as a way to “create new possibilities.”<sup>27</sup> Some examples are Sato’s transformational reconstruction method and Nakamichi’s Pattern Magic approach, Rissanen’s and McQuillan’s zero-waste fashion design, Julian Roberts’ Subtraction pattern cutting and Iszoro’s Accidental cutting.

## Challenging the Global Practice of Pattern Cutting

This dichotomous description of the pattern cutting field exists in a Western and Westernised approach to fashion design. It is crucial for this study to consider a broad definition of pattern cutting that includes the many traditional and indigenous ways of constructing a garment, too often omitted in a Western definition of fashion design. In this context, O’Neill’s definition of pattern cutting appears particularly suitable: “pattern-cutting involves a technical, conceptual and creative transformation: It turns two-dimensional cloth into three-dimensional garment form, changing fabric into fashion.”<sup>28</sup> This broad definition of pattern cutting also questions the meaning of pattern cutting itself. Many terms are used to refer to pattern cutting, often interchangeably: pattern cutting, pattern making, pattern design, pattern engineering, and technical design. For this research, I argue that pattern cutting and garment making are intrinsically connected, even being a unique activity in some cases. As a consequence, I deliberately choose to use the term ‘patternmaking’. The word ‘making’ implies a more holistic view of the design and making process and the role of ‘pattern cutting’ at every stage of fashion design. Based on this inclusive definition, I suggest a different way of looking at patternmaking. I distance myself from the Western categorisation based on creativity potentials, and geographical or cultural origins, to consider all patternmaking methods equitably and broaden their possibilities for creativity and innovation. Therefore, I have chosen to analyse patternmaking methods from a technical standpoint. I have defined four categories based on the starting point of the patternmaking/design process (Fig.1): methods starting from measurements, from fabric, from shapes or from pattern requirements or constraints. By organising and categorising pattern cutting methods as equal alternative ways to create garments, disregarding what I argue are arbitrarily allocated creative potentials, it offers a ‘toolbox’ from which methods can be selected and combined to develop new ideas.

The literature review has revealed the following knowledge gap: patternmaking does not seem to have been considered as a fashion design practice that could be used to foster social change in a participatory way. By applying the principles of design for social innovation to patternmaking and by formulating a more inclusive definition, a participatory practice-based methodology that aims at engaging women to develop their own creative practice was developed for this study.

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25. Kevin Almond, “Insufficient Allure: The Luxurious Art and Cost of Creative Pattern Cutting,” *The International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education*, 3.1 (2010): 15–24; Kevin Almond, “The Status of Pattern Cutting,” *Fashion Practice: The Journal of Design, Creative Process and The Fashion Industry*, 8 (2016): 168–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17569370.2016.1147692>; Eva Iszoro, *Direct Methods of Creative Pattern Cutting, Pedagogy and Experimentation*, PhD Dissertation (Madrid: ETSAM-Architecture School, Polytechnical University, 2016); Julian Roberts, “Free Cutting,” Tumblr, accessed May 18, 2019, <https://subtractioncutting.tumblr.com>.

26. Kuznia, James and Roberts, “Transforming the Sequential Process”.

27. Timo Rissanen and Holly Mcquillan, *Zero Waste Fashion Design* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 84.

28. Alistair O’Neill, *Exploding Fashion Making, Unmaking, and Remaking Twentieth Century Fashion* (Tiel: Lannoo, 2021), 9.

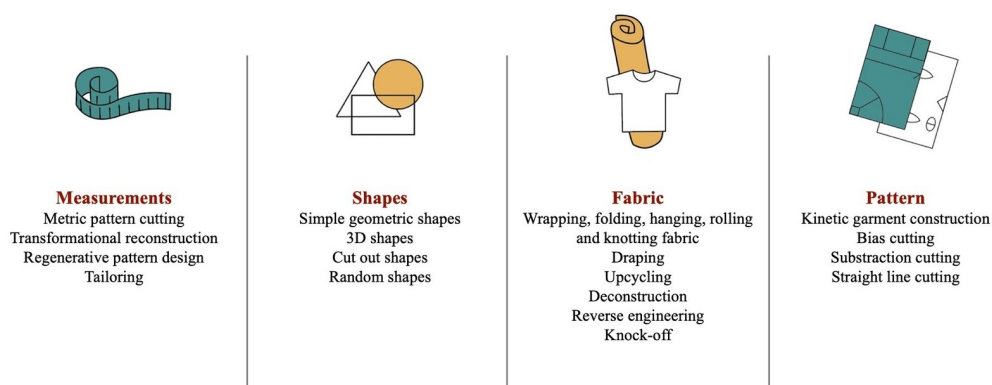


Figure 1: Categorisation of patternmaking methods. (Illustration by the author).

## Methodology

### Participatory Practice Research

This research is guided by the principles and values of design for social innovation, namely participation, inclusivity, and social justice. This qualitative research values the participants' voices and practices as meaningful interpretations of the world. It is situated within an interpretive paradigm in the sense that it values multiple subjectivities, including the researcher's,<sup>29</sup> but it also follows a transformative paradigm that "promotes human rights, social justice and social-action-oriented perspectives."<sup>30</sup> The research strategy adopted for this project is 'participatory practice research'. This builds on two types of strategies: participatory action research and practice research (Fig. 2).

Participatory action research involves partnering with non-academics to co-research and generate knowledge on a topic or an issue that they are facing following a collaborative and participatory process.<sup>31</sup> It values people and their knowledge and skills, and it places them as co-researchers in the project. Participatory action research is a powerful approach to understand people's experiences and their process of sense-making.<sup>32</sup> Practice research values practical and tacit knowledge as much as theoretical knowledge and places practice at the centre of the research inquiry.<sup>33</sup> It develops sited practices that contribute to knowledge in the form of "new concepts/designs and new knowledge, relevant to and for assessment by the community in the situation, as well as in new concepts/designs and new knowledge for design practice and for design research."<sup>34</sup> Participatory practice research combines both strategies. The object of

29. Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill, *Research Methods for Business Students* (Harlow: Pearson, 2019).

30. Patricia Leavy, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches* (New York: The Guildford Press, 2017), 13.

31. Leavy; Alice McIntyre, *Participatory Action Research* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008), <https://dx-doi-org.arts.idm.oclc.org/10.4135/9781483385679>.

32. Leavy.

33. Craig Vear, *The Routledge International Handbook of Practice-Based Research* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

34. Patrycja Kaszynska, Lucy Kimbell and Jocelyn Bailey, *Practice research in design: Towards a novel definition. Social Design Institute Working Paper* (London: University of the Arts London, 2022), 3.



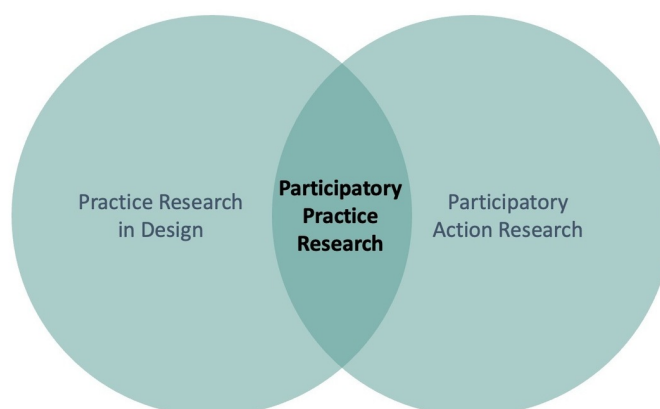


Figure 2: Research methodology. (Illustration by the author).

research is not the researcher's practice but the research participants' practices and their outcomes, both tangible (i.e. artefact or design) and intangible (i.e. the change generated by the practice). In this, the role of designers is to build on their practice to develop the conditions and infrastructure for participants to develop their own practice.<sup>35</sup>

## Research Methods

In order to engage community members, making workshops appeared as an appropriate research method for this participatory practice research. Workshops enable participants to engage in activities that lead them to “ideate, develop, envision and sketch together, to imagine future design objects or services and their uses.”<sup>36</sup> In fashion design for social innovation, collective making workshops are often used as method to involve community members.<sup>37</sup> For this research, workshops have been developed following a ‘maternalistic’ approach of co-design: increasing doses of creative ‘optimal frustration’ are introduced; “that is just enough to create a proper environment”<sup>38</sup> for the participants to progressively transition towards full creative agency. Thus, the approach consists in a series of eight making workshops (Fig. 3), built around the definition of patternmaking as a fashion design practice, which aim is to progressively lead participants to develop their own practices.

The ‘journey’ is split into four ‘chapters’: the first three introduce three different patternmaking methods, namely reproducing a garment by copying its pattern, using simple geometrical shapes to create garments, and modifying a simple dress using draping techniques. During the last chapter, participants create their own garment, making their own creative and making decisions. Participants were recruited with the help of a gatekeeper organisation that supports the local community. Participants are women living in the neighbourhood, ideally with some sewing experience and visiting the gatekeeper organisation

35. Hirscher defines infrastructuring as the building and transferring of skills to create the environment for opportunities to emerge.

36. Leavy, *Research Design*, 25.

37. Kaszynska, Thorpe and Mitchell, *MAKE (E)Valuation Report*; Mazzarella, *Making for Change*; Mazzarella and Black, “Fashioning Change”.

38. Thorpe and Gamman, “Design with Society,” 221.

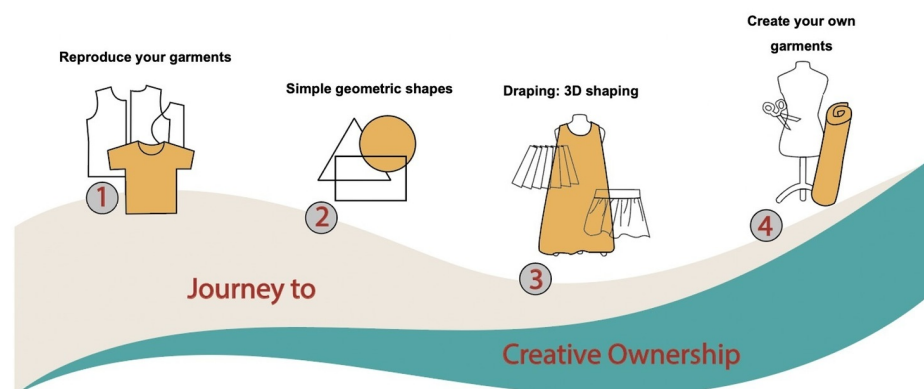


Figure 3: Journey to Creative Ownership: Patternmaking workshops. (Illustration by the author).

regularly. During the workshops, in a similar way as for an ethnographic study, qualitative data (i.e. observations, questionnaires, photography, participants' notes, physical artefacts) are gathered through "watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions [...], collecting documents and artefacts."<sup>39</sup> The qualitative data gathered are then analysed following two approaches: Thematic coding: categorising data under identified themes allows for the identification of insights from a large volume of qualitative data.<sup>40</sup>

Chronological comparisons: Each participant's journey is analysed in a chronological way to identify patterns of evolution.<sup>41</sup>

This should lead to a qualitative assessment of the short-term impact of the workshops and assess if the approach is successful in generating positive social change.

## Participatory Practice Development

This section reports on the process and outcomes of the delivery of two series of patternmaking and garment making workshops in Somers Town, London Borough of Camden from May to November 2022.

### Local Context

Somers Town, located between Kings Cross and Euston train stations, is considered one of the most deprived areas in England, suffering from multiple types of deprivation and social challenges: income deprivation, poverty impacting children (50.7% of children are living in poverty) and older people, unemployment, health issues (including anxiety and depression), crime and disorder.<sup>42</sup> A total of ten

39. Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.

40. Graham Gibbs, *Analyzing qualitative data* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018), <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526441867>.

41. Gibbs.

42. Camden Council, *Somers Town*, 2015, <https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/Community/Camden-Neighbourhood-Profile-Somers-Towns/dv62-dsg9>.



participants have taken part in the first two series of workshops. All of them considered themselves beginners in sewing and had limited patternmaking knowledge. Once a week, we met for three hours to explore and experiment with patternmaking and garment making. The sessions were led by the researcher and one or two workshop assistants, whose role was to support the participants.<sup>43</sup>

The sessions are designed in such way that the techniques can be replicated outside the workshop setting: affordable domestic sewing machines are used, and technical equipment is replaced as much as possible by objects readily available or purchasable at a low price. The material used is calico fabric, an unexpensive unbleached woven cotton fabric which helps participants to release their creativity and lifts the worry of making mistakes and wasting a more expensive and delicate fabric. As the workshops are organised in an open and adaptable way, the participants were able to develop their own designs for every 'chapter of the journey'. An array of artefacts was produced showcasing the wide variety of techniques which the participants experimented with (Fig. 4).



Figure 4: Dresses made by the participants during the draping workshops.

## Outcomes

The review of the fieldnotes, the feedback questionnaires and the analysis of the physical patterns and garments made during the workshops, reveal that participating in the workshops has had a positive impact on the women. At workshop level, the participants seem to have experienced some positive change in the following areas:

- **Skill acquisition:** At the beginning of the project, all the participants declared to be beginners in sewing and to have limited knowledge of patternmaking. During the workshops, they learnt

43. Two participants from the first series of workshops were recruited as workshop assistants for the following workshops and were remunerated.

about and experimented with three different patternmaking techniques which empowered them to develop their own design ideas (Fig. 5). All have expressed a desire to learn more advanced skills and some plan to join formal training.

- Creativity development: the participants had the freedom to create their own designs. The variety of garments made (tops, dresses, trousers, skirts, waistcoat, sofa covers, capes) and techniques used (ruffles, darts, pleats, raglan sleeves, appliqués) illustrate that point. Moreover, all of them experienced fashion design through making. During the making process, new design ideas emerged, and the participants were able to try them out and change their original design idea, often surprising themselves along the way. As a result of their participation in the project, all of them said that they “definitely” felt inspired and intend to use their patternmaking and sewing skills in the future and most of them feel more creative.
- Community engagement: the workshops were an opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. Participants often helped each other and shared their knowledge and ideas (Fig. 6).

At a deeper personal level, their participation in the workshops has contributed to improving their well-being and confidence:

- Well-being: all the participants have enjoyed the workshops “very much” and consider that the project has met their expectations. The participants also experienced great satisfaction and pride in completing physical pieces of design. Indeed, all of them would be happy to exhibit their work.
- Self-confidence: All the women mentioned that participating in the workshops have made them feel positive and more confident in their sewing, patternmaking and fashion design skills (Fig. 7). This also manifested in more concrete ways during the workshops; for instance, in the way they used the sewing machines with more confidence or in trying things out without asking for validation beforehand.
- Agency and empowerment: Along the journey, the participants became more independent and autonomous in making their own decisions and finding solutions. While at the beginning they preferred following instructions, asked for validation when trying new things, and worried about making mistakes, they progressively took more ownership of their projects, suggesting other ways of doing things, bringing their own fabric, patterns, and garments.

The following quotes show the personal journey of one of the participants:

“We are not designers.” (01.11.2022)

“I went shopping with my daughter this week. She liked a dress but it was poor quality. I told her that I can make it. I looked at the garments and it gave me lots of ideas.” (08.11.2022)

“My daughter told her sister ‘Look, mummy is becoming a designer’.” (15.11.2022)

As a result of their participation in the workshops, participants feel empowered to be creative and express their ideas and individuality. Some have expressed the desire to pursue further fashion design education, made to sell and open a dedicated making space. It is still early to observe any long-term change, but some stepping stones have been laid for the participants to develop future opportunities for themselves and the community.



Figure 5: Participant sewing gathers on a domestic sewing machine.





Figure 6: Two participants copying the pattern of a child's dress.





Figure 7: Garment sketch with measurements and fabric sample made by a participant.

## Conclusion

The preliminary outcomes of the workshops suggest that patternmaking and garment making can indeed foster social change when used in such a participatory way, thus filling the knowledge gap identified in the literature review. In the context of this study, two necessary conditions must be fulfilled for patternmaking to act as a vehicle for social change. First patternmaking is defined as a practice of fashion design and its crucial role at every stage of the fashion design process is recognised. Then a more inclusive approach to the discipline is followed, by equally considering various methods of garment construction, including those too often omitted in a Western definition of fashion design. Only then, can the values of social design for social innovation, namely participation, inclusivity, and social justice, be applied to develop a participatory methodology that allows the participants to develop their own practices. Therefore, this study not only presents a methodology of fashion design for social innovation, but it also suggests an original understanding of the field of patternmaking.

These first two years of research have also revealed some challenges that many community-based research projects face and that should be investigated further, such as accessing community groups, securing funding, evaluating social change, designing a legacy strategy, and managing the various roles of the researcher and designer.



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