

Podcasting and Collaborative Learning Practices in Placemaking Studies

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Introduction

This chapter explores the value of podcasting in UK planning undergraduate studies. It presents the findings of a research project carried out from Spring 2020 at the start of the first COVID-19 lockdown by an interdisciplinary research team of academics, an education developer¹, and students² on the use of podcasts³ in placemaking studies in Higher Education (HE)⁴. The starting point for this project, funded by an internal grant from the Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Built Environment at Birmingham City University, had been the experience of teaching on a final year undergraduate planning module devised pre-COVID lockdown. In this pre-pandemic module, named Drivers of Change, podcasts were for the first time introduced both as an innovative teaching and learning method (in the form of freely available podcasts from various digital platforms⁵) and as a form of assessment (in the form of students-generated podcasts)⁶. The aim was to introduce novelty to the learning experience of students in their final year of studies.

However, in the wake of COVID-19 lockdown and the need to rapidly shift to online learning (Crawford et al., 2020), the use of Educational Technology (edtech) such as podcasts gained new currency. The need to switch to online learning offered exciting opportunities to rethink how to reconfigure blended learning (online/offline, synchronous/asynchronous, and active/passive methods) to ensure engaging and creative students' experience, but also to experiment with new practices.

In recent years, podcasts have moved beyond recreational listening to contribute to HE, demonstrating a use and purpose that is innovative and effective (Guertin, 2010). The rationale behind their use is multifold: podcasts are an innovative, time-efficient form of communication to deliver teaching/research content; they enable asynchronous learning and, potentially, community building; they can meet students' propensity to study and learn using a variety of digital equipment; they can enthuse students as a novel method of teaching and assessment.

¹ Their role was to provide rigorous support on the learning, teaching and assessment-related complexities.

² Two second-year students joined the team acting as paid research partners.

³ A podcast, or *personal on demand broadcasts*, is any downloadable audio or video file (typically MP3) streamed via the Internet that can be downloaded and played anywhere and anytime. They can be simply developed using accessible software available on smartphones or tablets; they are easily downloadable on smartphones; they tend to engage in innovative content (topics/series) and are portable on smartphones and therefore very accessible.

⁴ Higher Education (HE) is a third level education leading to award of an academic degree.

⁵ For this chapter, we will refer to *freely available podcasts* when talking about existing podcasts already available on different platforms and websites, to *teacher-generated podcasts* when talking about podcasts developed by teachers within a specific learning context, and to *students-generated podcasts* when talking about podcasts developed by students as form of assessment.

⁶ The Drivers of Change module requires students to produce, together with a podcast developed in pairs, an individual essay.

Existing literature suggests that podcasts in HE have been used across different disciplines and mainly in form of classroom lecture recording or revision, supplemental course materials or students' feedback on assessments. The wide availability of freely available podcasts on various educational topics on different digital platforms makes them easy to access and to include as external resources for students to listen to and engage with.

The novelty of this research is twofold: first, the project explored the effectiveness of purposely teacher-generated podcasts in teaching and learning, and as a form of assessment within the context of an undergraduate planning course with the purpose of encouraging a more diffused use; second, the project specifically focused on the use of audio podcasts within placemaking studies, which traditionally have a distinctive visual representation dimension, by experimenting with new *audio* content, communication and a storytelling approach.

The research questions at the core of our investigation contribute to the three main themes explored in this book and relate to what educational potential podcasts have in learning processes in HE (*learning*); how the use of alternative teaching and assessment methods could promote inclusivity in the learning experience (*inclusion*); what podcast formats could better support and empower students in their independent learning (*empowerment*).

Another clear element of originality of this research was the interdisciplinarity of the team and, most of all, the inclusion of two second year planning undergraduate students. Their involvement as research partners, rather than research assistants, resulted in a distinctive factor of this project. First, the research-teaching nexus has become a recurrent theme in HE with great encouragement of embedding more research-based learning to enhance students' experience and intellectual development (Jenkins, 2003 and 2004). Involving students as research partners means they had the opportunity to gain relevant research experience and critical transferable skills that could be beneficial for future academic and professional careers. Second, by working as research partners, students moved from being the recipient to co-producers of knowledge: they had the opportunity to consult participant peer fellow students (through workshop discussions) and become active agents in the process, co-producing and co-disseminating knowledge (Hill et al., 2013).

A multi-method research approach was taken to answer the three intertwined research questions. It included desk research and online engagement between the research team and student participants in workshops and seminars. By analysing the origin and use of podcasting in HE, this chapter elaborates on the use of teacher and student generated podcasts specifically within planning undergraduate education as an important approach to teaching, learning and assessment. By engaging in podcast making, it analyses how students can shift away from passive information recipients and become active knowledge creators for placemaking studies, making their knowledge more visible and generating students' agency in their learning.

This chapter argues that the value of teacher-generated podcasts in planning education emerge fully when contextualised in the specific learning framework of a module and into structured tasks. The chapter discusses three major contributions that podcasting offers to this book and, more in general, to HE. First, the asynchronous nature of podcasts provides new, flexible, and attractive opportunities for students' study. As students can access teacher-generated podcasts anytime and anywhere via mobile technology, learning can take place outside of the traditional classroom setting. Second, podcasts offer flexibility to create and share knowledge that transcends physical co-location. As podcasts can be recorded by using Teams or Zoom, for example, opportunities are provided for the wider and more inclusive involvement of professionals, researchers, and peer students in the world of planning and placemaking. Third, using student-produced podcasts as a form of assessment can provide an opportunity for students to feel empowered and explore their interests in urban planning, providing the opportunity to work in small teams collaboratively. Student feedback from our research project suggests that producing podcasts can facilitate passionate, in-depth engagement with content that is more achievable than in traditional forms of assessment and

can sustain student enthusiasm. The chapter concludes by systemising the key learnings from the project within the three core themes of the book – learning, inclusion and empowerment.

Podcasting as a medium of teaching, learning and assessing

Recently, podcasting as a form of knowledge dissemination, has increasingly gained prominence throughout academic, professional institutions and private businesses. In planning research and profession, podcasting offers opportunities to discuss new projects and professional practice. This is the case of The Bartlett Planning Podcasts which is an outlet to discuss planning research undertaken at the Bartlett School of Planning at UCL⁷. Other examples include '50 Shades of Planning'⁸ which has established itself as a valuable platform for discussion and dissemination of current planning issues by academics, politicians and planning representatives; the long-standing podcast series from established planning practices such as Barton Willmore⁹ and planning barrister chambers such as No5 Barristers¹⁰; the APA podcast by the American Planning Association which all discuss issues shaping planning theory and practice¹¹.

In this section, we reviewed studies contributing to the three main themes this book focusing on: learning, inclusion, empowerment. Therefore, this review section is not intended to present a comprehensive overview of podcast mediated learning in HE.

In HE, the use of podcast has seen growing popularity since the 2000s. In principle, the use of podcasts is convenient, as all that is needed is a device (a mobile phone or a computer/tablet) an internet connection and no additional software or hardware (Zanussi et al, 2012). Such high level of accessibility makes the use, or the production of, podcasts ideal for educators and students (Hubackova, 2013).

As a result of the shift to online learning, there has been an uptake in interest in podcasting within diverse higher education contexts (Hitchcock et al., 2021; Marunovich et al., 2021, Donnet and Verpoorten, 2021). Research shows popularity in the use of podcasts among students because of the flexibility of the medium to support their (mobile) learning: podcasts are portable as they can be easily downloaded on personal devices (at a very limited cost as small files) and listened to offline, they can be reviewed and replayed, and they can be listened to while on public transport or walking, facilitating what Evans (2008: 492) calls the “just-in-time” learning where students can take advantage of unexpected free time: during lunch breaks, in the evenings and at weekends (Sutton-Brady et al, 2016).

Beyond the immediate COVID pandemic, podcasts can provide enrichment for distance learners; for advanced or highly motivated students; for learners requiring assistance with reading and/or other disabilities; auditory support for multi-lingual or foreign language students and finally, podcasting caters for both auditory and visual learners (Walls et al, 2010). Audio podcasts as learning tools are usually supplemented by metadata or visual material (Jalali et al., 2011) and can encourage further research into a topic. Emerging research further identifies

⁷ The monthly podcasts can be accessible from: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/planning/about-us/bartlett-planning-podcast>

⁸ The 50 Shades of Planning Podcast created by Samuel Stafford can be accessed from: <https://pod.co/50-shades-of-planning>

⁹ Relaxed discussions across the development industry: <https://bartonwillmore.co.uk/Knowledge/Intelligence/2021/Uncut-In-Conversation-Our-Podcast>

¹⁰ Seminars by No5 Barristers Chamber are accessible from here: <https://www.no5.com/media/podcasts/>

¹¹ The American Planning Association's podcast delves into with deep curiosity, expert analysis, and affecting, true-life stories” <https://www.planning.org/podcast/>

the potential inclusion role of podcasting in enabling visually impaired students to engage within higher education (Kusumastuti and Supendra, 2021).

However, Walls et al (2010) highlight some potential drawbacks: podcasting could result in cognitive overload when added on top of a large pre-existing workload for both teachers and students. The making of a podcast means engaging in new learning material, but also conveying it using a communication style which is different from a written essay or a verbal presentation. Additionally, some students could deem listening to a podcast as a replacement for a lecture, rather than complementary, risking affecting other forms of engagement resulting in poor academic performance. Finally, as students use mobile devices for entertainment, it may require some adjustment before students use their devices for learning purposes, resulting in mobile devices causing a distraction to the learning process.

Depending on how podcasts are used in teaching and learning, Zanussi et al. (2012) suggest that as students tend to learn better in groups and listening to podcasts tends to be a solitary exercise (at least in the learning, less so in the assessment), podcasting may not be the best supplement to traditional teaching methods. Additionally, podcasting is often referred to as passive learning as usually there is no opportunity for feedback or questions. Moreover, there is little research into the added value that podcasting provides, there is still a concern that podcasts could be viewed as a form of entertainment, not a tool, which is only helpful for some subjects or courses.

However, podcasts allow students to be more receptive due to the assimilation and re-presentation of content (Evans, 2008). Gachago et al. (2016) suggest that podcasting can lead to deeper learning as students feel more involved in their learning. Such argument is compounded by Lonn and Teasley (2009) who suggest that podcasts amplify a students' sense of contact with their lecturers (in case of teacher-generated podcasts), resulting in increased students' motivation. Reflecting teacher enthusiasm in the delivery of a podcast is another factor that can result in increased students' motivation when engaging with the subject (Konig, 2021). Such positives can certainly benefit students when engaging in distance learning.

Advantages seem to arise not only when podcasts are generated by teachers, but by students as well. Lazzaro (2009) states that the student learning experience can be vastly improved when involving students in podcast-making: engaging students in the co-creation of podcasts enhances subject knowledge, skills development and fostered community building (Killean and Summerville, 2020). However, for podcasting to be successfully employed it must be integrated into structured tasks so to foster deep learning, where students have an active understanding of the learning material's meaning and significance (Drew, 2017; Pegrum, Bartle and Longnecker, 2014). Pegrum et.al (2014) also discuss that inclusion of creative podcasting in the learning process had no negative effect and it fostered better retention of the material included in creative podcasting at exam level.

If podcasting has received some attention within teaching and learning processes and practices, the use of podcasting as a form of assessment (student-generated podcasts) is more limited. However, podcasting does have the potential to be a strong form of assessment: evidence suggests that student-generated podcasts as a form of assignment encourage the use and improvement of transferable skills like communication, creativity, teamwork, professionalism, and organisation (Powell and Robson, 2014; Besser et al., 2021, Killean and Summerville, 2020).

During the development of a podcast, students must fully appreciate and understand the subject matter involved to deliver a strong podcast, which listeners enjoy (Wall, 2019). Podcast making can generate enthusiasm in students: the over-reliance on conventional essay formats or problem question has become stale as a form of assessment (Wall, 2019). McSwiggan and Campbell (2017) point out that podcasts may engage students in assessment guidance and feedback, thus creating the opportunities for better interactions with lecturers and deeper understanding of feedback.

Research methods

As already mentioned earlier in this chapter, the opportunity to carry on a podcasting project to support students' learning experience and to enable innovative practices while learning remotely was certainly ignited by the sudden start of the pandemic. However, the use of podcasts as both teaching/learning and assessment methods had been already experimented by two of the authors (SG and SS) in teaching Drivers of Change in its pre-pandemic format (Autumn 2019).

In this section the authors will discuss the learning context of this module more in detail as, by its own nature, is conducive to experiment with contents, delivery, and assessment. By identifying local-scale actions/projects/innovation in European cities, this module aims to explore multiple ways in which urban problems are identified and addressed through local practices. The module explores case studies of existing initiatives confronting contemporary global problems and how such activities can transcend the local scale and generate broader impacts. Through the analysis of these activities, the module interrogates the extent to which planners can engage in drivers of change and offer alternative responses to global challenges. By engaging with radical ideas and practices, the module itself offered opportunities to experiment with innovative teaching/learning/assessing methods.

In its pre-pandemic version, freely available podcasts were initially employed both as a method of inquiry and assessment. Students were invited to use technology that was straightforward: mobile phones and an easily accessible software (Anchor, for example) were introduced in class. As discussed earlier in the chapter, reasons for using podcasts include: they are an innovative, time-efficient form of communication and are an accessible means to engage with research content. On the one hand, pre-existing and easily available podcasts allowed students to engage in contemporary debates and ideas, and on the other, simple technology allows students to design content, experiment with a new software, and innovatively aim to convey messages to the listeners by simply using voice and sounds.

The feedback of 100% students' satisfaction at the end of the module, as students felt podcasts were influential in their learning and, concurrently, the start of the pandemic and a new 'unknown' dimension, were both key factors that motivated the authors (SG, SS and EW) to start a research project on podcasting in HE. Considering what has emerged from the literature (see Zanussi 2012 and Walls, 2010), three intertwined questions demanded attention: what is the educational potential of the use of podcasts in HE; what is the podcast format that can best support students in their learning; and what learning activities and support do students need to make podcasts a form of assessment.

The core team that led this research project comprised two academics in urban planning (SG and SS), one education developer (EW), and two second-year undergraduate students in planning (CM and AW), all from the same institution. The interdisciplinary nature of the team was essential to this project. The two planners played the role of experts in placemaking, coordinating the phases of the projects and keeping the style of communication accessible. The role of the education developer was to provide rigorous support on the learning, teaching and assessment-related complexities. The two second-year students were the core of the team acting as paid research partners. The core team ensured their integration into the entire process as valuable research team members, rather than just supporting us with ad hoc tasks. The students were involved in each phase, and they received support throughout the process: in the weekly team meetings, in reviewing the literature and podcasts, in generating primary data through workshop and finally in preparing a joint conference paper presented at an international planning conference (UK-Ireland Planning Research Conference, University College London, 2020). Despite the awareness, the risk of being subject to unequal power relations was still a possibility, as SG was the students' course leader. However, such

asymmetrical relations was mitigated by EW and SS, whose age was much closer to the two undergraduate students, and by SS and his dual role of academic and PhD student. Students' experience was monitored and, through their feedback, resulted as largely positive.

The research, which underwent Faculty Ethical approval, was structured through five main phases (see fig 1). Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the field research for this project and all the weekly communications between the team were undertaken online using Microsoft Teams. The five research phases consisted of: first, a literature review and a seminar with a professional planner expert in communication via podcast; second, an online workshop with undergraduate planning students' recipient of this teaching/learning/assessing module before the pandemic; third, a review of the module delivery from freely accessible podcasts to designing and developing ad hoc ones; fourth, an interview with the two students partnering in the project to review their experience as researchers and students recipient of a reviewed version of Drivers of Change; and finally, the integration of the podcasts in the teaching and learning context of the module.

In phase one (Spring 2020), the team reviewed the historical experience of podcasting in the existing literature and identified significant emerging issues to consider during the workshop (phase two) with the cohort of final year students who had already experienced this mode of learning in pre-pandemic. A consultant expert, Sam Stafford convenor of the 50 Shades of Planning podcast series and an urban planner himself, was also invited to hold a seminar on communication via podcast. This seminar was important in establishing best practice in preparing, recording, and disseminating podcasts, informing the research team about the practicalities of generating podcasts and sharing expertise.

Phase two (Summer 2020) consisted of an online workshop organised with the cohort of final year planning students. The aim was to gauge their learning experience of the module delivery in the pre-pandemic, in the teaching/learning/assessment, in light of reviewing the module delivery. All final year students were invited and offered a presence voucher. In phase three (Summer/Autumn 2020), the research team used the data emerged from both primary and secondary research to (a) review the Drivers of Change module delivery approach and (b) design and develop six teacher-generated, short, and urban planning focused podcasts to replace the freely available podcasts to support the delivery of the module from September 2020 as part of a blended learning approach. By identifying and interviewing scholars involved in local-scale actions/projects/innovation in European cities, each of these podcasts was based on original material and explored multiple ways in which urban problems are identified and addressed in practice within the module learning context. Phase four (Spring 2021) offered the opportunity to AW and CM students to discuss and reflect through an interview their dual experience as researchers and students on the module. Finally, phase five (Autumn 2021) consisted in working towards integrating the podcasts, which had been produced and published (Gullino et al., 2021), within the specific learning context of the DoC module.

[insert here fig 1]

Towards an effective integration of podcasts in the learning context

In this section, we discuss the significance of our findings in relation to the key elements emerged in the literature and new insights into the use of podcasts in teaching, learning and assessing in HE.

In the initial phases of the research, the team reviewed existing literature on the use of podcasting in learning. Existing research shows clear evidence on the expansion of e-learning and the inclusion of new learning technologies (Nielsen et al, 2018). It also shows an increasing use of audio podcasting in specific curricula, for example health, psychology, social

work, but less so in placemaking studies where, as pointed out earlier, the visual component is still strong and traditional pedagogies seems to prevail.

Podcasts allows learners to easily engage in contemporary debates and ideas. Existing literature also highlights the benefits for deeper learning from students as motivation levels can increase and wider learning where podcasts can serve as an entry point to diverse topics (Gachago et al, 2016; Lonn and Teasley, 2009). Furthermore, learning can develop outside of the traditional classroom setting as students can access podcasts, and engage in their learning, anytime and anywhere via mobile technology.

Overall, existing literature emphasises the role of podcasts as a supplementary and inclusive learning tool in education (teaching and learning, and summative and formative assessment), which can be suitable for a diverse range of learners. Podcasts can in fact meet learners' diverse needs (that is, listening rather than reading or watching). Furthermore, the asynchronous nature of podcasts offers new, flexible, and attractive opportunities for students' study and potentially improving students' learning experience. Students can pause, rewind, and listen to a podcast several times (also during unexpected free time) to better understand complex material. Such features allow students to control the pace and frequency of listening to course content, which can be extremely important for English as a Second Language (ESL) students and students with learning disabilities (Guertin, 2010).

Additionally, podcasts can foster collaborations and community building. Video calling platforms like MS Teams or Zoom can facilitate virtual engagement by offering students possibilities to share/create knowledge in new podcasts that transcends physical location. Opportunities are provided for the broader and more inclusive involvement of professionals, researchers, and students in the world of planning and placemaking. This aspect is particularly significant at a time when travelling and movement could be significantly affected or even restricted, but also when trying to collaborate with people at a distance. Yet, the literature also points to potential barriers to technological adoption from both teachers and learners based on cultural values, entertainment perception and cognitive overload (Ifedayo et al., 2021).

Finally, exiting research shows that podcast development has the potential to empower students and even involve them in the learning process (Merhi, 2015). Podcasting can in fact enhance students' empowerment by fostering collaborations, but also by enhancing the development of new communication skills and providing a mobile and easy to access format of learning.

New insights emerged from the empirical research reported here within the context of placemaking studies in an undergraduate UK planning course. The final year students were invited to an online workshop to retrospectively recount and share with the research team their experience of the use of freely accessible podcasts¹² and the making of podcasts as part of their assignments. The aim of the workshop was that of generating data enabling: (1) develop purposely designed podcasts for the module (in terms of content exploration, formats, lengths, style); (2) better understand how to effectively embed them in the teaching and learning to encourage active learning and creativity yet limiting cognitive overload; and (3) shape effective support to students in their podcasting making.

Changes on the future module delivery of Drivers of Change and the support to students were discussed. When used as a teaching and learning method, as Zanussi et al (2012) claimed, podcasts risk to encourage a passive learning approach. It emerged as crucial to enhance the interactive role of the teaching and learning by associating their use with exercises and leading questions for students to adopt an active and engaging listening. Pre-

¹² Freely available podcasts were selected by the lecturer (SG) as part of the core reading specific to each topic explored.

existing podcasts in planning currently tend to be long, between 30 to 90 min¹³. The relatively short and snappy nature of podcasts (fifteen to twenty minutes) was also seen as a benefit to keep students' attention in focus. The innovativeness of podcasts as an assessment method was valued, for its challenges but also the opportunities to encourage creativity:

"Innovative podcasts had not been a feature of Uni assessments prior to this module. Using podcasts did offer some unique challenges in terms of structure, flow, and line of questioning. However, I did value this because if the assessment was another bog-standard, "write an essay with an intro, research, findings, etc", I don't think I'd have engaged with the topic or material anywhere near as in-depth" (Student 1, workshop, 24 August 2020).

The innovative component of podcast making was reinforced by the possibility for students to choose their own topic. Students felt enthused by the freedom to explore a topic they felt passionate about without constraints of word count or style:

"[Podcasting] is new but familiar as everyone has had conversations before! It was not intimidating. Working on a podcast allowed me not to focus on word count. It allowed us to go more in-depth into a chosen topic, as there was no concern over words count. It was also less fragmented compared to work on a (group) assignment like an essay" (Student 2, workshop, 24 August 2020).

From the workshop, it emerged that students built up academic confidence and a sense of empowerment by working in small teams and developing a podcast on an innovative topic seen as a driver of change. In the specific context of the module, an innovative, pro-active response to problems within an urban context:

"It felt natural in terms of how the conversation flowed, and whilst we were working to a time limit, it gave the chance to explore the topic" "It is very important to choose a topic as it allows you to feel more passionate about it" (Student 3, workshop, 24 August 2020).

The element of innovativeness was also seen as a potential career-advancing opportunity serving as a promotional tool in interviews, in a similar way that portfolios might supplement an applicant's ability to demonstrate knowledge. Students felt that employers would find the podcasts an engaging way of assessing a candidate.

The critical review of existing literature and the data generated during the workshop with the students led the research team to define specific features (see fig. 2) and the creation and use of podcasts (phase 3). As a result of it, six teacher-generated episodes were designed and developed and adopted in the Drivers of Change module from September 2020. At the core of each episode was an interview-based discussion with an urban scholar on a relevant topic pertinent to the learning context of the module¹⁴.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, AW and CM played the dual role of researchers and students. Their role as research partners shifted to students in September 2020 when they undertook the Drivers of Change module in its reviewed version with the inclusion of six teacher-generated podcasts. Through the interview, their views and reflections were captured, providing useful feedback when aiming at further contextualising the use of podcast in the learning context of a module. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, podcasts need to be integrated into structured tasks to encourage deep learning (Drew, 2017; Pegrum, Bartle and Longnecker, 2014).

From the interview, new insightful points emerged through their experience in relation to new innovative content, communication, and synthesis skills. In terms of teaching and learning, students talked about the value of teacher-generated podcasts recorded between

¹³ Episodes from *Monocle 24: The Urbanist* tend to be 30-40 min long, About *Buildings + Cities* between 60-90, 99% *Invisible* 30-50 min. *The Urban Planner's Podcast* tend to be shorter: 20-30 min.

¹⁴ These episodes are available as open sources on SoundCloud at: <https://soundcloud.com/birmingham-city-university/sets/drivers-of-change>

lecturers and experts in a specific field as an opportunity to supplement blended learning approaches. It allowed students the option to step away from reading as a way of receiving information to a listening mode, accommodating different learning needs. The reading versus listening way of learning was highlighted as a benefit: *“Change it up a bit, spice it up! Many people get bored by it [reading]”* (AW).

Podcasts were also seen as a tool to bring relevance to the classroom. Podcasts can present students with topics which are emerging and, often, are yet to be fully explored in academic texts: *“The podcasts let you dip your toes [...], where you can be introduced to a new topic”* (CM), have an exploratory approach to new subjects and enthuse students to further search. This innovative feature was seen as a key appeal by students, allowing them to feel like they are learning cutting edge information.

The sense of empowerment emerged when talking about the engaging nature of the podcast format as part of the assessment. Often associated with entertainment topics in everyday life, podcasts, when reimaged in the academic context were found to be more enjoyable to produce than as an essay. Students felt that the podcast was a stimulating way to conduct assessments. Combining the novelty element of podcast production with the necessity to synthesise and present key insights about a contemporary topic, meant that students found the learning process engaging and exciting. Although it was felt that the podcast format suited best to the introduction of a new topic or to broaden knowledge in a bite size manner, students commented on the fact that background research might be wider than in a traditional assessment like an essay.

Podcasting was also seen as an essential learning tool to develop new and advanced communication skills that were not necessarily present in traditional planning and placemaking education. Essays allow for an in-detail demonstration of knowledge and several lines of inquiry can be conducted. In a podcast, students felt that a more conversational style was a must, yet with a clear structure acting as a frame. Whereas essays were seen as restricting and needing a clear conclusion, podcasts allowed the exploration of a topic for the student to bring different influences together and the outcome was not predetermined.

Moreover, the lack of visual backing meant that students had to balance descriptive and analytical points, to convey their knowledge. Due to the format often informal and sometimes improvisational, confidence in the knowledge was also seen as a key prerequisite in producing a successful podcast. However, students saw the podcast format as a less stressful way of applying knowledge. The lack of pre-determined expectations and academic connotations allowed students to approach the podcast in an exploratory mode, open to learning: *“The informal style of the podcast benefitted the assessment”* (AW).

Issues such as knowing when to speak, moderating tone of voice, and reading invisible body language in the co-production suddenly became paramount. Voice articulation, that is the ability to convey meaning through audio clearly, was seen as another key skill. The audio format didn't allow students to hide behind an essay or references, but instead exposed a nervousness in their voice, hesitation, or lack of confidence, demanding that the researched topic was well understood before the podcast was recorded. Furthermore, podcasts required students to develop synthesis skills and be able to convey key points succinctly and engagingly to fit into the time-bound nature of the format.

Overall, students saw their communication skills challenged. Such challenges, however, were highly valued as the communication style enhanced by podcasting was seen as a key skill in the post-COVID world, where the prevalence of hybrid meetings and virtual work would only increase.

[insert here fig 2]

Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the use of podcasting in HE through a research project based on the students' experience of a final-year undergraduate module. The project specifically looked at podcasting as an innovative, time-efficient form of communication to deliver teaching/research content in placemaking studies. Podcasting offers multiple benefits, including asynchronous learning, community building and the development of critical professional and teamwork skills.

Students' responses from this research project suggest that podcasts bring great relevance to the classroom and, by introducing a new topic, encourage further exploration perhaps through traditional academic literature. The shifting from freely available podcasts to teacher-generated ones was seen as beneficial: students felt more motivated by the meaningfulness of topics which were fitting into the module context and the direct involvement of their teacher. Teacher-generated podcasts require considerable additional work: from the identification of topics and scholars to timing interviews on Teams (as still in lockdown), getting scholars' time to record and consent for the publication on SoundCloud, designing specific frames for each discussion, developing and producing the podcasts. It was all time-consuming, however it also meant that producing such podcasts ensured the preparation of resources with some longevity.

To have a high impact, teacher-generated podcasts need to have specific features (see fig 2) and, most of all, they require to be designed to fit in the learning context of a specific module. and be integrated into structured tasks to encourage deep learning. The aim and learning outcomes of a module provide a frame which is essential for the preparation of such resources aimed at a specific audience. The risk of podcasts to be seen as entertainment rather than education resource and approached passively need to be addressed too. For example, students can be asked to listen to a podcast while in class to start with. It can always be re-listened to at other times outside the classroom. While in class, an active approach can be encouraged by giving students some leading questions to answer (perhaps with a partner or in a small group) before opening the discussion to the class.

Producing podcasts can facilitate passionate, in-depth engagement with content that is more achievable than in more traditional forms of assessment. When discussing podcasting as part of their assignment, students participating in the workshop mentioned that '[podcasting] allows passion for coming through' and the 'power of voice', 'less anxiety for words limit' and showed appreciation for 'the go/innovative/novel assessment'. Student-produced podcasts can provide an opportunity for students to feel empowered and explore their interests in urban planning while working collaboratively. It allowed students to experiment and creatively design content, experiment with new and easily accessible software, and innovatively convey messages to the audience by simply using voice and sounds and enthuse them to contribute to creating Open Sources.

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