A VISUAL Guide for Communities Working with Academics on Participatory Research Projects

This Guide is a collaboration between community professionals from Ashington- Northumberland, Brisbane - Australia, and Cork City as well as academics from University of Lancaster, University College Cork and de Montfort University

Introduction

This guide is for communities interested in participatory research with academics. It has been written by community members, activists and academics who have been involved in research of this kind. It is intended to provide communities with

1) the **background** to, and **motivations** for, participatory research

2) **implications** that communities should consider when deciding whether or not to participate in projects and

3) **key steps** participants can take to minimize risks and maximize benefits.

Why do Participatory Research?

Working WITH

Traditional forms of academic research, in which community involvement is not sought from the outset, might be described as research <u>on</u> communities. Participatory research is focused on working <u>with</u> communities.

Functional AND Empowering

The rationale for using participatory research may be functional, to encourage community participation in order to improve the usefulness of the research to local people. For example, to help develop farming technologies more suited to the local area and needs or to improve reach and speed of adoption of new methods and technologies. Another reason may be for empowerment or social transformation, to strengthen local people's capacity in decision-making, in research, and in management of local resources, in order to improve their awareness of options and to strengthen their ability to act on their own behalf… Often participatory research is both functional and empowering.

Why do Participatory Research?

For Academics...

For academics, working with communities can
- enhance and help shape the aims of research,
- offer a better understanding of fields of research and
- demonstrate the relevance and value of projects in the real world... and [thus its] contribution to society.

aims

impact

relevance

For Communities...

For communities, it can be useful to note that academics have particular skills related both to exploring and understanding events and processes and to articulating ideas in written and spoken form. These skills can add insight and value to a project or campaign.
Academic involvement can also increase accountability for community researchers where community voices are strong and engaged.

Insights

skills

accountability

Value

What Issues do Communities Need to be Aware of?

Why is the community being contacted?

Does the community have specific collective resources, such as a shared identity or experience, or interest which enables a project to be developed? It is essential that the reasons for the contact are made clear so that communities can understand the impact of the research on their individual and collective interests.

## Are there any vested interests at play in the project?

Is the project being pursued for reasons which may undermine interests within the community? It may be that the project is of benefit to all people in the community, but it may also be that the research is being funded or promoted by an organization with interests, perhaps financial, which pose challenges for the community.

## What are the existing interests of people within the community?
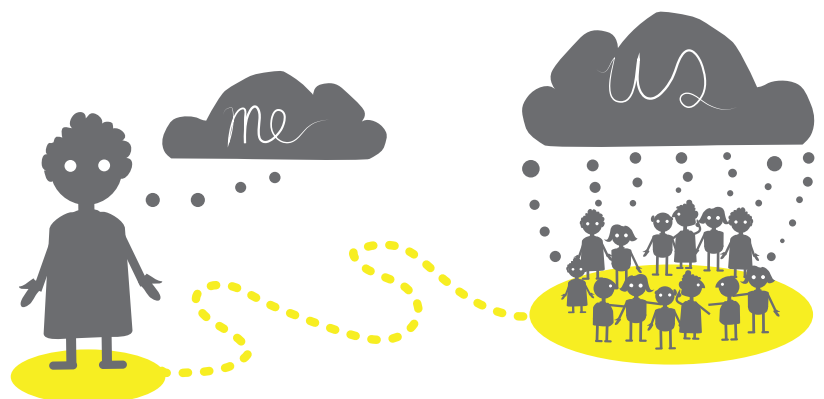
It may be that a participatory project enables community members to think seriously about the nature of their individual and collective interests. Often, these interests are invisible, but it is very important for communities to consider these interests before engaging in a project which may affect people in unpredictable and unintended ways.
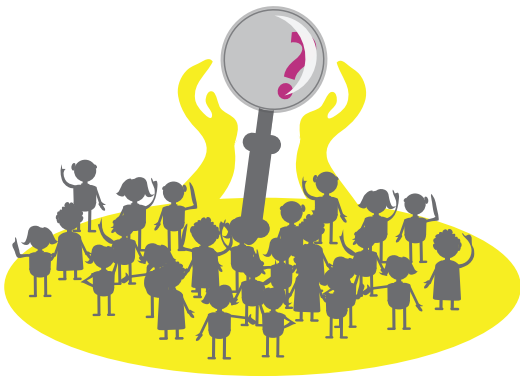
To what extent can communities collaboratively shape the research and the way in which that research can be conducted?

In participatory research, it is expected that communities shape the goals and nature of the research with academics. It is important that communities understand their power to control research which affects their interests.

**What are the practical and logistical implications of the project?**
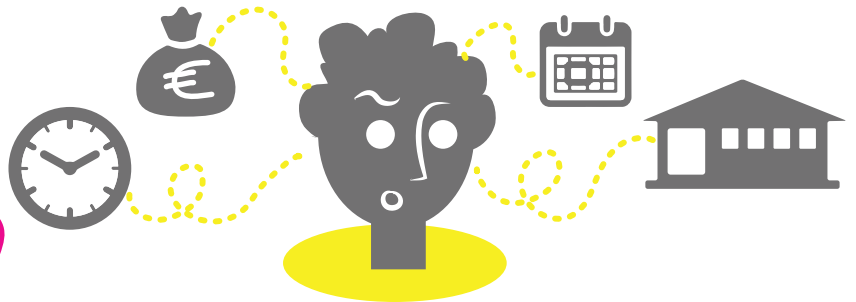
Research projects concerning different areas of life require different resources (money, time, spaces, etc.) and different forms of participation with different implications for the community before, during and after the research is completed. It is essential that thought is put into the longer- as well as shorter-term demands that a project places on people, including after the academics have left.
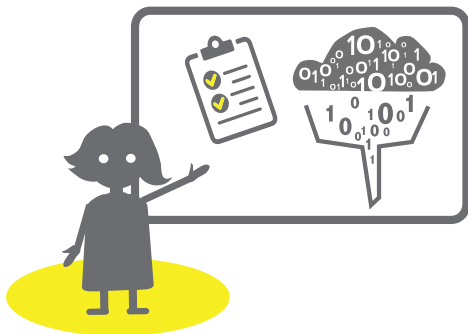
What training, if any, will be required for community members to engage in the project?

It may be that community members' existing expertise, with regard, for example, to cultural knowledge, is sufficient for the project to proceed. However, individuals may require research training with regard, for example, to data collection. This can be of great value to community members, enhancing their skill set, but it may also require time and effort that is devoted to other areas of life.

What, if any, funding is available and how will it be managed?
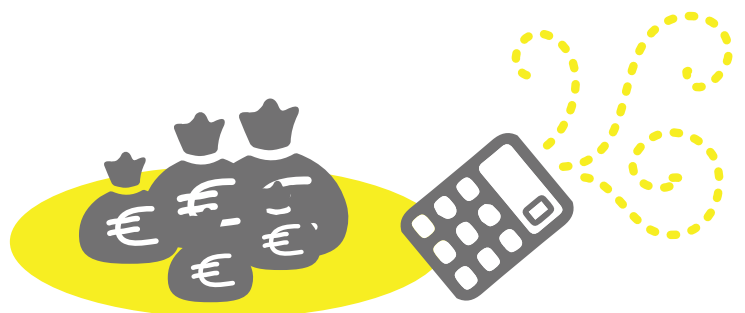
Will the funding be used to pay for research participants' time or will they work on a voluntary basis?

What ethical guidance exists for the research?

Universities have ethical review procedures, which mean that research projects which involve human beings usually have to be approved by research committees to ensure that the people involved are treated with respect and have their interests taken seriously. Researchers working in participatory projects will often develop ethical procedures in stages with communities to ensure that the project retains the support of communities as it proceeds. This means that communities often have opportunities to withdraw from projects without further consequence, ensuring that communities hold great power to shape research as it is taking place.

What methods of data collection will be used?

In some cases, there may be a need for 'beyond text' methods, such as the use of 'photovoice' or other arts-based approaches (see Wang and Burris 1997), to engage groups which may not have high levels of literacy or who may be more interested in, and engaged through, the use of more innovative methods.
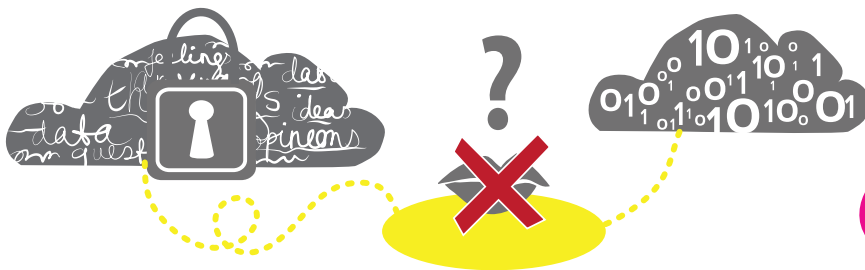
In what ways will data be available and used?

Linked to the ethical consideration, researchers have to be clear about the use that they wish to make of data. Participants must be made aware of the uses made of data and should always be aware of when contributions or information will not be anonymous.

Who owns the knowledge?

In collaborative research projects, establishing ownership of the research is essential. Put simply, who is acknowledged as contributing to the research and how does that acknowledgement take place? Moreover, who gets to disseminate the findings of the project? Although these issues appear to arise on completion of the research, such questions of ownership need to be resolved in the initial stages of the collaboration.

What are the Key Steps?

6 Familiarize everyone with policies and procedures around ethics, such as handling personal data, equality and diversity and talk to others who may have experience of similar research projects.

5 Create a written working agreement or contract which sets clear boundaries. This can be flexible so amendments can be made as the project and the participants develop. A working agreement can include a framework for measuring the progress of your research and outline basic agreed practices. It could also be used to set clear guidelines and promote accountability for agreed responsibilities, working as a written reference to decisions that have been made.

4 Agree on ethical principles, protocol for safety, handling conflict and safeguarding.

3 Consider the effect of policies and procedures that participants may be bound to as part of their role within their community and also those of the university.

2 Involve participants in decision making and governance of your research project in order to promote democratic practice and encourage debate on how to ensure all parties have the ability to be heard in a fair and consistent way.

1 Establish a language that can be understood by all to discuss and plan processes and structure to make it easier to work together.

Where Can I Find Out More?

⌨ Good Culture and Precariousness Blog http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/good-culture/

👂 Community-Academic Research Links, University College Cork: http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/ac/

👂 Participatory Research Hub, Durham University: https://www.dur.ac.uk/socialjustice/prh/