

Collaborative conversation as a method for exploring multiple perspectives on 'community' and forms of knowledge in the Congruence Engine

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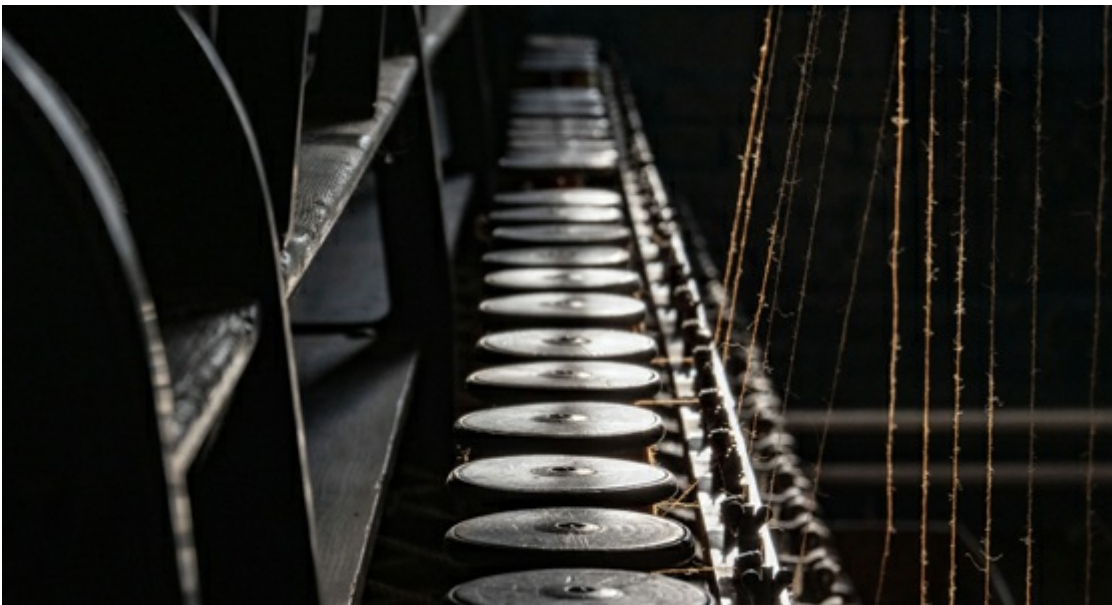
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Abstract

This article explores collaborative conversation as a method to surface multiple perspectives on community engagement and forms of knowledge creation in the Congruence Engine project. Our exchanges naturally converged around four main areas: the multiple meanings of the term 'community' and the nature of these relationships; the modes and spaces for engagement; the different nature of knowledge emerging from these interactions; and, finally, a series of practical issues and challenges that can act as potential barriers. The article also reflects on the opportunities of dialogic writing to enable participatory, inclusive and polyvocal approaches in the development of a national collection.

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Keywords

Community engagement, knowledge co-creation, participatory heritage practices, online cultures, remixing, digital sustainability, conversational writing

Introduction

Figure 1



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Detail of threads, Bradford Industrial Museum, 2022

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This collaborative conversation is the result of a group endeavour to discuss some of the initial experiences we have had as we develop common approaches to working together in the Congruence Engine project. We convened as a small group who were interested in exploring new forms of community engagement and knowledge co-creation. Each of us has particular interests, experiences and expertise that we feel complement, challenge and encourage open discussion.

Simon is Co-investigator in the project, responsible for digital translation of archival resources for community partners. His research is focused on the role of the archive and the use of digital tools in storytelling and the voicing of community histories. Stefania is the Research Fellow involved in the textile investigation. Her research explores the role of sound culture in the digital transformation of museums, with new forms of heritage, curatorial practices and ways of engaging communities. Arran, also Research Fellow in Congruence Engine, is co-facilitating the action-research methodology. He is interested in museum collections, digital practices and online remix cultures. Stuart is Programme Coordinator for Wikimedia UK, also partner in the project. He has eight years' experience as practitioner in digital heritage, collaborative knowledge creation and open data. Maggie is trustee for Saltaire World Heritage Education Association, one of the project partners. In the past years she has been managing the Saltaire Collection, researching, and writing books, articles and oral histories.

Our conversations flowed quite naturally; we could have continued for hours, using 'intense (and perhaps endless) conversation' as a method to 'discover underlying values, interests, and conflicts that are not immediately understandable or are taken for granted' ([Ripamonti et al, 2016](#)).

As we wanted to explore themes freely, we did not set initial boundaries, allowing topics to evolve and spill over into new areas. We wanted this collaborative conversation to reflect the very essence of the project – a space in which discussions and opportunities are able to present themselves in an emergent way, develop where and with whom they resonate, and fizzle out, leaving space to follow new avenues, where appropriate. We were not sure how the process would work, or if it would even sustain the time we had allowed for each session. We needn't have worried – and what we present here is a distillation of a

lively, engaged and ongoing conversation that demonstrates some of the many perspectives in the project and invites widening perspectives and ongoing continuation.

In our choice of format, we are indebted to an autoethnographic essay written by Marcin Kafar and Carolyn Ellis ([Kafar and Ellis, 2014](#)). Their conversational approach seemed like an appropriate model for capturing the core elements of our conversation and in allowing a polyvocal approach to be registered without an over-arching editorial 'voice', as well as aligning us with an approach that values personal lived experience as a valid research insight.^[1] There are limitations to our emergent conversational approach, and we felt more structure was necessary. We introduced this, but in an open and consensual manner. We each amended and tidied up the transcripts of our own comments and jointly edited the final selection, annotating and expanding via footnotes to add more nuanced and expansive references and resources.

Conversational frames

As we talked, our discussions coalesced around a series of topics that felt central to developing an understanding of who we are, how we wanted to work and what seemed most important in relation to the development of the project and the focus of our research and practices. Our reflections converged around four main areas: the meaning we give to 'community' and the nature of these relationships; the modes and spaces for engagement; the different types of knowledge emerging from these interactions; and finally a series of practical issues and challenges that can act as potential barriers. We have used these four main topics to structure the article, expanding our discussion via footnotes to add a further level of reflection and contextual information.

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1. Reflecting on the word 'community'

We began by considering how we might think about the people and groups we are working with and how we 'frame' our partners and audiences. The frameworks we use and language that supports them is potentially problematic and enforces notions of authority or status within a project and more broadly. We felt it important to begin by acknowledging the importance of language and the need to think about mutually understood terms and meanings.

Stefania

Let's start from the word 'community'. What do we mean by that? It might be useful to share examples, from our own practice, of different types of participants and different ways to interact with data.

Simon

Quite often they see themselves as individuals with their own projects. 'Citizens' is another word, but I find it equally problematic. And 'audiences' implies a receptive mode, doesn't it?^[2]

Stuart

In *Wikipedia*, we have affiliates around the world and those can be small user groups. But they might not see themselves as a community, so we're just imposing this term on them and saying, 'You're a community'.

Arran

This is why, in the Congruence Engine project, I have been trying to avoid the use of the word 'community'. We can talk about people who are in the project, and the people who are yet to be in the project, and that could be the differentiation we make. I suppose I'm interested in us not replicating the idea of: we are the researchers, you're the community, and we are going to

extract knowledge from you in order to help us develop the project ([Facer and Enright, 2016](#)).[3]

Stefania

I think we are searching for a different meaning here. In the Museums of the Dolomites project, we didn't engage a pre-existing group. (For more information on the project and its impact, see [Zardinin et al, forthcoming 2023](#).)[4] We created a heritage community[5] with a shared interest in the Dolomites. We worked with people with different interests, forms of knowledge and expertise: residents, cultural professionals, researchers, amateurs, Dolomites lovers. We used the word 'community' to describe the group of people that the project was able to create.

Stuart

This is similar to the *Wikipedia* model. Sometimes there is a pre-existing group, sometimes not, but *Wikipedia* creates its own knowledge communities from individuals. As long you are producing knowledge, you are part of it.[6]

Arran

There is something in human nature about that, isn't there? It's not just the digital affordance of tools and platforms or something that only happens for physical heritage. There's something about working as a group of people with shared interests to protect something that's important to you. And this is something I came across a lot in my PhD research, when I looked at online cultures and these forms of communities that develop around *niche* areas (See [Phillips and Milner, 2017](#); [Milligan, 2017](#); [Rees, 2021](#)).[7]

Simon

This idea of online communities is really interesting. The fact is that, online and on social media, people aggregate around particular histories, particular themes ([Duffy and Popple, 2017](#)).[8]

Arran

Yes, totally, and not just online and with social media. The history of Saltaire could be seen as a *niche* area to some. The Saltaire collection was developed from people who have got this interest that might be considered *niche* in the grand scheme of things but are now a core node in linking to other national heritage collections.

Maggie

And this is one of our major advantages. The Saltaire Collection is a tiny resource compared to a large museum collection, but we are lucky to have volunteers who come along and want to do research.[9] They may not have an academic research background in some cases but enjoy focusing on an aspect of Saltaire's heritage and want to add to what is known. You cannot actually expect to do that in a big museum, where you've got lots of galleries to look after and your focus is on attracting many visitors.

Figure 2



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Saltaire Collection Volunteers during a visit from Dan Snow

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Stefania

Maybe this is the way of framing the concept of 'community' in Congruence Engine. We are gathering people interested in the textile industrial history from different angles, without a pre-established idea of what their interest might be. They might come from a traditional academic background; they might be interested in their family history; they might want to engage in different types of history we cannot even imagine. But in the end, we will create a group of people that we can define as community: the community of Congruence Engine.

Simon

The thing that interests me is what is people's incentive and why do they want to do something? And also what do they get out of it? In the project we talked about distributed collections a lot. Perhaps we also need to talk about distributed communities. Because they're not a homogeneous thing. They have different motivations, different desires, different rewards from working as well.

Stuart

And there might also be different levels of engagement. In *Wikipedia*, the more work you do, the more you are involved in the project. Some people can become more prominent because they might have more time and resources, but also because they are just more driven to contribute than others. This can affect decision-making within the project as an in-group is formed, and a record of significant contribution can afford individuals licence for bullying or controlling behaviour.

2. Where and how do we co-create knowledge

Following our consideration of the types of people and groups we work with and how we tend to categorise them, we moved on to think about the importance of recognising where knowledge resides and how we can co-opt and value it. The role played by all who make up the Congruence Engine and are involved in the co-production of knowledge is paramount. As such we also thought about the ways in which we engage – from ‘institution’ outwards, and from ‘community’ inwards.

In opening up this question and considering what motivates people we thought about the dichotomy between spontaneous contributions versus outreach work – trying to recognise the two-way flow of knowledge production.

Stefania

Talking about the different motivations in contributing made me think of the different ways in which we can promote these forms of knowledge co-creation. Are these individual contributions spontaneously shared or proactively stimulated?

Maggie

We are fortunate in the people that we attract come because they want to write and share. Amongst our volunteers are a group of people who primarily want to research and write. There are six or seven of them, and we have named them ‘The Writers group’. And that’s a typical scenario for our small collection to have half a dozen people who are interested in pursuing enquiries.[\[10\]](#)

Stefania

Stuart, what is your experience? Do people just want to contribute to *Wikipedia* or do you actively engage with individuals and groups?

Stuart

Generally people come to us, but it depends. There might be a self-selecting community of people who want to contribute with their knowledge. But outreach is always a thing that we try to do actively. I was talking to a guy the other day who runs a young historians project, which is documenting the work of black people in the NHS. This is an important area of British history which is usually under-documented. So, I am going to that person asking, “Your group is doing a good work in this area, is there any way we can work together to somehow get some of this content on to *Wikipedia*?”

Stefania

Would you say that the local history type of knowledge is more self-selecting or needs more outreach?

Stuart

It’s hard to say. Local history is kind of self-selecting because it is the person that wanders around [their] town, goes to the archives, writes things down and puts it on a WordPress blog. But in order for that to interface successfully with a Wikimedia project, we have to facilitate their involvement. In general, any organisation, any group that’s got access to any slightly more formal ways to publish that go through an editorial process, then that starts to look like a source appropriate for *Wikipedia* and we can start extracting encyclopaedic information from it. University or institutional blogs are quite useful, for example, as places where academics can write about a subject in brief, perhaps to update research findings or add to the current thinking on something.[\[11\]](#)

As Stuart notes here, the real challenge is how to make existing knowledge more visible, stable and sustainable. So much is lost or hidden and falls through the cracks before it can be recognised and made widely accessible.

Simon

The question is: how do we make this kind of material and knowledge that we could find in a blog more stable, more visible? I did a project with a local history organisation in South Yorkshire. They were funded 15–20 years ago by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which was building regional local history websites. [12] There were several groups and affiliations of local history organisations who had put up all their collections on a big web platform. But then the company went bust and all data was 'lost' with regard to this central resource. When I asked, "Where is all your data?" they showed me an ancient laptop and said "It's all on here." So, we worked with them to help get it onto the cloud. There is a lot of rescue work in what we do. [13]

Stefania

The concept of 'rescuing' perfectly captures the experience I had in the Museums of the Dolomites project. In 2020 and 2021, we ran a social media campaign asking people to share their memories on places, rituals, traditions, trails, sport. We noticed that local residents and Dolomites lovers were already sharing their knowledge and experience of different aspects related to the nature, history and social life on social media. So we created a series of 'prompts', inviting users to share memories through their profile using the hashtag #DolomitesMuseum. [14] Through the hashtag search, we then collected all the social media posts which were created in response, and we transferred this knowledge to a shared digital space curated by the museums of the project. We realised that social media can be a powerful source to collect but can also prompt the sharing of knowledge, memories and stories around a place.

Figure 3

Voices of the mountain

Close your eyes and listen to the voices of the Dolomites. Some are barely audible: the creaking of ice, the chirping of insects, the whispers of trees. Others are loud and recognisable: the bleating of deer, the roaring of streams and the whistling of marmots.



Hiking in the mountains

Some sounds are barely audible: the creaking of ice as it thaws, the chirping or buzzing of insects and the whispers of trees. Others are loud and recognisable: the bleating of deer, the roaring of streams and the whistling of marmots. Close your eyes, and get ready to listen to the voices of the Dolomites!

[Find out more →](#)



At work

The Dolomites are also home to man-made sounds such as cowbells, spinning wheels and the chopping of wood. We can still hear them echoing in the meadows and on the trails. They speak to us of a time when life was slower. They are the sounds of work that give rest to the ear.

[Find out more →](#)



In front of the hearth

The voices of the mountain are dialects, songs, proverbs, nursery rhymes and stories for children to share in front of the hearth. Today, this immense heritage of sound can be shared with the whole world. Sit back and listen to the stories the Museums have collected for you: Once upon a time...

[Find out more →](#)

© museodolom.it

Image capture from *Voices of the Mountain*, the online gallery dedicated to the sounds, songs and stories of the Dolomites collected from social media during the #DolomitesMuseum campaign (<https://museodolom.it/en/exhibitions/>)

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Arran

I think it's really interesting because a lot of people still see social media as a very transient thing, despite it not really being transient. It is true that anything on social media can be deleted, but so can anything else online. Even if something is later deleted, if it has gone publicly online it is possible that it may have also been archived before it's deleted (see [Jules et al, 2018](#)). [\[15\]](#) Stuart, you were mentioning blogs before. Would you say that a social media post would be a valid enough source of information for some knowledge to be published on *Wikipedia*?

Stuart

As a rule, *Wikipedia* doesn't accept self-published sources. Sometimes social media is used as a primary source on certain articles on *Wikipedia*, for example about social media subjects themselves, such as a notable YouTuber. But there are definitely issues with the sorts of knowledge that *Wikipedia* privileges. Part of my work is translating knowledge or getting something to a state where it can be represented on English *Wikipedia*, even in the tiniest form, because often you're just looking for the smallest fact from a large amount of information to supplement or balance something or just keep a subject up to date.[\[16\]](#)

Maggie

This is an issue we have. I don't think that Saltaire Collection has ever considered publishing the outcomes of this research work beyond our own website. We've never gone beyond our own website, in terms of sharing. But I'm really interested in the possibilities of being connected to *Wikipedia*.[\[17\]](#)

3. Exploring new forms of knowledge

Our conversations revealed that we were all interested in the nature and value of different types of knowledge – some institutional and formalised, others open and unstructured – that define ‘communities’ and our potential interactions between them. In some respects, we felt that they might be seen as in conflict or oppositional – and that they might be perceived as existing at different levels of value and intellectual worth. At the heart of this lies an issue of power and relative authority that also emerges later in discussions of the status of storytelling versus archival records and whose interpretations are the most ‘valid’?

Our first exchanges considered the proposition of academic versus non-academic knowledge and the issue of power.

Stefania

These forms of non-academic knowledge are really interesting for us to explore. In this kind of participatory heritage project, different levels of expertise and new forms of knowledge are shared and created alongside the more traditional curatorial contributions. In the Museums of the Dolomites project, some of the museum curators felt uncomfortable with the different forms of non-academic knowledge which were being shared in the digital space (see also [Zardini et al, forthcoming 2023](#)).[\[18\]](#)

Simon

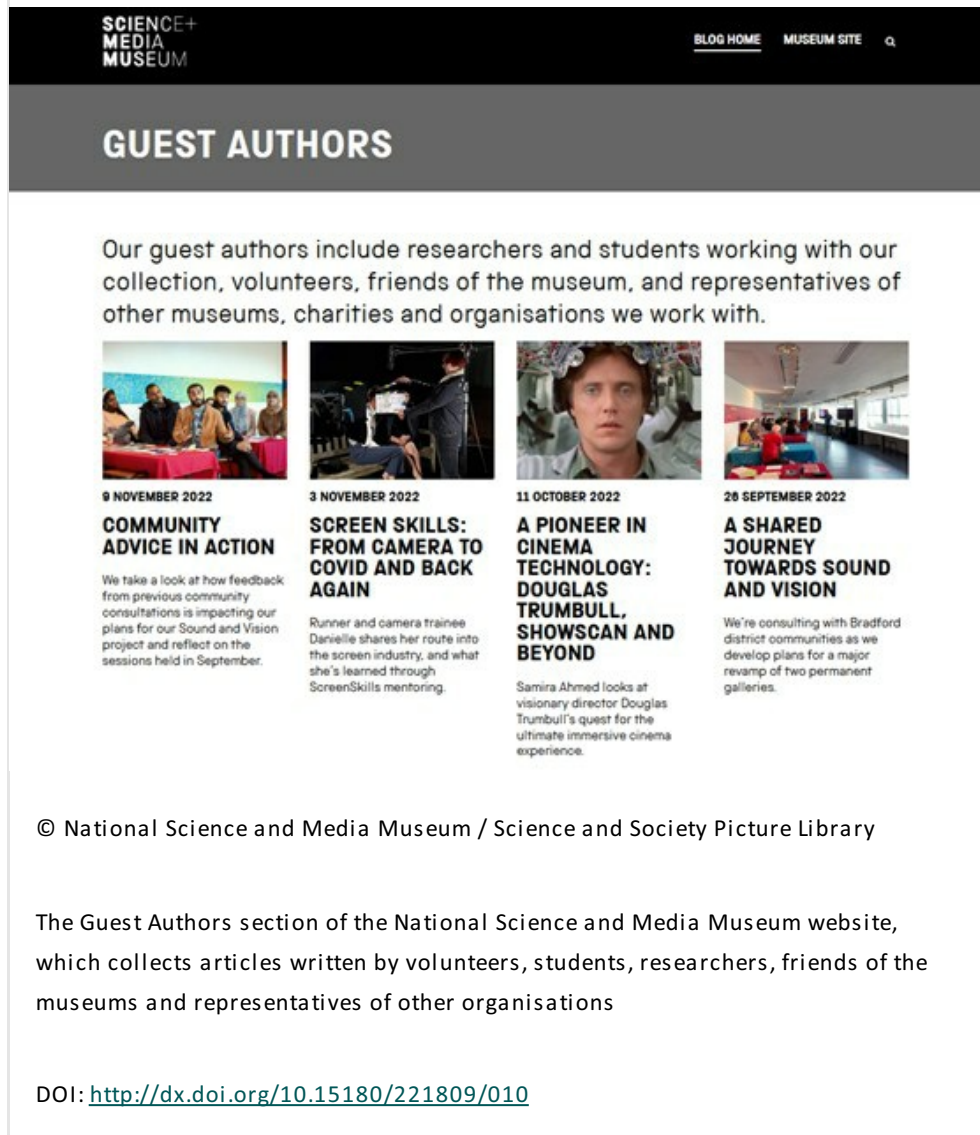
That's why I raised the idea of folk history, because there is that sense that there are different types of histories or different types of stories that have different status. Sometimes they bleed into each other and it becomes very complicated, but that's the way people talk and think. So, it's messy, which I really like, but it upsets ‘proper’ historians.[\[19\]](#)

Arran

There is a question of power here, isn't there? The idea that someone's knowledge is not valid until someone else in a higher position of power has said it can be valid. Even classifying a community story as community knowledge is an ‘othering’. It is a great thing that the museums are welcoming in more personal and community-derived stories, but it's still differentiating between curatorial and community knowledge ([MacDonald, 1998](#); [Mason et al, 2018](#); [Dewdney et al, 2013](#)).[\[20\]](#)

This reminds me the conversation I had with the Science Museum Group team about the different spaces for the creation of digital narratives. They described the blog as a dynamic polyvocal space where everyone can contribute, and the 'Objects and Stories' section as the curatorial voice of the museum. So, in a way the institution is differentiating the space where people can have a voice from the one reserved for curators, which is part of a more traditional, academic concept of knowledge (Simon, 2008).[21]


Figure 4




SCIENCE+ MEDIA MUSEUM [BLOG HOME](#) [MUSEUM SITE](#)

GUEST AUTHORS


Our guest authors include researchers and students working with our collection, volunteers, friends of the museum, and representatives of other museums, charities and organisations we work with.




9 NOVEMBER 2022
COMMUNITY ADVICE IN ACTION
We take a look at how feedback from previous community consultations is impacting our plans for our Sound and Vision project and reflect on the sessions held in September.



3 NOVEMBER 2022
SCREEN SKILLS: FROM CAMERA TO COVID AND BACK AGAIN
Runner and camera trainee Daniëlle shares her route into the screen industry, and what she's learned through ScreenSkills mentoring.



11 OCTOBER 2022
A PIONEER IN CINEMA TECHNOLOGY: DOUGLAS TRUMBULL, SHOWSCAN AND BEYOND
Samira Ahmed looks at visionary director Douglas Trumbull's quest for the ultimate immersive cinema experience.



26 SEPTEMBER 2022
A SHARED JOURNEY TOWARDS SOUND AND VISION
We're consulting with Bradford district communities as we develop plans for a major revamp of two permanent galleries.

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The Guest Authors section of the National Science and Media Museum website, which collects articles written by volunteers, students, researchers, friends of the museums and representatives of other organisations

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The question is how you translate these community stories into something that can be curated by a formal institution rather than something that's held within a group of people. There is, for example, a very active group of Windrush Nurses in Leeds who told their story through the Thackray Museum of Medicine.[22] Another example is the AHRC project Digital Tools in the Service of Difficult Heritage: How Recent Research Can Benefit Museums and their Audiences (2014). This is, for me, a really good example of negotiation, of how people work together sensitively to tell particular stories across public and institutional boundaries.[23]

Figure 5



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NHS protest poster, 2018

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We then moved on to consider what type of space open conversations could take place in and used Wikipedia as an example of a non-institutional platform – accepting that it still relied on traditional knowledge infrastructures, the use of secondary sources, notability and a traditional encyclopaedia concept. This led to consideration of the importance of non-written knowledge, especially in relation to individual stories.

Simon

In a *Wikipedia* article, where there is this idea of the sole author, there is the sense of academic rigor that's needed, particularly in historical subjects.^[24]

Stuart

This is a structural problem for us. *Wikipedia* relies on secondary sources. This worked quite well for the past twenty years, but it excludes a lot of knowledge. This originated from the decision of being an encyclopaedia and it falls into that particular structure. You can't really write anything speculative on it, and even some subjects which are clearly encyclopaedic are sometimes pushed out by people who just don't know what they are.

Arran

I think there is a really interesting tension there. Although we've got this tool that has the potential to democratise access to and contributions of knowledge in how it's set up, it still relies on secondary sources. So, it still relies on older forms of knowledge generation to be able to share that knowledge in this accessible form (Pfaff and Hasan, 2011).^[25]

Stuart

There's a project called Wikispore which doesn't require so much sourcing in it and I feel it is going to be more open to all kinds of contributions.^[26] There is a huge potential for oral history, for example. There are fantastic audio recordings on the British Library website, like a steelworker in Sheffield talking about their work in the 1950s.^[27] That would work so well into so many articles in *Wikipedia* in terms of illustrating ordinary people's lives, and audio recordings are really good for this.^[28]

Maggie

The Saltaire collection has a newly retired health researcher at the moment who is looking at a particularly large oral history, 200 pages long, that a Saltaire resident wrote himself.^[29] It provides a massive insight into life in Saltaire, particularly during the period between the two world wars. There are wonderful elements in this large file, like who was involved in the Home Guard at Salts Mill during the Second World War.

Figure 6

Living in Saltaire



Clara Barraclough

Clara came to live in Saltaire in 1894 when her father started to work at Salts Mill. Her account is rich in detail of living in a typical Saltaire terraced house

[Read more](#)



Jack Hogg

Born in 1922, Jack has vivid memories of growing up in Saltaire, including the arrival of new 'Tipler toilets', being isolated in hospital because of an epidemic, and the deafening noise in Salts Mill where his relatives worked

[Read more](#)



Audrey May Tattam

Audrey was born in 1926 and has many stories of playing on the streets of Saltaire, going to school, visiting Saltaire hospital, seeing a Royal visit in the 1930s, and of a curious lodger who was a famous West Indian cricketer

[Read more](#)

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The section of the new website of the Saltaire Collection dedicated to Saltaire residents and workers of the mill

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Arran

This is a really interesting point for us. Because the collections are mainly about notable people, but they contain lots of information about non-notable people, who have not ever really been considered 'entities' worth formally recording. (For example, see [Popple, 2020](#).) But that's where all the real links can really happen. Stuart, what makes a person notable enough to go on *Wikipedia*?

Stuart

Pulling out these individual stories of ordinary people who may have done interesting things is always a bit of a challenge in the context of *Wikipedia*. The general notability criteria is significant coverage in multiple sources, not connected to the subject, which is an incredibly high bar to pass. That's not to say it's not impossible. And there's also always ways of writing people

into the encyclopaedia without necessarily writing whole articles about them.[30]


Figure 7

Notable women [+ edit]

Pakistan has many immensely talented women who have played a vital role in changing the social standards and norms of the country. These women come from all walks of life and have played their role in all sorts of sectors. Women in Pakistan have progressed in various fields of life such as politics, education, economy, services, health and many more.

Politics and activism [+ edit]

See also: *List of the first female holders of political offices § Pakistan*, *Female political leaders in Iran and in Muslim-majority countries*, and *Timeline of first women's suffrage in majority-Muslim countries*

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In 2000, women's presence in political parties as well as in the political structure at the local, provincial, and national levels was insignificant due to cultural and structural barriers.^{[18][19][20]} The situation gradually improved, and by 2014, 26.7% of elected representatives were female, a statistic well ahead of the United States and less than 2% behind the United Kingdom.^[21] According to Fajra Saigq Khan while Pakistan is in one of seventy countries where at least one woman President or Prime Minister had been there, lately Pakistan also provides for certain electoral reservations for women at local and parliamentary level like five percent of candidates need to be women, but still Pakistan lags behind in gender equality, and satisfactory political inclusion.^[22]

Fogqa says while the highest number of women contested the 2018 general elections, still lower, i.e. just eight, got elected compared to previous years. Fogqa says that while electoral reservations provide for minimum level assurance, Pakistani familial, societal and institutional structure do little to give women a fair chance to thrive in competitive political environments. According to Fogqa, though local level elections give more opportunities at entry level, being non-political in character means that political exposure remains limited; political parties do allot five percent of their parliamentary seats, but mostly where chances of winning are bleak, and the parliamentary reserved seats for women are awarded based on clientelism. This results in no benefit of exposure in a competitive political environment and the patriarchal hegemony continues to stifle meaningful political inclusion of women in Pakistan's political power structures.^[23] Prominent actress Sarah Khan states that Allah provides for equal gender rank for women and that instead of women's day's Aurat March activism, women need to focus on their children's education.^[24]

Miss Fatima Jinnah, sister of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, was an instrumental figure in the *Pakistan movement*; in 1947, she formed the Women's Relief Committee, which later formed the nucleus for the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA). She was the first Muslim woman to contest the presidency in 1965, as a candidate of the Combined Opposition Party.

Begum Shaista Inayatullah was the first woman elected member of the *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan*.

Begum Mahnoodeh Saib Khan was Pakistan's first woman minister and member of the Cabinet of President General Ayub Khan.

Begum Razana Liaquat Ali Khan (1925–1990) was a women's rights activist. She was the founder of the All Pakistan Women's Association. Begum Nusrat Bhutto wife of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, led the Pakistani delegation to the United Nations first women's conference in 1975.


Benazir Bhutto was the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan (1985, 1991) and the first woman elected to head a Muslim country. She was elected twice to the office of Prime Minister.

Fahmida Mirza is the first female speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan. Other prominent female Pakistani politicians include Begum Nusrat Iqbal Khan, Syeda Abida Hussain, Sherry Rehman and Tehmina Durrani.


Hina Rubani Khan became the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan in 2011.

Makhtaran Isha a victim of gang rape has become a prominent activist for women's rights in Pakistan.

Aasma Jahangir and Hina Jaisi, prominent human rights lawyers and founders of the first all woman law firm in Pakistan, AGHS.



Women from Rawalpindi queued for their chance to vote in Pakistan's elections.



Husna Khatun, a member of a gang rape as a form of honour revenge.^{[25][26][27]} She is one of Pakistan's most prominent women rights activists.

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Image capture from the *Wikipedia* article 'Women in Pakistan' (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Pakistan#Notable_women). In this article, many of the women presented are not notable enough to have their own articles but are mentioned in this context

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We then discussed the potential of social media to both produce and disseminate new forms of knowledge. We were particularly interested in the value of sound and creative approaches to bringing working stories and traditions to life. Going beyond traditional knowledge structures and hierarchies led us to think about what are often seen as challenging and disruptive practices, such as remix culture and meme making.

Stefania

Social media are an incredible source for these kind of individual stories. In the #SonicFriday project, the National Science and Media Museum invited social media users to share their memories around sound technologies, and we ended up collecting 250 digital memories. (For more information on this project, see [Zardini, Stack and Jamieson, 2021.](#))[31] They were incredibly powerful in expressing the variety of emotional, personal, affective relationships with iconic objects such as cassettes, CDs, synthesizers. These memories were not the type of knowledge museums are used to defining as heritage, they were even different from a more traditional oral history approach, so this project challenged the curators to reflect on their value.[32]

Figure 8



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One of the cassette memories shared in the #SonicFriday project in summer 2020

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Arran

There are examples of formally collecting this kind of material; the kind that sit outside the more scientific and formal knowledge traditions, and belong to a more folkloric, or social approach.^[33] A lot of social history collections were originally called folklore collections. And we can see a lot of what appears on social media as a form of digital folklore. (For more information on the development of digital folklore, see [Espenschied and Lialina, 2009](#); [de Seta, 2019](#).) People have their own history, and their own ways of communicating in these spaces. And this form of knowledge is a valid thing to be archived and incorporated into our cultural heritage landscape. It's just a case of reconfiguring the idea of what can be collected.^[34]

Stefania

This was exactly the question the curators asked themselves at the end of the #SonicFriday project. Should museums collect people's digital memories? This can be a disruptive question. And social media can be an exploratory space, for museums, to understand and collect new forms of knowledge. (See also [Boogh et al, 2020](#).)^[35]

Maggie

Talking about new forms of knowledge, the key thing that came out of working together with arts providers in the Bradford City of Culture 2025 bid was that museums and collections are great resources for dramatic and creative representation. For example, an arts organisation and Bradford Museums were able to create a spectacular light show on Lister Mills' huge chimney, called 'The Mills are Alive...', and projecting a dramatized summary history of that building and the community in

Manningham over time.[36] I'm beginning to think that one of the most pleasant ways to share knowledge is through a dramatic or musical work.

Video 1



© The Brick Box CIC

'The Mills are Alive...' video presentation on Vimeo

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Simon

A recent student of mine, Ruxandra Lupu, did a fantastic PhD on connecting heritage organisations, particularly film archives, to local communities and using art practices as a way of engaging with people. She worked in Sicily with regional film archives and people's home movie collections around notions of belonging and place. She used innovative ways of engaging with people using primary and secondary source materials to create new narratives and new stories around those objects and memories.

[37]

Arran

This is part of our contemporary remix culture, isn't it? (See [Lessig, 2008](#); [Manovich, L, 2015.](#))[38] The remixing and reuse of material is a huge part of online digital culture. Participating in the internet or web environment opens yourself up to remixing, whether you want it or not.

Simon

It reminds me of this idea of bricolage, this idea, not even of remixing, but even before of creating something new from other components. In our storytelling platform YARN, everybody's stories, everybody's work stays where it is, but people can quote from it, so they can take pieces away and make another version of that story, but it always links back to the original story. (For an account of the project and the resources, see [Popple and Mutibwa, 2016.](#))[39] So, you're always credited. You can't change the integrity of that, people explicitly know where those ideas have come from.[40]

Here questions of authority and control clash with the concept of personal autonomy, creativity and different traditions of making

sense of histories and heritage. The loss of institutional control and creation of potentially disruptive counter narratives becomes an important debate and one which the project will doubtless foster through emergent practices and experiments. The contested nature of history and the surfacing, through storytelling, of hidden and repressed identities and experiences provides us with exciting possibilities for addressing absence and for using the archive as a means of 'speaking back'.

Component DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15180/221809/004>

4. Challenges

Our final theme looked to the future and explored a series of practical issues and challenges that can and do act as barriers to the creation of knowledge. These were seen as a mixture of legal frameworks, institutional practices, resources and sustainability, training, and clashes of tradition.

Copyright and licencing, for example, were seen as direct and often intimidating blocks to activity and were often anxiety inducing for all parties. The shifting nature of legislation, further complicated by Brexit, have added to these anxieties that often forestall activities and prevent the use of different types of data and creative outputs. The notion of a 'creative archive', for example, is severely limited as are opportunities to combine and remix different data sets and combine intuitional and non-institutional narratives.

Stefania

This idea of change and remix is a huge challenge in terms of authority and authorship, isn't it? In the Museums of the Dolomites project, the museums shared their images on social media to participate in the #DolomitesMuseum campaign. But when we asked them to publish this material again on a shared digital space provided by the virtual museum of the Dolomites, some of them asked for a protective license of their content.[\[41\]](#)

Arran

This is a really grey area, which I think is interesting. There's this view that to upload something onto *Wikipedia* or onto a cultural heritage site might feel like a more formal thing than sharing on social media. And I think that's why there is still this reticence about the idea of collecting from social media, and perhaps a discomfort from some people that their mindless drivel, posted late night on Twitter, might somehow make it into a museum or archive. Perhaps even invasive, even though users sign exclusive rights to their content away when they agree to the platforms T&Cs.[\[42\]](#)

Maggie

I think one of the reasons people feel perfectly OK about putting something on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram themselves is that they feel in control of it. They don't think by doing so that the posted material is now 'out of control', but the minute you talk about a more stable structure, such as the work you have mentioned, Stefania, then they may start to think and also believe that they could be open to criticism from someone who has more knowledge.[\[43\]](#)

Stuart

This is a difficult subject because people want to maintain a bit of control over content they've put work into, or put their *labour* into, and that has to be respected. If you're dealing with people who have collections and photographs it's very hard to deal with the intellectual property issues.[\[44\]](#)

Maggie

The volunteers who come here to do this kind of research work have an expectation that their work will be shared. But we have started to realise that we need to protect them a little as well. We have begun to ask ourselves whether we do need something that prevents misuse of their material; for example, by others radically changing it so that the original meanings are lost, or passing it off as someone else's work. At our next board meeting (July 2022) we're actually looking at a Creative Commons license that allows sharing but perhaps doesn't allow changes without crediting the original source or perhaps helps prevent commercial use.[\[45\]](#)

Stuart

The problem with non-commercial licenses is that legal definitions of commercial use can be incredibly vague and can extend into areas of education or artistic expression and restrict use in the kind of areas you perhaps intended.

Arran

It's really challenging when you put your content online. You can apply licenses to it and it will stop big commercial usage maybe, but this still won't stop this kind of amateur reuse and playfulness and taking of material and forming new things. I think this kind of more ground-rooted remix culture won't be put off by licensing structures.

Stuart

The principle is you have to give up some control. You have to give up certain amounts of ownership and sometimes all ownership in order for your work to reach the world, and whether that's a price worth paying varies between groups of people. It doesn't have to be all or nothing; there can be certain elements of things which can be very open to certain elements which are kept closed. This is a constant kind of negotiation with knowledge producers and knowledge holders.

Maggie

Also, because, for continuation of knowledge, you need to be able to change things. Recording history is always difficult, it is subjective to some degree, and you do a piece of work and then later on someone finds previously unknown documents and it actually changes the understanding of the first piece of work.

Stuart

There is the factor of how far you want your work to travel and generally the more open you have it, the further it can travel, and the more people can, as Maggie said, build on it. What you add to Wikimedia projects can be used to build other knowledge, and it can become greater than the sum of its parts. Which I think is the opportunity we look for.

The languages and traditions of different actors were also seen as a barrier to collaborative working and sometimes helped to enforce hierarchies and misunderstanding. Setting the terms of collaborative activities and the nomenclature of research are vital to ensure parity of experience and opportunity and foster mutual understandings. The role of language and the power it often exercises are another ongoing theme we are keen to explore and develop through our own interactions.

Stuart

Another challenge is metadata. Being respectful of people's nomenclature and language and words being used to describe things, while trying to reconcile that with a more top-down ontology at the same time. Wikidata[\[46\]](#) has a lot of room for people to input things on their own terms. That could literally be like a full language or dialect or just terminology. So those things are quite important to preserve and not necessarily translate into standard English or something like that.[\[47\]](#)

Figure 9

Haiti (Q790)



island sovereign state in the Caribbean Sea

Republic of Haiti | ht | Hayti | HT | République d'Haïti | Haitian Republic | Ayiti | 🇸🇨 | HAI

▼ In more languages

Configure

Language	Label	Description	Also known as
English	Haiti	island sovereign state in the Caribbean Sea	Republic of Haiti ht Hayti HT République d'Haïti Haitian Republic Ayiti 🇸🇨 HAI
French	Haiti	pays dans les Caraïbes	République d'Haïti HT la République d'Haïti 🇸🇨
German	Haiti	karibischer Staat auf Hispaniola im Atlantik	
Spanish	Haiti	pais en América Insular	República de Haití Haiti Republica de Haití ht

[Creative Commons License](#)

The Wikidata item for 'Haiti' showing many labels written phonetically or in Haitian Creole, for easier search and discovery (<https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q790>)

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Stefania

Do you have a curatorial role in relation to what people write?

Stuart

It depends on the project; you have to give people guidance on what's going to stick and what's not going to stick. *Wikipedia* is very formal and needs to be done in a certain way, and you have all these boundaries and constraints on what you can contribute. You probably aren't curating it in as much as you're saying, "Well, we're looking for this, this and this."

Simon

This is the idea that there are specific sets of protocols we give to people when we want to engage with them, and this is a challenge. One of the things that I've come across a lot is that people have their own sets of practices within the community or within an organisation or within a small group of people. However they define themselves, they have a language that they use that they mutually understand. They have a set of ways of doing things, they think about ownership in a particular way. For example, in one of the projects I worked on in Scotland we had a lot of resistance to doing things digitally. It was actually a conscious choice to say, actually, we want to work with paper. (For a discussion, see [Duffy, 2020](#).)

Stuart

This is a bit of an issue for Wikimedia, ideologically, as a movement, and this is not uniform and things have changed a little bit; we're a bit like "give us all the information and we can share and everyone shares all the information and that's great," but not everyone believes that. And it's hard to reconcile with certain projects, for example, in indigenous language projects where the history of exploitation, ownership and control are quite important. So, we need to balance this open approach with respect for the ownership of the work.[\[48\]](#)

The question of building sustainable resources and practices is key to the success of our joint enterprise and developing an approach that has sustainability at its core will be one of our biggest challenges. Digital resources in particular are often ephemeral, underfunded and soon become technologically compromised or under-maintained. The internet is littered with thousands of redundant sites representing a large investment of public money and citizen labour. The challenge to avoid future waste, duplication and lost knowledge is uppermost in the aspiration of TaNC and ensuring that collective endeavour remains visible and ongoing is perhaps one of our biggest challenges.

Simon

You can reach a lot of people very quickly using digital platforms, but they are also very ephemeral, and these links that we make between data and between individuals are also ephemeral because people pass away, data disappear or it degrades. So, there's always this sense of limited sustainability and this idea of running different systems at the same time. I know there have been debates about *Wikipedia's* sustainability over the years in financial terms.

Stuart

From a Wikimedia point of view, *Wikipedia* has shown that it's pretty sustainable as a project. It is incredibly well funded. But it's not a big website to support, it's not a Facebook, it's not a YouTube, it's a fraction of the sort of gigabytes of actual data.[\[49\]](#) There is always a risk that community coming along might delete your stuff and that's why things have to really belong on Wikimedia projects in order to have that longevity. But as a way of creating a kind of backup or having copies around the world, this means there is always going to be a copy of this image somewhere on some server. It's definitely a sustainable thing, but also there's a stewardship as well.

Maggie

In terms of sustainability, digital preservation is equally important for our collection as digital sharing. One of the things that we're very keen to do in Saltaire is to consider whether 'secondary source materials' should perhaps be preserved in our internal collection management system. So, in 100 years time perhaps, when someone is looking for what was of interest in Saltaire in 2020, there should be some information available that has been digitally preserved.

Stefania

This is one of the key challenges of the contemporary museums. It requires specialised skills, resources, but also a different mindset as to what should be digitally preserved. In the Congruence Engine project, we often reflect on the fact that the museum catalogue rarely captures the curatorial knowledge that is expressed in an exhibition. The archival records are often thin and usually contain the key, biographical information related to the object: place and date of creation; author or inventor; material and dimension; a short description. They don't usually capture the kind of contextual information that you might find in an exhibition or in a digital narrative, and they don't usually capture personal responses to the object. In the #SonicFriday project, we started to reflect on how the people's memories on sound technologies could be linked and embedded in the object record.

[\[50\]](#)

Arran

Yes, I totally agree. There are huge questions around digital preservation and cataloguing for museums. The Science Museum Group is one of only a handful of museums in the UK that specifically employ any digital preservation specialists (Tate and Museum of London are others I know of). Then when it comes to cataloguing, despite our sectoral standards being quite explicit that cataloguing is never a finished process and most collections management systems providing space to record new information found during research, engagement projects and exhibitions, there just isn't a culture of recording that information back in a central catalogue. (See also [Miles, Cordner and Kavanagh, 2020.](#))[51]

There are also a series of institutional barriers that we are keen to explore in allowing institutions and collections of varying scales to work together across permeable digital membranes. The right to access and engage is unwritten, but the capacity to engage is often wholly contingent on resources and skills base. This is something we see as an ongoing challenge we need to explore across the whole project.

Maggie

The Saltaire Collection will never be in a big building, as a traditional museum that people walk around. Although we will have a little more space in a shared new building from 2024, we will always be a dispersed museum. Digital methods will remain the main way that we can share the knowledge we hold.

Stefania

But also, the Saltaire collection and research community is a really great example on how a museum can involve people and collecting different types of material and build its collections from the bottom up. I think there is an issue here in terms of how we might bring this participatory approach within bigger institutions such as national museums. In the Museums of the Dolomites project, we noticed that the small community museums were more open to these forms of engagement and knowledge co-creation. The bigger the museums were, the more difficult it was for them to embrace these approaches. (See also [Zardini et al, forthcoming, 2023.](#))[52]

Maggie

It's true. We're using people's interests and passions and if they get involved because they want to research and write, or to collect an oral history, they can be encouraged to do so. And that is more feasible when a collection is small and does not have lots of formalities. I suspect that there are other small collections around that may have the same advantages.

Simon

Yes, perhaps it is sometimes easier when working at a smaller, more intimate scale. I have worked with several large institutions and there are certainly problems that are baked-in at scale. There are often competing and unrealistic pressures placed on meagre staff resources, internal layers of bureaucracy and fears about ceding institutional authority or perceived threats to institutional reputation that limits the ability to collaborate and make data freely available.

Stefania

The question is what can the national, large museums and institutions learn from the smaller, community museums? The ecomuseum is another great example of a type of museum which has been conceived around community participation and co-curation of heritage. (See [Rivière, 1980](#). See also [Rivière, 1985.](#))[53] But this museum category has been mostly applied to the protection and development of natural resources and local heritage and has not been extended to other kinds of institutions. This is not just a way of thinking about different types of museums and collections; it is a way to understand new forms of heritage and conceiving museums as institution. (See [Zardini Lacedelli, 2018.](#))[54]

Maggie

Can partnerships be brokered between large museums and small localised collections, where the larger partner offers interesting lines of enquiry and some resources that enable the smaller partner to work to gather the 'story' that could be told in more detail? This would mean giving up some of the formalities of 'ownership' of objects for the larger partner and some changes in curatorial practices.

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Conclusions and future steps

Working on this piece made us reflect on the opportunities of conversational and dialogic writing in research (see [Brownlee-Chapman et al, 2018](#)),^[55] and how this form reflects the very nature of the Congruence Engine project. The article originates from two online conversations which have been, for us, a space where we could pause and listen, share our previous experiences, draw in our different knowledges and perspectives, and respond to each other. The ways in which the different ideas and examples sparked and catalysed reflect the live exchanges that are at the very core of Congruence Engine. Inspired by the Systemic Action Research methodology ([Burns, 2007](#)), the project involves participants from different backgrounds – curators, historians, digital humanities scholars, data scientists – in a series of collaborative explorations around the potential of connecting collections. The project advances through forms of exchange which allow us to embrace multiple perspectives, approaches and ways of knowing.

We believe collaborative and dialogic writing can be a useful means of developing and reflecting future conversations across the Congruence Engine project and can play a key role in enabling participatory approaches in the creation of a National Collection. We would be extremely interested in hearing other ideas and opinions about developing collaborative writing and how we might use this form to create a common ground across the different registers, languages and knowledges of the project participants.

As for the themes that have emerged from this initial series of conversations, the challenges of community building, the nature of different kinds of knowledge, digital preservation, as well as the issues of power, remixing, ownership and control, are all extremely relevant not only for our project, but for the future of heritage institutions.

It is important to say that this is a starting point for much longer and more open discussions as the project evolves and more people come on board. Conversations are never definitive or neatly concluded and we feel it is important to register this in the extracts we have used to give a flavour of the themes and approaches which mark this project out as such a unique and collaborative venture. We hope that others will pick up where we left off.

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Tags

- [Museum collections](#)
- [Public engagement](#)
- [Participation](#)
- [Public history](#)
- [Co-production](#)
- [Digital collections](#)

Footnotes

1. For a helpful introduction to autoethnography, see Ngunjiri, F W, Hernandez, K-A C and Chang, H, 2010, 'Living Autoethnography: Connecting Life and Research', *Journal of Research Practice* 6(1), pp 1–17.
2. The AHRC Connected Communities theme considered the nature of 'community' as part of the research. See the project's final report for consideration of relationships, partnerships and notions of community: https://connected-communities.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Creating-Living-Knowledge.Final_.pdf.
3. Keri Facer and Bryony Enright characterise this as 'the fantasy of the "university" and the "community"'.
4. Museums of the Dolomites was a three-year project aimed to connect different museums and collections of the Dolomites through the co-design of digital initiatives. Thanks to a social media campaign and the collaborative development of a shared, digital space dedicated to the Dolomites heritage (<https://museodolom.it/en/exhibitions>), the project fostered the creation of a thriving heritage community of museum professionals, researchers, historians, art curators, geologists, inhabitants and Dolomites lovers. The project was funded by the UNESCO Dolomites Foundation and coordinated by the digital-born museum Dolom.it.
5. 'Heritage community' is a concept introduced by the Convention for the Value of Cultural Heritage for the Society (Council of Europe, 2005), described as 'people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations'. This concept signals a shift from the object-based conception of heritage to a more fluid, process-based, subjective concept of heritage.
6. A *Wikipedia* editor's edit count (the amount of edits made to a wiki) is often used as a simple metric for determining one's overall contribution.
7. Whitney Phillips and Ryan Milner refer to the 'unique contours of collective online spaces' (2017, p 6) in their work on online cultures. Internet forums, and now social media platforms like Twitter and TikTok, provide a space for people with very specific interests to coalesce. Sometimes these are just places to share interests, but they also often act as places to document and share those interests. A prime example can be found in the mass archiving of the early personal website platform GeoCities. Yahoo! bought GeoCities and in 2009 decided to shut it down with very little notice. Luckily (I'd argue) there was a *niche* group of self-identified 'rogue archivists, programmers, writers and loudmouths' (https://wiki.archiveteam.org/index.php/Main_Page) who quickly rallied to protect as many GeoCities webpages as possible. Web historian Ian Milligan argues that it is largely down to these rogue archivists that we have any access to the huge GeoCities archive today (2017, p 137). Of particular interest to me is the online collective of people behind KnowYourMeme.com, who do the same for memes and memetic culture today (Rees, 2021).
8. This was certainly the case in relation to the ESRC-funded *Island Stories* (2014) project which examined the research and storytelling traditions of a specific community on the Scottish Isle of Bute. It focused on their use and adoption of digital approaches within the context of the imminent arrival of high-speed broadband. Our research revealed the value of online communities and their co-option of Facebook as a primary mode of working and sharing information. It also revealed that many people preferred more traditional, analogue practices.
9. The Saltaire Collection website (<https://www.saltairecollection.org>) includes online exhibitions, timelines and digital narratives co-created in collaboration with the volunteers.
10. The writers group members all work as individuals (meeting in the pub from time to time to share progress and issues faced). One writer is currently researching the history of Roberts Park, Saltaire; one is researching the history of Salts Hospital and the Almshouses; another has transcribed audio tapes of interviews with a man named Clive Woods who led the campaign to have UNESCO designate Saltaire as a World Heritage Site (Clive died in 2001). One writer completed the story of Pace Microtechnology – an oral history undertaken with the three founding directors. This company was Jonathan Silver's first large tenant and played a significant part in his success in regenerating Salts Mill as well as being significant in their own right as leaders in the late 1980s digital revolution. Another writer has been researching histories of the small traders in Saltaire, while Colin Coates and I have completed a second book, *A Century of Hidden Histories: Saltaire* (Smith, M and Coates, C, 2021, Ings Poetry).
11. The Royal Historical Society have produced blogs to substantiate and collate information they have on women in classical studies to better support creating content on this subject. An example here: <https://blog.royalhistsoc.org/2019/12/16/how-can-historians-achieve-inclusivity-in-digital-archives/>.
12. A platform called COMMANET was established with HLF funding to support local history archives. The company behind the platform was wound up in 2010.

13. This example raises the important question of sustainability and permanence of access to important resources that are in danger of loss or invisibility. This is central to the TaNC scheme and the establishment of centralised and fully resourced and maintained repositories that are open to both formally constituted institutions and independent, community collections.
14. The #DolomitesMuseum campaign was carried out a first time in March 2020 and a second time in May 2021 with the aim of creating a collective narrative of the Dolomites heritage on social media. The themes of the campaign, identified by 12 'hashtags', were chosen by the participants of the Museums of the Dolomites during a series of design workshops. Alongside museums and heritage organisations, also visitor centres, tourist organisations, local community groups, Dolomites *aficionados* and local residents shared their own stories, reflections and memories of the Dolomites through their social media profiles. The campaign produced about 500 stories and 2,000 digital resources dedicated to the history, nature and culture of the Dolomites, which were subsequently collected and curated by the project participants, giving birth to 12 online galleries, called the Laboratory of Stories (<https://museodolom.it/en/exhibitions/>).
15. Documenting the Now is a great example of a project that realised this and has created ethical frameworks and tools to support archiving and documenting social media content. The project began around the time of the Ferguson protests in the US as a way to capture the conversations happening online. The project quickly developed to enable nuanced thinking around the benefits and harms of documenting social media content, and the methods of doing it in a balanced way. (See Jules, Summers and Mitchell, 2018, for more details.) Selective social media content is also archived more routinely through branches of the UK Web Archive and The National Archive, UK.
16. *Wikipedia* uses secondary sources that are independent of the subject. A list of criteria can be found here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources.
17. We simply do not know how to gain access to *Wikipedia* to place some of our work. If the routes to access were available we would want to use them.
18. The interaction with different types of memories and shared by inhabitants and Dolomites *aficionados* on social media had a different impact on the museum curators. The focus groups held at the end of the project revealed a high level of interest on the possibilities of expanding languages and experimenting with new formats. The name chosen for the space ('Laboratory') signals the willingness to depart from the traditional top-down narrative developed by curators for the public. However, these new forms of knowledge also introduced new challenges. Some of the curators expressed their concern in relation to the different language adopted on social media and the specific features of the online stories, which required a shift in tone from the traditional exhibition narrative.
19. It is crucial to think about notions of historical orthodoxy and 'who' gets to define or validate historical facts and interpretations. The different traditions such as oral histories or storytelling rub up against formally constituted academic fields and methods. This is an ongoing and unresolved question for the Congruence Engine project and one whose complexities will be incrementally revealed.
20. Museums are institutions with powerful perceived cultural authority (Macdonald, 1998; Mason et al, 2018). Historically, the formalised knowledge that comes from museums has focused on white, cis gendered (seemingly) heterosexual men who have money. Whilst, over time, the variety of people and stories that feature in museums has increased, the knowledge museums tend to generate is still predicated on a representational model where, for example, an object or a story collected from me might be used to represent the whole LGBTQ community. (For an overview of how the representational model developed from the late 1990s, see Dewdney et al, 2013.) My experience is very different from others who identify as LGBTQ – I am a white cis gendered man from a relatively privileged background. My experience, although a valid one, is not that of all my LGBTQ siblings. The museological practice of including 'community' perspectives here should be welcomed as a pluralising of voices, but it is still the curator who decides whose voice is present. A 'community story' is a story that has been invited by the curator as something other than the institutional knowledge created by them – it may be stored alongside a particular object the curator thinks is relevant, or in its own 'community stories' section – ready to be used when the heritage professionals think it is relevant.
21. During my PhD fieldwork at the Science Museum Group (2019–2020), I interviewed different members of the digital, curatorial and communication team in London, Manchester and Bradford. I wanted to explore the potential of online spaces and platforms to expand the voices of the museum. From these interviews, the blog uniformly emerged as a genuine polyvocal space to experiment with the inclusion of different voices: in each museum's blog all the members of the teams can write, but also volunteers, curators from other museums, researchers, wanting to offer their own unique perspective on collections, exhibitions and museum events. A clear distinction was made between this participatory space and the 'Object and Stories' section, which is used by curators to tell stories about objects. The different nature of

these online spaces made me think of what Nina Simon defines as ‘the power in platform management’ (Simon, 2008), and in particular the power to set the rules of behaviour. Considering that a certain level of management is always required in a platform environment, would it ever be possible to imagine a platform without a power relationship?

22. See <https://www.thackrayhealthheroes.co.uk/thackray-stories/windrush-nurses>
23. See <https://www.digitalheritage.leeds.ac.uk/>
24. This potentially denies polyvocal approaches and vests power/authority in the academy by implication and privileges academic sources.
25. The democratisation of knowledge is, according to *Wikipedia*, ‘the acquisition and spread of knowledge amongst a wider part of the population. The internet is often cited as one of the major technologies that has aided easier access to knowledge (alongside the printing press!), and a tool within the wider context of the internet is wiki-based knowledge tools. These wiki-technologies are often claimed to enable the changing of existing power dynamics and hierarchical systems in generating and sharing knowledge (Pfaff and Hasan, 2011). In this exchange I was referring more specifically to the democratisation of knowledge generation – who is able to contribute to public knowledge. So here, I wanted us to reflect on the fact that *Wikipedia*, although a tool with affordances that support the democratisation of knowledge, still relies on secondary sources – often ones whose affordances do not support the democratisation of knowledge – to validate a contribution.
26. Wikispore has entries collating information on subjects not well documented by sources of *Wikipedia*’s required standard, such as art scenes and movements.
27. Sound files can illustrate information not available elsewhere, such as accents and vocabulary. Recordings such as this: <https://blogs.bl.uk/sound-and-vision/2021/05/recording-of-the-week-we-showed-them-that-we-could-do-it-as-good-as-them.html>.
28. Thanks to the introduction of sound recording and the opportunity to record, store and preserve sounds (Sterne, 2003), sound heritage has become a thriving field of practice, with the emergence of sound archives and the development of oral history projects. The latest developments of sound technologies have contributed to expand the awareness of the cultural, social, economic and environmental value of sound, and the UNESCO General Conference has recently adopted a resolution on the importance of sound in today’s world (2017). In Congruence Engine, we started to explore how audio heritage can open new perspectives in connecting collections and understanding our industrial past. In the first pilot study dedicated to Saltaire and Lister Mill, a mini investigation was developed around the oral history interviews of mill workers from the Saltaire Collection and the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit.
29. This particular file is not yet digitised and is precisely why we need to create secondary material from the original. There are other personal stories in digital formats which are available on the Saltaire Collection website: <https://www.saltairecollection.org/saltaire-snapshots/workers/>.
30. See articles such as https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Pakistan#Notable_women, where many of the women listed or discussed are not notable enough to have their own articles but can be mentioned in this context.
31. #SonicFriday was a project co-designed within my PhD research to experiment with new ways to make audiences interact with the objects of the Sound Technologies collection and connect them with people’s lives. The project, launched by the National Science and Media Museum (Bradford, UK) during Summer 2020, invited social media users to share memories and stories around their personal relationship with sound culture: from cassettes, CDs and mp3s to digital sampling and lockdown sounds (an example of the Sounds of my Quarantine prompt on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MediaMuseum/status/1284053430437384193>). As a result, more than 250 digital memories were shared by online users and museum volunteers across different platforms, giving birth to YouTube playlists, multimedia galleries and sound maps.
32. During two dedicated focus groups at the end of the project, the museum team reflected on the value of these memories, recognising their potential to understand how objects are perceived and experienced, to collect stories of use, and to create emotional connections with the collection. See also Stefania Zardini Lacedelli, Annie Jamieson and John Stack talking to Ciprian Melian about the project in this video interview realised for the 2022 Best in Heritage edition: <https://youtu.be/t922PxXMGTA>.
33. Experimental collecting has long been practised in museums; from art galleries (Altshuler, 2004) to social history museums (Rhys, 2011; Rhys and Baveystock, 2014). Of particular interest here are the attempts at collecting social media. We should acknowledge the early attempt of the Library of Congress to, perhaps over-ambitiously, collect all of Twitter in 2010 (Zimmer, 2015); the work of the V&A in collecting a version of Chinese social media platform WeChat, and in their Towards a National Collection foundation project Preserving and Sharing Born Digital and Hybrid Objects

(Arrigoni et al, 2022); Museum of London's early and ongoing Twitter collecting (Ride, 2013); and the experiments of the Collecting Social Photo project in archiving social media photography (Boogh et al, 2020). For fuller descriptions and analysis of these projects, see Rees, 2021. See also Altshuler, B (ed), 2005, *Collecting the new: museums and contemporary art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); Arrigoni, G, Kane, N, McConnachie, S and McKim, J, 2022, 'Preserving and sharing born-digital and hybrid objects from and across the National Collection: Project report January 2022', Victoria and Albert Museum; Boogh, E, Hartig, K, Jensen, B, Uimonen, P and Wallenius, A (eds), 2020, *Connect to Collect: Approaches to Collecting Social Digital Photography in Museums and Archives* (Stockholm: Nordiska museets förlag); Rhys, O, 2011, *Contemporary collecting: theory and practice* (Edinburgh: Museums Etc.); Rhys, O and Baveystock, Z (eds), 2014, *Collecting the Contemporary: A Handbook for Social History Museums* (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc.); Ride, P, 2013, 'Creating #citizencurators: putting twitter into museum showcases', in ISEA International: Australia Network for Art & Technology; Zimmer, M, 2015, 'The Twitter Archive at the Library of Congress: Challenges for information practice and information policy', *First Monday*. 20(6); Rees, A J, 2021, *Remixing Museology: An approach to collecting social media in museums*, PhD thesis, University of Leeds. <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/29542/>.

34. In my research I frame social media as a new and emerging form of object that collecting institutions need to learn how to handle. The significance of contemporary online culture is often recognised by museum professionals, but the processes and procedures used to guide how collecting and collections management takes place are designed around collecting tangible, material artefacts. I argue that this leads to a conceptual barrier to collecting from online space and suggest that in order to remove this barrier to collecting new and emerging types of objects, museums and archives need to remix their collecting processes to change incrementally, alongside the development of new technologies (see Rees, A J, 2021, *Remixing Museology: An approach to collecting social media in museums*, PhD thesis, University of Leeds <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/29542/>).
35. Reflecting on the value of digital memories raised a series of key questions. The #SonicFriday project fostered the museum team to reflect on new practices of collective remembering and how the meaning of heritage is evolving. On a practical level, key challenges were identified: how to digitally preserve these memories in the long term, what elements should be collected (the content of the digital memory or also the social media context in which they were published?), what resources and ethical procedures need to be activated, which processes, competences, spaces and tools do museums need to collect this material and integrate them within the museum narratives. In considering these questions, the #SonicFriday project fits within a growing number of participatory projects which involve the collection and curation of people's memories on social media to enrich the museums' digital collections.
36. 'The Mills Are Alive in Manningham' was an epic projection show, which illuminated Lister Mills' chimney on 3, 4 and 5 March 2022. The projections took audiences on a journey of wonder and learning, telling stories of those who have called Bradford home through generations, from the industrial revolution through to present day. The show touched on iconic political and social movements, the birth of Bradford Festival and Bradford Mela Festival, reflections of contemporary Manningham, and local school children's imaginings for the future of the mill. Showcasing archive footage, music and original photographs, 'The Mills Are Alive...' was an immersive experience which inspired and ignited passion for heritage, mills and the Bradford District. The project was produced by The Brick Box with projections created by The Projection Studio. Alongside the projection events, The Brick Box worked with a number of community organisations and local residents to record oral histories and stories connected to Manningham Mills and Bradford. For 'The Mills are Alive...' project see <https://thebrickbox.co.uk/projects/the-mills-are-alive>.
37. Ruxandra Lupu: THE HOME MOVIE 4.0: (co)creative strategies for a tacit, embodied and affective reading of the Sicilian Home Movie Archive. See <http://homemoviesicily.com/>.
38. My use of remix culture here refers to Lawrence Lessig's description of remix as a shift from 'read only' culture, where society is encouraged to read ready-made units of culture, to a 'read/write' culture, where people are actively encouraged to interact, edit and re-share what they encounter (Lessig, 2008). Remix has its traditions in music, specifically hip hop, but continues to grow as a way of framing change, creativity and digital culture. Lev Manovich's description of remix as 'a composition that consists of previously existing parts assembled, which is edited to create particular aesthetic, semantic and/or bodily effects' (Manovich, 2015, p 128) feels particularly illustrative of the remix processes related to the discussions we had.
39. The YARN storytelling and research platform was co-developed as part of the AHRC Pararchive project to provide a space for research development and publication.
40. On the YARN platform all the projects remain under the editorial control of the author, and can be edited, updated and removed. They can also be quoted by other users to add to their stories or projects as a reference point or as a means of

developing a new or alternative version of the original. Each are co-linked so that the original source is always visible and autonomous.

41. The stories collected from social media in the #DolomitesMuseum campaign were re-published, with the consent of the contributors, in the Museo Dolom.it platform, a participatory museum co-created by Dolomites community and inspired by the platform model (Zardini Lacedelli, 2018). The platform adopts the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 International (CC BY-SA) [<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>] (SZL).
42. When a user signs up to use Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc., they sign the platforms' Terms and Conditions which state that they do not claim ownership over the content and that it remains with the user. However, the agreements do give the platforms a worldwide non-exclusive, royalty-free, transferable, sub-licensable, licence to host, use, distribute, modify, run, copy, publicly perform or display, translate, and create derivative works of the content uploaded (Twitter, 2022. *Terms of Service* – accessed 23 August 2022): <https://twitter.com/en/tos>.

I will note that YARN allows users to remove material and re-edit, never producing a 'fixed' and ceded entry (SP).

43. This fear totally shaped the co-design of YARN.
44. See Paul Duffy re Bute Island Stories, local collections and relationships with institutions.
45. See: <https://creativecommons.org>
46. *Wikipedia* is an online encyclopaedia, accessible and editable by anyone. It is the largest encyclopaedia in the world with over 6.5 million articles in English and more across another 328 languages. Wikimedia is the broader movement of volunteers and organisations behind *Wikipedia* and its sister projects. Wikidata is one of Wikimedia's largest projects, an open source graph database of over one hundred million objects, people, places and more.
47. As an example, the Wikidata item for Haiti has many labels, written phonetically or in Haitian Creole, for easier search and discovery (<https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q790>).
48. This relates to the work Nunaliit are doing with indigenous histories (<https://nunaliit.org/>).
49. As an example, Wikimedia emits 1.2 kilotonnes of carbon emission compared to YouTube's 702 kilotonnes See: https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Sustainability_Initiative#:~:text=The%20data%20centres%20hosting%20Wikipedia,carbo and <https://www.energylivenews.com/2021/06/11/youtube-alleged-to-be-worlds-highest-emitting-website/>
50. A first experiment was developed on the National Science and Media Museum blog, in the article 'Sounds of my Quarantine' (<https://blog.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/sounds-of-quarantine/>).
51. There are a few pieces of work on digital preservation and collections management for museums, but museums are still decades behind archives and libraries. There is a section of digital preservation with contributions from Bill Lowry and myself in the Contemporary Collecting toolkit (Miles et al, 2020), and I am also involved in new digital collections-focused guidance coming out to support the Spectrum Collections Management standard (the UK's standard for museum collections management, produced by Collections Trust). The Digital Preservation Coalition is also a great resource.
52. In the *Museums of the Dolomites* project, the level of involvement was not uniform but changed according to the individual participants, their willingness to contribute and the time at their disposal. From the qualitative study conducted at the end of the project, small and community museums were among the most numerous and active participants. This was partly due to the fact that smaller museums had less opportunities and resources to experiment on digital spaces, so they perceived the project as a way to extend their access in the digital space and collaborate with other heritage institutions. Furthermore, the small museums in the Dolomites are extremely close to their communities; they were often born and managed with the contribution of local inhabitants and have been less shaped by the 'visitor' model of the bigger institutions.
53. This new museum category, proposed by George Rivière and Hugues de Varine in the 1970s, places community participation at the centre of the mission. According to Rivière, in the ecomuseum, each member 'could be moving from the role of consumer to that of actor, and even author of the museum' (Rivière, 1989). The ecomuseum has further contributed to deconstruct the idea of the museum as an exhibition centre, by delineating a museum which is dispersed in the territory – a 'musée éclatée', exploded into space (Rivière, 1980).
54. In my PhD research, I reflected on the extension of the ecomuseum concept suggesting a new, post-digital, museum conceptualisation: the Platform-Museum. (Zardini Lacedelli, 2019). Thinking of the museum as a platform means to conceive it as a system of relationships that are built and constantly developed around cultural heritage. These relationships contribute to create different communities around the museum as well as new forms of heritage: not only objects, but also digital resources that are created and shared using different platforms. In this concept, the museum is a diffused, polyvocal, participatory institution, extended both in the physical and online spaces. Its physical dimension

embraces the building(s) where material heritage is conserved or displayed, but also the landscape and geographical context to which heritage is related. Its virtual dimension includes all the digital platforms and online spaces where the digital resources are shared, experienced and co-created.

55. Dialogic and conversational writing can be a powerful inclusive means not only to describe collaborative approaches in research but to embody them, building relationships amongst project participants, breaking down barriers and bringing together different voices.

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