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CREATING LIVING KNOWLEDGE

The Connected Communities Programme, community-university relationships and the participatory turn in the production of knowledge

Keri Facer & Bryony Enright



Acknowledgements

This report is not simply a product of two people. Rather, it has been produced with the generous support and involvement of many of the participants of the Connected Communities Programme and its wider network of advisors.

Our sincere thanks therefore, go to the hundreds of project participants from community organisations and universities who gave their time to participate in interviews and workshops – we hope this analysis both reflects your experiences and provides a starting point for conversations that will be some use to you in future. Thanks also to our collaborators on the seven legacy projects and the nine co-design projects who have been inquiring with us into how co-designed research might best be conducted and to the Community Partner Network, the Science Museum and the Heritage Partner Network for convening our three partner workshops.

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This report is also only one of very many reflections on collaborative research that the Connected Communities Programme is developing. Indeed it is indebted to the important work that is being done by Connected Communities project teams themselves in this area. Our resources section highlights many of these and we would encourage readers to draw on this very rich set of materials.

We also want to recognise the important role played by the AHRC team – in particular Gary Grubb and Mark Llewellyn - not only in shaping and nurturing the Connected Communities Programme as a whole, but in supporting this study and in encouraging free thinking and critique throughout the programme.

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Prof Keri Facer & Dr Bryony Enright

University of Bristol, January 2016

Disclaimer

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In Memory of Tim Lloyd Yeates

who could teach anyone the
meaning of principled collaboration

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Executive Summary

1. How can community and university expertise best be combined to better understand how communities are changing, and the roles that communities might play in responding to the problems and possibilities of the contemporary world? This is the question posed by the Connected Communities Programme, a UK Research Council Programme led by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
2. Since 2010, the programme has funded over 300 projects, bringing together over 700 academics and over 500 collaborating organisations on topics ranging from festivals to community food, from everyday creativity to care homes, from hyperlocal journalism to community energy. The programme is distinctive in its commitment to encouraging exploratory and open-ended projects that involve collaboration between university and community partners at all stages of the process, and in its commitment to drawing on the methods and theories of the arts and humanities to understand and research ‘community’.
3. This report focuses on the lessons that might be learned from the programme about how to bring together expert and public knowledges – a trend in both universities and the wider policy and public spheres that we might call the ‘participatory turn’. It is based on a two year study of the programme conducted by Professor Keri Facer (Leadership Fellow for Connected Communities) and Dr Bryony Enright (Connected Communities Research Fellow). The study involved 100 interviews with programme participants, a questionnaire completed by 309 participants, workshops with 59 community partners, collaboration with 7 projects in which university-community collaborations were used to analyse the legacy of specific elements in the programme, and 2 twelve month case studies of individual projects. Findings have been developed iteratively throughout the study with programme participants.

 *How can
community and
university expertise
best be combined?*

4. **Motivations** - One of the first questions the study was interested in is: “who is attracted to this sort of collaborative project between community and university partners, and why?” Participants’ motivations can be clustered into 6 broad characteristic groups: generalists and learners (who are interested in new ideas and connections), makers (who are interested in getting something tangible made or changed), scholars (who are interested in finding opportunities to pursue specific interests), entrepreneurs (who are attracted by the funding opportunities), accidental wanderers (who end up in the programme by happenstance), advocates for a new knowledge landscape (who are explicitly looking to experiment with new ways to create knowledge). These motivations are characteristic of both university and community partners. 98% of survey respondents reported they would do this sort of collaborative work again.
5. **Participants** - The community partners participating in the programme are highly diverse, with groups ranging from large national organisations and charities with established research capabilities, to smaller precarious and voluntary organisations, to individual community activists and artists. An important reason for many community partners to participate was the perception that this funding would allow them to take a step back, address fundamental questions and develop new insights about their work. For many groups, this was a unique opportunity as they often find themselves on a constant treadmill of activity and evaluation, often working to different and sometimes conflicting evaluation frameworks.
6. **Purposes for practical collaboration** - The university and community partners tended to work together for practical reasons (it was impossible to conduct the research any other way), for personal reasons (they had shared interests, values, commitments and ideas), and for symbolic reasons (university partners sought the ‘authenticity’ offered by collaboration with communities, and community partners sought the ‘legitimacy’ offered by collaboration with universities).

 *An important reason for many community partners to participate was the perception that this funding would allow them to take a step back, address fundamental questions and develop new insights about their work.*


7. **The fantasy of ‘community’ and ‘university’** - Project partnerships are often formed on the basis of inchoate ideas about what ‘the university’ and ‘the community’ might offer to projects. A central part of the work of collaborative research, therefore, requires treating these fantasies seriously. Such questions can require project teams to reflect upon their own claims to authority: to what extent do community partners really represent ‘the community’? To what extent do university partners represent the only or most appropriate way of producing meaningful knowledge? Such work is necessarily unsettling and can be disruptive of existing identities.
8. **Accountability issues** - There are competing accountabilities on projects. These are internal to the project teams: to community partners, to university partners, to community members; and external to the project teams: to disciplinary fields, to the wider public good, to personal social networks. These internal and external accountabilities require careful articulation and the tensions between them have to be carefully addressed.
9. **Deep traditions** - While the idea of ‘co-producing’ research may only recently have come into vogue in the research councils, the Connected Communities Programme demonstrates the longstanding and highly diverse traditions that project teams draw upon when invited to conduct ‘collaborative research’. The different traditions at play in the programme include but are not limited to: traditions of participatory, collaborative and community engaged research; people’s history; environmental activism; participatory ethnography; traditions of responsible innovation and public engagement; participatory/action research; communities of practice approaches; co-design and user-centred design approaches; civil rights, feminist and disability rights traditions; crowd/commons and open innovation approaches.
10. **Competing logics** - These traditions bring very different rationales and methods for the processes of collaborative research. There are key differences, for example, between those traditions that seek university-community collaboration for reasons of equity and democracy, and those that see it primarily as a means of

improving the quality of research and practice. Indeed, the idea of ‘community’ is framed very differently in different traditions – with some partnerships particularly concerned with capacity building amongst grassroots communities and others with building policy-level knowledge with representative organisations.


11. **Expertise required** - Negotiating different traditions, different motivations for participation and different relations of accountability requires expertise. To make projects work requires a highly diverse set of roles within the team, these include: the catalyser (who prompts and disrupts), the integrator (who synthesises), the designer (who connects and creates a plan), the broker (who negotiates relationships), the facilitator (who enables conversations), the project manager (who addresses progress and risks), the diplomat (who handles inter-institutional relations), the scholar (who connects the project with existing knowledge and ensures rigour), the conscience (who asks how the project is benefiting communities), the accountant (who manages the money), the data gatherer (who conducts the empirical/archival research), the nurturer (who keeps an eye on all participants), the loudhailer (who promotes the work). Notably, such roles are taken in these projects by both university and community partners.

12. **Funding benefits** - Funding for collaborative research that enables community partners to be remunerated for expenses and time is essential in introducing diverse life experiences into the research process. Civil society, community and cultural organisations simply are unable to access resources to participate in reflective projects without funding. Indeed, without resource, economically marginalised communities are effectively shut out of the landscape of research production. The money matters significantly. In the Connected Communities programme funding has significantly enhanced the capacity of projects to learn from the experiences and perspectives of economically marginalised communities. It has enabled investment in people, materials, equipment and institutions which has in turn supported further investment in collaborative research by some universities. The funding also plays an important symbolic role in signalling that this sort of research is valued and valuable.

13. **Funding issues** - The form that funding takes, however, matters significantly – short term projects are less beneficial than longer term support of partnership working. The relationship between individuals and groups committed to collaborative long term partnerships can be negatively impacted and rendered instrumental if the consequences, politics and implications of project-based funding are not discussed from the outset. At the same time, for small organisations, project based funding can cause difficulties in terms of longer term sustainability of activities with volunteers. The unintended consequences of ‘success’ in gaining research funding have to be carefully considered by all parties.
14. **Time and money** - There is also often a discrepancy between formal allocation of time and resources and the lived experience of individuals working on such projects. Participants report that such research requires significantly more time than is usually budgeted for. As a consequence, research assistants, who are junior members of the team but who tend to have the most time formally allocated to projects, tend to take a disproportionate responsibility for the success of these collaborations. Managing project finances through university systems that are often highly bureaucratic can also have negative impacts on community-university relations.
15. **Reframing impact** - In the area of research ‘impact’ these projects are leading to a reassessment of how we might understand the idea of what counts as a positive legacy from research partnerships. Indeed, they are troubling the popular linear model of research impact as a simple process that runs from ‘paper’ through to real world ‘application’. Instead, they are demonstrating that more sustainable, embodied and transformative legacies are produced through ongoing interactions between publics and universities throughout the development of projects and partnerships.

 *Research assistants, who are junior members of the team but who tend to have the most time formally allocated to projects, tend to take a disproportionate responsibility for the success of these collaborations.*

16. **Multiple legacies** - Project teams are working with plural notions of legacy, which include: the creation of new products (websites, guidelines, toolkits, academic papers, software, exhibitions, booklets, artworks, reports, performances); the creation of new networks and relationships; the development of new theories, ideas and concepts (relating to communities, histories of community and means of researching community); the strengthening and evolution of institutions (community partners are developing new services and strengthening their research capacities, universities are adapting their systems and developing greater capacity for collaboration).
17. **Embodied legacies** - The most significant and sustainable legacies, however, are embodied. Participants in projects are developing new skills, knowledge and understanding as well as the confidence to put these into action in the networks, organisations and partnerships they are involved with beyond the project itself. At the same time, the programme has nurtured the development of a new generation of community and university researchers who have 'grown up collaborative' and who take for granted the value and potential benefits of interdisciplinary community-university partnerships.
18. **Limitations to funding models** - There are some limitations to Connected Communities/research council funding as a model of creating powerful collaborations between universities and communities. First, those groups who are under-represented within university faculty demographics, in particular both visible and invisible minorities, may find it harder to create connections and collaborations with universities. Second, investment in partnerships through a project based approach does not easily facilitate the slower participatory forms of research that require commitment over time.

 *The most significant and sustainable legacies are embodied.*

19. **Work still to do** - There remains a need for research and scholarship, that is explicitly accountable to a wider public good; for more explicit and targeted attempts to diversify both faculty and the range of groups who partner with universities; and for ongoing community-university relationships to be sustained and nurtured through core and partnership funding rather than project based research funding.

20. **Key recommendations** - The following are the top level recommendations arising from this study of the Connected Communities Programme

a. Recommendation 1: **Take the simple steps needed to enhance the infrastructure for high quality collaborative research partnerships**, In particular by addressing the following priorities:

- i. Extend Connected Communities funding approaches across research councils
- ii. Invest in research assistants for the long term
- iii. Build capacity for early career researchers, doctoral students and peer reviewers
- iv. Develop university professional services to better support collaborative research

b. Recommendation 2: **Recognise that time is to collaborative research what a supercomputer is to big data.**

In particular, through the following three priority areas:

- i. Extend (the same) funding over longer time scales
- ii. Rebalance funding for partnerships and projects
- iii. Create connections between teaching and research



There remains a need for explicit and targeted attempts to diversify both faculty and the range of groups who partner with universities.


c. Recommendation 3: **Take explicit steps to mitigate the risk of enhancing inequalities through collaborative research.** In particular, through addressing the following priorities:

- i. Funders should develop a more nuanced lexicon of types of community partners and the forms of funding and support that might be offered to or requested from different groups.
- ii. Explicit efforts need to be made to understand and address the barriers that prevent different minority groups from contributing to research projects.
- iii. Research investment needs to be considered in the wider context of the university as a whole.

d. Recommendation 4: **Invest in civil society's public learning infrastructure** through one key priority:

- i. Establish a new funding programme open to civil society organisations resourced by a combination of RCUK and the larger charitable trusts and foundations

21. **To conclude:** The Connected Communities Programme demonstrates that 'public value' from research is not about creating short term, instrumental partnerships in which universities offer quick evaluations or specialist inputs in exchange for communities offering access to a 'real world'. Rather, it is about creating substantive conversations between the different sets of expertise and experience that university and community partners offer, and in so doing, enabling the core questions that both are asking to be reframed and challenged. Such a set of relationships is far from the naïve economic model that would see the value of research judged by its immediate utility. Instead, it is about the creation of a new public knowledge landscape where communities, and the universities that form part of those communities, can collaborate to question, research and experiment to create new ways of understanding, seeing and acting in the world.

 *'Public value' from research is not about creating short term, instrumental partnerships it is about creating substantive conversations between the different sets of expertise and experience that university and community partners offer, and in so doing, enabling the core questions that both are asking to be reframed and challenged.*



Preface


In 2010 the Connected Communities Programme was launched by Research Councils UK and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, with the aim of funding research projects, partnerships and networks that would create a deeper and richer understanding of ‘communities’ in all their forms and in all the roles they play and have played historically in our lives. Underpinning the programme was a commitment to encourage distinctive and risk-taking projects that would be characterised by two attributes:

- First, community-university collaboration. Connected Communities projects are explicitly encouraged to draw on the combined expertise, experience and aspirations of individuals working in both communities and in universities.
- Second, interdisciplinarity. Projects are explicitly encouraged to bring the methods and theories of the arts and humanities (which includes everything from philosophy, history and literature to design, cultural studies, architecture and drama) into dialogue with other forms of scholarship, research and practice.

Since 2010, the programme has funded over 300 projects, involved over 500 collaborating organisations and worked with over 700 academics from universities across the UK, on topics ranging from festivals to community food, from everyday creativity to care homes, from hyperlocal journalism to community energy.

In funding this sort of interdisciplinary, collaborative and often risk-taking research, the Connected Communities Programme is at the heart of a much wider and longstanding debate about how new knowledge, scholarship, ideas and practices should and could be produced today.

This debate includes questions about how new ideas can be nurtured: through social innovation or from scholarly research into frontiers of disciplinary knowledge? About who has expertise and knowledge to really understand what is ‘going on’ in communities today: those people who are living and experiencing it as their day to day reality, or those who are able

 *Connected Communities is at the heart of a much wider debate about how new knowledge, scholarship, ideas and practices should and could be produced today.*

to draw on much wider historic, philosophical and geographical resources to make sense of community? About who makes good custodians for the historical accounts of a diverse society – those with a passion and a personal commitment to lived traditions or those with the institutional and professional techniques to archive, analyse and maintain historical records? This programme is seeking to explore what happens when these questions are answered by saying ‘both/and’ – both the communities and the scholars, both the passionate personal interest and the robust, systematic modes of inquiry.

In so doing, the programme is situated within the much broader debate about the ‘public good’ role of universities today: should they become deeply engaged with the people and communities around them or will such engagement leave them open to exploitation by special interests and instrumental agendas?

These issues are not simply arcane questions of concern only to those interested in the minutiae of research and university funding. Rather, how we produce knowledge, scholarship and ideas about reality matters for the stories we are able to tell about ourselves and our society, and for how we frame our response to the changing realities of the contemporary world. If there are communities and cultures who are systematically excluded from these accounts of reality, then our stories of ourselves will be impoverished. If there is expertise and insight – whether in communities or in universities – that remains untapped, then society as a whole will lose powerful resources to help tackle the complex problems that it faces today.

In this context, Connected Communities can be seen as a significant experiment that allows us to better understand the risks, responsibilities and new possibilities that emerge for all concerned as changing relationships are forged between universities and communities. It is part of the wider ‘participatory turn’ that is opening up new relationships between publics, professionals, audiences, artists, citizens and policy makers in all areas of public life. To that end, this report on the first 5 years of the Connected Communities Programme seeks to understand these dynamics and to explore how the relationship between ‘university’ and ‘community’ knowledge is being reimagined and reconfigured through these projects.

In so doing, the report builds upon and contributes to the already rich history of research in the fields of community-engaged research, participatory and collaborative practice; and upon the highly diverse intellectual traditions that inform it from the work of David Watson to Michelle Fine; from Suzanne Lacy to Etienne Wenger. For researchers and practitioners already working in these fields, much of what we have to say in this report will be familiar – the enrichment of research offered by sustained partnerships, the often-repeated themes of the need for trust, respect, reciprocity and time.

The scale of the Connected Communities Programme, however, is such that we hope it allows us to do something different; in particular, we believe that it allows an exploration of the sheer diversity and traditions of ‘collaborative’ partnerships that arise across different disciplines and starting points, as well as the key tensions and points of commonality that arise between them. Examining collaborative research on the scale of a large programme also allows us to examine critically the more systemic risks as well as opportunities that such programmes might create for the longer term capacity to create knowledge that benefits from and reflects the expertise and cultures of the highly diverse communities that make up the UK today. We look forward to further exploring the funding in this respect with researchers, funders and civil society groups in future.

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Dr Bryony Enright

(Connected Communities Research Fellow, University of Bristol)

A users guide to terminology and organisations

Many of the terms used in this report are ambiguous and have different meanings in different situations. Similarly, there are organisations whose roles and purposes are far from widely understood. The following should hopefully provide a useful guide to navigating some of the language we use.

‘Communities’

It’s tempting to say that the word ‘community’ is so vague as to be unhelpful. Indeed, there is general recognition that it is a word that is often infused with nostalgia which masks processes of oppression and exclusion⁰¹ and produces unhelpful generalisations that mask real differences⁰². When we use the term here, we use it to refer to the very wide range of virtual, physical, geographic, interest and accidental groups that are formed around interests, issues, places, histories, cultures and professions. We recognise that communities are rarely coherent, are dynamic and changing. The question we are interested in here, therefore, is how are communities represented in this research? Through whom is the ‘community’ brought into research processes? What claims are made about ‘community’? Such questions are always political.

‘Universities’

Universities, equally, are a highly diverse set of institutions ranging from very well resourced and long standing organisations with a global reach, to significantly more economically precarious institutions. The definition of a university is contested, but they are commonly understood to be institutions whose primary purpose is the production of scholarship and knowledge and the conduct of higher education. Universities are funded in the main through student fees, through a block grant for core research costs, through commercial partnerships/licences, and through research grants awarded from



Communities are rarely coherent, are dynamic and changing. The question we are interested in here, therefore, is how are communities represented in this research? Through whom is the ‘community’ brought into research processes?

⁰¹ See Joseph, M. (2002). *Against the romance of community*. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press

⁰² See Delanty, G. (2003). *Community*. London: Routledge

research councils. For shorthand, we use the term “universities” throughout this report to refer to all Higher Education Institutions and Independent Research Organisations (see below).

‘Community partners’

Throughout the Connected Communities Programme the term ‘community partners’ has been used to describe any collaborator on a research project whose primary employer is not the university. Community partners, therefore, are highly diverse – they might be a local authority worker, a community artist, a policy advisor in national government, a charity representative. They also differ significantly in their relationships to wider communities – some are representatives of communities, others are organisations that work in and sometimes work on such communities. Community partners might also be academics in their own right – medical collaborators from the health service, for example, are often active researchers; community heritage groups are often producing information for the historical record; some of the community activists have a longstanding tradition of participatory action research. Some community partners may also be trained academic researchers with PhDs, who are now working outside the university.

In this report, a community partner is an organisation or individual who is playing an intentional role in the design, conduct or evaluation of the research. They may be, but are not necessarily, community members themselves, rather, they are representing and working with such communities in an active way in the research process. Their roles might include: co-designing research projects, providing advice and guidance on projects, brokering relationships, translating and mediating between communities and the project team, convening and facilitating activities⁰³.

03 See Sophia de Sousa’s summary of the different distinctive roles of community partners available on the Connected Communities website www.connected-communities.org

‘Community member’

There is an important distinction to be made between community partners and the community members who constitute the ‘community’ that is the subject of a research project. Community members may be involved in projects through explicitly participatory methods helping to co-develop the project, in which case they will be understood as community partners in this report. Alternatively, they may be involved through more traditional social science, arts and humanities approaches in which they are invited to participate and share their views, ideas and experiences through many methods. These community members may be beneficiaries or clients of community partner organisations who are co-designing the project. They may be the wider ‘grassroots’ public who live in a particular area or identify with a particular interest or concern. Our focus in this report is primarily on the relationship between community partners and university partners, rather than on the broader and equally complex relations with the wider community members who are subjects/ participants of research.

‘University partners’

Throughout the report, instead of the word academic or researcher we use the term ‘university partner’ to refer to individuals working in universities. We do so because we recognise that there are academics and researchers working in the community and we wish to avoid unnecessary confusion. We also do so in full recognition that the individual academic is as unlikely to represent and embody ‘the university’ as the individual from the civil society organisation, government or arts group, is unlikely to represent ‘the community’. Using the twin terms ‘community partner’ and ‘university partner’ stresses that these identities are relational, they are produced in that moment of institutional and personal collaboration, in which the ideas and resources of ‘the university’ or ‘the community’ are invoked for particular purposes. Such identities might at times be set aside, they might be superseded by relations of friendship, they might be disrupted and changed as individuals shift institutional allegiances.

 *The individual academic is as unlikely to represent and embody ‘the university’ as the individual from the civil society organisation, government or arts group, is unlikely to represent ‘the community’.*

Project Team

Throughout the report we use the phrase ‘project team’ to refer to the combined team of university partners and community partners who are responsible for leading, designing and conducting projects. It represents the form of corporate identity that a project develops over time, and the sets of shared commitments and allegiances to each other that are formed that exceed institutional accountabilities.

Principal Investigators

These are the individuals (who must, according to RCUK funding requirements, always work either in a university or an independent research organisation) who are ultimately responsible for a project. This is the person who takes a lead on developing and submitting the bid and is accountable for its delivery. This can involve management either of relatively small projects or responsibility for large grants across multiple institutions with tens and hundreds of collaborators. The PI role is usually costed into the proposal.

Co-Investigators

These are individuals who take a responsible role for particular areas of project delivery. This role can (now) include both university and community partners. Co-Investigators are responsible for both designing and conducting the research. The Co-I role is usually costed into the proposal.

Research Assistants

These are individuals who are employed on projects, often on temporary contracts, ostensibly to conduct data collection and analysis as part of projects. Their roles, however, are often significantly more diverse. These individuals may have completed formal doctoral training or be completing this alongside or as part of their paid role as a research assistant/fellow or have no formal research qualifications at all. They have often not been involved in the design of the research. Their employment is usually a significant cost in the project, and may not extend beyond the end of the project.

Early Career Researchers

The technical Research Council UK definition of an early career researcher is someone within 6 years of completing their PhD. Early career researchers, however, can in fact be at very different stages of their career. They may be young post-docs in their early twenties. Alternatively, they may be well established professionals or lecturers who have gained a formal research qualification later on in their career.

Independent Research Organisations

This term is defined by Research Councils UK to designate an organisation that has been judged eligible for research funding but is not a university. It usually recognises that there is a depth and longstanding tradition of research in the institution and that it is able to manage its finances in an accountable manner. This grouping typically includes large national museums, charities and long established independent research institutes.

Research Councils & the AHRC

The UK Research Councils (RCUK) award grants for research projects through competitive processes. There are (at the time of writing) 7 councils. Connected Communities is a cross research council programme and in principle spans all seven councils. For the purposes of this report, the most important research councils are: The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), all of whom have funded projects under the Connected Communities Programme. Connected Communities is led and administered by the AHRC.

Funding for research projects is awarded through three main modes: responsive mode (by which any academic can propose a research project to the council), highlight mode (in which particular topics are encouraged within responsive mode, and academics submit project proposals inspired by this), programme/theme mode (in which there are more tightly specified calls for proposals on particular topics

and themes, and where there is an intention to create a research community around these topics). In all cases, the proposals are peer reviewed by academics. In the case of Connected Communities and some other programmes, proposals are also peer reviewed by invited community partners. Only individuals working in universities or an independent research organisation, can apply for funding.

Research council competitive funding is one of two sources of university funding. The other is the core research funding that can be allocated as universities see appropriate, and which is awarded through the REF process (see below).

Award/Grant

Once the research council makes the decision to fund a project, the project is given an 'award letter' to confirm the amount that will be paid, for what and when. This often leads to the conflation of the terms 'award' and 'grant' to cover what is essentially funding for a particular project.

The 'REF' and 'Impact'

The Research Evaluation Framework is an exercise conducted every five years which aims to assess the quality of each 'research unit' – usually a department or faculty – within a university. Importantly, this quality assessment is tied to future funding, with 'higher quality' departments securing more funding. Failure to do well in 'the REF' has significant implications for the reputation of institutions and potentially disastrous consequences for their finances. It is a process that is therefore a significant driver of university behaviours. This is felt particularly keenly at the level of the individual academic, who is required to produce at least 4 very high quality research publications that should be submitted to the REF. These publications are reviewed by their peers on a 'REF panel'. Research units also have to demonstrate that their research is having an 'impact', which requires them to present case studies that make a connection between their own published research and a social benefit/change/development. This emphasis on impact

was only introduced in the last round of the REF and was subject to considerable controversy. It is seen by different groups as either a way of making university research more accountable to a wider public, or a way of making university research less risk-taking, less critical and more accountable to dominant interests.

Research Development Workshop

A research development workshop is a residential event, convened by a research council to enable the award of research funding. The events usually last several days, in which university and community partners participate in facilitated discussions that are designed to help them build new relationships and develop research proposals. Entry to the workshop is both by open call – individuals are asked to write two pages describing their background and their interest in the topic – and by invitation – to ensure a diverse set of participants in the workshop. At the end of workshops, teams are formed to ‘pitch’ ideas for projects. In the Connected Communities Programme, on the basis of these pitches teams are invited to apply either for grants in the region of £100k to develop a smaller stand alone project, or in the region of £30k to support the teams to work together to create a proposal for a large £1.5–£2m grant.



1

Introduction



Background to the study

This study of the Connected Communities Programme was conducted between 2013 and 2015 and was funded by the AHRC as part of Keri Facer's Leadership Fellowship for the Connected Communities Programme⁰⁴ with Dr Bryony Enright being appointed as a post-doc research fellow in 2013 for 2 years. Its original intention was to support the AHRC to develop a 'narrative' of the programme; in practice, it has turned into a reflective inquiry into the highly diverse conditions for collaborative knowledge production that arise when universities and communities are invited to 'co-produce' research.

Underpinning the study are a set of assumptions about 'research' that are drawn from previous analyses of interdisciplinary and collaborative research programmes⁰⁵; from the growing literature on both responsible innovation and engagement in the arts, humanities and social sciences⁰⁶; from the literature on interdisciplinarity and the social life of method⁰⁷; and from the literature on higher education and its relations with its publics⁰⁸. Drawing on these foundations, we understand research to be:

- **A socially situated process.** Cultural, institutional and social contexts will shape the conditions for research activity. Such contexts are subject to change over time and in different places. Research practices will therefore necessarily interact with patterns of inequality or exclusion that may shape such contexts.



04 Keri is one of two Leadership Fellows on the Connected Communities Programme. George McKay, who focuses in particular on the arts and humanities element of the programme, is the second. The Leadership Fellow role involves working alongside the AHRC team to help develop a coherent narrative for the programme, to identify areas for future programme development, to create a sense of intellectual community for programme projects, to provide support to project teams, and to conduct research in a related field.

05 e.g. RELU (Lowe & Phillipson, 2006), TLRP (Edwards et al, 2006/2007), Collaborative Heritage Research (Bell et al 2014), Watson 'Engaged University' (2013), Hart, Maddison & Wolff (2007), Beebeejaun et al (2015), People's Knowledge Collective (2015), Calhoun & Rhoten (2011), John-Steiner (1996)


06 e.g. Stilgoe, Owen & Macnaghten, (2013), Benneworth & Jongbloed, (2009), Belfiore & Upchurch, (2013), Mahoney (2012)

07 e.g. Barry & Born, (2013), Strathern, (2004), Savage, (2013)

08 e.g. Watson, (2014), May & Perry, (2013), Vostal & Robertson, (2012), Mahoney, (2012)

- **A discursive process.** Disciplinary boundaries, researcher identities (a ‘historian’ or a ‘geographer’) and definitions of research quality and validity are not neutral but contested, subject to change over time and can be understood as sites of struggle for symbolic and political power.
- **An embodied process.** Personal biographies shape desires, expectations, motivations and expertise to conduct research. Physical conditions, personal relationships, the materials and tools available, all shape research practices. 3 days in a windowless room, using flip charts, working 12 hour days followed by drinks in the bar, for example, create particular constraints and conditions for research collaboration; as do emotions of friendship or distrust.
- **A political and economic process.** The allocation of resources of time, money and materials shapes the conditions for research; similarly the broader political and economic contexts in which research collaborations take place frame both expectations and motivations, as well as the capacity of different social groupings and organisations to participate.
- **A complex process.** The consequences of research activity cannot be traced in simple linear trajectories. Research leads to unexpected, unpredictable and unintended developments which play out over both short and long timescales.

In other words, social contexts, language, people, politics, money and unintended consequences all matter in how research is conducted. How, then, should we research the process of doing collaborative research?

 *Physical conditions, personal relationships, the materials and tools available, all shape research practices. Three days in a windowless room, using flip charts, working 12 hour days followed by drinks in the bar, for example, create particular constraints and conditions for research collaboration; as do emotions of friendship or distrust.*

Study design

Our response has been to adopt multiple methods that elicit insights into different elements of the programme. These have included both systematic attempts to co-produce analyses of the programme in collaboration with community and university partners; as well as processes where we have taken a lead on the framing, data collection and the analysis of the work. Our aim in combining these two approaches was a response to the resources available for the study - we did not have the capacity to engage all participants in collaborative processes - and a concern that a completely co-produced approach would risk reproducing some of the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that we can already see arising in the programme. We also see this report not as a final definitive statement but as a contribution that in and of itself will be contested, taken on, developed and revised in the lively processes of dialogue both within and beyond the programme.

The study therefore comprised three elements. First, formal data collection processes characterised by interviews, observations and surveys designed and led by the authors. These comprised:

70 interviews with university partners, selected to represent the range of types of projects funded, and the degree of involvement of the academics with the programme

30 interviews with community partners, selected to represent the range of types of projects funded, and the different scales of community partner organisations

1 x workshop with 40 independent research organisation partners, in collaboration with the Science Museum, and comprising a range of museum, gallery and cultural organisation researchers and educators

Online survey, eliciting 320 responses from community and university partners



Allocation of resources of time, money and materials shapes the conditions for research.

2 x 12 month case studies, working with one large grant and one digital transformation grant, involving participation in team meetings, forums and visits to project research sites.

Second, the project also comprised more collaborative data collection processes where the authors worked alongside, supported and learned from project teams who were themselves working on questions of legacy, co-design and community-university research processes. 7 legacy projects, for example, were funded by AHRC to build community-university collaborative teams that would inquire explicitly into the sorts of legacies being produced from Connected Communities projects. As part of this, we convened three one-day meetings and a three-day residential workshop where we carefully interrogated how we understood legacy, how we made sense of the data that was emerging from the programme, and what this meant for university-community collaborations. In addition, the programme also funded 9 projects to conduct a two-stage co-design research process; we worked alongside these projects to support collective reflections on the process and the lessons that might be learned for future funding of such collaborations. In sum, these collaborative data collection activities were as follows:

7 x research projects⁰⁹ (studying legacy)

1 x network¹⁰ of co-design projects (reflecting on practice)

2 x workshops with 59 community partners, (agendas were co-designed and analysed by the Community Partner Network and the Heritage Partner Network)

3 x reflections group meetings

2 x group writing retreats (on social justice and legacy)



The consequences of research activity cannot be traced in simple linear trajectories.

⁰⁹ The seven Connected Communities legacy projects and their PIs are: 'Starting From Values,' Marie Harder; 'Valuing Different Perspectives,' Peter Matthews; 'Preserving Place,' Karen Smyth; 'Evaluating the Legacy of Animative and Iterative Connected Communities Projects,' Mihaela Keleman; 'Co-Producing legacy - the role of artists within CC projects,' Kate Pahl; 'Heritage Legacies,' Jo Vergunst; 'Translation across boarders - the use, relevance and impact of academic research in the policy process,' Stephen Connelly. All projects involve a large number of partners.

¹⁰ Robin Durie and Lindsey Horner were supported under the leadership fellowship to lead a series of reflective workshops during the course of the co-design projects. They also conducted a series of interviews with the PIs. We also encouraged collective reflections on the process through events and email exchanges. We then, with the encouragement of project teams, commissioned Valerie Walkerdine, David Studdert and Alison Gilchrist, to conduct further reflective interviews with community participants, PIs and community partners.

Data Collected



Finally, we have also, as Leadership Fellow and Research Fellow on the programme, been intimately involved in many of the events, mechanisms and processes of the programme for 3 years. We have read project reports, watched project performances and visited communities and sites in which projects are taking place. We have worked with project teams through some of the difficulties they have been facing as project partners disagreed about ways forward. We have sat in project meetings and board meetings, and been up late at night in the research development workshops as teams develop ideas. We have been present at the panels making decisions about which projects to fund, and have worked with universities trying to figure out how to make the projects work smoothly once the funding has been awarded.

The data generated as part of the study are therefore highly diverse, ranging from photographic records of project meetings, to interview transcripts, to cartoon images generated during workshops, to quantitative data. Our analysis has been ongoing throughout the project, with early observations presented for testing and reflection both at academic conferences and public events, and at three meetings of a 'reflections group' comprised of community partners, academics and funders of the Connected Communities Programme. We have shared emerging ideas about what seems to be going on with project participants and refined and developed these in conversation with them. The formal analysis has proceeded inductively in the first instance, working from a subsample of the interview and case study data in particular to identify significant themes and issues. This analysis was then used to design the survey, and to systematise a set of themes used to code all interviews and field notes.

This is a highly contentious field with a long history of intentional polarisations and oppositions in which both academic and popular knowledge have been caricatured and derided. Such caricatures have caused significant harm in the past. Words are slippery things and it is easy to read this report with a set of assumptions about what we are implicitly trying to say. We are also aware that as two academics (albeit with substantial experience of personal collaborative research (Facer)) we approach this from a position within the academy from which it is



very difficult to distance ourselves. This will bring unintentional blind spots. We have attempted to mitigate this through getting feedback on drafts from community partners.

Nonetheless, we would ask that readers approach this report assuming that we respect both the rich traditions of knowledge production and practice in communities as well as the rich traditions of academic knowledge production and practice. Our aim is to better understand how such traditions might complement and enrich each other in practice.

Notes of caution in interpreting the report

Note 1: The AHRC Leadership Fellow role under which the study was funded and conducted is ambiguous. There is a common (and mistaken) perception amongst project participants that the role conveys real influence with the Arts and Humanities Research Council who lead the Connected Communities Programme, and that the study was therefore designed as an evaluation or might impact future funding. Every effort was made to explain that our aim was not to apply a judgement of quality to individual projects and that the data from the study would be confidential to the researchers. Nonetheless, it is worth recognising that research participants are likely to have been cautious about narrating some of the failures and problems of this research. Where possible, however, we probed for such issues through an anticipatory perspective – asking how participants might do things differently in future, or how the programme might be adapted and developed to address particular difficulties.

Note 2: We need to acknowledge that the participants in the interviews and surveys may not reflect those academics or community partners who may have had particularly negative or simply uninteresting experiences of collaborations in the Connected Communities Programme. It is difficult to contact community partners without the academic they have been collaborating with providing contact details; inevitably when/if such relationships have broken down, access is unlikely to be encouraged. To counteract this, the

 *This is a highly contentious field with a long history of intentional polarisations and oppositions in which both academic and popular knowledge have been caricatured and derided.*

3 'community partner' workshops we ran were all advertised widely and via other networks in the attempt to draw in community partners without academic mediation.

As a consequence, therefore, we would suggest that this report is based on the views and experiences in the main of those who are interested in reflecting upon and examining their own research practice and in informing future directions for research funding. An analogy for this sample, therefore, might be with 'early adopters' in the area of technological development. As such, they are often more expert, more enthusiastic and also more critical than a wider cross-section of academic and community research collaborators might be.

Overview of the report

The report is organised to reflect the broad sequential development of the research programme and the different issues and insights raised by each of these stages.

It begins, in **Chapter 1**, by exploring how the programme came about and the sorts of people who came to be part of the research projects.

In **Chapter 2** it explores the different roles of participants in these research projects, examining how different relationships of accountability are negotiated and the way in which roles and boundaries are blurred between academic and community participants. It also explores the under-recognised significance of research assistants and university professional services staff in these projects, and the new roles that are emerging.

In **Chapter 3** we explore the very different traditions of collaborative research that are at play in these projects and the competing priorities and tensions that these traditions bring into practice. We pose a set of reflective questions for project teams to consider in framing their studies.



This report is based on the views and experiences of those who are interested in reflecting upon and examining their own research.

In **Chapter 4** we explore the issue of money and the impact it has on both enabling these projects and its less positive consequences. In particular, we explore the way that managing money brings in the institutional apparatus of universities, and how these respond to collaboration.

We then move on in **Chapter 5**, to explore the embodied, relational, material, conceptual and institutional legacies that are emerging from the programme and the ways that these unsettle the popular linear conception of research impact as a pipeline that flows from foundational research to real world applications. Instead we describe the more complex and more sustainable legacies that emerge from these projects.

In **Chapter 6** we return to the broader context for the programme and ask what it might tell us about future directions for the wider ‘participatory turn’ in research and policy fields. We explore in particular the twin logics of ‘quality’ and ‘democracy’ as rationales for this work.


In **Chapter 7** we conclude with some practical recommendations arising from the programme for funders wishing to support university-community research collaborations and for the universities and community partners involved in this sort of research.

Overall, we have attempted to get beneath the rather vague idea of ‘co-production’ that often dominates this field, to develop a language that allows us to explore in more detail the specific ways in which collaborative research is being developed in the programme. To that end, throughout the report, we do two things: first, the text is accompanied by the specific insights and voices of participants in the programme, making clear that any generalisations are always grounded in specific instances of practice which both support and trouble these larger claims. Second, readers will see that we have attempted to articulate in each chapter a set of ‘types’ of people, activities and projects to give greater granularity to different topics. This is not because we believe that projects or people neatly fit into



these categories. Rather, these categories help us to get more specific, and to address the most salient features and tensions at play in collaborative and interdisciplinary research.

The reality of a large research programme of 327 projects ranging in scale from 6 months to 5 years, will necessarily elude any attempt at its representation. Connected Communities is inevitably more unruly, rich and messy than we can do justice to here. What we hope, however, is that the analyses we offer helpfully trouble the polarisations and generalisations that can too often dominate discussion of collaborative research, and help to identify productive tensions and topics for future conversations and clarification.

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2

Uneven contexts and different tribes

Conditions shaping entry to collaborative research



Introduction

The Connected Communities Programme, like other funding programmes, does not land like a spaceship in virgin terrain, terraforming out of bare earth a brave new world of interdisciplinary and collaborative projects. Instead, it might be more useful to understand the programme through a different metaphor, perhaps that of the gardener, who intervenes in an already existing and dynamic research culture, seeking to nurture some perhaps formerly neglected plants and create space for them to flourish, while encouraging cross-pollination between others. Of course, the metaphor works less well when, as in Connected Communities, the plants begin to self-organise and set their own agenda, develop new ideas for what the garden should look like, and challenge the gardener's necessarily imperfect efforts. The gardener may also have their own troubles and politics to contend with that constrain what tools can be used.

There are limits to metaphors.

These projects, therefore, do not emerge, in 2010, as if from scratch, nor do they land in an untroubled landscape. Rather, the projects arise from an already existing, rich and complex history in dynamic interaction with other economic, social and epistemological factors. Understanding these factors helps us to better understand precisely what it might take to both deepen and diversify partnerships between communities and universities.

A stratified landscape


A key feature of the existing landscape of community and university research and practice into which Connected Communities is entering is the highly stratified nature of the civil society, community and cultural organisations who are already conducting their own research and evaluation. These groups include:



Research confident institutions. Large scale, well developed organisations with relatively secure if increasingly pressurised funding streams, for example large museums, city councils, different types of large scale national arts organisations, national charities, health trusts and NGOs. These organisations are often experienced in working with universities, they have teams able to negotiate the institutional relationships with universities. They may have specialised research departments of their own (although this capacity in local government has been eroded in recent years) or be independent research organisations in their own right. These organisations tend to be large organisations with a specific public remit to serve communities in specific ways.

Robust civil society/third sector organisations. These are organisations who usually have some secure core funding from the public sector, from their membership or from their own income streams. They might be Regularly Funded Organisations (RFO) supported by the Arts Council, a charity, or social enterprise. In most cases staff are paid by the organisation for their time, although their work may involve significant coordination of volunteers. Research and evaluation activities for these organisations are usually oriented towards developing the services of the organisation and securing future funding. These organisations may have some personal contacts with universities, but do not have their own established research teams. These organisations may have strong national and international links and be highly expert in best practice in their professional/practice domains. They are often selling/providing services to communities.

Voluntary/community organisations. These are smaller informal groups with insecure funding, and sometimes no formal constitution. They may be run by volunteers or unpaid staff and are often dependent on project-by-project funding. For this group, any new funding is a vital part of continuing their existence and plays a role in shaping the core of their activities. These groups may have research as part of their core purpose – for example, this is often the case for community heritage groups. If not, research and evaluation is often far down their list of concerns as they attempt to keep the organisation going. Their focus is on delivery of their core mission.

 *Projects arise from an already existing, rich and complex history in dynamic interaction with other economic, social and epistemological factors.*

Freelancers and consultants: There is also a flourishing network of individuals such as artists, musicians and independent advisors who tend to operate on a project-by-project or consultancy basis, who develop a portfolio of activities in which research forms one part of their overall activities. Where these individuals regularly collaborate with universities, the boundaries between ‘university’ and ‘community’ partners become particularly blurred, as they may often take on teaching roles, become regularly funded through projects, and over time take on formal research qualifications.

Activists, advocates and the gift economy: Finally, it is worth recognising those individuals for whom research/finding things out/documenting what is going on/making things happen, is a labour of love, a passionate interest in a particular issue or an ethical commitment to their local area. For these individuals, serving their community in this particular way is just ‘what they do’ and who they are. It is a core part of their personal and social identity. One of the significant challenges, as we shall discuss later in Chapter 5, is the shift that a funded research project can engender from such individuals’ participation in an informal gift economy to a funded project in which monetary value is increasingly assigned to these activities.

Today, these different groups and organisations are operating in an environment in which there is increasingly scarce funding. In this context, the landscape of austerity economics, shrinking resources and competitive bidding for services has made all but the most robustly funded organisation alert to the need to produce evidence and accounts of themselves. The expectations of big funders, the large trusts and foundations, government and the Arts Council, all serve to shape the expectations these organisations have of the value and purpose of gathering data and conducting research and evaluation.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the university landscape is equally stratified and diverse. There is no such thing as ‘a university’; rather, there are a wide range of institutions with very different traditions of collaboration with local and regional partners, very different orientations toward research, and with very different levels of success and support for academics to access research council

 *Projects have deep roots in longstanding relationships between university and community partners.*

funding. Such differences, moreover, are not random and are not innocent in their effects. For example, 25% of research funding goes to only five 'elite' universities, and those universities in which there are high levels, for example, of Black and Minority Ethnic Group (BME) students and strong relationships with BME communities, have historically received less research council funding¹¹.

A landscape shaped by previous partnerships

The research landscape is also shaped by a history of previous collaborations and partnerships. For many of the programme participants, their Connected Communities research projects have deep roots in longstanding relationships between university and community partners. One professor, for example, describes how his current projects date back to collaborative relationships that he has been developing since the 1990s. He describes establishing a public research group over 20 years ago that brought together people from across the university and the city to exchange information, to reflect on cultural diversity and to get projects started; this in turn led to significant funding to create more accessible public archives and a series of smaller research projects in the same area over many years.

Another academic can point to a track record of over 20 years of engaged research that has changed her university systems, built robust policy and community outcomes, and that is premised upon deep relations of friendship and trust with community partners who are now closely integrated with her institution. Reciprocally, a local government worker describes how her participation in a Connected Communities project builds upon 4 years of experimentation and intervention that has progressively engaged universities as evaluators, as advisors and subsequently as collaborators on her work. Another community organisation can point to over 30 years of successful research, campaigning and lobbying with fluctuating degrees of collaboration with their local university.



¹¹ Alexander, C. and Arday, J. (2014). *Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy*. London: Runnymede Trust

Any new initiative to promote collaborative research therefore needs to be understood as entering into and supporting pre-existing relationships. Indeed, 41% of the university partners and 26% of the community partners responding to the survey had already worked with their collaborators before receiving Connected Communities funding.

Taken together, these personal and institutional histories mean that the research landscape into which a programme like Connected Communities intervenes is rich but uneven, with highly diverse resources, knowledge and capacities in relation to different topics and amongst different sectors and populations. Some universities and individuals have longstanding research collaborations, others are poorly connected with very few networks beyond their own scholarly community. Some local communities are richly resourced either via government investment, high levels of social capital or local activism. In others, and in relation to other topics, that public knowledge capacity has been decimated, has never had the capacity or resources to flourish, and has never involved collaboration with HEIs, academics or research.



Creating a new space for research: key features of the Connected Communities Programme

In this context, Connected Communities is attempting to make a distinctive contribution – namely, to create a high quality space for research collaborations between communities and academics. Its aim is to facilitate a productive synthesis between on the ground experience and theory, between reflection and action, between the existing research literature and public knowledge; this is what some have called praxis knowledge. This is very different from the funding usually on offer to charities and civil society organisations, which tends to be focused on more immediate project evaluation or operational development. Similarly, it is very different from more familiar models of arts and humanities scholarship which is defined and shaped by academics in relation to their own topics and interests. At its best, it promises research which is both practically useful and intellectually ground-breaking. At its worst, it may address neither the needs and aims of community partners nor the requirements of scholarly research.

Such multi-faceted research is, as we will discuss in Chapter 3, not in itself new; and the research councils have attempted to facilitate such collaborations before. What is unusual about Connected Communities, however is: first, its explicit attempt to address the financial, logistical, social and cultural barriers to participation in research by community participants and community partners with limited economic resources; and second, its evolving self-understanding as a programme that is centrally concerned with interrogating and understanding these university-community relationships.

As of autumn 2015, the programme had funded 327 projects – these range from small scale scoping studies with very little collaboration, to five year projects involving deep and intensive working relationships between university and community partners. The majority of projects last between 7 and 18 months. There have been five open calls for research development workshops, which have become increasingly more specific about the nature of collaborative working that is expected between university and community partners. There have also been highlight notices, networking awards, fellowships, innovation awards. A significant collaboration has been between the AHRC and the Heritage Lottery Fund to support university-community collaboration on the topic of the First World War. The HLF has supported hundreds of community groups to conduct their own research. Reciprocally, AHRC has funded over 40 projects and 5 university centres that are intended to support and work with these community projects.

Key features of the Connected Communities Programme that relate to the intentional development of new relationships between university and community partners include:

- Two stage funding models that offer resources for academics and community partners to work together to develop research designs before putting in a full proposal.
- Funding guidance that requires interdisciplinary partnerships with strong arts and humanities involvement in both theory and practice.



At its best, it promises research which is both practically useful and intellectually groundbreaking. At its worst, it may address neither the needs and aims of community partners nor the requirements of scholarly research.

- Funding guidance that requires deep community involvement in research design.
- An explicit encouragement by the research council and programme leadership to develop and value novel methods and plural forms of research 'outputs' or legacies.
- Workshops and events that actively encourage new conversations to begin across community/university sectors and across different academic disciplines.
- A steady and intentional increase in community partner participation in programme research development workshops, from 0 in 2010 to 50% participation in 2014.
- Academic and community involvement on selection panels for awards.
- Academic and community involvement on the advisory board for the programme.
- Clear guidance to applicants, informed by university and community participants in early workshops, on how best to conduct university-community partnerships.
- Active promotion of the opportunity to fund community partners as part of research council funded projects.
- An opening up of the Co-Investigator role to community partners, allowing them to be paid at 100% of costs.
- A commitment to circulating and sharing knowledge about collaborative working across the programme through funding networking activities including: showcases, festivals, leadership fellows, the Community Partner Network, networks on specific topics and issues.

	2010	2011	2012
Research Workshops and Summits	<p>1st Summit (Birmingham: invitations to over 50 current AHRC award holders, some open call spaces). Two non-HEI involved as invited speakers. This event leads to guidance for CC projects in 'Annexes' for future funding</p> <p>1st Research Development Workshop Birmingham – Creative Economy (open call, academics only, 4-5 non HEI participants by invitation)</p>	<p>2nd Summit (Glasgow – invitation only, mainly AHRC and CC award holders only) This event leads to guidance for CC projects in 'Annexes' for future funding</p> <p>2nd Research Development Workshop Cardiff Health and Well Being (open call to academics, open to potential project partners, 12 non HEI's invited to participate)</p> <p>Design & Communities Workshop in partnership with Design Council, Durham</p>	<p>3rd Research Development Workshop Bristol – Environment & Sustainability – places mainly filled through open call. Non HEI participants could be nominated or apply independently. 16 non-HEI attend</p> <p>3rd Summit (Manchester – programme participants only plus their nominated CPs – 44 non HEI participants)</p>
Projects Arising from Research Workshops & Summits		<p>1st Summit Follow Up Projects (19 x £30k-£37k) (CC1)</p> <p>1st RDW Creative Economy Follow Up Projects (7 x £32k) – start March 2011 (CC4 & 5)</p> <p>1st RDW Creative Economy Project Development Awards (5 x £12k) – start March 2011</p>	<p>2nd Summit Follow Up Projects – bring award holders together, add value (8 x £40k) – start</p> <p>2nd Summit Pilot Demonstrators – demonstrate a distinctive CC approach to research (10 x c. £100k) – start Feb 2012</p> <p>2nd RDW Health and Wellbeing Follow Up Projects (4 x c. £30k)</p> <p>2nd RDW Health and Wellbeing Project Development Awards (4 x c. £30k)</p> <p>Design Follow Up Awards (4 x c. £30k)</p>
Large Grants following events & development awards			<p>Creative Economy Large Grants (3 x £1.2m)</p>
Open Calls		<p>OPEN CALL – 44 x Scoping Studies and Reviews (£14k – £33k)</p> <p>CC/RSA Peterborough Collaboration – open call 2 x projects £121k + £218k</p>	<p>OPEN CALL – 31 x Arts & Humanities Scoping Studies and Reviews (£14k-£33k) – start March 2012</p> <p>Open Call – 21 x Research for Community Heritage Awards (c £20k)</p> <p>Open Call – CC Leadership Fellows appointed (2 x £550k)</p>
Highlight Notices in Responsive Mode		<p>7 x Collaborative Doctoral Awards (£54k)</p>	<p>11 x Collaborative Doctoral Awards (£54k – £240k)</p> <p>10 x Research Networking Awards</p>

"We were having coffee and he said 'Oh, are you going for this sandpit thing?' I'm like 'what sandpit thing'... he'd got invited as a former grant holder... I'd not heard about it at all, so I put in a proposal thinking, Oh yeah, this is a pretty good fit... got accepted, went to the sandpit" (James, PI Large Grant and PI/Co-I on three smaller awards)

"It was kind of a brief meeting, but he mentioned being involved in a community farm... and at the end of that conversation, and it was one of those tiny tea break conversations across a table, and I said 'I'm involved in a community allotment... so you know what, that sounds really interesting' And he got in touch a bit after that and said 'Do you want to get involved in the project? So that was the very beginnings I suppose'" (Kay, Co-I on seven CC Awards)

"The sandpit allowed a space where I met people and came across people I've never met before, and I like that, I think it's great because your head is suddenly allowed... it opens up, and conversations intrude and suggest ideas." (Simon, PI Large Grant)

"The Sandpit as far as I was concerned was a category three, wholly novel experience... I was an outsider in a very novel process that was supernovel for me... And in those circumstances you probably do things you wouldn't ordinarily do, come up with ideas you wouldn't ordinarily have" (Justin, PI Large Grant)

"It was the low hanging fruit they got – they got the ones that were already around the peripheries of academia..." (Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

	2013	2014	2015
Research Workshops and Summits	<p>Showcase Event (London)</p> <p>4th Summit & Showcase Edinburgh (Showcase stands and presentations accepted after Expressions of Interest from existing CC Project teams; Summit participation only open to existing CC participants, CPs apply independently from HEIs)</p>	<p>Open call, 5 day sandpit. "Participation by expression of interest."</p> <p>CC Festival Cardiff (Showcase participation by Eol from existing project teams)</p> <p>ECR Development Workshop (Cardiff, Open call for ECRs only, no CP involvement, Expressions of Interest)</p> <p>4th Research Development Workshop (Sheffield) (Open Call to academic and Community Partners, as well as targeted/invited academics/CPs to promote diversity) Division & Disconnection</p>	<p>CC Festival (open expressions of interest from all previous CC projects)</p> <p>CC Conference (open call for papers/proposals from all previous CC Projects, some bursaries available for CP participation and travel)</p>
Projects Arising from Research Workshops & Summits	<p>Community Heritage Development Awards (11 x £40-£79k)</p> <p>Community Heritage Follow-on Awards (18 x £31k - £72k)</p> <p>3rd Summit Follow Up Awards (£29-43k) - start Feb</p> <p>3rd Summit - Co-Design Projects (10 x £100k) - start Feb</p> <p>3rd RDW Environment and Sustainability Follow Up Awards (7 x £30k)</p> <p>3rd RDW Environment and Sustainability Project Development Funds (4 x £12k)</p>	<p>4th Summit Follow On "Legacy" Projects (7 x £76-86k)</p> <p>11 x ECR Project Awards (£33k-£48k)</p> <p>Project Development Awards Division and Disconnection (4 x £25k)</p> <p>Follow On Awards Division and Disconnection (4 x £72k-£85k)</p>	
Large Grants following events & development awards	<p>Health and Wellbeing Large Grants (3 x £1.2m)</p>	<p>Emoticon Projects x 5 (£750k - £914k)</p> <p>Environment and Sustainability Large Grants (2 x £1.2m)</p>	<p>Division and Disconnection Large Grants Awarded October 2015 (start 2016)</p>
Open Calls	<p>Community Engagement and Mobilisation Large Grants (2 x £1.8m) ESRC lead</p>	<p>First World War Heritage Co-ordinating Centres (5 x £1.?? CHECK)</p> <p>Digital Capital Community Research Awards 11 x Projects (£134k - £475k)</p>	
Highlight Notices in Responsive Mode		<p>Design Highlight Notice (6 x projects, ranging from £130k - £1.2m)</p>	

"The project came about because we were sat in a gym talking with another yoga teacher. I had the contacts in the children's homes, [X] was the academic, and the person we were talking to was a friend who had been involved in yoga for trauma."
(Martin, Quality Assurance Officer, local authority)

"To date I've had two bits of funding for showcases - London and Edinburgh, and now we're getting Cardiff. What that's done is enabled us at each point to cumulatively add more materials or do more things or develop more thinking, so it's an ongoing project by default, because we keep getting little bits of extra money to do things."
(Stephanie, PI two awards, Co-I three awards including a Large Grant)

A summary of the different calls, workshops and events that have made up the programme is outlined in Figure 2 and a summary snapshot of all the funded projects is available online¹².

Who is drawn into the Connected Communities Programme?

The question we are interested in, then, is who does this sort of funding programme attract? At present (Autumn 2015) the following figures from the AHRC provide a rough overview of who has ‘become’ the Connected Communities Programme. 327 projects have been funded. These include:

- 139 different HEIs and 728 academics (who may have been funded multiple times).
- 342 male and 352 female academics (34 unknown).
- 600 academics who self- identify as ‘white’ (a term that is undifferentiated in the application form) and 39 as ‘black and minority ethnic groups’ (89 unknown) – which is broadly in line with the current highly skewed make-up of UK Higher Education¹³.
- Only 3 academics named on the application are aged under 25 and only 112 aged over 55.



¹² <https://connected-communities.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Connected-CommunitiesCalls-Overview.pdf>

¹³ According to recent Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data in 2012/13 (HESA, 2014) out of a total of 17,880 professors, only 85 were Black (less than 1%), 950 were Asian (5%), 365 were ‘other’ (including mixed) and the overwhelming majority (15,200) were White (85%).’ From Bhopal, K (2014) ‘The Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Academics: Multiple Identities and Career Progression’ in Alexander, C. and Arday, J. (2014). *Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy*, London: Runnymede Trust

- The balance of participation amongst different types of universities reflects a weighting toward Russell Group universities. Those universities which have a strong and explicit institutional commitment to collaborative research with their local communities, such as Brighton, are also very visible.

There are over 500 unique community partners. Little data is held by the research council on the make-up of these participating organisations, so here we have to turn to our own relatively limited survey responses to get a picture of the participants.

- Of the 80 who responded to this question, 11 reported having a local remit, 44 national remit and 25 'other' (usually relating to an international dimension).
- 28 of the respondents (35%) were voluntary organisations and 24 (30%) were NGO's/charities, 12% identified as social enterprises.
- Of the 19 that identified as 'other' these included: sole trader, not for profit Ltd company, artist, community interest company, freelance consultant, company.
- 50% of the community partner respondents to the survey reported having worked in a university at some point before.
- The majority of respondents to this survey from community organisations were educated at least to degree level.

Different tribes

These figures offer relatively limited information about who project participants are, they tell us nothing about the characteristics of the people drawn into these research projects. It is these characteristics, however, that allow new alliances to form between project partners or destructive tensions to emerge.



What is unusual about Connected Communities is its explicit attempt to address the financial, logistical, social and cultural barriers to participation in research by community participants.

Understanding these, therefore, is essential if we are to understand how project teams work productively (or not) with each other.

Again and again in our interviews and observations, we came to see different types of participants in the programme. To caricature this a little, we have come to think of these motivations as representing six ‘tribes’ of participants. Importantly, we note that all of these tribes include both community and university partners; and inevitably, individuals move into and out of these different positions at different times. The six tribes are:

Generalists and Learners. University and community partners in this tribe are defined by curiosity for new ideas, networks and partnerships. This group tend to identify themselves very closely with the Connected Communities Programme because it offers them a space to work that explicitly values their interest in transcending institutional and disciplinary boundaries. This group often embodies complicated career trajectories with many people having moved between different sectors; they may now have a role in civil society or the arts having once been an academic or vice versa. This is an orientation well captured by one individual who described himself as a ‘serial interdisciplinary recidivist’. This group is often characterised by a commitment to mutual learning, and is drawn to projects that allow them to develop themselves and their practices. They are keen to find partners to work with to challenge their thinking.

Advocates for a New Knowledge Landscape. This group are drawn into the programme by what we might call ‘epistemological discontent’ – a concern that the way we produce knowledge today is far from satisfactory, riven with historic inequalities. They are looking to develop better, more equitable and inclusive ways of generating knowledge and insight. These groups may come from community activist positions, seeking to disrupt dominant narratives about communities, or from scholarly research positions with a strong democratic agenda. Here both university and community partners are driven by the desire to democratise and challenge conventional forms of knowledge production.

“I’m an oil painter, a novelist, a nurse and a linguistic researcher as well as a literary critic. So it’s a no brainer for me to look at combinations of different disciplines and different knowledges and look at innovation cycles and new perspectives in health care.”

(Simon, PI large grant)

“Everything’s just so interesting and interconnected..”

(Brenda, Co-I large grant)

“We in local authorities are a bit like yourselves in academia – we realise that we do things almost in a silo and that we need to look out. You know we introspect far too much, we need to look out and collaborate”

(Martin, Quality Assurance Officer, local authority)

“We’re moving to a different world where knowledge is shaped differently and universities have a big part to play in that, there’s changes afoot.”

(Albert, Community Artist)

“Because everybody gets into group-think and there are certain things that get over-researched, and there are some questions that never get asked. And they might never get asked because the people who would be asking them are never in the room. So it’s about widening that pool and seeing what comes out of it. Might not produce better research, but might produce different research.”

(Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

“Also I suppose my academic background was in some ways about activism and academia. Or the real world of academia. And about the relationship between these two things and about the need to transform academic knowledge. And let other people in on conversations about what constituted knowledge”

(Kay, Co-I seven CC awards)

“I felt this was the last push ... you know if you couldn’t do it with this programme, then when would you be able to actually do it, and to what extent does the weight of the institution eventually bear down upon you. So I’m interested in all these spaces that can be created to do different kinds of engaged academic work and when and how your aspirations don’t get quite realised”

(Brenda, Co-I, Large Grant)

” **Makers.** This group is characterised by their emphasis on making real world artefacts and creating change – whether this is a form of aesthetic creation or the achievement of some form of social or institutional difference. While they are concerned with making products or practical transformation in organisations or society, they are also very concerned with process, often judging the quality of what they make on the ways in which it was produced – either through the nature of the participation of different groups or in the processes and techniques that are employed. This group is focused on knowledge as a means to an end, or as something that is developed through practice. They are drawn to Connected Communities for its commitment to innovative research methods and its freedom to combine theory and practice.

” **Entrepreneurs.** This group are explicitly motivated by financial and institutional survival aims. Many may be experiencing precarious employment conditions or fear the future loss of funding for their organisations or their positions. For the academics, they come to Connected Communities primarily as a route to securing a grant to consolidate employment or lead to promotion. For those working in communities, the programme can be seen as a way of generating income for a struggling organisation or about securing funding that will allow match funding from other organisations.

Scholars. This group have a clearly articulated intellectual project which they are seeking to explore in whatever way possible. They often carve out discrete sub areas of work within larger projects although they are happy to experiment with new methods and approaches as long as it furthers their intellectual project. While the majority of scholars are university academics, this is not exclusively the case and many community partners bring a desire to develop specific research agendas and interests. ”

“I think something that we bring to the project is maybe the aesthetic or the design of it [...] and I hope that’s a quality that we can bring to it in terms of the quality of the recordings or the photographs or the way that certain things are made or designed, that I wonder maybe if it was produced purely by academics, whether that might be different. Yeah for me that’s a really important thing and that can be the difference between something working and not working.”

(Eugene, Artist)

“Yeah so that’s my speciality, is tangible user interfaces, so interacting with the computer using physical objects [...] but it’s not linear, so essentially with design you very rarely have a good linear outcome [...] design is you have completely haphazard bouncing around between different stuff ... which you can’t put in electronic form [notes] that easily.”

(Alan, Early Career Researcher, mid-sized award)

“It’s a bit like the Mrs Merton Interview with Debbie McGee where the question was ‘so when did you first become romantically interested in the millionaire Paul Daniels?’ which is a little bit like ‘when did you first become interested in co-construction?’ when the AHRC started offering a lot of money to do co-construction.”

(James, PI Large Grant)

“That was completely new for me. So all my research up until now (I’m a philosopher) is books and desks and writing. And so I had not even done empirical work in the sense of field work or something like that [...] my attitude has always been I could contribute based on my own specialism and my own set of interests [...] So that was good, but that was new and it was also for me interesting, because philosophy it very often happens in a much more abstract way [...] the benefit that they can draw from looking at the world through a philosophical lens has been very interesting [...]”

(William, PI on three awards and Co-I on two awards)

” **Accidental Wanderers.** This group is part of the programme less from their own volition than as a result of circumstance. It includes, for example, those who were ‘nominated’ by their institutions to get involved in workshops and find themselves as collaborators on bids. It includes those workers in charities and social enterprises whose chief executives may have signed up the organisation to participate without fully consulting the team on the ground. It also includes a number of researchers for whom this is simply a job that pays the bills.

“So I guess when [the academic] was putting together his group for this project he thought of us, and initially he I think spoke to [X] who was then the cultural programmes manager. We had to make [X] redundant and so then he spoke to [Y]. And I think [Y] may have gone to some of the original meetings, maybe one or two. And then [Y] left so then I took over going to the meetings. So that maybe in some ways explains why I’m not hugely familiar with the background to the project.”
(Greg, Chief Executive, community design organisation)

Clearly, these are caricatures, and participants in the programme tend to operate with a meld of different orientations, or to move between these tribes at different times. It is arguably the case that the first three groups – the generalists, the advocates for a new knowledge landscape, the makers – would seek opportunities to do this sort of work irrespective of the prevailing conditions. They tend to be particularly supportive of the Connected Communities Programme, however, as they see it as providing validation and encouragement for work that they often feel is marginalised in traditional funding processes and institutional arrangements. This group tends to form the core of the programme, making links and building new collaborations, and pushing the research council to take more risks, create stronger connections with communities, and support riskier processes.

” *“I was doing it because it was something that needed to be done... which has nothing at all to do with my job here [...] this is before the idea of public engagement with research and before the idea of impact actually became an agenda. You know so I was just doing this because it was the right thing to do as an academic.”*
(Allister, PI FWW Engagement Centre and Co-I on three awards)

It may be that the experiences of the entrepreneurs, accidental wanderers and scholars in the programme, however, are of particular interest if we are to understand whether such research will effect a wider ‘participatory turn’ in institutional research practice, or remain a marginal activity. The extent to which participation in these projects transforms attitudes from opportunistic co-operation into sustained collaborative partnerships provides insights into the reasons why and whether such research may offer real value to participants.

In our interviews, one entrepreneurial PI of a large grant who clearly entered the programme for opportunistic reasons laughingly swears off any future collaborative interdisciplinary research. He describes it as ‘too hard’. Such laughter, however, is part of the repertoire of the now committed collaborator - he is already planning future partnerships. Reciprocally, community partners on the same project

express changed perspectives. Initially entering the partnership for reasons of securing match funding, they describe how the collaboration started reframing how they saw their own work, and led to new friendships and collaborations. Another PI talks of how it has reinvigorated her research, opened up new connections, ideas, networks and possibilities. ”

“It’s just been very refreshing to actually get out of the university, I mean you know I’ve been working in the university since the late 90s and I think I was probably ready for something a bit different. I hadn’t really done this work very much before and it’s been wonderful to meet different people and different organisations, feel a bit more part of the city.”
(Sally, PI, Research for Community Heritage Project)

Indeed, 98% of university partners and 97% of community partners responding to our survey said that they would do this sort of research again; with 29% and 25% respectively already planning further follow up activities with their collaborators and 44% and 43% ‘hoping’ to develop future collaborations. On this basis it would suggest that while generalists, advocates for a new knowledge landscape and makers will always be drawn to these forms of partnership, they have produced working relationships that are also of value to those community partners and university partners who entered the collaborations for very different reasons. This is not research, therefore, that is of value only to zealots and advocates.

 **98% of university partners and 97% of community partners said that they would do this sort of research again.**

Shaping a programme – the role of the early participants

It is also important to recognise that the nature of a research programme is not simply determined by those who fund it and by its historic conditions, but also by those who enter a programme at its earliest stages. This is particularly marked in the case of Connected Communities. The first two ‘summit’ workshops in the programme (Birmingham & Glasgow) to which an eclectic mix of existing community-engaged researchers and others were invited, or invited themselves, saw the creation of a strong network of researchers who identified Connected Communities as ‘their’ programme, as an important intellectual and practical space that they could not find elsewhere. As discussed above, many of this group are advocates for a new knowledge landscape and are actively committed to fighting for what they see as more inclusive and democratic research practices. Supported by funding calls that encouraged cross-fertilisation of ideas and collaborations, this group formed a strong network in which

ideas and methods – such as the work done by the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action on ethical processes or Johan Siebers and Michelle Bastian’s work on time – were circulated rapidly between them. This strong network developed a challenging voice to encourage the research council to take more risks.

Participants in these first two ‘summit’ workshops for the programme were therefore very influential in shaping the design of subsequent events and funding calls. Guidance on community-engaged research that was developed by participants at the first workshop in reaction to the absence of community partners at the event, can be traced through the various iterations of funding calls. It was initially used as informal advice to applicants and by 2014 it had become a set of requirements for panellists assessing proposals. At the same time, the AHRC’s ongoing commitment not only to open up research development workshops to communities, but to actively seek to invite more diverse participation and to fund time and expenses for their participation, can be traced back to these early participants.

In sum, for many, the first few years of the Connected Communities Programme saw it attracting researchers who had long been advocates for the sorts of risk-taking, cross-disciplinary and collaborative research that was being promoted. As one award holder said ‘this is what I’d been waiting for all my life’. Over time and as the programme has evolved, this has created a space where those who are looking for an opportunity to conduct interdisciplinary and collaborative research can confidently develop and propose their ideas and can expect to receive theoretically and methodologically well-informed feedback on and understanding of their work. Interestingly, however, such a process of building strong inter-programme collaborations also led to the perception of the programme as ‘exclusive’ and as supporting only those who were already ‘in’ the programme. An ongoing challenge for the programme remains the tension between building strong collaborative networks as well as remaining open to and encouraging new participants.

“That call – cried out for you to do work in partnership. Then it began to develop and people ... well originally in those early meetings we were criticising, we still do I think, the AHRC for not involving community partners, and there was a big debate at that Glasgow one about how could you pay them, what could you pay them, why couldn’t they be Co-Is. So as time has gone by it’s become much more the norm and AHRC is now not only allowing some of that, but actually enforcing some of that. It is interesting.”

(Stephanie, PI two awards, Co-I three awards)

The persistence of old inequalities

There are, however, a number of more fundamental difficulties that the programme is still working through with its participants and partners. In particular, a key challenge that remains is how to enable equitable opportunities for participation in the programme by community partners with fewer economic and educational resources. As already discussed, the community partner landscape is highly differentiated, ranging from those with significant experience and resource for collaboration to much smaller economically precarious organisations. Arguably, the programme has tended to engage more easily with those organisations who already have close links with universities through friendships, previous collaborations and shared social networks. Indeed, over 60% of the community partners and 73% of the university partners responding to our survey had pre-existing relationships with their collaborators. How the programme reaches out beyond this immediate circle of existing partnerships, particularly when successful collaboration is often premised upon trust and longevity, remains a challenge.

Another concern is with some of the mechanisms used to generate new project collaborations. In particular, the shift toward residential research development workshops, while successfully encouraging new partnerships, is potentially problematic from an equity and inclusion perspective. Interviews and observations suggest that these events disadvantage those with caring responsibilities and disabilities who are simply unable to attend or to participate fully. It is also surprising that while women make up 50% of the PIs on the smaller grants in the programme, to date (Oct 2015) only two women have emerged as leader of a large grant awarded through the development workshop process. At the same time, some community partners have identified these environments as highly stressful and confusing, without sufficient information and guidance on what is expected.

There is also a more fundamental concern that relates to how research ideas develop and are seen to ‘have legs’ by those university partners who are needed to submit proposals to the research council. From our interviews, again and again, we heard tell of the moment a seemingly





innocuous conversation ‘sparked’ an idea, or a relationship, when some sort of ‘resonance’ was created between people that allowed them to say that a topic was worth pursuing. However, recognising that these seemingly serendipitous moments can emerge anywhere (over drinks in a pub, at the gym, over a cuppa, were all examples we were offered in interviews) also flags a core problem for a research programme seeking to build links between university and community research. Namely, what happens 1) if groups simply don’t encounter each other in the first place to share ideas and 2) if different cultures, life experiences and priorities means that a ‘resonance’ is hard to find? Here, the culture of the university research community may militate against the development of research collaborations with the widest variety of partners. There is a need to examine how universities might better respond to the interests, concerns and ideas of communities who are currently under-represented amongst their staff – whether this is BME groups, disabled groups or non-visible minorities.

This relates, further to the question of whether a research council funded programme organised through competitive bidding processes is really the best mechanism to support deep community-university collaborations. Existing patterns of research funding distribution, for example, are arguably being replicated in the programme with familiar Russell Group universities being particularly successful; reflecting not only research quality but also the significant help and support in preparing bids that is available to academics working in these institutions.

Another implication of the research council funding model is that proposals have to be scoped and costed clearly and in advance, must be led by a university partner and assessed by an academic panel. Such requirements means that this funding process is a difficult fit with more embedded participatory models of community led research, in which communities and university partners might collectively develop research agendas over a long period of time, adapting these in the light of ongoing insights. There is also limited expertise amongst academic reviewers in relation to the criteria and processes that would build confidence that a more open-ended participatory approach was likely to be successful.

“You know, we’re pitching stuff, coffee, you know, in the bar in the evening.”

(James, PI Large Grant and PI/Co-I on three smaller awards)

“I met [name of academic], and of course, conversations start don’t they?”

(Allister, PI FWW Engagement Centre and Co-I on three awards)

To some extent these limitations of a project funding model may see an unlikely alliance being forged between those who advocate deeply engaged participatory work with communities and those making the case for disinterested scholarship funded outside the research councils: both argue the case for long term research investment in people and institutions rather than projects, which allows research to evolve as its needs evolve. To address this, we may need to recognise the limits of project based funding and revisit the role of core university research funding.

Summary

The Connected Communities Programme can be understood as, in itself, a process of community creation. In intervening in an existing dynamic and complex landscape of community and university research practices, it opens up opportunities to both deepen existing relationships and to create new networks and collaborations. It has attracted to its new community those who are seeking to radically disrupt existing modes of contemporary research, those who are frustrated by disciplinary and sectoral divides as well as those with more traditional research orientations and pressing financial concerns.

It is clear, however, that this process of community building is taking place in a broader historic and social context that militates against the programme's more implicit and ambitious aims to significantly diversify the types of communities and backgrounds of individuals involved in research. The existing imbalance in resources within both communities and universities means that the programme is up against significant historic barriers to diversifying research participation. There is simply insufficient resource to equalise the existing inequalities in community and university assets. At the same time, the existing demographic, ethnic and cultural make-up of university staff tends to militate against the programme representing the truly diverse nature of contemporary British communities.

 *An unlikely alliance may be forged between participatory researchers and those advocating funding for long term emergent scholarship.*

Given these conditions, and in a worst case scenario, there is a risk that in promoting community-university partnerships, the idea of a university as serving a universal 'public good' may be replaced with a more specific set of commitments to local research partnerships with organisations that replicate the social and demographic make up and interests of existing university staff.

Looking at how the programme has formed and who has become part of the programme, however, helps us to understand precisely what it would take to create a more level playing field for research collaborations for all communities. This is likely to involve investment that is channelled directly to communities rather than being mediated via universities, as well as long term, core funding for research partnership building to enable the slow process of making new contacts, building trust and finding potential resonances for new collaborations. The project-based approach of Connected Communities might better be understood, then, as a necessary but insufficient means by which to significantly diversify and enrich the knowledge landscape. It can help to accelerate and intensify existing relationships, it can create new relationships if the funding structures are right, but it is only one mechanism that needs to be located in a much wider set of interventions.





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stories they
tell us don't
make sense
anymore

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If it feels too easy, you probably aren't doing it right

Negotiating competing desires, accountabilities
and expertise in collaborative projects



Introduction

The principle of Connected Communities is to bring together different forms of knowledge, expertise and experience – whether from different disciplines or across university/community networks. Combining different forms of knowledge, however, is not an abstract intellectual activity. It involves bringing together individuals, organisations and, indeed, ‘communities’ with their own institutional commitments, preconceived expectations, career histories and aspirations.

What we want to do in this chapter is explore how the embodied processes of combining knowledges and communities often involves a dance between desire and accountability, between the different aspirations and hopes that project participants have for what a project might offer and the commitments and responsibilities that they have to their respective communities and organisations. This dance bears little relationship to the polarising language with which these sorts of projects are often discussed, which set up essentialised oppositions between ‘community’ and ‘university’ partners and then frame the debate around how well this ‘gap’ has been bridged.

Rather, these projects are created through dynamic and ongoing negotiations about when, how and under what circumstances various ideas of ‘the university’ or ‘the community’ can be invoked. These negotiations require all project participants to address fundamental questions about their expertise and their identities as community members, and as researchers. To explore how these negotiations are shaping the way that project teams are formed we examine the sorts of desires that are projected onto the idea of community-university partnership, the sorts of accountabilities that are negotiated in these relationships, the fundamental unsettling of identity and expertise that can ensue as these desires are negotiated, and the new models and roles that project teams are evolving in response to these processes.



What do partners want from each other?

University and community partners come to projects with practical, personal and symbolic reasons for collaboration.

Practical purposes. These are related simply to the necessity of building a partnership in order to make a project happen at all. For most university partners, their collaboration with community partners is essential to the delivery and conduct of the research. Without community partners' expertise, knowledge, ideas and existing relationships with wider communities, the research could not be realised. Indeed, university partners need their community partners for a whole range of activities – from brokering relationships, to providing advice and guidance, to education about specific topics, to convening activities, to helping create intelligent research designs, to informing on historical context and providing critical feedback. There is, therefore, often a relationship – frequently unacknowledged and unexamined – of dependency by university partners on community partners. Reciprocally, community partners have practical reasons for participation in projects. They may be looking for spare capacity to document what they are doing, for opportunities to reflect upon and gain feedback on their own practice, for access to specific scholarship and expertise on certain topics, as well as access to research methods and advice on gathering and using their own data. Importantly, however, community organisations are not usually dependent upon universities for the delivery of their core activity, even if they find the collaboration useful or helpful. The nature of the reciprocity in the relationship in practical terms, therefore, can be highly uneven.

"If you're going to be wanting to do research on adult community learning, [...] you need to be then partnering up with a provider really."

(Theresa, Co-I Large Grant)

"I need somebody else, I haven't got the kind of skills or the kind of contacts or even the time in my contract to do this, you know I just [...] if you really genuinely want to try and engage with people who you wouldn't normally engage with, it's quite hard work and it takes loads of time."

(Sally, PI, Research for Community Heritage Project)

"We cannot parachute in and just say 'Oh you've been doing for 30 years but you know we've got a 6 months project and we're going to do this in your area'. So we don't have a choice but to work with and listen to those who are already working in the area. [...]"

(Brenda, Co-I, Large Grant)

"The Youth Workers [...] know the young people a lot better than me and they know a lot more detail about the young people. [...]"

(Kay, Co-I seven CC awards)

"[...] word of mouth is so important. So they're really important for getting people in the room, but then they're very hands-off. So they don't come to the first session or anything like that."

(Lena, Co-I on two CC Awards including digital capital project)

"We're trying to break new ground, we're trying to do new things or things differently. In which case, you know there's learning from those that needs to be shared with others, and we just don't have the chance to write those things up."

(Stephen, Co-ordinator, community development trust)

"To make sure that what we deliver is of a standard and it works, and how can we learn and deliver our projects, you know, better do what we do basically."

(Clara, Local Government Arts Specialist)

"Some of it might be knowledge based about the subject area, and others knowledge might be around methods, it might be around theories. But you know ... and it doesn't have to be the same. And I think we even discussed that at some point around maybe if we needed you know somebody who was more a subject specialist and another person who could come with ideas around creative methods."

(Janette, Director, local charity)

Personal purposes. Collaborations, however, also emerge out of friendships, out of personal relationships and from previous professional relationships. They arise from a desire to get to know someone more and to develop ideas further, or from a shared desire to build alliances to understand and address social and cultural phenomena. Both community and university partners are often looking for critical friends and partners with whom to develop ideas and new practices. Others are looking for strategic alliances to address shared agendas and effect real change. The personal, embodied and emotional reasons for collaboration are a powerful driver for both the creation of new partnerships as well as for the maintenance of long term projects.

Symbolic purposes. In addition to these practical and personal aspirations, however, there is often on both sides of the partnership a set of reasons for collaboration that we might call 'symbolic'. They are concerned less with the actual people involved in the projects, or the practicalities of getting them done, and more with the complex idea of what it means to work with 'a community' or 'a university'. For university partners, for example, there is often an intellectual and political adherence to the idea that community partners will enhance the quality of research by bringing more authentic connections with community, rendering university research more legitimate and more accountable to a 'real world' beyond the academy. ”

Reciprocally, for community partners, there is often an adherence to the idea of 'the university' as an institution that has a symbolic power to validate and offer credibility to the work of the community partner. The research process is seen as a means of translating everyday activities into powerful arguments. Many community partners are engaged in urgent struggles to make the case for their work and the almost alchemical properties of a university research process that can offer validation and respect is seen as an important strategic resource. Indeed, for some organisations, simply being able to identify the university as a partner is sufficient to raise the profile and credibility of their work.

"It's really about engaging with reality and recognising that there are discourses for conservation that traditional knowledge, local knowledge, or people around the world in diverse cultures speaking diverse languages, are more sympathetic to conservation."
(Roy, PI Digital Transformations Award)

"I look to an academic for validity, to validate something [...] for me its objective validation of your theory, of your hypothesis, of whatever you want to call it. That's something that academics... you do that better than us – we tend to run off with an idea, without actually validating that idea, without you know."
(Martin, Quality Assurance Officer, local authority)

"Policy makers and other people listen much more when you have you know a university with you, than if you do it on your own - because it's seen as more credible."
(Janette, Director, local charity)

"It's going to be hard outcomes as well, and I think that's going to be very useful when we try and source further funding to be able to deliver these projects [...] when you are trying to source any funding from social services for example, you know they really do want the hard outcome evidence. So it's really important that we work with the university."
(Clara, Local Government Arts Specialist)

"Maybe on a subconscious level people see that there's a university involved – it gives it an extra ... I mean we're credible anyway, but it gives it that ... a different sort of credibility maybe. I might be overegging it I'm not sure, but ... Yeah we don't mind being linked with the University, it does give us some status – universities still have that status in this country."
(Brendon, community media organisation)

Negotiating the fantasy of the 'university' and the 'community'

This set of 'symbolic' reasons for collaboration, which are dependent on the twin ideas of 'the community' and 'the university' as sources of legitimacy, authenticity or truth, are ideas that need careful negotiation within projects. They can lead to partners being treated in deeply instrumental and tokenistic fashion on both 'sides'. In the worst cases, we have seen examples in which both the idea of 'the community' and the idea of 'the university' are simply harnessed to give a patina of either authenticity or credibility to partnerships. ”

For example, some community partners may find themselves given a high profile in publicity and promotional material for projects, because their images (particularly of those who come from visible minority groups) give an impression of inclusivity - while in practice, they may experience very little opportunity for their insights and experiences to be heard, acknowledged or taken seriously. In these instances, community partners can feel that they are treated simply as 'trophy' who are symbolically valuable, but not recognised as partners and agents with autonomous desires, knowledge and expertise. ”

Reciprocally, the desire for universities to offer symbolic status and credibility to community partner activities, can, at times, lead to the partnership being valued more than the process of producing meaningful research evidence and analysis. There can be tensions, for example, when the research evidence does not necessarily show that community partner's activities are having the claimed or desired positive benefits. Those (few) community partners entering projects simply looking for validation, without recognising that this validation is dependent upon academic autonomy and reciprocal challenge, are necessarily disappointed. ”

"Sometimes the University, you know they maybe like having a photo of academics working with different sections of the community. You know that's why I get a bit cynical because I think it's ... sometimes it's a bit superficial maybe, because they like the picture."
(Sally, PI, Research for Community Heritage Project)

"But each time, we worked so hard and then walked into empty spaces to present to 3 or 4 people ... why had we bothered? Walking into these spaces to find ourselves alone, feeling marginalised, sticking out like sore thumbs, so often being that bit younger, many of us Black people - often the only Black people in the room. We often wondered why we were there ... To perform 'community' for the majority of non-community participants? At its very worst we felt like performing monkeys, the 'exotic other'."
(Refugee Youth report to AHRC)

"I wouldn't from the outset want to say things that weren't evidenceable... If our research reveals, which it is, that this thing [...] isn't living up to its promise.. and a lot of people built up that it can do two things [...] and I'm not sure it'll do either.. and if that's what the research reveals, that's what we'll say, you know. And I wouldn't want to bring a certain politics to it that suddenly made me having to say that uncomfortable."
(Rowen, Co-I Large Grant)

"It also raises questions in terms of the content of the work that are quite uncomfortable for [our partners] to think about... which is to what extent do they really represent the views of a widespread community, are they just locked in a particular way of doing things? ... and when you work closely with people that can be very uncomfortable."
(Brenda, Co-I, Large Grant)

If both the university and community are approached instrumentally – as offering a quick fix access to ‘authenticity’ or a quick fix dose of ‘credibility’ – then the relationships are likely to deteriorate rapidly.

In the best cases, however, where these aspirations for authenticity and credibility are named and taken seriously, such tensions can lead to productive partnerships. Here, the desires that all partners bring into projects are acknowledged clearly, and given time to be addressed as a project team – so we want legitimacy? Let’s talk about what legitimate partnership with community might look like. So we want validation? Let’s talk about what a rigorous process of gathering data or challenging our ideas might look like. So we want credibility? Let’s talk about the nature of the expertise and experience we all bring to create that credibility. ”

In being explicit about these underpinning desires, in recognising that there are traditions of embodied expertise and knowledge that provide resources in responding to them, these projects become spaces of meaningful mutual encounter¹⁴. Such discussions often recognise that knowledge traditions are not simply interchangeable – that the process of democratising governance and decision-making in projects is not the same as assuming anyone can take on each others’ roles.

Taking seriously the desires of project partners for both authenticity and for credibility, brings uncomfortable but important questions for both community and university partners. Community partners are required to reflect upon the extent to which they can really fulfil their university partners’ projected desires for ‘authentic’ and ‘legitimate’ engagement with communities. There is a need to reflect upon and examine the extent to which they are in fact speaking as individuals or as members of a wider community; as advocates for a wider community or as an organisation that is in fact selling services (however beneficial) into that community. The claims that community

“We knew that there’d be times when we felt like we’d be speaking different languages to each other. And so we talked about how we communicate with people in various situations that could be quite tense when you’ve got deadlines and you think somebody’s not understood you. [...] you’re talking about something completely ... it was quite a funny meeting, but ... I think as a team at that point we really agreed that we would respect each other’s perspectives, whether we agreed with it or not. And actually I think what’s happened as we’ve gone along is that ... it’s almost like you transcend something. You work on something and you think everybody’s understood it, and then you realise well actually he’s got a completely different perspective from that person and that person. But eventually you do all come round to something, that perhaps was slightly different from what you initially envisaged, but it’s there and it meets what you want to do. So I think ... I guess from my perspective as a PI I really like that actually, and I think it’s been having the guts to just let it happen.”

(Gemma, PI Large Grant)

¹⁴ The Centre for Social Justice and Community Action’s (2012) Guidelines for Community Based Participatory Research provides a great insight into the complexity of the questions that projects might work on throughout the conduct of the project. Our analysis is intended to complement this by encouraging attention in particular to the expectations relating to the nature of ‘academic knowledge’ and the pressures of wider accountability structures that is not foregrounded as strongly in this work.

partners make about the nature of their connection with community will also necessarily be explored – is this connection still current, is it a historical claim, is it inclusive? Hard questions need to be addressed around, for example, issues of intersectionality and the extent to which community partners are acting as gatekeepers, advocates, or enablers of the communities they are representing.

Reciprocally, university partners are often required, in a way that they have rarely before had to confront, to explicitly articulate what they understand by ‘research’ and its perceived alchemical properties to translate everyday experience into ‘credible knowledge’. This can be both refreshingly challenging and a source of, in some cases, existential angst for academics – what is it I do? What is it I really bring? What is research anyway? Some, confronted with this question, point participants to the research council definitions of research. Others respond with the confidence of scientific positivism; research, they contend, involves the establishment of clear hypotheses, testing and control of the conditions of the experiment. Others frame the distinctive nature of research explicitly in its capacity to ask unexpected questions, to uncover different angles, to open up new realities. While others present research precisely as the creation of time and space to think, to read, to explore new ideas and to understand the history and underlying causes of contemporary conditions. ”

The methods and claims to credibility that university partners are bringing to the process of research are revealed to the daylight. The extent to which they are a product of custom and experience, of provisional and contingent exploration, an art as much, or more than, a science, can be a source of both discomfort and surprise to both university and community members of the project team.

A common consequence of these projects, therefore, is a moment of profound reflection for all participants in which fundamental questions are addressed: who ‘counts’ as community, and how and through whom can such communities be represented in research? What is this thing we call research that can translate lived reality into credible arguments? What do we mean by knowledge and who gets to

“I made a slide just today for the researchers just to try and like separate ‘this is what research is, and this is what you guys have probably been doing so far’ it’s not business as usual. We’re not looking at your existing services, we’re doing something different [...] a research study would have very clear aims and objectives. It would probably have testable hypothesis or some theoretically generated questions. It probably would use quantitative and qualitative data collection to catch any effectors or not. You would have documented processes and procedures as well.”

(Gemma, PI Large Grant)

“One of the problems is they all think they’re doing projects... they’ve got ideas, but they’re project driven. And I wrote an email this morning and said ‘this is not projects, it’s research, it’s fine to think for 3 months before you do your project – we don’t need you to do, we need you to think.”

(Christine, PI on Large Grant and PI/Co-I on multiple CC awards)

“If all we do is... this is the problem of thinking of it as following through of projects in each place to evaluate their success or otherwise, this already happens. Unless you can look at it from you know outside of the paradigm, or from a side view, you’re not going to make much of a difference.”

(Eric, Co-I Large Grant)

“For me it’s about learning actually more than anything, it’s about learning the different perspectives and how people approach things. There’s not necessarily one right way to doing something, there’s multiple ways of doing it ... so that’s been really ... I think that’s what I anticipated at the start actually would be really really good. So I think you’ve got to be quite open to learning from others in these sort of studies. I think if it was one of these big hierarchical medical type studies similar to the one that I’m involved in now it might not be quite as easy.”

(Gemma, PI Large Grant)

decide this? What processes – experiment, design, interview, archival analysis, ethnography, social action – really help us to understand and contribute to improving the realities of communities? These reflections can lead some project teams to return to familiar and well tested methods and processes. For others, they trigger transformative moments in which the complexities of these questions are addressed head on, and new methods and ways of working emerge¹⁵.

Relations of accountability

These discussions about research purpose and practice, moreover, are not conducted in a vacuum. The participants in project teams are also held within complex webs of accountability that shape their capacity to reframe their practices. The core relations of accountability within projects are both internal (to the core project participants) and external (to disciplines, to ideas of the ‘public good’ and to the families and other relationships who form the personal accountability networks of project participants).

INTERNAL RELATIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability to the community partner. A primary accountability regime in most projects, is to the organisations who are playing the role of community partners in the design and delivery of the project. As discussed, university partners are usually dependent upon these organisations for the delivery of the project, and therefore there is both a practical as well as an ethical requirement to ensure that projects meet the needs of their community partners. Equally, community partners themselves are keenly aware of their accountability to their own organisations. For many, ‘research’ is not a core mission of the organisation, and the benefits of project participation are strongly dependent on the extent to which the project will strengthen the organisation through developing people, developing projects and services and further serving the broader aims”



“Research wasn’t their priority and therefore one of the ways to make this work was to make sure that their needs were always being met, in a way. Almost from the first, before the research if that makes sense. Was to make sure that the research aligned as closely as possible with that. Because otherwise it wasn’t going to work.”

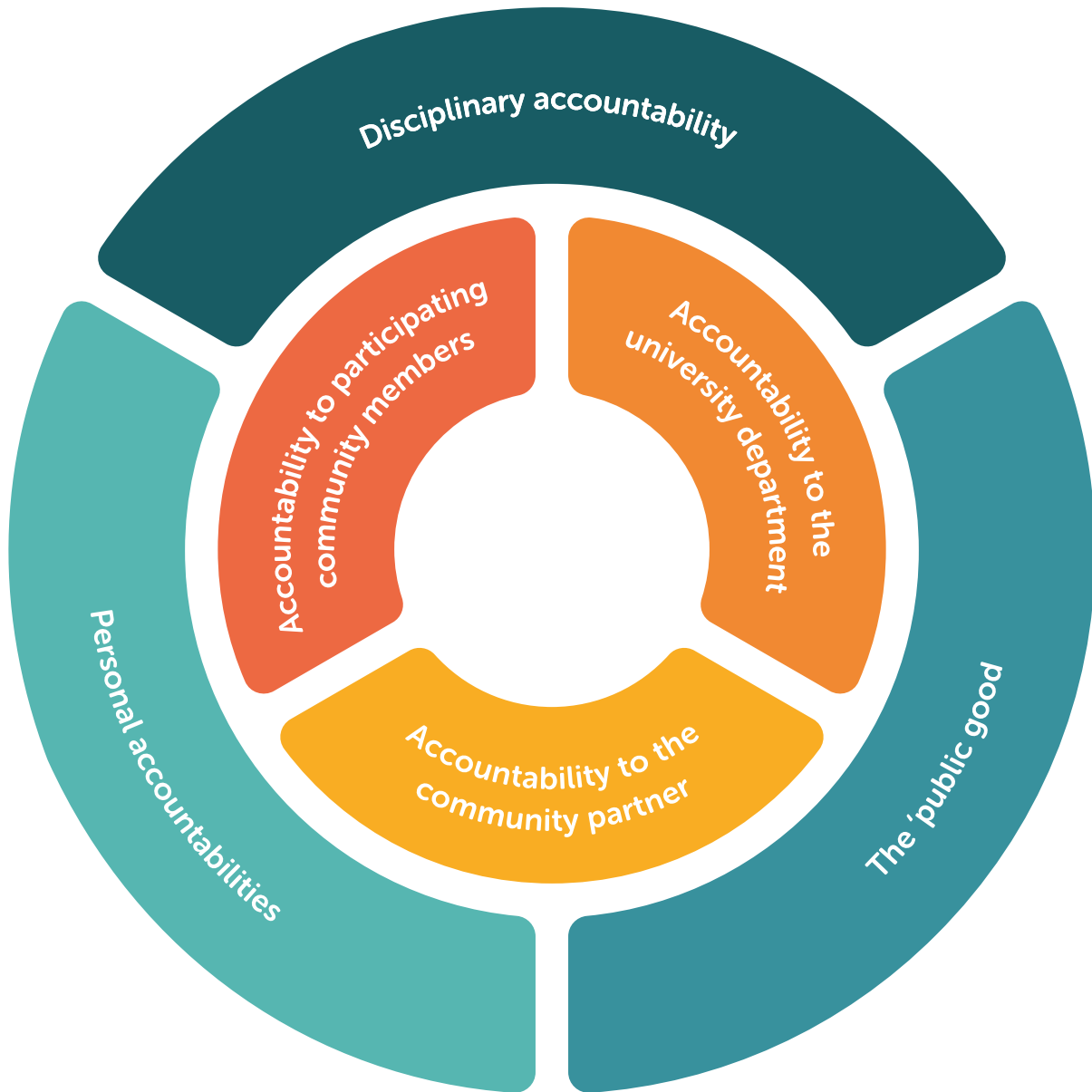
(Kay, Co-I on seven CC awards)

“I want to feel a) that that network is better off as a result of our intervention. And I mean better off both economically and in terms of its resilience and it’s survivability and its route into the future, its pathway into the future – I want to feel as though we are leaving that organisation stronger than we found it. And indeed leaving it might actually be impossible, because it might be that actually I think that organisation will be in my world, at various levels of my world, for a good deal of time to come.”

(Aaron, PI one small award, Co-I two awards including a Large Grant)

¹⁵ The two projects ‘Ways of Knowing’ and ‘Heritage Decisions’ come to mind as projects that have explicitly addressed these questions and attempted to work through what it means to ‘research’.

Accountability relations



of the organisation. Community partners are keenly aware of the slower timescale and longer horizon of research projects and often have to address difficult questions from their boards and management teams if evidence of benefit to the organisation is slow in arriving.

Accountability to the university department. An equally important accountability regime operating through projects, is accountability to the university. This is usually practically embodied in ideas of what the host department will value in terms of promotions or employment criteria, and in terms of the future income that will be secured via the REF (see glossary). This accountability is often viewed as being fulfilled through journal publications, research income and the ability to conduct research that has an ‘impact’. It can also be viewed in terms of developing colleagues and students within the department through funding and opportunities.

Accountability to participating community members. Both university and community partners hold a shared accountability to the community members who are invited to participate in projects. These individuals might be service users, members of a local community, the wider volunteering network of a community heritage association, or school children. These accountabilities are often addressed explicitly through ethical guidelines. More broadly, project teams articulate this commitment as being concerned with keeping promises and ensuring that projects make a meaningful contribution to the lived experiences of these communities. This relation of accountability is particularly keenly felt by those people – both researchers and community partners – who come from these communities.

These three accountability regimes – to the university, to the community partner, to the community participants – form the inner ring of accountability relations that a project has to negotiate. Surrounding these, however, are a set of external accountability relations that can bring significant tensions.

“So it’s kind of if you’ve got some young people that have bothered to engage with making a film and you said you’re going to make a film with them and you don’t do it, then that’s ... it’s not like you don’t get away with that, cos they’ve got no one to tell that they’ve been let down, they’re just let down ... and I think that’s one of the things that ... well it’s not just universities, it’s across the board of doing this kind of work, is people often get let down.”

(Albert, Community Artist)

“I’ve been a single parent myself [...] I live in this area. Many of the parents that come here you know, their children are my children’s friends. So it’s ... so in that sense I do feel that I can represent and talk you know on behalf of the organisation and members of the organisation. [...] I’ve always found it important to go back to people and talk to people and be in a constant dialogue with people. But sometimes I do that very informally by sitting chatting to people in a café or you know ... and sometimes we will do it by running workshops.”

(Janette, Director, local charity)

EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONS

Disciplinary accountability. Individual academics are also working within the broader accountability regime of academic disciplines, in other words, they are negotiating their responsibility to the wider international community of scholars with whom the academic identifies. These bring responsibilities in terms of developing insights that recognise and push forward the research field, and that operate within particular procedures for determining 'truth'. There are significant differences here between disciplines. Historians and literature scholars for example, often struggle to explain how the collaborative research, writing and analysis common in Connected Communities projects can 'fit' with the requirements of their discipline for single authored books focused on the creation of new archives and the analysis of primary material. Individual academics operating in the same project and sometimes even the same department, may therefore be operating with very different accountability regimes in relation to what 'counts' as good quality research. ”

The 'public good'. At the same time, the publicly funded nature of the research project requires project teams to balance the needs and interests of participating communities against a broader set of questions about a larger 'public good'. This involves asking: what sorts of empirical research, analysis and outputs can best serve not only the community partners and community participants within this project, but also the thousands of other community partners and communities grappling with the same issues across the country? Here, project teams are grappling with difficult questions of where their priorities should lie – in their more localised and immediate issues, or in the creation of insights, products and tools that can 'travel' to other communities? ”

"The danger is that in three years' time somebody would read it ... it would be internally reviewed and someone would say 'Oh this isn't REF-able'. [...] So I think we did have maybe one co-authored article in our last REF submission, but it's very unusual. So co-authored and ... I think the danger is that somebody would say well you know this isn't really based on primary sources."

(Lena, Co-I on two CC Awards including digital capital project)

"I think things need to be of a sufficient quality that they will travel and win audiences and have a seriousness of intent behind them [...] I think there's a real difference between a community arts project that exists to give an experience to the people involved in it, and a project that happens to be a community arts project that offers a performance or an output that draws an audience."

(Charles, PI Large Grant)

"We don't as an organisation just want to do our own thing and just sit happily doing our own stuff and completely forgetting about how we're contributing to the society and research and policy ... so this is an opportunity to be part of that."

(Billie, Operations Manager, arts based development agency)

Personal accountabilities. Finally, project participants also have relations of accountability to their own families and friends, to their own health and sanity, and to their civic and social commitments. Negotiating the balance between projects in which individuals are both professionally and personally committed, with the emotional and personal commitments to self and to family, (as we will discuss later in Chapter 4), is an often unrecognised source of tension in this work. ”

“I still have a teaching load, still have my you know REF stuff to do. So I just couldn't spend every evening, and I've got young children, I couldn't spend every evening going to these community meetings in east Leeds. So that's the ... that's the thing.”

(Sally, PI, Research for community heritage project)

“I don't think there is a way to separate that [professional and personal relationships]. I think because of the rhythms and the temporalities of community organisations I think, and in order to maintain and manage relationships, you have to be prepared to have it be part of your life... there's no boundary.” “This is a whole life thing, and you can't just clock off at 6pm.”

(Rita, PI Large Grant, Co-I three awards)

” These competing accountabilities are often, in these projects, embodied in the conflicting accountabilities experienced by individuals in the project. Indeed, these projects often see individuals disrupt and contest the idea that they have a fixed identity as either a ‘community’ or a ‘university’ partner. Some community partners make the case that they bring a long track record of research and may challenge disciplinary ideas about what counts as valuable knowledge and its production. Reciprocally, some university partners with complex career histories both inside and outside the university, who may be as closely connected with the communities at stake in the research, produce competing claims about what counts as a legitimate connection with and representation of community.

The challenge of negotiating competing accountabilities, therefore, is not simply a question of institutional relationships, but of individual webs of claims to legitimacy and accountability that are deeply embodied in personal histories.

Four models of inter-personal relationships

Project teams reconcile the diverse reasons for collaboration and the competing accountabilities at play in these projects in different ways. Here we outline four common ways in which such negotiations form themselves into distinctive patterns of personal relationships on Connected Communities projects.

“There also things around class and politics ... educational background? So I know ... you know my own educational background – I went to equivalent of a comp – the first person to go to university in my family. My mother was also a ... I guess an activist when I was little, in a number of different things ... and we lived in cooperative housing. So I come from a background where you're just always involved. And when I was in the civil service I was a union rep ... so it's more that sense of citizenship I guess, which I've never really thought about, because it just was something I assumed.”

(Rita, PI Large Grant, Co-I three awards)

Model 1 – Divide and conquer

This model treats different sets of expertise and knowledge as clearly divided, and serving particular purposes and different sets of accountabilities. People are secure in their knowledge, know what they need to do, and get on with their work. Community partners are often seen as representing ‘the community’ and doing the work needed to translate the community ‘into’ the project, while the university is responsible for defining what counts as research, and for designing how knowledge can be verified and tested. The project team is organised around a clear division of labour. Clear lines are drawn between ‘research’ and ‘practice’ expertise, and interpersonal relationships are often understood as contractual. When the synthesis of knowledge is required, it is achieved by treating different ‘perspectives’ as different lenses on the same external reality that can be combined to create a more complete image. Individuals are all recognised as having clearly defined accountabilities to separate constituencies, and legitimacy claims (to represent particular communities or ways of knowing) are often left unchallenged. Conflicts that arise and which originate from ambivalence around knowledge forms, legitimacy claims and accountability, tend to be addressed by individuals rather than the team; and the team subsumes differences, often through a hierarchical decision making process, within one pre-agreed overarching analysis. This approach has similarities with what Barry & Born¹⁶ call the ‘synthetic’ model of interdisciplinarity, in which different perspectives are brought together to create a new whole. It also often includes elements of what they call the ‘subsidiary’ form of interdisciplinarity, in that it can include some perspectives simply being used in the service of others. ”

Model 2 – Relational expertise

This model treats different sets of knowledge and expertise as lenses on a more complex reality that comes to be known depending on what perspectives one takes. In practice, within this model, project teams

“I bring the research or the methods, like the boring part. Write the protocol to design the study, to collect the data, analyse the data and disseminate. [W] is the practitioner, she delivers the intervention. [X] is the person that engages with the children’s homes and started the preliminary work of talking about it and introducing us and just creating a bit that network between the private sector and us. And then [Y], once he accepted the idea, he was the one in motivating these three children’s homes – the staff, the kids ... the higher management. And [Z] is the one that has facilitated the funding and has introduced that concept [...], which I wasn’t aware.”

(Andrea, Co-I, Large Grant)

“I think a researcher can research anything once you’ve got that grounding in research, you know. And then I see us as having the expertise or the experience should we say, the wealth of information that you require to provide the material for you to research.”

(Martin, Quality Assurance Officer, local authority)

16 Barry, A. & Born, G. (eds). (2013). *Interdisciplinarity: reconfigurations of the social and natural sciences*. London: Routledge

work to create sufficient understanding of these different ways of knowing within the team to enable what Anne Edwards¹⁷ calls 'relational expertise'. This form of expertise involves the capacity to empathetically inhabit another perspective in such a way that allows you to understand the sorts of questions and issues this perspective would bring to the situation. Here, individuals retain their own disciplinary, professional or community identities, accountabilities and roles, but temporarily inhabit other perspectives. Differences in perspective are understood as different lenses on the same situation that may not necessarily be compatible; and understanding the different accountability pressures individuals are working with is a core element of understanding these lenses. Conflict between perspectives is negotiated by attempting to see the others point of view. The project is concerned with the creation of sufficient common knowledge to allow new situations to be examined by any individual from multiple perspectives, and tensions around competing accountabilities and ways of knowing are addressed by diversifying and pluralising the forms of legacy and output that the project seeks to produce. ”

Model 3 – Remaking identities

This model explicitly sets out to build the capacity of project participants to not only understand but to take on each others' knowledge and expertise. This is an orientation that works toward the creation of different hybrid identities – to produce 'researcher-practitioners' and 'practitioner-researchers'. Its focus is precisely upon the long slow work of capacity building, of entering into each others' theoretical and practical domains. Mutual learning and the development of a community of practice is often the core focus and purpose of the project, with a long term view to address wider issues in solidarity between project participants. This model relates to what Barry & Born call 'agonistic-antagonistic' interdisciplinarity, in which participants are brought together from a fundamental sense of the inadequacy of their current ways of knowing. Individuals and groups are prepared to leave behind previous identities and construct new

"Everyone was open and friendly and engaging and I think you know respectful of each other's areas of interest and expertise and understanding and each of us wants to learn a little bit as well and we have kind of overlapped and intertwined as well anyway. So it was the opportunity to learn a bit more about these other things. I mean I'm naturally inquisitive I think most of us are so we're kind of... we're interested in where the edges or the margins of our disciplines are, or whether there are margins and we're interested in how things seep through back and forth, this kind of osmosis across."

(Fred, Projects Manager, independent national research organisation)

"Actually my theoretical framework was about homes and how in the homes the habitus gets passed down from generation to generation, it gets transformed. And [her] work is about the fiddle and her mum [...] and how it's transformed in the gig. So that was my bit of theory that I'd had all along, but it just made sense to her ... bizarrely in a gig at you know 10.30 at night she like got it. So those moments when it make sense are just brilliant because you're not imposing so much as going 'Does that click with what you're experiencing?' and then you're going to do it together."

(Christine, PI on Large Grant and PI/Co-I on multiple CC awards)

"If you're working in partnership, there's some important skills to try and develop your communication so that we can help people see what might be relevant for them that you can reflectively self function and think about where they're coming from and what they might want to know, from what you know. It's a very hard skill."

(Bernadette, PI on three awards and Co-I three awards including Large Grant)

¹⁷ Edwards, A. (2005). Relational agency: Learning to be a resourceful practitioner. *International journal of educational research*, 43(3), 168-182.

ones. The leaving behind process can bring emotional and intellectual difficulties for participants, and projects can be characterised by productive tensions. Such projects may struggle to make a case for a wider legacy in the first instance. Indeed, maintaining a sustained process of mutual learning in the context of both internal and external accountability pressures is a collective responsibility that becomes held and addressed by all participants.

Model 4 – Colonisation and confusion

This model of working often emerges from a desire to disrupt existing power relations within projects, without a recognition of the deep and embodied expertise involved in both community practice and research practice. Here, in the name of disrupting old inequalities, we see academics taking on the role of community organisers, without the experience or deep relationships needed to take on this work successfully. Similarly, we see community partners taking on research roles without wishing to engage with existing research literature, or the basics of research training. Here, we have a conflation of the idea of expertise and power, in which any form of knowledge is interpreted as an unhelpful correlate of unequal power relations. At the same time, existing accountability structures are keenly felt and participants remain anxious to address and meet the requirements of these structures. Indeed, there is often residual discomfort with the idea of mutual learning having intrinsic value. These projects are characterised by a process of profound unsettling of traditional identities, without the necessary correlate of a commitment to mutual learning, or the critique of the limits of traditional accountability regimes, to go alongside this. As a result, project participants can find themselves feeling deeply torn and deskilled, working outside their areas of expertise without support. ”

“[the community partner] was really grumpy about that for ages, because she felt like [academic] had really insulted her and said you know ‘You don’t have ...’ ‘You don’t know. Your ways of knowing are not as good as my ways of knowing’ – [she] hadn’t said any of that, you know it was suggestion, it was a suggestion based on her practice and her knowledge. But it couldn’t be her, if that had come from [other community partner] it would have been listened to because it was from a community organisation. And that’s where I think actually being able to reflexively analyse our own positions is really really important.”
(Emily, Early Career Researcher, Research Assistant, Large Grant)

“I think that’s what we’re still negotiating that, is knowing what we bring of our research selves into [the project]. And ‘expertise’ and ‘skill’ feel like quite loaded words, don’t they ... as soon as you talk about expertise and skill it sounds like it’s about power relations, but I think ... to me it’s much more about recognising that everyone has expertise and skill don’t they? I might have expertise in [x] research methods but there’s a lot of expertise I don’t have. And you have expertise in something different – what do we bring. And I think that’s the thing we haven’t quite negotiated in [this project] is maybe recognising expertises.”
(Adam, Co-I two mid-sized awards and Large Grant)

No project neatly fits into any of these models. Indeed, these are ideal types rather than categories capable of neatly dividing up the messy reality of the highly diverse set of projects that makes up Connected Communities. We present them here, though, to foreground the different ways in which competing expectations of legitimacy, of validity and accountability are being handled by projects. Notably,

what differentiates Models 2 and 3, from Models 1 and 4, is that they recognise (often based on a robust awareness of the existing substantial previous research and practice in this field) that collaboration is far from straightforward, that it requires time, listening, mutual respect and an intentional and reflective approach to how different claims to accountability will be handled. In comparison, Models 1 and 4 treat collaboration, in different ways, as easy. Model 4 gives insufficient time and care to the necessary difficulties involved in learning to take on each others' roles, it ignores the historic foundations by which expertise is produced and embedded in people and situations. While Model 1 assumes that the process of combining and negotiating different accounts of reality will be straightforward and additive. Both, over time, risk reproducing the inequalities and incoherence that they set out to avoid. In contrast, by attempting to produce relational expertise and to remake identities, Models 2 and 3 recognise, give time to and create the space for the necessary unsettling and emotional labour that is involved in meaningful intellectual and practical work.

"But that's just the way it is, it's been a massive learning curve to accept that there are majorly different ways of looking at the world, and even within academia there's so many different ways of understanding something."
(Layla, Early Career Researcher, Large Grant)

"In collaborative research the most important thing is the relationships and the relationship, the commitments that people have to each other and the sense of responsibility including care. As opposed to applying abstract principles or rules from codes of ethics or from university research ethics committees."
(Stephanie, PI two awards, Co-I three awards)

Recognising the emotional labour of collaborative projects


As we hope we have now made clear, the process of articulating and negotiating the competing expectations and accountabilities in these projects (which often, in Connected Communities, involve at least 3 university institutions as well as multiple community partners) is far from straightforward; not least because these accountabilities and desires are not simply abstract concepts, they are embodied in the project participants themselves and bring with them deeply held beliefs, commitments and emotions. These projects require not just intellectual and practical labour, but emotional labour.

"I guess in all of this what happens I think is just people become part of a social network... we're all friends on Facebook."
(Maureen, PI small award)

"I think what you can see probably quite a lot is the women doing a lot of the legwork and the emotion work with these projects. There's actually quite a lot of emotion work I think involved in doing projects that are you know trying to obviously work with the community ... so I think in some ways it could almost be more emotionally challenging than if you were just working in the community project yourself in a way, because you're having to go in and involve yourself aren't you (inaudible) for researchers in these kind of projects, you know. And then leave ... you know there's all emotional entanglements and engagements and everything else."
(Theresa, Co-I Large Grant)

Relationships between partners in projects, for example, were often described to us through the language of emotion and friendship, and the breakdown in such relationships was understood not merely as an instrumental or technical issue, but as something that evoked feelings of hurt, anger and frustration. Avoiding and ameliorating such feelings and building trust was sometimes described by female researchers as

the sort of work that women ‘often pick up’. And yet, many of the male PIs, in particular those working on large grants, also reported experiencing and participating in this sort of emotional labour.

To this end, one of the key features seen as necessary for managing this emotional labour and building trust, was, for some partners, a commitment to research collaborations for the long term. This longer term commitment was seen as important in addressing tensions and disagreements, in working through these questions of accountability and legitimacy, and were seen as a necessary part of proving credibility, building trust, sticking around and demonstrating a commitment to work with that community. 

While the focus on emotional labour of this work is often oriented toward understanding university-community relations, our observations are that such work is also likely to be necessary in addressing relationships between academics. The failure to recognise, in particular, the different accountability requirements of different disciplines, and the potential for academics to position themselves in competitive and individualistic relations to each other on projects, can spill out into significant public tensions that are often baffling and off-putting to other project participants.

Beyond the binary – creating new roles

Taking these competing expectations and accountabilities into account, it is clear that interdisciplinary and collaborative projects require project teams to take on new roles that leave far behind both the old binaries of ‘community partner’ or ‘university partner’. Over the last year, through numerous conversations and exchanges with programme participants, both about how they are working and how they would plan to work more successfully in future¹⁸, we have

“When you’re working with people you have already worked with, you know what to do when you hit hiccups.”

(Rita, PI Large Grant, Co-I three awards)

“I was able to prove my chops... I stepped up to the plate. I didn’t let people down, so then I got involved in another project.”

(Rita, PI Large Grant, Co-I three awards)

“I’m trying to maintain a relationship with the youth group and make sure they’re ok, make sure that that relationship with them is working while at the same time I’m also trying to get a project to its end and immediate relationships with other academics and other practitioners. Yeah I think I’d put it less like it’s protective and more like it creates an awful lot of work. Emotional labour for one and creates a lot more conversation that has to be had. It’s like it’s a waste of time. These projects are really demanding. You know, even at the best of times they’re really demanding at all kinds of levels, in terms of the skills required and just that level of activity. But you know mostly that kind of intensity is really positive... and there’s not a lot of spare capacity I suppose because the projects are so intense and demanding. Just a little bit of funding...So they’re already kind of overstretched...at least on good will.”

(Kay, Co-I on seven CC awards)

¹⁸ An earlier version of this draft taxonomy was developed by the Challenge Panel at the Sheffield Research Development Workshop, including Kate Pahl, Keri Facer, Karen Salt, Gary Grubb, and Mike Wilson. Sophia De Sousa’s analysis of community partner project roles was also a very helpful intervention in shaping this analysis. See also the work of ‘Co-producing legacy: What is the role of artists within Connected Communities projects?’ led by Kath Pahl (Sheffield), <http://connected-communities.org/index.php/project/co-producing-legacy-what-is-the-role-of-artists-within-connected-communities-projects/>

developed the following lexicon for describing the much more diverse and complex roles that need to come into play in these projects. These roles are:



The Catalyser – this role involves making contributions that stimulate, initiate or disrupt the thinking on a project, generate new conversations and new ways of framing problems; this can be necessary to create clear ground for conversation across different positions or traditions. It can be playful or explicitly challenging. ”

“It’s a new kind of leadership.”
(Louise, PI small award, Co-I two Large Grants)

“What was interesting was that unlike a lot of research projects where the PI is directing it very much, I had a completely different kind of bottom up approach, and then just tried to make sure that everybody threaded through.”
(Christine, PI on Large Grant and PI/Co-I on multiple CC awards)



The Integrator – this role involves keeping an eye on a big picture, spotting where ideas, practices and people can work together, building connections and making sense. It often involves summarising ideas and clarifying what progress has been achieved at the end of long and complex conversations and holding larger teams together. It is particularly important in democratic decision making practices where participants need to understand what positions have been agreed and what next steps have been identified. ”

“I go to these meetings, I ask these questions, I kind of push things. I produce products sometimes that push things ... I do a certain role within these projects, but it’s often covered by something else – I’m not an artist in residence, I’m kind of a film maker, or I’m facilitating a group or ... I’ve got a very definite specific function, but I kind of do the other functions behind.”
(Albert, Community Artist)



The Designer – this role involves connecting up the different ideas and elements of a project and translating it into research designs and plans that can effectively be carried out that meet the different needs of all involved in the project. ”

“It’s okay when you’re just doing the nuts and bolts stuff, but when you start standing back and saying ‘So what does all this mean?’ you know people will have different politics, different values, different backgrounds, different ideologies, and it’s going to be quite ... that’s going to be quite tricky I think... So it’s going to be tricky for me in particular cos I’m going to have to hold the whole thing together. But ... well we all have to hold it together, but I mean I feel a responsibility for ensuring that it doesn’t just fly off.”
(Matthew, PI on one Large grant and Co-I on one Large Grant)



The Broker – this role is concerned with building relationships for the project with partners and organisations beyond the core institutions concerned. It often draws upon longstanding prior relationships and involves individuals to trade on personal credibility. This brokerage role may be brief or sustained throughout the course of a project.




The Facilitator – this role is concerned with enabling conversations to happen, bringing personal capacities, techniques and processes that facilitate productive interactions both between project team members and with community participants.



The Project Manager – this involves keeping track of aims, objectives, plans and progress and making sure everyone is in communication with everyone else. This is a role that community partners often have more experience of, even if it usually falls to university partners as Principal Investigators.



The Diplomat – this role is concerned with institutional negotiations to smooth the way for the project to work well, this may mean negotiations around contracts, finances, ethical, legal and employment matters. It may also mean managing high level senior advocates and contributors as well as liaison with funding bodies. ”

 **Interdisciplinary and collaborative projects require project teams to take on new roles that leave far behind the old binaries of ‘community partner’ or ‘university partner’.**

“I’m a generalist in many ways as a scholar ... And that gives you a tremendous sort of diplomatic capacity to bring people together and to make them feel good about the work they are doing and carry on doing the work they’re doing.”
(James, PI Large Grant and PI/Co-I on three smaller awards)



The Scholar – this role is concerned with connecting the project with the previous research and knowledge in the field, ensuring that the means of gathering data or producing theory are robust and appropriate, and making sure that the individual activities push forward and develop new insights, theory and knowledge. There may be multiple scholars with responsibility to different research traditions in each project.

"In the first project the young people made their own film about how they understood the history of the allotments, and they had their own video recorder. They filmed it themselves, so they decided when to cut, they decided when to film, they decided who to film. In the editing process some of them went out decided to cut out of it, some of them who decided they didn't want to be visible on camera from the go were ones that filmed it. So they were negotiating a lot of ethical ... live ethical issues as well as telling their own story based on their own terms."

(Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation on one Large Grant)



The Conscience – this role is concerned with ensuring that the project accurately and ethically reflects the experiences and needs of both the immediate communities who are being researched and/or partnering on the programme, and the needs and interests of those wider communities and publics who might be affected by the research but are not participants in the project.



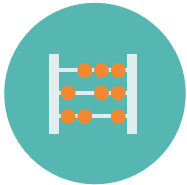
The Data Gatherer - this role is concerned with gathering information and data on the ground or in archives about the subject of the project. It is highly diverse in its activities, requiring everything from ethnographic forms of observation to creative arts practice to classic interview and survey techniques, and it is a role that can be taken on by both university and community partners. ”




The Nurturer – this involves the emotional labour of taking care of participants in the project, whoever they may be. It is about keeping an eye on and developing ways to address sensitive issues, as well as paying close attention to the different needs and desires of those in the team and how these might be developed.



The Loudhailer – this is an outward facing role, about going out and promoting the project through social media and face to face, networking. It is also about translating research into practice, policy and community action. It can involve simplifying the story so that more people can connect



The Accountant – this role is concerned with managing how the budget is allocated, either through setting up collective processes or by communicating transparently to others their own decisions.

 *It makes sense to unsettle the ideas that fix academics and community partners in particular roles.*

These roles are being distributed across both university and community partners, and being held by more senior and experienced, and junior participants. Clearly, in practice, such roles will be jointly held by different partners and prioritised at different stages of the project. The aim of explicitly articulating them here is precisely to provide a structure through which projects can examine how they are allocating resource to the many and competing activities required to address the complex accountabilities of this sort of research¹⁹.

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of distributed leadership in collaborative research projects, see Hart & Church (2013) http://about.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/images/stories/MUJ_22_2_Research_Leadership.pdf

Summary

Too often, when talking about collaborative research we are forced into a set of unhelpful binaries that divide project teams along simplistic lines: the ‘community partner’ and the ‘university partner’. Much of the effort of funders and projects is then dedicated to understanding whether this ‘divide’ has been bridged, whether ‘gaps’ have been closed, and whether historic power imbalances have been reversed. That such divides are simplistic, particularly in the arts and humanities, however, has been well documented. Indeed, studies highlight the increasing prevalence of blended researcher-activist and researcher-user identities²⁰. At the same time, it is also clear that the relationship between institutional identities, power and knowledge is becoming increasingly complicated at a time when fractional and temporary employment conditions are becoming commonplace. The large research organisation may be embodied in the person of a precariously employed and inexperienced junior researcher while the ‘freelance’ community worker may bring a full portfolio of well paid work, decades of knowledge, significant resources and the full confidence to pull rank and claim seniority.

It makes more sense, therefore, to unsettle the essentialist idea that fixes academics and community partners in particular roles and identities and simply attempts to work out how well projects have overcome these ‘divides’ and, instead, to work with an understanding of project participants’ identities as constructed in and through their interactions on projects. The significant question is not so much how university and community partners overcome divides, therefore, but rather: when are different identities, and competing accountability regimes invoked as reasons for certain courses of action, by whom, to what end?

 *The significant question is not so much how university and community partners overcome divides, therefore, but rather: when are different identities, and competing accountability regimes invoked as reasons for certain courses of action, by whom, to what end?*

²⁰ This echoes the findings of the Mind the Gap report which reports 29% of 210 respondents from HEIs and non-HEIs see themselves with a dual role of researcher-user. Bell, N. et al. (2014). Mind the gap: Rigor, and relevance in collaborative heritage science research. Exeter: university Exeter.

At the same time, it is clear that the negotiations of roles and processes on projects are deeply tied up with almost mythical ideas of 'the university' and 'the community'. Indeed, much of the work of successful projects is done in distinguishing the real individuals involved in projects, from these symbolic almost fantastical identities. A central part of the work of these projects, indeed, is in taking these fantasies seriously – what does the desire for 'authentic' research really look like in practice? What does 'credibility' really look like if we take this aspiration seriously?

Such questions can require project participants to reflect upon their own claims to authority – to what extent do they really represent 'the community'? To what extent is this disciplinary approach the only or most appropriate way of producing meaningful knowledge? This work is necessarily unsettling and can be disruptive of existing identities. These disruptions necessarily engender emotional labour – the slow building up of trust and the development of commitments and clarity of such commitments between project teams. In other words, what makes these projects strong is also what makes them difficult, hard work and meaningful. Which is why they are so often fraught and tense collaborations; if it feels too easy, you probably aren't doing it right.

Within Connected Communities, project teams are responding in very different ways to such unsettling processes – some are returning to and valuing the creation of clear divides and responsibilities in the research process, with clearer lines of public and community accountability. Others are intentionally creating opportunities to further blur those boundaries and develop both relational expertise and new communities of practice. Understanding how to do such projects well, as a consequence, is likely to involve both the time and a willingness to creatively play with traditional identities in the research process and develop a new language for talking about what it takes to get these projects to work.

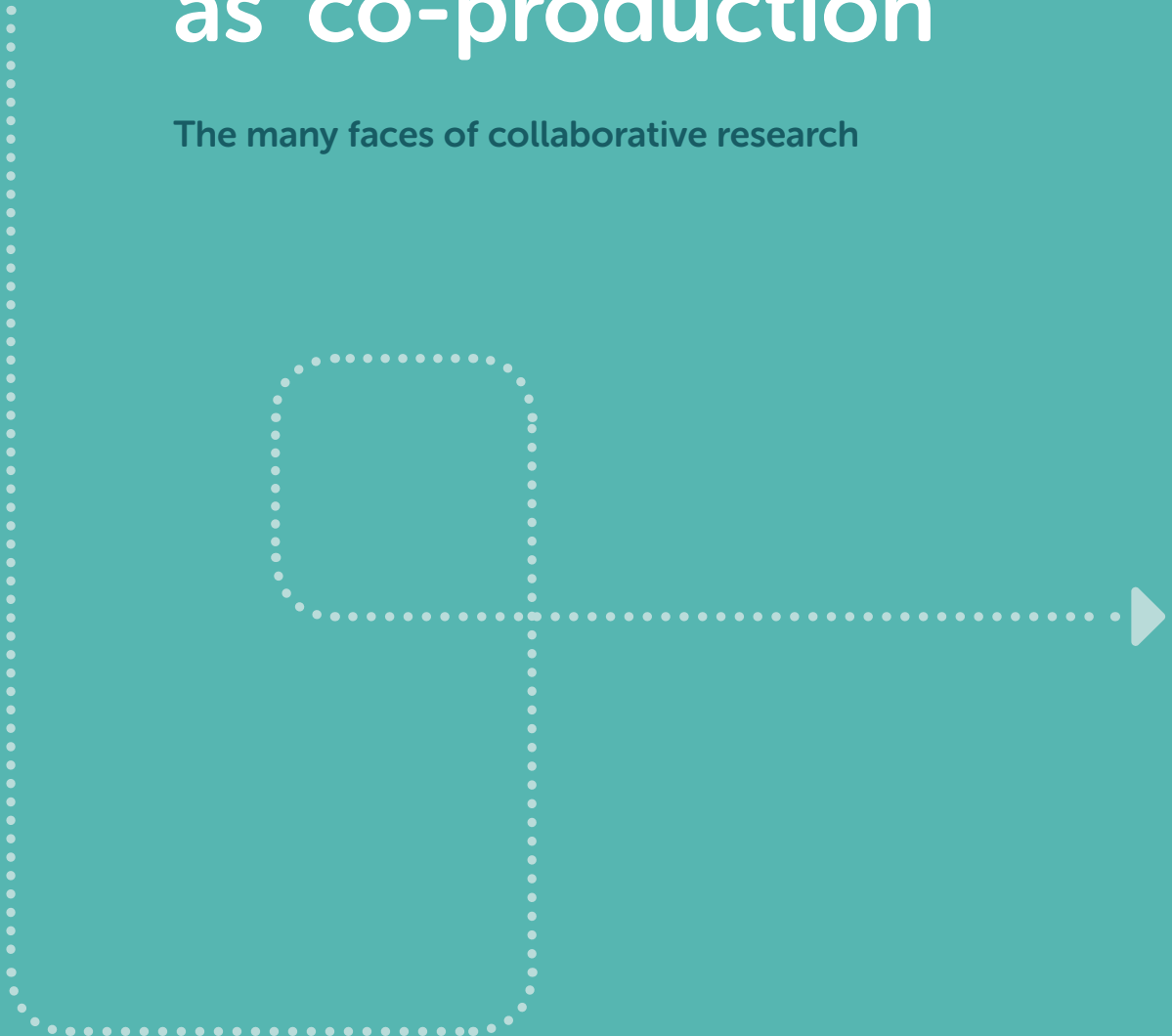




4

There's no such thing as 'co-production'

The many faces of collaborative research



Introduction

So far, we have discussed how the Connected Communities Programme was formed, how participants come to be part of the programme and how project teams take on and negotiate different roles in projects. This chapter provides an overview of the range of projects and research that is being conducted under the auspices of the programme. It aims to make visible the many different traditions that underpin these research projects, the important differences in aspiration and methods that emerge from different traditions, and some of the examples of how individual project teams have interpreted the invitation to conduct 'collaborative & interdisciplinary' research in the programme.

In so doing, we hope to achieve two things: first, to make visible the fact that collaborative models of research are not simply a recent innovation promoted by research councils or governments under the term 'co-production', but are the product of rich intellectual, artistic and social traditions; second, to articulate some of the significant differences in philosophy, purpose and practice that characterise these traditions.

This, we hope, will help move the field beyond the unhelpful and imprecise terminology that plagues it, with its over-reliance upon a vague concept of 'co-production'. Instead, we hope that this will help to clarify that there are different traditions, purposes and hence processes at play in collaborative research with communities; each of which brings with it different criteria by which a project might seek to be judged, and different emphases upon method, governance, accountability and philosophy. At the same time, this greater degree of precision about the key assumptions projects are working with may help project teams to more successfully identify where there are common causes, world views and objectives across projects, even when at first glance their methods and processes may seem to be radically different.



Deep roots, long traditions

To date, over 300 projects have been funded by the Connected Communities Programme bringing in researchers from organisations and research fields as diverse as gerontology and cultural heritage, environmental campaigning and youth action, community arts and philosophy. This is an eclectic, heterogeneous programme that examines 'community' in all its highly diverse forms – online, face to face, place based, professional, of interest, of accident – and from radically different theoretical and political perspectives.


The commitment of the programme to methodological innovation, in particular, to conducting research with, by and for communities, however, means that the programme has attracted project participants who, in the main, draw upon intellectual, artistic and social traditions that explicitly value previously hidden or marginalised perspectives and experiences. That these research approaches are rich and longstanding is evident, for example, if we focus simply on one of them. A quick scan of the new Encyclopedia of Action Research, for example, documents 9 different goals, 39 different methods, 62 methodologies and 17 different philosophical underpinnings²¹. Such depth and complexity can be seen in all the different traditions employed in the programme.

The following list provides a very brief summary of the main approaches, references points and issues that are invoked by both university and community partners in the Connected Communities Programme. These are central in framing how project teams differently interpret the programme's invitation to 'co-produce' research. We use the term tradition to cover a broad cluster of concerns, topics and methods that are shaped both internally to the university by particular disciplines, and externally to the university by topics that generate particular tensions in the encounter between academic and public knowledge. These traditions include (but are not limited to):

 *Collaborative models of research are not simply a recent innovation promoted by research councils or governments under the term 'co-production'.*

²¹ Brydon-Miller, M. and Coghlan, D. (eds) (2014). The Sage Encyclopedia of Action Research. London: Sage.

- Artists and researchers working within the interconnected but distinct fields of **participatory arts, community-engaged arts, arts and health, relational aesthetics, critical arts practice** and the related but distinct approach within the university of **practice as research**. These have diverse origins, from schools of fine arts, to 19th century social experiments, to early 20th century soviet schools, to the situationists, to Latin American social movement and theatre. It can take the form of arts practice as a means of hypothesis testing in which writing and arts practice form equal components of a portfolio of work, a critical social practice concerned with challenging elites and taking art out of galleries and into the world, or include professional artists working with health professionals. It is a constellation of traditions that engenders lively debate about participation, quality and process (Reference points here include: Barret and Bolt, 2007; Bourriaud et al., 2002; Bishop, 2012; Carter, 2005; Campbell, 2015; Coessens, 2009; Kester, 2004/2011)
- **Feminist, critical race theory and post-colonial traditions** are commonly referenced within the programme. Here the nature of ‘cognitive justice’ is examined and projects seek to develop new forms of theory emerging from and reflecting previously marginalised world views and perspectives. Such perspectives are explicitly political, and question the dominance of institutionalised, western, male and white forms of knowledge; they work from profound ontological and epistemological critiques of positivist science and social science. (Reference points here include: Butler, 1990; Connell, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2007; Fanon, 2008, 1965; Gilligan, 1992; Haraway, 1991)
- Those working around environmental agendas bring experience of the highly charged political debates about the differential costs of climate change and the eradication of **indigenous forms of knowledge**, as well as the tensions of reconciling popular and scientific knowledges. They also increasingly demand attention be paid to how the needs and **knowledge of ‘non-human others’** be taken into accounts. (Reference points here include: Jasanoff, 2004; Wynne, 1996; Irwin and Wynne, 2003; Tsing, 2005; Brosius et al., 1998)

 *The programme has attracted project participants who draw upon intellectual, artistic and social traditions that explicitly value previously hidden or marginalised perspectives and experiences.*

- Historians working in the programme draw upon **diverse traditions of public history**, often recognising that academic history emerged as a professional enterprise only around the 1870s. Before that, a ‘thousand different hands’ in every generation had shaped their own engagements with the past: from oral traditions to antiquarianism. The traditions of people’s and workers’ history, as well as community history include references to everything from Ruskin’s work in the 19th century, to the 1930s Workers Film and Photography League and the WEA’s long tradition of bringing together academics to work with communities and the university settlement movement. From the 1960s, the UK History Workshop movement drew on disparate experiences with workers’ education, archaeology and the arts to inspire many participatory research projects; more recent examples include the 1980s Worker Writer Movements and the Trades Union Research Centre in Birmingham. (Reference points here include: History Workshop Journal; Kean & Ashton, 2009; Kean & Paul, 2013; Myers and Grosvenor, 2011; Lloyd & Moore, 2015; Samuel, 1994)
- **Anthropological traditions** are implicitly referenced in the programme in the extensive use of ethnographic methods. Here, these methods are often employed reflexively, with a concern for the way that communities can play a role in co-interpretation of data. This tradition also increasingly encourages attention to be paid to the material cultures of communities, and to the way in which the cultural record is informed not only by the artefacts created and used by communities, but also by interactions with landscapes, climate and non-human others. (Reference points here include: Lassiter, 2008; Dalglish, 2013; Sayer, 2014; Ingold, 2000)
- A number of researchers draw on approaches and techniques emerging from health and medicine, and from science and innovation. The practices of **patient engagement** and the perspectives of **‘Responsible Innovation’** are a common reference point for those working on wellbeing and health in communities. Project teams here often come from or work closely with the traditions of public understanding of science,



and public oversight of technological and medical engagement. Here, collaborative research is often understood as a means of promoting public learning or of developing the understanding of professionals about the concerns and priorities of wider publics. (Reference points here include: Benneworth, 2013; Benneworth et al., 2009; Owen et al., 2013; Owen et al., 2012; Williams, 2006)

- **Cultural studies** perspectives also play an important role, with clusters of researchers particularly concerned with the inter-relationship between politics, economics and culture. In particular, they draw on Frankfurt School, Bourdieu and Critical Theory traditions to critique the elision of concepts of ‘creativity’, ‘culture’, ‘heritage’ and ‘talent’ with particular social classes and groups. They conduct research that refocuses awareness and attention to the knowledge and creativity of everyday lives. (Reference points here include: Hartley, 2005; Bourdieu, 1984, 2001; Florida, 2002; Hall, 1990, 1997; Benjamin, 2008; Bennett et al., 2013²²)
- **Action Research** and **Participatory Action Research** methodologies are the foundation for many of the participants’ practice in the programme. Here, researchers contest the validity of a ‘theory/practice’ divide, and often work with the Aristotelian/Deweyan concept of praxis. In so doing, they explicitly value action as well as theory, product and process as well as analysis. In these approaches, project teams are concerned with building participants’ capacity to critique and question current arrangements, and innovate in the development of new social practices. (Reference points here include: Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Bradbury, 2015; Dewey, 2004; Dewey and Rogers, 2012; Eikelund, 2008; Brydon-Miller, 1997; Brydon-Miller et al., 2013; Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991; Gaventa, 1993)



²² See also the literature review by the Understanding Everyday Participation Project Team here: <http://www.everydayparticipation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/uep-literature-review-formatted-version-final.pdf>

- **Communities of Practice** and traditions of situated, informal and public learning are strongly invoked by a number of project teams seeking to build not only projects, but sustainable long term communities able to develop the skills and resources to research and act together into the future. These perspectives pay close attention to the ways in which individuals and groups can be apprenticed into and become expert in shared ways of knowing, develop critical and reflective skills and are often located within more substantial efforts to change institutional and social relationships as well as work through individual projects. (Reference points here include: Hart & Wolff, 2006; Hart et al, 2013; Hooks, 1994; Freire, 2000; Lave, 1996; Wenger, 2007)
- **'Co-design'**, a term more frequently used by architecture, planning, and design research teams, draws on a variety of traditions: from the growth of 'responsible' product design, to ethnography and user centred design in computing, to urban studies and development traditions, to asset mapping approaches. Here questions of utility, efficiency, practicability and access to innovative ideas mingle with concerns for public participation and radical new approaches to the relationship between planners, policy makers and publics. (Reference points here include: Jacobs, 2002; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Kretzmann et al., 2005; Alexiou, 2010)
- The research councils' favoured terminology **'Co-production'**, as we have already mentioned, is increasingly used as a catch-all term for any type of collaborative research. It is understood more precisely by social scientists and policy analysts within the programme, however, as emerging from a tradition of analyses of public services dating back to the economist Elinor Ostrum. Here, social goods are understood as necessarily being 'co-produced' between publics and professionals, and that therefore the experiences, actions and contributions of citizens are important foundation for understanding how to produce better public services. (Reference points here include: Durose et al, 2013; Ostrum, 1996; Stephens, 2008)



- Many participants in the programme also explicitly locate themselves in the critiques, traditions and language of **civil and disability rights** movements, and prioritise issues of equality of access, legislative change, resources and entitlements. This perspective is also complemented by those who look beyond academic traditions to the cultural traditions of punk, social movement building and peace campaigning. Here, the concern is less with knowledge production, than with identifying and innovating with the legal, civil, cultural, social and political tactics necessary to effect change on the basis of already known experiences of inequality. (Reference points here include: McRuer, 2006; Kafer, 2013; Shakespeare, 2013; Michalko 2002; Titchkosky, 2007; Crow, 1992; Morris, 2014; Davis, 1995; Thomson, 1997)
- Finally, **Open Innovation, Commons and Crowd** perspectives focus on the new models of social mobilisation and knowledge exchange that are enabled by the legal, cultural and social practices emerging outside either market or state control and (often) supercharged by the connectivity and information gathering affordances of the internet. These perspectives see a new role for communities in scrutinising and managing social institutions by gaining access to massive banks of public data (open access). They also envisage the potential for large numbers of people to be coordinated and new communities created to contribute information, knowledge and expertise to much larger projects sometimes understood as a new 'commons'. (Reference points here include: Ostrom, 1990; Bollier & Henrich, 2012; Stallman, 2002; Benkler, 2006)

Clearly, far from being a 'novel' form of research, then, the collaborative research field is a longstanding tradition that has myriad robust theoretical and methodological foundations. In this way, it equals the so-called 'traditional' research field in its myriad competing schools and approaches.



These diverse traditions brought together within the overarching family of Connected Communities give rise to very different organisational forms for conducting research.

For example, and to caricature a little, each of these different perspectives gives rise to different underpinning assumptions about how research relates to social change. Radical participatory traditions, for example, will tend to prioritise the development of consciousness, knowledge and capability amongst grassroots participants as a basis for effecting social change. In contrast, co-design approaches might emphasise the creation of new artefacts and services. Civil rights traditions might focus on the actions and knowledge needed to change legal precedent and statutory instruments. While traditions concerned with cognitive justice will want to reconfigure the institutions and practices through which knowledge is produced in future. In contrast, historical and ethnographic traditions might focus on changing the public record, enriching the archive, and producing more pluralistic accounts of reality.

These theories of change are premised upon different assumptions about reality, different views of how change happens, different ideas about the role of knowledge in society. They are not necessarily incompatible, but they give rise to highly diverse models of research and assume very different relationships within the research process.

The formative tensions that shape collaborative projects

If we are to understand how and why knowledge is being produced in the way it is in these community-university collaborations, therefore, we need to understand that there is no single research method that can be labelled 'co-production'. Instead, there are myriad different forms, practices and methods that project teams are using to address the question of how to create new knowledge and practice about 'communities'. Indeed, simply mapping these different reference points makes visible the fact that 'co-production' is itself a discourse

 *Far from being a 'novel' form of research, the collaborative research field is a longstanding tradition that equals the so-called 'traditional' research field in its myriad competing schools and approaches.*

that is a political intervention; it is an idea which is being fought over to include and exclude certain methods and partnerships.

The diversity of these many different forms and traditions of collaborative research practice indeed eludes the production of a neat taxonomy of schools or methods in which certain approaches are necessarily understood as more desirable and in keeping with the ‘true meaning’ of co-produced research than others. Instead of outlining a new hierarchy or taxonomy of ‘acceptable’ methods against which others might be judged, then, we identify a set of twelve key tensions that offer critical choices about how collaborative research is designed and conducted and that demonstrate how such choices are informed by different world views, theories of change and traditions of research.

These tensions are important as they are critical indicators of the nature of the collaboration that will be created between academic and public knowledge, and of the underlying theory of social change and purpose that the project is assuming. The attention given to each of these tensions, as well as the way that the project team seeks to reconcile them, is what gives distinctive shape to each project. We present them here in no particular order and invite the reader to examine how they would rank these in terms of importance, and how they would position themselves in response to each of these questions.

Q: Why do we work with communities and with public knowledge?

This question relates to the assumptions a project team is working with about the value of communities’ knowledge. It broadly captures tensions between, for example, participatory and explicitly democratic projects which are positioned around the rights of communities to produce knowledge and those working within design or ethnographic traditions, in which communities are understood as essential resources of insight and knowledge.

Communities have a right to contribute, shape and inform the knowledge produced about them



Communities have knowledge, ideas and experience that will enhance the quality of knowledge produced by the project



“Cos I do you know feel strongly that without the people feeling that they’re part of it then it’s just ... it’s not an accurate picture, where it should be. Because it’s an evaluation of something that happens in real life, it’s not an engineering project which has got nuts and bolts, it’s got people’s emotions and feelings and experiences.”

(Kitty, Early Career Researcher, Large Grant)





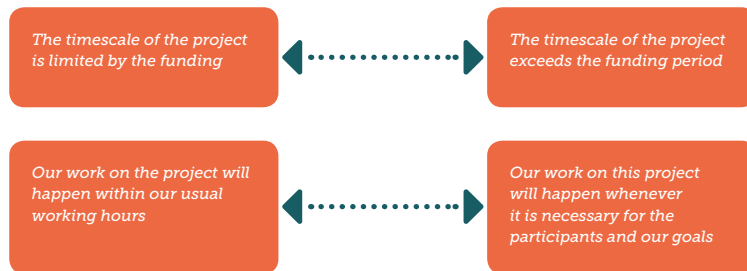
Q: Where do new ideas come from?


This question relates specifically to how university and community partners think about where novelty originates in the world. Community organisations often turn to university partnership as a way of understanding and validating their own innovations and new approaches. Reciprocally, university partners may consider their research a source of novel ideas and see community partners as means for testing, validating and disseminating these ideas. Navigating competing ideas of where novelty originates is one of the tensions underpinning many of the critiques of linear research dissemination, as well as critiques of simplistic instrumental accounts of public accountability.



Q: What is the temporality of this project?

This question relates to the way that time is thought about in projects, which leads to different interpersonal relations and assumes different sorts of commitments to the activities and the people involved. Where projects are positioned within a wider context of social movement building or interpersonal commitments then the temporality of a project will often be considered differently from situations in which projects are considered as a project with a definitive end date with an end product.



 *The diversity of different traditions of collaborative research eludes the production of a neat taxonomy in which certain approaches are understood as more in keeping with the 'true meaning' of co-produced research than others.*



Q: What is the nature of the human relationships in this project?

This question is related to the previous issue of temporality, as it concerns the expectations that project team members might have about reciprocity, motivation and the longer term legacy of the project. It is when there are incompatible views about the nature of the interpersonal relationships that significant difficulties are faced by project participants.

"We've worked with the people in that community for a long time and they know that we do as much as possible to work in a partnership way with them... We are very much accepted as being part of those communities insofar as they're interested in the work that we're doing."
(Matthew, PI on one Large Grant and Co-I on one Large Grant)

Our relationships are for the duration and purpose of the project



Our relationships will outlast the project and are important in their own right

Our relationship is defined through contract and economic exchange



Our relationship is defined through personal commitment

Q: Are we concerned with changing knowledge or changing reality?

This question can be a point of real tension between university and community partners, as well as between researchers working in different disciplines. It relates to the core underpinning motivations for projects, and the ways in which these different starting points lead to very different priorities in terms of the focus of work and evaluation of positive legacy. Such tensions between different motivations also raise questions about the distinctive contribution of 'research funding' as opposed, for example, to investment in community arts, youth work, health and frontline activities. How project teams respond to this tension tends to lay the foundations for how a project should be judged.

We are trying to address a problem/issue with what we know and how we know (epistemological starting point)



We are trying to address a problem/issue in the world (ontological starting point)

Q: Who 'counts' as 'community' for this project?

This question relates to the tricky idea of how a 'community' is conceptualised in these projects, and to the issue of what it means to work legitimately with communities in research. It also relates to questions about how best the knowledge of communities is engaged and who is best placed to do this – the academics or organisations who have been working with communities for a long time? This tension also raises questions about gatekeeping and accountability, of allocation of resources, and of who can speak 'for' communities.

Our focus is on working with grassroots communities

Our focus is on working with organisations who represent and mediate communities

"The quality of opportunity that it could give for those 10 to 12 people, I felt, was a worthwhile investment. [...] it's very hard to find a way of phrasing it that doesn't sound patronising ... but to be taken ... to be asked your opinion on a survey is one thing, to be actively included in active research I think is very different. And I think it does have a lot to do with the self-confidence and the boost and the opportunities to access the environment those people wouldn't otherwise have had."

(Pam, Peer Support Co-ordinator, local community organisation)

Q: What is our view of reality?

This question relates to the ways in which projects conceive of the relationship between research, action and the world. It concerns, for example, whether projects see the world as socially constructed through practice, or as external reality waiting to be discovered. This can be a particular flashpoint in projects, both between community and university partners, and between different disciplines as it also implies very different purposes to research – either as an intervention in the shaping of the world, or as a means of describing it.

We see reality as something external to us that we can discover

We see reality as something that can be shaped by our actions, choices and decisions

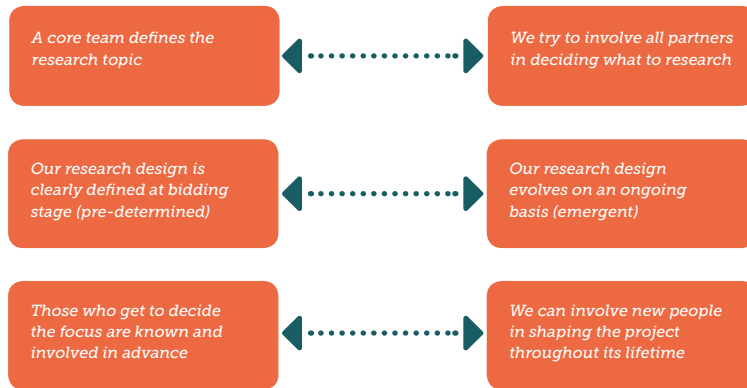
"If we're saying that community organisations need to be central to the whole process of research then actually the logical progression of that is that they also have to be central to the whole decision making about research."

(Claudia, PI Large Grant)

Q: Who chooses the research topic and when?

This question has been a particular focus of attention in the Connected Communities Programme, and is increasingly a concern for research councils. The shift towards co-produced research is often assumed to be a shift towards ever earlier engagement of communities in the design of research projects. In practice, the question of who decides the research focus is a question that arises more than once

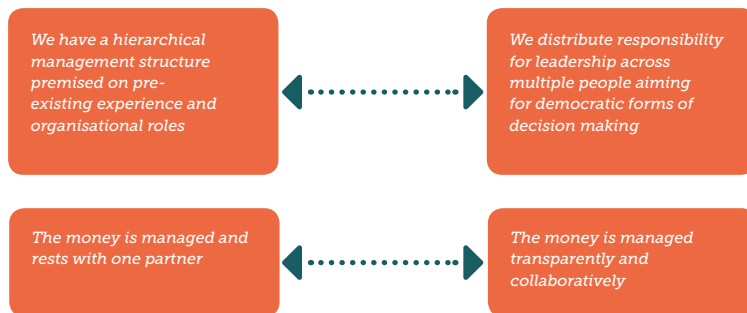
throughout the course of these collaborative projects as networks and connections increase. How projects answer this will significantly shape the type of ‘collaboration’ that then follows.



"I think one of the interesting things in all these projects is that you can't expect people to buy into something when they're not actually bought into it from the very beginning ... and this goes back to the whole design of the project, in that we wanted to follow the logic of a project through. We knew we couldn't pre-select in 2010 which partners we'd be working with in 2014 to 2015 ... particularly given how turbulent the environment was."
(Brenda, Co-I Large Grant)

Q: How should governance reflect our values?

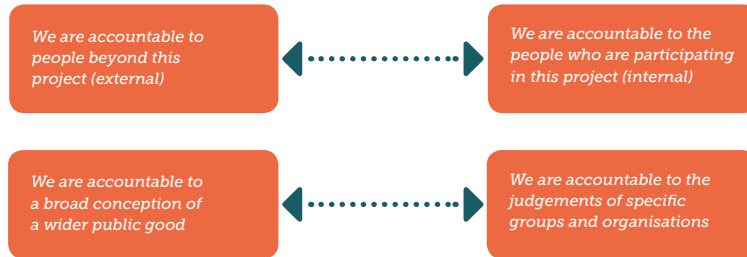
This question relates to the broader question of the governance of research, and the way in which values relating to knowledge are or are not extended into questions of finance, accountability and decision-making. It also reflects whether project teams see the mechanisms by which research is governed and managed as connected with or autonomous from the processes of knowledge production.



"Ours becomes more coproduced as we move into this final phase, this kind of communities and intervention phase where we're genuinely handing over control of quite a large budget - I think it's 40, 50K to spend in each of the two neighbourhoods... Which ... for me always sets up the interesting question ... the arts partners would have us spend it on certain things, but the community panel may not value those things in the same way."
(James, PI Large Grant and PI/Co-I on three smaller awards)

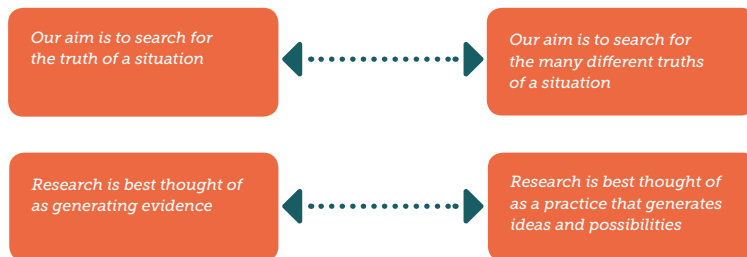
Q: Who are we accountable to?

As discussed in the last chapter this question is concerned with the competing imperatives and publics to which a project is directed. Here are some of the most sharply debated tensions between groups working operating with competing ideas of ‘the public good’.

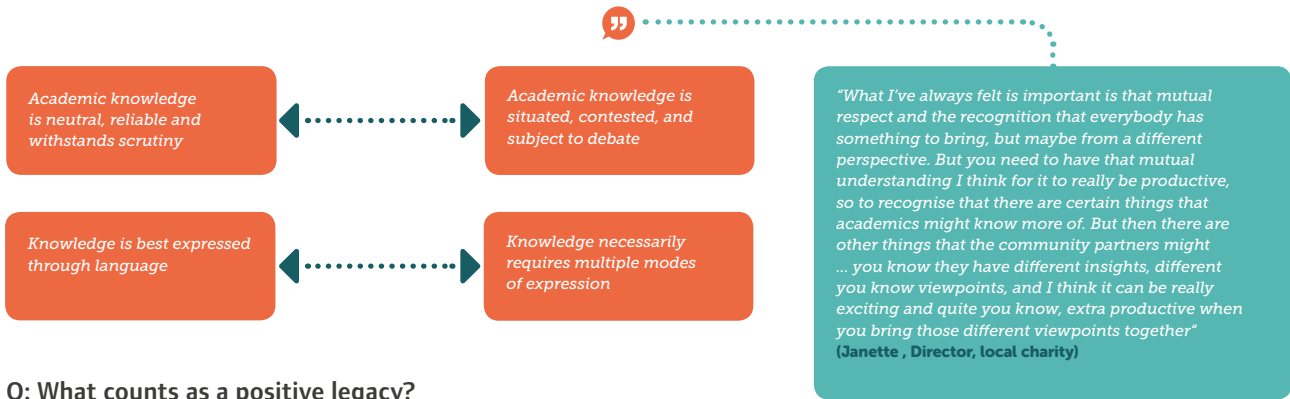


Q: What assumptions about ‘knowledge’ are we working with?

This question is concerned with project tensions that relate to the politics of knowledge, its origins, purposes and practices. It is here that there are significant differences between different research traditions, and the answers that project teams choose to give to these questions generate very different approaches to, for example, legacy. Conflicting ideas about knowledge often underpin mismatches in expectations between university and community partners in projects.

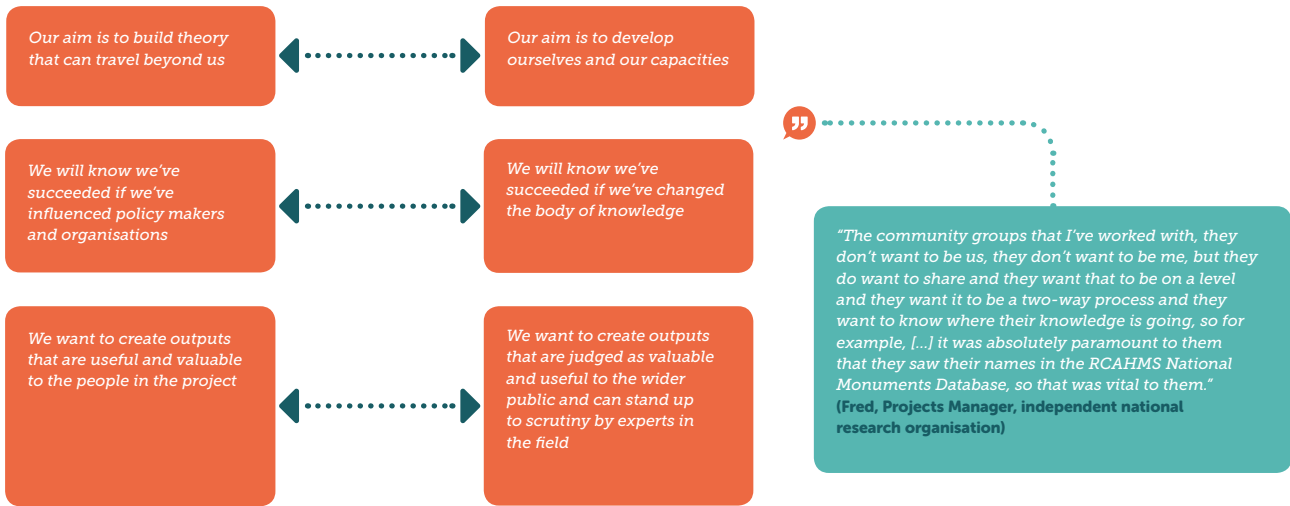


 **Conflicting ideas about knowledge often underpin mismatches in expectations between university and community partners in projects.**



Q: What counts as a positive legacy?

This question is specifically concerned with the implicit theories of change and purpose that projects work with. It highlights significant differences between research traditions, and is a key site in which the Connected Communities Programme is developing new practices (see Chapter 6).



Diverse models emerging from different traditions

These twelve questions capture some of the critical tensions that project teams are grappling with, and which they are often seeking to reconfigure as complementary rather than contradictory aspirations. The way such tensions are reconciled or addressed generates very different project methods and very different accounts of value and purpose. These choices are also often interdependent. One of the critical questions, then, is which of these tensions do project teams identify as being most important to address; which, therefore, will they prioritise as shaping and informing future decisions?

What is important to note, however, is that exploring how projects address these tensions helps us to see that there are multiple and shifting alliances that might be formed across projects that may look on the surface very different. For example, we might find that relatively methodologically traditional ethnographic research projects might find a common cause with the radical traditions of participatory research in their common starting point in identifying a problem with dominant accounts of reality. Similarly, we can see that projects that on the surface may seem very similar – those that work with deep democratic methods and processes in their governance – are in fact operating with highly divergent ideas of what counts as ‘community’, with real tensions between those that work with representative models and mediators, and those who work with ‘grassroots’ communities. Understanding the basis for these differences and commonalities is the foundation for beginning to build a better understanding of the different contributions these projects are making both to knowledge and to social reality.

The following five projects give a flavour of some of the ways in which projects in Connected Communities are addressing these tensions and consequently generating very different structures, processes and research methods (the www.connected-communities.org.uk website hosts summaries of all Connected Communities projects).



Productive Margins²³ is a five year project that operates with an explicit aspiration to ‘co-produce’ research. It draws strongly on the co-production tradition associated with public services as well as bringing in perspectives from participatory arts, participatory action research and critical theory. The project involves a collaboration between two universities and seven community organisations. The broad research aspiration was to explore how communities who are often not part of these processes could understand and reframe the practices that ‘regulate’ their lives. The research driver is primarily epistemological – a concern to create more democratic ways for communities to build knowledge and influence change. With the exception of two case studies, the specific research topics were not defined in advance. Instead, the project operates a ‘forum’ in which all the community and university partners regularly come together to propose topics for research, before creating sub groups that will work on these themes. While there were some previous professional working relationships between community organisations and the university, these relationships were not personal; and although in many cases they are longstanding and are expected to last beyond the end of the project, the relationships in the project are firmly focused on achieving the projects’ goals. The project is working explicitly to produce both scholarly and practical legacies, and is grappling with the ways in which this can be best achieved. Because of the investment in building trust between participants, new partners are not able to join the project and new topics cannot be proposed from outside.



It is in relation to five £50k ‘research pots’ and to research assistant time, that the forum is able to make financial decisions, which amounts to £350k in a £2.4m research project. The forum, therefore, has been a site of intense practical debate, in which the participants have been working to co-evolve their own principles and practices of co-production. The project has been inventing everything collaboratively – not only the research topics, but the processes by which they will be chosen. It is a long, slow process in which frustrations run high. After two years, however, a set of project topics have been agreed, (poverty, food, social isolation) working groups

23 <http://www.productivemargins.ac.uk/>

have been established, research assistants have been employed, and the competing aspirations to achieve research that makes a difference to the participating communities and research that pushes forward scholarly knowledge, have been negotiated.

Tangible Memories²⁴ is an 18 month project funded under the Digital Capital Call. It was stimulated by a real world problem – a concern for the experiences of older adults moving into care homes and how they could be enabled to better tell the stories of their lives. The aim of the research was to create a set of tools and artefacts that would address the lived issues of the community of residents in care homes and project participants were therefore selected on the basis of their expertise – whether the lived expertise of care home residents or the technical expertise of health experts and arts specialists. It draws strongly on co-design traditions as well as ethnographic approaches as they have been used in user-centred design in computing. It also draws in specialists in oral history and folklore and arts practice.

The working relationships on this project were, in the main, new to the project but friendships and personal commitments to the work rapidly formed. All participants were able to identify in some way with the research topic at a personal level. Most participants have quickly reframed their working relationships as relational rather than simply contractual, and all are now reporting working above and beyond their contracted hours because of their ‘care’ for the project. Decision-making on the project took place in team meetings where the folklorist and user centred design specialists, and artists would report back on the views of care home residents, and other expert views were taken into account. In order to build a better understanding of the requirements for the project, new experts and community expertise were brought in over the course of the project – in particular, the workers in the care homes.



24 <http://tangible-memories.com/>

The project has produced a wide range of outputs – from an ‘App’ that can be used in care homes, to a new interface that reflects the constraints of very limited movement capabilities, to the creation of a musical rocking chair. It has also produced friendships and working relationships that have already extended beyond the project to the search for new collaborations.

The **Ethno-ornithology World Archive**²⁵ is a project prompted by the observation that birds play an important role in cultures around the world as well as serving as important environmental indicators. More fundamentally, this project imagines a future global community made up of individuals with a passion for and interest in birds, as well as a historical community shaped by the cultures, fairy tales, myths and accounts of birds. Underpinning the project is the idea that people can understand their common humanity through understanding that there is a common love of nature. The project is inspired by contemporary currents in collaborative research towards the creation of mass open archives, and by the potential of individual citizens to collectively create transformative accounts of reality when these accounts are articulated together. As the PI says ‘it’s massively democratic. But what people will see in this extraordinary dataset (laughs) if we can call it that, you know, is you’ll have an insight into your own species that you had no idea was there, which has the potential to be transformative and is massively exciting’. The project is necessarily eclectic in its choice of collaborators, engaging with anyone who has a contribution to offer. Governance and management of the project rest with the academics but the aim of the project is explicitly to bring into being a new community, to use knowledge, narrative and research to create new connections and relationships where previously such relationships did not exist. In the words of the Principal Investigator ‘To put very simply and rather crudely, and maybe rather tritely, how EWA could help in those kinds of things [peace and conflict] – it is difficult to hate somebody when you know that they also love robins.’ The project is still ongoing.



“It is difficult to hate somebody when you know that they also love robins.”

²⁵ <http://www.ewa-archive.net/>

Dig where we stand²⁶ explicitly draws on the traditions of the History Workshop in working from the base assumption that ‘a community’s sense of itself and place rests on an understanding of its past’. The project comprised both skills exchange and capacity building, to support community groups and youth groups to develop the tools to conduct archaeological research and interpret materials in community archives and the local area. The project explicitly built in co-leadership of the project as a partnership between academics and community organisations – a process that was facilitated by the availability of separate HLF funding for the community organisations. The aims of the project were focused on embodied learning and legacy, as well as the subsequent development of the archive and the public record, achieved through community participation. The project worked in the first instance with representative organisations, but saw these as mediators to enable access to grassroots communities.

In Conversation With...²⁷ draws on the growing fields of post-human, multi-species and more-than-human research that see the traditions of knowledge production that are focused on humans alone as problematic. The project begins by arguing that our capacity to understand and respond to a range of environmental problems requires engagement with non-human others. To that end, the project intentionally builds on the emphasis within participatory research on including those affected by processes of knowledge production to ask what might be involved in enabling non-human participants to engage in the research process – specifically, bees, dogs, trees and water. In so doing, they are aware that they need to work with representatives able to speak on behalf of these communities and able to educate the researchers to work with them – for example, working with beekeepers. The project’s aim is to make an epistemological intervention in the collaborative research arena, by provoking debates about the boundaries of participatory research and developing guidance and research methods to assist with pluralising the knowledge production process beyond the human.




26 <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/dig-where-we-stand/>

27 <http://www.morethanhumanresearch.com/>

Summary

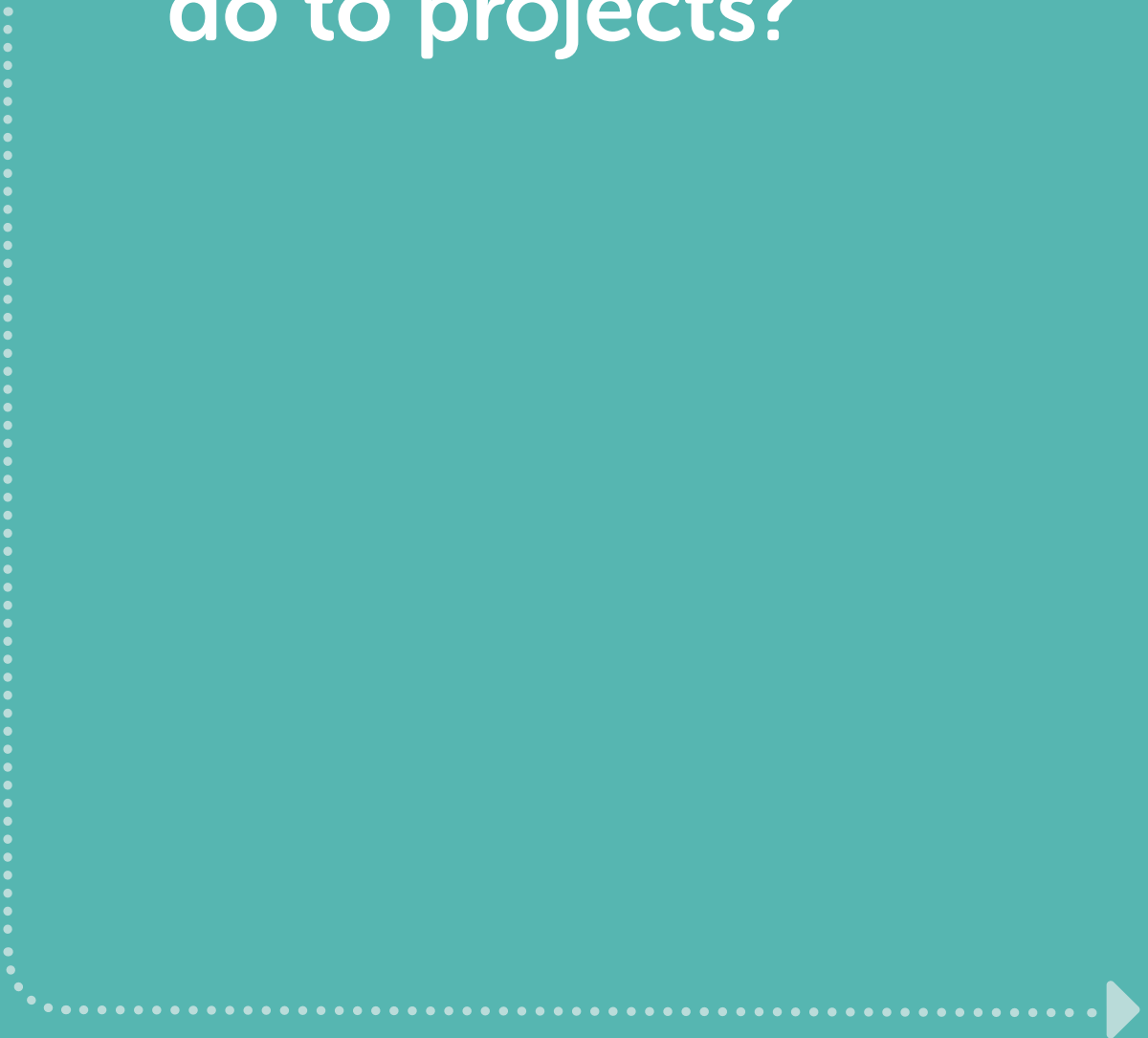
Our aim in outlining the multiple traditions that are at play in the Connected Communities Programme and the key tensions that projects are addressing, is to make visible the richness and complexity of the projects that are clustered under the broad invitation to 'co-produce' research in the programme. Our aim is also to cut through the at times unhelpful semantic debate about what counts as 'true' co-production and to make visible the fact that while project methods may differ, there are often commonalities between projects that would serve as a basis for both collective learning and for common cause. Or at least, that where there are differences, we can identify where and why these originate. Now that the field is so richly populated with case studies and examples of highly diverse practice, the challenge for participants is not merely to police each others' levels of adherence to a particular model of 'co-production', but to collectively and critically examine how the claims, for example, to democratic accountability that are made by many of these projects, are best served through different governance approaches and research methods.

 *While project methods may differ, there are often commonalities between projects that would serve as a basis for both collective learning and for common cause.*



5

What does the money
do to projects?



Introduction

Collaborative research projects do not run on thin air. They are budgeted for, staffed, resourced and administered. Researchers are employed. Expenses are paid. Contracts are signed. Deadlines are set. Objectives are defined. Such practical realities can often seem to be the unglamorous cousins of the intellectual exploration of social change that are the ‘real business’ of the projects. In practical terms, however, questions of money, of time and resource, and how these are organised and administered are critical factors in shaping how and indeed whether projects are able to achieve their goals. Bureaucracy matters.

The ‘money issue’ is a particularly live issue at present as communities, civil society, cultural organisations and local government struggle with austerity economics. Jobs are being cut, funding sources are drying up, the demand to identify and secure new funding streams is increasing. In this context, the potential for community partners to collaborate with universities has two clear economic attractions – first, as a new funding source to bring in resource; second, as a route to evaluating, evidencing and promoting organisations’ activities to better secure resource from other funders. Universities and academics, too, are far from immune to the changing economic conditions. In tightening economic circumstances, universities are under pressure to secure research grants and their overheads, and precariously employed individual academics are often looking for funding to provide employment for themselves or junior colleagues. Moreover, limited public finances increasingly demand that universities make a case for their public value. Collaborations with community partners that demonstrate public benefit therefore increasingly have a monetary value, as these activities can be translated into ‘Impact Narratives’ that bring with them central funding for research. Participation in collaborative research, then, is rarely entirely free from economic considerations. ”

In this context, a programme like Connected Communities is a significant investment. With over £30m of funding allocated to research over the last five years, it is arguably creating a new climate

“There’s no money left in the local authority, we’re all broke, absolutely broke, we need good evidence based practice before we can take it any further.”
(Martin, Quality Assurance Officer, local authority)

“I think ultimately it boils down to the fact that this wouldn’t be doable if it wasn’t for the match funding. From my point of view I guess the main focus for having that academic input was the match funding if I’m honest with you.”
(Donald, Co-founder/Director of Community Interest Company)

“People are losing jobs over the fact that the scoring of their papers, their books, did not add up to 11 and therefore take a teaching-only contract or get the hell out. And so from a really brutal point of view, from a really survival point of view – great to do all these participatory things, but what’s the point of gaining all those skills if you’re going to be out of a job in 2020. Or indeed in 2014. [...] I’ve sat on interview panels in the last year, and what do you go straight for? – how much income have you captured and what your papers look like.”
(James, PI Large Grant and PI/Co-I on three smaller awards)

“[a]cademia has changed hasn’t it quite dramatically in the last... well in a short space of time, it’s gone from men with elbow patches in ivory towers reading books, getting study leave etc. – that’s not what academia is now - you’re out chasing grants, it’s different. So I think we’re going to come together naturally anyway. People who are around academia, myself 10 years ago, saw people sitting in rooms not really engaging in the real world and thinking a lot, those people have lost their jobs [...] we’re all after the same pot of money now [...] it’s levelled the playing field almost a little bit you know.”
(Martin, Quality Assurance Officer, local authority)

for collaborative research. The questions we want to explore in this chapter, therefore, are: what does the money do to collaborative research? How are the current processes by which projects are funded, costed, administered and carried out influencing the nature of collaborative research? And what are the implications of this for the longer term relations between universities and communities?

Funding as an enabler

At its simplest, the funding enables projects to happen that otherwise would not happen. This research would not be funded by other sources – either within the research councils or elsewhere. Research councils have not tended to fund the level of community involvement that this programme supports. Reciprocally, funders of civil society, cultural organisations and community groups, have not tended to support the sort of blue skies collaborations with university partners (rather than evaluation relationships) that this programme allows. Above all else then, we can say that this research would not happen at the scale, depth and complexity that it is happening without this programme. It offers relatively open opportunities for collaborators to develop space to think, ask big questions and reflect on fundamental issues. It enables long term thinking space that is not tied into the immediate operational concerns of a community organisation or tied to the existing priorities of disciplinary communities.

More specifically, however, the money has other practical consequences. For example, a significant contribution of the types of expenses that funding can cover within this programme means that project teams have been able in many cases to democratise research participation. For individuals on low/no incomes and small community organisations, there would be neither the time nor the resource to participate in research projects without funding. For these groups, the possibility of budget to cover travel expenses, an honorarium for their time, and child care costs, are essential pre-requisites for research participation. In these instances, very small sums of money can make a very significant difference to who is enabled to participate in research,

“Space for experimentation is crucial, and it’s a space that very few charities at the moment can have through traditional funding routes. You know if you get funding it’s against targets, it’s not about knowledge creation generally, it’s not about building resources [...] what this research funding does is create that space for stepping outside of your traditional delivery boundaries and drawing on all of your experience and knowledge to explore questions that are of interest to you and that you feel probably can create something useful and relevant that you can’t necessarily demonstrate to a traditional funder.”
(Isabel, Chief Executive, independent charity)

“What you’re saying to people is come for free and you know that your organisation probably isn’t paying for you... because you might not have an organisation that does that kind of thing... so come for free, pay your own train fare, you know take a day out of your life, maybe pay for childcare for your kids. So all those considerations to actually come and participate in those things, there’s a lot more barriers for community groups than there are for academics. Because being a community group person isn’t your day job mostly, you know.”
(community organisation)

and to whose experiences, ideas and voices are therefore enabled to be heard. The price of a bus ticket can, for example, be a significant and insurmountable barrier to participation in a project. ”

The funding also has numerous practical legacies. Jobs are protected in both universities and community organisations, projects are sustained, organisations and university departments increase their turnover, equipment can be purchased. Precarious projects can be given some sort of longevity and shifted from marginal activities to a focus of meaningful attention. In some cases, the funding also enables organisations and individuals to generate match funding from other sources, or to develop new initiatives that enable organisations to create sustainable income models.

The funding also has important positive symbolic and interpersonal consequences. A key contribution of the research funding for both university and community partners has been to confer value, to enable participants to make the case that the work they are doing on these projects has status and is recognised. The award of research council funding, for some academics, has been transformative for their careers, enabling them to make the case for the quality and value of their work. This has, in some cases, led to institutional investment in this sort of work. Keele University's CASIC research centre and Cardiff's School for Community Journalism, for example, both build on the recognition and value awarded to collaborative research through the Connected Communities funding. Having sufficient funds to involve economically marginalised communities in ways that remunerate and respect their opinions appropriately also has the important function of recognising the value of their voices and experiences in the research landscape. ”

“The volunteers... would get their travel expenses paid. Which is really important because often travel is an access barrier to people. A lot of people have to take taxis because of their impairments, they can't access public transport. So actually having that funded is really key. And had it not been it would have prevented people from being able to come along.”
(Pam, Peer Support Co-ordinator, local community organisation)

“So we've got an event [...] for example where we're bringing all our young people in from the different projects together... we have to be crystal clear about the budget... I've got to pay for a carer's shift, somebody to go and accompany the young adults with learning disabilities because they can't go on their own. You know really clear with people. And this is when we'll pay for it, and this is where you have to be. Can you afford to get the bus to the bus stop? 'Right no, okay. How are we giving you your bus pass.”
(Bernadette, PI on three awards and Co-I three awards including Large Grant)

“Often in youth work we'll take a minibus or a car to make it cheaper, or we'll go by coach ... we'd stay in a youth hostel. But for the experience of our young people to be able to stay in a place where they don't have to share bunk beds or they don't have to camp is a massive deal. So there's many different ways of understanding what the funding has done I suppose, because it has for those young people provided some really different and amazing experiences, you know.”
(Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

“It's the recognition of what our organisation's doing, and it gives us that credibility I think. So yeah, and that adds value to the organisation. So it's something which we are proud about, so when we're writing, I'm in the process of writing a revenue application to the Arts Council, so we'll talk about our partnerships, we have partnerships with [X university] as well, quite close ones, and a slightly looser one with [Y university]. But [Z university] is definitely the one which we have the strongest partnership with, and these all do look very good to our funders.”
(Billie, Operations Manager, arts based development agency)



The funding, in particular the funding to connect up across projects and to participate in collaborative follow-on funds with other projects, has also served to create a community of researchers who are addressing common methodological and theoretical problems, and are able to learn from each other. It has begun to create a cross-disciplinary field, bringing together all of those who otherwise might have been located in smaller silos.

Finally, the funding arguably enables higher standards for this research. It enables partners to move beyond marginalised and voluntary activity to significant investment of attention. The discrepancies in costs for participants in the project (which we will discuss below) also has the potential to draw attention to the distinctive quality and contributions that individuals in project teams can make and to ensure the appropriate allocation of expertise to activities. Finally, the attribution of economic costs in collaborative projects between universities and community partners brings with it, again as we shall discuss below, hard questions about how else such resource might be spent in conditions of austerity. Such questions have the potential to prompt positive critical reflection on the purpose and value of research activities. ”

In sum, meaningful collaborative research is dependent upon funding. Civil society, community and cultural organisations simply are unable to access resources to participate in reflective projects without funding. Economically marginalised communities are effectively shut out of the landscape of research production without such resource. The money matters significantly.

The problem with money

Research funding, however, can sometimes cause problems when its implications are not discussed and addressed. In particular, the money can have significant implications for interpersonal relationships. In a context in which research collaborations are often built on previous informal and collegial relations, success in gaining funding can have the unintended consequence of transforming positive personal relationships

“And so what has it enabled me to do? - I think extend my practice, it’s legitimated it, it’s given me a community, and people who speak the same language. I’ve been able to encounter people who were perhaps more pure academic. If I call myself ‘applied’ and we allow that there’s a spectrum, I’d say that I’ve been able to mix with sort of area specialists in new topics that have been really exciting.”
(Lilly, PI on six awards, Co-I on five)

“Sometimes I’m just thinking ‘Well that’s got to be the thing I do then, I’ve got to work out a way that I can give you value from this research that helps you earn more money’ you know because that’s – you’ve got to earn more money, because you have kids as well don’t you? And that kind of tension reveals itself like that. So it’s about I think making my research be useful.”
(Rowen, Co-I Large Grant)

“Think at a time when we’ve cut lots and lots of things in youth and community work, is this an ethical thing to be doing? Perhaps not, but because the money’s coming through the research councils, it’s not like that money if it wasn’t being used for that would be put back into youth and community services. So if the money’s there then at least it is shining a spotlight on community development and youth work – which is a good thing.”
(Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

into contractual instrumental relationships, in which former collaborators are transformed into ‘clients’ and ‘funders/commissioners’.

In some circumstances, people’s informal contributions to communities had been understood as part of a gift economy, in which no remuneration was expected and work was conducted for its intrinsic value to communities and to the individual. When funding becomes available, these contributions are suddenly reframed as part of an economy of exchange. For those who maintain their commitment to a gift exchange relation either intentionally or because of lack of awareness of the possibility of payment, this can result in loss of status and in resentment between team members. In short, the money can see project collaborations transformed from relations of reciprocity to a ‘taxi driver’ model, in which contributions are made ‘on the clock’, and collaborators are turned into passengers/clients and drivers/consultants.

The organisation of funding for collaborative research within an RCUK funding programme - in other words, on a project basis rather than as part of the ongoing work of the university - also has implications for interpersonal relations and for the substantive nature of the work. The funding can encourage a move away from partnerships towards projects. In other words, the funding can cause a shift from the development of long term relationships and goals, towards the achievement of the objectives set out in the project documentation. Where such objectives are developed with long term aspirations in mind, this is unproblematic. Where this is not the case, and in particular for small community groups, this can have the effect of diverting attention away from the maintenance of ongoing activities. For example, there can be negative impacts on the support of day to day activities that sustain volunteer and community interest. Project based funding also risks the creation of dependency upon the funders, rather than the creation of a sustainable model for the organisation.

“Mean honestly I think I had thought it would be that we would be doing more of a practitioner research project together and I think it defaults into a bit more of a client relationship.”

(Brenda, Co-I Large Grant)

“We’d cooked this up together, this project, as fellow local activists[...and we both wanted to do this [...]. But then as soon as the money came in then she felt like she was my employee and treated it like a job where she just does her hours and treated it, no that’s not quite right, I mean I could fire her, you know, this is what she was thinking I think. Which to me was inconceivable cos we were partners on the project, you know it was our project, but it just, she didn’t see it that way [...] It felt before that it was motivated by interest, and then as soon as the money came in it became a job. Which is very reasonable, of course it should, but the money then ... it then turned into what can I do in this amount of time that you’re paying me for – what do I need to deliver, tell me what I need to deliver and I’ll deliver it, kind of thing.”

(Julie, PI on four and Co-I on two CC awards)

“Because Connected Communities are 12 month projects – which doesn’t really cut it to make something really meaningful with it. So I think something a bit ... you know 3 to 6 year projects I think on them would be a much deeper, better piece of research.”

(Pam, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

“Once the funding starts to dry up, the grants start to dry up, then they have to pull back the service. Whereas we’ve started from the other approach to try and set up a business, and then at the same time trying to do some social projects. ‘we’re trying to do is just live off what we earn – we don’t want to ask for money in the future, so we’re trying to grow the amount of earning capacity. Cos fund raising is just hard... its hard work.”

(Stephen, Co-ordinator, community development trust)

” The principle of subsidiarity, in which decisions about budgets are devolved to community partners in some projects also has the unintended consequence of producing an intensification of competition between collaborators. This can highlight conflicting motivations for the project – some are focused on finance for their organisation while others are concerned with developing new research and knowledge for their organisation or sectors. This intensification of tensions between partners is also unintentionally exacerbated by the lack of standardisation of payment rates for collaborators, with some operating on the basis of a minimum honorarium or expenses, and others requiring substantial day rates and overheads. While such competition is not a result of the project funding – community organisations and cultural organisations often operate in a context of competition for funding – such relations have the potential to militate against the intention of projects to produce knowledge for a common public good.

The way in which research funding is administered and allocated also risks working against the aspirations of many projects to create more democratic and collaborative research partnerships between university and community partners. The discrepancy in resourcing available to support early stage project ideas tends to mean that academics take the lead in the drafting of research proposals. Where alternative funding models have enabled resource to be available to cover community partner costs for project idea development, this has helped but the requirement for academics to be named as Principal Investigator still reinforces the balance of financial decision making toward the university. Where community partners have had their own resource to shape projects, as, for example, in the very significant collaboration between Connected Communities and the Heritage Lottery Fund we have seen more equitable relations beginning to emerge over agenda setting in the research process. ”

One significant consequence of the formalised funding of collaborative research projects is that the large differences in costs between universities and community/civil society organisations become visible. The differences in salary, for example, between frontline youth workers and the senior academics they may be collaborating with

“I think some community partners have been much more like ‘We want money, we want resources’ than others. And almost seen it as a way of getting project funding, but straight away, and they have been much more frustrated. I think some partners have been very frustrated with the process ... probably more than I have.”
(Janette , Director, local charity)

“Let’s just take it practically that there’s a pot of money to do some kind of project that a lot of organisations are desperate to get hold of, you know and that’s got worse over the course of the project.”
(Eric, Co-I Large Grant)

“So the heritage bodies [were asking] £750, is that too much for two days? Two afternoons? They said... no no, that’s fine we replied. And then we had the [Industrial Partner] giving 30 days of its time... ‘yeah, we’d costed that out about £50,000 – would that be too much?’ Yes, that’s too much bring it down a bit... So that was very funny.”
(Charles, PI Large Grant)

“In [the research development workshop] it felt very much like there was a lot of you know academics who were you know dying to get their hands on this money. And it was very much about you know driving their own agendas initially. It felt like there was much more of a division between the academics and the community partners in [the sandpit] than I think it has been with [our project].”
(Janette, Director, local charity)

“As a creative entrepreneur in his own right he’s used to calling the shots, and as a professor in my world I’m used to calling the shots a bit ... sometimes if I’m lucky. And the University ... because the University was the gateway to some resources, specifically some money that we were spending on the production, that was extremely frustrating for him not to be in control of that.”
(Aaron, PI one small award, Co-I two awards including a Large Grant)

“Also the other thing is it makes you feel a bit dirty, because you know ... yeah the 30 grand that we got to do this project could have been a post for a year, do you know what I mean? And any money that we might get as a consequence of having done this small pilot study say later on, you know, it runs the whole building, runs the whole project for two years or three years.”
(Eve, Co-I on five awards including Large Grant)

become striking. The substantial overheads charged by universities on full economic costing, raise questions for participating academics and community partners about whether funding channelled via universities for this sort of work constitutes good value. This is a particularly live debate when academics mistakenly take on roles such as community organising, youth work and events administration that would usually be run more cost effectively and with greater expertise by community partners. Such observations, however, can be beneficial in prompting reflective discussions about the distinctive contributions of different project members. ”

“For one piece of work we got £2000 towards staff costs, and £2000 paid for us for a 4 hours a week worker for a year. And that doesn't cover ... it would never go anywhere near that in a university would it?”
(Pam, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

Success in gaining research funding also necessarily requires the administration of grants. Here, the lack of involvement of professional services staff in the early stages of project development becomes particularly problematic. Funding for expenses and honoraria, while essential to the conduct of the project, for example, tends to require community partners to jump through the substantial and unhelpful hoops of university administration systems. Processes often begin with the university requesting, as a consequence of Home Office requirements, that community partners show their passport and prove they have the right to work in the country if they are being paid a fee for partnership; an initial point of encounter that does little to generate trust and produce positive relations. This is often followed by a byzantine process of form filling, and a timescale for payment of several months that leaves community partners (and sometimes research assistants) out of pocket and deeply frustrated. Legal contracts of hundreds of pages, forms that cannot be completed online, multiple requests for the same information from different departments and faculties, all of these can significantly erode both trust and desire for collaboration. To redress these imbalances and reduce risks, some project teams are beginning to identify middle-man organisations who are able to respond in a more agile and timely manner for payment purposes. At the same time, a number of universities are beginning to take these matters seriously with guidance for community partners, academics and professional services staff and the streamlining of systems. In the meantime, both academics and community partners are expending significant unnecessary energy in finding ways of working with systems that are far from fit for purpose. ”

“Just it's been very difficult working with the finance office, getting them to pay for childcare ... even though that was you know written into the grants ... getting them to pay the invoices of the community organisation in a timely fashion ... then just wanting everything in this kind of ridiculously rigid form.”
(Lena, Co-I on 2 CC awards, including Digital Capital Project)

More money (through project funding) is not necessarily better

In some circumstances, it is also clear that more money for collaborative research is not necessarily better. In a climate of austerity economics, academics and community partners are hardwired to look for the next funding opportunity. Where such funding opportunities come around frequently and previous award holders are actively encouraged to apply, then the process of bidding can become what some successful award holders describe as a 'treadmill' or 'funding fever'. Project teams working in expectation of a scarcity of future funding feel obliged to make the most of an opportunity for new grants. A consequence of this is that project teams can find themselves moving rapidly from one project to the next, with little time for reflection, consolidation and analysis. Repeated success with funding can also risk creating dependencies amongst project teams, as staff resources are allocated against the work and as other opportunities are not explored. ”

There also remain questions over whether the large grant funding model is the best use of resource to produce high quality research. Many Principal Investigators on large grants report that significant time and effort is simply spent co-ordinating between project partners and administering the project. The question of whether such large co-ordinated projects lead to equally substantial intellectual and practical legacies is far from certain.

Finally, there are two foundational issues that are raised by funding collaborative research with communities through competitive project mechanisms.

First, the allocation of resources to research collaborations rather than seeing such collaborations as a core and ongoing part of a university's role, has the unintended consequence of impacting on the sort of research that is considered acceptable. More exploratory, emergent and long term research that may examine historical conditions or

"You kept feeling like you had to bid for money because opportunities like this don't come up very often and the chance of success is like 50% [...] you've got institutional pressure to... you know 'Here's the money, there may not be money like this ever again. Really should grab this by the throat while I can'. But then the more things you get involved with the less attention and time you can give to them."
(James, PI Large Grant and PI/Co-I on three smaller awards)

"I've been part of four projects, I know some of my colleagues have been part of others, this is a lot to go on, and you don't have time to reflect and think. And at some point I felt, I could have applied for more, but I decided no, because I want to spend more time to actually work on this one, make sure it works, have time to reflect and exploit it."
(Eve, Co-I on five awards including Large Grant)

"We're swamped basically."
(Louise, PI small award, Co-I two Large Grants)

"So that time for reading and reflection is quite difficult and I think maybe we need to think a bit more about how we do that."
(Matthew, PI on one Large grant and Co-I on one Large Grant)

"There's a touch of academic guilt goes on with things like that where there is a genuine freewheeling intellectual 'Let's just take all the restrictions off and just have a play and see what the hell we come up with' and actually I think we came up with quite a lot of quite interesting stuff for the next bids. But there is a touch of guilt that 'Should this be fun?'"
(James, PI Large Grant and PI/Co-I on three smaller awards)

"I guess for people who know how this process works that's fine, but if you don't it's like 'Is it worth you spending your time doing this?' you know 'Is it going to produce anything?' And when you can't be concrete ... you know that's been slightly challenging."
(Janette, Director, local charity)

philosophical considerations, for example, can be harder to justify to partners in a climate in which money creates equivalences between different activities.

Second, the allocation of funding to research projects which aim to democratise and enhance participation in university practices needs to be considered in a wider context in which access to universities as a whole is becoming increasingly expensive. There is a strong case for examining whether some of these research activities might not, in other times and under different regimes, be seen as a core part of the widening participation, continuing education and public learning role of the university. There is a strong risk of tokenism in the limited resource allocated via funding councils to participatory and collaborative projects, as compared with the massive reduction in the investment by universities in their public education mission.

The paradoxical and central role of the research assistant

One important consequence of the current methods of funding collaboration through research projects rather than through core activities, is that a significant percentage of time and resource on projects is allocated to the 'resource' of the research assistant. This is a unique and paradoxical position in most Connected Communities projects²⁸.

Paradox 1: The research assistant is often the only person who is paid to work full time or at least for a significant majority of their time, on the project. They are usually the ones gathering data on the ground, they are often the people in the project team who are understood to be most closely involved with the project. At the same time, they are themselves often employed on a temporary contract and therefore in a precarious employment position which will require them to look for supplementary or subsequent work during the course of the project. These individuals are most likely to hold, but be least likely to be able

"There is a bigger social justice thing here, there's something about money being funnelled into an elite system that sometimes spends a lot of money on stuff that doesn't bring quality of life to people when they are living side by side with communities in abject poverty. It's unjust that we've got those systems isn't it? And things like Connected Communities are not going to solve that, but they could do a lot to start posing those questions and pushing the boundary a lot more."
(Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

"Some of the Connected Communities stuff is maybe stepping into a role because of the cut backs in the heritage sector a bit. So where local authorities used to provide some facilitating functions, they've all been slashed so you can't do that anymore. So we've sometimes been helping museums and stuff to do stuff that might have been funded from other budgets in the past in a way [...] some of it is not necessarily always about producing world leading research outputs you know, some of it's about getting communities engaged in research ... and that's a really valuable thing. But it's not just universities that have to do that or have done that in the past."
(Sally, PI, Research for Community Heritage Project)

"I find with any of these projects is that you know you're bought out for 10% of your time say for something, but in a sense for the project to really work it's those core early career researchers that actually make the difference."
(Adam, Co-I two mid-sized awards and Large Grant)

"The first projects that I did, the sort of scoping study was like you know a few months, then I had two 10 month projects, and then this one is like 18 months and seemed like a really long project, and now it's going really fast. And so it's just this sort of constant treadmill of writing applications."
(Natalie, Early Career Research Assistant, multiple CC awards)

"Because you spend so much time either doing research or stuff around the research ... cos you're only employed on one research project, you actually don't get much time to write ... not only around the current project, like writing up papers, but also your PhD stuff."
(Cameron, Early Career Research Assistant, Large Grant)

²⁸ See Enright, B. and Facer, K. (under review) for a fuller account of the roles of the research assistant in collaborative projects.

to take forward, the lessons and insights from the project to both further the research and develop a meaningful legacy.

Paradox 2: The research assistant is often the person who has to take responsibility for the research methods and ensure that the data gathered is robust and reliable. At the same time, the research assistant was usually not involved in the original design of the research by university and community partners, is often an early career researcher finding their footing within their own discipline and may be working outside their own area of research training. They may be less confident in their own research expertise than is anticipated by the community partners they are working with, and in fact, may be less experienced in the design and conduct of collaborative projects as a whole than (some of) their community partners.

Paradox 3: The research assistant often embodies ‘the university’, a large and relatively wealthy organisation, in the project. At the same time, the research assistant may have been recruited specifically from the community to conduct the research, and may be working on relatively limited and precarious income in comparison with the community partners leading the project. The research assistant, ostensibly a ‘university partner’, may therefore in some circumstances be both more vulnerable than the community partners they are working with and better able to represent the experience and needs of the wider community.

These researchers are responsible for much of the work of brokering and mediating between the different groups involved in the project team – this includes mediating between academic disciplines as well as between university and community partners. On large grants, the research assistant will often find themselves serving multiple masters: the academics to whom they are accountable for delivering project goals and academic outputs, and the communities, with whom they are often embedded and towards whom they may have deep personal empathy.

When the many roles of the research assistant – brokering, translating, conducting data, representing the university, representing the community, conducting analysis – are not fully understood; and when

“I was playing that important role between the academic project of what was wanting to be done and then actually working with local people, the people which took part in the research. [...] I had quite an important role in making it clear what it is that we were doing, why we were doing it on the one hand making them feel comfortable to take part but also to make it clear what we do as academics I suppose.”
(Peter, Early Career Researcher, small CC award)

the paradoxical nature of their role is not fully acknowledged, there are significant risks both to both the individual concerned and to the project. The individuals can find themselves poorly placed to build a robust career trajectory. The projects can, and do, find themselves poorly placed to build on the personal relationships that have been developed through projects and to develop intellectual and practical legacies from the projects.

Indeed, the way in which the longer term development of research assistants is being handled is central to the longer term sustainability of these projects, as it is through these individuals that many of the relationships have been developed and nurtured and through which both universities and communities have built their capacity for collaboration.

Time and Money – a fictional and symbolic relationship

The relationship between money and time, how this is imagined and managed on these projects, fundamentally shapes and reflects the nature of the research partnerships in this programme. Participants in the programme consistently tell tales of the discrepancy between their original plans and the amount of time they are committing. The infamous ‘J-es Form’ on which time is allocated and costed to the quarter hour at the planning stage of projects is widely seen as a fictional document, or at best, little more than guidance to give shape to the relative contributions of participants.

Universities, in particular, seem to treat the J-es form as a loose guidance for the amount of time researchers will be recognised as working on a project in their workload models, with some academics reporting that a 1 day a week time allowance in a budget translates into 2 hours a week in a workload model. This ‘fluid’ relationship between planned time and lived time on projects seems to be culturally accepted, as younger researchers report being told that working routinely in excess of costed hours is just a feature of

“The time I have written into the projects and the time that I spend on the projects has no relation to each other. But I’ve just accepted that you know, I mean that’s true to academia. So you know, you make your own bed in a way I think. I think you can’t be too bean counting about these things, if you’re going to do it you have to do it. And you have to protect yourself a little bit so you don’t go mad, but other than that you can’t pretend that it has a real relationship because it doesn’t.”

(Lena, Co-I on two CC Awards including Digital Capital Project)

“I mean, let’s be honest, you might get a nominal two hours a week for 6 months but nobody really gets that time.”

(Albert, Community Artist)

“And the other problem is that ... I’m sure this is true of all universities ... that you get an AHRC grant, and then the University starts clawing back all this money. So even if you ... like let’s say I go for a grant and I’m bought out for 20% of my time, that is so heavily discounted by the Faculty that I won’t end up with 20% of my time being bought out, I’ll end up ... I was calculating this the other day because I need to complain, I’ll end up with one sixteenth, so 20% buy-out translates into one sixteenth of my time.”

(Lena, Co-I on two CC Awards including digital capital project)

“I’m told that’s the norm for academia. And whether that’s a good thing is another question, but it’s something which is engrained into you, which I guess I’m used to now.”

(Cameron, Early Career Research Assistant, Large Grant)

‘academic life’. Community partners also routinely report that project costings bear little or no resemblance to the actual time that they dedicate to projects. In some cases, individuals and organisations are well able to bear the cost of this cultural norm; for others, the implications are negative and significant.

This fictionalisation of the relationship between time and money, in some circumstances is intentional and accepted. The funding is treated by some project teams less as a material resource than as a symbol. It is seen as a way of justifying work and activity that individuals and organisations would want to carry out whether resource was available or not. The function of the money is to provide a warrant, some breathing space, and some justification for the activity. The symbolic function of the funding is also to publicly demonstrate the existence of the collaboration, something that in itself is seen as valuable.

The fictionalisation of the relationship between time and money, in other circumstances, brings sharp and negative consequences. The nature of collaborative research is that it is particularly ‘time-intensive’. It requires the slow building up of trust and relationships, the careful nurturing of time and space for conversations. It requires a responsiveness to circumstances and to needs beyond the confines of the working week; it requires participants to get involved in and create activities that fit around communities’ own schedules and constraints. The urgent needs of many communities participating in the programme also create an imperative to respond to requests for support and contributions that can be difficult to resist. The work-life boundary is blurred through the work, and while this can offer huge personal and professional rewards, it can lead to significant negative consequences. The costs of what Lauren Berlant²⁹ calls ‘intimate labour’, the personal and political engagement involved in this work, can be high for both university and community partners.

“I think to be honest with you I think that AHRC money is prestigious, it’s good for careers and CVs, and of course some component of that, it would be disingenuous to suggest otherwise. I mean for us AHRC money was something we’d not had before, we’d had ESRC framework stuff and all that kind of stuff, but it provided a longevity which was important.”
(Carl, Co-I Large Grant)

“I felt like I wasn’t doing it properly at times. And that’s all very well if you’re skimping on you know your own research, but when you’re working with an organisation and you’re working with a vulnerable group of people, you know, you really don’t want to let anyone down.”
(Lena, Co-I on two CC Awards including Digital Capital Project)

“The interesting thing about the women’s side of all this I think is ... [...] You know because a lot of this work is about emotional labour, and it’s hidden stuff and it’s like you know making things happen ... all that stuff I was saying about the bus tickets and is [so and so] coming to give me my 20 quid ... a lot of male academics I know would not be arsed with all this sort of stuff.”
(Bernadette, PI on three awards and Co-I three awards including Large Grant)

²⁹ Berlant, L. (1997). ‘Feminism and the Institutions of Intimacy’ Kaplin, A. and Levine, G. (eds). *The Politics of Research*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

For those academics who have moved into the university sector from the community, such commitments are often associated with feelings of guilt and anxiety at having left behind frontline work and the need to ensure that they are still making a contribution. Such academics often find it hard to discuss the requirements to produce academic outputs from research projects and to prioritise such activities within the confines of the project. As a consequence, 'writing up' projects becomes an activity conducted in evenings and at weekends, a personal contribution to the knowledge landscape. This is also a particular concern for those early career researchers, working on fractional contracts, who are often over-committed on practical and logistical work on these projects. ”

Summary

” The money and how it is administered in these projects, matters significantly. Without funding, it would be impossible for poorer communities and individuals to participate as active agents in the research landscape. These communities, individuals and organisations would be assigned simply to the role that has been familiar over the years – that of being researched and represented by those with more economic and educational resources. The investment in community participation in research is essential if we do not want to see a research landscape dominated only by those who can afford to share their ideas and expertise without remuneration and expenses.

That being said, there is some way to go to before we have developed the institutional practices that would be most beneficial in supporting a more democratic and pluralistic research landscape. There are significant questions about whether a project-based funding model, particularly one premised on the short durations encouraged by treasury timescales, is best suited to the development of long term collaborative relationships; and about how such relationships sit in the wider landscape of public involvement in universities at a time of increasing student fees and the decimation of adult and continuing education activities. Within the project-based funding model, the

“And I've chatted to people who've worked on like, they jump from project to project, having not written up anything from any of them, or have written very little, maybe one publication at most. Like for research posts, particularly ones that are only 12 months long, you just don't get the opportunity. And when you're applying for jobs often we're told what people will look at are publications, and when you're on short term contracts which you're only employed to be research based – how are you going to find the time to write it unless you do it in your own spare time.”

(Cameron, Early Career Research Assistant, Large Grant)

“You know I think the relationship between universities and some third sector organisations is terrifically difficult because of the ... if you're with Nesta or Ofcom actually in power and money terms and status terms actually it's okay. If you're third sector and you've got no money at all and you've been asked to come to meetings for nothing, and you're not allowed to get anything from people like us who have been bought 150 quid train tickets to London without even thinking about it – that sets up a whole lot of real real real problems for those organisations.”

(Aaron, PI one small award, Co-I two awards including a Large Grant)

“If you really want to engage with sections of the community that don't normally engage in academic research a year's too short I think. It just takes too long to get to stage 1 before you actually start doing ... it depends on what your research is, it depends on what you're doing maybe ... but for me it was ... stage 1 was getting people to talk who were interested to talk about stuff, and then we like got the heritage project going and started doing some of the research and going to archives and stuff. And then also you know if you are working with people who wouldn't normally do it, it's slow – you don't get you know that much done very quickly. And it's volunteer, so you know people don't turn up, and they're doing it in their free time or whatever. So I think it's quite short that period of time. I think you would be better doing ... even if it was perhaps just spreading it longer and with slightly less money maybe, you know ... but I think a year's too short, that's what I think – for these sorts of projects I think it needs to be longer.”

(Sally, PI Research for Community Heritage)

byzantine processes of university finance and HR systems require significant adaptation to enable more responsive, respectful and reasonable collaborations with small organisations and individuals.

At the same time, university and community partners need to work out a relationship between time and money that is sufficiently responsive to the emergent, challenging and creative process of research which does not sustain itself through intimate labour and personal costs to members of the project team. In particular, the under-acknowledged but absolutely central role of research assistants on these projects, requires much more careful consideration both for the individuals concerned and for projects' longer term legacy. Understanding the initial stages of project budgeting and costing as the allocation of relative time, rather than absolute time, might be an appropriate alternative model to begin this process.

Finally, we need to recognise that this research is being conducted in conditions of economic austerity in which both community and university partners are increasingly being asked to justify their existence and to operate within a climate of competitive contractualism. As a consequence, there are significant pressures towards short term instrumental relations and practices in these projects. That such pressures are being resisted, that meaningful relationships and experimental and exploratory work is being conducted, is in no small part down to the commitment to the longer term thinking characteristic of the arts and humanities, as well as to the personal and ethical commitments of the project teams.





Needle's Eye

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Mausoleum

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Country Park

Scholes

Greenough

Keppel's
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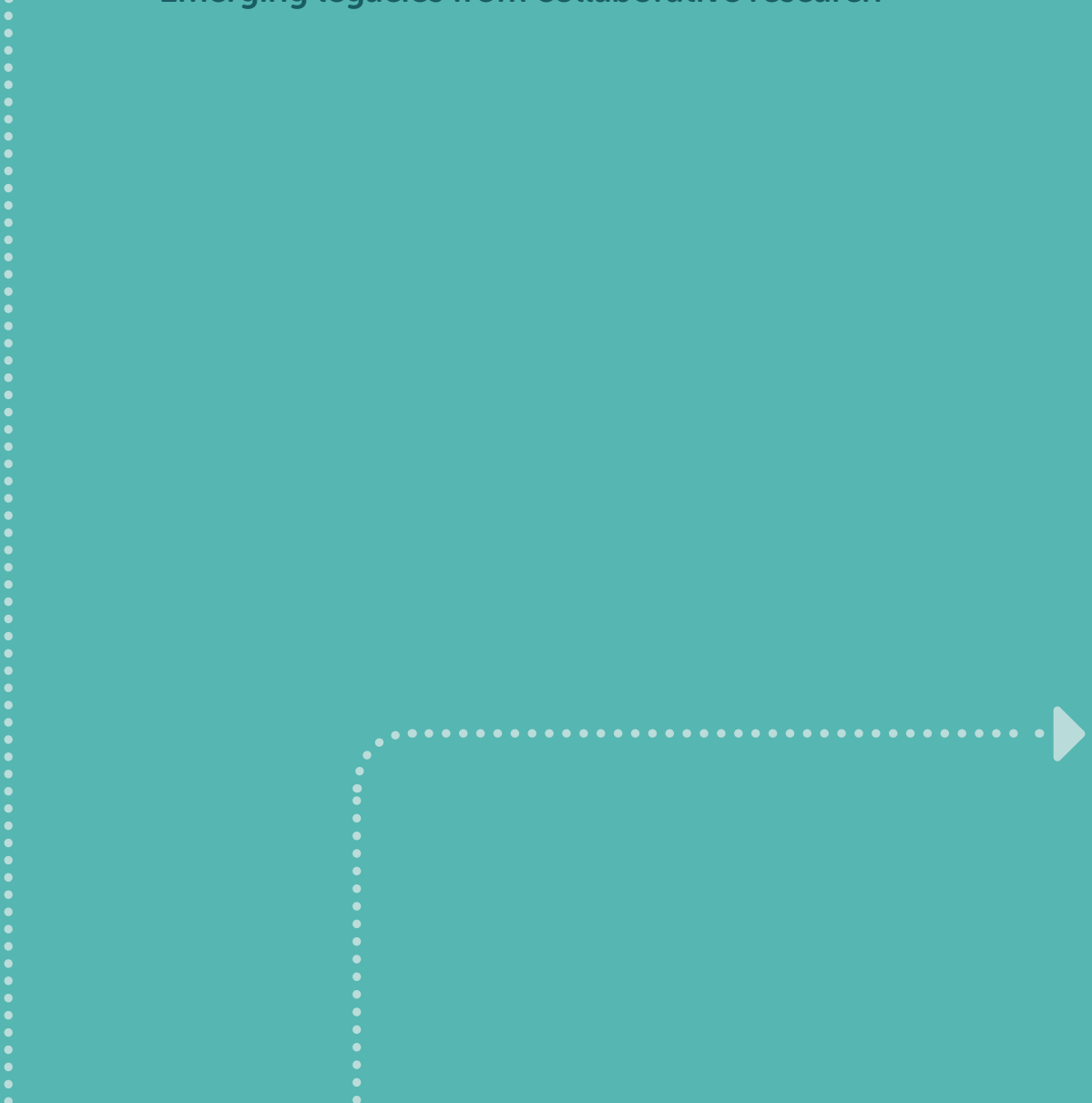
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Why it's all worth it

Emerging legacies from collaborative research



Introduction

How do you judge the legacy of community-university collaborations? It is tempting to draw on the sardonic wit of Steve Pool, a community artist working on a number of Connected Communities projects, who, in a film exploring government and university preoccupations with measuring the impact of research, simply pulled out a tape measure, spooled it out against the word impact marked on a sheet of cardboard, and pronounced ‘that’s about 60 centimetres’³⁰.

Such an intervention takes to extremes the ridiculous inadequacy of relying on a singular measure of value for these projects which have, as described in Chapter 2, multiple and often competing accountability regimes and purposes. Indeed, the response of most projects to the different needs of project participants has been to pluralise the forms of outputs they are producing, and to intentionally diversify how they conceptualise ‘legacy’. To that end, we propose it makes sense to think about legacies from these collaborative partnerships under 6 broad headings:

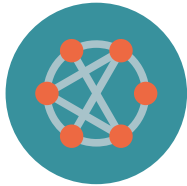


Products – these are the tangible outputs produced by projects; they include material objects, software, exhibitions, artworks, booklets, guidelines, performances, reports and papers. In other words, the sorts of legacies that are often understood as ‘outputs’ of research.

³⁰ Steve Pool’s film speaks particularly to community partners to explain the debate around impact: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcjlEuuEikM&feature=youtu.be>



People – here we focus on project legacies that are embodied in project participants, this includes legacies for community members, as well as community and university partners. Such legacies relate to learning, to capacity building, to confidence and capabilities, to feelings and emotions, to the development of careers and personal security.



Networks – fittingly for a programme called ‘Connected Communities’, we recognise that the programme itself is bringing new communities into being. There are new connections, relationships and networks that are produced through both individual projects and the programme as a whole. These networks have the potential to produce a form of what Danny Burns calls ‘systemic action research’ that leads to wider structural change³¹.



Concepts – it may well be too early to make the case for conceptual development, nonetheless, a number of projects are beginning to develop new languages, tools and ideas for understanding community that are beginning to gain currency in academic, policy and practice fields.



The programme itself is bringing new communities into being. There are new connections, relationships and networks that are produced through both individual projects and the programme as a whole.

³¹ Burns, D. (2013). *Systemic Action Research: A strategy for whole system change*. Bristol: Policy Press




Institutions – the concern here is with the legacies of these collaborations for participating institutions: community groups, civil society organisations, cultural organisations and universities. It focuses on the implications of these partnerships for institutional structures, processes and practices.



The research landscape – here the legacy relates to the changes that the projects have effected in the conditions for future collaboration between universities and communities.

Despite these categorisations, we have to acknowledge that the question of legacy for the wider public good and for the individual members of the ‘communities’ that these projects have been part of, is impossible to trace with confidence at the scale of a research programme as a whole. Legacy – and it is for these reasons that we use this term rather than the less subtle concept of ‘impact’ – is necessarily provisional, complex, contextual and uncertain and plays out in different ways for different projects and groups of individuals. As we discussed in Chapter 1, these projects enter into already existing complex systems, with their own dynamics, resistances and properties, all of which will shape the legacy of any individual project. ”

What we hope to do here, therefore, is not to provide a formal documentation of the tangible ‘outputs’ of these projects (such an analysis and its associated cost-benefit calculations can be achieved by spending many happy hours on the research council’s database of research output³²). Nor to seek the fantasy of documenting demonstrable impact upon X individuals, in Y communities in Z geographical regions.

 *Legacy is necessarily provisional, complex, contextual and uncertain. Projects enter into already existing complex systems, with their own dynamics, resistances and properties.*

“For me personally, if one child reports feeling better about themselves, feeling more positive, more confident – that’s a success for me. It’s been worth it, everybody’s effort’s been worth it if we just ... because that one person, that one child feeling better about themselves, you don’t understand how wide ranging that effect is. You drop the stone in a pond, the ripples ... I had a teacher who said to me ages ago ‘You can’t change the world’ – yes you can, you change one person, you’ve already changed the world, you know.”
(Martin, Quality Assurance Officer, local authority)

³² The Gateway to Research, RCUK’s database of research outputs and research projects, is available here: <http://gtr.rcuk.ac.uk/>

Rather, we want to argue that the traditional output-oriented concept of ‘impact’ from a research project is being discussed, disrupted and transformed by these sorts of collaborations. In other words, we want to argue that the very language of impact requires re-examination when we take seriously the idea of sustained community-university partnerships in research³³.

What are the ‘products’ of these projects?

The first disruption to the traditional means of judging project value is the widespread critique across the programme of the idea of the journal paper as the most important project ‘output’. Indeed, the production of academic papers from projects is often deferred or delayed. This is for many reasons: teams tend to prioritise outcomes that are of more immediate utility to community organisations; the heavy workload of making collaborative projects happen means that there is insufficient time in the project itself for writing; teams often want to produce outputs to which all project participants can contribute and so turn to audio-visual media more than text; and some academics simply find it very difficult to write up this research in a way that is recognised and valued by their disciplines. Indeed, the Connected Communities Programme represents c.14% of AHRC projects in Researchfish but accounts for only 4% (352 in total) of total academic publications. In contrast, the programme accounts for 41% of the AHRC total outputs classified as ‘Artistic & Creative’ as well as 41% of outputs classified as ‘Tools & Methods’.

Where writing is happening, however, its purpose is often being reframed. For some on the programme, writing is now being rethought not simply as a form of performance for academic audiences, but as itself a mode of inquiry and a way of deepening collaboration. In other words, the debates about what counts as a valuable ‘output’, seems

“What they do and the impact they have on the lives of young people is far greater than an article in the British Journal of Criminology is ever going to have. You know I’ve always struggled with this, I’ve always really struggled with this, you know. What exactly are we doing, why do we do the things that we do, and for what.”

(Charlotte, Co-I small grant)

“I’m sitting on several years of research projects to write up, to where I am now... if I was teaching I don’t know how I would manage this because there just really isn’t the time in the duration of the projects to do much writing up anyway.”

(Kay, Co-I seven CC awards)

“The community members, I don’t think, would get anything from a publication necessarily, i.e. academic journal paper. But we do have a booklet which we produced of some of the photos and some of the words and a summary of the project which is being given back to the people who took part in the research, so they could see an output in a slightly formal kind of sense.”

(Peter, Early Career Researcher, small CC award)

“Actually a paper is probably not going to change our organisation at all, and it’s not going to have that much impact... it’s not going to be a big deal, and a lot of our young people will never know it exists. So for us the outcome is going to be the experience of the young people, or whether it creates some social change.”

(Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

“What’s harder to say is well what would be the kind of ... what would be a three star, four star journal article ... apart from one that’s much more reflective about methodology. That’s the difficult thing.”

(Adam, Co-I two mid-sized awards and Large grant)

³³ Many of the discussions in this chapter have been informed by the highly productive shared inquiry process between the seven Connected Communities legacy projects and the Connected Communities Leadership Fellowship. An edited collection bringing the work of these projects together and explicitly examining how we think about ‘legacy’ will be published by Policy Press as part of the Connected Communities Book Series in 2016.

to be reinvigorating the writing process as a meaningful practice of collaborative inquiry rather than simply another step on the treadmill of banal academic over-production.

To that end, the programme includes a number of examples of the co-writing of journal papers between university and community collaborators, often led by those who have been working in this way for some time³⁴. This is not without its difficulties. Writing papers that explicitly connect a project with the wider theoretical literature for example, is often not an important priority for many community partners. While some community partners observe that their lack of experience in writing can leave them struggling to accurately reflect their ideas in this form, and searching for other venues and sites for communication. The critical issue, as one experienced university partner observes, is in exploring and negotiating the value of different forms of writing for different partners. ”

In the context of such discussions the forms of writing that projects are involved with are proliferating, with many projects developing collectively authored blogs and websites that allow multiple voices to interact and collaborate³⁵. Such blogs are widely accessible, and provide rapid updates on project findings – something that all project teams are finding increasingly difficult to achieve through the increasingly slow process of academic publishing. Teams are also expanding these written texts with films, photos, animations and drawings. Many of these are now gathered together in the extensive ‘Connected Communities Media Collection’, itself a Connected

“Towards the end we were beginning to you know share some of our different perspectives and bring in some academic ideas I guess. But yeah it was largely when we were trying to formulate an article. In that group, the one that we wrote the article from, we did the literature review and we did introduce that and passed it to the group ... and some of them looked at it and some of them didn’t. So some of that we came back to at the end. But for many of the community members that wasn’t interesting. The theories and co-enquiry and that sort of thing wasn’t necessarily interesting.”
(Stephanie, PI two awards, Co-I three awards)

“We try to share an explicit understanding in our group about notions of reciprocity and the different types of outputs we produce and what the intrinsic/strategic worth of them is for each of us.”
(Contribution to CC Researchers Email Discussion on Co-Writing)

“Because it’s already well over two years since we first sent it in as well, and it’s been a massive delay. [...] that article was such a nightmare, I can’t tell you what a nightmare it was. But anyway we’ve done it, we’ve done it, we’ve done it and hopefully they will publish...”
(Stephanie, PI two awards, Co-I three awards)

³⁴ The following are some examples of journal papers and publications co-authored between Connected Communities academics and community partners: Pahl, K., Steadman-Jones, R. and Pool, S. (2013). ‘Dividing the Drawers: Creative Approaches to Research, 6 (1), 71-88; Pente, E., Ward, P., Brown, M. and Sahota, H. (2015). ‘The co-production of historical knowledge: implications for the history of identities.’ *Identity papers: A journal of British and Irish studies*, 1(1), 32-53; Lewis, C., Pryor, A., with contributions from Barnes, J. (2013). *Archaeological investigations on the earthwork in castle close*. Cambridge: Sharnbrook, Cambridge Access Archaeology; Aumann, K., Duncan, S., Hart, A. (2014). ‘What Have We Learnt? A Year on from the first UK Community Partner Summit.’ *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, 7(1), 129-143; Macpherson et al. (forthcoming 2016) ‘Listening Space: Lessons from artists with and without learning disabilities and their art materials’ *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*.

³⁵ See the Connected Communities Fellows website for a discussion of all the types and approaches to collaborative writing currently in development.

Communities funded project, that brings together in one place the hundreds of audio-visual records of project events, as well as the many films and documentaries that have been produced in the programme³⁶.

These projects, it seems therefore, are conceptualising valuable project ‘outputs’ very differently. Products include live performances, exhibitions, portraits, performance art and public installations, prototypes, archives, maps, historical records, films and photographs. These might be a large scale illuminated projection on the wall of blocks of flats in Sheffield, a ‘craftivist’ installation of knitted flowers, a set of portraits of British Muslims, a series of playful performances on the streets of a Welsh town, a supply of ‘fish and chip wrappers’ to be used in fast food outlets that tell stories of historical modes of food production, a prototype of a digital rocking chair, an App, a contemplative film about fishing, a boat that is used as a site for performances, a temporary public platform that is constructed and reconstructed in public spaces, a set of hundreds of tiny china creatures that find homes with families...

These products might be seen simply as a means of ‘disseminating’ project findings – to do so, however, would be to misunderstand their role in the project. These artefacts are not merely a way of ‘communicating’ the research. Rather, the process of researching and making these material products is central to the conduct and process of research³⁷. Their creation is central to the process of inquiry. The longer term legacies of such products are therefore likely to be traced in both conceptual or personal development as well as through these often fleeting material objects or events.

These products also produce unpredictable legacies. Consider, for example, the case of the digital totem pole that was created in Wester Hailes, a large estate to the south of Edinburgh, as part of an early Connected Communities project. This totem pole referenced the history of the neighbourhood. The name of a former community

 *Projects are conceptualising valuable project ‘outputs’ very differently. The process of researching and making these material products is central to the conduct and process of research.*

³⁶ Connected Communities Media Collection available here: <http://ccmc.commedia.org.uk/>

³⁷ There is a long tradition of reflection on the process of making as research that is best captured in the Practice as Research tradition. Born & Barry’s work on Interdisciplinarity also highlights the tendency to mistakenly see arts practices simply as a means of ‘engagement’ with publics, and not as a valid mode of inquiry in and of itself.

newspaper – The Sentinel – was written around it and it included motifs of the neighbourhood’s distinctive architecture. It also looked forward to the use of the digital in playing a new role in connecting that community. While the original intentions of the totem pole may not have been realised quite as intended – the community members were not quick to use the slightly cumbersome QR code technology on which it relied - it has now unexpectedly come to serve as a visual representation of the spirit of the local community and has important place-making qualities in its prominent location.

People – embodied legacies

A second important disruption to the dominant ideas of research impact, is the repeated insistence of many project teams, particularly those working in participatory action research traditions, that it is in their effects on people – their ideas, their understanding, their skills and capabilities to effect positive change – that they should be judged. And indeed, it is the experience of mutual learning between partners (as discussed in Chapter 2) that characterises many of these projects.

This mutual learning includes the formal development of skills and knowledge by both university and community partners – learning how to use archives, how to get through NHS technical procedures, how to conduct interviews and surveys, how to work with older adults with Alzheimer’s, with young people with learning difficulties, or with bees and trees. This mutual learning includes the careful process of unsettling and unlearning that is involved in creating communities of practice, and of enabling both university and community partners to understand and inhabit each others’ worlds for a while.

For community members, embodied legacies also include the development of confidence gained through encountering new experiences. Here we might equally think of the community members confidently sharing their knowledge of their local area with specialised research communities, the older residents of a care home who helped test out Oculus Rift (a 3d head mounted display technology)



“But actually that confidence building means that now when [X Mental Health Charity] have approached us to do some more work, there have been people noticeably who took part in [CC project] who’ve put themselves forward as volunteers. So for us that’s a way of measuring the level of success for those particular people.”
**(Pam, Peer Support Co-ordinator,
local community organisation)**

or the young people who travelled to another city to participate in a workshop, which meant staying in a hotel for the first time. Such experiences, when they work well, demonstrably build confidence, voice and the ability to participate in public and research-based discussions. Reciprocally, for those university partners with limited prior experience of community-engaged activity, collaborative research with communities has resulted for many in significant personal transformations. Not least, a richer awareness of the cities and communities of which they are a part, of their resources and potential, and of their own potential place and contribution to and with those communities. Confidence, the ability to encounter novel experiences, and to get out into different worlds are common and valued embodied legacies therefore for both university and community partners. ”

The nurturing of embodied legacies, however, requires the same care and attention as the crafting of an art work or the slow production of a journal paper. When people are not treated with care, when the historic inequalities that shape the encounter between universities and communities are not acknowledged, when all the difficulties of language and its capacity to exclude are not addressed, then the embodied legacies of collaborative research can also be disempowerment, renewed exclusion and resentment. A failure to listen, to pay close attention to what is being said, to create positive environments for meaningful conversation, can lead to participants feeling silenced, excluded and detached. ”

“It’s about entitlement isn’t it, some of those young people have never had an experience of a hotel. And their parents might have had you know a hotel for a night when they got married, so their sense of entitlement for things like that is quite low. And perhaps it’s part of a much bigger picture of what we hope to do, which is to raise people’s aspirations. And I don’t mean just about money, but I mean just generally about life opportunities, you know ... and that’s a little bit of that isn’t it?”

(Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

“I think for almost all of them It was their first experience of doing any work with a higher education institution [...] to be asked your opinion on a survey is one thing, to be actively included in active research I think is very different. And I think it does have a lot to do with the self-confidence and the boost and the opportunities to access the environment those people wouldn’t otherwise have had.”

(Pam, Peer Support Co-ordinator, local community organisation)

“I go to museums more and theatres more and stuff, because I know people who are doing the stuff there now cos I’ve worked with them and I’m just more likely to turn up you know. It’s definitely also made ... it’s made a big impact on the way I’ve seen my job. I mean my job has changed a lot from now to 5 years ago, because of this working and because of the centenary, the First World War, but really this is the way that I’d done the centenary. Other colleagues who are working on the First World War have used the centenary to write a big book and to have research to do that. Whereas the centenary for me has absolutely been about working with community groups really, and that’s been great. So in terms of my daily working life it’s been transformed by this, it really has.”

(Sally, PI Research for Community Heritage)

“I know a member of staff went to the meeting that I didn’t go to, and her feedback was very much that she felt disengaged from the academic language that was being used. So although she has a lot of knowledge that she was able to share, and I know that that was very much appreciated by everybody, you know the academic members were you know using the language that she didn’t always understand. And that tends to then make people feel disempowered.”


(Janette, Director, local charity)

From me to we – the creation of networks, alliances and friendships

One of the most valuable legacies from this programme is highly intangible, not to be found ‘anywhere’, but rather to be found ‘between’ projects and people, in the networks, friendships and indeed ‘communities’ that are forged through collaborations.

Such networks are sometimes formal – for example, the programme has supported the creation of a Community Partner Network, led by community partners and the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement³⁸, as a mechanism for sharing good practice and advice in university-community collaborations. This now has over 120 members and is developing useful resources to support community-university partnerships. Another network is the Heritage Research Network³⁹ run by De Montfort University in Leicester. It currently has a mailing list comprising 102 individuals, representing 92 different groups/projects. It aims to provide support and guidance for all communities involved in the co-design and co-production of heritage research. Smaller networks organised around shared interests include the Authority Research Network⁴⁰, which has been particularly successful in demonstrating the value of developing interpersonal relationships, friendships and writing as a process of working out ideas rather than performance of academic identity. The programme as a whole also forms a loose network, to which project participants are more or less closely identified. This is sustained through mechanisms such as the annual events, fellows website and twitter accounts⁴¹, through the email list (set up by one of the most active programme researchers, Michelle Bastian), and through a new book series.

The projects themselves, however, are also actively constituting and creating new communities. Consider, for example, the case of the hyperlocal research strand of the Creative Citizens project. By

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³⁸ <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk>

³⁹ <http://www.heritagenetwork.dmu.ac.uk/about-us/>

⁴⁰ <http://www.authorityresearch.net>

⁴¹ <https://connected-communities.org> | @ahrconnect



ELECTM

connecting up a large number of small community projects producing hyperlocal journalism, the research was able to make the case that these individuals were part of a wider movement. They weren't just cranks, in other words, they were at the vanguard of what one of the researchers on the project called 'a new way to do news'. This connection between projects also provided important opportunities for project teams to learn about good practice, new technologies and to strengthen their own professional networks. This networking of small scale local projects to reflect on the systemic changes they are already making and the changes they might make, is a critical component of what Danny Burns (2013) calls 'Systemic Action Research'; a means of connecting up localised action with much wider long term effects. ”

Such networks also emerge by accident, haphazardly. Consider, in contrast, the new community of local heritage organisations that has grown up around the scarce resource of the magnetometer (a device that allows archaeologists to 'see' magnetic fields under the ground) that was purchased to support the project 'Sensing the Iron Age and Roman Past'. Although the funding for the project has ended the magnetometer is based within the community organisation which is continuing the work started by the project and is creating connections between a variety of local groups, helping them to pursue their research interests as well as creating a cross archaeological society group of amateur geophysicists.

Perhaps the most important legacy of the programme, however, is the fact that the programme and its projects are clearly leading to the creation not only of professional working relationships, but of friendships that are built on shared experiences and deep personal respect for the knowledge and interests of people from other communities, other disciplines and other institutions.

Friendships across the programme are forged through late night conversations at programme events, or conversations over the tea break, as well as through the bonding experience of shared last minute bid preparation and the frustration with funding processes.

"It helped us to get a better understanding of social media, because up until that point I think we would have considered ourselves mainly as a newspaper, a print newspaper, the old fashioned stuff, which costs a lot of money to print – who as a side-line did a blog, which was beginning to get quite a lot of hits. But now I think our attitude to social media and our blog is growing in importance and growing in effectiveness, and I would attribute quite a lot of that to our developing understanding of the role of hyperlocal and social media following on from [X academic's] involvement with us really."

(Jessie, community media organisation)

"What we've been doing a lot over the past 15 years is a lot of grey research where we work directly with youth workers and young people... to come up with a small scale piece of research that's quite tied to local benefit. So anecdotally and with that grey research we've got some really strong bits of data for us, but not strong bits of data that policy makers would recognise because the datasets are either too small or haven't been validated by a university essentially. So our plan over the next 5 years is to try and undertake three pieces of long term research, and this has come about through CC."

(Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

Within projects, friendships are forged through the slow and difficult exploration of how to work together, and the gradual evolution of new ways of talking, listening and working over the course of several projects. These friendships have a wide range of consequences, not least the simple preparedness of individuals to help each other out in informal or formal ways. For some, it is the friendships created through the programme and the projects that provides the emotional foundation for the creation of a richer intellectual and practical landscape for future collaborations. Such relationships are the basis for the ongoing interpersonal commitments that encourage participants to attempt to sustain collaborations beyond the loss of project funding. ”

A legacy of ideas and concepts

The legacy of Connected Communities is also a legacy of ideas and concepts. Understanding which of these ideas will consolidate themselves in the practices of communities, in the work of policy makers or the language of disciplines, is necessarily impossible at this stage. Such developments evidently take time and need to gain currency within the academic, practice and policy communities. And indeed, this is only the halfway mark for the programme, as the first three large grants are only just reaching completion.

Nonetheless, we can see that project teams are developing new language and concepts related to substantive issues of ‘community’, as well as to methodological processes. These include the work theorising what we mean by ‘community’, for example, that is emerging from the Performing Abergavenny project team. Here the team are working towards thinking of community less as a noun than as a verb, a constantly produced performance, made up of acts of what they call ‘micro-sociality’. These ideas also include the deepening and testing of concepts of ‘creativity’ by the Understanding Everyday Participation projects. Here the research teams are closely documenting and making visible the highly diverse forms of creative practice embedded in communities and demonstrating how this often eludes the attention and recognition of mainstream cultural policy. Or the already mentioned insights into the new forms of journalism being ”

“The trust we have in friendship is something that is enabling [...] particularly of thought, creating this ability for thought and creative thought and deep thought.”

(Claire, quoted in ‘Starting from Values’ Legacy Project Poster)

“We’ll like all relationships and friendships, they don’t have to be consistent and still there all the time, but you do have that in your mind if you are going to go along and pursue that piece of research, you’ve built those relationships and that nexus of contacts if you like and friends and people you can dive into pools, amazing pools of knowledge and wealth that can help you and you can help them as well. So I think that’s really really vital to academics that this did that in a way that as far as I can see straightforward academia programs never ever do as well. So I think that a brilliant piece of disruption.”

(Fred, Projects Manager, independent national research organisation)

“To some extent you go to communities on projects that they have finished, because you develop a friendship and partnership. So I’m still visiting places that the project has already finished. So that’s outside the academic work and outside any ... yes plan.”

(Austin, PI on innovation award, Co-I on six awards including Large Grant)

“So I was publishing as I went really, and I did a little short 6 pager, writing blog posts, and that had quite a nice impact. So Ofcom were happy to take the stats. I worked with the team who were writing the 2012 communication market review. Which was a really nice experience, really super-clever people at Ofcom who write all the reports. Built a nice relationship with [the head of digital literacy research] and with [the director of research] at Ofcom, so really good policy links for us, which is a great outcome of the report. And then I did a presentation to the BBC at one of their events around this data. It attracted interest from Nesta [...] and they went off and did their own research.”

(Rowen, Co-I Large Grant)

developed by the Creative Citizens team, whose research has already informed the OFCOM report in this area. These ideas also include the interrogation of what we mean by remembrance and the role of memory in shaping community, through the hundreds of collaborations taking place between community heritage projects and university partners working on the legacy for communities of the First World War.

From the perspective of conceptual tool development, the sustained collaboration between researchers working in design and architecture at the Open University with The Glass-House Community Led Design, has begun to develop a much more sophisticated language for both conceptualising and practically representing ‘assets’. This has been translated into both practical resources and toolkits for community practice as well as into a sustained theoretical exploration of what it means to ‘map assets’⁴². These processes are being used now in a wide range of different settings in the UK and Greece. Similarly, the tools for evaluating intangible legacies being developed by the Starting from Values team, are now being used by a wide range of NGOs, charities and community groups.

What is noticeable about these collaborative projects, however, is that the theories and concepts that are being developed are not detached from the conditions of their production. The theory that is being built is a form of ‘living knowledge’⁴³, a praxis knowledge that connects lived experience on the ground with the wider body of national and international critical knowledge. As one community partner observes:

‘it’s not just about going and doing but its about that combination of active support on the ground for communities and the production of evidence and a knowledge base at the same time... in an ideal scenario, and what this aimed to do, was that those two things should support each other, and in a sense... that knowledge base sets up a resource, and the action on the ground continues to contribute to that knowledge base and keeps it alive’ (Isabel, Chief Executive, independent charity)

⁴² See for example - <http://comparativeassetmapping.org/>

⁴³ We are inspired to use the term ‘living knowledge’ both by the British Library and the European Network of the same name, as well as by Whitehead’s original coining of the concept over half a century ago.



The theory that is being built is a form of ‘living knowledge’, a praxis knowledge that connects lived experience on the ground with the wider body of national and international critical knowledge.

In this way, these collaborations hold the potential for project teams to collectively develop what Michelle Fine and Lois Weis (2012) call ‘critical bifocality’, the ability to see with two lenses: both the lived experience and the macro conditions and contexts in which they are located, and to connect these up through both practice and theory. This potential of praxis knowledge to offer a rich, dynamic way of knowing, has long been familiar to the traditions of collaborative research we outlined in Chapter 3; but it is a way of knowing that the traditional dependence upon a linear model of ‘research impact’ singularly fails to grasp.

Institutional legacies

A common concern in assessing the impact of research is with its effect on the wider ‘public’. This can often lead to a hunt for numbers that tell us how many people have been involved in projects – with little insight into whether these involvements have been productive or sustainable – or to hard pressed communities being chased up years after their involvement to provide positive stories about the experience.

Understanding, in a robust and meaningful way, the impact of these 327 projects on communities and publics as a whole is beyond the scope and resources of this work. And indeed, we have doubts about the legitimacy and validity of this sort of search for public impact and numbers. What we can do here, however, is begin to explore how these collaborative projects have changed the ways in which the partnering organisations – in universities and communities – carry out their work, and the implications that this may have for their future contributions to understanding and working with communities.

Broadly, we are seeing these projects producing a number of institutional legacies for community partners working in and with communities. Projects are enabling community partners to test



Projects are enabling community partners to test out and develop new services.

“And it helped me go to the board and say actually you know being ambitious doesn’t necessarily mean high numbers, and having an impact doesn’t necessarily mean high numbers, it means the quality of what you do and what you do with it afterwards [...] all of the thinking we did in that project has really filtered into the thinking of the organisation [...] it was hugely influential for us.”

(Isabel, Chief Executive, independent charity)



out and develop new services; for example, the new approaches to working with care home residents being developed by the charity Alive! or the use of arts-based approaches in healthcare and medicine in the Mutual Recovery and Dementia and Imagination projects. Similarly, where they were not previously doing this (and we need to recognise that a minority already were) community partners are extending collaborative and co-produced research methods as part of their own repertoire of approaches. The Blackwood Foundation and Southville Community Centre (community partners on Scaling up Co-Design and Productive Margins) for example, are actively developing much more collaborative processes of working with disabled adults and older adults in their communities.

Many projects are also strengthening the claims that community partners can make about the validity and impact of these new approaches through being able to confidently demonstrate the research evidence that backs them up. Reciprocally, some community partners are reflecting on the limitations of their current approaches, and developing new ways of working as a result.

The institutional legacies of collaborative work with communities do not rest only with the community partners, however, rather, these projects have led to significant institutional impacts for (some) participating universities. For some, the large number of community connections created between universities and communities have required the development of more sustainable ways of supporting university-civil society networks through the work of university public engagement offices. Other universities have decided to make engaged research an area of strategic investment. Edinburgh, for example, has supported a number of Connected Communities Early Career Researchers through Chancellor's Fellowships. While Cardiff, Keele and the Open University have explicitly built upon the Connected Communities projects to further invest in engaged and collaborative research and try to build up momentum in this area. In Cardiff, Connected Communities investigators received an award of a further £500k to support engaged research. In Keele, the university has supported the establishment of a new university research institute, the 'Community Animation and Social Innovation Centre'. There

"That part of the evaluation had really really interesting outcomes, so [the PI] sent the article to the [the academic journal] last September... and it was published, so that was exciting [...] you know I can send it to councillors and you know head of services and social services and so on, so it brings our project to a high profile doesn't it, so it's very beneficial in that way and with funders and so on. So its, you know that's one of the reasons we evaluate is for that to happen. But also you know to make sure that what we deliver is of a standard and it works, and how we can learn and deliver our projects, you know better do what we do basically, so that's a reason why we take part [in the CC project] as well."

(Clara, Local Government Arts Specialist)


"So that some of the projects that they do in the future can link to the University ... not necessarily with me [...] it was really good to have undergraduates involved and have internships, the University quite likes that, that works okay. So if I'm getting linked in with that then they won't feel dropped."

(Sally, PI, Research for Community Heritage Project)

"The Vice Chancellor is really keen on community engagement at a University level. He knows there's a lot of engagement that goes on around projects. He wants the University to be seen to be 'The connected university' [...] So there's a pot of money for engagement projects, and there's five of them, and we got the last tranche of funding. So we got money to build on these investments really [...] To build on these investments that we got from AHRC and ESRC employing a person to actually do that ... building up those links and taking them to a slightly higher university level."

(Matthew, PI on one Large Grant and Co-I on one Large Grant)

is also now a strategic partnership between The Glass-House and the Open University, with the aim to expand collaboration between research to the development of teaching programmes and resources, events and practical support/delivery on projects⁴⁴. One of the first professors appointed through the 'knowledge exchange' pathway at the Open University is a Connected Communities Large Grant Principal Investigator. In contrast, not all universities have decided to build on these projects; highly successful projects at Falmouth University, for example, have not saved participating departments and individuals from significant cuts.

Organisational legacies also emerge from the unintended consequences of trying to combine the working practices of smaller, rapidly changing community organisations with the large and slower moving practices of universities or museums. The institutional legacies of this clash can sometimes be profoundly negative, as expenses and invoices can take months to pay, leaving community organisations and individuals with at times very difficult cash flow issues. These encounters, however, are beginning to leave a more positive legacy in the greater understanding and awareness of the needs of smaller organisations by legal, HR, contracts and finance teams as well as in the development of everything from more simplified contracts to guidance for all participants in the process⁴⁵. In some institutions, this is part of a much wider attempt to create positive, reciprocal working spaces for academics and community partners. Success in transforming university bureaucracy in these settings, however, is often a hard slog conducted by dedicated academics over many years, and with significant personal and professional effort. 

"But when you say about a space in university, I think the thing is we've created that space, you know together ... you know it's not been a space that was there just to come into – it wasn't like that, I mean we've fought hard to have that space – put a lot of energy. The dedication has gone into creating that space and working strategically with other people and ... you know ... just getting on with people."
(Bernadette, PI on three awards and Co-I three awards including Large Grant)

⁴⁴ http://www.theglasshouse.org.uk/blog-entry/_/new-partnership-between-the-glass-house-and-the-open-universitys-design-group/122/

⁴⁵ See for example: Toolkit produced by the 'Know Your Bristol' project, <http://knowyourbristol.org/resources/>

Foundations for future university - community collaboration

As we have already discussed, individual projects can be very challenging, as individuals and organisations seek to learn how to work with each other for the first time. An important legacy from these struggles, therefore, is the foundations that these projects lay for future collaborative partnerships.

One of the most important foundations from the programme as a whole, for example, is the large cohort of university and community researchers who now have substantial experience of the tensions and potential of collaborative research. This includes hundreds of early career researchers and doctoral students who have ‘grown up collaborative’ through these projects. These individuals have developed expertise in nimbly negotiating between university and community concerns, and in navigating the different requirements of interdisciplinary working. For a number of early career researchers and lecturers, their success in gaining funding through the programme has also been instrumental in establishing their research careers. We see a number of the early career researchers who were Principal Investigators on the innovation and small awards, for example, securing long term research fellowships or permanent positions, while more senior researchers are securing promotions. This is particularly the case in those institutions that are seeking explicitly to signal their commitment to ‘engagement’.

This legacy of a new generation of collaborative researchers, however, is at risk in those institutions that organise teaching (and hence lectureships) around narrowly segmented disciplinary and subdisciplinary concerns. When these new researchers seek to gain permanent positions within such institutions, they can find themselves at a disadvantage compared with more monolingual researchers who specialise in more specific subject areas. A consequence of this is that a significant number of these early career researchers are actively developing either portfolio careers, allowing them to maintain roles in both the university and the community, or leaving academic research

 *One of the most important foundations from the programme is the large cohort of university and community researchers who now have substantial experience of the tensions and potential of collaborative research.*

altogether⁴⁶. As one community partner observed, the disjunction between these researchers' expertise and the organisational structures of some university teaching systems, is stark:

'Within the career structures of universities I think someone's got to get their heads around the fact that they're developing people with amazing capacity to do stuff that universities need to do, and then they're just letting them go off to other sectors because there's no career progression for people who are really good.'

(Albert, Community Artist)

A second important legacy for the future research field, is in the development of a cohort of critical and collaborative community partners. Many of these projects have actively supported community partners to become more experienced in negotiating and working with universities. In the process, they have become active research partners, taking a lead in shaping the research agenda. The work of the Community Partner Network, in particular, has been central in building expertise and sharing advice amongst community partners. Individual projects have also supported this process. Some, for example, have invited world leading participatory action researchers from Latin America to visit and advise projects, others have supported community partners to spend time in Canada and the US, studying their approaches. Such experiences have fostered a strong and critical generation of community partners, well placed to drive the research agenda in their own projects, and explore opportunities to develop new partnerships. ”

This new generation creates a fertile ground for future projects and collaborations. These are nurtured by the shared understanding that projects have developed of precisely what it takes to work together. Consider, for example, the work of the Community-Based Participatory Research team at Durham who collaborated to produce a set of ethical guidelines for this sort of research⁴⁷. But it is also fuelled ”

"We started being in a sense observed and studied and have then moved into a role of a connector and broker to working with communities on the ground... to then developing projects together with academic partners, and most delightfully, codesigning projects in the end' [...] it feels like we've gone from them saying 'Oh they're an interesting organisation, let's go and have a look at it' to looking together about how can this research really enhance the work that all of us are doing."

(Isabel, Chief Executive, independent charity)

"I think the work that [academic] is doing is equally one of those building blocks stuff. So through the work with [academic] she's been able to find money for myself last year to go to Canada to the Community University Expo with her. And then this year my colleague [X] to go to Chicago for the Community University Expo. And the model from Canada and America are a few steps ahead of us really in terms of the way that they conceive the community university partnerships. So first of all it's much more possible for community groups to set an agenda to interview academics for a piece of research they have identified."

(Cheryl, Youth Worker, regional community organisation)

"It's been a hugely amazing learning experience and learning curve about what's possible to do. I'm right now working on a couple of grant applications that are very much informed by the experience of Connecting Communities. And one of them directly comes out of Connecting Communities. But the other ones, it would be with a new community partner. But still very much drawing from a lot of things that I've done or learned or experienced in Connecting Communities."

(Eve, Co-I on five awards including Large Grant)

"There's a lot of shifting of vision, but there's a lot of learning about what's possible and what's not possible and what works and doesn't work that goes into those projects. Which then might be more sustainable all round – it's the one that works for me and works for them."

(Kay, Co-I seven CC awards)

⁴⁶ See Enright, B. and Facer, K. (under review) Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Research in Precarious Times: the experience of early career researchers

⁴⁷ https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/cbpr_ethics_guide_web_november_2012.pdf

by the identification of new and exciting areas for collaborative inquiry, often driven by an awareness of what failed to be achieved in the earlier projects in earlier research projects. The intellectual agendas of many participating researchers, for example, have been significantly transformed by participation in these projects. ”

The creation of a new cohort of university–community researchers, the development of formalised expertise and guidance on collaboration, the lessons learned by university administrative teams, and the intellectual excitement about new areas to pursue together, all lay strong foundations for future collaborations.

Summary

The legacies of these community–university collaborations are diverse. They do not fit easily into popular conceptions of conventional measures of research impact. They relate not only to products, but to people, networks, ideas, institutions and the foundations for future research collaborations. These legacies are sometimes uncomfortable – painful lessons have been learned on all sides about what not to do, about how not to collaborate. They are often unexpected – from the personal and powerful consequences of friendship to the long term legacy of a digital totem pole.

Taken together these legacies add up to the creation of a thriving field of interdisciplinary and collaborative researchers who are learning more with every project about how best to harness diverse sets of expertise and experience to create living knowledge that changes the research field and effects real change in the world.

Such legacies, however, are not secure. They are vulnerable to institutions that fail to build upon the foundations that have been laid. Investment in people, learning and relationships can easily be lost due to a commitment to contract-based employment, institutional oversight and bureaucratic inflexibility. They are vulnerable to changes in research funding priorities; indeed, a shift to a more instrumental form of research funding in order to achieve demonstrable economic

“It’s changing my research direction because I’ve really enjoyed doing this and I’d really like ... I can’t imagine now doing a conventional research project that didn’t have this kind of component to it. So I think I’m shifting my research direction to encompass this kind of thing.”

(Lena, Co-I on two CC Awards including Digital Capital Project)

or social ‘impacts’ would, on the evidence of this programme, actively militate against the creation of precisely the sorts of reflective spaces that are likely to generate the powerful living knowledge of benefit both to community partners and to the broader knowledge base.

Such legacies will also themselves create unintended consequences. As new networks are formed, and new relationships forged, new exclusions are necessarily produced. More precise languages co-developed between university and community partners to help with communication can in turn create new divides from those who were not party to those discussions. Given this, both the wider research programme and individual projects will have to remain alert to the risks of becoming comfortable in the partnerships that have been achieved, and not forget those who remain, for whatever reasons, outside these networks.



Taken together these legacies add up to the creation of a thriving field of interdisciplinary and collaborative researchers who are learning more with every project about how best to harness diverse sets of expertise.



University of
BRISTOL

Know your Bristol

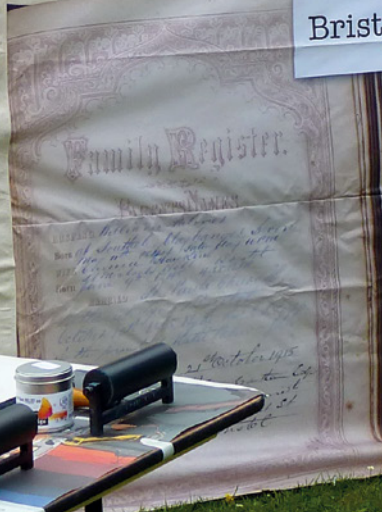


Know your Bristol



Thomas had three sailing charts near where the Theatre was

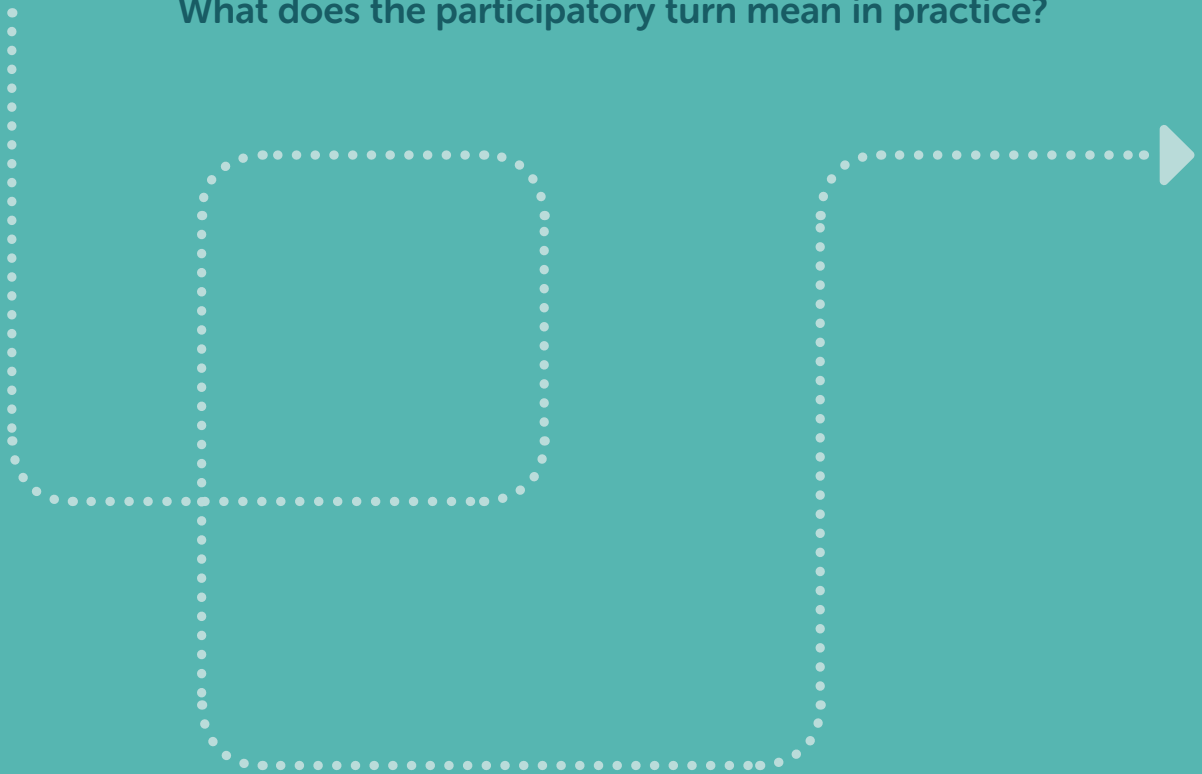
Bristol's history, people's stories



7

Quality or Democracy

What does the participatory turn mean in practice?




Introduction

One research programme will not transform a research landscape on its own. While the approximately £30m funding of the first five years of the Connected Communities Programme is a significant investment by any measure, when compared with the wider funding landscape it is tiny. The combined spend of the research councils, for example, is approximately £3bn per annum; the Arts and Humanities Research Council spend is around £98m per annum; while the Big Lottery Fund alone spends around £670m a year on projects. The 700 odd academics involved are a small proportion of the 194,000 academics in the UK, and are drawn in the main from the social sciences, arts and humanities. The 500 odd community partners involved in the programme are a tiny fraction of the UK's highly diverse and thriving civil society, let alone its wider population.

We need, therefore, to temper the desires amongst some observers and participants to see the Connected Communities Programme as, in and of itself, transformative of relationships between universities and 'publics' in the UK. Indeed, to place such a weight of expectations on one programme is to guarantee disappointment.

Another way of considering the programme, however, is to recognise that it is one part of a much wider contemporary tendency toward participatory practices in areas ranging from the arts, to industry, to 'open' government in which users/publics/patients/audiences/communities are invited to take on more active roles in shaping the knowledge, policies and practices of the world around them. In this context, the greater significance of the programme may lie less in tracing its immediate legacies for project participants, than in what it can tell us about the strengths and risks of what we might call a 'participatory turn' in the processes of contemporary knowledge production.

This question matters for universities who are increasingly having to work out how to position themselves in a much more complex landscape in which research, analysis and education are becoming a core part of the remit of other organisations from think tanks

 *The greater significance of the programme may lie in what it can tell us about the strengths and risks of what we might call a 'participatory turn' in the processes of contemporary knowledge production.*

to industry. It also matters for those who are interested in social innovation, in the creation of a vibrant cultural landscape and in the practices of democratic policy making. How partnerships can be built between different communities, sectors and institutions to create better forms of knowledge, richer accounts of reality and of humanity, and new insights into how we might think our ways out of contemporary problems, is not a niche concern.

What then, do the projects and partnerships that make up the Connected Communities Programme help us to understand about the possibilities, and the limits, of the participatory turn in knowledge production?

Multiple and competing rationales

At its simplest, the programme makes clear that this concern with unsettling traditional relations between expert and public knowledge is far from a uniform phenomenon. It comprises highly diverse activities and is underpinned by equally diverse and sometimes competing logics. In practice, project teams are working with complex motivations that are retrospectively or prospectively yoked together under a catch-all term such as ‘co-production’ or ‘participation’.

Particularly significant in all these partnerships however, and indeed in the public discourse surrounding participation, are two, sometimes competing, sometimes complementary, logics: the logic of quality – that community-university partnerships will enhance the quality of knowledge; and the logic of democracy – that community-university partnerships will create a more democratic knowledge landscape. To conclude this report, we want to examine these two claims in more detail and consider their implications for the participatory turn in research practice.

 *How partnerships can be built between different communities, sectors and institutions to create better forms of knowledge is not a niche concern.*

The question of quality

What counts as ‘high quality’ research? And how would we know it when we see it? Such a question keeps university administrators, funding bodies and bean counters merrily occupied in today’s audit culture, as anxieties rise ever higher about public accountability and declining finances.

These projects, however, demonstrate that the very point at which publics become part of the processes of research and scholarship is the point at which the metrics by which we judge the quality of research necessarily begin to fragment into multiple measures. Asking whether collaborative research between universities and communities creates better research elicits the response from community-university project teams: better according to whose criteria? For whose purposes? Under which conditions? A serious commitment to considering public perspectives in the research process, rather than simply a rhetorical flourish towards the invisible ‘tax payer’, therefore necessitates a very different view of research quality – one that is provisional, contextual and capable of recognising the multiple ways in which research knowledge can be used and practiced.

Indeed, it is these multiple audiences and users of research that are understood by project teams to strengthen the research quality of these projects. By requiring participants to treat research as living knowledge, as an encounter between what Whitehead called ‘the adventure of thought and the adventure of action’, they are required to test conjecture against practice, and practice against the wider field of existing knowledge.

This potential is not, however, always realised. The more important question to ask, therefore, is not whether the ‘quality logic’ for collaborative research makes sense. Whether this research is ‘better’ than, for example, ‘non-participatory’ research – as though to make a judgement about whether it should continue to be supported or not in future. This research, after all, has equally as robust and longstanding a heritage as any other traditions of scholarly and academic research; it should no sooner be required to justify its existence than should, for example, ‘quantitative’ or ‘qualitative’, ‘archival’ or ‘critical’ research traditions.



The public discourse of participation is driven by two logics: the logic of quality and the logic of democracy.

Rather, the more important question is: what are the conditions that are necessary to produce high quality research through these sorts of collaborative methods and approaches? And here, just as other research approaches have their necessary infrastructure, resources and training requirements, so too does this sort of research have its necessary infrastructure for success. Such infrastructure is intellectual, embodied, institutional and practical. It includes project teams' familiarity with the very many different traditions and methods upon which they might draw if they are to become expert collaborative researchers. Such a recognition allows teams not simply to operate within a single inherited set of practices, but to become expert with a repertoire of approaches and perspectives.

It includes researchers and project teams skilled enough to listen and to unlearn at the same time as having the confidence to bring in the expertise and insights that each individual can uniquely contribute to the conversation. It includes project structures and management processes that enable individuals to work out where they can most effectively contribute while maintaining a collective inquiry through which ideas, actions and experiences are constantly tested and developed together. It includes the financial, legal and HR systems in universities and funding bodies that allow projects to build trust rather than erode it, and that responsively adapt to the needs of the partnership as they evolve.

Most important, however, these projects require the intangible infrastructure of time. Just as big data analysis requires supercomputers, so collaborative research requires time. The development of personal relationships, trust and exchange of expertise and knowledge, particularly between people and groups with no prior history of collaboration, requires time. Time to talk informally, time to exchange ideas that may not lead anywhere immediately, time to really get to know each others' institutions, expertise, hidden passions, problems and histories. Time is what enables the slow development of understanding that creates the exchanges that enable the production of living knowledge. Time, for people to talk with each other, is the fundamental resource required to create high quality collaborations between universities and communities.




To realise the potential for these collaborations to produce high quality research, therefore, requires investment in the intellectual resources, embodied capabilities, institutional structures and, most important, people and relationships, that form the essential underpinning infrastructure for such research. In a context of austerity economics, making the case for such time can be achieved by pointing out the demonstrable and sustainable benefits of such collaborations that far exceed the impoverished, instrumental demands for quick wins from short term projects.

The democratisation question

The second logic that drives the participatory turn in research, is the logic of democratisation. Here collaborative research is presented as a means of redressing historic inequalities in the conditions of knowledge production and of beginning to create more democratic research projects in which the full diversity and range of knowledge, talents and experience relevant to an issue is able to find a voice and to be contested and debated.

Here the lessons from Connected Communities are more ambivalent. We have seen projects that in themselves have been powerful resources for diverse groups of individuals to share their expertise, reframe the existing research literature and produce changed practices and insights of value to the communities of which they are a part. In these projects the logic of democratisation and the logic of quality are deeply and necessarily inter-related.

 *These projects require the intangible infrastructure of time. Just as big data analysis requires supercomputers, so collaborative research requires time.*

We have also seen, however, the way in which collaborative research projects necessarily emerge through conversation and connection, arising from that ‘spark’ that happens when community and university partners identify a common interest. We have seen that groups unfamiliar with research processes may find it harder to hear about, gain entry to and participate in these research projects. We have also seen the way in which research partnerships necessarily arise not only as a result of intellectual and practical agendas, but from personal relationships and friendships and in partnership with those organisations and individuals who have the time and resource and interest to develop these ideas with academics. At the same time, we have seen that the complex accountability structures that emerge in these projects can militate against the service of a wider public good; potentially setting up commitments to local project partners against the broader commitment to similar groups and organisations outside the project.

There is nothing, therefore, intrinsically democratising about ‘co-production’ between universities and community partners. It depends on who is being collaborated with, for what purposes, in what ways. In fact, it brings the risk that rather than democratising research agendas, it may erode the principle of academic autonomy (including the autonomy that has historically allowed some academics the freedom to fight on behalf of and alongside those groups who were historically exploited) while further consolidating research knowledge in the hands of those groups who have the time and resources to participate. Moreover, such research projects can distract attention from the broader trends for universities to focus more on market positioning, student consumers and commercial partnerships.

It is clearly inadequate, however, to respond to this complexity with the argument that the safe thing to do in these circumstances is for universities to claim to ‘speak for’ the people under all circumstances. To do so would be to lose the demonstrable potential to create the high quality research that arises when we successfully combine public and academic knowledge. It would be to assume that the current highly skewed demographic make-up of universities genuinely represents the greatest intellectual talents of the country today (something that is hard to believe). And it would be to ignore the

 *There is nothing intrinsically democratising about ‘co-production’ between universities and community partners. It depends on who is being collaborated with, for what purposes, in what ways.*

long history of harm that has been caused by the over-confidence of some academics to speak for ‘the people’ – whether in under-representation of patients’ actual concerns in medical research or the sort of exploitative hit and run research that created stellar careers and damaged communities.

With this in mind, therefore, the logic of democracy that often drives the ‘participatory turn’ might be better placed to take a wider view of the current institutions and structures of knowledge production. As well as asking how publics might be ‘engaged’ in projects, therefore, we might also ask what other changes might be needed to create democratic (by which we mean diverse, multi-vocal, contested) research institutions that draw on all the talents of contemporary society.

One important place to start might be to ask how “the public” becomes “the universities”? This means asking how the student body, how staff, how administrators and funders of our research and education institutions, can better reflect the talents of people from all sectors of society. Indeed, collaborative researchers driven by a democratic imperative clearly share common ground with those working on the difficult questions of widening participation, on the cinderella questions of part time and adult education, and on the issue of the financing and funding of universities.

A second important question to explore is: how should learning in public be supported? After all, what is clear from the Connected Communities Programme, is that there is a huge and unmet demand for public learning, for communities to develop the skills and knowledge to tell their own stories and share their own histories on a public stage, for civil society groups to develop the capacity to reframe their problems and experiment with new solutions that can then be used in other places and other networks. Such a demand is fundamentally not instrumental, it is a deeply held desire to understand self and society that is manifested in everything from the reflective work of professionals, to the shared learning of social movements, to the passionate obsessions of local history groups.

 *As well as asking how publics might be ‘engaged’ in projects we might also ask what other changes might be needed to create democratic (by which we mean diverse, multi-vocal, contested) research institutions.*

What, then, might be the sustainable infrastructure that supports, encourages, challenges and develops this sort of public learning? Such public learning is not the same practice as university research, it has its own timescales, values and purposes. At the same time, such an infrastructure cannot be dependent upon universities for its patronage, for all the reasons we have already rehearsed. Rather, public learning is an organic need, pleasure and desire that requires support and development in autonomous institutions or practices that are adequately resourced by and for civil society. This is not to say that academics have no role to play in such institutions both as members of communities themselves and as public intellectuals – but the impetus, initiative and framing of public learning needs to originate outside the university.

The democratic logic that underpins collaborative and participatory research, therefore, needs treating with some caution. There is no necessary corollary between such research methods and the wider democratisation of the educational and research landscapes. Indeed, under some circumstances, the imperative to ‘co-produce’ research can actively militate against such an aspiration. The broader aspiration to ensure that the way we produce public knowledge draws upon the talents, expertise and experiences of the diverse communities in the UK today, therefore, requires attention to be paid also the question of ‘who gets to go to university’ and to the too-often overlooked fields of adult, public and continuing education.

The idea of a university

Above all, what the Connected Communities Programme makes very clear is that there is a desire for the sorts of reflective foundational research practices that are currently very hard to find outside the university. Indeed, the ‘idea of a university’ remains a powerful and important one even in conditions of economic austerity and in the context of the rise of sometimes more agile and immediately responsive research and educational institutions. Surprisingly for those who saw the Connected Communities Programme as the harbinger of a new instrumentalism in research when it was first launched, the idea of the university that



emerges from this programme is not the sort of task oriented institution in which academics are corralled into simply doing ‘useful research’ as defined by those in the ‘real world’. Nor is it, clearly, the idea of a university simply as a gilded fortress, protected from the lives, cultures and needs of the communities around it. Rather, it is a return to a much older concept of the need in society for sites of reflection in action.

The sorts of spaces, times and practices that are being developed by the community and academic partners in these projects, in other words, bear a closer resemblance to an old Aristotelian idea of ‘skohlè’ than they do to the fantasies of management consultants eyeing up the best ways to make universities accountable. Skohlè, the word that gives most European languages the word school means, among other things, a time of freedom, a moment of reflection that is an important part of the rhythm of living. It is the space within which to reflect upon progress achieved, to re-examine core purposes and values, and to experiment with trying out alternatives. Skohlè is the site in and through which both action and theory are developed through dialogue. It is a time in which the different focus of knowledge held by individuals and organisations are released from their habitual associations and made public, available for common use.⁴⁸

The mirrored desires of community partners for validity and of university partners for authenticity, embody this aspiration from different standpoints. Across the Connected Communities Programme, we have seen this desire for a space that combines connection and reflection, that enables engagement with the world as well as the ability to step back and ask how it might be otherwise.

The sorts of institutions that are adequate for this sort of work cannot be set apart from the world, they have to be intimately connected with it. Indeed, they are the places where the world comes and is supported to reflect, to debate and to move thinking forward. Nor can these be spaces ‘in the world’, they have to be freed from the urgent pressures and needs of day to day living in order to get at the underpinning questions and issues that frame that everyday practice.



The idea of the university that emerges from this programme is not the sort of task oriented institution in which academics are corralled into simply doing ‘useful research’ as defined by those in the ‘real world’. It is a return to a much older concept of the need in society for sites of reflection in action.

⁴⁸ Masschelein, S. (2011). ‘Experimentum Scholae: The world one more... but not (yet) finished.’ *Studies in philosophy and education*, 30(5), 529-535.

It will be interesting to see how both universities and communities respond to this demand, and how they come to create the new sorts of practices, spaces and relationships that this sort of meaningful collaboration will require. We might conjecture that it is far from certain that this sort of ‘idea of a university’ will necessarily remain within the buildings and practices of the contemporary institutions of higher education. Indeed, there are already signs that these sorts of collaborations are requiring universities and communities to innovate with institutional formations and create new forms of partnership. We can also conjecture that it will be the new generation of university and community researchers who have ‘grown up collaborative’ that will prove determining factor in whether it is the university as we know it today, or other sites and structures, that in the end create the socially distinctive sites for reflection in action that are much in demand.

What is unquestionably clear, however, is that the real strengths of participatory and collaborative research to create the sorts of ongoing, productive conversations that enable both academics and communities to reframe their assumptions, build living knowledge and create embodied and lasting legacies, are not well served by promoting instrumental relationships of accountability between universities and publics. Indeed, the sort of impoverished short term thinking that demands that universities ‘get with the programme’ to address ‘evident’ social, economic or industrial needs overlooks the distinctive contributions that these sorts of reflective research spaces can produce – namely, the reframing, unsettling and disruption of the core questions that common sense would suggest we work with. Indeed, in the current debates about the future of university research funding both ministers and the wider research community would do well to remember that a focus on short term instrumental benefits can, in the end, undermine the very long term relationships that will create the sort of vibrant, agile, responsive landscape for living knowledge production that contemporary challenges so urgently require.



A focus on short term instrumental benefits can undermine the very long term relationships that will create the vibrant, agile, responsive landscape for living knowledge production that contemporary challenges so urgently require.



8

Recommendations



Building robust, high quality collaborative partnerships between universities and communities is far from a trivial undertaking. The personal capacities it requires, the institutional changes it demands, and the intellectual agility it encourages, are all well recognised in the existing histories of the field. It is not our aim here to simply restate the lessons of this existing body of knowledge or to provide advice to academics and community partners on how to begin and conduct such research. This sort of advice and guidance is available in many other places⁴⁹.

Our recommendations therefore are not oriented toward the individual partners on collaborative research projects, but to those who are in a position to shape the infrastructures that can support high quality and productive partnerships. We address, in particular, those organisations – the research councils, statutory bodies, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, HEFCE and the charitable funders of civil society – whose responsibility it is to create a vibrant landscape of research and projects, and who are currently exploring how best to bring together the diverse sets of expertise that exist in civil society, communities and universities. We also address, in particular, the universities who will be negotiating with these funding bodies for resources to sustain and support such collaborations. In so doing, we hope to ensure that the lessons we repeatedly learn and forget as each new generation discovers collaborative research for the first time, can be embodied and embedded in the institutional memory of our collective research cultures.



⁴⁹ See for example, the work of the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, (<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>); the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action at Durham, (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/>); and the Community University Partnerships Programme in Brighton (<http://about.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/>). See also the list of resources from the Connected Communities Programme at the end of this publication.

Recommendation 1: Invest in the infrastructure for high quality collaborative research partnerships

High quality collaborative research partnerships between university and community partners involve the development of trusting, challenging relationships and opportunities for real conversations, informed by a deep knowledge of what is already known in research and practice. There are simple steps that can be taken to remove barriers to the development of these partnerships and to enhance the likelihood of them occurring. Four priorities are:

- **Extending Connected Communities funding models across research councils and other funding bodies** – in particular the two stage model that supports community partners and academics to collaborate at the earliest stages of research design as well as the ability to name and pay community partners as co-investigators.
- **Investing in research assistants** who often carry the relationships, deep knowledge and potential legacy of collaborative research projects – by committing to longer term employment opportunities and offering follow-on funding for project legacy activities.
- **Capacity building.** An understanding of the different traditions of collaborative research should form part of basic training for early career researchers, doctoral students and peer reviewers for research councils. National investments in research methods capacity building (e.g. NCRM, Doctoral Training Centres, Collaborative Doctoral Awards etc) should be required to demonstrate their expertise in this area alongside other arts, humanities and social science traditions.
- **University professional services** require training and support, as well as more agile and adaptable systems, to enable processes in HR, finance and legal departments that are adequate for partnership working with multiple small scale partners. Here, research councils, universities and professional bodies, such as the Association of Research Managers and Administrators, need to work closely together to build capacity and require the commissioning of adequate systems within the sector.

Recommendation 2: Recognise that time is to collaborative research what a supercomputer is to big data

The critical factor in developing high quality research partnerships is the time for individuals from universities and communities to meet, to develop ideas, to become familiar with the concerns, issues and expertise of the other, and to reframe and develop common agendas. This suggests the following three priorities:

- **Funding should enable collaboration over much longer time periods.** This may mean that research councils and other funders should consider significantly extending the duration of potential research projects (this does not necessitate raising overall budgets).
- **The balance between partnership investment and projects needs to be rethought.** There is a need to rebalance investment in partnership activities as compared with 'project' based activities. If time is critical infrastructure for these collaborations, then researchers need access to funds such as infrastructure accounts and impact acceleration awards for activities such as project design, partnership development and networking.
- **Reconnect teaching and research.** A critical overlooked mechanism for building sustained collaborations between universities and communities as well as for enhancing student learning, is to embed collaborative research into the teaching programme of universities. Opportunities for university and community partners to co-develop curriculum and pedagogy should be encouraged.

Recommendation 3: Take explicit steps to mitigate the risk of collaborative research partnerships actively intensifying existing inequalities

Not all community partners are the same. Large international charities and government organisations, vulnerable voluntary projects, social enterprises developing services for communities, are all very differently positioned in being able to participate in knowledge production. Universities are also products of existing social, cultural and economic inequalities and do not reflect the full diversity and talents of the UK population. Explicit efforts therefore need to be taken to ensure that the encouragement of collaborative research does not lead to the intensification of existing inequalities. This suggests the following four priorities:

- **Funders should develop a more nuanced lexicon of types of community partners and the forms of funding and support that might be offered to or requested from different groups.** This new lexicon would encourage greater reflexivity about the increasing requests for match-funding on RCUK projects, and about the forms of resource that might be needed to support particularly economically excluded groups to participate in research projects.
- **Explicit efforts need to be made to understand and address the barriers that prevent different minority groups from contributing to research projects.** This will require both the development of new and better lines of communication between the 'research community' and more diverse public communities through active and intentional efforts; explicit strategies of small scale investment and training to build the capacity of minority groups to take a confident and active role in research activities; and the cessation of mechanisms such as residential research development workshops/sandpits as a mechanism for project generation.
- **Research investment needs to be considered in the wider context of the university as a whole.** This means examining the impact of the significant reduction in part time and adult education courses on the diversity of those entering universities and becoming staff members; it means examining the impact of the lack of diversity in faculty members on the willingness of different communities to trust and collaborate with universities.

Recommendation 4: Invest in civil society's public learning infrastructure

The Connected Communities Programme has demonstrated that there is a significant demand for public learning that enables individuals, community groups, activists, social enterprises, charities and civil society as a whole to reflect on the fundamental challenges, histories and futures of communities today. This demand does not always fit easily with the constraints and timescales of a research funding programme. That our civil society would be immeasurably enhanced in its capacities for development and social innovation by a more widespread capability to support such public learning, however, is not in doubt. This suggests the following urgent priority:

- **A new funding programme open to civil society organisations should be established, resourced by a combination of RCUK and the larger charitable trusts and foundations.** The aim of the fund would be to support civil society, third sector and community organisations to develop exploratory, non-instrumental research partnerships that allow them to address foundational and long term challenges and issues. Early stage collaboration with universities on substantive issues rather than as evaluation partners should be encouraged as part of such a fund, but such collaborations may equally concern the theoretical and foundational research development of networks of civil society organisations alone.

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Relevant Resources from Connected Communities Project Teams

The following are just some of the many resources and reflections on the processes, traditions and philosophy of collaborative research emerging from the Connected Communities Programme. They were gathered through a call-out on the Connected Communities mailing list and so represent some project teams more than others. For a full overview of audio-visual outputs from the programme see the Connected Communities Media Collection where projects can archive their films and other media outputs (<https://connected-communities.org/index.php/connect-communities-media-collection/>) and for a full list of all projects and their resources, see the Connected Communities Fellows website: www.connected-communities.org

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Connected Communities participants' websites & blogs with a specific focus on collaborative research

Bristol University Resource on Practice as Research in Performance: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/parip/bib.htm>

Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/>

Connected Communities Fellows Website: www.connected-communities.org

Connected Communities Media Resource: <http://ccmc.commedia.org.uk>

Community Animation and Social Innovation Centre, University of Keele: <https://www.keele.ac.uk/casic/>

Community-University Partnership Programme, University of Brighton: <http://about.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/>

Co-Producing Knowledge Blog: <https://coproducingknowledge.wordpress.com>

Co-Production for Change Blog: <https://coproductionforchange.wordpress.com>

Ethics in community-based participatory research, Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University: https://www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/ethics_consultation/

Ethics in CBPR: <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/work-with-us/current-projects/ethics-cbpr>

The Authority Research Network: <http://www.authorityresearch.net/>

Image credits

Front page Clockwise from the top: Tangible Memories Project Team; George Logan, 'Hand of God' with the Football and Connected Communities Project; Zahir Rafiq, 'Material Knowledge' with the Imagine Project

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As a funder and as a partner in a Connected Communities co-design project, the learning in this report resonates strongly. I would recommend it to everyone - policy makers, funders, researchers and community organisations - interested in how universities and communities can work together successfully to create new knowledge, solve problems, and make a difference in society.

Karen Brookfield
Deputy Director (Strategy), The Heritage Lottery Fund

For funders and communities, universities and researchers, this report offers a stimulating reflection on the Connected Communities Programme. From its engagement with individual projects and clusters of awards to the divergent traditions, roles and structures at play, the report provides a frank perspective from participants on the challenges, both inherent and less expected, that have emerged as the Programme has evolved. But it does so by also exploring the vitality and energy, creativity and distinctiveness that is possible when we acknowledge that new knowledge requires new approaches to funding and collaboration.

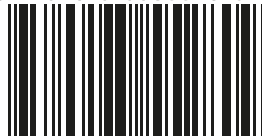
Professor Mark Llewellyn
Director of Research, Arts and Humanities Research Council

This report offers a mix of the conceptual and the practical that is exemplary. I am confident that it will inspire universities to rethink their future missions for years to come. That the work is itself a result of deep collaboration between the AHRC, the University of Bristol and a wide range of community partners is both most appropriate and a source of pride.

Professor Guy Orpen
Provost, University of Bristol



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