



## Valuing academic perspectives: the final report.

[Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer](#)

### Citation for published version (APA):

Matthews, P., Brown, L., Brown, J., Connelly, S., O'Brien, D., & Astbury, J. (2015). *Valuing academic perspectives: the final report*. Arts and Humanities Research Council.

### Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### Takedown policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester's Takedown Procedures [<http://man.ac.uk/04Y6Bo>] or contact [uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk) providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.



# Valuing academic perspectives

## The final report



Dr Peter Matthews  
Dr Laura Brown  
Dr Julie Brown  
Dr Steve Connelly  
Dr Dave O'Brien  
Dr Janice Astbury



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council



## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction.....                              | 1  |
| Methods .....                                  | 1  |
| Limitations .....                              | 4  |
| Context: social reality in Wester Hailes ..... | 4  |
| The ‘reach’ of the evaluated projects .....    | 6  |
| Outputs and outcomes .....                     | 6  |
| <i>Totem pole</i> .....                        | 6  |
| <i>Social history code books</i> .....         | 8  |
| <i>The Digital Sentinel</i> .....              | 8  |
| <i>All projects</i> .....                      | 8  |
| Barriers to effectiveness.....                 | 9  |
| Potential: future, ‘not yet’, impact.....      | 10 |
| Discussion and recommendations.....            | 11 |
| <i>For community partners</i> .....            | 12 |
| <i>For academic partners and funders</i> ..... | 13 |

## Introduction

This report summarises a number of evaluative studies carried out in the neighbourhood of Wester Hailes, Edinburgh in the summer of 2014 by a team of academics, as part of a wider Arts and Humanities Research Council funded Connected Communities project *Valuing Different Perspectives* (VDP).<sup>1</sup> The overall project sought to use a range of evaluative perspectives to the study of a number of previous AHRC *Connected Communities* projects: Community Hacking 2.0, Ladders to the Clouds, and the Communities Within Spaces of Flows projects.<sup>2</sup> The projects produced diverse outputs for the local community: a totem pole; a social history walking “code book”; wall plaques (in preparation); the renewal of the local newspaper *The Wester Hailes Sentinel* as an online ‘hyper-local’ news source, *The Digital Sentinel*; and a local partnership called Our Place in Time. The earlier *Connected Communities* projects also supported the local housing association (Prospect Community Housing [PCHA]) in continuing their use of the social history Facebook page *From There to Here*.

The evaluations used a variety of different methods, stemming from different methodological perspectives, to understand the impact of the projects. Ultimately they all were all designed to assess whether the projects had met their aims in terms of outcomes in the local community. These aims are summarised in the goals of the Community Hacking 2.0 project to:

- generate significant social capital by engaging with the diverse ages, backgrounds and interests present in the Wester Hailes community
- explore and capture the community’s memories of the area
- articulate a collective future ambition for the community.

The projects also aimed to

- improve the health and wellbeing in the local community through achieving the above outcomes; and
- develop better partnership working among the community.

*Valuing Different Perspectives* also had a broader goal of comparing different approaches to evaluation. This will be the subject of a separate report – here we present the findings of the academic evaluations, with comment on their significance and limitations, and conclude with recommendations for both community and academic partners when engaging in partnership working and seeking to deliver outcome change in communities through coproduced community research.

## Methods

The four evaluations used by the academic team and their different approaches are set out in Table 1 below. Overall the evaluations were all ‘*ex post*’ i.e. carried out retrospectively, after the work they were valuing had been carried out. In a way which contrasts with many formal approaches to evaluation, there was no ‘baseline’ data from *before* the projects, nor was there a “control group” (i.e. a ‘similar’ community *without* projects with which Wester Hailes could be compared.) This reflects the late development of the evaluation project and

---

<sup>1</sup> The individual reports are included as appendices to this report.

<sup>2</sup> *Valuing Different Perspectives* began while *Communities Within Spaces of Flows* was being completed. *VDP* did not specifically include this project within the evaluation.

the practicalities of delivering it, and which is in many ways typical of evaluation of complex interventions in community regeneration. It also relates to the approach which underpins the *Valuing Different Perspectives* project as a whole, which was committed to using evaluation as a tool for community development<sup>3</sup> based on aiming for an understanding of the 'mechanisms' by which outcomes are generated, rather than simply on measuring quantitative outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1: the four evaluations**

| Lead evaluator   | Topic  | Approach and principal methods and research question   |
|--|--|--|
| (A) Dr Laura Brown,<br>University of Manchester          | health and wellbeing                                 | Psychological and public health<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Postal survey</li> <li>- Group interviews</li> </ul> What reach did the projects have in the community and what wellbeing benefits might be delivered?   |
| (B) Dr Peter Matthews,<br>University of Stirling         | Online hyper-local news                              | Realist policy analysis approaches to evaluating community engagement<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence review of hyper-local news</li> <li>- Interviews with hyper-local news developers</li> </ul> Why is engagement in the <i>Digital Sentinel</i> low and what may increase this? |
| (C) Dr Julie Brown,<br>Southampton Solent University     | the value of public art and arts practice            | Cultural policy analysis<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arts Council England methodology for arts valuation</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews</li> </ul> How is the community art output valued and what is the benefit of this?  |
| (D) Dr Dave O'Brien,<br>Goldsmiths, University of London | the impact and reach of the projects in elite groups | Political science<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Semi-structured interviews with key elites in academia and local policy-making and politics</li> </ul> Have policy and other elites heard of the outputs and what impact has this made on the elites and the community of Wester Hailes?   |

Practical issues and increased understanding of the projects which developed during the evaluations also encouraged changes in approaches during the course of *Valuing Different Perspectives*. Reflection on these changes is an important source of learning about 'what works' in evaluating complex projects in a community such as Wester Hailes. We return to this below but here point out that the key issues are that there is no clear beginning and end to the processes within the community being evaluated, even though projects have clear start and end dates. Their impact depends on the past, and their effects will be felt in the

<sup>3</sup> See Patton, M. Q. (1994) 'Developmental evaluation' *Evaluation Practice* 15(3): 311-319.

<sup>4</sup> See Mayne, J. (2012) 'Contribution analysis: Coming of age?' *Evaluation* 18(3): 270-280 and Pawson, R. and N. Tilley (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*, London: SAGE.

future – many important outcomes (as opposed to outputs such as totem poles) will only become visible beyond the projects’ lifetimes. This is widely recognised in evaluation literature, and is particularly the case with complex, multiple interventions in deprived neighbourhoods such as Wester Hailes. For example, a previous evaluation of a large regeneration programme in Wester Hailes found significant outputs were delivered (for example, new homes and training opportunities taken up by local residents), but struggled to identify outcome change that was a result of regeneration activities<sup>5</sup>. Although all the outputs from the projects we were evaluating had been delivered (except for the wall plaques), this had been relatively recently so many of the longer-term outcomes (see Table 2) were unlikely to have been delivered, at least in a measurable form. Crucial aspects of the evaluations were therefore to capture intangible and qualitative changes, rather than simply measurable outcomes, and also to use evaluators’ and local understanding of processes to assess the contribution of the projects to *potential* as well as actual change.

**Table 2: Identified potential outcomes in the community<sup>6</sup>**

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Short-term outcomes</b>                                 |  |   |
| NHS Social Prescribing                                     | Digitising local projects                      | Better partnership working                          |
| Use of new smart phones and apps by community              | Health apps                                    | Media profile of projects and neighbourhoods raised |
| Underpass  | Engaging with Community Council                | Use of closed community newspaper                   |
| People writing their own positive stories                  |  |   |
| <b>Medium term outcomes</b>                                |  |   |
| Increased creative self-expression                         | Improved image of estate                       | Digital Sentinel maintained                         |
| Community media  | Improved effectiveness of community council    | Improved connectedness and social capital           |
| Increased digital participation                            | Public Wi-Fi etc.                              | Interconnectedness of localities                    |
| Improved engagement with local services and responsiveness | Tackling social isolation                      |   |
| <b>Long-term outcomes</b>                                  |  |   |
| Increased personal resilience                              | Increased community resilience                 | Revitalise local democracy                          |
| Community activism and empowerment                         | Confidence and resources to use new technology | Empowerment over wellbeing, broadly defined         |
| Employability  | Health and wellbeing                           |   |

There was great diversity among the research team in terms of disciplinary background and familiarity with the area. This extended to prior involvement in the projects, which impacted on the approach taken. In particular, Dr Peter Matthews had been heavily involved in the previous projects, so his evaluation took a more developmental approach, seeking to explain

<sup>5</sup> Cambridge Policy Consultants (1999) *An Evaluation of New Life for Urban Scotland*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Executive

<sup>6</sup> These outcomes were identified by the community partners in a logic modelling workshop facilitated by the principal investigator in March 2014 to provide the basis of all evaluation work.

why engagement in one output – *The Digital Sentinel* – had been low and how this might be improved.

**Table 3: The four evaluations: methods used**

| Lead evaluator   | Topic  | Details of methods   |
|--|--|--|
| (A) Dr Laura Brown,<br>University of Manchester          | health and wellbeing                                 | Postal survey of 500 tenants of PCHA, return rate 4% (n. 21)<br>Three group interviews (n. 16)                                   |
| (B) Dr Peter Matthews,<br>University of Stirling         | Online hyper-local news                              | Semi-structured interviews with those engaged in hyper-local news in Edinburgh and a researcher studying hyper-local news (n. 6) |
| (C) Dr Julie Brown,<br>Southampton Solent University     | The value of public art and arts practice            | Semi-structured interviews with key actors in the project (n. 3)   |
| (D) Dr Dave O'Brien,<br>Goldsmiths, University of London | The impact and reach of the projects in elite groups |  |

### Limitations

A number of factors introduced methodological limitations to the studies. For instance, access to political representatives was restricted because of the impending Scottish independence referendum. Further, many interviews had to be done using Skype because times when all interviewees and the researcher were available could not be found. It was difficult to recruit local participants to the focus groups, some were recruited through the postal survey and some were recruited as they were already active within projects in the community and all those who did take part were aged over 54.

### Context: social reality in Wester Hailes

It is important to recognise the extent of concentrated deprivation in Wester Hailes, even though it has received considerable investment in regeneration. All the datazones<sup>7</sup> in the neighbourhood are in the most deprived 15% of neighbourhoods in Scotland, with relatively high levels of unemployment, long-term unemployment, poor health and wellbeing, and low educational attainment, as can be seen in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Deprivation in Wester Hailes**

|               | % of population aged 16 – 64 claiming key benefits | % of children in poverty | S5: Percentage of pupils with 1 award at SCQF level 6 and above | Respiratory Disease Admissions - both sexes - all ages - rate/100,000 |
|---------------|--|--------------------------|---|---|
| Wester Hailes | 36.7   | 44.6                     | 33.1  | 2088  |
| Edinburgh     | 17.5   | 18.6                     | 56.4  | 1603  |
| Scotland      | 11.8   | 18.2                     | 58.1  | 1267  |

<sup>7</sup> Standard geographical units used by The Scottish Government in neighbourhood statistics.

The findings from the evaluations provided the residents' own insights into the meaning of these figures. For the residents of Wester Hailes, although many are exceptionally proud of the neighbourhood and feel its bad image is routinely exaggerated, this does mean there are regular challenges they have to deal with. In this research anti-social behaviour and drug and alcohol abuse were cited by residents as particular problems:

'At the Lidl side there's always a few standing about, if they're not smoking they're giving it all that, but I would say the front, as you say, where the library is about is the worst area, and as I say it is very intimidating, you're kind of thinking, do I want to go past there?' ['Jean']<sup>8</sup>

Residents recognised the structural roots of many of these problems, such as: a lack of suitable employment opportunities; poor quality public services and a feeling they were receiving lower service levels than more affluent neighbourhoods; and the physical disconnection of being resident in a neighbourhood five miles from the city centre (although recognising this had improved a lot due to regeneration in the 1990s). As one resident suggested:

'Do you not think that that's the social side, it's the council, it's the social side because they're turning round and saying, at the end of the day, that okay, Wester Hailes, nobody over there really matters...' ['Clifford']

This was combined with problems of individual deprivation and challenges, such as drug and alcohol addiction and poor mental health. However, the exaggeration of these problems and the resulting stigma was recognised as having a negative impact on the neighbourhood:

'The press it gets, both from local media and national. [...]Anything that's bad they will put on air or in the papers or in headlines in the evening news, but they don't report anything good that happens.' ['Margaret']

The challenges this level of neighbourhood deprivation poses to success in delivering the outcomes identified above must be acknowledged – if a neighbourhood is marked by concentrated deprivation and stigma, then it is likely people are less likely to feel a sense of belonging and thus engage in their community. National level data from the Scottish Household Survey 2013 shows lower rates of community attachment in the most deprived neighbourhoods. In the most deprived 15 per cent of neighbourhoods in Scotland, 70 per cent of individuals felt very or fairly strongly connected to their community compared to 78% the rest of Scotland. Again, in the most deprived 15 per cent of neighbourhoods 29 per cent of people described themselves as not very or at all strongly connected to their community compared to 21 per cent in the rest of Scotland.<sup>9</sup>

However, a shared view in the resident focus groups was that people stay in the neighbourhood and the community is close-knit. As with many residents in deprived

---

<sup>8</sup> Pseudonyms are used where qualitative data is quoted in the text.

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government (2014). Scotland's People Annual report: Results from 2013 Scottish Household Survey. Edinburgh, The Scottish Government.



neighbourhoods, participants in this research were quick to defend their neighbourhood and offer more positive stories.<sup>10</sup>

### The 'reach' of the evaluated projects

For any intervention to have an impact on changing outcomes in a community it must reach sufficient numbers of people. The methods used in these studies give a good indication of the challenges of achieving extensive reach in Wester Hailes. The return rate for the postal survey (evaluation project A) was just 4.4%. Out of the small number of people who completed the survey, only 16 agreed to then participate in a focus group, even though they would receive a £10 supermarket gift card if they did do; and of these 16, six did not attend on the day. Although the response rate was low, only two respondents reported having never heard of any of the outputs from the earlier *Connected Communities* projects. This mirrors experience with the earlier projects and what data is available – the *Digital Sentinel* website has a very low level of engagement by local residents writing stories or even submitting images or other media, and struggled to achieve many “hits”. Similarly, the parallel *Spaces Within Communities of Flows* project struggled to get residents to engage with the project linked to the local Timebank.

Within local policy elites, the projects similarly struggled to achieve reach. While a key council officer was aware of the totem pole, they were not aware of the wider projects supporting it. Local councillors were not aware at all because they concentrated on their electoral support within specific areas of the multi-member ward. However, the academics involved in the projects did highlight they had reach through them out to a wider academic and policy community. Evidencing this was difficult as mostly it was through informal conversations. The totem pole image appeared widely on publicity material relating to public engagement by academics – the AHRC used it in a brochure on *Connected Communities*; an image was used in a presentation at the *Connected Communities Showcase* in Edinburgh in 2013; the totem pole image and the related projects have had a high profile at events organised by the Edinburgh Beltane for Public Engagement; and the striking image has also been used on the cover of a book proposed by two of the academics involved in *Valuing Different Perspectives*.

### Outputs and outcomes

In this section we discuss the outcomes that the evaluations identified that were associated with each output, taking the outputs in turn.

#### *Totem pole*

In terms of the value of the totem pole, WHALE Arts<sup>11</sup> (who commissioned the artist) saw it as “a significant piece of public art”. This publicness extended to the collaborative processes used in its design. In evaluation project C WHALE Arts described benefits for local residents (such as self-esteem and creative skills, improved physical health) which they attributed directly to participation in the project. There was also some indication that the shared design of the totem pole had helped to create a sense of social connectedness - providing opportunities for local people to come together to meet and talk. However, a recognised

---

<sup>10</sup> Dean, J. and A. Hastings (2000). *Challenging Images: Housing Estates, Stigma and Regeneration*. Bristol, Policy Press.

<sup>11</sup> WHALE Arts are a local community arts and community development project. They played a central role in all the evaluated projects, and in the evaluation project itself. They were not, however, directly involved in managing or designing the academic evaluations discussed in this report.

weakness identified in the evaluation was because of the artistic method used (chainsaw sculpting) and the eventual size of the totem pole, the engagement only extended to its design, not its production or erection.

In terms of delivering greater community engagement through its ongoing existence, residents did recognise the totem pole as a possible way to engage young people in the history of Wester Hailes and its ongoing governance:

'Yeah it's great for them they love it. Just for a wee, it's something to do. I know it's not a massive thing but they get something out of it, they feel as if they're getting involved with what's going on.' ['Paul']

However, it was also recognised that not many people had interacted with it, as discussed below.

The main value ascribed to the totem pole was in place-making value. Its obvious location next to a key path on a prominent site by the canal was noted. In particular, the fact that it had stood the test of time and not been vandalised, even though it was very prominent, was noted by council officers, councillors, community organisations and residents:

'Well that's the first thing that I haven't seen vandalised in years. ['Steve']

The view of people in policy roles outwith the neighbourhood - that the totem pole's longevity is a surprise to them - may be counted as evidence that it is valued positively by the local community. Beyond this place-making role, its value is not contested: simply there is little know about how people value it. As the academic principal investigator on the *Community Hacking 2.0* project described:

'Maybe some people might think what on earth is a wooden totem pole doing out there with a QR code stuck on it? It is a multi-sided place in which the values are very different –not necessarily contested, because if they were contested, they might have burned it down by now and it's not. Maybe they are suspending their assessment of it, maybe it's seen as something else - I would love to know what that was but I don't know'

Thus, evaluation C concluded that the totem pole might be valued at any one time as an object of encounter; a shaper of place and space; an image maker; a symbol of self-identification; a material signifier; or none of these things.

In terms of wellbeing improvements for the local community, these were particularly noticed among those most engaged with the carving of the totem pole, with WHALE Arts reporting that two men benefitted from:

'the chance to come in and participate on a regular basis in the carving process, to meet new people and to feel that sense of achievement from seeing their involvement in the early stage to the point that the art work was unveiled.'

If the totem pole is valued for its place-making value and could have health and wellbeing benefits, then there would be benefit for policy-makers and academics understanding this and expanding the approach into other similarly deprived neighbourhoods. Awareness among policy-makers was poor, as described above. The AHRC were clearly supportive of

the totem pole as a co-designed output of a funded research project. Whether this support can be extended to other research funders, or other research councils, is unknown.

### **Social history code books**

Awareness, and in particular use, of the codebooks was far lower than it was for the totem pole, for the obvious reason that the books were not as publicly visible as the totem pole. In discussion with residents, their view of the booklets was positive, particularly in terms of improving the perception of the neighbourhood among outsiders:

‘if they had seen a booklet like that before, they would not... their reaction to my **area where I stay** wouldn't have been that negative.’ [‘Raymond’].

However, without evidence of use and people going on social history walks with the books, then it was not possible to identify the obvious health and wellbeing benefits that might have been achieved. Similarly, that they were less visible than the totem pole also meant they had limited reach among policy-makers and politicians.

### **The Digital Sentinel**

Evidence from residents was that the paper version of the old *Sentinel* was missed as a means of finding out what was going on in the neighbourhood:

‘The old paper, everybody knew about it and enjoyed getting it because it was more or less always up to date, and anything that was going on in Wester Hailes, they knew about it straight away. And when you had events, they were well attended.’ [‘Ben’]

This was echoed by the community development worker who produced the *What's On* guide. She described how people asked her when it was due out and when the Learning Fair happened in Westside Plaza people were enthusiastic to get a copy of it from her.

In contrast, during the summer in which the evaluation was carried out, hits to the website were generally very low, and engagement of citizen reporters was minimal. The proposed community-led editorial group to set editorial standards and approve stories for publication had not been established. This lack of engagement was noted by the academics involved in the original projects and by a local council manager. The greatest engagement with the *Digital Sentinel* was photo stories of the 2014 Wester Hailes fun run. The community journalist working on the *Digital Sentinel* at that time suggested this was because people from outside Wester Hailes who participated then downloaded the photos.

### **All projects**

The key outcome that was identified across all the projects for the community organisations was the institutional capacity developed that had cemented partnership working. As described by one resident heavily involved in the projects:

‘Social capital has been created through the interaction that's taken place in particular between Prospect Community Housing, WHALE Arts and the Health Agency. So whereas people knew each other, they are now each working collaboratively on practical projects internally within the estate’

In particular, it was recognised that the community partners had gained skills in working with academic partners which enabled them to get outputs and outcomes that they wanted. For

example, the Community Hacking 2.0 project evolved significantly from its initial aims and objectives, the direction strongly influenced by the community partners and activists, who had a very clear idea of community aims and desired outcomes from the outset.

This outcome also extended to academics involved in the project. They valued the skills they had gained and the trusting relationship they had developed with the community organisations that allowed continuing development of research projects. While the academics lacked outputs formally recognised by universities – particularly academic papers – they had gained esteem through networks made with other academics and new skills in working with community groups.

### Barriers to effectiveness

As well as identifying evidence of success in delivering outcomes, or markers that may identify that outcomes will be delivered, the evaluations also recognised barriers to success among the projects. Key among these was the challenges of digital inclusion in a deprived neighbourhood. Data from the Scottish Household Survey (Table 5) reveals the starkly lower levels of internet use in the most deprived 15% of neighbourhoods in Scotland, and a further large difference between residents in socially-rented homes and owner-occupiers. Given the majority of housing in Wester Hailes is socially-rented, this suggests that digital inclusion would be a major barrier to engagement.

**Table 5 - Internet access**

| Household                        | ...has internet access (%) | ...does not have internet access (%) |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Scotland                         | 79                         | 21                                   |
| Household income £0-6,000        | 63                         | 37                                   |
| Household income £40,000+        | 98                         | 2                                    |
| Most deprived 15% neighbourhoods | 64                         | 36                                   |
| Rest of Scotland                 | 81                         | 19                                   |
| Social renting households        | 58                         | 42                                   |
| Owner occupying households       | 84                         | 15                                   |

The starkest difference in internet use in Scotland was between older and younger people, with internet use declining precipitously with age. This means projects such as these will struggle to engage older people. Noting no one in the focus groups was under 54, residents recognised this age barrier:

'I know it's more easy for the younger people than the elderly people like myself that can't use a smartphone and things like that.' ['Mike']

'we're the one to be behind with the technology, but at the end of the day, the difference between the sentinel and the paper was, the elderly got it who didn't have a clue about computers and things like that.' ['Steve']

With another recognising the socio-economic barriers to digital engagement in the neighbourhood:

'you've just said the proper word there, 'if'. If you've got these things.' ['Jean'].

Digital exclusion was a particular barrier to success for *The Digital Sentinel*. The barriers of digital exclusion were also highlighted by local policy-makers and politicians, suggesting it is a widespread problem broadly recognised.

Evidence from other online hyperlocal news sources researched for Evaluation B suggests they are often started by individuals or groups campaigning against a specific issue – for example a planned development or a school closure – who choose to use online tools.<sup>12</sup> If they continue to report on wider issues then they need a local population that is well connected through social media to be successful. Even then many successful online hyperlocal news sources produce printed editions to overcome digital exclusion and widen their readership. This use of particular issues or events to bring traffic to a hyper-local news source was successful with the fun run, as mentioned above. Other issues in Wester Hailes – the reopening of the underpass to the shopping centre; the repositioning of a bus stop for access to the new Healthy Living Centre – have had considerable activist support within the neighbourhood and have been partially successful, yet they have not translated into reporting and activity on *The Digital Sentinel*.

While the outputs faced specific challenges because of the socio-economic circumstances of Wester Hailes, it should also be recognised that similar activities meet challenges to success in very different circumstances. A UK survey of hyper-local news services showed how very few had actually created a sustainable business model and most relied on the good will, time, energy and skills of a specific individual. These individuals often feel torn between recognising they're providing a local public service that is valued, and also a burden that they are the only individuals carrying out this communication and campaigning role. Specific resources around community development workers may be required to maximise the benefits of the outputs.

Finally, while recognising the benefits of the funding in delivering the outputs, the way the funding was delivered was also recognised as a barrier. The relatively short deadlines for submission of proposals gave the academic and community partners insufficient time to develop detailed proposals. Once the funding was awarded the projects also were not long enough to complete all the activities and if they were showing early signs of promise, there was not a guarantee of further funding to further catalyse gains. However, it must be noted that this problem was recognised as not being unique to the AHRC Connected Communities programme.

### **Potential: future, 'not yet', impact**

As discussed above, it is simply too early to say whether the higher level, or longer-term, social outcomes intended for the projects have been, or will be, produced. The evidence suggests that the totem pole in particular has certainly gone some way to achieving some of its objectives: generating positive external publicity and media attention and helping improve the image of Wester Hailes in the local press; it has become a "talking point" engaging local people and others in conversation about the local area; and it has remained standing a testimony to its value as a place-making object. As discussed in the methodology, while this

---

<sup>12</sup> Williams, A., S. Barnett, et al. (2014). *The State of Hyperlocal Community News in the UK: Findings from a survey of practitioners*. Cardiff, University of Cardiff.

is not evidence for delivering outcomes, the evidence does suggest the potential for greater change in outcomes if the projects continue.

In particular, there is clear potential for impact on specific aspects of wellbeing. Improvements to wellbeing can take a long time to produce measurable impact, as discussed. The qualitative evidence that the totem pole was valued for its place-making role, and could have potential for inter-generational engagement, all point to improvements in wellbeing that could be sustained by continuing investments in the activities.

Evidence on digital exclusion in Scotland from successive waves of the Scottish Household Survey suggests a lagged effect rather than permanent exclusion is common – that is the youngest and wealthiest are early adopters of ICTs, with older people and less wealthy people becoming engaged when the technology becomes more ubiquitous and cheaper. Potential benefits may therefore arise because of factors beyond the control of the community partners: the falling cost of ICTs; the move by other service providers to “online-only” delivery; and demographic changes in the local population.

That the outputs had garnered a lot of attention for the academics involved and raised their profile, along with the news reporting of the totem pole, also suggests greater potential for raising awareness of the projects. Focus group participants recognised the potential of the project outputs to attract attention and interest from people living outwith Wester Hailes. For instance, the uniqueness of the totem pole was recognised, and seen as something that outsiders might be interested in, or want to replicate; the social history walk and code books could attract people to the area; and the website information could alert people to how far the area has come. They also recognised a need to raise the profile of the *Digital Sentinel* through simple advertising and profile-raising around the neighbourhood to increase readership and engagement. Interviews with policy-makers suggest a preference for case-study, narrative evidence on what works to produce outcomes in local communities. This evaluation contains substantial evidence such as this, and in particular narratives that produce an evidence-based link between a very small initial investment, for example in a community art project, and much more substantial outcomes for individuals involved, and for the broader community.

## Discussion and recommendations

As a result of this set of evaluations, we can say with some certainty that the projects have contributed to short term outcomes in:

- improving place quality;
- developing mechanisms by which individual and community wellbeing could be improved;
- developing partnership working and institutional capacity among community and academic partners;
- and raising the profile of the projects outwith Wester Hailes and Edinburgh.

However, the nature of the evaluations and the complexity of the projects and the community does not allow detailed, separate attributions of projects to impacts. These are very much *collective* achievements of the projects and their community partners.

The projects have faced barriers, particularly around digital inclusion. However, it must be noted that this is a shared experience among the most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland and to have got high levels of engagement would have been a substantial achievement.

While it is recognised that the funding has allowed for the achievement of some short-term outcomes, it is apparent from the evidence that a longer timescale is necessary to produce measurable change in outcomes through the interventions. The short timescales and small quantities of funding, combined with onerous reporting mechanisms has long been a complaint of the voluntary sector, particularly organisations working in deprived neighbourhoods that have been subject to successive regeneration initiatives. However, the evidence from the evaluation of these projects suggests that the *Connected Communities* programme is continuing this trend and could have more of a strategic approach to the allocation and dispersal of funding, providing a programme that projects could follow to access ongoing funding if they are demonstrating they are achieving outcomes. Much of what was achieved to date in Wester Hailes has been based on the goodwill of all those involved in the project, and has involved utilising considerably more resources, both from academics and universities and community organisations, than funding allowed for.

The projects in Wester Hailes have clear potential to achieve more substantial outcomes over the longer term. The evaluation studies highlighted clear mechanisms by which desired outcomes could be achieved. From the various perspectives offered in this evaluation report, we can support further investment in these activities to continue delivering change in Wester Hailes.

#### *For community partners*

- There are identifiable positive outcomes from the projects that should be celebrated. These outcomes are particularly around place-making associated with the totem pole, but this has broader links to health and wellbeing within the community;
- The substantial barriers due to socio-economic deprivation and digital inclusion in Wester Hailes should be recognised as limiting factors in successfully achieving outcomes – the projects are swimming against a tide of other problems outwith their control;
- These outcomes can be maximised through continued activity and investment. It should also be recognised that many of them will take a long time to produce within the community;
- The evidence-based case studies of positive impact can be used to secure support from policy-makers and local politicians for continued investment by demonstrating the contribution of partners' activities to improved wellbeing;
- The successes and potential of the projects should be communicated more widely to celebrate their success, challenge negative perceptions of Wester Hailes and build on the existing goodwill and celebrity of the totem pole;
- The strength of partnership working between community organisations was widely recognised and should be sustained, made stronger as an asset, and publicised. It was clear that evidence of partnership working was valued as a strategic asset in discussion with other partners, such as the City of Edinburgh Council.

### *For academic partners and funders*

- Coproducing research with communities can be an experience that transforms methodologies, practices and outlooks. However, this can be at the detriment of outputs that are valued by universities;
- Processes for applying for funding are too short to develop extensive partnership working between communities and academics in advance of a project starting;
- The short amount of time that projects ran meant they could not fulfil their potential. This was particularly frustrating when funding ran out for projects that were demonstrating potential.



## Appendix – academic reports

### **The Impact of Connected Community Outputs on Resident Wellbeing in the Wester Hailes Area. End of Study Report (December, 2014)**

**Laura J.E. Brown**

#### **Plain English Summary**

The term ‘wellbeing’ is generally used to describe the extent to which someone feels that they are ‘living well’. Several different definitions of wellbeing have been proposed. These definitions focus on aspects such as how happy a person feels, their levels of self-esteem or sense of purpose, the quality of their relationships with others, and how satisfied they feel with their lives. The aim of this evaluation was to find out whether any of the outputs of the Connected Communities project (namely the digital totem pole; the digital sentinel; the Wester Hailes Social History Walks and Code Books; and the ‘From There to Here’ Facebook page) had affected levels of wellbeing within Wester Hailes.

Two separate studies were completed. The objectives of the first study were 1) to estimate how familiar people in Wester Hailes were with the Connected Communities outputs, and 2) to find volunteers for the second study. The objective of the second study was then to find out what impact these Connected Communities outputs had had (or could have) on residents’ wellbeing.

For the first study, a postal survey was sent out by Prospect Housing, in July 2014, to around 500 households in Wester Hailes. The survey asked people to report how familiar they were with each of the Connected Communities outputs. Only 21 people returned the survey. All of the people who returned the survey were aged over 35 years. The output that people were most familiar with was the digital totem pole, with ten of the 21 people reporting that they had used or seen it, and a further five people reporting that they had heard of it. Only six people reported that they had used or seen the ‘From There to Here’ Facebook page. Three people had used or seen the Digital Sentinel, and only one person had used or seen the Social History Walks and Code Books. Two of the people who returned the survey reported that they had not heard of any of the Connected Communities outputs.

For the second study, ten residents from Wester Hailes each took part in one of three discussion groups in July 2014. All participants had indicated that they were aware of at least one of the Connected Communities outputs. Half of the participants were people who were known by the community-based researcher (Janice Astbury) on this Connected Communities project. The other five were people who responded to the newsletter survey or a text message (sent out by Prospect Housing), and were unknown to the researchers before taking part.

In the discussion groups, people were first asked to talk about the good and bad things about living in Wester Hailes, and then to discuss their views and experience of each of the Connected Communities outputs. Transcripts of the discussions were then analysed to look for common themes in what people said.

Participants in the discussion groups talked about a number of aspects of Wester Hailes that could have a negative impact on levels of wellbeing. For instance, they talked about anti-social behaviour,

such as drug taking, that led to feelings of intimidation; a sense that Wester Hailes was disconnected from the city; and the poor reputation of Wester Hailes (and perception that the people living there 'don't matter') to people living outside the area. Despite this, residents reported many opportunities for friendship, activity and involvement within the community, and expressed a sense that the area had changed for the better, and was not as bad as others often think. They also reported that the paper version of the community newspaper (West Edinburgh Times; Sentinel) was much missed within the community.

Participants in the discussion group also felt that levels of awareness of the Connected Communities outputs within the community were low. However, when described, participants felt that the outputs were good things for the community. They did feel that the digital nature of the outputs might not appeal to certain sections of society (e.g. older people), but still felt that they could be of interest and benefit to many younger (and technologically savvy) people in the area. Some people also talked about instances of younger and older people using the outputs together. There was also some discussion of how the outputs could attract positive interest and attention to the area from people living outside of Wester Hailes. No participants felt that the Connected Communities outputs had had a negative effect on wellbeing.

People in the discussion groups also gave some suggestions as to how awareness of the Connected Communities outputs could be raised. These included: putting information about the outputs into the 'What's on' booklet; getting stories about them into the news; having a big screen in the community that displays the Digital Sentinel; putting up signs telling people how to contribute to the Digital Sentinel; having some paper versions of the Digital Sentinel – or leaflets advertising the digital version; changing the name of the Digital Sentinel to 'Wester Hailes Local News', so that it is clearer what it is; Distributing the Social History Walk and Code books from more locations, including those outside of Wester Hailes e.g. the Water of Leith centre; and getting teachers in schools to introduce children to the digital information about the history of Wester Hailes.

In conclusion, whilst the effect of the outputs on wellbeing was limited by the low levels of awareness in the community, the results of the discussion groups highlighted ways that the outputs could improve wellbeing in the longer term. For instance, increased engagement of younger people with the community and older generations could serve to reduce anti-social behaviour in the future. In addition, improving the image of Wester Hailes to people living outside of it could increase the desirability of the area to others as a place to live, and increase their regard and respect for people who live there. Future evaluation studies could look to see whether wellbeing had been improved in the ways suggested.

## Full Report

### Introduction and Aims

In its broadest sense, the concept of wellbeing can be considered to represent a person's subjective feelings and perceptions of the extent to which they are living well (George, 2000). A number of more specific terms and definitions are used in the literature. For instance, Diener (2000) defines 'subjective wellbeing' as comprising the balance of positive and negative moods experienced (or 'happiness') plus one's general satisfaction with one's life, whereas Ryff (1995) defines 'psychological wellbeing' as the six subdomains of autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth and positive relations with others). Related concepts of 'social wellbeing' (e.g. social integration, engagement, participation etc and an absence of loneliness) and resilience (i.e. managing and coping with stress and adversity) have also been described (Lara et al., 2013). For the purpose of this report, a very broad and inclusive approach will be taken, so that aspects of all of these definitions will be considered. In addition, as it is not always possible to separate the concept of wellbeing from the *determinants* of wellbeing (George, 2010), factors that could plausibly affect someone's level of wellbeing (e.g. isolation could cause loneliness; or social comparison could affect satisfaction with life) will also be considered within this evaluation.

When measuring wellbeing in a psychological study, the most common approach is to collect quantitative (numerical) data that is derived from self-report scales. For instance, a participant might be asked to rate on a scale of 1-6 (corresponding to the extent to which they agree with each statement) whether they feel valued by others, or feel that their life has meaning etc. A typical study design for an evaluation would then involve asking participants to fill in the same wellbeing scales before and after the intervention occurred, so that changes in levels of wellbeing can be observed. The amount of change in the group who experienced the intervention would then be compared with another 'control' group of participants who did not experience it (e.g. people living in a different neighbourhood).

In the current evaluation, quantitative measures of wellbeing were not deemed appropriate. This is because the evaluation was not planned until after the Connected Communities (CC) programme had occurred, and so no 'baseline' measures of wellbeing were available. Therefore, a less conventional, mainly qualitative, approach was used to try to determine what impact the programme had had on resident wellbeing.

In order for a community programme to have an impact on wellbeing, it first needs to have 'reach'. That is, people in the community need to be aware of it. The main aim of Study 1 was therefore to estimate the reach of the CC programme in Wester Hailes by administering a newsletter survey to measure residents' familiarity with the outputs of the CC programme. A second aim of this study was to identify potential participants for study 2 (the wellbeing evaluation). This was to ensure that a wider sample of people from the Wester Hailes community could participate in the evaluation, rather than just those people who already knew the research team, and who may be biased towards more favourable views. The aim of Study 2 was to explore the impact of the CC outputs on wellbeing, by conducting focus groups with Wester Hailes residents on the topic of the CC outputs and living in Wester Hailes. The details of each of these two studies are described below.

## **Study 1: Newsletter Survey**

The aims of study 1 were twofold:

- 1) To estimate the reach of the CC programme in Wester Hailes
- 2) To identify an unbiased sample of potential participants for study 2.

## ***Method***

### *Recruitment*

A brief paper survey was created and posted out to 500 housing association households in Wester Hailes. The survey was printed on a double-sided sheet of A4 paper and was posted out with Prospect Housing's regular tenants' newsletter. The survey was posted to a subset of the approximately 900 Prospect Housing Association tenants in Wester Hailes that receive the newsletter. A freepost return envelope (addressed to Janice Astbury at Heriot-Watt) was enclosed with the survey. An online version of the same survey was also created (hosted by Select Survey) as an alternative means of providing a response. A weblink to this was included on the paper survey.

### *Survey Details*

The first six questions on the survey asked participants to indicate how familiar they were with each of the following aspects of the CC project: 1) the Wester Hailes Digital Totem Pole, 2) the Digital Sentinel, 3) the Wester Hailes Social History Walks and Code Books, 4) the 'From There to Here' Facebook page, 5) the Wester Hailes Community Map, and 6) the 'Our Place in Time' project. For each item, respondents were able to choose one of the following three options: 1) I have never heard of this, 2) I have heard of this but have not used/seen it, 3) I have used/seen this.

The next four questions asked people for their feelings about living in Wester Hailes by indicating the extent to which they agreed with each of the following statements: 1) I like living in Wester Hailes, 2) I feel proud to live in Wester Hailes, 3) I tell other people that I live in Wester Hailes, 4) I would tell other people to live in Wester Hailes. Respondents were able to choose from the five options of: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The final three questions on the survey asked the respondent to report their age (from the following seven categories: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, and Over 74), gender, and postcode.

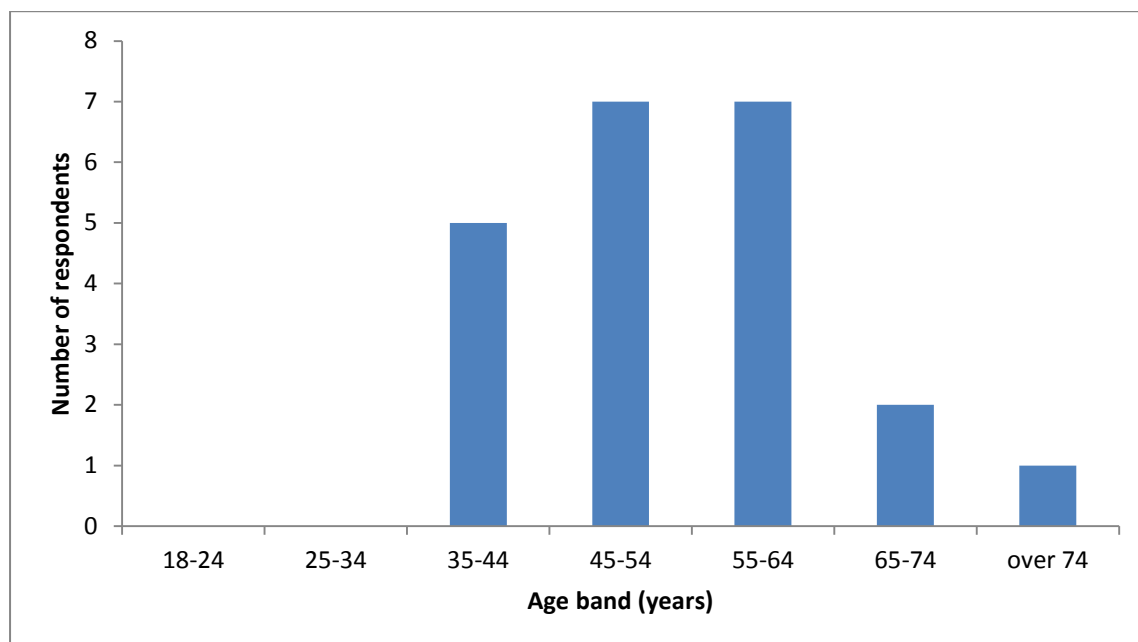
At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate whether they might also be interested in taking part in a short discussion group about local community activities (i.e. Study 2) in return for a £10 shopping voucher. There was a space for them to provide their name and contact details, if they were happy to be contacted. Additional information provided on the survey explained to readers how the data would be used, and that Prospect staff would not see individual responses. In order to encourage people to complete the survey, they were given the opportunity of entering a prize draw to win a £50 shopping voucher by returning the survey by a specified date. They were notified that only one entry per household would be entered in the prize draw, and that the minimum age for entrance was 18 years.

## Results

### Respondent Details

A total of 22 survey responses were returned: 21 of them were completed on the paper survey and one was completed online. Responses were received from 5 males and 17 females. The numbers of respondents in each age band are shown in Figure 1.

Eighteen of the respondents provided their contact details for entry into the prize draw, although three of these were received after the deadline for prize draw entry. Twelve respondents indicated that they were happy to be contacted with further information about the discussion groups.



**Figure 1: the number of survey respondents in each age band.**

### Familiarity with CC Items

Summary details about respondents' reported familiarity with each of the CC items are shown in Table 1. Familiarity scores were also calculated for each item by scoring responses from 0-2 according to how familiar each person reported being (see Table 1). The mean familiarity scores show that respondents reported being most familiar with the digital totem pole, and least familiar with the 'Our Place in Time' project. Mean familiarity scores for each participant ranged from 0-2, with a mean of 0.67. Only two participants (9%) reported having never heard of any of the items.

Responses to the questions on feelings about living in the neighbourhood were scored from 0-4, with higher levels of agreement with each statement receiving a higher score (i.e. each strongly disagree response was given a score of 0, and each strongly agree response was given a score of 4). Scores for each respondent were then summed, to give a total 'positivity about neighbourhood' score ranging from 0-16, with higher scores indicating higher levels of positivity. The mean score for the sample was 9.82 (SD=4.96), with a range of 0-16. The median score was 10.5, indicating a tendency towards positive feelings.

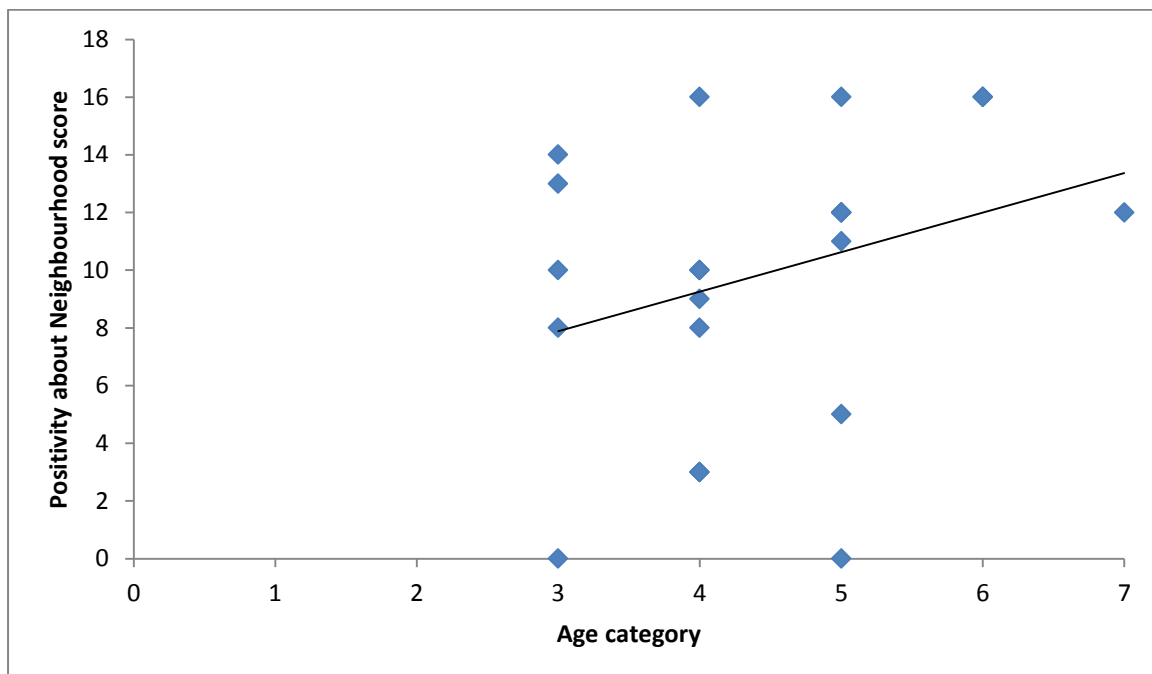
**Table 1: Frequency of familiarity responses to each CC item.**

|   | I have never heard of this (score 0) | I have heard of this but have not used/seen it (score 1) | I have used/seen this (score 2) | Mean familiarity score (/2) |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Wester Hailes Digital Totem Pole                  | 7                                    | 5  | 10                              | 1.14                        |
| 'From There to Here' Facebook page                | 12                                   | 4  | 6                               | 0.73                        |
| Wester Hailes Community Map*                      | 12                                   | 5  | 4                               | 0.62                        |
| Wester Hailes Social History Walks and Code Books | 10                                   | 11   | 1                               | 0.59                        |
| The Digital Sentinel                              | 13                                   | 6  | 3                               | 0.55                        |
| The 'Our Place in Time' project                   | 15                                   | 5  | 2                               | 0.41                        |

\*note that this item was not included in the internet survey and so a response for one respondent was not collected.

*Positivity about Neighbourhood*

Figure 2 shows each respondent's positivity score plotted alongside their age category (where a value of 1 indicates the age group 18-24, 2 indicates the age group 25-34 etc, through to a value of 7 which indicates the age group 'over 74'). A Spearman's Rho test showed no significant correlation between age group and positivity ( $r = .34, p = .12$ , two-tailed), although there is evidence of a trend towards higher positivity with increased age.



**Figure 2: plot of respondents' positivity about neighbourhood scores against age category.**

### ***Discussion***

The majority (91%) of respondents to this postal survey reported having heard of at least one of the outputs of the CC projects, suggesting that they have had demonstrable 'reach' within the community. However, due to the low response rate to the survey, these results must be interpreted with caution. In particular, it is possible that people who were not familiar with any of the outputs mentioned in the survey might have been less likely to complete it, as they might have perceived it to have lower relevance to their lives. The observed 'reach' of these outputs might therefore be an over-estimate of the actual reach within the community.

From this survey, it was also not possible to determine the validity of people's responses. That is, for instance, some respondents may have misinterpreted the names of the outputs as referring to something else. Equally, some respondents who actually were familiar with one of the outputs might not have recognised the label/description used on the survey. A face-to-face (doorstep) survey could have increased the validity of the findings, although would also be much most cost and labour intensive.

Respondents' feelings about their neighbourhood were very diverse: ranging from extremely negative (with scores of 0/16) through to extremely positive (with scores of 16/16). Interestingly, there was some evidence of a trend towards increased positivity about neighbourhood with increasing age. Although this correlation was not shown to be significant, it suggests that people of different age groups within Wester Hailes may have different feelings towards their neighbourhood.

Despite the incentive of a chance to win a £50 Asda voucher, the response rate to this postal survey was very low, at just 4.4%. When discussing this low response rate at our first workshop, a representative from Prospect Housing suggested that the relatively wordy information that accompanied the survey might have been off-putting to some residents, especially those with low literacy levels. Although the survey had been designed to be as simple and enticing as possible, I felt that it was important to ensure that information relating to anonymity, use of data, contact details, and storage of personal details etc was included in the survey. These are standard principles for ethical conduct of research, but should also help to reassure people that their data will be treated securely and confidentially. Perhaps in this case, this approach back-fired, and made people more suspicious or distrustful of the survey.

## Study 2: Qualitative Reports of Wellbeing impact

### **Method**

#### *Recruitment*

Participants for the three focus groups were recruited through a number of methods. First, any respondent from the newsletter survey who had agreed to be contacted about the focus groups, AND who reported at least having heard of one of the six CC items, were eligible to be invited to participate in the focus groups. Of the 12 people who had agreed to be contacted, 11 were eligible. However, two of these could not be contacted in time, and two were not available on the date of the focus groups. The other seven eligible participants all agreed to take part in one of the focus groups.

A short (155 character) text message was also sent out by Prospect Housing to their tenants asking them to telephone me if they were interested in taking part in a discussion about local community activities. Of the three people who responded with contact details, one had not heard of any of the CC activities, and so was not recruited. The other two agreed to take part, and one of these also volunteered her partner to take part. Recruitment posters were also placed in the library and arts centre in Wester Hailes, but yielded no responses. Finally, the CC community-based project researcher recruited six additional people through the community contacts that she had made. Thus, a total of 16 people were recruited into the focus groups.

All participants who agreed to take part in one of the focus groups were given an information sheet explaining what the study was about, and a copy of the consent form. They were also sent details of when and where their focus group would take place. Where this information was sent in the post, it was sent in a prepaid envelope bearing the University of Manchester logo.

#### *Focus Group Procedure*

Three focus groups were run on a Wednesday in July 2014: one at 10:30am; one at 2pm; and one at 5:30pm. The first two focus groups were held at WHALE Arts centre and the third was held at the Wester Hailes library. Each focus group was led by Laura Brown (an academic co-investigator on the project), and facilitated by Janice Astbury (the community-based project researcher). Before each focus group began, participants were asked to complete a form that asked for some basic demographic details. The form also asked participants to think of *one good thing* and *one bad thing* about living in Wester Hailes (in preparation for the discussion). Participants were not required to write a response to these questions, although most chose to do so.

Each focus group began with participants being asked, in turn, to report the one good and one bad thing about living in Wester Hailes that they had thought of. A description (and photograph/screenshot/print out, as appropriate) of each of the following CC outputs were then presented to the participants: the digital totem pole; the Digital Sentinel; the Wester Hailes Social History Walks and Code Books; and the 'From There to Here' website and/or Facebook page. Participants' knowledge, thoughts and feelings about each output, and the impact it had had on the community (or could have), were explored through discussion. The length of the focus groups



ranged from approximately 47 - 79 minutes. All three focus groups were audio-recorded and then transcribed for subsequent analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

A thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was conducted on the transcribed data to identify themes relevant to the following three research questions:

- What wellbeing issues were talked about by residents of Wester Hailes? (i.e. what is the wellbeing context of the CC initiatives?)
- What impact have the CC outputs made, or could they make, on wellbeing in Wester Hailes,?
- How could the impact of the CC outputs be increased?

## **Results**

### *Participant Details*

Six of the 16 participants who had agreed to take part in the focus groups did not take part on the day. Five of the seven participants recruited from the newsletter survey did not turn up (only one of whom telephoned to explain that this was because of an unexpected work commitment); and one of the participants recruited through community-based project researcher's network was no longer able to make it. A total of ten participants therefore took part: five in the first focus group; three in the second focus group; and two in the third focus group. All participants were aged over 54 years: six were in the 55-64 age group; three were in the 65-74 age group; and one was aged over 74 years. There were eight male participants and two female participants..

Although all participants were recruited on the basis that they had at least some knowledge of at least one of the CC outputs, the actual levels of awareness and previous experience varied quite a lot: some of the participants had been directly involved with one or more of the CC outputs, whereas one had only heard of the totem pole, and wasn't even quite sure what that was. In order to maintain anonymity, participants' real names have been replaced with pseudonyms in this report

### ***Thematic Analysis Part i) Wellbeing Context of Wester Hailes***

#### **Theme 1) Anti-Social Behaviour**

Drinking, drug taking, and acts of anti-social behaviour in Wester Hailes were a clear concern for many people. It is highly visible in the area, not well controlled, and leads people to feel intimidated within the environment. There were concerns about safety, although at least one resident reported a sense of resilience in not letting people stop her living her life.

Drugs. Really bad. Especially when you go over the centre, I tend not to go there. ['Paul']

At the Lidl side there's always a few standing about, if they're not smoking they're giving it all that, but I would say the front, as you say, where the library is about is the worst area, and as I say it is very intimidating, you're kind of thinking, do I want to go past there? ['Jean']

I don't see why the Police can't walk along every half an hour or whatever, a schedule that the Police do but they've not bothered, nothing at all. ['Paul']

## **Theme 2) Not as Bad as People Think**

Despite the antisocial behaviour within Wester Hailes, there was also a sense of several residents sticking up for the area: claiming that it's not as bad as people think; a lot of it is harmless; there are worse places to live etc. Several residents expressed their love for, and pride in, the area. Several residents also had a strong sense of the history of the area, and were clear that things are better now than they used to be.

I go up there every other day, I go in that place several times a week. Nobody has ever given me a bad eek. ['Clifford']

You know they don't bother anybody. ['Steve']

I have to admit okay, it's still far from perfect but there are worse places in Edinburgh now than this. ['Mark']

I love living here, I wouldn't move away from here. ['Jean']

I'm actually proud of being from Wester Hailes ['Mike']

## **Theme 3) Disconnection from the City**

Some residents reported a sense of Wester Hailes being somewhat cut-off from other parts of the city. There is a sense that, both historically and in the present day, the city is hard to reach, as it is far away, not well-served by buses, and a perceived unwillingness of some service-providers to come to Wester Hailes. This disconnection was mentioned by one person as a causal factor to some of the historical drug problems in the area.

One bad thing for me about living in Wester Hailes? The only thing that springs to mind is the access for people. There used to be a lot more access in Wester Hailes, whereas it's not so much now. ['Ben']

it was only in the late eighties that a bus went in Clovenstone. ['Mike']

Delivery men from the like of Asda and Tesco as well, but that's better now ['Margaret', talking about the services that wouldn't come into parts of Wester Hailes]

the reason these folk were junkies in the seventies and eighties and the majority of them were, was because there was no transport here ['Mike']

#### **Theme 4) Reputation and Bad Press**

There was talk of the bad reputation that Wester Hailes has had, and still does have. Whilst some felt that it didn't matter to them, there was also reference to how this reputation might affect people's job prospects or the willingness of services (or people) to come here. Indeed, several of the participants in the focus groups said that they had not moved to the area by choice. There was also talk of how these perceptions of the area were not accurate, but that it was difficult to change the way that others think about the area: residents felt that the press were only keen to report the bad side of Wester Hailes, and that people were not keen to come to Wester Hailes to have their perception changed.

I've met thousands of people that have said, 'oh you come from Wester Hailes, I don't know how you can live there..' ['Jean']

nobody came to Wester Hailes wanting to come to Wester Hailes. ['Mike']

The press it gets, both from local media and national. [...]Anything that's bad they will put on air or in the papers or in headlines in the evening news, but they don't report anything good that happens. ['Margaret']

but if you were unemployed, an employer and you're a person coming from Morningside, a person coming from a nice area and a person coming from Wester Hailes. ['Mike']

#### **Theme 5) The People of Wester Hailes don't Matter**

There was a feeling that, both historically and in the present, Wester Hailes has not had the services and resources it needs, and have been left to sort things out for themselves. Some commented that people living there are seen to not matter.

There's no policing at all. ['Paul']

Do you not think that that's the social side, it's the council, it's the social side because they're turning round and saying, at the end of the day, that okay, Wester Hailes, nobody over there really matters... ['Clifford']

I think the City of Edinburgh council used to use Wester Hailes as a kind of test area, test this and that and see what happens. ['Ben']

### **Theme 6) Continuity and Endemicity**

There was recognition by some that people who live in Wester Hailes tend to stay in Wester Hailes. This perspective had both positive and negative connotations. On the one hand, individuals expressed pride and benefits of living in the area for so long, and a sense that people were sticking to their roots. On the other hand, there was a sense that some of the anti-social behaviour seen in Wester Hailes was a result of being brought up by troubled families, and made worse by a lack of prospects for young people.

I've lived here forty-five years, and I know a lot of people by faces. ['Jean']

So you look at that problem and you go, 'well why do all these people take drugs?' It's because their mother and father started back in the eighties. ['Paul']

I tend to think 'why are they taking drugs?'. It's because there's no prospects for jobs here, really.. ['Mike']

### **Theme 7) Opportunities for Friendship, Activity and Involvement**

Several participants recognised the considerable opportunities that Wester Hailes offered for people to do things, and get involved, and of the friendly nature of many of the residents. There was also a sense that it has been the people of Wester Hailes that have changed things for the better, and a strong sense of community spirit and action. There was also recognition of 'good' and 'bad' people in Wester Hailes.

I'm always looking for stuff to do at the agency like they've got walking groups and all that kind of stuff as well which a lot of people are involved in it. I mean there's loads of stuff to do in Wester Hailes ['Mark'].

I think the community spirit is good in Wester Hailes, and although it's split into maybe sections of different areas it's still a good community centre. ['Margaret']

that was the days when the people would get up off their backsides and they were interested in their local community, and they went ahead and they did something about it. ['Steve']

### **Theme 8) Loss of the Sentinel**

The loss of the Sentinel (and West Edinburgh Times) newspaper was seen as a loss to the area. There was recognition of the role that it played in being an up-to-date source of information about what was going on in Wester Hailes, that it represented the whole community, contained positive features, that everyone read it, and that 'it came to you'.

The old paper, everybody knew about it and enjoyed getting it because it was more or less always up to date, and anything that was going on in Wester Hailes, they knew about it straight away. And when you had events, they were well attended. ['Ben']

a lot of new people that came into the area didn't know where to access information, and the Sentinel is a paper going through your door that gave you that, plus the fact the amount of times that people have written in and you've written in, I've written in, and over the years it gets printed. ['Steve']

Even your kids read the Sentinel because they got loads of information. ['Jean']

### ***Thematic Analysis Part ii) Potential Impact of CC Outputs***

#### **Theme 1) Engaging the Kids**

There was much enthusiasm for the potential that the CC outputs had to engage the younger generations. Several people were aware of children (and adults) who used the totem pole, and also felt that the other digital outputs were of interest to younger people, and a good way to engage them with the area and its history. The fact that the totem pole had never been vandalised was recognised by some as the positive regard that younger people held it in.

Yeah it's great for them they love it. Just for a wee, it's something to do. I know it's not a massive thing but they get something out of it, they feel as if they're getting involved with what's going on. ['Paul', talking about kids using the totem pole]

but the young ones like it, they think it's, 'cool', is the word? ['Margaret, talking about the totem pole']

Yes, I've spoken to a few kids, and they do like it. Some of the kids that are interested in the history of Wester Hailes, you know, I heard them talking about the underpass on the way to the shopping centre, and then you point it out to them, they didn't even realise it was there. ['Ben', talking about the totem pole]

Well that's the first thing that I haven't seen vandalised in years. ['Steve', talking about the totem pole]

## **Theme 2) Not Everyone is Digitally Ready**

There was recognition that not everyone in Wester Hailes could benefit from the digital aspects of the CC outputs. In particular, older people and those without smartphones were seen as least likely to be able to (or want to) access the digital information. Although the library offers public access to the internet, participants felt that this still lacked the convenience of information coming to you (as with a newspaper). Some participants also stated that they preferred paper over digital information. No bitterness about the inability to access the outputs was expressed though.

we're the one to be behind with the technology, but at the end of the day, the difference between the sentinel and the paper was, the elderly got it who didn't have a clue about computers and things like that. ['Steve']

I know it's more easy for the younger people than the elderly people like myself that can't use a smartphone and things like that. ['Mike']

you've just said the proper word there, 'if'. *If* you've got these things. ['Jean', talking about access to digital information].

Well Prospect have a booklet, a leaflet that comes out every 3 months or something, and they asked if they wanted it stopped and put on to Facebook and on the computer and people said 'no', they wanted it on paper. ['Margaret']

A bit of paper in your hands is still quite good sometimes. [Male]

## **Theme 3) A Good Thing**

The CC outputs were pretty much unanimously seen as being positive for the area. Even those who had not previously been aware of the outputs, or who were not able to engage with them, seemed to think that they could only be a positive thing for the area.

I can't really walk anymore, can only maybe walk 40-50 yards, I mean having a look at it it's good. ['Steve', talking about the social history walk and code books]

Yes, if it's available, it would be very interesting. If you keeps and it's going to be free isn't it? ['Raymond', talking about the social history walk and code books]

Yeah it's smart man ['mark', talking about the totem pole]

#### **Theme 4) Opportunities for Inter-Generational Contact**

A couple of participants described how the CC outputs had provided opportunities for them to engage with their children – e.g. by discussing old photographs that the children had found on the websites. The digital barrier that often exists between generations also suggests that the digital CC outputs have additional potential for bringing generations together through the sharing of complementary digital and social history knowledge and interests.

I know my children went looking for it and enjoyed it, they said 'that's a cracking picture of you Dad'. [Ben', talking about the Facebook/web site]

Aye, aye, I think my kids have mentioned about this, one of them went through it all and had seen pictures of my boys from when they playing for [name of football team]. [Paul', talking about the Facebook page].

Oh I know, it's all 'googlybook' to me. [Mike', talking about trying to talk to children]

#### **Theme 5) Opportunities for Engaging with Current and Past Wester Hailes**

Participants felt that the CC outputs offered great potential for enabling people to find out more about the various events, activities, and opportunities that are available in the area – letting people know what they have got. The information about the area's history was also seen to be very important and useful – for interest, or as a way of helping people to learn or be reminded about how the area has changed (and improved over time).

That's something else, a lot of people in Wester Hailes don't know where the canal, you know where the stops are, what's the name for it, bays? [Margaret']

but there's bound to be information about things they can do, I never knew there was a boxing club in Clovenstone, I don't know if it's still there, I noticed that earlier. [Mark', after looking at one of the social history walk and code books]

I can't say, it's information that a lot of people really could use. It kind of backs up a lot of the facts of how over the years this place, what it's been like, the poverty and again deprivation and alcoholics and the various stages that this place has gone through.

[Interviewer asks whether it's important for people to know about that]

Definitely. Oh aye. There's still people that look at Wester Hailes and don't want to help us, there has been improvements but there could be a lot more. [male]

### **Theme 6) Limited Reach and Awareness**

The limited reach that the CC outputs had so far had was evident from the focus groups. Several people were not previously aware of some of the outputs or, in the case of the totem pole, had seen it but did not know what it was. Those who had greater involvement with the project and outputs also felt that they weren't reaching enough people.

Oh I've passed it loads of times aye, nearly every day on my bike along the canal. I always wondered what it was ['Mark', talking about the totem pole].

I still don't think it's reaching enough people. ['Duncan', talking about the Digital Sentinel]

### **Theme 7) Attracting Interest and Attention from Outside – Changing Perceptions**

There was some discussion of the potential of the CC outputs to attract attention and interest from people living outside of Wester Hailes. For instance, the uniqueness of the totem pole was recognised, and seen as something that outsiders might be interested in, or want to replicate; the social history walk and code books could attract people to the area; and the website information could alert people to how far the area has come. These outputs could therefore help to change the bad reputation that Wester Hailes was felt to have.

I don't think they've got anything like that in Edinburgh anywhere else, not that I've heard about anyway. [Mark, talking about the totem pole]

I certainly know the few times when I have brought a boat up and dropped the passengers off at the mooring, I've seen them go up to the totem pole and scan the barcodes. [...] They tell the passengers, if they're not local, to go up to the totem pole. ['Ben']

if they had seen a booklet like that before, they would not... they're reaction to my **area where I stay** wouldn't have been that negative. [Raymond, talking about the social history walk and code books].

The ones that have come up are quite surprised to how much it's changed, it's not a concrete jungle anymore like it used to be. ['Ben']



**Specific Suggestions for increasing awareness of the CC outputs included:**

- Putting information about the outputs into the 'What's on' booklet.
- More press articles
- Having a large physical public display of the Digital Sentinel – e.g. a big screen in the shopping centre or library.
- Public signs telling people how to contribute to the Digital Sentinel
- Having some physical (paper) versions of the Digital Sentinel – or leaflets advertising the digital version.
- Call the Sentinel 'Wester Hailes Local News', so that it is clearer what it is.
- Distributing the Social History Walk and Code books from more locations, including those outside of Wester Hailes e.g. the Water of Leith centre.
- Getting teachers in schools to alert children to the digital information about the history of Wester Hailes.

**Specific Suggestions for improving the CC outputs included:**

- Making it easier to update the information on the digital totem pole
- Ensuring that the Digital Sentinel is more up to date by speeding up the time it takes to get an article submitted.
- Making the outputs more interactive
- Having a way of getting feedback from the community about the outputs
- Adding additional information into the walking books e.g. information about regulations for using the canal tow path.

## ***Discussion***

The results of this study highlighted some of the community wellbeing issues that were salient to Wester Hailes residents. Perceived threats and impediments to wellbeing included: anti-social behaviour, such as drug taking, that led to feelings of intimidation; a sense of disconnection from the city; and a poor reputation, and perception that the people of Wester Hailes 'don't matter' to others. Despite this, residents reported many opportunities for friendship, activity and involvement within the community, and expressed a sense that the area had changed for the better, and was not as bad as others often think. Other relevant context included the loss of the paper version of the community newspaper, which was much missed, and the perception that individuals (and their families) tend to remain in Wester Hailes.

Although levels of awareness and engagement with the CC outputs were relatively low, residents perceived them to generally be 'a good thing'. Whilst they recognised that the digital nature of the outputs might not appeal to certain sections of society (e.g. older people), there was much enthusiasm for the positive impact they could have on the wellbeing of younger people, and a suggestion that they could provide a mechanism for increased inter-generational contact. There was also some discussion of how the outputs could attract positive interest in, and attention to, the area from people living outside of Wester Hailes. Thus, whilst this evaluation was 'not yet' able to reveal much impact of the CC outputs on wellbeing, it did highlight ways that the outputs could improve wellbeing in the longer term. In particular, increased engagement of younger people with the community and older generations could serve to reduce anti-social behaviour in the future. In addition, improving the image of Wester Hailes to people living outside of it could increase the desirability of the area to others as a place to live, and increase others' regard and respect for people who live there. In order for the potential of the outputs to be reached though, additional investment and initiative is required in order to increase their reach within the community. Some specific suggestions for doing this were offered by participants. Future evaluations of the CC outputs could test these proposed mechanisms of potential 'wellbeing impact' by including measures of the suggested mediators: such as more favourable perceptions of outsiders towards Wester Hailes; increased quality of inter-generational relationships; and reductions in anti-social behaviour within the area.

## ***Limitations of the research***

There are some limitations of this research. First, the sample of participants in both studies was smaller than planned, and all participants in study 2 were aged over 54 years. Given that some of the key potential benefits of the CC outputs identified by participants related to younger people, it would have been useful to hear the views of some younger people on these topics. In addition, as the correlates and determinants of wellbeing are thought to change with age (Cooper *et al.*, 2011), it is possible that younger participants may have revealed additional wellbeing issues that were not identified from the participants who took part.

There are a number of potential reasons why recruitment was poorer than expected. In particular, feedback from one of the community partners was that the survey used in Study 1 may have been too complex and 'wordy' to attract many people from completing it, particularly given that literacy levels in the Wester Hailes community are lower than national averages. It is also possible that the name of an unfamiliar (and English) university printed on the written correspondence with

participants may have deterred some people from taking part. Future research of this type should ensure that the complexities of recruiting participants from an unfamiliar community are taken into consideration, and that sufficient time is dedicated to getting to know the community, building relationships, and to devising effective recruitment strategies.

Due to the difficulties of recruiting participants into study 2, the community-based project researcher recruited additional people from her network of contacts. Half of the ten participants who took part were recruited in this way, and thus had previous contact with the project team, and were generally very familiar with one or more of the Connected Communities outputs. Although this went against the original intention of recruiting people who had not been directly involved with the project (with the assumption that they would provide more objective, less biased, views on the outputs' success), the 'insider knowledge' provided by these people proved useful in understanding the impact of the CC outputs. This knowledge was particularly useful given the general low knowledge and awareness about the CC outputs within the wider community.

The low levels of knowledge about the CC outputs evident in the focus groups also cast some doubt on the true levels of awareness reported in the results of study 1. For instance, whilst some participants in the focus group were aware of the totem pole, not all of them were fully aware of what it was for. Furthermore, when talking about the digital sentinel, some participants in the focus groups initially confused this with the Sentinel newspaper. It is therefore possible that the levels of awareness observed from the survey findings represent an overestimate of true levels of understanding. On the other hand, there may have been members of the community who were aware of the outputs, but who were not familiar with the labels used to describe them in the survey. In either case, these issues highlight the value of the qualitative approach taken for evaluation for getting a rich and accurate account of people's knowledge and understanding of the CC outputs.

As levels of knowledge and awareness about the CC outputs were generally low, much of the discussion about their potential impact was hypothetical in nature. That is, many comments were about what impact people *believed* the outputs *could* have, or about how interested they thought they *would be* in the outputs, given that they were not aware of them before being introduced to them in the focus group. Such comments therefore need to be treated with caution at this stage, as they are based on supposition rather than experience.

## **Conclusions**

Although the limited reach of the CC outputs means that there has not yet been much evidence of an impact on community wellbeing, the results of the two studies reported here highlight clear potential for impact on specific aspects of wellbeing. For instance, there were suggestions that the CC outputs could engage younger people in the area, and that they could provide a mechanism for increased inter-generational contact. There was also some discussion of how the outputs could attract positive interest in, and attention to, the area from people living outside of Wester Hailes, which could help to improve the poor reputation of Wester Hailes that is held by others. A number of specific suggestions for ways to increase awareness of the CC outputs were also identified in this project.

These findings also provide useful suggestions when designing longer-term evaluations of the impact of these outputs. For instance, given the potential for changing others' perceptions of Wester Hailes, future evaluations could investigate whether people living outside of Wester Hailes feel more likely to visit, or feel more positively about the area, if they are made aware of the outputs. Similarly, measures of inter-generational contact, attitudes, or relationships could be taken following use of the CC outputs. The evaluation also revealed a number of suggestions for ways in which the reach of the CC outputs could be increased within, and beyond, the Wester Hailes community.

## References

- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Cooper, C., Bebbington, P., King, M., Jenkins, R., Farrell, M., Brugha, T., McManus, S., Stewart, R. & Livingston, G. (2011). Happiness across age groups: results from the 2007 National Psychiatric Morbidity Survey. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 26, 608-14.
- Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: the science of happiness and a proposal for a National index. *American Psychologist*, 55, 34-43.
- George, L.K. (2010). Still happy after all these years: research frontiers on subjective well-being in later life. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 65B, 331-339.
- Lara, J., Godfrey, A., Evans, E., Heaven, B., Brown, L.J.E., Barron, E., Rochester, L., Meyer, T. & Mathers, J (2013). Towards measurement of the Healthy Ageing Phenotype in lifestyle-based intervention studies. *Maturitas*, 76(2), 189-99.
- Ryff, C.D. (1995). Psychological well-being in adult life. *Current Directions in Psychological Sciences*, 4, 99-104.

## Appendix 1: Postal Survey

### Your Chance to Win £50!

We are doing some research into the effectiveness of recent community projects that have run in the Wester Hailes area. As part of this research, we want to find out how much people know about some of the local activities that have taken place. We are therefore asking Prospect tenants to answer the questions on the other side of this page, and return the completed questionnaire to **Janice Astbury, at Heriot-Watt University** in the freepost envelope included. Alternatively, you can complete this questionnaire online at:

<http://bit.ly/1m0YvPd>

Please note that all entrants must be at least 18 years of age.

**Completed questionnaires that are received by 5pm on  
Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2014 will be entered into a prize draw to  
win a £50 ASDA shopping voucher**

You do not have to complete this questionnaire. Information about which people completed the questionnaire will **not** be made available to Prospect staff.

The information that we get from this questionnaire will be used to help us determine how effective these recent community projects have been. Summaries of the results of this research will be made public. However, no names or contact details of any respondents will be included in these reports.

#### Further information about this research

The project is led by Dr Peter Matthews at Heriot-Watt University, along with Prospect, WHALE, the Health Agency, and the University of Manchester.

If you have any questions about this questionnaire please contact Laura Brown ([laura.brown@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:laura.brown@manchester.ac.uk) tel: 0161 275 2563).

Questions on the wider project can be answered by Peter Matthews ([p.matthews@hw.ac.uk](mailto:p.matthews@hw.ac.uk) tel: 0131 451 4641).

Please note that only one entry per household will be entered into the prize draw. The winner of the £50 shopping voucher will be notified by Friday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2014. Names and contact details will be retained only for the purpose of contacting the winner of the prize draw, and for contacting those people who have indicated that they would like to receive more information. We will therefore not retain names or contact details after the prize draw and project have been completed.

## Questionnaire

**Please indicate how familiar you are with each of the items listed below**

|   | I have never heard of this | I have heard of this but have not used/seen it | I have used/seen this |
|---|----------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Wester Hailes Digital Totem Pole                  |                            |  |                       |
| The Digital Sentinel                              |                            |  |                       |
| Wester Hailes Social History Walks and Code Books |                            |  |                       |
| 'From There to Here' Facebook page                |                            |  |                       |
| Wester Hailes Community Map                       |                            |  |                       |
| The 'Our Place in Time' project                   |                            |  |                       |

**Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements**

|  | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| I like living in Wester Hailes                     |                |       |         |          |                   |
| I feel proud to live in Wester Hailes              |                |       |         |          |                   |
| I tell other people that I live in Wester Hailes   |                |       |         |          |                   |
| I would tell other people to live in Wester Hailes |                |       |         |          |                   |

|                                     |       |       |       |       |       |       |         |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| <b>Your age</b><br>(please circle): | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-74 | Over 74 |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|

|  |      |        |                |                            |
|--|------|--------|----------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Your gender</b><br>(please circle): | Male | Female | Rather not say | <b>Your postcode</b> _____ |
|--|------|--------|----------------|----------------------------|

\*\*\*\*\*

We are also inviting small groups of Wester Hailes residents to share their views on some local community activities in return for a £10 shopping voucher. Please tick the box below if you might be interested in taking part in one of these discussions, so that we can contact you with more information. Unfortunately, only a limited number of people can take part in these discussion groups, and so not everyone who expresses interest will be invited to take part.

**Yes: I am interested in taking part in a discussion group, and am happy for you to contact me with more information.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Your contact details** (for prize draw entry, or for further information about the discussion groups)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Tel \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

# Barriers to participation in the Digital Sentinel

*A report delivered as part of the Valuing Different Perspectives Connected Communities Legacy Project*

Peter Matthews, University of Stirling



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council





## Summary

As part of the Valuing Different Perspectives project, led by the University of Stirling, this report evaluates engagement in the Digital Sentinel in Wester Hailes. Rather than taken a before-and-after, or like-with-like comparison, the evaluation shares the observation that engagement with the Digital Sentinel has been low and there are barriers to this that need to be understood. The evaluative study found that:

- While the Digital Sentinel can be thought of as one intervention, it actually includes four different mechanisms seeking to produce different outcomes in Wester Hailes: to engage volunteers; to get engaged volunteers to write stories; to engage the wider community in events and activities; and to increase the number of people active in campaigning about local issues.
- Successful hyperlocal news sites were commonly lead by skilled, active local individuals. The most common reason they got started was to campaign on a specific issue, quite often a planned development. These individuals struggled to get more people involved and felt a double-edged sword of responsibility – they appreciated that their activities were needed, but also felt this as a burden.
- Digital exclusion, deprivation, poverty and low levels of educational attainment are all extensive barriers for residents in deprived neighbourhoods like Wester Hailes getting involved in a hyperlocal news service like the Digital Sentinel.
- There are five identified ways these barriers might be overcome:
  - *The Digital Sentinel requires to be supported by a paid worker* – this role should focus on community development and not journalistic or editorial output;
  - *Local campaigns should be used to develop the Digital Sentinel* – this could be positive support for new developments or campaigns for environmental improvements;
  - *The Sentinel must be plural in what is counted as news* – a higher degree of delegation is needed in administration to encourage people to submit a wide variety of copy and see it posted quickly;
  - *The Sentinel must concentrate on the existing website, but use other media* – automatic aggregation of tagged photos and a Facebook page would all encourage further engagement with little input; the moderation of the From There to Here site provides a good model for this;
  - *The Sentinel might expand its geographical reach* – this would bring in resources, expertise and skills from surrounding neighbourhoods.

## **Introduction**

The Digital Sentinel developed as a spin-off from the Ladders to the Cloud AHRC Connected Communities project and funding from the Carnegie UK Trust. It was one of a broad range of projects brought together in the Our Place in Time (OPiT) partnership in Wester Hailes. In discussion with key OPiT partners before this project began, the Digital Sentinel was seen as a natural development of these activities because:

- It could harness the activities and engagement on the From There to Here Facebook page;
- It was an extension of the good partnership working that was developing;
- There was a genuine sense that Wester Hailes had lost an important voice in the Sentinel/West Edinburgh times and there was a need for a similar service;
- The organic growth of online hyperlocal news provided a good model for restarting the Sentinel in a digital format.

It must be highlighted that the Digital Sentinel was an unanticipated outcome of these projects and that it has got started and has had some attention is a success in its own right. However, there was awareness that the Sentinel had not had the level of engagement anticipated and there were specific barriers to engagement that were being regularly encountered.

This evaluative study has used a realist approach derived from the work of Pawson and Tilley (Pawson and Tilley 1997). The core of this is to construct a context-mechanisms-outcome (CMO) framework and test this against the available evidence. The CMO framework is designed to unpack the implicit ways in which any intervention intends to make an impact in wider society. It recognises that in any given intervention there will be a whole set of by which it aims to create outcomes in society. It further recognises that the context within which any given intervention can be implemented is varied and that these contextual factors can impact on whether a mechanism will produce the desired outcome.

The particular utility of the realist evaluation approach is that it is pluralistic in the evidence it uses. Whereas a systematic review or randomised controlled trial might have looked at hyperlocal news sites developed in a range of comparable neighbourhoods, the realist evaluation approach brings in all evidence that can tell us why a hyperlocal news source might, or might not, be successful (Pawson 2006). The overall aim was to understand what barriers might exist, and what success factors need to exist, for the Digital Sentinel to become a sustainable and vibrant local news source in Wester Hailes. The report is therefore forward-looking and problem-focused in its orientation.

## **Evidence collection**

Most of the evidence collected for the project was secondary evidence from a broad range of disciplines. To complement this evidence six interviews were carried out. The interviewees were selected to provide specific information rather than to form a representative sample. Thus the interviews covered:

- An established hyperlocal news site with a contrasting history and in a much less deprived neighbourhood than Wester Hailes;

- An established hyperlocal in a neighbourhood with some areas as deprived as Wester Hailes;
- An academic who specialises in research on hyperlocal news sites and who runs their own hyperlocal news site;
- Local authority officers who run hyperlocal news services or are engaged in similar activities.

### Context-Mechanisms-Outcomes Framework

To begin the evaluative study, we firstly have to produce an initial CMO framework. This is based on the previous projects and particularly the initial logic modelling session with the community partners as part of the *Valuing Different Perspectives* project. At this stage the Sentinel itself is the mechanism. At its inception the Digital Sentinel was intended as a community news source, with local citizen journalists producing content themselves. Therefore the mechanism has two outcomes, to create engaged citizen journalists and revive local democracy.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Mechanism</b><br>A sustainable web-based hyperlocal news site | <b>Outcomes</b><br>Engaged citizen journalists<br>Revived local democracy   |
|  | <b>Context</b><br>One of the most deprived 15% of neighbourhoods in Scotland<br>Strong local voluntary sector working together<br>Supportive policy context for hyperlocal news |

Through the evaluative study we have been able to unpack this basic mechanism and outcomes further and treat the web-based hyperlocal news site (the Digital Sentinel) as an intervention with a range of different mechanisms at work possibly creating different outcomes.

| <b>Mechanisms</b>  | <b>Outcomes</b>  |
|--|--|
| a) Volunteers are engaged  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People have the skills and abilities to get others engaged in writing news stories;</li> <li>• The Sentinel is self-sustaining without grant support.</li> </ul>                        |
| b) Engaged, active civic-minded people write local news stories    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People are knowledgeable and confident enough to write about issues that are affecting their lives;</li> <li>• People have skills which could help them into employment;</li> </ul>     |
| c) People hear about local events and take part in them            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a stronger shared sense of space and community;</li> </ul>   |
| d) People hear about local issues and begin to campaign about them | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is more engagement between people and groups within the neighbourhood;</li> <li>• There is an improvement in neighbourhood conditions because of campaigning activity.</li> </ul> |

The mechanisms can obviously be categorised as those that act on individuals (a and b) and those that act at a community level (c and d). The two will be interlinked – engaged individuals are more likely to campaign on local issues with others – but for clarity they will be addressed in turn here.

## **Mechanisms acting on individuals**

### ***Engaging volunteers***

**Mechanism:** At its inception and through training sessions the Digital Sentinel has so far attempted to create individuals with the skills and level of engagement required to form an editorial board to sustain the service. However, the evidence suggests this mechanism is unlikely to be a success.

**Evidence:** The largest survey of hyperlocal news services in the UK showed that the vast majority of these were set up by committed individuals and these people sustained them (Williams, Barnett et al. 2014). Often they started off as single issue campaigns – often land-use planning campaigns. For example, the Broughton Spurtle emerged out of campaigning against the closure of London Road Primary School, along with the Poll Tax. Hyperlocal news sites emerging out of broader issues, such as environmental improvements, or from a business plan are uncommon. Therefore, it is more likely that civic engagement and activism on single issues will lead to hyperlocal news developing, rather than the other way around.

The fact that the majority of hyperlocal news sites rely on the efforts of an individual is a challenge to sustainability. Even the most successful of hyperlocal sites, covering a wide area struggle to get a substantial number of regular volunteer writers. Being the individual who a site relies on for basic copy and editorial direction can therefore be a burden. One participant highlighted the double-edged nature of this: on the one hand individuals can enjoy the burden knowing that their initial efforts to campaign on issues are now broadly welcomed; on the other hand people then feel like they cannot give up because the community would lose a key resource they have come to rely upon. Further, a great deal of time needs to be spent by these individuals working in a community development role, training others to take over if they wish to step back. Even if this is done, it can still be a challenge to maintain people's engagement.

**Context:** This mechanism of engaging individuals is made more difficult by the contextual factors, particularly the concentration of deprivation in Wester Hailes. In the last quarter of 2012, 37% of residents in Wester Hailes claimed key benefits compared to 12% in Edinburgh and 18% in Scotland; 45% of children were in poverty compared to 18% in Edinburgh and Scotland; and in 2012/13 no children in Wester Hailes got five awards at SCQF level six and above compared to 19% in Edinburgh and 16% in Scotland.

The barriers this presents to engagement have to be recognised. As the evaluation of the Wester Hailes partnership and the New Life for Scotland programme found, engaging the wider community was a challenge even during this period of intense investment and engagement (CPC 1999). The New Deal for Communities programme in England invested a third of its overall budget on community engagement activities. Only 17% of residents in NDC areas ultimately engaged in partnership activities and the vast majority of this was

informal and passive attendance at fetes and galas. Only around 2% of residents engaged more actively in partnership activities (Batty, Beatty et al. 2010).

This is also shown in data from the Scottish Household Survey 2013, with lower rates of community attachment in the most deprived neighbourhoods (Scottish Government 2014). In the most deprived 15% of neighbourhoods in Scotland, 70% of individuals felt very or fairly strongly connected to their community compared to 78% the rest of Scotland. Again, in the most deprived 15% of neighbourhoods 29% of people described themselves as not very or at all strongly connected to their community compared to 21% in the rest of Scotland.

Analysis of the UK Citizenship survey provides more evidence as to how these barriers manifest themselves. Looking at levels of volunteering, it found that the key trends were poorer people spent more hours volunteering than wealthier people. However, whereas better-educated and wealthier people engaged in formal volunteering activities, such as joining committees or community councils, people with lower educational attainment and poorer people tended to carry out informal activities, such as caring for relatives and friends (Egerton and Mullan 2008). Subsequently, at a population level we can see that Wester Hailes will have more people carrying out informal activities, but they are less likely to engage in the sort of formal volunteering that the Digital Sentinel requires.

From the primary research carried out for this study, hyperlocal news sites only moved to a broader community development role when provided with specific funding. If this activity was carried out without funding, it was because the editor had the time and other resources to devote to the activity.

### ***Case study – Greener Leith***

Greener Leith has been very successful at getting a wide range of organisations to engage with their activities using their website as a base. One of the most successful activities was their consultation on Leith Walk. The site has, at the time of writing published 334 news stories on Leith Walk many following the tram works and resulting disruption. Without further funding they organised a collaborative consultation exercise among interested parties to agree a vision for Leith Walk, available here: <http://bit.ly/GLLeithWalkPlan>. They pioneered using open methods, such as having a document on Google Drive people could just add to and edit as they wanted. As one person involved commented, their aim was to counter arguments the City of Edinburgh Council may have made against more radical proposals. Indeed, the project lead from the Council was specifically not invited to the first meeting as they had suggested they would “explain the scope of what’s possible” and curtail open discussion. More about their campaign can be found here: <http://bit.ly/GLLeithWalk>

This example does suggest there is scope for hyperlocal news services can organise existing community organisations and others to engage in broader activities if they have the resources, ability and willingness.

### ***People writing in the Sentinel***

**Mechanism:** the people writing for the Digital Sentinel or producing other content will increase their ICT skills.

**Evidence:** much of the evidence presented above about getting people to engage at all with the Digital Sentinel discussed above also applies here. However, the focus here is on skills acquisition, rather than the development of civic-mindedness or social capital.

The idea of using the Digital Sentinel to improve people's skills has a stronger backing in available evidence. Other community media projects have been historically successful at providing opportunities for people to gain media skills – most commonly community radio stations. Recent evidence on the links between social networks, individual behaviour and social networks suggests that an employability intervention focused around the Digital Sentinel could be highly successful (Lindsay 2010).

A key barrier to unemployed young people and those further from the labour market in getting work is adequate social networks (Green and White 2007). For example, research with unemployed young people in deprived neighbourhoods in England showed that those in geographically and socially isolated neighbourhoods had difficulty imagining themselves in employment situations. If the Digital Sentinel could work with people to develop their skills and confidence in forming social ties beyond their immediate neighbourhood, friends and kin, then it might produce employability outcomes. Further, while social networks are still surprisingly important for finding work, increasing digital skills are necessary to complete online application forms to apply for work which is now a requirement for receiving benefits.

The Full Employment Areas Initiative in Glasgow provided one community-development based model the Digital Sentinel could follow (Quinn and Seaman 2008). Recognising the distance of some people from networks into labour markets, it used a community development work model to link people into these networks and recognise the value of good work. The Digital Sentinel may be able to provide the basis for such an initiative.

Linking this to the evidence above, while it is difficult to get people from deprived neighbourhoods to engage in activities that might be formally classed as community engagement, the 2,000+ likes on the From There to Here Site demonstrates a desire to engage more passively. This could be harnessed with a more open platform for the Sentinel allowing people to post things they might be writing anyway – poems, recipes, announcements about local events – and post them on the site.

**Context:** the policy context for employability projects is not as favourable as it once was. The Work Programme is a very structured format with incredibly short timescales not necessarily suited to an intervention based around the Digital Sentinel.

In projects such as the Digital Sentinel in deprived neighbourhoods it is correct to assume that issues around digital inclusion prevent people from engaging fully and that part of their role could be to provide people with ICT skills. Data from the Scottish Household Survey (table 1) and Ofcom does support the existence of a digital divide. The data from the Scottish Household Survey in table 1 demonstrates clear divides between the least affluent and most affluent households and neighbourhoods in terms of internet access and use. Further, while we cannot easily interrogate the data, those in socially rented homes seem to have particularly low levels of internet access. It is interesting that home internet access and use of internet vary, with the latter being higher in deprived neighbourhoods and people in socially rented homes. In households with an income of less than £10,000 a year, 12% of people use the local library to use the internet, compared to just 4% of those with an income

over £10,000. This reflects international evidence that people will go to great lengths to access the internet, recognising its benefits, and also explains the high usage rates for internet access at Wester Hailes library.

| <b>Table 1 - Internet access</b>  |                     |                               |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------------|
|   | Has internet access | Does not have internet access |
| Scotland  | 79                  | 21                            |
| Household income £0-6,000   | 63                  | 37                            |
| Household income £40,000+   | 98                  | 2                             |
| Most deprived 15% neighbourhoods  | 64                  | 36                            |
| Rest of Scotland  | 81                  | 19                            |
| Social renting households   | 58                  | 42                            |
| Owner occupying households  | 84                  | 15                            |
| <b>Use of internet</b>  |                     |                               |
|   | Uses internet       | Does not use internet         |
| 16-44 year olds   | 96                  | 4                             |
| 45-59 year olds   | 84                  | 16                            |
| 60-74 year olds   | 63                  | 37                            |
| 75+ year olds   | 25                  | 75                            |
| Most deprived 15% neighbourhoods  | 70                  | 30                            |
| Rest of Scotland  | 82                  | 18                            |
| Social renting households   | 65                  | 35                            |
| Owner occupying households  | 84                  | 16                            |
| Source: Scottish Government (2014). <i>Scotland's People Annual report: Results from 2013 Scottish Household Survey</i> . Edinburgh, The Scottish Government. |                     |                               |

The biggest divide remains around age, however, with steep reductions in the number of people who use the internet with age, dropping to just 25% of those over 75. As Wester Hailes has a younger age profile than the rest of Scotland, age as a barrier to internet access is likely to have a slightly lesser effect. Across all categories, the main reason people do not use a computer or the internet is because they did not like doing so (34%) with only 12% citing the cost of a computer or internet access as a barrier.

Although Ofcom does not provide accurate data on socio-economic status, they provide more up-to-date data and proxy measures for people in low-skilled work or unemployment. These suggest lower rates of internet use among the least skilled or unemployed and a greater use of devices such as games consoles to access the internet. However, over time the gap between the least affluent and the most affluent is falling (Ofcom 2013). Research on internet use and digital inclusion from the US suggests that generally people from a wide range of backgrounds recognise the utility of the internet and thus will go to great lengths to access the internet (Mossberger, Kaplan et al. 2008).

Evidence from the US suggests that a neighbourhood effect may exist around internet use – that is, people who live in certain deprived neighbourhoods have a lower rate of internet use than others controlling for individual factors such as income and education. While the effect was shown statistically this could not prove the cause, however it was theorised that it might be due to people sharing stories of the difficulties of internet access among their social networks (Mossberger, Tolbert et al. 2012).



That internet use is higher than internet access in Scotland's most deprived neighbourhoods suggests that this is not the case, and that people will overcome personal barriers to access the internet. However, it is the case that not all households in deprived neighbourhoods are experiencing poverty and neither are all households in socially rented housing low income, yet the internet access and use rates are similar between these categories. This suggests further effects unexplained by the basic correlations might be at work creating barriers to internet access; i.e. non-poor households in social housing are not accessing the internet for some reason unexplained by socio-economic data.

### ***Case study – Broughton Spurtle***

Getting stories written is the greatest hurdle for all hyperlocal news services. The Broughton Spurtle has a purposefully open policy as to what is news to encourage people to get involved. Regular writers have provided recipes; a local scoutmaster provided regular witty updates; and a young father who has recently moved to the neighbourhood describing his experiences in getting to know the neighbourhood and being a new father.

This approach in Broughton is supported by it being a mixed neighbourhood much like the rest of Scotland on the Scottish Household Survey above with much higher levels of internet access and internet use.

### **Community outcomes**

That there is a desire to use the Digital Sentinel to build community cohesion, activism and engagement is not unsurprising. The UK survey of hyperlocal news sites showed that this desire to do civic good was what drove most sites to continue; if they moved towards a revenue-generating business model it was usually quite far down the line and very few sites had achieved this.

### ***People hearing about local events***

**Mechanism:** One of the strongest feelings, reiterated in the interviews for this research, was that with the closure of the West Edinburgh Times, local residents had lost an important source of information. While there are a wide range of activities going on in the neighbourhood, there are limited nodes – people or organisations - that bring this information together. The City of Edinburgh Council South West Neighbourhood Partnership website is largely used to communicate news of the council's activities and the formal processes of the partnership.

**Evidence:** while this is a laudable aim for the Digital Sentinel, it is unlikely to be a success because this is not how the vast majority of hyperlocal news services get started, however local announcements do provide content once they are established. This barrier will be discussed in greater length below.

The main barrier to the Digital Sentinel acting as a community noticeboard is generating audience. To date the most popular story on the Digital Sentinel has been the photos and videos of the 2014 Wester Hailes fun run with around 500 hits.

The challenge to drive audience growth is recognised by many hyperlocals. One widely considered way of driving audience growth is through producing a paper newspaper that is delivered to people. Services such as paperlater.com print-on-demand are making it much

easier and cheaper to do this. In this research, the Broughton Spurtle went from being a free sheet delivered to people's letterboxes to a being an online and paper-based news service. The paper copy, produced once-a-month, includes stories from the website with links to longer versions as well as copy produced solely for the paper edition and is paid for through a small amount of advertising from local businesses and politicians, annual "subscriptions" (effectively donations), and it is delivered by volunteers. To drive growth, Greener Leith is considering doing a "Spurtle backwards" and creating a print edition.

Advertising forthcoming events is an easy way to get copy for a hyperlocal news service, especially since organisations are likely to be producing this themselves, and are often willing to pay to cover some of the costs (see *What's On* case study). However, this is very different to the editorial content that makes a news service and, indeed, there can be conflicts in including editorial and information copy. A simple example of these conflicts of interest is that one of the reasons *What's On* persisted even when *Outlook* was being produced by the City of Edinburgh Council for the South-west and Pentlands was a recognition that its editorial copy was retrospective and it was therefore no use for announcing forthcoming events.

**Context:** the barriers to digital inclusion presented above are also, obviously, barriers to using the Digital Sentinel as an information source. Given the levels of deprivation and predominance of social housing in Wester Hailes, we can presume that the possible audience will be over 20% less than in the rest of Scotland.

The way people seek information also has to be appreciated. Research on internet use suggests that people replicate offline, information-seeking behaviours when they are online. For example, women are more likely than men to use the internet to seek information from friends, whereas men are more likely to research information on technical issues (Colley and Maltby 2008). Therefore a hyperlocal news source is going to be most popular with people with strong local links who are used to finding information on the internet (Hargittai 2007).

Some of the evidence from this study, and the wider Valuing Different Perspectives work, suggests there are differences for Wester Hailes in this regard. The tangibility of the *What's On* guide is recognised as being highly important even though all the information is online, suggesting people do not go to websites of organisations for information. Prospect Community Housing has most success in contacting tenants through the immediacy of text messages, rather than letters or their website.

On the other hand, activities at partner organisations that attract a broader range of participants from neighbouring more affluent group of users from surrounding neighbourhoods have a larger web presence, particularly in the form of social media – for example Dad's Rock Edinburgh. Part of the success of the story on the Digital Sentinel about the 2014 Fun Run was the non-Wester Hailes residents who used the story to see photos of themselves.

### **Case study – *What's On***

The *What's On* guide is a good example of a self-sustaining local information source. Set up because of the recognised loss of a community information source in the *West Edinburgh Times*. Local organisations pay a scaled-rate for an advert within the guide which is delivered to all homes in the area of the former *WET* using the same distribution company. It

is published three times a year to coincide with the start of the school term and community education activities. The tangibility of it as a paper document that people can thumb through is recognised by those involved with it.

While its costs are entirely covered by payments from advertising organisations, this is the sole content of the guide. For one issue it received extra funding from the Neighbourhood Partnership to cover the whole South West Neighbourhood Partnership area but it still did not include any editorial. Any editorial material would increase advertising costs and could also be a barrier to the Council continuing to advertise in the guide. A news source that accepts funding from the City of Edinburgh Council would always have to be conscious of how services of the council were reported, stifling its independence and campaigning. However, the case of *What's On* it suggests that there is an audience for a paper guide for local activities and this can be financially self-sustaining.

### ***Campaigning***

**Mechanism:** one of the broadest aims of the OPiT projects identified in the logic modelling session with the community partners was a revival of local democracy. The role of the Digital Sentinel in this is through local people writing about problems, raising their profile and getting them fixed, particularly by local service providers.

**Evidence:** Part of the desire to restart the sentinel was to return to a lost sense of activism and campaigning spirit that had previously existed in Wester Hailes. The experience of Greener Leith in the case study above suggests that this can happen. Indeed, the available research evidence suggests that the vast majority of hyperlocal news sites begin as single-issues campaigns (Williams, Barnett et al. 2014), such as the Broughton Spurtle.

There is no evidence as to how successful these campaigns are. However, we do have evidence more broadly on the success of different campaigns and why they are successful. Many of the single issue campaigns are about planning and development proposals, on example is the reporting of by the Broughton Spurtle of the proposed annex of Broughton Primary school at 154 Macdonald Road. However, we know from a wide range of research in land-use planning that it is the more affluent and able groups that can engage with the planning system in this way (Matthews, Bramley et al. 2014). The system is highly technical and requires a wide range of knowledge – often groups in affluent areas, such as Community Councils, can call on retired planners to help them with this task, resources that may not be available in Wester Hailes (Abram, Murdoch et al. 1996). Further, the evidence shows that when these groups engage and don't achieve a successful outcome, they learn from this so they can be more successful next time.

Research on school closure campaigns in the 1980s showed a further barrier is the way in which campaigns are presented. This research found the campaigns that were most likely to be successful were those that were led by affluent communities, or those from less affluent communities that had leaders or figureheads who were professionals (Bondi 1988). The ability of professional and more affluent groups to present their views in the most effective way is demonstrated by the community response to the proposals at 154 Macdonald Road <http://bit.ly/154McDRd>. While the school text book style presentation is not to everyone's taste, it is striking and the document contains solely relevant, technical material considerations regarding the planning application.

A challenge of single issue campaigns is that research with hyper locals suggest they become single-issue campaigns by accident; it takes them a long time for them to build up an audience; and it is not guaranteed that they will move beyond a single issue to broader activities (Williams, Barnett et al. 2014).

Facebook can be particularly effective at garnering support around single-issue campaigns. The page on Facebook to save the threatened Castlebrae Community High School led to the recognition that the *Craigmillar Chronicle*, like the Digital Sentinel, was a lost information source that would have once been active in such campaigns. While such campaigns can raise the profile of issues locally and bring protesting activity to the attention of service providers, they very rarely raise profile wider than this. In research on hyperlocals, only one example of a story begun as a campaign on a Facebook page reaching mainstream local news was found, in this case relating to regeneration around the former Longbridge car plant in Birmingham: <http://bbc.in/1wfPvaJ>

**Context:** The concentrated deprivation, and the individual challenges people face in Wester Hailes are likely to make developing such campaigns difficult. Many of those who would be most able will also be in full time employment and practically will lack the time to engage. Analysis of the British Social Attitude Survey also showed that people who lived in socially rented housing and the most deprived neighbourhoods were much likely to support new housing development than other groups (Matthews, Bramley et al. 2014). Therefore residents in Wester Hailes may support major developments such as Curriemuirend Park or the proposed garden suburb rather than oppose them. The development of 120 homes off Clovenstone Road could provide 30 affordable homes to rent or buy which would largely be welcomed. This positive support is not the sort of campaign that gets hyperlocal sites recognised.

The Scottish Household Survey also provides details of the sorts of issues that people see as problems in the most deprived neighbourhoods. People's attitudes to their neighbourhood decline as neighbourhood deprivation increases – 99% of people in the least deprived 10% of neighbourhoods rate it as good (23%) or very good (76%) compared to 81% in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods, with only 27% rating their neighbourhood as very good – almost 50% fewer people. The problems that drive this are *perceived* as being drug dealing (33% higher in the most deprived 15% of neighbourhoods), litter (46% higher), or animal nuisance such as dog fouling (47% higher) (Scottish Government 2014).

This suggests there is scope for local campaigning to improve neighbourhood conditions – these problems could be solved by better local services, particularly policing and environmental services (Hastings 2007). In the case of environmental services, a challenge here is getting people to recognise the structural causes of waste problems in deprived neighbourhoods: health inequalities and poor diet leading to more littering; higher population densities; greater numbers of pedestrians in public spaces; non-traditional urban design creating places where litter congregates; street layouts that are difficult to clean efficiently; low incomes meaning people cannot buy high quality goods so they are disposed of more readily; fees for special uplifts from the local authority being a barrier to people on low incomes to dispose of their waste properly; and finally local authority resources being deployed to more affluent areas due to demand from local communities.

A good example of the inequalities in engagement with environmental services was the introduction of communal waste bins in the New Town at the end of this research, and the resulting problems of street cleanliness when the bins overflowed. This led to a Twitter campaign (<http://bit.ly/NTStreets>) directed at the City of Edinburgh Council focused on structural service issues: regular street cleaning, regular bin servicing and education of residents from the Council. The pressure was on the local authority to improve its service and increase resources in the New Town, not a prejudiced assumption that because people live in the New Town they are lazier and drop litter more.

Environmental services could become the focus of a campaign by a hyperlocal news source such as the Digital Sentinel – indeed Greener Leith has been vocal in this regard. To lead this campaign Greener Leith has had to submit numerous Freedom of Information requests about service provision and measured street cleanliness – knowledge, skills and commitment that might not be readily available in Wester Hailes. At the start of this research one community activist was working with the City of Edinburgh Council to get the grass outside their house properly mown. Although recognising that the poor grass-cutting was due to other parks in the city being prioritised resources, they did not feel they had the skills or confidence to set out this argument in the Digital Sentinel or to the local authority, even though the individual had an extensive career as a community activist.

Another contextual barrier to campaigns for improved everyday services in the neighbourhood is also public attitudes. While committed community activists and informed environmental officers may recognise the structural causes of poor environmental outcomes in deprived neighbourhoods, it is far too easy to slip into stigmatising, cultural explanations – that people in Wester Hailes just drop more litter because they are lazy and don't care. This leads to poorer outcomes as no one takes full responsibility for the neighbourhood and its cleanliness (Dean and Hastings 2000; Hastings 2009).

### ***Case study – the underpass***

An early success of the OPiT initiatives was the campaign to get the underpass beneath the railway line to the shopping centre realigned as it was before the extension to the car park. While this campaign did not involve the Digital Sentinel, or was even reported in the Digital Sentinel, it does demonstrate how local anger can coalesce around an issue and force change. In this case, recognising that the Healthy Living Centre redevelopment offered an opportunity for wider public-realm improvements, but these could get lost as the underpass was the boundary between the Pentlands and South West neighbourhood partnerships, the Wester Hailes Community Council forced a joint meeting of the NPs to consider the issue. In a precursor to the Digital Sentinel, the issue was recorded on the From There to Here blog: <http://bit.ly/WHunderpass>

## Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis unpacking the mechanisms by which the Digital Sentinel might be successful presented above highlights numerous barriers. Most of these are associated with the concentrated poverty and deprivation in the neighbourhood and are barriers for all projects and engagement activities, even those with substantial funding and resources. However, it must be acknowledged that the data and evidence presented is for all deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland or for specific neighbourhoods across the world. The experiences of Wester Hailes may be different, or may be similar to these national averages and case studies.

It would be wrong to assume this is because there is no need – that Wester Hailes had its problems solved by the regeneration programme of the 1990s. National level data demonstrates that the needs identified by the OPiT partners for the Digital Sentinel – people in deprived neighbourhoods are less happy with the neighbourhood environment, recognising greater problems; they feel less place attachment; they feel they can do less about their neighbourhood to improve it; people experiencing poverty also feel they have fewer people to call-on for help and support and also are less likely to be members of voluntary organisations.

The Digital Sentinel is therefore trying to overcome extensive socio-economic challenges. Partners should not be defeatist about this as there are numerous examples of projects making important small improvements in deprived neighbourhoods (Richardson 2008).

The recommendations that stem from this analysis are:

- *The Digital Sentinel requires to be supported by a paid worker* – a trained community development worker can help individuals develop the skills and confidence, the social and cultural capital, to become more engaged in the Digital Sentinel. As with all community development roles, this has to be supportive and nurturing, rather than replacing community activity. There is a danger that trained journalists take on too strong an editorial and journalistic role and do not allow community engagement.
- *Local campaigns should be used to develop the Digital Sentinel* – if local services, such as schools, are threatened with closure, the Sentinel must be ready to support local activists in campaigning to keep them open. A positive campaign in support of a particular development, or to improve the design of a new development, could be a further way to engage local people. The former petrol station, Dumbryden Primary School, and Hailesland Place all offer new development opportunities that could be the focus of campaigns. A longer-term campaign on environmental issues would also provide a good focus if the skills and persistence of volunteers is available.
- *The Sentinel must be plural in what is counted as news* – recipes, poems, features by residents on their experiences in the neighbourhood should all be actively encouraged. The ability to approve stories for publication needs to be distributed among a group of people so items with no controversial editorial content can be published rapidly making the site livelier.
- *The Sentinel must concentrate on the existing website, but use other media* – Youtube videos and photos provide easy content for people to post. Images from Twitter, Facebook and Instagram tagged with “Wester Hailes” can be easily aggregated into a page on the Sentinel website. A photography competition could be

used to encourage people to submit with a short article about the photographer included. The moderation approach of the From There to Here Facebook page provides a good model for a Digital Sentinel Facebook page to generate content like the activists fighting the closure of Castlebrae High School did.

- *The Sentinel might expand its geographical reach* – becoming the West Edinburgh Sentinel could bring in resources from surrounding less-affluent neighbourhoods. The neighbourhoods of Wester Hailes could be twinned with neighbouring areas – Dumbryden with Parkhead and Longstone; Calder and Murrayburn with Sighthill; Clovenstone and Westburn with Kingsknowe and Juniper Green. The resources, financial and social, could support engagement with the Sentinel from within Wester Hailes. This could also strengthen links outwith the neighbourhood, challenging stigma and isolation.

## References

- Abram, S., J. Murdoch, et al. (1996). "The Social Construction of 'Middle England': The Politics of Participation in Forward Planning." Journal of Rural Studies **12**(4): 353-364.
- Batty, E., C. Beatty, et al. (2010). Involving local people in regeneration: Evidence from the New Deal for Communities Programme. The New Deal for Communities National Evaluation: Final report – Volume 2. London, Communities and Local Government.
- Bondi, L. (1988). "Political participation and school closures: an investigation of bias in local authority decision making." Policy and Politics **16**(Jan 88): 41-54.
- Colley, A. and J. Maltby (2008). "Impact of the Internet on our lives: Male and female personal perspectives." Computers in Human Behavior **24**(5): 2005-2013.
- CPC (1999). An Evaluation of the New Life for Urban Scotland Initiative in Castlemilk, Ferguslie Park, Wester Hailes and Whitfield Edinburgh, Scottish Executive.
- Dean, J. and A. Hastings (2000). Challenging Images: Housing Estates, Stigma and Regeneration. Bristol, Policy Press.
- Egerton, M. and K. Mullan (2008). "Being a pretty good citizen: an analysis and monetary valuation of formal and informal voluntary work by gender and educational attainment." British Journal of Sociology **59**(1): 145-164.
- Green, A. and R. White (2007). Attachment to Place: Social Mobility and Prospects of Young People. York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Hargittai, E. (2007). "Whose Space? Differences Among Users and Non-Users of Social Network Sites." Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication **13**(1): 276-297.
- Hastings, A. (2007). "Territorial justice and neighbourhood environmental services: a comparison of provision to deprived and better-off neighbourhoods in the UK." Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy **35**(6): 896-917.
- Hastings, A. (2009). "Neighbourhood environmental services and neighbourhood 'effects': exploring the role of urban services in intensifying neighbourhood problems." Housing Theory and Society **24**(4): 503-524.
- Lindsay, C. (2010). "In a Lonely Place? Social Networks, Job Seeking and the Experience of Long-Term Unemployment." Social Policy and Society **9**(01): 25-37.
- Matthews, P., G. Bramley, et al. (2014). "Homo Economicus in a Big Society: Understanding Middle-class Activism and NIMBYism towards New Housing Developments." Housing, Theory and Society: 1-19.
- Mossberger, K., D. Kaplan, et al. (2008). "Going Online Without Easy Access: A tale of three cities." Journal of Urban Affairs **30**(5): 469-488.
- Mossberger, K., C. J. Tolbert, et al. (2012). "Unraveling Different Barriers to Internet Use: Urban Residents and Neighborhood Effects." Urban Affairs Review **48**(6): 771-810.
- Ofcom (2013). Communications Market Report 2013. London, Ofcom.
- Pawson, R. (2006). Evidence-based Policy: A Realist Perspective. London, Sage.



Pawson, R. and N. Tilley (1997). Realistic Evaluation. London, Sage.

Quinn, P. and P. Seaman (2008). Social Networks and Poverty. Glasgow, Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

Richardson, L. (2008). DIY Community Action: Neighbourhood Problems and Community Self-help. Bristol, Policy Press.

Scottish Government (2014). Scotland's People Annual report: Results from 2013 Scottish Household Survey. Edinburgh, The Scottish Government.

Williams, A., S. Barnett, et al. (2014). The State of Hyperlocal Community News in the UK: Findings from a survey of practitioners. Cardiff, University of Cardiff.

# Evaluating community arts interventions

Final Draft Report (20 Dec 2014)

Dr Julie Brown; Southampton Solent University

## Summary

As part of the AHRC *Valuing Different Perspectives* project, this research study evaluated the social/community benefits and impact(s) of the Totem pole project in Wester Hailes, Edinburgh. This project was part of a number of interconnected Connected Communities projects that have taken place in Wester Hailes since 2011. Unlike the other Connected Communities projects, this one involved the design, creation and installation of a community art intervention.

Within the debate about the “value” of the arts, community and public arts based strategies have increasingly been encouraged as a means of promoting community development and policy makers, arts practitioners, funders and researchers have suggested a broad range of positive social effects resulting from these interventions.

But there are also well documented methodological challenges involved in establishing the impacts of community arts interventions, and the social benefits directly derived them: Many benefits are intangible; cause and effect are very difficult to attribute; and long term effects are difficult to identify and validate, as many benefits will only be felt or seen long after a project ends.

Evaluating community arts projects is particularly challenging because of the large numbers of people, groups and organisations typically involved and the large number of possible outcomes. An evaluation of specific, clear and measurable outcomes may also not reflect the complexity of the cultural or social impacts.

The different “value systems” of people and groups associated with community arts projects also makes evaluation complex. These values may also change significantly over time and in response to a range of events or experiences which may or may not have anything to do with the original project itself.

Because of these challenges, there are very few robust methods for evaluating community art interventions in terms of their “outcomes”. What researchers can do is to look at the processes involved in developing a community arts project and ask whether this is likely to lead to the sorts of benefits that are hoped for.

The approach used in this study was designed to combine an evaluation of *process* and an evaluation of *outcomes* and *impact* as it intended to provide a more holistic evaluation. This approach also

aimed to see if there were any differences in findings between using an “outcomes” based or a “process” based approach.

The underlying question driving the evaluative analysis was: *Has the Totem pole project contributed to positive social change at a local level in Wester Hailes?*

The information was gathered using semi-structured interviews with key people involved in the planning, design and implementation of the Totem pole project (academic; community partner organisation, community volunteer/activist).

Questions about *process* explored whether “good practice” methods identified in successful public arts projects were used to plan, design and implement the Totem pole project; while questions about *outcomes* were developed using the project’s own stated aims and objectives to determine whether these had been met and what social and community changes, or *impacts*, could be directly attributable, at least in part, to the project.

Additional questions were asked about project self-evaluation, to understand the degree to which the project team had undertaken any formative (process) or outcomes-based evaluation themselves. There was variation in detail of the questions asked depending on what issues arose and who was being interviewed.

### **Key Findings:**

#### **“Values” of community art**

Multiple “values” are associated with the Totem pole. It is viewed by some, but certainly not all, of the project partners as a public art intervention. WHALE Arts who commissioned the artist saw it as “*a significant piece of public art*” (AF), with particular benefits (social and creative) for those involved in the process of design and carving it. There was also value in it being a method of engaging members of the local community in the design process.

Both the academic team and the community activist (whose idea it was) saw it as an “accidental” arts intervention – a means to an end as something that was encountered on the social history walks or a way of directing people to the online community activity, although there was acknowledgement that using art was a good way to get people involved in the wider project.

The Totem pole now has a particularly strong place-making value due to its prominent position and visibility within the Wester Hailes community: people pass it when walking or cycling along the canal, and visitors comment on it. It has become an important visual “symbol” of Wester Hailes for those outside the community (the media, Councillors, and funding bodies) and acts as a catalysing role by providing a positive image of the estate to outsiders.

The Totem pole’s “value” to the wider Wester Hailes community is unclear – no formal or informal evaluation has been carried out and much is based on anecdotal evidence. Some people don’t know what it is or does. The fact it has not been vandalised is seen to indicate that there is some “value” associated with it, whatever that might be. These values are not necessarily “contested” – they are simply unknown.

The Totem pole's intended functional value (through its digital/ storytelling element, and as a means of pointing to the activity taking place online on the community's *From There to Here* Facebook page, blog and digital Sentinel newspaper) is currently little used, so much of its intended "value" has not been realised. This might indicate it has been unsuccessful as an intervention – or it might indicate future "value".

The Totem pole might be valued at any one time as an object of encounter; a shaper of place and space; an image maker; a symbol of self-identification; a material signifier; or none of these things. **How do we attempt to understand these complex and interwoven "values"? Will these "values" change over time, and in response to what? How as researchers/community partners do we capture this process?**

#### **An outcomes or process approach to evaluation?**

The outcomes approach proved extremely difficult.<sup>13</sup> Much of the evidence was anecdotal and many of the outcomes difficult to quantify with "hard" evidence.

WHALE Arts described benefits for local residents (such as self-esteem and creative skills, improved physical health) directly as a result of participation in the project. There was also *some* indication that the shared design of the Totem pole had helped to create a sense of social connectedness - providing opportunities for local people to come together to meet and talk.

It is unclear whether these people have continued to benefit from the skills and experiences gained since the project has been completed; whether the *social capital* generated has been maintained; or the extent to which this has had any positive "knock on" effects within the wider community. These processes are less direct and more complex.

An "outcomes" approach might indicate this as "failure", as many of the higher level *social* outcomes have not yet been realised, but it is simply too early to claim significant social changes in the community as a result of the Totem pole project.

The project has certainly gone "some way" to achieving some of its other objectives: generating positive external publicity and media attention and helping improve the image of Wester Hailes; it has become a "talking point" engaging local people and others in conversation about the local area. This in itself is a positive outcome, but one particularly difficult to measure and to sustain over the longer term.

Significantly, considerable "institutional capital" also appears to have developed between community organisation partners. Again, this was a stated objective and it is important to capture this in the evaluation, as this arguably has been responsible for the Totem pole project's success and will positively influence future funding bids and projects taking place within Wester Hailes.

Some aspects of the project have also been less successful than others. One of the objectives was to improve digital participation in Wester Hailes but this appears to have been less effective. Evaluating

---

<sup>13</sup> The outcomes evaluation was made more difficult as no baseline data had been collected by the project partners (either before, during or after the project's completion) which could have been used to find out whether community members had benefitted from the project as intended.

the project based on this particular outcome at this particular point in time might indicate that the Totem pole has been unsuccessful as an intervention – or it might indicate the evaluation is taking place too early.

There is an acknowledgement by project partners that the Totem pole project has laid good foundations – and opened up the possibilities to the Wester Hailes community - but that further work is required to secure the longer-term benefits, and that many of the desired community benefits will only be seen years down the line.

**This poses a significant question for researchers: when (within what timeframe) is an evaluation of a project' outcomes appropriate?**

The *process* evaluation (below) was insightful. Many of the “good practice” principles were incorporated in the Totem pole project and partners were also able to reflect on project constraints and challenges as well as things they would have liked to have done differently or would change in future projects to help make them more “successful”.

The summary below draws out the factors that positively contributed to the Totem pole project and that are likely to have enhanced outcomes, as well as external and internal factors (key challenges) that reduced the impact of outcomes.

**What worked:**

- Building in time to plan and develop projects. Time is needed to lay the foundations for successful partnership working
- Community articulating clear idea of aims/desired outcomes from outset (taking ownership and addressing community needs)
- True collaborative partnership between all parties (between different community organisations and between community organisations and the academic team) - building trust and “institutional capacity”
- Community had equality of influence (in project planning, design, implementation)
- Dialogue, between academics and community partners throughout (aims and objectives are worked through in terms of delivery and understood by all partners)
- Flexibility and openness of the academic team to ideas from the community
- Different community partners taking the lead on different aspects of the overall *Connected Communities* initiatives (WHALE Arts in the case of the Totem pole)
- Activity was strongly led or directed (democratic process but an ‘anything goes’ approach was not evident)

**Key challenges:**

- Funding time-scale limited involvement of the wider community involvement in the early stages of the project
- Lack of existing community development infrastructure in Wester Hailes meant over-reliance on volunteers and goodwill not covered by project funding – sustainable?
- Involving the wider community when no community development mechanisms in place to facilitate this was extremely difficult.

- The time it takes to build the mutual trust and understanding necessary to develop strong partnerships of this type should not be underestimated
- Short-duration funding/project length an inhibitor for developing projects with physical/tangible design elements and longer term community impacts.
- Small, one-off, or time-limited project grants make it extremely difficult for community partners to maintain momentum in terms of community interest and “buy in”.
- No formal or informal evaluation of the project (before, during or after) by any project partners (as no time/budget allocated to this), meant reliance of anecdotal evidence of community impacts.
- How to measure intangible outcomes or those which are only apparent a long time after the project itself finishes?

### **Reflections for Connected Communities going forward:**

The evaluation has also uncovered some areas requiring further consideration for funders, particularly regarding funding timescales, responsibilities to communities and ethical research; the need for follow-on/consolidation funding; and supporting academics undertaking community-based research:

- Is Connected Communities funding “fit for purpose” for this form of research? Short-termism; a lack of understanding of the implications of community-engaged research (timeframes, what and who needs financed; responsibilities to the community)
- Significant ethical issues - small pots of funding made available for very short time periods risks the continuity and hence sustainability of project outcomes and the longer-term benefits to communities.
- Recognition from funding bodies of the time to plan, design and deliver projects and particularly the time it takes to really engage the community in that process is vital.
- A number of “incipient” community activities are underway in Wester Hailes – how to sustain these beyond the life of the Connected Communities project/funding is a significant challenge.
- Related to this, there is no closure with communities – at what point does the academic team leave?
- Funding bodies also need to recognise projects take place in multiple phases and timeframes. Follow-on funding is needed to help ensure that the intangible benefits are realised after the tangibles are in place.
- Important for communities to take a strategic approach to funding and forward plan.
- Measuring and defining impact is not straightforward – what ‘counts’ as impact?
- How to validate/evaluate intangible, long term social/community impacts in a time-limited project?
- Community-based research has significant but under-acknowledged implications for academics - and early career academics in particular. How can they be better

supported in undertaking this form of research? What alternative metrics can be used to determine academic impact of this type of work?

### **Reflections on the evaluation process:**

Assessing the Totem pole project's "success" against specific outcomes or indicators is extremely difficult and showed few higher level social "benefits" resulting from the project *at this stage*. High-level social impacts desired by the academics, project partners and funders are largely unrealistic to assess when applied to short-term or time limited projects: these impacts take time – possibly years - to develop. This poses researchers a significant question: when (within what timeframe) is an evaluation of a project such as this appropriate?

The "impact" of community arts interventions is often analysed and described from the viewpoint of benefits to/effects on, the *local community* – but there are also considerable impacts on the academic team and the community partners. It is important to capture this when evaluating projects, as the increased "institutional capital" developed has arguably been responsible for the project's success and the collective learning will positively influence future funding bids and projects.

"Evaluation" needs to be considered in a more holistic way. Rather than being "externally defined" or based only on a set of pre-defined indicators, a more fruitful approach would be to see evaluation as an internally reflective process, enabling all parties to learn as projects unfold, and helping improve understanding of how the impacts of projects can best be developed. Quantitative measurements of outcomes should only be seen as one aspect of project evaluation. Reflective narrative approaches can be extremely powerful.

Project evaluation also needs to be longitudinal, rather than undertaken at one point in time, particularly to understand longer-term *social* impacts and pathways of positive social and community change, which are only likely to become apparent over a longer period of time. Follow-on project funding is paramount so that these longer-term but significantly important social benefits can be researched and recognised.

### **1. Introduction to the Connected Communities Projects in Wester Hailes, Edinburgh**

Two AHRC Connected Communities projects have been completed in Wester Hailes: *Community Hacking 2.0* and the follow-on project *Ladders to the Cloud*. Prof. Chris Speed, University of Edinburgh/Edinburgh College of Art was PI on both. A further 6 month AHRC follow-on project *Communities within Spaces of Flows* began in February 2014.

The rationale for *Community Hacking 2.0* was derived from the belief that ICT could offer radical new ways of delivering community support by transforming community relations, service provision, participation and identities and providing a tool to overcome the loss of service provision resulting from recent financial cuts. Also, to promote engagement between academics and local communities: ICT as a tool for academics to use in researching inaccessible or hard-to-reach individuals and communities. Wester Hailes was chosen as an example of a community currently undergoing such cuts but with a long history of community activism.

The main outputs of *Community Hacking 2.0* were a "code book" of social history walks, developed with the Wester Hailes Health Agency, to enable people to scan QR codes as they walked about the

neighbourhood and learn about its history from the Facebook page *From There to Here*; and the development of a carved wooden digital Totem pole.

The Totem pole was designed to provide a physical platform for “hacking” images and sharing conversations about the Wester Hailes area. It features wooden carvings along with QR barcodes that are gateways to cloud based material relevant to the location of the pole. People can scan one of the labeled tags and access and contribute to historical photographs, community members’ stories, video and audio clips of the area both past and present.

The intention was that the pole would act as a social resource to help build connections between the people and the place of Wester Hailes, as well as drawing upon online resources. Significantly, the pole is specifically for local residents as the QR codes cannot be scanned outside of the local area.

WHALE Arts coordinated the production of the Totem pole project from development to delivery. A steering group of community members and project partners was created to ensure that clear targets were set and achieved and this remained in place throughout the project. A local professional artist was commissioned by WHALE Arts to lead the carving of the pole, and 5-10 community members assisted, following a number of local community consultation events on the design.

Although the design and carving of the Totem Pole was instigated during *Community Hacking 2.0*, its installation was completed during the follow-on *Ladders to the Cloud* project. There was a significant delay due to the process of securing planning permission for the pole. The *Ladders to the Cloud* project continued to explore how network technology and digital media could support connections across the community into the past and present, by combining new technology and the arts to promote health and wellbeing and place-making in Wester Hailes.

## **2. Developing a framework for evaluation**

### **Theoretical approach: arts and community-level social benefits**

There are wide-ranging social outcomes claimed for community arts interventions, from health and wellbeing, to learning and cognitive or skills benefits, to attitudinal and behavioural benefits, to community-level social benefits (See table 1).

Theory and discussion about community-level social benefits is fragmented across different disciplines, including sociology, psychology, public health, anthropology, political science, cultural policy and cultural economics. So although there are many potentially useful concepts, there is not a comprehensive theoretical approach (McCarthy et al., 2004).

Studies of community-level social benefits tend to focus either on firstly how the arts can build a sense of community or secondly how arts-related activities can help build a capacity for collective action. Concepts such as social capital<sup>14</sup>, social cohesion, community identity, social control and their role in the quality of community life are central theories.

---

<sup>14</sup> Social capital is described as a key *outcome* of communities that have developed social cohesion, as well as a key *input* for collective action (McCarthy et al., 2004).



McCarthy et al. (2004) suggest a framework for bringing these social benefits together to form a simplified theory to describe how these various ideas might relate to each other (Figure 1). Social benefits are gained at each stage, and each stage is important. Each stage must be built on the stage below it, but the challenges are likely to increase as a community works its way up the pyramid. For example, community revitalization involves collaboration across groups and issues and sustained collective action and co-operation over time.

**Figure 1: Hierarchy of capacities**



Source: McCarthy et al. (2004), p87.

**Defining the benefits and social impacts derived from the arts.**

In a study for the Arts Council England, Jermyn (2004) reviewed the empirical (research) literature and categorised the community arts outcomes into: personal; collective; community; and ‘hard’ impacts, providing examples of indicators for each (Table 1).

To relate this to the theory described above, the collective/group impacts could be called “social capital” (stage 1 of the pyramid) and the civic/community impacts could be called “community organising” (stage 2 of the pyramid).

**Table 1: Categorisation of community arts outcomes and indicators**

| Outcomes  | Indicators   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>‘Hard’ outcomes</b></p> <p>impacts that are measurable/ quantifiable</p>          | <p>Such as improved health, higher levels of educational attainment, crime reduction</p>   |
| <p><b>Personal impacts</b></p> <p>impacts that individual participants derived from</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased self-confidence</li> <li>• Feel better about themselves, sense of satisfaction, enhanced self-esteem</li> <li>• Feeling of self-determination and sense of control</li> <li>• Pleasure and enjoyment</li> </ul> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| arts experience  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts inclusion (contact where none or little previously, enhanced creative skills, increased arts knowledge, changed attitudes if previously negative)</li> <li>• Acquisition of other skills (e.g. communication, completing tasks and seeing things through to end, computer and technology, attendance and reliability, planning and problem solving)</li> <li>• Future outlook (broadened horizons, employment prospects, education prospects)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Collective/group impacts</b><br><br>impacts derived from social relations with other individuals or groups as part of arts experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More social contact (new acquaintances, friends etc)</li> <li>• Increased understanding and tolerance of other people (different generations, cultures, areas)</li> <li>• Group identity and pride (belonging to team, pride, expression of group identity)</li> <li>• Skills (teamwork, social)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Civic/community impacts</b><br><br>impacts that go beyond individual or group   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community belonging and involvement</li> <li>• Community identity and pride</li> <li>• Active community – people co-operating and working together to generate social change</li> <li>• Local democracy – involvement in decision making and control by residents</li> </ul>  |

Source: adapted from Jermyn (2004) based on Landry et al, 1996; Williams, 1996 & 1997; Matarasso, 1997; DCMS, 1999; Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2000; Harland et al, 2000.

### Methodological challenges

These are well documented methodological challenges involved in establishing the impacts of community arts interventions, and the social benefits directly derived them (see Jermyn, 2004 for a review). Many benefits are intangible; cause and effect are very difficult to attribute; and long term effects are difficult to identify and validate, as many benefits will only be felt or seen long after a project ends.

Measuring progress towards “hard” outcomes such as employment and establishing the transferability of impacts is also challenging. So applying the principles of evaluation widely accepted in the field of health and social care to the arts raises a number of difficulties (Matarasso, 1997).

Evaluating community arts projects is also challenging because of the large numbers of people, groups and organisations typically involved and the large number of possible (intended and unintended) outcomes (Landry *et al.*, 1996). An evaluation of specific, clear and measurable outcomes may not reflect the complexity of the cultural or social impacts that result.

The different “value systems” of people and groups associated with community arts projects also makes evaluation complex. These values may also change significantly over time and in response to a range of events which may or may not have anything to do with the original project itself.

Because of these challenges, there are very few robust methods for evaluating community art interventions in terms of their “outcomes”. What researchers can do, is to look at the processes involved in developing a community arts project and see whether this is likely to lead to the sorts of benefits that are hoped for. This is described in more detail below.

### **Developing an evaluation framework – comparing outcomes and process**

There are basically two main types of project evaluation that researchers can use: outcome evaluation and process evaluation.

**Outcome evaluation** aims to identify the impacts of a project - how far it achieved what it set out to achieve and whether there were any unexpected impacts (good or bad). In an outcomes approach, a possible evaluation of the Totem pole project’s “success” might be to look at its actual outcomes and assess these against its stated aims and objectives and intended outcomes. These were defined on the [project website](#):

“generate **significant social capital** by **engaging with the diverse ages, backgrounds and interests** present in the Wester Hailes community to **explore and capture their memories of the area** and also to **articulate a collective future ambition** for the community:

- Collaborative working between organisations and individuals in the community.
- Positive publicity and increased aspirations for the community.
- Increased skills, sense of community and confidence from early adoption of technology and learning new skills.
- Improved physical health through walking route & physical carving of Totem poles
- Improved mental health & wellbeing through increased social interaction, learning new skills, and engagement in the arts.
- Intergenerational and cross cultural understanding improved as memories/stories are recorded and similarities are discovered.
- Connects, in a networked structure, the various social history activities that are taking place in the area.”

Clearly, these outcomes range across each of the four categories outlined in Table 1, and they are largely intangible and difficult to measure. Also, it is likely that many of these outcomes will not have been realised during the project itself or even immediately after it –time is a very important element to consider in project evaluation. As a result, judging the “success”, or not, of the Totem pole project and its impact in terms of community *social gain* using this approach alone is unlikely to draw meaningful conclusions or recommendations, either for researchers or the community themselves.

**Process evaluation** aims to assess how projects were implemented, including how they were planned, how delivery was managed, who was involved in what aspects of the project, and what happened when. This is typically used as “formative” evaluation, conducted at the beginning of a

project and then at various points in time throughout the project, so as to allow changes to be made to the project in light of results or learning as the project progresses. As this evaluation study took place after the Totem pole project ended, formative evaluation was not possible, but it was still possible to use this method to look at and understand how the project was planned and implemented and to think about how this process influenced the project outcomes and might influence the longer term impact on the Wester Hailes community.

Jermyn (2004) also reviewed the literature to identify recurring “good practice” principles underpinning public arts projects (Table 2). This approach looks at elements that are likely to lead to successful projects, and focuses more on “process” than “outcomes”. These principles were used to help inform the types of question incorporated into the evaluation study.

**Table 2: ‘Good practice’ principles influencing successful outcomes**

| <b>Recurrent good practice principles</b>                      | <b>The sorts of questions investigated</b>   |
|--|--|
| 1 Sufficient time, planning, resources, equitable partnerships | What steps do projects take in planning projects?<br>What factors are considered in working with participants?<br>What factors (in terms of planning) contribute to a ‘successful’ project or enhance outcomes?<br>What external and internal factors result in project plans changing or reduce the impact of outcomes?<br>What models of partnership working are effective or not effective? |
| 2 Embedded local control, connecting to community needs        | How, if at all, do organisations identify the needs of participants?<br>How, if at all, do projects develop in response to needs?  |
| 3 Clear objectives, evaluation                                 | How, if at all, are aims and objectives set?<br>What, if any, social objectives are identified and are participants made aware of desired outcomes?<br>How do projects intend to achieve social objectives?<br>How, if at all, are objectives evaluated?<br>How do aims and objectives change, if at all, over time?   |
| 4 Flexibility  | How flexible is the participant-artist relationship and in the arts process?   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 5 Issues around ownership, control of agenda, artist as collaborator | <p>How are participants involved in the process (from project concept through to implementation and evaluation)?</p> <p>What are the dynamics between artist, participants and partners in controlling the agenda and directing the project?</p> <p>How do participants make views known or influence direction of project (any formal mechanisms)?</p> <p>What is the nature of participation (ie type of activity, intensity, challenge/risk taking, level of directed activity, relevance)?</p> |
| 6 Values and principles  | <p>What principles, if any, underpin work that aims to be socially inclusive? How do principles translate into practice?</p>   |
| 7 Importance of quality, pride in achievement                        | <p>Do participants and artists regard 'excellence' or 'quality' as important? What do they understand by these terms?</p> <p>Is there a relationship between benefits derived from arts participation and pride in achievement?</p>  |
| 8 Sustainability and legacy  | <p>Do projects consider the longer term legacy of projects? Are steps taken to provide lasting benefits to participants? What exit strategies exist (any form of progression or continuing support for participants)? What are the sustainability issues in terms of organisational resources?</p>   |

Source: Jermyn, 2004.

### Evaluation approach

The approach used in this study was designed to combine an evaluation of *process* and an evaluation of *outcomes* and *impact* as it intended to provide a more holistic evaluation approach.

The evaluation looked in detail at how the project was planned, designed and implemented (*process*) and whether “*best practice*” methods were used. It also looked at whether short-term/immediate aims and objectives had been realised (*outcomes*). Lastly, it looked at intended or unintended social and community changes, or *impacts*, and what changes could be directly attributable, at least in part, to the project.

### Data gathering

The research method involved conducting semi-structured interviews with key people involved in the planning, design and implementation of the Totem pole project: Principle Academic Investigator (CS); WHALE Arts Project Co-ordinator (AF); community activist/representative (EH). The interview guide (Appendix 1) outlines the key themes and questions which were addressed. These covered the ***process*** of project design, development and implementation; ***outcomes (immediate)***; and ***community impacts (long term)***.

Questions about process were developed using Table 2 above and questions about outcomes and impacts developed from the project’s own stated aims and objectives.

Additional questions were also asked about project self- evaluation, to understand the degree to which the project team had undertaken any formative (process) or outcomes-based evaluation themselves. There was variation in detail of the questions asked depending on what issues arose and who was being interviewed.

### 3. Evaluation findings

#### 3.1 “Values” of community arts

Multiple “values” are associated with the Totem pole. It is viewed by some, but certainly not all, of the project partners as a public art intervention. WHALE Arts who commissioned the artist saw it as “a significant piece of public art” (AF), with particular benefits (social and creative) for those involved in the process of design and carving it. There was also value in it being a method of engaging members of the local community in the design process.

Both the academic team and the community activist (whose idea it was) saw it as an “accidental” arts intervention – a means to an end:

*“To be honest, we didn’t know we were using public art. What we wanted for the social history walks was something people could take home with them and something they could encounter on the walk....and what they were encountering was the Totem pole.”(EH)*

*“The Totem pole was a way of materialising and pointing to the activity that was taking place on the community’s From There to Here Facebook page and the blog.” (CS)*

There was acknowledgement that using art was a good way to get people involved in the wider project:

*“The form it took is quite art related, but then that’s the best way that people take ownership of something” (CS); “by making, you give people voice. Not everyone in the community has a voice. But as they make, they have voice and they have signature on that work.”(CS)*

The Totem pole now has a particularly strong place-making value due to its prominent position and visibility within the Wester Hailes community: people pass it when walking or cycling along the canal, and visitors comment on it. It has become an important visual “symbol” of Wester Hailes for those outside the community (the media, Councillors, and funding bodies) and acts as a catalysing role by providing a positive image of the estate to outsiders.

But the Totem pole’s “value” to the wider Wester Hailes community is unclear – no formal or informal evaluation has been carried out and much is based on anecdotal evidence. Some people don’t know what it is or does. The fact it has not been vandalised is seen to indicate that there is some “value” associated with it, whatever that might be. These values are not necessarily “contested” – they are simply unknown:

*“Maybe some people might think what on earth is a wooden Totem pole doing out there with a QR code stuck on it? It is a multi-sided place in which the values are very different –*

*not necessarily contested, because if they were contested, they might have burned it down by now and it's not. Maybe they are suspending their assessment of it, maybe it's seen as something else - I would love to know what that was but I don't know."* (CS)

*"I think it's mixed. It is all of those things. I think it's appreciated by some as a piece of art. It's certainly a point of curiosity by others. The responses you get speaking to people are really varied. Some people are very positive about it. It was described as incongruous by someone last month by someone in the council. But that in itself, it acts as a talking point and engages local people and other council workers in conversation about the local area."* (AF)

The Totem pole's intended functional value (through its digital/ storytelling element, and as a means of pointing to the activity taking place online on the community's *From There to Here* FB page, blog and digital Sentinel newspaper) is currently little used (Wester Hailes is not digitally engaged), so much of its intended "value" has not been realised. This might indicate it has been unsuccessful as an intervention – or it might indicate future "value":

*"I'm not sure how frequently people go to the pole and scan it. Anecdotally, people mention it if they've seen someone there and there seem to be fairly regular occurrences of people going to it and it's sited in a very prominent location next to a public footpath between the shopping centre and the school, so there's certainly a good flow of pedestrian traffic past it. It's also visible from the union canal, so it's a bit of a local landmark certainly for a local social enterprise Bridge 8 Hub they mention that if they've got people coming up the canal on a cruise or other methods, they'll get off and have a look at the Totem pole."*(AF)

The Totem pole might be valued at any one time as an object of encounter; a shaper of place and space; an image maker; a symbol of self-identification; a material signifier; or none of these things, and the academic team acknowledged the Totem pole would always be associated with different value interpretations and would therefore always have different indicators of whether it was commensurate with some type(s) of "success":

*"For some it was an art process, and the engagement and deep satisfaction in making; for others it is an art object, and somewhere to access their memories; for others disconnected from either of these value systems it might be perceived as a waste of public money."* (CS)

How do we attempt to understand these complex and interwoven "values"? Will these "values" change over time, and in response to what? How as researchers/community partners do we capture this process?

### **3.2 Outcomes evaluation**

This part of the evaluation aimed to explore the actual outcomes of the Totem pole project and to assess these against the project's stated aims and objectives and intended outcomes to see if the project had achieved what it had set out to achieve.

As already discussed, this is not straightforward, as most of the Totem pole's stated aims and objectives were intangible *social benefits* and so very difficult to estimate or measure concretely. The task was made more difficult as no data had been collected by the project partners (either before, during or after the project's completion) which could have been used to find out whether community members had benefitted from the project as intended.

Much of the evidence is anecdotal and many of the outcomes difficult to quantify with "hard" evidence. Everyone interviewed believed the project had gone "some way" towards meeting its stated aims and objectives, however: *"It is fair to say that each of those [stated outcomes] are relevant to what has been happening to varying levels and extents."* (EH)

WHALE Arts described benefits for those directly involved in designing and carving the Totem pole: the development of enhanced creative and digital skills; and improved health via the physical activity of carving the Totem pole. *"Significant wellbeing benefits"* (AF) were also reported for two of the men helping carve the Totem pole who had not been involved in wider community activity and were experiencing issues around mental health. They benefitted from; *"the chance to come in and participate on a regular basis in the carving process, to meet new people and to feel that sense of achievement from seeing their involvement in the early stage to the point that the art work was unveiled."* (AF)

There was *some* indication that the shared design of the Totem pole had helped to create a sense of social connectedness - providing opportunities for local people to come together to meet and talk (and bringing different ages and generations together). An example was given of an article shared in the local newspaper: *"There's an article in the local evening news somewhere...there were youngsters involved I think with their grandparents that were with them."* (EH)

It is unclear whether community members have continued to benefit from these skills and experiences since the project has been completed, or whether the *social capital* generated has been maintained. Only a small number of community members took part in the actual design and creative process, but it is unknown whether their participation in the project has had any positive "knock on" effects within the wider community in terms of a collective future ambition.

An "outcomes" approach might indicate this as "failure", as many of the higher level *social* outcomes have not yet been realised, but it is simply too early to claim significant social changes in the community as a result of the Totem pole project.

The project has certainly gone "some way" to achieving positive external publicity and media attention and helping improve the image of Wester Hailes; another objective the partners were looking to accomplish in order to challenge some of the negative stereotypes that are often applied to Wester Hailes. As mentioned above, it has become a "talking point" engaging local people and others in conversation about the local area. This in itself is a positive outcome, but one particularly difficult to measure and to sustain over the longer term.

Significantly, the Connected Communities projects - and the Totem pole in particular - have helped catalyse collaborative working between different community organisations in Wester Hailes. Considerable "institutional capital" also appears to have developed between community organisation partners:



*“Social capital has been created through the interaction that’s taken place in particular between Prospect Community Housing, WHALE Arts and the Health Agency. So whereas people knew each other, they are now each working collaboratively on practical projects internally within the estate”* (EH)

Again, this was a stated objective and it is important to capture this in the evaluation. The “impact” of community arts interventions is often analysed and described from the viewpoint of / benefits to/ effects on, the local community – but there were also considerable impacts on community organisation partners. The increased “institutional capital” developed has arguably been responsible for the project’s success and will positively influence future funding bids and projects taking place within Wester Hailes.

Some aspects of the project have also been less successful than others. One of the objectives was to improve digital participation in Wester Hailes participation (an ongoing area of work that both WHALE Arts and other community partners are pursuing) but this appears to have been less effective, as the Wester Hailes community is not digitally ready or particularly digitally engaged. Evaluating the project based on this particular outcome at this particular point in time might indicate that it has been unsuccessful as an intervention – or it might indicate the evaluation is taking place too early.

There is an acknowledgement by project partners that the Totem pole project has laid good foundations – and opened up the possibilities to the Wester Hailes community - but that further work is required to secure the longer-term impacts, and that many of the desired community benefits will only be seen years down the line.

*“The intangible outcomes will include the experience gained by volunteers working on the project; confidence building and a level of ambition about what we can do to build on the project.”* (EH)

**This poses a significant question for researchers: when (within what timeframe) is an evaluation of a project’s outcomes appropriate?**

### **3.3 Process evaluation**

This part of the evaluation aimed to understand how the project was planned and implemented and to think about how this process had influenced the project outcomes and might influence the longer term impact on the Wester Hailes community. The evaluation was insightful. Many “good practice” principles were incorporated in the Totem pole project and partners were also able to reflect on project constraints and challenges as well as things they would have liked to do differently or would change in future projects to help make them more successful.

#### **Time, planning, resources**

The “good practice” review (Table 2) suggests that projects which have enough lead-in time and time for planning and for building successful participatory methodologies are more successful. Due to time constraints associated with funding and the need to mobilise resources quickly, there were a number of constraints on the planning of the Totem pole project. These were recognised as constraints by the project partners:

*“The longer that funding is available for and the more time you have to plan the better. There was a degree of urgency to commit project spend to a fairly tight timescale of the AHRC. But that’s not unusual, it’s a frustration I have with a number of different funders.”* (AF)

Again, due to time constraints, WHALE Arts commissioned the artist without community consultation: *“A timing issue – we needed to get things moving on the project.”* (AF). But there was also reflection on this process: *“In future, we would try to involve local people in that decision process from an earlier stage.”* (AF)

The community was not involved in initial project design or planning. Wider community engagement was only in the tangible outcomes of the project (designing/carving the Totem pole; visiting/using the Totem pole) rather than in defining the project aims and objectives or desired outcomes. A lack of community development resources in Wester Hailes and a resulting disconnect within the community following funding cuts also made reaching/consulting the wider Wester Hailes community in a short space of time very difficult. These constraints were recognised by experienced community partners, who were then able to plan tangible outputs to help engage the wider Wester Hailes community:

*“But in responding quickly to what was available, we deliberately created tangible outcomes that were participatory and that would create engagement.”* (EH) *“So engagement - by accident – was less around the development of tangible outcomes and more about how these tangible outcomes could encourage local participation.”* (EH)

### **Connecting with community needs - evolving aims and objectives**

Connecting with local needs is another of the “good practice” principles identified in Table 2. The Totem pole project began responding more to the community’s needs as it developed. The project evolved significantly from its initial aims and objectives, the direction strongly influenced by the community partners and activists, who had a very clear idea of community aims/desired outcomes from the outset.

While the research team initially had very specific academically informed RQs, these were not necessarily in line with the needs/desires of the community, as quickly became apparent. The initial objective was to watch social networking playing out as “deviant” behaviour. The team were looking for stories of (mildly) illegal/illicit online activity or “hacking” as a response to Big Society/community challenges faced by Wester Hailes residents. This approach was very “top down” (CS). However, the initial findings indicated the community were more keen to share positive experiences about their lives in Wester Hailes.

The openness of academic team to community desires and flexibility to shift objectives in light of these initial findings was a significant element in the process of project development in terms of the project’s overall “success” (and is another “good practice” principle). From an academic standpoint, the project evolved to become something very different (the implications of this are discussed later).

### **Strong, equitable partnership working**

Another “good practice” principle in Table 2 is to have strong and effective working partnerships. A key element contributing to the success of the Totem pole project was the formation of the project Steering Committee, composed of academics; community organisations with arts, health and housing interests (WHALE Arts, Prospect Housing, Health Agency, West Edinburgh Timebank); and community activists, which formed early on and became the core team, remaining in place throughout the project, and driving it forward:

*“The project idea really did come about through those partner meetings and the wider community involvement fell into place after the basic project had been agreed.” (AF) “There was a general understanding of the direction that community partners wanted to see things going.” (AF)*

The significance of true and sustained collaborative working with community partners and the academic team was held up by all interviewees as key to the project’s early success:

*“They [the project outcomes] wouldn’t have happened without genuine collaborative working. Very often collaborative working is just a euphemism for a joint funding application, but there’s been genuine collaborative working between ourselves internally and ourselves and CS and PM.” (EH)*

The time it takes to build the mutual trust and understanding necessary to develop strong partnerships of this type should not be underestimated. The academic and community partners had worked together on the previous Connected Communities projects, and trust had already been developed over a number of years with the community.

An important feature was that different community organisations took the lead for different aspects of the Connected Communities projects in Wester Hailes. WHALE Arts took overall lead for the Totem pole/public art aspect of the project and were able to utilise their skills and expertise in this area.

The Steering Committee played a further vital role in helping negotiate connections and “opening doors” within the community (e.g. took old Sentinel photos to Dove Centre, Centre55 and several festivals, events and places – out to wider community to gain exposure).

The community partners also had equality of influence throughout the project, which was considered to be a key component of the project’s success (a transfer of power). Again, this is another of the “good practice” principles in Table 2. EH (community activist with a community development background) instigated many of the project’s creative and tangible outputs, including the idea for the Totem pole:

*“We were using some Totem technologies – tagging photos in the project already. I think this allowed EH to think through, “why not have an actual Totem?” Totem pole is symbolic of community practice and representative of elders, so has a significant meaning.” (CS)*

## Reaching out - involving the wider community

“Good practice” principles suggest involving participants from project concept through to implementation. Lack of lead-in time meant the community was not involved in the planning stages of the Totem pole project. This point was reflected on: “I think in an ideal world, it would have been good to see more engagement from the local community in the whole process.” (AF); “In future, we would try to involve local people in that decision process from an earlier stage.” (AF).

WHALE Arts worked hard to engage the wider Wester Hailes community via design sessions, technology sessions and in carving the Totem pole itself which managed to reach people from the community who had not previously been engaged in WHALE Arts projects. They also brought a number of other local community/council run organisations on board with the project (Gate55, Dove Centre, the local Wester Hailes library):

*“... we worked with everyone from the local nursery through to the Dove centre an older age group. So while we didn't work with all of the community of reach the whole community, I think there was a reasonable level of engagement with that project.”* (AF).

There were; “lessons learned in what worked quite well in engaging the local community.” (AF). This included a mobile social history shed used at several local events as a way of raising the profile of the project and engaging local people in sharing their views of the past and trying to encouraging them to put forward some ideas for what they wanted to see happening in Wester Hailes. This was popular and helped gain interest in the project and build positive links with the wider community.

### 3.4 Identifying “impact” and legacy

The impact (or legacy) of the Totem pole project is difficult to define or assess. In particular, there is a very significant time dimension to many of the Totem pole project's expected “impacts”. **The high-level impacts desired by the academics, project partners and funders (the “intangibles” such as community pride, reinvigorating local democracy, improving health and wellbeing, increased social capital; self esteem/confidence/identity etc) are largely unrealistic to assess when applied to short-term or time limited projects: these impacts take time – possibly years - to develop.**

The project's tangible outputs are already considered by interviewees to have had significant “impact” for the community:

*“The legacy on the ground is usually a small percentage of the total grant in any academic funding. With the Digital Sentinel, code books, Totem pole in particular, wall plaques – the tangible elements are good in terms of leaving something local people can see and feel and touch.”* (EH)

*“I am 100% convinced it has had impact – reflected in the Facebook activities; the Digital Sentinel running on a day to day basis without any resources, just social capital. It's put something material in the ground which was the hardest possible thing.”* (CS)

The *sustainability* of outcomes is also seen as an important measure of the project's "impact": *"That we helped substantiate a series of virtuous systems that keep going beyond AHRC funding – the Totem pole is key example."* (CS)

The resourcefulness of community partners in utilising Connected Communities funding has facilitated this by enabling community partners to build capacity and leverage further funding :

*"Part of the beauty of the Totem pole and other projects such as social history code books, was that we were able to divert for want of a better word - or creatively use some of the AHRC funding to deliver projects that had been identified by the community or by the community partners and that has helped to sustain interest and participation locally but it has also helped to secure further income and profile. The Digital Sentinel, the incubation of that was wrapped up in some of the social history work and some of the Totem pole project as well, so we were able to secure some money from the Carnegie UK trust to continue the development of that. And the VDP project has allowed the community access to a small budget as well to continue to develop project ideas."*(AF)

Local "institutional capacity" has been a significant project outcome and legacy, with organisations regaining a more outward perspective and focus and a recognition that they can be part of the bigger picture of development of Wester Hailes:

*"The legacy has really been around the really strong partnership work that happened, particularly with Prospect Community Housing and the Health Agency, I think there was a really good level of understanding and mutual support and trust that harks back to what my understanding is of the past in Wester Hailes, where there were a whole number of community organisations that all worked quite effectively together."* (AF)

The community partners do, however, recognise the need to develop a more strategic and less reactive plan for the future. Larger pots of money are needed to sustain existing initiatives and pay for community resources (e.g. community journalists, community research assistants). Much of what has been achieved to date has been based on the goodwill of all those involved in the project, and has involved utilising considerably more (academic and community) resources than funding allowed for:

*"A more strategic plan - or a strategic plan for similar types of activities for the next 5 years. What we've tended to be doing is respond to Connected Communities programmes and applications as they've been successful. For instance, there was an application for £100,000 for the Digital Sentinel and that was unsuccessful...But we don't have development staff to make that happen. Basically anything that's happened so far has been on a wing and a prayer and volunteering. Staff from the three core organisations have put in a lot of time as well."* (EH)

### **3.5 Project (self) evaluation**

There was some degree of resistance to the idea of "evaluation" from those interviewed: evaluation was seen as a "tick box" exercise and a waste of finite resources: *"In this project,*

*evaluation is implicit not explicit – we spent all the money maintaining the resource rather than counting.”(CS)*

Significantly, no resources for evaluation were included in the initial funding bids. Very little in the way of formal or informal evaluation took place before, during or after project completion:

*“Fairly rudimentary evaluation in terms of the numbers of people who were involved in the sessions and capturing some of the feedback from those participants, but not sure there was any more in-depth evaluation that took place.”(AF)*

Due to the nature of the project, evaluation was seen as having little meaning as many of the “values” associated it may be unknowable in empirical terms. Again, the element of time was mentioned:

*“I’ve helped EH put a Totem pole in the ground. Someone else in the community might not value that for five years, so do you take an assessment of how they value it now, or do you ask them what it’s worth in five years’ time? The Totem pole might only make sense to someone when they’ve been interviewed for the Digital Sentinel.” (CS)*

**It was clear, however, that all those involved in the project had undergone their own evaluative processes, reflecting on what had gone well, what had gone less well, and using this knowledge to adapt the project as well as to think about how they might approach future projects.**

### **3.6 Reflections on Connected Communities funding**

The evaluation has also uncovered some areas requiring further consideration for funders, particularly regarding funding timescales, responsibilities to communities and ethical research; the need for follow-on/consolidation funding; and supporting academics undertaking community-based research.

#### **Funding timescales**

Funding bodies often underestimate or don’t understand the length of time it takes to plan, design and deliver projects and how long it takes to really engage the community in that process:

*“Tiny pots of money and short time periods. It’s not enough to do design research – if you want to do something engaging, it is very difficult.” (CS)*

*“The benefit of having a longer period of time to support the incubation and engage the local community in the process would deliver something much more meaningful.” (AF)*

**Is Connected Communities funding “fit for purpose” for this form of research? Short-termism; a lack of understanding of the implications of community-engaged research (timeframes, what and who needs financed; responsibilities to the community).**

### **Ethical research**

There are very significant ethical implications to community-engaged research of this type which are under-discussed. In particular, small pots of funding made available for very short time periods risks the continuity and hence sustainability of project outcomes and the longer-term benefits to communities:

*“It’s been very unfair on partner organisations as small bids only provide an RA for a short period of time, then they’re removed.” (CS)*

Nonetheless, it should still be recognised that: *“Without research funding some of these projects may not have happened at all. So there is a balance to be struck between delivering projects that meet the outcomes of the research council or any funder and the aspirations or needs of the community.” (AF)* And a possible tension between community development and academic research needs. There is also an urgent need to consolidate the initial Connected Communities funded initiatives. The fragility is recognised by all interviewees - all project initiatives are currently in an “incipient” state and under-resourced:

*“There is a risk that the area could quite quickly turn into a vicious cycle again given the cuts [to public funding]. I don’t know if project is a truly virtuous cycle yet? It is taking off if I show you the Facebook pages - people finding voice, sometimes political, sometimes taking ownership, but AF desperately wants more resources for the community journalists” (CS)*

The academic team has also struggled with the question: “At what point is it OK to leave the community?” It is really important to state that “there is no closure with communities.” (CS).

**What responsibilities do academics have to communities beyond the lifetime of the project itself? This is a wider question for the academic research community in general.**

### **Follow-on funding for project consolidation**

The lack of follow-on funding to consolidate existing projects has resulted in multiple projects with different outcomes, and the sustainability/impact of this approach is questionable, given the (lack of) resources available:

*“Was it sensible to try to launch a community newspaper? I don’t know. On reflection it might have been a push too far, given the AHRC are hopeless at resolving how they instantiate these projects and they can’t give us the money to see them through.” (CS)*

**Funding bodies need to recognise community-based projects take place in multiple phases and make resources available to help ensure that the intangible benefits are realised after the tangibles are in place.**

### **Balancing academic and community needs**

The tension between conducting theoretically informed/robust academic research and delivering projects that meet and support community needs/expectations/desires was particularly evident throughout this project, seen most clearly in the evolving aims and objectives, but also in the subsequent research bids:

*“On the last project [Communities within Spaces of Flows] we tried to do something different, and this has opened up some research questions – but it wasn’t very successful with the community. It was pushing too far, when could have spent more time resourcing the community newspaper. But it will help us write the next grant, which looks at reciprocity.” (CS)*

The willingness of the academic team to meet community needs has meant sacrificing standard measures of academic “success”, i.e. peer reviewed journal publications, as the project has evolved significantly away from the initial theoretical constructs:

*“I haven’t had a single academic paper out of the three projects yet, so there has been little academic reward. Reciprocity isn’t particularly balanced! Press and connection is great but for the REF? What is in it for the academic team?” (CS)*

“Non-standard” measures of success (e.g. physical design projects such as the Totem pole) are not easy to include/account for in funding applications – and pose a key challenge as they go beyond the idea of what “outputs” academics are supposed to develop. There is likely to be a significant time-lapse for academics as results may take much longer to become visible:

*“There is also a disjoint between academic funding requirements and realising a community-based project of this nature, which is very long term and where immediate “benefits” do not manifest themselves.” (CS)*

**Community-based research has significant but under-acknowledged implications for academics - and early career academics in particular. How can they be better supported in undertaking this form of research? What alternative metrics can be used to determine academic impact of this type of work?**



## References

- Blake Stevenson Ltd. (2000). *The Role of the Arts in Regeneration*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Central Research Unit.
- Department of Culture, Media and Sport (1999) *Arts and Sport, Policy Action Team 10: A Report to the Social Inclusion Unit*. London: Department of Culture, Media and Sport.
- Harland, J., Kinder, K., Lord, P., Slott, A., Schagen, I. & Haynes, J. (2000). *The Effects and Effectiveness of Arts Education in School*. Slough: NFER.
- Jermyn, H. (2004) *The Art of Inclusion*. London: Arts Council England
- Landry, L., Greene, L., Matarasso, F. & Bianchini, F. (1996). *The Art of Regeneration: Urban renewal through cultural activity*. Stroud: Comedia.
- Matarasso, F. (1997). *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*. Stroud: Comedia.
- McCarthy, k., Ondaatje, E.H., Zakaras, L., and Brooks, A. (2004) *Gifts of the muse: reframing the debate about the benefits of the arts*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
- Williams, D. (1996). *Creating Social Capital*. Adelaide: Community Arts Network of South Australia.
- Williams, D. (1997). *How the Arts Measure Up: Australian Research into the Social Impact of the Arts, The Social Impact of the Arts, Working Paper 8*. Stroud: Comedia.

## Valuing different perspectives: elite awareness and engagement

### Introduction

This short report presents a summary of a series of interviews in the summer and autumn of 2014 for the AHRC Connected Communities Valuing Different Perspectives project. This part of the project had aimed to explore the impact of the research from the point of view of the connections and interactions between policy and academic practice. The research sought to answer two questions:

- What “elite” groups were involved in the original AHRC Connected Communities projects and what was the impact of this on them?
- How aware were local elites in Scotland and Edinburgh of the outputs of the original Connected Communities projects and was there any noticeable impact of the projects?

To answer these questions the researcher, Dr Dave O’Brien, contacted the original academics and seven policy-makers and/or politicians at a local and national level (listed below). Due to the Scottish Independence Referendum on 18 September most of the policy-makers and politicians were too busy to respond to repeated requests for interview. The final sample was the two academics (the Principal Investigator on Community Hacking 2.0 and Ladders to the Cloud; and the Co-Investigator on Ladders to the Cloud), and two local politicians and a local council officer. The academics were interviewed over the summer 2014 over Skype; the politicians were interviewed in person by the project Research Associate in autumn 2014. The interviews are analysed thematically in turn.

### Academic elites

This section covers the experiences of the two researchers working on the project(s) that Valuing different perspectives sought to evaluate. The data aggregated below are subject to the range of caveats that come from a small sample as discussed above. That notwithstanding, there were four key themes of note:

1) **The impact of the project:** Both of the researchers suggested the project had an important impact in creating a relationship between academics and local community gatekeepers. This means that future projects are possible and that some of the poor relationships between community and academy have been repaired. The researchers also suggested that the physical impact, that of the digital totem pole, was important, as a public art legacy for the project. The community newspaper was also cited as important. Finally it was felt that Wester Hailes had developed a reputation both as a case study of good practice for community development, but also as a site that was more visible for local and Scottish policy makers. Examples of the projects having a high profile at AHRC Connected Communities events and through the Edinburgh Beltane for public engagement were cited.

However both researchers stress that the impact beyond the relationships built by the projects was highly precarious and fragile. The community media depended on future funding and key individuals and both researchers were cautious about longer-term sustainability, especially given regeneration funding was being cut very severely.

2) **How impact is judged:** The above is therefore closely connected with how impact is and measured and valued. Both researchers stressed how the impacts were centred on relationship building and thus would be unlikely to register in traditional ways of assessing impact. Reputational analysis is difficult to judge, as is the quality and value of relationships. However, the narratives

around future grants being developed, around the street-level knowledge and the methodological insights gained from the research may all be captured by more participatory rather than traditional methods. For one participant this crystallised around the issue of dissemination of findings, which were largely unwritten and narrated by conversations with other researchers and with community members. For the other it comes in the form of useful papers that were additional to the conversations cited by the other researcher. Finally both pointed to future projects that are developing with the area, suggesting quantifiable impact.

**3) The specific methodologies that work for research practice:** Both researchers placed a stress on the importance of methods for doing community research. These include the importance of time and building trust between academic and community (another hard to quantify element of the projects); the importance of letting the community have control over budgets and decisions; the importance of digital forms of engagement, particularly Facebook; the usefulness of historical and archive material as a way of beginning conversations; the need for a physical presence in the community, either the digital shed or the totem pole; the insight that small amounts of money can be used to fund a large amount of community work; finally the need to have people, for example a postdoc or RA, embedded in the community. That said, both researchers were cautious about the exact replicability of the project, aside from the methodological lessons.

**4) Lesson for *Connected Communities*:** The question as to the appropriate (or not) set of methodological practices is important when considering *Connected Communities* itself. The programme was seen as having particular strengths and weaknesses. There was seen to be considerable duplication across the programme overall and a question about 'usual suspects' doing the work. However these were seen as a price worth paying. This was, in the first instance, for AHRC to clearly display the value of its projects that combine different approaches, such as design, history and geography, to deal with social problems. Second it was to re-establish the relationship between academics and communities, a vitally important role for the University within the new world of a transformed funding regime and the overall impact agenda.

### **Local policy and political elites**

Accepting the small sample size of the interviews that did take place, they confirmed much of Stevens' (2011) work on the use of academic work in policy and the difficulty of raising awareness of this work in the minds of policy makers. The policy interviews raised three themes about the projects being evaluated: lack of awareness of the projects and the evaluation; questions as to the use and sustainability of the Totem Pole; and the need for research to be framed and presented in ways useful for policy.

**1) Lack of awareness of projects:** interviewees were blunt, albeit sympathetically so, in their lack of awareness of the project(s). Partially this was to do with geography, whereby the councillor was more focused on his own part of the ward and the council officer was dealing with a much broader area. Related to this was the number of other projects the council officer was involved with or was aware of, meaning it was difficult to give detailed knowledge of an individual project. This suggests future work might plan in policy impact much earlier in the process, such as mapping key individuals and targeting them more specifically across several stages of the project.

**2) Awareness of the totem pole:** There was, however, awareness of the Totem Pole as an object. There was good humoured surprise at its longevity, but questions were raised about its use by the

local population. A specific issue, raised by the council officer, was around the access to hardware needed to engage with the pole. This was a particular issue as the *Sentinel/West Edinburgh Times* newspaper had not been replaced by the pole and the associated *Digital Sentinel*. It was thus a 'plan B' for disseminating and engaging with information, as opposed to being as favoured and trusted as previous community newspapers.

3) **The usefulness of knowledge for policy:** interviewees stressed the need for case studies as examples of specific citizens' or communities' experiences. Case studies were also seen as easier to interpret and deploy, particularly when as part of political discourse, whereas statistical information and more detailed research reports were used by the council officer when a particular topic was 'hot' and were not seen as useful at all by the councillor. The latter point reflects the role of a councillor in local representation, which is often driven by the stories of citizens and places experiences, rather than social data. The use of research was also seen as something that would be welcome, but the gulf between policy makers' awareness of projects and evaluations and the academics and communities producing the work was the overarching theme emerging from the discussions.

#### **Appendix – people invited for interview**

Alasdair Mckinlay head of the Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill team, the Scottish Government

Eric Milligan local councillor

Dominic Heslop local councillor

Bill Henderson local councillor

Donald Wilson local councillor and Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh Council

Mike Avery, Neighbourhood Manager, the City of Edinburgh Council

Mike Rosendale, Better Outcomes Leaner Delivery Team, the City of Edinburgh Council

