

# Research on community heritage: moving from collaborative research to participatory and co-designed research practice

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**Abstract:** This paper will examine recent experience in the UK of encouraging greater collaboration between university researchers and groups outside the academy around the practice of community heritage and archives. The paper will explore this theme within formally structured attempts at collaborative research and co-creation such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC) Connected Communities programme Research for Community Heritage. In particular the paper will refer to the work of the UCL team Dig Where We Stand / Continuing to Dig within that programme in order to assess the current state of practice in seeking to overcome the barriers to real and sustained collaboration between those in the academy and those located outside in the development of community heritage research.

**Keywords:** Community-based heritage research; collaborative practice; participatory approaches

## *Introduction. Community-based heritage practice*

This paper arises out of our shared interest in collaborative, participatory and community-based research practice and the current fashion internationally for the promotion of collaborative and participatory practices within heritage thinking and practice, including public history, community archaeology and community-based archival activities as well as the specific stress in UK academic research with engagement, impact, participative approaches, co-creation, co-development and co-production of knowledge and of community-led and community-based activities. We will do this by looking at some of literature and context in which this practice takes place as well as drawing on our own experiences seeking to work in this fashion (successfully and unsuccessfully) as heritage practitioners, researchers and academics. Whilst acknowledging the many different (and often contradictory) bases for these practices, we wish for the purposes of this paper to foreground the approaches to community engagement advocated by universities and heritage organisations alongside the autonomous, transformatory and counter-hegemonic motivations of some community-based activists. We will examine whether the current interest in public engagement, impact and participation in the universities and the cultural heritage sector in the UK has really resulted in the promotion of more collaborative and equitable research relations with those outside those institutions. To do so we will reflect on our experiences as researchers, archivists, and collaborators with a specific focus on the multi-disciplinary Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded heritage teams at UCL (Dig Where We Stand (2012) and Continuing to Dig (2013)) which sought to develop collaborative relationships with various community heritage projects all supported by a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) stream of funding called 'All Our Stories'. This was not a process without problems and challenges, but nonetheless there have been positive results and interesting lessons for anyone involved in public history, community-based archives and participatory heritage practice in general who is seeking to develop sustainable, equitable and even transformative relations between heritage researchers inside and outside institutional and mainstream frameworks.

## *Archival context for collaborative / participatory practice*

As writers from other fields have commented ‘participation’ is itself ‘a warmly persuasive word’ which seems ‘never to be used unfavourably’ (Hildyard et al, 2001: 58). This is generally applicable to our own use of the term in the heritage sector where there is an implicit general consensus within our literature that participation is a positive attribute, something to be aspired to and encouraged. Despite this positive framing, it remains difficult to firmly articulate exactly what being ‘participatory’ actually means. Writers from other fields openly acknowledge that being ‘participatory’ is an ‘infinitely malleable concept that can be used to describe almost anything involving people’ (Cornwall, 2008: 69).

Despite the slippery nature of the concept it is possible to draw out distinctions around the use of the term within the archival and heritage field. Therefore, we will briefly outline three different ways in which we see the term ‘participatory’ being framed when the lens is narrowed to a focus on academic and professional discourse. These three frames are not exhaustive and by that we mean there are possibly other ways in which archivists and heritage workers frame being ‘participatory’, they are also *by no means mutually exclusive*. The three frames presented here merge in and out of each other and can even be found overlapping. Nevertheless, each has a distinct emphasis through which to create the boundaries around the concept.

The first way in which archivists have set about defining what being ‘participatory’ is has been to examine it from a relational perspective, framing a ‘participatory approach’ in terms of a renegotiation of roles. In this context a ‘participatory approach’ is seen as one which changes the traditional boundary between the ‘professional archivist’ and ‘other stakeholders’. In this framing being ‘participatory’ is about allowing ‘others’ to move into spaces that have been traditionally seen as the responsibility of the professional (Theimer, 2013). In framing ‘being participatory’ primarily around the relationship between ‘professional’ and ‘other’ there is the hope of a ‘democratization’ that will dissolve the professional distinction. ‘Shared authority’ becomes one of the driving aspirations; a shared authority *between* ‘professional’ and ‘other’.

The second frame focuses on the nature of the content and products that the participatory approach can generate. Here, the participatory approach is tied into a commitment to use participation as a *creative process* to reveal and explore multiple pathways, understandings and contextualities. Here participatory approaches are foregrounded as processes that enable ‘multiplicity’ and ‘diversity’ to flourish. This ties in neatly with constructivist theories on knowledge generation and production which champion a non-deterministic approach; seeking to understand and make explicit the subjective meanings that individuals, communities and societies place on their experiences with an understanding that these meanings are varied, multiple and complex. Here, the participatory archive becomes the process and the space in which a constructivist archive can shift and evolve.

The third way of framing the ‘participatory’ focuses in on the *transformatory* potential of the approach. It is different to the other two ways of framing the ‘participatory’ because it begins with defining an injustice or social problem that ‘participation’ is specifically designed to address and change and as such has the de-stabilization of existing power dynamics as its core and explicit central aim. This framing of the ‘participatory archive’ is illustrated in Shilton and Srinivasan’s exploration of ‘Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections’ (2007) when the uneven balance of power and control between mainstream and marginalized is the injustice in which the ‘participatory approach’ locates itself and which it seeks to transform. Similarly, participatory models specifically rooted in challenging injustice are being articulated out of work to address concerns around archival issues and indigenous human rights in the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia where there is a recognition that Western archival and legal frameworks that assert who has the ability to control, disclose, access and use these records restrict the self determination and freedom of the Indigenous communities that these records are about. It is in direct recognition and response to these issues, that an advocacy

position has been articulated by McKemmish et al (2010; 2011) to establish an alternative approach to negotiating rights. This is articulated as a participant relationship model which acknowledges all parties to a transaction as immediate parties with negotiated rights and responsibilities (Iacovino, 2010). Acceptance and use of such a model represents a landmark transformation in archival frameworks of control.

This rooting of a 'participatory' approach by some archivists into a specified injustice with the intention that the approach will transform the status quo meshes with much discussion within other fields and other discourses where research is undertaken within a framework of social justice. Many parallels can be drawn between emerging praxis in an archival context and work undertaken using methodologies such as Participatory Action Research (Whyte, 1991), Participatory Community Research (Denison and Stillman, 2012), Community-Based Participatory Research (O'Toole et al, 2003) Anti-Oppressive Practice (Moosa-Mitha, 2005), and the many forms of action research that are rooted or influenced by critical and emancipatory theories (Strega, 2005).

### ***Collaborative/participatory practice and history making***

In the practice of history-making, heritage and archiving, radical participatory approaches which embrace the transformational power of representing oneself or community, of assuming the authority for your own histories or the histories of your community have a long and influential lineage, often making the same connections between the radical participative approaches discussed above and social movements rooted in civil rights and social justice perspectives. Many of the activities are driven by a shared recognition that community-based knowledge-production, including history-making, is socially-constituted, invariably contestatory and a valuable process and resource which aims to transform not only the lives and understanding of those who engage in the process but also may contribute to the transformation of the political, social, economic and cultural realities in which they find themselves. The emphasis here is on a 'public history' which stresses the 'making' and the engagement with the process of meaning making as opposed to a passive consumption of official, professionally mediated history and heritage (Kean 2013).

Community-based archival, archaeological and historical research activities whether they reflect class, national, gender, regional, ethnic, faith or other identities or a combination of such, invariably seek to unsettle established and dominant heritage narratives by asserting the community's authority to represent itself (Hall 2001; 2005). Whether it be the Jewish Historical Societies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the US and the UK seeking to use communal history to deflect anti-semitism; the archives relating histories of those of African background as tools for supporting education, positive identifications and self-confidence; labour and working-class movement museums offering narratives of past struggle to inform and mobilise around contemporary campaigns for social, economic and political justice; women's, gay and lesbian archives and resource centres offering safe spaces for the articulation of emotional responses to frequently traumatic individual and community histories; all place understanding and engaging with the past firmly in the collective present whilst looking to transform future realities. Research into Palestinian archive and heritage 'fever' in Gaza, the West Bank and the refugee camps encapsulates this simultaneous look to the past (the exiled home), the present reality (disenfranchised exile) and future aspirations (not only return (to the past) but also a transformed future society) (Butler, 2010; Doumani 2009).

The acknowledgement of the value of the meaning-making of the past and the socially-constructed nature of that 'work...of a thousand different hands' (Samuel, 1994) has led to many attempts by professional heritage workers and academics, often motivated by political and social justice sympathies to support, participate and collaborate in these endeavours. In the UK, radical and democratic History Workshop approaches, history from below movements, the sharing of authority in oral history and the community archive and archaeology movements have all combined to seek to dissolve the boundaries between the

‘professional’ and others engaged in history-making by collaborating, facilitating and sharing expertise and skills (Kean, 2013 xxiii-xxv).

A famous, influential and, for us inspirational framework for this collaborative approach and facilitation was provided by the Swedish writer Sven Lindqvist. Gräv där du står (Dig Where You Stand, 1978) and an English article of the same title in *Oral History* (1979) made the case for the distorted and biased nature of industrial and business history and argued that instead ‘factory history could and should be written from a fresh point of view, by workers investigating their own workplaces’. Lindqvist wrote that history was dangerous and important ‘because the results of history are still with us’ and while it was crucial that workers (and others) should carry out their own research, it was essential for someone to facilitate that processes by providing guidance on the techniques and methods of historical research. He thus produced *Dig Where You Stand*, ‘...a handbook which would help others, especially workers to write these factory histories in their own neighbourhoods and their own places of work’ and toured Sweden (and later the UK) addressing factory groups and Workers’ Educational Association meetings on the workers doing factory community-based research. The advantage of the skill sharing and facilitating approach advocated and practised by Lindqvist and Samuel (Kean 2013: xxiv) was that the subject matter of the research and the control and ownership of the research remained with workers (in this case), that is, it remained a participatory approach that was closer to a community-led model than it was to a more collaborative, partnership model of co-development and co-production advanced elsewhere by History Workshop and regional (labour) history societies where activists from inside and outside the academy sought to work together on historical research and publication.

Relationships between community historians, and academics and professionals to produce community-based heritage research and community archaeology were relatively common in the UK in the 1980s but declined in the early 1990s as academics and community-based researchers drifted apart. The oral historian Alistair Thomson (2008) has outlined the reasons for the growing estrangement of academics from community history and community oral history in terms of an increasingly specialised and academy-focussed research culture in the universities, the decline of adult and continuing education departments within higher education institutions, and a growing divergence of practices which were characterised as ‘overly theoretical’ or ‘popular’ and ‘uncritical’ respectively which contributed to community and academic practitioners moving in different directions.

The 2000s however have seen a renewed interest in community-based activities and an increased willingness to explore partnership and collaboration, including exploring the possibilities of co-development and co-production in ways that seek to empower rather than falling into previously identified traps of tokenism and exploitation (Arnstein 1969). Despite welcoming these developments, we would also wish to guard against complacency and ignoring practices which in fact reinforce ‘abiding and inequitable imbalances between professionals and communities in relation to the control of resources and narratives’ (Watson and Waterton 2010: 2).

The facilitating model advocated by Lindqvist has important benefits, not least in leaving the ownership of the project with community, but it did (does) tend to reinforce top-down notions of where expertise lies between the academic or heritage professionals and those they are working with and can result in financial and physical resources remaining in those institutions which are deemed to be the centres of expertise. The provision of such skills may not only facilitate history-making but may also give the community access to the tools to continue to make meaning of the past. However on the other hand, a more bottom-up, collaborative approach aiming at the co-development and co-production of research might be ‘more complex and challenging’ to establish and to implement but the results might also have ‘greater success and sustainability’ in the longer term (Perkin 2010: 120).

## ***UK Funding Context for Collaborative/Participatory Research***

Funding is another critical factor for understanding the context in which these community-based participatory heritage research collaborations happen. In some contexts those engaged in community-based heritage research or archival activity may be doing so without recourse to external funding (relying on individual or community resources owing to the small-scale, grassroots nature of the activity or perhaps out of an explicit decision to remain autonomous and self-reliant and avoid the contradictory aims, restrictions and strings that might be attached to external funding). However in the UK much of this community-based heritage activity and participatory academic / community collaborations has been facilitated by public funding either directly from government or from arm's length bodies such as the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and academic research councils such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). All these funding bodies have their own aims and objectives and whilst much of the recent community-based history-making would not have happened without their funding, it does raise questions regarding the coincidence between the aims of community-based researchers (particularly radically minded or identity-focussed activists) and the funding body. MSC's community focussed funding in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s supported a huge amount of community heritage, community archaeology and oral history work but the funding resulted in tensions and pressures over the priority of training over research, the aims of more politically engaged projects, and the scale of institutional resources needed (Thomson, 2008: 102, Moshenska and Dhanjal, 2012: 2). HLF and latterly AHRC funding has, along with developments in technology and social media, been absolutely central to the revival of participatory community-based archive and history practice, a second-wave of community archaeology in the late 1990s and 2000s and the beginnings of the re-engagement of university-based researchers and heritage professionals with this community-based heritage activity (Isherwood 2012: 7-8). Certainly very little of the activities that we as researchers have been involved in has happened without support from these external funders. The consequences of the reliance on these funding streams for participatory practice and for collaboration and co-production of history-making is one of the issues which underpins the prospects for future growth of this kind of activity.

Of particular significance in this regard is the central focus in government driven funding and research on the problematic notion of community. A notoriously slippery and ill-defined term with dangerous implications for being a language of othering and marginalisation, 'community', community cohesion, community well-being has been at the centre of government (local and central) rhetoric and policy for much of the last 15 to 20 years in the UK (Alleyne 2002, Crooke 2007, Waterton and Smith, 2010). The HLF's focus on the benefits that engaging and participating in heritage activities might bring to communities has been firmly in line with these broader concerns, and has ensured that community heritage and community archives have been given a prominent role in delivering the social impacts of participatory heritage practices. The funding of research in UK universities has addressed similar priorities in recent years.

This renewed interest in participatory approaches to knowledge creation and community-based participatory research has been accompanied by public policy and research council focus on impact, engagement and the notion of community as an important (and largely beneficial) construct. This has led to a number of funding streams and research opportunities which encourage collaboration between academic departments / institutions and individuals and groups outside the academy. This has included sponsorship of community-based participatory research for community heritage.

Since 2010 the UK Research Councils (RCUK) have been funding a large cross-council multidisciplinary programme entitled Connected Communities 'designed to help us understand the changing nature of communities in their historical and cultural contexts and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life'. Connected Communities funded research:

*... seeks not only to connect research on communities, but to connect communities with research, bring together community-engaged research across a number of core themes, including community health and wellbeing, community creativity, prosperity and regeneration, community values and participation, sustainable community environments, places and spaces, and community cultures, diversity, cohesion, exclusion and conflict.*

Connected Communities research not only has communities as its focus but also stresses the engagement of the community in all stages of the research process as a key feature. The programme seeks to connect research expertise, so that Connected Communities is not (or not just) research on communities, but research for and with communities. Of particular relevance here is a particular funding strand, led by the AHRC which is entitled Research for Community Heritage ('research with communities, not on communities') which between 2011 and 2013 funded a number of multidisciplinary heritage research teams including at UCL. This strand, in which both authors were engaged in 2012 and 2013 sought by:

*Working closely with the Heritage Lottery Fund ...to catalyse and develop sustainable links between expertise in research organisations in the area of community histories and heritage and relevant community groups. It is expected that this will lead to the development of innovative collaborative or co-produced community heritage research projects led by community groups.*

Some early-stage evaluations of this initiative, the partnerships and collaborations it stimulated and in particular the extent to which the programme successfully enabled the 'innovative collaborative or co-produced community heritage research' it aimed for will be the major focus of the rest of this paper.

### ***Dig Where We Stand<sup>1</sup>***

The UCL Dig Where We Stand (DWWS): Developing and Sustaining Community Heritage (and Continuing to Dig: supporting and sustaining innovative community heritage projects in London and the South East) project (2011-2013) was established as part of the AHRC's Connected Communities Research for Community Heritage programme. DWWS was one of a number of multidisciplinary teams funded by the AHRC in universities across the UK to work with and support the community heritage research activities of groups funded by the AHRC's partner in the scheme, the HLF. In a specially designed stream of funding ('All Our Stories' grants worth £3000-£10,000), the HLF funded some 500 community-based groups to conduct heritage research. DWWS was comprised of UCL-based researchers from archaeology, archives, history, oral history, cultural heritage, digital humanities, public geography, film studies and museum studies, united by an interest in community-based heritage and in engaging our disciplines and our research with people outside the university. As previously noted one of the stated objectives of the Research for Community Heritage strand was the development of sustainable partnerships between heritage researchers inside and outside the university, and ultimately 'innovative collaborative or co-produced community heritage research projects led by community groups'. Taking our cue from Sven Lindqvist and Dig Where You Stand, DWWS sought to work with groups to enable them to

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<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by grants from the AHRC's Research for Community Heritage fund. The UCL Dig Where We Stand team comprised Principal Investigator (Andrew Flinn), Co-Investigators (Gabriel Moshenska, Kris Lockyear, Beverley Butler.), researchers (Sarah Dhanjal, Tina Paphitis, Anna Sexton) and other UCL team members Ego Ahaiwe, Caroline Bressey, Debbie Challis, Lee Grieveson, James Hales, Louise Martin, Gemma Romain, Chris O'Rourke and Melissa Terras.

develop and implement their research ideas, offering training in particular research skills where necessary, and encouraging a more holistic approach to community-based heritage research by bringing together the different elements (eg archaeology, archive research, oral history and digital technology). Lindqvist's work and slogan was inspirational and appropriate for us not only because it linked the use of archaeology and other historical methods to understand the history of where communities stood but also because it emphasised the significance of history, the importance of people participating in the telling of their own histories, and the fact that the tools used by the academic historian required for rigorous community or factory based historical research could be made available to all via handbooks, workshops and as web resources.

Over the two years (2012-2013) we worked with a number of groups prior to the submission of their funding ideas to the HLF, held one to one surgeries and delivered workshops on heritage research techniques with grant holders and then worked in a more sustained fashion with ten to fifteen groups on the delivery of their projects. The overall scheme (the partnership between the two funders the HLF and AHRC) had its problems and frustrations as we will discuss later in this paper but it was still overwhelmingly an exciting and constantly challenging experience for all those involved. For various reasons (to be explored later) we may have been more often offering access to skills and expertise rather than truly engaging in the co-development of new and innovative community-based heritage research, but in some cases (such as with Mental Fight Club) that process did begin and we have been able to develop our relationships with some of the groups which if sustained further may lead to new and more innovative community heritage research. In any event many of the groups were able to use the techniques, equipment and good practice guidance that we were able to offer to produce heritage research and final products considerably enhanced from what they had originally intended. To give one example, one project (Hoxton Hall) declared that they had 'greatly benefited' from the guidance and conversations with us on oral history techniques and particularly on the ethics of recording and display, and this had resulted in 'a project that is of real relevance to the community of Shoreditch and our organisation' and that this learning was now embedded in the organisation and was contributing to their other large heritage projects.

### ***Instigating participatory practices - an evaluation and a framework***

In 'Interrupting Positions' (2005), Herising develops a concept of 'thresholds' to critically explore and open up discussion around the stances that academic researchers take when working with and in marginal communities. Herising's concepts of 'positioning' in relation to 'thresholds' and the building of 'passageways' through which collaborative research can traverse are useful in articulating some of the substantive questions facing the DWWS team in considering how to develop collaborative relationships between ourselves and the communities we were seeking to work with. Within the overarching question of what we mean when we say we are aspiring to 'co-production' with our communities there are a multiplicity of other questions relating to position, space and boundaries: Is there a chasm to negotiate between ourselves as academic researchers, the gatekeepers in the community projects we were working with, and the wider community that each project engages with or represents? What are the challenges of negotiating the spaces between these relational thresholds? What are the frictions and dissonances within and between these spaces? What aspects of our positioning need to alter to enable us to traverse with our partners? What aspects of our beliefs, values, identities, and knowledges do we need to disinherit, disavow, decentre, disrupt, claim, reinsert or centre in order to work with our various communities (Herising, 2005, p.128)? What other relational thresholds impinge or have an influence on how we traverse? Are we as a team of cross-disciplinary academics in a cohesive relational space or are there chasms to traverse between us too and to what extent can this question also be asked of the gatekeepers and their wider communities?

Reflecting on these questions should of course be an iteratively embedded part of the research process itself. In keeping with Herising (2005: 128), in exploring thresholds and passageways it is not to seek an arrival at a fixed and certain ground but rather ways of dwelling within “the realm of questioning, experiment and adventure” (Heilbrun, 1999: 98). However, we can perhaps begin to suggest a narrative of the reflexive journey we are on by exploring our initial (as the academic partner’s) stance on ‘co-production’. How has our idealised view on how we will traverse with our community partners been shaped and then challenged? What ‘best-practice’ assumptions did we initially bringing with us? First and foremost we aspired to develop ways of working that can be seen as community and not academy led. This stance is in recognition of the broader socio-historical framework in which we are working in. The imbalances of power that have existed (and still exist) between institutionally led and/or academic heritage production on the one hand; and grass-roots community led heritage production on the other sets the tone for wanting to establish the community itself as the core around which we work. This is in response to the fact that institutional and academy led versions of heritage are still ingrained as the accepted meta-narratives for people, communities, societies, and nations while community produced versions still struggle for broader recognition.

Reflecting on the balance of control running through the positioning of stakeholders in a partnership and the way relationships are developed and infrastructures are maintained is vital to understanding who ultimately pushes and pulls in the co-production of heritage. In relation to DWWS, our stance has been to articulate an over-arching recognition of the value inherent in the community owning their projects and controlling the production of their heritage. In doing this there is perhaps an overwhelming desire to avoid enacting the role of “the appropriator”, particularly for those of us who can reflect back on ways of working where we have been blinkered to our own complicity in systems of domination and subordination and have missed the opportunity to re-draw the power relations between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ (Strega, 2005: 229). In seeking to avoid appropriation, we are articulating an affinity with the tenets of many published typologies on Participatory Action Research which, while differing in emphasis and perspective, generally echo the idealisation of ‘citizen control’ in Arnstein’s ‘ladder of participation’ (1969). But what ramifications has this overarching stance had on how we further articulate the relational positioning between us, as members of the academy and supporters of community produced heritage on the one hand, and our community partners on the other? In our commitment to see the community as the primary controllers, do we see ourselves as “facilitators” and what can this mean when we know we can never facilitate neutrally, passively or objectively? Do we draw on a “consultant” “client” metaphor where we as academics, are cast as the specialists while the community partners are cast as the recipients of our expertise? Do we draw on different models depending on situation, need and circumstance? Where possible, should we see our overarching aim as being one that seeks to move away from one-way exchanges of knowledge and skills towards two-way processes which have the potential to invoke co-authority, co-control, and co-production, at least over some activities within the overall community owned project? Critically, if co-production is our aspiration, how can we open up as “much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration [as possible]...without the mandate of conquest”? (Morrison, 1992, p.3 in Herising, 2005: 132)

A significant challenge to our aspiration towards ‘co-production’ and the ‘with’ not ‘on’ philosophy we wanted to adopt, came from the size and scope of the ‘All our Stories’ funding stream which limited grants to between £3000 and £10000 pounds with an expectation that the project would be operational for around 6 months. The funding was aimed at encouraging community participants who were new to exploring and producing community history, as well as supporting more experienced community participants to explore their shared history from new perspectives. In both cases, the emphasis in the grant documentation was more towards process rather than product, with the development of learning outcomes for participants being stressed within the grant criteria to a much greater extent than the development of sustainable heritage resources. Crucially for the DWWS teams, the comparatively small nature of the ‘All our Stories’ grants meant that there was not

the necessary scope to develop an involved research process with co-production between DWWS, the grant holder, and the wider communities that the grant holder sought to involve and represent. Infra-structures for co-production need to be flexible and fluid to build in the space for project goals and boundaries to shift and change, such infra-structures are simply too time and resource intensive to be possible within the scope of the 'All our Stories' funding.

This barrier to co-production was further compounded by mis-matched timelines between when funding became available to DWWS through the AHRC and when 'All our Stories' partners received money from the HLF. The lack of dovetailing between the funding bodies meant that we were meeting some of the projects after they had submitted and been awarded their grants. The benefit of this was that the projects were therefore very much community-led from the outset, with ideas and ways of working already established by the community representatives, but this also meant that opportunities to develop innovative co-produced research as opposed to skills exchange were limited.

There was also an issue with the numbers of groups that actually received 'All our Stories' funding and our capacity to support them effectively. Due to the number of applications the HLF received from community groups there was a decision to increase funding from £1 million to £4.5 million to fund an extra 400 projects. This meant that there were now over 75 'All our Stories' funded projects in London alone which might want to collaborate with us. We ended up working in a sustained capacity with 10 projects, but even this number of projects constrained the depth of interaction that our team could give to each one. For example, as a researcher working one day a week on the project, Anna had sustained input into three projects and briefer bespoke input into one further project over her six month contract and we found that developing a single point of contact was important for the groups in establishing trust and a personal relationship. However, to move to genuine 'co-production', Anna felt she could have done this better if she could have focused on one group. Therefore, there was an issue of breadth at the expense of depth, even though the number of groups we worked with was small compared to the numbers of potential collaborators.

The result of timings and parameters around the projects meant that the Dig team ended up providing a lot of workshops training and skills sessions (like Lindquist's handbook) rather than co-developing new research. How far we managed to move away from the academics as 'experts' model will become clearer though our more in-depth evaluation but initial feedback speaks of our input both in terms such as 'specialist competence', advisors on 'best practice' and providers of 'expertise' and 'guidance' as well as terms that suggest that there was on occasion a more reflexive, two-way exchange involved with the creation of 'meaningful connections'.

Our provision of 'expert-led' training not only falls into a model that we were seeking to avoid but actually risked causing real upset. In offering 'free' (actually subsidised by the AHRC) training in oral history for instance we diverted potential income streams from established community providers. Here is how one established community heritage group manager described the situation:

*So for example, UCL is now doing some of the work that we could sometimes generate income from, in terms of supporting other grass roots initiatives. So for example, I had a community group come to me recently looking for advice which took my time, and we offered training that we would have been able to charge about £250 for, but they got back to me and said they don't need our training because UCL is helping. There is a danger that UCL is taking a valuable funding stream away from us. Which is a shame. It's something I want to talk to Andrew about.*

The danger is of course that the relationship between universities and community heritage groups is already unbalanced and can become more problematic. The community heritage group leader continues:

*We are working with another university at the moment, and they are adamant that they are going to put in a bid on our behalf even though the project was our idea. Academics work in a different way, I want to see more discussion around how*

*academics work with the community heritage sector. I think that discussion is needed.*

Clearly this is right, we do as academics seeking to engage in this territory need to discuss and negotiate with those already well-established and perhaps dependent on this territory to support their own history-making activities. In reality we have never had any long-term interest in setting up UCL as an alternative skills provider, we are more interested in establishing longer-term relationships in which we can move on from skills exchange into co-development and co-production of new research but this response reminds us even more forcibly of the need to take account of all the impacts of our interventions.

Continuing with our reflections on the tensions and challenges around moving from one-way 'skill exchange' towards 'co-production', we have also found that the relationship between the community project and its wider community was significant. Some of the projects we worked with were being run by existing and established community groups who had the production of community heritage already firmly embedded in their working practices; some were well established community groups but were new to community heritage or at least seeking to undertake a heritage activity that was new to them; others were groups who were seeking to engage or establish new relationships within their community and were new to community heritage. The complexity of starting positions means that a 'one size fits all' approach by us would be completely inappropriate and our responses to the projects needed to be localised and specific to each one. In some cases, skills exchange was perhaps an appropriate and useful response where the groups were exploring the use of a new heritage approach in which we have experience.

However, reflecting back on what 'skills exchange' and 'training' we pro-actively suggested we could offer to the groups, we were perhaps taking a blinkered approach which missed an opportunity for us to input more effectively into the community projects. We focused our offers of training both in terms of workshops held at UCL that the community projects could attend; and bespoke training tailored to specific groups around 'heritage activity'. For example, how to do...oral history, archival research, exhibitions, or managing archaeological finds. However, what we could have offered to the community groups was skill exchange in 'co-production' and 'participatory approaches'. At the time we lacked a wider vision that the heritage activities are of course embedded in broader relational structures and processes of working; and that we have something to offer the groups (and the groups have something to offer us and each other) in terms of how to embed participatory approaches into their own work. Where a project itself was more committed to taking a participatory approach with its own community; then we found we were often asked by the gatekeepers to deliver activity based training directly to the community itself as an embedded part of the project. This was the case with Catch 22's 'Stories of Becontree' project which sought to engage and connect disadvantaged young people to the history of their housing estate through archival research, oral history, and film making. Here we delivered training in oral history and archival research directly to the young people who were then empowered to take control over the project and shape its outcomes. By embedding us directly into the project process the potential for 'co-production' became possible from there.

It became apparent as we worked alongside some of the groups that, in some cases, the gatekeepers themselves were taking a 'top down' approach in how they were structuring their project and their interactions with community. There was in some cases, a careful controlling of heritage activities by the gatekeepers and a desire to engage a chosen audience within the community with those activities but not perhaps to share control of the project with those communities. In hindsight, where we became aware of a project taking a 'top down' approach it was more likely connected to a lack of awareness around the benefits of (and ways of taking) a more participatory approach rather than a desire for control. It was a reinforcement to us that a project can carry the label of 'community' but we need to be careful about our own assumptions around what that label implies in terms of relationships and processes and that of course projects can be community-placed without being community-based (O'Toole: 1526).

Another example where ‘skills exchange’ transitioned into something more collaborative was with Mental Fight Club (MFC). Reflecting back on what made this transition possible there is again a connection between the broader established ways of working within this group which are inherently ‘participatory’; and our ability to become embedded (at least for a pocket of time) within these frameworks that are already conducive to ‘co-production’. Our relationship with Mental Fight Club was inspired by a connection of interest around ‘heritage and well being’ that was shared between this group and several members of the DWWS team. In establishing this common ground, we were asked by the community to develop a series of talks which we called ‘Archaeologies of the Mind’ which would explore some of the ways which we as academic researchers see the connection between heritage and well being. Over the course of three weeks we delivered talks which were developed in collaborative discussion with MFC’s founder, Sarah Wheeler, and which led to broader collaborative discussions with the members of the wider MFC community around our shared interest. From the starting point of these talks flourished exchanges around meanings, frames, labels, concepts and ways of seeing and knowing. There was a sense in which these sessions (although small in number) became iterative with the participants response to the previous session shaping, changing and influencing the development of the next set of talks. While we can reflect further on the extent to which we as academics took a directing role and how we could have worked in an even more co-operative way, our commitment to active listening and learning and the group’s underlying culture of creative and shared exploration made the process feel genuine. To collaboratively question and push around issues that are fundamental to our academic research was hugely beneficial for several of the DWWS team and the response from the community participants suggested that these benefits were shared and reciprocal.

Standing back from our reflections, constraints relating to mis-matched timelines prevented us from creating starting points with our community partners and embed co-production throughout the ‘All our Stories’ project processes. This was further compounded by short project turn-around times, and needs outweighing resource. However, within the structures and frames established by the communities, where the community itself had an existing culture of co-production which aligned with a participatory approach, we found spaces opened up for us to be positioned within these frameworks and our input could align with these existing tenets. Here the thresholds between what we aspired to and what was already in place were easily traversed. A one-way exchange became two-way and three-way (with relationships developing not just with gatekeepers but with the wider community in which the projects were embedded). In these cases there was a reciprocity which allowed both the authority and the benefits to be more equally shared. The challenge is perhaps to consider our role in supporting projects without these embedded ways of working, how we can be transformative as well as supportive in these instances. Similarly, where a culture of co-production already exists how can timing and resource be dovetailed to enable co-production between us, our community partners and their wider communities to be established in more than just pockets or bursts of activity? How can we develop and foster future frameworks that enable co-production from the outset, throughout and even beyond the strict boundaries of the ‘project’? And how can we do this in a way that does not encroach either on the relationship the project wants to establish with its community; or on existing frameworks of support between community groups who rely on exchanging skills and developing partnerships with each other as valuable income streams. Here we need a broader awareness not just of the benefits of our attempts but of the potential damage that we might do - a reminder to critically question who stands to lose out as well as gain from our actions.

### ***Conclusions: Cycles of engagement?***

An interesting and useful initial outcome of the Connected Communities programme is the publication of a series of different cross-disciplinary scoping studies and literature reviews about research on communities and with communities. The fact that interest in

community-based research and participatory approaches are common to many disciplines and occupations of course underpins the logic of RCUK's Connected Communities programme and such multi-disciplinary sensibilities inform our own research approaches. Nevertheless it is still revealing and useful to compare our experience of engaging in community-based research with those from different fields and to find similarities in practice and reflection. One such scoping study produced by researchers from the University of Exeter (Robin Durie, Craig Lundy and Katrina Wyatt, *Researching with Communities*, AHRC Connected Communities Scoping Studies) draws on complexity theory to propose a 'cycle of engagement' which in seeking to model the actions or circumstances needed to achieve successful community-based participatory research includes many factors which we as a team have found to be essential both within the structures of the Dig programme and in other less structured collaborations.

At the core of what we have learnt from Dig Where We Stand is a reinforcement of the importance of infusing all of our interactions with community partners with critical reflection that looks inwards on our actions within the boundaries of the project and outwards on the potential consequences of those actions beyond the project itself. Our critical reflections need to consciously examine how our relationships are developing; the structures that sit around what we are doing (and how those structures enable and hinder); the extent to which assumptions are shared or conflict; and how authority and control is perpetuated through the complex relational exchanges that occur within and between us. We must pay attention to space and positioning and the distances that exist between us both as individuals and as we come together in different incarnations of 'community'. This critical reflection needs to go hand in hand with our actions and we should look for opportunities to make the reflective process itself more equitably shared.

Durie et al encapsulate this need for critical reflection within their engagement cycle model which looks at the different stages within a project, and how reflective and flexible phases need to occur before, after and during the key period of co-production. Durie et al argue that this should be recognised by funding bodies and built into the process of designing and supporting collaborative and participatory practice. They also highlight the difficulty yet significance of aligning rhythms and structures across academic and community settings. The broader structural scaffolding that sits around these formal and to some extent artificial collaborative and participatory approaches inevitably creates constraints that limits the fluidity, creativity and flexibility within the co-production. This can lead to frustration and tension for all concerned. The top-down nature of research management structures in academic institutions need to be scrutinised in relation to compatibility with the ethos of co-production that seeks to reach beyond the academy. In cases where external funding bodies also play a part in supporting collaborative practice by academics with communities, the rigidity of the system is often a stumbling block. The Connected Communities programme is a progressive and enabling environment for collaborative and participatory practice but in order for it to better support this work there is refinement needed. In relation to DWWS, the lack of dovetailing between the two funding bodies involved (AHRC to support the academic partners and HLF to support the community partners) added an extra layer of constraint as it was difficult to tie together when we were able to be involved and when they were working on their project. We were never working alongside each other from start to finish; it is almost impossible for co-production to flourish successfully if the partners' timeframes do not sufficiently overlap. Something as simple as the mutual identification of desired outcomes and benefits at the beginning of the project was not possible. The reality is that the scale and timeframes of these projects meant that the development of co-produced research was unlikely; but what the scheme did was allow us to support those groups that required or desired our help and whose own work may have been transformatory and life-changing in different ways for some of those who participated. The dangers of the skills exchange and facilitation model remain (not least in the allocation of resources and the potential for harming other providers), but engagement with community projects in this fashion also introduced us to each other and allowed us to begin the conversations which might result in the future

(within timeframes which are less circumscribed and more synchronised), in something more sustained and co-produced.

The notion of ‘cycles of engagement’ suggested by Durie et al is useful when considering how to approach each individual project that we as academics committed to co-production might be involved in. But it is also useful in thinking more broadly about how time and resource bounded projects can be seen on a macro level as one ‘engagement’ in a broader cycle. If we have any aspiration towards sustainability we must view our work within individual projects like DWWS as a small part of a broader holistic process; as a vehicle for adding to and building on sustainable and long lasting relationships. We have had some success at this as some of the community partners we engaged with already had established relationships with members of the DWWS team but there is a challenge that sits around how best to sustain relationships beyond the boundaries set by individual initiatives. DWWS has opened the door on relationships and enabled us to take some established relationships in new directions; our next steps need to further those relationships.

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