

Connected Communities Consultation

Monday 12th January, 2015
Arnolfini, Bristol

Introduction

On 12th of January 21 community partners working with universities on Connected Communities projects came together to discuss their experiences, and explore the value of this work. This summary report highlights the key findings from the day. The event aimed to capture the experiences, motivations and legacy of community partners working on Connected Communities projects specifically

- Roles community organisations played on the projects
- Outputs, outcomes and legacy
- Relevance and specific reasons for working in partnerships with universities on CC projects.

The event was designed and facilitated by Sophie Duncan from the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement and Kim Aumann, a community partner with over 10 years' experience of community university research partnerships and an active member of the UK Community Partner network.

Key findings

- Community partnerships on research were really worthwhile, although difficult at times
- Getting the partnership right was challenging – but it was important to start how you mean to go on – with clear sharing of expectations, contributions, roles and timescales
- Understanding the cultural differences between those working in universities and those working in community based organisations was a key to developing a partnership that works
- You shouldn't underestimate the importance of communicating regularly, face to face, and with a wary regard to differences in language
- Projects delivered a range of tangible outputs including exhibitions, websites, booklets and guides
- Participating in a community research partnership had many personal and professional benefits, including making new contacts; sharing new ideas; and developing confidence
- Organisations benefitted from the space to reflect critically on their work; validation of the work they were doing; and connections with new people who inspired different ways of thinking
- Making a case for community involvement in research was straightforward – with a range of benefits including more useful impactful research; benefitting from the insights and experiences of community members; access to a wide group of people who can help inform the research process etc.
- Finding specific evidence was less easy. Whilst people believed in the work there was a challenge to find examples to back up the case. This could potentially be for a range of reasons including – long term impact takes time to develop and be measured; some of the examples were not included as delegates felt they were too small scale – the impact being felt by 2 or 3 individuals; delegates wanted an opportunity to go and draw out the evidence they held within their organisation.



Welcome and introductions: who were the participants?

The participants:

- Had all experienced working on a Connected Communities Research project, as a 'community partner'
- Had a wide range of experience of community university partnerships, with delegates who were in the throes of their first research partnership, to those with years of experience
- Represented a range of sectors and roles including: artists, community organisations working for social change, organisations running heritage projects, organisations run by volunteers, and those with paid staff.
- Had a diversity of perspectives and interest in engaged research.
- When asked to describe themselves in three words some words were mentioned by several people including: community; research and researcher; artist; public; activist and activism. The words that were captured are shown in the wordle in Appendix 1.



Exploring the partnership process - why do we bother?

We invited participants to respond to three questions about their project before attending the event – the results of which were categorised and shared at the event. The questions and their responses are summarised in Appendix 2. Delegates considered the responses to these questions and considered which ones resonated with their experiences, which they thought were most important, and what was missing. The following conclusions were drawn:

Top Tips

1. **It is important to start out with being clear – with clear roles, responsibilities, objectives, outcomes, actions, assumptions, contributions etc.**

There was a lot of discussion about the importance of setting up the partnership in an effective way from the start – although a recognition that this could be really hard – especially when you are first getting to know each other. Several suggested factoring in time to get to know one another, before developing a shared project.

There was a need to recognise cultural differences both in terms of sense making, timescales, languages, and the needs of each partner.

In addition there was a need to consider equitable funding allocation, or at least transparent budgeting.



2. **Communicate well**

Discussion focussed on the need for regular, face to face communications – with space to build open formal and informal relationships. Language was particularly important – and understanding how the same terms can mean different things to different people.

3. **Value your community expertise and use it**

This was considered important especially when partnering academics who are trained to recognise their expertise, and sometimes underestimate the value of other forms of expertise.



Activities

Many of the projects were hosting events – including launch events; celebration events; consultation events etc. There were boat trips; international conference presentations; visits; training and even some touring sound boxes. You can see an activities wordle in appendix 4

Services

Here people reflected on how their projects have been turned into useful services to others including the development of educational resources for schools; an app to support older people sharing their stories; and using mobile phones to support time banking.

Other

Here people began to reflect on the outcomes of their work – from changing the culture of their organisation; establishing new networks of support and reflective practice; and developing new relationships.

Outcomes and legacy - what difference does it make?

Delegates were invited to fill in postcards addressing the following question: **What difference has the CC project you have been working on made to: you, your organisation, your community and others.** Delegates were able to identify a range of benefits from working on Connected Communities Projects.

The responses were categorised and you can see the results in appendix 5. In summary the top things highlighted as benefits were:

1. Developed new relationships (this was relevant to individuals, organisations, communities and others)
2. New knowledge and learning (for all groups except 'others')
3. Validation (again for all groups except others)
4. Confidence (for individuals and organisations)
5. Improved skills (for individuals, organisations and communities)
6. New opportunities (for organisations and communities)
7. Understanding research partnerships/ universities (individuals and organisations)

Delegates interviewed each other to explore the changes that had happened as a consequence for working on the CC project. The interviews were very informative and covered a lot of ground. There were some key themes emerging across the different questions – described in appendix 6 and summarised below.

What changes have happened/ do you want to happen?

- Difficult to identify changes that they wanted or were needed
- Some projects were challenging and had been too ambitious at the start
- There was lots of unexpected outcomes – which were mainly positive
- There were individuals who changed as a consequence of these projects – including increased confidence, participation etc.

How do you/ will you know change has happened?

- Personal testimony – and seeing change in action in people's lives – was the main evidence cited.
- Easier to assess increased contacts and networking - tracking change was difficult, especially when project ends
- Changes in how organisations valued and/ or used research
- Qualitative or 'soft' evidence not valued, need for hard evidence to support community university partnerships
- Need for people to build on the outputs to make change happen

What would you do differently next time?

Here there was little consensus. Topics mentioned were:

- Do less or get more staff time
- Have more confidence
- Push for more projects, and a more equitable distribution of funding
- Initial discussions could have been clearer
- Share aspirations

One delegate suggested that 'the dance is more important than the thing'; and another that the most important thing is the 'time we spend with individuals'.



Have you changed your ideas about Community university partnerships?

The majority said yes – it had. Changed ideas included:

- Be rigorous about asking what the focus of the research partnership is
- Self confidence
- Thinking differently
- Simplify
- Be more serious about the role of artists

Have you changed how you think?

Again the majority said yes – with changes including

- The way I see academics
- Set agenda for new research
- Broadened horizons 'outside my little cave'
- Validated sense of stories
- Be more realistic with projects

How ensure legacy?

- Difficult as in others hands
- Make more use of students
- Universities need to be more outward looking. One delegate suggested universities 'should see communities as valued asset to achieve their goals'
- Get funders on board

What gets in the way?

- Volunteer time
- Lack of funding and resources
- Convincing decision makers that CUPs are worthwhile
- Hard to make quick decisions with large groups
- Constantly changing what the outputs were
- Lack of vision

Making a Case – can we argue the toss for this way of working?



Delegates were invited to make a case for community partner involvement in research projects. Each group focussed on a different audience for the case: a research funder; a CEO of a community based organisation; a researcher; members of the community. Critically they were asked to provide evidence to back up the case that they were making.

Perhaps not surprisingly there were commonalities between the case made to funders, and the case made to researchers. These focussed on the value of the new insights, and knowledge from working with others; and the potential for impact. Efficiency was considered to be important for funders, whereas access to community

members and other networks more compelling for researchers.

CEOs of community organisations and community members were considered similar in their interest in added value to them personally or organisationally – such as new contacts, skills, and knowledge. In addition the belief that this type of working makes a difference, was a key reason to work in this way. CEOs were considered to be likely to respond to the legitimisation of their work by academics, and the credibility this provided whereas community members were likely to be interested in ensuring research was grounded in space or issues, rather than research for research sake.

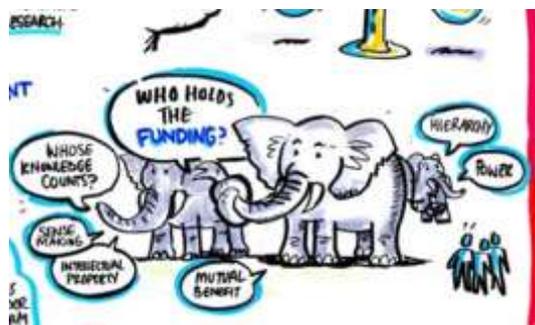
What proved difficult were citing specific examples relevant to the case being made – although several delegates reflected this could be done with more time, and an opportunity to reflect on the specific projects that they have been involved in.

A table summarising the cases made can be found in appendix 7.

Reflections on the event

Several themes came out of the discussions about the event. Most notably:

- Definitions of communities and academics. What do these terms mean, and to what extent do they matter. Delegates defined these terms differently. One delegate reflected that to her academics meant anyone who had had a university education; another that, having done a degree did not mean that they had understood the full breadth of work universities did. It was suggested that the Connected Communities project consider to what extent community partners involved in these projects had previously been students and/ or researchers at universities. In addition – the term community caused challenges – with suggestions that this could mean communities of geographic, interest, social concern etc. It was suggested that everyone, to some extent, is in a community.
- What we mean by engagement and disengagement. There was a helpful discussion about the notion of ‘not engaged’ meaning ‘not engaged with the things I want you to engage with’ rather than not engaged with anything
- There were discussions about the challenges of sharing funding, expertise etc – and the very different ways people thought about this. For example, some were wary of funding, as it biased the sample of people who might participate, and others were keen to ensure that communities were paid in an equitable way. There was no consensus about how community input should be recognised through funding and distribution of resources – but there was a clear sense that this should be transparent, and that it should be clear who was getting what and why.
- MOUs were discussed – again with no clear agreement as to their use. Some reflected that they could become a stick to beat them with; whereas others had found them helpful to agree the terms under which university academics would work with them.



Participants

Ingrid Abreu Scherer, The Mill

Kim Aumann, Boingboing (facilitator)

Andy Barrett, Excavate

Paul Barrett, Kirkgate Centre

Milton Brown, Kirklees Local TV

Peter Brown, York Civic Trust

Dan Burwood, Some Cities CIC

Stephanie Dale, Caistor Arts and Heritage Centre

Ronald Dane, Cottesmore Plan Plus Cottesmore History Group

Sophie Duncan, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (facilitator)

Bryony Enright, University of Bristol (table facilitator)

Penny Evans, Knowle West Media Centre

Keri Facer, University of Bristol (observer)

Becci Feltham, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (table facilitator)

Mark Goodway, The Matthew Tree Project

Lucy Heywood, Stand + Stare

Barney Heywood, Stand + Stare

Heidi Hinder, Independent artist

Eoghan Howard, Our Place in Time

Amelia Lee, LGBT Youth North West

Jeff Lewis, Smallford Residents' Association

Cassie Limb, Kelham Island Arts Collective

John Lock, Southwell Community Archaeology Group

Paul Manners, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (table facilitator)

Susanne Martikke, Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation

Ann McNulty, Health and Race Equality Forum

Becky Moran, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (table facilitator)

David Owen, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (table facilitator)

Steven Pool, Independent

Trevor Roberts, Canal Connections (Social Enterprise)

Amber Sanchez, Salford Lads Club, New Barracks Tenant Management Co-op, Salford University

Hugh Thomas, The Bristol Initiative Charitable Trust / My Future My Choice

Appendix 2: Summary of answers to survey questions and additional points

Top Tips

The top tips synthesised from delegate responses, are summarised in black; amendments and additions made at the event are in purple.

1. Start out well by being clear: roles, responsibilities, objectives, outcomes, actions, assumptions, needs, contributions; translation; language - discuss early; ethics and funding; set aside own cultural landmarks and boundaries; Our overarching 'most important point' is the need for: clarity of mutual objectives/ roles/ responsibilities BUT we also agreed how hard it is to achieve this.
 2. Communicate well - regularly, face to face, build open formal & informal relationships, be with the community, take care with language possibly through formal doc if suitable
 3. Value your community expertise and use it
- Be prepared for the unexpected, have a moderator
 - Take time – some tasks will take longer
 - Monitor relevance, value the change you are seeking
 - This is good – but hard. 'loads of assumption' – you don't know each other
 - Take risks and learn from mistakes
 - Equitable budgeting, understanding and planning
 - Ethics/ understanding expertise of different groups
 - Make it meaningful

Best things

The best things synthesised from delegate responses, are summarised in black; amendments and additions made at the event are in purple.

1. Tangible outputs and outcomes; scalability
 2. Legitimacy
 3. New ideas and connections
 4. Sharing knowledge, accessing expertise and enthusiasm
 5. New relationships, learning
- Chance to research, try new things
 - New skills, improved quality and increased scale of work
 - Changed lives and hearts/ minds/ aspirations; Lives changed and changed lives – for them to change their lives. Practitioners also change.
 - Community expertise and experience valued, voices heard
 - Time to think, open it up, see the bigger picture
 - Empowerment – potential – not always!
 - Funding
 - Validation from having university there – public validation
 - Has built a positive image of the area we've worked in
 - Chance to meet and work with new people – I often work on my own
 - Innovation and experimentation
 - The luxury to work in an academic way. To do it 'properly' for once
 - Empowerment – not just for me personally but for the people involved in the project
 - Development of practice/ validation/ critical analysis
 - Engagement of citizens
 - Emotional truth
 - Depth

Worst thing

The best things synthesised from delegate responses, are summarised in black; amendments and additions made at the event are in purple.

1. Timescales too tight or too slow, drift, extra work, lots of admin and bureaucracy ; **Lots of bureaucracy**
 2. Lack of understanding of “community”, its politics - **language**
 3. False expectations re what could be **achieved – have to manage EXPECTATIONS and TRANSLATION**
 4. **Power**, Lack of power or decision making authority
- Effort to achieve consensus or equity between community groups, representation issues
 - Too little funding for the work involved
 - Feeling overwhelmed, out of depth – **level of detail not always relevant – too much detail**
 - Being factotum (i.e. **someone who does a bit of everything; a jack/jill of all trades**)
 - Being brought in after the bid was written ‘fitting square peg in round hole’
 - Less admin and bureaucracy compared with other types of projects – separate these out
 - **Takes time to really appreciate and understand each others expertise and how to work like this**
 - **Need to distinguish – did something bad happen or was there a disappointment in not achieving something**
 - **‘We didn’t know what we were getting into’**
 - **Confusion over the funding and what it can be used for**
 - **‘it’s just very disorientating’ academics are used to this shifting environment. We need clearer milestones and clarity . ‘academics have a culture of over working’**
 - **Deep mining – wider pool of academics needed**
 - **Inaccessibility of outputs i.e. research papers**
 - **Outputs valued differently**

Appendix 3: Numbers of people answering the following questions

1) Enjoyment factor – ecstatically fun, quite pleasant, not much fun, deadly dull?

14 responses

Ecstatically fun: 3

Quite pleasant: 10

Deadly dull: 0

Not much fun: 1

2) Value factor - really worthwhile, help to advance my cause a bit, interesting but don't make much difference, on balance - a waste of time?

17 responses

Waste of time: 1

Helped a bit: 1

Seriously worthwhile: 13

Not much difference: 2

3) Efficiency (input vs output) factor – never have got involved if I'd known how long it takes; complicated and hard to do; difficult sometimes; pretty straightforward and smooth running?

16 responses

At times difficult: 11

Far too much time: 4

Straight forward and smooth: 0

Mostly complicated and hard: 2



Appendix 5: Post cards

Those benefits cited by more than one person are highlighted below:

Perceived benefits	you	organisation	community	others
Developed relationships (new contacts/ relationships/ partnerships etc)	5	8	6	5
New knowledge/ learning	5	4	2	
Validation (including improved case for funding, kudos with funders/ policy makers)	4	6	1	
Confidence	4	4		2
New/improved/ honed skills	4	5	1	
New opportunities (to learn/ partnerships)		7	1	
Understanding research partnerships/ universities	3	4		
Publicity / raised profile		3	3	
Tools and resources/ products			3	3
Personal benefits (mental health; empowerment; feel valued; more creative; became a researcher)	3			2
Potential for future projects		3		2
Sharing work with policy makers/ funders/ others				5
Improved practice	2			2
Experimentation (including for one new technology and another risk taking)		4		
New experiences for other people				3
Funding		3		
Enjoyment	2			
Co-authorship of papers		2		
Empowered individuals			2	
Increased relevance			1	
New discussion			1	
Change in environment			1	
Challenged assumptions			1	

Appendix 6

A fuller description of notes from the interviews

What changes have happened/ do you want to happen?

The following comments were raised by more than one delegate. In summary:

- Some found it difficult to identify changes that they wanted or were needed – one reflected that it was the academics who had suggested the changes needed
- Some projects were challenging and had been too ambitious at the start. Some delegates were now having to manage their own expectations about what could be achieved.
- There was lots of unexpected outcomes – which were mainly positive, although one delegate reflected that ‘the community voice was lost’ on their project – although this was subsequently addressed.
- There were individuals who changed as a consequence of these projects – including increased confidence, participation etc.

How do you/ will you know change has happened?

- Personal testimony – and seeing change in action in people’s lives – was the main evidence cited.
- People found it relatively easy to assess the increased contacts and networking that the projects had inspired - tracking change was difficult, especially when a project came to an end.
- A number of delegates reflected that the change was evidenced in the outputs – although one explained that ‘impacts only exist in people’s experiences’.
- A couple reflected on how their organisation now valued research differently, and a couple of the research use
- Several looked to see what would happen differently in the future e.g. would artists contribution in projects be valued differently as a consequence of the CC project undertaken or more people would visit their community.
- One delegate suggested that the qualitative or ‘soft’ evidence was not valued, and that it would be good to get some hard evidence to support community university partnerships in the future.
- A few delegates reflected on the need for people to build on the outputs to make change happen, and that this was frustrating, especially when people did not utilise the work.

What would you do differently next time?

Here there was little consensus. Topics mentioned were:

- Do less or get more staff time
- Have more confidence
- Push for more projects, and a more equitable distribution of funding
- Payment structures could be better
- Too involved emotionally
- Be more innovative
- More co-production
- Initial discussions could have been clearer
- Share aspirations



One delegate suggested that ‘the dance is more important than the thing’; and another that the most important thing is the ‘time we spend with individuals’.

Have you changed your ideas about Community university partnerships?

The majority said yes – it had. Changed ideas included:

- Be rigorous about asking what the focus of the research partnership is
- Self confidence
- Thinking differently
- Narrow down who you want to work with
- Develop new partnerships with universities
- Reflecting on own practice
- Work at the boundaries of setting
- Simplify

- Be more serious about the role of artists
- Don't do website

Have you changed how you think?

Again the majority said yes – with changes described as

- The way I see academics
- Understanding CUP work and the way participants worked with a university



- Set agenda for new research
- Broadened horizons 'outside my little cave'
- Validated sense of stories
- More positive about my community
- Be more realistic with projects
- Skills and knowledge
- Focus on the positive, layering validation from the work
- It's ok to say no to resource
- Growth of influence
- How to facilitate diverse group
- Struggle in getting universities to make use of our work



How ensure legacy?

- Difficult as in others hands
- Make more use of students
- Universities need to be more outward looking. One delegate suggested universities 'should see communities as valued asset to achieve their goals'
- Get funders on board

What gets in the way?

- Volunteer time
- Lack of funding and resources
- Convincing decision makers that CUPs are worthwhile
- Hard to make quick decisions with large groups
- Constantly changing what the outputs were
- Lack of vision

Appendix 7: Summary of cases made for community involvement in research

Key reasons for working in partnership with communities on research:	Evidence	Funder	CEO community org	Researcher	Community member
Real depth of knowledge, not reinforcing academic world view. Challenge the status quo. Uncovering hidden knowledge, trusted relationships.	'People will tell adults what they want to hear'. This way of working reveals new insight e.g. using peer researchers Different ways of thinking/knowledge transfer	Top		Top	
Real world application. If involved, more impact!	Susanne's involvement will help ensure the findings get embedded in practice. 'Whose Heritage' project. The project informed by involvement of HLF officer who also arranged a full day meeting with over 20 HLF staff to share findings. Research Excellence Framework (REF) – Impact, real world issues	Top		Top	
Knowledge exchange, network, new opportunities, benefits in kind Develop skills and experience	Reflections of community groups involved		Top		Top
Make a difference New perspective/approach/challenge	Visit places where Connected Communities projects have happened and assess difference		Top		Top
Efficiency – saves academic time by bringing different expertise to bear. 'People power', volunteer effort – boots on the ground.	Example of 'boots on the ground' – Ronald's projects with Leicester University – university supported lots of projects which involved lots of people. Also iworkedatraleigh.com	Top			
Legitimisation, credibility (branding)	Is it possible to assess whether bids for funding which include letter of support from university are more likely to be funded?		Top		
Expression, issue and space – make sure that it isn't research based, but issue or space based.					Top
Access to community and other networks	People involved in connected communities projects			Top	

