Evaluating the Legacy of Animative and Iterative Connected Communities Projects: reflections on methodological legacies

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Our evaluation focus

What is the legacy project and how has it conceptualised methodological 'legacy'?

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1. Introduction

1.1 The "Evaluating Legacy" project

Background

Since 2011 the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) has funded nearly 300 community research projects through its Connected Communities programme. The programme funds research that builds understanding of the changing nature of communities and their role in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life. It has an interest not only in achieving new insights but also in new ways of 'researching community'.[1] In 2013 two teams, between them responsible for four of these projects, designed a follow-up joint project focused on the legacy of their original research - which had seen them evolve new ways of working based on animative and iterative methodologies.[2] The project received AHRC funding in 2013 to look at ways of creating, enhancing and assessing the legacy of the four original projects.

Defining impact and legacy

When discussing the legacy of a project, notions of legacy and impact are often used interchangeably and there can be some confusion between the two. The AHRC defines legacy as the outcomes, results and learning of projects, which is remarkably similar to definitions of outcomes and impact (also often used interchangeably) commonly adopted in the broader evaluation field – eg, "outcomes are the changes, benefits or learning that happen as a result of your work"[3] or "impact is the difference(s) made by an intervention".[4] For this project we accept the close and potentially overlapping relationship between impact and legacy, but find it useful to make a distinction between the two so as to be clear about our focus on legacy.

Legacy encompasses both 'what we leave behind' and 'what lives on or continues' after a project or activity is completed. It can be intended or unintended, tangible or intangible, positive or negative. For the purposes of this project we have considered legacy as what the original research projects have left behind for others to use, learn from or otherwise benefit from, as distinct from project impacts (the differences made by the original four research projects). This understanding builds on both popular understanding of the term and the literature as it relates to project legacy, which makes a link to notions of continuation and sustainability (as in the legacy narrative of large-scale projects and events such as the Olympics or Live Aid)[5]. The latter importantly adds the idea that legacy is not simply what is left behind but is in fact what is left behind and being used, that is, still in some way 'living'.
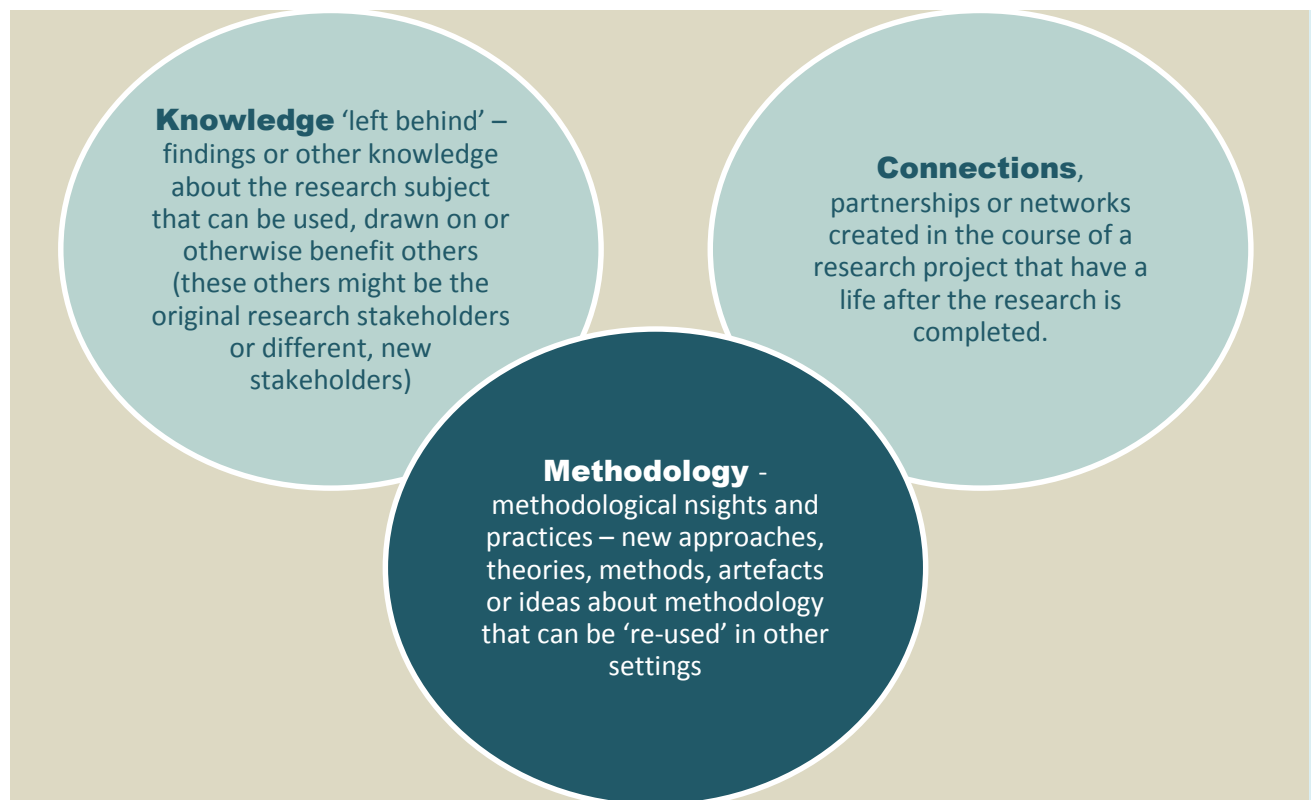
Understanding impact and legacy in a research context

There is a growing interest in the idea that research impact matters and that as researchers we should seek to maximise the impact of our research wherever possible.[6] Discussions about research impact most commonly focus on research use[7] - **the impact of findings**, how our findings are used, what people learn from them, how they influence others in their thinking, decisions or actions – so, what is left behind is primarily knowledge, insights, data, information. Some also consider **the impact of participation** in research as a core aspect of research impact as, for instance, in action research or participatory or empowerment research. Research legacy is not as often discussed as research impact, but is a useful way to broaden out conversations about the value of research. It enables us to consider and be more proactive about what else we might 'leave behind' that others could benefit from – for instance, tangible legacies such as research outputs, assets, artefacts, resources that may be 'reusable', or more intangible legacies such as changes in attitudes or culture, new connections or working relationships, new approaches or ideas that others might build on or practices they might adopt.

The legacy 'model' adopted by this project

From the outset the project team was interested in considering three different dimensions of legacy – legacies of knowledge; connections; and methodologies. These are captured in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – three dimensions of research legacy

Knowledge 'left behind' – findings or other knowledge about the research subject that can be used, drawn on or otherwise benefit others (these others might be the original research stakeholders or different, new stakeholders)

Connections, partnerships or networks created in the course of a research project that have a life after the research is completed.

Methodology - methodological nsights and practices – new approaches, theories, methods, artefacts or ideas about methodology that can be 're-used' in other settings

The three dimensions shaped the questions of interest for the legacy project as a whole:

- Questions about **knowledge legacies** – what interest has there been in the original research, who might be interested and how can they be engaged with the findings?

- Questions about a **legacy of connections and partnerships –** what legacy has working together across organisations and across disciplines left? What has been the life or journey of partnerships and networks created during the original research that have continued and been added to through this project and beyond? What has been the value of these connections and the learning that has taken place across disciplinary boundaries?

- Questions about **methodological legacies** – what has been the legacy of project methodologies and artefacts? What 'life' could the methods and the original artefacts have beyond the original research projects as other audiences engage with them, experience them, learn about them, consider how they could apply them in their practice, and ultimately put them into practice in different settings and with different 'communities'?

This report is primarily concerned with just the last of these three dimensions - the methodological legacy of the project. Other project partners have elsewhere reflected on legacy creation in relation to knowledge and connections, including mapping some of the new connections made and considering the impact of these on partners so in this report we only touch upon these other dimensions of legacy in those places where work to create or enhance methodological legacy overlaps with them.

The original projects resulted in a number of methodologies and cultural artefacts the team felt could have a valuable 'life' beyond the original projects, as a core part of the projects' legacy. Our remit at NCVO, as reflected in this report, was to try to capture and describe this methodological legacy and to assess the value of a different approach to enhancing that legacy – an active and 'performative' approach.

1.2 Understanding the projects' methodological legacy

A legacy of approaches, methods and tools

Animative methods. Cultural animation is a community arts practice said to animate (or give life to) the underlying dynamic of a community. There are a number of traditions of animation with different theoretical underpinnings and these inform different models of animative practice. "Creative animateurs" for instance, facilitate people's engagement with art forms for enjoyment, self-expression, and learning whilst "socio-cultural animateurs" work with people and groups so they participate in and manage the communities in which they live (here the focus is more educative, and linked to building individuals' capacity to participate in and shape their communities).[8] In the original Connected Communities projects the partnership between Keele University and the New Vic led to the evolution of a practice of "cultural animation as research" that draws on both those traditions to address research goals – enabling self-expression, enjoyment and creativity for participants alongside opportunities for increasing self-awareness, a sense of personal and community agency. It evolved as a method of co-producing actionable knowledge through meaningful engagement with members of communities, specifically by using techniques that required participants to articulate ideas and experiences in actions and images rather than (or rather, as well as) the spoken word. In the process participants created artistic and cultural artefacts – puppets, songs, poems, dramas and performances around an identified research theme.

Iterative methods. Iterative methods have been defined, at least in relation to data analysis, as "a set of reflexive processes that spark insight and help us develop meaning".[9] In the *Revisiting the Midpoint of British Community Studies* project, iterative methods were variously used – including semi-structured interviews built sequentially using mobile interviews for further moments of iteration as people made reference to locational material encountered on journeys to initiate, illustrate and refine interpretations. During the course of the project a board game called Glossopoly was produced which as well as functioning as an artefact to illustrate the outcome of research also then and subsequently functions as an iterative method for conducting community research and a mechanism for simulating debates about community. The iterative process of playing the game enables refining of views and helps generate new themes for discussion and analysis.
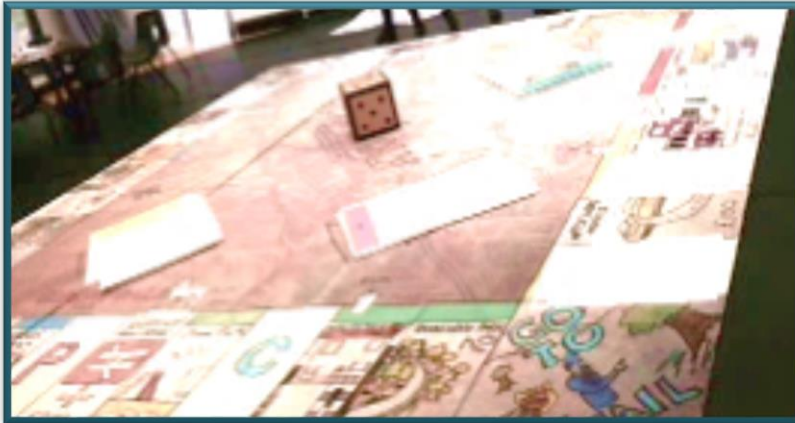
Though these methods are distinctly different, they have several things in common in terms of their approach and value base:

- They are highly participatory, group-based methods. In common with other participatory research methods, the process (engagement of participants with the theme, activities, and, importantly, with each other) is valued alongside the output.
- They are at heart creative, drawing on play, imagination, art and games as ways to energise people to articulate ideas and experiences in new and different ways.
- In both methods (in their particular iteration as developed through the Connected Communities projects), objects, artefacts and creative tasks serve an important purpose as a way to stimulate imagination and conversation.

A legacy of cultural artefacts

The four original projects resulted in the creation of four artefacts – 'a game, a tree, a boat and a play'. Though created differently, these were all designed out of people's stories and ideas, and in the original research served as 'tools' to enable further engagement of people individually and collectively in telling their stories and talking about what matters to them; thus making them tools created through animation and iteration that were always intended in turn to enable further animation and iteration.

Game – Glossopoly, created during the *Revising the Midpoint of British Community Studies* study, is a game-based method of engaging people to interact, reflect and discuss notions of community. It is an instrument of iterative research - a game that involves players engaging with others' views as they respond to cards and tasks that serve as discussion and activity prompts. The comments and images on the cards and on the board on which the game is played come from original interview data, along with excerpts from transcripts of people's conversations or images created while playing the game. The game is iterative in a number of ways, particularly as there are repeated movements between people's initial viewpoints and the views of others at the table or as represented in the game. Originally created as a table-top board game, in the course of this legacy project a full-size floor mat version was also created.

Tree – The *Tree of Life* was an installation and artefact created during a visit to Minami-sanriku, Japan following the 2011 Tsunami. The highly symbolic tree – a symbol of longevity and endurance in Japanese mythology - was given branches onto which people could 'hang' their stories and their hopes for the future. Like the boat described below, this was an installation that started life as being about lost worlds and reimagined new ones.

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Boat – The boat is an installation created through cultural animation as part of the *Bridging the Gap* project. The boat is a seven-foot wooden 'barge' on wheels, with sails made out of images created in workshops focused on ideas about creating 'new worlds' to replace the lost worlds of coal, steel and ceramics in Stoke-on-Trent. In the original workshops the boat took participants on imaginary voyages of discovery, inviting them to make artefacts and write poems about the things that they or their communities might have lost, and to imagine a different future. The boat was then displayed as part of an interactive audio-visual installation with sound waves (recordings of people's stories), and areas where people could record their own stories, make their own small boats, and write down their poems and stories (eg, adding more sails).

Play – The play is an interactive documentary drama of about an hour's length, created through the *Untold Stories of Volunteering* project and performed by real people and actors. This focused on the role of volunteering – exploring volunteer journeys. It was created using people's testimonies from interviews, then using cultural animation workshops to weave those into a drama that also includes voice-over (interview clips), songs and poems written by original participants in the project.

1.3 Planned activities to create and evaluate legacy

An animative and iterative approach to legacy *creation*

A key facet of both cultural animation and iterative approaches as developed in the initial Connected Communities projects is that knowledge is actively created. The project team applied this notion in its thinking about how to understand legacy creation. So, rather than seek to passively map the original projects' legacy, it adopted an animated (active) and iterative, experiential approach. This part of the project was to involve three types of activity:

- ◉ **Demonstrations and tasters:** performances, workshops and installations aimed at engaging new audiences in directly experiencing the methods and artefacts so as to raise awareness of and interest in them and improve understanding of their potential as tools for research and for engaging with communities.

- ◉ **Supported pilots:** a small number of trials where the methods would be tried out by others (in partnership with the project team) to build their skills and confidence to use the methods in their work, as well as helping the team understand better where and how the methods work and what might support wider dissemination and use over time.

- ◉ **Evaluation of the tasters and pilots:** NCVO was tasked to provide evaluative feedback on these two legacy creation activities and methodological legacies more generally, to increase understanding about, and to provide useful feedback on: the elements of legacy; how methodological legacy can be created/enhanced; and the overall impact of the legacy activities.

A pragmatic approach to legacy *evaluation*

The original project proposal suggested that the evaluation would rely on animative and iterative methods alongside more formal approaches, but there was an early sense of mismatch between questions and suitable method; a low level of comfort and confidence of the evaluator in using animative and iterative approaches; and insufficient time available around workshops and activities for a highly creative or participatory evaluation input. This led to a largely pragmatic decision to rely more on traditional, 'formal' and light-touch methods – particularly observation, use of simple feedback mechanisms (paper and online), and interviewing.

- ◉ **Workshop observations** – with an evaluator observing all 'taster' activities aimed at showcasing and introducing the methods and artefacts, with, where possible, short reflective post-workshop conversations with facilitators and/or participants.

- ◉ **Feedback activities with participants at and after sessions** gathering feedback from participants at all bar one session (one of the pilots) using group discussion, feedback forms, and online follow-up questionnaires as well as more informal methods where time or other constraints meant formal or more structured follow up was difficult (eg, one-to-one discussions or seeking email feedback).

- ◉ **Observations and interviews with those trialling the methods** pre- and post-workshop semi-structured telephone interviews with researchers, observations of their pilot/trial sessions and feedback activities with participants (as above).

Part 2: Creating a methodological legacy

Our evaluation questions

In this section we reflect on what the project has delivered, who engaged with project activities and how the project's legacy-creating activities worked in practice. We consider:

- What has the project delivered and who has engaged with the legacy activities?

- How did the different project activities work, how well did they work, and what part did they play in building the original projects' methodological legacy?

2.   Activities to create or enhance legacy

Our report focuses on the learning from and impact of a set of twelve proactive legacy creation activities. Other activities took place under the project umbrella including meetings with policy-makers and practitioners (eg, at the Department for Communities and Local Government) and a field trip to Canada involving showcasing the activities via talks and cultural animation workshops that reached almost 100 delegates (members of a non-profit network, a business school, local academics and members of local communities). However, our chief concern has been the UK-based showcase activities (delivered over five separate events) and the two supported pilots where researchers new to the methods tried them out in real research settings.

2.1   Showcase and taster activities

Figure 2. Sharing findings and methods

Session	Audiences
A drama performance and workshop: A performance of the Untold Stories play followed by a taster workshop to introduce the methods that went into creating the stories	A mixed audience interested in volunteering and the original research findings [47] and a smaller group of volunteer managers, researchers and policy-makers [11] interested in findings and methods (cultural animation).
Summer camp for Community Organisers: Two taster workshops (boat and game) and an interactive installation (tree) during a summer camp for community activists[10]	Community Organisers on their annual weekend Summer Camp [36] with an interest in the methods as potential tools to engage communities, as community development/ planning tools.
National volunteering workshop: a taster workshop in cultural animation organised by the National Association of Neighbourhood Management for people interested in engaging with volunteers in Big Local areas[11] preceded by a presentation and Q&A on Untold Stories of Volunteering	Residents of Big Local areas - volunteers and members of partnerships engaging their communities to improve local areas [20] with an interest in the findings of the research as well as in the methods as potential tools to engage with volunteers.
Big Local learning events: two short taster workshop in cultural animation with residents of Big Local areas preceded by a presentation and Q&A on Untold Stories of Volunteering and cultural animation methods	Residents of Big Local areas - volunteers and members of partnerships engaging their communities to improve local areas [27]. Interest in methods as tools to engage community members and/or to energise planning processes within local partnerships.
Legacy project upscaling event: Four intensive half-day tasters – 2 x cultural animation and 2 x Glossopoly	Mixed audience of academics/ practitioners to give in-depth experience of methods [35]. This audience was interested in the methods for engagement and research purposes.

Overall there were more showcase activities than planned as partners responded flexibly to growing interest in the methods. In total more than 175 individuals were exposed to the methods and artefacts via these largely experiential workshops as outlined below.

Showcasing the 'Untold Stories' interactive drama

Performance followed by cultural animation and evaluative workshop
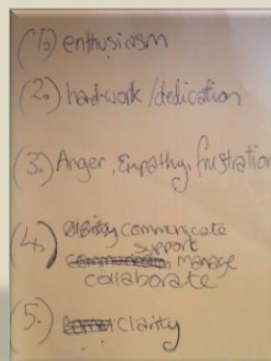
Overview. A one-hour performance by actors and some of the original volunteers whose stories had informed the development of the drama followed by a short discussion giving the audience a chance to reflect on the drama and their own volunteering stories. There were pre- (reflective) and post-performance (taster and evaluative) workshops for an invited smaller group to help them consider volunteer stories and how we capture and use them, and to help them understand (through direct experience) the cultural animation processes by which the drama had been created.

Aims. We had multiple purposes for the different audiences. We were simultaneously:

- showcasing the artefact/performance as a way of presenting research findings, offering a kind of "fictive reality" (Jones 2013: 10) and assessing the audience's reaction to the findings and to performance as a way of engaging people with them
- conducting a research activity - introducing an iterative process so that people watching could discuss and add/reflect on their own volunteer stories – becoming "spectactors" not spectators, though not during the performance (Boal 1993)
- introducing cultural animation, explaining its contribution to Untold Stories and giving people the chance to experience the method focusing on the theme of volunteering and volunteering stories, then asking them to reflect on the methods and their experience of them and how they might use them in their own work.

Results. Though on the day the different elements did not quite relate to each other as strongly as they might (perhaps the result of an overambitious programme for the afternoon), nonetheless participants fully engaged with each element separately and feedback was highly positive. Priority was given in the post-performance workshop to experiencing the methods, leaving less time than anticipated to explain their part in the research and the creation of the play, or for reflection on how and when participants might use them in their own work. Our aims were therefore only partially met.

Showcasing iterative methods (the Glossopoly game)

Three experiential workshops (where the game was played)

Overview. A 1.5-hour Glossopoly workshop at the annual Community Organisers camp. The game was set up around a table. After the game was explained briefly, people started to play it with support from the members of the research team who had devised the game during the original project. At the second set of workshops held at the New Vic Theatre a different approach was taken. These were two one-hour workshops with a mixed group of academics and community practitioners and during the workshop the group was split into smaller groups with one playing the game on a table top board set, one doing some creative work (drawing) with an artist, and another small group playing a 'life-size' version of the game where players move around the room instead of using a table-top board.

Aims. With each of these workshops the goal was to showcase the artefact (the game), and to give people the chance to experience the method in hopes of generating useful feedback about the experience but primarily to generate interest in the game and ideas from participants about how they could use it, or the idea of it, in their own work. The New Vic workshops were more intensive and were part of a day more distinctly aimed at potential adopters of the methods and covering the range of both iterative and animative methods.

Results. The participants in each session engaged well with the game with a majority enthusiastic about it as a mechanism to get people to engage with views that are not their own, and to think about issues in depth from different standpoints. Though participants were mainly positive about the game and its potential, the sessions also generated useful learning about what people found more challenging about the game as a research method. Key reflections from those exposed to the game included concerns about the open-endedness of the activity, the difficulty of keeping people fully engaged if the game took a long time, and how participants might feel if it took a long time but did not then have a clear ending.

> *"just great. I really enjoyed the format. The environment of structured play made idea generation and group discussion really exciting and stimulating."*

> *"something very long-winded … which means it would be hard to finish it. I wonder whether asking people to play a game which ends with no sense of resolution might be a bit demotivating if we were to use this in a project."*

Overview. A 1.5-hour cultural animation/boat workshop with Community Organisers – exploring issues of community and community resilience. Following a warm-up activity (names and actions) and a game involving chairs and movement the workshop focused on an imaginative activity linked to the boat installation and the creation of new worlds. During the same event the Tree of Life was installed in the summer camp reception area for Community Organisers to visit and engage with in a more ad hoc way over the weekend of the camp.

A cultural animation workshop for local partnership members from Big Local areas showcased some of the methods used in the original research projects. Big Local volunteers were also the target group for two similar workshops on methods held in Birmingham and in London. Here the activities included the same animative warm up name game, and an exercise with chairs, before a 'picture frame' activity and production of cinquains/poem-writing. In each case the workshops were preceded by a separate presentation on findings about volunteering from the Untold Stories project giving the opportunity to explore both findings and methods.

Two mixed-group 'scaling up' taster workshops at the New Vic targeted potential adopters of cultural animation methods – academics and practitioners – and offered a more in-depth exposure to the methods. These gave people the chance in small groups to try out activities with the boat and the tree, writing cinquains and an animative exercise with buttons.

Aims. With each workshop the purpose was to showcase the artefacts and methods from the original research so as to generate interest in trying them out in different settings. Most of the exposure was to people hoping to learn about ways to engage others in their own community (eg, local residents or potential volunteers) rather than to researchers considering cultural animation as a research method. However in the more intensive workshops held at the New Vic, academics were targeted as part of the audience.

Results. We found high levels of enjoyment and participation when people were given the opportunity to experience the methods, with people leaving each session 'on a high' and with ideas about how they could use them in their research or at the very least a desire to find out more though some found the sessions too full or rushed. We discuss broader learning from these workshops later in this report.

2.3 Pilots – supporting others to use the methods

The original idea was to try and attract four academics or practitioners interested in piloting animative and/or iterative methods and then to support them to use the methods and to follow their progress and learning. However, negotiating take-up / adoption of the methods within the project's timescales proved difficult and in the end only two pilots took place.

In the original project plan it was proposed that individuals or organisations would express their interest in testing out the methods after the in-depth 'scaling up' workshops held in October 2014 at the New Vic but in the end only two of the four pilots were able to go ahead despite some initial work on the part of the project team with partners including a community project and a school. The reduction in the number of pilots from four to two did, however, create space that enabled the additional taster workshops offered to the Big Local programme (which were not in the original project plan) thus generating wider exposure of the methods to new audiences than originally anticipated – achieving breadth perhaps, rather than depth, of exposure.

Figure 3. Co-delivering research pilots with new partners

Session	Audiences
Green Keele research workshop. A research workshop delivered in partnership with researchers involved in a university campus-based sustainability project[12] - using cultural animation to explore environmental issues and the relevance of sustainability to different groups and disciplines within the university.	Students, lecturers and staff in a mixed group of around half students, half staff. The group involved 3 researchers and 20 participants and was a part of a wider research project on sustainability.
LGBT research workshop. A joint project undertaken in partnership with an academic from Middlesex London University and a LGBT older people's group based in Stoke to explore issues of LGBT identity and ageing.	Researchers and members of an older LGBT group [1 researcher, 5 participants] took part in this session which was conceived as part of a wider exploratory piece of research into ageing, sexuality and identity.

Piloting cultural animation in a research setting
Investigating attitudes towards sustainability in a university setting

Overview: A 1.5 hour workshop delivered by New Vic in partnership with the Green Keele project (a sustainability project based at Keele University) and attended by 20 academics and students. The workshop was planned to complement a survey and other activities as part of a project exploring attitudes towards sustainability at the University.

Aims: Three research questions were originally identified: *As we move into a resource-limited future (a) what skills and knowledge will your discipline(s) contribute to an enduring and thriving society? (b) How does/could working in more than one discipline affect your ability to contribute to such a society? (c) How has studying/working at Keele prepared you to contribute to such a society?* Ultimately, however, these were changed during the planning process on the advice of the Cultural Animateur to reflect broader exploratory themes linked to the notion of a resource limited future. The research team hoped using cultural animation would help deliver a depth of insight into views and values linked to sustainability, explaining: *"Methods like this allow you to get a bit more out of people. A lot of time people think there's a right answer, this is a morally loaded issue, but we believe working with these methods will help us find something deeper and perhaps more honest – we've seen the potential in it creating a safer space – people will be behaving in ways that they would not normally, and we will be creating an environment that removes the more formal lecturer/student structure."*

Results. On the day there was slightly less time than anticipated but the workshop still managed to fit in a wide variety of activities, including a warm up activity game (names and actions); engagement with the boat installation (imagining the earth in crisis and having to leave for a safe place); creation of a new safe place/building a new community and collecting significant artefacts to help create the future for that community; creating a new name; writing an acrostic poem (story of the past); and then creating a community anthem and dance. The workshop culminated with a performance of each group's anthem but unfortunately following this there was no time to reflect and feed back as a large group on the activities or the performances. Despite some time constraints, feedback from both the researchers and the participants was positive and overall the workshop achieved its objectives with the researchers particularly pleased to see barriers broken down and honest sharing of views and ideas as they had hoped.

> *"I wanted it to be equalising and it was, absolutely."*

The Green Keele lead researcher assessed the workshop later as making a meaningful contribution to their wider sustainability research project. It also generated useful learning about the potential of the methods in new settings for the legacy project's core team.

Piloting cultural animation in a research setting
Investigating ageing in the LGBT community

Overview. This half-day workshop delivered by New Vic in partnership with an academic with a research interest in LGBT identity and ageing was attended by five individuals (fewer than originally intended) from an older people's LGBT group based in Stoke, though other participants, staff and volunteers from the New Vic attended to assist on the day helping create a very mixed participant group with an age range from late teens to early 80s. After two warm up activities, including a name game and a statement-based 'musical chairs' game which worked as effective ice-breakers, the group played a version of Glossopoly and discussed questions of community as relevant to them, and then took part in a cultural animation activity where the animateur encouraged people create an artefact, a kind of sculpture or installation using items people could choose to represent something of meaning to them when thinking about their own experiences, their identity or their community.

Aims. The lead researcher on the project hoped that the workshop would be wide-ranging and exploratory. He did not want to 'impose' a research question but wanted participants to talk about what they felt was important, seeing the workshop as the start of work to engage with people's own narratives to understand the range of issues, "messiness" and complexity of the subject. He was looking forward to "working with open-endedness as a way to help get to the messy stuff" and very interested in learning about how the methods work, believing that taking part would *"add another dimension to the kinds of conversations I've been having with myself about the researcher role."*

Results. A lower-than-expected turnout on the day meant that some planned activities did not work quite as well as hoped – particularly where the larger group broke into smaller groups to take part in activities. The lead researcher fed back that some activities worked better than others with, in this instance, animative activities working better than iterative in the sense of more actively engaging participants and generating different kinds of conversations and richer data. Despite suggesting some limitations of the iterative board game as used in this particular setting, overall he assessed the session as highly successful and felt that it had met his aims. He reported afterwards feeling excited at the potential of the methods, and particularly pleased to see the way the activities engaged participants in positive ways that they enjoyed:

> *"I'm very pleased with how it went, it did give people the chance to share on their own terms … people were creating things that represented parts of their identities and their lives … it was amazing, incredible."*

Part 3: Learning about the methodologies

Our evaluation questions

Seeing the methods practised and getting feedback from participants and practitioners about what they experienced gave us a number of useful insights into the value of the methods, practicalities of using them in research settings, and potential limitations or areas for further exploration.

- What have we learnt about the specific animative and iterative methods, how they work, and their value/potential outside the original projects for researchers and community practitioners?

- What have we learnt about using the methods and any challenges in using them in practice?

3.   Learning about the value of the methods

3.1 The strengths or benefits of the methods

Based on our own observations and feedback from researchers and research participants we identified a number of benefits of the animative and iterative methods developed by the original Connected Communities projects.

> **3.1.1 DEMOCRATISING AND INCLUSIVE. The methods can break down barriers and address (redress) issues of power between participants; enabling more equal participation and encouraging conversations in which more voices are heard and valued.**

The methods offer potential to achieve more inclusive and "balanced" groups for research or community engagement purposes, as opposed to some other group methods where the more articulate, those with more power over words, can dominate or be 'heard' more than others in the group. The methods were seen as 'levelling' and challenging power dynamics. As one of the project team members put it, this way of working "makes the division between experts and non-experts somewhat irrelevant". This was something we observed and that both participants and the researchers piloting the methods identified as one of their strengths.

"It creates an opportunity for people of different status to work together and make best use of their experience and creativity ..."

"In any setting you may get some voices heard more than others, but I felt with this methodology people who may not normally do so, feel safe."

"It (Glossopoly) encourages people to work in a democratic way and share their experience, vision, ideas, which might be helpful for community planning."

"One thing I like about this approach is the way that, being slightly unexpected, it levels the difference between residents and paid staff. Because this is not a work-based-formula that professionals are more experienced or comfortable with then when the mixed group works together they are all even."

"This differs considerably from using more traditional qualitative methods … as great as focus groups and interviews can be I think in focus groups for instance some can take a back seat or feel lacking in confidence to lift their own voice, but here it seemed people were all equally obliged to share to make it work and equally did share."

3.1.2 DEPTH OF INSIGHT. The methods quickly enable in-depth reflection in groups – people feel able to talk at a deeper, more meaningful level earlier on in sessions than may be the norm in more conventional group settings however well facilitated.

In each session participants and facilitators drew attention to the type of discussions being held, and frequently expressed surprise at the ease (and speed) with which people seemed able to 'drop their guard' and 'open up'. In part this reflects skilled facilitation and the selection of themes and topics that resonate with participants, topics that interest and stimulate. It could also be in part related to the fact that during the legacy project, most of the groups involved relatively like-minded individuals and people with significant sets of interests in common so this may have contributed in part to the quick deepening of conversations we observed.

> *"It was interesting to hear what priorities other people had, although we all generally agreed, so it would be even more interesting to see how the technique would work if there were differing opinions."*

However, though the 'sample' of those involved in workshops may have been relevant, at least a part of the relatively quick shift to deeper conversations and insights we saw was certainly about the nature of the methods themselves. There is something more direct and immediate about the conversations generated which strongly focus on how people experience and feel about things. We observed an immediacy about the way people related to questions - where they were encouraged to feel, to emotionally respond to questions rather than staying apart from an issue and theorising about it. For instance, in the environmental workshop participants fed back that the activities and workshop approach had enabled them to engage with issues of sustainability in a different and powerful way because they 'felt' things at a deep level that they had previously only talked about in a slightly more 'distanced' way. Likewise in an earlier workshop in an activity involving buttons and imagined scenarios for a community in crisis, participants fed back that the techniques used meant they actually 'felt' the pressure of making decisions where resources were shrinking.

> *"I really felt things – you feel the pace, like how time really is running out"*

> *"the conversations were amazing – things weren't being intellectualised – the way they spoke was lighter in some ways because they were able to joke, but still at a deeper level?"*

The iterative nature of processes at work as conversations take place within groups (and during games in particular) also helped create a space for views to be expressed and developed and new ideas to be formulated through conversation with others or as new questions are raised.

> *"The games prompt conversations that are so rich and informative - giving a real insight into peoples' lives."*

There is a real open-endedness about these methods and the activities that the teams have developed and as such they have a particular value in regard to exploring values and opinions, experiences and stories; for understanding complex dimensions and experiences of social or community problems; and for imagining solutions.

> *"They are ideal for dealing with and engaging with messiness."*

> *"What I find exciting about these techniques is that they work on several levels - enabling people from different backgrounds to speak the same (equally unfamiliar) language, helping us to visualise and understand complex ideas or relationships."*

Looking at the experience of the pilot projects these showed very clearly that open exploratory questions were far more suitable than very specific and narrow questions (as originally proposed by one of the research teams concerned).

> *"It's very open ended. If you were really wanting to answer more specific questions this would not be the way … though it helps if you want to gain a deeper understanding of a problem and how people see that problem."*

> *"Great for exploring an issue where there is a lot of subjectivity and there may be different perspectives you want to hear about."*

> *"If I was doing it again I'd focus on different kinds of questions, not too specific but also not too broad … otherwise it's so easy for it to go in a different direction with such a big subject and so much to cover."*

Some theorists have argued that animation helps generate ideas, data and results about things that matter to individuals and communities.[13] Through the course of the project we saw this happen with both animative and iterative methods quickly getting to the heart of what mattered most to participants, their values, views and priorities in a way and/or with a speed that sometimes surprised both researchers and participants alike.

> *"It definitely made me open up, and feel more vulnerable because I was being made to do something I wouldn't normally and that seemed a little "silly"."*

> *"I felt it enabled us to get to the heart of things in a very direct way even though conversations start indirectly if that makes sense."*

3.1.4 A PART OF SOMETHING, OR THE START OF SOMETHING. These methods may have a particular value where the research seeks to be a part of or a contributor to social or community change, where there is an interest in engaging participants as more than research 'respondents' and in particular as a way to kickstart a community engagement or research project. Indeed certainly for research purposes the methods are not ideally used as a standalone activity, and may be best when complemented by other qualitative methods.

These methods lend themselves to research that is about addressing problems and thinking about solutions to research that is linked to action and change. One of the things that helps this focus is that quite a few of the activities and exercises that have formed part of the legacy of the original projects have focused on imagining and reimagining alternative futures and in so doing exciting people about these. Participants engaged during the life of the legacy project saw this potential and talked about wanting to consider using some of the methods in community mapping and community planning, seeing the methods in a wider context, for instance as part of a wider programme of community engagement.

> *"very useful for encouraging people to discuss ideas with strangers in a way that could involve everyone … might be useful to councils for community action plans."*

One of the legacy project's community partners suggested in her reflective practice report:

> *"Cultural animation is the start of something. … can be used effectively at any stage of a deliberative project, but the exercises are particularly great as 'the start of something' as they tend to build collaboration, creativity, a sense of excitement and can-do agency."*

Both the research teams who trialled using the methods to address new research questions reported afterwards feeling that this way of working may really only work, or at least may have most value, when considered as part of a wider process, and both intended for their purposes that the method would be used as only a part of a study alongside other methods.

> *"It did meet my expectations. It was messy but it was 'storied', it had a narrative feeling to it, albeit disjointed and revealed in fragments. You're given strands of people's life narratives. I think what would work well would be then to interview to the people in the group as a follow-up."*

> *"This would be no good as a one-off activity. It's a little like shaking a cherry tree and the interesting fruits come down … it's like the start of a process. If you could then keep up the process, eg, with in-depth interviewing, and then use the interview data to follow up in a more focused way in a second workshop I think that could work really well."*

3.1.5 PARTICIPANT ENJOYMENT AND BENEFIT. There is a level of enjoyment inherent in these methods that is relatively unusual (at least in comparison with some other research methods) and significant. Encouraging creativity, self-expression and play offers the potential for participants to benefit in several ways, including not just enjoyment but also learning, increased self-awareness or feelings of empowerment.

Participants taking part in workshops reported high levels of enjoyment, particularly of activities that encouraged creativity and play and use of the imagination, acknowledging that even though they felt they had been dealing with important and serious issues, this had happened in an enjoyable and stimulating way.

> *"I think it was real genuine creativity that I saw. There was this one particular moment when a most beautiful metaphor came out and that emerged from a deeply creative mindset."*

> *"The art of creating was amazing, there was a real enjoyment in creating, it engaged different senses in a quite powerful way."*

> *"It (cultural animation workshop) the most memorable part of the day."*

Comments from participants reflected ways in which they felt they had benefited from taking part with some talking about having learnt new things about themselves or about the subject alongside other positive gains.

> *"You can easily forget a lecture about sustainability but you can't forget this experience"*

> *"Positive, uplifted, inspired, loved it! It opened my eyes."*

> *"I'm sure that the moments of genuine worry, whilst scavenging for objects during the time pressure, will have done much more for changing minds and reinforcing ideas than any poster or fact-receiving session. This morning was a great way of exploring the concept. Fantastic."*

> *"It was a very unusual experience but very worthwhile. I keep thinking back on various things we did/I thought which I'm surprised at. The experience seems more persistent than I'd expect for a workshop."*

This idea that fun and play matters as an outcome of engagement with these methods is important, but we found this was not just a benefit of taking part in animative and iterative workshops, but also an essential part of the process, fundamentally at the heart of why the methods work. In the next section of our report we consider the place of enjoyment and play alongside other factors that help explain how and why these methods seem to work and why they achieve the results that they do.

3.2 Learning about how the methods work

3.2.1 THE POWER OF PLAY

Stimulating the imagination through play contributes significantly to enjoyment and other positive outcomes. The use of play and enjoyable activities contributes to deeper, sustained engagement, reflective conversation and creative thinking.

Watching people sing, write poems, build themselves a safe haven (like building dens in childhood and putting treasured items in them), and immerse themselves in play and in using their imagination it was clear there was a lot of enjoyment taken in completing activities during workshops, and this was confirmed in all the post-event feedback we received. Encouraging play helps break down barriers between people, and seems to encourage creative thinking, including re-imagining situations and coming up with new solutions to problems.

"It was surprisingly enjoyable. I didn't expect that."

"the method forces you to be playful and imaginative … a solution is more likely as you're encouraged to think of new ways to do things."

Using play for learning, enjoyment and creative thinking

Example: survivor activities (movement and imaginative play)

In the sustainability research workshop lecturers and students were jumbled together in a boat and faced with a practical task – "you are survivors of an environmental catastrophe, you are on the boat to a new world, what messages would you put in a bottle for future generations?" This led to instant engagement with a topic on an emotional level and also acted as a leveller, with participants reporting that they felt a sense of all being 'in it together' (literally and figuratively), breaking down barriers and creating a positive group energy.

At the Community Organisers workshop people were tasked that having arrived in a new world as survivors they should create a safe place in their new home. "What objects would you save and take with you? What would you do to make it safe? What name would you give your new home? Once you have created your new home, create a charter or set of rules for how you want to live in it." Again this activity tapped into creativity and imagination and touched on notions of what makes a community safe. In the process of building and creating, rich conversations took place. In choosing objects and making a case for their inclusion, and in negotiating the new charter, conversations quickly got to the heart of individual and collective values and beliefs, reaching consensus in a way that was collaborative and fun.

3.2.2 THE POWER OF DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY AND DOING DIFFERENT THINGS

Being active, and putting people collectively out of their comfort zone contributes to the effectiveness of the methods, it breaks down barriers between people and the barriers that sometimes hinder individuals from sharing their own views in a group setting.

Doing things differently seems to encourage thinking differently and relating to others differently. One thing that seems to be a part of this is encouraging people to be active. Each session we saw involved some movement, particularly at the start. Moving about and getting active and immersed in tasks changes the way people communicate and removes situations where those used to meetings or formal group activities might dominate discussion, helping break down barriers and encouraging different voices to be heard. Taking people out of their comfort zone – though at the same time making them feel safe – and using activities that have a "we're all in this together" feeling also seems to act as a leveller. This contributes to a sense of democratising the process and encourages all to feel they can engage.

"We were moving about quite a lot. I think that physical movement played a part in getting us thinking and talking differently." *"The methods literally break down boundaries and personal spaces."*

"Everyone is out of their comfort zone, no one can use their usual language or systems, and so it creates a level playing field and opens everyone's minds."

"We could have done a more mainstream workshop but I'm not sure that would have got the same results … with the lecturer/ student relationships – this puts everyone slightly out of their comfort zone but in the same way".

Breaking down barriers

Example: ice-breakers and warm up games (active and symbolic)

One of the warm up name games used successfully in workshops was a game involving people giving their name and performing an action connected to their name. Once the group has gone around once with each participant linking their name to an action, people then 'pass on' introductions, when introducing someone else being obliged to remember and repeat or mirror the action associated with their name. This acts as an ice-breaker, instantly putting people out of their comfort zone, standing, doing 'silly' actions, but making no reference to who people are in their lives outside of the room (eg, their job titles or expertise) or reasons for being present/interest in the subject.

A chair-based activity was also played with some success where people place their chair randomly around the room and sit on it but there is one empty chair and one person standing at the opposite end of the room far from the chair. The people seated have to quickly move around from one chair to another, blocking the standing person from getting to a chair. As well as breaking the ice, on each occasion the game was used we saw how it was used to introduce important themes for the session – for instance at its simplest, causing people involved in community development to consider how their end point or goal (chair) has to change as different barriers and obstacles get in their way and then discussing this.

3.2.3 USING OBJECTS AND FOCUSING ON TASKS

Using objects and object-based tasks to explore questions and express answers seems to enable people to feel safer to express themselves and have in-depth conversations on sensitive topics and helps generate new insights.

The use of objects and focus on tasks can make people feel safer to have in-depth conversations. This seems in part because they take the focus from a person to an object and thereby can remove the awkwardness that can sometimes be engendered by direct questioning on sensitive or emotionally charged subjects, and in part because they encourage imagination and empathy.

> *"I think there is something around using an object/action to speak for you, making it easier to speak for yourself as a result."*

> *"It felt like I was able to express my personal opinion easily, because there were symbols and objects to use to do so. As with the Glossopoly game, people very quickly moved to high level in-depth thinking, even though it was fairly abstract."*

> *"You're thinking of your research agenda but then you get flashpoints where someone says something new to you or to each other that is just unexpected … It was a result of engaging with the objects and creating stuff."*

Enabling deeper conversations through object-based tasks

Example: Creating a community using buttons

This exercise was developed by Sue Moffat from the New Vic Theatre as part of her Imperial War Museum Fellowship in Holocaust Studies. It was shared and adapted for use during a taster workshop where the group was asked to use the buttons to create a community. The group were asked to reflect on the process and what they were thinking of with the facilitator giving feedback and enabling the discussion.

Once the buttons were arranged, the facilitator introduced a second level of sorting. Participants were advised that they were now the government, "this is your community, these are your people, things have to change as there is a crisis, there is not enough food, money or space. Decide quickly how you will change the community to respond to the crisis." Some incredibly rich conversations just "dropped out" as people played with the buttons and created their 'map' and then changing map of a community, explaining their thinking and actions. This functioned as a rapid way of generating observations on what community means to people, what resilience means, and helped get to the heart of some very deeply held views about what matters in community and community 'rules' and 'resources' and how these should be distributed. As part of the process people co-operated, listened, assumed roles, creating a dynamic and generating insights that you would be unlikely to see, or certainly not as quickly in a focus group or purely discussion-based activity on the topic of community.

3.2.4 SHARING POWER WITH PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH PROCESSES

Engaging with open ended questions and letting conversations flow as iterative processes take things in different and potentially unexpected directions contributes to the power and effectiveness of these methods. The use of techniques that encourage participants to synthesise and prioritise what's most important to them all help build a co-productive approach to creating knowledge that helps generate rich data.

The methods ask engaging open questions and create a structure or framework for activities, but then encourage participants to take their conversations in directions that matter and make sense to them. As several participants expressed it, moving away from a traditional question and answer focus seems to enable people to participate more on their own terms. In this way the approach is closer to co-producing knowledge than generating data/data collection.

> *"I went to a volunteering workshop very cynical at first, but I was quite wrong-footed seeing people participating in the issues much more on their terms than on the researcher's. I was amazed by the data you can get."*

> *"There's a sense in which as the researcher you have to let go and trust where the process takes people."*

> *"In the (Glossopoly) workshop I felt able to express my thoughts very quickly with the group I was in, and then to the wider group. The questions were deep and complicated in many ways, yet they allowed us all to contribute a mixture of personal experience and more general social observation."*

Some of the games and tasks used ask people to prioritise between things that mean something to them (eg, items to save in a time of crisis, words to write in a message in a bottle, how to reshape a world when resources are being reduced, how to make the most of a community resource so that the most benefit is gained). Various word play and poetic activities such as producing cinquains and acrostics have the same effect - requiring people to distil ideas into a limited number of words. This type of prioritising or summarising activity can help groups quite quickly reach consensus, identify what matters most to them or succinctly sum up what lies at the real heart of much longer conversations.

> *"I very much liked the idea of the 'Cinquain' which I found really useful in helping to distil the most relevant points. For me, whereas the preceding discussions tended to be rich and quite broad, the 'Cinquain' provided a helpful tool to summarise the most significant aspects concisely which participants might be more likely to remember for a while following the end of the workshop."*

Getting to the heart of what matters

Example: 'Creating stuff' from objects and group writing activities

During workshops with Big Local volunteers groups were tasked to select and use objects from a selection brought by the facilitators to create a picture that would tell the story of their Big Local area. Each person in the group took part, each had a say, choosing objects that meant something to them. People found the exercise enjoyable and it generated interesting conversations about priorities within and across the different groups. New insights emerged within each little group about their local stories and their priorities as people created the pictures and then shared their meaning and significance back to the larger group. (This activity had previously been used in the Untold Stories of Volunteering project as a method where groups were asked to populate empty picture frames with people and ideas missing from official discourses of volunteering as a part of the process of identifying untold stories.)

> *"Creating that picture was very interesting. I was surprised. It really felt that in just 15 minutes or whatever it was, we'd said some of the most important things about what's happening in our area."*

In several of the workshops groups were tasked to create a cinquain (five line verse) to capture the heart of their conversation. This was commonly used at the end of an activity with people as a group identifying messages, verses, words that have meaning in relation to the issue being explored (eg, notions of home, community, environment).

This, like other group writing activities with a performative element (for instance, producing a charter, writing a message in a bottle, producing an acrostic) involved distilling messages and prioritising words and thoughts that mattered most to the group. The process helped people quickly agree on and sum up the things that matter to them collectively and then express these things succinctly and in a memorable way.

3.3 Learning about using the methods

The taster workshops and pilot sessions provided valuable learning opportunities; increasing our understanding of some of the practical challenges of using the methods for researchers or community practitioners coming to them new. For those new to the methods we identified a number of issues that require further consideration.

3.3.1 ENSURE CLARITY OF ROLES

It is vital to clarify the respective roles of researcher and animateur, and researcher and participant, when using cultural animation as a research method. Guidance on what works well in partnerships between researchers and artists could prove useful to those coming to this work new and wanting to use a partnership approach similar to those developed between researchers and artists in the original Connected Communities projects.

One of the strengths of the activities we observed was the easy relationship between the team involved in the original Connected Communities projects, with researchers, animateurs and artists working side-by-side in a comfortable and complementary way. What we saw when different researchers then sought to work alongside a cultural animateur for the first time was that they are likely to need extra investment in planning and discussing processes, roles and responsibilities to ensure that there is clarity about how things will work. We found some lack of clarity among the new researchers about their role during sessions they were involved in and about the extent to which they could contribute, intervene or influence activities being directed by the animateur. In the end in one session the researcher role was a passive one (an observer role), in the other a slightly 'messier' mix of researcher, participant and observer. In both instances the researchers concerned felt they were only just starting to learn about how to work alongside an animateur and would need to do more of this to be able to fully appreciate how best to manage that relationship in a research context.

> *"I would be clearer next time about how things would work practically on the day."*

> *"I've reflected on the messiness of collecting qualitative data but also the messy boundaries between researchers and participants. (We) wanted to go and observe as researchers and collect data so we would use observation and talking to people, but we actually got involved. There's a sense of negotiating our identities as researchers differently. As we got through the day we weren't recording data so we ducked out to stop and take notes."*

Our observations and these conversations with researchers new to the methods caused us to reflect more generally on the question of roles within cultural animation as research, particularly for those new to it. For instance, could or should researchers or community

practitioners learn arts skills or skills in cultural animation? Or, do researchers brief or co-design projects with animateurs who then 'become' the researchers engaging with participants whilst the researcher takes a back seat to observe and record as appropriate? Is the researcher in such partnerships responsible for research quality and the arts practitioner responsible for arts practice/engagement or do these separations and distinctions lack meaning in this context? These and other questions occurred as relevant if the methodological legacy is seen as the wider adoption of the methods by single practitioners or partnerships of researchers and artists. It may turn out as the methods evolve and more use them in their work that there can be no hard and fast rules about roles, and indeed the researcher experiencing the slightly 'messy' different roles on the day was able to identify some benefits of this, but at the very least the experience of the pilot sessions suggests the value of having early conversations about both objectives and roles to ensure a shared understanding is in place

> *"Cultural animation needs the cultural animateur - this is quite a different role. Could this be easily replicated? Do or can researchers adopt this role or do they work with arts professionals?"*

> *"I was wrong-footed in some of my assumptions about people's experiences … and taking part meant I was challenged about my views as much as I was able to challenge them … in fact it worked well."*

3.3.2 CONSIDER AND BE AWARE OF THE VARIETY OF WAYS THE PROCESS COULD INFLUENCE THE DATA BEING COLLECTED

Adopters of this method need to carefully consider the ways in which the facilitator role and the nature of the techniques themselves (based heavily on performative and creative tasks) can potentially influence the resulting research 'data' and outputs.

Both animators and researchers come from a tradition that advocates neutrality and objectivity to respect and allow for people's stories to emerge in their own words. However, in the course of our legacy workshops we saw some of the difficulties of remaining neutral when working with the energy of large groups and seeking to maintain a positive dynamic, particularly when focusing on the completion of creative and/or performative activities or tasks. We identified a number of areas or challenges that those coming new to cultural animation as a research practice might need to be aware of.

There is a risk that facilitators needing to step forward to maintain a group energy and flow, can find it hard to then step back if there is a danger that they could unduly influence conversations and/or the creation of artefacts and written records. We saw the potential for less experienced facilitators sometimes to be tempted to map meaning onto something symbolic for participants and suggest to people what an activity could symbolise after the fact if a participant or group do not themselves see a particularly relevant symbolism (as judged by the facilitator). Or, if under pressure of a time constraint to finish a task, a facilitator might shape a

conversation or a choice more actively than might have been expected within a more traditional research process – for instance choosing a word to complete a poem, attributing a meaning to an object for a participant. Particularly if the artefacts from a cultural animation process are to be a part of the way the research is represented, the process by which they are created (and who is involved in that process and the part they play) is key. If such outputs or artefacts are overly shaped by the ideas and preferences of facilitators rather than participants, this would introduce 'bias' and make the artefacts less reliable research outputs or at least not outputs to be taken or interpreted at face value.

> *"I learnt that it is important for facilitators not only to work towards creating a safe and comfortable environment in which participants are invited to bring their creativity, imagination and thoughts, but also it is crucial that facilitators retreat and refrain from the temptation of imposing in order to allow participants' stories to emerge in an authentic way."*

> *"I was thinking how much the facilitators were feeding in to not just the questions but also the answers. I felt certain answers were heard more – with one that I saw, I felt a lot of their own ideas (the facilitator's) were coming into it."*

How people complete the activities (the process involved) also affects the meaning and value of the artefacts in ways that need to be taken into account. Where cultural animation involves choosing an object and discussing its meaning or attributing a meaning to it, there is a need to consider not just what is chosen and what is said but the wider context of the activity and the motivation of the person choosing the object.

> *"I wonder also at how 'leading' these activities can be - especially the acrostic (CRISIS) or the haiku - we were just coming up with words which fit, and then those choices were rather over-interpreted as meaning more than they did. The same with the buttons and how certain things were interpreted and fed back."*

> *"In our groups, some people were rather domineering, and the others let them make choices, which were then interpreted as representing the views and ideas of the group. I didn't recognise some of the justifications/explanations reported back at the end of an activity. These issues need to be taken into account if we want to use these techniques for research. What effect does the game have on the knowledge or questions generated?"*

Another potential challenge to be aware of in being very task-oriented and including performative or artistic tasks in research is the danger of tipping the balance in favour of concentrating on output production (a charter, a poem, an artefact, a performance) or on the quality of that output or performance, losing sight of the purpose of the task or other priorities. So, in some workshops we observed participants become so engrossed with the practicalities of a task (eg, concerned with preparing for a performance, with getting something 'right', or with meeting a deadline for completion of a task) that conversation shut down and

the reason for doing the task or any connection to the research themes and questions, was lost. We saw occasions where facilitators or participants themselves shut down valuable conversations in order to hurry a group on to complete a task in a certain way, or where valid questions were not answered as people were hurried to move on to the next task. This may not be dissimilar in essence to the way in which a researcher using a more traditional discursive method such as a focus group may make a judgement call about the point at which to close down one subject and move to another, but it was a notable feature of some of the workshops we observed (possibly, granted, because of time pressures), and one that might warrant further consideration as the methods continue to evolve.

One other way in which using arts methods could affect the data generated is where participants (or even facilitators) are influenced by their own views about what would be valid for inclusion in artistic records of conversations or activities, or what would constitute 'good art'. This again could influence the validity of any artefacts created if these are seen in any way as research outputs. For instance, we observed people on occasion changing words that someone else had chosen and one participant's choice of words for a poem rejected by someone else as not sufficiently poetic. This hinted at the way a concern with how an end result 'looks' or sounds could potentially lead to some viewpoints or ideas being seen as less valid and not 'heard'.

3.3.3 PAY ATTENTION TO STRONG BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

These methods offer a different and potentially challenging kind of research experience for participants – active, participatory and focused on creative group activities. As with any such method, activities without introduction or where insufficient time is put into a good ending (however that is defined in the context of the activity) can make participation feel less meaningful and can lead to disengagement.

As with any group-based research practice, the beginnings and endings of sessions, activities and tasks really matter. From our observations ensuring strong beginnings and endings may be more than usually important as animative and iterative methods represent for most participants a very different experience and one that can initially engender a high degree of nervousness or lack of confidence in where things are going or what might happen.

> *"I was very nervous to begin with and considered leaving!"*

We saw in each session how important well- facilitated warm up activities could be, and the significant difference they made to how well sessions went. In each session following active warm up activities there was a visible shift in individual demeanour and collective energy in the room from nerves to smiles, from closed to open body language, from hush to laughter. It became clear that these activities are important for setting the context and tone and breaking the ice. In the sessions we saw they were also skillfully used to start a rapid early focus on

content. For practitioners new to the methods, developing strong skills in breaking the ice and setting the tone for activities will be key to success.

> *"Really liked the first activity – set the tone well for the rest."*

> *"the dice rolling acted as an ice breaker in a way that made participants relaxed and comfortable and got them talking to each other instantly. I also thought this paved the way for the serious and fruitful discussions to happen afterwards."*

It perhaps goes without saying that strong endings both to group activities and longer workshops are also important. Mainly because we saw sessions often running out of time we saw first-hand that rushing activities or ending them without sufficient time for some kind of closure can negatively impact on enjoyment and engagement (though generally where this happened participants realised this was about the time-limitations of the showcase approach rather than some problem with the methods or how well they were being delivered).

> *"It isn't ok to just stop without reflecting. It makes you feel well what was the point of that? … none of the activities was finished before we were told to move on, so it felt a bit pointless, like the person running (it) wasn't really interested in what happened."*

> *"I would have liked to have a more clear summing up - "what did we learn from this card/question?" However, I also know this is meant to happen on a much longer timescale, so part of this was due to the nature of the workshop."*

> ### 3.3.4 CONSIDER THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF PROCESS AND OUTPUT AS THIS WILL AFFECT DECISIONS ABOUT BOTH DELIVERY AND 'DATA'.
>
> **It will be important to have considered in advance where the 'value' of an animative or iterative workshop or activity will lie for the particular project and context in which the method is being used. That is, will it lie in the *process* (the doing and creating/the engagement with objects, tasks or games); in *what is said* (the conversations, words, views expressed); in *the records or artefacts* (the objects created during the process) or equally in all three elements? Thinking this through will be important for decisions about how activities are delivered and how sessions are recorded and 'data' collected.**

We saw some tensions as the methods were trialled by new research teams when it came to understanding where the value of the activities lay for them in the context of their research. Researchers were not always certain whether they should be observing group dynamics and creative processes, recording conversations, or paying attention to the artefacts completed as a result of practical or creative tasks. There are important questions to be at least considered about where researchers see the value of these methods lying. For community engagement

processes there may be a stronger emphasis on the group's creative process, on what people do together, and less concern about outputs and artefacts, but for researchers this may be less clear cut and records of what is said and artefacts may be of equal importance.

Researchers coming new to the activities shared their uncertainty about this issue, for instance expressing concern during or after the sessions about the activities and conversations 'going off track', not focusing on their priority questions, even though at the same time not being entirely sure if this really mattered. Certainly in one case the research team came away with a sense that the process had been valuable for participants but the result of prioritising the process had meant some sacrifice in terms of the quality and usability of the 'data' generated for the researcher's purposes.

> *"We enjoyed it and you could see we all definitely learned a lot – lots of interesting ideas came up, but I'm not sure it will have answered your research questions."*

> *"There was a danger of veering away from subjects we had planned to focus on. We had a broad framework … and we generated a lot of data but though there great moments, there were moments when we definitely veered away. As an observer you had to be really attuned to what's relevant …."*

3.3.5 BE PREPARED TO BE CHALLENGED IN YOUR IDEAS ABOUT RESEARCH DATA, WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO WORK WITH IT

The methods raise important questions about the nature of knowledge creation and research data, who data generated through research should be useful for, and what research outputs should or could look like. They generate different kinds of data and this throws up challenges for data collection, analysis, interpretation and for how findings might be best captured and presented or shared.

The following are some of the data questions and challenges we identified:

⚪ **First what is the data and how is it best collected?** What matters most during a cultural animation activity – what people do, what they say while they're doing it, how they relate to each other in the group, or the artistic outputs that arise from the things people do and which then 'hold', embody or represent in some way their ideas, views or stories? These are not just abstract theoretical questions – practically researchers trying to use these methods for the first time struggle to figure out precisely what it is they are supposed to be trying to capture and record - the process, conversations, outputs (eg, the written poems, performances). Because of uncertainty about what should be captured, and worrying about missing something important there is a risk that researchers end up collecting too much information and feeling overwhelmed by it – ending up with a wealth of documentation, words, images, videos, and artwork that is then hard to order, prioritise and

make sense of. It can also be a challenge to make data capture unobtrusive so as not to influence people's engagement and responses.

> *"If I did it again I wouldn't try with pen and pad, I'd just make sure I had it all on video and record conversations because there was so much happening that it was hard to know what to note. … The other issue … is that I found the video was making people a bit uncomfortable so sometimes I turned away."*

○ **Second, and related to the first question, is the question about who the data is for, who should it be useful for?** These methods generate knowledge in a partnership with participants but from the workshops we observed there will be times when this knowledge is more useful to the participant than the researcher. This is not per se problematic but may leave researchers with questions unanswered or data that is not as usable as they had hoped when considered against the original research questions. However, if the researcher is not too fixed in his or her ideas about the data that will be generated, perhaps has plans for other activities to complement and add detail in different ways, and is interested in co-producing knowledge that might be as useful to the people taking part as to the researcher, then these methods come into their own.

> *"Even as a qualitative researcher I see the data could be flimsy. That's why it can't just be a one-off, it would have to be part of wider data collection."*

> *"this process can help generate **new knowledge that's valuable to the people taking part** even in established groups where people are familiar with each other."*

○ **Third, how is the data best analysed and interpreted?** We might also ask who should be analysing and interpreting it and should this be a process that is co-operatively or jointly done in keeping with the broader ethos of the methods. We did not see data processed following either research pilot but to our knowledge participants were not involved in the process. What we did find was that however approached, this 'sense-making' stage is a labour intensive and complex part of the process.

○ **Fourth, how are findings presented and shared?** What kinds of research outputs best reflect the methods? As with other arts practices, can the artefacts, poems, drawings created through cultural animation stand as research outputs that embody and communicate the knowledge produced in their creation[14] – particularly given our earlier observations about the importance of capturing the details of the knowledge creation process before taking such artefacts at face value?

> *"Truthfully I'm not sure yet what all this means for the data. We have so much to go through – there are artefacts, pieces of card, the video will be a core record of things, but there is more too … three videos and lots of photos."*

Part 4: Project impact
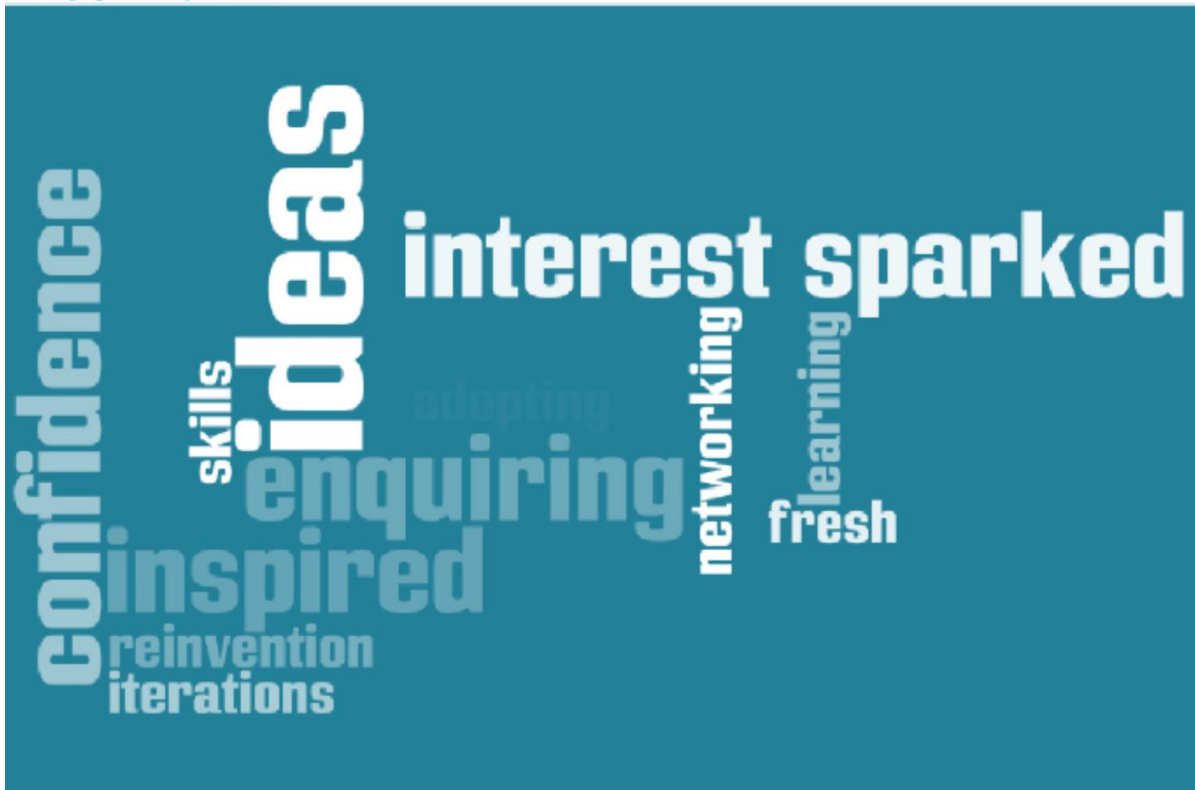
Our evaluation questions

What have been the results of the legacy project, what difference has this it made? Has it helped ensure that the methods and the original artefacts would have a 'life' beyond the original research projects as other audiences engaged with them and experienced them; learnt about them; considered how they could apply them in their practice; and ultimately put them into practice in their own work or in their own communities.

- To what extent has the project created or enhanced the methodological legacy of the four Connected Communities projects?

- What has been learnt from the experience of trying to differently (and more proactively) engage new audiences with a set of research findings and methods?

- In what sense and how successfully have the artefacts from the original projects formed part of a legacy – been given a life beyond those original projects?

- Ultimately what does this methodological legacy look like – has it turned out as planned?

4.   Project impact

4.1 Describing project results

4.1.1 OUTPUTS REINVENTED

Artefacts from the original research projects have been re-animated and reiterated as others have engaged with them in different settings.

This legacy project has given the methods and cultural artefacts developed during the original projects a life beyond those projects as more than 175 individuals have been newly introduced to them – academics, community development practitioners and volunteers have directly experiencing the methods first hand through experiential workshops.

One of the advantages of the initial research resulting in cultural artefacts as well as more traditional written report outputs, is that these artefacts could then be re-used in a way that more traditional outputs could not. So, we found during this project that the artefacts of the first research projects moved from being records of research, holding the stories of those who helped create them, to being tools for future research, receptacles for new stories or new responses to old stories. We saw the artefacts – the drama, the boat, the tree and the game – being re-used, reanimated and reiterated as new groups of participants used them as the startpoint for telling their own stories and taking their own exploratory journeys, or engaged with them for their own re-imaginings of different communities and different futures.

> *"The tree is just beautiful and so simple. I feel I could quite easily do this with some of the people I'm working with."*

> *"… would love to find a way to create a version local to where I both live and work. … I intend to look at options to develop a [local area] version of Glossopoly."*

4.1.2 INTEREST SPARKED AND IDEAS GENERATED

The legacy project activities have contributed to an increased awareness of and interest in the methods from academics and community practitioners. They have sparked ideas and enabled participants to reflect on their own practice and to think differently particularly about issues of power, participation and the value of play and creativity in their work with communities.

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Experiencing the methods has led to more awareness and understanding, and more interest in finding out more if not trying them out. After each activity exposing people to the methods and artefacts, participants reported increased understanding of the methods and an interest in learning more. We were also made aware of people wanting to spread the word within their own networks – a ripple of impact that we were not able to track but which does suggest the potential of more interest than we have been able to monitor.

> *"Even though this was about a specific place I could feel how the playing of it (Glossopoly) was making me think about local issues. I would like to play more."*

> *"New ideas for how to engage with my community."*

> *"I'm not sure how exactly I will use them yet but I know that I will keep them tucked in my mind ready to emerge when necessary!"*

> *"Because you've experienced the workshop, you're going to think about it, reflect on it, talk about it with other people/colleagues, and generate even more thoughts/ knowledge."*

The project has inspired many of those it engaged with to reflect on their practice and consider different ways of engaging – particularly taking into account their learning from exposure to the methods in relation to power, participation and the value of play. For community practitioner audiences the methods strongly appealed as extra tools for their community engagement toolkit and were seen to have a number of advantages. For academics and researchers the sessions also sparked ideas but more commonly accompanied by "how to" questions about the practical application of the methods in research settings.

> *"I learnt how powerful it can be to provide a range of items or objects from everyday life that participants can relate to and be able to tell any stories they associate with such objects."*

> *"Challenged me to think creatively beyond the boundaries of current systems"*

> *"I might use this technique to encourage co-operation, idea-sharing and community engagement."*

> *"Liked the dramatic aspect – gave scope for different skills and creativity. Will take that away and think about new ways to enliven group work."*

> *"I thoroughly enjoyed last year's workshop and though I can't strictly say I've used any of the specific practices from the day, it did influence how I understood community organising and how creative practices can tie into it, which meant I felt more comfortable using creative practices in the community setting."*

4.1.3 INDIVIDUALS INSPIRED

Many of those engaged in workshops reported feeling inspired and voiced their intention to do something different or to use the methods in some way in their work, already developing more concrete ideas before leaving the session they had attended.

Some of those attending workshops had already begun to think about how they might use the methods in their work before the end of the session – whether it be using the same techniques or activities, or adapting the ideas for their own use. At the large upscaling workshop for a mixed researcher/community practitioner audience, for instance, every participant said afterwards that they had learnt something useful and would be considering how to use what they had learnt in their work.

"Fun and inspiring."

"I would like to use these activities to get non-academics and academics from different fields to plan research together

"It would be interesting to bring a mixed group to work on each activity and think about where things went wrong locally."

"I am helping on a creative project with some employees at a corporate company, and I am going to use some of the ideas from Glossopoly around getting them to draw a place in their community and write about the emotions and connections that occur to them about that place."

"This was the first time I had taken part in any form of cultural animation and it was amazing. Out of everything I think I will use the cultural animation more as it is more applicable to my work - I will use it at events where we are listening to communities as well as inviting others to take part."

"Before coming I thought the research idea was a bit ridiculous. However, now I think it is incredible and will consider ideas for my own research."

4.1.4 NEW PROJECTS STARTED

The project has enabled a small number of practitioners to adopt the methods and try doing things differently with support

Cultural animation methods have been used in two new research projects – one looking at environmental attitudes on a university campus and one exploring experiences of ageing and identity in the LGBT community. The two lead researchers on the projects voiced excitement at trialling the methods, and saw involvement as a real opportunity to do something different that would add value and depth of insight to their research. At the time of writing this report, both projects are still ongoing and final research outputs have not been produced but both lead researchers have been positive about the overall value and impact of having used the methods

> *"I see it as an exciting opportunity as we've been tending to try and make sense of complex issues through old lenses - this is an opportunity to add to the debate and I'm keen to see if this way of working will help me get a sense of messiness and complexity as much as, if not more than clarity."*

> *"For me it's about creating a space and a stimulus for new stories. I'm particularly attracted to … co-creating knowledge; looking at methods that take a much more embodied role in the process of generating data; and breaking down power dynamics. … It's a joy to be working co-operatively on issues."*

> *"It was very helpful to us and though I'm not sure yet how it will all come together, I'm optimistic about the usefulness of the information and views we collected on the day."*

Over and above these two research projects we did not have the capacity to follow up whether or not there had been other instances where those exposed to the methods had actually tried them in their work. However, adhoc feedback received towards the end of project points to at least one or two trying to do things differently. For instance, this shared by an academic following her attendance at the all-day intensive 'scaling up' workshop event.

> *"I haven't used them (the methods and tools) for research yet, but I've certainly drawn on them in planning research and an event. I've put in a proposal … which is certainly influenced by that workshop, though we don't plan to use exactly those activities. And I am putting together a social and cultural research outreach event at a food festival which will also use arts activities, to demonstrate research into food cultures and thereafter to get interested members of the public to plan a research project with academics … Although I can't say in a clear-cut way 'I have taken XY and Z from the New Vic workshop and applied it', I have definitely found it influential and I expect to keep on drawing on what we did there for a long time to come."*

4.2 Understanding project results

Here we consider how effective the taster workshops and pilot projects have been overall as a way of creating or enhancing the legacy of the original projects, what worked well and what could have gone better, and what has been learnt about ways of creating or strengthening methodological legacy using a performative approach.

4.2.1 ENABLING PEOPLE TO DIRECTLY EXPERIENCE AND ENJOY THE METHODS DID SUCCESSFULLY GENERATE INTEREST IN THEM

Adopting a performative approach was an effective way to create legacy because it would be almost impossible otherwise to convey how the methods work. Experiencing the activities first hand and finding them enjoyable definitely built participants' interest in using them themselves.

Taking an active and experiential approach to creating legacy worked well overall because it is extremely difficult to convey with the written or even spoken word how animative and iterative methods work and to appreciate their potential and value without actually experiencing them. There is, if you like, a strong element of "seeing is believing" or perhaps more appropriately, "experiencing is believing". As one workshop participant put it:

> *"I thought the idea was stupid until we did it and now I'm inspired to do it myself."*

The power of experiencing directly what it would be like to participate in these kinds of activities is a real plus of the project's performative approach. It is rare as researchers, even as community development practitioners, that we get to 'play' and understand what it would be like to be 'the researched', or members of the community being studied or consulted. This experience gave people interesting insights into their practice and ideas for how to work differently as well as food for thought about how they engage with research participants. (Though learning came not only from immersion in the methods but also from observing cultural animateurs and facilitators at work.)

> *"I find it incredibly helpful to see other methods in action, but also to see other facilitators' approaches and learn from them."*

> *"I learnt techniques that make me consider the different communities and stages involved in a process of change. …makes me think about whose perspective I will be looking at in my PhD research."*

The project workshops created a high level of interest in and enthusiasm for the methods in part because participants found the experience not just thought-provoking but also highly enjoyable.

> *"Really thought-provoking, many thanks for an interesting afternoon." "A great way to engage with people's stories." "Unusual and fun."*

> *"I really enjoyed participating in all three and felt welcome and listened to … The three activities got me thinking differently about participation, because of how easy it felt to share in the context of them."*

4.2.2 LEARNING ABOUT THE METHODS MAY HAVE BEEN ENHANCED BY A BETTER BALANCE BETWEEN 'SHOW AND TELL' WITHIN THE PROJECT

A solely performative approach without sufficient time invested in explanation has some limitations as a legacy creation method. As a result of wanting to maximise people's direct experience of the methods, less time was given to balancing *experience* with time for *exploration and explanation*, limiting the amount of learning that was possible.

One important shortcoming of the performative approach to legacy creation adopted by the project is that those being targeted to engage with the methods experienced much but were not always given sufficient time to understand how the methods had previously been used, and then to explore how they themselves might use them. The focus on direct experience of the methods and artefacts sometimes came at the expense of context setting or post-activity reflection and discussion that might have been helpful for participant learning and as a result following workshops participants were left with unanswered questions about the methods. For instance, they were often really interested in how and where the methods have been used, raising questions like "how did you do it?", "how did this actually work in Japan?", "what have been the pros and cons of engaging in this way?" Inevitably some were left wanting more, feeling the focus had been too much on "*see how this feels*", and not enough on "*think what you could do with this*?" though broadly people accepted immersion was a priority and the best use of time if limited time was available. However, we would argue that where legacy is in part about adoption and use of the methods, the latter question matters as much as the former.

> "with more time, it would have been good to critically explore these issues -
> understand why we were doing the activities and how they related to the project"

> "it felt a quick session and it would have been great to have some more time to
> deepen the conversations/drawings. I would have been interested for some
> discussion to emerge around where the game has been used, and how it could be
> used, since I think it's a powerful tool for discussion. But in the time given, it was
> best to experience and to play the game!"

> "It would have been great to play for longer and learn more about how responses
> feed into research … How are the players' responses analysed? Interpreted? … How
> do communities respond when they take part?"

Because there wasn't separate space made for reflection participants found themselves trying to participate and reflect at the same time and this didn't always work. So, at different points in the workshops those attending were participants (doing and feeling) whilst at others they were students/researchers trying to learn something from the process to apply at a later point (learning) and we saw this cause frustrations – eg, if someone was immersed in an experience as a participant which was unfinished but they were then asked to stop and move on to the next task because of the opportunity for learning something else and thus jolted from participant into learner mode. For some the learner role was frustrating because it didn't feel real and they

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wanted to be a 'real' participant. For others the participant role frustrated when their interest was in learning more about the application of the methods. Lack of time was the most common complaint about taster workshops, alongside lack of time to discuss/reflect suggesting it might have been useful to build in time for reflective discussion as part or just after the workshops.

> *"I loved all of the boat, tree, and buttons. I felt a bit like some of our thoughts were swept aside in the rush (probably due to the compression of the workshop)."*

> *"Because we were asked to use imagined, hypothetical scenarios, there was a lack of sincerity and a lack of engagement. It might work better if it was 'real'."*

> *"Sometimes in the game though, you didn't hear what everyone had to feed back to the group. This was a shame since I felt that there was more learning from each other that could be done from this, and perhaps opportunity for more discussion to spin off from it."*

4.2.3 ADOPTION OF THESE METHODS MAY NEED MORE AND POSSIBLY DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUPPORT
Though pilot sessions worked well to take researchers a step closer to using the methods in their work, in both cases the researchers felt more support would be needed before they could confidently use the methods themselves or in partnership with a cultural animateur. The methods remain highly dependent on delivery from the New Vic team.

The original project plan was that four 'adopters' of the methods would be identified, supported through a journey to trial using the methods in a research or community engagement project, with their experience evaluated for learning purposes. However, only two pilot workshops were conducted leaving us with less evidence than we hoped to assess the efficacy of this method as a way of enabling knowledge/skills transfer to other practitioners. After the workshops both participating researchers felt if a suitable occasion arose they would like to use the methods again, but neither felt sufficiently skilled or confident about doing so and felt they would need more opportunity to learn, in both cases feeling strongly that the power of the methods remains tied in with their original team and the lead Cultural Animateur from New Vic in particular.

> *"I'd like to use the methods again (cultural animation) but I'm not a performer or an artist and it would be hard for me to facilitate. I tried to do something similar, a more engaging kind of workshop, earlier this year and it just didn't go very well. I can't see how I could do it at the moment."*

> *"I'd like to do one workshop as full participant and one as full observer. I can't tell what difference it would make to the data if I was in those different roles … in some ways I feel like I've only had a taster."*

> *"This was very dependent on Sue, on the role of the community animateur. I see a real challenge in that it could fall very flat if someone else without those amazing skills was trying to do this."*

Part 5: Conclusion

Our questions

- What conclusions can we draw about the overall success of the project in creating and enhancing a methodological legacy?

- What more could be done to continue to build and share that legacy?

5. Conclusion

Positive outcomes – learning and ripples

Overall the Legacy Project has achieved a range of positive outcomes. For the original project teams there has been considerable learning as the methods and artefacts have lived through different iterations with different groups and have continued to evolve. At the same time new 'audiences' of community practitioners and researchers in the UK, Japan, Greece and Canada have also benefited. They have been challenged in their thinking and inspired to try new techniques to engage differently, more equally and more creatively, in their work with communities.

Power and potential of the methods – creativity, co-production and change

The project has tested and confirmed much that was previously suspected about the power and potential of the methods following the original research projects, and in so doing it has enabled us to add to understanding being developed elsewhere in the field about the value of different kinds of knowledge and about creative approaches to knowledge production and 'sense-making'. Echoing work taking place elsewhere in the growing field of creative research practice, through the project we have clearly confirmed that:

> *"creative practice can be a form of research in itself … Inquiry through creative practice privileges such things as play, intuition, serendipity, imagination and the unexpected as resources for making sense."*[15]

The project has also confirmed the potential of the methods to create a more inclusive culture or practice of research where knowledge is co-produced for the benefit of the individuals and communities taking part; as well as the potential not only to change the way that researchers and others engage with communities, but also how communities themselves perceive and respond to the issues that face them.

> *"A fabulous way to explore ideas about community that results in a visual representation of our values and beliefs. At first was sceptical and at the end shocked by what a good, yet fun way of exploring our views on communities it was."*

Unanswered questions about the methods

We have identified some of the challenges of this way of working, including understanding different roles when working in a research/artist partnership; deciding what matters most in relation to process and outputs when delivering a creative research activity; and working with different ideas about what data is, who it needs to be useful for, and how it can be captured and represented. As the project draws to a close we are still left with some unanswered questions about some of the practicalities of how others might begin to use the methods in their work and how some of these challenges might best be overcome, but we have identified a number of important next steps that we believe might prove helpful in supporting more widespread take-up of the methods going forward.

Recommended next steps for a longer-term legacy

1. Produce a clearer description of the methods and how they work

We have talked in our report about the need for the project to not just "show" (the methods) but also to "tell". However, the project team has so far not always found it easy to explain clearly to others outside the project what the methods comprise and how they work. In light of growing interest in the methods, and limited time or resources to continue with a very time-intensive demonstration model, it would seem timely now to develop a clearer way of describing them and also capturing the whole set of values, principles and techniques that sit behind the methods so as to create a description of an emerging methodology or methodologies (animative and iterative) as opposed to what could otherwise, without this important information, seem a loose collection of creative tools or techniques rather than a methodology. If the project team could find a plain English way to describe the methods, one that mirrors the ethos and values that underpin the methods themselves - eg, accessible, inclusive, levelling - we believe this would considerably help future engagement and understanding of both academic and non-academic audiences.

2. Build capacity by offering advice/support on the "how to" of the methods

We identified a keen interest in practical support and advice or even training as a next step for building legacy, a real appetite for follow-up support and advice on the "how to" side of things. If resources and advice could be developed where the methods could be explained and skills and confidence built to work with them, this would support wider adoption of the methods.

"The session was engaging but could have done with a bit more context and practical ideas about how this could be used in community settings and what the outcomes are for those who take part."

"Can I please have a copy of all stages as would love to use this?"

"Can we have access to the written steps / guides to each of the activities we experienced to apply to work with all ages as appropriate?"

3. Build and strengthen the network of those interested in the methods

The project has created a genuine excitement about the methods and a growing network of people interested in and trying out the ideas. We have not been able by any means to capture the extent of the ripples of change the project has contributed to as this was outside the remit of our particular element of the project, but we are aware of a growing list of contacts keen to know more and also aware that the project team have delivered many more workshops and activities based on the methods outside of the legacy project that have had similarly positive results. Continued engagement with and networking with those interested individuals would certainly be valuable in ensuring a longer-term legacy and wider adoption of and development of the methods. Feedback from one workshop participant, an academic, suggested that the project has been and could continue to be an important contributor to not just a shift in her thinking, but a wider shift in attitudes towards the value of working in partnership between

researchers, artists and communities, and of using creative and innovative techniques to engage and conduct research in and with communities.

> *"… there is something in the air at the moment - finding ways to work with people who are coming at a problem from a different background to university researchers, to produce good research, on equal terms (or as equal as we can manage) …somehow, slowly these innovative techniques are making their way into university departments."*

As we write this report, it is exciting to conclude by noting that Keele University has recently demonstrated its own commitment to be a part of that shift in thinking about interdisciplinary and creative approaches to research with communities.

Last but not least - an important footnote - CASIC

In March 2015 Keele University launched a new Cultural Animation and Social Innovation Centre (CASIC) under the Directorship of Professor Mihaela Kelemen, the lead partner for this Legacy Project. More than 60 people attended the launch and many more again, this time from within and outside the UK, will attend the Centre's first international summit in October 2015. The Centre will see the original Connected Communities project partners and some of that growing network of people interested in the projects' methods coming together to share ideas and take forward plans for work that will continue to develop and share the methods further afield.

Among its ambitions the Centre aims:

- To develop interdisciplinary and creative solutions to complex issues based on a recognition that creativity is an equal partner in the scientific pursuit

- To foster local and global connections for action, to support social innovation and change.

For more information see https://www.keele.ac.uk/casic/

The establishment of this Centre, with these bold ambitions, gives us confidence that some of the ideas that have emerged from our work for ensuring a longer-term and living legacy might be considered even as this legacy project comes to an end. The launch of CASIC represents an exciting step for the methods and their proponents, and though not strictly within the scope of this project, in its own way the Centre stands as both a part of the original Connected Communities projects' legacy and as an exciting way to continue building legacy in the longer term.

Deb James, NCVO Research

2015

6. Notes and references

[1] http://connected-communities.org/

[2] This AHRC-funded project "*Evaluating the Legacy of Animative and Iterative Connected Communities Projects: A Three Dimensional Model of Change*" has built on the following original Connected Communities Projects: *Exploring Personal Communities: A Review of Volunteering Processes* (AH/J012238/1)*; Bridging the gap between academic rigour and community relevance* (AH/K006185/1); and *Untold Stories of Volunteering: A Cultural Animation Project* (AH/K006576/1), all led by Mihaela Kelemen in collaboration with New Vic Theatre, Newcastle under Lyme, and *Revisiting the Midpoint of British Community Studies* (AH/J006920/1) led by Martin Phillips in collaboration with Glossop Heritage Trust and High Peaks Community Arts

[3] http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/ from Charities Evaluation Services, National Council for Voluntary Organisations

[4] Impact is commonly defined as the changes (intended or unintended) attributable to a particular intervention, project, programme or policy. For instance, White, H. (2006) *Impact Evaluation: The experience of the independent evaluation group of the World Bank* (World Bank, Washington DC)

[5] For instance, Thornton, G. et al. *Post-Games Evaluation: Meta-Evaluation of the Impacts and Legacy of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games* (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2013)

6 For instance the Research Councils UK guidance (requiring work to address its Pathways to Impact framework – see http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/innovation/impacts/

[7] See for instance, Higher Education Close Up Summit 2014 "Research Making a Difference" particularly Saunders, M. *The use and usability of research outputs: making a difference*. HECUF, Lancaster University 2014 at http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/events/hecu7/docs/ThinkPieces/saunders.pdf

[8] YMCA George Williams College, http://infed.org/mobi/animateurs-animation-learning-and-change

[9] Srivastava P. and Hopwood N. *A Practical Iterative Framework for Qualitative Data Analysis*. International Journal of Qualitative Methods. 2009, 8(1) p76-84

[10] For more see http://www.cocollaborative.org.uk/about-community-organisers

[11] For more see http://localtrust.org.uk/

[12] For more see https://www.keele.ac.uk/greenkeele/

[13] For instance, Freire, P and Macedo, D. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2007) translated by Ramos, M.

[14] Kara H. *Creative Research Methods in the Social Sciences: A practical guide* (2015) p22 here referencing the work of Biggs *New media: the 'first word' in art?* (2009) In Smith, H and Dean, R (eds) Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts. 66-83. p67

[15] Kara H. (2015) p22