

Creating Living Knowledge

The Connected Communities Programme and what it tells us about university-community collaboration

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- What was the Connected Communities Programme?
- What shaped the research collaborations in the programme?
- What made these projects work
- What legacies arose?
- What did we learn for collaborative research?



What is Connected Communities?



- RCUK Programme led by AHRC – partnerships with ESRC, EPSRC, MRC, Design Council, DCLG
- 327 Projects, £30m+
- 6 months – 5 years

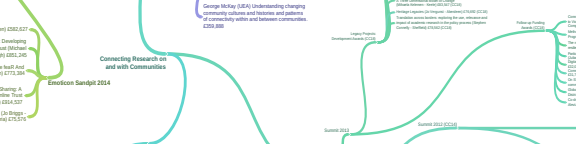
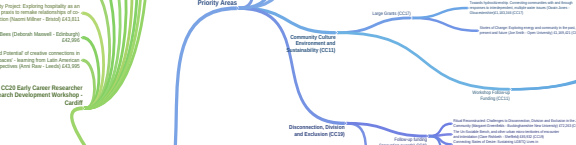
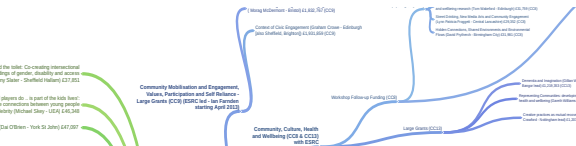
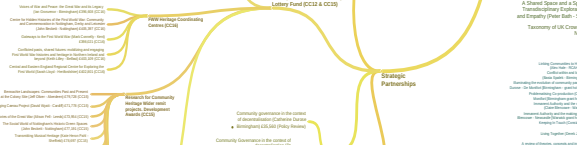
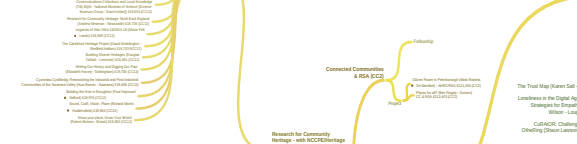
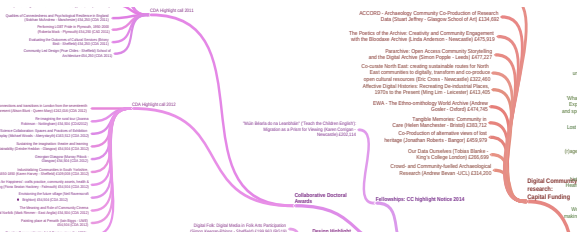
- Creative Economy
- Environment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Participatory Arts
- Methods & Theory
- Culture & Heritage
- Civil Society & Social Wellbeing
- Diversity & Dissent



- CC Projects bring together academics and community partners to share expertise and co-develop projects. Innovations include:
 - Community partners can be funded and named as Co-Investigators
 - Two stage funding processes
 - Community organisations involved in peer review processes
 - 50% CP involvement in large grant development workshops



Connected Communities Programme June 2015



- **Tangible Memories** – Folklorists, Historians, Computer Scientists, Artists, Care Home workers, Dementia Patients
- **Around the Toilet** – architects, truckers, transgender rights groups, artists,
- **Creative Citizens** – Journalism, cultural studies, hyperlocal journalist networks, OFCOM
- **Hydrocitizenship** – communities gathering around water
- **ACCORD** – Royal and Ancient Monuments Scotland, Climbers Groups



A changing context



The Bigger Picture

CC can be understood as an attempt to answer the question

'How can university and public knowledge best be combined to create better research?'

Massive experiment in interdisciplinary & transdisciplinary co-produced research between academics and communities



Arose in a contentious moment for university-society partnerships

The increasing consensus from research councils and universities that co-produced research is a 'good thing', able to solve many problems...

Supporting closer working between academics and research users to co-produce knowledge has the potential to develop new insights to the 'big questions' in society, for example climate variability and caring for aging communities. (N8/ESRC project)

British Academy 'Punching Our Weight' (2008) – towards co-production as a means of "Long term policy thinking"

"research co-production is increasingly seen as one of the most effective ways to ensure research impact' (Urban Public Health Collaborative)

Providing a high quality social science knowledge and evidence base, which is at the heart of the ESRC's mission, is fundamental to addressing a range of economic and social issues within the UK and globally. To achieve this, active two-way dialogue and collaboration between social scientists and potential users throughout the research process and beyond is crucial (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/strategicplan/impact/default.aspx>)

Uniting in Defence of Higher Education in Britain

Higher Education in the UK is experiencing a raft of reforms that are fundamentally reshaping what universities are, how they are governed and their ability to undertake their core task: the production of knowledge in all its guises.

CDBU holds that these reforms are premised on two linked shifts associated with the marketisation of higher education:

- the instrumentalisation of knowledge and its production (though mechanisms that seek to determine what the outcome of research will be)
- the privatisation of public educational assets (e.g. in which costs and benefits of education accrue to the individual who can afford it rather than to the whole community)

The CDBU does not dispute that the work undertaken in higher education institutions should be connected to other sectors of the economy. But the processes that underpin all education and knowledge are necessarily unpredictable and open-ended. So the universities that support those processes must be maintained as autonomous institutions to protect them.

FEATURED POSTS

[CDBU's Response to Green Paper](#)

LATEST BLOG POSTS

- **[CDBU Response to REF Review](#)** 30 March 2016
- **[What is the Purpose of the Teaching Excellence Framework?](#)** 21 January 2016
- **[CDBU's Response to the Green Paper](#)** 14 January 2016
- **[More Misrepresentation in the Green Paper Damages its Credibility](#)** 17 December 2015
- **[The shaky foundations of the TEF: neither logically nor practically defensible](#)** 7 December 2015

LATEST CDBU TWEETS

James Wilsdon looks at responses to REF consultation (including ours)... <https://t.co/ot764zzKuh> about 7 hours ago from [Facebook ReplyRetweet-Favorites](#)

What's going on in university-community research collaborations?

- Instrumentalisation?
- Marketisation?
- A search for better quality research?
- Democracy?
- Accountability?



Exploring the answers with and through the programme

- Survey of 320 participants
 - Interviews with over 100 participants in the programme
 - 1 Funders Forum
 - 7 projects studying legacy
 - 3 workshops
 - 2 retreats
 - 1 network of co-design projects
-
- Thanks to Dr Bryony Enright, Connected Communities Researcher on the project.



What shapes these collaborations?



- Highly diverse community and civil society sector
- Highly diverse university sector
- Previous initiatives



Drawing on different traditions of collaborative research

- Participatory Action Research
- People's History
- Responsible Innovation/Co-design
- Open/Crowd and social innovation
- Participatory Arts

What draws people to participate?

- Generalists and learners
- Makers
- Scholars
- Entrepreneurs
- Accidental Wanderers
- Advocates for a new knowledge landscape



How are projects developed?

- Ideas for projects are generated through conversations – which raises the question - who is in the social networks where these conversations happen? Over 50% of community partners responding to the survey had previously worked inside universities in some way before
- Or in formal ‘sandpit’ events - Intensive sandpit workshops over several days can discriminate against people with caring responsibilities and with disabilities



Making these projects work



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

- Risks of tokenism on both sides
- Diverse faces on a university brochure, the university logo on the funding application or report
- Getting beyond the quick fix... critical questions to ask
- For academics – what can 'research' actually offer? How do our habits of producing knowledge actually achieve their legitimacy?
- For communities – to what extent do we in fact represent 'the community'? What is our responsibility to wider networks? Who are we excluding?
- **These projects can lead to a productive crisis of identity.**
- **that leads to new roles and deeper relationships**



Recognising different accountability relations



Different approaches to collaboration emerge

- Model 1 – **‘divide and conquer’** – let’s all just do what we do well and stitch it together afterwards
- Model 2 – **‘relational expertise’** – can we learn to see the same issue through each others’ eyes?
- Model 3 – **‘remaking identities’** – can we learn each others skills and acquire each others’ knowledge so that we can take on each others’ roles?
- Model 4 – **‘colonisation and confusion’** – unsettle identities, but don’t create space for learning, remain torn and unable to address any accountabilities – fragmentation.



New roles are required

- The Catalyser
- The Integrator
- The Designer
- The Broker
- The Facilitator
- The Project Manager
- The Conscience
- The Accountant
- The Data Gatherer
- The Nurturer
- The Loudhailer
- The Diplomat



Time is essential

- To build trust
- To work through crises
- To develop an understanding of each others' expertise
- To examine and articulate theories of change at play
- To move beyond pro-forma roles and form teams



Different types of collaborative research emerge – useful to know which tradition you are working in

- Mutual Learning
- Crowd & Open
- Design & Innovation
- Correcting the Record



Legacies



These projects produce very different sorts of research

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

The 'adventure of thought' meets 'the adventure of action' (Whitehead)



Diverse legacies emerge

- **Products** – websites, guidelines, toolkits, academic papers, software, exhibitions, booklets, artworks, reports, performances
- **People** – (project partners and communities) confidence, skills, new knowledge, expertise that can be carried to different places, career development,
- **Networks** – relationships, communications structures, systemic connections
- **Concepts** – reframing of communities themselves, their history and their capacities, new languages and ideas for understanding community as a whole
- **Institutions** – new policies, strengthened practices, robust foundations and evidence for practice, new directions and opportunities
- **A new cohort** of people and institutions who have learned how to work together



- OFCOM understanding of Hyperlocal Journalism
- New historical record of the Dunbarton Stone
- New concepts of micro-sociality
- Enhanced social, cultural and symbolic capital in marginalised communities
- Theoretical development around concepts of authority
- DCLG changing approaches to community involvement in Rotherham
- Communities of Practice approaches adopted in hundreds of schools in Greece



Ongoing Issues to address



Legacy harmed by precarious employment

- Relationships underpin collaboration
- Relationships are often held by the most junior and precariously employed members of staff – who actually do the project – these are the very people least likely to remain in the institution and build the relationships over time
- The powerful legacies of collaborative research can be undermined by institutions designed around a logic of short term, just in time forms of employment, based on contracts rather than secure positions.



Risks of reproduction of inequalities

- The University-Community collaboration enters an existing context
- This context has embodied within it uneven histories, personal aspirations and intellectual traditions
- If collaboration is to address existing inequalities in this context, these need to be named and actively contested
- **There is a risk that the injunction to co-produce research can reproduce and intensify existing inequalities unless active steps are taken to mitigate this**



The mixed blessing of funding

- Strengths

- Funding is essential to democratise the research process. Small amounts of money make a big difference to who can be involved. Child care costs, travel, bus tickets all help. Work wouldn't happen without it.
- Protects projects, enables things to happen, gives symbolic value to this work – can act as a foundation for further investment

- Some issues with PROJECT-based funding

- Short term projects can disrupt core activities of smaller partner organisations
- Short term funding doesn't allow relationships to develop and risks to be taken
- Money can get in the way of friendships, partnerships and trust – and produce competition
- Money leaves the power in the hands of the universities (as currently organised)
- Money requires administration, contracts and working with university systems...

- More money is not necessarily better money – the form it takes matters – poor practices create negative legacies



So what does collaborative research mean for the university?



Is this just about instrumental capture of the university?

Collaborative research offers ...

- more freedom to academics who can respond to emerging ideas and change projects as they go, and requires a fundamental and profound reflection on what it means to do research and work with knowledge
- ... more freedom to community partners who can explore bigger questions than other funders often allow



Will it democratise and pluralise the university?

- It depends...
- on who academics work with
- on whether there is the time to make connections with groups, cultures and experiences not already well connected with universities
- on how the funding is arranged
- on whether we keep an eye on the bigger picture.

- There is no guarantee that the current drive for 'co-production' will necessarily produces more democratic research practices



Will it create better knowledge?

- Collaborative research is a method like any other – it is part of the repertoire – it should not be required to justify itself as though it were an interloper.
- However... to do it well...
- High quality collaborative research requires a knowledge of the wide repertoire of different traditions, possible approaches and their (sometimes) conflicting purposes.
- An understanding of which forms of collaboration are being used, and to what end
- A recognition that 'better' knowledge will often take many different forms



What am I working on now?

Time & Listening

Time:

What is the role of 'time' in structuring our perceptions of problems and ability to respond to them? – British Academy 'Times of a Just Transition' Programme, 14 countries, 28 researchers, 14 disciplines – looking at how Time, Temporality and Rhythm play a role in shaping (in)justice in sustainability transitions.

Listening:

Maybe it's not about voice, maybe its about learning to listen differently. We've had 50 years of saying the same thing in environmental arena – and are still facing massive biodiversity and climate crisis – so, perhaps we need to rebalance attention to developing the capacity to listen.

My work at SLU

- The Society for Transformative Conversations
- Experiments in talking, listening, learning together across difference
- First event – brought together artists, farmers, scientists, policy specialists, facilitators, cooks – for a day, around a day-long meal, to get to know each other and explore the challenges of creating new food systems.



If you would like to join a future Society of Transformative Conversations Event at SLU

Please send me an email (Keri.Facer@bristol.ac.uk) stating:

1. Why you are interested in new sorts of conversations
2. What thorny problems or new areas of your research or practice you would find it helpful to have new perspectives on
3. What expertise and knowledge – both as an academic and as a person – you would like to bring to a conversation