



Navigating participatory research: a visual guide



Published December 2022 by the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University, UK

Copyright Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University, UK

These materials may be freely reproduced and circulated for the purposes of teaching and learning. However, no part of this publication should be included in another publication or reproduced for sale without prior permission of the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action.

Photos and Figures Cait Jobson, Janelle Rabe, Zijie Lin, Sarah Banks and Sui-Ting Kong

Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Department of Sociology, Durham University, 32 Old Elvet, Durham. DH1 3HN, UK

durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/social-justice-community-action

socialjustice@durham.ac.uk

Funded by Research England

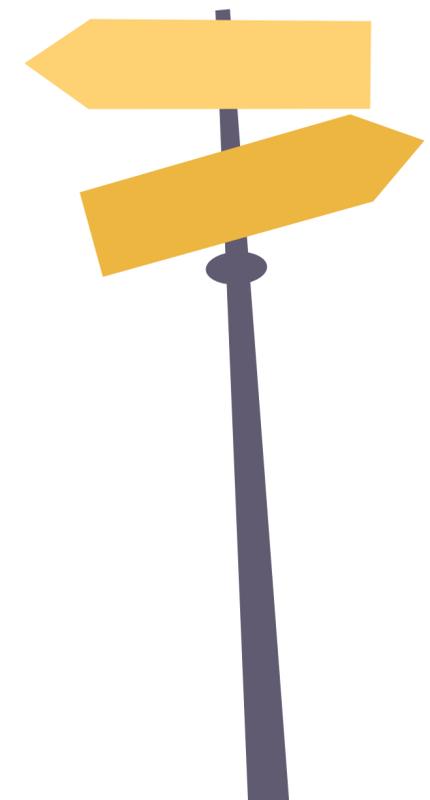
Authorship Durham Community Research Team comprises a group of academic, postgraduate and community-based researchers linked to the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action at Durham University.

The team for this project was coordinated by Sui Ting Kong, with Cait Jobson, Zijie Lin and Janelle Rabe (Postgraduate researchers); Nelli Stavropoulou (visual facilitator); Sue Shaw (Community Chair of CSJCA); Gaynor Trueman and Yvonne Moffitt (community researchers and members of CSJCA steering group); Sarah Banks, Andrew Russell, and Andrew Orton (Directors and Deputy Directors of CSJCA)



Contents:

Acknowledgements	04
Centre for Social Justice and Community Action	05
Participatory Research, Innovation and Learning Labs (PRILL)	06
The journey of participatory research	08
Glossary	10
Pack your bag and get ready!	12
How to use the guide	14
Island of initiating engagement and maintaining relationships	19
Island of shared understanding	26
Island of input and resources	36
Island of process and ownership	43
Other useful tools	49
Appendix 1 - Making your own island worksheets	50



Acknowledgements:

This Visual Guide would not be thinkable without the contribution of participants in the Participatory Research Innovation and Learning Labs (PRILL). They shared their experiences, views and knowledge, navigating the complex reality of doing participatory research. Many also developed innovative practices for addressing common or discipline-specific challenges when doing their own participatory research projects. We owe Abby Kinchy, Cait Jobson, Catrin Noone, Deborah Riby, Katherine Arrell, Kelly Smith, Nick Rosser, Gaynor Trueman, Yvonne Moffitt, Nelli Stavropoulou, Pablo Munoz-Roman and Sui-Ting Kong many thanks for contributing their examples in this visual guide.

Consolidating the learning in PRILL and translating that into this visual guide rely on the enthusiasm and commitment of the production team, coordinated by Sui-Ting Kong with Alison Duffell, Andrea Lambell, Andrew Orton, Andrew Russell, Cait Jobson, Gaynor Trueman, Nelli Stavropoulou, Pablo Munzo-Roman, Sarah Banks, Sue Shaw, Yvonne Moffitt and Zijie Lin. They continuously contributed to the content and design of the visual guide, and to ensure it is as engaging, useful and accessible for as many participatory researchers as possible.

We also want to deliver our gratitude to Melissa Kirby from Curious12 for her outstanding creative efforts put into producing this visual guide.



Centre for Social Justice and Community Action:

The Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (CSJCA) has been promoting community-engaged and participatory research for over 12 years. We run courses and public events for community partners, early career researchers and academics from different disciplines about Participatory Action Research (PAR)/Participatory Research (PR).

Many Centre members are also committed participatory researchers, and over the years they have shared numerous journeys with local and international communities experiencing poverty, structural and interpersonal violence, and marginalisation based on aspects of their social positions, such as age, sexuality, ethnicity and ability.

When PR was a narrower road less travelled, the Centre insisted on building ethical and impactful knowledge, with social justice and people's wellbeing at its heart.

Nowadays, with more people joining us on the PR journey and more resources invested in ensuring impact and promoting participatory research, the Centre embarked on a project called Participatory Research Innovation and Learning Labs (PRILL) to stimulate and support learning and innovation in PR.

PRILL was supported by UKRI Research England, Participatory Research funding. The full report of the project can be found [here](#).



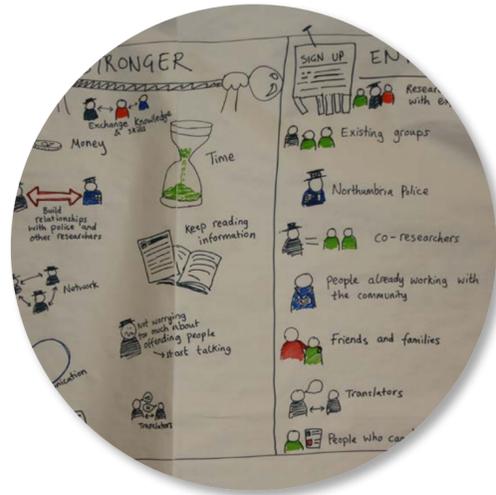
Participatory Research Innovation and Learning Labs (PRILL)

PRILL aimed to build on and map the range of experiences, expertise, aspirations, good practice and challenges for participatory research at Durham; and to create a shared yet diverse space where novel, challenging and complex approaches, methods and problems could be worked on collaboratively by groups of practising participatory researchers.

The programme comprised five events:



Initial Event
Making Research
More Participatory (online)



Learning Lab I



Learning Lab II



Innovation Lab I¹
Mapping – to create useful
landscape representations of
people’s diverse understanding
and experiences of PR



Innovation Lab II²
Plotting Your Route – for sharing
tips and wisdoms to travel safely
and happily

Participatory Research Innovation and Learning Labs (PRILL)

The PRILL team identified four major areas of challenges and opportunities in doing PR, based on the analysis of experiences and views collected in the initial event and learning labs:



Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships



Shared Understanding



Input and Resources



Process and Ownership



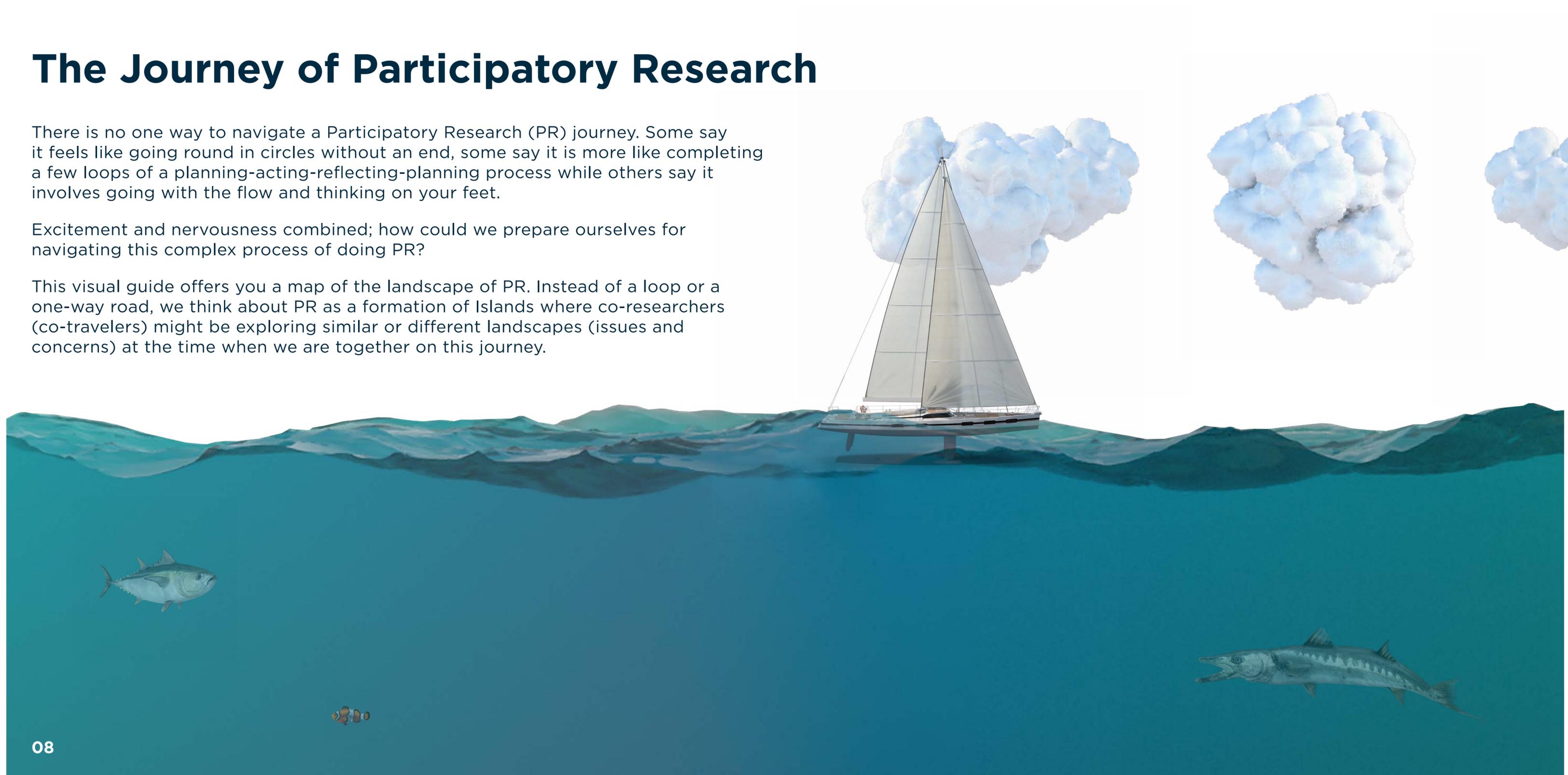
These topics, underpinned by ubiquitous power dynamics and social inequalities, were further explored in the subsequent Innovation Labs. The full report of the PRILL project can be found [here](#).

The Journey of Participatory Research

There is no one way to navigate a Participatory Research (PR) journey. Some say it feels like going round in circles without an end, some say it is more like completing a few loops of a planning-acting-reflecting-planning process while others say it involves going with the flow and thinking on your feet.

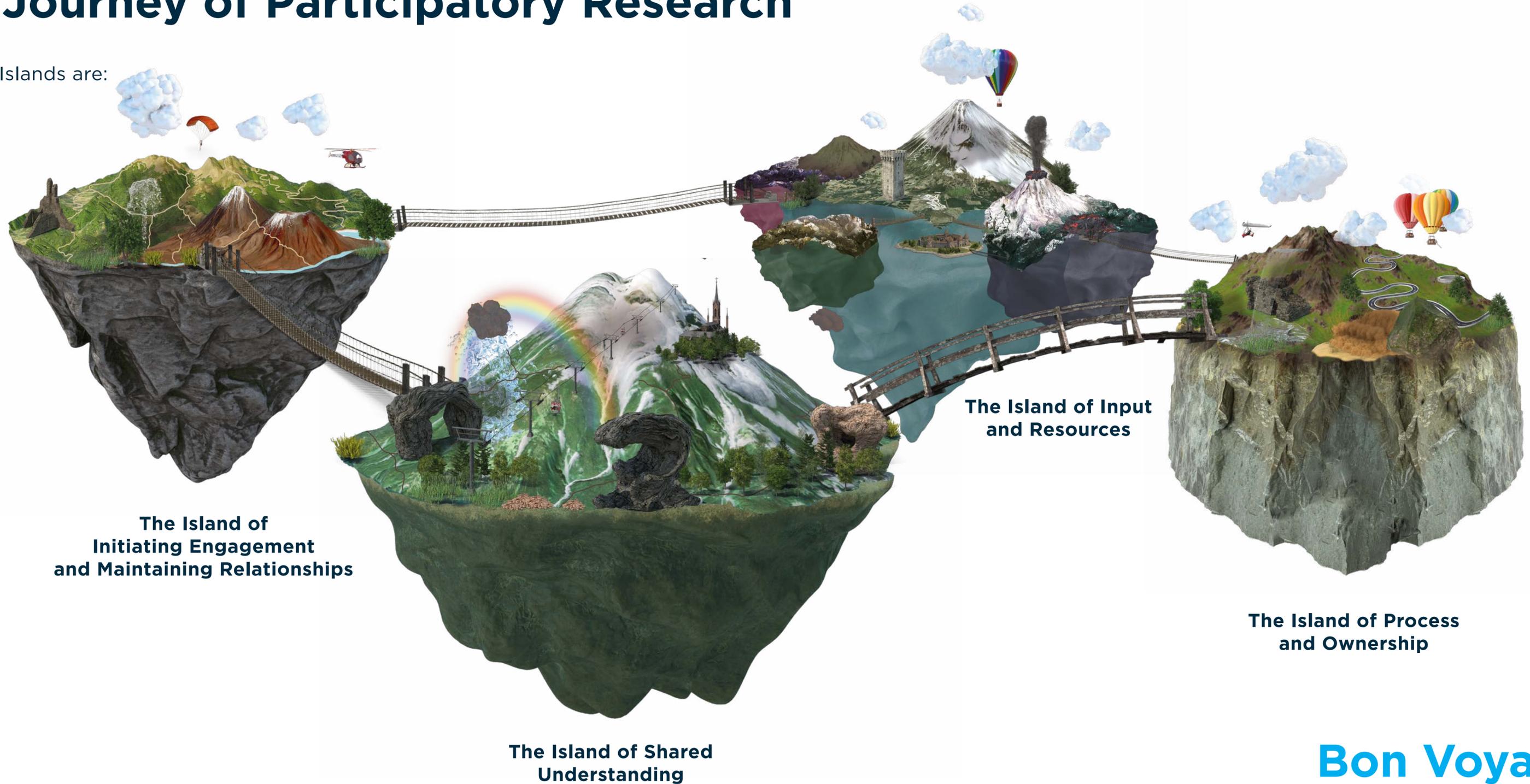
Excitement and nervousness combined; how could we prepare ourselves for navigating this complex process of doing PR?

This visual guide offers you a map of the landscape of PR. Instead of a loop or a one-way road, we think about PR as a formation of Islands where co-researchers (co-travelers) might be exploring similar or different landscapes (issues and concerns) at the time when we are together on this journey.



The Journey of Participatory Research

These PR Islands are:



Glossary

We invite you to think of the different PR elements as islands - each one being a unique landscape with hidden natural resources to be explored and support your future explorations.

The notion of PR as a journey serves both as concept as well as a methodological approach; opening up the possibilities of different ways of travelling; across diverse landscapes and with different routes and ways to go from one island to another.

Island

Participatory research may take many forms and can be applied in different disciplines. What is appropriate in terms of methods depends on the context in which it occurs and most importantly on the needs of the community members whose lives are being explored.

Understanding PR experiences from the perspective of 'islands' can better support our reflection on the different, yet equally important, elements of PR journeys. There are four islands (p. 19-48) to be visited and explored as part of one's PAR journey.

Each island is unique as it has its own ecosystem and is defined by specific characteristics including core values, challenges, and learning opportunities.

Although islands exist as separate entities, they are all interconnected via different routes as part of the PAR archipelago - a formation of islands that can provide both refuge and space for innovation. Within the PR archipelago each island is re-imagined as a space for transformation, co-creation, and collaboration.

Journey

Understanding PR trajectories as journeys invites us to make sense of PR as a process as well as a destination - one that is yet to be discovered.

PR has been described as one of the most 'adventurous' research processes, defined by precarity, 'messiness', and openness towards the unexpected. Therefore, embracing PR as a journey opens up the possibility for something new; a trajectory that is yet to be drawn and a commitment on producing something unique to the interests, needs, and experiences of its 'travelling crew'.



Glossary



We encourage you to map out your own experiences using the PRILL resources (see Appendix 1) and invest in your imagination and creativity while completing your PAR journey(s).

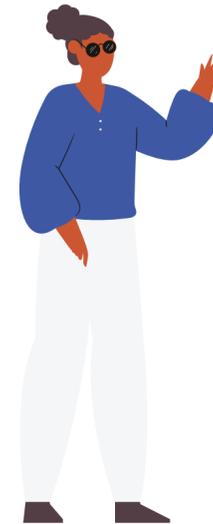
Mapping

Mapping has been widely applied in community research settings as a participatory method to map out and make sense of important personal and collective experiences.

Mapping can support the visualisation of our (un)shared experiences for self- and collaborative exploration and analysis and foster a sense of ownership and participation. Its tangible nature allows the revelation of ideas, assumptions, and opinions, and can encourage learning and sense-making of the world through bodily,

sensory and interactive engagement with 'art-making'.

Mapping enables co-researchers to connect with each other's experiences and express differences in a less confrontational way, while it invites uncertainty, a sense of adventure, and excitement for what has yet to be discovered or encountered. The basic principle of mapping is not to suggest the 'best route' but to facilitate one to explore and expand their experience and imagination of possibility using artistic symbols, metaphors, and storytelling.

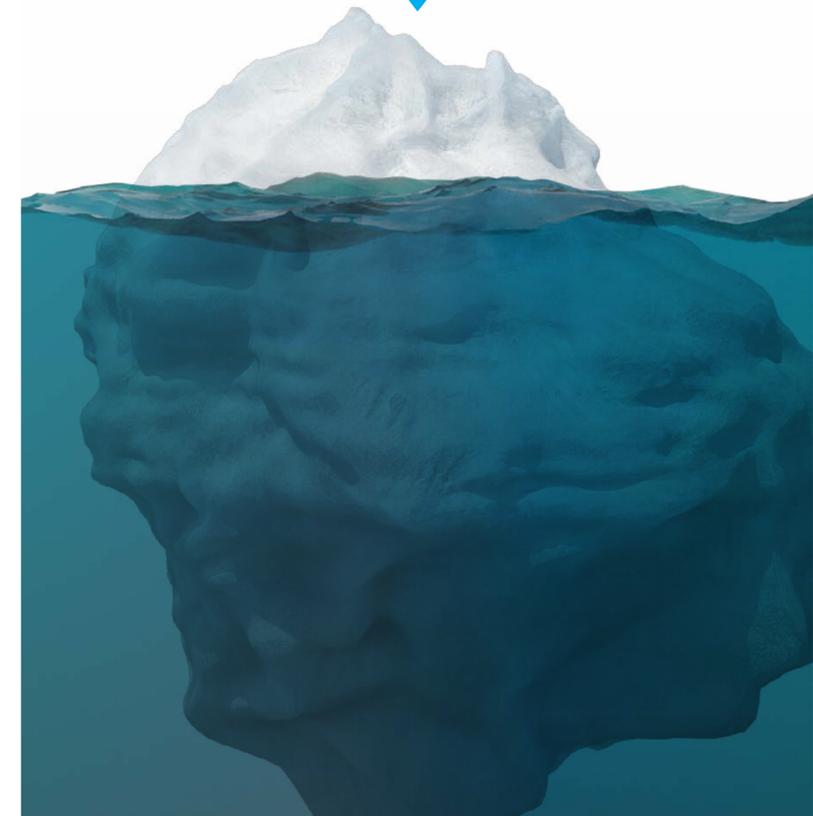


Metaphor

We use metaphors a lot in our everyday life – a financial blackhole, a tip of an iceberg and a bumpy journey – because they are powerful in capturing and extending people's imaginations and sentiments in ways that plain words otherwise cannot express.

Metaphors are multi-faceted, which means they can simultaneously create complexity, offer clarity, make sense of what is yet to be revealed, and support different ways of knowing and feeling. In doing so, metaphors can function as bridges supporting the development of a common language that facilitates exchange of different viewpoints and experiences.

If you are using the mapping exercise as part of your work with diverse communities, bringing in metaphor as part of your conversation will help you come together as a group and find a shared language.



Pack your bag and get ready!

Shared values and principles:

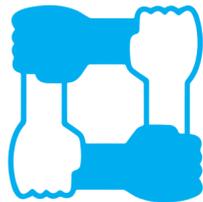
Social justice



Care and Compassion

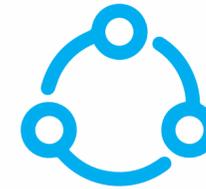


Diversity and inclusivity



Good practice:

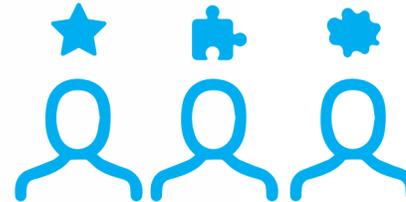
Shared decision making



Regular check-in with individuals



Acknowledge and work with differences in views, capacities, and preferences



Pack your bag and get ready!

Other CSJCA toolkits:

[Co-inquiry toolkit. Community-university participatory research partnerships: co-inquiry and related approaches, by Beacon North East \(2011\)](#)

[Community-based participatory research: A guide to ethical principles and practice \(2012\)](#)

[Community mentoring toolkit: Working with socially excluded households \(2013\)](#)

[Community toolkit. A guide to working with universities on research projects, by Beacon North East \(2012\)](#)

[Dilemmas cafés: a guide for facilitators \(2015\)](#)



[Ethics guide for community-based participatory research \(2012\)](#)

[Mapping impact together: Alternative approaches to impact in co-produced research \(2015\)](#)

Performing ethics (2014):

- [Performing ethics: Using participatory theatre to explore ethical issues in CBPR](#)
- [Forum Theatre: Participatory ethics through participatory theatre](#)

[Research in Transition: Developing Guidelines for Activist-Academic Research Collaborations \(2013\)](#)

[Resources for PAR - a 2-page overview of CSJCA resources \(2015\)](#)

How to use this guide

Extending the notion of 'journey', this guide will introduce you to the four major islands that you will inevitably pass through or even get stuck on while navigating your PR explorations:



The Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships

...is often considered as the foundation of all PR journeys. Without exploring this island in a sufficient depth, it might make it very challenging to plot your way through other islands. This is both a point of departure as well as a recurring destination that you will revisit while maintaining important relations with your co-travellers.

How to use this guide

Extending the notion of 'journey', this guide will introduce you to the four major islands that you will inevitably pass through or even get stuck on while navigating your PR explorations:



The Island of Shared Understanding

...is one that you will come back to very often in your PR journey. It is an Island where you need to learn each other's languages and try to communicate clearly with both travellers and islanders.



How to use this guide

Extending the notion of 'journey', this guide will introduce you to the four major islands that you will inevitably pass through or even get stuck on while navigating your PR explorations:



The Island of Input and Resources

...is an archipelago (a collection of islands) featuring contested water territories and boundaries of guarded islands. Each island in the archipelago has its unique culture and systems, but efforts have been made in the past to ensure friendly exchanges and even collaboration across islands is possible.

How to use this guide

Extending the notion of 'journey', this guide will introduce you to the four major islands that you will inevitably pass through or even get stuck on while navigating your PR explorations:



The Island of Process and Ownership



...is one that has varied morphologies – it is mountainous and rocky, with cliffs and sand. The weather on this island is very unstable, so get yourself prepared for last minute changes of plans. While this island may sometimes appear very rocky, it is equally inviting and open to different kinds of travelling experiences. Good luck!

How to use this guide

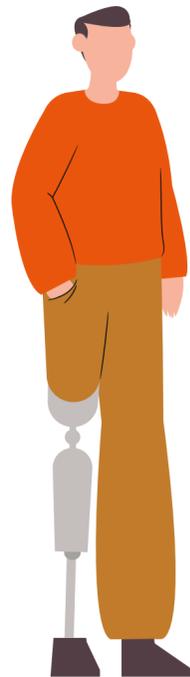
For each island, we will provide you with a map that includes keys to (1) help you learn about the values/principles for travelling safely; (2) understand the features of the island; and (3) be prepared for potential challenges as you plot your way through the island. Travelling tips are provided at the end of each island section.

Remember there is no one way to travel on and across these islands and they are not organised in any fixed order. Each route is different and unique to the group of travellers, their backgrounds, and experience. This guide does not offer a final 'travel guide'; instead:



We do...

...encourage you to plan and reflect on your own PR journey with the help of the maps and travel tips.



We do...

...invite you to share the maps with your co-researchers to plan your journey together.



We don't...

...provide a step-by-step guide for your PR journey.

Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships

As you begin your participatory research journey, you will first encounter the Island of **Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships**.

It is a mountainous island surrounded by a stream where people tend to gather. You can take different paths to reach different parts of the island where you might meet various groups, team up with them and discuss the next steps of your journey.

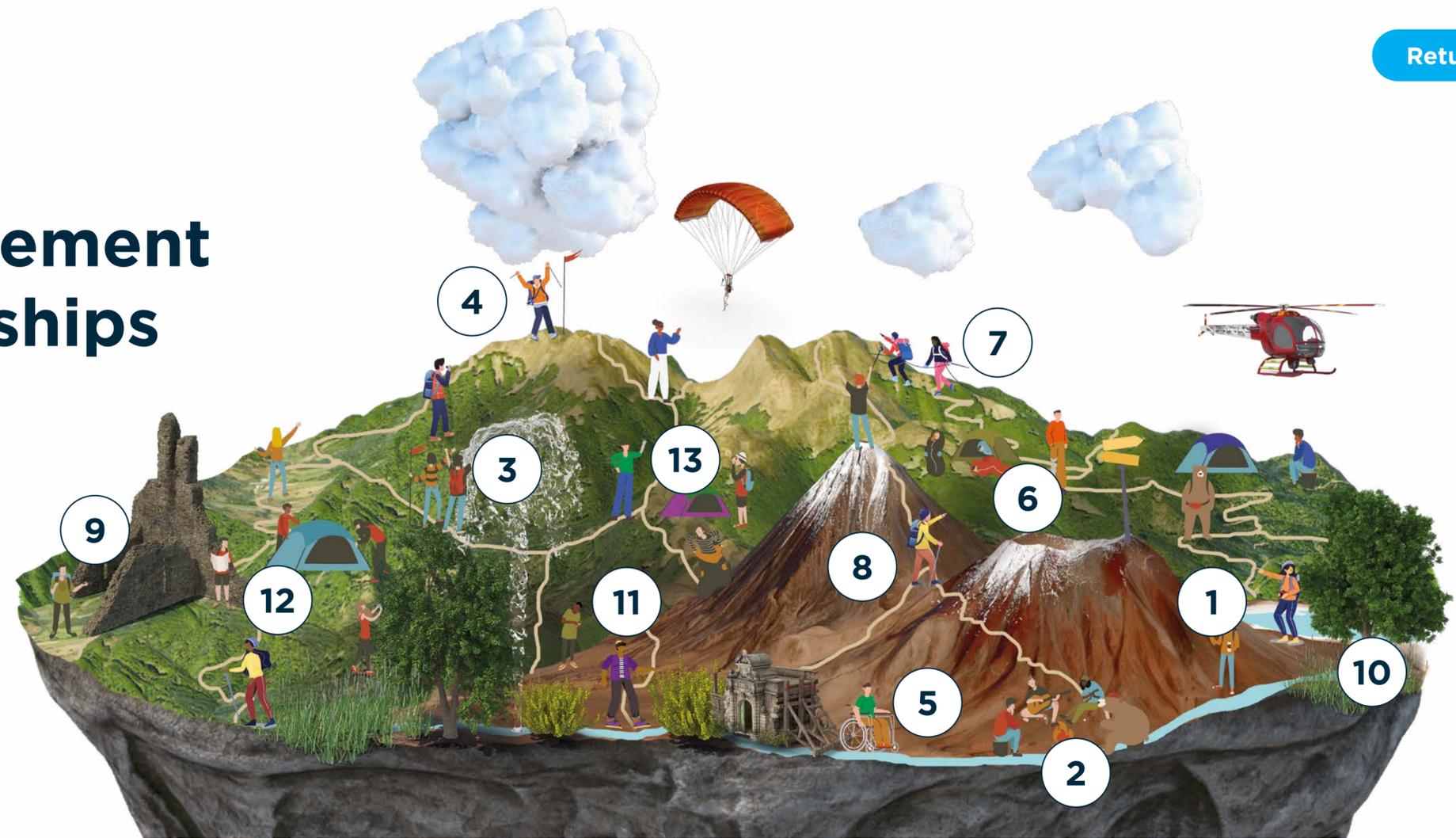
Some of these paths are more traveller-friendly than the others, whereas some rocky terrains can be challenging for people to make the climb. We all play a part in making sure the path is as inclusive and accessible as possible for individuals with different needs and experiences. The mountain also has rest stops in case anyone wants to pause and have some rest.

Teams are expected to check on those who stop, to see if those stopping need support or would like the team to return back to them after continuing to hike on. These teams recognise that everyone may have different end points on their journey, whilst every team member is valuable.

Often, we need some friendly and helpful guides, supportive teammates and maybe even a rescue team who will keep everyone safe and well supported in the journey. As we climb up with our shared kindness and compassion for each other, you can rest assured that we will enjoy the climb and the view at the top.



Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships



Values/principles

1. Sustainability and persistence.
2. Teamwork, collaboration and communication.
3. Flexibility in engaging with people.
4. Proactiveness.
5. Inclusivity and accessibility.
6. Kindness and compassion.

Features

7. Establishing relationships.
8. Mountainous terrains, with different hiking paths and rest stops (to improve accessibility).
9. Looming shadows (the pressure of deadlines and other commitments) and the rescue team (how teamwork could bring people out of the shadows and into the light).
10. Safeguards on the beach (protecting ideas and the relationships from being washed away).

Cautions

11. Imbalances of power and finding ways to involve diverse people equally.
12. The tension between sustainable engagement and limited resources.
13. Negotiating the meaning of participation and appropriate expectations.

Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships

What should I do when forming a research group with community partners?

Support the creation of a research group with diverse membership. (2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13)

Demonstrating passion, care and love for the community is key to relationship and rapport building with diverse partners. Sharing a vision for social change, prioritising practical outputs over academic outputs, making oneself available for partners and taking initiatives to address power differences in the collaboration can take the partnership a long way.

Exploring the **potential benefit** of participation at the earliest possible time, and adopting a **democratic leadership model**, such as a collective decision-making mechanism, culture of listening and deliberation and ways to ensure marginalised/dismissed voices are heard, can motivate co-researchers to engage in the process.

Example: *A community researcher, collaborating with a Durham University academic to co-produce a PR project in prison, reflected on how the project's initial criteria for participation had to be revised to ensure that all interested participants were able to contribute across various project stages and in different capacities. As the community researcher explained: 'We recognise that not everyone will be able to attend all workshops. Therefore, we need to ensure that they have opportunities to be involved as much as they want and in important stages, such as sharing the intended work plan, offering their opinions and feedback to develop it further and listening to their stories before they are released.'*



Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships

How can a team be built in a participatory research project?

Agree on core values and ways of working. (2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13)

Early in a participatory research project, it is important to agree on some 'ground rules' and core values for working in participatory ways (see also the **Island of Shared Understanding**). This often involves discussions about

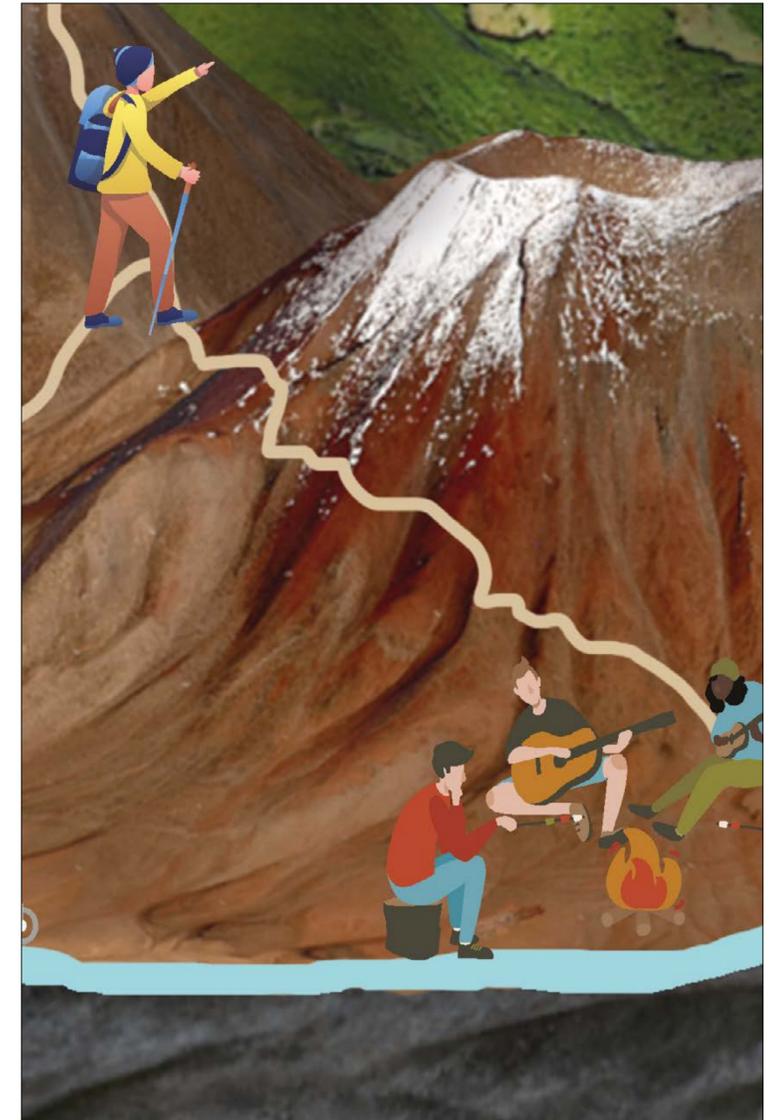
- Who should be included (membership)? ...and why?
- What commitments are expected from each member?

The level of **flexibility and permeability of the membership** will need to be explored at the earliest possible time and revisited along the way (see also the **Island of Process and Ownership**).

To **balance control and support**, the initiating researcher(s) will need to ensure the agenda and knowledge are relevant to the concerns and experiences of the team and the wider community. This will require time for careful planning, open conversations about what is required in terms of support, the expected level of control/guidance by the initiating researcher(s) and how decision-making responsibilities will be shared across the group.

Example:

Through volunteering at a local lunch club, a community researcher realised the importance of inviting participants to experience the preparation of food, space, serving, and clearing up to create a 'beginning to end' robust inclusive lived experience. People came together around one big table to share food and conversation to challenge experiences of exclusion and loneliness. People passed food around making sure everyone had what they needed. To preserve and then replicate this positive environment in the PR project, the community researcher suggested holding sessions after lunch, keeping the same big table as the 'home base' for the project. Here everyone had access to a space which silently spoke of togetherness, sharing, and equality. This process created a natural habit-forming rhythm.



Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships

What to do to generate common concerns?

Work together as team to identify important issues. (2, 5, 7, 10, 11)

Ongoing conversations for **exploring shared and unshared concerns** can benefit working collaboratively. Identifying questions that the members are already asking themselves, in relation to the issues concerned, will help develop **generative questions** for the group to explore their collective and unique experiences with the issues and their wisdom for addressing them.

Example:

In a participatory research project that involved working with women who had experienced coercive control, generative questions were created around victim-survivor identities and mothering. Who are victims and who are survivors? Can people be both or neither?

Whose responsibility is it to protect children in the context of domestic violence? Why women? Would people practise parenting differently without domestic violence?

It is important to note that acceptance of diversity in opinions and experiences must be maintained, so that no one feels left out in the conversation. To empower and encourage people to participate, it is important that certain team members **constantly check in with other members** to ensure discussions are accessible, action plans are inclusive, and the decision-making process sufficiently considers minority voices.

How can we draw on each other's strengths?

Map out individual interests, strengths and needs. (1, 8, 10)

Working together as a team also involves **understanding and appreciating each other's strengths and concerns**. Through group activities/workshops, facilitator(s) can use asset mapping to enable group members to find out who possesses what skills and resources, supporting conversations on what is feasible to do as a group and the division of labour in various tasks. **Asset mapping** helps foster a sense of shared responsibility especially important when other team members, at times, find it hard to fulfil expectations or carry on in the participatory research journey.



Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships

How to work in partnership with the wider community?

Provide opportunities for collaboration and dialogue. (1, 2, 13)

Producing knowledge that is actionable and has potential for making change in real life requires engagement with the wider society. Good practice includes:

- **Identifying existing partners and mechanisms** that generally work towards the same/similar goal(s) of the participatory research team.

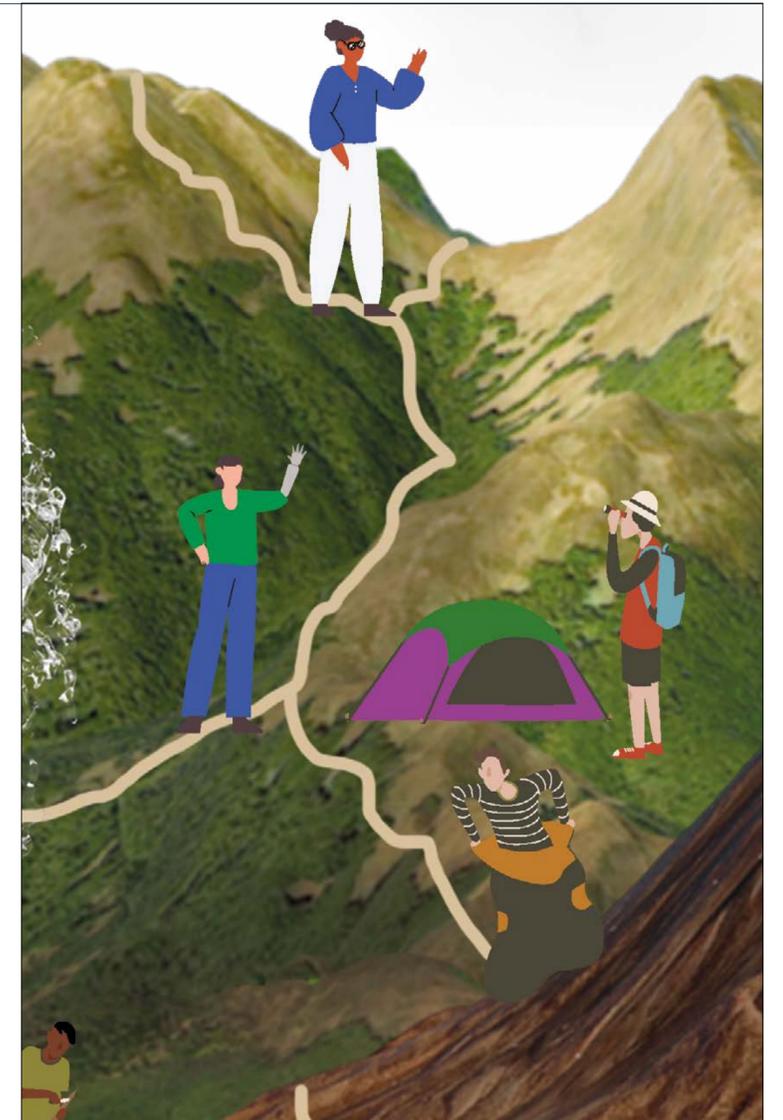
- **Matching action orientations** of the research team and the identified partners/mechanisms will create synergy across different groups in the wider community, hence providing stronger possible allies for collective action if needed.

- Crucial to this process is that everyone is realistic about what can be achieved and listens to team members' concerns that might well be different from their own.

Feeling overwhelmed or unable to carry on?

Collectively agree on support systems. (1, 5, 6, 8, 11)

No one can complete the participatory research journey without the support of others. Everyone can experience personal circumstances that might limit their capacity to participate. The **'rescue team'** comes in to share project responsibilities when someone in the research group requires a break or is in a dark place in their life. Some academic researchers said that they had formed a **collective** with those who are doing participatory research in similar areas to support each other (see also the **Island of Process and Ownership**).



Pause, reflect and get equipped



Packing

- What values, principles and goals do you already share?
- What expertise and skills do you have in the group?
- What kind of relationships have you built with each other?

Repacking

- What do you need more of in terms of expertise and skills to archive the common goals and tackle any concerns?
- Have you been checking in with everyone about how comfortable they are in speaking up or making decisions?

Unpacking

- What differences in values, principles and goals do you have in the group that need to be understood more?
- Are there any conflicts of interest or power differences that need to be attended to?

Toolbox

- **Co-inquiry toolkit. Community-university participatory research partnerships: co-inquiry and related approaches, by Beacon North East (2011).**



Island of Shared Understanding

The **Island of Shared Understanding** starts with mountains and cobbled ground to highlight respectively the challenges ahead and the uneven and inaccessible paths to get there. There are dark spaces and shadows which represent the (academic, social and political) narratives that often problematise communities, shut down unheard voices and see PR as inferior knowledge. The Island of Shared Understanding has created opportunities for bridging the gap between diverse communities.

Before you arrive, you are invited to study the islanders' and fellow travellers' languages and be open to learning from them and their cultures once you get there. The Island is inhabited by warriors who are both vulnerable and strong, and are led by values of openness, honesty, and transparency. Along your journey up the mountains, you will come across a castle which from a distance may look scary and gothic, but as you approach you will see its beauty as a red carpet invites you into its cosy, welcoming inside space (symbolising the collaborative experience of PR).

There are cable cars and footpaths which make the journey up PR mountains more accessible. Online tours and communication are maintained to enable participation of those who cannot participate in the physical tours. The weather and seasons on the Island of Shared Understanding changes over time and sometimes within the same day, but the islanders are motivated, passionate and full of hope. On the Island of Shared Understanding, the adventure never stops. Keep exploring and learning from each other!



Island of Shared Understanding



Values/principles

1. Grounded on mutual experience and respect.
2. Values of openness, honesty, transparency and passion.
3. Hope and progress.
4. It is important to acknowledge privileges and listen to and amplify others' voices.

Features

5. Learning each other's languages through shared experiences.
6. Bridges and bridge builders that cross the gap between academia and communities with PR through building a common language (e.g. shared metaphors).
7. Construction work including building lifts, flattening footpaths, creating online spaces and beyond to make the paths accessible.
8. The island is both online and in person.
9. Hiking boots are required to traverse the terrain.

Cautions

10. The landscape might seem scary and intimidating at the beginning (The Castle of PR may appear as a forbidding shelter – intimidating outside but really cosy inside).
11. Academic clumsiness: inaccessible language, problematic narratives about communities and their use of power to shut down the voices of unheard people.
12. Mind the real and imagined gap between 'us' and 'them'.
13. Difference in abilities to be heard, to travel in different terrains and to access PR.
14. Changing weather and seasons.

Island of Shared Understanding

How do I prepare my mind to be open?

Let go of preconceptions.

(1, 2, 4, 9, 12, 14)

Co-researchers may join a PR project with preconceived ideas about the topic and each other based on their personal experiences. To come into the research with an open mind (see also the **Island of Process and Ownership**), it is important to constantly check our assumptions and potential prejudices toward each other. Some good practice involves timetabling activities for revisiting our assumptions and the experiences on which they are based, and to create a friendly environment for examining the validity of our perceived barriers in communication.

Example:

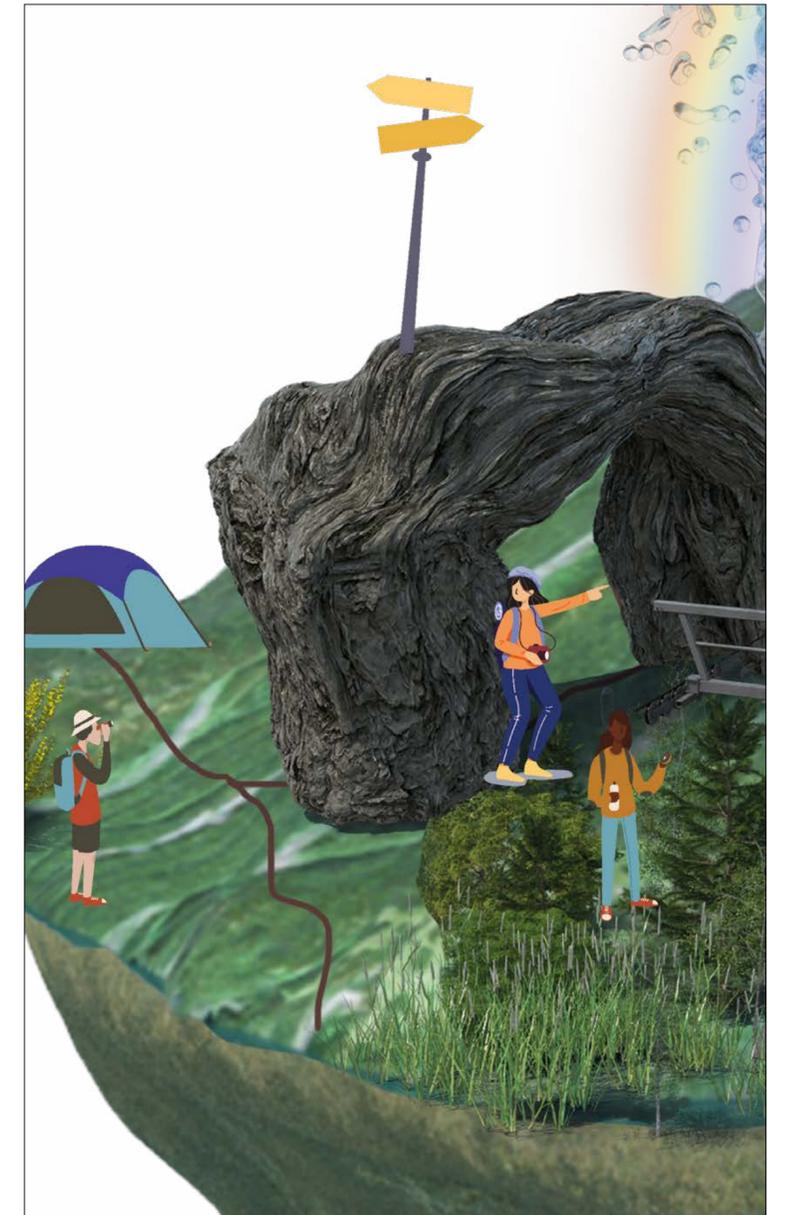
In a research project on belonging at the university, researchers assumed there would be difficulty gaining access and getting University decision makers on board. Instead, the enthusiasm from the top pleasantly surprised them. Their advice: “Be brave! Just ask”.

How do I create the space to be open?

If the participatory research journey is taken with an open mind, it is much easier to be flexible to the changing weather and seasons. By flexible we mean to be more adaptable, ready to revise our understandings and change our plans (see also the **Island of Input and Resources**). This includes being understanding towards changing feelings and experiences due to life circumstances that might mean plans have to change (empathy). The right level of transparency around self-disclosure, observed interactions and pre-existing dynamics involving others outside of the group will also be needed to navigate changes in PR.

Example:

A PhD researcher carrying out a participatory project with older people in a day centre had to be flexible during the Covid-19 pandemic due to day centre closures, death and loss, and fluctuating health of co-researchers. By having empathy, listening to people’s experiences and having an open mind, the researcher was able to ensure empathetic solidarity. The project continued successfully through this persistence.



Island of Shared Understanding

Why is the language we use so important?

Language can help us find common ground. (5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13)

The language we use should convey values of respect and care, which are a big part of the ethos of participatory research, taking into consideration the contexts of those we are working with. Careful selection of the words we use throughout the project is crucial, otherwise we risk othering people by using inaccessible language, making sweeping generalisations or problematising communities by emphasising differences rather than talking about ‘connectedness’.

There are many vocabulary debates and identity politics within different groups. So, it is important to check with members of communities how they want to be referred to and how their experiences should be represented.

Example of vocabulary debates:

- *There are debates around the language of ‘people first’ or ‘diagnosis first’. For example, talking about ‘autistic people’ or ‘people with autism’.*
- *People have criticised the use of the terms ‘benefits’ or ‘social security’ when many on Job Seekers Allowance don’t feel much benefit or security.*
- *Talking about ‘children at risk’ may problematise the individual child rather than saying ‘children who need support’.*
- *In LGBTQ+ communities, some perceive the word ‘queer’ as a homophobic slur in the way it was first used, whilst others may have reclaimed the word.*



Island of Shared Understanding

How can I make the language that I use accessible?

Good practice for making language as accessible as possible is to

- Check the choice of words. Can this be understood by all co-researchers? Are difficult terms explained properly?
- Check understanding. This can be done verbally, by asking if anyone needs clarification, but also by taking stock of non-verbal indications such as facial expressions.
- Give sufficient time for translating languages across different worlds. Translation can be enacted through ‘bridge builders’ who have experience of being and working with both communities and academics to ensure language accessibility and mutual understanding.

Example:

A PR project hoping to collaborate with women at a female prison will be exploring support for those who identify with resettlement pathway 9 (specific pathway of support for sex workers). Language used regarding this subject can be complex; both historically in terms of having previously employed derogatory terms as well as in relation to current self-identification, as some people might not describe themselves as sex workers due to the various roles within the adult industry or due to exploitative experiences. To address these complexities and find a ‘shared language’, the research team will be holding an introductory session with the women to discuss preferred language, name the project and map out the different roles and experiences. Having this session will create space to work through assumptions and support ownership of the project. In doing so, the research team hopes that this will create a common ground to safely hold important discussions and to ensure that the women feel part of a discussion that is often held without them.



Island of Shared Understanding

How do I deal with conflicts or tensions around approaching the project?

Allow space for dialogue and diverse viewpoints. (1, 2)

Although co-researchers are pulled together by shared passions, values and visions for transforming the world, there are always **disagreements or tensions**. For example, some might be inclined to idealism, some to pragmatism. There needs to be attention to constructive dialogue towards these tensions/ conflicts. It is vital to

- **Acknowledge these different positions** as everyone will be coming from different perspectives and life experiences.
- Space should be given to **air any disagreements**, but also for **parking the disagreements** if they cannot be resolved at the time. Taking coffee breaks or swapping groups might provide breathing space for co-researchers involved in an intense conversation or disagreement.

- It is important to avoid dichotomous thinking but to **identify space for middle ground**. For example, focusing on how barriers to equal participation may be pushed within existing systems is not necessarily a compromise but can be a merger of idealism and pragmatism.

Example:

A group of academic researchers ([Project Team \(durham.ac.uk\)](http://ProjectTeam.durham.ac.uk)) carried out a participatory project that looked at landslide hazards and risks in Nepal post-earthquake. They constantly had the need to navigate between the two sometimes competing ideals of doing 'rigorous science' and working with local communities - by seeking the right amount of pragmatism. The project opened a new observatory to look at areas at risk of landslides, but that also created worries among members of the local community who asked questions such as 'is this area more dangerous?' or 'why aren't you covering my

neighbourhood?'. The researchers had to be aware of the emotional experiences of the locals but be pragmatic as it would be impossible to monitor everyone's homes. Instead, they got people to take photographs of their local areas so that they could compare quantitative observatory data with qualitative photography and a balance was made between hard science and local concerns.

Reflecting on and **remembering our common goals** may allow us to reset and continue to work together. With shared goals and values, how can we put our differences aside to achieve impact?



Island of Shared Understanding

How do I recognise that we all know different but equally useful things?

Include different ways of producing and sharing knowledge across the PR team.
(4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13)

There are **diverse ways of making sense of the world**, such as drawing, writing or talking. While some co-researchers may have personally experienced the issues being researched, others may have practical knowledge gained through working out creative solutions to those challenges. It is important to **appreciate and support these different ways of knowing**.

Example:
In the same co-produced project engaging women in prison who identify with resettlement pathway for sex workers the research team plans to hold creative workshops that will include mapping activities such as 'Rivers of Life' and creative writing, to allow different ways of producing and presenting data. As the community researcher explains, this is important as this will enable 'participants to share their stories in ways that they feel is best expressed for them using a variety of materials and media but without having to only describe their experiences in words, which some may find it hard to do.' The data will also feed into the development of the training package for prison staff, which the residents will also co-deliver to inform need.



Island of Shared Understanding

How do we share our understandings and knowledge in ways that can be useful to all of us?

These experiences and **ways of knowing can be represented in different ways.** For example, data can be portrayed through photo-taking, drawing, poem writing, using metaphors, dancing, reflective notes and storytelling. **Sharing emotions** through films, artefacts, photos, and stories can ignite empathetic responses even if other co-researchers and the public audience might not have experienced the issue themselves. In this way, we could ensure further impact (see also the **Island of Process and Ownership**).

Example:
*In one of our innovation labs, a participant highlighted the emotive power of the film *I, Daniel Blake* which was directed by Ken Loach. It depicted the lives of people living on Jobseekers Allowance. It had a positive and emotive reception, which gave these issues more mainstream attention and as the participant put it “changed hearts and minds”.*



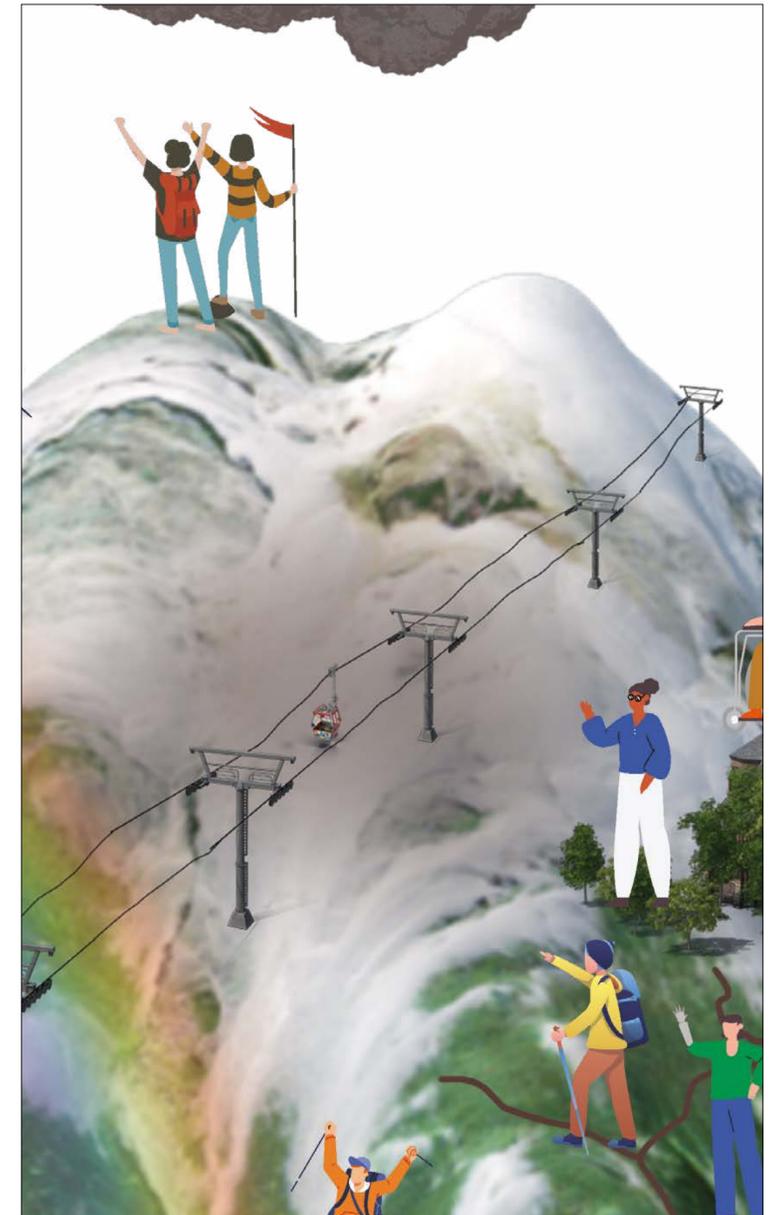
Island of Shared Understanding

How do we share our understandings and knowledge in ways that can be useful to all of us?

Another way towards shared understanding is through sharing resources (see also the **Island of Input and Resources**). Readings and library resources should be open access instead of being behind paywalls (see also **Island of Process and Ownership**). This process of sharing resources must not stop at ‘access’ but also focus on building co-researchers’ capacities, skills and knowledge on how to find and use resources for what we might call ‘we’-search – a process of using research to expand common knowledge on a subject matter. Be careful to **avoid creating a hierarchy of knowledge**.

Example:
In a co-inquiry project on mental health and entrepreneurship, the academic researcher found that community researchers could not gain access to key articles for a group literature review. In an introduction session, which looked at different aspects of mental health and entrepreneurship, the group split their discussion into different areas of interest; for example, recovery interventions, neurodiversity or burnout. The academic researcher then did a quick literature search for each topic area and created a shared Dropbox folder with articles covering each sub-topic. Each member then picked an area that interested them most and read the 10 articles most relevant to them before the next session. Then the group met to discuss their readings and tried to make connections using A3 paper and post it notes. Through this process, they gained a collective understanding of the literature.

Whilst the Island of Shared Understanding prides itself on its wider reach and access through digital means, it is important to **be aware of the tension between digital assistance and the digital divide (different levels of access to digital technologies)**. As online spheres may give more access to some, they may restrict access to others.



Pause, reflect and get equipped



Packing

- In your research group, what is the preferred way of communicating with each other?
- Have you agreed upon common phrases for people to use when referring to each other and their life experiences?
- Have you got your jargon translated in accessible phrases understood by everyone?



Repacking

- Do you need to acquire new languages, ways of expressing yourself and skills for communicating?
- Do you need to learn new research methods that align better with the group's ways of making sense of the world?
- Do you need to abandon certain ways of speaking and doing research to make the process more accessible?

Unpacking

- How has the process so far made you feel? Why do you think you have felt in such a way (values, assumptions and habits)?
- How have conflicts or tensions been dealt with? How could we have dealt with these differently?
- How can we be more comfortable with the tensions?
- Are there any changing understandings and misunderstandings in the group?

Toolbox

- **Co-inquiry toolkit. Community-university participatory research partnerships: Co-inquiry and related approaches, by Beacon North East (2011).**
- **Community toolkit. A guide to working with universities on research projects, by Beacon North East (2012).**
- **Research in Transition: Developing Guidelines for Activist-Academic Research Collaborations (2013).**

Island of Input and Resources

The **Island of Input and Resources** is actually an archipelago – a formation of islands with varied geographic features containing different combinations of input and resources, both tangible (money, time and physical spaces) and intangible (cultural understanding, mental energy and patience).

These islands are individual entities indicating different stakeholders and potential audiences related to PR such as academia, communities and funders, while they are also interconnected. We need to build bridges and use boats or ferries to travel across different islands, that represent potentially different cultures, disciplines and protected interests, to bring together the multiple resources and perspectives needed for PR.

Access to the islands varies. Some islands are inhabited and well-travelled, while others are uninhabited or under-explored (there is some fallow ground where nothing has ever happened before).

There is always a question of whether we should extend our adventure to the unknown. We may need to draw upon shared resources and bravery to dare to explore such virgin territories. In doing so, we need to be mindful of our coloniser mentality and be respectful of the ‘indigenous’ perspectives of the inhabitants who were there before we arrived.

As you find your way across each island you will encounter ‘natural boundaries’ and contested/negotiated territorial frontiers. These different boundaries are crucial for negotiating resources and input but need to be problematised and re-negotiated all the time. While charting your own novel routes, it is important to remain reflexive and compassionate towards each island’s unique features and history.



Island of Input and Resources



Values/principles

1. Flexibility, courage, commitment, patience, and sometimes impatience (with injustice).
2. Make ensure everybody is prepared for handling conflicts.
3. Demanding input, facilitation and involvement.
4. Being brave to travel into an area that we don't know and prepared for going back and forth and putting an end to our adventure.

Features

5. Islands are individual entities but are all connected in one way or another (concerns, social networks, resources and knowledge on the subject matter).
6. Through connections (building bridges and using boats), we can connect different resources and disciplines for handling challenges encountered in PR.
7. Islands have their boundaries which are both natural, negotiated and contested (anticipation of conflicts in doing PR and negotiating for resources).
8. Uninhabited and unexplored islands in doing PR.

Cautions

9. Differences in cultural practices and people's perceptions of individual islands' boundaries.
10. PR requires a huge amount of resources and may involve re-drawing territories/boundaries (establishing the culture of shared resources and responsibility).
11. Not having enough resources for sustaining long-term commitment which is essential for PR.
12. Be prepared for ethical issues.

Island of Input and Resources

What range of resources do I need for PR?

Acquiring diverse resources for PR. (4, 5, 6, 10, 12)

PR researchers need to build infrastructure to **acquire diverse resources from different groups**, including academia/universities, funders, communities, and policy makers. The resources are not limited to funding availability, but also knowledge, experiences, skills, information and advice as well as social networks from different stakeholders. A well-resourced platform that brings together different stakeholders is considered useful for information sharing, knowledge exchange and resource distribution.

Building trust among different stakeholders and having stable contact points of the communities, universities and funders are fundamental for collaboration and information and resource sharing. Funders of PR should be aware of the need to resource relationship building, and the importance of paying community researchers for their engagement and participation in PR projects (see also the **Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships**).



Island of Input and Resources

What range of resources do I need for PR?

Example:

A project conducted by university researchers was involving neurodivergent young people in conducting research and advising on the research process. The research team had spent months working with community organisations, children with autism and their parents before they could set up the advisory panel consisting of neurodivergent young people to offer feedback and insights as well as to co-design the research project. The PR project would produce a manual for resources that helped researchers from speech and language therapies and psychology to embark on their own participatory journeys with the neurodivergent communities.

Enhancing capacity for academia, communities, policy makers and funders to carry out PR will also involve **providing generic and specialised PR training to multiple stakeholders** (1, 2, 3, 9).

Through training and sharing of knowledge and experience, we can encourage knowledge transfer between more experienced PR researchers and those who are beginning their journeys. In this learning community, co-researchers may find similar struggles with each other, and become more prepared for ethical, practical, methodological, and political challenges arising in the different PR projects. Finding like-minded peers through PR training can further enhance the social and mental capacity of participatory researchers, that they can seek practical and moral support when uncertainties and changes arise in their PR journey.



Island of Input and Resources

How to deal with pre-existing boundaries of different groups?

Keeping, contesting, and negotiating boundaries. (1, 4, 7, 8)

Different stakeholder groups have their established ways of working (boundaries), including culture and customs, resource distribution and evaluation methods. These established customs, protocols, rules, or guidelines that exist before any PR projects will become frameworks that the PR research group plays by or sometimes contests. These established ways of working usually control the flow of resources and sharing of funding, assets, space and information with other collaborating stakeholders. Examples include university library resources exclusively available for students and staff members, research funding bodies not always prepared to pay community researchers, and academic traditions that see PR as less scientifically credible.

Example: *A community researcher (who was engaged in a PR project to explore, trace and re-imagine civic participation) highlighted the importance of listening when entering an already established community. As she explained, “every member navigates their own relationships, patterns, and understandings in their established community, which collectively act as an unseen and often unacknowledged complex yet necessary third party”. In this particularly case, the role of the PR researcher is to inhabit that environment whilst being conscious of the need to resist interfering with the established dynamic unless welcomed by the community.*



Island of Input and Resources

What range of resources do I need for PR?

While PR researchers are there to test and reconfigure boundaries to promote equal participation, democratic decision making and fair recognition of people's knowledges, they may also need to set their personal boundaries with other co-researchers in terms of what they could or could not do given their time, resources, skills and personal and professional circumstances. Key steps to agreeing on input and resource allocation hence are: (1) **identifying boundaries** of different groups and individual co-researchers, (2) **appraising their impact** on inclusion, equal participation and collective action; and (3) deciding on whether **keeping, negotiating or contesting those boundaries** would be suitable for curating an ethical process and making positive impact.

Example:
An academic researcher studied citizen science and worked with an interdisciplinary team. Part of her interdisciplinary work was identifying which tools would be useful for people undertaking citizen science. She worked with people to develop tools for testing soil for lead. She also developed activities to involve people in the neighbourhood to analyse the soil. The test results raised citizens' awareness on their lead exposure and health inequity for children getting treated for lead exposure. Citizens' participation time was paid for, and participating citizens were recognised in the project as soil justice fellows. The academic had to reflect on how to strike the right balance between enabling the community to lead, yet providing structure and expertise in problems which are invisible in people's everyday life. The academic felt that more consciousness-raising was

needed. However, it is challenging to make a case to universities and funders that they should support and resource consciousness-raising work since it doesn't usually result in publications but the outcomes at the community level are profound.

As a result of many successful negotiations in PR projects, research funding can then be used to pay community researchers, lab tests can be carried out in community settings, research knowledge could have immediate impact on people's lives.



Pause, reflect and get equipped



Packing

- Have you got all the resources needed for supporting all the co-researchers in this process? Where else can you get extra resources to fill any gaps?
- Have effective communication practices been developed among co-researchers coming from the community, funding bodies, policy making institutes and academia?
- Have you prepared yourself in terms of time and mental conditions?

Repacking

- Have you managed expectations of each other and made clear boundaries? Do they need to be rediscussed and/or changed?
- Are there any new skills and capacity-building activities you might want to pick up on the way?
- Have you checked in with how everyone is feeling? Have you created any plans for self-care?



Unpacking

- Are there any tensions or conflicts among multi-disciplinary collaborators?
- Have you noticed any potential conflicts or tensions arising from the different established ways of working by community researchers, university researchers and the funders? Can these boundaries be reflected on and re-negotiated in the process?

Toolbox

- [**Dilemmas cafés: a guide for facilitators \(2015\).**](#)
- [**Co-inquiry toolkit. Community-university participatory research partnerships: co-inquiry and related approaches \(2011\).**](#)
- [**Community toolkit. A guide to working with universities on research projects, by Beacon North East \(2012\).**](#)
- [**Community-based participatory research: A guide to ethical principles and practice \(2012\).**](#)
- [**Participatory action research toolkit: an introduction to using PAR as an approach to learning, research and action \(2012\).**](#)

Island of Process and Ownership

What if someone wants to leave the group?

Support a flexible membership.
(2, 3, 4, 6, 8)

This allows co-researchers to be in charge of their PR journeys by having the option to choose when to join/leave and the level of participation that they prefer at different times. When members want to leave the research group temporarily or permanently, it is crucial to have a conversation on the following (see also the **Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships**):

- Does this person feel left out because of a lack of support or the group space being exclusive?
- Are there changes in personal circumstances/priorities that clash with their participation in the project?
- Are the project goals no longer relevant to the person's concerns?
- In what way and to what extent would the person like to stay in touch with the project at later stages?

These questions can sustain an open dialogue across the team and better support one's transition as they decide to end or re-negotiate their participation, in their own terms. Moreover, these questions help the group understand if the leaving of group members is the result of undemocratic/exclusive practices in the group or other external factors.

Example:
A community researcher spoke metaphorically about how co-researchers worked together - the idea of walking with each other in a line. A person with initial responsibility may be first in line but the group walks with each other. They may sometimes walk at a different pace, a bit ahead or a bit behind, but the group continues in unity. Every time there is a 'turning point', the group comes together to form a circle to re-connect. In her words: 'PR is not about regulations; it is about humanity, vulnerability and ownership.'



Island of Process and Ownership

Who owns the co-produced data and outputs? Rights, obligation and recognition?

Discuss and agree on processes of ownership. (1, 5, 9, 12)

Ownership of the data and the outputs of a participatory research project is a very complex topic. Ownership is on one hand about **rights and obligation (both formal and informal)**, while on the other hand is about **proper acknowledgement of contributions**.

These conversations will need to be had at the earliest time possible in the group:

- Who has ownership of the work produced as part of the research? To what extent this is made clear to and agreed among co-researchers?
- Who will have access and the rights to use the coproduced 'data' within and beyond the project? What are the consent processes needed if data are used for purposes outside the agreed scope?

- When co-researchers are acknowledged in the outputs, how could we balance the rights to ownership and confidentiality? How anonymised should the data and outputs be?
- Is there the possibility of open access outputs?

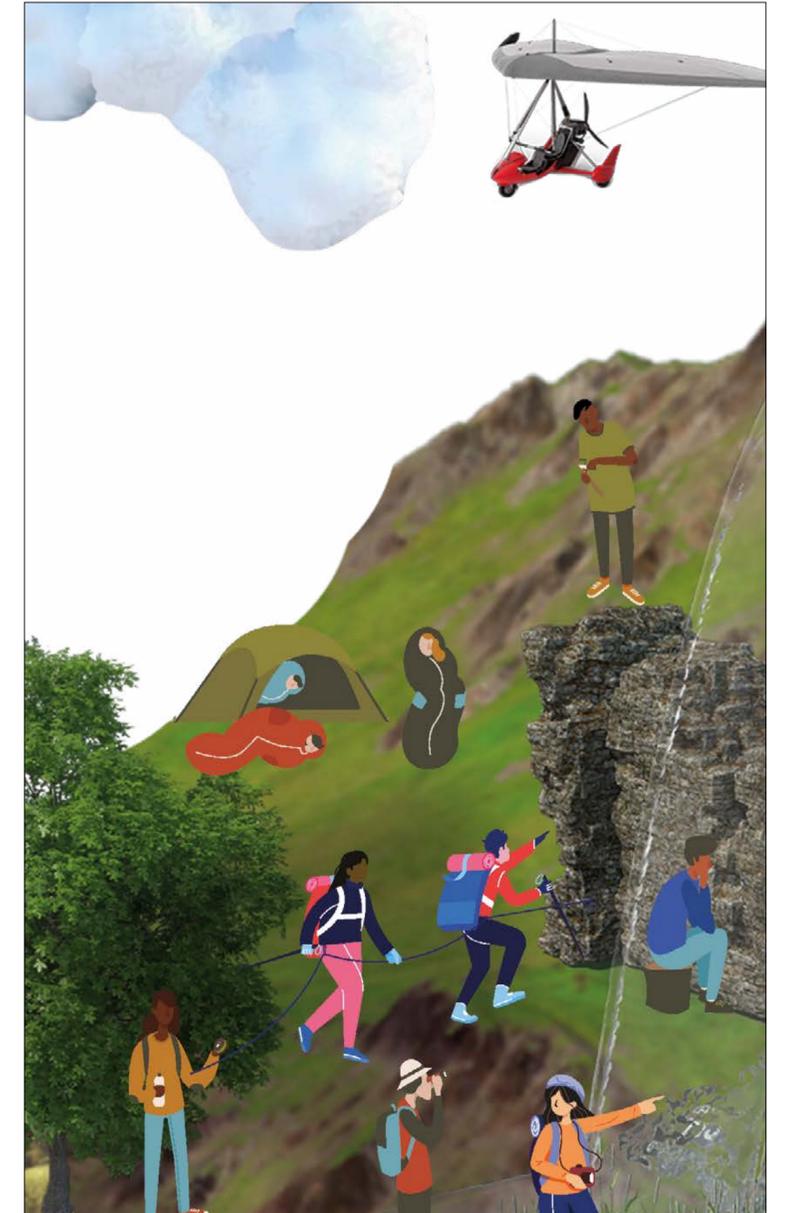
Example:

In a participatory project working with local communities in the North East, community researchers were invited to share their experiences and opinions as part of a public conference. They were in charge of deciding what they would like to contribute and how. However, this was not the case for some other dissemination activities for which they were not allowed any input and had concerns about how their work was represented and how it might create negative perceptions. A valuable lesson that occurred through this process was the realisation that ownership within a PR project should underpin the whole process and ensure that community

researchers are recognised above all as people with their right to voice their opinions.

You might find that not all members of the participatory research project can be directly involved in the analysis/writing up or that their participation might fluctuate across the PR journey. Nevertheless, acknowledging their contributions and all other work that leads to that stage and beyond must always be acknowledged. Ways of recognising their involvement and role include naming them as 'authors'. Alternatively, there are many other good ways to acknowledge people's participation in a PR project – as contributors, curators (exhibits/displays/shows), artists, editorial team members etc.

We can be creative!



Island of Process and Ownership

How could we be prepared for doing PR in a hostile environment?

Check our assumptions. (7, 11, 13, 14)

It is important to critically reflect on our assumptions including stereotypes, formulaic stories of certain lived experiences and personal biases, when we interact with co-researchers from different walks of life. Our assumptions might sometimes mirror the hostile environment where we live in and affect the way we interact in the research group. Both academic and community researchers are subject to structural and institutional restrictions of different kinds while they are also trying to resist and change them.

Example:

Research conducted by a Durham University PhD student explored lived experiences of seeking asylum through biographical and participatory creative methods. Realising the impact of the UK's hostile immigration policies on the lives of displaced individuals led her to adopt a participatory, arts-based approach (photography, collage, and drawing) that would invite storytelling

beyond the legal context. She was aware of the responsibility and the necessity of promoting a safe research environment that resisted the possible risk of 'mining stories' and supported the co-creation of dialogical space in which community researchers could decide what kind of stories they would like to share and in what ways. As part of the study's creative sessions, she was able to co-create with individuals, discuss plans about future projects, and collaborate on preparing materials as part of two public exhibitions.

Doing PR in hostile environments may present different challenges in relation to participation and ownership by introducing boundaries of exclusion and limited entry. Acknowledging that academia can often be perceived as hostile to communities is essential towards reconciliation. When engaging in PR, we carry the historical burden of those who came before. Therefore, each new PR journey must be agreed and planned afresh in ways that are

specific to the needs of those involved. Such a realisation also brings forward important questions: How can our shared journey support the development of new pathways towards knowledge production that meaningfully involve all participating communities? What do we give back as PR researchers? Is it enough?

Being aware of the **barriers to equal participation and unfavourable environments** (10, 13, 14) in which co-researchers live and collaborate with each other will help alleviate biases towards each other. For example, academics who want to publish papers from PR might not be essentially instrumental but just be pragmatic about university expectations, while community researchers who want nothing to do with academic outputs might not be hostile to traditional academic research but still be **more impact-focused**. Giving time to listen and being more empathetic to the limitations of each other are necessary to promoting collaboration in PR and creating a safe research space.



Pause, reflect and get equipped



Packing

- Have you had open discussions about ownership? What does it mean to co-researchers, and what kind of expectations might these understandings introduce?
- Have you had discussions about potential outcomes and ways of dissemination? What would be important for co-researchers in terms of key audiences to be reached with the findings? Who can help make change?

Repacking

- Have you 'checked in' with all crew members about how they feel as members of the travelling crew? Do they feel comfortable to travel at their own pace?
- Does everyone have a clear role? Do they feel involved and well supported for such a position of responsibility?

Unpacking

- Have you checked your assumptions?
- Have you thought about the power dynamics involved and ways of mitigating them?

Toolbox

- [Co-inquiry toolkit. Community-university participatory research partnerships: co-inquiry and related approaches, by Beacon North East \(2011\).](#)
- [Community-based participatory research: A guide to ethical principles and practice, by CSJCA \(2012\).](#)
- [Participatory action research toolkit: an introduction to using PAR as an approach to learning, research and action, by Pain, R. Whitman, G. Milledge, D. and Lune Rivers Trust \(2012\).](#)
- [Mapping impact together: Alternative approaches to impact in co-produced research \(2015\).](#)

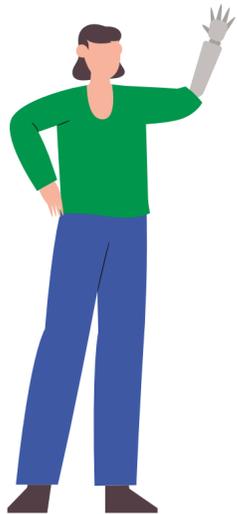


Other useful tools

Toolkits, Guides and Case Studies,
developed by the Centre for Social
Justice and Community Action.

durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/social-justice-community-action/toolkits

Participedia: A global network and
crowdsourcing platform for researchers,
educators, practitioners, policymakers,
activists, and anyone interested in public
participation and democratic innovations.
participedia.net



Appendix 1: Making your own islands worksheets

Have a go! Make your own island.

You can make your own islands by yourself or with your peer researchers.

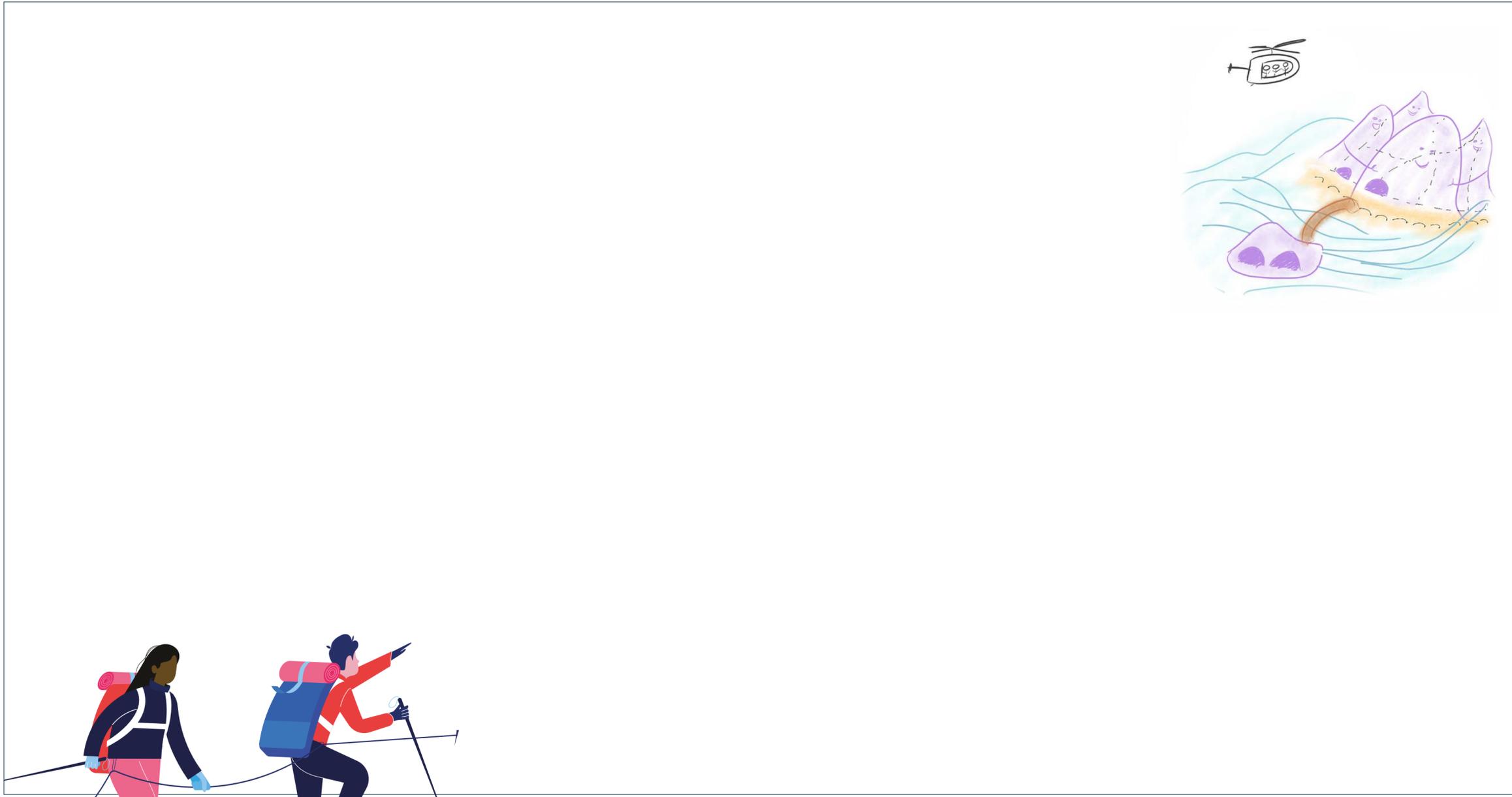
Use these worksheets to help you think about how each island might look like to you as you travel through your PR.

Use a little creativity to draw, mark and write on the map to build the landscape that speaks to your own experiences and anticipation. What are the key values/principles? What are the key features of the island? What should you be cautious of as you move around? These things can change, and it is always useful to revisit these islands as you carry on with your PR journey.



Have a go! Make your own island...

The Island of Initiating Engagement and Maintaining Relationships



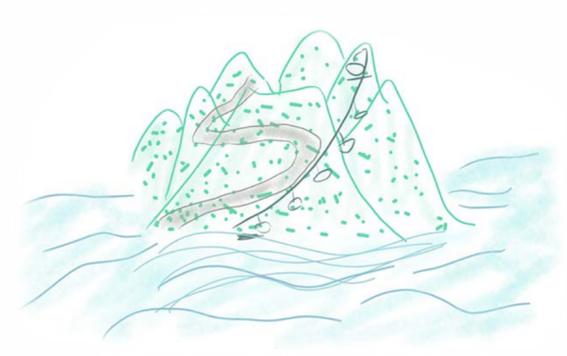
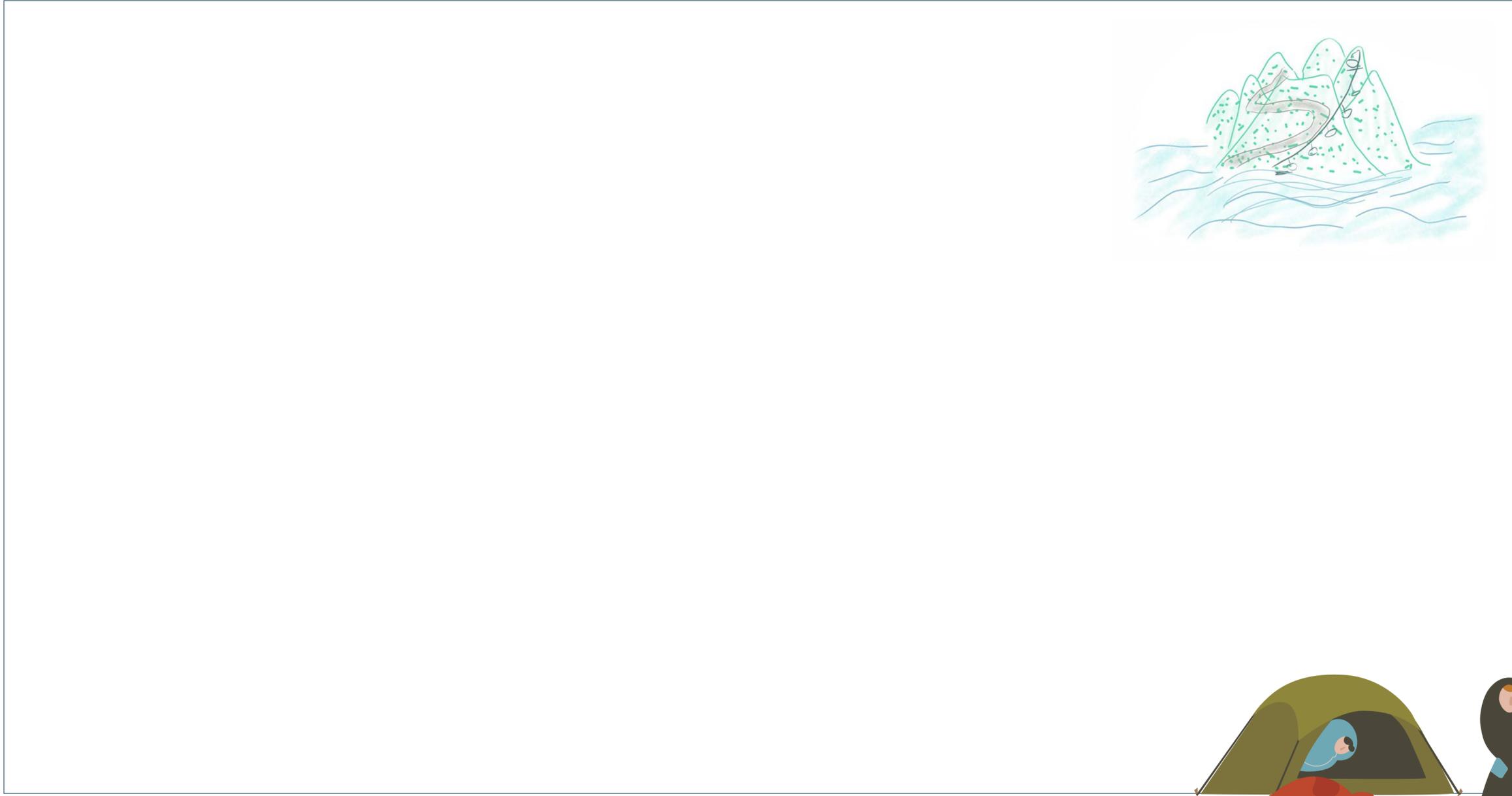
Values/Principles

Features

Cautions

Have a go! Make your own island...

The Island of Shared Understanding



Values/Principles

Features

Cautions

Have a go! Make your own island...

The Island of Input and Resources



Values/Principles

Features

Cautions



Have a go! Make your own island...

Island of Process and Ownership



Values/Principles

Features

Cautions

Footnotes

1.

In Innovation Lab I, participants formed groups around the four topics based on the relevance of the topic to the participants themselves. With the help of the artistic facilitators, participants used an online platform, Mural, to co-create maps for each topic, then forming four 'Islands' of doing PR. Questions asked include: Who is there? What is there? What happened there? How did you interact with the people and the external realities in that moment? What worked and what didn't?

2.

In Innovation Lab II, the digital maps co-created on Mural were printed out (A1 size) for plotting participants' individual journeys on the chosen islands. Participants were encouraged to think of their own experiences of doing PR when choosing their island, and were then asked to put down their own challenges and good practices on post-it notes and attach them to appropriate locations on the maps.





Thank you!