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Participatory Research Hub, Durham University, 2015-17

Summary Report

Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University, UK, July 2017



Background

The Participatory Research Hub at Durham University was a short-term project hosted by the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (CSJCA) during the period 1st February 2015 to 30 June 2017. It was funded by Durham University's Economic and Social Research Council Impact Acceleration Account in two phases in 2015-16 and 2016-17 (£29,142 and £37,238). The Hub was hosted in the Geography Department, with Prof Rachel Pain as the main coordinator, supported by Prof Sarah Banks and Dr Andrew Russell (co-directors of CSJCA), and administered by a part-time Development Officer (initially Dr Catherine Alexander, and then Dr Helen Moore).

Aims and objectives

The aims of the Hub were to strengthen the infrastructure for co-produced social research, stimulating and fostering long-term relationships, generating learning and the capacity to undertake co-production across Durham University and its partner organisations; and to enhance the generation of high quality research, which can have an impact on social and economic policy, practice, advocacy and activism.

The objectives were:

1. To promote and support the co-production of social research, involving University researchers working in partnership with outside organisations.
2. To develop infrastructure to actively link third sector and other organisations that wish to learn about and undertake co-produced research with relevant researchers at Durham University.
3. To offer training and support on aspects of co-production and participatory research, from establishing partnerships through to measuring impact.
4. To support and mentor new and existing research partnerships to generate, monitor and evidence research impact.

Major achievements

345 participants (186 academic and 159 community partners) registered with the Hub during its lifetime.

156 participants completed the final evaluation survey (including 60 academic partners, 57 postgraduate students, 15 from non-University public sector, 24 from the voluntary sector, 8 volunteers). Responses included 68 suggestions on how research support could be provided in the future.

Over 200 email and 30 telephone enquiries were managed by the helpdesk (with more than 80 enquiries from outside organisations), and the Hub Coordinator, CSJCA Co-Directors and Academic Development Officer held numerous face-to-face meetings with staff, students and community partners seeking support and advice.

36 events and training sessions were undertaken (see list at end). Over 1280 participants attended events and training, including 387 academics/postgraduate students and 305 participants from external/community organisations.

At least 16 research collaborations and eight cases of substantial support to existing projects were recorded (this is probably an underestimate due to the issues with tracking impacts of this nature).

A number of research partnerships are currently underway (July 2017), including partnerships with Friends of Bearpark, Changing Lives, Middlesbrough Interfaith Network Justice First, KCC Live, Chilli Studios, Regional Refugee Forum North East, Laajverd Visiting School, Centrepoint, Horden Colliery residents Association, Ribbon Road, EMPTEP, NSPCC, Durham University -Thrive Teesside partnership and the People's Parliament.

A number of research collaborations are in the discussion/planning stage (at least six), including a partnership between students, community and government in Indonesia, partnerships between an Occupational Therapist/service users/academics to augment the service users' voice and create meaningful collaboration between practice and university, and a collaborative undertaking examining issues faced by BME Muslim women.

The Hub's online training materials have been taken up and used by Hub members on diverse national and international projects, which include an international landslide risk reduction project, a Creative Participatory Action Research workshop in Pakistan, the practical application of PAR in community and voluntary sector context, and various doctoral projects.

Seven small grants of up to £500 each were awarded to start up or support academic-community research collaborations in 2016. This was enabled by unspent funds (due to a staff vacancy in 2016), and turned out to be a very positive and valuable aspect of the Hub's work, showing that a relatively small amount of funding can pump-prime new collaborations. The grants were as follows:

- "Leisure Access: Human Right or Social Privilege?" Dr Jo Cairns (Geography, DU) with Changing Lives
- "PAR Workshop Development for Partner in Pakistan" Zhara Hussain (Geography, DU) with Laajverd, a Pakistani NGO who run Visiting Schools at sites of conflict and crisis
- "Unearthing Local Perceptions of Community Woodland Management" Charlotte Lee (Geography, DU) with Friends of Bearpark Woods
- "What really matters to us... Listening to Voices of Young People with Learning Difficulties" Dr Rosie Ridgway (Education, DU) with Hopewood Academy
- "Identifying the Gaps: Mapping Faith-based Provision for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Middlesbrough" Sam Slatyer (Geography, DU) with Middlesbrough Interfaith Network
- "Walking Hi(stories): Narratives of Mental Health Experience in Relation to Exclusion and Belonging" Nelli Stavropoulou (SASS, DU) with Chilli Studios, a mental health arts studio and creative service
- "Phone Home: Mobile Phone Addiction and Young People" Dr Catherine Wilkinson (Education, DU) with KCC Live, a non-profit youth-led community radio station

Results from the final evaluation survey in 2017

Two evaluation surveys were conducted in 2016 (30 respondents) and 2017 (156 respondents) to collect the views of those registered with the Hub. Key findings from the final survey conducted in April-May 2017 included:

- 93% of respondents said the Hub had increased their knowledge of participatory research (was 77% in the first year), 54% said that it had increased their skills (compared to 45% in the first year evaluation).
- 76% felt the Hub resources were relevant to their work (compared to 55% in the first year evaluation).
- 81% said the Hub had made them more confident about doing participatory research (up from 65% in year 1).
- 63% said the Hub has helped them with existing research.
- 78% said that the Hub had helped them to plan future research (compared with 48% in year one).

Future developments

As part of the evaluation, participants offered suggestions for future developments. Generally further training and networking opportunities were the most common recommendations. The work of the Hub will be picked up by its parent body, the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, although on a less extensive scale as it does not have dedicated financial resources for this work.

As a result of the successful work of the Hub, two developments have occurred:

1. Durham University was invited to be involved in a large bid for a global *Knowledge for Change* (K4C) network of training hubs for community-based participatory research. This initiative is being led by the UNESCO Chair in Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. Part of the reason Durham was identified was its serious work in capacity-building and training in this area. The funding bid to the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research

Council was not successful, but a network of training hubs is being developed worldwide and Durham will be part of this.

2. A bid has been made by the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action for DARO support for fundraising for a *Knowledge for Change* Hub at Durham University.

Studies of participatory research impact

The Hub has also played a leading role in critically examining the impact of participatory action research, resulting in a report: Pain, R. et al. (2016) *Mapping Alternative Impact: Alternative Approaches to Impact from Co-Produced Research*. Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University, www.dur.ac.uk/socialjustice/toolkits/

Building on this work on impact, participants in one of the research partnerships involving members of the Hub have recently had published an open access article on this theme:

Banks, S. , Herrington, T. and Carter, K. (2017) Pathways to co-impact: Action research and community organising, *Educational Action Research*, advance access, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09650792.2017.1331859

Some comments from Hub participants

“Sharing problems and finding solutions is an important element ... The whole concept is novel and an important step forward in disseminating ideas and putting people in touch with each other who would not necessarily meet otherwise.” **Community Volunteer**

“The outcome is a funding proposal that is still in the draft stages. We hope Regional Refugee Forum North East will be part of the outreach work we develop. The Hub provided a very useful contact that will help us made additional connections to other local organisations and develop a proposal that has additional opportunities for community impact.” **Durham University Lecturer**

“I have been an active participant of the Hub based in Durham University and have greatly benefitted from the variety of workshops and sessions that the Hub conducted throughout the year. Since I work with communities in Pakistan, the Hub introduced me to several approaches, methods and techniques as to how I could make my projects more participatory and what stages the community can be involved and made part of the projects”. **Durham University PhD student**

“The Hub has had an invaluable impact in my work and personal development as a participatory action researcher in two ways; primarily by offering excellent training and skills-oriented workshops, offering me the opportunity to be part of a like-minded community that is invested in participatory methodologies and finally allowing me to present and discuss my work within a supportive and constructive environment. Secondly, as a recipient of a small grant, I was given the opportunity to develop, deliver and evaluate a participatory action research project involving participatory photography (Photovoice) and walking methodologies.” **Durham University PhD student**

“I have a finer appreciation for the specific ethical challenges involved in participatory research. As a result of the workshop I attended, developing relationships has become my first research development activity, ahead of proposal writing, etc ... We have found the Hub to be a very useful and necessary tool, both in the past and in our present research projects. As we are not members of an academic institution, it helps us to stay in touch with development in Participatory Research as well as with current research being done by others. The Hub events have provided an important input to our work and we hope that the Hub will continue and grow.” **Member of community-based music group**

“Significantly more aware of the breadth and depth of participatory research and how methodologies and evidence can help us deliver.” **Member of community-based heritage group**

Appendix

List of events held during 2015-17 (total attendees)

- 06/02/15: Participatory Action Research 1: Introduction to PAR (45)
- 06/03/15: Participatory Action Research 2: Embedding participation in research practice (30)
- 27/04/15: Participatory Research Hub Launch Event: Doing Research Together (80)
- 13/05/15: Developing Policy and Practice through Participatory Research (30)
- 09/06/15: Introduction to Participatory Action Research and Speed Dating (20)
- 10/06/15: Participatory Research Hub Workshop on Action Research
- 17/06/15: Action Research for Social Justice: Changing the Climate for Research and Teaching (25)
- 19/06/15: New Developments in Community Finance: 50 years of Credit Unions & where next? (89)
- 22/06/15: Participatory Ethics through Participatory Theatre (13)
- 23/06/15: Participatory Action Research – a 2-day course (35)
- 23/06/15: Dilemmas Café: Using Dialogue to Explore Ethical Challenges in Community-based Participatory Research (24)
- 15/09/15: Mapping Impact Together ... Alternative forms of Impact in Co-Produced Research (60)
- 23/10/15: Developing a Participatory Research Project (68)
- 16/11/15: Participatory Research in Arts and Heritage (42)
- 25/11/15: Ethics in Participatory Research: Building Trust and Being Fair (13)
- 02/12/15: National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement Engage Conference 2015 (40)
- 04/02/16: Issues and Challenges in Participatory and Collaborative Research (25)
- 04/03/16: Participatory Action Research 1: Introduction to PAR (33)
- 08/03/16: Chemical Youth: understanding the chemical lives of young people through participatory action research methods (50)
- 22/04/16: Open Space for Project Development and Mentoring (10)
- 10/05/16: Participatory Video, Ethics and Decolonizing Research: Retrospective Hyper-Self-Reflexivity (10)
- 18/05/16: Developing Policy and Practice through Participatory Research (11)
- 20/05/16: Methods in Action: Developing PAR in post-conflict Zones (15)
- 17/06/16: 'How to be Heard' Collaborative Research for Arts and Drama (50)
- 07/07/16: Dilemmas Café: Using dialogue to explore ethical challenges in participatory research (24)
- 07/07/16: Participatory Action Research Course - 2 day course (40)
- 08/07/16: New directions in participatory research ethics: Perspectives from UK and USA (89)
- 09/11/16: Our Streets Are Numbered – Folk songs on the social housing crisis (40)
- 08/12/16: Knowledge for Change: A Seminar by Dr Rajesh Tandon (14)
- 03/02/17: Participatory Action Research 1: Introduction to PAR (49)
- 16/02/17: Issues and challenges in participatory and collaborative research – sharing experiences (20)
- 17/02/17: Exploring issues of Trust and Mistrust: Ethics in Participatory Research, Design, Democracy and Action (43)
- 03/03/17: Participatory Action Research 2: Embedding participation in research practice (56)
- 08/03/17: Researching Social Change: Reflections from Brazil (12)
- 20/03/17: Theatre of the Oppressed Seminar and Workshop (56)
- 29/03/17: Recent International Developments in Community-University Engagement: A conversation with Budd L Hall, Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research (17)