

Institution: The University of Salford

Unit of Assessment: D36 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management

Title of case study: Connecting creative communities, and social action: refiguring research processes

1. Summary of the impact

This case study focuses on community cultures and social movement activism, offering an understanding of participatory arts organisation and practice, and the history of radicalisation for new generations of activists, demonstrating the following impact:

- Understanding the changing nature of communities in their historical and cultural contexts and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life;
- Connecting communities with research, developing community-engaged research across a number of core themes, including:
 - Community creativity and participation;
 - Countercultures and protest groups;
 - Community environments, places and spaces such as festivals, and gardens;
- Informing policy development in the areas of community participation and agency;
- Informing social movement agendas and actions.

2. Underpinning research

The key researchers and positions they held at the institution at the time of the research are as follows:

Professor George McKay (2005-present), founding Director of the Communication, Cultural and Media Research Centre, School of Arts and Media (2005-12) and AHRC Leadership Fellow for the Connected Communities Programme (2012-15).

McKay's work on and with communities, including alternative communities and cultures of resistance is characterised by an engagement with community cultures and arts, polemic landscapes of festival or garden, and the cultural politics of popular music, developing research findings which contribute to understandings of participation and agency in community cultures. McKay's research demonstrates an exemplary understanding of counter cultures, which have contributed to the impact described here - the development of mechanisms for the wider application of those understandings to give agency to wider expressions of community for their benefit. This case study is underpinned by the following research:

- **2005:** In *Circular Breathing*, McKay explores jazz as export culture, seeking to refigure British jazz history, and to more comprehensively include its ideological assumptions and actions around areas including the peace movement, the women's movement. **[4]**
- **2005:** *Community Music: A Handbook*, co-edited with Pete Moser, a leading community musician, is a collection of nine chapters by community artists about their work, exercises and repertoire, and includes McKay's history of the movement. **[5]**
- **2006-2008:** *Society & Lifestyles*, an EUFP6 project with 15 European partners, focused on understanding subcultural groups and new religious movements in largely post-Soviet contexts, from neo-Nazi skinheads to eco-villagers. Includes a public-facing subculture event at a pagan festival in Lithuania. **[11]**
- **2010:** '*Community arts and music, community media...*' considers ways in which 'community' has been constructed in community arts and media organisations in Britain since the 1960s to understand what its meanings are in today's cultural economy. **[3]**
- **2010-2013:** The *Rhythm Changes* project, led by the University of Salford, is a HERA FP7 project, collaborative and transnational, delivered by a team from five European countries. McKay's contribution focuses on jazz festivals, music and ideology, theory. **[9]**
- **2011:** *Radical Gardening* is an interrogation of the polemic landscape of the garden and public park, of gardening and floriculture, linking propagation with propaganda. McKay explores moments, movements, gestures, of a socially-engaged approach to gardens and gardening, weaving together garden history with the counterculture. **[2, 10,]**
- **2012:** *Community Music: History and Current Practice* is an AHRC scoping study, co-written by McKay and leading UK community musician Ben Higham, reviewing community

music research and policy literature. [1, 8]

- **2012-15:** McKay was appointed AHRC Connected Communities Leadership Fellow, in the cross-Council programme designed to help understand the changing nature of communities in their historical and cultural contexts and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing quality of life. [6]

3. References to the research

Key outputs

1. McKay, G., Higham, B., 2012. [‘Community music: history and current practice, its constructions of “community”, digital turns and future soundings: an AHRC Research Review’](#), *International Journal of Community Music*. 5(1), pp. 91-103.
2. McKay, G. 2011. *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden*. London: Frances Lincoln. ISBN: 978-0711230309 (REF 2)
3. McKay, G. 2010. [‘Community arts and music, community media: cultural politics and policy in Britain since the 1960s’](#), in: Howley, K (ed.), *Understanding Community Media*. London: Sage, pp. 41-52. DOI (REF 2)
4. McKay, G. 2005. *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain*. Durham: Duke University Press. URL
5. Moser, P., McKay, G., eds, 2005. *Community Music: A Handbook*. Lyme Regis: Russell House. URL

Key grants

6. 2012: [Understanding changing community cultures and histories and patterns of connectivity within and between communities](#), AHRC, £359,888. PI: McKay (100%).
7. 2012: Community Gardening, Creativity and Everyday Culture: Food Growing and Embedded Researchers in Community Transformation and Connections, AHRC, £9,079. PI: McKay (100%).
8. 2011: [Community Music: History and Current Practice, its Constructions of ‘Community’, Digital Turns and Future Soundings](#), AHRC, £26,773. PI: McKay (100%).
9. 2010: [Rhythm Changes: Jazz Cultures and European Identities](#), HERA, £855,947. PI: T. Whyton; Senior Researcher: McKay.
10. 2009: [Radical Gardening](#), S. Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust, £1,000. PI: McKay (100%).
11. 2006. [Society & Lifestyles: Towards Enhancing Social Harmonisation Through Knowledge of Subcultural Communities](#). EUFP6, £111,957 (of total award €1.6m). PI: McKay (100%)

4. Details of the impact

McKay’s research is always concerned at its starting point with (often musical) culture; whether the cultural politics of protest in the garden or the riot, or popular music (from jazz to punk to techno) and post-subculture, or transatlantic and diasporan cultural exchanges, or community arts, media and festival as history and as practice. The impact described here highlights some of the ways in which McKay’s research supports community participation and agency through offering an understanding of its history and leading to the development of new forms:

2012-onwards: In September 2012, McKay was appointed as a three-year AHRC [Connected Communities Leadership Fellow](#) to provide intellectual leadership to the Connected Communities Programme, with Professor Keri Facer, University of Bristol. The fellowship has two equally funded facets: work on the programme and with AHRC, and a personal research project. The two Fellows play a pivotal national role in connecting research by identifying cross-cutting issues and supporting the development of collaborations and partnerships. McKay’s focus is ‘Understanding changing community cultures and histories and patterns of connectivity within and between communities’, and his specific brief is around the contribution of arts and humanities research:

- The vision for the Programme is ‘to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health and well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities.’ Effectively, Connected Communities is entirely about funding impactful research, co-designed and

co-produced between academics and community partners, and the AHRC Fellowship (one of only six covering all AHRC priority themes across the UK) places McKay at the forefront of such initiatives.

- Minister for Universities and Science David Willetts said: '*Connected Communities projects will lead to the development of new ways to engage communities in creating, interpreting and using arts and humanities research data. This will leave a sustainable resource and legacy for future research and for communities.*' Around 280 awards have been made to date, working with over 400 community partners.
- At the core of McKay's personal research project in the programme are community arts practice and the temporary creative community of festival. Each strand involves collaborating with community partners, and is linked with much of McKay's other work:
- One indicative activity took place in March 2013, 'An Evening With George McKay' in a marquee at Spitalfields City Farm, with a communal meal, a lecture and discussion of the politics of community and of gardening with local people.
- This is a powerful continuity with McKay's earlier impactful work. For instance, with *Community Music: A Handbook*—collections of chapters *by* rather than simply *about* members of the communities under discussion—McKay sought to enable the production of texts of community voices, each of which became a valued—occasionally contested, but necessarily referenced—resource for those communities.

2010-2013: As the largest research project funded to date in Europe for jazz, Rhythm Changes drew on McKay's work and the team have published on the value of jazz in national settings and developed this research for festivals, venues and arts promoters, including practice-based engagement with professional development schemes. The project includes the *Grow Your Own Festival* resource, at which McKay spoke, to provide arts organisations with practical tools to design festivals. McKay's activities include future curatorial collaborations with major events, including London (2013) and Cheltenham Jazz Festivals (2014).

2011: The impact of Radical Gardening, (a Book of the Year (*Independent on Sunday*), a gardening book of the year (*Guardian*)) is evident from discussions about it in both the gardener and activist blogospheres. Bloggers articulate the book's achievement precisely in terms of its impact on their thinking, their activism, and how these are transformed:

- Chicago Now / Chicago Garden website: '*Can a garden-related book change your life? This one has changed mine and how I see the garden and how I relate to it*'.
- Mr Brown Thumb blog: '[*The book*] has opened my eyes and given me new insight into what a garden is and what it can mean ... and how it can be approached.'
- Civil Eats website: 'it will surely be the definitive text ... for years to come.... *This transformed my sense of what gardens can be and, in fact, are.*'
- Treehugger blog: '*changed everything I thought I knew and understood about the role of gardening in society. Radical Gardening will fire you up, and you'll be marching out the door ready to occupy your garden*'.
- John Stepling's website: 'I suspect *new kinds of schools* may gradually develop. Community level, or linked to radical practices of resistance in other fields.'

2013: McKay's work in recent years with two of the UK's leading community music organisations, More Music and Community Music East, has led to considerable impact:

- Pete Moser, More Music: "Working with George McKay since 2005, on *Community Music: A Handbook*, which we edited together, and for the new book *Community Music Now* that we are currently working on, has enabled me to think through my own pedagogic practice and my organisation *More Music's* place and achievements in the community arts movement. Co-producing research with George has really helped me become a more reflexive community artist and also to understand the academic world and context. It has also contributed both to More Music's status as a leading community music organisation, as well as to the creative health of community music nationally.
- We toured nationwide with *Community Music: A Handbook*, and people coming to workshops loved that book—I have since used the book as a key text when running

training workshops in Lisbon, Hong Kong, Shanghai and in Belem (Brazil) and have found that the concepts that we originated translate easily in an international context. It has been refreshing to work with an academic like George *outside academia*".

- Ben Higham, *Community Music East*. "Over the past three or four years I have been working with Professor McKay on engaging academic expertise in the context of community music and media practice, to bring a different, more historical, and objective perspective to our understanding of the way we work as community artists. It began with McKay's inspiring keynote to the Community Music East 2010 Conference, Art 4 All, which provoked some fascinating and frank discussions around practice and purpose. Working with McKay on our AHRC scoping study on community music in 2011, which involved writing different versions of its findings for three different audiences (AHRC, an academic journal, the magazine of community musicians), has in turn led to a further AHRC project on which I am co-investigator, the Community Music Research Network. Each of these interactions has challenged me to re-evaluate what we do and what we can do as practitioners, and I really think that McKay's observation and analysis of the nature and culture of community music has helped to change the way community music thinks about itself. For me it has been a very stimulating collaboration".

McKay was engaged as a consultant academic for the [MSN British festival-goers survey](#), and quoted in the extensive national and international media coverage of the survey's findings.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Link to McKay's website providing further information of the Radical Gardening project: <http://georgemckay.org/radical-gardening/reviews/>
2. Connected Communities Leadership Fellows website is at www.connected-communities.org
3. Corroboration of the impact on community music from the founder and Artistic Director of More Music (1993-present); and,
4. The founder and Director of Community Music East (1984-2010), independent consultant and researcher.