

Institution: Durham University
Unit of Assessment: 17B
Title of case study: Embedding participatory research in museum practice
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>DU researchers have delivered their innovative model of participatory action research (PAR) with Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums Service (TWAM, a major regional museum service in the North east, comprising seven museums and galleries) to further social inclusion and deepen participation from socially marginalised groups. Research findings have led to: (1) enhanced income generation for TWAM, with bids citing DU research bringing in more than £0.5m at a time of shrinking resource for the museum sector; (2) the development of a major new museum gallery, which opened in July 2013; and (3) changes to professional practice consequent upon intensifying the practice of participatory working within TWAM.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>DU research has been at the forefront of pioneering and developing participatory approaches to geographical research since the 1990s. Our work has spanned a variety of sub-fields, including social and cultural geography. Pain (DU staff 2000-) has played a leading role in developing participatory action research (PAR) in geography, making a series of contributions which have delivered PAR into diverse areas of research (Reference 1). In this ICS we report on one area of our PAR work, with museums.</p> <p>Our PAR work with museums is framed by a policy context in which, under the influence of New Labour's Social Exclusion unit, the museum sector was charged with becoming more socially inclusive. A national level review in 2009, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF), worked to gauge the effectiveness and nature of public engagement within the museum sector (<i>'Whose Cake is it Anyway?'</i>, 2011). The PHF report is part of a wider move to develop participatory practice in museum services. Engagement had occurred on the margins and fringes of museum services, typically via 'downstream' outreach activities. The report proposed that participation should instead move 'upstream', becoming central to core museum practice, including curatorial practice.</p> <p>The Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums Service (TWAM) comprised part of the PHF study. Within the museum sector, TWAM has a longstanding reputation as a pioneer of social history from below, focused particularly on white, working class identities. The policy turn to social inclusion together with the drive to participation within the museum sector saw TWAM commission research with DU's Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (2009-2010), recognising Pain's expertise in PAR (Reference 2) and involving Matthijsse (DU researcher 2006-2010). The research sought to develop a whole-institution participatory approach to its services. It involved staff, stakeholders and particularly 'hard-to-reach' audiences and non-visitors. Distinctive elements of DU's PAR approach were incorporated into the research design. A focus on space and scale enabled connections to be drawn between local, regional and global identities and community concerns; our emphasis on the importance of participatory ethics and the importance of the principles of reciprocity, accountability and mutual benefit shaped the ways in which key external groups were involved in the research; and the research drew on the critical appraisal of visual techniques. The research was conceptualised as a 'contact zone' of inter-cultural encounter, facilitating meaningful dialogue and interaction between different social groups (Reference 3).</p> <p>The research involved 262 visitors, 151 non-visitors, 18 external experts, 11 funders and stakeholders, and 88 museum staff and volunteers. TWAM staff were trained in PAR by the Durham researchers and conducted peer research. In addition to the development and transfer of a participatory methodology, key findings for museum practice were: (1) feelings of emotional connection with the regional and local identities articulated via the museum's galleries were important for visitors. Traditional visitor groups felt strong connections with TWAM's museums/galleries, which provided a space for intergenerational learning; (2) in contrast, socially marginalised groups felt excluded from the perspectives represented (largely white, working class and grounded in the North east), and were less likely to visit these museums and galleries. Local Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community members, and marginalised young people, identified a number of social, cultural and physical barriers to access (Reference 2).</p>

Subsequent to this research, TWAM commissioned a further piece of research on participatory museum practices via a ESRC-funded PhD Case studentship between DU and TWAM (Morse, DU PhD student 2010-), supervised by Pain and Crang (DU 1994-) with co-supervisors Macpherson and Edwards from TWAM. This research has involved a placement at TWAM as well as contributions to an evaluation of the Heritage Lottery-funded 'Stories of the World' project and to the UK-wide Museum Ethnographers' Group's 'Engaging Curators' project.

3. References to the research

(**Bold** denotes DU researcher at time of research; citations and journal impact factor are as of 31 July 2013)

1. Kindon S, **Pain R**, Kesby M (Eds.) (2007) *Connecting People, Participation and Place: Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods* (London: Routledge). 176 Google Scholar citations.
2. **Pain R**, **Matthijse M** (2010) *In order that we can all touch our past: Participatory Re-visioning of Discovery Museum: research report*. Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University.
http://www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/researchprojects/completed_projects/our_past/.
3. Askins K, **Pain R** (2011) [Contact zones: participation, materiality and the messiness of interaction](#). *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, 803-821. ISI journal impact factor 1.92; 26 Google Scholar citations.

4. Details of the impact

TWAM has a longstanding reputation in the museum sector for community participation built up throughout the 1990s, and is now recognised nationally as a beacon of best practice. It is described by Source 1 as:

"... unarguably one of the UK's most successful museums services. It has a deservedly high reputation within the sector for innovation and audience engagement. It has set particularly high standards for reaching a wide local audience ...".

Independent testimony confirms TWAM's contribution to debates in the museum sector around participation, stating that the PAR project with DU (Reference 2) meant that

"TWAM was uniquely well placed to contribute to emerging discussions and projects around public participation and co-production" (Source 2).

Senior TWAM staff have disseminated the research within the museum sector nationally and internationally, through conference papers. Source 3 states:

"I very regularly refer to that Revisioning work as an important milestone in our journey. And we talk about the concept in terms of developing other services and facilities [...]. When you get a really good piece of research – and I think it was a really good piece of research – lots and lots of things spin out from it".

The DU-TWAM research collaboration has had direct impact on three areas of activity within TWAM:

1: Income generation. The research reported in Reference 2 is cited in successful bids which, at a time of shrinking resources for the sector, have thus far brought in £552,300 from five grants (Source 4). The successful bid documents make extensive use of the research findings and the overall development of participatory practice in the museum. The impact on funding activities within TWAM is made clear by Source 5:

"The Discovery Revisioning gave us a powerful document to invoke when applying for investment ... It has generated evidence of gaps in the service we provide and shown us things we didn't know... It is a powerful approach and the findings have great authenticity" (Source 5).

Source 2 states that the Discovery Revisioning research

"clearly became an important element in the development of Discovery's plans, the report helping support and win funding for the new Destination Tyneside gallery".

2: The development of a new permanent gallery: Destination Tyneside. 'Destination Tyneside' opened on 12 July 2013. It documents recent immigration to the North east region. The instigation, planning and design of this gallery were directly informed both by the research findings and by the adoption of PAR within TWAM. Source 6 states that Destination Tyneside was

"hugely influenced by the [...] Revisioning Project. Through its work with local communities [we] found some of the gaps that we have in Discovery Museum. One of the biggest being that a

number of participants from minority ethnic communities felt that their stories, histories and voices were not represented within the museum and the staff felt that this was having an impact on our visitor demographics”.

Source 5 confirms that:

“The [DR process] helped [us] identify people from BAME groups who felt that there was nothing in the Discovery Museum that was relevant [to them]. It provided powerful evidence that was important for writing bids and putting human voices – and voices of local communities - into it. And so it helped us develop [new] content in the museum.”

In the first week of its opening 1409 people visited the gallery. A joint DU-Discovery Museum evaluation of the new gallery (12-31 July 2013), based on 160 visitor questionnaires, showed that 65% of visitors surveyed said that they had found the exhibition interesting and enjoyable, they had learned something new, and increased their knowledge and/or deepened their understanding of migrants and migration. The gallery promotes feelings of inclusion and connection with museum content among BAME groups and educates the local white community about the reality of migration on Tyneside, challenging stereotypes by forging emotional connections. Already, the gallery has attracted new BAME audiences: one-third of those surveyed were visiting for the first time, with 85% coming explicitly to see the new gallery, 50% of whom were non-White/British.

BAME visitors remark positively on their experience, saying:

“It has made me realise that migration is something that should be celebrated” (Female, 30-49, White British Latino) and “It is nice to know that I’m not alone. In fact having visited this gallery I feel I belong to the international culture of Tyneside” (Male, 18-29, Arabian).

For TWAM’s core visitor demographic, the gallery has increased knowledge and understanding, and led to changes in attitudes towards migrants and migration. Visitors comment:

“It educates people about the diversity of our region and challenges stereotypes about migration” (Male, 30-49, White) and “It changed my views of why people come to this country”.

Migrant storytellers whose stories feature in the gallery said in interviews that their involvement in the process of creating the gallery had been an overwhelmingly positive experience, acting to recognise and cement their identities and to pass understanding of these on to their children, grandchildren and the wider public:

“Participating in the DT process made me realise that Poland is no longer my home, this is my home. This is where I belong” (Anna, Polish storyteller).

3: Changes in professional practice. The findings from the Revisioning project led to changes in both curatorial and working practices within TWAM. The research led to: (1) the implementation of a number of recommendations on infrastructure (Reference 2) within Discovery Museum, regarding customer care, visitor orientation, the building, events and learning programmes; and (2) the adoption of PAR training and peer research within the organisation which has enhanced the skills base and capacity of TWAM staff. Staff members have built PAR into their day-to-day practice for planning, research and decision-making within TWAM museums. Interviews with the gallery curator, Museum director and manager show that PAR was embedded in the curatorial process for Destination Tyneside:

“A number of staff who were involved with Revisioning were trained in participatory techniques which then involved setting up for a day down in the museum and speaking to visitors, asking them about the museum what they wanted from it and about Newcastle and how they viewed it [...] We used that technique when we were developing Destination Tyneside and members of the project team went downstairs, spoke to visitors and asked them what they knew about migration, the kind of things they’d like to find out ...” (Source 6).

PAR skills and techniques have also influenced the way that staff work, with the Discovery manager and Outreach Team using participatory methods directly in ongoing research with visitors.

“Staff who were involved in the project got some real confidence building in terms of going out and working with groups in different ways. And the fact that it wasn’t just Outreach and Communities staff but actually a much broader range of staff. That’s had some long term benefits” (Source 3).

The success of the Revisioning project in turn led TWAM to commission a further piece of participatory research with the unit, via Morse’s ESRC CASE PhD studentship The project focuses on creating the institutional and infrastructural conditions to support and sustain participatory ways

of working with socially marginalised communities. Alongside Morse and TWAM's involvement in a range of national initiatives (such as the Heritage Lottery Funded 'Stories of the World' project), Source 2 states that the collaborative studentship

"has brought to TWAM a space for critical reflection upon the practical and institutional barriers to participatory work (as well as the possibilities)".

A co-authored article written by Morse with Macpherson and Robinson has appeared in a special issue of the practitioner-facing journal *Museum Management and Curatorship*. It examines the challenges of fully embedding engagement and co-production throughout TWAM and other museum services and, as a co-produced output, exemplifies changes to professional working practices within TWAM. The emphasis on upstream participation has had further material change on TWAM's wider engagement with national museum programmes, particularly through involvement in the Paul Hamlyn Foundation-funded project 'Our Museums – Communities and Museums as active partners'. This three-year project began in February 2012 and involves nine national museums (<http://ourmuseum.ning.com/>). Source 2 confirms that

"Morse's work at TWAM helpfully fed through into these discussions nationally (to which she frequently presented) and into the wider debates. Thus the overall impact of the Durham University collaboration has been to keep alive the idea that the craft of engagement is worth critically reflecting upon, analysing and learning!".

Morse is a member of TWAM's Our Museums' steering group and her 2013 report '*Museums and Community Engagement: Baseline Report on Perceptions of Community Engagement in Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums Staff*' was the basis for TWAM's presentation at the Our Museum Peer Review Event (24 April 2013) (Source 7).

Source 2 states the overall value of the DU-TWAM collaboration in the context of the challenges facing the museum sector:

"A collaboration such as that between Rachel Pain and Nuala Morse at Durham presents a model and paves the way for further fruitful collaboration between museums and higher education, to the benefit of both. More importantly, such a strong and creative collaboration is to the benefit of the public, as we attempt to make these institutions more useful and relevant to these challenging times".

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Source 1: Deputy Director of the Museums Association, "No one is safe", 27/11/2012

<http://www.museumsassociation.org/maurice-davies-blog/27112012-maurice-davies-no-one-is-safe-newcastle-cuts-budgets> [Independent Reporter]

Source 2: Testimony letter from Museum Writer, Researcher and Consultant, 19/8/2013. [Independent Reporter]

Source 3: Director of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museum Service. Confirmed transcript of phone interview, 27/2/2013 [Participant and Reporter]

Source 4: *Bid documents which cite DU research*: (a) (2011) "Influx – The Making of Modern Newcastle", DCMS/Wolfson Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund 2011-15, Round 1 2011-12. £250,000 awarded January 2012; (b) (2011) "What's Your Story? Discovering Family History", Heritage Lottery Fund. £45,000 awarded in June 2011 (71% of project cost). November 2011 to Feb 2014; (c) (2011) "Home and Away – North East Sport and the Olympics". Heritage Lottery Fund. £48,500 awarded August 2011 (72% of project cost). Project ran June 2012 - Jan 2013; (d) (2012) "Our Museum – communities and museums as active partners", Proposal to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. £150,000 awarded in February 2012, over three years; (e) (2012) "My Tyneside: Stories of Belonging", Heritage Lottery Fund. £58,800 awarded July 2012 (90% of project cost).

Source 5: Principal Development and Trading Officer, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museum Service. Transcript of face-to-face interview 15/2/2013. [Participant and Reporter]

Source 6: Project Manager Destination Tyneside Gallery, Discovery Museum, Transcript of video interview 31/7/13 [Participant and Reporter] see 11'50"-12'24" and 14'24" – 15'07" for key quotes

Source 7: Transcript of presentation by Director of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museum Service at 'Our Museums' Peer Review Event, Cardiff. 24/4/2013. [Participant and Reporter]