

Knowledge, impact and legacy in community heritage research projects: Cambridge Community Heritage and beyond

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Introduction:

This paper reviews the aims and impact of *Cambridge Community Heritage* (CCH), focussing on issues of achieving a sustainable legacy for future generations from heritage-related research programmes.

CCH was funded by AHRC *Research for Community Heritage project* in partnership with the *Heritage Lottery Fund* 2012-13 to develop heritage-related research collaborations between the University of Cambridge and communities in eastern England. Ten researchers in Archaeology, History, Heritage and Anthropology worked with eligible groups (ie constituted not-for-profit organisations operating within the third sector) to develop groups' ideas for their own heritage projects. Successful proposals received up to £10,000 from the HLF to run their project and support from CCH, which provided academic input, training, advice and supervision.

The 28 CCH projects involved more than 5,000 members of the public, local historical societies, church groups, schools, women's groups, military regiments, Traveller communities, football clubs and more. Projects ranged widely in theme and approach and achieved a range of both tangible and intangible outcomes, introducing people of all ages to the process of heritage investigation and generating new understanding of diverse heritages and a wealth of resources for future research, such as by discovering and identifying archaeological sites and finds, synthesising local histories, recording oral histories and creating heritage trails, apps, displays and exhibitions.

Case Study 1:

Saffron Walden Museum's project aimed to involve 30 local sixth-formers in excavations searching for the castle bailey, generating new knowledge about the medieval site and the extent and condition of buried remains in the area, new finds for the museum and new learning resources.

Understanding *impact* focusses on the ways in which the outcomes *made a difference*. Walden residents became more knowledgeable about their local heritage and more engaged with it; pupils excavating gained new transferrable skills in observing, recording and analysing and a track record in volunteering, taking on new challenges and working with persistence. Organising the excavations forged relationships between the museum and local schools, councillors, businesses and residents, and their success enhanced the reputation of both the university and the museum.

The project *legacy* (ie its sustainable, longer-term impact) includes resources for future research and new education packs; knowledge cascaded to subsequent generations; pupils with new skills for university and work enhancing their capacity to contribute to society; a local community strengthened by new networks; and a museum more secure through having demonstrated its value to the local community, which itself provides both place and personnel to sustain the legacy of the project, completing a virtuous circle. Drawing on success, future collaborative projects are already being proposed, which will propagate the legacy, enabling it to adapt in the future.

Case Study 2:

One Voice for Travellers' project aimed to involve teenage Gypsy girls in recording oral histories of the lives of older Gypsy women. The project involved researchers and OV4T leaders in establishing contacts in GRT community; identifying, recruiting and training 15 interviewers; recruiting dozens of interviewees; developing acceptable protocols (especially around confidentiality); recording and editing the interviews; creating a website and CD; and developing an exhibition for the Museum of East Anglian Life in Stowmarket.

In terms of wider impact, the project gave 15 gypsy girls new transferrable skills in communication, interviewing, editing and time management; boosted their self-esteem, engagement and aspirations; made them new friends within GRT community; and gave them a better understanding of their gypsy heritage. Project leaders in the GRT community gained new project management skills and visitors to museum exhibition and project website gained a better knowledge and understanding of gypsy heritage. The project created new networks linking the university, OV4T and the GRT community and generated enthusiasm for other collaborations in the future.

The longer-term legacies of the OV4T project include a new oral history archive for future research, while the teenage girls who took part are better fitted to gain qualifications and employment and may pass their attitudes to heritage and volunteering on to their families and communities. The GRT community will be strengthened by reputational enhancement, new networks developed during the project and by a wider population better informed about GRT lives. This all enhanced the capacity for GRT needs to be better catered for in the future, while new collaborations in the future will help propagate this legacy.

Conclusion

While the outcomes of each CCH project were unique, aspects of the impact of the case studies outlined above were replicated again and again across the 28 CCH communities, especially in relation to the ways they built capacity for the heritage and education sectors and developed social capital within individuals, groups and communities. Participation impacted on *individuals*, (developing skills, social contacts, networks, aspirations and attitudes enhancing personal well-being); *groups* and *institutions* (gaining collective knowledge, reputational enhancement, improved recruitment capacity and extended contacts; enhanced capacity, or new assets); and wider *communities* (whose resources, integration, cohesion and resilience were extended and reinforced). Particularly impactful legacies are seen to be those capable of becoming self-sustaining - developing, adapting and growing - such as collections which can be both curated and added to, knowledge, ideas and skills which may be expanded, activities which adapt to new needs, or networks which extend to new members.

CCH showed how the legacy of heritage-related collaborative and co-produced research projects can be very positive, advancing knowledge as well as developing social capital and sustaining beneficial culture change, but it also reminded us that even the most impactful projects need to take care to identify, nurture and evidence those impacts, and to consider how to elicit the relationship between project, outcome, impact and legacy. In considering how best to support the process of diversifying and pluralising knowledge in research processes, it is apparent that while only *individuals* can contribute knowledge and time, the support of a *collective* is essential if the necessary resources and commitment are to be curated, disseminated grown and propagated into future generations. Here, there is a clear role for universities.