

Co-producing research with communities

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Co-produced research

- Research undertaken collaboratively by people from different settings and backgrounds
- Usually involving people with lived experience of the issue being researched and researchers/practitioners from universities/NGOs
- Often with a focus on achieving social change
- Based on principles of equity, democracy and valuing diverse contributions



Co-producing research *with* communities

- Communities are collectivities of people with some, but not necessarily all, characteristics in common (e.g. people living in a particular neighbourhood, young people who are deaf, people who identify as LGBT+)
- There can be diversity and conflict within and between communities
- Communities can be as exclusive and oppressive as they are inclusive and caring



Why do co-produced research?

- An ideological commitment to participation
- To achieve social justice and social change
- Diverse perspectives contribute to research design, interpretation
- Capacity building in communities
- Access to 'hard to reach' or 'easily ignored' participants
- Improved implementation of research into practice
- Community engagement and impact agendas in non-profit sector & universities



Challenges

- Takes time and effort to build trust, partnerships, and handle power differences
- Training may be needed
- The research design may change, the process is 'messy'
- Potential for misunderstanding, raising expectations
- Blurring boundaries between researcher/researched, and academic/activist
- Complex issues about anonymity, privacy, confidentiality
- Handling intra-community conflict, democratic representation
- Institutional ethical review processes
- Credibility and validity



Examples

- ***Debt on Teesside: Pathways to Financial Inclusion***
- ***Imagine – Connecting Communities through Research***



Debt on Teesside: Pathways to Financial Inclusion

- 2-year action research project funded by a charitable foundation
- Partnership between Thrive Teesside, Church Action on Poverty (CAP) & Centre for Social Justice & Community Action, Durham University
- Focus on high interest loans & unmanageable debt in poor households:
 - Household interviews
 - Mentoring scheme
 - Community campaigns



Durham
University

Department of Sociology

Participatory impact

Changes in thinking & practice of co-researchers & partner agencies through *doing the research together*

1. **Households** – as informants, mentees, co-researchers and activists.
2. **Core research partners** – Thrive, CAP, Durham University
3. **Community mentors-researchers** – volunteers, seconded staff
4. **Advisory Group members & organisations** – advice and housing agencies



Collaborative impact

Take-up and use of the *findings*

- **Changes in thinking & attitudes** – how to work with people on debt
- **Changes in policy and practice** – Thrive, CAP, University, Local Councils, Advice agencies.



Collective impact

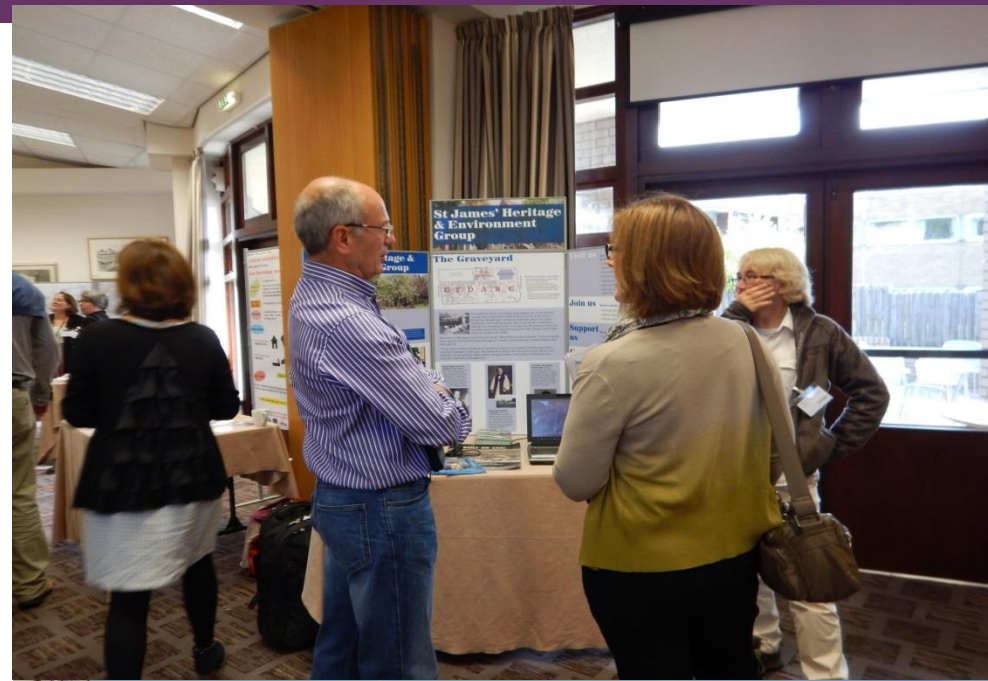
Specific, targeted change

- Reforming the practice of particular loan companies ('rent to own')
- Government regulation of high-cost, short term credit (capping interest rates)



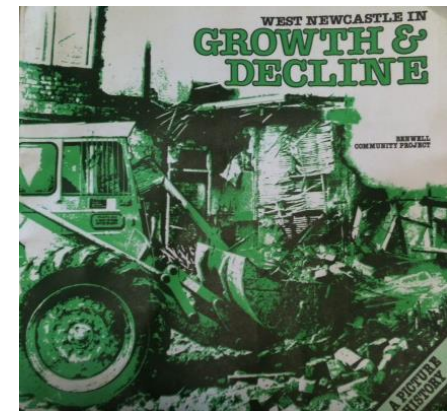
Imagine

connecting communities through research



Imagine North East

- Focus on 'civic participation' – past, present and future
- Part of a larger 'Imagine' project with three other work packages
- Imagine North East - 2 ex-industrial areas, classed as 'deprived', which had National Community Development Projects in the 1970s
- 12 community organisations – variety of research projects
- Durham University – interviews, statistics, history of regeneration and community development policies (1970s to present)
- Co-inquiry action research group



Examples of North Shields Community Projects

| Type of Project | Project Title | Lead Organisation |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Family and community history project | Imagining Community at Cedarwood | Cedarwood Trust |
| Community-led oral history project | Bridging the History | Meadow Well Connected |
| Inter-generational graffiti art project | A Journey through Time | Phoenix Detached Youth Project |

Impact

- **Participatory impact** for community organisations –developing ideas and practices through seeing the bigger picture (history, politics); connecting with other community organisations; engaging in dialogue with academics, politicians
- **Collaborative and collective impact** – Local & National Government officials and politicians gained new understandings of community issues, barriers to civic engagement & the value of co-production (briefings, roundtables, policy workshops, exhibitions, booklets ..)



Further information

- **Debt on Teesside project,**
<https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/social-justice-community-action/research-areas/completed-projects/debt-on-teesside/>
- **Article:** Banks, S. et al. (2017) [Pathways to co-impact: action research and community organising. *Educational Action Research*, vol 25, no 4](#)
- **Book:** Banks, S., et al (eds) (2019) [*Co-producing research: a community development approach*](#), Bristol, Policy Press

