ENHANCING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH SKILLS AND PARTNERSHIPS

PROJECT REPORT

The Leeds Arts and Humanities Research Institute

August 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD

Participatory research requires systems or holistic thinking and has been used to help solve complex problems. A common theme across all these approaches is **impact**: either on current practice or evidence to inform policy. It is a fundamental mechanism to address social and environmental issues, developing new opportunities for collaboration and knowledge creation.

The Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures has engaged with various forms of collaborative research over a number of years. This report identifies the current landscape of collaborative research activities with external partners in the Leeds City Region. It also provides current, empirical evidence of the breadth of participatory research being undertaken and future opportunities, examining factors that support and hinder them. The report culminates with a set of recommendations for undertaking participatory research. We thank everyone who took part in and contributed to this project.

We welcome this report 'Enhancing participatory research skills and partnerships.' It is increasingly important to understand how researchers have engaged in participatory research and we will look to identify how further we can support these endeavours and how we may implement the recommendations made.

Professor Andrew Thorpe,

Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures and

Professor of Modern History

INTRODUCTION

Participatory research emphasises democratic partnership and collaboration. It is about 'engaging and valuing doing research **with** rather than **on** those who are subjects of this research' (Vaughn and Jacquez, 2020, p.2).

There are myriad ways of doing participatory research. The methods depend on what is required of the research itself and have been applied in many different settings. With the broad expertise of researchers within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures (AHC), their participatory research projects encompass a range of approaches and methodologies. Some scholars have used participatory research as 'an umbrella term for a school of approaches that share a core philosophy of inclusivity and of recognizing the value of engaging in the research process (rather than including only as subjects of the research) those who are intended to be the beneficiaries, users, and stakeholders of the research' (Cargo and Mercer, 2008, p.326). Following Cargo and Mercer (2008), Hacker (2017) argues that this philosophy embraces many approaches, which have been known to be used as synonymous terms, including action research, participatory action research, participatory research, and community-based participatory research. Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) list 27 approaches and frameworks associated with participatory research, emphasising that the list is not exhaustive.

Brown (2022) usefully summarises essential features of participatory research, including the distribution of responsibility over the research process and results between participants, the purpose of participatory research, which is different from non-participatory approaches in that it must have specific benefits for participating partners, and the way participatory research challenges the conventional perspective of who owns the research and its outcomes. Importantly for the purposes of this project, Brown (2022, p.202) further differentiates between participation and involvement:

> The involvement of expert participants, such as patients in health research or consumers in market research […] cannot be equated to participate as equal partners. Where involvement allows researchers to take into account the views of participants without handing over the reins of and to the research itself, true and full participation requires the participants to (1) have a role in setting the agenda of inquiry, (2) take part in the data collection and analysis and (3) have control over the use of outcome and the whole process…

These are suggested as the criteria of truly participatory research; however, Brown recognises participatory research as a continuum where participation ranges from consultive to collegiate, following Biggs, cited in Cornwall and Jewkes (1995), who provide a classification of four modes of participation.

While acknowledging the change in the balance of power in participatory research, Brown points out that there are factors, such as potential risks to the participants and their lack of certain skills or knowledge, which require the researcher to take some responsibilities that may differ from those of the participants. Similarly to Brown, Wurm and Napier (2017) identify reflection as a vital characteristic of participatory research, as well as its purpose, which consists in social change. Wurm and Napier emphasise that creative expression and exploration by participants are central to knowledge production in participatory research.

The University of Leeds was fortunate to receive Research England funding for two projects conducted simultaneously: 'Enhancing participatory research skills and partnerships,' carried out by Leeds Arts and Humanities Research Institute (LAHRI), and 'Capacity building through the interdisciplinary Co-Production Network for enhanced best practice in participatory research,' carried out by the Leeds Social Sciences Institute (LSSI), led by Professor Gehan Selim (Deputy Director at LSSI) and Ruth Smith (LSSI research fellow).

It had been planned that the LAHRI's project would also undertake to develop a suite of video case studies to highlight differing approaches to participatory research with community and voluntary groups. Early in the project, owing to the close parallels between planned activities, the LAHRI project team agreed that LSSI would oversee the development of video case studies through their project 'Capacity building through the interdisciplinary Co-Production Network for enhanced best practice in participatory research.' One of the aims of this project was to develop an online platform to showcase best-practice methodologies to build new sharing knowledge and cultural exchange platforms, for which videos were already in the plans. The LAHRI team shared with the LSSI team their ideas for people to develop videos and podcasts with.

This report presents and discusses the findings from the project '**Enhancing participatory research skills and partnerships**' conducted by **LAHRI** between April and July 2022. The overall aim of the project was to enhance and extend participatory research skills and partnerships with a focus on the arts and humanities. The project

had three strands, each appointed a research team with distinct objectives and methodologies:

1) A review of mechanisms for engagement with community and voluntary organisations, led by Dr Pammi Sinha (acting Deputy Director for LAHRI) and Dr Elizaveta Vasserman (postdoctoral research associate (PDRA)),

2) A pilot project with community partners, led by Dr Fozia Bora (Associate Professor of Islamic History) and Dr Vahideh Golzard (PDRA), and

3) A pilot project with Special Collections, led by Joanne Fitton (Associate Director: Special Collections and Galleries) and Dr Bing Wang (PDRA).

The report is accordingly structured into four parts. Part 1 presents 'A review of mechanisms for engagement with community and voluntary organisations' that aimed at mapping participatory research activities and understanding the nature of interactions between colleagues from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures (AHC) and non-academic organisations within the Leeds City Region. It included the following research activities: a desk review of projects showcased on the AHC websites, which engaged non-academic organisations, analysis of data from conducted surveys and interviews, and a workshop.

Part 2 presents 'A pilot project with community partners.' This worked with five members of the local Iranian and Syrian communities to explore how Persian and Arabic collections within Special Collections at the University of Leeds Library could be made more accessible. This study included interviews, a participatory workshop, and a follow-up discussion about the participants' engagement with Special Collections. Although small in number of participants, the project saw immediate impact in that Special Collections has prepared a display of Qur'anic manuscripts, the significance of which is now better understood by the curators, and considering a targeted awareness raising campaign.

Part 3 outlines 'A pilot project with Special Collections.' Using rarely displayed items in the Chinese collections, a zine-making workshop was designed for working more closely with the Special Collections. Although time constraints prevented this workshop from running, it was felt that the workshop ideas and structure had created a mechanism for connecting various communities with the Special Collections.

Part 4 outlines the recommendations at faculty and university level and at project level that we propose from the three strands of the project.

1. A REVIEW OF MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

1.1. Introduction

This report by Dr Pammi Sinha (PI)[1] and Dr Elizaveta Vasserman (PDRA)[2] summarises findings from the research project 'Enhancing participatory research skills and partnerships: A review of mechanisms for engagement with community and voluntary organisations.' The project was conducted between April and June 2022.

The aim of the project was to map participatory research activities and understand the nature of interactions between colleagues from the AHC and community and voluntary organisations within the Leeds City Region. The project sought to answer the following questions:

1) What is the range of organisations with which colleagues from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures have worked?
2) What are the origins of collaborative relationships and how do they develop?
3) What are some of the examples of good practice and lessons learned?
4) What potential opportunities for future collaboration and funding support are there?

The initial findings were shared with the academic community at a workshop organised in the end of the project period. The results of the workshop are included in this report.

1.2. Research approach

To answer the research questions, the first part of the research for this project consisted in the analysis of the content of the University of Leeds website. We investigated research projects in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures (AHC), listed on the website at the time of data collection (April-May 2022), which appeared to engage non-academic organisations within the Leeds City Region. The aim of this study was to map research activities by colleagues in AHC involving non-academic

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organisations and to understand the types of organisations involved in the research projects, representation of different schools within the faculty, and sources of funding.

At the start of the project, we applied for an ethical review of our proposed research involving colleagues at the University of Leeds to conduct surveys and interviews. Our proportionate touch research ethics application was approved by the AHC Research Ethics committee.

The surveys and interviews were designed to collect more specific and up-to-date data, as well as more relevant. Relevance here was seen as relating to projects involving participatory research, rather than projects engaging with non-academic organisations using other methodologies and approaches. The surveys and particularly interviews were also aimed at collecting first-hand data and insights from researchers, as well as learning from them what learnt lessons they could share and what issues and questions they would like to raise. Some of the interviewees suggested that we read the LSSI report on the review of collaborations between the University and Leeds City Council conducted by LSSI earlier (Carroll and Crawford, 2000). Although our project is not linked to the LSSI report, the report informed our thinking about our own project.

The surveys were conducted online using GDPR-compliant Online Surveys recommended by the university and mainly distributed using the Artynet network to reach academics and researchers in AHC. We also sent some invitations to the principal investigators identified during the website analysis stage. The surveys also helped to identify colleagues willing to be interviewed, as one of the questions asked if they would be willing to participate in interviews. The questionnaire that made the basis of the first survey that was initially circulated is included in the Appendix. Later we created a second survey, which was a shorter, streamlined version of the first one in the attempt to increase survey response rates. When designing the second survey we also drew on the LSSI's report (Carroll and Crawford, 2000), to see if the results would correlate.

Overall, 26 people participated in our surveys and 16 people were interviewed during the project. The list of interviewees can also be found in the Appendix. We had survey respondents and interviewees from different areas, together representing all the schools in the faculty.

1.3. Study of the AHC projects based on the website content

The analysis of the AHC research projects based on the web content identified 73 projects which engaged with non-academic organisations within the Leeds City Region. These non-academic participants were subdivided into several categories, shown in Figure 1-1.
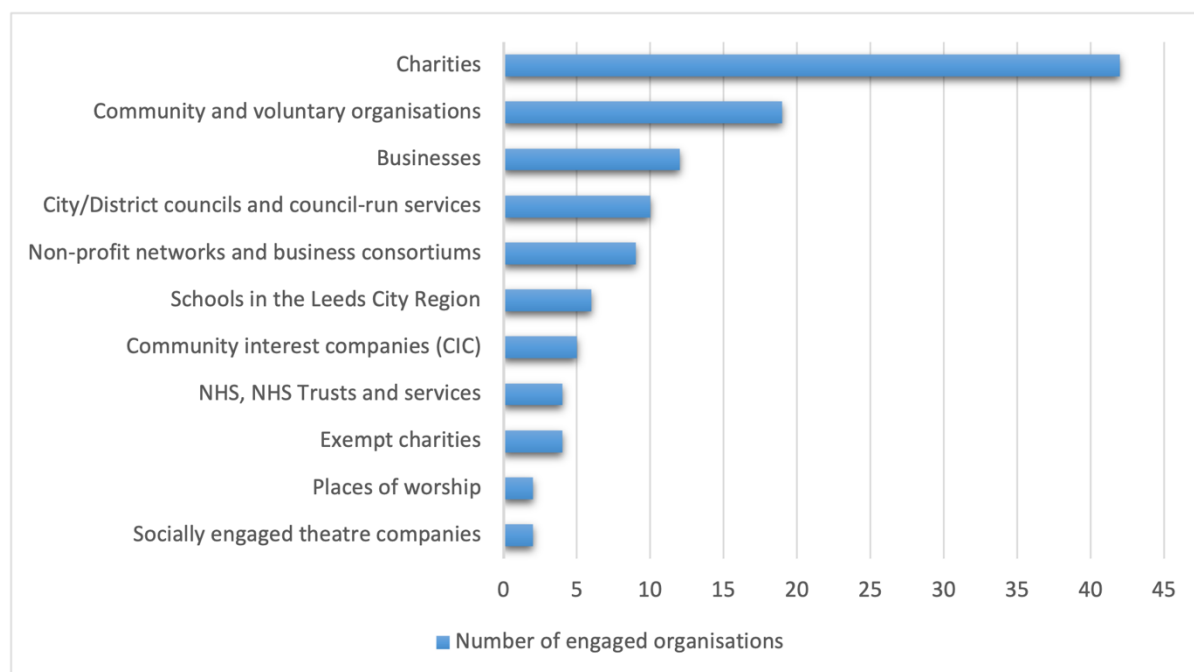
Figure 1-1. Classification of organisations involved in AHC research projects

Research projects in AHC, covered in this part of the study, in total engaged 113 organisations. It should be noted that the exact number and specific schools in the Leeds City Region could not be identified from the gathered data; therefore, the number indicates instead the number of projects that collaborated with schools.

The study showed that collaborative projects were conducted by researchers affiliated with all schools within the faculty. The relationship between the AHC schools and different types of organisations is presented in Figure 1-2.

In addition to the AHC schools, two projects included in the analysis were identified as conducted within the Cultural Institute, an interdisciplinary research centre at the University of Leeds, due to its focus closely connected to AHC. The scope of the Cultural Institute's activities embraces three main strands with the following aims: to 'increase pioneering research collaborations with creative sector partners, widen cultural engagement and participation and build the skills of our students' (University of Leeds, 2022). The Institute runs several programmes facilitating

engagement of non-academic partners, for example, the Leeds Creative Labs programme that pairs academic researchers with creative professionals.
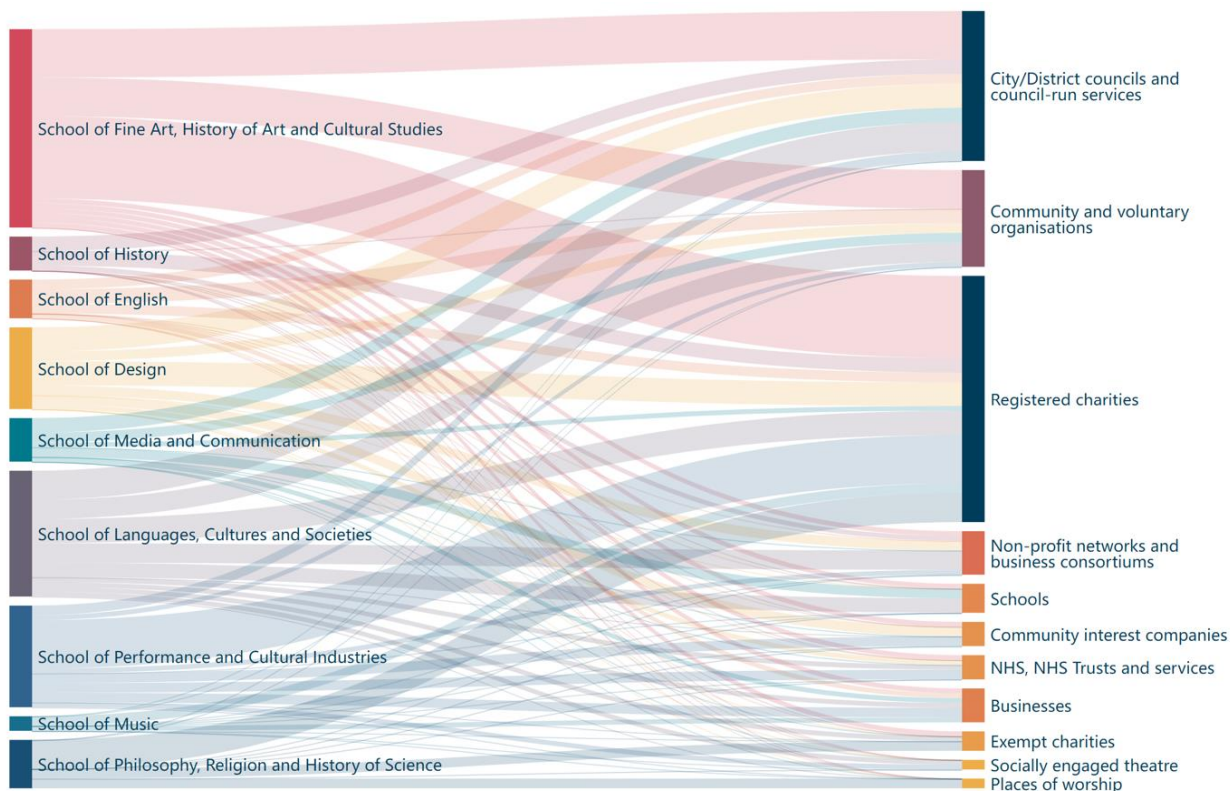
Figure 1-2. Corelations between AHC schools and number of projects involving different types of organisations

The most frequently indicated sources of funding for the projects in the study were internal funding from the University of Leeds and AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council), which funded 24 and 23 projects, respectively. A smaller number of projects received funding from other research councils, such as:

- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC),
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (Impact Acceleration Account, IAA),
- Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), and
- European Research Council (ERC).

Internal funding included, for instance, support from the Cultural Institute, LAHRI, LSSI, Interdisciplinary Pump-Priming Fund, Laidlaw Scholarship, and University of Leeds Q-Step. The funders grouped as 'other' in Figure 1-3 supported one of the projects in the study each. Among them, for instance, was the British Academy; therefore, the percentage does not necessarily mean smaller funds per

project. The role of AHRC as the leading funder corresponds to the data collected from the surveys and interviews as will be shown below in the next section.
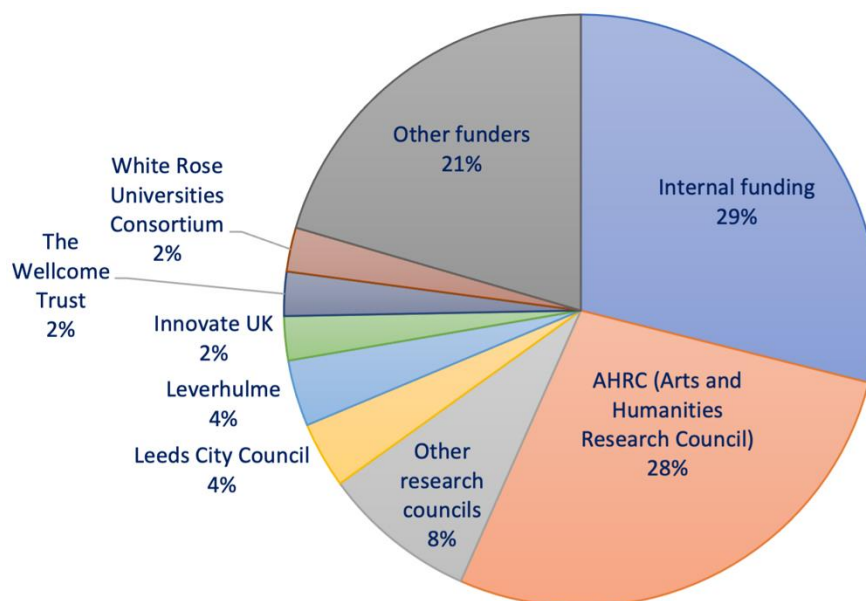
Figure 1-3. Project funding

This section has presented findings that map engagements and interactions with non-academic organisations within the Leeds City Region to assess the range of such organisations, with which colleagues from AHC have worked. As we particularly focused on organisations within the Leeds City Region, we created a typology of various organisations and analysed the number of projects that involved organisations of each type. We recognise the limitations of this data as the University website does not reflect the full scope of research activities; it is also limited by the temporal factors as the time distribution of the projects was not always clear and some of the most recent projects had not yet been publicised.

1.4.   Analysis of the findings from surveys and interviews

This section of the report presents the analysis of responses collected in the surveys and interviews. It is subdivided into several sections highlighting questions which were most relevant to our research objectives.

1.4.1   What defines participatory research?

The survey respondents and interviewees highlighted the crucial role of long-term relationships with communities, built on trust, mutual understanding of each other's

goals, and the aim of making change and bringing value to the community which is directly involved in the process.

For me participatory research is all about that spectrum of agency and the ability of the participants to actually make change and have some control over the research journey itself.[3]

Research, the very thinking process starts with the communities, the organisations that we want to work with.

It comes out of embedded longitudinal relationships of trust, and we never work from the point of view that we know different because we're academics.

It is about authenticity and proximity to the group. It is about people doing it themselves.

At the very basic level, I define participatory research as research where we work together to understand what happens and then to effect change upon what happens. It's about research that is never hierarchical. It tries really hard to consistently address the elephant in the room, to have challenging conversations about what we're doing, why we are doing it, and what is the advantage of what we're doing.

It's a wider inquiry into how we make change within the city.

Figure 1-4 below shows the most frequently occurring words from the conducted interviews that the interviewees used to answer the questions of what participatory research is or what defines it. The word cloud visualises how the academics approach participatory research and what factors and elements are most significant to them in such research projects.

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[3] This is a quote from an interviewee. All text in this style from here on presents quotes from interviews supporting the argument.

Figure 1-4. A word cloud of 50 most frequently used words defining participatory research

1.4.2   What are the main challenges in participatory research?

This section presents some of the most challenging parts in participatory research our study identified. The bullet list below includes the main challenges identified by the respondents of the first survey, where this was an open question, and by the interviewees:

- Gaining trust and building the relationship, together with the issue of time and sensitivity in the process;
- Securing funding;
- Recruitment of participants and ensuring diverse representation;
- Managing conflicting timetables and workload;
- Ensuring consistent contact with organisations throughout the project (particularly difficult during the pandemic);
- Dealing with existing hierarchies within participating organisations which can make it impossible to conduct discussions all together;
- Ensuring the benefits for the participants;
- Sharing information due to different procedures within the organisations and the university;
- Publicising the created resources, moderating, and maintaining them;
- Practical challenges of efficient organisation: having to combine the roles of researcher and project manager;

- Dealing with the principles of ethics;
- Dealing with the principles of authorship and copyright;
- Measuring what participation takes and how it gets paid;
- Dealing with the University procedures, including payments;
- Lack of research support from the university;
- Defining, storing, and using data;
- Managing anticipations and assumptions on both sides due to different agendas for participants;
- Dealing with resistance to change within the industry.

We have to consistently be asking ourselves the question: what the value is of what we are doing to the people that we are working with and if we can't define that then we shouldn't be doing it, because it has to be more beneficial to people, we are researching with, than to us.

A lot of participatory research makes claims to being more democratic, but you could still be talking to exactly the same people who have a voice in the first place. So for me it's always a question of are you just talking to the usual suspects or are you talking to other people?

There are always power dynamics... There are endless questions, for example, of race, sexuality, gender, and personality dynamics. These issues are always going to be very live in any collaborative process. All you can ever do is try and make those visible. Try and speak about them. Try and navigate them, but they're never going to be solved…

Speaking as a woman who works in a male dominated field brings up that question of the assertion of expertise.

Understanding and maintaining alignment with their [participating organisations] strategic aims and making sure that you stay relevant to them and that they are relevant to you. Maintaining momentum, checking if they are still interested, particularly when personnel changes.

It can be very challenging to get people to change the narratives they think they know and therefore be flexible about outputs.

When we conducted the second survey, we included this as a multiple-choice question to expand our previous findings and also to compare them to the reported barriers in the LSSI's report (Carroll and Crawford, 2000). The answers to this question in our survey are visualised in Figure 1-5. While the LSSI's report focused on collaborations (not necessarily participatory research) only with the Leeds City Council, the main barrier it showed was the same: lack of time, identified by the majority of respondents; conflicting timetables and workload, the second top challenge in our results, also was one of the top three barriers in the LSSI's report.
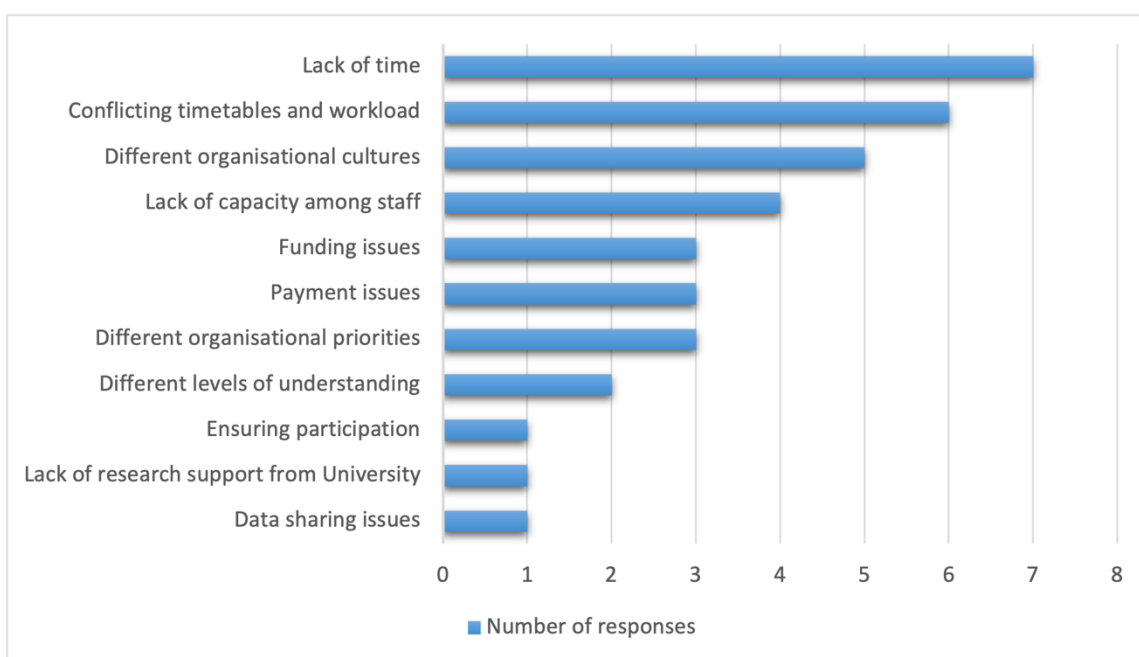
Figure 1-5. The most challenging aspects of participatory research according to the survey respondents

1.4.3 How does the place of participatory research in AHC differ from other fields?

Based on the findings from the interviews, AHC and some schools in particular have always worked with external organisations, such as museums, theatres, concert halls, etc., and now this research tradition has coincided with the interest of funders like the AHRC in impact and engagement.

Arts and culture are by its nature about having a particular kind of sensitivity to the world, so of course it [participatory research] is particularly important.

Research in the arts and humanities often tends to be theoretical, engaging with philosophical and critical traditions, which may be not accessible and pose a challenge to participation. On the other hand, the arts and humanities expand our understanding of what it means to know and to be, and therefore facilitates participatory research.

> *These questions mean that we can all be part of knowledge production together […] and that the arts and humanities is a great space for participatory and action research approaches.*

1.4.4 Value and benefits for participants

When asked about the value of participatory research for participants, many survey respondents and interviewees reflected on the innovation and experimental approaches, which the organisations were able to implement in their practice, as well as the understanding of alternative and challenging ideas and solutions, reflecting on their practice and making change. Giving voice to persons or groups that do not always have it was also an important part of it. Benefits from the perspective of individuals focused on opportunities for professional and personal development, and sometimes renumeration. The latter is linked to one of problematic issues discussed below in section 1.6.

> *Reflection. Applying complex conceptual thinking to real-world contexts. This involves translatory strategies: sometimes organisations think that they're doing things, but their audiences don't necessarily understand what they're doing or what it means. We can help them with that, we can help them explain things to policymakers, funders, or media. I think it's one of the things that academics are quite good at: explaining how something that means something to one group might not mean very much to another group until it's put in other terms. Sometimes we can help to translate that.*

As for the most positive aspect of participatory research from the perspective of academics, when answering this open question in our first survey, the respondents tended to focus on learning from each other and adopting a new perspective, being

able to engage with new audiences, and hearing the participants' voices. Many researchers emphasised the crucial role of the participants' involvement saying research would not have been possible otherwise; therefore, making it difficult to identify specific positive aspects.

In the second survey, answering the same question but in a multiple-choice format, formulated based on the results of the first survey and the LSSI's report (as discussed in section 1.4.2), similar results were found, summarised in Figure 1-6. This survey showed another important value of participatory research: driving social change.
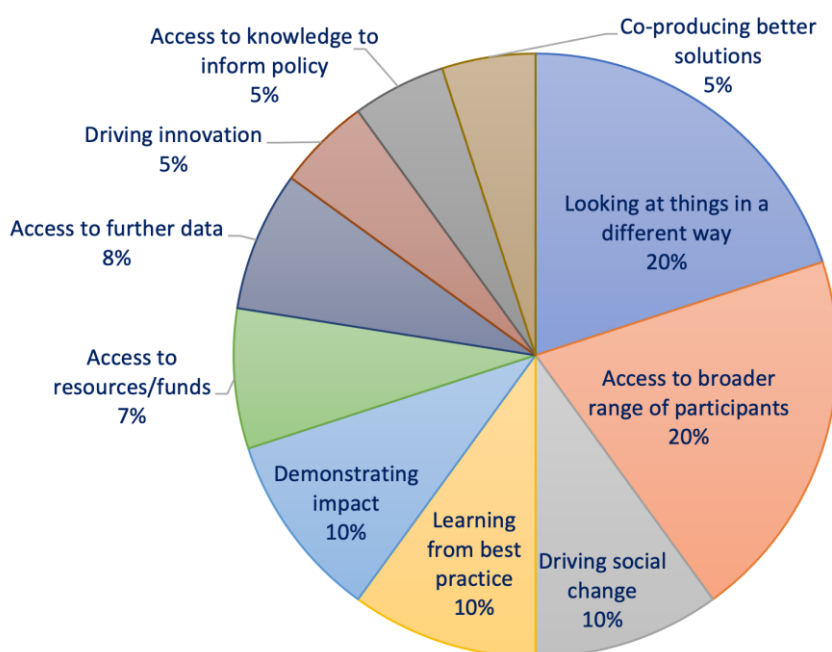
Figure 1-6. Most positive aspects of participatory research from the survey respondents' perspective

1.4.5 Building collaborations

Speaking about the process of building collaborations, most of the respondents have emphasised the importance of long-term relationships built on trust, care, and understanding of each other's motivation and role. Existing contacts appeared to be the main way, followed by networking, for the researchers to establish communication with organisations initially. Afterwards, the stages of projects at which organisations were involved, differed more.
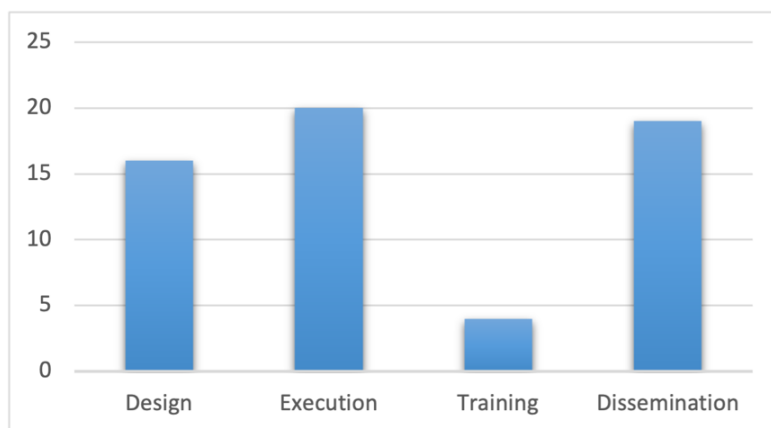
Figure 1-7. Survey responses indicating the stages of projects, at which participating organisations were involved

The survey responses about the key enablers for collaboration were distributed in the following way:
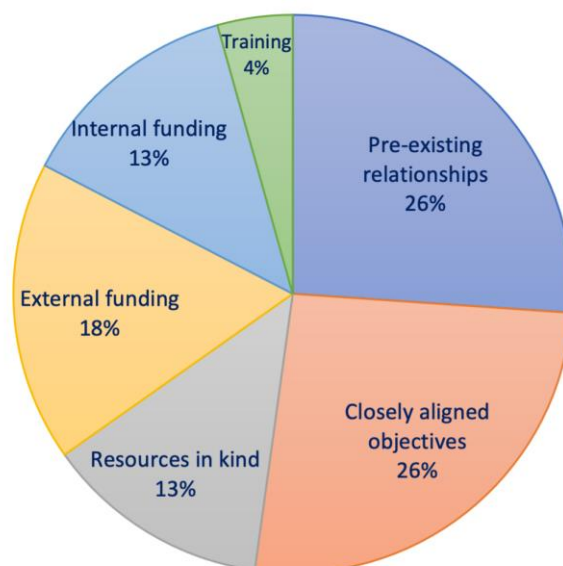
Figure 1-8. The key enablers for collaboration

The predominant role of pre-existing relationships and closely aligned objectives as the key enablers corelated well with the ways contacts were reported to be established. The interviewees similarly stressed the need for aligned objectives and regular communication with the participants, revisiting those objectives and progress.

1.4.6 Funding sources
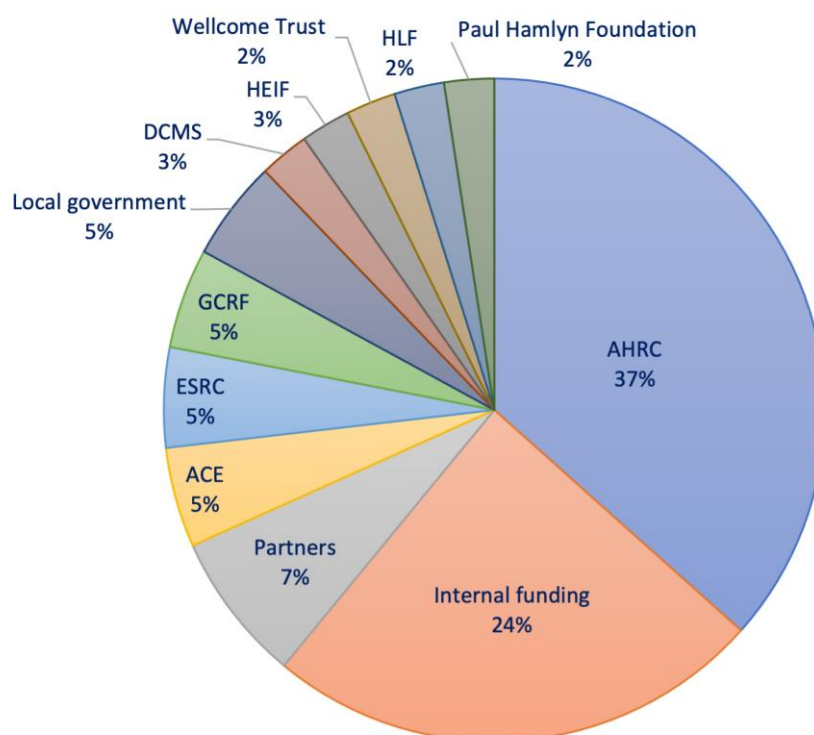
Figure 1-9. Funding sources

The information on funding collected from respondents to both surveys, compared to the data gathered via the website, showed the same predominance of AHRC and internal funding, although in a different correlation. Additionally, some sources of funding were demonstrated that were not apparent from the website analysis, such as the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF), the National Lottery Heritage Fund (HLF), and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

1.4.7 Lessons learnt

This section presents some of the lessons learnt as identified by the interviewees.

1)   Some interviewees have reiterated the importance of careful building of relationships and trust, ensuring the benefit of participating to the organisations, facilitating effective communication throughout the project, and recognising all the partners' contributions.

[We need to be] really alert to how much we rely on our participants in the research writing, at the grant writing, the research delivery, and research outputs and how we consistently need to minimise the impact

> *upon them in terms of workload and be really grateful for anybody who wants to get involved: saying 'please' and 'thank you' and always recognising contributions is really important and yet does not happen enough.*

2) Trying to understand the barriers to participation is another important contribution from the interviewees in terms of lessons learnt. This is a factor, linked to recruitment issues and equitable representation, which could benefit from further discussion.

> *I think understanding what the barriers are to participation in the first place is really important. And then I think also if you are going to position your participants as co-researchers, you've got to really spend some time explaining to the participants what you mean by that.*

3) Not trying to record and analyse all the data but focusing on the main task which involves people.

> *It is about the participating people and it takes a lot of time. You can absolutely drown in the amount of data if you analyse every bit.*

4) Making power dynamics and inequalities visible and navigating them.

> *There are always so many dynamics even if you have a group of people who aren't embedded in structural inequalities […] Part of what you learn through your failure to create a genuinely equal space is exactly how that power operates, and so part of what you can learn from the inability to be equal is something more about exactly how power operates.*

5) Mentorship of senior colleagues and support from the University are important not only for guidance but also for backing up one's status as an expert.

1.5. Workshop analysis

The workshop was held on 28 June 2022 on the University of Leeds campus in the hybrid mode. 23 people participated in the workshop, including 9 participants attending online via MS Teams. The main aim of the workshop was to share the initial findings and to hear from the participants what their thoughts on the findings were and what other experiences and ideas they would like to be reflected.

Based on the main challenges of participatory research identified through the surveys and interviews, as well as the questions that the respondents and interviewees wanted to raise, we created four multiple choice questions, summarising the identified concerns, to ask the attendees of the workshop and to understand how relevant they believed the issues to be. The questions were presented as polls where the most frequently selected answers were shown as the highest percentage of votes. The answers are discussed in this section.

When considering the main issues related to academic research workload and project management, the most urgent issue, according to the 12 respondents, was managing expectations and assumptions on both sides due to different agendas for participants (83 per cent), followed closely by the problem of managing conflicting timetables and workload (75 per cent). The results are presented in Figure 1-10.

What are the main issues related to academic research workload and project management? 😀 12

Managing conflicting timetables and workload
75%

Practical challenges of efficient organisation: having to combine the roles of researcher and project manager
58.33%

Managing expectations and assumptions on both sides due to different agendas for participants
83.33%
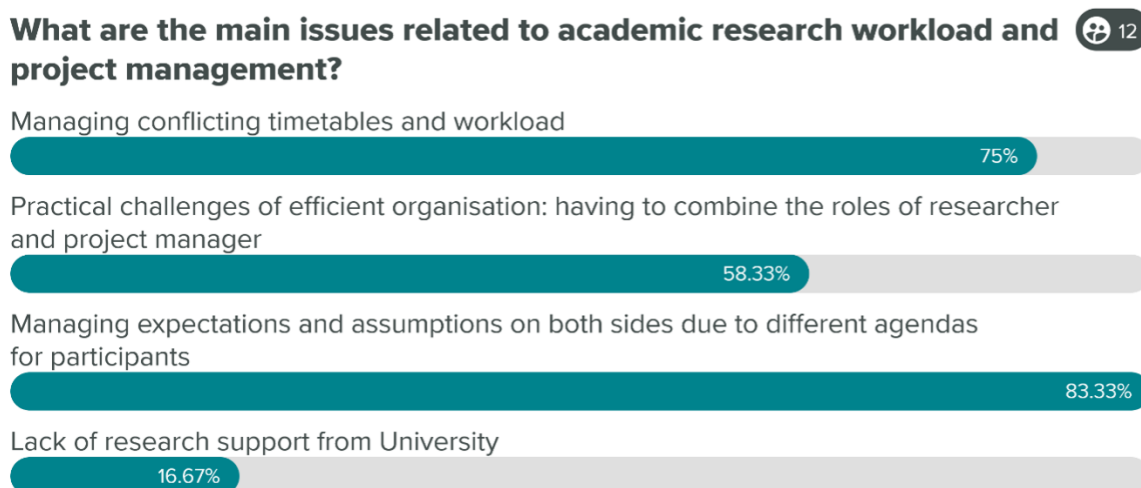
Lack of research support from University
16.67%

Figure 1-10. Results of Poll 1

The workshop participants added to this the problem of continuity of established relations that is complicated by changes in funding, changes in the roles of key people, etc. Another question raised by the participants concerned a role that impact support

officers might play in working with external partners in AHC as permanent members of staff and how it could be supported.

Among the issues related to collaborative agreements, authorship, and copyrights, ensuring the benefits for the participants was the issue that received the most votes (73 per cent). Such distribution agrees with the data collected from the survey and interviews where this issue was highlighted as one of the main challenges throughout the process of participatory research. On a more administrative level, the issues of sharing information with partners and dealing with existing hierarchies within participating organisations were the main issues from the respondents' view, receiving 55 and 45 per cent respectively (see Figure 1-11).

What are the main issues related to collaborative agreements, authorship, and copyrights? 😊 11

Dealing with existing hierarchies within participating organisations
45.45%

Ensuring consistent contact with organisations throughout the project
36.36%

Ensuring the benefits for the participants
72.73%

Sharing information due to different procedures within the organisations and the university
54.55%

Publicising the created resources, moderating, and maintaining them
18.18%

Dealing with the principles of authorship and copyright
36.36%

Dealing with resistance to change within the industry
27.27%

Figure 1-11. Results of Poll 2

The workshop participants stressed that co-writing presented a serious problem with some funders and publishers, especially in relation to REF, and noted that it could be very demotivating. They also suggested that the use of specialised software, such as Basecamp, could be helpful when managing projects involving multiple partners; it was recommended by one of the participants for the support it provided them in streamlining communication and coordinating work between participants, particularly in remote work contexts.

The main issue related to payment and funding identified by the respondents was dealing with the University procedures, including payments (83 per cent of votes). The distribution of votes is shown in Figure 1-12.
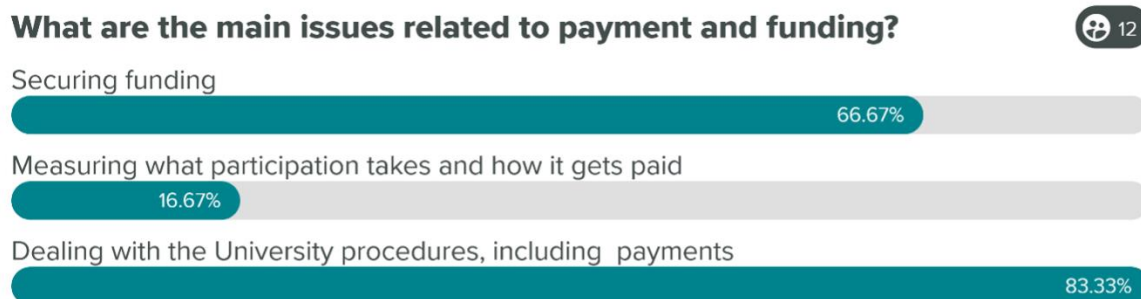
Figure 1-12. Results of Poll 3

The main issue related to ethics procedures according to the votes (80 per cent) was the challenge of gaining trust and building the relationship with external partners, including the issue of time and sensitivity on the process. Dealing with ethics principles was the second most voted for answer (60 per cent), as presented in Figure 1-13.
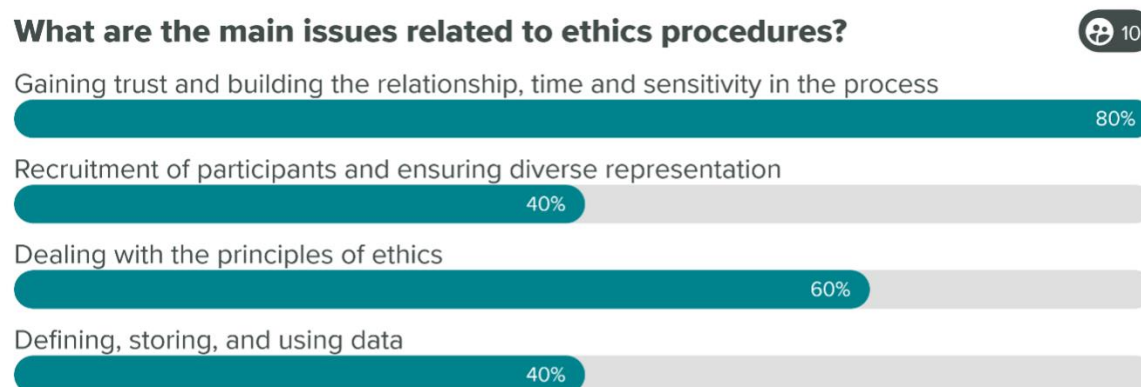
Figure 1-13. Results of Poll 4

The demonstrated concern about ethics reflects similar findings from the surveys and interviews. It is therefore discussed in the next section of this report. The workshop participants also made a suggestion of investigating a possibility to introduce a potential pathway specifically for short-term projects, a quick response mode for time critical projects.

1.6. Questions to be raised (potential implications of this project)

This project has identified a number of concerns that the researchers share and issues that they would like to be discussed at the faculty and university levels. These are mainly structural issues, and they include the following:

a) Streamlining collaborative agreements and payments to external partners:

It is currently reported to be an unreasonably long and complicated process that may be discouraging for individuals to collaborate with the university again.

b) Authorship and copyright:

Ensuring that the copyright fairly reflects the participants' contributions.

c) Emergency funding:

Availability of limited quick-response funds that would allow to secure or maintain a resource created within a participatory research project.

d) Project management:

Introducing a funding and/or organisational model that that supports the PI with the project management workload.

e) Alternative ethics procedures, including obtaining consent in the context specific to participatory research projects and a provision for a fast track for short projects.

Regarding the ethics procedures, Dr Helen Graham led a series of workshops in 2019 with the Participatory Research Group in AHC, the Centre for Practice Research in the Arts (CePRA) and interested researchers. The workshops resulted in recommendations developed specifically for practice-led, action-led, and participatory research projects (as well as separate notes for autoethnographic research). These recommendations and notes for autoethnographic research were presented to the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee who made them available on the university website: https://ris.leeds.ac.uk/research-ethics-and-integrity/faculty-specific-information/ahc-faculty-research-ethics-committee/.

These recommendations, 'Notes for Applicants and Reviewers,' emphasise that ethical review processes need to be adaptive and there is room for discussion between researchers and the review committee to clarify how ethical research processes may apply different approaches and how they could be detailed in an application. Considering the findings from our project, we feel that the AHC research community could benefit from wider circulation of these recommendations, to make them better known and accessible, and including them (or a reference to them) in the standard guidance for completing the application form for University ethical review.

1.7. Conclusion

To answer our research questions, we undertook desk research to understand the current landscape, conducted interviews and surveys, and organised a workshop. Our desk research identified that the AHC faculty currently undertake substantial participatory research with external partners within the Leeds City Region. This study mapped and analysed collaborative research activities. It identified 73 research projects in AHC that collaborated with 113 various organisations. It classified the organisations, with which colleagues from AHC collaborated, and provided an overview of the identified funding sources and relations between different organisations and schools within AHC. We recognise the limitations of this data as the website content does not reflect the full scope of research activities and the details of the projects are not always clear. It would be, therefore, desirable for the University website to have a more consistent representation of research projects with their timelines and funding sources indicated, among other information.

Our analysis of the data from the surveys identified some key issues around what participatory research meant in terms of research methods, approaches, benefits, and challenges that were inherent throughout participatory research. It increased our understanding of the process of building relationships with non-academic organisations. Importantly, the surveys helped us find the colleagues who were willing to be interviewed.

The interviews provided more insights into the challenges of participatory research and brought forth what obstacles could be avoided, what lessons the researchers learnt, as well as what questions they wanted to be elevated at faculty and university levels, as discussed in the previous sections. They informed the recommendations that we included in this report (see Part 4).

Overall, 26 people participated in our surveys and 16 people were interviewed during the project. Based on the analysis of responses from the surveys and interviews, we formulated a number of questions, grouped into four areas, to discuss at the workshop: (1) Academic research workload and project management, (2) Collaborative agreements, authorship, and copyrights, (3) Payment and funding, and (4) Ethics procedures. 23 people participated in the workshop and contributed to our initial findings.

Both the survey and interview respondents and the workshop participants agreed on the following as being some of the main issues in participatory research:

- Managing the researcher's own changing workloads and priorities;
- Taking the time and care to build and maintain relationships with partner organisations;
- Sharing information across the partners;
- Finding ways to sustain relationships and created resources after a project might have ended;
- Ensuring benefits for all partners through the project;
- Understanding barriers to participation and fair representation and addressing power imbalances;
- Dealing with the university procedures including payments to partners.

  An issue not identified through the surveys and interviews, but which came up in the workshop was the use of technologies as a solution to keep project relationships or communications going.

As a result of the project we will endeavour to use the findings to inform future training workshops, such as LAHRI's AHRC Workshops series and the Building Impact Momentum programme, create good practice guidelines for early-career researchers (ECR) on participatory research, and contribute to ethics reviewing processes.

Appendix

A. List of interviewees

1. Professor Abigail Harrison Moore
2. Professor Alice O'Grady
3. Dr Aylwyn Walsh
4. Professor Cecile de Cat
5. Professor Emma Stafford
6. Erica Ramsay
7. Dr Helen Graham
8. Professor Jane Plastow
9. Professor Jessica Meyer

10. Dr Leila Jancovich

11. Dr Mani King Sharpe

12. Nichola Casse

13. Dr Papiya Mazumdar

14. Professor Paul Cooke

15. Dr Paul Wilson

16. Professor Stephen Coleman

B. Survey questions

Survey 1

1. Have you conducted (or participated in) research projects which engaged non-academic organisations?

2. Have these projects engaged non-academic organisations within the Leeds City Region (including Bradford, Calderdale, Craven, Harrogate, Kirklees, Leeds, Selby, Wakefield, and York)?

3. When did you conduct the project?

4. How long was the project?

5. What kind of organisations were involved?

   - Community or voluntary organisation
   - Community interest company
   - Charity
   - Exempt charity
   - Another non-profit organisation
   - Business
   - Other

6. Could you tell us the names of these organisations?

7. What was the nature of the engagement of non-academic organisations?

8. Were these organisations involved in any of the following stages of the project? Please select:

   - Design
   - Execution
   - Dissemination
   - Training

- Other

9. How was the project funded?

10. How did you establish contact with these organisations?

11. What was the most positive or valuable part of their engagement from your perspective?

12. What was the main challenge of engaging these organisations?

13. How did these organisations benefit from the project and/or research findings?

14. Do you describe your project methodology and these organisations' involvement as participatory research?

15. Would you be willing to tell us about the project in more detail during a short interview (15-30 minutes)?

16. Do you agree to be contacted by email for follow-up questions?

17. We are planning to deliver a workshop to consider our findings about participatory research at the University of Leeds; would you be interested in attending such a workshop?

18. Name and email

19. What school are you affiliated with?

Survey 2

1. What school are you affiliated with?

2. Who was the non-academic partner you collaborated with?

3. How was the project funded?

4. What were the start and end dates of your project?

5. Would you describe the collaboration as participatory research?

6. Were the organisations involved in any of the following stages of the project? Please select:

   - Design

   - Execution

   - Dissemination

   - Training

- Other. If you selected Other, please specify

7. How did you establish contact with these organisations?

8. What would you say was a key enabler for your collaboration? Please select as many as are appropriate:
   - Pre-existing relationships
   - Closely aligned objectives
   - Resources in kind
   - External funding
   - Internal funding
   - Training
   - Other. If you selected Other, please specify

9. What was/were the most positive or valuable part of their engagement? Please select as many as are appropriate:
   - Access to data analysis skills
   - Access to resources/funds
   - Learning from best practice
   - Driving innovation
   - Driving social change
   - Meeting commitments for the city
   - Access to knowledge to inform policy
   - Access to further data
   - Looking at things in a different way
   - Demonstrating impact
   - Co-producing better solutions
   - Access to broader range of participants
   - Other. If you selected Other, please specify

10. What was the main challenge of engaging these organisations? Please select as many as are appropriate:
    - Lack of time
    - Lack of capacity among staff
    - Different paces of working/timescales
    - Different organisational priorities
    - Different levels of understanding
    - Not knowing who to contact
    - Different organisational cultures

- Data sharing issues

- Potential reputational/political risk

- Payment issues

- Copyright issues

- Ethical approval

- Different financial expectations

- Other. If you selected Other, please specify.

C. Interview information sheet

You are being invited to participate in the internally funded research project 'Enhancing participatory research skills and partnerships: A review of mechanisms for engagement with community and voluntary organisations.' Please take time to read the following information and ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to participate.

About the project

This research is conducted by Dr Pammi Sinha (principal investigator) and Dr Elizaveta Vasserman at the Leeds Arts and Humanities Research Institute. It aims at mapping participatory research activities and understanding the nature of interactions between colleagues from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures and community and voluntary organisations within the Leeds City Region. The project runs till the end of June 2022, and we plan to organise a workshop to share our findings within this period.

Your participation

You are invited to the interview because you have indicated in the survey, taken as part of this study, that you conduct participatory or collaborative research, or because we have read about such research on the website of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to give verbal consent. You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. We will set a time for an interview convenient for you, it can be either in person or via MS Teams and it will take approximately 15 minutes. You will be asked questions about your research projects that engaged members of non-academic organisations. The interview will be audio-

recorded. After the interviews have been transcribed, the voice recordings will be destroyed; the transcriptions will be destroyed three years after the end of the project.

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this research will contribute to our understanding of participatory research conducted at the University of Leeds as well as the benefits to the Leeds City Region and enhance opportunities for future collaborative relationships and funding support.

We will not collect any personal data, other than your name and work email. You will be able to choose whether to share the details of your research for the benefit of providing examples of good practice. The information you provide will not be anonymised and may be included in the project report.

Should you have any questions or need further information, feel free to contact Elizaveta: Dr Elizaveta Vasserman, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Leeds Arts and Humanities Research Institute (LAHRI), E.Vasserman@leeds.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read through the information.

D. Preliminary interview questions

1. Could you tell us briefly about your research project that engaged non-academic organisations within the Leeds City Region?
2. When did you conduct the project?
3. How long was the project?
4. How was the project funded?
5. What kind of organisations were involved? (community or voluntary organisations, charities, social enterprises)
6. Could you tell us the names of these organisations?
7. What was the nature of their engagement?
8. Do you describe your project methodology as participatory research?
9. What factors defined it as participatory research?
10. In what stages of the project were these organisations involved?
11. Did they participate in defining the aim of the project and research questions?
12. How did you establish contact with these organisations?
13. What was the most positive or valuable part of their engagement?
14. What was the main challenge of engaging these organisations?

15. How did these organisations benefit from the project?

16. How did you share project findings with them?

17. Did they get compensated for their time participating in the project?

18. What feedback did you receive from the participants about their role in the project?

19. We aim to deliver a workshop to consider our findings about participatory research at the University of Leeds; would you be interested in attending such a workshop?

20. Would you like to talk about your participatory research at the workshop?

2. A PILOT PROJECT WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

2.1. Introduction

This report by Dr Vahideh Golzard (PDRA),[4] supervised by Dr Fozia Bora (PI),[5] summarises findings from the research project 'Enhancing participatory research skills and partnerships: A pilot project with community partners.' The project was conducted between April and July 2022.

This project investigated how Special Collections at the University of Leeds presents and curates materials, and what inspires community engagement. Special Collections at Leeds holds numerous valuable items and collections of significant relevance and interest for our local communities; however, many of these collections are currently inaccessible to those beyond the University. This project worked with local Iranian and Syrian communities in West Yorkshire to explore how Persian and Arabic collections could be made more accessible.

2.2. Participatory research: A guiding definition

For the purposes of this project, we adopted the following definition of participatory research, which resonated well with our aims in this time-limited yet path-breaking community engagement project:

> Participatory research (PR) encompasses research designs, methods, and frameworks that use systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by an issue being studied for the purpose of action or change. PR engages those who are not necessarily trained in research but belong to or represent the interests of the people who are the focus of the research. Researchers utilizing a PR approach often choose research methods and tools that can be conducted in a participatory, democratic manner that values genuine and meaningful participation in the research process (Vaughn and Jacquez, 2020, p.1).

The participants were keen to be involved in shaping how the engagement took place, as well as contributing to the research itself in crucial and critical ways, outlined below.

2.3. Research methodology

The methodological design for this study involved three methods of engagement comprising: semi-structured interviews, a participatory workshop, and a post-

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workshop discussion. The interviews were conducted and recorded via the Zoom platform, which aided the accessibility of the project to participants, although this also limited participants to those with digital access. Observation methods were used in the participatory workshop to understand participants' experiences and explore how they feel about the parts of Special Collections that reflect their culture and identity.

The community members involved in this research were originally from Iran and Syria, and English was considered by them as a second language. As a native speaker of Persian and a bilingual researcher, I (Dr Vahideh Golzard) did not have difficulties in communicating with the participants during the data collection. Some of the respondents preferred to answer the interview questions in Persian. Thus, the questions and answers were all provided in Persian (see Appendix for the Persian version of the interview questions) which I then translated into English, before analysing the responses.

In line with the first strand of the project, 'A review of mechanisms for engagement with community and voluntary organisations,' we applied for an ethical review of our proposed research. The participants' personal details have been anonymised so that they are not identifiable from this report, and no personally sensitive information or response was sought or received.

2.3.1 Three methods of participatory engagement

In order to the canvass the views of a number of volunteer-participants from the above-mentioned communities, this study is based on ethnographic methods and qualitative research using:

1) Semi-structured interviews at the first stage of the engagement;
2) In-person or online participation workshop held on 14th June 2022 in Special Collections at the University of Leeds;
3) Post-workshop, discussions about the engagement with Special Collections materials continued over lunch at a local Persian restaurant.

These two latter settings, on and off campus, were chosen in discussion with participants, so as to maximise the comfort of participants, and to balance the sense of discovery with the ease of discussion generated by being in a familiar place, as the restaurant is a known and loved venue for the participants. While it was necessary to go into Special Collections to handle some of the items (although one participant engaged very effectively over a video call), having further discussions in a more

community-oriented space removed the guest-host binary (and hierarchy) that might be perceived by participants coming into the potentially unfamiliar space of the Brotherton Library, which can be seen as both beautiful and imposing. This addressed the issue identified in the report on the first strand of the project: 'Making power dynamics and inequalities visible and navigating them' (section 1.4.7).

In short, the combination of these modes of engagement (questionnaire, workshop, and discussion at lunch) was designed to maximise the value to be gained from participants' responses.

2.3.2 Interview questions

The interviews took the form of a list of six questions. The research sample consisted of five participants, whom I selected through a snowballing sampling technique. Initially, the sampling relied on 'previously identified members of the group to identify other members of the population' (Fink, 2002, p.72). The initial participant was known to me through a friend, then this person introduced the other sample members. The respondents were from Leeds, Wakefield, and Barnsley. They were a mix of native Persian and Arabic speakers who were keen to participate in the interview and the subsequent Special Collections-based workshops. The participants were not asked to share their personal information such as age, occupation, or marital status, but they represented a range of these. The small sample size was appropriate for the limited time scope of the project. The engagement was intended to provide a valuable case study for a particular mode of community engagement that will provide useful learnings for Special Collections, LAHRI and beyond, and a foundation on which further engagement work can be built, both with these communities and others.

To make them fully accessible to the linguistically-diverse participants, the semi-structured interviews were conducted in both Persian and English. The following questions were formulated in order to explore participants' experiences and thoughts:

1) Have you ever visited Special Collections or archives in a library?

2) If so, would you like to share your experiences? How do you feel about those Collections which are associated with your culture and identity?

3) In your opinion, to what extent would accessing Special Collections have an impact on our communities? In what ways?

4) What are the main challenges or barriers involved in accessing these items?

5) In your opinion, how can Special Collections at the University of Leeds Library make these items accessible to others? What is your recommendation?

6) We aim to deliver workshops either in-person or online to consider our findings about Participatory Research with Special Collections at the University of Leeds; would you be interested in attending such a workshop?

The online interview lasted between twenty to thirty minutes and the participatory workshop took place over one hour and half. The participants explored various Persian and Arabic manuscripts titled in religion, arts, poetry and literature, history, cosmography, and calligraphy. The two methods yielded complementary results. Via both the interviews and the participatory workshop and discussion, the results I outline below were achieved.

2.4. Findings

The result of this research has revealed that the key barriers for the participants in accessing Special Collections are (1) a lack of awareness and (2) a lack of information about these materials. The language barrier is also one that needs to be considered in such a model of participatory research, and interpretation/translation services need to be provided accordingly. Although all the interlocutors were educated in both Britain and in their home countries, none of them has ever heard of the Special Collections and Archives in relation to their identity, culture, and languages.

Access: Some participants stated that they would have assumed that these collections are accessible only to academics, and 'even our children do not receive any information and guidance about these Collections in the [setting of] school.' One of the female participants expressed the view that the cost of travel is one of the barriers that can restrict her community from benefiting from a visit to see these items in the library.

Workshop responses: Community participants were keen to stress that the workshop was 'very interesting and extremely informative.' By visiting the Special Collections at the University of Leeds Library, all the participants in this research emphasised that the manuscripts reflect their culture and history and that they 'feel deep connections to their heritage and identity' via looking at and discussing the items. Some participants expressed their views on Persian epic poetry present in the Collections, such as the 'Epic of Kings' Shahnameh and Gulistan by the poet Saadi,

seen as masterpieces of Persian literature. They stated that these manuscripts 'have a special place in our hearts.'

All the interlocutors valued accessing the Special Collections in the University of Leeds library because through reading, looking at and absorbing texts and images in archives and manuscripts written in or captioned in their languages they believed that they were able to witness the preservation of their heritage and gain confidence in their cultural identities in the best possible way, through tangible items of significant Persian/Arabic cultural heritage. The following reflections on the manuscripts and catalogues displayed in the workshop express some of their views.

Figure 2-1. Catalogue number MS 299. Persian translation of Qur'an

Participants A and B expressed that the Persian translation/commentary of the Quran in Figure 2-1, present in Special Collections, was a powerful reminder of their grandparents and those of their generation who lived in the older houses of Iran, where the elderly would recite from these kinds of older bilingual versions of the Quran.

Figure 2-2. Catalogue number MS P.29. The Gulistan and Bustan of Sa'di

Participants C and D stated that 'the *Gulistan* of Saadi,' as a landmark of Persian literature, is 'very precious to us.' They also expressed that 'by visiting this manuscript,' they 'feel proud' of this great work that has been read and appreciated over many centuries. As minorities living in a widely-dispersed diaspora, the links with their literary history represented by such items in Special Collections is especially important to the participants. The feeling of cultural pride and enjoyment of such items fostered by the workshop is not often facilitated in mainstream cultural venues outside Iran.

All the participants expressed their deep feelings for one of the greatest Persian epic poetry books, the *Shahnameh* or 'Book of Kings' (see Figure 2-3). Participant A stressed that the '*Shahnameh* preserves the Persian language and identity, and it is so special to us.' Again, being able to see/handle such items in Special Collections builds a sense of communal solidarity amongst the participants, and deepens a sense of shared uninterrupted history, through the persistence of such cultural artefacts. The participants were moved by the experience of engaging with these key spiritual,

historical, and literary texts, which span the breadth of their own cultural education back in their or their elder family members' countries of birth/origin. The multi-lingual dimension of some of these works also expresses their own often polyglot and culturally rich backgrounds.

Figure 2-3. Catalogue number BC NCC/ZIM. The epic of kings: Stories retold from Firdusi

Moving on to images of artefacts in some of the Persian art books in Special Collections, participant D expressed her response that the image of Persian pottery bowl in Figure 2-4 reminded her of the cities of Isfahan and Shiraz in Iran and left her 'feeling nostalgia' for these ancient places that are central to the Iranian cultural and historical landscape. The two cities are famous for their Persian-Islamic architecture, tiled mosques, and minarets. Such artefacts, and images of them, offer a link to these places that are physically distant but emotionally close to the heart of the participants. They valued seeing such artistic objects being potentially displayed, appreciated, and brought to the attention of wider audiences in West Yorkshire and across the UK.

Figure 2-4. Catalogue number BC Read Catalogues/VIC. 1000 years of Persian art: An exhibition covering many facets of the Persian creative and artistic powers and skills of the last 1000 years (epigraphical turquoise pottery bowl, dd.13th-14th century)
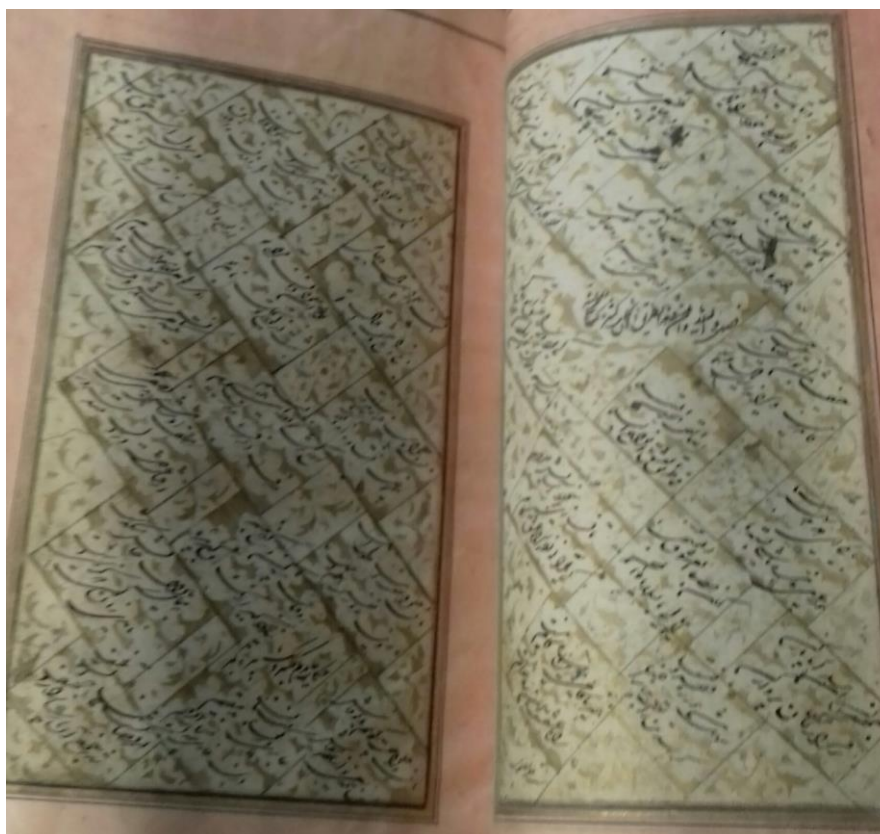

Figure 2-5. Catalogue number MS P.26. Persian calligraphy

In regard to Persian calligraphy, participant E stated that the sample notebook in Figure 2-5 reminded her of her childhood, when she received training in the art of calligraphy. She noted with enthusiasm that this manuscript 'is very impressive' and written in a 'harmonious and skilful manner.' This, too, is a tangible link to an

experience that is common in Iran, but not often represented or acknowledged in the art/culture landscape of the UK.

2.5. Recommendations

Through the three modes of engagement, described above, the five participants in this project offered a range of recommendations, as follows:

- Participants suggested that it is important for Special Collections in the University of Leeds to establish networking opportunities between the archive/heritage services and local communities. Through this kind of connection, the communities can gain more concrete knowledge and information about the items that are related to themselves and others within their communities, from a range of language, age, and educational backgrounds.

- Via the questionnaires, respondents suggested that broadcast media, schools and prominent advertisement in community-accessible spaces can play a crucial role in raising awareness of Special Collections and its rich range of assets.

- The community as represented in this sample of participants recommended that the fragile older manuscripts could be displayed safely to the public by using Archival Glass. This would ensure that the items could still be seen and appreciated by visitors, and the link with their cultural history maintained.

- Some participants suggested that the University of Leeds library should designate specific sections of the library for the safekeeping and display of Persian and other communities' archives.

- One participant stated that if key aspects of the Persian manuscripts/heritage could be translated into English, this will make it easier for their children, who were born in the UK, to understand the contents of these Collections, to access them and engage with them.

These recommendations were generated by all five participants, who were highly enthusiastic about the Collections and their potential for community access and engagement in a variety of ways. They are keen to foster these links further, and for others to be drawn into these kinds of projects in the future.

2.6. Conclusions

This project offered a concrete opportunity for the research team including community participants and the academics/library officers to reflect together on:

1) How we co-curate the material in the Special Collections using a participatory model;
2) What decolonisation means in relation to the collections;
3) What animates, inspires, and facilitates community involvement.

We were delighted to be able to generate trust, positivity, and investment in our shared activities both during the project itself and for future relationships. The co-curation model has already led to a bilingual Arabic-Persian Quran translation being put on display in the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at the University of Leeds, as of early July 2022. Future interpretation and curation work will build on the responses provided by participants and invite them to help shape the labels, descriptions, backstories, and contextual insights attached to items in Special Collections that connect directly with their culture and heritage.

On the issue of decolonisation, while wider questions of 'ownership' of items could not be addressed in a project of this scope, there was a strong feeling that participants do feel a sense of cultural representation, of involvement, of being valued as research participants and interlocutors through research of this kind, and they felt invested in the project. Thus, this expressed a tentative and limited yet meaningful decolonial approach, in which 'ownership' in the sense of access, interpretation, representation and enjoyment of cultural artifacts, is extended by means of a participatory research model. Community involvement is enhanced by sensitive discussions around venues, types of engagement (including whether digital, physical or both), multilingualism, incorporating a social dimension to the participation and making sure that all expenses are paid through an easy-to-navigate process.

In looking to the future and to the next steps beyond this case study, which we hope to expand on at a further date, the respondents warmly welcomed this project and stated that they would be very much interested to be involved in similar projects in future. As the data shows, a lack of awareness about Special Collections is a major primary barrier that was identified by most of the participants in this research. Involving more communities from the West Yorkshire region by creating networking opportunities will open up wider possibilities for accessing Special Collections and

Archives on the part of local currently disengaged communities. In this particular project, the three modes of soliciting participant responses in a range of settings, as well as covering travel and subsistence costs for the participants, facilitated the engagement very successfully.

This project has opened a pathway to future engagement that promises to be fruitful, mutually beneficial to both communities and Special Collections, and has the potential to bring Persian and Arabic heritage into a space of engagement and enjoyment for visitors whether from Persian/Arabic backgrounds or from anywhere in the world. Participants did indeed find the Collections to be 'Special' and look forward to building further collaborations in the near future.

Appendix

E. Farsi version of interview questions

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آیا تا به حال از مجموعه ها یا آرشیوهای ویژه در یک کتابخانه بازدید کرده اید؟

اگر بازدید کردید، آیا می خواهید تجربیات خود را به اشتراک بگذارید؟ درباره مجموعه هایی که با فرهنگ و هویت شما مرتبط هستند، چه احساسی دارید؟

به نظر شما، دسترسی به مجموعه های ویژه تا چه حد بر جوامع ما تأثیر می گذارد؟

چالش ها یا موانع اصلی دسترسی به این آرشیوها چیست؟

به نظر شما، چگونه مجموعه های ویژه در کتابخانه دانشگاه لیدز می توانند این آرشیوها را در دسترس دیگران قرار دهند؟ توصیه شما چیست؟

ما قصد داریم کارگاه هایی را به صورت حضوری یا آنلاین ارائه دهیم تا یافته های خود را در مورد تحقیقات مشارکتی با مجموعه های ویژه در دانشگاه لیدز در نظر بگیریم. آیا شما علاقه مند به شرکت در چنین کارگاهی هستید؟

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3. A PILOT PROJECT WITH SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

3.1. Introduction

This report by Dr Bing Wang (PDRA),[6] supervised by Joanne Fitton,[7] summarises findings from the research project 'Enhancing participatory research skills and partnerships: A pilot project with special collections.' This was a three-month participatory research project exploring potential participatory approaches to engage communities with the Special Collections at the University of Leeds. The following questions were considered:

1) What are the barriers for people to use the collections?
2) How can the Special Collections staff team learn from the communities with respect to interpretation?
3) What are some of the examples of good practice and lessons learned?
4) What potential opportunities for future collaboration and funding support are there?

This pilot project focused on Chinese collections within the Special Collections at the University of Leeds. Due to the fragile and delicate nature of the items in Special Collections, it is not often easy for communities to engage with the materials. Many also have no idea that the Special Collections houses a wide range of items that may be beneficial to community work. The main users of the materials have been mostly audiences who have a tendency to have high engagement levels with culture and heritage services, alongside scholars with high levels of subject knowledge. Collaboration with schools of the University was viewed as a good starting point for engagement with the Chinese student community.

3.2. Planned research event

This research was ethnographic in nature and thus an ethical review was required. A light touch research ethic application was approved conditionally by the AHC Research Ethics committee. It was agreed that none of the participants were vulnerable (e.g. young people, or disabled people) or could be vulnerable because of the nature of the study (e.g. refugees). The invited participants were a group of MA

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students. Regarding the data collection process, it was agreed that no personal information would be collected, and consent forms would be distributed to participants. No video or photographs would be taken. The data collected were in the form of field notes, post-its and zines made by the participants.

The activity was framed as a collaboration between the Special Collections, led by Dr Bing Wang and School of Performance and Cultural Industries (PCI) with Dr Ruth Daly as the main collaborator. An event was planned to invite a group of Chinese Masters students from PCI to engage with some chosen items from the Chinese collections and make zines as a response to the materials. Dr Bing Wang was responsible for selecting the items. Most were classic readings that would be familiar to Chinese students, such as poetry collections, classic novels, and essay anthologies. A Chinese coin collection and some artworks were chosen because they may not be easily accessible in China.

The thinking behind this selection was to pique the students' curiosity of seeing their own culture in a foreign land and inspire them to consider the relationship between the collections and themselves. It was also intended to showcase the great diversity of the Special Collections. This research event was designed to gain new insights on the interpretation of materials, learn how the collections could benefit their studies and understand the potential difficulties for them to use the collections.

Figure 3-1. The invitation poster for the research event

The event was planned to be hosted in the Shepherd Room at the Treasures Gallery at the University of Leeds. Up to 25 students were invited. Dr Bing Wang and Dr Ruth Daly were the main facilitators for the event. One or two staff members from the Special Collections staff team were able to assist the facilitators for an introduction to Special Collections and data collection. The facilitator would be introducing the items.

The first part of the planned event included a brief introduction. The students would be invited to share their experience of the Special Collections as an ice-breaker activity. Their responses would be documented to identify the issues regarding accessibility. Following the introduction, the students would be invited to explore the items either in groups or individual depending on the size. The students' responses and their interactions with each other and facilitators would be collected as first-hand data.

The second part of the event would be a zine-making workshop led by Dr Elspeth Mitchell from the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies. She is an experienced workshop leader on zine-making as well as a researcher. After a brief introduction on zine making, the students would be encouraged to consider a few questions related to their courses to brainstorm ideas for their zine-making activity. The questions included:

- Do the materials still matter in contemporary China?
- How would you use these materials regarding China's cultural industries?
- Do you feel close to the material and what do they mean to you and your culture as a Chinese student in the UK?

Guided by these questions, the students could make their own zines as a response and interpretation to the materials. During the workshop, the whole process would be observed and recorded in field notes including the conversations made between the facilitators and the participants. At the end of the workshop the participants would be invited to share their works and thoughts. The dataset would include observational field notes, post-it notes containing feedback from the participants, zines made by the participants. Emerging themes from the data, relevant to the research questions, would be analysed.

3.3. Analysis of the approach

The decision to collaborate with schools and departments was made due to time limitations, as it would be straightforward to build connections within the university. There is a large and diverse Chinese student population on campus. Our students and staff could be advocates of the services we provide while this has not been adequately investigated to date. The collaboration with PCI has been supported and welcomed by the staff at PCI. As the main collaborator, Dr Ruth Daly says,

> This collaboration has significant transformational potential for students in PCI. A central focus of this project has been cross-cultural exchange. The aims and objectives of this student-entered project are aligned with the University's agenda regarding equality, diversity, and inclusion as well as the university's wider Curriculum Redefined strategy in its commitment to inclusivity, flexibility, and transformation. It also speaks to the University's Four Strategic Objectives regarding the student education delivery plan over the next five years, specifically, Partnership; Transformation; Belonging; Sustainability.

> This participatory focused project challenges notions of an authoritative or single story in favour of new interpretations of existing materials from the perspective of the Special Collections user/student. It speaks to the university's commitment to explore diverse narratives through participatory practice. This will enhance the student experience at PCI, allowing students access to materials for dissertations. It will enable our students to put into practice engaged citizenship and it will give Chinese students in the School an opportunity to impact the changing landscape of the university.

This participatory approach can allow the Special Collections to understand the needs of the Chinese community and learn from them in a bottom-up approach in practice. It breaks down the authoritative barriers and leaves the door open for interpretations, collaborations, and new possibilities.

3.4. Future projects

This participatory approach has the potential to reach out to other communities through collaborations with other organisations. Within the university, collaborations with the Special Collections are not only to help with teaching and learning but also raising general awareness and providing enjoyment for communities.

For example, the University of Leeds Art and Design Saturday Club run by the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies is part of a national network created by the Sorrell Foundation and coordinated by the Saturday Club Trust. The Club gives young people aged 13 to 16 (years 9, 10 and 11) the unique opportunity to

study art and design on Saturday mornings at their local college, university, or museum, free of charge. The Club generally plans its activities 3-4 months in advance and, in some cases (e.g. in the event of arranging trips and visits), this can be extended to 6 months in advance. As The Club has worked with academics across disciplines, used spaces across campus and previously visited The Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery, having the opportunity to visit Special Collections would be a welcome addition to the programme. There is scope within the programme to include a visit to Special Collections in the 2022/23 academic year and have Club Members respond to the collections in an interactive workshop (e.g., a Chinese calligraphy workshop in response to the Chinese collections; workshops involving responses to manuscripts or responding to the recipe book collection, amongst other ideas). Sessions run 10:00-12:00 on Saturday mornings during school term-times if this could be facilitated in the event of a visit. Showing Club Members the Parkinson Building and the Brotherton Library would also be useful as part of a visit to align with widening participation agendas to encourage young people to engage with the resources available at the University of Leeds.

3.5. Issues raised

A few issues were raised during the research process. Firstly, significant input from the Special Collections team was required since the items are fragile and stored in various locations and great care is needed in deciding what to select, how to prepare materials for the event and deliver the workshop. Second, three months was considered short to connect with communities. It takes time to build trust with target communities and get their opinions on how to work together. Liaising with multiple stakeholders to fit into their schedules also takes time. In this specific instance, the time taken for ethics approval and availability of the students to attend the workshops did not coalesce. In addition, the national strike actions by the UCU and it being the summer period compounded a lack of staff to support the workshop being staged.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations at faculty and university levels:

I. Streamlining collaborative agreements and payments to external partners:

    It is currently reported to be an unreasonably long and complicated process that may be discouraging for individuals to collaborate with the university again.

II. Authorship and copyright:

    Ensuring that the copyright fairly reflects the participants' contributions.

III. Emergency funding:

    Availability of limited quick-response funds that would allow to secure or maintain a resource created within a participatory research project.

IV. Project management:

    Introducing a funding and/or organisational model that that supports the PI with the project management workload.

V. Alternative ethics procedures, including obtaining consent in the context specific to participatory research projects and a provision for a fast track for short projects.

VI. More consistent information on the University website on research projects, including their timelines and funding sources.

Recommendations at project level:

Do:

- Invest in time to:
    - Take care to develop building of relationships based on trust;
    - Maintain relationships with partners in between projects;
    - Develop networking opportunities to raise public awareness of expertise and resources available within the university;
    - Try to understand the barriers to participation;
    - Make power dynamics and inequalities visible and navigate them;
    - Consult the guidelines available for ethics review for practice-led, action-led, and participatory research projects in AHC and have dialogues with relevant reviewers, if necessary;

- Develop the ethics review paperwork as early as possible, it can take a minimum of one month to approve a light touch review.
- Manage expectations for all participants.
- Discuss and agree on effective communication processes throughout the project: in multi-partner projects consider specialised management software.
- Recognise and express gratitude for any and all participants' contributions – a 'please' and 'thank you' can take you a long way!
- Ensure that all participants benefit from the project.
- Comprehend partner capacity to undertake work – minimise the impact on their workload.
- Seek mentorship of senior colleagues and support from the University.

Don't:

- Try to record and analyse all the data but focus on the main task – analysis of everything can overwhelm.
- Try to 'force fit' projects – research objectives for both parties must align closely.

Useful resources

Ethics review guidelines for participatory research: https://ris.leeds.ac.uk/research-ethics-and-integrity/faculty-specific-information/ahc-faculty-research-ethics-committee/.

Participatory research groups in AHC:

1) https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/performance-research-innovation/doc/participation-research-group;

2) https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/participatory-research.

Project management platforms: Basecamp https://basecamp.com/.

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