

Digital Butterflies of the Backstreets: Participatory Art and the Digital Divide

Volume 1 of 2

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Abstract

Through this practice-based research I interrogate the terms community art, activism, social and digital media, as well as community and place. It is an investigation into both theoretical and practical aspects of community art practice and its connection to national and local policies on community, arts and digital media. It considers the increasing role digital technology and social media have in communities and community organisations, in particular under the guise of austerity, and how community organisations (do not) use social media and digital technology to encourage participation. It considers my position and role as an artist, curator and resident within the community that I live in and how, through becoming active and engaged with the place, I can develop a strategy for sustainable and long-term social engagement.

This practice based Ph.D. takes as a starting point the stalled housing regeneration, due to the halting of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, in the community where I live. The research builds upon my experience of working as an artist, curator and arts educator since the turn of the millennium where, under consecutive governments the purpose of contemporary art and its educational use has either been to effect social change (New Labour) or its economic value (current coalition government). Through the creation of a series of participatory and digital engagement events and workshops the research interrogates and considers the connections and conflict between the 'physical' (public space) and the digital and supposedly 'open' (the online). The research will be of use to those who feel an increasing and urgent need to engage with their own community as practitioners as well as community members.

For Rachel and Aphra

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These are the various online and social media links for the projects that have taken place in Bensham & Saltwell over the course of the PhD.

Saltwell Road Project

Blog: <<https://thesaltwellroadproject.wordpress.com/>>

Facebook Page: <<https://www.facebook.com/SaltwellRoadProject>>

Twitter @SaltwellRdProj

Bensham & Saltwell Cooks

Facebook group:

<<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BenshamandSaltwellCooks/>>

Spence Watson Archive Project

Website: <<http://spencewatsonarchive.org.uk/>>

Twitter: @SWArchive

Chapter 1. Introduction

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I've spent a lot of my life looking, but less of it looking around

I have found myself coming back to the above quote by Lucy Lippard (1997b, p.114) time and time again. Written as the first line of her important essay 'Looking Around: Where we are, Where we could be' in Suzanne Lacy's essential book *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1997); it has acted as a starting point for me to question my own understanding of looking around. In particular looking at the community I live in, on a local, national and global scale, and try to understand where I fit in, what my role within it is, and what actions I can take to work within it, as an artist, curator, researcher and community member.

It can be seen that a lot has changed in the seventeen years since the essay and book was first published. From the optimism of a new UK Labour Government in 1997, the horror of 9 September 2001, 7 July 2005 and other terrorist atrocities and the subsequent global war on terror; through to the start of the world recession in 2008 and the 2010 capitulation of New Labour and the now austerity measures imposed by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government and the supposed implementation of the Big Society. These changes and world events have resulted in large scale rethinking and interest in the meaning of the word 'community', academically, and politically as well as from a grass roots community level. In addition the rise of technology and social media, which arguably has resulted in the increase of global grass root political (with both a large and small p) activism, allows people to communicate, create and be active citizens. This has possibly changed the way community is considered and constructed from a global or local sense to a glocal understanding.

Digital communities can be understood from a local or national sense to a global or non-prescriptive construct where the importance of being local or global disappears and is replaced with a sense of belonging in a given virtual community. The rise of social media was meant to enable excluded people to have a voice (Mele, 1999), and can arguably be seen as being non-hierarchical, creative and experimental (Delanty, 2003, p. 182) This does not mean that there are no problems with the online idea of community, which still suffers from

issues of essentialism, state sponsored surveillance (p.183), and possibly is not as democratic as first thought.

1.1 Research Question

This practice-based research is an investigation into the potential of community art practice and digital media as a catalyst for social collectivism, to support individuals and groups to potentially connect and collaborate under a common interest in order to create a place for dialogue and action. This is pursued via a practical framework that understands theoretical aspects of both socially engaged art practice, digital and social media and community to develop critical art based strategies in the contexts of community, place and collective action. The core research questions are:

- What potential is there to develop a sustainable¹ and socially engaged art project in Gateshead that enables participation, collaboration and action through an understanding of a specific place and community?
- What is the potential for digital technology to act as a possible counter public sphere² to traditional/prescribed community art participation as understood in the context of Gateshead?
- What are the connections and conflicts between the 'physical' (urban space) and enclosed (private/public space and area boundaries); and the digital and supposedly open (including the online)?

The practical aspect of the project involves working within my local community Bensham and Saltwell in Gateshead, using the 'town is the venue' methodology of Deveron Arts, Huntly, Aberdeenshire (whom I worked with over the Summer of 2010). Their working methods have inspired this research and thesis (see

1. Sustainable in this context means long term - beyond the initial period of the project – and after the artist and the initial participants have left the project. This would enable the continuation of the project allowing it to develop beyond its initial purpose and time period.

2. Counter public spheres, as put forward by Nancy Fraser in 'Rethinking the Public Sphere' (1990), can be seen as places for marginalised groups outside of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) from which they are excluded.

section 4.5) as a starting point for interaction. Deveron Arts³ works with no exhibition/project space but sees the town itself as the venue for all art projects. Artists are invited to work within the town on specific themed projects to investigate issues within the community through direct involvement and interaction in the public spaces of Huntly, Aberdeenshire.

At the start of this research Bensham & Saltwell was, and still is to a point, undergoing a large and ambitious programme of regeneration; where old Victorian housing stock were to be knocked down to build modern family housing (Richards, 13 July 2011). This regeneration programme, which started in 2008, lost government Pathfinder funding in 2010/11 at the start of my research (Hilditch, 2011) and as a result large areas of Saltwell and Bensham became either wasteland of rows of boarded up housing. Resident anger has increased due to the lack of action and a belief that the local council do not fulfil their promises and the resulting economic and social problems (Hunt, 7 July 2009; Keighley, 28 Mar 2011). A resident group, Bensham & Saltwell Resident Association⁴ and the national campaign group Save Britain's Heritage⁵ have been campaigning against the demolition of the housing through the courts (Save Britain's Heritage, 2013), which is still an on-going concern, at the time of writing.

The anger against the council also arguably stems from a belief, true or not, that the traditional community is being displaced resulting in a form of gentrification. Many believe that the new housing will be out of reach in terms of affordability for the current community. Alongside this is the emergence of new communities, or groups of people such as the 'creative classes' (Florida, 2002) who have moved to the area due to the affordability of housing, and immigrants and students becoming more economically and socially visible within the area.

1.2 Contribution

The research aimed to understand how grass roots technology and social media could allow individuals and groups (formed or not) to develop an understanding of their locality to enable collaborative and collective action.

3. <http://www.deveron-arts.com/>

4. <http://www.sbresidents.org/>

5. <http://www.savebritainsheritage.org/index.php>

Working with SiDE (Social Inclusion through the Digital Economy) ⁶ research project at Culture Lab, Newcastle University, the research worked with community organisations, groups and individuals who can be said to work or live below the 'digital divide' due to lack of resources. This divide has increased due to the funding cuts and austerity measures placed on public funded organisations. As SiDE (n.d.) states, "the potential benefits of the Digital Economy are not realised by all members of society; it is recognised that digital exclusion mirrors many aspects of more general social exclusion. That is, not just poverty, but the "mutually reinforcing" consequences of citizens enduring unemployment, discrimination, poor housing, crime, bad health and family breakdown".

The research project took the regeneration in the area as a starting point to understand and develop a methodology and consider how communities, through dialogue and action, could potentially implement change in their immediate environment. Using Deveron Arts' 'the town is the venue' modus operandi, the project examined the potential for the regeneration area to be utilised by or inspire the community until the housing is, inevitably, built. The initial project was as a result, ephemeral, due to the project being short term but always with the intention of developing a legacy beyond the initial research. The research aims to address issues and interrelated problems found in contemporary art discourse concerning 'socially engaged art', with regards to ethical issues and the meaning of 'community' within this type of community based artistic practice.

1.3 Structure Of The Research And Thesis

The title of the thesis is inspired by a quote from JB Priestley's book *English Journey* (1934) written during his travels around England in 1933. He visited Gateshead and was very impressed by 'social initiatives', such as the Bensham Grove educational settlement. In the book he controversially described the

6. SiDE (Social Inclusion through the Digital Economy) is a Digital Economy Research Hub that aims to tackle social exclusion by making it easier for people to access digital technologies. The £12 million Hub is based at Newcastle University and is a key element of the Research Councils UK Digital Economy research programme. The Hub, addresses four fields: Connected Home & Community; Accessibility; Inclusive Transport Services and Creative Industries.

unemployed men in the area as “the dingy butterflies of the backstreets” (p.259). I wanted to relate this to my experience of working with community organisations, groups and individuals in Bensham. To describe how they currently use or do not use digital and social media and as a result find themselves both digitally and socially excluded.

The research project builds upon my experience as an artist/curator who has worked within an educational context from the mid 2000's, where at the time, under New Labour, the culture of commissioning educational and public art was to effect social change (Matarasso, 1995). Now, under the coalition government, and with the current political and economic climate funding and support for engagement, has been decimated (AceDigitalUncut, April 2011; Arts Council Press Release, 2011; CODA, 2011), resulting in the closure of a number of arts organisations, such as the Lancaster based digital arts organisation Folly (BBC, 2011). This concern has become even more significant as art can be seen to be increasingly valued for its monetary worth as an object (BBC, 2013), rather than as a aesthetic, social or political tool.

The practical aspect of the research involved basing myself in and as part of the community through meeting with and starting conversation and discussions with local residents, community workers and businesses, volunteering at community organisations, running workshops and events and attending meetings and events run by others. The intention being to make myself visible within the community and to discover what ‘needed to be done’. A large element of the research methodology, and which supported the understanding of community and creative engagement in Gateshead as well as nationally, involved interviews with community workers, community members and creative people who work in the area, as well as with other artists and creative organisations who work within communities nationally.

Throughout the research I positioned myself so as to understand the social context in my own community and consider the importance and relevance of socially engaged artistic practice and community art in this age of austerity. In addition, I investigated how digital media is thought of as a way of connecting communities and as a catalyst for collaboration and community action. Yet it can also be exclusionary due to communities and community organisations lacking resources, knowledge and economic and financial opportunities. I also drew upon my role as a researcher/artist/curator working in

a given community, examining in particular how these roles have ethical conflicts and advantages when the researcher is also a resident of the community.

I begin the thesis by developing a theoretical framework looking at ideas concerning socially engaged art practice and community art; theories concerning the word 'community'; and digital and social media from an arts perspective. I go on to give contextual grounding in terms of government policy in relation to the Big Society, Localism and austerity measures; recent Arts Council Policy regarding digital and socially engaged art practice; and local Gateshead policy in relation to the future of the borough and how volunteering can support its goals. These theoretical and contextual frameworks are then reflected in my methodology where I relate my practice to ideas around different forms of community, the ethical issues of being a researcher and resident; grass roots creativity and digital media and the artist as non-expert. This is developed as a narrative in terms of the actual practice through a study of the area and the different groups that are active and how my research connects to the different projects, activities and events that are taking place in the community of Bensham and Saltwell.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework: Critical Artistic Discourse

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The practice-based research comes from three perspectives, socially engaged arts practice and the many different terms and descriptions that problematises it, community and its blurred, unfixed and controversial position and finally digital technology and media and its broad terms and many fields. The content of each of these overlap and connect as well as raise problems and conflicts.

I start with socially engaged practice considering it as community art and looking at the theoretical and academic arguments that have taken place since its contemporary re-emergence in the late 1990s, to its current omnipotent presence, choosing to focus on the two opposing views of Clare Bishop and Grant Kester. Kester understands socially engaged art practice as community art with social, dialogical and community methodologies, whilst Bishop sees it as more gallery based working within gallery/curatorial strategies. I discuss community and its many definitions, understanding it from a utopian viewpoint, both negative and positive and from a digital perspective. Finally, I analyse digital technology and social media and its role as a creative artistic medium and its development as part of a socially engaged arts and curatorial practice.

2.1 Socially Engaged Artistic Practice

The real social possibilities of the arts have been a subject for debate for the last one hundred years. From the moment the Dadaists implicated the audience within their performances and events, (Bishop, 2006a, p.10), through to groups and movements such as the Situationists, Fluxus, Artists Placement Group (who convinced politicians and industry to employ artists as thinkers and decision makers in business), Group Material, and artists such as Allan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, Suzanne Lacy, Lucy Lippard and Stephen Willats. Artists, critics and art historians have taken on and critiqued the writings of philosophers and social scientists who have tried to define ideas around community, participation, collaboration, social change and the arts role within all these contexts (Cultural Policy Collective, 2004). The arts have become a place for discussion and debate around the possibility and potential for the improvement of society through the transformative power of the arts.

Literature on the subject, specifically with regards to participatory practice, took its cue from public art and performance, in particular the 1960's

Avant Garde and Happenings, which called 'the author into question and the distance between art and life' (Kravagna, 1998, p.2). Such practice also took into account activism, feminism, environmental and other political issues and developed a critique between what is termed public art and community art. In this critique public art is questioned as being visible but not accessible, whilst community art was developed in opposition to gallery practice, which was seen as elitist and inaccessible. This however can be seen as simplifying the argument (Macgregor, 1998, p. 7) and does not take into account the nuanced and different practices that artists develop.

Alison Green in her essay 'Reading about Public Art' (2007) sees the wider literature on public art being 'inaugurated' in the late 1980's by Arlene Raven in the US pushing an activist agenda and Malcolm Miles in the UK addressing the issue of art and urban regeneration. Suzanne Lacy (1995) used the term 'New Genre Public Art' to describe an alternative public art that instead of being a model of individuality, the artist as lone creator, but of collectivism and collaboration with the public. For Lacy 'NGPA' 'resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by aesthetic sensibilities' (1995, p.19) and cites artists who have 'developed distinct models for an art whose public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language' (1995, p.19). Lacy puts forward that the most successful public art projects are when the artist acts as a facilitator or kind of agent, where they connect genuinely and work alongside a real 'community' rather than an abstract idea of the public (Green, 2007).

Literature focused on seeing such art practice as not dissimilar to public art, and the site specific (Kwon, 2003). From static, permanent or temporary public art that are imposed on a site, which Lucy Lippard would call 'Plop Art' (1997a) to artists working directly with communities. This would bring up many questions regarding the relationship between an artist and community, the agendas of each party, and in what respect such a project turns into a form of social work (Kwon, 2003). Research has asked such questions and emphasized the social aspect of art practice above, or even to the negation, of the aesthetic (Kester, 2004), others have questioned this and insisted on the aesthetic being above or equal to the social (Bishop, 2006b).

Participatory art has varied terms and definitions that can be confusing and contradictory, whilst being understood to critique similar art practices and

be interchangeable. Artists, critics and curators use phrases such as participatory, collaborative, socially engaged, collective action, dialogical, littoral, relational aesthetics amongst others. All of these terms can be confusing and possibly contradictory seemingly designed for the author to create his or her own niche in the area of socially orientated art practice (Billing, 2007).

Claire Bishop puts forward the idea that there have been three concerns and motivations for participatory art since the 1960's— activation, authorship and community (2006a, p.12). These terms can be seen to be all related to the idea of the artist engaging with the public, but all come with slight differences in terms of approach and understanding (Billing, 2007). However one thing in common they more or less all possess is the artist adopting a 'performative process-based' approach (Kester, 2004, p.1). Where they depart from the tradition of object making, and instead dialogue and exchange come to the fore and the facilitation of conversations becomes an integral aspect of the work.

Research on the subject started through artists reflecting on their own and other artists practice, mainly because socially orientated art practice was initially and in many cases purposely outside of the gallery based art market and its "hegemonic" and 'bourgeois' structures. However, as it seems is always inevitable, it soon became part of the system and has been embraced and instrumentalised by curators, educators, galleries, institutions and authority as can be seen in the late 1990's to early 2000's with UK governments interest in art as a tool for regeneration and an expanding sector of the economy as a major exporter and stimulant for tourism (Bishop, 2006b; Belfiore, 2008; Matarraso, 1994; Myerscough, 1998).

The question in terms of socially engaged art, which always seems to be at the forefront, is whether the projects/works should be thought of as art. This mainly stems from the issue of whether the work should be judged on ethical or aesthetic grounds. Grant Kester, in his book *Conversation Pieces* (2004), argues that critics should ask themselves has it worked as social project and has it worked as a piece of art? He differentiates between the two and sees them as separate questions. He, to a point, dismisses the notion that socially engaged practice should be dealt with aesthetically as most of the work produced does not have such issues.

Claire Bishop however disagrees with Kester, stating in her important but controversial essay in Artforum 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its

Discontents' (2006b) that authorial intentionality (or a humble lack thereof) is privileged over a discussion of the work's conceptual significance as a social and aesthetic form (p.182). Earlier in the essay she argued that it is also crucial to discuss, analyse, and compare such work critically as art (p.180).

There shouldn't be an assumption that the work is there to do the work of councils/governments. It is not a substitute for social workers, which is where the need for aesthetic judgement becomes paramount. Aesthetics could be seen to be important in order to remind us that the work is an art project created/produced by artists/curators and not by social workers, therapists, councillors and/or the government.

Bishop sees socially engaged art as something that should be critical, antagonistic and uncomfortable and as a result critiques the very notion of engagement and the relationships between the individuals in the group. Kester envisions it as ameliorative and that it should not critique the subject or relationships but should support them in their interests and agendas. Both these ways of thinking and methodologies are important and have a point, yet being for or against one of these is reductive and does not allow for the full scope of socially engaged and artistic practice, be it gallery or community based practice.

Kester (2004) sees participatory art projects as being 'centred as exchange between an artist (creative, intellectual, financially and institutionally empowered) and a given subject who is defined as priori, as in need of empowerment or access to creative/ expressive skills' (Kester, p.137). Kester does not necessarily see this way of working as the correct way, citing the problem of the artist being situated as superior to the participator, through intellect, class, money, etc. Kester notes the many problems and issues of an artist, the "outsider", and working with the 'alterity', the "other". Leading to accusations of exploitation and the artist becoming a spokesperson for the community and 'papering over the cracks' (Beech, p4) of the possible social issues and problems found in deprived and disenfranchised social groups. He continues this theme in his most recent book *The One and the Many* (2011) where he wonders whether the many should fear the power of the one, for whom the world is a mere resource to be "joyfully manipulated and transformed" (p.2).

For Hal Foster in his seminal essay 'The Artist as Ethnographer' the artist is typically an outsider who has the institutionally sanctioned authority to

engage the locals in the production of their (self) representation and is concerned the authority of the artist goes unchallenged (p.138). The artist as being institutionally sanctioned can be considered alongside Henri Marcuse idea of ‘Repressive Tolerance’ (1965) where ‘hegemonic strategies neutralise undesirable ideas by granting them a place’

Kester does see the ameliorative effect as important for the role of publicly engaged art in communities rejecting art that may offend or trouble its audience. Claire Bishop, however, questions socially engaged art and its healing effect stating that as a result of a perceived political urgency such art practice are all seen to be equal and important ‘artistic gestures of resistance’ (2012, p13). She goes on to say that as a result of this, criticism of collaborative art, as being unsuccessful, unresolved or boring, is discouraged as all are seen as equally important in ‘strengthening the social bond’ (2012, p13). Bishop believes such art needs to be critiqued arguing that placing participants and the artist, in an uncomfortable or frustrating position can be crucial to understand an artworks aesthetic impact and a new perspective on the human condition (2006b, p.182). Art that has an antagonistic aspect to it, Bishop states, takes participants out of their comfort zone enabling them to question their social position and possibly act upon it. Whether this is truly believed is questionable and it could be said this belief comes from an institutional perspective rather than from artists, however there are many art projects that claim to be participatory yet are not and if dealing with the public could be seen as, Foster claims, dangerous (1996).

2.1.1 Community and participatory art

The issue of what type of community to work with and how it forms itself is paramount to artists’ understanding of community. Whether a group is already formed prior to the artistic engagement, such as a tenants group, or formed specifically for the project, possibly due to a shared interest or individual similarities, such as location, gender or sexuality. Miwon Kwon, in her book *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2004) describes four different types of community (p.118-135) that artists work with:

- *Community of mythic unity* – “community based on specific physical cultural similarities e.g., gender, race, sexuality.”
- *“Sited” communities* – existing organisations or communities. “Has clearly defined identities in the sense of having established locational bases, modes of operation, or a shared purpose.”
- *Invented community (temporary)* – “is newly constituted and rendered operational through the coordination of the artwork itself.”
- *Invented community (ongoing)* – “as the temporary version but becomes sustainable beyond the artwork.”

Kwon believes these all have their value and purpose as well as problems, mainly the positioning of singularities or individuals in a false community. Just because someone has basic cultural similarities it does not necessarily mean they have similar interests or motivations and such imagined communities are unpredictable and not sustainable. Stating that “sited” communities are ‘susceptible to appropriation by artists and art institutions because of the singular definition of their collective identities’ (2004, p.146). Kwon criticises essentialist community formations that require the assertion of a monolithic collectivity over and against the specific identities of its constituent members, i.e. community above individualism. Kwon feels that they become easy to control by institutions and artists and results in heavily bureaucratised and formulaic versions of community based art (2004, p.150/51).

For Kwon, invented communities are more favourable for community-based art as they allow for differences amongst participants and a more interesting end result that is not prescribed. The project can potentially exist beyond the end of the initial time period, and after the artist has left. Kester however disagrees (Kwon, 2004, p. 145/46) making a distinction between:

- *Pre-existing “Politically- Coherent” Communities* – “That allow for a process of exchange and mutual education. The artist learning from the community and having their presuppositions (about the community and the specific social, cultural and political issues) challenged and expanded.”

- *Created' Communities* – “Fraught with paternalism as participants are “socially” isolated individuals whose ground of interconnection and identification as a group is provided by an aesthetically ameliorative experience administered by the artist.”

For Kester ‘pre-existing communities’ are more agreeable for community art as he feels that they are formed by an ongoing collective dialogue formed around a common interest. Such communities are more resistant to appropriation and abuse by the artist or art world.

Participation is a social rather than physical interaction that aims to close the gap between art and life. This is done through the participation of the general public in art projects allowing for a conversation between the public and the artist. Participation places the participant in a specific role within the art project with rules and parameters they must adhere to be a part of the work. Any breaking or subversion from these rules leads to possible exclusion from the participatory process, even if the artist asks them to be themselves. Participation shifts the focus, as Miwon Kwon states (2004) from the artist to the audience, from object to process, from production to reception and emphasises the importance of a direct apparently unmediated engagement with particular audience groups ideally through shared authorship in collaboration. An artist that is bought into a community by an institution can be seen as a mediator between the two and other stakeholders. A local artist can take the role of a community spokesperson or a translator between the institutions, be it an art, council or other authority, and the community group. The artist as a result can get stuck in the middle with no fixed identity or loyalty to either side (p.136).

There is a temptation with participation to treat it as a solution to arts problems based on the idea that the artwork can offer something more than just an inclusion in an art project and can be a solution to social issues and arts marginalisation. Questions put forward by Dave Beech in his essay ‘Include me out!’ in *Art Monthly* (2008) are what is the degree of choice, control and agency of the participant? Is participation always voluntary? Are all participants equal with each other and the artist? In his essay ‘Ethics and Participation’ (2011) he claims that people in the art world have subscribed to the idea that participation or collaboration is an “athletic sport in which artists must compete for their form

of participation to be deeper, stronger, faster, longer!” As a result the ideal utopian form of participation or collaboration clouds and mystifies every project that even hints at participation.

The concept of participation does not result in rights and personal beliefs of the participants being excluded and put aside for the artist’s own values. Dave Beech states “Participation cannot deliver what participation promises” (2008, p.2). He sees it as coming from a longing for social reconciliation but is not a mechanism for bringing about transformation (ibid). It could be argued that participation brings a level of neutrality and blandness to an artwork where everyone is told to act the same and abide by certain rules. It neutralises the participants and makes them as one rather than individuals and as a result negates conflict and differing opinions. These are the very things that participation aims to eradicate and are replicated in the participatory process. For Beech rather than us wondering how to get people to participate we should be asking why get people to participate in the first place (2008).

2.2 Theories On Community

Community can be seen as a muddled and confusing word. There are so many varied and different definitions coming from historical, sociological and philosophical viewpoints (Bippus, 2011, p.2). Community has become re-thought with phrases such as ‘community without community’ ‘unavowable’, ‘inoperative’, ‘imagined’ or the ‘coming community’ (Esposito, 1999; Blanchot, 1983; Nancy, 1991; Andersen, 1983; Agamben, 1993). For Gerard Delanty, in his book *Community* (2003) there is an older emphasis on community as a form of social interaction based on locality and concerned with meaning and identity (p.2) and community can be viewed as what separates people and not what they have in common (p.3). The term designates both an idea about belonging to and longing for community and a search for meaning and solidarity and a collective identity (p.3). It is arguable whether this is a longing that is ever obtained and can be seen as nationalistic and exclusionary (Andersen, 1983).

The advent of technology and social networking brings new dimensions to the idea of community. This can be seen in terms of place, where ‘glocalisation’; the merging of the global and the local, has become the norm (Wellman, 2002). It could also be said that, due to technology, specifically the online, levels of hierarchy and class have been transformed due to this

increased interconnectedness, However even though the notion of community has become less ruled by boundaries of a particular locality and place due to technology, it is still central to how communities are imagined and how beliefs, values and perception are reinforced. As a result it is still important to study community in all its forms to understand how it has changed or been understood in terms of community art in relation to the online.

An early understanding of community came from the early 20th century theorist Ferdinand Tönnies who contrasted urban life with rural village communities or 'Gemeinschaft' (Bitton et al, 2011a). Everyone in the village knew each other and because of this he argued that the world within the village was a predicable place, taking this as a positive ideal. Tönnies also argued that outsiders, who were not known within the village, challenged this ideal and compromised the village's social order. This coincided with increasing industrialisation, therefore, for Tönnies, urban living was characterised less by 'Gemeinschaft', community, and more with what he called urban society 'Gesellschaft' (Crang, 1998). This however could be seen as a romanticised view of community, but one that still resonates today.

There is a tendency in current criticism and media to hypostatise community as either wholly positive, such as "community values" pushed by the Government for example, The Big Society; or entirely negative, the idea of the essentialising community where, a group is already constituted with fixed traits. These concepts of community can be seen to be open to levels of abuse from groups from both the political right and left (Kester, 2004 p. 129). Modern thought sees the state as the enemy of the social (Delanty, 2003, p.9) and that it is a utopian ideal, something that was lost and in need of being recovered and restored (p.9). This nostalgic view could be said to have given rise to fundamentalist and nationalist ideologies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Blanchot believes that community is something experienced as a loss and as an absence in people's lives, one that can be desired but never fulfilled (p.136). However it is just as true that it is a mythical utopian ideal that never was but something that we try to achieve.

In his book *The Inoperative Community* Jean Luc Nancy (1991) saw community as 'not the origin of nations and societies' but 'what happens to us "in the wake of society"' (Billing, 2007 p.18) He understood community in terms of singularities stating that we are not individuals but bound together at a pre-

cursive level, (Kester, 2004, p.155), through our relationships and human connections. Nancy also sees community defining itself around the experience of mortality, the ability to recognise our own lack of fixity/permanence by the “other’s” death (Kester, 2004, p155). For Nancy our identities are always in flux, in the process of being formed and reformed through our encounters with others. He asks (pp xli/xi):

“How can a community without essence (neither people, nation, destiny or generic humanity) be presented as such? What might a politics be that does not stem from the will to realise an essence? How can we be receptive to the meaning of our multiple dispersal fragmental existences, which nonetheless only make sense by existing in common?”

How can a community without a common interest or position be understood, or even brought into existence? Nancy questions this romanticised positive idea of community, which we could relate to the current governments idea of the ‘Big Society’, where we are meant to be ‘all in this together’. Though it is interesting that the government use the word ‘society’ instead of ‘community’, when looking back to Tönnies definition of the two. Nancy proposes to understand ‘communal being as a singular plural being’ where ‘we are singularities, original albeit contingent existences, who never exist in isolation but always with others’ (Bedorf, 2011).

Community can be said to be a self-defeating construct relying on its own destruction to exist or come into being. The really existing community is a besieged fortress defending itself against the outside world (Delanty, p118). A ‘crisis’ in a society or place creates community, for example people coming together due to social problems, such as housing, drugs, teenage or financial issues creates a community that maybe was not there before.

One issue that is perceived as detrimental to the ideal of community is the “pervasive spread of individualism” (p.120), which is criticised as being instrumental in its decline. Yet it could also be argued that it is the basis for a lot of good and communal activity that keeps and sustains collective action due to strong individuals taking control and responsibility. Nancy sees us not as individuals but “singularities” bound together at a pre-discursive level (Kester,

2004, p.155) and the idea of the individual in a community should not be dismissed as detrimental and or opposite.

People can exist in the same place but have no shared understanding. People may be involved in everyday presence alongside one another but may not actually make meaningful contact, such as connectivity (Turkle, 1995). Digital technologies can be of interest in this respect as they are said to lead to shared cultural understandings and are seen as place for people to become part of a social learning community (Shirky, 2008, p.100). This interest can be seen in the rise of academic research into communities, for example the recent Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC) research study 'Connected Communities' that aims to understand how communities both offline and online connect and engage through creativity and digital media (AHRC, n.d.).

Community has become even more complicated since the advent of the online, especially with Web 2.0 in the mid-2000's and the usage of online social networking such as Facebook, Twitter, and online gaming. The difficulty of defining community, in terms of place and locality resulted in early researchers of online communities looking for other strategies, such as the strength of relationships between individuals. Online community researchers used the term to mean feelings of connection, empathy and support, which could be seen in chat rooms with particular themes, such as breast cancer chat rooms (Preece, 2005).

Jenny Preece and Diane Maloney-Krichmar in their article, 'Online Communities: Design, Theory, and Practice' (2005) identified researchers, who were looking for definitions of online communities as either trying to create and understand community through the creation of platforms and software whilst others identified key parameters of community life and tried to locate this presence online (Preece, 2005). They put forward that maybe the best method is to understand the boundaries of community as 'fuzzy' that can be defined by noting the similarities and differences between new members compared to established members, stating that this is how most of us think about communities in our everyday lives (Preece, 2005).

2.3 Digital Art, Technology And Social Media

The terms digital media, digital technology, new and social media can be seen as broad terms which, dependent on the field of practice they are approached

from, have varied meanings. The AHRC 'Connected Communities scoping study 'Situating Community through Creative Technologies and Practice' (2011) by the SiDE Creative Industries team, defines digital media and technology as 'encompassing a broad range from computers to digital media production tools, mobile and/or locative technology, online networks and content community platforms' going on to say that 'it is not only seen as technical and market-facing, but as being an inherently social and creative medium, interwoven into complex ecologies of creativity, society, and community' (p.4).

The increased visibility of public participation in digital media comes as a result of the development of online communities and the establishment of Web 2.0 as a social and communication tool. This has also resulted in a change in the understanding of the term community and how artists relate and work with them. A change from demographic-based to a distributed idea of community and art practice. New media and digital technology has allowed the user (author) to become designer, creator and controller of their online world, resulting in users becoming consumers as well as producers, developing communities of interest in an online capacity, creating content such as images, video and discussion. However this is not always the case for everyone as we shall see

Sherry Turkle in her seminal book *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (2005) sees us as taking computers for granted and being more than mere tools but "thought-prosthetics" (p.3). We have gone from an early idea of computing transparency, of knowing how something works, to just expecting something to immediately work (p.8/9). The utopian view saw this as empowering people who may not be interested or knowledgeable about computers and encouraging political and social engagement (p.10). Turkle goes on to explain how this has not been realised believing the cultural message of digital technology is complexity not simplicity and opacity and not transparency (p.10), seeing us as consumers and not citizens or participants.

The contemporary art term new media further complicates things as much of which can be described as digital media also comes under the bracket of new media. Ele Carpenter in her PhD thesis 'Politicised Socially Engaged Art and New Media Art' (2008) defines new media as the "convergence of digital media, tools, systems and networks" (p.21) going on to say "new media technologies include: software, programming code, digital data, internet,

network systems, computer games, virtual reality, mobile technologies, hardware, lo-tech and DIY media.” (p.21). For Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham in their book, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media* (2010), new media can be seen to refer to commercial broadcast forms such as interactive television, but broadens when placed into the categories of technology or science, including software or data visualization (p.3). In terms of new media art, they describe new media as characteristically being about process rather than object but frequently having “problems with categories of medium because of its mixed-media, multimedia, intermedia or hybrid media nature” (p.5).

Steve Dietz presents three categories for new media: *interactivity*, *connectivity* and *computability* (Cook 2010, p. 6), however for him, not all new media involves interaction or participation (2010, p. 111). *Interaction* might occur between people, people and machines, between machines, or between artwork and audience. Interaction is often, in these cases a simple “reaction” – the pressing of a key or the triggering of a sensor for which the computer program reacts but not actual interaction between the audience and computer (p. 112). *Participation* implies that the participant has some kind of input that is recorded and changes the artwork’s content. This can be seen to act on a number of levels, from just voting to being more active within the artistic process (p. 113). *Collaboration* implies the production of something with a degree of equality between the participants that alters how the artwork is created. Whilst interaction and participation primarily involves the relationship between artwork and audience, collaboration concerns production, which may be between artists, curators and non-artists (p. 114).

Nina Simon (2007) discusses the various types of online groups and participants comparing them to the museum experience. She sees various participant groups, using YouTube as an example, as ‘lurkers’ who watch videos, but do not submit them; ‘judgers’ or ‘curators’ who rate, tag, and comment on videos, but do not submit videos; and the smallest set being ‘contributors’ who actually upload videos they have made. These groups could also relate to how people contribute, or not, in their communities, both online and in person. From the person who attends meetings and events, but just observes, the person who comments at community meetings and complains to the council, through to the active community member who organises the meetings and is a trustee or board member for local community organisations.

Ele Carpenter researched the similarities and conflicts between politicised socially engaged art and new media art (2008), with the question 'What are the connections and conflicts between politicised new media art and politicised socially engaged art?' The thesis discusses the concept that socially engaged artists and new media artists have evolved similar, if not, identical methodologies, characteristics and language and that the hybrid practice of socially engaged new media art has evolved through these connections and conflicts. Carpenter observed how concepts of participation, collaboration, connectivity and 'communities of interest' were being explored by NMA artists in parallel to SEA, with little interdisciplinary discourse.

In a similar respect, Beryl Graham, in her essay 'What kind of participative system? Critical vocabularies from new media art' (2010), discussed the difference between interactivity, participation and collaboration with respect to new media art. Graham stating the ability to cut and paste, copy, manipulate and morph any media using digital technology can add a layer of active readership. This layer is literal rather than metaphorical, and can enable the reader to not just be passive but active and with the potential to become a creator (p. 285). She goes on to say, with caution that new media art however cannot offer "full conversation between a machine and a person" but can create a "platform for conversation between people", (p. 287), and can be a 'host' to facilitate this.

Graham discusses the differences and similarities between socially engaged art practice and new media art practice within these three terms. The most obvious difference being that both can offer 'platforms for interactive, communicative experience' but new media can offer this interaction remotely or at a distance (p. 291). Graham goes on to say that audiences for, what Ele Carpenter calls 'Socially Engaged New Media Art' (SENMA) (Carpenter, 2008), are not audiences in the traditional sense, but always users. Ele Carpenter defines socially engaged art as 'covering art practice that facilitates social creative processes, engaging in conversation and exchange with other people...to describe artistic, creative or cultural activity that takes place through the social process of participation and collaboration starting where people are at, rather than an educational programme (p.19). So in that respect socially engaged new media art can be seen as the combination of both of these terms to produce a practice of participation and collaboration that involves

conversation, sharing and creativity through the use of the many forms of new media, digital media and technology.

Collective/collaborative and new media art practices can be seen to have many conflicts and similarities such as connectivity and a 'community of interest' and the ability to work outside the 'white cube' model (Carpenter, 2008). Carpenter sees its as stemming from a use of vocabulary, political methods and the theories and strategies laid down in terms of engagement, collaboration and participation (2008). Collaborative practice, participation and collective action can "result in the conception, production and implementation of works or actions by multiple people with no difference between them in terms of status" (Kravagna, 1998).

For Graham the system, or artwork, must always react to the user and be open to user-generated content (2010, p. 298). As a result not just interacting with the artwork but with each other, something that in a gallery or museum context could be problematic in terms of the audience being 'out of control' (p. 298), by which she means either not able to understand how the work should be used through lack of technological knowledge or having no interest in how or what the artwork is due to lack of interest in technology. In a socially engaged non-gallery based public facing practice this could be ideal with its potential for human interaction through open source production, distributed networks, flash mobs, which are all particularly well equipped to deal with and relish the out-of-control (p. 298).

In 1970 artist Stephen Willats drew the diagram, 'A socially interactive model of an Art Practice' (Image 1). On the right is how he perceives a traditional artwork comes into existence whilst the left is how he proposes his working method, where the 'artist', 'audience' and the 'context' all interact, feed off each other to produce an artwork, be it one of Willats photographic collages or whatever the artist is producing.

Contrast and compare it with Beryl Graham's diagram for distributed curatorial networks alongside centralised, decentralised networks (2010, p.285). This is based on the American engineer and pioneer in the development of computer networks, Paul Baran's 1964 model 'On Distributed Communications Memorandum' (Image 2). The connections and similarities between computer engineer Baran's diagram from 1964; Willats 1970 social interactive artistic model; and digital curator Graham's 2010 diagram can be seen. Baran's

computing idea was to have unbroken contact that allowed connections to various nodes through different routes rather than relying on one centralised connection (1964). This methodology can be seen replicated in socially engaged arts practice with the urge to have non-authorship and pure collaborative artistic processes and its equivalent in Socially Engaged New Media Art. The resemblance between the two diagrams shows the similarities between socially engaged art practice and basic social media and computing theory. The nodes on Graham's decentralised diagram, replicate the points on Willat's 'Socially Interactive Model of an Art Practice', where there is always a way to communicate and produce even if one or more of the connections are broken. This would be seen as the utopian ideal of socially engaged art practice where there is no hierarchy and every node/grouping has a voice and equal role to play for creative production but keeps their individuality.

The concept of the 'multitude' used by Hardt & Negri acts as a replacement for concepts like community or 'the people'. 'Multitude' remains as a plural, a multiple, a set of singularities where each social subject maintains its difference. Compared to the individual who must deny his or her difference to become part of a community, multitude is not fragmented or disconnected but consists of active social subjects who can act together. This distinguishes between common on one hand and community on the other where common can include singularities and communication between them comes from the social collaborative processes that is behind all production (Billing, 2007, p.18). The aim is not to make each node/community/individual the same and denying the difference but to connect them whilst keeping their singularity, their individuality.

Artist Lucy Lippard questioned new media worrying that human contact is being replaced, asking 'what kind of community access do we have now?... No more getting small groups together and getting them to go out and have more meetings...?' (Franklin Cohn, 2006, p. 33). In response the art group Yes Men state that those using new media seriously for participation do not see them as a utopian replacement for human contact, but as just one of the 'necessary media' for connection and interaction (2006, p. 292). Digital media should not be understood or developed on its own but alongside human interaction, as another way of connecting and interacting in a differentiated learning, creative and communication experience.

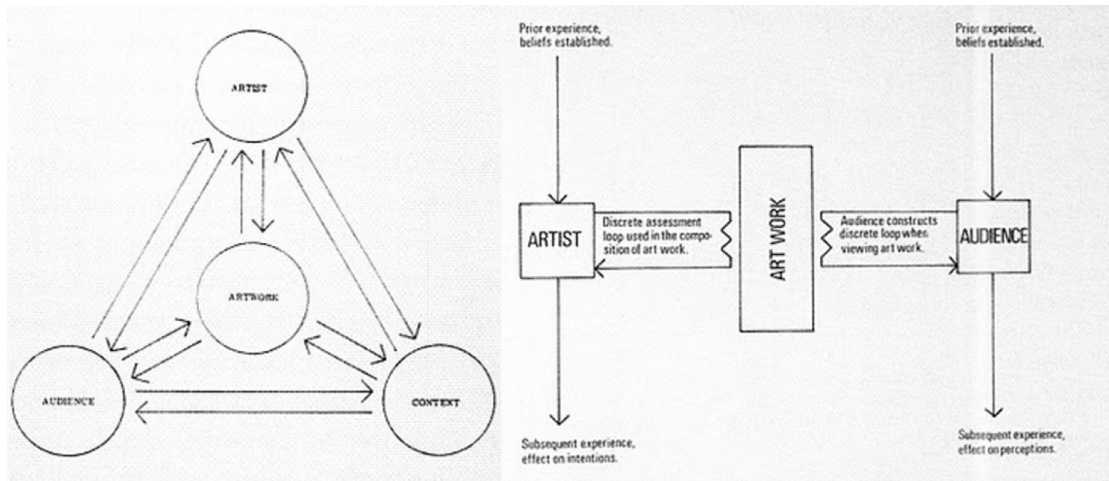


Image 1: Stephen Willat's (l) 'A socially interactive model of an Art Practice' (c.1970) (r) 'Relationship of artist to audience. Traditional Model' (c. 1970) (Willats, 2012, p. 9A and 13C)

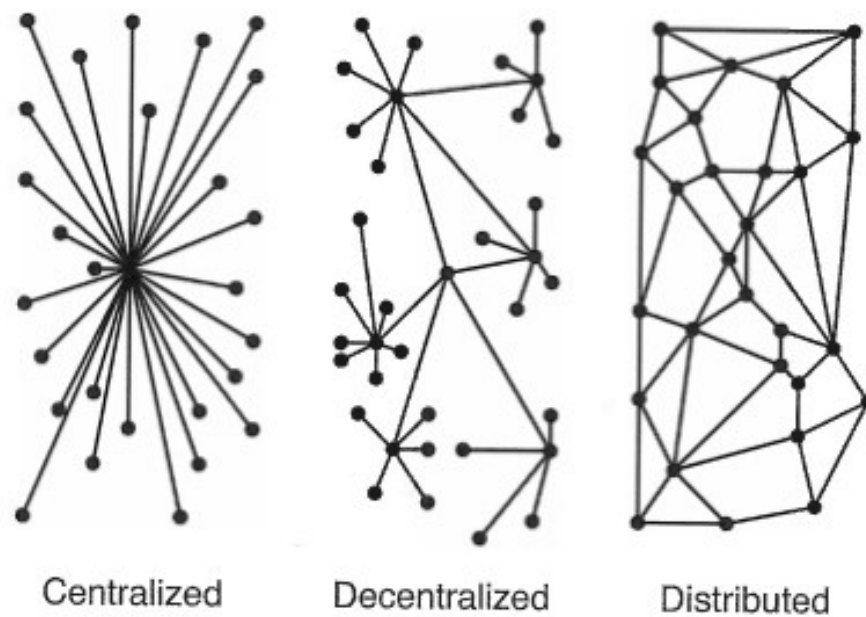


Image 2: Beryl Graham's diagram on centralised, decentralised and distributed networks (Graham, 2010, p.285)

Chapter 3. Contextual Framework: National And Local Policies For Community And The Arts

Chapter 3. Contextual Framework: National And Local Policies For Community And The Arts

Under New Labour, the culture of commissioning educational and public art in disadvantaged communities was intended to affect social change through promoting social cohesion and community empowerment (Gilmore, 2013; Matarasso, 1995). This was criticised as being seen to 'paper over the cracks' of economic and social problems (Kester, 2004, Beech, 2008) and reducing art to 'statistical information about target audiences and performance indicators' (Bishop, 2006, p.180). Now, under the coalition government, and with the current political and economic climate, funding for arts organisations, it could be argued, has been decimated, in particular for arts organisations working with digital technology and socially engaged art practice. This has resulted in the arts, specifically digital artists and organisations, questioning how policy makers and funders perceive them and what they see as the purpose of digital media and technology (Hemmett, 2011). Recent promotion of the arts as a valued part of society has been based on how much it brings in to the UK economy and how it is seen as a major export earner and stimulant for tourism (Belfiore, E, 2008, p6). The current government sees contemporary art practice mainly for its economic value as can be seen from a comment made by a former culture minister, Maria Miller, 'the arts world must make the case for public funding by focusing on its economic, not artistic, value (BBC, 2013).

This chapter will consider the context of being an artist working in a community setting. It will discuss UK national policy towards community and volunteering, the Arts Council and NESTA's (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) policies on digital media and participatory art practice; and finally Gateshead council's long-term strategy for volunteering and the creative industries.

3.1 UK Social Policies And Research

This section will discuss current UK social and community policies, in particular the Big Society, the Localism Act, and how they have come into being through cuts in funding. It will consider how such policies affect volunteering with community and cultural organisations and in relation to them working below the digital divide.

3.1.1 The Big Society

The desire of the Big Society is to get people more involved in their communities, through volunteering or supporting a charitable organisation. Big Society's ambition is to create a transition from 'Big Government to Big Society', taking power, responsibility and decision making from the state and giving it to individuals, neighbourhoods and voluntary and community groups (Evans, 2011, p.164). Traditionally described as decentralisation, the government has used the term 'localism' and by establishing The Localism Act required local authorities to maintain a list of assets of community value to enable local groups to bid and buy the asset when it comes available on the market, the idea being to help communities keep what is deemed as important and much loved sites and buildings in public hands and use. (Localism Bill, 2011, p.9). Macmillan sees Big Society as not a single concept but a "loose and encompassing alliance of ideas with a range of purposes" (2013, p.5), going as far as saying the use of language such as 'social' and 'community' is to "soften the familiar conservative ideological tropes of the Conservative government concerning defence, law and order and free markets and away from the idea of them as the 'nasty party'" (ibid).

The rhetoric for Big Society put forward by the UK coalition government is that it aims to mend 'broken Britain' by providing an alternative to what they deem an over spending bloated public sector and to help the unemployed back into employment through gaining experience through volunteering (Evans, 2011, p.165,). It aims to encourage people to take a more active role in their communities through volunteering and charitable giving (Johnston, 2011, p.4,) whilst handing over 'opportunities for communities to take over community facilities and assets such as libraries and community centres, promoting active citizens to mend 'societally Broken Britain' through encouraging individual action, activism and self-reliance rather than depending on the state to do it for them (Evans, 2011, p.167).

However set against the coalitions major public spending cuts and a public service reform that is driven by cuts it can be argued that the Big Society is more about deficit reduction than improving and giving opportunities to communities (Butler, 2011). Big Society as a concept is seen as very vague and confusing, and, as a result councils have not made much progress in delivering it (Curtis, 2011). It is also seen as nothing new in relation to the third

sector, with just the language being different (Macmillan, 2013, p3; O'Toole, 2013).

3.1.2 Working '*below the radar*'

The Big Society has brought into focus small voluntary organisations, community groups and informal activities that take place in the third sector with the purpose of giving them a higher profile and societal role. The term 'below the radar' has been used to describe such groups (Mcabe, 2010, p.3). It was also used by MacGillivray (2001) to refer to such organisations and groups that are unregulated and so do not appear on databases. It is arguable whether these types of community organisations can deliver the Big Society agenda alongside cuts to their services and the expectation on them to increase voluntary opportunities.

Whilst this may be possible for well-managed, established, organisations based in well off areas where people have the time and resources. This may be difficult or impossible in a community that is deprived and disenfranchised and with community organisations that are young so do not have a volunteering structure in place or a business plan to gain alternative funding (see Chapter 8. Outcomes: Community Activism and Socially Engaged Art). Big Society is linked to deficit reduction, the delivery of services on the cheap and the rolling back of the welfare state and as a result creates a situation where potentially consumers with resources have more access to quality choices whilst services for the poor become poor services (Mcabe, 2010, p.14).

It can be argued that the movement from community engagement to social action is significant. By creating a situation where volunteers have replaced community activists (who would usually work from a grass roots level raising support and funding separately from the state) whose agenda is driven by Government policy rather than communities, community engagement and action has arguably become an instrument for delivering social policy of low paid work and increased volunteering to compensate for cuts and state funding reduction. It is criticised for being co-opted by the state as a means of sustaining the existing social order (Ledwith, 2005; Cooper, 2008). For community organisations that work below or around the digital divide this is the situation they find themselves in and consider it an opportunity to deliver the

work they did before the Big Society came along, seeing it as nothing new, but rather the same thing in a different language (Macmillan, 2013, p.3).

The Big Society depends on people having the time to engage in local action and community events, that is reliant on people's time, which is arguably more achievable for those who have more control over their time due to having fewer commitments and responsibilities due to such reasons as being retired or economic stability. Coote (2010) argues that those in low paid jobs have less control over their time, especially as zero hour and flexible contracts become more prevalent. Coote goes on to say that this undermines one of the key premises of the Big Society in that the social and financial gains that are its aim only comes from replacing paid employment with unpaid labour.

3.1.3 Volunteering and the Big Society

The Localism Act recognises voluntary and community groups and the fact that their contribution is "neglected when they carry out some of the innovative and effective work in public services" (2011, p.8). The Act goes on to express that they should be encouraged to get more involved but, along with the Big Society, it heavily relies on people having the time to engage and be active.

The level of time, other responsibilities and motivation varies amongst different demographics. Volunteers are more likely than average to be what the *Taking Part Big Society Report* (2011) calls "wealthy achievers" – "wealthy executives", "affluent greys" and "flourishing families" (p.5). These are characterised as affluent, likely to live in rural or commuter areas, large families living in large houses, older affluent professionals and farming communities (p.5). This demographic of volunteers are significantly more likely to believe they have influence over local matters (p.8).

The voluntary sector is seen as independent and separate from state services and as a way for community members to gain some level of control over services. They can be seen as way for underfunded community organisations to benefit from people's skills whilst giving that person experience and opportunities or as a cheap alternative to public services to reduce the state deficit.

Not all community organisations have the resources and motivation to recruit and increase volunteer opportunities however it is often assumed by policy makers that they will (Evans, 2011, p.166). Evans describes the voluntary

and community sector through the Big Society becoming a distinctive player in a truly “tri-sectoral national economy”, (2011, p.171,). Evans argues that the government’s narrative of the voluntary sector is not coherent and does not show a real understanding of how the sector truly works or how it could possibly survive as public spending cuts kick in (ibid).

Johnston and Pattie (2011) argue that social capital can be built or eroded, depending on how people interact in their communities. The more people are involved in their communities, by taking part in local organisations, social networks and so on, the more social capital they generate (p.6). Volunteering however implies putting your hand up and doing something for free. Whether that is using a skill or knowledge you have or supporting someone or an organisation that have either asked for or needs extra support. You don’t necessarily have to have a skill though to participate. DIY/self-organisation is something you do yourself even if no one has asked you to do it.

Big Society can be seen as the politicisation of volunteering, through the push for people to volunteer due to cuts to services, and at the same time depoliticising it by undermining the role community groups and volunteers have in campaigning for political and social causes (Mason, 2014). The scope to change, activate and politicise such volunteer ‘opportunities’ could be discouraged, as community activism is co-opted under the banner of The Big Society.

3.2 Arts Funding In England

This section will look into a number of long-term plans put forward by Arts Council England (ACE) with a specific focus on their references to digital media, social engagement and in relation to the North East of England. It will discuss the funding decisions made by the Arts Council for their National Portfolio, how this has affected digital and socially engaged arts organisations, particularly focusing on the conversation between the Council of Digital Arts (CODA) and Andrew Nairne, Executive Director of the Arts, ACE. Finally it will discuss the Digital R&D Fund for Arts & Culture that ACE developed in collaboration with National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA).

This section focuses on Arts Council England due to them being the main funder of the arts in England and to understand how and what they consider as socially engaged arts digital art practice.

3.2.1 Arts Council England National Plan

Arts Council England's report *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A Strategic Framework* (Art Council, 2010) aims to set out a ten-year vision for the arts in England. This report came from a major open public consultation in early 2010 that proposed a vision for the arts over the long-term. It included five 10-year goals⁷ through which the vision could be realised, and suggested how the Arts Council and arts sector may need to work differently to achieve the goals (p.12). These five goals aim to provide the rationale for Arts Council England's investment in the arts and will inform their future funding decisions. The report covers all aspects of the arts but it is notable, from a digital arts perspective that it does not discuss digital media or art independently but as something the Art Council needs to be aware of (p.20).

In the introduction digital media is mentioned in terms of the way 'we make, distribute, receive and exchange art' and that the arts needs to understand the language of digital media alongside classical notions of art (p.3). This is encouraging for the use of digital media and technology as both a creative medium and a communication tool and important to acknowledge. The report goes on to mention the changing nature of how audiences experience, behave, have expectations and have access to information due to digital technology, such as social networks, live broadcasting etc, with a specific mention of young people (p.20). However it is acknowledged that only a small percentage of arts organisations are equipped or taking full advantage of technology to 'experiment artistically and build relationships with audiences'. (p.20).

7. At the heart of the framework are five 10-year goals:

- Goal 1: Talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated
- Goal 2: More people experience and are inspired by the arts
- Goal 3: The arts are sustainable, resilient and innovative
- Goal 4: The arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled
- Goal 5: Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts

The Arts Council does not see digital art as an art form that needs special attention or to be singled out and critiqued separately from the more traditional art media, hence the lack of consideration. It could be said however that it is not the role of this report to do this. The report places most of the emphasis on digital media as a tool for communication - towards increasing audiences and developing funding schemes - and not as an art form within its own right. Whilst the importance of digital media as a communication/business tool is important and relevant for arts organisations, it can be claimed that the digital as an artistic and creative medium that can work with and for the public through social engagement and participation is being dismissed or merged with the visual arts with no recognition of its potential and exploratory nature.

The Arts Council Plan: 2011-15 (Arts Council, 2011c) follows on from the report *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A Strategic Framework for the Arts* (Nov 2011) and sets out what the Arts Council will do to deliver their goals and priorities from 2011 to 2015. The plan aims to support the five goals as mentioned in the Strategic Framework through the development of a number of priorities⁸. It puts forward the priorities that each region will concentrate upon over this period.

The eighth priority of the plan is 'Digital innovation' where technology is seen as having a huge potential to support and accelerate the delivery of all of the Arts Councils goals and priorities" (p.10). From looking at the aims of this priority put forward by the Arts Council, the emphasis is to see digital technology as a tool to distribute, archive, for sharing and for new revenue streams, working with their partners to develop policy and support, mentioning in particular intellectual property and how the advent of digital technology has affected it.

8. Arts Council Priorities

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Museums & Libraries | 7. Touring |
| 2. Arts at the heart | 8. Digital Innovation |
| 3. Talent Development | 9. Becoming more audience focused |
| 4. Diversity | 10. Organisational resilience |
| 5. The Cultural Olympiad | 11. Opportunities to enter the arts workforce |
| 6. People and places with the least engagement | 12. Children and young people |

The plan splits England into a number of regions so as to understand the different ‘characteristics, opportunities and challenges of each area’ (p.17). The North includes the regions the North East, the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber. For the North five of the priorities are targeted (p.24-25). These include:

- Talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated
- More people experience and are inspired by the arts
- The arts are sustainable, resilient and innovative
- The arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled
- Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts

Whilst Digital Innovation is not included as one of the priorities, within the five chosen, elements of digital technology can be seen as relevant to their aims as well as the plan to build on existing relationships with higher education institutions.

For the North of England the report wishes to respond to existing partnerships and the apparent interest of Northern audiences in site-responsive work involving heritage, landscape and the environment (p. 24). The region’s strong track record of digital technologies is noted and seen as a strength to build upon (p.24). Media City, Salford in particular is mentioned as a collaboration that is pushed by the Arts Council (p.24), and something that has been criticised by the digital art world as possibly too commercial (Poulter, 2011).

The Arts Council acknowledges that communities in the North have a lower engagement in the arts than other parts of the country, something they wish to tackle. Yet at the same time NPO funding was cut to prominent North East organisations such as ISIS Arts whose mission is “projects are developed with culturally diverse communities for whom the work is their first engagement with the arts in the UK, and we are particularly interested in continuing to reach audiences that might not otherwise experience contemporary art” (ISIS Arts, 2012).

Relationships with the business sector are seen as paramount for sustainability and innovation and are seen as becoming more important due to

the economic situation. One way the Arts Council is pushing this is by implementing the Catalyst programme (2011b), which aims to help cultural organisations diversify their income streams and access more funding from private sources.

The plan continues on from the *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A Strategic Framework for the Arts* (2010) in seeing digital technology primarily as tool rather than a creative medium (p.5). It could be argued that the Arts Council role is not to promote one artistic medium over another, however the perceived lack of support of digital organisations during the 2011 National Portfolio process decision, could be seen as indicative of a lack of understanding of the medium (ACEDigitalUncut Google group, 2011).

3.2.2 Arts Council England National Portfolio

Support for socially engaged artistic practice, specifically for digital technology based engagement, has been decreased drastically (AceDigitalUncut, April 2011; CODA, 28 April 2011). An Arts Council press statement from the Arts Council released not long after the 2011 National Portfolio funding decision stated *“Digital technologies enable artists to connect with audiences in new ways, bringing them into a closer relationship with the arts and creating new ways for them to take part. They also support the development of new business models, new networks and new forms of creativity”*. The report goes on to say that the new National Portfolio does includes digital organisations either through *“creating digital art or using digital technologies to support audience engagement work, which will help to deliver our goals and priorities”*. (2011d)

This press release has been heavily criticised for concentrating too much on the instrumental use of digital tools, such as marketing and communication, and not seeing the potential of digital as an artistic medium and for creative merit (ACEDigitalUncut, 2011). The general feeling amongst arts practitioners and organisations is that digital technology is primarily viewed by the Arts Council and the government as a tool for business growth, feeling that digital arts and its potential as a creative tool is seen as a niche market that is not open, accessible or participatory enough for audiences (Baker, 2011). Most of this criticism comes from digital arts organisations and supporters so could be construed as being a very one-sided viewpoint, however it is hard to disagree

when mapping the number of digital arts organisations that have been completely cut from the National Portfolio by the Arts Council (Worthington, 2011).

In an open letter to Andrew Nairne, Executive Director of Arts at the Arts Council from CODA (Council of Digital Arts) an amalgamation of digital arts organisations and practitioners, it is acknowledged that digital technologies can be a tool to engage with audiences, and for business growth. However they go on to stress that funders and policy-makers do not see this as the extent of digital culture, and that it needs to be recognised at a national policy level and is about more than extending the reach of existing arts practices, but is about “entirely new forms of production, expression, practice and critical reflection that digital technologies have made possible” (CODA, 28 April 2011).

In his reply Andrew Nairne (CODA, 28 April 2011), acknowledges that, as with many areas of the 10-year strategy (Arts Council, 2010) the policy around the digital agenda is still being developed. Putting forward that a significant proportion of investment in the digital agenda will be based around goal two of the 10-year strategy, which highlights the desire for more people to experience and be inspired by the arts. Nairne goes on to say that ‘The Arts Council is strongly committed to supporting innovative artistic practice, in all media and including digital arts, and this will continue to happen through Grants for the arts, our open application lottery fund, as well as through our National portfolio investment’ (CODA, 2011).

In response to CODA’s question with regards to the Digital Fund (Digital Programmes, 2011), Nairne says that investment is likely to focus on ‘increasing reach and engagement, capacity building and strengthening business models for arts organisations’. Going on to say that ‘digital arts practice may in many cases contribute to these aims but we will not be specifically ring-fencing any part of the fund to specifically support this work.’ As can be deduced by Andrew Nairne’s reply to CODA, for the Arts Council, digital media as an art form is not deemed to need a funding stream of its own or specific support, but is seen as one of many mediums that crosses all platforms under the Arts Council remit. Digital media is specifically seen as a way of improving audience engagement and business models and digital arts practice as possibly supporting this. He does however express his wish to continue

dialogue with CODA and the unsuccessful arts organisations to the NPO scheme to develop and support the digital arts sector.

One of the funding streams the Arts Council has developed since the NPO decision is a research and development scheme in collaboration with NESTA (Digital R&D Fund for Arts & Culture, 2011). This fund was set up not as an alternative funding stream for digital arts organisations but as a very specific funded research project with specific aims and purposes. The Digital Research & Development Fund for Arts and Culture is a partnership between the Arts Council England, Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and NESTA to support arts and cultural organisations across England who want to work with digital technologies (Digital R&D Fund for Arts & Culture, 2011) to:

- expand their audience reach and engagement⁹
- explore new business models¹⁰

In considering the types of organisations that have been successful it is possible to suggest that many do not have digital arts as a primary medium but are large scale cultural organisations, a large proportion seemingly music and performance/ theatre based - 30% of applicants were performing arts organisations (Bakhshi, Dec 2011), whilst the digital based organisations are not necessarily contemporary digital arts specific. This could be seen as a policy and criteria set up for the scheme by ACE and NESTA designed for a specific agenda, or the fact that, as a result of the still very recent NPO decision there was a mistrust of the scheme by digital arts organisations.

9. **'Audience reach and engagement'** is interpreted in three ways:

- Audience broadening: increasing the number of people who participate
- Audience deepening: intensifying the level of involvement,
- Audience diversifying: attracting new audience groups

10. **Business model** is interpreted as the mechanism by which a business intends to manage its costs and generate its outcomes

The six key areas and fund themes for the Digital R&D Fund for Arts & Culture (2011) was:

1. **User-generated content and social media** - harnessing the power of the internet and social media to reach audiences and to give them a platform for discussion, participation and creativity
2. **Distribution** - using digital technologies to deliver artistic and cultural experiences and content in new ways
3. **Mobile, location and games** - developing a new generation of mobile and location-based experiences and services, including games
4. **Data and archives** - making archives, collections and other data more widely available to other arts and cultural organisations and the general public
5. **Resources** - using digital technologies to improve the way in which arts and cultural organisations are run, including business efficiency and income generation, and the way in which they collaborate with each other
6. **Education and learning** - developing interactive education and learning resources for children, teachers, young people, adult learners and arts and cultural sector professionals

As can be seen by the six themes, the idea of digital media as a creative medium and as a participatory/socially engaged artistic form still seems to remain a low priority and be under-recognized by the ACE and NESTA. The scheme seems to be very much geared towards establishing digital technology as a medium for solely for communication, marketing, audience development and business growth.

One of the successful groups, led by the 'New Art Exchange' and 'artfinder' resulted in The Culture Cloud¹¹ This project offered an opportunity for artist's to register and submit a 2-D artwork (only painting, drawing, printing and photographs allowed) of their work onto an online platform as part of a competition. A selection of curators edited the submissions down to sixty

11. <http://www.theculturecloud.com/>

artworks and then the public; through 'liking' their favourites on Facebook chose the top thirty. The final thirty were then physically displayed in a gallery where two winners were chosen, a 'Peoples Choice' and a 'Curators Choice'.

Looking at the definitions of digital art new media art as put forward by Carpenter, Graham and Cook, the use of digital technology in this project cannot be seen as the artwork, but is a means to place non-digital art (a painting, print, drawing etc.) in a digital format. As Carpenter (2008, p.21) said

"it is important to make a distinction between New Media Art that simply uses new media to reproduce traditionally created media; from artists who use new media tools and networks to create their work, integrating form and content on a platform of production and distribution (computers and the internet)."

This distinction is important in terms 'The Culture Cloud'. Whilst there was use of digital media and technology (software) in the setup of the project, this is not the artwork itself, but a means of presenting a traditional understanding of art (painting, drawing, print etc.). As a result the digital aspect, which is obviously integral for New Media and digital art, is used just as a way of presenting a traditional art form to a wider audience (to increase audience engagement).

Digital Audience: Engagement with arts and culture online report (MTM London, 2012) sees engagement with the arts through digital media as a mainstream activity, something to augment rather than replace the live experience (p.4). It breaks down interaction with arts and cultural content in digital environments into five main categories: access, learn, experience, share and create (p.5), similar in respect to Simon's 'lurkers, judges, and contributors' (2007). The report expresses the importance of arts organisations not relegating the Internet to the role of marketing channel (p.7), but as a complementing the live experience (p.5). The report sees digital media as a means of engaging with those who are already culturally active (p.6). The report places audiences into five distinct segments based on their behaviour and attitudes to the arts and digital media, emphasises the three most artistically and digitally engaged groups, confident (29%), late adopters (21%) and leading edge (11%) (p.37). It briefly mentions the two others groups, (those who are not interested in arts and

culture, audience for offline, free arts and culture only) seeing little evidence that digital technology in and of itself offers a way to engage with people with little or no current interest in arts and culture (p.37). As a result these groups are seen as low priority for arts organisations due to their low levels of interest in the arts and believing that digital technology is not a route to increase their engagement (p.37). This view is short-sighted and excludes a large proportion of the population who are beginning to become digitally engaged and may see digital technology as useful and readily available route to cultural engagement. Many of these groups do not see art galleries and museums for them (p.13). As mobile technology and social media becomes more ubiquitous and peoples main means of communication, especially for those who are unable to or lack confidence in attending arts events, social technology could be a tool to engage with new audiences in a way in which they are already well versed. Of course peoples access, or lack of, to such technology needs to be acknowledged, as there are 4 million homes in Great Britain with no Internet access (Office for National Statistics, 2014, p.14). As everyday use of the Internet in Great Britain has increased to 38 million adults (76%) in 2014, 21 million more than in 2006 (p.1); and Internet use via a mobile phone more than doubled between 2010 and 2014 from 24% to 58% (p.1) then more people are able to access the arts through digital media, and increasing digital skills could be through access to creativity and vice versa.

The Digital Arts and the creative use of the digital, specifically in a relation to social engagement, does not seem to be a priority to the Arts Council, in particular for those who aren't culturally engaged already. From just looking at the organisations that have and have not been funded by their National Portfolio and the mission of the Digital R&D fund in collaboration with NESTA. Very few organisations use technologies to engage customers as users and co-producers of their products or services (Aga, 2011, p.1). However, as mentioned before, the lack of digital art organisations involved in the ACE/NESTA research was because the fund was not set up to support the existing work of digital arts organisations but for a specific research purpose therefore something that would not replace the NPO funding.

The main conflict between the Art Council/funders and new media arts organisations seems to be an understanding of the role of new media. How

funderson understand its role being potentially different to new media art organisations, new media artists and curators. For funders it is implied that they see new media as a communication tool to increase audience development and to connect and communicate with potential customers and therefore as business and marketing tool. For new media art organisations, new media artists and curators, many of the older ones who started using new media for activism, see its role and usage as a tool for social engagement, activism and as an art form itself and therefore as a creative and social medium. This difference, some have put forward, is why new media arts organisations have been cut, at what some who work in the field say is at a disproportionate level compared to other art forms (Biggs, 2011).

It has been put forward that an alternative way of working has to be envisioned to counter these problems and to enable the creativity of digital art to be seen as paramount alongside its instrumental nature (Biggs, 2011). That digital media is now a mainstream means of communication and a creative medium and this needs to be acknowledged by digital media artists.

As Biggs (2011) goes onto say, the alternative future has to be led by the digital arts community themselves taking into account the historical past of digital arts, as non-mainstream and its mode of self-production, but also the current mainstream nature of digital media. It will have to come from a grass root level or non-mainstream position with knowledge of how people use digital technology and how it can be utilised further to enable social engagement.

3.3 The North East: Participation and digital policy

This section discusses participation and digital policy in the North East as a whole as well as concentrating on Gateshead. It discusses the findings of the *Taking Part* survey for the North East and policies and strategies in relation to cultural participation, engagement and volunteering as well as national and local digital statistics. It also considers the long-term strategies and policies of Gateshead Council in relation to volunteering and culture, and how they see it supporting the future well-being, economy and success of the borough in relation to national policies, as well as what digital policies Gateshead Council themselves may have.

3.3.1 Cultural participation and digital use in the North East

According to the *Taking Part 2011/12: Findings for the North East* regional survey (2012), people in the North East were significantly less likely to have engaged in the arts on three or more occasions in 2011/12 than people across England as a whole. They were significantly more likely not to have engaged at all (29% compared to 22%). (Taking Part, 2012, p.4). People in the North East in 2011/12 were significantly less likely to both attend events and participate in the arts than those across England as a whole, and significantly more likely to not take part in the arts at all¹² (Taking Part, 2012, p.5). Of all the England regions the North East was the lowest at 54% for adult engagement in the arts, being significantly lower than the next lowest, Yorkshire and Humberside (60%).

Attendance across the art forms in the North East is lower than the rest of England as fewer people attend art events and different forms and medium of art and culture¹³. Fewer people in the North East visit cultural arts organisation websites including theatre, libraries and museums compared to the rest of England (Taking Part, 2012, p.5). However when asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'There are lots of opportunities to get involved in the arts if I want', 54% agreed compared to 23% who disagreed, the rest being neutral.

Looking in more detail at Gateshead, the Active People survey (2014), a national survey by Sports England about participation in sport, collected data for every local authority in England. From 2008 to 2010 this included questions on cultural participation and engagement. The percentage of adults in Gateshead who have either attended an arts event or participated in an arts activity at least three times in 2009/10 was 37.21%¹⁴ meaning Gateshead is in the bottom 20% nationally (Understanding Everyday Participation, 2012) for cultural participation.

12. Engagement for the Taking Part survey includes both attendance and/or participation in the arts (p.14 Taking Part).

13. Musicals (17%), plays or drama (15%), art/photography/sculpture exhibitions (12%), public art displays or installations (10%), carnivals (5%), classical music concerts (3%), jazz performances (2%), events connected with books or writing (2%), opera (2%), and contemporary dance events (2%) (p.9 Taking Part 2012).

14. Taken from the 'Once a week overall participation fact sheet APS8 Q2' (Active People survey, n.d.)

Gateshead Council at the time of writing has no digital strategy and very little data available around digital inclusion in Gateshead as a whole, and none concentrating solely on the Bensham & Saltwell area. A number of reports have been commissioned but concentrate on the well-being, health and participation of residents across the borough (Gateshead Council, 2012; Gateshead Council, 2014; Gateshead Housing Company, 2014). In August 2012 Gateshead Council launched a Digital Inclusion project, on the back of the Government's commitment to deliver digital services as the default mechanism for government services (Gateshead Housing Company, 2014, p.1).

Gateshead's Digital Inclusion project had three broad objectives (p.1):

- Ensure all residents and employees have the opportunity to become digitally literate and confident users of technology
- Ensure that good quality, high-speed broadband is available to all homes and businesses
- Increase the delivery of public services using digital technologies

These objectives came from a need to increase digital inclusion across the borough, due to broadband access being below the national average. The key findings of the 2012 Gateshead Residents' Survey (Gateshead Council, 2012) that took place between 2 July and 24 August 2012, with a total of 4,086 people responding, found that four in five residents had access to the internet, with 71% via broadband at home (p.75). However it also found out that 19% of people do not have access to the Internet at home at all. This is significantly higher proportion than the national average 13% and typically older residents (65+), those with disability and those from a lower socio-economic group who are least likely to have access (p.75). The survey also states that 21% of people in Gateshead have no ICT skills at all, severely limiting their opportunity and chance to get online (Gateshead Council, 2014, p.38).

This survey alongside Taking Part and Active People shows a lower than average level of participation in culture and sports and a higher proportion of people with no Internet access at home. This lack of participation, activity and digital inclusion coincides with the knowledge that the average healthy life expectancy is lower in Gateshead than that for the North East of England as a

whole. Both men and women on average experience a life limiting illness or disability approx. 5.5 years and 4.9 years sooner than the England average respectively (Gateshead Council, 2014, p.33). It can also be seen that more deprived wards such as Bensham experience significantly lower life expectancy than the rest of Gateshead. All these figures and surveys lead to the conclusion that there is a severe lack of resources, access and knowledge concerning the benefits of creativity, activity and digital technology in Gateshead to support health and wellbeing, especially amongst the older residents, those with a disability and those of a low socio-economic group. With the Government expecting more and more of their services to go and be accessed online the lack of internet access and ICT skill amongst Gateshead residents will have an impact for accessing benefits as in the future many of these will need to be applied online. Therefore digital inclusion can in itself positively impact on health and wellbeing.

3.3.2 Vision 2030

Vision 2030 is the Gateshead Strategic Partnership (GSP) strategy for the future over the next twenty years. *Vision2030* was formed from a consultation process in 2007 of over 5,300 people and businesses from the public, private and the voluntary sectors across Gateshead. The consultation aim was to agree long-term strategies for the future, across the whole of Gateshead. Launched in 2007 the strategy aims to improve the economy, wellbeing and equality of opportunity so that 'all residents and businesses can fulfill their potential' (p.3). It sets out the vision that "Local people should realize their full potential, enjoying the best quality of life in a healthy, equal, safe, prosperous and sustainable Gateshead." (p.4).

This consultation was followed up in 2009 with 10,000 people being asked whether the strategy was still relevant to them. Through this consultation process six 'Big Ideas' were established (p.6) with the aim of taking these forward to improve and develop Gateshead in the future. The most relevant of the six ideas are Creative Gateshead and Gateshead Volunteers. Creative Gateshead concerns investing in heritage and people and giving local people the chance to enjoy creative experiences and opportunities to improve the quality of their lives and the look and feel of the borough (p.6). Gateshead

Volunteers is about encouraging more people to get involved in their community to benefit them and their community as a whole so that Gateshead becomes known as a national leader in promoting and supporting volunteering (p.6). The overall aim by 2010 is for the town to have the qualities of a great city and a more diverse and larger population (p10). A range of milestones on a pathway that have been marked out throughout Vision 2030 (p.11), most to take place before 2020 and the remainder between 2020 and 2030.

Creative Gateshead has a number of intended outcomes including recognition and preservation of Gateshead's heritage and culture; the best use of peoples innovation to develop local solutions and an effective digital infrastructure used by all homes and businesses in the borough (p.18). Achievements so far include the opening of a heritage centre; use of the Empty Shop scheme to encourage creative industries; and free internet access through the library network (p.18). To further move Creative Gateshead forward the report puts forward a 'Pathway to achieving Vision 2030' (p.19-20) with the ultimate aim that by 2030 90% of residents will be feeling a sense of identity and belonging with Gateshead; 90% of residents proud of Gateshead's heritage; and a University presence supported by a Research and Development Centre.

Planned outcomes for Gateshead Volunteers include a thriving third sector; vibrant and sustainable communities through volunteer sector organisations delivering local services; volunteering recognized as career development; and social responsibility through local businesses supporting volunteers (p.34). Achievements so far include a 2% increase in volunteering from 16 to 18%; development of volunteering strategies; support through a mentoring programme and an annual Volunteer of the Year award (p.34). The Pathway has the ultimate aim of Gateshead becoming the volunteering capital of England by 2030; the opening of a volunteering training centre; and volunteering levels reaching 35% of all residents (p.36/37).

This very ambitious strategy has already achieved a number of its targets in all six of the ideas, and a number of principles, initiatives and a Community Development Strategy (p.41) have been adopted to deliver the remaining targets and to support local people to make a difference in their community.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodologies and strategies I developed before and during the practice. It is fair to say that the research project changed as the project developed due to the flexible and uncertain nature of community based practice and concerning digital technology and its use. As a result the parameters of the methodology only came into focus through the practice and continue to do so.

This chapter looks at a number of methodologies and problems that arise and have arisen during the practice. I consider the various ways of engaging with a community and the different ways that a community can manifest itself. I consider the ethical issues of working within communities and in relation to my own experience as an artist/curator, researcher and community member. I understand digital media as a grass roots medium, considering free and readily available software and hardware already in use within the community. I discuss how working in a grass roots manner can mean working below the digital divide and put forward the artist as a non-expert, considering how the strategy of workshops can change a community based project. Finally I critique two other projects, Deveron Arts, a participatory arts organisation that works in a rural Scottish community, and 2Up2Down, a Liverpool Biennial project by Dutch participatory artist Jeanne van Heewisjk.

4.1 Methodologies Of Engagement With A Community

Though the area of Bensham & Saltwell is where I live and the “community” I live in, before I started my research, I did not necessarily ‘know’ the area. My understanding of Saltwell and my interaction was limited. I felt as a starting point it was important to get to ‘know’ and understand the area of Saltwell and Bensham through looking around and being more aware, walking through the streets and going to the places I wouldn’t usually go to and interacting with people, organisations and other community members.

There were a number of community organisations, businesses and possible ‘communities of interest’ within Gateshead that I wanted to approach. I needed to understand how these groups were formed and work within the community for me to fully grasp how they could fit into my research and practice, and how I

could work with them and engage the people who use them to increase cultural and social participation.

There were a number of questions that I needed to investigate and answer for my research:

- What are the different types of organisations and community groups within the area?
- How are they formed and what are the differences and possible conflicts that may occur with working with these various types of groups?
- How do I approach or conceive my practice-research within the context of the area?
- What are the issues that may arise if the project brief (i.e. regeneration and community) does not relate to the work, or maybe relates too much to the work of the groups?
- What is the role of the council? What if the controversial regeneration results in conflict between the group and the council?

These were issues that may have arisen early in the process or as the project and research developed, but I felt they were questions that I needed to consider as potential problems. I needed to understand them in terms of the ideas concerning community and the different types put across by Miwon Kwon (2002) and Grant Kester (2004) as discussed in chapter '2.2 What type of Community?'. These various types include for Kwon *Community of mythic unity*, *"Sited" communities*, *Invented community (temporary)* and *Invented community (ongoing)* (Kwon, 2002, p.118-135) and for Kester *Pre-existing "Politically-Coherent" Communities* and *'Created' Communities*. (Kwon, 2002, p. 145/46). These needed to be understood not just from an art perspective but also from other academic and community perspectives, to get a fuller and rounder understanding of the different methodologies and issues that could be at play.

Taking into account these various possibilities there were a number of approaches I could take to engage with the community and community organisations. These approaches included Kwon's *Community of mythic unity*. This was obviously problematic in many ways as who is the community in this context? Is it based on the fact they live in the same area or pass through it? It could be said that there are no physical or cultural similarities for this community

apart from their location. A way of working with this group could have been through developing a project that used the area/street as a starting point where people come across it accidentally. This could have involved the use of the wasteland, or specific landmarks within the area.

Another possibility was working with *Sited/ Pre-existing politically-coherent* communities such as community organisations or groups, whether formal or informal. Issues with this working method are that these groups would have a political or social agenda that could have interfered or taken over the project. An example in the area is the Saltwell & Bensham Residents Association, which was set up to protest and campaign against the regeneration process within the area. Whilst this is an integral aspect of my research, I wished to understand the regeneration from a critical point of view, taking in many different viewpoints, not just the one, and to understand how the regeneration would affect and change the area for both good and bad and how the local populace could gain a voice to put forward what they felt they needed. By taking sides, or only dealing with one agenda, I felt this may be a problem resulting in the research becoming too focused on one possibility and agenda

Invented/Created would be a new group that could either be temporary or sustainable after the project. For me allowing the project to continue beyond the research was integral to my working method but creating or organising a new group is both difficult to start and sustain, due to members not necessarily having a commitment to the project (an initial curiosity maybe). The issue for this type of group is how to sustain it beyond the initial few meetings and how it can remain on-going. One possibility was using existing groups as a base to develop a new group from within an existing framework.

One group that neither Kwon nor Kester touch upon, nor take into account is emergent communities. These groups are usually new to an area and may not be fully formed due to there being no structures or frameworks in being in place. For Saltwell this includes groups such as students, immigrants and the increasing number members of the creative classes that are moving into the area due to the affordability of housing compared to Newcastle. This has changed the area, which is traditionally a white working class area, to a mixed and multicultural community (in terms of class, race and ethnicity).

Working with the above possibilities I felt my approach could involve a mixture of a few of the methodologies mentioned. I decided to work with specific

formed groups such as a community centre and their users but to try and form a new group to work within the context of the research in working with a group, whether pre-formed or not, I was aware it could potentially be difficult to be creative and have a collaborative experience with a community as it is very dependent upon the community's and groups interest, belief in the project and continued involvement for sustainability.

It needed to involve the whole group working and learning together and taking collective responsibility to make the project work in the social and political context of the area. There needed to be a process of collective learning (Heeswijk, 2011) when working with such groups and there was a need to engage with different agendas, personalities and creative energies if there was any potential for collective action in order for us to become a shaping force in our immediate environment (ibid). Such processes can sometimes be a long and painful process, with a need to learn about each other's ideas and different viewpoints

4.2 The Blurring Of Artist/Curator, Researcher And Resident

All research can be said to raise ethical issues, much of which is enforced through strict institutional policies and frameworks and structures. Participatory practice however can be said to create issues and problems due to working with communities and people where the boundaries between the researcher and participant is blurred (Banks, 2012a, p.4). Ethics in relation to participatory research becomes not just about institutional ethical procedures but personal ethics as an artist, researcher and in my case resident working in the community I live in.

There are a number of issues that need to be considered with such research. These include how power, control and authorship are negotiated, how people's very personal experiences are shared and made public and how the different needs and expectations of the participants are balanced in the design of the research process (Bank, 2012a, p.4). There are questions concerning co-design, collaboration, social engagement, authorship and the role the artist has in all these ways of working as the potential 'spokesperson' for a given group or community.

4.2.1 Community Based Participatory Research

There are questions of how far it is ethical to be involved in people's personal lives and, through a project, disclose details of your own life. What responsibilities does the artist have with the group and with individual participants? How much is a practice-based arts research project separate from the actual reality of everyday life, especially when you are immersed in that community through living in it? This brings up the problem of artist as social worker or 'shoulder to lean on' and instead should be seen as an opportunity to reflect and learn in a supportive process (Banks, 2012b, p.26).

As a result there can be messiness with such research and community art practice where boundaries can become blurred as participation and research engages on very much a human level. Whilst it is still essential to have and draw boundaries between the researcher/artist and the participants, this can be difficult if working in the community where you reside. Therefore it was important to develop insight into how to engage with people as part of the research, and to be open to receiving feedback and reflection from participants, colleagues and community organisation staff

For Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) the role of the researcher in a given community means learning as much about yourself as it does about 'the other', and the struggles that are often involved in the process, particularly when the 'content' of the research is close to your own journey (Banks, 2012b, p.28). A critical part of a community-based research project is the need to have 'community' built into the research process itself so it is not just studying 'the community out there' (Banks, 2012b, p.28), but inbuilt into the actual research and practice from the beginning. One of the ways (CBPR) does this is through participants become co-researchers and collaborators rather than just research material for the researcher. This way of working obviously mirrors the arguments taking place concerning participatory arts practice as mentioned in the contextual chapter of this thesis and the ethical and moral issues of working with people. The participant is not just the material of research but also the collaborator, voice and, hopefully, eventual leader of such artistic and research projects.

4.2.2 The 'outsider' and the 'other'

The role of the artist as researcher needed to be questioned, and can be problematic in terms of being situated as superior to the participant, through intellect, class or money, (Kester, 2004) The researcher can be seen as an "outsider" working with the "other" resulting in them becoming a spokesperson for the community (Kester, 2004). The 'delegate' as put forward by Pierre Bourdieu, in 'Delegation and Political Fetishism', (1994) acts as the spokesperson for the community or group, either by choice or not. Bourdieu believed that it was true to say that it is the spokesperson who creates the group" (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 204) and represents the community in its absence. The groups 'absence' possibly in relation to Andersen's idea of the 'imagined community' (1983). The delegate not only represents the group but also creates it, and "functions as a sign in place of the totality of the group" (p. 206) where the group can be seen to serve the delegate and not the reverse. As a result the community can be seen to exist (both politically and symbolically) through the delegate. In the case of community-based socially engaged art a community can be seen to exist through the creative expression of the delegate and, less so, the people whom the artist engages with. This brings with it problems of power, of the artist having the authority to speak on behalf of a given group thereby empowering themselves politically, professionally or morally.

In a dialogical practice, as put forward by Kester (2004, p.95) the artists, whose perceptions are informed by his/her training, past projects and lived experience come into a given community characterised by its own unique construction/constellation of social and economic forces, personalities and traditions. In this exchange what follows for both the artist and collaborators will involve having both their existing perceptions challenged. Community-based projects that are a collaboration between an artist (creative, intellectual, financially and institutionally empowered) and a community can be seen as an intellectual and institutionally empowered individual working with a group that are in need of empowerment or access to creative/expressive skills (Kester, 2004, p.137). Therefore groups or the 'community' can be seen as culturally, economically, or socially different from the artist.

Pascal Gielen in his essay *Mapping Community Art* (2011), starts with the idea that aesthetics and ethics are two separate things (2011 p.18) and puts forward the idea of a compass with four points (2011, p.20).

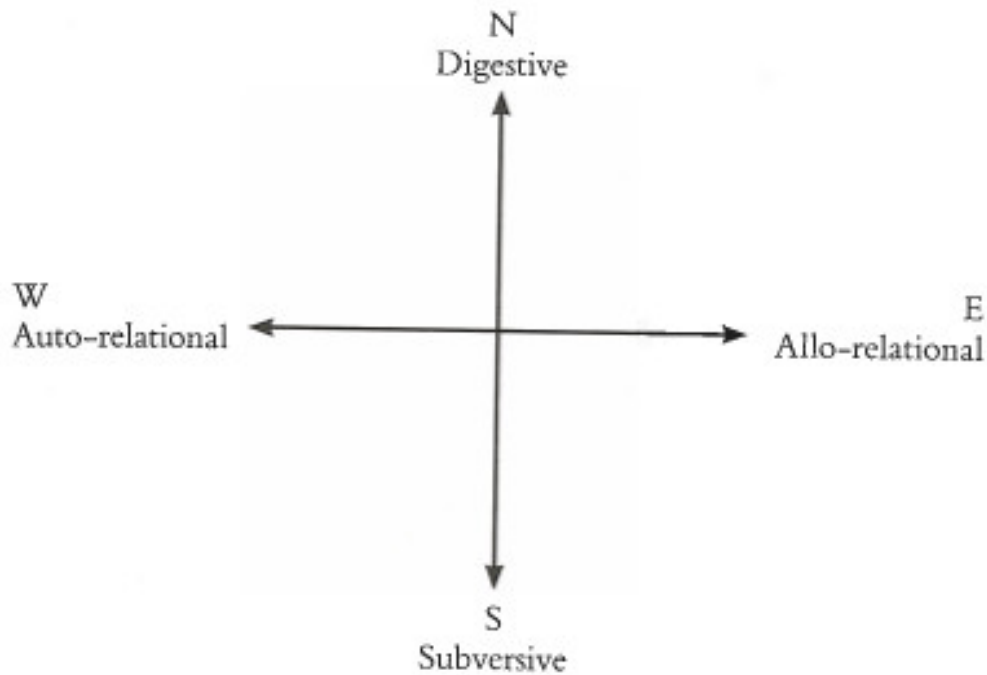


Image 3: Pascal Gielen compass diagram of community art directions
(Gielen, 2011, p.19)

In this diagram (Image 3) auto-relational (west) is where art comes first, where aesthetics is paramount and the work is about furthering the artists career (2011, p.19). It could also be said that this is where a lot of gallery based participatory practice is based. Allo-relational (east) is where the art 'serves' the 'other', i.e. the community or social group, and aesthetics is a moot point over the ethical and social issues that are being discussed. For both of these there are problems and issues both ethically and artistically. Auto-relational art can be seen to be using the community for the artist's own agenda where a collaborative act has no purpose beyond itself (and the promotion of the artists career. Allo-relational art however, for some can be seen as artistic suicide as the work becomes social resistance rather than an aesthetic artistic experience (2011, p.19). The idea of community and its promotion can be seen as not wholly positive due to issues around exclusiveness (Kester, 2004, p.129). North and south are digestive art and subversive art respectively where digestive aims to integrate social groups into society and subversive, as it implies, aims to create radical subversion (p.21).

Whilst each individual point has its positives and negatives, what this diagram allows is for an artist to 'track' their work and understand where they

may currently sit within their practice at a given moment in time. Projects may begin as digestive and become more subversive over time and vice versa. In the same respect a project may have the intention of being allo-relational but it will always benefit the artist sooner or later if successful, by becoming a part of their practice. Jeanne van Heeswijk is an example of an artist whose work can be seen to be subversive as well as socially aware, however each project has supported her practice and success as an artist. Whether a project becomes digestive over time could be argued as, if successful, it becomes the norm and the way the community works. It allows the artist to consider each interaction individually and treat each encounter separately, critically and self-reflexively as the project develops.

This connects to Henri Marcuse's 'Repressive Tolerance' where a hegemonic strategy neutralises undesirable ideas by granting them a place (p.29). The artist receives the green light from an authoritative power, such as in this researchers case Gateshead Council, to demonstrate some subversive behaviour. This brings into question whether subsidised community art can acquire any level of subversive behaviour. What may have started as being subversive becomes digestive once the hegemonic structures become aware of it and offer support.

Kester in his most recent book *The One and the Many* (2011) sees there as being other ways of working where collaborative labour is seen as generative, not simply symbolic, improvisationally responsive rather than scripted, and in which the distribution of agency is more reciprocal (p.76). This could be seen as the difference between the aesthetic and the social, the political and politicised. In terms of whether the arts main aim is to be an artwork in the contemporary art canon and tradition or has other purposes such as being a social events and facilitator of change.

Can the researcher/artist/curator be thought of as part of the community, not as a separate and privileged individual, and not as the only one who can enable this 'transformative ideal'? Can they be seen as someone who has specific knowledge and experience that can be utilised by the community as tools within the neighbourhood? I needed to consider how I am 'positioned' within the community, and how does my role as a researcher as well as a resident might bring conflicts to my position, even though I had, at the time of

starting the practice aspect of the project, been a resident in Gateshead for six years and still felt like an outsider.

4.3 Digital Technology And Media As A Grass Roots Tool

The emergence of digital media is often identified as ‘motors for social change’ with their ability to lower barriers and create access to communication, digital and creative production and content. (Bitton, 2011b, p.5). It is argued that they could hold the key to the empowerment of people and communities by turning consumers into producers and distributors, as a result increasing control over content creation and information flow (Bitton, 2011b, p.5). Enabling new forms of grassroots movements as well as facilitating the efficiency of already existing ones as innovative fertile ground for alternative social organisation (Bitton, 2011a). Digital media has facilitated the sharing of human experience, enabling people to belong to multiple social groups, creating and overlaying both place-based and non-place based communities on a local and global scale (Bitton, 2011b, p.6). Place is still relevant as online interactions feed back to and have an impact on people’s local daily lives. Digital technologies and online social networks have enabled physically connected, local communities to thrive by modifying interactions at the neighbourhood level enabling people who live in the same community and location to communicate in a new and potentially more equal manner.

However, mere accessibility is neither a guarantee nor a direct cause of empowerment. These attributes are not inherent in technology but are shaped by its design and are only realised through use, which play out in particular socio-cultural contexts. This democratisation then, is not necessarily immutable of existing power relations (Bitton, 2011b, p.5). There can be a risk of the amplification of specific agendas within a community, resulting in just one idea of a few becoming the believed view of the whole¹⁵.

Access to technology is not possible for all, individually or organisationally wise. This can be due to a number of reasons – economic, social, resource, physical

15. Bensham & Saltwell Resident Association call themselves the ‘official campaign for opposing Gateshead Council’s proposed demolition of 440 homes in central Gateshead’ (2006) proclaiming themselves the ‘spokes group’ for Bensham & Saltwell residents.

or mental disability for example. Many of the community based groups that work to deliver social benefit in Gateshead, work below the digital divide.

When interviewing community organisations and talking to staff and centres users as to why they did not have access to digital technology responses included lack of resources and staff to develop a digital strategy and/or fear of a negative reaction from centre users and the community, and basic lack of digital knowledge and awareness (O'Toole, 2013; Hoult, 2013).

Community organisations have been termed 'issue based creative clusters' (IBCC) and seen as organisations and groups that are largely voluntary-led and work within the 'Big Society' agenda (Schaefer et al, 2012, p.3). For Schaefer IBCCs utilise a range of complimentary creative skills in order to address social issues and problems. They work below the radar and can easily be dismissed as 'insignificant elements of the creative economy' (Schaefer et al, 2012, p.3). These groups work on community and issue-based projects and social problems, near, or even below, the digital divide, and in relative isolation from each other.

One research-based approach that could support such IBCC's is Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) as mentioned in chapter 4.2. CBPR aims to share power and resources working towards beneficial outcomes for all participants, especially 'communities of locality, common identity, interest or practice (Banks, 2012a, p.4). CBPR can be led and initiated by members of community groups and organisations themselves, or more commonly, by community groups working alongside, or in partnership with, professionals, including academics and research students. (Banks, 2012a, p.4)

Whilst my practice-based research cannot be considered as true Community Based Practice Research (CBPR), as I rather than the community undertook the research, the conversations and practice did influence the direction it took. Whilst I can't claim this is as a result of my research, since the start of the project a few organisations have started to (re)consider their use and understanding of social and digital media¹⁶. The research and methodology is also reflective in terms of my own position in the community as a resident,

16. Since my conversations and volunteering with various groups they have started to use social media to promote their work, and have bought digital equipment. I have been approached by Bensham Grove Community Centre to consult with them in the redesign of their website.

and how I started to become a centre user and volunteer rather than only a researcher of these community organisations

4.3.2 'Strategies' and 'Tactics'

As people have become more creators than just watchers of technology it is not always used in its intended way. It is appropriated and redefined in innovative, creative and sometimes unexpected ways. This can include the customisation of consumer products, collective cultural or artistic output emerging from experimentation with new technologies Bitton (2011b). This can also be sometimes due to urgent political and social reasons, both positive and negative such as how Facebook was used to promote and galvanise people during the Arab Spring or Blackberry Messenger during the London riots of 2011.

In his essay, 'The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life' Lev Manovich takes his influence from Michel de Certeau's 1980 book *The Practice of Everyday Life* in particular with de Certeau's ideas on "strategies", used by institutions and power structures, and "tactics", used by people in their everyday lives. The example De Certeau gives is a city's layout where "strategies" include signage, parking rules and official city maps created by authority. The way an individual moves through a city, for example taking short cuts or wandering aimlessly can be seen as "tactics". In other words, an individual adapts the city to their needs by choosing how to negotiate it. For De Certeau, "strategies" are fixed and very slow to change, whilst "tactics" are adaptable and can move quickly.

Manovich takes this idea and applies it to how people use the Internet, such as open source software, DIY media culture and hacking. However for Manovich, these roles are reversed. "Strategies" have become "tactics", whereby Web 2.0 and social network companies allow users to make decisions and actively encourage DIY culture. This can be seen in media such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogging, where we can decide the layout and design and add content, such as images, videos and text. On a more technical level we are encouraged to design and create our own 'apps' for smart phones. What were once "tactics" have been sold back to us as "strategies" meaning, similar to De Certeau's idea on "tactics", they are more able to be flexible and continuously change.

However this also means online and digital “tactics” have become a corporate “strategy” whether we are aware of this or not, meaning rather than being active and free creators of our own online world, we are consumers and content creators for multi-national companies. What we search for, create, comment on and upload becomes part of the online presence of such companies allowing them to gather information about us and tailor advertising and search results to our interests. The question to consider for the project was how far this relates to a community that is possibly not digitally aware or able due to lack of resources. Social media can be seen as a tactic that has been reformatted into a strategy, but could it be turned back into a tactic?

4.3.2 Symbolic and actual practice

Pablo Helguera in his book *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (2011) writes about the difference between symbolic and actual practice, where both are political and socially motivated. Yet symbolic practice acts ‘through the representation of ideas and issues’ at a metaphorical level rather than as true social engagement. With this in mind the author discusses whether art could actually make a difference in a community, as either a social or active practice, if residents feel disenfranchised, de-invested and excluded from their own environment. Further, is this especially true when communities are undergoing change through regeneration, and do not want to participate in art projects or see arts as a solution to any of the issues that are ‘blighting’ the area (Saltwell resident, 2011).

Bearing this in mind this project attempted to use the skills and knowledge of the author through training, experience and practice as a professional artist, curator and art educator, developing and facilitating workshops, to try and understand how these experiences can support the community. This did not necessarily just mean in an artistic way (i.e. the traditional or contemporary idea of art and definitions of socially engaged/ participatory art practice) but through working in the community and understanding how individuals and groups currently engage both socially and creatively. The author seeks to consider how artistic sensibility; understanding and perspective could be used as a ‘tool’ to explore the potential for developing a strategy with other community members to create a space for community action, indeed whether, as an artist interested in socially engaged art practice it

would be more useful to abandon art altogether and instead become a professional community worker or activist.

Alongside this the research also aimed to understand how the community, used (or did not use) digital media, specifically social media, and how my experience and knowledge of such media could help support community centres, projects, groups and individuals in the area. I wanted to understand how the groups and people I worked with experience technology and what types of media they do use. Through understanding their knowledge and experience the objective was to develop a project that fitted into their own understanding and experience of digital media.

4.4 Artist As ‘Non-Expert’

The artist as ‘expert’, where their role can be seen as educator, role model, teacher, and researcher (Pringle, 2002), has become prominent as a way of promoting social cohesion and community empowerment (Matarasso, 1997). The arts, and as a result artists, have become a tool used by governments, councils, researchers and policy makers to improve well-being and health, reduce prison populations, increase social stability and the renewal of civil society amongst others (Belfiore, 2008, p.6).

The artist as non-expert could be seen as way of negating, resulting in the artist becoming observer and participant as well as facilitator/collaborator taught by professionals/experts in a given field. The artist would become not only an instigator, but also a participant, learning from the community, the expert as well as the other way round. An exchange would take place between the various groups and individuals as in Stephen Willats diagram, ‘A Socially Interactive Model of an Art Practice’ (2012, (Image 1) as mentioned in section 2.3 of this thesis. The individual points or ‘nodes’ of the model are not just a way of making sure there are no breaks in communication as suggested by Paul Baran’s initial model, (Image 2) but as a way of exchanging knowledge and ideas amongst each artist and participant as well as the expert. In this respect the artist should also be considered a ‘non-expert’.

4.4.1 Participant observation

Artist as non-expert or amateur is a way of decreasing the hierarchical levels of community-engaged practice, if not dismissing them all together.

Whilst the professional/expert may take over that role, the artist maintains their role as facilitator but learns alongside the participants whilst being a participant observer. The term participant observer is widely used in anthropological and sociological studies as a qualitative method for data collection, such as interviews, observation and documentation (Kawulich 2005, p.1). The advantages of participant observation include the rich detailed descriptions that can be produced and the possibility of more informal observations, which can result in new questions and hypotheses (p.6). However disadvantages can include that sometimes the researcher may not be interested in what happens out of the public eye (p.6), meaning different researchers would gain different observations due to relying on community leaders or marginal participants.

4.4.2 The workshop as a creative medium

The idea of the workshop was central to my working method as a space for engagement, participation and experimentation where the outcomes are not fully complete but a place for discussion, creativity and pedagogical outcomes (Bishop, 2012, p, 7) between the various 'nodes' involved. The workshop became the performative stage and place for social and learning agent interactions, as well as their thinking, planning and execution (Allen, 2011, p.1). Kester sees this interest in the workshop as a social form that has grown in conjunction with critical remobilisation of craft practices (2011, p.96). The workshop as a result became a tactic to engage with participants but also a way to learn, and a tool for DIY and potential social and community activism.

This employment of the workshop brought with it the issue of quality and aesthetics. As mentioned workshops can mean the creative outcome is not fully realised or known beforehand resulting in issues of process versus product and amateur versus expert. The question of quality in participatory art is a contested issue, rejected by many politicised artists and curators as serving the elite (Bishop, 2012, p.7) and contemporary art world market. Bishop believes that value judgements are necessary, not as a way of reinforcing elite culture and policing the boundaries of art and non-art, but as a way to understand and clarify our shared values at a given historical moment (Bishop, 2012, p.8). The employment of the workshop as a creative tool enabled the artist, in the context of this research, to become not just an artist or facilitator, but a participant who learnt alongside the other community members.

4.5 Deveron Arts, '*the town is the venue*'

Deveron Arts works under the *modus operandi* the *town is the venue* where the town of Huntly¹⁷, in rural Aberdeenshire, becomes the venue, studio, gallery and stage for the creation of contemporary cultural and art practice. Active since 1995, Deveron Arts has developed a regional, national and international programme of art events and symposia very much dealing with the issues of locality, and an understanding of place in both a national and an international context.

The Town is the Venue (TiV), as Jay Koh states (2010) expresses a desire to move out of a white cube or conventional elitist space into a more expanded and contextualized space of a town, or a desire for more active engagement with the social-political-economic character of the site, or for participative and collaborative ventures with the residents of the town. TiV grew out of not just economic reasons – a lack of space and funds for a conventional gallery – but a realisation that the traditional strategy of the white cube can be prohibitive and divisive, possibly more so in such a small community. A physical understanding of a gallery can result in barriers, both physical and mental being inadvertently put in place where the audience (or community in this case) does not feel able, or willing, to engage with its content or even to cross the threshold, physically or mentally.

Working loosely around four themes - generational, environment, heritage and identity - visual artists, musicians, writers, curators and other creative people are invited from all over the world to live, work and engage with the residents and physical space of Huntly. Topics stem essentially from listening closely to other people in the town, and looking at socio-political concerns from a micro-society perspective (Sacramento, 2010, p.38). Invited artists are encouraged to engage with the local community through their practice and are introduced to a wide range of inhabitants and community groups. This results in an ongoing and intense exploration of Huntly as a community in the context of socially engaged art practice and participation. Outputs vary greatly from project to project - installations, exhibitions, books, videos, and websites – and accompanied by discussions, debates and festivals,

17. Huntly is a 4500-people strong market town in the North East of Scotland on the direct train line between Inverness and Aberdeen and on the foothills of the Cairngorms National Park.

to bring people from the community, art and topical fields to the town (Sacramento, 2010, p.40). Projects have included Jacques Coetzer's 'Room to Roam', exploring how tourism branding can change or reinforce the town's sense of identity (Room to Roam, 2008); Hamish Fulton's '21 Days in the Cairngorms', where he spent twenty-one days in the Cairngorm's National Park without human interaction or interference (21 Days in the Cairngorms, 2010); and David Sherry's, 'Health & Safety Effects', looking at the myths and ideas behind health and safety and how the issue affects people's lives (Health & Safety Effects, 2010). The projects either directly relate to the history, geography or issues connected to or concerning Huntly or take a wider national or global context.

Patrick Semple notes that the 'Town is the Venue' does not specify the nature of the event, nor its orchestrator, but merely anticipates its occurrence (2008, p.1). The phrase does not even express that its subject is art but could be anything that it wants to be, an everyday occurrence or presentation. However a location cannot become a venue without an event, but suggests one is going to take place and that the town itself is to be acted upon by an outside agent or agents in order to create the event (2008, p.1).

The 'Town is the Venue' is not site-specific or venue based but topic centered. The town is seen as a perimeter that defines the themes, as long as it finds resonance with the cultural and socio-historical context of the town. (Sacramento, 2010, p.56) For Claudia Zeiske, director of Deveron Arts, the starting point is always the context, secondly the artist. The context is considered first and then an artist invited. It is only when the artist arrives that the search for the venue begins. Sometimes it is not a venue as such but a place or space, such as a square (Zeiske, 2012). Curator Nuno Sacramento says in an analysis of Deveron Art's curatorial methodology that it places the artist in the heart of the community, where the artist uses the town as the studio, the gallery and the laboratory (Sacramento, 2008a). Artists stay in Huntly for a period of at least three months allowing enough time to immerse themselves into the context: joining local clubs, bringing families, enrolling children into the school/nurseries, partners take up short term jobs amongst other things (Sacramento, 2010 p.26)

The curatorial team also act as stakeholders in the town through going to meetings, events, collaborating with community groups, schools and

organisations as well as everyday life of the town. (Sacramento, 2010, p.57-58). The small group of permanent staff live as well as work in Huntly, whilst temporary staff and interns are expected to live in the town as well. By not just working but living in the town and being part of life in Huntly, even if it is just for a short period of time, it enables the artist and staff to understand how the town works and develop professional relationships and dialogue with individuals and groups to further and enhance their art project. This requirement to live in the town, however, brings with it ethical issues with regards to the type of work produced by the artists and curators employed by Deveron Arts. Antagonistic work could be problematic and create issues if you have to live, work and drop your children off at school. This however does not mean the work can't be critical but possibly not disruptive to town life.

Huntly itself is not actually specified either, only the term town. The phrase therefore raises the idea of the town as a generic social construct whose essence lies not in location but in an ongoing process (Semple 2008, p.1). The phrase suggests the idea of exploring place, space and theories concerning community on both a local, national and potentially global scale but not necessarily in relation to one location. The 'town' itself could be anywhere, though for Zeiske, the fact Huntly is a rural town is central for the 'Town is the Venue' to work. For her a city is too big and does not have natural boundaries, she states that in a city you are either in a poor or a rich area (Zeiske, 2013, p.44). This is too simplistic a view of a city or an urban town, especially when considered in relation to a suburban area such as Bensham, which has a mix of both poor and well-off residents, as well as council ward boundaries that clearly indicate the area.

4.5.1 Cultural Health Visitor

The Town is the Venue aimed to become not just away of presenting art in a site-specific context but also as a way of bringing art to people who may not have much understanding or initial interest in the arts. The possibility of connecting with people who do not usually engage in a creative or artistic way is a problem, which can be seen in many community art projects, and it is questionable whether TiV has succeeded in this case. Zeiske when interviewed discussed the problem of having a quick turn over of residencies every three months meaning the organisation became too thematic resulting in not enough

time, for the artists, the community and Deveron Arts to fully understand the project before they had moved onto the next one (Zeiske, 2013, p 27/28). Whilst making the artist live and work in the town tries to counteract this there is still the problem of an artist being 'parachuted in' to a community before having to leave just as quickly as they arrived.

To try and solve this problem, Deveron Arts developed a long-term position called the Cultural Health Visitor. Based on the NHS's Community Health Visitor, the Cultural Health Visitor's aim is to develop engagement with Huntly residents who are 'hard to reach' due to their socio-economic situation or do not engage with creative projects and to increase the longevity of the artist's ideas and projects (Cultural Health Visitor, 2014). Deveron Arts defines cultural health as the condition of a person or a community's cultural orientation and their capacity or willingness to explore new ideas and behaviours. Cultural Health, alongside physical, mental and social health, contributes to the general well being of a person as well as to that of a community (Cultural Health Visitor, 2014).

In recent years, Huntly has been identified as an area with relatively high unemployment and a number of poverty indicators¹⁸ and as a result is socially vulnerable. This has been due to a number of factors including the decline of jobs in agriculture, changes in shopping trends (in particular shopping via the internet), and the centralisation of services to larger centres. This decline is most apparent in the edges of the town centre through empty shops, derelict buildings, charity shops and undeveloped industrial land (Sacramento, 2010 p.34).

The Cultural Health Visitor can be seen as similar to cultural institutions Outreach Officer developing outreach workshops and projects based on the galleries exhibitions. The Cultural Health Visitor supports the artist in developing their project, laying the foundations and engaging people before they arrive and developing a legacy once the artist leaves. Zeiske acknowledges the difficulties and danger of equating the arts with health, especially confusing the boundaries between an NHS Health Visitor and the Cultural Health Visitor (Zeiske, 2013, p 39). Local health bodies have expressed their fear that Cultural

18. High school free meal indicator; poor nutrition habits, high number of unemployment (Sacramento, 2010 p. 34).

Health Visitor could undermine and teenage pregnancies, above average potentially trivialize the role of the health visitor. Current Cultural Health Visitor and artist Catrin Jeans is aware of this and is trying to question and critique the role and its concept. Jeans has been working as a socially engaged artist for five years and previously worked with Deveron Arts on a number of projects. Her own experience as an artist on temporary socially engaged projects has influenced her approach. Jean feels that she is 'parachuted in' to do projects that either have an ulterior motive as well as that of making art, of audience development, community development or maybe an aspect of social research (Jeans 2013, p.2). These she feels are not always successful as a result. Jeans sees the Cultural Health Visitor as looking at who does not get access or who struggles with access to cultural activity, why this is the case, and identifying those gaps and trying to fill them. She sees her role as not just to engage with people with contemporary culture or creative projects developed by the invited artists, but with local traditional cultural and community activities and everyday participation, such as Céilidhs, established knitting and reading groups and the local football team.

The Cultural Health Visitor role could be seen as a long-term project concerned with art and wellbeing, but for Jeans it is a way of critiquing this to discover what the problems and positives there are. She is aware that the job will produce many failures that she feels is already happening, due to the nature of the role. This failure could be seen as due to the clash between the way Deveron Arts works with a broad spectrum of the community compared to the Cultural Health Visitor's purpose of working with set groups who have social problems. Jeans is aware of this problem but sees it as an element of the project that she is working with rather than against.

4.6 '2up 2down'- ' *it isn't called a fortress for nothing*'

2Up2Down is a project by Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk as part of the 2013 Liverpool Biennial. Based in the Anfield area of the city the project aims to work with local residents and young people to investigate the issues surrounding housing regeneration and development in the area. Anfield has a long history of housing regeneration initiatives and strategies, as a former Housing Market Renewal pathfinder area, many of which have not come to fruition, resulting in large swathes of boarded up housing. Since 2008, van Heeswijk, has been

working with residents of Anfield to rethink the future of their neighbourhood, for local people to “take matters into their own hands” and make real social and physical change in their neighbourhood (About 2Up 2Down, 2012).

For many of her projects she works with public spaces on socially committed art projects, where she sees herself as not just an artist but a mediator and communicator. She stimulates and develops cultural collaboration and production and creates new public spaces and meeting zones as well as remodelling existing ones, working closely with artists, designers, architects, software developers, governments and, most importantly, citizens (van Heeswijk, J, 2013a).

The context of the project came out of the Biennials programme working with the Housing Market Renewal pathfinder agency, NewHeartlands, to work in the Anfield area. The housing issue in Anfield has been an ongoing problem for approximately 10 years (Peake, 2013). Van Heeswijk was commissioned for the project due to her working in housing regeneration-related art projects in Holland¹⁹.

Van Heeswijk made regular research trips to Anfield leading her to propose a communal self-build scheme, the setting up of a Design and Build workshop on one of the vacant spaces in the neighbourhood to allow people to develop urban design, architecture and construction skills and to develop social enterprises of their own. Working with the architects of the Anfield Housing Market Renewal area and a team of architectural Master of Art students from Sheffield University, she wanted to enable participants to gain an understanding of the housing regeneration and acquire the skills to play an active part in making it a positive space to live, work and play (2Up2Down, 2012).

In collaboration with Architects URBED and other design specialists van Heeswijk and the community re-modeled a block of empty properties working with a group of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). The whole community were treated as the “client”, to design an affordable housing scheme, bakery shop and kitchen, meeting and project spaces, with

19. Jeanne van Heeswijk creates contexts for interaction in public spaces distinguishing themselves through a strong social involvement. Van Heeswijk stimulates and develops cultural production and creates new public (meeting) spaces or remodels existing ones. She often works closely with artists, designers, architects, software developers, governments and citizens. (Jeanne van Heeswijk, 2013a).

the needs of real individuals in mind (About 2Up 2Down, 2012).

When I visited the bakery in January 2013 to interview van Heeswijk and Laurie Peake, the then Programme Director of Public Art for the Liverpool Biennial, it seemed that there was a feeling amongst residents that they were always forgotten in terms of large investments, such as the City of Culture, 2008 and left with little support – ‘fortress Anfield isn’t called a fortress for nothing’, (Liverpool resident, 2013). This was in relation to Liverpool football club’s stadium, Anfield, dominating the area but was felt by this resident to not actually support the community. In contrast, residents are also bombarded with urban planning and regeneration plans, which hardly ever come into fruition and are tired of the constant stream of researchers and policy makers coming into the area asking for their opinions. (Liverpool resident, 2013). The aim of van Heeswijk’s project was to put the power into the hands of the residents. The project started by taking over a former bakery and a number of flats, on a corner opposite Anfield football ground, with the purpose of creating a community-run bakery and to redesign the flats to be occupied by local people. At the same time, the group have set up Homebaked Community Land Trust to enable the collective community ownership of the properties, and a co-operative business to reopen the Bakery as a social enterprise (About 2Up 2Down, 2012).

Van Heeswijk visits Liverpool once every three weeks and sees herself, as she does with all the projects she implements in communities, as a community member, not geographically, but with a common interest or goal. When discussing the project she talks about having local experts on location who know what it means to live there. For van Heeswijk the local is a process of collective learning on what a local is (Heeswijk, 2013b). One way she does this is through employing local artists to work on the project creatively when she is not there, some of whom are Anfield residents so can be seen to blur the line between artist facilitator and participant. As an artist she never denies that what she does is art but for a lot of people the creative aspect becomes lost and does not matter anymore as they get engaged and challenged (Heeswijk, 2013b).

She does not make the community believe that the project can make a difference or aim to solve all the problems and issues in the area. Potentially the bakery may not happen and the flats may not become homes to people but residents are told that for the project to work, a lot of it is down to them to make

it happen. Van Heeswijk tries to work with communities to take matters into their own hands, to not wait for regeneration, but to learn how to create and design, not as a fantasy, but a reality (Heeswijk, 2013b). In an interview with her she explained her work as finding a way for people to imagine themselves as part of their daily environment and assisting people to create a new image of the place they live in. (Heeswijk, 2013b)

This is a long slow process even more so in an area that has been let down on many occasions, taking a long period of knocking on doors, leafleting, meeting with people and gaining trust and confidence. Quotes from housing professionals and other people from business sectors have seen the approach as being innovative and interesting, throwing up opportunities that they hadn't really foreseen (Peake, 2013). People have come round tables that very rarely come together and had conversations that would have been unimaginable in any other circumstance, because they necessarily work in pretty bureaucratic silos. They never have an opportunity or a reason to come together (Peake, 2013). Peake has seen a change in certain individuals over the past eighteen months, being able to think differently about where they live and how they interact with where they live, what they can do to affect that and to actually value their own input into that, their own qualities and their own actions (2013).

4.6.1 Digital technology and 2Up 2Down

For van Heeswijk digital technology is important, but at the right moment. For all the different uses, and possibilities of technology and social media for her it is about finding ways that are appropriate and fit the project and use them creatively (van Heeswijk, 2013b). However different ways of accessing the project are important to create a way that gives an interface for people to participate (2013b). The example van Heeswijk gave was young people in Anfield use Facebook mainly for instant messaging but could not understand the idea of using it as a project.

A good percentage of local people that work on the project in Anfield, according to Peake, don't have a computer so working on the project face to face is very important. A lot of the initial communication and contact as mentioned was through leafleting, meetings and knocking on doors. Peake says that a large part of the project is, to actually get people out of their houses to come together under a cause and idea (Peake, 2013). Despite all this there is

an online presence via a blog and a Facebook account for the project. (2013b). For van Heeswijk all the different mediums are important and crucial to consider, ways in which to use them that brings forward and drives the project in a creative manner.

4.6.2 Creator not Consumer

Van Heeswijk sees an urgent need for artists to re-engage and witness the “invisible vectors of power that shape publicness, and reorganise urban interaction and to challenge the political and economic frameworks” (Heeswijk, 2011). She asks if art is capable of creating a place where we can research, debate, face up to the confrontation and address one another as co-producers of the city? Can we make this area of tension visible and develop instruments to enable intervention in that area in order to create models that allow for people to become participants in the process of “visualizing the dynamics, complexity and diversity of the city they live in and collectively develop a narrative about the city in which everyone has a place?” (ibid). How can we as citizens not just be customers or consumers but able to shape our place and space to suit our needs and requirements? This is a utopian ideal, which could be seen as out of reach and unworkable due to authoritative structures that do not allow agitation. Is Liverpool Biennial just another hegemony alongside the council? How does this weigh up alongside Heeswijk’s ideal of the citizen not as consumer but creator of their own surroundings (ibid), when the area of Anfield is still in a state of limbo with no further movement on the housing issue?

Whilst there is a movement, and has been since New Labour and Mataraso’s ‘Use or Ornament’, to trust and believe in the potential of greater community participation to develop better places to live, this is often led by government agendas and can be naive to the idea of harmony and togetherness in a community. The idea of choice rather than allowing free and open decision-making is just another form of the citizen as consumer (van Heeswijk, 2011). The community has to have more than merely a few choices given to them through public consultations but be active citizens, community activists in their place. (Heeswijk, 2011). One could question whether 2Up 2Down does not see the resident as consumer to a degree, as how was the decision made to reopen the bakery or take over the housing and how far can the project go before being halted by the council or developers as not viable?

This process potentially would not have happened if suggested by a local artist and resident. It needed to be suggested and started by a creative 'outsider', backed by an established and well-respected arts institution, for anything to happen.

In September 2013, the Liverpool Biennial took place and the bakery was open to the public selling bread from the community bakery and presenting the other projects. Once this has finished (September to December 2013), the formal handover will take place, handing over the project to the community to lead on. Van Heeswijk role continues but more as an observer and is dependent on whether the community wants her involved (Heeswijk, 2013b). She sometimes gives comments, if something has changed, but otherwise for her the project has finished and she moves on to her next community.

Chapter 5 Bensham & Saltwell

This practice research stemmed from a desire to understand the area I live in, as a researcher, artist, curator as well as a resident and community member. I wanted to develop a way of working through understanding how the community engage with each other, both digitally (through local computer access, social media and local websites) and non-digitally (through local papers, meetings etc) and to work with this at a grass roots level. The aim was not to encroach upon or replicate other community projects but to find an area of common interest. Using Deveron Arts the 'Town as a Venue' methodology, the project purpose was to find out, through discussion, and address, through practice, the current issues and problems that affect this particular community and which are at the forefront of resident's minds.

Initially this involved a period of close study of the area using local and council resources, interviewing community workers and residents and attending community meetings. This study took place between January and April 2012 and brought together aspects of local history, economic and social data and statistics and information on existing community centres, projects and cultural events. This also involved working with local community organisations, projects, creative organisations, individuals and the local council who work in the area and understanding how the community currently engages and how as an artist/curator/researcher/community member I can engage too. By tracking this information the aim was to understand how my practice and research fits in and overlaps with the existing knowledge that community groups, projects and centres are already undertaking in the area and how my work can complement and work alongside it.

The starting point was to try and understand the area where I live and to examine what I felt I already new about the area and my current position and role within the community. I wanted to explore how my role could develop, I wanted to find out what current and past community projects and resources already existed in the area and what local people thought and felt about the regeneration process and changes taking place. It was also important to understand how community centres and projects used technology and what digital resources were available.

I wanted to locate myself and understand how I personally navigated the area before I started the research, compared to during and after the project, through mapping the community organisations and businesses I have come in contact with. For this I developed a map of how I navigated the area prior to starting the research in September 2010 compared to during/after August 2012 (Image 4) to understand how my experience of how Bensham and Saltwell had changed. This allowed me to understand more about the community and map areas I was aware of and those I wasn't.

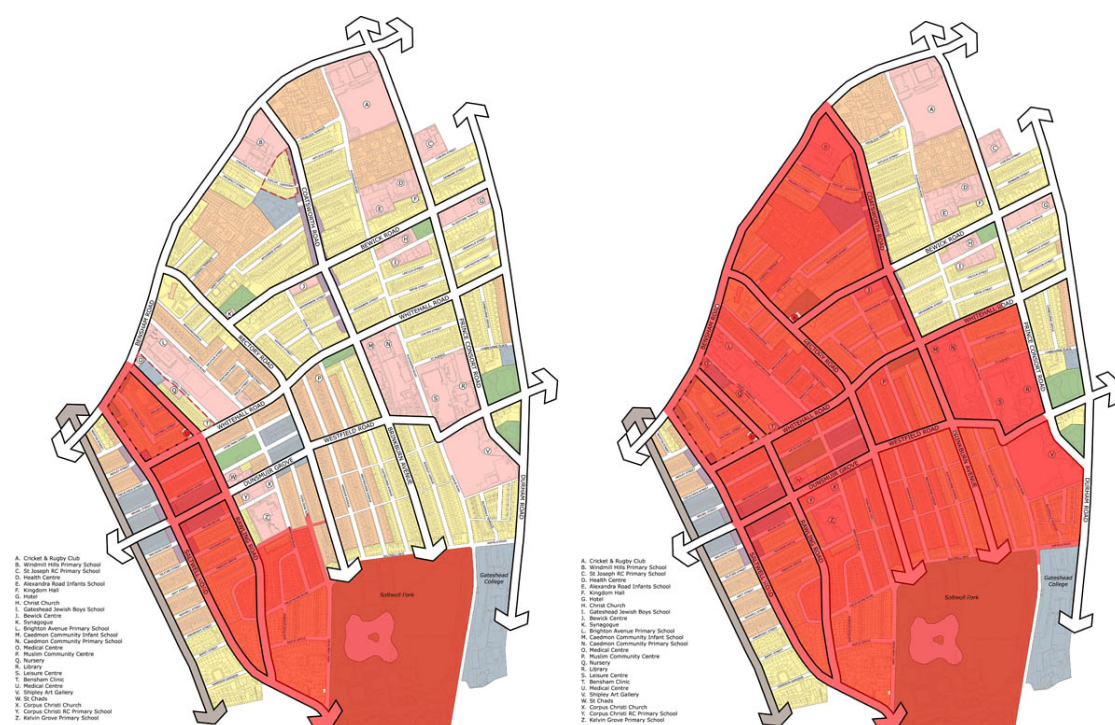


Image 4: Sept 2010 (l) and August 2012 (r). The red area represents how my geographical experience of the area has changed over the research period

I decided early on to concentrate my practice in the area around Saltwell Road, one of the main shopping areas in Saltwell and where a large percentage of the regeneration process was taking place. Saltwell Road consists of a mixture of properties for both commercial and residential use. Most of the commercial properties are independent shops and services, such as a butcher, tattoo parlour, hairdressers betting shops, a post office and national convenience stores as well as a number of empty shops.

5.1 Regeneration And Social Renewal Policy And Action

The vast majority of housing in Saltwell is of the original early 20th century stock

BENSHAM AND SALTWELL PREFERRED PLAN

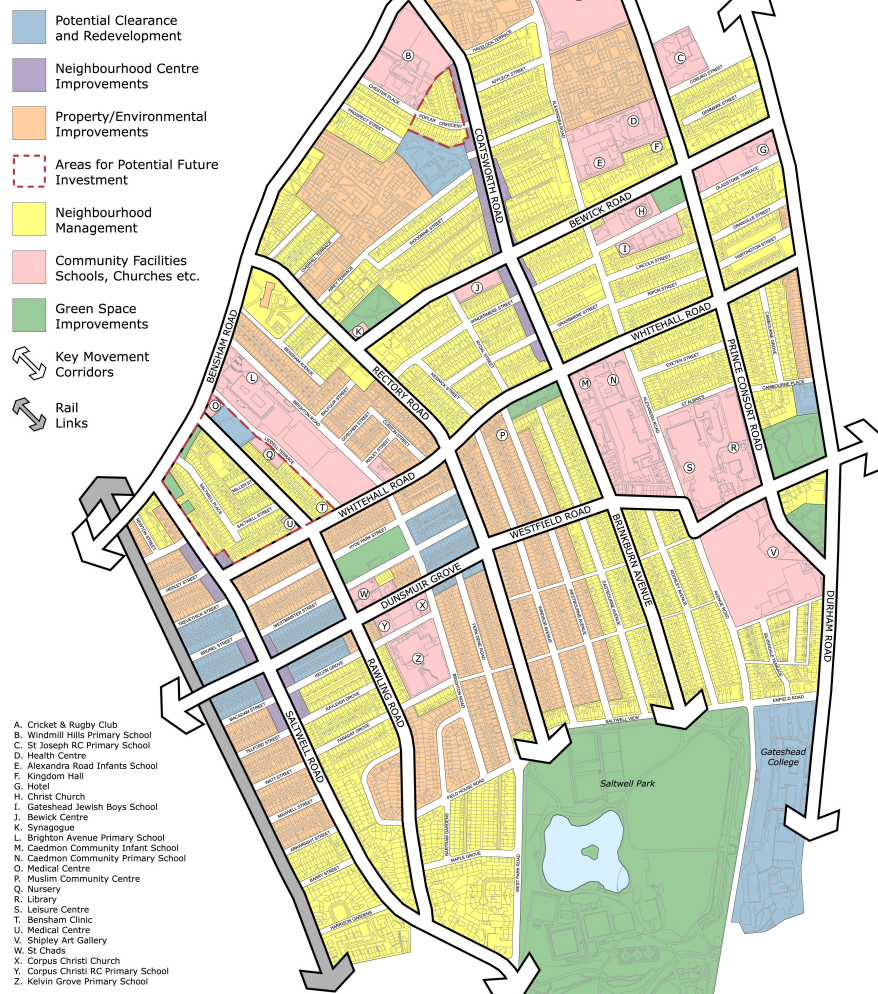


Image 5: Bensham and Saltwell preferred plan1, December 2005, Gateshead Council

of Tyneside flats with some newer housing in areas, particularly at the north and southern ends of Saltwell Road. In 2005 Gateshead Council developed a plan for the regeneration of the area (Image 5) including demolition of certain areas, refurbishment and neighbourhood management (Gateshead Council, 2006). According to Gateshead Council, 4% of the housing in the Bensham & Saltwell area will be knocked down and new housing built (Live Gateshead, Love Gateshead, n.d.). There are four areas that have been targeted for regeneration on both greenfield and brownfield land. One site has already been cleared of housing, two others currently consist of boarded up housing whilst the other area is a small brownfield site that is currently overgrown wasteland.

Gateshead Council aimed to build 2400 new homes across 19 sites covering 70 hectares over the 15-20 years on a mixture of both greenfield and brownfield land across the whole borough. In Bensham & Saltwell the plan was to build just over 600 large family houses on the various sites, approximately 200 on each of the large sites and an unknown amount on the small brownfield site (Live Gateshead, Love Gateshead, n.d.) (Image 6) This process has been well documented due to its controversial nature (Saltwell & Bensham Residential Association) and the problem of delays due to the closure of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder programme in 2010/11, four years earlier than planned (BBC, 2010) resulting in the funding for the housing build being withdrawn and in 2010/11 a court case against the demolition brought by the SAVE Britain's Heritage and Saltwell & Bensham Resident Association. At the moment no housing has been built but some of the streets have been cleared of housing (Image 7).



Image 6: Brownfield sites in Bensham, photograph taken October 2011



Image 7: Boarded up houses in Bensham, photograph taken October 2011

5.2 Local Community Organisations

The organisations discussed below are the main community centres and projects that are active in the area that have buildings. Whilst I am aware there will be smaller and less well know projects that will be even further under the radar these are the main three that have a building and used by the community as a whole.

5.2.1 Bensham Grove Community Centre

In the nineteenth century Bensham Grove was the home of the Spence-Watson Quaker family, in particular Robert and Elizabeth Spence Watson, renowned liberal, political social and education reformers. Bensham Grove was a place for advanced contemporary thought and discussion and visited by politicians,

artists, writers and other C19th thinkers including William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown.

In 1919 Bensham Grove became an educational settlement for the benefit the poor and unemployed. It was handed over to Gateshead Council in 1948 where it became the areas adult learning centre offering educational courses for people of all ages, such as pottery, painting, embroidery, guitar tutoring and a place for groups to meet such as a young women's group, local history and gardening.

Bensham Grove currently runs approximately 172 adult education courses a year (O'Toole 2014, p, 2). These come at a cost (approx. £26.40 per course), but are free for people on jobseeker's allowance. Most of the people who attend the courses are women, the management committee are all women, and attendees include a large number of immigrants and refugees including an Asian Women's Lunch Club and an African Church group. There are also courses specifically tailored for students with learning disabilities, particularly people with physical disabilities such as stroke victims. The building has a long held reputation as centre for arts excellence and a strong arts ethos, (p.3) in particular fine art, ceramics, silversmithing, glass and textiles. People come from outside the area, from Northumberland and Middlesbrough to take part in particular courses (p.5) due to their good reputation.

Chris O'Toole, Community Learning Manager through Learning and Skills, has managed Bensham Grove Community Centre for thirteen years. Due to austerity measures her role has changed as the centre has taken over the work of the Youth and Community Learning Workers. For her this seems to work well as she has direct contact with people but she observes that as community centres close or become independent as part of governmental austerity measures, financial and general support from the council is decreasing (p.8/9) as is support in developing an educational strategy. The centres position within the Bensham & Saltwell community according to O'Toole is limited mainly due to the expansion of her role and the centres role in supporting other community centres across Gateshead (p.10/11). As a result she understands Bensham Grove as community of interest rather than based on its location, meaning for her it does not necessarily need to be in Bensham (p.15).

Digital resources are very limited at the centre and the centre's visitors use what is available infrequently. The website was established through a

community capacity building fund via Gateshead Libraries, and is basic. The use of social media to promote the centre was limited, mainly due to not having the resources or anyone to manage social media (the team at the time consisted of two permanent members of staff). This is further problematised as the council prohibits the use of social media sites, such as Facebook or YouTube on their network. Such sites can be a useful teaching resource for the centres teaching staff to access for examples for their students (p.27). For the centre to access such sites a slot has to be booked through the council for a set amount of time, which is prohibitive. Most of the information about the centre and the courses that are run was disseminated via hard copy brochures posted through people's doors, though this has recently changed to a digital copy for cost cutting reasons. For O'Toole developing the use of social media was important as a way to attract a younger audience, when a lot of the centres users are currently older people.

At the time of visiting I observed that there were a number of digital and computer courses run from the centre including 'Everyday Computing', 'Digital Photography' and 'Learn to use your Laptop'. These courses can be seen to be fairly basic in their output. For example, when sitting in on the 'Learn to use your Laptop' course, all the participants were elderly with a very basic level of computing. However more and more people want to learn how to use their tablet, or how to use their smartphone, via an adult learning course.

The centre had recently bought a number of iPads to use across the borough, improved the buildings Wi-Fi access and updated the monitors in each room for the educators to use in their classes as OFSTED requires that any education has IT embedded into it (p.28). As welfare benefits are increasingly only available online, O'Toole believes, more and more people will access digital education courses at community centres (p.29), and she wants Bensham Grove to be better prepared for this.

5.2.2 St. Chad's Community Project

St Chads was established in 1990 as a response to growing concern that members of the local Bensham population had diminishing access to already limited resources in relation to child care, recreational and training facilities. St Chad's works with young families in Bensham and Saltwell offering childcare, family support and opportunities for social action, learning, leisure activities and

training and has previously developed art projects with young disadvantaged people including theatre, performance and dance events. The parents that they work with need support due to issues such as isolation, or are referred to them by health visitors and schools (Hoult, p, 2/3). Initially based at and strongly associated with the local St Chad's church, the project has moved away from St Chads both physically and financially but still has links. Families that use the facilities do not just come from the immediate area but from surrounding areas and come from a large cross section of the community and with many different needs and issues, from middle class families to families that are referred to the St Chads by Social Services

St Chads have a website, which people do look at for information on services and Hoult also puts information on 'Netmums'. They do not have member of staff available for technological support but instead use, by their own admission, basic knowledge (p.11). They had considered using Facebook to disseminate their services but had been unsure of using it due to lack of resources and staff and were concerned people would criticise the centre online (p. 9/10). An observation by Hoult is that many centre users have smart phones (p. 11/12) or a computer at home (p.21) but do not know how to fully use them. She also commented that many grandparents bring children into the centre (p.14) and do not use technology. The centre is well resourced with a large number of rooms for different activities including a crèche, and a large hall with a kitchen.

5.2.3 Windmill Hills Centre

Windmill Hills Centre in contrast to the Bensham Grove Community Centre and St Chads Community Project is fairly new and opened in January 2011. Based in the former nursery school premises of the Windmill Hills Primary School site and surrounded by a large area of un(der) used land that used to be the schools playing field and car park. The main school building has recently been knocked down and will be offered to a developer to build housing on.

The centre is used by a variety of groups in the community, in particular Gateshead veterans, refugee groups and is the site of the The4Cs community climate change project who work with local people and minority groups on environmental sustainability and develop connections to sub-Saharan Africa (The4Cs, n.d.). Whilst the centre has many people and groups using it and the

surrounding land for recreation, learning and meetings, it currently has no paid members of staff and is wholly run by volunteers. The centre has been under threat due to the need for a business plan and a strategy to ensure its sustainability. As the research took place Gateshead Council and Bensham & Saltwell Alive had supported the centre and were currently working on a business plan with a number of stakeholders and residents.

5.3 Who Participates, How And Why

The organisations and projects mentioned here are opportunities for the community to participate and be active, creatively as well as in general. All are funded and supported by the council, either directly or indirectly. None of them have a fixed location and some are organised by creative people from outside of the area. They all come under the umbrella of Bensham & Saltwell Alive.

5.3.1 Bensham & Saltwell Alive

Bensham & Saltwell Alive's aim is to support community groups in the area and enable access to knowledge and experience through finding out what skills abilities and interests local residents have. Bensham and Saltwell Alive is run by local residents and community groups and supported by Gateshead Council. Its aim is to:

- Find out about the interests, talents and skills of residents in the neighbourhood
- Give residents an opportunity to share and develop those skills

Supported by Gateshead Council, Bensham & Saltwell Alive hold regular steering group meetings where residents and interested parties can discuss issues and problems in Bensham & Saltwell and find out what is happening in the area. Bensham & Saltwell Community Festival and a local free newspaper, BASE (Bensham & Saltwell Express) is organised through B&S Alive. These meetings, usually held on a Thursday morning at St Chad's Community Project, though sometimes fairly well attended mainly involve council workers, community police and other organisations working in the area, with not many actual residents attending.

I attended the monthly steering groups where the agenda included the Community Fund, which had been reduced to £20,000 per ward from £30,000

for 2012/13 and has reduced further for 2013/14 to £10,000; Bensham & Saltwell Community Festival and BASE newspaper. In 2012 Bensham & Saltwell Alive successfully obtained charitable status resulting in the structure of the organisation changing to meet the requirements of charities, forming a board and ceasing to hold open meetings. This however opened up funding streams and support opportunities for residents who may not be able to access funding to put on activities in the community, and can now apply via Bensham & Saltwell Alive.

5.3.2 Bensham & Saltwell Community Festival

The Bensham & Saltwell Alive group runs the Bensham & Saltwell Community Festival. In its second incarnation, it was originally started by local residents in the early 2000's before being taken over by the council. The festival takes place each year in June and aims to be a celebration of the community and is replicated across the Gateshead borough in different neighbourhoods. Held on the Brighton Grove Primary school fields (one of the only large grass areas in the community that is secured via fencing) the festival has involved local people booking stalls to sell products, singing and playing music, as well as entertainment from outside the local area.

5.3.3 K-Alive-oscope

K-alive-oscope, set up by North Shields based theatre practitioner and founder of Little Cat Theatre Pete Ross and supported by Bensham & Saltwell Alive, offers opportunities for individuals and groups of all ages, that live and/or work in Bensham and Saltwell, to demonstrate their skills, abilities and interests in theatre, performance and music. The intention was to unlock creativity in Bensham and Saltwell and to give as many people as possible an opportunity to express themselves in whichever way they wish, either in terms of performance, music, storytelling, or in using backstage and organisational skills (K-alive-oscope, n.d.).

Ross has over ten years of experience in children's and community theatre working in communities who have little existing access to theatre. Gateshead Council approached Ross in 2010 to develop theatre work looking at the health divide within Gateshead at the launch of the Vision 2030 paper. He was then approached by Bensham Neighbourhood Management Team to

engage local people in activities to talk about their lives and to support them to discover their skills and talents (Ross, 2013, p. 8/9).

Events have included an annual community festival where local people, and schools have shown off their talents through playing music, singing and dancing; the creation of an amateur creative writing group called Scribblers, who have performed at various events, and one off music and poetry events at venues across the ward, including Bensham Grove Community Centre, Gateshead Library, Shipley Art Gallery and Kelvin Grove Primary School.

The purpose as explained by Ross was never to 'parachute' acts in to put on shows but to engage and inspire residents to talk about the area, to perform shows, music and writing they had created about the area and to discover new things about people living in the community. For Ross, not being from the area does not exclude people from being involved as long as they have some form of connection to the area, no matter how tenuous (2013, p.20). He never considers himself an insider or tries to impose himself, but considers his work as about finding out what life is about from the community's perspective (2013, p.21). The intention is to facilitate the various groups that have formed until they feel confident enough to carry on independently without support from K-alive-oscope.

Due to council cuts, funding for K-alive-oscope, which was financed through the community fund, stopped in June 2014. One of the last events was a collaboration between Pete, Scribblers writing group and myself, as part of the Spence Watson Archive Project (see section 8.3). Whilst this was the last event under the banner of K-alive-oscope, Ross is still continuing to work within the area developing new projects.

5.3.4 *BASE newspaper*

Edited by artist Pete Ross, BASE (Bensham & Saltwell Express) is a free newspaper funded through Bensham & Saltwell Alive to share photographs, news and stories about and written by local residents in the area of Saltwell and Bensham. The paper aims to represent local people at a time when a lot of the free local newspapers were going out of business and is a space where residents can provide stories about themselves and the area on a sharing basis (Ross, 2013, p.8/9). The 1st edition was launched in autumn 2011 and was delivered to 8000 households in the area. This has been a useful way of

publicising my workshops and events to the community and reaching residents who may not be online.

Chapter 6. Saltwell Road Project

Chapter 6. Saltwell Road Project

The eight-month period January to August 2012 is when I initially started the practical element of my research. A large proportion of this time was spent meeting with local residents and businesses, volunteering at local community centres and projects and attending community meetings. The project aims are to address issues and interrelated problems found in contemporary art discourse concerning 'socially engaged art' and its role in community creation and development, with regards to authorship, self-organisation, authority/activism, creativity and the meaning of community within this type of artistic practice. The aim was to observe the community and consider and act upon the council's community development balanced against the concerns of the community itself.

6.1 Online Presence

With this in mind I created the Saltwell Road Project, with the aim of placing the project firmly within the area and to give it an identity and brand for people to recognise. The name was chosen as it is one of the main roads in the part of the area where most of the regeneration is taking place, and the road closest to where I lived at the time. Saltwell Road has the dual purpose of being a shopping as well as a residential road, and where a large percentage of the derelict land and boarded houses connect.

The name is also a way of distinguishing it from other community resources and organisations in the area. Whilst I was the main person running the project and the main contact it enabled me to develop a logo (Image 8) and be distinguishable from other local organisations, rather than one individual in the community. I started 'The Saltwell Road Project', with a blog, Facebook and Twitter account²⁰ and promoted it through leafleting and posters in prominent community venues in the area and the local free newspaper²¹. I saw the social media as a place to disseminate information as well as to create a 'space' for residents to discuss, propose and develop ideas and events to take place in the spaces and places in and around the area.

20. The online links can be found at the beginning of the thesis

21. See Volume 2 of the thesis for images



Image 8: Saltwell Road Project logo

6.2 Physical Presence

I met with and visited local business, people, community centres and projects as well as council run initiatives in the area both formally and informally. This included volunteering in community centres, going to meetings, walking the streets and talking to people to see what people's opinions are on the regeneration, community action and digital media as well as interviewing people in a formal structured way. Unsurprisingly there are many different views but always a feeling that there is no community spirit. I spoke to a number of local residents, both informally, on the streets, and formally via recorded interview, with regards to the regeneration and their feelings about the area and council support. Below are conversations I had informally with two residents, one a local businessman and the other a volunteer at a community centre.

Brian, a local businessman on Saltwell Rd moved his business to the area just before the houses came down as he was told by the council that they would be built straight way. Six years later the housing is yet to be built and there is no indication of when development will take place. He expressed the feeling that he didn't want "arty farty projects" as the council has suggested, just the new housing built as was promised. Brian also said that the 'Council do not

listen, and that he tries and get them to answer his questions but he gets no reply. He continues by saying that he thinks the council are too bothered about being trendy, one councillor tweeting all the time, and on things not relevant to Gateshead. He does also say that the area has such an interesting history, yet it's not well known, and wonders why this hasn't been publicised.

Denise, a resident for forty years, was involved in community projects (such as the community festival and Bensham & Saltwell Alive) when it first started in the 1990s but now does not want to be part of it anymore, 'I just close my door behind me and not get involved'. She feels that there is no community spirit left and too much control and imposition of policy from the council. She told me that she believes that 'technology is the problem for young kids, there is too much of it' and that 'I don't want accreditation for things; I just want to do things. I am not interested in healthy eating for a qualification. I just want to do it and learn how to make something.'

Unsurprisingly there is a lack of trust towards the council, and possibly vice versa, and a feeling amongst residents of being left to deal with the changes with no support, whilst some people feel that the houses should not have been knocked down especially when there is a housing shortage. Though this is not always the view, some residents believe that something needed to be done to improve the area.

6.3 Physical Distribution

To find out what people in Bensham and Saltwell were interested in the initial idea was to develop a portable digital device that would enable people to redesign the large grass areas that are part of the regeneration process in using such software as Google Sketch up, and enable people to make further suggestion and comments using video and audio. This was felt for an initial investigation to be complicated and exclusionary due to the technical nature of the software, and hardware. Instead the ready made 'Bespoke' digital voting system, Viewpoint, was used as a simple digital tool to gain people's views.

The Bespoke research project took place between 2009 and 2011, aiming to explore the use of citizen journalism to design unique technologies for a specific community (Taylor, 2013, p.5). The first manifestation of Viewpoint was implemented in Preston to allow councillors and community workers to ask yes/no questions of a community and reply with an answer and form of action.

Viewpoint was designed in response to expressions of disillusionment from members of the community, who had been frequently consulted on improvements to their area but rarely perceived any benefit from their participation. (p.5). The voting box used an open-frame monitor and a compact PC inside custom built shell, with a hacked mouse providing button functionality (p.5). Devices were installed in a local shop, a community centre and the offices of a local housing association for a period of two months, during which time questions were posted weekly.

The second manifestation of the voting system allowed the participant to answer multiple-choice and scale questions, rather than giving yes/no answers, and enabled the question writer to create a more complex question with up to five different possible answers or a scale of agreement. The aim of placing the voting box in Saltwell was to see what questions the community may have for the community itself, to get residents to ask questions of their neighbours, with the possibility that the community and interested parties could think about, discuss and make things happen in the area through the Saltwell Road Project.

Renamed the 'Saltwell Community Voting Box', to give a sense of community ownership, it was positioned around Saltwell in various strong community locations between June and August 2012. The aim was to gain information with regards to what the people of Saltwell think about living in the area and what they feel should be done to improve and develop the community. This was specifically in relation to the on-going controversy regarding the housing regeneration and development in the area. At that point (September 2012) there were three large areas of grassland and three streets of boarded up housing. It had been like this for nearly five years and it was not known, at that time when the new housing would be built. Whilst the research aims to use only what is already employed in the community, the community voting box was implemented for a short amount of time and not about people using it in a personal participatory manner but as part of a public consultation process.

The locations of the voting box (Image 9) were Bensham Grove Community Centre, Dominic's Café, Saltwell Road Post Office, and St Chads Community Project. The first location however was the Bensham & Saltwell

Community Festival in June 2012. This was an opportunity to introduce the voting box to the community and the Saltwell Road Project. The questions and results from each location can be found in Appendix C and Volume 2 of the thesis.

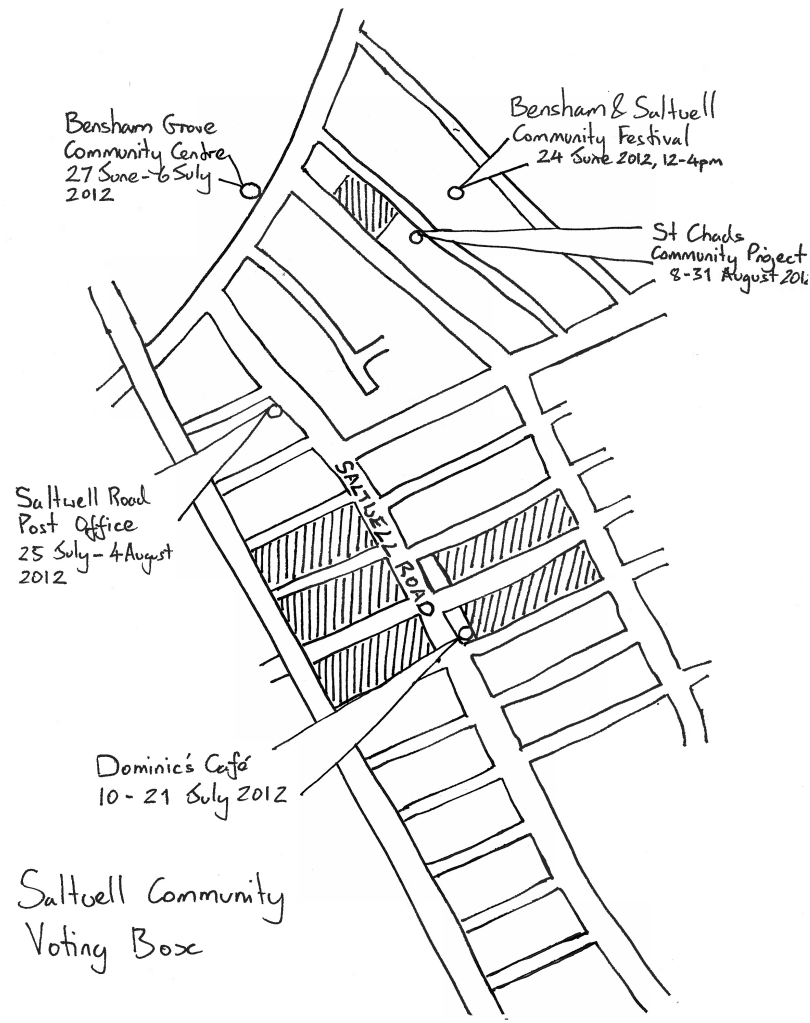


Image 9: Map of locations for the voting box

6.4 Voting Box: Bensham & Saltwell Community Festival

Organised by Bensham & Saltwell Alive, Bensham & Saltwell Community Festival was held in 2012 on Sunday 24th June from 12-4pm in the grounds of the Brighton Avenue Primary School. The school is one of four primary schools in Bensham and is the only one with a large grass playing field. The school is opposite St Chads Community Centre, one of the main community

organisations in the area and the main meeting place for Bensham & Saltwell Alive.

The festival aims to be a celebration of the community and is replicated across the Gateshead borough in different neighbourhoods and communities. Supported by Gateshead Council, through Bensham & Saltwell Alive, the community festival has been described by a community worker as a 'hot potato'. It has been moved and organised by different community members and organisations over the years and with varying levels of success. This has been due to lack of funding, organisational structure and, as a community member told, the apparent interference from the council, when it was first run by community members.

I set up an outside stall (Image 10) at the festival that included the voting box, information about the Saltwell Road Project, (including posters, leaflets and stickers), and a blackboard so people could add questions they would like to ask their own community (Image 11).



Image 10: Saltwell Community Voting Box at Bensham & Saltwell Festival, 24 June 2012.



Image 11: Close up of Saltwell Community Voting box stall at the festival.

Over the course of the festival there were a number of interesting and significant conversations with visitors that affected the direction the project subsequently took. I spoke to a single mother in her twenties who had heard about the Saltwell Road Project via a leaflet put through her letterbox and she was interested in hearing more. She discussed her mental health issues, depression, and resultant breakdown and explained that she had worked with the local community arts project K-alive-oscope to write a short story about her experience that was in the process of being turned into an animation. She expressed an interest in cooking classes for single mothers but felt there was little support for her in the area, due to cost, financial restrictions and lack of childcare and a support structure.

A woman in her sixties, discussed the group she attends which provide support for older people with mental health issues. She felt that there wasn't much of a support structure for people with mental health needs in the area. She spoke about her son who was a recovering heroin addict who had taken up

cooking as a way to keep him active and aid his recovery and supported him to learn new skills.

The stall was approached by a group of women, in their twenties/thirties, and their children who were, pre/early teens. I explained that the intention of the Saltwell Road Project was to think about ways of improving the area and that the voting box was a way of gaining people's opinions. The adults seemed to lose interest very quickly and wanted to leave, whilst the children were a bit more curious. This reaction from the adults could be attributed to the voting box, and my description of the project, being similar to a consultancy exercise by the council. This lack of interest can possibly be attributed them not wanting to be questioned or asked their opinion, maybe as they felt this was a meant to be a fun day out and that I was from the council.

Overall there were some interesting conversations with people who did attend with regards to what they felt was needed in the area, especially in relation to cooking for people with mental health issues and general mental health support in the area for young people.

6.5 Voting Box: Bensham Grove Community Centre

The Bensham Grove Community Centre has provided adult educational opportunities since 1919 when it became an educational settlement after being the home of prominent local family the Spence-Watson's. It was handed over to Gateshead Council in 1948 where it became the areas adult learning centre offering educational courses for people of all ages, such as pottery, painting, embroidery, guitar tutoring and a place for groups such as a young women's group, local history group and a gardening group to meet. Since it became an educational settlement, women have mainly run the centre and it remains an all-woman management committee. People come from all over Gateshead to the centre, and it is well attended by immigrants and refugees who live locally.

At the time of discussing the project, Chris O'Toole the manager of the centre admitted it did not have much of a digital presence. There were few physical online resources (no Wi-Fi in the building and quite basic digital courses such as 'Everyday Computing', 'Digital Photography' and 'Learn to use your Laptop' on offer). Neither was there a strong online presence; (at the time the centre had no Facebook, Twitter, and quite a basic webpage). O'Toole was unsure what the reaction to the box would be and did not expect many people

to take part. In addition the centres course were beginning to wind down for the summer so not many people would be coming to the centre over the time period.



Image 12: Saltwell Community Voting Box in Bensham Grove Community Centre, 27 June to 7 July 2012

The voting box was positioned in the entrance to the building (Image 12) for a week and a half on the information table amongst and surrounded by other leaflets and stands. The area also has a digital monitor with scrolling images of information about the centre, but no other usage of digital media. The box had one question on it for the time period of 27 June to 07 July 2012. Included with the box were instructions about what to do, contact details for people to put forward their own question; and information concerning the Saltwell Road Project including leaflets and a poster.



Image 13: A question on the voting box at Bensham Grove Community Centre. 'What event would you most like to see taking place in Saltwell?'

I also encouraged the users of the centre to participate by intermittently standing next to the box as people entered the building and talking to them to discuss the question (Image 13). This gained a mixed response with the mainly elderly women who were arriving to attend a course at the centre. Replies included 'I don't live round here', it doesn't interest me' and 'nothing on there interests me'

Its possible that part of the problem with the women I met was the look of the box, the colour scheme and the white text on the digital screen, which may have been hard for them to read, especially for elderly people, speakers of English as an additional language and people with reading difficulties. Also the location in an area where people do not 'hang around' may have been an issue.

However in a place which has mainly elderly clientele and non-English speakers, I was pleasantly surprised at the number of votes (92) and it was surprising that the most popular choice was a website. This may have been as a result of the same few people continually voting. This may have skewed the results towards only a few people's opinions.

6.6 Voting Box: Dominic's Café

Dominic's Café (Image 14) is a small café on Saltwell Road, which has been open in the same location for approximately 50 years. Originally owned by one family and passed down from father to son, the café has been run by Pam and Mark Brown for the last seven years, and the previous owners still work there.



Image 14: Dominic's Café, Saltwell Road, Gateshead

The café has a strong local presence and a loyal number of customers (mainly older people) who come to the café on a regular basis, and in some cases every day. I approached the café for its strong presence in the community and as a place where members of the community congregate.

For the first week I decided to repeat the question that was used at Bensham Grove to see how different the results would be with a different group

of people at the café. Demographically the café customers on the whole are very local and live around Saltwell Road, compared to the community centre, which has people attending from across the borough of Gateshead. It is also likely that a few of the people who attend the café do not participate with the community centre and in addition do not feel they have a voice within the area due to the housing and regeneration issue which is very close to the café.



Image 15: Saltwell Community Voting Box in Dominic's Cafe

The voting box was positioned at the back of the café (Image 15) alongside other information and café condiments. As a result it was more inconspicuous compared to its location at Bensham Grove. The box was positioned in the café so it was easier for me to be on hand to talk to customers and people interested in the project as well as being a customer, positioning me as both a community member and researcher by, enabling me to observe how people both 'consider' as well as 'use' the box. I visited the café on a regular basis to see how people reacted to the box and to be on hand to discuss any questions or thoughts. I also had become aware at this point that there was not many people sending in questions so decided that I would formulate questions through conversations

with customers at the cafe. To find out who used the box I also placed a small paper questionnaire next to the box to find out basic information about the people using the box such as gender, age, digital usage and what question they would like to ask the people of Saltwell.

From discussions with customers and the owner of the café, the initial feeling was that it was a council run project, and that people thought I worked for the council. This resulted in reluctance to engage with the box, but this was overcome through conversations and the owner talking to people about the box and encouraging people to use it. Many conversations I had with people related to the regeneration of the area and people asked when the housing was going to be built, what was happening to the land until then, issues around youth unemployment, litter and graffiti.

Over the two-week period two questions were placed on the voting box, the first one a repeat of the question asked at Bensham Grove and the second question that came about through conversations with the café customers and owners. The first question in relation to what people would like to see happen in the area had a marked difference on the leading option from Bensham Grove and Dominic's Café. Whilst the 'winner' at Bensham Grove was a local website at 27.2% of the votes, at Dominic's this came last with 7.3%. The overwhelming 'winners' at Dominic's was film screenings and a music festival both with 24% of the votes. There were a similar number of votes (92 at Bensham Grove, 82 at Dominic's Café) though the voting box was at Bensham Grove over 10 days compared to 5 at Dominic's Café so this may have changed if over a similar time period. However I feel the difference between the two votes reflects the difference in demographic of people who use the community centre compared to the café. People who attend the community centre are engaged with the community through being involved in creative activities, whilst café customers are engaged in a different way whilst some may only be passing through.

The second question and its choice of answers came about through conversations with the café customers and related directly to the regeneration of the area. The question asked people what should happen in the area until the housing is built. With 92 votes over a six-day period, the options, which came about through conversations with the customers in the café, had two outstanding answers. These were 'music film and art events' (32.6%), possibly in relation to the previous question, and allotments (33.7%). The use of the

space for allotments had previously been put to the council by some residents but was rejected, which may be a reason for such a large number of responses to the question. Saltwell and Bensham already had a large number of allotments, further down Saltwell Rd South (possibly one of the reasons for the rejection) so possibly this result could reflect a lack of access to the allotments, that there are too few in number and a general interest in growing fresh fruit.

6.7 Voting Box: Saltwell Road Post Office

The voting box was positioned at the Saltwell Road Post Office at the entrance to the building next to the post office leaflet stand (Image 16). The Post Office manager was happy for it to be there but said that he was 'not sure how long it will stay there', implying it will be probably get stolen.



Image 16: The voting box positioned in Saltwell Road Post Office



Image 17: 'I would volunteer on a project to improve the Saltwell area if I felt it would really make a difference'

The question posed to visitors to the post office came from talking to residents and was concerned with whether people would be willing to volunteer if they felt it benefited the community (Image 17)

During the time period the amount of votes dropped off dramatically compared to Bensham Grove and Dominic's Café. This was possibly because the location of the voting box in the post office is not intended as a place people would stay in for a long period of time compared to the other two locations as well as the fact that in previous locations there were people on hand to show residents what it was and how it worked.

The result was also fairly disappointing, only a small agreement with the question and just above 'no opinion'. This again is possibly to do with the location but also could be a trend in attitude to volunteering within the area.

6.8 Voting Box: St Chads Community Project

St Chads Community Project was established as a response to growing concern that members of the local Bensham population had diminishing access to already limited resources in relation to child care, recreational and training facilities. I met with Christine McDarmont (Project Manager) and Joan Hoult (Family Support Coordinator) in early 2012 to discuss the work of St Chads and the potential of working with them in the future. When discussing the regeneration taking place in the area (the knocking down of houses, and the movement of people), they said they were a non-political organisation and their aim was to work with local people to 'help them through the processes and the changes taking place in the area and not to question whether the regeneration was a good or bad thing' adding that neither of them live in the area. When I proposed placing the voting box in the area, they gave a similar response, stating their reservations about the political nature of the voting system and how it fitted with their policies. They said they would be interested if the questions were based around their work but not if they were anything that could become political.

Subsequent conversations were more positive especially when discussing the idea that the questions would come from the people who use the project. However they were concerned that not everyone might understand the questions as a lot of the families who use the centre come from deprived backgrounds and therefore might not use technology or feel confident to do so.

The set up of the voting box at St Chads was different compared to the other locations. As St Chads is a children's project it was not possible for it to be open for anyone to enter the building so voting was restricted to users of the building. It was also not possible to set the box up permanently in a location due to access issues and it was requested that the questions be related specifically to the work of St Chads. As a result the box was only brought out and used during certain 2-hour drop-in sessions for young families and their children.

The box was positioned in the hall (Image 18) where the drop-in sessions take place. I was available at all the sessions to discuss the project and to show

people how the box worked. The box was at St Chads for approximately 25 days but only accessible for five 2-hour sessions over this period. The questions were developed through discussions with the staff at St Chads so as to make sure they were relevant to both their work and my research. They related directly to young families and the digital and physical activities they would like to see in the local area.



Image 18: Community Voting Box at St Chads Centre

Overall the number of votes was disappointing possibly compounded by how the box was positioned and the low turn out to each of the drop-in sessions. This low turnout was a surprise to the staff as they were expecting a lot more people to turn up to the sessions. The people who did turn up however were mainly young mothers with children 1-10 year olds. The staff was unsure whether some of the families would understand the questions due to the

questions using what was believed to be technical language such as 'smartphone app'. I decided to leave it in to see whether this was the case.

There was strong interest in using already known and used social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, rather than trying something new or unknown such as smartphone apps or creation of people's own websites/blogs. This is because of lack of familiarity, or due to participants not wanting to add another layer of social media site to what they already use. Through conversations with the people who took part and voted it came to light that it was felt that there was a lack of resources for young families such as playgrounds, help with cooking and a place to find information about events in the area. This was interesting as the box was located in a family support centre that offers all these services. After speaking to members of staff it came to light that whilst a lot of these services are offered and people are informed about them people either do not listen or forget very easily. They mentioned that St Chads do tell people about online support and information, such as 'Mumsnet', but they are not sure if they listen or take it in.

Looking at the results of all the multiple-choice and scale questions there seemed to be an interest in developing and creating a community hub in the area, be it a community music and art festival; the creation of a community allotment or a community website or blog. Whether people would actually be willing to volunteer to make it happen or to expect it to come from the council was open to debate.

For my research purposes it was important to question offering choice as a mechanism to produce results and answers, rather than giving the people the opportunity to come up with the answer themselves. This only provides a certain number of options for people to vote for and does not enable their own suggestions. Rather than being given the opportunity to make his or her own decision or having an opportunity to create his or her own answer, there is only the option to make a choice. This question of 'choice' can be seen as a problem with social inclusion. Rather than giving residents the rights and opportunity to overcome social inequality, it emphasises the individual's societal obligation and responsibilities. It tells residents what they should be rather than letting them choose themselves.

Therefore to try and overcome this, the strategy was to try and open up the use of the voting box and the limited number of options it offered voters by

having the questions (and possible answers) come from the community. This however proved problematic as people were either unwilling to put forward a question or said they would but then did not. To bypass this issue conversations and discussions with people around the voting box were anonymously used to form questions and answers. Whilst this was not perfect it allowed people to think through questions and issues through conversations with colleagues, friends and myself.

6.9 'Reduction'

As a way of suggesting and visualising the potential of what could happen in the grass area in an aesthetic manner, the digital project 'Reduction' was developed with fellow participatory artist Paul Buchanan²². I met Paul at the DIS2012 conference at Newcastle University and shared a common interest in participatory arts practice and digital media. I invited him to come to Bensham to collaborate on a new work about the area.

As a collaboration we developed a project that involved projecting photographic images taken by the two of us depicting scenarios suggested by the results of the voting box into the grass area in order to encourage members of the community to consider the possibilities and to start conversations with local people about what the space could be used for before the housing is built. Suggestions included, an allotment, a park and playground and art and music events amongst others. The project also used imagery (and the title) to question how the area has been changed and changed and the potential community spirit lost due to austerity measures and the stopping of the regeneration process.

On the night of the 30th July 2012, at 9.30pm we went to the area and set up a projector and laptop and projected the images into the space and onto surrounding buildings (Image 19). We decided to do this quite spontaneously and catch people as they walked by. The event was publicised on Twitter and Facebook for the Saltwell Road Project followers. Below is a short outline anecdote of some of the conversations we had with the some of the passers by and local residents.

22. Paul's work is concerned with exchange mechanisms and transactions, on both a physical and a virtual level (Buchanan, 2012)

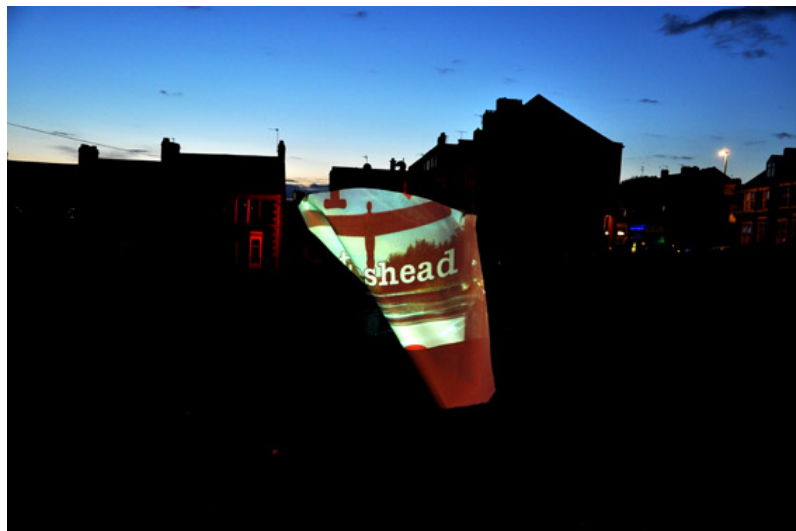


Image 19: 'Reduction' by Paul Buchanan and Ben Jones, 2012.

As we were setting up two men in their twenties, approached us, one on a scooter, as we built the structure we were going to project onto and asked us 'What are you doing?'

We replied that we were artists interested in what was happening in the area and we wanted to try and focus on and bring to the light the problems caused by the regeneration. I explained that I was interested both as an artist and a resident of the area.

They lived across from the grass area and were getting more and more annoyed as nothing was done.

'Why don't they build a play area for kids'

'Are you taking this to the civic?'

'They have put good soil on the others but on this one its just rocks'

'The council only have £68,000 left to the build the houses, that wouldn't even build one.'

They mentioned that they had friends still living on one of the roads that is boarded up ready to be knocked down and that the council were trying to evict them. As there was no money they were not going to get any money or compensation. '

'A man was killed at the weekend just up the road, he was a landlord killed by his tenant.'

He asked again if we would take it to the civic. I said possibly and that I was trying to work with them to understand what was going on here.

He couldn't get the head off the torch he was holding to work because of a loose connection, Paul offered his head torch.

'Off shooting rabbits over near the rail tracks' 'I have to feed the bairns somehow' Some people say its tough meat but it's alright' 'haven't managed to shoot one yet'

They both left, taking Paul's torch.

As we powered up the generator and were projecting into the space, a man started shouting at us from a window opposite, too far to see whom, just a silhouette in a window. Not sure if he was shouting at the noise of the generator, the light of the projector or just in general.

A police van pulled up and asked what we were doing, as she was curious, we explained we were artists, she said

'You do know where you are don't you? Not a good idea to be carrying that camera around in Bensham.'

She offered to drive down the road past the house where the man was shouting. He soon stopped.

A young man on a bike came up and asked what we were doing, Paul explained, he bumped hands with Paul, and rode off.

At this point after fifty minutes we decided to pack up and leave.

6.10 Reflecting On The First Stage

Reflecting on elements of my practice at this point made me question my position and role with regards to what could be achieved within the area. This was both in relation to ideas around socially engaged art practice as well as my own interest in working within the community in a 'non-art' manner but as an active community member. I also questioned whether art was the correct route in terms of what the community wanted or whether, as it seemed with the way Bensham & Saltwell Alive worked it is seen as a form of social service. The concept of the delegate relates to this and the question of who decides what is right for the community and why? How do I form a group and in whose shape would it form, the communities, the councils or my own?

Community organisations such as Bensham Grove Community Centre and St Chads Community Project work below the digital divide, and do not see or feel the need to change this. This can be down to lack of resources, the staff not seeing its relevance to their work and a belief that the people who use their services do not or cannot use digital technology. This can be due to age, social or economic demographic. However this does not necessarily mean this is correct and that people do not use such technology or media. This can also be seen in the community itself, which is common in many places, and there are a number of community initiatives, all from the council taking place in Gateshead to try and combat this. My interest however is for this to start from the community itself, from a grassroots level where agency could be gained.

The start of this process was to try and understand what the community wanted and wished to have and do in the area. This was started through the use of the Saltwell Community Voting Box placed in prominent locations within the community, through late June to August 2012. The aim was to gain

information with regards to what the people of Saltwell think about living in the area and what they feel should be done to improve and develop the community.

The voting box strategy was specifically created in response to the ongoing controversy regarding the regeneration process that is taking place in the area. I wished to see what questions the community might have for the community itself, to get residents to ask questions of their neighbours, with the possibility that the community and interested parties could make things happen in the area through the Saltwell Road Project.

Basing this on Helguero's idea on symbolic and actual practice, the symbolic is still important in terms of simple gestures and actions that allow for the creative process and communicative action. Therefore alongside and as part of the process after the voting box there is still the need for the symbolic as action. One such project that has been developed and is on going is 'Reduction' with fellow artist Paul Buchanan. This involved projecting images into the grass area to think about and start conversations with local people with regards to what the space could potentially be used for before the housing was built. Suggestions included, an allotment, park and playground. The project also used imagery (and the title) to question how the area has been decimated and the potential community spirit lost due to the stopping of the regeneration process.

These two projects, whilst coming from different directions aimed to address the same issues from a symbolic and action route. Through working in the community I developed something that came from the people, from a grassroots level and was complementary and supportive to the projects already taking place. The potential difficulties were that I would push my own agenda onto what I think people want rather than what they do want, or if I am unhappy with what people decide they do want. How do I respond to that and what reactions do I expect if the project is not something that is useful to people? For me the project was always about trying to find out about the area I live and how I, as a neighbour, artist and researcher, can support the work being undertaken and develop something to improve the place where I live.

By working within the community to understand how using technology as a "tactic" can support the work and services of community organisations as well as the people who use these services. The concern for me was not to create something that is just symbolic, an art project with no real purpose beyond its

own creative output, but something that would actually make a difference to the area and engage the community.

Chapter 7. Saltwell Road Project: Cooking And Growing

Chapter 7. Saltwell Road Project: Cooking And Growing

The overarching aims that run throughout The Saltwell Road Project is to understand how an artist can create socially engaged creative responses and interventions within their own community. The starting point of the whole project was to see how the community could use the large areas of grass space that are 'urban cracks' – in between spaces and wasteland that are neglected, underused, waiting for or fall outside of planning development (Steel, 2011). Further, to discover if art and creativity can actually make a difference in a community, as either a social or active practice, when residents feel disenfranchised, de-invested and excluded from their own environment, especially, when communities are undergoing change through regeneration, and may not see art as a solution to any of the issues that are 'blighting' the area. The research questions the role of the artist/curator, who is also a researcher and an active member of the community, and examine the tensions of this multi-strand role. It questions how the researcher and resident, as a community member can make a difference. In addition, the project aims to understand how and to what extent is digital media currently employed by community services, groups and individuals in the Bensham & Saltwell area and what are the barriers are there to increasing its use.

The employment of the voting system in the community and conversations with people from the first stage established an interest in cooking and growing and identified that those who voted wanted education in cooking and growing produce in particular how to cook healthily and on a budget and how to grow in a heavily built up area where few houses have large gardens. Conversations with members of the local community indicated that people often felt that there was nothing available locally that facilitated this interest and what was available involved studying an adult learning course and gaining a certificate through the council, which not everyone wanted.

The aim was to work alongside and in collaboration with existing community projects in the area, taking into account the many creative groups, projects and individuals already active in the area. My interest was not to work with an existing group but to try to work across the community in an informal manner, as suggested by Kwon (2002) Kester (2004). I wanted to see how people could connect and engage with the project, each other and the

community as a whole and potentially form a group that would be sustainable or develop in some form beyond the initial stage of the project. Whilst I was aware that this would be very difficult and problematic in terms of engagement with a disparate group of people, this best fitted to my idea of working across the community rather than a potentially 'closed' group. In terms of digital technology and media it was important to use grassroots approaches and open source/ 'free' software in relation to what was available to the community members. I did not want to bring technology into the community that was unfamiliar and potentially unaffordable and therefore unsustainable but rather to work with what community groups and individuals currently had available or software that could easily be accessed for free, acknowledging that much of the community could be working below the digital divide (Schaefer K, 2012)

I was aware of my own experience, or lack thereof, in terms of cooking and growing, and that I would be approaching this as someone who would be learning alongside the participants; a 'non-expert' as discussed in section 4.4 of this thesis. This meant that I was not knowledgeable or the right person to lead the sessions but should position myself more as the facilitator and organiser rather than an artist or expert.

Through the research undertaken I developed two separate but intertwined projects, one concerned with cooking the other growing. These two projects were connected but for practical reasons, involved working with two different community centres and organisations with the area. The intention was to try and engage across the community rather than at only one physical space. The aim was to see how community groups and individuals use digital media and how it could be used within these projects that both had a very physical and practical purpose. Both of these proved to be difficult which will be discussed in section 5.7.7, reflecting on the project and in the Conclusion.

In order to develop a space and place (physical as well as digital) for people to learn to cook and grow I created two separate but connected projects, 'Bensham & Saltwell Cooks...' and 'Bensham & Saltwell Grows...' By giving them these names I wanted to place the projects very much within and about the community and with an opportunity, through the use of the '...', to be influenced by and open-ended for the participants. 'Bensham & Saltwell Cooks...' was a series of cooking events that took place in the area over 2013, whilst 'Bensham & Saltwell Grows...' mainly took place through September and

December 2013. Both projects were located very much within the community, working with various community groups of interest and with the various community organisations in the area.

The project has a whole suffered from many problems and issues in relation to digital technology, all of which affected what was possible in terms of physical and digital engagement within the community. This however enabled me to understand the issues that a community, such as Bensham has when trying to engage with digital and social media both from an individual's position as well as an organisational perspective.

For the thesis I have decided not to go into too much detail with regards to the actual content of the workshops, as they did not affect project or research outcomes and theories. Instead this chapter will concentrate on the issues and conversations that came out of them and subsequent outcomes.

7.1 Bensham & Saltwell Cooks...

It became apparent early in the project that it was not possible to use the grass spaces and brownfield areas as sites to present the practice, due to the council being protective of its use, due to the controversial nature of the regeneration. I also did not feel it was wholly right to be subversive or antagonistic as my opinions on the regeneration were not wholly negative, after conversations with residents. I contacted and approached St Chads Community Project, one of the community projects in the area, and one of the locations for the voting box. St Chads had, I felt, the best facilities and ready-made structure for the project and the ability to engage with the community members who expressed an interest in learning how to cook. Previous conversations with St Chad's staff had resulted in discussions around digital use by the centre and its users, both of which were sparse. These conversations led to engaging with St Chads centre users to understand more how they use technology currently and what could be stopping them from being more digitally engaged. As a centre St Chads can be said to work below the digital divide (Schaefer K, 2012). They have a website but no technologically professional on the staff, but apply their own self taught knowledge, which they admit is basic (Hoult, 2012)

Through discussions with Bensham & Saltwell Alive and using their knowledge and networks, I contacted and employed Rob Stewart a professional chef to run the workshops. Using my approach of trying to only use local

resources and opportunities, Stewart was introduced to me via the Bensham & Saltwell Alive Twitter account. Stewart²³ is an active user of Twitter, promoting his personal chef business as well as using it as a tool for online cooking demonstrations, which he actively engaged with once a week with his followers. It was important to me to find someone who was both connected to Bensham & Saltwell, even if he didn't live in the area but connected digitally, and further to work with someone who was already digitally engaged.

Working with Stewart we developed, collaboratively, a series of six cooking sessions, at St Chads Community Project (Image 20). These workshops and demonstrations were to be recorded and viewable online on the Saltwell Road Project website for residents to use as toolkit and guide, to comment on and ask questions. The initial aim was for the group to develop their own recordings as the project developed for online and/or private use through their mobile phones or other personal recording equipment.



Image 20: Bensham & Saltwell Cooks: One-pot cooking workshop, 1 June 2013

23. Rob Stewart has worked in the Catering and Hospitality industry for 15 years and has focused on the teaching and training of future chefs as well as the enthusiastic home cook. Stewart uses social media as a teaching tool, tweeting to his followers recipes and tips as he cooks, @cooknortheast

Participants were to be encouraged to promote and comment through the use of social media (Twitter, Facebook etc) and create engagement beyond the participants and into the community. The chef, as much as possible was to use and promote locally bought produce and ingredients during each session.

The project was publicised in the local area via posters placed at local public spaces such as community centres, Gateshead Local Library, Shipley Art Gallery, and local cafes, post office and shops. Short texts were written for the local free paper, Bensham & Saltwell Express (BASE), which is funded through Bensham & Saltwell Alive to promote local events, stories and issues and posted to 8000 addresses in the area. It was also publicised online through the projects Twitter page, Facebook site and project blog as well as locally on community sites such as 'ourgateshead.org'. I also promoted the project to local groups at community projects and was invited by the Shipley Art Gallery to have a stall at a Local Makers event in the gallery. These varied community engagement methods enabled me to engage with the different demographic groups that live in the local area.

The initial idea was to develop live-streamed cooking demonstrations, where a cooking workshop would take place at St Chads Community Project with participants and this would be live-streamed to other local community spaces, in this case a local café, Dominic's Café and Gateshead Central Library. This would also be viewable online so people could see it from their own homes and follow and cook along with the chef from their own kitchens. People could also ask questions via Twitter to the chef and communicate between the three locations (Image 21) However connection problems materialised when it came to light that Dominic's Café did not have an internet connection and St Chads Wi-Fi did not reach the part of the building which the kitchen was in. This initial idea was an example of the problems I faced as a result of my intention of only using local resources. It was suggested that the workshops were moved to a location in the area that this could be easily set up, such as Gateshead Library. I dismissed this idea, as I felt it compromised my interest in working with community projects that could be said to be 'below the digital divide' (Schaefer K, 2012).

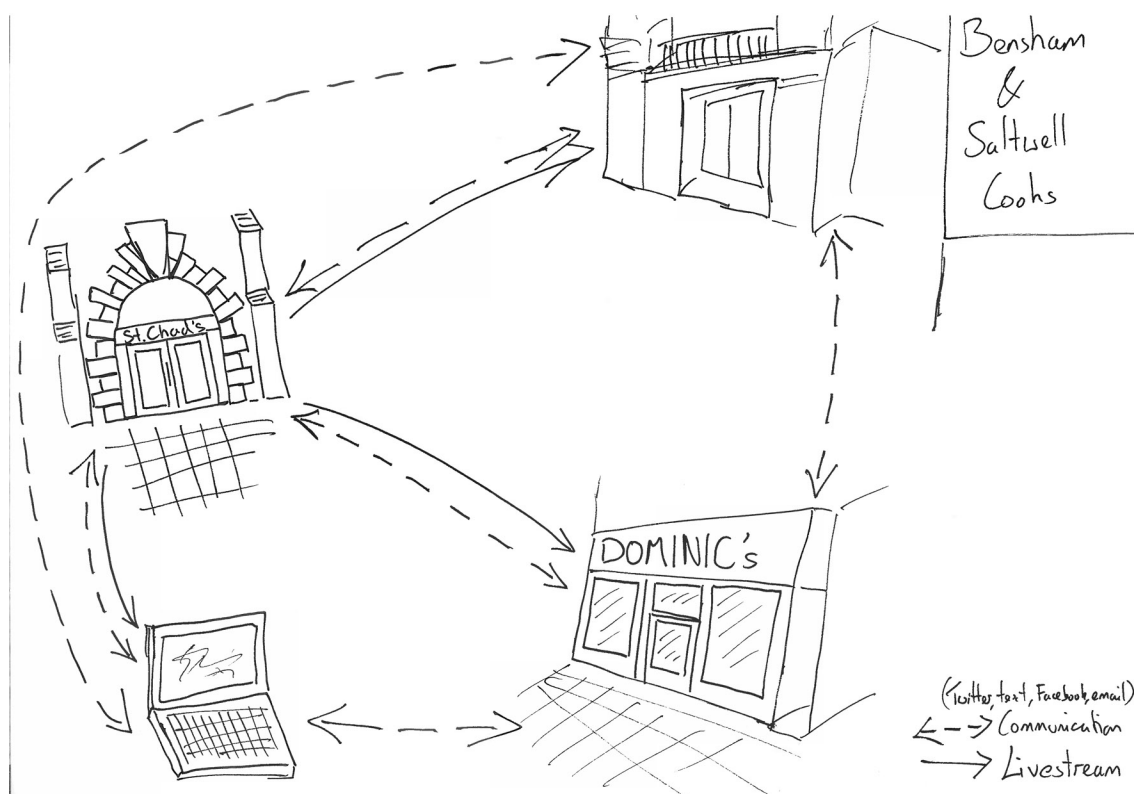


Image 21: Bensham & Saltwell Cooks, drawing of live streaming

I felt the best way to deal with this problem was to try and work in a different way to engage with the local community but to keep the project at St Chads Community Project. I decided to film each workshop and edit it to be put on the project blog but, taking my cue from Stewart, Tweet the workshops live, Tweeting each cooking instruction and adding images of the workshop when relevant as an ongoing active process during the workshops. As a result my role changed and the nature of the project from a collaborative digital project, where the intention was for the participants and community to digitally participate and add content to myself becoming the 'digital creator' of the project.

A logo was designed and the project and workshops were publicised via Twitter, Facebook and the blog in advance and made available to all the Saltwell Road Project Twitter followers. As well as the Twitter feed, postcards were produced and given to each participant and available to other community members (image 22) These were also digitally produced on the project website alongside the video of each workshop. By having these different modes of dissemination and opportunities for participation it enabled people who were already digitally

aware to be involved whilst those who weren't could also access the workshops by being there in person or picking up a recipe card.

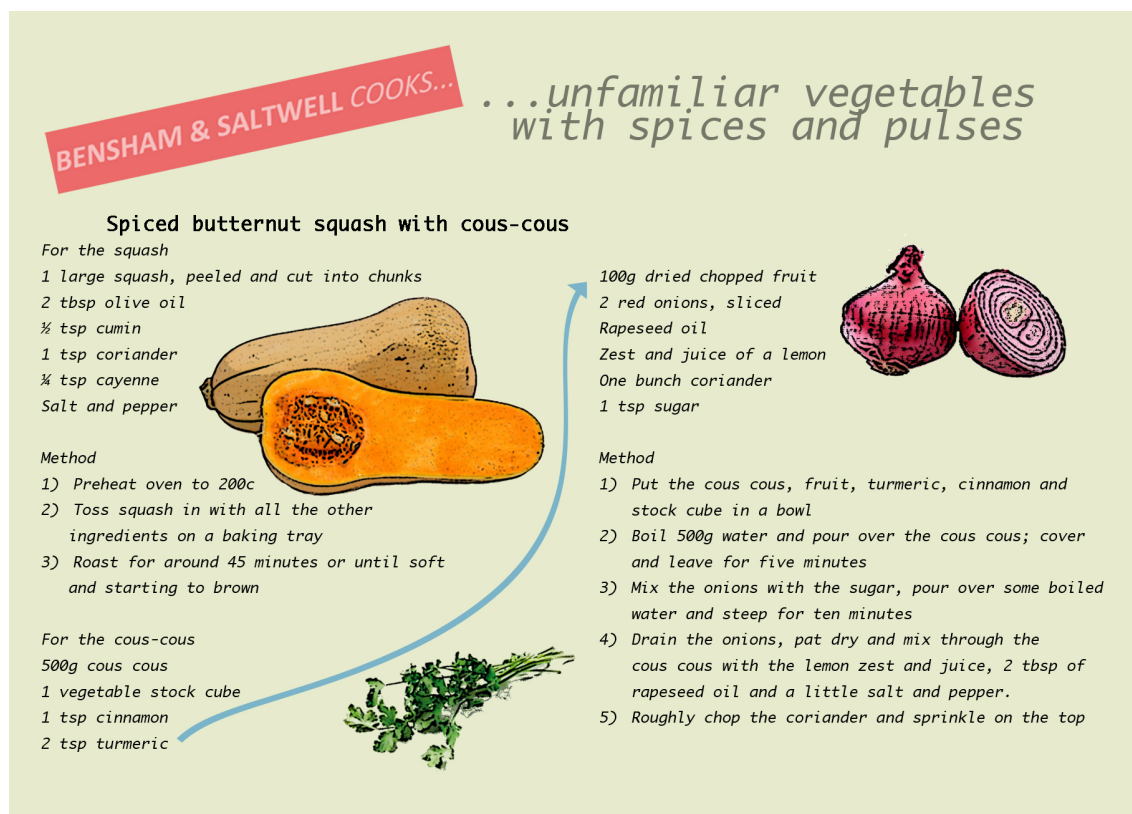


Image 22: Example of the front of a recipe card handed out to participants

At each workshop participants were encouraged to discuss and decide what the following workshop should be about with the chef and myself so they were engaged in the development of the workshops as they progressed and involved with the structure or the project overall. This was achieved through the use of printed postcards that participants were encouraged to write on during the workshop and which I collected at the end of each session (image 23). They were also encouraged to contact Rob or myself through the projects Facebook group or Twitter.

The workshops took place over a six-month period between March and August 2013 and were once a month on a Saturday, 1-3pm at St Chads. Most of the people who attended the workshops were users of St Chads Community Project (not all of whom lived in the immediate area) and on the whole young mothers although with the odd exception (partners, children). Participants came from the community as well as other areas of Gateshead.



Image 23: Postcards filled in by participants expressing what they would like to see happen at the next workshop and in the future

Over the six workshops a core group of approximately four people attended nearly every workshop. During the workshops I filmed and Tweeted the instructions (Image 24) and asked participants to fill in postcards suggesting ideas for the next workshop for both cooking and growing as well as the project overall. I also gave each participant a recipe card of what was being cooked and encourage them to participate on the projects Facebook group and blog. Stewart also encouraged them to engage with him online through his Twitter page during and after each workshop.

Through out the workshop participants were encouraged to take photographs, Tweet if they had an account and add to the projects Facebook page. This was very hard to encourage as it came apparent through discussions as well as the questionnaires that not many of the participants were digitally engaged. Most people did not have access to technology, such as a smartphone or laptop or in some cases had no Internet at home (see Appendix D for an example questionnaire).



Image 24: Screenshot of Saltwell Road Project Twitter page

If they did have technology some either did not use it too its full potential or were not aware of certain types of social media²⁴. This lack of digital engagement correlated with discussions I had with the staff of St Chads Community Project prior to the start of the workshops. In an interview with Joan Hoult, Family Support Coordinator at St Chads Community Project, she commented “everybody has got a phone in their hand. They’ve got no food in their cupboards, but they’ve got a phone in their hands” (p.12, Hoult, 2013). She also commented that “the majority of people have got laptops or computers for their children and stuff, but I don’t think they know to the extreme of how to use them” (p.21). This made it increasingly hard to embed the technology into the

24. One young mother asked me at the end of one workshop what Twitter was and when I explained what it was she said she would have a look.

actual workshops as originally intended, resulting in myself becoming the main digital creator of the workshops rather than the workshops being a participatory collaborative creation with the participants.

7.2 Bensham & Saltwell Grows....

'Bensham & Saltwell Grows...' considered the 'urban cracks' – in between spaces, wastelands that are neglected, underused and fall outside of planning development in the area (Steel R et al, 2011). 'Bensham & Saltwell Grows...' was designed to use these spaces for the benefit of the community by working with already existing community allotments and organisations interested in growing as well as to map the grass and underused spaces there are in the area for future employment as sites for growing and community use. It was formed to develop and discuss growing projects in the area and to promote sustainable community growing. The aims of Bensham & Saltwell Grows...' were to:

- Map green areas around the community that residents could use to grow food and create an online map of Bensham & Saltwell growing areas.
- Consider different ways of growing and how these areas could be used for the benefit of the community in a sustainable and environmental manner
- Share gardening tips and ideas about growing food in backyards, allotment and window growing, in an area where most people do not have gardens
- Work with local residents to make more growing events happen in the area and to enable knowledge exchange.

The first thing I attempted to do was to map all the empty grass spaces and brownfield sites in the area that had the potential to be used for growing. I walked round the area, took photographs and estimated the length and size of each space. This was then mapped onto a Google map with a pointer, photograph and short description of the size and appearance of each area

(Image 25). This was embedded onto the website as a starting point to the project and for future use. This Google map was an attempt to understand what spaces there were in the community, how these were currently used (or not) and possibilities there may be in the community for growing in these spaces. For example, the possibility to utilise and indeed transform the space left by demolished housing and other generally underused spaces such as small patches of grass between streets into growing spaces with produce available to all members of the community.

The staff and participants at St Chads showed a lack of interest in developing a community allotment at the centre. This was mainly due to them having tried unsuccessfully in the past to create a community allotment and initial interest waned once people realised the hard work it involved. Instead I approached Windmill Hills Centre, which was the base for the4Cs a community allotment group²⁵.

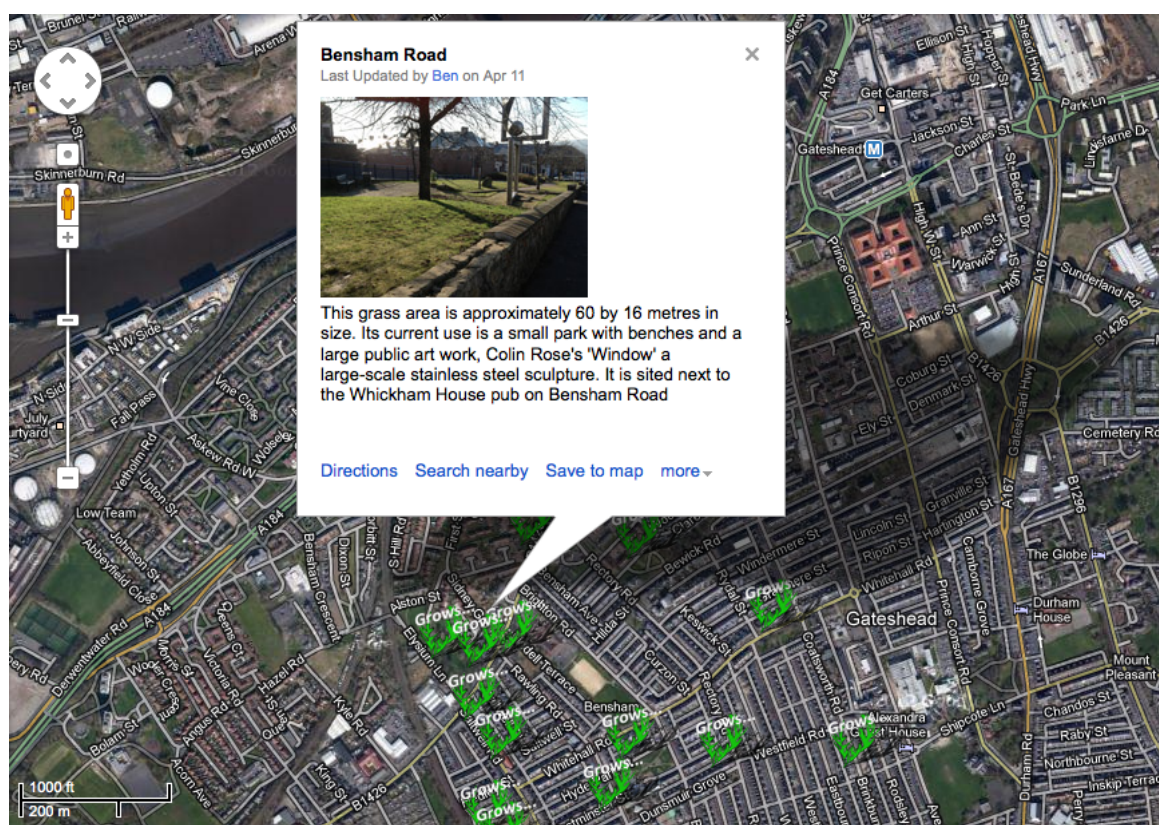


Image 25: Google map of Bensham & Saltwell showing underused spaces

25. The4Cs work with local people in the North East of England and minority groups alike on environmental sustainability, and bridges to sub-Saharan Africa. <http://www.the4csne.com/>

Collaborating with The4Cs we developed a 'soil to table' event to promote local growing and produce. The event combined the cooking and growing through produce being picked from The4Cs allotment and cooked on the day in the centre for participants to eat and discuss the project. Rob Stewart was approached to cook the food, similar to 'Bensham & Saltwell Cooks...' and The4Cs, for their part, invited The Comfrey Project²⁶ to develop a series of workshops on growing. My role, as with B&S Cooks, was as facilitator and resident, organising and developing the project whilst learning alongside the other participants.

The event was publicised through postcards being put in local community centres and places such as Gateshead Library, online through local websites, such as 'ourgateshead.org', and on the projects blog and social media pages.

The community allotment celebration was held on the 7th September 2013, to celebrate growing and volunteering in the community. The 'soil to mouth' event consisted of participants picking vegetables from The4Cs garden, and Stewart prepping and cooking a meal over the course of the day using what was picked (Images 26 and 27). The Comfrey project ran a propagation workshop for visitor and participants (Image 28). I presented my map of the area showing where there are empty spaces that could be used for growing and residents could write and comment on new ideas, uses and possible other activities for these areas. The event aimed to bring together community members to talk about growing, volunteering and how we can develop future food and growing events in the area (Image 29). The event was photographed and filmed with the intention of making it available on the project blog.

26. The Comfrey Project works with refugees and asylum seekers on allotment sites across Newcastle and Gateshead with the aim of improving their conditions of life and general wellbeing. <http://thecomfreyproject.org.uk/>



Image 26: Member of The4Cs picks vegetables to cook (photo: The4Cs)



Image 27: Rob Stewart explains what he was cooking (photo: The4Cs)



Image 28: The Comfrey Project's propagation workshop (photo: The4Cs)



Image 29: 'Bensham & Saltwell Grows...' (photo: The4Cs)

7.3 Building Bridges (Community Food Project)

In September 2013 Gateshead Council Neighbourhood and Community Team invited me to apply to the local Community Fund for £1000 funding towards continuing the cooking and growing project at Windmill Hills. I was invited as a result of attending Bensham & Saltwell Alive management meetings meaning the council's community team had become aware of the cooking and growing workshops I had been running in the area. I was asked to develop a series of workshops at the Windmill Hills Centre as a pilot project to investigate the potential community interest in a long-term community led food project in Bensham & Saltwell and to try and increase the number of volunteers at the centre. Based at the Windmill Hills Centre, the project built upon the work already undertaken by myself as part of my PhD research, and was seen as a possible solution to the problems the centre was facing (see section 6.1)

The intention of the project was to bring the two elements – cooking and growing – together in a more concise and structured way, working with a professional chef, community growers and community members. The project involved running a series of cooking and growing events at Windmill Hills and in the surrounding area to develop participation amongst community members leading to a more sustainable and on-going food project.

The funding bid was successful and was used to develop three workshops over November and December. Two of the workshops focused on growing, working as before with community allotment groups The4Cs and the Comfrey Project; and the other focused on cooking working again with professional chef, Rob Stewart. Due to the time of year, the growing workshops had to be seasonal meaning they involved thinking about preparing and getting ready for the following Spring and Summer. The cooking project worked across the community with the diverse groups that live and work in the area to engage with foods, learn new skills and to start a conversation about the future of the project. My role with the project was to organise the events, create and publicise them, buy materials and pay the organisations for their time for room hire. My role on the day of each event was to promote the idea behind the project and document it through photography film and Twitter.

The first growing workshop, which took place on the 30 November 2013, was a creative growing event. The4Cs worked with twelve participants to create a willow animal (Image 30) planted in the ground outside the centre. As the summer came the willow leaves grew and the shape of an elephant appeared.



Image 30: Willow elephant workshop at the Windmill Hills Centre (photo: The4Cs)

The second growing event took place on the 14th December 2013 and involved The Comfrey Project leading on a propagation event at the centre, preparing plants for the summer through cuttings (Image 31) There were seven participants in the workshop and this event supported The4Cs in their own growing project.

The cooking project took place between the two growing events on the 7th December 2013. For this event Stewart developed a cooking workshop concerned with 'how to cook a stress free Christmas dinner' building on the 'soil to table' workshop that used the vegetables that were grown in the The4Cs allotment (image 32) There were five participants at the event in total.



Image 31: Propagation workshop at Windmill Hills Centre, The Comfrey Project, December 2013



Image 32: Cooking workshop at Windmill Hills Centre, Rob Stewart, December 2013

In total there were 24 participants at the project, not including two members of The4Cs who attended all of the events. Most of the participants came from the immigrant community, many of whom had an established relationship with either the Comfrey Project and/or The4Cs. The initial outcomes of the project was to help towards starting an action plan for Windmill Hills, increase the number of volunteers and support the development of the centre using food and growing as a focus (see section 6.1). As a result of 'Building Bridges', and the conversations that took place during the workshops The Comfrey Project, The4C's, Windmill Hill Centre users and myself began to develop an interest in possible future directions for the centre (see 6.1).

7.4 Reflecting On The Second Stage

Initially early on in the project (January 2012) the idea was to work within my local community separately from hegemonic, authoritative structures but as an independent self organised project working in and with the community at large. The aim was to understand digital technology as a way of connecting and creating a 'space' for self initiated projects, ideas and creativity. However as the project developed and the more involved with local community organisations and projects I became, I decided to see how I could engage with the structures whilst trying to work separately.

The technology became more of a means to document the workshops and to allow for digital engagement after each session rather than during. As a result I began to see the filming, tweeting and use of Facebook as more of a way to create a community based learning tool where participants and other residents could visit the site to view the workshops videos after each session.

Due to my lack of cooking and growing knowledge and experience it became apparent that I needed to collaborate with experts and skilled professionals within the context of cooking and growing. My role became more about being a facilitator/curator, working within the community to make connections between groups and individuals both within the community and outside of it. This resulted in me not just being the facilitator but also a participant, a non-expert, learning along side my community members. It also highlighted the problems of using digital media when working in such a community and with community groups, where there is a little or no structure or engagement with digital media. Whilst it could be said that the digital media

needed to be embedded into the project from the beginning, I feel this would have harmed its development, as it would have become more about the technology rather than the community.

The project was developed to work in the community, with different organisations and to complement each other. Whilst it was not expected to create an on-going series of cooking and growing events, they were seen as a way of starting the development of such a project in the area and to hopefully bring other organisations and groups on board. To develop a momentum and an interest in the possibilities of such events becoming part of the community and to bring together interested parties, whether as a cooking or growing project or a different route.

7.5 Ones That Got A Way

As well as the cooking and growing projects, as described, there was two other projects that were discussed and developed with participants, community organisations and community members. These projects did not take place or get off the ground due to a number of reasons. This includes lack of interest, fear of digital medium and opposition from other organisations working in the area that felt we were 'stepping on their toes'.

Alongside the cooking workshops and as a way of getting participants to take a more active role in the project I developed 'The Bensham & Saltwell Digital Community Kit'. This consisted of a digital tablet with livestreaming software on it and a dedicated Twitter and Facebook page. The purpose was to give community members the opportunity to record themselves cooking to an online audience from their own kitchens. These recordings would be recorded and embedded on to the projects website for people to add recipes, photographs, videos and comment on ideas. If the resident wished the recordings could be available publicly online or kept for personal use only.

The participants that came to the workshops were encouraged to get involved in the digital dissemination of the project to the community and it was advertised in the local free paper, BASE. There was very little interest in participating in this aspect of the project, however, mainly as a result of fear of the technology, not wanting to be filmed, be in control, or be personally commented upon and possibly abused online. Reflecting upon this, the digital community kit went against my initial idea of not bringing in technology to the

community, but using what participants and community centres used already. At this point many of the community centres did not have access to equipment such as tablets, or the facilities to live stream. This was reflected in the people who attended the workshops and their own insecurity and lack of confidence about using such equipment.

Another aspect of the project was to develop a website that could be used by the community to discuss cooking and growing as well as other community issues. Continuing my aim to work with local resources and people, I collaborated with a Bensham based web and digital designer, who both lived and worked in the area. The aim was to develop a simple site that would act as a social media site, blog and hyper-local website, which would be available for residents to contact each other about their interests, add to and be creative. The idea was presented at a Bensham & Saltwell Alive meeting to gain support and funding but suffered from problems, in this case due to local politics. The creator of the website Ourgatesead.org, run by Gateshead Voluntary Organisation Council (GVOC), objected to the fact that he felt this was something that Ourgateshead.org already did and would result in cross purpose and in them being pushed aside and potentially lose funding.

'OurGateshead.org' role was to be an online space for community groups and organisations to add content to publicise events, whilst our idea was to do with individuals. GVOC were, at the time, one of the few organisations facilitating online content across Gateshead for community organisations and groups. This potentially made them feel like gatekeepers for digital content in the area for which our project, whilst having different aims, would in their opinion undermine them.

Chapter 8. Outcomes: Community Activism And Socially Engaged Art

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This chapter also briefly discusses directions, in relation to my research, undertaken by the main community centres that I worked with in the community since the doctoral research period. The two projects discussed in this chapter, whilst they happened after the research and practice, are outcomes of it. The direction they took and the methodologies they used were as a direct result of the previous research with the aim of pulling the strategies previously used together, working in both a social and creative manner. They also indicate the future direction of my research and practice within the area and how the doctoral research has influenced my thoughts and ideas for future creative community engagement with Bensham & Saltwell.

8.1 Bensham & Saltwell: Future Directions

Since the workshops at Windmill Hills Centre, conversations have taken place between the centre, Bensham & Saltwell Alive, the Neighbourhood Management Team at Gateshead Council, The Comfrey Project and myself, concerning its future. As mentioned in chapter 5.4 the centre is under threat of closure due to having no sustainable focused strategy for its future direction or funding stream. Currently the centre is well used by a wide variety of groups including, The4Cs, local public services, Gateshead veterans, refugee and asylum seeker groups, men's groups and on an ad hoc recreational basis. However there are no permanent paid members of staff and the centre is run entirely on a volunteer basis. The site of the main school building, which is now demolished, will be sold to a housing developer in the near future, which adds another level of uncertainty to the future of the centre.

Bensham & Saltwell Alive are currently supporting the writing of a business plan by Jayne Hopkins (secretary of B&S Alive and freelance consultant²⁷) and the Comfrey Project, who have held workshops at the centre in the past. They are developing a visual and written plan for how they could be involved in the centre. The Comfrey Project, who have recently closed their Gateshead allotment due to problems regarding access, were approached by

27. <http://www.assetbasedconsulting.net/>

the Gateshead Council Neighbourhood Management Team, to discuss the potential for Windmill Hills to be the new site for their allotment.

Since the cooking workshops finished in 2013, St Chads started their own cooking workshops using a different professional chef. This was not as a direct result of 'Bensham & Saltwell Cooks...' but something they had already planned previously. This period has allowed for their to be a period of reflection and realisation that 'Bensham & Saltwell Cooks...', if it continued at St Chads, would be replicating what they are currently doing. As a result there is a need to rethink what, if any, engagement is possible with them and whether it would be a different project altogether.

8.2 A Place To Be, A Place To Grow

My role, using the Building Bridges workshops as a starting point, was to support locals and reimagine the centre to develop dialogical and creative outcomes in collaboration with the centres users and Gateshead residents. I proposed a series of drop in workshops with the aim of encouraging ideas from the community for the future of Windmill Hills Centre and to increase awareness of the centre. Recent conversations about future use of Windmill Hills Centre have considered ideas around gardening, cooking and the idea of a place for people to 'work, rest and play'. The Comfrey Project put forward the strapline 'A Place to be, a Place to Grow', which was used as a starting point to develop conversations with participants.

There were three half-day drop in workshops and interventions at Windmill Hills Centre, to encourage current centre users to come up with ideas; and at Gateshead Library to connect to people who may not be aware of the centre (Image 33). The materials for the workshops involved a map with an aerial view of the centre including the surrounding grounds; photographs of the centre and grounds; photographs of gardening and cooking resources (allotment site, multi use play space, garden benches, pond, orchard, poly tunnels, raised beds, garden, pizza oven, etc) and other materials such as felt tip pens and paper.

Participants were able to add comments and to design their own idea of Windmill Hills and how it could look in the future by adding recreational and cultural images to the map using the photographs of the space itself as guidance. There were opportunities to add comments and thoughts about what

future use there could be for example events about healthy eating, the environment, local growing and who could use the centre such as current users, young people, young families.

Each design was photographed and used to create a collage of the potential uses of Windmill Hills. These designs will be printed as large-scale posters to be used in presentations and disseminated as digital file. These posters will be placed back in the workshop venues to gain further responses from the Gateshead Community.

The intention was to create a new community food organisation in the area, with Windmill Hills Centre and Comfrey Project and to use the resources available at the centre to develop a unique food-based learning centre working with local businesses, schools, community organisations and community members. The aim is to create an innovative centre at the forefront of environmental, local growing and sustainable issues, where people can learn new skills, improve their food knowledge and develop community projects. The Windmill Hills Centre can act as the focus point and leading community centre in the area on sustainability, the environment, health and local growing. The centre could be involved in developing a programme of cooking lesson delivered for and by residents; a dedicated large-scale community allotment and garden; an organic farm shop; and project participants have the potential to become local experts on land management and bee-and hen keeping.

As part of this I am interested in developing a community arts organisation that could work and be based at Windmill Hills centre. For this I would be looking to set myself up as a social enterprise to attract funding. This potential is only possible with the support of the current centre users and its trustees who would remain the main focus and users of the centre. This project is in the early stages of fruition but could be a way for the project to develop a long-term sustainable focus, based and working with Windmill Hills Centre but working across Bensham & Saltwell.



Image.33: 'A Place To Be, A Place To Grow ' Drop in workshop at Gateshead Library

8.3 Spence Watson Archive Project

The Spence Watson Archive Project was a self-initiated digital and heritage participatory art project that came out of conversations I had with staff and users of Bensham Grove Community Centre and Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM). Funded through a small grant from Arts Council England the project involved researching and presenting the personal items found in Tyne and Wear Archive, which belonged to the nineteenth century social activists Elizabeth and Robert Spence Watson during their time spent living at Bensham Grove House, Gateshead, which is now the community centre. These items include records of discussions and recollections about important visitors to the house, such as William Morris, talks by speakers at the Lit & Phil and Armstrong College, and concerning local political and social issues, as well as every day family life.

The project was not part of my PhD research but came out of the conversations and relationships I have developed over the course of the research. It involved the creation of a series of participatory digital artworks collaborating with artists, community members, local community and cultural organisations and a local school. The outcome was the development and

creation of a number of digital art and heritage participatory artworks that were presented in the house itself and online. The project purpose was to be both art and as an educational tool, bringing the history and heritage of the area to a wider audience, in particular the local community, enabling the archive to be visible beyond TWAM and to produce new archival material about the area of Bensham.

Through April and May 2014 three participatory workshops and one public event took place, run by five invited artists in participation with Bensham Grove Community Centre, local people and a local school working with residents, school children and centre users. The artists used the archive as inspiration to be creative and develop participatory workshops and events. The outcome of these workshops project is five artworks – audio, film, online – and a website.

The direction this project has taken is different from the work and activities of the Saltwell Road Project. The Spence Watson Archive Project uses a more contemporary participatory methodology, with the aim of creating a co-authored participatory artwork that involves a process of creative social enquiry, whilst considering the aesthetic nature and potential of the work as creative participatory contemporary artwork.

My role in this project is more curatorial, involving researching the archival and historical material and inviting and contracting artists to work with people in the community to develop aesthetic artworks and outcomes. Whilst still working at a grass roots level, the project considers the connections and problems that arise through community and digital artistic collaborations. It implements the use of new digital hardware, such as iPads and software such as 'ideasmache'²⁸, and has a professional website²⁹ that was designed for the project.

8.4 Social versus Aesthetic?

These two projects came from very similar conversations concerning community centres and their potential for creative and social collaborations and

28. <http://ideamache.ecologylab.net/>

29. <http://spencewatsonarchive.org.uk/>

participation. Both are both continuations of my research working with in the community but also have very clear differences.

The work with Windmill Hills very clearly is directly related to the methodologies and strategies developed through the PhD research. Whilst the obvious connection is the relationship to food, both cooking and growing, the project is social, rather than aesthetic (Bishop, 2004, 2012; Kester, 2004, 2011), it involves actual rather than symbolic practice (Helguera, 2011) and could be seen as allo-relational – for the benefit of the community above the artist – and digestive in nature as interpreted by Gielen (2011). It can be seen as about the community rather than about the individual (Delanty, 2003).

The Spence Watson Archive Project on the other hand could be seen as opposite to this in many ways, though still with a social bent, using creativity in a contemporary sense to understand a given communities past, present and potential future. It is however more aesthetic, symbolic, potentially auto-relational – artist agenda above community – and could possibly be subversive. My role in both of these projects, however, still remains as artist, curator, researcher, community member and community activist.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

Chapter 9. Conclusion

Through this practice-based research I have considered the importance and relevance of socially engaged artistic practice and community art in this age of austerity, Big Society and localism. I have discussed how digital media is considered a way of connecting communities and can act as a catalyst for collaboration and collectivism to bring people together through collective action. Yet the problem of digital exclusion and the issue of groups working below the digital divide (Schaefer et al, 2013) have the potential to prevent this from happening. I have considered how artists connect to their own community (Deveron Arts) or work in communities in 'crisis' (Jeanne van Heeswijk) and how both these methodologies reflect and influence my own practice working in Gateshead under similar social situations.

The thesis contextualises the research through understanding what is meant by Big Society and the Localism Act, seeing them as policies that have been put in place because of and related to austerity measure and funding cuts. I have also considered how it has affected the Arts Council and subsequently socially engaged and digital arts organisations nationally through a decrease or withdrawal of funding. I also researched local policies and strategies for Gateshead and their report Vision2030 in relation to cultural and voluntary strategies. There are three core research questions that this research investigated:

- What potential is there to develop a sustainable and socially engaged art project in Gateshead that enables participation, collaboration and action through an understanding of a specific place and community?
- What is the potential for digital technology to act as a possible counter public sphere to traditional/prescribed community art participation as understood in the context of Gateshead?
- What are the connections and conflicts between the 'physical' (urban space) and enclosed (private/public space and area boundaries); and the digital and supposedly open (including the online)?

The potential to develop a socially engaged art project in Gateshead needs to be achieved through fully understanding and taking into account the demographic, space and community of Bensham itself and how the community currently communicates and works. This involves understanding issues of localism, how austerity has affected the community and how digital technology is implemented, or not, by community organisations and residents. An understanding of how the community of Bensham & Saltwell works is paramount, which has been one of the main intentions of this research, in order to develop a new strategy that works for the community and is aware of the specific challenges there are to working in this area. This means being aware that it is not possible to take a methodology, such as Deveron Arts 'the Town is the Venue' or van Heeswijk's '2 Up 2 Down' and plant them in Bensham and expect them to work as they do in Huntly and Liverpool respectively. It is however possible to take aspects and parts of each methodology that connects with and could potentially work in Gateshead.

The question mark over Deveron Arts methodology can be simply understood by their strapline, 'the town is the venue'. This statement places great emphasis on the town becoming the gallery and space for intervention by the organisation itself and the artists they invite to develop creative projects in the community. Yet who has given them this right to claim the town as their own and what does this turn the residents of Huntly into? Participants, viewers, actors, tools to be used and manipulated by the artists and curator? This gives the curator and director of Deveron Arts great responsibility to work within the community of Huntly in an ethical and moral way. The director of Deveron Arts is wary of developing an antagonistic project and acknowledges this, to a degree, but this results in self-imposed restrictions on the type of project they are willing to do (Zieske, 2013). It is also acknowledged through the Cultural Health Visitor who acts as a link between local services, health and wellbeing and the aspects of the community that do not engage with cultural activities (Jeans, 2013). Yet this is only down to their awareness of being community members themselves and the ones who have to live with repercussions of each project after the artists have long gone.

Claudia Zieske, Director of Deveron Arts, questions the potential for 'the town is the venue' to work in an urban setting due to her believing that a city is too big and does not have natural boundaries, and in her view has poor or rich

areas (Zeiske, 2013, p.44). This is too simplistic view of a city or an urban town, especially a suburban area such as Bensham with a mix of both poor and well-off residents, a socially and economically diverse community, and with a rich mixture of religions and ethnicities. In many ways positioning such a methodology in such an urban area means there are possibilities for a more fluid and ambitious creative process, the potential to develop antagonistic and problematic projects due to not living in a small population but one where people from the outside come and use the amenities available such as schools, libraries, galleries and community centres. In rural communities, such as Huntly the same population on the whole uses these amenities and could result in the same people participating in projects. By working in an urban community the artist is able to work across geographic and politically created boundaries and is not restricted to working with specific communities or groups due to location.

These problems do not necessarily surface in van Heeswijk's '2Up 2Down' project, due to the methodologies and strategies put in place by her, and her working practice. The intention is always to give people a voice and enable them to lead on a project, though under her guidance (van Heeswijk, 2012). By employing local artists and working with local residents to develop the project she enables the community to lead on the direction it takes, though always with her intention and agenda embedded. Van Heeswijk makes sure each project she works on is over a sustained period of time, in the case of '2Up2Down' five years. However this is only possible due to it being a Liverpool Biennial project and because of whom she is and her standing within the contemporary art world. This was a well-funded project but as mentioned in chapter 4.6 concerning 2Up2Down, would this project be possible if a local artist had developed it, and are local artists roles only as employees, workers and volunteers? As with all these types of projects there is the problem of what happens after, once the artist has left the project. Heeswijk, like many artists who work in this way, moves onto another project, leaving the community to either continue with the idea, possibly in a different way due to some participants or the councils personal or political agendas or due to lack of funding abandoned altogether.

The initial aim of the project was to work with community organisations, and individuals to develop a sustainable socially engaged art project that enabled participation and collaboration; and to understand how digital

technology can allow them to have a place, separate or distant from institutional and hegemonic structures, to enable 'collective action' as a possible form of politicised collaboration.

The potential for digital technology to act as a possible counter public sphere to traditional ideas of participation was never truly realised. This was due to the low use of digital technology by community organisations and the project participants. The reasons for this were many but mainly due to a lack of understanding, poor resources and, to a degree, a fear of technology. This resulted in the researcher facilitating the use of technology rather than in collaboration with the participants, meaning what was produced digitally was a resource rather than a place for groups and individuals to meet and discuss issues. It should also be noted that when an idea was put forward to design a resident-led social media site just for Bensham, this was criticised and stopped by the organisation who had developed a Gateshead Council funded community site as they felt it would conflict with what they were already doing. This meant the research became more about understanding how community organisations currently use technology and the barriers that stop them, as previously mentioned.

As the project developed, through conversations with residents, community workers and participants, it became apparent that a community such as Bensham & Saltwell, with social and economic problems does not have the digital 'infrastructure' to achieve such possibilities. It was apparent, mainly in community organisations that there was, to a degree, a resistance to the potential of digital technology due to the issues mentioned. There was also apparent frustration due to understanding technology as being important and something that will become more so in the future, but, with funding cuts and finite resources, it was not possible to undertake more work through developing and instigating digital strategy.

It came apparent that trying to work separately from hegemonic structures in such a small community was not fully possible, the community centres involved in the project were part of such structures, and the council quickly became aware of my research. Through attending meetings with councillors, council workers and community staff, I began to feel it could become more interesting to see how to work within such frameworks, considering Marcuse's 'Repressive Tolerance' (1965), whilst trying to remain

outside authoritative frameworks. I attempted to understand the impact of the funding cuts, Big Society and Localism on the council and community organisations and to work with what the community could accommodate, rather than bringing technology in.

The connections and conflicts between physical and digital spaces in Bensham & Saltwell relates to the physical problems of using digital media in certain spaces due to the nature of community buildings and lack of digital resources. It also relates to the changing landscape of the area and the halted housing regeneration, where large areas have been knocked down and left as wasteland until the new housing is built. As a result large areas of what used to be housing have changed the physical geography of the space as well as the populace and what people see as a sense of community. The physical and community feel of the area connects to the digital exclusion of the community as both have a feeling of being left behind socially, digitally and economically. This can be seen by the lack of movement in terms of new housing, the building of which has been dormant since before the start of this PhD research in 2010, the area having a higher than national average unemployment rate (see Appendix B) as well as lower than national average internet access (Gateshead Residents Survey 2012, Oct 2012). One aspect the continuing research is looking to develop is the between spaces and wasteland that are neglected and underused, and that fall outside of planning development. These 'urban cracks' (Steel, 2011) connect to the potential of a counter public sphere or digital space that is outside of hegemonic structures and have the potential to be taken over by and for the community to use.

The creation of community cooking and growing projects through the research practice connects to ideas around the everyday participation and other research that has taken place in the area (Understanding Everyday Participation, 2014). It has also been acknowledged through De Certeau's ideas around strategies and tactics (The Practice of Everyday Life, 1980) and Manovich's take on it from a digital perspective (The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life, 2008). This exploration of the everyday continuously comes to the surface, and always will when working in a socially engaged and community based practice. This can be seen in the project discussed in chapter 8.2 'A Place to Be, A Place to Grow', where the overall purpose is to develop a community garden and allotment for the benefit of the community. By working in

a given community all creative projects touch on the everyday and community practices, whether directly through project outcomes or through the project's processes. Through this, everyday activities, whether that is cooking workshops, gardening events, attending meetings or going for a walk, become integral parts of the creative process to learn and understand and how to engage and be creative with the community.

Ethical challenges have appeared throughout the research and relate to how I perceived myself as a resident and researcher working in this community. The challenge of understanding my role within the area, as an artist and researcher as well as resident is acknowledged. The research draws out the role of the researcher/artist/curator working in a given community, in particular how these roles have ethical conflicts and advantages when the researcher is also a resident of the community. In addition how the researcher/artist/curator is potentially and questionably seen as 'superior' to the participant but also seen as 'outsider' and inadvertently becoming the spokesperson or 'delegate' for the community (Kester, 2004, Bourdieu, 1994). All community-based projects have ethical and moral issues and considerations, whether directly if the project is a social project or indirectly if its solely creative. This is overcome through acknowledging the artist's role within the community on a project-to-project basis and the artist/researcher becoming a participant through the employment of workshops learning alongside other participants as a non-expert, where participants are co-researchers and collaborators.

As a result of this way of working and the direction the work took in terms of cooking and growing, I began to see my role as closer to a community member, volunteer and community activist over my professional status as an artist, curator and researcher. How I worked within the community changed. I saw myself as being a resident of the community, someone with knowledge and experience that could be used by the community and community organisations, and as an individual, who is aware of the problems involved in becoming the 'spokesperson' for the community.

This methodology connects to ideas concerning political and politicised ideas of art and digital media (Carpenter, 2008), Helguera's idea of symbolic and actual practice and the distinction between the two types of socially engaged practice (2011). It links to when the artist works within a given community in an 'allo-relational' manner where the art 'serves' the 'other'

(Gielen, 2011, p19). Pablo Gielen's matrix of community art (p. 51) shows how socially engaged practice could operate in various contexts and through different strategies. Different projects would start at different places on the matrix, dependent on the nature and purpose of each creative project, and may change dependent on how the project develops over time, going from allo to auto-relational and back for example. This may need to be acknowledged throughout a project and, dependent on the nature of it, would need to be rectified. It is also worth being aware that all creative projects aim to further an artists or curators career, whether directly or indirectly. This should not be seen as problematic but as a way of increasing both the potential for new opportunities and funding for future projects in the given community.

The practice has concerned working on a local level, with local and national issues, and treating each encounter with each organisation, group and fellow community member differently and critically as well as being self-reflexive as part of the work itself. There is an increasing belief and concern that there is a need for arts funding to be given to grass roots projects run by artists and communities, rather than to large institutions and expecting them to be the ones to run community projects, which leads to bureaucracy and a lack of true feeling for a community's needs. This issue is an on-going concern, something that the future outcomes of the practice aim to question and challenge.

This project has been about making small gestures and changes over a considered period of time and making, as John Holloway suggests, 'cracks' in the everyday, to create a space away from the capitalist system (Holloway, 2010) and a place for the community away from hegemonic structures. A theoretical 'crack' alongside the physical urban cracks suggested by Steel et al (2011). Holloway suggests that these small cracks gradually widen and converge until the system shatters and the job of those who wish to find alternative structures is to seek out or create these cracks, occupy them, deepen them, create alternatives spaces in these cracks and aid their convergence (2010).

The continuation of the PhD research project sees the artist working on the margins of the contemporary art world, in a community, where the aim is not necessarily to further the artist's career, but to support the community in its endeavours, as a community member and activist. This however does involve working with cultural organisations and within the structures of the

contemporary art world as an artist/curator. The aim is to connect the aesthetic and social together and influence and inspire further research and practice and to create a few cracks in the everyday of Bensham & Saltwell.

Appendix A

History Of Bensham & Saltwell

The area of Bensham and Saltwell is a fairly new settlement in terms of the development of the town, having only become urbanised in the early 20th Century. Prior to this, from around 1858 (Image 34) the area consisted of mainly countryside and was primarily used for farming and many open cast mines. The area was also a place where well-off industrialists lived in large houses - close enough to their factories and the River Tyne, yet far away enough to enjoy country life and the health benefits that came with it. Saltwell Road at the time was known as Saltwell Lane and was surrounded by fields apart from the few homes of the industrialists, such as Bensham Tower, Bensham Hall and Enfield House. From about 1850 onwards at the time of the development of the River Tyne as an industrial force, workers began to move to the area from other parts of the country (many Irish and Scottish) and the need for housing in the area became obvious, and the start of what is known as the Tyneside flats in the area (Brown, 2012).

Urbanisation spread rapidly in the late 19th and early 20th century as the need for housing for workers in the factories increased. The Bensham area of Gateshead began to become urbanised in the late 19th century with the start of the streets known as the Avenue's and the building of schools and workhouses amongst other amenities. It was in the early 20th century that as a result of the relentless urbanisation that many of the large houses were abandoned and either knocked down to make way for Tyneside housing or their purpose changed, such as Bensham Hall which became Stirling House and is now a public house (Sauntering in Saltwell, n.d.).

By 1898 (Image 35) the North Eastern Railway had cut through, parallel to Saltwell Lane, taking trains north to Newcastle and beyond. By this time Bensham and Saltwell had their own railway, Bensham Railway Station, which opened in 1868 and closed in 1954 (Bensham, 2012). In 1890 the Gateshead Union Workhouse moved from its location in Bensham and opened in a new build just beyond the railway line near to the south part of Saltwell Lane. Unemployed men under a 'labour test' scheme built the workhouse, where poor relief was given in return for the performing of manual labour (Higginbotham, 2012). The site later became High Teams Institution and in 1938, the hospital

facilities separated to become Bensham General Hospital, which it still is today (Gateshead, Durham, 2012).

By 1919 large swathes of the area had become urbanised (Image 36) with the traditional Tyneside flats, and by 1939 fully so including a tram system that ran along, what had now become known as Saltwell Road (Image 37). Though traditionally a working class area, Saltwell and Bensham also have a historical 'bohemian' background including many artists, musicians, social activists and reformers living in the area (Brown, 2012). Over the last ten years (alongside the housing boom at the beginning of the 21st century) it could be argued that the area has changed further as a young 'creative' class has moved in due to housing affordability, and in recent years a large number of immigrants and international students.



Image 34: Saltwell, Gateshead, 1858, Ordnance Survey Map, Gateshead Library



Image 35: Saltwell, Gateshead, 1898, Ordnance Survey Map, Gateshead Library



Image 36: Saltwell, Gateshead, 1919, Ordnance Survey Map, Gateshead Library



Image 37: Saltwell, Gateshead, 1939, Ordnance Survey Map, Gateshead Library

Appendix B

Demographic And Statistics

Information regarding demographic was obtained from the Gateshead Council website, and in particular the online statistics and census information service, Gateshead Electronic Neighbourhood Information Engine (GENIE). I have only taken the sections that are relevant to the study and the PhD research.

Statistics for GENIE was obtained from a number of sources including Gateshead Council, NHS South of Tyne & Wear, Northumbria Police, Connexions Tyne and Wear (Gateshead Council), and 2008 South of Tyne and Wear Lifestyle Survey amongst others and is updated on a regular basis.

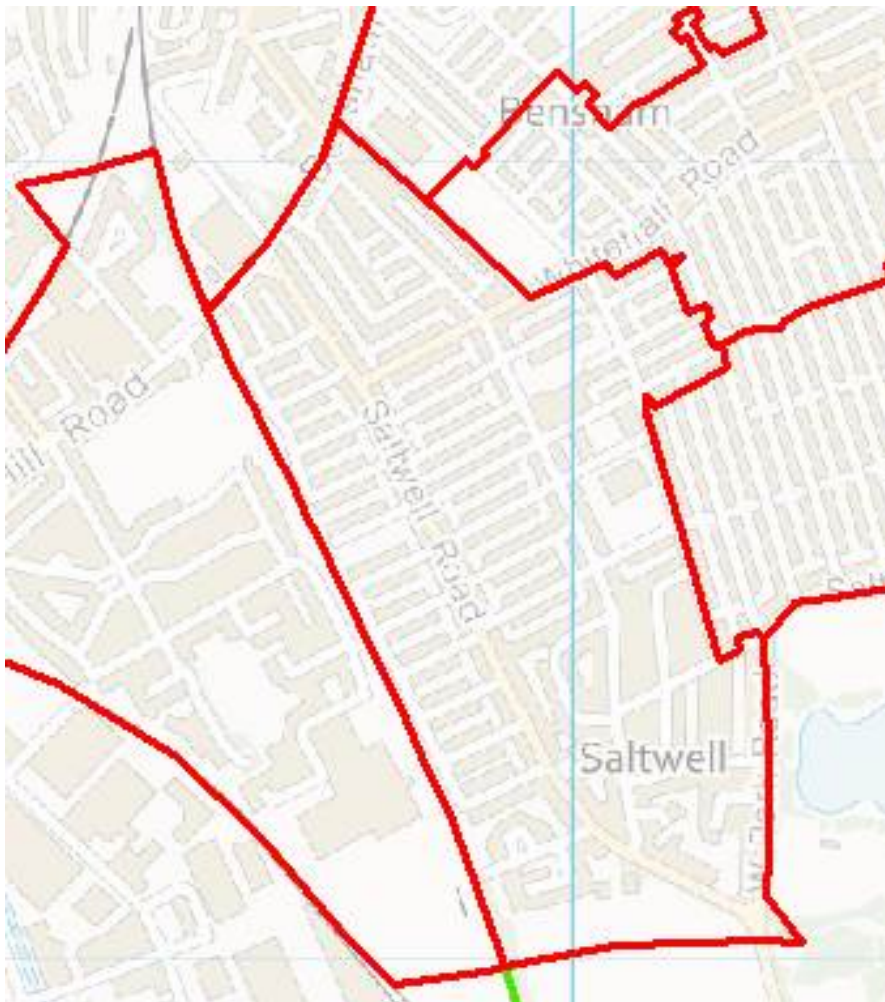


Image 38: Saltwell boundary set by Gateshead Council, GENIE website

The red-bounded area (Image 38) cross the main area and neighbourhood that the PhD practice and research involves. Drawn by the Neighbourhood

Management Team of Gateshead Council by local knowledge of the area, the boundaries aim to reflect 'natural' neighbourhoods and to be large enough to obtain meaningful statistical information. Each boundary consists of on average 1,000 dwellings and is reviewed annually taking into account changes to housing and regeneration and housing development. This area had a population in 2010 of approximately 9,000, which was a drop of 500 from 2001. Gateshead as a whole has a population of 191,690 in 2010³⁰.

This area as suggested mirrors the area as suggested by PhD research and acts as a good boundary to use for the practical aspect of the project. Using the set boundaries established by the council it would allow statistical information to be gathered that reflects the area and enable a true representative understanding of Saltwell.

The average age for life expectancy for a male and female³¹ in the area of Saltwell is 74.6 and 80.6 years respectively. For Gateshead as a whole average male life expectancy is 76.2 years whilst for females it is 80.5 years. Nationally throughout the United Kingdom, the average mortality rate for males and females is 78.1 and 82.1 respectively and for England alone 78.4 and 82.1 respectively.

Children & Young People - NEETS Aged 16-18³²

The proportion of young people aged 16-18 who are not in employment, education or training³ (NEET's) in the area of Saltwell is put at 24.4%. The figures shown are an aggregate of 3 months (Nov to Jan) with Gateshead as a whole put at 8.3%, whilst for England as a whole it is 6.4%. This is obviously very high and is something that can be seen to be trying to be tackled in the area by the council with the work of Connexions and the Avenues Project.

Children In Poverty³³

Percentage of children in poverty⁴ in the area of Saltwell is put at 20.1% (south Saltwell), 39.4% (central Saltwell), Gateshead as a whole is put at 24.3% and England as 20.9%.

Anti-Social Behaviour Incidents And Criminal Damage³⁴

Anti-social behaviour incidents in the area of Saltwell is put at 9.6% per 1000 population. This is very low compared to Gateshead as a whole which is put at 67.9% per 1000 population. ⁴

However criminal Damage in the area of Saltwell is put at 18.9% per 1000 population, which can be seen to be considerably higher than Gateshead as a whole which is put at 13% per 1000 population

Commercial And Business

Today Saltwell Road has a mixture of both commercial and residential usage. Commercial use includes the Stirling House Pub, the Saltwell Social club, Dominic's café, four barbers /hairdressers, a clothes shop, two sandwich shops, three convenience stores, two tanning shops, two Chinese and one Indian takeaway, two fish and chip shops, a post office, two newsagents, a butcher, a grocers, two betting shops, a tattoo parlour and two garages amongst others. There are approximately two empty shops on the road (both corner shops) including what used to be the only bakers on the road and one that has been empty for considerable time. Most of these commercial businesses, apart from the obvious convenience stores and betting shops, are independent shops run by local people; as a result the owners potentially have a personal as well as commercial interest in the area and some of whom have previously discussed the problems and issues concerning the regeneration process to the local press (Keighley, 28 Mar 2011).

Residential

There is a mixture of residential properties on Saltwell Road; the most prominent is the traditional Victorian/Edwardian Tyneside flats which is the main housing stock in the area of Bensham and Saltwell. To the north end of Saltwell Road there has been modern, post 1950's flats built whilst to the southern end, leading to Saltwell Park can be found post 1950's brick housing. The roads that lead off Saltwell Road mainly consist of Tyneside flats, a number of which have been either knocked down or boarded up for demolition. Moving away from Saltwell Road can be found the local schools, Kelvin Grove Primary School, Corpus Christi RC Primary School and the churches St Chads and Corpus Christi Church.

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30. This information was obtained from the Office for National Statistics in 2010
 31. This information is obtained from NHS South of Tyne & Wear from 2004-2008 and updated on 15 March 2011. It is calculated through taking the expected number of years an average person will live created by combining data from the National Statistics Public Health Mortality Files (aggregated over 3 years) and the Mid-year population estimates for Gateshead wards (ONS experimental statistics). The data shown is an aggregation of five individual years.
 32. This information was obtained from Connexions Tyne and Wear (Gateshead Council) from November 2010 to January 2011 and last updated 17/03/2011. Connexions aims to provide information, advice and support to young people between the ages of 13 and 19. Local Authorities now have responsibility for delivery of the Connexions service.
 33. Information obtained from Gateshead Council in 2008 with a last update in March 2011. It measures the proportion of dependent children who live in families in receipt of out of work benefits and working families whose income is below 60% of the national median income. The term child is defined as any dependent child under the age of 20.
 34. Crime data is provided by Northumbria Police to Tyne and Wear Research and Information. The number of Anti-Social Behaviour Incidents is displayed as a rate per 1,000 people (from the ONS Experimental Population Estimates) in the neighbourhood.

Appendix C

Saltwell Community Voting Box Results

Questions and results from the Saltwell Community Voting Box when placed around Saltwell and Bensham.

What event would you most like to see taking place in Saltwell?

27/06/12 - 14/07/12

	Bensham Grove (27/06-07/07/12)	Dominic's Café (10-14/07/12)	Overall Total	Overall Total (%)
Film screenings	18 (19.6%)	24 (29.3%)	42	24.1
Music festivals	21 (22.8%)	24 (29.3%)	45	25.9
Community Art projects	21 (22.8%)	16 (19.5%)	37	21.3
Community place	7 (7.6%)	12 (14.6%)	19	10.9
Local website/chatroom	25 (27.2%)	6 (7.3%)	31	17.8
TOTAL	92 (52.9%)	82 (47.1%)	174	

What should happen on the grass area until the new housing is built?

16-21 July 2012

	Dominic's Café	Overall Total (%)
Weekly/monthly food and craft market	19	20
Music, film and art events	31	32.6
Allotments for local people	32	33.7
Sports area for young people	7	7.4
Nothing, just tidy it up	6	6.3
TOTAL	95	100

What online support would you like to see available locally for young families?

6-18 August 2012

	St Chads	Overall Total (%)
A chat room to talk and support each other	3	20
Text system for local support and information	1	6.7
The use of social media to find out about local events	8	53.3
The use of smartphone apps to find out about local events	1	6.7
Support in the creation of your own personal or group web page	2	13.3
TOTAL	15	100

I would get involve in community events if I felt they would benefit the Saltwell community. 25 July – 4 August 2012, 24 vote

On a scale from Strongly Disagree –Disagree – No Opinion – Agree – Strongly Agree, the marker finished just above ‘no opinion’ in the agree bracket.

What would you like to see in your local area for young families?

20-31 August 2012

	St Chads	Overall Total (%)
More ‘how to cook cheaply’ support and advice	8	27.6
A new outdoor play and activities space	6	20.7
Low-cost day trips away	6	20.7
An online ‘what’s on your local area’ advice	7	24.1
More arts and crafts activities	2	6.9
TOTAL	29	100

Appendix D

Example Cooking Participant Questionnaires

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire. All data will be kept anonymous. If you have any questions then please email me at ben.jones@ncl.ac.uk

1. Gender M ☐ F ☐

2. Age

3. First part of your postcode

4. Do you have the Internet at home? yes ☐ no ☐

5. Do you have W-fi or cable at home? Wi-Fi ☐ Cable ☐

6. Which of these do you have at home? Computer ☐ Laptop ☐ Tablet ☐

7. Have you got a smartphone? yes ☐ no ☐

8. What do you use your mobile phone for?

Make phone calls ☐ Texting ☐ Internet ☐

Apps ☐ Facebook ☐ Twitter ☐

Maps ☐ Taking photos/videos ☐ Other ☐

If you ticked other please say what

14. Are you interested in growing food and would you be interested in starting a growing group?

yes ☐ no ☐

15. Are you interested in presenting your own short online cooking lesson?

yes ☐ no ☐

If yes please leave your contact details here:

Chapter 11: Bibliography

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