



In Flux

A collaboration between Excavate
and the Centre for Hidden Histories.





In Flux

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Common Cause Research

This case study was produced in 2018 as part of the Common Cause Research project.

Common Cause aimed to document and explore existing collaborative research between universities and Black and Minority Ethnic community organisations. The project was funded under the AHRC Connected Communities Programme and included partners from University of Bristol, University of Liverpool, Xtend, University of Nottingham and Runnymede Trust.

We hope that these case studies will provide inspiration to those thinking of engaging in collaborative research, as well as insight into the challenges and benefits of such partnerships. Our intention in these case studies is to document the relationship between the partners from the academic institution and the community organisation. We have not evaluated the projects or engaged with the project participants. However, by capturing the perspectives of the partners, we hope to understand the structural and practical support needed to initiate and run projects involving universities and Black and Minority Ethnic organisations.

You can find more case studies, resources and information about Common Cause Research at www.commoncauseresearch.com.

At A Glance

Title

In Flux

Key Partners

The Centre for Hidden Histories
<http://hiddenhistorieswwi.ac.uk/>

Excavate

<http://excavate.org.uk/>

Funder

The Centre for Hidden Histories, through a grant from the Higher Education Innovation Fund

Dates

June 2015 – July 2017

Websites

<http://hiddenhistorieswwi.ac.uk/uncategorized/2017/02/in-flux-first-public-performance/>

<http://excavate.org.uk/projects/in-flux/>



Performance of In Flux, Nottingham.
Photograph by Andy Barrett.

Project Summary

In Flux is a collaboration between Excavate, a community theatre company, and The Centre for Hidden Histories (CHH) at the University of Nottingham undertaken between June 2015 and July 2017. Excavate is a Community Interest Company (CIC) established in 2000, it creates site specific theatre and works with local communities across the East Midlands. The company aims to unearth stories that shape, define, divide or bind communities together and has also produced a body of research about its work in conjunction with the University of Nottingham. Most projects undertaken by Excavate are delivered in partnership; some ideas are developed by the company which then seeks out partners to work with, other projects are developed after an organisation approaches Excavate with an idea. Excavate is part of several regional and international networks that look to develop and investigate community and participatory arts.

The Centre for Hidden Histories is one of five First World War Engagement Centres, established by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), to support community engagement activities that seek to reflect on and commemorate the legacy of the First World War. A key aspect of work undertaken by the Centres is to connect researchers from universities with communities. The lead university for the Centre for Hidden Histories is the University of Nottingham, the Centre has a consortium of staff from the universities of Nottingham, Derby, Nottingham Trent, Leeds, Manchester Metropolitan, and Goldsmiths University of London. Themes of particular interest to the Centre for Hidden Histories include migration and displacement, the impact of this and subsequent legacies of the First World War on diverse communities within Britain.

A key historical event informing the development of In Flux is the Sykes-Picot agreement made during the First World War, a secret arrangement between Great Britain and France that led to the division of the Ottoman Empire into various French and British-administered areas. The year 2016 was the centenary of the Sykes-Picot agreement which is described as defining the borders of Iraq and Syria and a key



Panorama from In Flux performance, Nottingham.
Photograph by Andy Barrett.

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influence on the current map of the Middle East. In Flux aimed to examine the history of borders in the Middle East and the implications of their collapse on those living in, or fleeing from, the wars taking place in this region.

Excavate undertook background research, with support from the British Red Cross and the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum. This research focused on spending time with and interviewing people who had made hazardous journeys to find safety in the UK and with others who could provide knowledge and insight about asylum, refugees and current day issues in the Middle East. The data generated through this work informed the development of a theatre performance, In Flux, with a cast from Bakur, England, Syria and Iran. The performance, presented at venues including Theatre Royal Nottingham and Nottingham Playhouse, has three interlinked monologues: the history of the secretive Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, a key influence of the current map of the Middle East; the story of a woman whose sisters live in Kurdistan and yet find themselves in four different countries; and the account of a young man who escaped the war in Syria and travelled via the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean to Nottingham.

How the collaboration came about

Excavate have worked with the University of Nottingham for over 10 years, before the Centre for Hidden Histories was set up at the University. The initial connection was established by Excavate who approached the University to communicate that they were interested in undertaking research about their work. Subsequently, Excavate and academics from the University worked together on a couple of projects.

It goes way back because so many years ago ... probably like 10 years ago or more ... the company (Excavate) actually approached the University to say we do community theatre and we would like to do some research, we'd like to know more about what we're doing and the impact of what we're doing. And as a result of that we developed a relationship with two members of the School of Education, I'd actually formed that relationship with them because they were doing some research on the Creative Partnerships Programme and I was a practitioner and they came and interviewed me, so there was an element of knowledge of who each other were. And through that we ended up doing a big project with them over a period of years. From that we became connected to the University in a way, our work was known. Quite a lot of our work is about gathering stories, histories and creating pieces of work that have at the heart of them an exploration of identity of geographical communities. We were then asked to do another project. So that kind of brought us in ... through doing that we became connected with the History Department as well.

(Community partner)

When the Centre for Hidden Histories was established, staff from the University who were already aware of Excavate recommended the company as a community organisation the Centre could work with.

We knew Excavate, they've worked with the University before. They'd done a couple of projects before I joined the University, but the relationship existed between University and (community partner's) theatre company. And so when I came on board and I was looking for people to work with, other members of staff recommended (community partner) as one of the people to work with. And he was actually named as a key partner in our bid to AHRC, so we needed to identify potentially a community and a local authority partner, this was the bid for the Centre for Hidden Histories and so (community partner) effectively been a partner on the main project, Centre for Hidden Histories, since its inception.

(CHH partner)

Terminology such as 'research', 'collaboration' and 'Arts and Humanities' was not a specific focus for discussion in relation to In Flux. Excavate and the University of Nottingham had previously undertaken collaborative research together and common ground was already established in relation to undertaking collaborative Arts and Humanities research. The community partner had learned from previous work with the University that collaborations can take place in different ways.

Well in previous projects the collaborations happened in different ways. So I was aware that it could happen in any number of ways. So for one of the projects we had an ethnographer all the way through, so the collaborator was very much with us the whole time pretty much, you know documenting, writing what we were doing.

(Community partner)

In relation to race and ethnicity, both partners describe that initially the focus of the project was not on Black and Minority Ethnic communities, this occurred as the project evolved and people from the Middle East became the key focus. The connection with

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refugees evolved through discussions about the League of Nations that was set up after the First World War and which established a Commission for Refugees.

It wasn't about BME communities, it was about non British communities (in the early discussions). But then we moved towards the Middle East, but it was because of a historical reason, it was because of the Sykes-Picot agreement, it was because of history. It was because it was the centenary of Sykes-Picot happening in the Middle East. The decision was based on the history, not on the community of people we were talking to. So it happened to be the Sykes-Picot agreement, if it had been a partition story, the centenary of that for instance, we might have been engaging with the Indian and Pakistani communities. In between discussing Sykes-Picot and focusing on the Middle East there was the idea of refugees, because of the idea of setting up the League of Nations which was one of the results of the First World War, and through that the kind of initial ideas of refugees. So there was a connection there.

(Community partner)

The long-standing connection between the community partner and the University was a significant factor in how the In Flux collaboration came about between Excavate and the Centre for Hidden Histories.



Performance of In Flux, Nottingham.
Photograph by Andy Barrett.

Developing collaborative research

The idea for In Flux came from the community partner and is described as evolving from initial discussions with the Centre.

Ultimately, the kind of finished idea of what the project would be came from me... but it came about through a series of discussions and us narrowing down what it would be that we would do. And that came about through the experience of actually going out and talking to people and realising that the topic was just too big.

(Community partner)

The CHH partner is of the view that In Flux should be seen more as the community partner's project.

In fact it's more proper to think of this as (community partner) project than ours. We had the ambition to work with the Middle East as a topic and then Middle Eastern communities as a people. I made some effort to do that and they weren't all that successful. I came up against barriers and things like that.

(CHH partner)

A key barrier encountered by the Centre for Hidden Histories in progressing work with a focus on the Middle East relates to identifying the relevant communities and establishing contact.

Firstly it's finding the people. And so I mean I had to do some real digging around to find out where these people were but these are far smaller and dispersed

communities and I just had to pull in all the contacts that I had and just have conversations with people. I was given a piece of advice that there was a disproportionately large number of Kurdish people in Plymouth. And I found a contact down there from the British Red Cross, and they'd got their headquarters in Plymouth and I went down to see them, that didn't come to anything. I had a conversation with (community partner) and he's got some contacts in Nottingham with the Refugee Council and he was much more successful. But in terms of getting to the people, we weren't able to go to the community directly ... as we'd have done with every other community we've worked with. I mean we have go-betweens in some sense, but only just to find names. To identify other groups we've got a contact at say Leicester City Council or the Heritage Lottery Fund or the Arts Council (who we can go to) and say 'I'm trying to work with these people', they say 'Oh yeah, here's a group, here's a group' and then their contact details come in – this, In Flux, was different.

(CHH partner)

A further barrier to engaging with people who have asylum seeking or refugee status relates to their concerns about how official bodies might use, or misuse, the interaction or information they provide.

Some of the people that (community partner) has spoken to were frightened when we approached them. Because he was, although he isn't part of the University, he was representing the University, which they took to be as the government. And if the government starts asking questions about you, then that's something to be worried about. And it took a long time building trust, and a long time in sort of gaining that trust. And with that it means that for universities and for the civic organisations that want to do this, we need time and we need resources and we need to have that kind of patience. And what I mean by that is the institutional patience – we are not going to see the returns on this for a long

time. We're going to spend a long time developing that. And to a certain extent were it not for (community partner) I don't think we could have got the project anything near as well done as we have. I still consider this as being sort of a pilot approach for us at the University, the value of this is to say this can be done and these are the things that we want to get out of it.

(CHH partner)

The community partner describes the aim of the project as being to create a performance that would explore the historical moment, 100 years previously, of the Sykes-Picot agreement and use that to investigate questions around borders, their fragmentation, dissolution and the impact on people's lives.

Now obviously that's a huge subject but we thought that we might be able to create something that allowed us to work with members of the Middle Eastern community to tell their stories in a way that absolutely got away from the victim discourse that was going on. And create something that was generally informative and provocative.

(Community partner)

The community partner had thought it would be difficult to explain the Sykes-Picot agreement to communities in an engaging way during early discussions but found this was not the case.

But it was interesting because of the historical connection with the centenary and the history. You know that meant that it was always going to be difficult when I was describing the project but actually funnily enough a lot of the communities we spoke to, particularly the Kurdish communities, they knew a lot more about the topic. They were very pleased and interested. It was very much like all our

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projects, we try and start with a conversation with people and then the form kind of evolves around the conversations that we had.

(Community partner)

A similar observation, regarding knowledge of the Sykes-Picot agreement among people of Middle Eastern origin, is made by the Centre for Hidden Histories.

We identified that the Middle East had a huge amount of relevance to the First World War. In some understandings the impact of the First World War on the Middle East is the longest legacy ... and it's a very, very strong contemporary element ... and it's almost unknown. And so we began to look at the Sykes-Picot agreement, its known from research that's been done that in the Middle East itself the main Sykes-Picot history resonates, and people would know what you mean. If you were to stop somebody on the street in certain areas and say Sykes-Picot they would know what you meant. And if you do that exercise in Britain nobody would know.

(CHH partner)

In developing the research aspect of the project, the community partner highlights additional work undertaken to support community members due to the plight of their situation. There was a supportive and a social angle to engaging with communities.

And in the conversations that we had, we ended up, particularly me, doing lots of other work around the edges because of the situation at the time. The political situation, the kind of desperate situation of people that we spoke to, I'd got loads of people, teaching them English, coming round my house for dinner, giving things to people, it was like ... a lot of the project ended up being non arts based in a way.

(Community partner)

The remit for the Centre for Hidden Histories includes looking at the impact of war on the communities that make up modern Britain. The Centre was aware that it had been successful in engaging some Black and Minority Ethnic communities more than others; the communities established over a longer period of time, with access to people in positions of power and authority are described as being less excluded than those without these assets.

The first group we worked with were Sikhs in Leicester, and we found this Sikh community overall to be very, very engaged. And although yes in one sense they're a minority group, they weren't an excluded group. You know if you think that (for the specific project they were working on) they've got access to the heritage infrastructure of the UK, they've got the ear of ministers. One of the people on their board was a Lord. So these are people who have an access to that. And we were interested in making sure that we didn't miss out the groups that don't have access to that, particularly newly arrived Middle Eastern communities who haven't yet had the multi generations of people in this country.

(CHH partner)

Another possible reason some Black and Minority Ethnic communities may engage more than others with heritage work connected to the First World War, is described as being related to the way colonialism was experienced by people from different countries and how they view related heritage in the modern day.

For some communities it's similar to the White British point of view that this is a piece of history that is of inherent value, that is inherently a piece of public history because it affected so many people, and is inherently worth examining, commemorating and sharing. For other community groups it's a lot more heavily politicised, which doesn't mean they want to ignore it, quite the contrary, but it

means that they wouldn't necessarily do it in the same way. I've had conversations with people who are representatives of African Caribbean communities who have got a very kind of charged politicised view of this and they don't see it in terms of this is a piece of heritage let's share it and celebrate it. Sections of those communities see this as part of a different conversation, that this is something to do with the struggle, they see it in terms of colonialism. Now this is interesting because the Sikh experience is one of colonialism, but was kind of a different ... they were treated differently. And that's had an impact on those communities today. There's been some very interesting conversations I've had with members of the Chinese community, who are an even more forgotten aspect of the First World War. And the use of Chinese labourers, which have a lot of similarities with slavery, the way that they were treated and mistreated, the way they were exploited, the way they were dehumanised. Those groups also see it in those stark terms.

(CHH partner)

A lack of confidence is highlighted as a potential barrier to individuals engaging with communities they are interested in working with.

I know that there people who, for the best of intentions, are frightened about having conversations because they're going to use the wrong terminology, they're going to say something dreadful. Conversely other people don't worry about that and they go and do say something appalling. Some people ... particularly older people ... that's straying into prejudice there too but they find that they would prefer to have somebody to go out and do this kind of outreach work for them, they want an outreach expert, in the same way they wouldn't do their own finances, or run their own budget because they've got somebody they could call

on to do that kind of thing. So to a certain extent there is a demand for an expertise, a particular expertise now.

(CHH partner)

The importance of outreach work in developing research with communities is highlighted and this requires skills, confidence and expertise relevant to the specific communities being approached. Black and Minority Ethnic communities established in a country for several years can be, relatively, easier to locate than new migrants, those seeking asylum and refuge may be more difficult to reach and require sensitivity regarding their immigration status; a related risk is that communities that are easier to reach are the ones more likely to be approached. The feedback highlights that communities can hold more knowledge about a topic, in this project the Sykes-Picot agreement, than is initially envisaged by those who wish to engage them in a project. A further consideration is that the views and experience of people regarding policies such as colonialism are likely to impact on whether and how they engage in collaborative projects in which such policies are a focus; this suggests that research projects should accommodate representation of a range of perspectives to avoid bias in knowledge generation.

Funding

In Flux was funded by the Centre for Hidden Histories through a sum of money they were awarded by the Higher Education Innovation Fund to support the work of the Centre, which had received its core funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Funding requirements included that the work undertaken should have a public engagement aspect, be undertaken with an established external partner and to innovate, to have something that couldn't have been done through any other means.

So effectively we were given a kitty of money that we could use. And so for us it was the obvious thing to do because the rest of our work was taking care of itself. This, because it was so much more difficult, it made sense for us to use this other sum of funding to do that.

(CHH partner)

After securing funding the community partner was approached by the Centre for Hidden Histories and asked if Excavate would be interested in developing a project with a focus on the Middle East. The community partner was interested to collaborate and put together a menu of options, with costings, for going forward which are described as being very useful for the Centre because it can be difficult for University systems to cost public engagement activities that don't fit the usual academic approaches to this work.

(Community partner) is an experienced deliverer of community projects, he can put a price on something, we're doing a similar thing with him now. So he goes away, he puts together a menu of options with broad costs, the kind of audiences, size of audiences he expects to be able to reach and how, timescales and things like that. For that, I mean the collaboration with (community partner) was very, very useful because he was able to write these estimates that we were then able

to work with. Which gave the project a little bit more of a structure and a background before we started doing it, in a way that I'm not sure we could have done as a university on its own. We can get costings for research projects, we can get costings to go and teach somebody, it's not well established in universities how you cost a piece of public engagement activity that isn't the traditional 'Here's an exhibition, here's a public talk'.

(CHH partner)

The community partner highlights additional, initially hidden, costs which are necessary to support community participants, and to build trust and relationships. However, community partners can end up paying out of their own pocket because these are not budgeted in to project costs and there is a lack of clarity regarding whether they can be included.

Yeah but you can't say oh we're going to do a project in which I'm going to spend ... you know I'll budget in five meals with an Iranian guy and three hours of teaching English when he comes round or whatever. Well I suppose, yeah that's a good question why do I feel we can't do that? I don't know. I would think that doesn't fall within the services if you like that we really provide to make community theatre. Yeah I mean doing this project again now knowing this I would have a much greater idea about what you would need to do.

(Community partner)

A number of messages were highlighted for consideration by funders, based on the overall work undertaken by the Centre for Hidden Histories and its approach to funding community groups:

- Appropriating a sum of money that can be issued as direct grants to communities who undertake work without the involvement of academics. This

money is used to support the involvement of community groups with the Centre for Hidden Histories and covers costs such as research trips, travel costs to undertake archive work, visits to museums or to receive training relevant to the project.

This was incredibly useful, incredibly useful. And I would recommend any large scale grant has some kind of version of this. It was useful for several reasons, one of them was it was a very small grant by university standards, almost invisible by university standards - for the community group it was incredibly valuable.

(CHH partner)

- Making funding available for relatively small costs that can enable community groups to develop ideas, make their research more accessible, develop their IT or undertake preliminary research to support applications for larger grants.

£200 to get their website, put on their research findings and there were a lot of these little tiny costs, these research visits that they need to do even before they were able to apply for their own funding. They're not salaried staff, it's not like a university. So it was useful on that level.

(CHH partner)

- Taking steps to support and enable the process of applying for a grant accessible to community groups, is described as especially useful to those with no experience of making grant applications.

We deliberately made the application accessible so it would be open even to people who had never made a grant application before. We needed to gather the information so I put that information on there, effectively I was filling in the back

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end of it but as far as they were concerned, filling in this form - very easy, press send.

(CHH partner)

- Undertaking outreach work to inform community groups about available funding is described as important to establishing contact and building relationships.

The small scale direct grant was a very useful calling card, because it proved that we were interested. It made it easy to have a conversation because mostly it was me making sort of the overtures, I was reaching out to them, and so a lot of people are suspicious. As soon as you start saying 'Well I'm talking to you because we've got this scheme where we're giving out money' - it made that more easy. And once we had that kind of financial relationship, which as I say from a university point of view is tiny, for them it was huge - it showed that we were keen. I've got several people I'm working with who say 'That was the point I knew this could be done, that's the point where I knew that this was a real thing' - because money changed hands.

(CHH partner)

University payment systems are described as presenting a challenge to working with community groups due to the length of time taken to make payments, this can also damage existing and potential university-community collaborations. The issue of prompt payments is described as being of particular relevance to small community groups and organisations that don't match university categories relating to their payment systems.

The single biggest problem that I had with 3 ½ years of working with the Centre is getting the money out to the community partners. Partly it's a question that the

universities don't quite know how to regard them because they're not ... they're not in the university, they're not a large organisation or a heritage organisation, or a research council and they're not really a supplier, and they don't quite know how to categorise these people. And so the universities need to have a system, or need to have within their financial systems, a recognition that these small relationships exist. And they need to be able to pay these people properly and to pay them on time, because for us ... if I forget to claim expenses in a particular month I still get my salary at the end of that month. These community groups, if you don't give them their £500 that can be the difference between them existing and not existing. I mean I've got groups where things have gone disastrously wrong and I've spent ages trying to resolve it and I get worried sometimes – is this group going to work with us again.

(CHH partner)

Community participants were volunteering on In Flux and gave significant amounts of their time to work on the project, they received payment for expenses such as travel. The community partner also highlights delays in payment to participants as being problematic and the added factor of looking into whether and how they can be recompensed legitimately.

We sat down and said this is the deal, we've got X amount of shows and I can give you some money to cover buses, time. I could see that they needed some money, they were using up a lot of their time, and it would encourage them to kind of commit. But even that's been problematic because I have to pay them through the right channels and we need to do it in a way that is legally not going to get them in trouble.

(Community partner)

The funding for this project was secured by the Centre for Hidden Histories before commissioning the project. The community partner played a key role in devising options and costings for taking the project forward, this is described as helpful because universities can find it difficult to cost public engagement activities. Funding requirements can influence how a project is taken forward, in this project the requirements were to undertake innovative work with an established external partner and have a public engagement aspect; all are criteria that the project was able to meet. There were additional unforeseen costs, met by the community partner, to support participants and described as helpful to building relationships and trust; especially because the community partner and participants came together for the first time to work on the project. The CHH partner recommends options for addressing inequalities in access to funding for community organisations including through outreach work, providing direct grants for small sums of money and simplifying the process of applying for funding. University payment systems are described as a challenge due to delays in payment and potential negative impacts on the collaborative relationship, community partners and participants who may be experiencing financial constraints. Community participants who volunteer their time need to be recompensed promptly and there should be recognition of the fact that they cannot be expected to commit significant amounts of time, over several weeks or months, without being paid.

Undertaking the research

The Centre for Hidden Histories' involvement, beyond recruiting the community partner and providing funding, is described as minimal. The community partner is described as effectively undertaking the role that an academic Principal Investigator would undertake. The research aspect of the project focused on obtaining background information through informal interviews conducted by the community partner and attendance at a conference, with two community participants, to obtain background information.

This isn't one of our traditional coproduction pieces. The University's involvement in this was very, very slight. It was mainly (community partner's) project, we effectively provided a piece of funding. Our main involvement is in assessing this as a structural exercise. For example, we are not going to get a piece of purely academic publication out of this. It's possible that we'll be able to publish on the process of doing this, and I think in something like 'Research for All' or something like that, maybe an article and a case study about how the University of Nottingham did this outreach. We're not going to publish anything about the Middle East or about Sykes-Picot or anything like that.

(CHH partner)

We did that research on our own – all the contacts we made were on our own, the University never said speak to these people. The research angle was that the University invited us and paid for us to go to a conference and we took some community members, two Kurdish guys, to that. So we were invited into that space.

(Community partner)



Performance of In Flux, Nottingham.
Photographs by Andy Barrett.

The community partner was confident in undertaking the work and also surprised there was no academic allocated to work on the project. Some academic input is described as potentially being useful to developing the research aspect of the project.

No we didn't do that (work with the University to develop the interviews). Partly because we've done so many over the years and spoken to so many people that we felt confident about it. I mean I was slightly surprised we didn't have an academic attached to the project. I'm not sure why that is, it might have been to a certain extent because of the confidence in us as an organisation to deliver a holistic thing and the fact that we have a methodology that we talk about ... so that might have been part of it. It would have been useful to have academic input, I think that it might have been helpful to have a historical research angle. Yeah, I think that would have helped sharpen the focus quicker, which may have saved me time, I think it would have been of use, yeah, without a doubt.

(Community partner)

Both partners see the project as an initial, exploratory piece of work that has evolved organically which the Centre for Hidden Histories can potentially build on and any follow-on projects could have a more academic research angle.

I mean my thoughts are that this is a very preliminary piece of work and I hope that in time that we would be able to publish a piece of traditional scholarship research. It might be three projects down the line before we get to that stage and that might just be a case of we need to do more work, or more time needs to be passed. To demonstrate that this piece of work is of value to the University I need to put it in those terms and to say this is an early stage piece of work, we're not going to get a REF-able (Research Excellence Framework) case study out of this that can be used. It can be part of a portfolio of public engagement where you can demonstrate there's a piece of theatre that's been created, so there's a public

engagement output that exists, and that can be used in some way ... but it doesn't really fit within the formal assessment structures that the University has to go through.

(CHH partner)

In Flux is described as being of more value to the University from the public engagement perspective and able to inform the future development of these activities, which the University is currently working to improve.

Where Nottingham University is at the moment is that it recognises that it's got a bit of a deficit perhaps of public engagement and there's a strong drive towards sort of improving that. The University is not terrible at it, but we identify that the standard should be higher. And so there's work under way in the University now to improve that. And my case to that working party, saying well these kind of small scale projects are of value for the learning from it. And I think the most valuable outcome internally to the University of Nottingham is in the report, a case study report. I mean the fact that it's part of our reports is of value. But also something that I would be able to hand in through my department and hand in to the new Head of public engagement and saying look here's a case study and here's my recommendations and let's see how can we apply these recommendations across public engagement activities.

(CHH partner)

In addition to talking with people from the Middle East to inform development of the project, the community partner also had conversations with professionals working with refugees and those who had knowledge and expertise regarding borders and co-operation. The project evolved and was informed by feedback gathered from a range of people. This approach is described as useful and also unusual.

Yes, we were given total freedom to develop the project and I don't know why that is, I think it might be because we were trusted because we'd done a number of projects. And it wasn't a large amount of money we were given, compared to our previous project we'd done.

(Community partner)

Challenges to working in this way relate to being mindful about the sensitivity needed when working with vulnerable people and to capturing their interest in a project that is still evolving, with no predetermined outputs in place, at the point of recruiting community participants.

It was challenging because I didn't know what we'd make of it. So when you're working with people that are.... you're talking to vulnerable people, so you don't want to feel as though you're using them in any way. Because of course you always are if you're telling their stories. So it was like we wanted to offer them something, we wanted to offer them some involvement in it, but we didn't know what we wanted to make. So that was kind of ethically challenging in other ways. It also meant that when we were explaining to people what it was we were doing, and we didn't know what we were doing, it was very difficult to get them interested.

(Community partner)

The British Red Cross and the Nottingham Refugee Forum were key brokers in enabling access to people who had recently fled areas of war in the Middle East and arrived in Nottingham.

Our main community partner outside ourselves was the Red Cross. In fact our performances even fundraised for them ... and they have a group it's kind of a

support network for people who've just arrived as asylum seekers and we were basically signposted these people through them. And we didn't necessarily call them Middle Eastern ... they were from Iraq ... you know people were coming over from Iraq, there was a lot of Kurdish people. We'd get the people's stories, and we interviewed some people that had made the journey over wherever they were from ... they were from Iran, from Iraq, they were from Syria because that's where people were coming from, they were from Turkish areas of Kurdistan. Nobody from Saudi Arabia came over ... its places where the wars were going on.

(Community partner)

The informal interviews and conversations were conducted by the community partner. These informed the development of the performance but were not used in any other way, in order to maintain anonymity due to the sensitivity of the topic and the situation of some interviewees.

There was lots of issues around sensitivity of material. So originally we thought we'll interview all these people and there'll be this bank of interviews, recorded interviews with people explaining their journeys. It became obvious quite early on the people we were talking to didn't want that. So I just got rid of it, I just deleted it, because that was fair enough. They felt as though they would be putting their families under threat.

(Community partner)

Information gathered from interviews informed development of the performance which was designed to be small, suitable for touring and which could be presented in academic as well as community settings.

I realised that the design of it should be something that would fit within an academic or a community setting, something that we could do at a university or

We can bring to the academic table some really interesting stuff on it, these stories. It wasn't going to be a play, it was going to be people telling stories.

we could do at an Afghan restaurant. It wanted to be portable and small. But I was thinking okay research, research... we can bring to the academic table some really interesting stuff on it, these stories. It wasn't going to be a play, it was going to be people telling stories.

(Community partner)

Three community participants and the Artistic Director of Excavate, who was also the Director of the performance, worked together on producing the show. Some scenes became more sensitive during the course of the project as events unfolded in the lives of community participants, such scenes were omitted to protect them.

There was one situation where there was a cartoon of (a political figure) and it was quite an aggressive cartoon, and she (community participant) said can you not show that because there might be somebody in the audience and so we just censored it there and then. Then there were times when it was very very difficult because family members of another community participant were being arrested back home. You know suddenly it was very, very difficult to rehearse just because of the realities of the lives of the performers. So it was an incredibly difficult process.

(Community partner)

Community participants attended rehearsals when they could, the community partner organised the rehearsal space and advised on individual performance, costumes and so on. The final performance presents three interwoven memories: the history of the secretive Sykes-Picot agreement; the story of a Kurdish woman whose sisters all live in one nation and yet are separated by three borders; and the story of a young man who arrived in Nottingham from the Golan Heights via the Sahara Desert, the Mediterranean, the refugee camp at Calais and the back of a lorry. Large projections and live music were part of the performance, presented at venues in Nottingham and beyond.

In Flux

In Flux is described as an exploratory project undertaken by the community partner with minimal involvement of the University. The benefit of the project to the University is more in relation to public engagement than research, the project can form the basis of further research in future. Ethical considerations in recruiting partners to a project that is still evolving are described as a challenge. The interviews undertaken with community participants were not recorded in order to protect interviewees and engage them; this highlights a need to give consideration during the planning stages of research to issues regarding the collection, storage and use of sensitive data collected from vulnerable participants. The community partner was confident in undertaking the work and also surprised there was no academic allocated to work on the project. Some academic input is described as potentially being useful to developing the research aspect of the project.

Roles and responsibilities

An informal approach was adopted regarding roles and responsibilities, the Centre for Hidden Histories is described as having an administrative role and the community partner led on the design and delivery of the project.

It kind of evolved as a natural process. In essence (community partner) took on effectively a dual role. I mean his role was what would ordinarily have been the PI (Principal Investigator) so he was designing the project and leading it. My role representing the University was far more administrative in nature. So having challenges with an issue, how do we resolve problem X. You know whether it was a financial thing, whether it was a formal thing, whatever ... and I'd fix that.

(CHH partner)

The community partner provided updates to the Centre for Hidden Histories but otherwise feels there were no responsibilities to share in this project.

We didn't have an assigned academic. So in a way the only port of call really was (CHH partner). So in terms of kind of sharing responsibilities there kind of weren't any really. I mean we were providing a thing, we went away and provided the thing and they came to see the thing.

(Community partner)

In a broader context, the administrative role of the CHH partner, a Community Liaison Officer, is described as important to supporting collaborative research. The duties of this role such as organising meetings, dealing with financial aspects, establishing contacts and developing community engagement are described as important in enabling collaborators to give greater focus to the project.

I've said to people that probably the best outcome from my kind of role is that everything works, everyone turns up, they have the conversation, they can carry out the research, they deliver the performance, whatever it is. And that's really it. So yeah I'd just kind of urge Research Councils and universities to recognise the value of this. You can have somebody who can spend time, build up the contacts, plan things over many, many months, go out and meet with people, go to a venue that they will be happy with you going to ... and a lot of my initial outreach was in coffee shops. You're not sitting there in a room with an agenda, someone taking notes.

(CHH partner)

The brokering aspect of this role is described as key to developing and supporting collaborations and is also supportive of academics who do not have the time, or experience, to broker effectively between universities and communities.

Go to a venue that they will be happy with you going to ... and a lot of my initial outreach was in coffee shops. You're not sitting there in a room with an agenda, someone taking notes.

Accountability

Both partners describe accountabilities as being informal and because In Flux was recognised as a pilot project that there may be a risk it would not work out but would, nevertheless, provide valuable learning.

Much of the way this project was done, it was through not knowing what the outcomes were going to be ... if there were going to be any. And for a large part of the time I wasn't sure that we were going to be able to deliver anything. And we had to sort of acknowledge and accept that as a risk. I mean we were fortunate with the fact that because we had so many other projects on the go I would have been able to write up a report about this piece of work whether or not we'd got the performance.

(CHH partner)

The informal approach to accountability in this project was facilitated by the established level of trust and confidence between the University and community partner and is said to have worked well for both partners. A more formal approach would have been considered and put in place if working with a new collaborator. The feedback suggests an element of risk is present in projects that have no predetermined outcomes; nevertheless, this can be a valuable and necessary approach to undertaking innovative work and generates useful learning to inform future projects.

Outputs and legacy

Both partners describe the main tangible output as the In Flux performance which had been performed in four main theatre performances at the time of writing. The CHH partner will write a case study of the project as part of a wider report for the AHRC. The performance is described as being well received and attracted a diverse audience which was achieved, in part, as a result of talking to a wide range of people at the start of the project which raised awareness about this work.

A lot of the audiences have been Kurdish, Middle Eastern ... you know a lot of the audiences are not English audiences ... which has been the biggest success for me, we look out and there'd be a real mix. It was because of amount of people we engaged that were from countries in the Middle East, can you tell friends. Yeah, they knew that it was happening.

(Community partner)

Less tangible outputs are identified by both partners. The CHH partner describes the contact established with the community and related learning regarding outreach work as valuable to informing future projects.

The relationship with the performance and the community is the main intangible output. It means that ... we've got a stronger chance of working with these communities again in the future. Whether it's with the individuals concerned, that would be great, or whether it's with other people from similar or the same communities where this is the calling card that we use to get in. So the relationship is one of those - the knowledge we've gained of how do we get this piece of outreach in place.

(CHH partner)



Performance of In Flux, Nottingham.
Photograph by Andy Barrett.

The community partner describes the support provided to community participants, the confidence they gained, and the contacts established as some of the less tangible outputs of the project.

Fundamentally the performance and then all the associated social work are the main outputs. Yeah I was asked to give a reference for somebody to go to university, he's now in Cardiff. Non tangible output ... but it's not really, it's a very tangible output – our Iranian musician wanted to know how do I set up as a freelance artist, and I was able to offer advice. It's not to say she wouldn't have done it without this, but this was obviously a useful part of her process of doing that, being part of this performance.

(Community partner)

Ownership of outputs is described as lacking some clarity and though not a concern in relation to this project, it is acknowledged that this area requires greater focus and discussion in relation to university-community collaborations. The need for a more equitable approach to ownership is highlighted, particularly in relation to small community organisations who may not have access to legal representation.

I suppose in legal terms the outputs are owned by the University. It's not something that we've discussed or been concerned with on this project, although we perhaps ought to be ... but it's not something we should ignore on an ongoing basis. It needs future discussion. And it needs it from an equitable point of view. In one sense there are a set of defined rules that exist.....whoever pays for this has got an assumed right to a certain amount of the IP (Intellectual Property). It is potentially a worthwhile topic for more broader debate, I would consider to be a valuable panel discussion or paper to be given at a public engagement conference, and it possibly needs to be discussed in the relevant press as well, it

needs to be debated with people in the community. And I think that what we need to start acknowledging is that there needs to be some kind of representation of these very small groups that probably have no legal representation whatsoever, and to ensure that they retain some level of ownership of the work that they've put in. Otherwise there's a real risk that we're doing the exploitation that we set out specifically to address.

(CHH partner)

A further complexity regarding ownership of outputs is highlighted in relation to collaborations that have multiple universities and other organisations or individuals participating in a project.

The other aspect to that is that it's often several stakeholders. So it's not so much 'Here's the Research Council, here's the university, here's the community partner' – there are several universities. We need something that looks at branding, how you brand these products that you make. When you consider is this a University of Nottingham initiative, is it a Hidden Histories initiative, is it an AHRC initiative, what about the community groups?

(CHH partner)

The legacy of the project is described by each partner in a different way, reflecting the nature of their involvement with the project. Legacies identified by the community partner include: money raised for the Red Cross by passing a hat round at the performances; connections established with communities and organisations such as the Red Cross; a diverse audience attending the performances; and for Excavate, the opportunity to work on a project that is very different to previous work the company has undertaken. Further legacies are described as being possible but not yet realised.

I feel that we could present it now to a group of history students, to some international relations students, to students that are dealing with human geography ... and that they would get stuff out of it. It's not realised yet. So for instance the Imperial War Museum are interested in us doing it, so it might be that someone from the British Museum says 'Oh what was this thing you did, that sounds really interesting.' So the potential is there because it's an unusual piece of work. In a way it's a shame, it's a waste. It feels like we have got this really good piece of work and we're not doing anything with it. We could do more, I think push it more.

(Community partner)

Further appropriate resourcing is identified as potentially enabling more legacies to be realised.

Well money. We'd be suddenly saying here's some extra money so that you can employ somebody to kind of administrate, to organise the gigs. It would pay me for giving money to everyone that's doing something ... and it's a five person thing, because we have a technician come with us, big screen and what have you. It was a performance that took place in front of a really big screen all the way through, so it's like visually interesting, and there's a musician and there's all the performers.

(Community partner)

The legacy from the perspective of the Centre for Hidden Histories is the learning enabled by reaching and engaging one of the communities it had found hard to identify and engage.

In a way it's a shame, it's a waste. It feels like we have got this really good piece of work and we're not doing anything with it. We could do more, I think push it more.

One of the risks that we had all the way through the project is that if you say we're doing outreach to BME communities, then I'd go and work with the most easy to reach Sikh community and we would never have reached these people. So part of the legacy is it's not just how to do it, but that it should be done, this demonstrates that you know, and this makes it very clear that you cannot just sit back and go away and get David Lammy to open your event ... as we have done. Box ticked ... and also how far you define BME communities once you've reached one community how far do you go? And then some of the further lessons about how you go and do that.

(CHH partner)

The performance is the main tangible output of In Flux, the money raised for the Red Cross at these events has enabled them to purchase a stock of guitars that are being used to teach asylum seekers guitar lessons and are being lent to those who can play but do not have any other access to an instrument. The engagement of diverse audiences in the performances is seen as a valuable outcome. Intangible outputs such as the contact established with marginalised communities, provision of social and personal support and knowledge gained by all partners and community participants are also legacies that can inform future collaborations. The feedback highlights a need for more focused discussion regarding ownership of outputs and an equitable approach that avoids exploitation of community partners and participants. There is potential to realise further legacies from this project if relevant and necessary resources are made available.

Structural inequalities

The CHH partner highlights a number of factors that can prevent people from engaging in university–community collaborations and present a structural inequality in terms of access. Factors that can present barriers to engagement include geographic location, lack of awareness about the range of Black and Minority Ethnic communities, their particular circumstances and the size of community organisations.

In our work with communities that are based somewhere in the countryside, they don't have the same access as people in the cities do. So that is an example of a piece of structural inequality that these people ... it's difficult to know these people are out there, or how to go and reach them. These groups, new migrants, that we're working with, because they're so new, that's often the source of the structural inequalities that ... I mean some of them ... if you're a newly arrived individual who's seeking ... who's got indefinite leave status ... you'd often have larger priorities. If your community group isn't as large, then you have fewer people available to take part in this kind of project, fewer people to have those internal debates with.

(CHH partner)

Structural inequality is described in relation to representation whereby working with some people from a particular minority ethnic group is not representative of all people in that group, but there is a risk that it may be interpreted as such.

Let's say you're working with Syrians and you're working with newly arrived Syrians, you're working with that group of Syrians that are here because they're in opposition to the Assad regime. Are you getting the full Syrian perspective if you were speaking with those people? One issue I suppose we have on the

localised basis is that the people we can recruit to take part in these collaborations, are within those communities that get involved. And is there a further hidden group of people that don't get involved, and have they got some valuable perspectives to share?

(CHH partner)

The community partner highlights several structural inequalities:

- Community organisations that are known to universities and have an established relationship are more likely to be approached to participate in collaborative work, this limits who gets to collaborate.

It's not an open call, it's not ... and this is something that I'm very aware of as someone that is lucky enough to work with universities. With the universities ... it's about structure of clarity and openness and opportunities.

- Funding timescales can contribute to inequalities if academics recruit community partners from those already known to them, due to pressures of meeting funding deadlines. This leaves fewer or no opportunities for other organisations to collaborate.

So the AHRC might put out a call for something and the academics might go for it. Then those academics that are involved with the project go 'Oh we know this company' so you have a conversation, and before you know it you're part of the bid rather than them saying 'We are developing a project.' And that might be down to timelines, the funding ... we've got to turn the funding application round pretty quickly, all sorts of things.

- The use of unpaid volunteers in university–community collaborations is described as a structural inequality.

Well one thing ... and this is a structural inequality thing ... it's interesting because fundamentally they (community participants) were volunteers, Excavate was providing an opportunity. But then the flipside of that was we were providing a product, a piece of theatre, that relied on (community participant's) story. And him doing it, he was taking part in it. So you know it feels like he should be getting paid as much as everyone should be getting paid.

External impacts on the project relate to the political situation in Middle Eastern countries at the time the project was being undertaken and the transient nature of the lives of people who had fled from these countries. Community participants in In Flux who were directly affected by events in the Middle East needed to take time out which led to a delay in completing the project. Other people signed up to participate in In Flux, then had to move to another geographic location leaving fewer participants and a skills gap in the tasks they had agreed to work on, such as music, for example.

Another impact relates to the volunteering nature of community participants' roles and their wider responsibilities and commitments, this can mean they are not always able to participate if other more pressing demands present on their time. Further pressures on new migrants and those seeking asylum or refuge relate to demands on their time such as to attend language classes, appointments relating to immigration and precarious housing that can mean moving at short notice, including to new geographic locations and in some circumstances deportation from the UK.

One guy was producing a film for us and he was going to do some music for us. And then he left, he went to Cardiff ... it's a much more transient community. So

it's much more difficult to work on projects with people who don't know if they're going to be called in to the Home Office and sent off at any time. Or college, going to college to do English classes means that your availability is kind of being impacted a lot of the time. Suddenly you have a house available ... a flat available to you, so suddenly you want to spend a week decorating your flat. Just the nature of the lives of those people you work with - that had an impact.

(Community partner)

Lack of information and awareness about the range of local Black and Minority Ethnic communities, the geographic locations in which they reside, and the precarious situation of new migrants are described as structural inequalities that impact on who can access opportunities to participate in collaborative projects. The need to recognise sub-groups within communities is highlighted in order to avoid excluding them and making generalisations on the basis of work undertaken with a specific group in a particular community. Working mostly with community organisations that are relatively easy to reach and engage, or working repeatedly with the same organisations, are described as structural inequalities that exclude other groups from accessing opportunities to collaborate; funding and related timescales for delivering projects can exacerbate this because identifying, engaging and building trusting relationships with communities and community organisations requires time. Inequalities are highlighted in relation to the use of volunteers who give their time and input for free, or for minimal payment, compared to other paid staff working on a collaborative project. The precarious situations of some volunteers, such as those seeking asylum or refuge, require specific consideration regarding how they can be best accommodated to participate in projects that require significant input; this has implications for retaining community participants for the duration of a project and will impact on meeting project and funding timescales.

Representing communities

Community participants were recruited by the community partner both for the interviews to obtain background information and to work with Excavate on a performance. The community partner sought advice from The British Red Cross and the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum about the best way to identify and approach potential participants.

We went to the Refugee Forum. Yeah, so it's Nottingham Refugee Forum and the Red Cross. First of all we spoke to somebody who we knew that worked at the Refugee Forum and explained the project, what is ethically the best way to approach this, what should we not be doing. So we went through gate holders ... people who work with those communities. And we basically asked for advice. And then they suggested people for us to talk to. And then from that it kind of span out.

(Community partner)

Recruitment of community participants was, therefore, informed by people in contact with the organisations approached by the community partner and subsequently, those who came forward to indicate their interest in being interviewed and/or work on the performance. Word of mouth snowballing was also a significant; those interviewed, people in the university and other organisations also suggested people the community partner could approach.

The CHH partner highlights the difficulty in identifying new migrants and that they don't appear in official population statistics, so it is difficult to gauge how many people from a particular group are resident locally or nationally and the extent to which a project is representative of them.



Performance of In Flux, Nottingham.
Photograph by Andy Barrett.

It's a presumed limitation because these groups are so new, it's being able to know ... in the UK we know how many people who identify as BME, whether they identify as African Caribbean or they identify as South Asian or they identify as Far Eastern ... you know because they've been here long enough as a population that we've got figures, they appear in census and things like that, all this kind of thing. When you're dealing with a population group that's constantly changing, and they're also subject to things like ... I mean if you haven't got indefinite leave status then you can be deported. And it means that you're never quite sure what proportion of people you ought to be reaching for you to have any kind of penetration in that community.

(CHH partner)

Community participants represented themselves by presenting their own stories, in their own words, in the performance and pulling these together in rehearsals was done through discussion and mutual agreement with the community partner who was also the Director of the performance. Interpreters were used in interviews where there was no shared spoken language between the community partner and interviewees; all participants working on the performance had a shared spoken language and no interpreters were required or used for this aspect of the project's work.

One community participant wanted to perform his own story, rather than telling me it and somebody else performing it. He told me his story, I recorded it. I wrote it up, I showed it to him, I said I'm now going to write this as a storytelling, so the words are going to be different but as we work through it we can make changes. Another participant's story was a composite story plus an imagined narrative that I used to allow us to attach things to. Pulling from the other information from stories, pulling from interviews, thinking about borders, listening to programmes about the borders, so it was much more kind of ... there was a philosophical kind

of edge to it if you like about interrogating what is a border. And then she worked with me on kind of rooting it in. And then musically, the community participant working on this chose the music and the tunes and the type of things based on something that I'd had no knowledge of. So that language came through her expertise, not mine, nothing to do with me.

(Community partner)

The community partner acknowledges that though all participants contributed, ultimately, he took charge of pulling together and directing the overall performance. The audience reaction is highlighted as one way of gauging how authentic the material presented was.

Obviously I was directing it and ultimately kind of putting it together so ... but I do feel as though there were a number of people that put things in. The big success of it for me was the audience was very very mixed, we got a particularly large Kurdish audience. And they would be responding to things that I probably didn't even know about, the musical choices, about maybe something that was written. There was a whole load of stuff going on that I wouldn't have even known about, but I think that would come about from another language that I don't speak, which is language rooted in a culture that I know nothing about.

(Community partner)

Several challenges are highlighted in relation to achieving meaningful representation. Recruiting community participants through community organisations is valuable but means only those in contact with such organisations have opportunities to participate; word of mouth snowballing can be helpful in reaching others but does not guarantee a wide reach. Lack of information in the public domain about new migrants and other communities contributes to difficulties in identifying and reaching them. Representation in terms of translating community experience is described as being facilitated by

In Flux

enabling participants to represent themselves; however, it is acknowledged that limitations do present when one person, the Director of the show in this project, has overall responsibility and the final decision on content and presentation.

University–Black and Minority Ethnic community collaborations

Both partners highlight several issues for consideration in developing collaborative research between universities and communities. The community partner reflects that working with community participants who are refugees is different from working with those who are not and extrapolating learning from this group to apply to other Black and Minority Ethnic groups is not possible.

I couldn't say anything other than the specifics of their situation as refugees, implications of this on their lives and on participation in the project. In terms of what I've learnt from this, I couldn't extrapolate to other communities. It was certainly different working with a group of refugees than with people who aren't refugees.

(Community partner)

The CHH partner acknowledges In Flux does not demonstrate collaboration in all aspect of developing and delivering the project, partly due to its experimental nature; nevertheless, he emphasises the importance of having a clear plan that supports academic and community partners to collaborate at all stages from design to delivery. Financial planning should be thorough, taking account of all costs and having a dedicated brokering role is recommended.

I mean this sounds contradictory in relation to In Flux, but to sort to have a ... have a plan to go and do this type of work at the point when you are making funding applications, but recognising the need to collaborate all the way through. So, being able to state more ... you know your aims for this kind of impact. And

also to incorporate the finances that are required, the time that's required, the amount of effort that's required into your plans. We do recommend, we have recommended to other university partners to have a dedicated project officer or a community liaison officer to go and do this kind of work. And I've talked about that to staff in Research Councils and they endorse our view. So that's something to think about because of the effort that is required. And to recognise it as a valuable piece of work for the project.

(CHH partner)

The community partner outlines that it would be helpful to have greater clarity about why universities undertake collaborative projects, what they get out of them and what they put into them. The reasons academics work on collaborative projects are described by the community partner as potentially ranging from enabling career progression, to a desire for affecting change for political and humanitarian reasons.

Okay, I think with universities ... I think it's really helpful to know what they want to get out of it, why are they doing it and also what are they going to put into it. Because obviously sometimes universities would do a project and you really commit to it, and then you realise that actually at the end of it they (academics) move on to the next thing. Because actually there may be more of a career laddery kind of thing going on with some researchers, than the ideal which would be something that we're all committed to. You know well actually I'm doing this, I'm making this work because I have a strong political humanitarian belief in it. I think in a way what are you willing to do in this project, what are you willing to sacrifice for this project, how muddy are your boots?

(Community partner)

The feedback highlights the need to remain mindful and vigilant about extrapolating and applying knowledge and experience gained from working with one minority ethnic group to another, or indeed from a subgroup of a larger community to other groups in

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that community. Planning, including finances, between all partners and at all stages of collaboration is described as a key aspect of developing mutually beneficial collaborations. University motivations in undertaking collaborative work and how this will be used should be made transparent.

The future

Both partners are keen to continue collaborating and are discussing plans for future projects, including follow on work from In Flux. The community partner emphasises the importance of collaborating both in order to access funding and to shed light on social issues that arts organisations connect with. Challenges encountered should be seen as points of learning that inform how things can be done differently in future.