Communities and Culture Network+ Annual Report 25.10.13

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Key Findings to date:

1. Digital transformations of communities and culture are hugely affected by the austerity measures and welfare reforms. Firstly the austerity measures have produced severe cuts across the sectors we primarily engage with (third & public sectors), which has meant that regardless of technological innovation, if there is insufficient resources to implement change, transformation will not happen. Secondly, there is at the same time and increased pressure to use digital technology as a cost effective means of engagement. This has produced a real lived tension between organizational pressure to embrace digital, and a lack of means to engage. All our work to date has therefore necessarily engaged with complex, specific and general organizational, lived and technological process and practices.

2. The cuts to the public and third sectors, in addition to the Localism initiative of the current government have increasingly fragmented resources that have traditionally helped or sustained communities: public sector representatives talk about an increasing 'lag' between services (social, youth, homeless, food aid, education, health, civic). At the same time, the digital initiatives, which generally try to map or connect services, face problematic ethical and security issues. Quite often the underpinning support services for communities have insufficient resources to cope with an increase in demand, so making them visible via digital technologies is problematic, as is the sharing of sensitive data, which is still plagued by security issues. There is a real question, then, about transforming these sectors through digital technologies that goes beyond 'simple' top down design or innovation.

3. The communities that are benefitting from digital innovations are middle-upper class, consumerist communities in specific locations. This is because much innovation is directed at a consumerist neoliberal model, and those with income can benefit. Smart home technology, personal devices, mobile technologies, smart bins may all enable these communities, but they do so in very particular ways.

4. At the same time, the third sector and public sector communities we engage with, express deep concern that issues of responsibility, welfare, civic duty are being erased from these sectors, leaving only a consumerist neoliberal model. The increased pressure to embrace partnerships and decentre resources have produced a vacuum in terms of who is actually responsible for civic or welfare issues. Wider discourses of 'resilient' or 'sustainable' communities celebrate activities that also work to de-politicize or a-politicize these issues.

5. Our current task as we see it, is to work towards an ethically robust technologically-orientated solution that engages with these issues. For our Network+, designing technology without consideration of these lived realities does not move us forward. Our current call will hopefully work towards this. There is increased interest in technologically innovative solutions because of the pressure to engage, which has opened up real possibilities for impactful engagement. However, we need to deal with the issues as a whole: if we were just to focus on design over implementation or ethical consideration, we would simply be adding to the noise, and repeating the mistakes of the past.

THE AIMS OF THE CCNETWORK+ ARE:

1. To both produce and facilitate creative, targeted and response led activities that directly speak to the speed and scope of digital technological change while simultaneously critically interrogating it.

We are addressing this aim through a number of funded activities which have all been peer reviewed. We have also issued a third call for further pilot projects), networks and placements to commence January 2014 (deadline 1st November. Outputs in the form of interim and final reports are published in our online working papers series as well as usual scholarly and policy publications. The original scoping studies (2012) have been picked up by OfCom, LARIA, LGComms, *the Conversation* and other universities. Published journals and books are noted below in the section on outputs. **Current funded activities** are listed below. Many have gone onto receive significant further funds, which demonstrates the success of the model and the quality of the research. Those that have attracted significant funds are marked with a *:

Seed projects (£1-6k):
Event Mining in our Rural Past. Led By: Kate Byrne (University of Edinburgh), Peter McKeague (RCAHMS).Status: Awarded.
Big Talk about Big Data: Discourses of 'Evidence' and Data in British Civil Society. William Allen (University of Oxford):. Status: Awarded.
Food Aid Scope. Led by: Liz Dowler (Warwick University), Hannah Lambie-Mumford (Sheffield University). Status: Commenced.

Scoping Studies (~£25k):
Plenty as a Response to Austerity?: Expanding big data expertise in cultures and communities. Led by Caroline Bassett (University of Sussex). Status: Awarded.
In/visible and un/fixed Communities: Living with the Welfare Reforms. Led by Helen Thornham, Edgar Gomez Cruz (University of Leeds). Status: Commenced.
Capturing the lived experience of food bank clients and volunteers. Led by Marialena Nikolopoulou, Karen Martin (University of Kent). Status: awarded.

Pilot Projects (£25-30k):
Everyday Growing Cultures. Led by Farida Vis (University of Sheffield). Status: Completed, final report due.*
Digital Data Methods. Led by Helen Kennedy (University of Leeds). Status: Completed, final report due.**
Trajectories to Community Engagement. Led by Dave Harley (University of Brighton). Status: mid-way through.
Reaching Out Online. Led by Sharif Mowlabowcus (Sussex Univeristy) and Justin Harbottle (Terrence Higgins Trust). Status: mid-way through. ***

Networks (£15k):
Storystorm. Led by Mel Woods (University of Dundee). Status: commenced
Sustaining Feminist Knowledge. Led by Kate O'Riordan (Sussex and Santa Cruz Universities). Status: mid-way through.****

* This grant has secured further funds from the ESRC (Festival of Social Science Funding), and AHRC (Cultural Values of Digging).
** The PI has just been awarded a prestigious AHRC 18 month Fellowship 'Understanding Social Media Monitoring', that develops from her pilot project
***'This grant received additional funding from the Big Lottery Fund, which matched the funding from the CCNetwork+
**** The CO-PI, Aristea Fotopoulou received awards from NEMODE for a research project at the University of Santa Cruz as part of their placement funding.

2. To radically conceptualize community and culture in a digital age through empirically grounded but methodologically innovative activities that are discrete-but-connected.

The concept of 'digital community' is one that is still being addressed by the CCNetwork+ through all its work. Some of the major changes that are currently being addressed relate to the Welfare and Austerity measures, which are shifting the power of the digital in third sector and public sector organizations in particular, as there is increased pressure to engage with digital technologies as a more cost effective means of engagement or communication. A second issue relates to the lived realities of these reforms on communities and cultures of practices. These issues have overtaken a technologically-focused approach for the CCNetwork+ because one of our key findings has been that regardless of the technology on offer to the sectors we are engaging with, if there are not the resources or people to take up the technologies, technological innovation will make little impact. We have discussed these issues through a number of knowledge exchange activities, including:

Annual CCNetwork+ Event: Digital Practices [IN]Visible Communities (September 2013). Keynote speakers Larissa Hjorth (RMIT, Australia), Eric T Meyers (Oxford Internet Institute), Anne Balsamo (FemBot, FemTechNet)

Workshops:
- Data Challenge (15th July 2013)
- Data Show and Tell (4th August 2013)
- Sarah Pink Workshop (29th October 2013)
- Queer, Feminist and Social Media workshop (May 2013)

Knowledge Exchange Activities:
- Trip to San Francisco, funded by the British Consulate (£12,750) March 2013 (report accessible at http://www.communitiesandculture.org/files/2013/04/USA-full-report.pdf)
- Exchange visit to Universidad de Medellin, Colombia, funded by the Universidad de Medellin (August 2013)
- Panel Presentation from the CCNetwork+ at the World Social Science Summit and knowledge exchange with University of Montreal and Toronto (September 2013)
- Erinma Ochu TEDX City Talk (September 2013) Everyday Growing Cultures
- Smart Towns (Farida Vis, Eriman Ochu, September 2013)
- Communities in the Digital Age Conference (Keynote Address, Helen Thornham June 2013)

3. To work with the communities and cultures to which and through which we speak in order to generate cross-disciplinary dialogue that impacts onto policy, industry, academia, and practitioners.

All of our activities involve community, policy and academic facing outputs and dissemination. This has produced ongoing dialogue and communication, and has helped shaped the directions of the CCNetwork+.

Organisations we work with include: Kew Gardens, FemBot, Terrence Higgins Trust, British Library, Science Museum, Leeds Council, Sheffield Council, Open Data Manchester, Open Data Sheffield, MadLab, The Kindling Trust, Grow Sheffield, FeedLeeds, FareShare, Trussell Trust, Space 2, Studio12, Leeds Museums and Galleries, Trafford Council, Co-Op, Mozilla, PROUD, Sussex Community Internet Project (SCIP), Brighton and Hove Museums, Age UK, Community Base, Worthing Society for the Blind, The Migrant English Project, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, Meridian Mature Citizen's Forum, The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Historic Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Milngave Heritage Trust, National Trust of Scotland, Dunblaine House Trust, The Govan Stones Trust, The Burns

Monument Centre, HIArts, Royal Bank of Scotland Archivists, Orkney Heritage Trust, Archives NZ, Digital NZ, Aotearoa Digital Arts Network, BBC Big Screens Network., FemTechNet, Brighton Feminist Collective.

Published scholarly outputs for the CCNetwork+ to date include:

- Ardèvol, E. & Gómez Cruz, E. (In Press). Digital Ethnography and Media Practices. In *International Companion to Media Studies: Research Methods in Media Studies*. Blackwell.
- Ardèvol, E. & Gómez Cruz, E. (2012). 'Digital technologies in the process of social research: theoretical and methodological reflections through virtual ethnography', 'n *Knowledge Politics and Intercultural Dynamics. Actions, Innovations, Transformations*. CIDOB/CEPAL: Barcelona.
- Bassett, C. et al. (2013), 'Better Made Up: The Mutual Influence of Science Fiction and Innovation'. *Nesta Working Paper Series* No. 13/07. http://www.nesta.org.uk/library/documents/bettermadeup.pdf
- Fotopoulou, A. (2013). 'Remediating Politics: Brand(ed) New Sexualities and Real Bodies Online'. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* Vol. 17, 3-4 2013, pp. 253-266.
- Gómez Cruz, E. & Ardèvol, E. (In Press). 'Digital ethnography and the field in media(ted) studies', in Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture Special issue – Media ethnography: The challenges of breaking disciplinary boundaries.
- Gómez Cruz, E. & Ardèvol, E. (2013). 'Performing Photography Practices in Everyday Life. Some ethnographic notes from a Flickr group'. *Photographies* 6 (1).
- Gómez Cruz, E. (2013). 'Más allá del álbum fotográfico: (des)materializaciones y memoria en la fotografía digital', in P. Vicente (Ed.), *Álbum de familia (re)presentación, (re)creación e (in)materialidad de las fotografías familiares* (pp. 175-182). Madrid: La Oficina.
- Gómez Cruz, E. (2012). 'La fotografía digital como una estética sociotécnica: el caso de la Iphoneografía'. *Aiesthesis* 52: Santiago de Chile.
- Tait, E. et al. (2013) 'Linking to the past: an analysis of community digital heritage initiatives'. *Aslib Proceedings*, Vol. 65 Iss: 6, pp.564 – 580.
- Thornham, H. & Parry, K. (2014, in press) 'Constructing Communities: The Community Centre as Contested Site'. *Journal of Community Development*.
- Thornham, H. & McFarlane, A. (2013) 'Articulating Technology & Imagining the User: Generating gendered divides across media' in Thornham and Weissmann ed. *Renewing Feminism: Narratives, fantasies and futures* IBTauris
- Thornham, H. (2014, in press) Claiming 'Creativity': discourse, 'doctrine' or participatory practice? *International Journal of Cultural Policy*.
- Thornham, H. (2013) *Digital Welfare Only Deepens the Class Divide*. The Conversation. http://theconversation.com/digital-welfare-only-deepens-the-class-divide-15828
- Townsend, L. et al. (2013) 'Broadband as a solution to the social and economic problems of rural isolation'. *Journal of Local Economy* Vol.28 (6), pp.580-595.
- Vis, F. (2013) 'A critical reflection on Big Data: Considering APIs, researchers and tools as data makers'. *First Monday* Vol.18 (10), http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4878/3755

Online

'The Transformative Potential of Gardening with Data': guest post on the *Open Knowledge Foundation* blog by Farida Vis.

'Digital welfare only deepens the class divide', article by Helen Thornham published in *The Conversation*, 8 July 2013

Digital Data Analysis, Public Engagement and the Social Life of Methods: Interim Report

Everyday Growing Cultures in the North of England: Interim Report

USA Research Exchange: In March 2013 Five members of the Communities and Culture Network+ travelled to the States, visiting San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Santa Cruz and Chicago, thereby marking the first step in a series of transatlantic exchanges for the network.

Communities in the Digital Age Symposium, 12th June 2013 - 'Engagement, Expertise and the Everyday or the Problems of a Tooling-Up Approach'. (keynote speech delivered by Helen Thornham, University of Leeds).

Working Papers Vol.1, April 2013

Public Engagement & Cultures of Expertise Scoping Report. This scoping project investigated public, civic and cultural engagement using Leeds as a case study for a wider snapshot of British culture and practices.

Cultural Heritage & Built Environment Scoping Report. This scoping study investigated the digital and

architectural thresholds between a heritage institution and the local community.

Everyday Life & Cultural Communities Scoping Report. Researchers at the University of Aberdeen ran a series of small projects and horizon scanning activities to empirically identify the function and impact of digital technologies in three contrasting areas of everyday life: cultural heritage, migration and sustaining rural communities.

'Expertise' Scoping Report. This strand of the scoping studies explored how questions of expertise intersect with issues arising around culture and community engagement with digital technologies as the latter become increasingly pervasive.

Future activities:

- Nordic Network for Digital Visuality. Knowledge exchange activities funded by the Nordic Network 2014.
- RMIT collaborative digital ethnographic research. 3 month exchange to do collaborative research around screen cultures. July-Sept 2014.
- Finland knowledge exchange and secondment. Caroline Bassett on behalf of the Network+. Sept 2014.
- Entrepreneurial Workshops. University of Aberdeen, February 2014
- Awarded Projects, networks and placements start January 2014
- Ethical hackathon. University of Leeds (2014)
- Cross Network+ call (see below) December 2013.

Collaborative Projects (2014-15)

NEMODE, Sustainable Society Network+ and Communities and Culture Network+ are launching a joint, interdisciplinary two-year project focusing on food banks. We aim to use food banks as a focal point and case study for a range of connected issues that vary in scope from the very local to the global. NEMODE is interested in issues of volunteer economics and platforms; Sustainable Society Network+ is interested in sustainable infrastructures, food chains and environmental impact; Communities and Culture Network+ is interested in the relationship between food banks and the wider political, economic and social landscape. However, while we each have interests and concerns around this issue, it is the combined strength of an interdisciplinary approach, which marks this project as unique.

The food bank project takes a social, cultural and civic issue that is locally felt and globally shaped as a case study. We aim to respond to the interdisciplinary issues we highlight through a combined critical and creative digital response: building for failure, for local and for disruption within systems. These pose a range of challenges that can only be met through the unique interdisciplinary approach suggested. The critical and ethical issues that are routinely asked within the Communities and Culture Network+ meet with the environmental, infrastructural and sustainable concerns of Sustainable Societies Network+. Both of these critically speak to the solution and innovation seeking aims of the New Economic Models Network+.

We propose a four-stage project that draws on the interdisciplinary expertise of each Network+, in a unique working relationship that will offer a whole system approach. The stages include open calls for research, open events for the wider community, workshops, hackathons, and prototyping: the methods reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the project.

Stage One: Identify the working practices, issues, concerns for food banks – including locating food banks within a range of economic, environment and community spheres. Address the scope of food banks beyond the Trussel Trust, identifying why this model in particular has been so successful, and what alternative models there might be.

Stage Two: Launch a range of calls for interdisciplinary projects, placements and networks that develop from and speak to stage one of the project.

Stage Three: Build and implement solutions to be used in a bottom-up way. In a global world of

big data, a digital solution that shares sensitive data about local populations may be ethically and politically problematic. Given this, is it possible to design a digital system that is local, useable and unhackable or minable? Can we utilize the newly available resources of big data or open data to routinely source food for food banks, without highlighting key geographic areas for interested parties if people or organizations want to remain hidden? Can we produce an ethically sound support that is digital in nature (in order to be useful for the national if not international user groups) that is built for a sporadically digitally literate population? What are the motivators and issues around food distribution to food banks from a range of perspectives and how can we build to improve this in a connected way?

Stage Four: Implement and test, through practical, critical and reflective processes some of the design-led propositions emerging form Stage Three.