Shifting authority in the evaluation of community-university partnerships

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Findings from ‘Starting from Values – Evaluating Intangible Legacies’
Project funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council
Outline

- In context
  - Introducing the project
  - What is ‘Starting from values’
  - Shifting authority
  - Discussion points
The context of our work

‘Connected Communities’ is a theme in the UK Research Councils for funding community-engaged research.

The Research Council recognises that current mechanisms for reporting on such projects is not adequate.

‘Starting from Values’ was one of seven projects funded to investigate new ways of articulating the legacies of this kind of work.
Introducing the ‘Starting from Values’ project

**Our premise:** Values of funders and partners shape decisions on which project outcomes and impacts are evaluated …but these are often *implicit*
Introducing the ‘Starting from Values’ project

Our premise: Values of funders and partners shape decisions on which project outcomes and impacts are evaluated …but these are often implicit …and some perspectives may be missing
Introducing the ‘Starting from Values’ project

Our premise: Starting from values in partnership projects give us new mechanisms for saying ‘what should be evaluated’
Introducing the ‘Starting from Values’ project

Our approach:

(1) Working in-depth with two strands of ‘Connected Communities’ projects

- The Scaling-Up Co-Design Project
- The Authority Research Network

(2) Building capacity among partners and working with a further six projects
What is ‘starting from values’?

Starting from Values’ means: taking what is important to individuals, project teams and organisations as the starting point for evaluating partnership projects.

Definition - we understand values as ‘principles or standards of behaviour; one’s judgement about what is important in life’

Oxford English Dictionary
What is ‘starting from values’?

.eliciting values (finding out what’s important to people)
prompting new thoughts and clarifying what these values might ‘look like’
identifying and mapping values-based aspects (processes and/or outcomes)
reflecting on the overview to articulate legacies

Broad stages of our values-based approach

Values elicitation by audio walk and diagramming

Prioritising values and mapping for evaluation
Shifting authority

Making values **explicit** allows us to systematically identify a broader spectrum of outcomes
(i) ‘missing’ ones
(ii) Deeper dimensions of existing ones
Shifting authority

Making values **explicit** ‘re-sets’ the balance – *who decides what is important to evaluate?*

This may be different from different perspectives

The systematic approach gives community partners and academics **new language** to speak about impacts and outcomes of projects - which ones may be ‘missing’.
Shifting authority

“You often go through a project and miss outcomes or legacies…you feel them but you don’t actually have the authority to articulate them.”

Justine, Silent Cities

The values lens provides a new way of looking at evaluation and outcomes
Concluding remarks

Recognising values from different perspectives can lend **authority** to ‘missing’ or new depth in understanding impacts, outcomes.

We can be **explicit** about why certain impacts ‘count’, and others – for evaluation.

Arts-based, critical and creative approaches are **needed**
- to articulate values
- give space for articulating and developing measures of deeper aspects of projects.
Thank you – project partners

Blackwood Foundation: a UK-based charity that helps disabled people of all ages to live more independently

Fossbox CIC: a non-profit specialising in open innovation and open source solutions for social impact

Silent Cities: a social enterprise that aims to build creative environments where silent voices can flourish

The Glass-House Community Led Design: a UK charity supporting participation and leadership in the design of the built environment

Academic partners in design, arts, humanities and geography from: University of Brighton, Open University, Cardiff University, University of Northumbria, Sheffield Hallam University, Brunel University and University of Sussex
Example of ‘missing’ outcomes identified

From Scaling-Up Co-Design project. Starting from Blackwood Foundation values
Example of ‘missing’ layers, depth identified

Starting from the values of the Authority Research Network (rather than individual projects)