Reflections Upon the Experience of Longitudinal Research into Cultural Event Production in a Developing Destination

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Reflections upon the experience of longitudinal research into cultural event production in a developing destination.

Key words: Longitudinal Research, Experience, Grounded Theory, Ethnography.

ABSTRACT

Longitudinal studies have the capacity to provide more nuanced explanations of tourism and event phenomena, taking account of complexity, change and context. This paper is a self-reflexive, methodological study of research practice. It investigates my experience of engaging with cultural event producers in an emerging destination over a 7 year period. Focussing on my research journey, it considers the social and relational dynamics associated with longitudinal research. Reciprocal relations and co-production of cultural events reveal nuanced information and expose fluid relationships and networks. Long term engagement uncovers evolving practices and develops understanding of event processes embedded within their wider context.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reflects upon an experience of engaging in longitudinal research. Focussing on my research journey, it responds to calls for greater reflexivity, debate and reflection within tourism and event research (Ateljevic, Pritchard and Morgan, 2007; Ren, Morgan and Pritchard, 2010) and for further consideration of researchers role as activists “affecting social change" (Mair and Reid, 2007:519). It demonstrates how long term engagement affects research practice and identifies the implications of this for research outcomes. Following Bottrill, (2003) and Ren, Morgan and Pritchard (2010) I contemplate my research journey. I consider how the combination of an experiential framing and practical learning in the field led to study evolving. I reflect upon the research process, focussing on my situation in relation to my research subjects, my actions and activities, my relations outside the research and my embodied characteristics (Coglan, 2012; Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). I acknowledge my lived experience within the research, my centrality to the investigation and complicity in shaping knowledge (Anderson & Austin, 2012; Botterill, 2003) as I explore the experience and implications of long term engagement.

This experiences identified in this paper are situated within a wider research project which investigates local cultural event production in an emerging destination, in East London. The research area encompasses the Olympic Park (hereafter called the Park) and its surroundings. A broad range of social/community and arts/performance conceptualisations of culture underpin cultural event production in the area (Stevenson, 2012). Event production is varied and encompasses small scale community and art

events, annual festivals, and several large events to celebrate the London Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 (hereafter called the Games) and the reopening of the Park. Cultural events are embedded within wider processes and practices associated with city regeneration and staging a mega event. Both involve a range of policy initiatives, promises and physical developments which impact on people in the local area.

The wider research project was designed to explore how a range of complex phenomena associated with event production converge and are experienced and acted upon by people in a local area. Specifically it set out to investigate local cultural event practices in the period of the Cultural Olympiad (4 years preceding and during the Games) and the first two years post Games in an area just outside the Park. A case study approach (Brewer, 2000) was adopted to capture local stories about lived experiences in the context of change. The study focussed on local perceptions and practices, thus an experiential framing was essential (Holloway, Brown and Shipway, 2010; Shipway and Stevenson, 2012). These local perspectives and experiences are subjective, reflect a variety of local values and are emotionally charged but when considered together common themes can be identified that underlie cultural event production in the area. Detailed findings of the early part of the wider project are published elsewhere (Stevenson, 2009; 2012; 2013). In contrast to the previous papers this paper is a self-reflexive, methodological study which focuses on my experience of research and its implications.

METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory

The research project was informed by grounded theory that was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and is based upon the belief in

- "the need to get out in the field if one wants to understand what is going on
- the importance of theory grounded in reality
- the nature of experience in the field for the subjects and researcher as continually evolving
- the active role of persons in shaping the worlds they live in through the process of symbolic interaction

- an emphasis on change and process and the variability and complexity of life, and
- the interrelationship between meaning in the perception of subjects and their action" (Glaser, 1992:16).

Grounded theory offers a systematic approach to qualitative analysis with detailed advice on interviewing, coding, comparing data, writing up reflective memos and writing up findings. The method has evolved with the approaches advocated by Glaser and Strauss diverging (Goulding, 2002). Constructivist grounded theory is of particular relevance to this paper and makes the "assumption that social reality is multiple, processual and constructed" (Charmaz, 2014:13). Charmaz (2006, 2014) argues that grounded theories do not emerge but are constructed through a researcher's engagement in the field.

Researchers have adopted a range of practices – some which are relatively rigid and prescriptive and are developed from the works of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and others more flexible reflecting the research topic, and researcher interactions and interpretations of their comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory is used in tourism, events and leisure by many researchers including Gao, Zhang and Decosta (2012); Humphreys (2014); Goulding (2002), Pavelka and Draper (2015); Stevenson, Airey and Miller (2008) and Stumpf & Swanger (2014). The approaches adopted in these papers are underpinned by a variety of practices within the range identified above. For example Goulding (2002) and Stevenson et al. (2008) and Stumpf & Swanger (2014) appear to be more influenced by Glaser, Humphreys (2014) by Charmaz, and Gao, Zhang and Decosta (2012) by Strauss and Corbin.

Ethnography

The study was not devised as an ethnography however ethnographic concepts provide a useful lens through which to interrogate my experience. An increasing body of research into aspects of tourism, events and leisure are underpinned by ethnographic approaches. Examples include Anderson & Austin (2012), Holloway et al. (2010), Jaimangal-Jones (2014), Palmer (2001), Rickly-Boyd (2012), Shipway and Jones (2007), Shipway, Holloway and Jones (2013).

> "Ethnography is defined as the description and interpretation of a culture or social group; its aim is to understand social reality by focusing on ordinary, everyday behaviour, and to provide an in-depth study of a culture" (Holloway et al., 2010:76).

In an ethnographic study the researcher becomes immersed in the research setting, this immersion leading to interaction, sharing and participation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Holloway et al., 2010). Ethnographic research is iterative and inductive: "it evolves in design through the study….(and involves) direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives…"(O'Reilly, 2009). Ethnographic approaches enable reflection upon interactions and meanings within cultural context (Holloway et al., 2010). Academic validity arises from the sense of perspective gained through triangulation "within method" through comparison and reflection upon interviews and observations in the field (Fetterman, 2010). Auto-ethnograpy "takes the principles of ethnography and applies them to the researcher/author as the study subject" (Coghlan, 2012:108). Situating the researcher within the research, it acknowledges emotional engagement and "complicity in knowledge building" (Swain, 2004:116).

Comparison

There are commonalities between ethnographic and grounded theory methodology (Hammersley and Aitkinson, 2007; Charmaz, 2014; O'Reilly, 2009). Both methods are inductive, involve immersion in the study area and encourage the suspension of prior knowledge. For example grounded theorists are entreated to enter the field "without knowing the problem" (Glaser, 1998:122) and ethnographies with a "conscious attitude of almost complete ignorance" (Spradley, 1979:4). Both involve data collection through observations and interviews. Charmaz (2014) claims ethnographic studies increasingly focus "on learning about events and actions in specific settings and situations as they unfold" (2014:36), a practice which involves the analysis of processes and is seen to complement grounded theory practice. She identifies "grounded theory ethnography" as an approach which prioritises a phenomenon or process and is less structural than other ethnographic approaches.

Charmez (2014) identifies that a potential problem within ethnographic studies is in "seeing data everywhere and nowhere" (2014:41), claiming grounded theory can help

to connect events and compare data and enable the researcher to direct their focus. This sentiment is echoed by O'Reilly who says grounded theory provides many "systematic techniques and key concepts which would enable those ethnographers who prefer concrete guidelines for analysis to proceed with the messy business of sorting and analysing and make sense of data" (O'Reilly, 2009:95). There are also potential problems arising in the use of grounded theory. For example Ellis (1986) reflects upon her use of grounded theory when she revisits a community she had studied in the past. She questions whether her use of grounded theory led her to force ideas into categories and to present a "life lived much more categorically than day to day experiences warranted" (1986:9).

One difference between the two methods is that grounded theorists explicitly seek to create theory while ethnographers describe and interpret in an attempt to increase understanding (Charmaz, 2014; O'Reilly, 2009). Another is the position of the researcher. "Ethnographers are not outsiders looking in. They have to be reflective insiders, negotiating roles and subjectivities, looking out"(Coffey, 2009:57). In research informed by grounded theory the researcher is more likely to portray themselves as an observer (Gao, Zhang and Decosta, 2012; Stumpf & Swanger, 2014; Stevenson et al., 2008) and in ethnography as participant observer (Jaimangal-Jones, 2014; Shipway Holloway and Jones, 2013). Field work for these participant observers is both intellectual and physically embodied.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The project was envisaged and designed during early 2008. Initially interviews with an elected councillor and someone from a local community/arts organisation helped to identify parameters for the study and potential interviewees (including residents, artists, arts organisations, local government officers, councillors, a vicar and a head-teacher). I was interested in developing long term engagement in the area that was experiencing rapid physical change and had a highly mobile population (LBH, 2007). My first problem was to identify a mechanism to fund a long term study. My response was pragmatic, involving the development of a phased project which would evolve as I learned more about peoples' experiences of cultural engagement and production. I designed a project that could be carried out with minimal resources, part time and on my own – but which would intensify during periods when I could win research funding.

A 2 phase project was envisaged, the first phase focussing on the 4 years leading up to the Olympics and the second post Olympics. The first phase coincided with the Cultural Olympiad and was initially supported by a funding award from the International Olympic Committee in 2008-9 and then a small award from the University of Westminster in 2010-11. This phase was characterised by an intensity of event production in the locality in response to perceived opportunities and threats arising from the Games. The second phase was funded by the British Academy between 2012-4. It is still in progress and focusses on local perceptions and experiences of cultural projects and events both during and after the London 2012 Olympics. At the start of this phase some of the smaller scale locally-led cultural event practice stalled, partly in response to difficulties in accessing the area and partly because of the plethora of activities around the Games. Since then event production has resumed.

The research awards provided much-needed interim deadlines and places to pause and reflect. They enabled research assistance including transcription, funds for workshops and events to discuss emergent ideas. They also funded some travel and conference expenses to discuss findings with the wider academic community. Two unsuccessful research funding bids made during the process did not halt the project but varied its pace. With hindsight they had some beneficial effects – both encouraging reflection and, somewhat perversely, reinforcing my determination to continue.

THE DYNAMICS OF LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

The combination of staying in the field for 7 years, a rapidly changing context and the pauses created by the need to identify and present elements of the project to different grant awarding bodies has involved reflection and learning about the framing, methods and findings of the study. The study setting has changed rapidly in the context of the wider economic, social and political processes associated with hosting a mega event. As the project evolved it was reworked and presented to different audiences and interrogated by some of the research participants. Constant comparison of data and coding aided learning about peoples experiences of cultural events in a specific context. The research experience led to engagement in the social world of my participants (Wolcott, 2009) and research memos enabled reflections about myself and the experiences of my research subjects. In particular I have been able to reflect upon long term engagement in a study area and its implications in terms of my position as a researcher, relationships and embodiments, participation, methodology and method.

Position

O' Reilly (2009) uses the terms insider/outsider to identify the position of the researcher in relation to their research subjects. She identifies a process of gradual socialisation in ethnographic research which draws the researcher in from the outside and enables an insider perspective. During the early stages of my research I identified myself as a privileged outsider. My privilege arose because as a funded researcher I could approach people from the "legitimate periphery" (Lave and Wenger, 1991). I had previously worked as town planner in the study area, and had also taught one of the local councillors. This provided insight, contacts, experiences, historical perspective and a way in. Early reflections on my outsider status are captured in a memo:-

> "I do not live in the study area, and I do not produce cultural events there. While I live approximately 4 miles away, it usually takes an hour to get there - due to its isolation and limited transport links. It is not a place I visit often and I know 2 people who live or work in the area" (Research memo excerpt, 2010).

My outsider status had social and spatial aspects - the research was located in my home city but was not in my neighbourhood or a place I considered local. I was not involved in the lives of my research participants beyond the act of interviewing and observing them. Two years later I reflected:-

> "My own personal and professional networks have a much wider reach into the area than originally anticipated. As I start to write and talk about my research, more connections emerge often in unlikely places – neighbours, friends and colleagues have networks which include some interviewees, new research contacts further reinforce those networks. So rather than there being 6 degrees of separation there are usually 1 or 2. As these networks become denser they entangle me in the wider social relations of the place – while it is geographically 'other' it is becoming socially 'local' (Research memo excerpt, 2012).

By 2014 the study area felt both geographically and socially local. I organised events to discuss my research findings with other researchers and practitioners in the area, creating denser networks and new social connections. I regularly attended meetings and events in the area and as the route became more familiar the place felt closer. Also as I visited more often it became part of my regular life - I recognised and spoke to people in the street in the way I would speak to my neighbours. By engaging in

events it became impossible not to become part of the phenomena being studied and my role evolved to “both an insider and outsider” (Sandercock and Attili, 2012:142). However my position within the community is not fixed and is subject to constant reworking and re-negotiation with its different members. My relationship with different people varies over time, partly on the basis of how often, where and how we connect, whether we attend the same meetings and events, and whether we engage events together. My familiarity and connections with people also reflect my embodied characteristics (gender, age, personality) and these will be discussed further in the next section. Constant negotiation and reconfiguration around relationships and working practices is part of my wider experience. It is not specific to this research process and in reflected other aspects of my life. Research by Jaimangal-Jones (2014) into dance cultures resonates with my experience and reflects a nuanced and fluctuating insiderness. The extent to which we are outsiders or insiders depends on the type of event we attend and reflects the people we are with.

Relationships and embodiment.

Coffey (1999) advises the “definition and location of self is implicitly part of … ethnographic research endeavour” (1999:36). As a researcher I was embodied in the field and relationships established there reflected my embodied self. My research objectives reflect wider aspects of myself; my prior experiences, aspirations, responsibilities, social life, gender and my life stage. My embodied characteristics including my age, appearance and gender influence my access, networks and participation in events. So, for example, I am invited to co-produce an event to present the community to a wider audience on the basis of my perceived experience. I am also invited to festivals, homes, bars, cafes, workshops, talks and the local theatre. However a combination of age, personality and position as a lecturer/researcher means I am not invited to ‘raves’ and ‘all-nighters’.

As my research journey develops I have made an “embodied, visceral journey into the socially and culturally distinctive way of life” (Evans, 2012:98) of my research subjects. Studio events are often small scale, and held in private/intimate spaces where people work and live. Participation in events involves a range of social practices: talking, eating, drinking, listening, looking, making and dancing. It creates shared experience and empathy as I become embroiled in the stories about the challenges and possibilities arising from

change. Friendships are formed, creating emotional entanglements (Chok, 2011), as I co-produce events with members of the community.

My work is also influenced by emotional and relational aspects which are outside of my research but influenced my experience and engagement in the study. In my case family relationships provide opportunities and create constraints. Yamagishi (2011) undertakes a similar exploration of relationships that influence her research and demonstrates how this provides a more critical and richer reflexive assessment. My family have been supportive and keen to attend some events. When we attended events together my husband and son took photographs, many of which have been used in my research presentations. While they enjoyed the food, music, spectacle and general ambience of the event I had the freedom to speak to people, make wider observations and written notes.

> "Attending events with my family provides more naturalistic/social experiences of those events. It is sometimes more difficult to collect information but also means that some people see me in a different light - as a person not a researcher" (Research memo excerpt, 2012).

We enjoyed experiences together and talked about them afterwards, engaging in a wider reflection on the events, the place and the people. Social engagement and enjoyment of the area with family changed the tone of my relationship with several research subjects. For example one was initially unwilling be interviewed but changed his mind after meeting me with my son at a community event. Attending events with family also led to constraints around the need to deal with their diverse needs such as hunger, boredom, tiredness.

Participation

Another way of thinking about my position is by exploring the extent to which I am an observer or participant. O'Reilly (2009) claims:

> "A participant is a member of a group, joining in activities, sharing experiences and emotions, contributing to debates, and taking part in the very interactions on which social life is built. An observer is an outsider, watching and listening, not always fully taking part, and rarely being a fully-fledged member of the community. An

observer intentionally joined the group and will leave at some time; her participation is instrumental" (2009:151).

Initially my intention was primarily to observe. I would speak to people about their experience and attend events they had organised. As a researcher my life would not be affected in the same way as theirs by the unfolding changes associated with the Olympic Project. The role of observer appeared to be the logical and ethical position and to this end I advised all participants that as a researcher my intention was to observe and then write up my findings. Hennigh (1981) identifies the difficulties in remaining detached in long term field work, suggesting that an activist role is more ethical because it means that the researcher invests time and energy in the community. My long term engagement established common experiences and connections and as the project has progressed I am increasingly a participant in the activities I am observing.

An example of one instance of this transition is outlined below.

> "It had taken a while to be invited to attend the meeting– and the invite when it came, was supported by the requirement that I bring biscuits….. At the outset I felt like an outsider –I arrived early and observed conversations … as more people arrived I recognised interviewees and people I had previously met at events. People explained ideas to me and asked me for my comments. They wanted to know whether I could help find volunteers for events…. At the end of the meeting I was invited back. There appears to be an expectation that I bring ideas and practical help next time rather than biscuits" (Research memo excerpt, 2012).

The cumulative dynamic of this transition can be seen by considering a series of events and meetings over the next year. At the next meeting I was asked to take minutes. Then I invited some members of the group to participate in an event I was organising at my University. The event was attended by people who had been involved in the research and other artists, researchers and academics. At the end of the evening I was approached by someone from a local community centre who asked me to help them find volunteers for a fundraising event. Participation in this event led to more contacts and I was asked by another organisation for help. When the community was offered the opportunity to present their activities at a national museum I was invited to

co-produce an event which told stories about local practices. Active participation has led to the development of deeper relationship based upon a range of embodied shared experiences and practices. For example “carrying artwork around the building, flyposting, negotiating, making and drinking tea, interviewing, chatting, photographing, listening to music, observing, laughing, dancing and drinking wine” (Research memo excerpt, 2014).

Methodology and methods

In the previous section I identified some of the commonalities and differences between grounded theory and ethnographic methodologies. My wider research project is underpinned by a methodology influenced by grounded theory. However in this paper ethnographic concepts are used as a way of interrogating my experience and learning in the field. They provide a lens through which I can contemplate my research practice, changing position and embodied and relational aspects of my research journey.

My experience in the field, combined with the changing relations outlined above, has resulted in some changes in method which resonate with ethnographic practice. My interview practice has evolved. In the early stages interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. Broad questions were based on my interests and interviewees were given opportunities to bring in wider topics and ideas into the discussion. I was aware that as the instrument of data collection I needed to ensure that I was sensitive, reflexive, intuitive and receptive (Leedy and Ormarod, 2001; Patton, 2002) and decided to write a memo after each interview in order to reflect on my experience and findings. Memos were written within 24 hours of the interview and captured initial ideas about the material gathered and my experience. I revisited these as I developed and refined my ideas and approach.

The memo writing process enabled reflection on my findings but also identified subtle changes in my practice. As I became more familiar with the interviewees and subject my style became more “empathetic” (Fontana and Frey, 2005) and interviews more unstructured and dialogical (Schram, 2012). Discussion frequently touched on shared experience and the sense of collaboration and mutual exchange increased. Follow up interviews were more informal and conversational with information flowing in both directions. A more fluid approach emerged after I started to attend meetings of a local group in 2012. During and after these meetings I encountered a wider group of people

with an interest in cultural production in the area. I started to record exploratory conversations with the idea that I would interview people later. These interactions were characterised by normal social conventions -with laughter, gossip and asides - and yielded particularly rich data as we explored ideas together and developed empathy. This feminist interview practice (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) is more "collaborative, reciprocal, trusting and friendly … participatory and democratic" (2003:96) and as the project has progressed this approach is being used with increasing frequency. More recently I have experimented with note taking during interviews, particularly when I am aware that material is privileged or sensitive. My research is now underpinned by a range of interview practices and some semi-structured, some conversational. Better understanding of the community has led to a better sense of when to use a tape recorder and when not.

My coding practices have also evolved in the light of ongoing consideration about the data I am collecting and processes behind the development of themes and categories. Much in the same way as Ellis (2006), I have become increasingly concerned that the categories and themes developed early in the study act to constrain my thinking and encourage me to force data into pre-existing categories. Initially grounded theory offered a systematised way and a set of processes that provided rigour. However as the study progressed, those processes and my initial categories seemed to get in the way and to abstract me from the data. In rapidly changing environment the initial codes had less salience – people changed their minds, and responded differently as time went on. I have become increasing reliant on looser intellectual processes to compare and theme data.

INSIGHTS

Developing practical wisdom

My research aims to develop understanding about local perceptions and experiences of cultural event production in a rapidly changing area. It reflects work by Flyvbjerg (2001), Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius & Rothengatter (2003) and Flyvbjerg, Landman, & Schram (2012) who endeavour to develop "Phronesis"… "practical wisdom on how to address and act on social problems in a particular context" (2012:1). These researchers focus on emerging practice at the local level and their work is grounded in the idea that "knowledge [that] grows out of intimate familiarity with practice in contextualized

settings" (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012:2). Throughout the study my aim has been to develop practical wisdom to inform policy and practice. However my shifting position and active engagement in event production has changed my understanding of what practical wisdom is and how it is developed. Initially the process of informing was conceptualised in a traditional academic sense - information exchange would arise through relatively formal, tried and tested methods such as follow up interviews, writing, workshops, conferences etc. However my experience within the field led to a reworking of this process. Many of my research subjects are actively involved in projects and events and as activists they continually seek out opportunities and people who will collaborate with them. They identify and use the experience and expertise of those researchers, business and policy makers who are engaged within the area. Cultural event production is used as a mechanism to create connections, reflecting a perceived need to develop a sense of local community in an emerging destination. In this context, active practice, including the co-production of events, is an essential part of understanding experiences within the community.

My quest for practical wisdom reinforced my decision to accept an offer to co-produce part of the *Hackney Wick Take Over,* a one night event at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Engagement in the physical and embodied aspects of event production reinforced relationships. We met, shared ideas, solved problems, collectively experienced pre-event tensions and then had fun together as the event unfolded. Through this I was able to develop better understanding of the experience of my research subjects. Closer relationships meant I was able to collect more nuanced information and also to interpret those nuances. This uncovered a broader and more subtle range of power relations that underlie and shape decisions. Deeper engagement exposed relatively hidden networks, underlying tensions and concerns about "gatekeepers" and their role in controlling information (Clegg and Pitsis, 2012:84). It also identified "backstage activities" (Harvey, 2001) and privileged information which was largely hidden during my initial research. Backstage activities and relationships are not easy to unpick but they define the scope for action. Thus they are crucial to developing an understanding of local experiences of cultural event production and the role and place of such events in an emerging destination.

Nuanced positionality

One of the implications of longitudinal engagement is a change in my positionality. However this experience cannot be characterised as a gradual move from the outside to inside as suggested by O'Reilly (2009). From the outset, aspects of my research practice have outsider and insider qualities. My shifting position has occurred through a multitude of practices and processes as I "weave" my way "in and out of other peoples worlds" (Cheater 1987 cited in O'Reilly 2009:113). While there is an overall shift towards the inside the micro-processes work in both directions. My position depends on a constant reworking of relationships with the people I study, which in turn reflects their wider negotiations and reworking within their networks. My position in the network changes as relationships between individual members of the group change. These changes are often not the result of any direct action on my part but by wider relations within the network.

In such a rapidly changing community I have a longer engagement in the field than some of my research subjects. O'Reilly (2005) contends "When you have hung around long enough you become part of the setting, part of the background that others are taking for granted" (2005:93). This process is reinforced by my awareness of both recent changes in the area through my research and historical changes due to my previous employment and ongoing interest in the area over 28 years. For some this provides a potential resource and for others a potential threat.

Social interactions with the people I am studying are fluid, negotiated, and reflect myself. Rather than fighting a rather inevitable development of closer relationships, by developing a reflexive approach I have started to embrace those changes, reflecting upon their methodological implications and effects on my research findings. Many ideas that emerge as the project progresses are less tied into the formal community structures, and more difficult to uncover and unpick. The inclusion of those ideas exposes some of the contradictions and tensions around the experience of cultural events in a rapidly changing area and has an impact upon the understanding of practice.

Fluidities

Engaging in longitudinal research identifies fluidities in peoples' views. Interviewing people over time in captures changing attitudes, emerging networks, tensions within and between groups. So while some broad issues are persistent - for example

concerns about the implications of gentrification - the responses to them constantly change as people move into and out of the area, form and reform alliances, and new opportunities become available.

The study has also uncovered both social and spatial fluidities around notions of local. In my experience the place becomes more local as I have more experiences within it, as the journey becomes familiar it seems to become shorter. The local community is also constantly in flux as people move in and out of the area. Even those that live in the area for the entire study period have interests, needs and aspirations which mean that their engagement in local events varies over time. There are many sub-communities within the area - some are very insular and some live there for a temporary period. Although physically located in the place some parts of the community do not engage in its social aspects. Perceptions of locality are both socially and geographically fluid, and are underpinned by multiple processes which work in many directions and evolve over time.

Multi-dimensional selves

My research participants are involved in cultural event production, however most would not identify themselves as event producers. They have a range of other formal roles - artists, architects, community/social workers, vicars, researchers, studio providers, policy makers, regeneration professionals, etc. Many who engage in creative practice undertake part time and temporary work as bar-staff, administrators and teachers in order to afford to live in London. Some are residents, some workers, all with personal networks of families, friends and colleagues which connect them to other places. Events production is just a small part of what they do and they engage in it for a variety of social, personal and economic reasons. Some as part of a process of responding to and engaging with wider changes in the area others as a way of supplementing their income or exploring their creative practice.

In short term research we are able to present an aspect of ourselves to our subjects. The part of ourselves that is a researcher collects information from people who are selected on the basis of a feature of themselves i.e. local resident, tourist, event producer, policy maker, and our exchanges are based our performance of those partial roles. In longer term research it is difficult to maintain the facade of a one-dimensional self. Common experiences connect us in different ways and as we get to know our

research subjects a degree of informality emerges. So rather than an aspect of myself exploring an aspect of themselves, repeated interaction starts to uncover our dimensions which, although outside the main research activity, directly influence our relationships and actions.

CONCLUSION

This paper reflects upon the implications of longitudinal research on research practice and understanding. It contributes to emerging debates on methods and methodology by illustrating a research experience that encompasses introspection, experimentation, discussion and discovery. Long-term engagement identifies fluidities and complexities within the research area which arise through a constant reworking of understandings, perceptions and relationships. This dynamic process is underpinned by continual negotiation and network formation as people develop projects and events together. Peoples' experiences condition their response to new opportunities and thus new approaches evolve as the study progresses. Everything is in motion – for example my position as a researcher is fluid, constantly renegotiated and varies around different relationships and networks within the community. Our experiences intersect and resonate as we learn from one another. Notions of local and locality shift as our connection with the study area change. Our daily work and leisure activities both connect and disconnect us from the area. Knowledge gained in other places and developed with other people permeates local practice.

During the research process it becomes apparent that while it is possible to develop practical wisdom through research into practice, this is dramatically enhanced by engagement in practice. Co-production of ideas and events shifts the research focus from practice-informed research towards research-informed practice. It creates social networks and opportunities for us to share stories and learn, providing fresh insights of ways of being, seeing and doing. Co-production that spans a longer time period enables the development of practical wisdom about event production, which recognises multiple processes and networks outside of the event which influence practice.

In this study a combination of active practice and longitudinal research uncover deeper and more nuanced understanding of cultural event production, taking account of contextual aspects and incorporating networks, relationships and ideas which are hidden at the outset. This enables reflection upon cultural event production in an

emerging destination within the setting of wider regeneration, events and processes. These processes intersect and are underpinned by broader relations, structures and networks that influence, enable or inhibit peoples' actions. Long term engagement provides more space to reflect, learn, build relationships and share knowledge with research participants. Providing a combination of privileged and contextual information, it enables connections to be made between aspects which initially appear to be separate. It develops understanding which reflects human actions and interactions over time and is broad - encompassing context, and deep - encompassing backstage interactions.

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