

Co-producing Community Narratives

In brief, what is this project about?

This project involves working with citizens in one community (initially) in local authorities across North Wales to define their community and support them in describing, through creative methods (art, photography, film), what it looks and feels like to live/work there. From this, we will have a more holistic, richer, and creative understanding of the community.

The creative output from the project can be exhibited locally, used to aid the Public Services Board's well-being planning, and used as a tool to encourage further conversations with citizens.

Why and how has this project come about?

Public Services Boards must prepare and publish an assessment of the state of economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being in their area. Among other things, the assessment must identify community areas within their area which are large enough to show differences between them and have a sense of identity.

The [Statutory Guidance](#) on the Well-being of Future Generations Act for Public Services Boards (SPSF 3), advises that "since official statistics are generally resolved down to the recognised ONS LSOA (Lower Layer Super Output) area, it would make sense for the community areas identified to correspond with multiple LSOAs rather than cut across them" (p.14).

Through discussions at the North Wales Insights Partnership, a partnership that has been enabled by the Public Services Boards to work together on common research and engagement issues, it was felt that statistical geographies are useful in providing the structure for collecting, processing, storing, and aggregating data. They do, however, have a big drawback and this is that people do not tend to relate to them at all. They can cut across neighbourhoods rather than aligning with real communities on the ground. In addition, data at this level tends only to be quantitative in nature, and the latest local level data (which is primarily drawn from the Census) is a decade old and reflects a time which is pre-Brexit and pre-Pandemic.

Whilst the statistical patterns may well be the same, we would like to work with populations to define what and where their community is, describe what it looks and feels like to live/work there. This way, we will have a more creative, narrative, co-produced approach, one that helps us to understand our communities in a more holistic and richer way.

The intention is that we will learn from this approach and hope to be able to apply this learning with other communities.

What would this look like in practical terms?

Working with communities, we would like to use creative methods to provide a narrative of their community. We envisage using a range of media (written, photography, video, artwork) to be able to story-tell our communities. The type of media used will largely depend on the creative practice of the academic(s) working with the community and what the community want to do. We will then work with them to develop narratives of their community, their place.

Our multi-disciplinary team (see section, *Who is involved?*) based at Wrexham Glyndwr University will be supported by a number of post-graduate students who will use this project as part of their research studies. We envisage that in doing so, they will bring their own creativity and practice to the work whilst being mentored by the academic staff. In practical terms, the students' research modules¹ take place between January and May 2023, which is good timing for supporting this project.

This project is an innovative way for the Public Services Boards to collaborate with the university.

It is important that in deciding which community to work with, that:

- it is useful for the Public Services Board, to further develop their understanding of that place
- it is informed by their Well-being Assessment
- it is adding value to work that maybe already being undertaken there
- the project isn't a transaction with the community, that it is part of their continuing relationship with people and places.

Denbighshire

With all this in mind, working with Iolo McGregor (Denbighshire County Council's Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader and Public Service Board Co-ordinator) and Cath Taylor (Denbighshire County Council's Principal Manager - Community Resilience), we have identified Bruton Park in Rhyl as the (initial) community we will be working with on this project. The vignette below provides a profile of Bruton Park.

This is a highly collaborative project. To manage the project, we will create mini-community teams which will include *at a minimum* academics from Wrexham Glyndwr University, Iolo McGregor, Cath Taylor, and other community enablers.

¹ MA Art/Design Interdisciplinary Practice. Transdisciplinary Practice module takes place between January and May 2023.
MA Arts in Health. Arts in Health Practice module takes place between January and May 2023.
MA Creative Production and Curatorial Practice. Collaborative Project module takes place between January and May 2023.

Bruton Park is a local authority owned estate with mixed tenure and a mixed demographic. It benefits from a large, wooded area to the rear of the estate which hosts a nature trail and historical ponds.

The estate is home to a vibrant community who have had a highly active tenants and residents' association. The association in its' heyday put on various community activities, trips and ran a small community centre on the estate acting as a hub for community development activity. Following the folding of the association the community centre went back into housing stock for letting so the estate no longer has a natural hub or centre. It has been the vision of the residents of Bruton Park to set up a purpose-built centre on the estate to house various activities and provide support services to the community. There is even the possibility of setting up a small community café to attract business from the adjoining nature trail and link the project up with greenspace development, for example willow weaving, hedge laying, path laying.



As with many social housing estates, Bruton Park comes with its' own set of challenges, including historical fly tipping, anti-social behaviour and rent arrears. It is fair to say the estate has huge potential. It straddles two local authority wards with four County Councillors representing the area. The wards do not display high levels of deprivation, but we know this is because more affluent property adjacent, dilutes the statistics to a certain degree. The local community association applied for some funding a few years back from the National Lottery in the hope of setting up a multi-purpose health centre. They lost out to another project in West Rhyl which sits in the most deprived ward in Wales.

The design of the estate includes a series of cul-de-sacs with some green space in the centre of each one so naturally lend themselves to a community setting. There is also a large play area and MUGA.

The biggest social capital that Bruton Park has is its' residents. A strong, resilient community with keen, active members. They want to set back up as a resident's association and they still have a highly active Facebook page, used by the community:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1849826535149614/>

What are the timescales for the project?

We envisage that the project will commence in the spring. However, preparatory work, planning, and the creation of the community team will commence in January and February.

What would be the output?

Given that we will be using creative methods to undertake this project, we envisage visual output (film, art, photography) from the communities themselves, which can be exhibited locally and used to aid the Public Services Board with well-being planning and used as a tool to instigate further conversations with citizens.

In addition, we will provide a traditional report of the project which will outline the background, the methods, key messages, and learning.

This is an innovative project, and we would be keen to share and publish the approach and output. In order for us to do this we would need ethical approval from Wrexham Glyndwr University's Ethics Committee (this is just to make sure that everyone involved is aware, for example, of why they're involved, that they are and feel safe, how the information is going to be used and by whom). This will also help to raise the profile of the work of and approach of the Public Services Board.

Who is involved?

We have an exciting multi-disciplinary team to support this work. We're drawing on expertise in social sciences (Dr Rachel Hughes), health and social care (Dr Viv Dacre), graphic and social design (Dr Heliana Pacheco), and artists (Drs Karen Heald, Paul Jones, Sue Liggett), all of which are experienced researchers and practitioners. They will be supported by a number of post-graduate students who will use this project as part of their research studies.

We are excited about this innovative project and very much looking forward to working with you on this.