4

TOOLKIT-FOUR

COMMUNITY CO-PRODUCTION

Who is this toolkit for?

- Heritage professionals
- Municipalities
- NGOs interested in heritage, historic environment, communities and urban development
- Civil society stakeholders (neighbourhood and residents)
- Researchers

This is one of six toolkits to help you to develop innovative ways of:

- **Valorising** the past in the present
- **Engaging** and working with communities
- **Recognising** the different meanings of heritage and narratives of about places and their pasts
- **Presenting** heritage to local and non-local audiences
- **Building** social cohesion, peaceful communities and heritage tourism

(Previous spread)
Co-Production filming

(*Previous page*)
Discussion of intellectual property rights.

Why is this important?

Community co-production is a form of participatory collaboration between the powerful and less powerful to create material – often for public dissemination and use – that involves sharing the creative work of production.

One purpose of this is to give **creative agency and 'voice' to people whose voices are not usually heard, and whose stories, interests and perspectives are rarely shared.** It allows community members to communicate publicly, and should provide them with the resources and guidance to do this in an empowering, respectful and rewarding way.

Another purpose is to help us to **understand people's lived experiences of heritage and to build our knowledge about the meanings of the past and of historic sites.** Even if you are a heritage professional, **co-production should enable you to *learn*** by gaining new insights, experimenting with new processes and making rewarding links with communities.

Voice is about find ways for people to be able to express themselves to wider publics, especially in circumstances where they are generally unable to do so. It recognises people's 'lived expertise', which is to say that people are experts on their own lives and – in personal ways – the places of their lives. Voice is the right to express views freely, including a general entitlement to have these views heard.

There are instances in which giving voice must be regulated or moderated, for example, where people express hatred towards others, and/or express racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic and other prejudicial viewpoints. In these cases, you need to make decisions based on knowledge of public order legislation and the sensitivities of community relations. While this may be prejudicial to peace, participants who make such statements may be breaking the law without knowing it, or they may be putting themselves at risk of reprisal from those against whom they speak.

You should consider carefully how to deal with such situations, taking care that all parties act within the law. While you should not shy away from reflecting tensions across the plurality of heritages in the setting in which you work, you need to think carefully how this can be achieved without fomenting social division, putting people at risk or promoting falsehoods.

Co-production can take the form of displays or other kinds of media outputs (e.g. films, photo-essays, sound recordings, etc etc.). They can be documentary or creative, or a mixture of both. Co-production can:

- Help people to feel that their voices are being heard and that their communities and views are recognised.
- Reveal hidden histories and add to the stock of knowledge about heritage and the histories of places and communities.
- Valorise people's 'lived expertise' alongside academic expertise.
- Encourage respect for, and promotion of, cultural diversity.
- Facilitate intercultural and intergroup dialogue.
- Reduce potential for conflict.
- Protect the rights of expression of marginalised groups.
- Increase people's sense of ownership of, and pride in, historic sites, encouraging civil and civic engagement.
- Reduce people's senses of alienation from authorities and from decision-making processes.

A key problem with conventional practices of heritage management and communication has been the concentration of power to speak within a limited group of heritage experts: architects, archaeologists, heritage professionals, historians and art historians etc. For these groups, the meanings and value of heritage sites often relate to their established historical significance as monuments, expressions and achievements of important civilisations and cultures and witnesses of high-profile events from the past. While these are significant, they do not necessarily align with the importance of sites for communities. A common criticism of this is that it produces an **Authorised Heritage Discourse**, which may have little meaning for community stakeholders, making them feel like their stories don't matter. It also tends to present a single 'heritage story' about a site. Co-production is a way of rethinking 'expertise' and shifting power balances in order to avoid these problems. When done well, it as an inclusive practice, because it:

- Includes new information about sites into the established body of knowledge, so that new layers of interpretation can be added to a site, augmenting our understanding of its history and significance in the present and attracting new audiences.
- Includes more people's voices and perspectives in expressing the significance of heritage.
- Champions a more democratic and less elitist process of managing the past in the present.

At the heart of a successful co-production project is a desire to recognise and promote value in this more pluralistic perspective on what it means to manage and communicate heritage.

Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) is a concept identified by Heritage Studies scholar Laurajane Smith in her 2006 book ***Uses of Heritage***. AHD is based on typical expert discipline-based knowledge, expounded by people who have recognised authority to judge if the past is valuable to protect, and what aspects of it should be valorised through preservation or interpretation. AHD also sees heritage as innately valuable , but underneath this there may be elitist aesthetic judgements about what is beautiful, or political choices about what heritage is important to tell the story of a place, a nation or a people. The formation of AHD relies international organizations like UNESCO—"the authorizing institutions"—to achieve dominance.

AHD is powerful: people struggle to 'see' heritage in any other way. Indeed, they may not even perceive their own heritages as important because they do not fit with AHD. A consequence of the pervasiveness of AHD is the inability of the people to recount their heritage experience outside the AHD discourse. Community engagement and co-production offer important ways to overcome a narrow AHD and to change the balance of power over who can speak about heritage.

What can co-production be?

There is no single agreed form for co-production activities and much will depend on:

- The nature of the site or organisation and its appropriateness for one medium or another.
- The interests and skills of project participants
- The availability of equipment and expertise to support the production
- The aims and target audience of the project

Despite this, a number of common media are listed below, along with some recommendations as to their advantages and disadvantages.

Film

Film is a powerful and relatable medium for focussing co-production processes. Most participants have some experience of watching film and may understand its visual language. The wide range of cameras, from mobile phones to production-standard 'red' cameras, allows a similarly wide range of methods to be used and there is no simple formula for success. However, the more professional the equipment, the higher the learning curve, so you should think carefully about what you expect participants to do, considering, for instance, their interest in learning camera skills, the possibility of accessing equipment, and people's availability for training.

Photography

Photography has been successfully used as an element in or as the entire basis of co-production with heritage sites and institutions. Like film, it benefits from people's familiarity with it, but it may also be challenging to work with participants to see possibilities for the medium beyond straightforward 'snapping.' To explore photography's creative possibilities more extensively, some co-production projects have experimented with producing photo essays that bind a set of photos together in a sequence, or have combined photographs, text and audio in 'digital stories,' which are mixed-format digital presentations that can be viewed on computers or televisions. For example, you may be able to make a film using static images that you can pan around, overlaying voiceovers and musical audiotracks. The skillset required for this can be taught, and community participants may be able to master this and exercise considerable creative agency. Popular software currently includes iMovie for Mac, Movie Maker for Windows PC and Animoto or Storykit on Android or iOS platforms respectively.

Audio

Podcasts, field recordings, interviews and studio recordings can all be employed in co-production. Unlike film and photography, most of us have little or no experience recording audio. This unfamiliarity makes for an interesting co-production challenge, as participants learn to see (or rather hear) the world in new ways. Field recording (taking audio samples outside of already-present sounds) can be an interesting way of exploring a familiar neighbourhood or area.

[Image 3] Setting up for audio recording

Ethics of co-production

Co-production is a challenging and dynamic practice which can provoke fundamental questions about professional knowledge, authorship, voice and collaboration. There is no magic formula for establishing a clear ethical framework for successful co-production, but a number of issues should be considered from the outset, negotiated with participants and ideally agreed upon in writing. These include:

Issues of authorship

Participants should understand their rights to be recognised as an author of the work and how that relates to the rights of others, including the instigators of the project and any other parties they are working with. This will likely involve a discussion of intellectual property rights (IPR) and other legal factors, but should also help all parties to understand the limits of the project and what is and is not appropriate for inclusion. A common problem with co-production is establishing what is and what is not relevant. As facilitators, we recognise that the challenge to our understanding of 'what is in' is vital to shifting power to communities. As professionals, we want to produce something that has value and relevance for others beyond the project. In our own work in Istanbul we approached this dilemma by issuing a series of creative prompts for participants and production professionals to respond to (see below in the case study section). Our experience was that by carefully framing a task that included elements of speculation, creativity and personalisation, we gave agency to participants and produced relevant and interesting material. You may prefer to give participants more freedom, and this may be an appropriate and ethical strategy in some contexts; it certainly responds to the egalitarian ethos of co-production. However, you should also be sensitive to people's abilities and confidence: participants may – when given a lot of freedom – lose focus on key issues and stray from the topic; they may also feel overwhelmed and intimidated by the task of making something meaningful when they have few guidelines and parameters. You must feel your way with this, seeking to find the right balance between controlling the process and giving people the freedom they need to participate in ways that are meaningful and gratifying to them.

The GNU foundation give the definition below for copyleft. Although they are describing software development similar principles can be applied to other kinds of media including film, audio or photography.

'Copyleft is a general method for making a program (or other work) free (in the sense of freedom, not "zero price"), and requiring all modified and extended versions of the program to be free as well. […] To copyleft a program, we first state that it is copyrighted; then we add distribution terms, which are a legal instrument that gives everyone the rights to use, modify, and redistribute the program's code, or any program derived from it, but only if the distribution terms are unchanged.'

Media literacy and intellectual property

If co-produced materials are to be released publicly it is vital that participants understand what is involved. It is not safe to assume that people from all backgrounds understand, for instance, the mechanics of social media sharing and how this can reframe or re-contextualise media work. It may therefore be necessary to work with participants to explore the potential consequences of putting media in public and to have procedures in effect for, say, future requests to remove or edit material. Similarly, many people have little familiarity with copyright laws and these vary from country to country. The assertion of intellectual property rights may also be political issue for some (e.g. in some so-called copyleft / open source practices) and it is important to establish a grounding for these principals, up front, from the outset.

'I had an inflexible way of thinking actually. In documentaries you cannot guess very much, so there is a flow in it, there is always something in my head. However, in a work like this the subject might go in different directions. In fact that's what happened here too. Well, you go there with some thoughts, you looked at what had been said [our interviews were given to them] and you make guesses. But still the things that you had never guessed come up. This enriches you.'

(Filmmaker reflecting on processes of co-production in the Plural Heritages Project)

Collaboration with professionals

Many co-production processes involve the work of paid professional producers such as camera operators, directors, photographs, sound engineers or artists. In all of the above considerations, it must be recognised that these people also have rights as co-authors of the work, their own perspectives on the issues at play and their own competencies and limitations. It is – unfortunately – easy to instrumentalise the work of such professionals; but a co-production process should recognise their agency in the process and respect their voice. It is important to negotiate with creative producers to come to a common understanding of their role and voice in the project. It may be inappropriate for them to take a strongly authorial role in defining the message of the work, for instance in a project focussing on the difficult history of a community of which they do not form a part. In such an instance it would be vital to agree mutually on how the working relationship between producer and participant is to be managed, how the various kinds of work get done and by whom, and how this affects claims to rights, authorships and so forth. Most of all it is essential to give producers a chance to engage genuinely with participants, and this means that time for them to spend together should be built into the project design. It is also likely that they will gain invaluable perspectives through their work and it is helpful to include debrief sessions to capture these and to gain feedback as to the strengths or weakness of the process of which they were part.

Managing relationships

Co-production can be a time-consuming, emotionally-challenging and sometimes financially-troublesome activity for participants. 'Participation fatigue' the process by which people's time is too heavily drawn upon, is a known problem and it is important to be clear with people from the outset about how much time is likely to be expected, the kind of work involved, and what kind of difficulties they may encounter. It is to some degree a matter of professional judgement as to how much involvement is reasonable and this may be affected by how people's time is recognised with credit, money, exposure or other factors. For example, the choice of whether to offer financial recompense for people's work is complicated. If you do not, it may lead to feelings that you are unfairly exploiting people's time and good will, and some people will disengage because they are not sufficiently motivated. If you do offer financial recompense, then it can change the balance of the relationship, making people feel like they are working for you, or they may actively try to do more than they would ordinarily be inclined to do, because of financial inducement. There is no easy answer to this conundrum, and it requires careful thought and – where possible – ethical clearance from your institution and any others with which you are working. Finally, it is vital to be responsive to the needs of participants throughout the project, recognising when enough is enough, or conversely giving people the right opportunities to contribute fully.

Sourcing equipment

Equipment can be a prohibitively expensive factor in co-production and its costs should be factored in. Some professionals may charge extra for the use of their own equipment and hire costs for extras can run to 10% of the retail price of an item. As instigators of a co-production project, you may not have the technical skills within your organisation to adequately scope the equipment needed, but it is also true that to a large extent the budget scales with the degree of professionalism expected in the project outcomes. It may make economic sense to seek professional advice in purchasing or hiring equipment to help here. If you are working with professionals it is essential to understand whose insurance (both for equipment and public liability) should cover the activities and with whom the responsibility lies with respect to health and safety, including risk assessments.

Plural Heritages of Istanbul: co-production

As part of our research project we undertook a large co-production phase involving around 10 participants and 7 professional producers (film-makers, sound engineers and directors) to produce around 30 individual films. The aims of our project were to identify and valorise alternative perspectives on the heritage value of a large UNESCO world heritage site, the Theodosian Land Walls of Istanbul, a 6km long Byzantine defensive structure which cuts across the city's historic peninsular. To frame our activities, we asked participants and producers to respond to 3 creative prompts: to narrate a walk around their local neighbourhood talking about their pasts; to focus particularly on the sounds of their areas and lost sounds in particular as a focus for reflection; and (perhaps most unusually) to write a letter to a specific part of the walls asking a question about the past and to discuss possible answers to that question. Over a period of several weeks we met producers and participants together, discussed issues of rights and authorship, established deadlines and methods for the production and provided feedback relating to emerging questions from the process. In addition to the professional producers, a combined research team of around 8 university academics were involved in making the process work.

[Image 4] Co-production briefing

The outcomes of this work were to be publicly available via the online video hosting platform vimeo.com[1] and some of them were also to form the basis of a smartphone app, produced after the co-production phase which would combine the materials in to a series of geo-located walks and experiences that wider publics could enjoy in situ, along the walls.

1) https://vimeo.com/album/5262750

Our activities produced a wide variety of perspectives on the Walls and were particularly successful in drawing out personal, emotive and imaginative responses. Participants richly described the past sounds of milk sellers in the street, lost bird and animal life and the day-to-day experience of living in communities in the past. The imaginative setting of our 'letters to the wall' activity enabled them to reflect on historical events and in some cases relate them to contvemporary issues of social or political importance in Istanbul – a process which we believe underlines the usefulness of co-production in reframing the relevance of heritage to our lives in the present.

The key messages from this toolkit are:

- Co-production is an opportunity to identify, valorise and present perspectives on heritage from outside the canon of professional museological knowledge.

- Many different media can be used and it is important to assess the options for their viability, suitability and fit to the aims of the project; skills and knowledge of participants and producers and the resource available.

- Balancing the ethics of the project should be an inclusive process which involves all parties.

- Gaps in knowledge which affect participation (such as knowledge of IP rights) should be identified and explored together.

- Co-production is a process which brings people together and the on-going management of relationships before, during and after the process should be built into the project design.

Filming co-production videos.

This series of toolkits was produced by an international team of researchers based in Newcastle University, UK, and Istanbul Bilgi University and Bursa Uludağ University, Turkey. They are for general use by people who are involved in engaging with heritage and communities.

The toolkits are based on our 'Plural Heritages of Istanbul – The Case of the Land Walls' research project and the aim of the toolkits is to share what we learned from our experience. We asked how communities give meaning to major heritage sites and what happens when such meanings are intertwined with marginalisation, or are not recognised in official heritage interpretations. Our project explored the 'plural heritages' of the Istanbul Land ('Theodosian') Walls and their environs. This 5th century UNESCO World Heritage site stretches over six kilometres setting a boundary to the Historic Peninsula of Istanbul. In this context we asked how ethnographic studies, community co-production and dialogue with heritage agencies could contribute to a more 'plural' account of the site's heritage.

www.pluralheritages.ncl.ac.uk

Toolkit 1: Different Experiences of Places and Pasts
Christopher Whitehead

Toolkit 2: Working with Communities to Revalorise Heritage
Christopher Whitehead
Gönül Bozoğlu

Toolkit 3: Creating Memory Maps
Tom Schofield
Gönül Bozoğlu
Figen Kıvılcım Çorakbaş

Toolkit 4: Community Co-production
Tom Schofield
Christopher Whitehead

Toolkit 5: Understanding and Documenting Intangible Cultural Qualities of Urban Heritage
Figen Kıvılcım Çorakbaş
Zeynep Kunt
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Toolkit 6: Rethinking 'Outstanding Universal Value' at Urban World Heritage Sites
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