

# CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Understanding the changing  
nature of communities in  
their contexts and the role of  
communities in sustaining and  
enhancing our quality of life.



## The Connected Communities

Connected Communities is a cross-Council Programme being led by the AHRC in partnership with the EPSRC, ESRC, MRC and NERC and a range of external partners. The current vision for the Programme is:

*"To mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse, communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities."*

Further details about the Programme can be found on the AHRC's Connected Communities web pages at:

[www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx)



Scan this code with your smartphone QR reader to access the Connected Communities web pages.

## Photo Credits

1. Graeme Spurway using the Foerster magnetometer at Ashwell. Part of the 'Sensing the late Iron Age and Roman Past: geophysics and the landscape of Hertfordshire' project at University College London. Image: Kris Lockyear

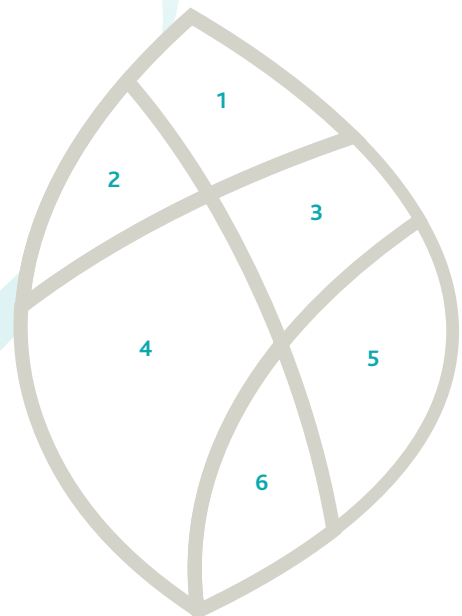
2. The 'Remaking Society' project worked with collaborators to demonstrate and assess participatory cultural activities to generate evidence about lived experience of poverty and exclusion and to create opportunities for marginalised communities to communicate with wider audiences. Project led by Tom Wakeford (University of Edinburgh)

3. Performing stories at the Connected Communities Showcase in Edinburgh as part of Dr Elizabeth Curtis's (University of Aberdeen) 'Sharing All Our Stories Scotland Project'

4. Open day for CAER Heritage Project: 'Exploring the archaeology of Caereu and Ely'. Image: University of Cardiff

5. Refugee community groups dancing at the Connected Communities Showcase event in Edinburgh as part of 'Being Engagé from the Seen and Heard: Developing participatory action research with young people' project led by Tom Wakeford at the University of Edinburgh

6. 'Asylum Heritage Montage' by an ArtSpace participant from the Building and Enriching Shared Heritages: A Toolkit for Community Organisations project led by Professor Rosemary Sweet (University of Leicester). Image: University of Leicester.



The Programme brings communities in all their rich and diverse forms to the centre of research agendas. It looks to improve our understanding of the changing connections, networks, values and practices that underpin notions of community across a wide range of historical and cultural contexts. This enhanced understanding is informing the development of more effective ways to contribute towards flourishing communities and address key economic and societal challenges.

generates new research insights and meaningful legacies for communities.

The programme supports research across a number of core themes, including: community health and wellbeing; creative and digital communities; civic engagement and social innovation; sustainable community environments; community heritage; disconnection, division and exclusion.



Dr. David J. Williams

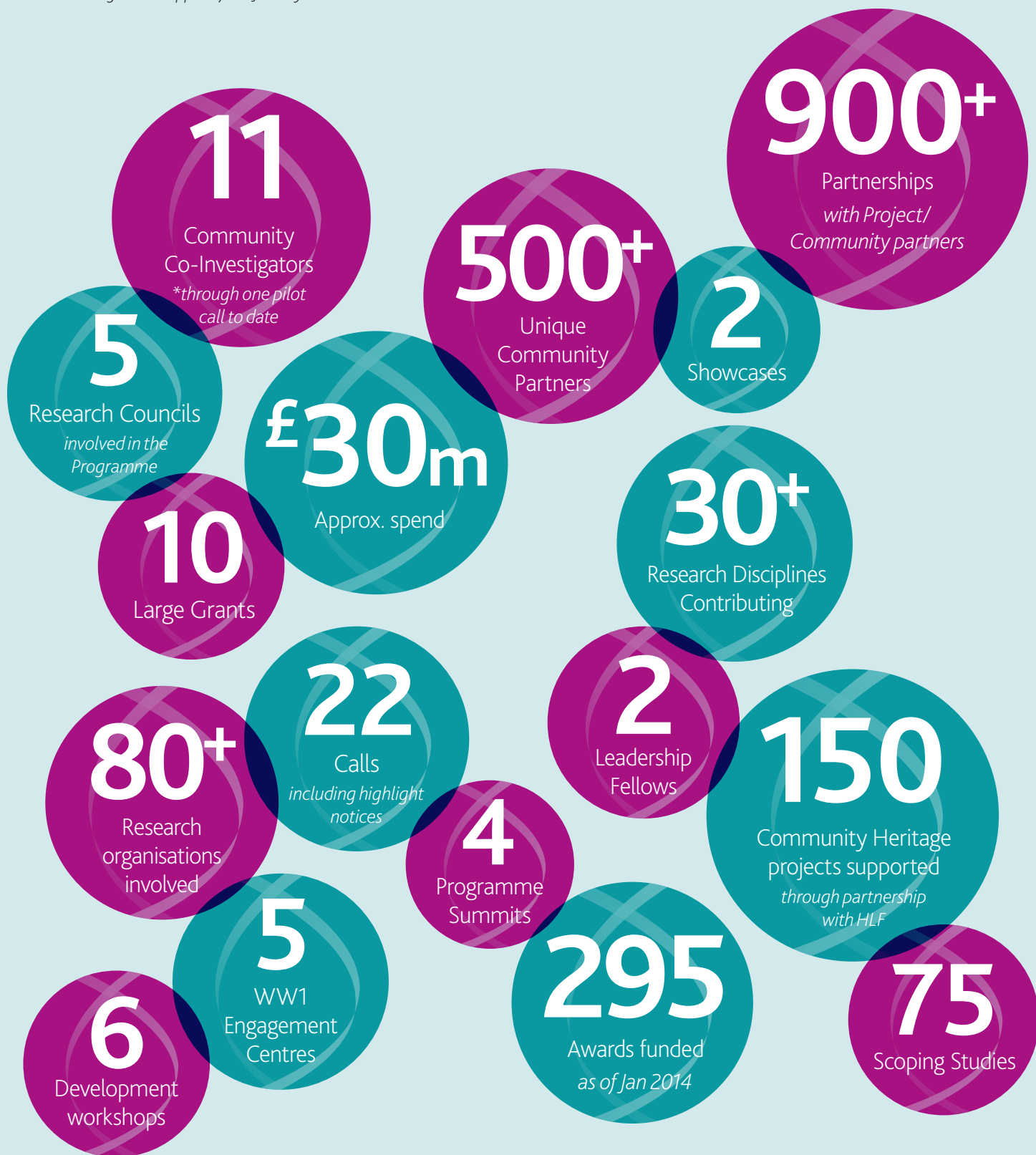
“ The AHRC-led Connected Communities Programme is unique. It is leading by example in demonstrating how innovations in the co-design of research, reconfigurations of engagement with research users and challenges to the distance between academic research and community engagement can be channelled into productive new perspectives. The distinctive role that the arts and humanities have in this approach is generating new insights and interactions across a range of organisations, communities and research fields. ”

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jay Galvin



# CONNECTED COMMUNITIES IN FACTS AND FIGURES

*Figures are approx. from January 2014*





## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The theme explores the importance of community connectedness for our health – physical, mental and emotional – and the contribution of community-based activities to improving our well-being. Research under this theme includes projects exploring: the potential to create more dementia-friendly communities; the ways in which community-based creative representations of health can inform health policy and services; and how creative practices can support communities to address mental health difficulties.

► The Dancestry project enabled school children in Saddlesworth to explore their local heritage through dance with professional dancers and Professor Richard Morris (University of Huddlesfield).  
Photo: Olivia Burgess



### Dementia and Imagination

Connecting Communities and Developing Well-Being through Socially Engaged Visual Arts Practice

**DR GILL WINDLE**

BANGOR UNIVERSITY, WALES

**This research explores how communities which are supportive of dementia can benefit from creative activities. Working with community arts partners, the project team are developing and delivering a programme of visual arts activities to people with dementia, building on good practice from around the world.**

As well as measuring the individual, economic and social impact of this research, artists are working with the research team and using their skills to interpret the process and findings. These artistic outputs will be displayed in exhibitions and workshops which aim to stimulate debate and challenge perceptions of what it might be like to live with memory difficulties. Age Watch, a non-profit organisation helping people to live healthy lives, is a major project partner. This project was co-funded by the AHRC and the ESRC.

## DISCONNECTION, DIVISION AND EXCLUSION

Disconnection can occur from, within and between communities and in a variety of cultural contexts. It can take many forms including loneliness, exclusion, discrimination, conflict, extremism and low levels of civic participation. This theme explores the potential for research to engage with diverse communities to address some of the challenges that can be associated with these and other forms of 'disconnection'.



► Disconnection can include loneliness, exclusion, discrimination, conflict, extremism and low levels of civic participation



### Connectors, not Communities, in Preventing and Responding to Violence and Disaffection; Marginalised Youth and Complexities of 'Community'

PROFESSOR BASIA SPALEK KINGSTON UNIVERSITY

**This study examines the role of 'connectors', key people within communities, in sustaining and enhancing the quality of vulnerable young peoples' lives. Young people may face violence, poverty, and other forms of marginalisation, but often certain people can play a significant role in mediating the critical issues in their lives.**

These connectors may work within and across many communities, and so this study brings together researchers who have worked with different groups, for

example Muslim and white working class communities, to undertake empirical research. The project includes partners such as community practitioners, police, and the Department for Communities and Local Governance.

Research relevant to this theme includes several projects looking at the potential to use online environments to counter loneliness, map patterns of trust in communities, and to create cultures of empathy.



## COMMUNITY HERITAGE

Our heritage is all round us – in our buildings, our institutions, our histories and, perhaps most importantly, in our communities. This theme aims to enhance outreach, engagement and sustainable links between research groups in the arts and humanities and community groups and organisations interested in exploring their local, regional, or national histories and heritage. As a part of this theme 18 research teams were supported to collaborate with over 150 community heritage projects funded by the HLF's 'All Our Stories' programme. This partnership with HLF has been further extended with the creation of five Community Engagement Centres to support communities to undertake research as a part of activities to commemorate the centenary of the First World War.



### Voices of War and Peace

#### The Great War and its Legacy

**PROFESSOR IAN GROSVENOR**

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

**Voices of War and Peace will reach out to multiple communities both local and national to explore issues around memory, remembering and commemoration during the centenary of the First World War.**

Based at the new Library of Birmingham, Europe's biggest public library, the Centre will form the focus for workshops, exhibitions and wide-ranging research on how the conflict has shaped the past 100 years. It will focus on themes about gender, family and the home front, belief, commemoration and childhood and will work with communities to research the First World War and its legacy.

▲ Neville Chamberlain addressing a meeting of the armed forces

► University of Birmingham Great Hall as a Military Hospital Ward

*Images: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, University of Birmingham*



## CREATIVE AND DIGITAL COMMUNITIES

There is increasing recognition of the importance of communities for local economies and economic regeneration, and of their role in stimulating creativity and innovation, particularly in the UK's rapidly growing creative and digital economies. A cluster of projects is looking at the potential for communities to co-produce digital assets of enduring value such as new digital platforms to combine community and archival materials, crowd-sourced 3D models of prehistoric artefacts, and digitally enhanced physical objects to stimulate the memories-of older people in care homes. In addition, large grants are exploring: creative citizenship and networks in local media, hyper-local publishing and community-led design; the cultural value of 'everyday' participation within communities; and the role of cultural organisations in connecting communities to the creative economy



▲ Residents and members of WHALE Arts, Prospect Housing Association and the Lord Provost of Edinburgh scan local information at the opening of the Digital Sentinel totem pole

▼ Showcasing the community news service for Wester Hailies [www.digitalsentinel.net](http://www.digitalsentinel.net)

### Ladders to the Cloud

CHRIS SPEED

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH



This project saw the installation of a four-metre totem pole carved by local residents in the Wester Hailies area of Edinburgh, and the development of a community newspaper. This work followed on from another Connected Communities project, Communities 2.0, which sought to design and develop social media infrastructures in the same area.

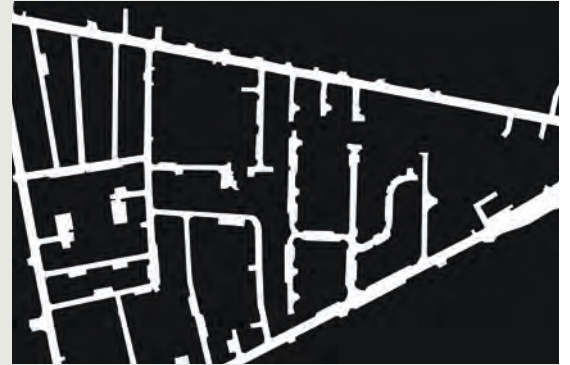
Local people are able to use QR codes (a type of barcode read by smartphones) on the pole itself to post news and events, and to share resources. Community journalists then choose the information to retain within a digital cloud for residents of Wester Hailies, or to release the information to the wider world.



## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS

Research under this theme is exploring the importance of the environment for community life, the role of humanities to explore with communities environmental challenges around water such as flooding, amenity use, waste and biodiversity.

Two large projects are exploring: the potential to use narrative and storytelling approaches to engage communities in debates about current and future energy choices ; and, the potential to use arts and humanities to more effectively engage with communities to explore interconnected issues around water (flooding, amenity use, waste, biodiversity, etc.)



▲ Ground of the Inner-East; pre-redevelopment in 1969 (left) and post-redevelopment in 1994 (right)

▼ The abrupt termination of Bright Street, once a main thoroughfare connecting adjacent streets

All images: Donovan Wylie & David Coyles

### Communities as constructs of People and Architecture

A historical assessment of the spatial legacy of The Troubles within inner-city Belfast, 1969 – 1994

DAVID COYLES

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

To explore the legacy of the Northern Ireland Troubles, this study brought together a research team including an architect, a fine art photographer and project partners from the community and government. The study examines the relations between community life in inner-city Belfast, architectural design, and the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland.

Practice-based architectural and photographic analysis of the city environment revealed how the community was transformed during the unrest, and how the now disconnected streets and fragmented spaces restrict free movement of the residents. Collaborative and co-designed community workshops established that this important aspect of the cultural history of the area was unknown, and revealed how communities can be disenfranchised and disengaged from the socio-economic forces that govern their built environments.





► Post boxes at Portland Works, Sheffield.  
Image: Julia Udall



## Stories of Change

Exploring energy and community in the past, present and future

**Dr Joe Smith**

GEOGRAPHY, THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Many people feel put off by the way environmental issues are talked about, and find it difficult to identify with or respond to them. The Stories of Change project aims to help to revive the stalled public and political conversations about energy by looking in a fresh way at its past, present and future.

The stories in the project offer a popular and engaging route into thinking about the past and present, and the imaginary futures of energy. Stories, narratives and narration are concepts that everybody can gather around. The project draws on history, literature, social and policy research and the arts to encourage more imaginative approaches to current and future energy choices.

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## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

Civic engagement and community action are embedded and enduring elements of social interaction and culture. This theme looks to understand how individuals and communities make their voices heard, the barriers to community empowerment and the ways in which social innovation and wider participation can be enhanced. Two large grants under this theme are looking at new ways in which communities can engage in decision-making processes across politics, policy and the arts; and exploring the potential of different forms of community building to inspire imagination about the future and create a momentum for change.



► Original Library Room at the Liverpool Athenaeum (built 1797), c.1920's. Photo: Liverpool Athenaeum

▼ The network explores the future of public libraries in the digital age, and in an age of austerity. Image: Warwickshire mobile library by portableantiquities, CC BY 2.0



### Community Libraries

Connecting Readers in the Atlantic World, 1650 – 1850

DR MARK TOWSEY

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

**Before the introduction of free Public Libraries in 1850, libraries emerged to serve particular communities. This research network seeks to explain the emergence of these libraries and to consider the cultural history of these spaces.**

Libraries emerged to reflect the specialist demands of military garrisons, emigrant vessels, prisons, schools, churches, factories, and informal networks of professional men. Commercial libraries were a part of a newly emerging leisure industry, while subscription libraries and book clubs made an important contribution to the spread of new political ideas across Britain, North America and continental Europe.

At a critical time for the future of public libraries in the UK this network explores whether historical models of library provision can be adapted to meet the challenges faced by community libraries in the digital age, and in an age of austerity.



## SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION

Connected Communities has supported early career researchers since its inception with tailored calls designed to allow new voices to be heard and to help develop the engaged researchers of the future. Research for Community Heritage, which brought academics and community heritage groups together, provided a range of collaborative opportunities for early career researchers as well as bespoke training in public and community engagement. The programme has also launched targeted calls for postgraduates through the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme, which supports doctoral training through universities in tandem with a partnering organisation. The programme continues to support early career researchers with targeted funding and training opportunities.



“Taking up a post-doctoral position on a large Connected Communities project has enabled me to combine my skills in policy, research and practice with a passion for community engagement. Working with an inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral team on applied issues in the creative economy has offered an opportunity to address key debates in policy and urban studies, such as localism and austerity, and to consider how academics can work more effectively with different community groups to achieve positive impact and change.”

**SASKIA WARREN** BIRMINGHAM

▲ The programme continues to support early career researchers with funding and training opportunities

▼ Early career researchers at the Research for Community Heritage project at the University of Sheffield. The scheme provided a range of collaborative opportunities for early career researchers as well as bespoke training in public and community engagement.



## PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITIES

One of the Programme's most important aims is to support and promote the idea of the co-design and co-production of research and to support this through projects run with communities rather than about them. For example, a cluster of projects is exploring a two-stage approach where initial co-design with communities sets the agenda for the second, co-production phase of the project, challenging more traditional project approaches. A pilot is also being conducted under which community groups can nominate themselves as project co-investigators, thus bringing community groups centre stage in project management.



► Andrea Jarvis performing in Abergavenny shopping centre.

▼ A staff photo at J G Thomas & Sons, Builders, Decorators, Hot & Cold Water Fitters, Lion Street, 1903. Image: David Owen, from Handbook to Abergavenny, Crickhowell, Usk & Raglan by Ed Burrow.



### Performing Abergavenny

Creating a connected community beyond divisions, of class, locality and history

**PROFESSOR VALERIE WALKERDINE**  
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

**This co-designed and co-created project works with local people and organisations to create and deliver interventions based in the arts and humanities which can involve community members who might otherwise be overlooked or marginalised.**

Citizens come together with local councils through public performances and popular history, addressing the disengagement between people and local governance. The research thus addresses barriers to social cohesion by combining small performance acts with social action. The co-creation of the project, involving members of the community contacting the project team with ideas, has made for a rich and meaningful project with a local legacy.





“The New Vic Theatre has been a community partner with Keele University on a number of exciting Connected Communities projects putting the communities centre stage and ensuring that research done is meaningful and useful. Connected Communities gives community groups opportunities to make sense of their experiences, explore positive ways to make a difference, have a powerful voice to reach policy makers and dissolve hierarchies which prevent genuine interactions.”

SUE MOFFATT NEW VIC THEATRE



Image by Steve Pool

“The Connected Communities programme has changed how I do research with communities. It has made it possible to listen to other ways of knowing, coming to grips with key societal challenges with communities but through different lenses, including art practice, poetry, philosophy, music and literary theory. This process has enabled new kinds of knowledge to surface.”

KATE PAHL SHEFFIELD



“Connected Communities is a fascinating programme. It is a great opportunity for broad-ranging, free-thinking approaches that value the knowledge and expertise of local communities as well as that of academics. I just want more community partners to know about it!”

JESS STEELE LOCALITY



## THE FUTURE

As the programme continues to develop we will further extend the diversity of communities involved and explore creative ways to engage with wider communities, through festivals and digital media for example, and to enhance the legacy of the programme for communities and future research.

New research projects are emerging which explore the challenges of disconnection, division and exclusion within and between communities, empathy and trust in on-line community environments and the potential for design thinking and approaches to enhance community-engaged research.

We plan to further develop activities in areas such as community heritage and digital research co-production and to develop new research agendas exploring the connections between communities, work, enterprise, creativity and social innovation. We hope to contribute distinctive perspectives to emerging cross-disciplinary research agendas in areas such as cities and urban development and big data.

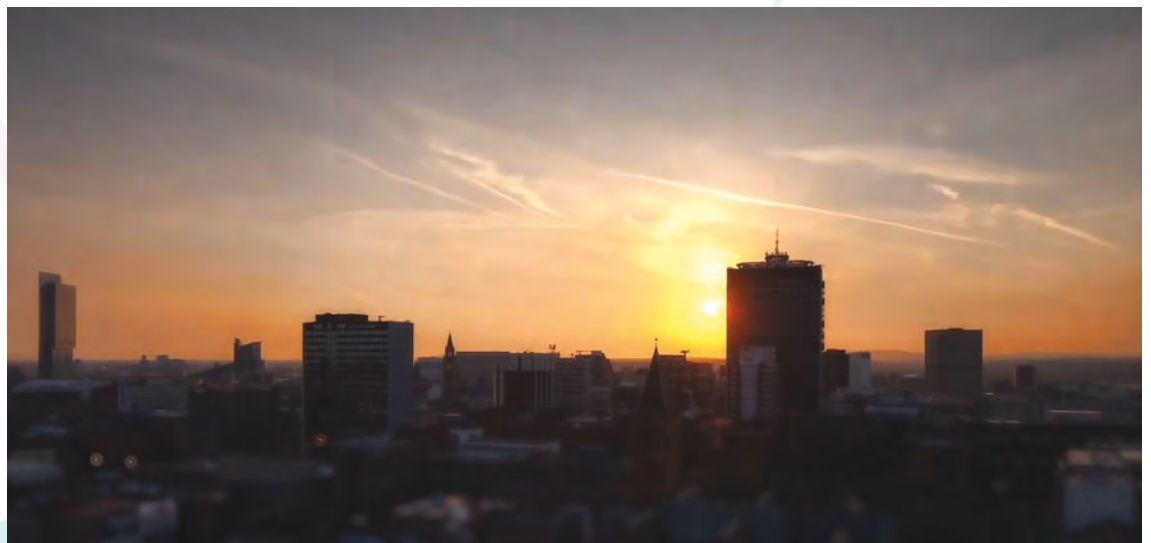
We will also extend our range of partnerships, explore potential wider international connections and collaborations, extend our support for early career researchers and further develop the long-term legacy of the programme.



“The Connected Communities programme has developed a unique model that has supported an incredible range of talented and engaged UK researchers. In the process, the programme has inspired adventurous and committed research by challenging orthodoxies around what research is and who can do it.”

MICHELLE BASTIAN EDINBURGH

► From a film of the 'Understanding Everyday Participation' project, led by Dr Andrew Miles of Manchester University, which is investigating the connections between understandings of community, cultural value, the creative economy and everyday participation.



# LEADERSHIP FELLOWS

[www.connected-communities.org](http://www.connected-communities.org)



## Professor Keri Facer

Leadership Fellow for the Connected Communities programme and Professor of Educational and Social Futures, University of Bristol

**Professor Facer's work is broadly concerned with understanding and building relationships between different knowledge communities in pursuit of flourishing and equitable societies.**

Formerly, this has included bringing together researchers, educators, civil society groups, digital artists, computer scientists and young people in collaborative design projects in education and the arts. Currently, this includes sociological analysis of the interaction between different communities in co-production processes, and exploring the practical uses of 'the future' as a site to foster reframing, collaboration and social change. She has collaborated with organisations ranging from Unesco, Microsoft, the BBC and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to primary schools, city farms and local museums.



## Professor George McKay

Leadership Fellow for the Connected Communities programme and Professor of Cultural Studies, University of Salford, MediaCityUK

**Professor McKay's work is broadly in cultural politics and community arts, ranging from popular music to the cultures of social movements, and from festivals, gardening to community music.**

His most recent books are *Radical Gardening: Idealism, Politics and Rebellion in the Garden* (Frances Lincoln, 2011), and the AHRC-funded *Shakin' All Over: Popular Music and Disability* (Michigan, 2013). His collection *The Pop Festival* is forthcoming from Bloomsbury. Along with a number of grants from the AHRC, he has received funding from EUFP6, HERA, British Council, HEFCE, Arts Council, and others. He is a semi-professional double bassist.

## Strategic Advisory Group

The Programme has established a strategic advisory group drawing together members drawn from the community, voluntary and policy sectors as well as a wide range of academic disciplines to advise on future directions, opportunities, partnerships, priorities and events. Details of the membership of the Advisory Group can be found in the AHRC's website.

