Welcome to our annual review of Newcastle University’s work on Social Renewal during 2016. Our theme of social renewal, focused on ‘Thriving in Turbulent Times’, resonated even more strongly as a societal challenge in 2016, with the UK’s vote to leave the European Union and the election of Donald Trump as US President. These two momentous decisions are seen by many as symptoms of dissatisfaction - with globalisation and inequality, with elites and experts, and with an emerging democratic deficit and sense of powerlessness. ‘Taking back control’ has much appeal in such turbulent times.

For those of us in universities, seeking to contribute our expertise to addressing the major societal challenges of the day, there are a number of responses. One is to try to analyse and explain what underlies these decisions of electorates, in the hope that their concerns can be identified and addressed. Another response is to seek to anticipate the impacts of Brexit and to help to inform the development of the new national policies which will be needed in place of EU policies in so many respects, from human rights and environmental protection to agricultural support and the car industry. Even more fundamentally, these developments called into question the role of expertise and reason, truth and post-truth, prompting reflection on to what extent evidence should inform policy and debate and how this occurs, if it does.

In these pages you will find examples of our work during 2016, some of which touches on these questions and all of which seeks to promote ‘excellence with a purpose’, engaging with various publics and helping to address the question of how to thrive in turbulent times. Highlights include poverty proofing the school day; remembering the Great War and drawing lessons for promoting peace today; involving young people in research; working with voluntary and community organisations to influence policy and practice; and inspiring a new generation of young people. Reflecting on our first five years we believe success derives from working across boundaries between academic disciplines, between the academy and knowledge exchange partners, and between nations - interdisciplinarity, interaction and internationalism. As we move forward into 2017 we will draw on these to address the pressing new challenges of thriving in turbulent times.

Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE, Director of Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal

Newcastle University’s Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, of which I am very proud to be a member, spent a large part of 2016 on an important journey to explore and agree its values and we are now working collectively to ensure that those values are applied in all areas of our work, in teaching, in research, and in our wider engagements with society. The work of the Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal is a significant expression of that value system in action and has been an especially meaningful intellectual space in which we can assemble and debate political and social issues in a year of turbulence and change. Spaces of this kind, conceptual and actual, in which to think (and to think through) are an essential part of a dynamic university community. Equally important, however, is how that thinking goes out into the community and the world and works with other individuals, groups and organisations to make real change, shape policy, inform practice and transform lives. You will find numerous examples of this work in the pages that follow and I hope you are as inspired as I am to be part of the ongoing story.

Professor Julie Sanders, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Social Renewal as a Societal Challenge

In a rapidly changing world, what helps people thrive?

Newcastle University is a world class civic university - concerned not only with what it is good at, but what it is good for. The Institute for Social Renewal is a focus for one of our three Societal Challenge Themes, bringing this vision to life. NISR builds on the university’s global reputation for academic excellence by helping colleagues to work with external partners. The process of Knowledge Exchange also enriches our own work. Working across the university, it focuses on the following themes:

- Arts and Culture in Social Renewal
- Children and Young People
- Digital Innovation
- Enterprise in Society
- Health, Inequality and Wellbeing
- Knowledge, Evidence and Policy
- Learning for Change
- Martin Luther King Legacy
- People, Place and Community
- The Past in the Present

Newcastle University Institute for Ageing

The Newcastle University Institute for Ageing is our response to the societal challenge of Ageing. We are seeking new ways to make the most of the extensive opportunities associated with increasing human longevity, while at the same time solving some of the problems. Our mission is to be a global leader in interdisciplinary ageing research, as well as translating our ideas into positive changes to help us achieve the focus of our research agenda: “How can we live better for longer in our communities and maintain our quality of life?”

Our ageing network will work with the National Innovation Centre for Ageing by bringing together, in one centre, world-leading scientists to work together with industry, the NHS and the public to develop, test and bring to market, products which promote healthy ageing as we grow older.

More information can be found at www.ncl.ac.uk/ageing

Newcastle University Institute for Sustainability

The Institute for Sustainability at Newcastle University coordinates research across multiple disciplines to deliver practical, engaged solutions to real-world issues in sustainability, under the banner ’Enough, for all, forever’. It supports excellent interdisciplinary research at Newcastle University to establish best practice in sustainability through science, innovation, policy and action – by drawing upon areas of research excellence in energy, food, transport, water and earth systems engineering. Underpinning the Institute’s mission in the world is the concept of justice and governance, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Newcastle University researchers lead sustainability research and engagement that supports the rights of all people to environmental benefits and safeguards communities from environmental burdens, including pollution and climate risks.

More information can be found at www.ncl.ac.uk/sustainability
Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal has three guiding approaches:

1) To lead public debates in social renewal.

2) To engage in the production and dissemination of high quality research and scholarship that informs policy and practice at all levels, governmental and non-governmental.

3) To work on selected projects on a co-production basis with partners to improve the practices and effectiveness of social renewal. Our intention is to explore new ways, such as ‘Demonstrator Projects’ and Open Chairs, in which a research intensive university - its staff and students - can connect with society in order to make a difference.

Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal values the following in its work:

- Academic Freedom
- Collegiality
- Respect for, and tolerance of, diversity of views
- Knowledge and understanding based on evidence
- Debate as a formative process
- Transparency in the positionality of the researcher
- A concern for social justice, kindness, and social responsibility

Images: 1 - Newcastle University campus  2 - New Pathways to Social Renewal springboard event (credit: Simon Ver-Wilson)  3 - Hatton Gallery, Newcastle University

www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal
Involving Young People in Research

Shawlands Academy is a multicultural secondary school in inner-city Glasgow. In November 2014, Deputy Headteacher Cath Sinclair noticed that although the school is frequently approached by researchers because of its diversity and its geographical location, the pupils themselves had never been asked for their opinions on such research being undertaken.

Giving a Voice

As a result, Professor Peter Hopkins from Newcastle University’s School of Geography, Politics and Sociology was invited to work with staff and pupils to correct this. After a period of conducting focus groups, Professor Hopkins with the students developed a shared protocol about their involvement in research. The purpose was to give students a greater say and to keep them better informed. Funded by a NISR grant, a group of S4 students from Shawlands were invited to Newcastle University to talk to researchers about the research process, and to work together to organise their feedback into a protocol.

The protocol, titled “Getting the Facts Right”, makes it easier for decisions about taking part in research to be student-led, rather than made by teachers. It also sets out how research should be conducted and how researchers should behave when working with young people.
“The genuine partnership between Shawlands Academy and Newcastle University was built firmly on the principle of allowing students to have more than just a voice about research in schools, but actually to steer the project from inception to outcome.”

Cath Sinclair, Deputy Headteacher at Shawlands Academy

Why Research Matters

The students said that taking part in research gives them a chance to explore a range of topics relevant to their lives, and helps them understand why they think the way they do and why they might disagree with their friends and classmates. As a guide to researchers, therefore, a summary of topics young people think are important is included in the protocol.

In a Newcastle University blog, the Shawlands students said that “the only way for humans to excel and expand our understanding and knowledge is to carry out research and unlock new experiences”.

Getting the Facts Right

In June 2015, the protocol was presented by Shawlands students to officials from Glasgow City Council. The group is also mentoring and training younger pupils at the school so that there is a sustainable student voice in decisions about which research takes place at Shawlands Academy.

Teachers, pupils and researchers will be able to access the new research protocol on the Glasgow City Council website, and the student-centred research protocol is being introduced in schools across Glasgow.

In 2017, Professor Hopkins and Cath Sinclair published an article that summarised their findings in a new journal about participatory research: "Research, relevance and respect: Co-creating a guide about involving young people in social research".

Youth Matters

This way of involving young people in research is now being developed in a different way by other Newcastle University colleagues. Karen Laing and Jill Clark (School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences) supported young people to undertake their own research as part of a Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded project. Following the work with Newcastle University, one group (aged 12-17) now conducts research with community members on a regular basis about local issues that concern them, and disseminates this research through a local radio show.

NISR funded four of the students to present at an academic conference, Youth Matters 2016, to talk to academics about their experience of research and working with Newcastle University. They produced a short film about the difference it made to them. Their youth worker said ‘I think they have got much better understanding of what research is, and the value it can bring’.
Poverty Proofing the School Day

The impact of poverty on learning and life outcomes is stark and well documented. However, whilst we know that pupils living in poverty are less likely to do well in school, we are less sure about how schools can ‘compensate for society’ in the words of the educational researcher Basil Bernstein. An evaluation carried out by staff at the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching has found a North East scheme with significant positive outcomes in this area.

Children North East and the Poverty Proofing Audit Tool

The Poverty Proofing the School Day audit, created by the charity Children North East and evaluated by Dr Laura Mazzoli Smith and Professor Liz Todd, aims to remove barriers to learning for the poorest students, through uncovering stigmatisation. The audit process is an intensive whole-school evaluation in which pupils, parents, teachers and governors are questioned about the ways in which pupils living in poverty may be disadvantaged during the school day. The evaluation found that all the participating North East schools were presented with over thirty areas each in which it was found that poorer pupils were stigmatised throughout the school day. These areas were largely generic and left almost no area of school life untouched, highlighting how our poorest pupils are likely not to be able to afford the correct uniform or the increasingly costly school trips, have their free school meal status shared publicly, not possess specific resources or be able to complete homework on computers, and may be routinely absent on non-uniform days.

The scheme advocates schools using simple measures to help youngsters living in poverty get more out of the school day. The evaluation found that these low-cost steps, such as offering students a free drink and snack before exams, improving IT access in school, introducing more breakfast clubs, changing the ways school meals and uniforms are administered, and cutting the number of non-uniform days, could prevent poorer students being discriminated against during the school day.

The evaluation found evidence that this then led to improved attendance and attainment for these pupils, as well as greater uptake of free school meals, school trips and extracurricular activities. The significance of this research is in identifying what can often be thought of as pastoral aspects of schooling as barriers to learning that directly impact on academic outcomes.

Helping Pupils, Families and Schools Thrive in Times of Social Change

A key finding of this work is that much of this stigmatisation is unwitting and hidden, even in schools which foreground the needs of their most disadvantaged pupils. The final report highlights that without asking very specific questions about the impacts of poverty – enabled through a tool such as the Poverty Proofing audit – barriers faced by the poorest pupils can remain largely invisible. In times of shrinking school and welfare budgets, it is vital that schools have access to a process through which they can get support about how to identify and remove these hidden barriers.

In order to disseminate and reflect on these findings more broadly, NISR also supported Dr Mazzoli Smith and Professor Todd to organise a public event, Education and Poverty – new evidence on an old problem, which included contributions from Manchester University, Children North East, Schools North East and Universitat Ramon Llull Barcelona. Schools Week also ran an article on the research, highlighting not only how pupils, but
“Poverty Proofing the School Day helps schools uncover the myriad ways in which children living in poverty can be stigmatised and this research helps explain why it is still so difficult for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to do well in the English education system in the 21st century”.

Dr Mazzoli Smith

also their families and schools have been helped to thrive in times of social change. This research has provided independent evidence of the effectiveness of Poverty Proofing the School Day and offered an analysis of the reasons why such a process is necessary, effective and significant in the current context, with impact well beyond the region.

Professor Todd said: “State schooling is supposed to be free. In fact, the cost to families is high. Uniform, food, equipment, study support and other activities are central to becoming a successful adult, not optional add-ons. Our research suggests that attainment gains follow when schools take action”.

www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal
The Illustrated Soldier

The books we read and share are an important part of the way we understand who we are. Stories shape our view of ourselves and each other. Books and the stories they contain are part of the creative and cultural capital of a society, a community, a family, and an individual reader.

By engaging in dialogue with ex-service personnel about portrayals of the military in books for the very young, Dr Helen Limon (School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics & Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts) created a space for people who have been greatly impacted by conflict to participate in debates about military life and the place of service personnel in society.
This project gave us a chance to understand if and how this example of popular, mainstream culture might help individuals to ‘thrive’ or indeed to form barriers to them ‘thriving’.

Dr Helen Limon

The Soldier in Print

Working in collaboration with Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children’s Books, and the service veterans charity Forward-Assist, groups of service veterans and Dr Limon discussed the portrayal of military personal and military conflict in a selection of picture books for children.

A series of three workshops took place to gather the veterans’ responses to stories and images that use the military as characters in illustrated fiction. Building upon this, a new activity called ‘book-hacking’ was undertaken, and a short animation was created using the illustrated titles to illuminate the veterans’ reactions to the work.

With an estimated 125 000 to 208 000 service veterans living in the North East all of whom have a range of different experiences and with many of whom being supported by a range of statutory and non-statutory organisations, it is important to find out how veterans see themselves reflected in this significant example of contemporary culture and to listen to what their view of these portrayals in children’s fiction tell us (and them) about their life as military personnel and their transition back to civilian life.

Changing the Culture

Dr Limon was interested in developing this project to examine how female service personnel in particular are portrayed in children’s books. However, this led to the discovery that there was a massive absence of female portrayals of military life in mainstream culture.

Following a “Warrior Women Book-Hack” at the AHRC Commons Festival, Dr Limon engaged with an international, market-leading activity book publisher, which had published a range of sticker books in which women characters appeared only as passive bystanders or victims.

As a result of this project and the public pressure it exerted, the publisher agreed to make big changes to the sticker books. The new versions which started to appear in book shops in September 2016 now show women participating alongside men in a professional capacity, and do justice to the concerns raised by community partners within this project.
The Urban Living Partnership

The Urban Living Partnership (ULP) brings citizens together with university researchers, local authorities and partners from business and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to help tackle local issues and ensure the continued prosperity of Newcastle and Gateshead. It is a first-of-its-kind investment by the seven UK Research Councils and the government’s innovation agency, Innovate UK. The £1.2m ULP – named Newcastle City Futures – is led by Newcastle University working with Northumbria University, and includes representatives from local government, businesses and community sectors. It is only one of five cities to be awarded the prestigious designation. Taking a ‘whole city’ approach, Newcastle City Futures will bring together a unique body of expertise cutting across over 20 disciplines including civil engineering, computer science, planning, psychology, management, arts and humanities, the creative industries and health sciences.

Carnegie UK Trust InterAction Report

How can academics and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) work together to influence policy and practice? The Carnegie UK Trust appointed Professor Mark Shucksmith (Director of Institute for Social Renewal) to explore this very question, and in 2016, a report was published on the findings. Professor Shucksmith analysed the discussions of a series of roundtables, and explored the challenges and opportunities present in working together. His report analyses examples of best practice and then makes recommendations to 1) Universities 2) VCSE organisations 3) Funding bodies. The report has been well received by all sectors, and downloaded 1639 times from the Carnegie website by September 2016. Reviews of the report were also carried by Times Higher Education, the Oxfam blog and the LSE Impact blog.

The report was collated and authored by Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE, Carnegie Fellow.

The Civic University Book

Higher education is engaged in society in a range of ways, although there has often been a lack of joined up frameworks in which to maintain and develop these relationships and interactions. The editors of this book on the subject hope to revitalise the concept of the civic university, one which is embedded and engaged with the outside world. Published in 2016, this book has been described as an “overdue correction” to the discourses of responsibility on contemporary universities, and a welcome approach to the balance needed in universities between their “traditional research and teaching missions and the ethical imperatives of a civic mission”. Analysing 8 Higher Education Institutions, this book is an innovative contribution to the debate about how universities should be making a difference in the world.

This book was edited by Emeritus Professor John Goddard (Newcastle University Centre for Urban and Regional Developments and NISR Ambassador), Emeritus Professor Ellen Hazelkorn (Policy Advisor at the Irish Higher Education Authority and Emeritus Professor at Dublin Institute of Technology), Louise Kempton (Newcastle University Centre for Urban and Regional Developments) and Paul Vallance (Newcastle University Centre for Urban and Regional Developments).
Go Volunteer

Go Volunteer offers students volunteering opportunities to develop employability skills, meet new people, supplement courses and have a positive impact on the local community. Their opportunities include student-led projects (such as helping older people become more digitally inclusive; or learning beer science with our microbrewery, Stu-Brew) and community initiatives (e.g. designing and building a community amphitheatre in Northumberland; and helping disadvantaged communities, through projects such as N.E.S.T (North East Solidarity and Teaching), which helps Syrian Refugees to develop their English language skills). Run by a team of staff co-ordinated by Katie Blundell, over 160 organisations are involved. Areas of interest to students are wide but common requests include mental health, refugees and the homeless. Volunteering is particularly popular amongst international students and amongst women students. Go Volunteer guards its volunteer ethos carefully and for most students the prime benefit is enjoyment and the promotion of wellbeing.

Teaching the Town Meeting

Three years ago, Newcastle University academics collaborated with Cap-a-Pie theatre company to involve citizens in the planning process using theatre. The Town Meeting project, a play that asks the audience to respond to a fictionalised planning problem in “Little Rikjord”, has now been performed to over 400 people in 10 communities across England. But at the end of the play’s first tour, Dr Paul Cowie and Maggie Roe (Architecture, Planning and Landscape) recognised that there was another group of citizens who could especially benefit from this opportunity. As a result, the team developed a new Masters level module for Newcastle University students, exposing future planners to a real life planning situation through “The Town Meeting”. The unusual format meant that after an initial scepticism at being asked to take part in a performance, the students were totally engaged. The module also encourages students to ‘perform’ their group work rather than the traditional PowerPoint presentation at the end of the module. Creative methods help the students contextualise and reflect on their learning and knowledge, and the Town Meeting has now changed the way that students are taught.

For more information see:
http://www.cap-a-pie.co.uk/the-town-meeting/
and for a podcast about the original play:
https://soundcloud.com/capapie/thetownmeeting

PGR Training Programme

The Institute for Social Renewal have been honoured to work with postgraduate students from within Humanities and Social Sciences who form a vibrant part of the research community at Newcastle University. Students have participated in modules developed by the Careers Service and also by the Postgraduate Team within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Working with the students to develop ideas and approaches on interdisciplinary projects which address a societal need has been fascinating, rewarding and inspiring and a particular highlight was the PGR showcase on 23 June 2016 which demonstrated the richness of the research abilities and the relevance of our postgraduate community.
Addressing the Gap: Housing in the North East

In June 2016, a group of researchers from Newcastle University met to discuss housing in the North East. They asked the questions: “what are the main drivers of change?” and “what will the issues be in the next few years?” This was a response to the ESRC Housing Evidence Centre call, and featured research from several Newcastle University academics who are hoping to answer these questions by exploring the key issues at play and developing collaborative solutions. At this workshop, participants considered the “good ideas” that could be taken forward, as well as hearing from particular current research projects, including ‘the studentification of the urban middle class: living and working’, ‘the way we live now and in the future: commuting and the housing crisis’, and ‘future homes: changing the current housing offer’. From the connections made and the ideas generated, Newcastle University hopes to contribute to responses to the housing crisis and to work with communities to prepare for the turbulent times ahead.
From the Border to the Wall

Although the Anglo-Scottish border is an area rich in history, sometimes its past landscapes are not understood, with many archaeological sites going undiscovered until recently. This is why Caron Newman from the McCord Centre for Landscape in Newcastle University decided to recover aspects of a forgotten past using local volunteers and Newcastle undergraduates in the "From the Border to the Wall" project. The project uncovered the medieval landscape of Cumbria and discovered seven new examples of prehistoric rock art. The discovery of new archaeological sites has led to a 70% increase in the number of entries in the Historic Environment Records for the case study areas. Now, the project is having an impact on the local community, who are benefiting from the increased knowledge of their heritage assets, and the better conservation management that will result.

Tyne and Wear Citizens

Making changes where we live, work and play in a way that really involves a diverse range of people is not easy. Marching and signing online petitions is important but does it really change anything? Citizens UK engages people in taking action on issues for the common good selected from a process of deep listening. Current national campaigns include Citysafe, Good jobs campaign, Living wage and Refugees welcome. Power is created through organising people, with relationship building as a basis for action. Citizens has come to the North East and the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences/NISR are founding partners of Tyne and Wear Citizens. Other organisations involved include St Chads College Durham, NE Wellbeing, St Cuthbert’s Primary, Islamic Diversity Centre and Newcastle Quakers. Listening campaigns will be taking place in many organisations in Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham which will lead to the selection of local or regional actions that will be launched at a major delegates assembly in November 2017.
ACCOMPLISSH

This novel and exciting EC Horizon 2020 project is focused upon harnessing the value of social science and humanities research to society. By concentrating upon working with partners from public sector, industry and society it will model good practice in joined up collaborative working. In a consortium of 14 Universities from across Europe, Newcastle University is playing a key role in championing engaged research to deliver responsible research and innovation that ensures that insights are generated with and for the benefit of society.

Digital Civics for Health in Refugee Camps

There are 1 million Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon, with some living in informal tented settlements experiencing difficulties in accessing antenatal care. Focus groups with 60 Syrian refugees found that they want a digital medium that allows them to communicate with healthcare providers (HCPs) remotely, but viewed HCPs to be reluctant to communicate with them. Furthermore, they expressed low agency when communicating with HCPs and that every household had a mobile phone. Accordingly, Citizen Radio was developed to facilitate a female refugee in hosting a radio talk show that is synchronously delivered through mobile phones. Refugees reported higher self-reported agency when asking their health questions through this medium and it aided in building trust and understanding between them and HCPs. This project is an ongoing collaboration between Dr. Hala Ghattas at the American University of Beirut, Reem Talhouk, Dr. Madeline Balaam, Dr. Vera Araujo-Soares, Dr. Balsam Ahmad and Professor Patrick Olivier at Newcastle University.

Constructing Informality: From Slums to Citizenship

It is now acknowledged that neither the state nor private institutions are able to provide the numbers of houses required by the growing populations in the cities of the global south. Instead most new housing will continue to be self-built by low-income inhabitants - and the challenge is to understand these processes in detail in order to design supportive policy responses. Since 1985, Dr Peter Kellert (School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape) has been studying self-built informal settlements in Colombia. Over a 30 year period he has returned 9 times to live with a family in one of the settlements to document the housing trajectories of communities and households through changing economic and social circumstances. Drawing on his qualifications in architecture and social anthropology, his ethnographic data illuminate the interrelationships between processes of housing construction, furnishing and habitation – and fundamental issues of identity (re)construction and the role of the dwelling in people’s lives. Starting with simple wooden shacks, most families have not only managed to incrementally construct solid, multi-room houses, but many of the next generation are well educated and contributing effectively to society and the economy. Starting from ‘slums’ they have demonstrated significant agency to improve both their housing and position within society.
**People, Place and Community**

**Independent Creative Living**

What happens to those involved in arts and culture when they grow older? How can they be helped to thrive by their built environment? These are the questions that drove Professor Rose Gilroy (School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape) to pursue the potential for a housing community for older artists and people in related cultural occupations in the North East. In the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, 79 potential residents and other interested parties were asked “what are the gaps in current housing provision in the region?”; “what might a housing scheme to help people live creatively for life look like?” Through drawings and discussions, ideas were generated, and now the task falls to a Steering Group to take this forward and create an exciting space, which strikes the elusive balance between independence and community.

**Children and Young People**

**Changing Stories**

Too often, young people talk about not being able to identify with university students. There is a perception that university is not for everyone, and that that is connected to the backgrounds and stories of the students themselves. However, the reality is that there is huge diversity in the pathways to university amongst students. Dr Laura Mazzoli Smith and Karen Laing from the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Newcastle School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, consulted with young people in this project to create an online portal called ‘Changing Stories’. This portal will allow those under represented stories to be told. Desk research identified similar projects elsewhere in the country and further national-level work is being developed collaboratively with these partner institutions. A core team of student ambassadors have recorded an introductory video to the Changing Stories portal and contributed their own life stories. This work has been disseminated and the portal is shortly about to be launched through Newcastle Students’ Union. Stage 2 student Emily Jobson said: “I want students considering university from the local area to recognise Newcastle is for them no matter their background.” If you’re a student interested in sharing your life story, or in a school interested in taking part in the piloting of the portal with pupils, please do get in touch with Laura at laura.mazzolismith@newcastle.ac.uk
Arts and Culture in Social Renewal

Circus Between Worlds

This collaborative participatory arts project explored the unique role that arts and culture can play in generating energy and action in areas undergoing rapid change. Neil Bromwich, School of Arts and Cultures, worked with residents from the Gorbals area of Glasgow, along with staff, students and collaborators from Edinburgh University, Glasgow School of Art and Newcastle University at the iconic Caledonia Road Church in Glasgow, forming a rich cross-institutional learning environment responding to site. The project was launched as part of the Glasgow International Festival and gained more than 500 visitors. Through the creation of rich and evocative ‘circus’ style environments, performances and workshops, new energy and perspective was given to the possibilities of place, and the potential futures that the area could hold.

Martin Luther King Legacy

Poetry and Human Rights

During May 2016 the Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts (NCLA) welcomed the poet Carolyn Forché. Forché coined the term ‘poetry of witness’ to reflect the 20th-century tradition of poetry that politics has pervaded, as it pervades the life of the poet. In situations of war, imprisonment, torture or forced exile - suffering, or the will to survive it - impresses itself on the poetic imagination. This project explored that connection through a workshop, a poetry festival and a discussion on human rights and poetry, film of which has been distributed via local poets’ networks and hosted on the NCLA Digital Archive. An article on this subject written for the Guardian was shared over 3000 times, and the content could scarcely be more relevant.

Digital Innovation

OpinionExplorer

Involving all sections of society in the physical planning of communities is a challenge for local authorities and planners. Outcome reports from urban planning consultations are lengthy, static documents, and present barriers to engagement for non-experts. This project, led by Dr Sebastian Weise (School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape) in collaboration with Dr Philip James (School of Civil Engineering and Geosciences), built an interactive demonstrator with support from Lancaster City Council - OpinionExplorer - to help non-experts interpret large batches of consultation data easily. In order to realise the social value of open data to society, a toolkit is needed to help connect data in easy ways: to map it spatially, to group citizens’ responses thematically, and to aid transparency in the planning process. After showing the tool to Lancaster City Council planners, the project has opened eyes for the possibilities of mapping to help participants hold more informed debates about plans for their local communities. Next to the potential to make consultations potentially more accessible, interim results have also pointed to some important ethical debates over the use of personal data in future political processes.

www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal
Health, Inequality and Wellbeing

Allotment Biomonitoring

Allotments provide a vital role for old and young in our communities. An increasing number of young families can be found on allotments and waiting lists for plots are at an all-time high. However, Newcastle’s allotments routinely contain raised lead concentrations; the result of a combination of natural geology and external factors. Lindsay Bramwell from Newcastle’s Institute of Health and Society worked with Newcastle City Council and the Health and Safety Laboratory in this NISR funded project to bring research to bear on this issue. The study provided vital evidence regarding adult blood lead concentrations associated with gardening on soils with raised lead concentrations; addressing ongoing underlying anxieties about their relationship. The results are informing guidance on ‘safe’ soil guideline values, and promote confidence in urban health and thriving.

The Past in the Present

Reading the Wall

There are many historical sites that have played into modern imaginations, but none more recurrently than Hadrian’s Wall. Recently, it has benefited from new visitors – fans of Game of Thrones – who travel in order to experience the inspiration behind the story. This NISR-funded project was a collaboration between Dr Rob Collins (School of History, Classics and Archaeology) and Dr Stacy Gillis (School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics), to combine expertise in regional history with genre literature. Following a comprehensive survey of the way that Hadrian’s Wall features in media, the project hosted an international conference including as keynotes the award-winning authors Garth Nix and Christian Cameron. Building on the insights gained, there will now follow an application to the AHRC, and this project will help build a network around the relevance of the past to our present.

Enterprise in Society

Captured

Captured is a participatory research-based programme exploring how anchor institutions, including business schools and private sector organisations, can engage with micro-businesses to develop skills for growth. Originally funded as a pilot intervention by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, the Newcastle University Business School programme seeks to provide a platform for larger firms to explore the ways in which they can contribute to small firm development. The programme matches senior managers from large regional organisations with small firm owners to help them develop leadership and management skills that can improve the performance of their business. The managers from the larger organisations also get the chance to learn from the way in which a small firm operates.
The programme has gained the support of some of the region’s largest companies, including Siemens, GSK and Sage, and worked with 41 small firms over six cohorts between January and June 2016. Captured is continuing into 2017 with funding from the Business School and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership with the goal of encouraging more larger firms to support small firm growth, thereby contributing to the economic development of the North East of England.

Knowledge, Evidence and Policy

Devolution Revolution

Regional devolution is high on the political agenda, often heralded as the solution to challenges facing government and society today – from economic growth and better public services to democratic renewal and keeping the UK together. But a number of questions must still be answered if devolution is to succeed. Newcastle academics and external partners have come together to answer these questions in a new policy pamphlet: The Devolution Revolution: Empowering Local Communities to Drive Change. The proposals contained within this pamphlet, concerning the legitimacy of elected mayors, the equality of economic growth, and citizen-led decision-making (to name but a few) were then discussed at a roundtable in Newcastle University London, involving academics and policy-makers. Professor Mark Shucksmith commented: “Done right devolution can help transform our country, give people a greater say, and bring about increased prosperity for many more. But for this to be achieved, it is vital that the voice of local communities is heard.”

Learning for Change

Equipping Schoolchildren to Thrive

In Wallsend, a group of 14-16 year old girls were introduced to Karen Laing (School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences), some of them being viewed as disengaged from their school. As part of an ESRC IAA Knowledge Exchange secondment, she undertook a small piece of research with them. She worked with a local youth group to establish the topics that the girls felt were important to discuss, and then used their suggestions to conduct a series of focus groups. 23 girls took part and the findings were disseminated to local practitioners to form the basis of changing local service provision. Following their participation, their Deputy Headteacher reported that their involvement had changed their behaviour. She believed that being listened to in a non-judgemental way, about topics that were important to them, had made a real difference to the girls, and therefore she has changed her practice to involve them more in decisions about school life. Two of the girls have subsequently received an award from the school for their behaviour and a further two are about to take part in a wider consultation event for young people to talk to practitioners.
Images: 1 - Circus Between Worlds project (credit: Colin Gray). 2 - Authors Christian Miles Cameron and Garth Nix at Hadrian’s Wall, part of the “Reading the Wall” project (credit: Rob Collins). 3 - The Bootlegger App, Digital Civics (credit: Open Lab). 4-6 - “BWK-BCN: Co-Producing Responses to Climate Change” project (credit: Alexia Mellor).
Digital Civics

Open Lab is Newcastle University’s centre for digital civics research. Digital civics is the application of technology to solve real-world problems, in areas ranging from health and social care to education and politics. This world-leading research centre investigates human-computer interaction and social and ubiquitous computing, and includes academics from the fields of computer science, design, engineering and social and health sciences. Led by Professors Pete Wright and Patrick Olivier, the EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) in Digital Civics at Newcastle University trains doctoral students in the design, deployment and evaluation of community-driven digital technologies and services. The CDT is a unique partnership between Newcastle University, Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Council and Northumberland County Council, and a range of local, national and global industry and third sector partners. Whether it is through the redesign of local services with communities, or rethinking how citizens can and do interact with local government, technology innovation and design has a critical role to play in enabling digitally connected citizens and communities.

Social Interactions of Ageing

The Institute for Social Renewal and Institute for Ageing at Newcastle University recognise that the need for interdisciplinary research has never been more pressing. With extended working lives, technological advancements and challenges in the equity of housing and healthcare there is great potential for the social sciences, arts and humanities and medical sciences to work together to explore the social interactions of ageing to help all sectors of the population to thrive. A cross disciplinary workshop was held in July 2016 and a joint research funding call has been created by the two Institutes to support multidisciplinary proposals to strengthen Newcastle University’s competitiveness for major national and international research programmes.

Co-Producing Responses to Climate Change

How do abstract, global issues like climate change translate at the local level? This was the question that Alexia Mellor (School of Arts and Cultures) investigated in “BWK-BCN” a participatory art project named after a fictional flight between Berwick-Upon-Tweed and Barcelona. Members of the wider Berwick community collaboratively investigated what a merging of Berwick and Barcelona might be like by developing a playful toolkit. How does climate influence infrastructures, environmental systems, and socio-cultural activities?

BWK-BCN created new learning and catalysed opportunities for stakeholders to reimagine Berwick. The project shed light on challenges and advantages of coordinating between institutions and communities, and the importance of drawing upon local experience and expertise. Above all, participants shared the value they saw in how BWK-BCN brought together stakeholders from varying backgrounds in order to suspend disbelief and collaboratively reimagine how we address issues.
Looking Ahead

Freedom City 2017

2017 is the 50th year since Martin Luther King was awarded an honorary doctorate at Newcastle University. Newcastle University was the only UK University to acclaim him in his lifetime in this way and his acceptance speech was to be his last speech outside of the US before his assassination in 1968. War, poverty and racism were the three ‘urgent and great problems’ identified by Martin Luther King in his speech, and these resonate with contemporary problems today.

The 50th year since he was awarded his honorary degree will be marked with a year’s programme of cultural activities and events, and his legacy in the city endures beyond this programme.

NISR is supporting a number of projects, including Dr Ben Houston’s multimedia exhibition, ‘Not as it is written: Black Pittsburgh in voice and image’, hosted at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh and Newcastle’s Great North Museum; Professor Peter Hopkins’ political participation project with Muslim youth in Glasgow; and a symposium on race and racism in children’s books which will be jointly hosted by Newcastle University’s Children’s Literature Unit and Seven Stories.

In partnership with Newcastle University Humanities Research Institute, NISR is facilitating the development of a collection of comics and a resource for teachers which will demonstrate that the visit of Martin Luther King to Newcastle, and the award of his honorary degree, were not isolated events, but form part of a larger and longer history of the city’s and region’s engagement with campaigns for civil rights.
Thriving Through and Beyond Brexit

Brexit is a significant challenge to the UK and how we thrive in a globalised world. It represents a time of change and uncertainty as the UK prepares to leave the EU with exit terms and trading agreements to be negotiated and agreed and the impact on the economy unclear.

With the support of funding from the Economic and Social Research Council, engagement activity led by Professors Liz Todd and Mark Shucksmith and REA Fellow Mel Steer involved hosting two knowledge exchange events in March 2017. Key strategic regional partners including industry, local authorities, the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and universities were invited to take part. The purpose of the knowledge exchange events was to consider the economic and employment implications of Brexit and to identify how the region can develop its approach to this unprecedented change to thrive through and after Brexit to create a strong, fair and prosperous region.

New Pathways to Social Renewal

There is more pressing need than ever for new thinking to solve global societal challenges. Adoption of the neoliberalist doctrine of market-driven, individualist, small-state solutions has led to diverse outcomes and a widening of the inequality gap across the life course in many countries around the world.

We will explore what evidence-based contributions an interdisciplinary community of scholars might make together to this major challenge of our time. We are aware this is a hugely ambitious task, and we do not expect to produce a simple or complete answer; nevertheless, through this process we may develop some innovative and important contributions to rethinking a paradigm for thriving in turbulent times. Our search is therefore for New Pathways for Social Renewal.

Social Renewal in the North East

Deindustrialisation and globalisation resulted in the loss and contraction of many industrial clusters in the UK (shipbuilding, manufacturing, fishing) and austerity measures following the economic crash in 2008 have increased economic divisions in the UK. Insecure, low paid service sector jobs have not replaced the quality of jobs lost.

The North East region has a rich heritage of innovation and creativity and we are working with partners to identify projects, opportunities and initiatives to ensure that the best of times can be ahead for the region. Professors Mark Shucksmith, Simin Davoudi and Derek Bell and REA Fellow Mel Steer are leading work that will explore approaches to social renewal and their application in the North East. This programme will include workshops, funding calls, collaboration and knowledge exchange with partners and editing of an accessible book and briefing papers for public debate. This work will identify regional case studies that will be of benefit to the UK, and of interest beyond the UK in developing ways to thrive in turbulent times.

www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal
Find out more about the work of the Institute:

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