

STRUCTURES: FORMS OF CO-PRODUCTION

Charlotte Tomlinson (University of Leeds) [00:00:08] Hi everyone. Welcome to this second session on the forms and structures of co-production.

In this session we'll start to get a bit more specific and consider those first steps in co-production and collaboration, thinking about how we approach it, how we structure it and really practically how do we begin these sorts of projects and partnerships, asking questions such as how do we plan for and establish partnerships with collaboration and co-production in mind? What are our formats, our models and what are the implications of those, and what lessons have we learnt?

Before we begin I should introduce myself. My name is Charlotte Tomlinson. I'm a public historian and a PhD student at the University of Leeds. I've been really lucky in my career so far to work on lots of collaborative projects, some working directly with archives but some working more indirectly with archives through museums, community groups and cultural organisations. For example, in 2017 I worked on a big project alongside Hull City of Culture. But more recently I worked with the East End Women's Museum on a new project and we're going to hear from them really, really soon.

So it's a real pleasure to be asked to chair this panel. Our first speaker, as you can see, is Sara Huws who among many, many wonderful things is one of the co-founders of the East End Women's Museum, who I just mentioned I've had the pleasure of working with first-hand. So please welcome Sara to the front.

Sara Huws (East End Women's Museum) [00:01:43] Introduction in Welsh. Thank you very much for the welcome here at The National Archives today. It's a fantastic thing to see you all here either engaged in co-production, curious about it or looking for ways to incorporate this way of working into your own establishments. So thank you very much to the team here and of course with all the partners as well for inviting me to speak and for your attention this morning.

So for the next ten minutes, I'm going to give a quick outline of my own experiences of co-production and then move on to how we use co-production at East End Women's Museum

and if we have time, might finish with some questions for you to consider as you move towards or further into co-production.

I just want to say thank you so much for the thoughtful contributions from the previous session. I'm going to try not to reiterate things but hopefully you will find some resonant themes.

But first a short word on who I am. My name is Sara Huws and I'm co-founder of East End Women's Museum which is an inclusive women's history project in East London. I spent over 12 years working for National Museum Wales, including a seven year stint at St Fagan's National Museum of History, which actually has a very well-established co-production model used to develop large-scale displays, make decisions about programming and also of course to enrich collections.

Nowadays I work in participation and engagement at Cardiff University libraries and archives, making our content and our services more accessible, more useful, more enjoyable to audiences outside academia.

When I'm not doing that, I present a television show on S4C called *Waliau'n Siarad*, which is about Wales' architectural history. This is a job that means I get to visit archives up and down the country (the country in question being Wales) to meet archives professionals and build connections and then share their collections onward with a wider audience through our programmes.

So sharing collections and seeing what happens when you introduce a group of people to a collection, enable them to engage with it on their own terms, and also put in place ways to ensure that they feel ownership of that process and what comes out of it. That's what excites me, that's what energises me, that is why I got up at 4am this morning to get a train to London.

And I'm here mostly today with my East End Women's Museum hat on so I'll be focusing mostly on that aspect of my work. But what I've learned and what I hopefully can share succinctly with you today comes from participating in projects with a wide variety of community groups, artists, individuals, professionals and many more besides.

So I would like to acknowledge from the outset how much of what I'm sharing today comes from contributions they've made and how much I value what I've learned as a professional through co-production. Because if there is one thing that you take away from what I tell you this morning, it's that co-production really is a two-way street at the very least. Always remember that you as a cohort of archival experts, of academics, genuinely have something to learn from the people you're working with, whether they are experts by profession or experts by experience or a little bit of both, and especially if they come from a different walk of life, a different age group, a different ethnic background or have grown up with a different worldview from your own.

So when you make an invitation to co-produce, expect something to change, to move for you and your organisation. Enabling deeper connections with collections isn't a one-way transaction, and so don't go into it thinking you're going to 'make an impact' on someone outside your walls without being ready for them to make an impact on you and what's inside your walls. I'm not saying that the laws of Newtonian physics completely apply to archives but it definitely is something that co-production should enable when it works best.

The whole point of co-production is that through making a genuine invitation and working openly, collaboratively and accountably, that you do create that third thing something your co-producers, nor you, could produce without each other. And that's how you really start to build meaningful, long-lasting connections between your institutions and your audiences.

When it comes to East End Women's Museum I guess that one of the questions I was asked to address was how do we plan co-production? Well we did it all by mistake! I'm very lucky to have experienced first-hand with East End Women's Museum an organisation that we founded with an open invitation to participate. And we've employed co-production methodologies quite naturally on a micro and macro level because that is how I was taught to work at St Fagan's, it's how I naturally kind of enjoy working with heritage in general. And this born participatory approach I know is probably quite unusual for an organisation in this field, and I'm aware that a lot of you here will be using co-production to make interventions at more well-established organisations who normally have their own traditions when it comes to choosing the audience you work with, your attitudes to collaboration historically and also how you approach sharing knowledge, what gets shared, what doesn't.

Right. But having seen both types of co-production methodologies in place through my work at East End Women's Museum and through National Museum Wales and now Cardiff Uni, that born-participatory approach and the interventionist models are both full of potential, no matter how big or small your organisation so I would encourage, even if it is an experimental approach, they are definitely worth investigating.

At East End Women's Museum it does mean that we work in a different way day-to-day because we're not only accountable to our board and to our values but we have a network of people who hold us to account in all seven boroughs from elected officials, community leaders, professional peers, volunteers, members of the public, our citizen steering group and a very vocal kind of social media following as well.

And we also allocate our resources in a different way. Organisational development takes a different format as we pay particular attention to how we design consultations and programmes, as well as making sure that communities are part of researching, collecting, interpreting and sharing women's history wherever possible.

And we make sure that at each milestone, the communities we serve can feedback on our work, can make suggestions, can ask difficult questions and also see that we're delivering on what we said we would do. It's a great motivator, it keeps us very, very focused. We do get offered a lot of nice kind of corporate empowerment work. We get offered a lot of cute, low impact research stuff that would be frankly a delight to rummage in. But that's not what East End Women's Museum is for. It's not a pet project for us. It has been built by the communities of East London for their benefit.

And you might be thinking it's a big time cost to have so many hands involved at every point in the process and you would be absolutely right. As mentioned in the previous session, co-production is an investment. You cannot build a museum on your own. Well you can, but don't expect your next door neighbours to be particularly pleased when it pops up out of nowhere.

I might have conceived of the idea for the museum but as a core team, we've always conceived of the project as a form of activism using museological and co-production methodologies to create an asset for, as well as about, women and girls in East London.

We've employed co-production on so many levels of our work and what we've built together, as I mentioned at the top of the talk, is far beyond what any of us could have produced without each other.

If you're not familiar with our work, we started our journey as a viral tweet. I'd been chatting with my co-founder Sarah Jackson about the opening of the Jack the Ripper Museum, how it had been framed as a women's history museum but unveiled as this sort of strange attraction with disembowelled mannequins and women's screams on a loop, and even at one point Ripper cupcakes.

And I proposed that we try to make the missing museum, the one that celebrated East London women in life, not just their murders. And when Sarah took that discussion public she added an open invitation – who wants to join us? And within a day we had had about 800 offers of support.

And that I guess would be where I would dwell on lessons learned but I'm going to try to keep to time and maybe we'll get to that in the discussion. But that generosity, as was mentioned again in the last session, when people see you as a point, a very accessible point, and you've asked them for their opinion about something. You know, make sure you have the capacity to respond to that demand.

We learned very quickly which systems worked for us. We kind of used an ad hoc Google group to start with to try and sort people by what they could offer us, their kind of shared interests, but it was only with the support that came from more established organisations such as Hackney Museum, Tower Hamlets Archives, Eastside Community Heritage and then that vital financial support from our crowdfunders, from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, London borough of Barking and Dagenham, and as of yesterday the Mayor of London's office, we were able to invest in actually supporting this demand and responding to it. We were able to grow the organisation, develop new opportunities for people in East London to engage with the histories of women, women and girls and employing co-production I would say in some description in about 80% of our programmes.

Addressing the kind of forms and formats that that takes. There's so much literature out there about it, I'm not gonna kind of rattle off a literature review. It's out there, it's an

established way of working. But I mentioned that we do use co-production on a micro and macro level, so I thought I'd give you some specific examples of how that works for us.

In terms of a micro level there might be the type of co-production you're used to, working with a group to research, record and represent a topic. For example, a case in point would be working for equality which was an exhibition looking at 50 years of the Dagenham Ford strikes and the Equal Pay act. And this was a National Lottery Heritage-funded project in which a group of volunteers, supported by a volunteer coordinator, were recruited from Barking and Dagenham. Training was then provided by Eastside Community Heritage, collecting oral histories and conducting archival research.

The volunteers researched the 20 oral histories recorded and then of course formed the basis of an exhibition which we then used to tour different community spaces and used that as a catalyst to ask people more questions about their own experiences of women's history in the borough.

And the legacy for that now that is that all of those findings become the basis for new learning resources. So those are able now to be used in local schools that are relevant to Barking and Dagenham and rooted in that community's women's history.

So, so far, so conventional really, it's a working method as I said, that's supported by a lot of mainstream funders and it's outlined in a whole bunch of books and papers that you can very easily access. Although that's an assumption. I work in a library now. I had no idea how many books you guys could get when I was working in a museum. Blimey!

On a bigger picture scale, an example of successful co-production that is completely embedded in our work is the steering group. That's a group of 17 women recruited from all seven boroughs, mix of ages, backgrounds, interests and experiences. And they were recruited to complete a finite task. And that was to advise on the design and delivery of our community consultation. So we deliberately recruited by hand-flyering, working with local libraries, as well as sharing the call for participants online. These were voluntary positions but we were able to cover expenses and we were proactive in arranging meetings, for example, at times where childcare was less likely to be a barrier to attending for example.

And these women met regularly with our director Rachel Crossley and our volunteer coordinator at the time Fani Arampatzidou, and they developed the community consultation together. And the results of that is what we will then be using as the basis for our next phase of development. So we co-produce the next phase of our co-production, if you like, and that will be how we move into a building in Barking town centre. And how we can do that in a way that is accountable to people who already live there and takes notice of their needs and what they would like to see in their own backyard.

The steering group did have a decision-making role when it came to the appointment of the artist who was going to be designing the consultation. So they actually did have an active decision making role. They were key as well in building capacity for us. Making sure that the consultation did reach a wider audience in East London, not just those audiences that are very well catered for in terms of mainstream cultural offer in London. People who already know who we are. But the museum is for a broader audience than that.

We were very, very grateful to be able to shortcut community connections and to have that increased capacity to publicise the consultation, so we decided to provide training in public speaking and provided a resource pack that would enable the steering group to go out to all sorts of different venues, their children's schools, church groups, hobby groups, all sorts of different places. They could tell the story of the museum in their own words and also could present a consultation and collect responses.

That then enabled us to collect over 2,000 detailed responses and those responses are what are shaping our plans for the future.

And now that that finite task is finished and because of financial constraints, we are a tiny organisation achieving a hell of a lot, we weren't able to support the group at the same level as we did. But they are an absolute powerhouse. They're amazing advocates for the museum as we had to be completely upfront with them about the kind of ongoing support that we would be able to offer. Because if they're going to give something as valuable as their time, introduce us to their community connections, we wanted them to know that those contributions were valued and that had a you know incredibly important role to play in our organisation. So we were fully prepared for the group to completely disband because we weren't able essentially to fund that support anymore, but because they'd played such a key role in developing the consultation, they did have ownership over it and

they wanted to see it through. Many of them then decided that they would like to stay on in some capacity where they were able to.

So out of 17 participants, 12 of them still volunteer for us. They represent the museum at events, they share information about us, they give us feedback, they hold us to account and they remain an extraordinarily valuable part of the East End Women's Museum team.

And as for the results of that consultation we'll now be incorporating what we've learned into our five-year plan and we're currently looking at the feasibility of creating a community research lab as part of the museum, so that we have an integrated lab that is part of how we set our research agendas, how we design our programming, something that would also enable us to map into skills pathways available in the London boroughs and lead people to them, signpost other services as well. Barking and Dagenham for example is a borough where, there is a low proportion of women registered to vote for example and there are also very high rates of domestic violence. So there are things like just encouraging people to register to vote or signposting supportive services that we feel that we would be able to do. And hopefully we can keep building these vital and exciting connections between collections and communities.

I have three foundational principles. I'll rattle through them really quickly.

1. Make a genuine invitation. If you are not ready to make a genuine invitation, do the work inside your organisation first. Attend training, join networks, find out who's out there, talk to people who are already doing the work in this room and outside. And if you're not sure who to invite, do your research. Use tools like Audience Finder, which is fantastic (even though it doesn't have a Welsh dataset, the Arts Council can talk about that later). Use demographic data. Look at community projects that are already ongoing, try not to step on their toes, try and learn from them.

Second... first being make a genuine invitation. Second is budget for it. Or you will end up with the same old faces. And everything has a time cost. And not taking this into account pushes that cost onto your audience. And also make sure that the quality of your outputs is exactly the same as what you would be putting in a blockbuster exhibition. But the quality of food, if it's good enough for your board of trustees, it should be good enough for your volunteers, it should be good enough for your steering group. It's just little things like that,

like consumables, like the quality of the output, that's really important. Because they know then that they're valued as a member of the team.

And be open and receptive. You can learn to do this, if like me, you are not naturally open and receptive. Training in action learning, active listening, liberating strategies, which is a facilitation technique, consensus making which comes from activism spaces. These are all ways that you can learn to be a better listener and also to be slightly less defensive of your organisation when someone comes along and says 'that's not how I would do it'.

And show your audience that you hear them by feeding back and showing them how you follow through. Show them that you value their time and by doing what you said you were going to do.

Good. Right. Thanks very much, talk to you later.

Charlotte Tomlinson (University of Leeds) [00:19:28] Thank you. Wow, there's been a lot to think about already but we've got a second speaker so I'm very happy to introduce Kristian Lafferty who is the Content Acquisition Manager at Ancestry, a platform I'm sure most of us are familiar with. And at Ancestry he's responsible for managing historical content partnerships. So please join me in welcoming Kristian.

Kristian Lafferty (Ancestry) [00:20:06]

Thank you and thanks Sara for that great presentation, really interesting.

Thanks for having me. My name is Kristian Lafferty and I work for Ancestry looking after our content partnerships in England. Not quite the public face of Ancestry but I am, in a manner of speaking, the appendage that extends out into the archives and libraries of England working on a range of different, but similar, collaborative projects.

I suppose I should start by saying a bit about Ancestry and what we do. We advertise on the TV, so some of you may have seen one of those advertisements and know that we're a family history website, and I suppose that some of you may have accessed the site or even be subscribers.

But I thought it might be a bit more helpful, on the theme of co-production, to say a bit about how we work in a structural sense: we, as far as I am aware don't own any, or certainly own very little of, the *underlying* content collections on our sites. I don't think it would be wildly inaccurate to describe us, primarily, as a tech company, using technology to help people discover information about their ancestors and about their past. Our mission is to Empower Journeys of Personal Discovery to Enrich Lives.

There's no doubt that our content is at the heart of everything we do, and like I said, it generally isn't ours at all. We depend massively on our relationships with the custodians of historical content, with archives and libraries across the world, and their willingness to work with us on collaborative digitisation and publishing projects.

I don't know if you're familiar with the pollination methods of figs? Figs exist as a result of a symbiotic relationship between the fig tree and the fig wasp, which climbs into the unripe fig, laying its eggs, allowing the larvae to hatch, fly away, and pollinate other fig trees; so the wasp gets a nursery and the tree gets a pollinator in a brilliantly mutualistic relationship.

I think, and I hope, that our relationship and our collaboration with archives is broadly analogous in the sense that we both benefit from working together. Without our archive partners furnishing us with ripe and juicy content collections we would be barren. The adult wasp usually dies and is dissolved by enzymes in the fig, so I hope that's where the analogy ends. Nonetheless, it's on this principle of mutual benefit that we try and work with archives and libraries.

With regard to forms and formats of co-production, I think we can succinctly describe our model as digitisation and dissemination through licensing.

So what does that really mean? Essentially, we sign contracts with archives that grant us permission to access, digitise and publish historic records online, and we operate on a kind of value-exchange model. So we try and give back to our partners what they really want, and I think that's a good basis for any collaborative project. We perpetually require new and interesting content sets, and we typically end up working with archives when they require one or more of the following things:

- Money - An additional revenue stream
- Digitisation services - Images
- Or wider dissemination and raised awareness of the collections they curate

I suppose this touches on the question, 'when is co-production most effective?' For us, it's when our need for more family history content aligns with some of those things that we can give back to an archive. But I suppose just by virtue of being the commercial entity in the room the question perhaps of whether or not co-production is useful or exploitative may hang over us.

After 10 years of governments who demonstrably don't care very much about cultural heritage institutions, I do sometimes wonder, and I have no doubt, that the money piece takes on an increased level of importance, and I do wonder, and hope, that the wider benefits of working on collaborative projects with us are meaningful, and that archives don't feel working with commercial entities is an unavoidable and unwanted necessity.

Which is why we try to make sure that our agreements capture what the archives really want to get out of working together, whether that's Ancestry access for the library service or a marketing and PR push for the record office.

We've worked this way with loads of archives and record offices across the world. Here's just a snapshot of some of our English partners.

So a lot of planning goes into working collaboratively with an archive; from choosing the collections we want to work on together, to figuring out the logistics of digitisation, indexing and publishing, which ranges from the nuances of document handling and conservation to the more practical elements like finding some space within an archive for us to work; from the repository to the reading room, to the broom cupboard (which I'm told isn't a bad place to set up a scanning operation, as it tends to be windowless).

One of our challenges in the UK is that the content team is actually really small. So you may assume that because Ancestry is a fairly large organisation that we have endless resources, but in the UK, certainly, that isn't the case. It's the five of us in the content team, and I should point out that our digitisation function remains in-house so three of the five are digitisation.

I would love to be able to stand in front of you and talk about all the great community and academic projects we're working on, but what often happens when we're approached by, say, an academic wanting support for a research project is we end up scrambling around to extract and cobble together an index or a letter of support for a funding application, as a kind of aside from our business as usual. And I genuinely do wish we could do more in that respect, but the reality is that most of our collaboration is directly with archives; I suppose that's when co-production is most effective for us, as a commercial entity; which of course isn't quite the same question as 'when is co-production most effective?', to which I think the answer is when what you want to achieve, what you want to accomplish and achieve aligns really well, and what each party is able to contribute complements the other.

Anyway, to give you a brief breakdown of how we plan for and execute our projects with archives, I thought I would share with you part of an overview that we worked with on an archive recently.

This is the workflow that we put together for Cumbria Archive Service, to work digitising their collections relating to family history. All of our collaborative projects are quite similar, I would say, but for this one, uniquely, a lot of the planning exists in PowerPoint, so it's quite handy for us here today. I should point out that we don't actually have an agreement with Cumbria. In my experience, it can take anything from 18 months to five years to go from planning to contract to execution. But like I said we have continuously ongoing licensing projects and most of them are quite similar.

We're currently in Worcestershire digitising Bishop's Transcripts and we've just finished digitising some parish registers collections in Westminster City Archives. Anyway, you can see the process mapped in this workflow. I'm right here at the start - acquisition. I mostly talk about what content sets would work well for a family history audience, what the archive wants to get out of working together, and how to structure a licence agreement.

Next we try to scope out the project in order to create a method statement. You can see that many documents are different sizes. Some are loose leaf frayed, some are folded into bundles. So these are some of the projects that we've scoped out, worked on, some that we haven't worked on but we have scoped out. Some even contain a miscellany of bullets. So one or several of Pete, Amina and Nikita (my digitisation colleagues) scope that out

with the archive and, working, working with them, come up with a neat overview of how we'll tackle the project. Essentially a concise view of what we will photograph and how we might do it. And I suppose the point is the complexity of the project dictates the approach that we take and also how long it takes us to do it.

We then spend some time on recruiting digitisation operatives, and we try and find people who have a genuine passion for working in the heritage sector. We try and recruit locally, and we encourage our partners to talk to volunteers or other people connected to the archive or library about applying for any roles.

I know the team are very proud that many of the people of the many people who have worked with us who have gone on to have successful careers in the sector. And I think there's quite a bit of stalking goes on to keep this updated and refreshed: all consensual I'm sure.

But I would sort of tie back the recruitment point to the usefulness of collaboration, too, because it's not just the output or benefit to institutions that should be the measure of that; I think it's the benefit to communities, through employment, cultural capital, and to individuals to gain experience of working on these kind of collaborative projects.

And with the recruitment comes training. Based on this slide you may surmise that it's: don't tear the priceless scroll in half or play giant jenga with the records. But I think it's useful to acknowledge that working on a large project like this requires a good deal of trust and goodwill, and we take it really seriously and listen to any specific requirements of our partners, whether that's unique instructions on how to flatten and rehouse a will or how to remove 1.5 million staples from some masters and mates certificates.

Then, aside from some dull (to most people) technical stuff, for this prospective project, we suggested a planetary camera set-up, which kind of harks back to the method statement that we look at the project and work from there to work out the best way to tackle it, working with the archive. And that's worked quite well lots of time. For example if it was a bunch of hardy and resilient, resilient index cards, then we may try and sheet feed them, as Nikita is doing here in this converted toilet. So we take a lead from our partners, and we work that out together.

Anyway, we try and share our expertise and take guidance from our partners in turn. We'd never pretend, for instance, to be experts in records management, archiving, conservation, and a whole host of other stuff, so we try and lead on the things that we're good at (creating reliable digital surrogates, publishing, marketing, and so on) and follow on everything else. For this prospective project we met with the conservator to discuss any special requirements, condition issues, handling requirements and how to address them. In the past, under the guidance of others, we've taken an active role in conservation and document prep. This is the 1851 Manchester Census, which was water damaged. We brought in a conservator, and we were able to piece that back together. We also experimented with a UV camera to make previously unreadable text legible once more. Which I'm sure you'll agree is pretty great.

Here's some various projects where we've worked in a conservation role. At the National Maritime Museum, the Gretna Green Marriages and conserving and rehousing West Yorkshire wills.

So I don't want to go over time so I'll just whiz through this last bit, which is where the real work actually starts. I think, probably, the biggest lesson we've learnt about working, where two or more separate entities come together to work on a project, is the process and need for continuous and ongoing communication. Shown here in a literal sense of a progress report on digitisation but also over the top of our whole project sits the fifth member of our team, Sophie, our project manager, who talks constantly to our partners about the scanning, indexing, publishing process, who solicits feedback on collections before we launch and so on. And, eventually, we can put the collections on Ancestry: co-branded and co-produced, like so. Harking back, again quickly to the question of useful or exploitative. It's a challenge for us to reconcile the product or brand that we're selling, Ancestry, with the individual collections and contributions of our partners. So we go to great pains to ensure that the provenance of the collections on our site is very clear, and that the contributions of our partners are acknowledged.

So, just to wrap up, the last thing I'm going to talk about, is slightly different but it would be remiss of me not to mention this on the theme of collaboration, the Ancestry World Archives Project or AWAP as we call it.

Ancestry World Archives Project is a collaborative indexing project whereby we make some of our record collections available to the public to index themselves. We still manage the process of digitisation and publication in the usual way but with AWAP we create conversion instructions to show how the records ought to be indexed and let our users download a tool and index those collaboratively, which is a great thing to do not just because it engages our users in the family history community but also because it allows us to put those indexes online in front of the paywall without the need for users to have a subscription. We've done this successfully with the Getty images collection, the police gazettes, Gretna Green marriages, and a whole host of other stuff.

So I'll wrap up there and I look forward to a good panel discussion. Thank you.