

Co-Researching Participation and Community: A (researcher's) account of community based research with residents in Deprived Urban Communities

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From 2007 to 2009, Bradford University's International Centre for Participation Studies was involved in an innovative research project with residents from two deprived urban communities in the North of England. The research employed and trained residents as 'community researchers' to facilitate an estate-wide process of self-research into resident involvement in local decision-making. Drawing on grounded theory and participatory action research the project sought to understand how and where residents participate, both in their own communities and in spaces offered by agencies and statutory bodies. It also sought to ask why the British Labour government has been unable to generate self sustaining transformations in these communities, in spite of its evident commitment to improving the lives of the most excluded social groups.

A year on from the research project, I aim to reflect on the value of the project and the wider concept of community based research. The research raised questions of how research is constructed, what methods dis/enable participation and in what spaces. It also led us to ask who is seen to have knowledge and power (even at a very local level) and made us question how academic and policy documents, by their nature, often make us construct particular discourses about the communities we are researching.

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I am currently a Government of Canada Post Doctoral Research Fellow researching Participatory Visual Methods with a focus on Participatory Video and Knowledge Production.

I come from an interdisciplinary background with a PhD in Peace Studies, an MA in International Development and Post Graduate pedagogical training. Prior to becoming an academic I worked as a Head of Special Educational needs setting up inclusive programmes to enable vulnerable and excluded young people to receive education in mainstream schools.

My research involves using innovative visual and participatory methods to facilitate involvement by so called 'marginalized' communities in the research and the policy arena. My work has included ethnographic visual research with excluded British-Pakistani and Indigenous British young men ('street youth') in deprived inner city areas; working with residents in social housing to facilitate a community based research project examining participation in decision making processes; and working with people with dementia involved in campaigning to bring about change in the social and medical treatment of people with dementia.

I am currently co-editing a book *Theorising Participatory Video: critical issues and challenges* which seeks to relocate participatory video, trace accounts of its use in research and interrogate assumptions about its emancipatory nature and potential for social change.