Monograph:
Cox, C. orcid.org/0000-0002-9568-6994 (2023) Open Research Case Studies: Faculty of Social Sciences. Report. Open Research Case Studies . University of Leeds

https://doi.org/10.48785/100/158

Open Research Case Studies: Faculty of Social Sciences

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School of Education

Opening Up the Academy: The Case of the Early Education for Young Deaf Children and Their Caregivers in Ghana project with Ruth Swanwick and Daniel Fobi

Daniel Fobi

My research background is in sign language interpreting, where I am particularly interested in how to improve sign language in education, to enhance the outcomes for deaf students. I pursued my PhD along these lines, which is how I met Ruth who was my supervisor. Currently my research pursuits include looking into early-years education for deaf children, and enhancing mechanisms for learning support.

Ruth Swanwick

I've been in deaf education for most of my career after being a language teacher in UK schools. I developed the MA Deaf Education Programme at Leeds that has a sign bilingual philosophy. I've always been interested in bilingualism and how children learn multiple languages in exceptional circumstances. In the case of deaf children this involves learning sign language alongside other spoken and written languages.

What do you think of when you hear the term 'open research'?

"I would say that it [research] is visible to all, and that it has no boundaries and gives people cooperativity to assess [the work in question]" - Daniel

"Accessibility, transparency, and sharing" - Ruth

Early Education for Young Deaf Children and Their Caregivers in Ghana

"*Deafness affects 32 million children worldwide and is disproportionately prevalent in low and middle-income countries where the physical, economic, cultural, and social contexts of children's lives inhibit access to inclusive and equitable early education. This project aims to investigate these challenges in Ghana where early childhood development and inclusive education for all is a development priority. The research team is working to co-produce case studies in rural and urban environments and survey extant practices and policies to inform a contextually situated and intersectoral approach to early education that builds on the proximal and external resources around the child. The development of research and practice in early language and communication as core foundations for learning supports SDG planning in Ghana and is relevant also to other low and middle income countries in sub-Saharan African and elsewhere*." - project summary from the British Academy website

We developed our project design and methods in the Ghanaian context, where the early support infrastructure for young deaf children is limited. One of our drivers was the need to change the flow of knowledge about the early childhood education of deaf children that has traditionally been from north-to-south. By working with education and health practitioners and caregivers in Ghana our aim was to develop an understanding of the local contextual factors that influence early support in a low-income context and to identify what can be done in terms of the development of materials and intervention strategies to improve provision for deaf children and their families.

"We were interested in looking at the nexus between education and health, and providing that kind of infrastructure support for the language and communication of deaf people in early years." - Daniel

The project was funded by the British Academy and based across Leeds and University of Education, Winneba. The British Academy set it up so that the funds and research distribution was equitably shared across both institutions, both with their own budgets and project managements. This devolution was also symbolic of the drive to give greater say and input from the global south mentioned; positioning the project on an equal footing, as opposed to be concentrated at a northern-based university.

Methodologically we utilised mainly qualitative methods like interviewing and observational data, where we would learn from participants societal experiences in schools, churches and social clubs on deaf-related matters, and impacts and influences on families and caregivers with deaf children. We had to conduct many of these collections via online mediums like WhatsApp because of the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Because part-and-parcel of this project was to help and have impact for those engaged in deaf education, we regularly involved educators and parents in our discussions about their experiences with certain resources and how they thought they could be improved or new ones that may be introduced.

Open research practices used

The project has used several methods and approaches that can be considered open research:

Open education

In terms of open education one of our aims was to open up and broaden knowledge production and sharing in relation to the early support of deaf children by giving greater voice to practitioners and researchers in the global south. We identified the need to decentre concepts of early support and intervention that are traditionally developed according to Western understandings of childhood and culture and to broaden the research base to include other global contexts. Most deaf children live in the global South and so we hope that the work in Ghana serves to ensure that indigenous childrearing practices and cultural understanding of deafness, language and communication are represented in the literature.

Open access

Some of the papers we have published have been made open access, directly related to our work in Ghana and wider deaf education. Here are the DOIs to access them: https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2116028
https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2022.2078650

Shifting knowledge production away from the global north

Also part of open education (in opening up and broadening knowledge production and sharing) has been our drive to give greater voice to the global south in academic research (also known to some as 'decolonisation'). The whole project is about shifting concepts of early support and de-centring them from the 'Western Academy'. That's a very small centre, and traditionally not inclusive of other global contexts, where by focusing the project in Ghana with locally-based researchers and stakeholders we have sought to help rectify this.

Participant engagement

Those who participated in our data collection were not just used for the purposes of gathering data. Rather, we worked with them, by conversing with them, incorporating their views and inputs into our project, especially in terms of what kinds of impact they wanted. Daniel worked extensively with the deaf community and organisers in Ghana, where they helped design materials for parents and teachers, and organise and design the workshops we ran.

How do you go about forging collaboration and co-operating with external stakeholders?

It's about patience and building trust with the relevant communities and organisations that can help facilitate impact. For instance, Dani utilised his extensive network of local contacts he had built over the years, as well as spent long amounts of time building additional networks. It can be a very-laboured and bureaucratic process, like for example waiting for numerous appointments with the Ministry of Education. Technological advancements like social media had helped shorten such processes, but in a developing country like Ghana there are limits to how well such can mitigate the length the processes take. Some of these organisations can also be very small, have limited resources and busy schedules, where it can be hard schedule-in meetings and build working relationships. An example here was the Ghana National Association of the Deaf. However, at the end you make contacts for life, where people/organisations you have collaborated with could be prospective partners in future endeavours.

Developing resources for deaf accessibility

One outcome of our project was to see how we could produce and disseminate materials to support language and communication, where we found it was vital such materials be decentralised and specifically-suited for a given context. Subsequently we have designed materials based on our findings that are multilingual in the sense that they are video-based with both English captioning and Dagbani captioning. The latter is based on the importance placed on having material being locally-accessible, where in Ghana there are over 79 different local languages, where Dagbani is the dominant one with over 80 percent of Ghanaians knowing it.

These resources were led by our deaf colleagues, who also brought their own perspectives and shared their experiences as deaf people. We have also conducted various conferences, workshops and seminars, and have published quite a few papers from the project.

At the moment we are working on a book which can help with deaf education in Ghana, again utilising multilingual aspects like English and Dagbani languages. On this we are working with the Ministry of Education, the Ghana National Association of the Deaf, and National Association of Sign Language Interpreters. It will also include short stories from the various people and organisations we have interacted with.

Did you encounter any challenges?

Cross-cultural understandings, and communication and expectations are ones you encounter at the start. However, you overcome these by building trust and collaboration on an equal footing, which is what this project has done from the outset. Understanding and appreciating other peoples' expectations and workflows, and accommodating these helps in this regard to.

Of course, when working with human participants and those from marginalised communities ethical considerations are crucial, which is something we had to navigate carefully. In fact, we plan on having a chapter or section around ethics in the book we're working on in order to share our experiences and help others.

Generally-speaking being transparent in all aspects of the project work has been essential.

Future plans

Aside from concrete plans like the book mentioned, we are hoping this project will help serve as a good case study and example to try to open up the academy more to voices from the global south.

We are working on an impact plan from the project, but require funding which we are yet to attain. The overall idea of this would be in enhancing confidence and the global outreach of academia based in these countries, not just Ghana. There are many working on deaf education in the global south, who are struggling to break into the academy, and one means of this is through reaching out to others. So, we're hoping to expand this project out to other cases across Africa.

The plan also includes training deaf people, building deaf leadership and a community of deaf leaders.

Participatory Research in the Young People & Active Journeys in Leeds project with Peter Hart

[Note: Interview conducted in July, 2022]

What does 'open research' mean to you?

I think of it as being partly about making sure the findings and results, and any kind of potential impact from research is available to all. That is not just to people within academia or people who have access to journals, so not just things like having journals as open access, but also about having more imaginative and creative ways of disseminating results. In other words, making sure that they can be accessible to people without any particular academic background.

When you work in the School of Education, almost everything that we research should be accessible to the general public. Open research should also be about making the data itself accessible. Again, that may or may not be to the general public. I have worked on projects where the data has been made just accessible to anybody who asks for it in, such as in the White Rose repository. Therefore, transparency is also important.

Young People & Active Journeys in Leeds

Project description:

The Yorkshire Sports Foundation, University of Leeds, and Leeds City Council are teaming up to work with young people (ages 11-18) to trial new ways to access their extra curricular activities through active travel.

Active travel are modes of transport that involve some kind of physical activity, like walking or cycling. We want to know young people's perspectives on the attraction of, and barrier to, engaging in more active forms of travel around Leeds to contribute to a more sustainable future for the city.

This participatory project will be working with young people from the city to act as ‘peer researchers’, who will engage with other young people to better understand the reasons behind choosing walking, cycling, scooting, and other modes of active travel. The aim of this project is to create change with young people – to devise a project aimed at increasing levels of active travel and then piloting it.

The purpose of the funding for the project is actually more of a kind of social or youth work-type intervention, funded by the Yorkshire Sports Foundation, which has come to us through Leeds City Council (LCC). The aim of the funding is to increase young peoples' amount of active travel. 'Active travel' is any form of transport for a particular purpose, so not for exercise, not just going out for a walk because you fancy a walk. It's about having a kind of purposeful journey to get somewhere and choosing to use some form of transport that uses your body, like scooting, rollerblading, cycling, walking.

How does the project use open research practises?

Participatory action research:

The project is quite early along but there is a strong emphasis on participants leading the research and project itself, so it is essentially citizen science/participatory action research (PAR). The funder wanted a project with researchers rather than something that perhaps a sports organisation could do, because they want the way we work with young people to be replicable to other organisations and other areas. What we're doing is an action research project where we're going to engage young people (those aged between 13-18), and train them up as researchers. Those young people will then go back to their organisations and they will run some kind of research project that will seek to improve opportunities for active travel, or at least better understand why their peers don't use so many forms of active travel.

In terms of the data collection, we're still working on what types of data we'll use. However, because of the participatory nature it's very much going to be down to the participants for the types of data they choose to collate. As I've said we'll be providing training on how to conduct research so that will inform and shape their decisions here. So, we could have a variety including interviews, focus groups, surveys/questionnaires, etc. We're working with three organisations, where we're going to train about 6 young people as peer researchers, and then they are going to go back to the organisations to attempt to create some kind of research.

I am the principal investigator of the project, but I'm also working alongside Morgan Campbell from the Institute of Transport Studies on this project. My role is kind of front-loaded, where I was involved in designing the methodology and doing an initial set of exercises with young people in different organisations. We collected some data from focus groups, but the main aim of those was to generate some interest in taking part as peer researchers; to advertise our research to young people. I will then be involved with the training aspect. From that point on, we have a research assistant who will work more closely with the young people to develop their project, so from that point onwards they will pretty much take over the project.

There are multiple benefits for conducting this type of research with this subject. First, it will allow for a more dynamic and interactive experiences where the relevant people to the subject are conducting the research themselves. So, it helps in both collecting more accurate data, with grassroots perspectives involved. Second, we hope it will teach young people about research and allow them to build experience in conducting some. This could lead to them pursuing other ventures in the future. Third, by working with the target community from start-to-finish we hope the project will have a positive, constructive impact on local transport strategies.

Open and FAIR data (findable, attainable, interoperable, reusable)

As I mentioned earlier, the funders are aiming for this project to be something that can be replicated in other areas/regions of the UK with other youth-based organisations. Therefore, we will be aiming to make the data collected FAIR and open to others to access. However, in our data management plan we basically put that we may or may not make the data publicly available, or the extent to which it will be publicly-available depends on the kind of data we get, which is quite difficult to predict where we are at the moment. There's certainly going to be some things that we have already collected with our initial focus groups that would be absolutely fine to put on. But I could imagine that there could be areas that are quite heavily-redacted just because our first priority has to be to the participants rather than potential future users as a data.

Public engagement and policymaking

One of the reasons LCC is involved with this is that previous transport strategies were entirely devised by adults with no consultation with children or young people. Obviously, children and young people, and sports strategy is about more than just active travel, it's about sustainable forms of travel and reducing reliance on cars generally.

Young people are some of the people who use buses and public transport disproportionately and walk disproportionately, and they were one of the demographics that feel most excluded if they do not have access to transport compared to friends whose parents are able to drive them to places for activities. So, the fact that they were missing from council's strategising, was a bit of a concern, and people in the council began recognising that. Hence, why this project has been developed.

We hope that this will affect policy. Not necessarily just the findings, although we hope that they will at least help the areas that they are in, but it is this process of researching with young people that we hope will have the impact. The people are working within the council are hoping that they can take what we've done and run it themselves in different organisations across the city, and then that will collectively lead to some kind of change within the transport strategy.

In terms of the training what sort of activities and programmes will you be doing?

It is going to involve training across two Saturdays, about 8 hours in total. The actual training the young people will receive will involve activities around what constitutes good research and introducing our particular project to them. It will also be interactive. It will involve workshops on ethics, especially recognising that kind of 'ambiguousness' of being a young person researching other young people, so particularly on issues of consent and withdrawal, and how easy it is to withhold consent if you know the person as a friend who is trying to interview or collect data from you. Then it will focus on teaching qualitative methods, where we will cover some quantitative ones, but focus more on qualitative methods.

We will also talk to young people more about how to conduct different forms of qualitative research, including more creative and visual methods. The way that we do that is through practical examples, like we do already with undergraduates. We will therefore practice methods like interviewing and focus groups, where they will take the lead, share it around, with everyone providing feedback. We will be asking them for their views and assessments on such methods. Finally, at the very end, we will be then taking everything that they have learned and turn it into an action plan for their own research project.

Have you encountered any challenges?

Unfortunately, because of timings and logistical hurdles we have encountered, such as getting the right people in the right place, we have a limited time to conduct the project; ideally we will be doing our data analysis in September 2022. So, that does not give much time for the young researchers where training, for instance, in itself and them familiarising themselves with doing the research can take a lot of time.

We also had an issue with recruiting organisations, just firstly being able to find organisations who were interested in participating or helping out. That does require quite a bit of effort on their part in terms of helping us recruit young people, and then also that they would be willing to work with us and the young people, and the data collection afterwards. Of course, these are predominantly voluntary sector organisations, that are doing a lot of work with pretty limited means. So, the people who are running them and looking after them are often pulled in lots of different directions. It can be difficult getting the attention of the person that you need to while also recognising that they are probably busy with more important things so you do not want to be pushy and potentially alienate them. Therefore, putting things in the calendar and agreeing to dates and times for meetings, discussions, activities, etc., can be further time-consuming.

In terms of trying to overcome such issues, we have not done anything in terms of offering incentives for the organisations. We have advertised it on the basis of it being good for their young people, that they might have been people who would really benefit from the training that we are offering. It is also particularly appealing to people who have an interest in active travel or issues with statistics, sustainability and climate change. I think it is fair to say that all of our key contacts also have a personal interest/commitment to climate change, so personal interest and motivation on the part of the would-be researchers is crucial.

What sort of ethical issues have you encountered with regard to doing participatory research, especially with this project?

With this project I think some of the issues around making the data accessible has been whether or not we get any stories from young people that essentially people could use against them. For instance, we're talking to them a lot about their travel habits, travel journeys, where they go, what places are significant to them, etc. As you can imagine, some places that are significant to your average teenager are perhaps places where they avoid adults being able to see them or places that could be bordering on legality in terms of whether or not they are allowed to be congregating there.

If we make this data publicly-available and young people have told us they meet in a churchyard that they know they are not allowed in, for example, then they may be concerned we tell people from the LCC, then authorities start moving them away. A main means to mitigate against this is anonymisation, so removing names and identities from the data. This, again, is something we are going to heavily emphasise in the training sessions to the would-be researchers.

What do you think of open education? Is it something the project can employ?

'Open education' does make me think that part of the purpose of this is to create change, and so that's going to involve some kind of education, both in terms of the actual findings for the local areas that we are involved with, but also the process that will go on and be used with local, young people as the researchers. A problem with expanding this information dissemination and knowledge from the project will be funding. It is a small pot of money and it is very much a finite project, that is due to finish in September. I know that there are other ways that you can extend that through things like impact acceleration, but again, there does tend to be a little bit of a lag with that.

I guess that means that momentum leaves, especially if it is something that we would like our young people to be involved with, if we want our researchers, our peer researchers, to come back and help us with some of those educational engagement activities. For instance, a sixmonth gap might not feel very long to an adult researcher, but to somebody who is approximately 14-16 years of age it feels like half a lifetime. It is definitely something we would seek to do, especially with the council but we will have to wait and see.

Speaking more fundamentally, the approach could be argued to lend itself to open education. After all, we are training young people outside the university setting to become researchers and conduct their own data collection. It has been a big selling point in our advertisements to the organisations who are taking part.

We also have two Laidlaw scholars working with us. They will be working with the young people to help them use social media in a particular way to record the processes that they're going through, and then later disseminate their findings. They are going to lead some of the training in a couple of weeks' time and then spend the last couple of weeks actually working alongside them to document what they are doing.

More generally, what are attitudes towards open research like in the School of Education?

Generally-speaking we are probably quite biased in favour of research being open. We have not done many seminars for a while (since the pandemic) but before then there was a seminar series that we would run which would be fairly 50/50 split between academics and practitioners. I guess that is partly because we are working predominantly with practitioners in things like education and social work; those kinds of professional practices where professional development is embedded within what they do and part of their daily job. Therefore, we are working with an audience that is already attempting to seek out opportunities that could be considered professional development.

Further, most of our subject material that me and all the colleagues work on are things that are inherently practical. Well, one thing that is maybe a little bit different is I focus more on the childhood studies part of education rather than the strict teaching in the formal school side of education and I think perhaps some of the childhood studies end of research can feel a little bit more abstract or a little bit more removed.

A lot of it is more international, which is great for lots of reasons, but it does mean it perhaps has less of an obvious relationship with what is happening in the lives of people in the local area. That is true in terms of things like the seminar series, but then that becomes open in a very different way, because that is about using our resources here for a lot of our researchers that engage in places like South Africa and Cuba. They are using the resources that they have access to in Leeds to ensure that less privileged countries and communities are able to access some of this data, and some of the findings. I therefore think because education is already quite vocational in terms of the research and teaching that we do that ‘open research’ was being done here before it became a major agenda item across the whole university.

“I think it was perhaps embedded here more than some places.”

School of Politics and International Studies

Open Research in Political Science: Challenges in Using Social Media Data with Viktoria Spaiser

What do you think of when you hear the term 'open research'?

For me it's research that can be reproduced. It's also about being transparent, where you describe exactly the steps you've taken in your data collection and analysis. Also, where possible you should try to make your data open and accessible to others. So, I'm a quantitative researcher, where for instance the scripts you use in your analyses, like in Python for example, should be shared so others can reproduce your analysis.

"Basically, open research is about being completely transparent, being completely open, making everything accessible as far as it is possible, and to make sure that it is reproducible."

Understanding Normative Change to Address the Climate Emergency project (running 2021-25)

One of the main obstacles to the Paris Agreement succeeding is not technological, but the societal and political will.

The goal of this research is to understand how this societal and political will can be mobilised and to work with partners and stakeholders in the civil society and government to turn that understanding into actions and policies that would help to achieve the net-zero greenhouse emissions target. Specifically, this research will transform our understanding of social change and how it can be accelerated in response to the climate crisis.

Research has shown that normative change (i.e. the change in social acceptability of behaviours, opinions, institutional processes etc.) is crucial for enabling large-scale social change; normative change creates a citizenry that demands and actively supports necessary political decisions. For that reason, we will focus on the process of normative change promoted by civil society actors such as Fridays for Future as the driver for social change. Within this broad aim, the fellowship is structured around three objectives:

1) Understand unfolding normative change. We will focus on civil society actors as norm entrepreneurs and assess to what extent the new norms are taking root within wider society and political institutions, in contest with existing norms that are regarded as inadequate in response to climate emergency.

2) Identify what is blocking normative and social change. Specifically, we will analyse the counter reactions to the normative change from, for example, populist politicians and opinion leaders, and assess the potential consequences of these counter reactions (e.g. disinformation or defamation) in terms of normative change adaptation within the wider society.

3) Determine how normative and social change can be strengthened, amplified and accelerated through various interventions.

These objectives will be achieved with an ambitious, interdisciplinary research agenda that will bring together mixed methods such as natural language processing, machine learning and social network analysis of large volume social media data, statistical analysis of secondary data, qualitative interviews with policy makers, smartphone-based field experiment on individual and community level, survey experiment and agent-based modelling. The research will also integrate insights from disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, political science and computational social science.

Part of the research is based on analysis of Twitter data, which means we cannot share the data as such; it's not allowed by Twitter's terms and conditions. So if you collect Twitter data from using Twitter Application Programming Interface (API), basically you have to agree to the terms of conditions, which means you cannot just share the data.

But, with Twitter API others can basically reproduce that data based on the twitter IDs that you give them, so they still theoretically should be able to do the same research, but it is not guaranteed because of course it's sometimes the case that tweets or accounts are deleted. So, there is no 100% guarantee that you have the same data again when you try to reproduce the study.

Where we use Twitter data for our analysis, we would share the tweet IDs for this analysis, and the Python scripts we wrote for the analysis. We also use Gephi, which is a network visualisation programme that is free - everyone can install it, so it doesn't have any fees.

What is the state of open and FAIR data (findable, attainable interoperable and reusable) in your field?

There is a lot of data sharing, but also a lot of exclusive data. When it comes to quantitative data there are a few obstacles. So, for instance, if computational social scientists work with companies like Facebook, they sometimes get exclusive access to Facebook data while collaborating with Facebook, which they cannot share again. That becomes a major obstacle to facilitating reproducibility. With some companies you can effectively buy the data but this in turn limits broadening accessibility and reproducibility as only you (the purchaser) can use that data.

Of course, it adds an additional financial cost to your research. In some cases, funders may be reluctant to provide cost-covering for such purchases, especially if they are very committed to open research principles; they would prefer it if you collect or use data that can be made easily accessible to others. When it comes to qualitative data, it's a mixed bag. I think open research debates and ideals are only just starting to take shape in those research practices.

Data being published along with your paper/analysis is increasingly becoming the norm, but I believe there's still much work ahead to make data more open and accessible. One of the main obstacles we need to overcome is data licencing and third-party restrictions related to data procured by corporations, and we need to figure ways of working with them whilst trying to make the data we use more widely available. Another is that a lot social science research is still done in a traditional format, where researchers, especially those who have collected qualitative data, want to keep that data for themselves. So, we need to have more discussions and mechanism in ensuring transparency.

How do you tackle issues related to accessing data held by social media companies?

You can apply for an 'academic Twitter API account', which gives you basically almost limitless access through a special API tier. This is relatively new, it started only couple of years ago.

Other companies like Facebook and associated social media platforms like Instagram are much more restrictive, so it's more difficult to get their data and conduct reproducible studies. Even if I had a large grant to help pay for their data I would still not be able to publish it or share it with others. I think we need to have more open debates about issues related to the 'public good' and power around data. For example, is it 'right' that such companies basically own and monopolise such data? Should it be deemed to be in the public's interest that it is made available?

I think we're not even discussing that properly in public, which I think is really bad because this data is obviously not just useful for research purposes, but also for helping to gauge support for certain issues, attitudes/opinions, and in helping out with various campaigns. At the moment, those who can pay, have a comparative advantage in using the data to advance their interest, which might not be aligned with public interest. Wider, more democratic access would allow members of the public and civic organisations to better scrutinise policy platforms/positions in political campaigns when it comes to elections for instance, helping to tackle issues like disinformation and ensure wholesome debates.

As an academic researcher working on a specific project where such data is needed for analysis I therefore have some avenues available to getting a hold of social media data, but as an individual working in the third sector with limited resources for instance, it's essentially shut off.

Will you be making your data from the project open and FAIR?

As I mentioned there are significant obstacles in doing this with social media-sourced data. However, we will try to do our best with the Twitter-based data, where we can publish Tweet IDs at least. It's basically expected by the UK research councils that you try your upmost to make your data open and FAIR, and we addressed this in our grant application. However, of course, we had to illustrate the limitations with the types of data we're dealing with.

The journals we are publishing with are also very demanding of transparency and open research. So, we intend to include the python scripts, instruction on how we did the analysis in Gephi, and also the Tweet IDs. This will be a zip file package to allow others to download and use for reproducibility purposes. In other instances, we have our scripts on GitHub and link to these in the papers we publish. Other data that we collect directly, like the field-experimental data we will collect through a bespoke smartphone app, will be made freely available and entirely accessible through data sharing platforms such as UK Data Service.

What have been your experiences with open access?

I aim to make my publications, data and analysis scripts open access wherever possible. Again though, much of my research deals with social media data so there are limits on what I can include in these publications. One project involves Twitter data that I cannot publish - I can publish the tweet ID's, but no more than that.

Where do you deposit your data?

I have tended to use UK Data Service, which is essentially a central repository in the UK for social science data.

Have you engaged with preprints?

I do usually put up my research on some platform where they're available as preprints. These include the Social Science Research Network, PsyArXiv, SocArXiv and ResearchGate. I usually put up preprints because it can take quite a long time for things to be published. It's nice to have things publicly available so you can always point people to working papers that you have.

It's also a great means for getting preliminary feedback, where in the past some have pointed out some mistakes I have made in my papers, which have allowed me to correct and improve papers prior to journal-level publication.

Have you used preregistration?

This is something relatively new to me. I believe it's a good idea, but is something that can't be applied to all kinds of research. I think it works very well for surveys or experiments where you have specific hypotheses you want to test, but other types like observational research where Twitter data is used, for instance, it may be less viable. In such cases, the research is much more explorative, so you may have some research questions and assumptions, but not specific hypotheses to test. You would have to write such a long document where you write out every possibility that you might find in the data, so preregisters aren't viable here.

But, I will use preregistration in the coming months for a survey experiment and a field-experiment, also part of my larger UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship award research. Some high-ranked journals will now no longer accept papers without preregistration, particularly for experimental studies.

What are your experiences with open education?

I think making education accessible to everyone would be great. There is a lot already happening with examples like online courses and lectures that you can find on YouTube on all kinds of topics, with researchers presenting their work there. There are also so many free, great tutorials available for instance for computational analyses. I have learned myself a lot through such tutorials. So, I think it's really great and I know many people make use of these.

In terms of how to enhance open education, this is not necessarily my area of expertise; I don't know how it works with the business model of universities. Making teaching material open, from my side, I'm happy to share it with everyone with no restrictions.

Have you done any public engagement initiatives based on your research?

Having impact is a big deal for my UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship. So, we do try to establish quite good links with different kinds of climate social movements, particularly with the youth, but also some other activist networks. We work with them together to help them to become more efficient as a movement in driving social change. One of the main means for doing so is through directly sharing our research findings with them. Part-and-parcel of this has been presentations, podcasts and knowledge exchange events. For example, there was the Ilkley Literature Festival, where we did a podcast on social change and the climate emergency.

"We definitely do a lot to try to communicate our research and share it with the public and with politicians."

Have you done participatory action research?

In Sweden I worked on a project on segregation, where from the beginning we worked with a regional government agency, who wanted to know about school segregation in Sweden and how it affects students' mental health. We worked on the research questions, data collection and analysis together. We then wrote a report and gave a presentation to them to answer their questions that they had specifically.

What are attitudes like towards open research in POLIS?

In POLIS many researchers work with qualitative methods or even not empirically at all, so purely theoretically. And open research practices are not yet as common within the community of qualitative researchers, but its changing, there is a growing awareness, that open research and certain standards should also apply to qualitative research and my colleagues in POLIS are generally open to such changes. Some of my colleagues, more on the quantitative side, are already good examples of open research, including using pre-registration, sharing data, scripts etc. But some have also some concerns, for instance when it comes to pre-registration, that it restricts what analysis you can do and what you can publish, they tell me of researchers they know, for whom pre-registration resulted in a lot of frustration, because they struggled to get published, because the results came out differently from what they anticipated in pre-registration. Overall, I think it's a learning process for everyone at the moment.

Open Research in Political Science and the UK Reproducibility Network with Eike Rinke

What does 'open research' mean to you?

Well, the first idea that comes to mind is the idea of good research. There's this famous slogan within the open science community, which says “Open Science: Just Science Done Right", and I think that encapsulates a lot of what open research is about. It is to produce research that is more closely aligned with the ideas, principles and values of academics and academic research. The concept of open research is vastly complex, multifaceted, and we can go into much greater detail with regards to what it all means. But at the bottom of it, I think that's what you can boil it down to really; proper research, as it should be done.

"open science is good science”

What has been your personal experience with open research?

I've now been engaging with open science/open research and open scholarship discourse for a couple of years. I originally started whilst I was an early postdoc, and the reason for me becoming interested in open research was that I have found it to address some of the issues that I think were coming up on a frequent, recurring basis as I proceeded to find my way in academia at the time. Most often issues arose to do with incentives being structured in ways that would lead researchers to engage in research practices that perhaps aren't in the best interest of finding truth. Or perhaps in the best interest of producing public value for wider society, and not in the best interest of bringing ‘outsiders’ into the research process at our academic institutions. So that's what originally nudged me to become interested in open research.

It's been quite an interesting ride so far, as the overall discourse and discussion around open research has built up steam over the last couple of years. In fact, I think it can now be considered one of the most encompassing, transdisciplinary reform movements we have seen across many disciplines.

Hidden Universe project

This is a project that is broadly situated in the realm of meta-science, which of course is closely aligned with and connected to open research. Meta-science is research about research, which analyses and critiques existing ‘ordinary’ ways of conducting research. As a new academic field of its own, it has come with a demand to better understand what it is that we're doing and how we can fix things within established research practices.

Our meta-science project is entitled ‘Observing Many Researchers Using the Same Data and Hypothesis Reveals a Hidden Universe of Uncertainty’'. Here is a link to the article we have recently published, in PNAS which is open access.

What we were doing here was to try to understand how different researchers – when given the same data and the same hypothesis to test – would come not only to different conclusions but would vary in how they arrived at those conclusions and test the hypothesis. So, the open research practice of reproducibility was very much the central theme to it.

Really what we're interested in here was to look at inter-researcher variability or variation where we had a presumption that was directly connected to the reliability of research being done, in the social sciences and beyond. In an ideal world, or perhaps intuitive view, you would think that if a handful of researchers were given the same data and the same hypothesis to test, they should come to the same results and draw the same conclusion. We had a feeling that this may not so easily be the case.

Of course, you don't usually get to test this; most of the time researchers just work on one piece of data with one hypothesis at a given time, and it's not multiple teams doing the same work at the same time. However, we set up what we called the 'Crowdsourced Replication Initiative' (CRI), which allowed us to have multiple researchers work independently, testing the same hypothesis using the same data.

We recruited 73 research teams to participate in that study, and quite simply what we did was to give them the data and hypothesis to test. The hypothesis is based on a fairly prominent social science study, which was published in a high-profile journal in sociology.

Original study: **https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122413513022**

Hypothesis: "immigration reduces support for social policy"

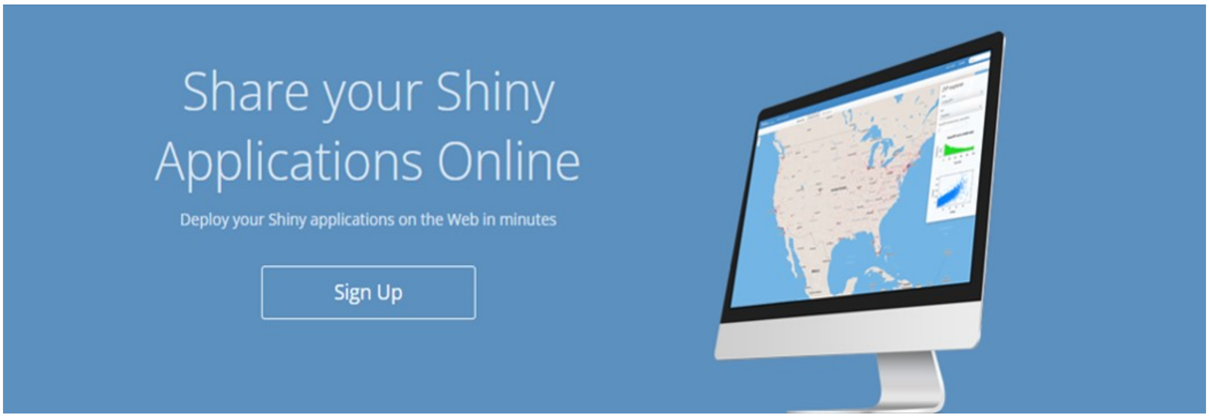
We observed what happened next, and what we found was not that all these research teams came to the same results and the same conclusions, but that in fact there was a great amount of variation in the results. These researchers came up with widely varying conclusions drawn from the same data, which unsettles a bit the intuitive assumption that say two researchers given the same date and same hypothesis would also quite naturally come to the same results and conclusion. That doesn't seem to be the case.

So, we tried to explain that variation in results by taking a look at numerous factors and variables. These included looking at researcher characteristics, which includes: expertise in statistics, topical expertise/substantive knowledge, prior attitudes on the subject of immigration and social welfare, and prior beliefs.

We also looked at additional possible explanations of the variation in numerical outcomes and substantive conclusions between these research teams, such as the various decisions they took in the research process. We took a lot of effort to code their decisions in a standardised fashion, so as to track the various steps these researchers took as they tested the hypothesis. Encoding their research workflows in this way was meant to allow us to pinpoint the decisions taken that impacted the outcome of the study, whether they would come up with a positive or negative, or inconclusive result.

The surprising result of that exercise was that we weren't able to explain a whole lot of variation that occurred in the results and conclusions based on the differences in the characteristics of the researchers. Like I said earlier, neither their expertise nor their prior beliefs and prior attitudes, and also not, even more surprisingly perhaps, the direction they went into with their analysis and the decisions they made at the various key decision points explained why they diverged, sometimes greatly, in what they found. So, a lot of unexplained variance remained after trying to explain in the researchers' results and conclusions using those predictors, and that led us to the conclusion of what in the title we call a 'hidden universe of uncertainty' in the production of research findings.

Open research's fit with the project



Screenshot of Shiny website

We sought to make this study a textbook example of open research. Aside from the main reproducibility drive, we also created an open accessible and user-friendly 'Shiny app'. A Shiny app allows researchers to convert statistical programming language scripts into a user-friendly interactive browser based-application that allows readers of a study to dig deeper into the data on their own, to slice the data however they want.

In our case, the Shiny app allows users to slice and sub-set the results submitted to us by our 73 participating research teams to see how such slicing and sub-setting affects the results we got. Users of the app can then make up their minds based on a dive into the data on their own about whether they find the conclusions we draw from our data compelling. We hope that creating this option enables a more vivid understanding of the data that went into our own study and informed our conclusion about the existence of that “hidden universe” of uncertainty in data analysis in the social sciences.

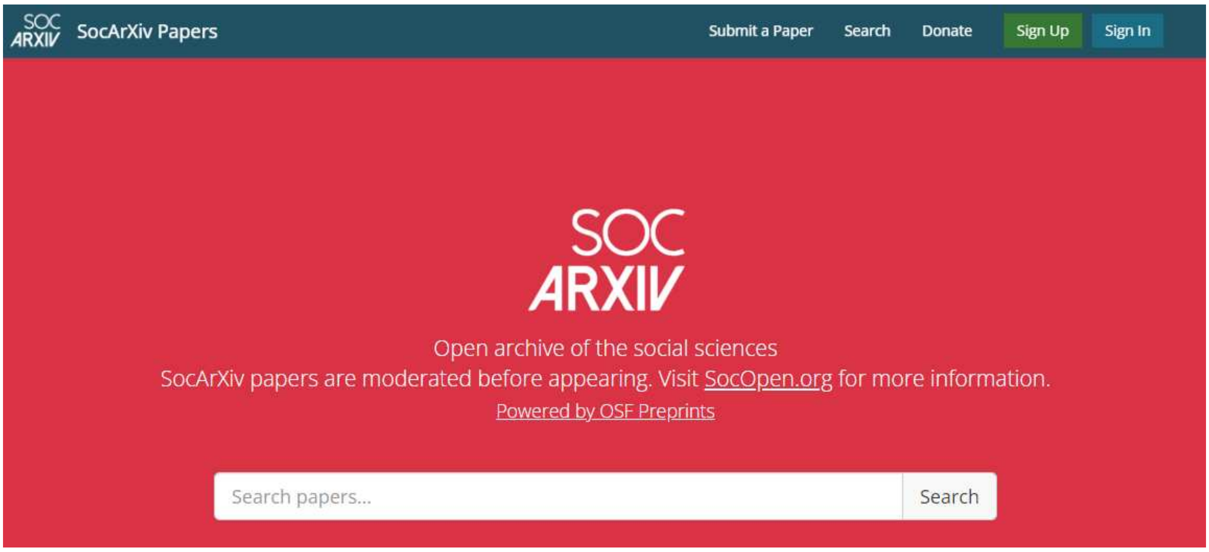
Speaking more generally, Shiny apps are a concept that was developed seven years ago or so by the people behind RStudio. It is fully open source, and increasingly used by researchers in many disciplines. In my view, Shiny apps are a great way for researchers to offer a low-threshold and user-friendly interactive browser-based experience that can bring scientific data to life for readers of scientific reports.

It's important to emphasise that Shiny is a fully free and open source software package that can be used by anyone to make their research results much more accessible and transparent to a broad audience. They offer a degree of data and conclusion transparency for authors of research reports that previously simply wasn’t easily attainable.

In addition to the Shiny app we also set up a data repository for this particular project, which holds all the data that went into the study, including the full suite of R Markdown notebooks and corresponding HTML files documenting our workflow. These constitute supplementary data for additional detail that the restricted format of the research article published in a journal doesn't allow to be presented.

Did you encounter any challenges concerning data ownership and usage?

With this project, not very much as we used data made publicly available and free-to-use by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). The ISSP has made its data available to anyone online for a long time, a fabulous service that allowed us to set up our project in the first place! But we of course had to negotiate how to best handle the code and altered data submitted by our participating researchers. One result of this is that we anonymised all data and code they submitted for us to include in the overall (meta-)analysis. We also followed what we think is good practice by putting up a preprint of our study (link: https://doi.org/10.31222/osf.io/cd5j9) and an early executive report (link to executive report: https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/6j9qb) as early as they were written up on the preprint servers MetaArXiv and SocArXiV.



Screenshot of SocArXiV website

The UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN)

What is the UKRN?

The UKRN is short for UK Reproducibility Network and broadly is a national peer-led consortium that aims to ensure that the UK remains a centre of world-leading research. In practice, this means that at UKRN we are interested in matters of research integrity and research quality, and how both connect to the openness of research.

There is a two-tier structure to it where on the one hand we have an informal network of local networks, where each local network community is composed of local researchers and academics interested in matters of research and reproducibility. There are more than 60 such local networks around the UK. On the other hand, UK higher education institutions can also join the second tier of UKRN by becoming an institutional member. An institutional membership requires the institution to make a formal commitment to establish a senior-level role as a point of contact and a commitment to supporting the aims of UKRN and the delivery of UKRN activities (training, workshops etc.) within the institution.

Open research practices are constantly evolving and getting ever more refined. So, our activities at UKRN include raising awareness and the training of future researchers, from the undergraduate level to PGR and beyond.

UKRN logo

What kinds of feedback have you received?

We have had a lot of feedback, much of it positive. As the local network lead at Leeds, I'm very happy to oversee a community of almost 200 Leeds-based researchers. The growth of our local network shows that there is explicit interest in matters of reproducibility and openness. We have received positive responses to our monthly journal club, ReproductibiliTea at Leeds, which is a local rendition of a global journal club format with which is centred around issues of reproducibility. We also host an active MS Teams space that any Leeds-based researchers and academic-related staff can join (click here to join UKRN@Leeds MS Teams space).

Do you offer training to researchers in reproducibility, especially to different levels of researchers?

That's one of the goals I think we have to work towards in a more systematic manner than we have so far. It's one of the key ambitions of UKRN, as an organisation, to provide support for member institutions to reform research training across all levels in a way that updates it to current cutting-edge ways of making research open.

What you need to do with open research is not only commit to doing it but also learn the skills to do it. Issues around open research often simply are a matter of one’s ability to do what is being asked of you. If you want to be open, it's also a matter of the resources available to you to make your work open, which can be time- consuming and require additional funds.

These are considerations that the UKRN is acutely aware of and hopes to promote further here at Leeds. I don't think we have a systematic open research teaching provision at the minute, but it's something that is on the top of our minds. Hopefully we can work together with the university in the near future to develop a programme along those lines.

What are attitudes like towards reproducibility and open research in POLIS?

I'm very grateful to be working in a department that recognises the need to think more about open research and the openness of the research that we do. One very concrete way in which this is being expressed is by the fact that starting this academic year, I will have some time allocated to serve as the newly created open research lead within POLIS. I'll be working together with the Director of Research within the School to make sure that we offer our colleagues ample support, necessary training and so on, to make their own research more open. At least in the first instance, our aim is to increase their awareness of questions around openness in research, and to provoke a thought process along with that, so that more of us at POLIS start asking “Hey, how could I make my own work more open than it currently is?”

So overall POLIS has been quite a receptive environment for these issues. In terms of the broader environment, evidence of openness and transparency is becoming more important in the REF. I think it's going to become even more important to engage with questions of openness across the entire research lifecycle going forward.

Have you heard of and used preregistration?

Yes, absolutely. I've co-authored a UKRN primer on preregistration and registered reports. That's one of the activities UKRN engages in as well. We publish reports and primers on cutting-edge methods of making research more open and transparent, and inclusive.

I have also preregistered studies myself. The Hidden Universe study was preregistered, for example. I've also been part of survey research – again meta-science research – in which we asked about other researchers’ knowledge of and experiences with preregistration. You can access two examples of this through these links:

https://osf.io/preprints/metaarxiv/w48yh/

https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2022.2108880

Preregistration is feasible and desirable to different degrees in different disciplines. Hence, the reactions and responses to the practice of preregistering your research plans vary quite a bit depending on what kind of researcher you ask!

Are preprints a major practice in political science/wider social sciences?

I'm mostly speaking for myself here. I try to put pre- and postprints up for everything that I publish, within the legal limits set by publishers. I think everything that can be made openly available as a preprint or postprint should be. We here at Leeds have excellent library support that more or less automates the process in many cases, but I also make it a point to upload preprints and postprints as soon as possible without being prompted first.

There is a non-commercial, community-operated preprint repository for the social sciences called SocArXiV, which I help moderate. Quite generally, I would think that during the last couple of years we've seen a big transformation within political science towards an ever-greater awareness of the importance and ease of putting your own research up as a preprint before publication in a journal or book. I hope I'm not mistaken by saying that today most of my colleagues use preprints.

Knowledge Co-production with Students in Political Science with Charles Dannreuther

What does 'open research' mean to you?

I believe it moves the research agenda and narrative away from what has traditionally been seen as closed-off centres of academic knowledge towards a more open discussion about what 'knowledge' is and how research takes place. It then becomes less about perceived wisdoms and hierarchies of knowledge associated with academia and opens up a much more contested debate(s) for more pluralist positions on knowledge production and ownership. This reframes the starting assumptions of research, and also involves a conversation around collecting data and undertaking research.

At the heart of this, I believe, lies knowledge co-production. As a politics researcher and teacher, I have become more involved with co-working with citizens and marginalised groups in society which I think is a more progressive form of working today partly because the assumptions around knowledge are always open to debate.

What is knowledge co-production?

"The integration of different knowledge systems and methodologies to systematically understand the phenomena, systems, and processes being studied in a research project" (National Science Foundation)

"[an] iterative and collaborative processes involving diverse types of expertise, knowledge and actors to produce context-specific knowledge and pathways" (in A.V. Norström, C. Cvitanovic, M.F. Löf, S. West, C. Wyborn, P. Balvanera, et al.)

Knowledge co-production is something I place a strong emphasis on and incorporate into my undergraduate curriculum. Principally, it involves students going out there and doing the research themselves, crucially with external stakeholders. This is not exploitative; we are not using student labour to do our research for us. Instead, it is engaging them in a cooperate endeavour, where they gain valuable skills, experiences and, most importantly, confidence in conducting primary research and analysis.

Example 1: Britain and the EU

This is a third-year undergraduate module called 'Britain and the EU' (PIED3310) which had two formal assessments. One was report-based, where it was designed to make students more comfortable and accustomed to selecting, collecting, analysing and presenting empirical data. Given the nature of the subject in question, especially considering Brexit, there was a lot of claim-making, subjectivity and varying perspectives in the debates. So, I wanted the students to become comfortable in sorting out data and making judgments about its credibility and doing that in a fairly exploratory way without being too linked to particular set of methodological assumptions.

After a very brief conversation with the House of Lords Select Committee (which has multiple committees scrutinising EU policy) we regularly invited the committee clerk to set questions for the students to respond to. After about 5/6 years with the House of Lords visit, we went on to work with the Foreign Office (submitting evidence to the Review of the Balance of Competences), with the Trade Union Congress (TUC), senior MPs, the Local Government Association (LGA) etc.

The engagement with the select committee was strictly organised in relation to POLIS assessment protocols and deadlines. I contacted the clerk in late September (the earliest they could know the sessional agenda) to set a question for the students to address that would be pertinent to the committee debates in four months' time. The students would have around 6 weeks to submit a 1500-word report that was assessed on the quality, interpretation and presentation of the primary data they uncovered. I would mark them and the top five would then be invited to go down to the House of Lords and present their work to the committee.

The report and London visit was a great experience for both myself and the students (and their CV, etc.) but also gave them confidence to find quality data that they could interrogate debates in the secondary literature with as well. The second assignment encouraged them to do this by writing a mini journal article format in what we called a project. The students were given clear advice on how to structure the piece in responding to an essay-like question set in relation to the module's weekly topics. The advice required them to a) review and identify gaps in the relevant literature b) draft a research question to fill the gap c) use their data skills to gather data to answer the question (i.e. just like the report) d) summarise the data and offer conclusions to their own RQ (i.e. just like the report) and e) show how these conclusions critically engaged the literature reviewed at the start of the project. Completing these instructions sets up the submitted work for a very high grade as the student would begin to make original claims to knowledge.


Photo by: RussellK2013 / flickr

These two assessments gave the students confidence in challenging the data used in the journal articles they read and allowed them to show that they could collate and use their own data, and then could challenge pre-existing assumptions. They also got a lot of firsts!

"They generate really good results... they had this confidence in engaging with real world practical problems and drawing on empirical data, and sifting through the data to work out which was useful for answering the question."

Example 2: Engaging the Modern City

We also have a more 'localised' module, focussed here in the city of Leeds (FOAR5000M) open to all PGTs at the University of Leeds. It is an interdisciplinary module, also drawing on other fields like business, social policy, etc., and available to any taught postgraduate student who normally are unable to engage with practical themes due to the structure of their degrees. The idea was developed by a brilliant collaboration including Ben Walmsley (CCP), Jamie Stark (AHRI), Rafe Hallet (LITE), Liz Harrop - Centre for Cultural Value.

There was an emphasis on external collaboration and co-operation with five or six different key actors around Leeds. Examples include Leeds Playhouse and the Performance Ensemble, and others through the Culture Institute, which helped organise and implement the module. In terms of operation, we would aim to recruit around 30 students, and split them up into 5/6 groups of 5/6 students. Each would respond to a particular proposal from a particular practitioner organisation. The idea would be that they would bring academic work and their experiences together from all these different disciplines they come from to address these challenges and they present something around the end of March to these partnering organisations. The practitioner would help them each step along the way, providing them with data and necessary training.

Throughout the module the students are supported by dedicated tutors from faculties and services across the University of Leeds and weekly two-hours sessions that provide practical and conceptual skills for them to work effectively together. For example, we just had a great talk from Steven Dobson about how to work in a group and have other sessions on communication, negotiation, evaluation etc as well as bespoke sessions in the new year that are open to the partners.

Did you encounter any challenges with these modules?

With the Britain and the EU module one challenge was building the confidence of the students to engage directly with the House of Lords. Naturally, it can be quite daunting and intimidating for them. We would have a run-through of their presentation and simulation of the Q&A to better-prepare them for the experience. In the end I felt that it was the process of writing for this audience that brought the best out of the students.

With the Engaging the Modern City module there were similar confidence issues initially, but I think it was also the format that would at times prove challenging to them. It is quite different than a typical module in POLIS, not the usual lecturer-seminar format with essay and exam assignments but a series of assessments based on reflection, cooperation and performance. The lack of predictability, which is part of the process of interactions with external partners, meant that things tend to not go according to plan and we partly assess the students on how they respond to such challenges. For example, the students usually go into this module with ideas and plans which events supersede, so it is about managing these expectations and trying to assure them that any sort of deviation/change is expected and to be welcomed as a learning opportunity.

Are there any ethical challenges to running these modules?

We have a duty to make sure our students are safe and secure in doing these modules, especially considering they are working with people/organisations external to the university. Securing annual approval, ensuring the students and partners are aware of the ethical regulations and requirements can be quite time-consuming. This has been particularly the case with Engaging the Modern City module, as many of the partner organisations are often quite small. They do not have the adequate apparatus for ethic processes and safeguarding structures, which the university would like to see, and that makes it quite difficult. Further, we draw in a significant amount of foreign students to such modules, who are not overly-familiar with research and social practices in the UK. Whilst of course this is natural, ensuring they have sufficient understanding and training can therefore sometimes add to the timing issues.

For me open research raises important and timely considerations about the ethical status of our research and teaching. Why are university processes necessary or even effective in gauging if a local organisation is protecting its clients properly? What does it say about how the university perceives its position in the community it belongs to?

What sort of training and support do the students receive for these modules?

For the Britain and the EU module I give them a 1-hour training session at the beginning on how to do it, which is centred on dissecting large quantities of data and getting it down to inform the 1500-word report. This is daunting at first but they soon become more confident.

With the Engaging the Modern City, they receive loads of support. They get support on identifying what their skills are in learning how to work cooperatively, on how to negotiate, how to plan, how to use different software to communicate. There are theme sessions which are 2-hours long, in which these techniques are taught in relation to the project they are undertaking. They also have a tutor who meets with them five times for an hour, and they also have five meetings with the partner organisations.

But they are also given lots of independence and responsibility to deliver their projects on their own. They are given a lot of agency to explore the issues and address them. So, they would put together a portfolio, which is about what they did as a team and how they responded to the projects, and deal with the practical issues they faced. They also have a reflective log and that encourages them to think about their first session where they identify what skills they have got and then how they have identified their roles and what needs to be done, what they have learnt about themselves, how they have addressed their skill gaps and then how they contributed to the project. These form part of the assessment process.

The great thing about the logs is that it shows how they developed their skills and adapted to the challenges posed by the respective project over time. These personal insights are nice to see but also offer an unusual insight into the student experience that I do not normally see in my teaching.

Logistically, training is 50/50 split between academics and skill-providers (e.g. Careers Centre, Lifelong Learning, Library) based here at the university. For example, the Career Centre helps to identify what skills you need and the corresponding training. We also have people from the Library who help them work out how to use communication technology. We have people who have worked in business who can provide training on how to engage with the practitioner organisations.

What has the feedback been like from students who have undertaken these modules?

We have tended to have really good feedback. Normally there is initial competition over which partner to work with but we usually ensure students work with their top three choices. Soon these preferences fade as projects with the less well known, smaller organisations can be very interesting and rewarding and help the students to grow and reflect well.

The great thing about these modules is the independence given to the students. It allows them to learn more practically, and practice and enhance their skills. I think that is partly why they enjoy it. Attendance has always been excellent. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic attendance remained high where they still did some terrific work, even though the whole thing was done during lockdown behind a screen. Interestingly international students seem to do particularly well as they are able to draw on their own knowledge and ways of thinking to offer insights and experiences to designing and delivering projects. I wonder whether, at least at the initial stages of the module, this more experiential learning allows for a better transition into the university than a more traditional reading based module. These often assume that highly developed academic English reading skills are already developed when they might not yet be.

Do the students know of 'open research'?

Not in specific terms like that I would say, but they are very much aware of the concepts and other terms surrounding it like transparency, external collaboration, public engagement, and the opening up of knowledge production beyond the university setting. We are doing quite a lot already in the modules in terms of getting students to work together and to reflect on what they are learning. If we try to re-frame the teaching to think more about the philosophical foundations of open research directly, it might be too much. However, the key tenets of open research are present in these modules.

"I think implicitly it's clearly there because it's about having open conversations and treating partner organisations as equal actors."

What have been the responses from the practitioner organisations?

Our experiences with the external organisations have been incredible. We have worked with some of same organisations for several years now like Leeds Playhouse and Performance Ensemble. They are clear that they have received valuable outputs from our students.

For the Playhouse, for example, we began by surveying participants in their hugely successful Heydays project. This has been going for over 40 years and involves over 300 older people who make Heydays "a vibrant, creative community where skills are developed and stories are shared". Initially we asked users what they liked and, in doing so, found out that some people had problems accessing the Playhouse on the Wednesday session. So, the next year we did a study of what got in the way of their access by mapping their journeys to the Playhouse. During the pandemic we helped develop project that addressed isolation by co-producing artworks online and the students made some fantastic artworks with older people. Then last year they looked at how do you get people back into the community who've effectively felt isolated due to pre-existing conditions and how Covid-19 compounded them. So, over four years we've had an extraordinary progression of projects related to helping older people in the local community access arts to live better lives. And I have been able to work with an extraordinary organisation like the Playhouse!

"There's lots of ways in which the value comes out and it's been very mutually beneficial."

Has there been a decolonisation drive with your modules?

It has definitely been a major element with the Engaging the Modern City module. We have conducted some of the projects over the past couple of years with the Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network (LASSN), asylum seeker support networks in and around Leeds, where their main objective was to improve education access and services for asylum seekers. Speaking to LASSN allowed excluded voices to be heard and documents in a serious report and even a walk about campus. The report was shared with the Vice Chancellor of the university and contributed to the University of Sanctuary application as well as being discussed at a high-level conference in Brussels. Students have done an excellent job in working with these groups and putting together reports which highlight the challenges to such endeavours, including language barriers, and institutional and financial obstacles.

Have you conducted any public engagement based on your research?

I have always been concerned that my research engages with public themes and debates. For a long time I have been involved with small business policy and in running large European networks on themes like the financial crash, EU accession, on presenting better stories concerning migration and currently on promoting pluralism in economics. In particular I have worked on policy implications for small businesses. For example, I have written legislation for the EU on the single market from the perspective of small business policy. I have also delivered big projects around Turkey and Bosnia, and trained about 700 people on the East Lisbon Agenda through the lens of my business support training.

I am much more interested now in 'place'-based engagement, which is not around speaking to policymakers, but more about affecting change or supporting local community activity in places like Leeds, where knowledge co-production with the relevant actors on the ground is a major aspect. After all, they are the people who are going to be more effective at formulating those policies and responses.

My understanding and my approach to policy or to research engagement has changed quite dramatically. Brexit was a pivotal moment in this change or orientation, with a need to look at different ways of understanding politics, political organisation and policy problems. Away from the macro-level policymakers and governmental institutions I have become far more interested in working with local actors.

What are your views on open access?

I am hugely in favour of this and believe our knowledge should both be open access but also understandable too. However, I think the main issue with this is who pays. I think the publishers are making a lot of money out of the free labour of academics where universities could produce high quality journal/publications without using professional publishers. We do all the work for the journals, so I would like the university as a whole to be more proactive in the market and to cut down the costs to make open access easier.

Open Research in Politics: #GlobalJustice? Project with Madeleine Le Bourdon

What does 'open research' mean to you?

"I think 'open research' is making sure that the work that we do is both accessible and inclusive. I think that academia has long had a history of kind of sitting in the ivory tower, and actually there are a lot of people within the academy who want to make sure that the work that we're doing has real impact."

Part of this should be working with those external organisations and people as partners, as opposed to just collecting data from them. For instance, in my line of work, that entails working with international development where we need to work with people authentically to have positive, real impacts.

Concerning research dissemination making traditional academic outputs like journal articles open access is important, but we need to also use other, wider means of disseminating our findings than the expected academic routes. We also need to ensure those who participate in our research are honoured, and have their voices and lived experiences heard.

What is your research methodological background?

My methodological background is mainly qualitative, working predominantly with data collection tools like interviewing and focus groups. I originally also pursued participatory observation and ethnography, but I came to reflect more on my own privilege and positionality through an open-access article I read, and found these methods to be not so-conducive towards carrying out effective research, so moved more towards the participant-orientated methods I now use. For me 'data' is about is gaining and reflecting information and knowledge about the world around us, where individuals' lived experiences and their voices provide valuable insights.

#GlobalJustice?

This project was funded by the European Educational Research Association (EERA). It was a small project, but it was essentially centred around conducting four focus groups with young people across the UK to understand how they engage with global social justice issues through social media. These focus groups were very flexible with no time limit or rigid structure, where school students took on the reigns to have a conversation and debate issues related to global justice. The only real guidance or structure were some prepared questions I put together. As an output we made these spider-graphs detailing what had been discussed.

The project was impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Schools and teachers were under great pressure at the time, so I had to make sure I wasn't intruding too much on students' time, where I would have mixed results in terms of the numbers who participated in these focus groups, and had to adapt the process at various points. For example, with one group I literally had four or five students, whereas with another school there was more engagement, with three rounds of different classes that wanted to take part.

How has the project used open research practices?

Participatory research

Given the focus on students' views and dialogue on social justice issues, there was a strong emphasis on participatory research, where they would take charge of the course of these discussions. Indeed, that's why focus groups were used as the primary method for data collection, where inclusivity and free expression were major facets. Making sure they were confident to discuss these issues was important, and I always perceived them as the experts given the subject was on young people's views and interactions with social justice. Using such methods helps greatly in ensuring the accuracy and viability of our results. We need those lived experiences and perspectives to shape the analysis we are undertaking.

I think it is also important, generally, that we recognise some of privileges we enjoy as researchers. Having self-reflexivity is vital. For instance, I am a white woman who holds a privileged position as a university-based researcher. I interact with people from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, where I will never be in a position to fully-understand their experiences. It is therefore important that those experiences and perspectives are properly heard, documented and analysed, where the best means of ensuring that is through incorporating them in the research process itself, playing an active role. In the end this is crucial if you want to have positive, meaningful impacts, beyond just writing up and publishing your findings.

"It's not about researching on people, it's researching with people in whatever way I can do that research."

External collaboration

This project would not have been possible without the co-operation and facilitation by the schools visited.

In terms of organising this collaboration, getting the ball rolling for this project was a bit tricky because as it was during COVID-19 Pandemic the lockdowns had a massive impact on schools and education, and our capabilities to interact with prospective participants. At the time I worked for the Consortium of Development Education, a national-based network that works with local organisations and groups focussed on development education. In that capacity, I reached out to local groups which try to work with young people and schools on subjects like global social justice issues to try to establish participation networks for the project. This was hard as educators were overwhelmed at that point with addressing changes to teaching and the curriculum, amending them to meet the challenges of the pandemic.

Luckily, however, I was able to build enough networks through other research that I've done. The process of establishing a working relationship for the research naturally took time as you need to build rapport and trust with those you are going to do research with. So, I would send out loads of information about my work and myself (as the researcher) and have chats and conversations on the details of the project. Flexibility on my part was important; being able to meet with them whenever it was viable.

Of course, there was the added ethical dimension that I was working with school students, most under 18 years-of-age, and from various socio-economic backgrounds. So, we had to have discussions each time with the different schools involved to get a better understanding of the students there, as well as if there was anything I could do in return for their help. For instance, I gave a talk and Q&A to sixth form politics and history students. I had a lot of engagement from that where we talked about what it was like to research politics, attending university, and more broadly about the issues related to global social justice. We have also continued to work with some of these schools since the end of the project, with new endeavours like development and diversity.

Public engagement

I wrote up two different reports. The first was a longer report, which was for the EERA. The second was a shorter blog piece on the project's findings and experiences for students, teachers and wider audiences. I was hoping to go back into the schools to discuss the findings, however this was not possible due to the aforementioned pandemic-related pressures where teachers and staff were really busy and/or unable to organise these sessions.

However, one element that did come about was to try and build a relationship with those different communities, especially those from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. For instance, I'm a trustee of Diversity In Development, which encourages young people from different socioeconomic, cultural backgrounds to engage with international development topics. In November 2022 in Leeds we hosted a workshop for students as part of the wider Social Sciences Festival along these lines and also invited those from the schools that had participated. Attendance was really good and students enjoyed the experience.

What have been your experiences with this project?

Feedback

We have had positive feedback from those who participated who said they really enjoyed it, as well as the teachers who helped accommodate it. It is worth pointing out many teachers tend to feel uncomfortable in talking about topics like global social justice, politics, etc., because they not taught in-depth in schools - there is a lot of controversy surrounding such. Teachers do not want to be seen as biased or leaning one way or the other. Whereas having someone externally come in to conduct this subject helps create a safe space to have these discussions, which the teachers were receptive of.

As for the students they had positive feedback because they enjoyed being able to express their opinions and they felt included, where having their voices heard was a major benefit. Further, these interactions helped build positive relationships which we may be able to turn to to gauge interest in future projects.

Have you encountered any challenges?

As mentioned above the pandemic and its various forms of lockdowns massively-impacted getting this project off the ground in terms of building those connections conducive towards doing the research, and it leading to delays in interactions, which naturally lengthened the course of it. The education system was overwhelmed, even before the pandemic, so a big challenge was balancing getting the research done whilst also recognising the teachers themselves were overwhelmed with limited time, and respecting that and trying to work out a course of action that facilitated them.

You have to be pragmatic, and recognise things are not always going to go according to plan or even work out. Academic research is typically expected to be extremely rigorous, where you tick all the boxes. However, you must be realistic and consider practical and logistical dynamics.

In terms of doing the actual research, there were times where I would have to be careful that the students I was conversing with did not go down a rabbit hole, where discussions could veer off-topic. You need to honour that, as they're leading these discussions but you also had to try to steer the conversations forward. Overall, I think this balancing act worked well and was able collate valuable data.

Are there any future plans for the project?

I am currently working on a [new project] for the British International Studies Association with my colleague in POLIS, Dr Louise Pears, and also Dr Andreas Papamichail at Queen Mary University, and Dr Nat Jester at the University of Gloucestershire. We're going to conduct similar focus groups but with university students who are enrolled on courses like politics, development and international relations, and to see how they engage with social media with global social justice issues.

We are currently awaiting funding, which hopefully we will secure. This project has been directly shaped/influenced by the #GlobalJustice?, as we noticed the older students get the more confident they are in engaging with these issues, so we wanted to conduct a full, similar study with regard to university students.

Experiences with other open research practices

Open access

I've had most of my articles made open access for free, where most of the journals I interact with place a strong emphasis on it. However, having said this, I recently published a paper on privilege and positionality in the International Journal for Qualitative Research, and only found out right at the end just prior to publication that I would have to pay to make it open access. In the end I opted to pay for it myself from my annual personal research allowance, as the preparation and peer review process is exhausting and I did not want to go through that all over again, and I treasure making research as open and accessible as possible.

I think that it is a real shame that some journals have this fee, where I now think more about what journal to submit my articles to, because for me making my research accessible is an essential part of what we do. A concern I've come across is that more journals are charging for this, and this can seriously disadvantage researchers on precarious contracts or whom do not have enough funding to cover the costs, as it reduces the scope of journals they can viably publish in.

I currently sit on the board for the International Journal for Development, Education and Global Learning and we make sure all publications are open access. We work with the UCL press, where we try to ensure that we're encouraging early careers researchers.

As a further commitment to open access, I secured funding from the Decolonising Development COST Action group to start a podcast 'Politics and Pedagogy' with my CTIS co-director where we bring key scholars into conversation all things teaching/learning and global challenges. The first series explores 'Decolonial Approaches' and what that means within the context of UK higher education.

Social media use for research dissemination

I use social media a lot in various aspects like research dissemination, feedback, and networking. I think it is a really important space for such. I regularly share links to my articles and blog posts on Twitter, which is great for making works more accessible and reaching more people. Of course, we have to remember there are limits to this where 45 percent of the world still don't have regular internet access, but I think it is still an ideal stepping-stone for reaching out to people beyond the academic setting.

Open education

Much of what I research relates to how we can open up and enhance the education process, particularly with regard to decolonisation, whereby greater voice is given to those from more marginalised communities. The discussions from the focus groups on global justice issues helps both facilitate this through the conversations had themselves, as well as challenging education norms as we know them.

For example, one participant who was identified as black, where is mother was from West Africa, said they had conversation about the pulling down of the Edward Colston statute in Bristol, and explained neither of them had never heard of him. From that he said it was really enlightening as they recognised topics like British colonialism and the slave trade had not been taught in schools. From this we found young people accessed significant amounts of information, knowledge and debates from social media, that were not readily-discussed or explored in the education system.

In addition, I view podcasts as a great means of facilitating conversations, and found many young people utilise them a lot in learning, drawing on topics and debates they do not come across in schools, and even at university. I therefore try to incorporate some of these into my own teaching to broaden the horizons of learning.

Future for open research

I definitely think there should be more awareness and training on open access, but also the other practices associated with open research. We should be aiming to build momentum in decolonising research and education, to make it more transparent and inclusive. I think open research really does have the potential to cut through and help dismantle the longstanding dominance structures and hierarchies, and help reshape the academy along these lines.

This is something we are very much trying to do in POLIS, where we are placing more emphasis on decolonial approaches when it comes to research methodologies. It is vital we keep these conversations going and expand them in how education is delivered. Part of this is through building discursive spaces to have these conversations and knowledge exchanges.

School of Sociology and Social Policy

The Timescapes Archive at the University of Leeds with Kahryn Hughes

What is the Timescape Archive?

The Timescapes Archive is a specialist resource of qualitative longitudinal (QL) research data. It was first set up in 2010 under the ESRC Timescapes Initiative, and has since undergone further development under the ESRC Changing Landscapes for the Third Sector project. The resource has been developed in collaboration with the UK Data Archive (UKDA), and forms part of the Institutional Repository at the University of Leeds. It is run as a joint venture between staff in the Families, Lifecourse and Generations Research Centre in the School of Sociology and Social Policy, and the University of Leeds Research Data Management Team.

It all started with Peter Townsend, a scholar who had been exploring poverty over the decades, who asked the question: "What's going to happen to my research data at the end of this lifetime of research? I've been funded through public money to research public concerns: it is in the public interest. What happens to all of this data now? Are they simply going to erase qualitative data?"

Much qualitative data has historically been erased as part of an ethical endeavour to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants, and Townsend's question prompted a whole new debate about the ethics of keeping qualitative research data for its reuse value. His question was taken up and explored through a series of investments made by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in establishing the value of methods for reusing qualitative data. They then developed established and growing infrastructures, such as the UKDA to store those data for the purposes of reuse. The Timescapes initiative was specifically set up to interrogate in detail the value of qualitative research, data reuse and also the challenges of developing a specialist archive. The Timescapes initiative resulted in a bespoke archive for qualitative longitudinal data developed for reuse purposes.

The online, digital archive itself boasts a widespread variety of data types including, but not limited to interview transcripts, audio and visual files, manuscripts, photographs, artworks and essays.

"It's got really quite diverse data. So, it has interview transcripts, as you would expect from qualitative research, but it also has photographs, a few feature essays, sound files, and it has timelines, family trees."

"It has illustrated mapping projects by the participants themselves. So, it's any object that can be digitally-recorded. If you take a photograph you can store it, as a JPEG file for example, or photographs of illustrations or diagrams.... and it is what participants have produced."

How does the Timescapes Archive incorporate open research practices?

FAIR data (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable)

The archive helps facilitate the reuse and accessibility of data already created and/or gathered by other researchers deposited there. This allows for reusability and reproducibility, whereby other researchers can access datasets stored to help inform their own research designs, analysis and education practices (e.g. undergraduate teaching).

What is distinctive about the Timescapes Archive is that it has been set up principally for the purposes of reuse. We were supported by Dr Libby Bishop, a Senior Archivist from the UKDA to develop an archive not just to store social sciences data, but also to make those datasets available for reusers. The Archive is also an ongoing project in that we continue to interrogate the value of reuses, the academic, intellectual, ethical challenges of data we use and then the Archive website itself is also a knowledge bank. It provides a whole range of resources, blogs and methods, guides, working papers, and other sorts of associated assets. The Timescapes Archive, both through the data repository and through the associated website activities and communities, provides a hub for interdisciplinary scholars who are interested in qualitative archiving, qualitative longitudinal, qualitative secondary and analysis in any format. These include, for example, people who build archives or write the software for the archive user interface, to the researchers reusing or depositing datasets.

“It's a place for people to come together and to learn more about each other. It seeks to foster communities.”

Transparency

Transparency stands at the heart of opening up research. Archives support the transparent sharing of data in order that people can develop the findings of particular research teams. This need for transparency and openness has informed the development of global networks in efforts towards generating best evidence. It is something we have seen in recent years in response to combating a global pandemic. Open research seems to me to also be sort of a nose-to-tail process whereby we're open about what it is that we've done and what it is that we've found in forging and sustaining these global networks.

Open Education

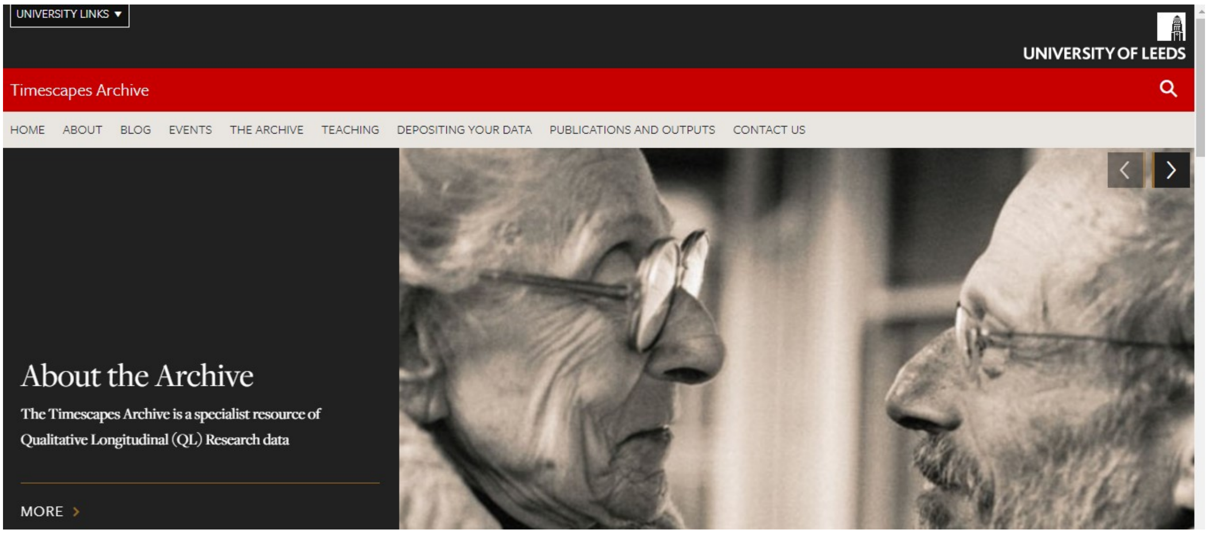
The Timescapes Archive goes a long way in trying to facilitate 'opening-up' material for education purposes, which is another major drive in open research initiatives. However, there is a distinction between 'open' and 'transparent'. Qualitative archives have data that require special protections, registration protocols and also deposit terms and conditions. Once data are archived, the transparency of use becomes far more feasible, whilst still adhering to the ethical undertakings of the originating research teams towards participants. Openness here refers to qualitative research archives as repositories for digitalised material, that can support researchers in digitising their unique datasets and depositing them here for others to access.

The whole world has gone digital over recent years. We have produced innumerable ways of capturing human interactions in digital ways and then storing them. This is actually really quite new, it's still quite recent aspect of global human society. People have become increasingly excited about the possibilities of great big datasets where, when we're talking about volume and formats, we're talking imaginably large and fast and to the point now where 'terrestrial computers' are no longer capable of crunching the numbers.

People often think of qualitative datasets as small. However, a research team of scholars from the Universities of Southampton and Edinburgh took 7 of the original empirical studies of the Timescapes programme, cleaned them up, reorganised them and redeposited them in the Timescapes Archive as a teaching dataset, and it is available internationally, free-of-charge for teaching and research training purposes. They then explored the use of a range of Computer Aided Qualitative Data Software analysis programmes to analyse these amalgamated data. In this way they developed methods of Big Qual.

This is only one area of methodological development in qualitative data reuse. The possibilities and opportunities that are offered through qualitative secondary analysis are infinite and has tremendous potential for international research collaboration and development.

One of the things about qualitative data, in the way that we're storing them here, is that they become a sustainable part of our detailed human social record. They preserve the voices of the most marginalised and vulnerable in our society, who are least likely to be captured through digital transactional data. So, qualitative data archives are absolutely integral to taking forward our own national histories and the voices of who we are into the future in a more comprehensive way that attends to those who are least likely to be included in other forms of digital data capture.



Screenshot of Timescapes Archive site:

What makes the archive different to others related to the social sciences?

Crucially, it is the fact it is an archive created specifically for QL data; it's a specialist resource and the only one of its kind. In that respect, the Archive and the QL datasets are distinctive because they are data that have been collected with participants over a period of time. Of course, QL data have additional ethical sensitivities and restrictions because people become increasingly identifiable from their data the longer you research with them, so many features of their lives that are captured over much longer periods of time than say a one-off one-hour interview.

Data archiving has long been focused on quantitative research in the social sciences, which is something Timescapes has tried to rectify. I don't think that the debates have quite kept up with advances in qualitative archives, qualitative methods of data reuse and the incredibly rich opportunities that are offered through these for developing research-based explanations of how and why people do what they do.

I don't think there is a recognition of what is meant by detailed qualitative data, or what qualitative data consists of, especially if they are principally a quantitative researcher. Often quantitative researchers describe people's names and addresses as qualitative. Whereas in detailed qualitative research, we are aware that in interviews people tell us about the most fundamental events in their lives and the most profoundly human aspects of being: human life, death, birth and illness, poverty, addiction, education, friendships, parents, ageing, everything - every aspect of human life. So qualitative data actually constitutes a very wide spectrum of capture of the most personal details of everyday life.

Is there a 'decolonisation' drive behind it?

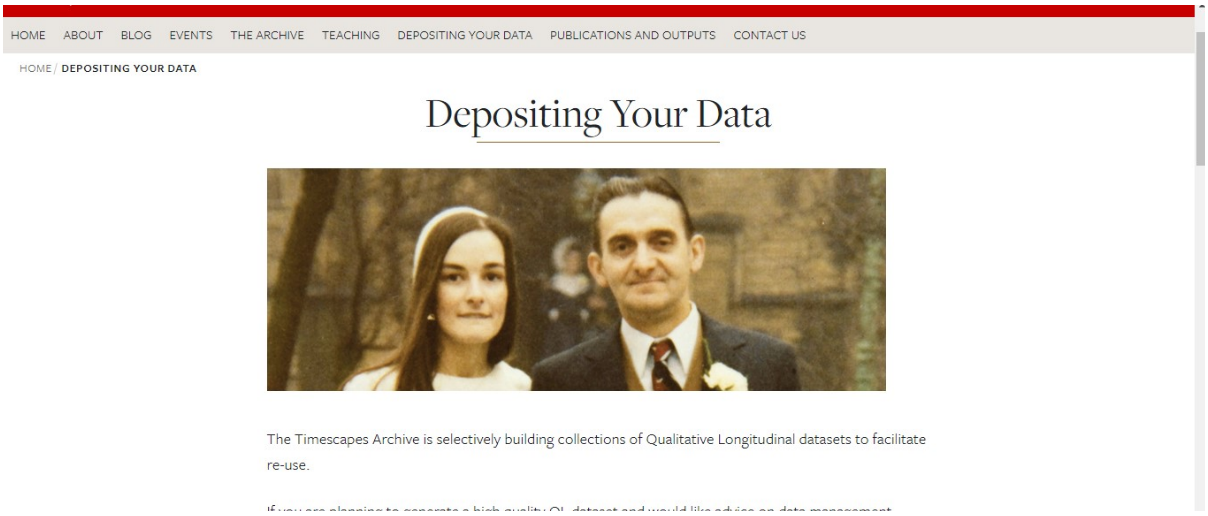
Yes, there is absolutely, and in the Timescapes Festival (September, 2022), one of the key strands of the festival was decolonisation because qualitative archiving, as its currently stands including the Timescapes Archive, might not necessarily be the best format or way of archiving the most valuable or useful data for different people in society, different groups, different individuals. So I think that there is an absolute pressing need for those debates to be supported around how we may decolonise archives or produce/diversify the collections that are currently held in our archives, because they're predominantly white and middle class. There is a major conversation to be had about what archives should be, for whom, and how they ought to be sustained.

How do you deposit data into the archive?

In terms of depositing data, one of the things about QL research is that it's multiple sweeps of data collection. So a dataset needs to be properly organised in ways so that they can be ingested. We have an ‘ingestion’ and ‘meta data’ schema, that datasets need to conform to in order that they can be deposited so that they are discoverable through the browser and search functions of the Archive. That includes file names and designations. The Research Data Leeds team provide guidance and support for researchers who want to deposit their datasets. They are also responsible for the technological sustainability of the Timescapes Archive, and ensure that the data management and protection protocols are kept up to date.

The datasets themselves receive DOI's and citations, so those datasets become a citation and an output from the originating research team. This is part of a conceptual shift from a data ownership to a data stakeholder model. So, the underlying aim is that originating researchers can retain a very particular relationship to those data, which can be acknowledged and cited, and the datasets themselves are kite-marked, despite the fact that they are deposited in an archive for other people to use. By kite-marking this means that researchers can cite a dataset as a publication and output from research.

In terms of copyright of the data, there are all sorts of innovations around that at the moment. For example, participants themselves may be offered shared copyright with the transcripts in order that in the future, if they ever wish to redact their data from the archive, it would be perfectly feasible for them to do so.



Screenshot of Timescapes Archive site:

How do you address ethical concerns with depositing such qualitative data, especially given much of it deals with human participants?

The archive has granulated levels of access. We don't have really any open access data in the same way that UKDA has, which mean data that are available for reuse without registering as a user to the Timescapes Archive. Nor does it have descriptive data of datasets, which are often also described as open access data in relation to qualitative research data. Instead, it has registered-only access which means that people need to sign a contractually-binding and a user terms and conditions that were drawn up by the University solicitor, with support from UKDA. These are gold standard data protection protocols and are constantly reviewed to ensure they continue to comply with changing data management and protection legislation. Then we have restricted access which is permissions-only, whereby researchers originating from the research team individually scrutinised applications to use those datasets that they produce because they're maybe particularly sensitive cases in there, and introduces an additional level of monitoring and surveillance in terms of how those data may well be used.

Then we have the 'dark archive'. That's for embargoed data, which may be because researchers are still trying to write up their research, so it may be a short period of time, maybe two or three years, but they may well be on a 50-100 year embargo because the data is incredibly sensitive. And it's been decided or decreed at some point that they ought not to be even offered as part of a registered access process. Also, we restrict users. You need to be in a bona fide research institution to register for the Archive. So, you can't wander in off the street, you can't be someone's relative: “I want to have a look at my dad's interview”, for example. You can't be a journalist, can't be a ‘casual user’ of those data. One of the protections that puts in place is that the researcher will themselves normally have to undergo ethical review, but also they work under institutional regulations and are therefore accountable both in law and through their institution for the ethical use of those data. So, both at an individual- and an institutional-level, there are controls and embargoes around how data are used.

Finally, there’s an ongoing project over the last 20 years or so with the wider Timescapes programme team and various other associated academics in developing enhanced ethical protocols that supersede those that are set out. For example, GDPR legislation or institutional ethical review, which are very much about the ethical treatment of other people's data.

In primary qualitative research studies, our ethical attention is more commonly concerned with researcher's relationships with their participants. The ethics are very much focused on those relationships. Whereas in qualitative data reuse, qualitative secondary analysis, concerns very much have to be around our relationships to those data. So, we have enhanced ethical standards and debates around how we may properly reuse those data.

Have you received feedback from users?

I think auditing user's experiences is an area that we need to develop, but it's me and Research Data Leeds, and we've all got our day jobs and taking on these extra jobs is quite hard. There have been numerous publications over the last 10 years from work based on research reusing the Timescapes Archive, but authors don't talk about the Archive itself. They talk about the data stored there. However, there has been an increase in usage of the archive by researchers due to the Covid-19 pandemic, where many have struggled to get out there and collect their own, original data.

"The archive actually became more popular [during the pandemic] because people weren't able to do in-person fieldwork, but they were able to sample transcripts and participants from studies that spoke directly to their research questions, and reuse those data in new and novel ways."

What are your present and future plans for the archive?

Future plans are to extend it into low and middle income countries in terms of promoting the Archive itself, but also promoting qualitative archiving more generally and methods of qualitative secondary analysis. As for the archive itself, it's just to keep it ticking over, to continue to ingest new datasets, so to promote it and keep it visible nationally to researchers conducting qualitative longitudinal research.