

Bringing the arts into socio-ecological research: An analysis of the barriers and opportunities to collaboration across the divide

Freelance artist 3 Interview transcript notes

The interviewee is working with 2 academics - Sociology department and a prof of political sociology.

Developing an 80's to present day timeline of activists and activism in Manchester, ESRC funded. Part of a bigger project. The project was due to wrap up last year but got hit by Covid. Covid prevented an event that was planned [with activists in Manchester inputting their experiences into the timeline] so money returned to ESRC. Then they got another bit of money from ESRC to take the project in a slightly different direction.

Initially, the interviewee approached the researcher who the interviewee had known for 20 years but never met. A colleague of his interviewed the interviewee the year before [as an activist from Manchester].

During this interview, the interviewee realised "how much of our activist history was being lost" and, "The history is being told by academics and not us [activists]".

So the interviewee suggested making a timeline: a short n sweet low budget project "*Haha*".

He was interested so meetings started.

It was going to be a co-created timeline. It didn't happen, due to covid and instead they had an online/zoom event. They still want to bring people together in the flesh in spring 2022.

The team had loads of interviews with activists – done before the interviewee became involved as an artist in the project.

Not being able to meet with people as the interviewee had wanted, so the interviewee has been going through the transcripts. A lot of work. A lot more work that anticipated.

They worked together to design the workshop events. The interviewee has full autonomy for timeline design.

And the interviewee is working with a web developer to design how the timeline will work on a webpage.

The interviewee feels integral to the team.

Unfortunately, they are not given enough money to cover time and costs but the interviewee really wanted to do the timeline.

The interviewee did a calculation just for the timeline.

allowed 5 days however, the project shifted due to Covid and has taken much longer as well as involving more work. The fee hasn't increased, the full budget is £3k inc. fee and web developing.

The interviewee could apply for Arts Council England funding, but the time and energy seems more trouble than its worth. The interviewee did get a bursary to look at web digitalization, which has helped.

In hindsight, the interviewee should have at least doubled the fee to allow for contingency. The interviewee would do this in the future and advise others to do the same. Would consider working as part of a research team, but would cost it differently.

The interviewee is interested in soil and fungus so has done reading and research but it feels infinite – so much and all over the world. If the interviewee were to approach a scientist, the interviewee would go to what the interviewee already knows about in terms of fungi and soil and follow what looks interesting and pops up on their radar and then the interviewee would reach out and make contact. Although doesn't know how the interviewee would like to work with a scientist at this stage. The interviewee would like to hear lots of fascinating things and take it from there.

Collaboration is not central to Freelance artist 3's work and their creative development. However, if on a 3 year project, it would be absolutely fantastic 3 years offers a degree continuity: time to absorb and take stock. It would be great.

The interviewee's practice [like many freelance artists] is opportunity driven; but threads run through their work and the interviewee has choices. Basically, the interviewee undertakes short-term projects with a 6-month period to deliver for an exhibition or event and produce new work [this is a generous time frame, often it is less, especially if it's a residency].

With their gallery hat on, if approached by a university, the gallery would ask: Can you write me something that I can circulate amongst members. They would need a clear description of the proposed project and the budget before circulating it across their membership.

People don't realise how over-stretched arts organisations can be. If they came with a research budget, they [the gallery] would be willing to spend some time helping them by offering high quality artist briefs and call outs that they could model their call out on.

The interviewee could also see this as a potential role for the gallery if they were paid for this service. Many small galleries and arts organisations run on shoestrings and have no additional capacity. Any additional work has to be accounted for in both terms of budget/income and additional staff days, either as a new post, or offered as extra days to a PT staff member.