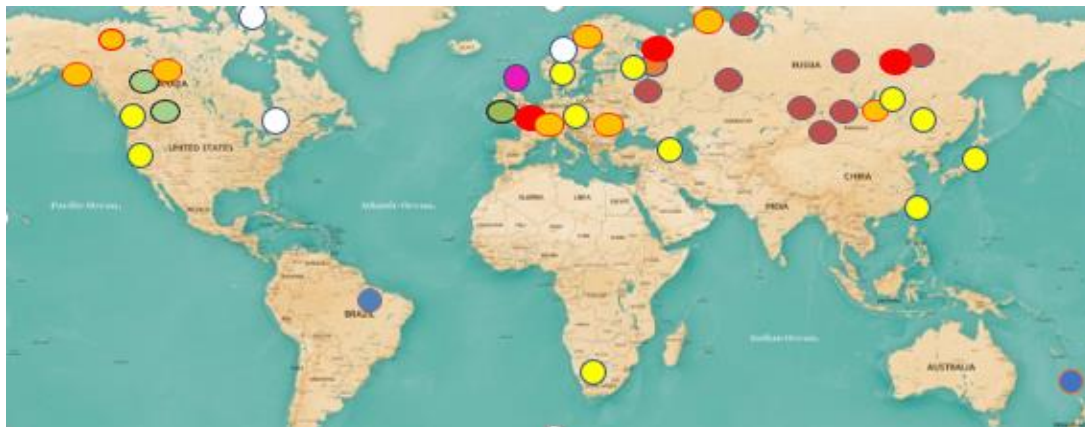


Institution: University of Aberdeen		
Unit of Assessment: 22 (Anthropology and Development Studies)		
Title of case study: Revitalising Culture: Community Collections Research and Digital Engagement		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 01 Jan. 2003 - 31 Dec. 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
David G. Anderson	Professor	2000-10, 2014- present
Nancy Wachowich	Lecturer	2001-present
Jo Vergunst	Senior Lecturer	2002-present
Rob Wishart	Lecturer	2010-present
Tanya Argounova-Low	Senior Lecturer	2003-present
Andrew Whitehouse	Lecturer	2003-present
Alison Brown	Professor	2005-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2003-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Many rural and indigenous peoples have been denied access to images of their past, and to evocative artefacts, which has contributed to a sense of loss and weak health parameters. Our researchers have devised techniques to restore significant artefacts and/or knowledge traditions to both young and old, helping to shape public discourse, and spark new cultural revitalization programmes. Our research group has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased knowledge, access and awareness of vital cultural resources across multiple generations within remote, rural, and often indigenous communities; • Inspired a change in policy and practice within public institutions, museums, and other local repositories of cultural heritage; • Developed and implemented innovative collaborative research practices, which contribute to a sense of pride and shift in the local and public perception of heritage. 		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Colonial expansion simultaneously dislocated local ways of being while concentrating significant repositories of artefacts and images curated in the metropole. Building on its heritage as an embarkation point for the Canadian and Eurasian Arctic, a team of seven scholars in Aberdeen has developed new protocols for digital sharing and artefact repatriation with communities worldwide. Since 2003 this work has touched approximately 40 communities in multiple countries, contributing to cultural revitalisation in numerous ways (see map). Although the heart of our work has been with indigenous communities in the Canadian and Russian Arctic, we have also employed our techniques in Scotland, New Zealand, Australia, and China. We have collaborated with numerous repositories and with them worked through approximately 120 collections (IA1). Our collective impact was developed across several, successive, externally funded research grants. This ICS presents an overview of nearly two decades of integrated, collaborative work. The research was organized along <u>three pathways</u>: digital sharing, enskilment, and reconnecting communities. Our work in digital sharing progressed from early work aimed at creating digital proxies of fragile glass-plate negative collections in Russia (RG1, RG2, RG5), to documenting disappearing folklore and birdsong in the Northeast of Scotland (RG3, RG6), to the creation of 3D printed versions of museum artefacts which could be re-employed in day-to-day life (RG4). Our work with digital proxies progressed to using community video, and other digital tools, to document enskilmed processes resulting in the creation of new artefacts using ancient techniques. This work developed from the re-design and sewing of traditional Tłı̄ch̄o lodges (RG1), to the revival of skills to create sealskin clothing (RG7) to the loan of a mammoth ivory sculpture from the British Museum to Eastern Siberia raising the profile of traditional carving practices (RG8). At all stages of the work, we reconnected communities to their treasured and often sacred artefacts. This ranged from creating open-access catalogues of collections (RG1, RG2, RG4, RG5, RG8), to initiating dialogues with host communities leading to exhibitions, workshops, and eventually to repatriation of objects (RG1, RG4, RG5, RG9). Our work with reconnection not only identified source communities but cast a public spotlight on lost or forgotten collections invigorating local</p>		

Impact case study (REF3)

repositories to continue the work in reviving cultural traditions. Nine (of 19) of the most significant externally funded research grants in this case were:

- **RG1** 2003-2008 AHRC: [Aboriginal Land-Rights in Siberia: Archival and Living Transcripts at Lake Baikal](#) GBP146,796
- **RG2** 2005-2007 [Arcadia Endangered Archives Programme](#) GBP42,075
- **RG3** 2007-2009 AHRC: [Anthropological Investigation of Bird Sound](#) GBP168,340
- **RG4** 2012-2018 ERC AdG: [Arctic Domus](#) GBP1,898,351
- **RG5** 2013-2017 ESRC [Etnos and the Peoples of the North](#) GBP516,686
- **RG6** 2013-2014 AHRC [Bennachie Landscapes](#) GBP79,729
- **RG7** 2013-2020 SSHRCC [Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage](#) GBP111,746.89
- **RG8** 2015-2019 [AHRC Narrative Objects](#) GBP445,154
- **RG9** 2013-2015 [Leverhulme Trust Blackfoot Collections in UK Museums](#) GBP50,731



3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- Anderson, D. G., and C. Campbell. 2009. 'Picturing Central Siberia: The Digitization and Analysis of Early 20th Central Siberian Photographic Collections', *Sibirica* 8 (2): 1-42
- Brown, AK. 2017. 'Co-authoring Relationships: Blackfoot Collections, UK Museums, and Collaborative Practice'. *Collaborative Anthropologies*, 9(½): 117-148
- Oliver, J., J. Armstrong, K. Milek, J.E. Schofield, J. Vergunst, T. Brochard, A. Gould & G. Noble. 2016, The Bennachie Colony: A Nineteenth-Century Informal Community in Northeast Scotland, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 20 (2): 341-377
- Wachowich, N. 2018. "Intimate Clips: Sealskin Sewing, Digital Archives and the Mittimatalik Arnait Miqsuqtuit Collective." *Museum Anthro Review*, 12 (2): 75-99
- Whitehouse, A. 2015. 'Listening to Birds in the Anthropocene: The Anxious Semiotics of Sound in a Human-Dominated World', *Environmental Humanities* 6: 53-71

Further, the work was displayed at a large number of public exhibitions both in the UK and overseas. These exhibitions are available for inspection as museum catalogues, including:

- Brown, A; T. Argounova-Low. 2015 [Century Long Journey](#) An exhibition of mammoth ivory carving held at the National Art Museum of the Sakha Republic, Yakutsk, from 16 April -28 Sept 2015. Total number of visitors: 20,217 people, plus over 250 tours. The exhibit sparked workshops, roundtables, and TV shows inspired by the model.
- Dudding, J., D.G. Anderson, D.Arzyutov. 2015-17 - [River Stars Reindeer](#) A series of exhibitions of rare digitized glass plate photographs of Evenki and Orochen peoples displayed in over 15 locations in Cambridge, St. Petersburg, Aviemore, Beijing, Hailar, with approximately 130,000 visitors in total.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Our work has benefited approximately 5,700 members of specific indigenous communities, over 70 museum professionals in seven countries, and been seen by at least 150,000 museum visitors. The main countries impacted are UK, Russian Federation, China, Canada, United States, Sweden, Norway, and New Zealand. Among indigenous communities, our impact has directly affected between 7% and 30% of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Gwich'in, Inuit, Sami, Evenki, Sakha, and Nenets communities (IA1).

What is significant about our work is not its global reach, nor the numbers of individuals affected, but the fact that by combining digital technologies with community training, skills, images, and artefacts have once again begun to circulate. Our impact can be detailed in four categories:

- Impacts on the well-being of youth and adults in rural and indigenous environments
- The revival of ceremonies and educational outreach
- Impacts on museum and archive professionals, including building new capacity
- A shift in the public and international perception about rural and indigenous communities

First and foremost, the work on digital revitalization and enskilment has restored a sense of **well-being in young and old**. For example, we experimented in the use of community video to document the skills of working with sealskins in the Inuit community of Pond Inlet (**RG7**). The project involved training young Inuit to record sewing skills and lexica and to produce video installations aired online, in local and international venues such as the British Museum, Oslo Museum of Cultural History, and the Sámi University. The work with Inuit seamstresses on documenting traditional sealskin sewing techniques sparked intergenerational learning:

It's a good reference tool for the younger generation

My little girl learned how to soften sealskin. Something I've never done with her until now, she's Inuit. I learned more Inuktitut; and how to sew proper!

Just being able to witness, let alone participate, is a tremendous privilege (IA2.1)

One of our largest collaborations was the AHRC funded exhibition and workshops which brought back a mammoth ivory model of a Sakha ritual held in the British Museum to Siberia where younger generations could view it for the first time (**RG8**):

It's of spiritual importance. It reflects the spirit of Ysyakh. – 12 year old child

We will remember our people and religion. – 12 year old child

It means a lot. There are few of us, so it is important to inform the world that there is such an ethnic group. – 19 year old youth

The model makes us think how and why the actions during Ysyakh are done. It means a lot, since I won't see it for a long time, if at all again. I will be telling my children about this – ANON (IA2.2)

One of our longest-running collaborations (**RG1, RG2, RG5**), involving the digitization of a complex set of paper and photographic records associated with the Soviet Polar Census of 1926-7, led to wide public participation according to the director of the regional archive:

After the publication of the documents ... the record of villages and households in Turukhansk Territory became available to the wider public. Many indigenous clients came to know the history of their clans, and the occupations of their ancestors. They could read about the exact number of reindeer in a particular family, and of the conditions of their dwellings and their lifestyles ... Every year a great number of researchers consult our digital catalogue. Even the members of the project "The Blue Roads of Taimyr" used ... our documents to find an [undocumented archaeological] site (IA2.3)

In terms of the **educational outreach and revival of ceremonies** our work has had multiple, often unanticipated consequences. The British Museum collaboration (**RG8**) inspired a diploma project at the Arts College in Yakutsk where students employed an old style of carving to create new models, boosting interest in the traditions of mammoth ivory carving. Our collaborative work with the Blackfoot Confederacy of Canada and the USA (**RG9**), which featured in an initial impact report in [REF2014](#), has developed further to create teaching resources for schools, contributed to the traditional transfer of ceremonial knowledge rights by facilitating physical access to collections in UK museums, and delivered exhibitions and workshops for Blackfoot artists, students, ceremonial leaders and educators:

[It] reawakened knowledge that was handed down along the generations ... It's always been there and it was reawakened and the high school students that went hunting, got the animals, got the skins off the animals, tanned the animal skins, I mean the whole nine yards of it. Collected the quills of a live porcupine and cleaned them, I mean it just went on and on and on. And all that knowledge was brought front and centre again amongst the First Nations, giving them again the pride. (IA3.2)

We also established the Blackfoot-UK Museums Network which has reconnected Blackfoot people with a significant collection at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, ultimately leading to an agreement to repatriate part of it - a process delayed by the pandemic (**IA3.1**).

Our Leverhulme-funded project with a network of nine UK, Russian and Chinese partners recovered and presented never-before seen images of pre-revolutionary lifeways - the local record of which had been annihilated during the Cultural Revolution (**RG5**). The reconnection of pre-Revolutionary images to their descendants in Northwest China has sparked a revived interest in traditional culture:

I do wish we could catch up properly ... there are many small things to share - for example, a young Orochen 20-year old was so inspired by the "repatriation" of the photos he is now fully devoted to the cause of ethnic revival - he almost singlehandedly petitioned the local government for funding and now they are running Orochen language classes twice a week in Alihe (IA3.3).

A 4-month photographic exhibition in the remote regional capital of Salekhard in Western Siberia led to the start of a unique apprenticeship between school students and the regional archive – which was interrupted recently by the pandemic:

The exhibition had well over 500 visitors, among them several groups of school children ... The exhibition also organized a project of sponsoring Russian and indigenous school children to write research reports for their studies using the records on the display. In this way these old documents and photographs came to life with future generations (IA3.5).

Closer to home, our collaboration with the community organization The Bailies of Bennachie in Aberdeenshire led to a digital app of the Bennachie Colony Trail – downloaded more than 300 times - which brought “together much of [the] research in an accessible way, especially for younger people” (**IA3.6**).

The digital sharing pathway led to a change in **museum and archival professional practice**. At the beginning of our work there was not a recognized method for digitizing the type of glass plate negative commonly used in Russia, or a way to work with Soviet-era manuscripts sewn into thick folios (**RG1 RG2**). Our teams pioneered techniques for the oblique photographing of folio collections in archives:

We installed scanners with back-lit lids, one of the first sets in Russia ... Until the start of this project, these glass plate collections were consulted rarely due to the difficulty of working with such a large and fragile collection without specialized equipment. This collaboration attracted the attention of seven neighbouring regions across Siberia, where we mounted the new equipment and trained the local personnel Our collaboration led to the setting of the first standards for the digitization of glass-plate negatives (IA4.1)

One 12-year research collaboration (**RG5**) led to the attribution and documentation of one the largest collections in the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in St. Petersburg installing “a metadata protocol still in use ... today” (**IA4.2**). The senior curator of the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology notes that our work:

greatly enhance[d] our documentation, including updating materials, techniques of production, cultural context and provenance for MAA’s catalogue, which is core to all collections work ... and accessed on-line by over 5,000 international researchers annually (IA4.3)

The Head of the Scottish Government’s Nordic and Arctic Unit has noted the importance of our work to strengthening Scottish-Arctic cooperation:

The research ... has brought a distinctive contribution ... promoting Scotland’s expertise internationally, while refining solutions that have been successfully applied domestically. Crucially, the University of Aberdeen’s team have worked alongside rural communities and Indigenous people, placing sustainability, diversity and inclusivity at the heart of their research activities. This is fully in line with the approach set out in Our Place in Time, the Scottish Government’s vision for Scotland’s historic environment ... (IA4.4)

In terms of **shifting public perception and debate**, the increased accessibility of these various collections has led to wide interest in the traditional skills of indigenous peoples. In the case with our first collaboration (**RG1**) with Northern Canadian Tłı̨ch̨ Nation – where the knowledge of Siberian seamstresses was used to augment that of Canadian indigenous craftspeople – the exchange of skills led to wide-spread international impact:

This complex genealogy of linked and related projects ...served to stimulate a sense of cultural pride in our Evenkii, Gwich’in, and Tłı̨ch̨ partners, while fostering a strong sense of identity and well-being in the Indigenous youth involved. It helped foster and support international relations between Indigenous and university-based scholars from seven

circumpolar nations, generating an extensive body of peer-reviewed scholarship focused on Indigenous hearth and home. It created a lasting 'nation-to-nation' bond between the Tłı̨chǫ and the National Museums of Scotland, as well as ongoing relationships with the Marischal Museum and several museums in Evenkiia; relationships that will continue to grow over the coming decades. Perhaps most importantly, these projects inspired the Tłı̨chǫ Nation to complete their comprehensive land claim with the Government of Canada and, as Tłı̨chǫ elder and scholar likened to 'building a nation'. (IA5.1)

Our work in Western Siberia distributed 3D-printed versions of ancient 2000-year old mammoth ivory harness pieces. The experiment led to wide participation but in particular to a narrative about the “*long-term stability and sustainability of the culture and their traditions*” (IA5.2). In the opinion of a local government expert working with cultural heritage:

While some families were generously sharing their stories about cultural varieties of reindeer gears among Nenets, the others spent many days with the field researchers conducting experiments with harnessing a reindeer to understand how such (un)familiar parts of the gear might work. from the ongoing interest of tundra and urban Nenets in the experiment, I see how successful that research has been. The scholars knowing the cultural practices of nomad Nenets conducted their research in a highly ethical manner which first and foremost assisted local communities in their cultural revitalization. (IA5.3)

In 2017-2019 our team in collaboration with the Han Hwech'in and Teelit Gwich'in communities in northwest Canada worked with youth to produce a series of videos on the sewing and construction of sled dog packs and a traditional fish wheel – the knowledge of each of which was held by one or two elderly experts (RG4). The crafting and re-crafting of objects re-embodies skills in living generations creating a vibrant proxy which has served as a model internationally:

The meeting congregated a diverse international audience including scholars, 150 Indigenous community members from several countries in the Americas and Australasia, media support staff, policy-makers and NGO representatives working on indigenous rights, biodiversity conservation and community health. Both the film screening and the dynamic discussions that followed around the vital importance of effectively and collaboratively revitalizing indigenous knowledge, language and practices such as traditional fishing technologies for contemporary use were profoundly instructive to all scholars, indigenous community members (especially elders and teachers of tradition), and NGO representatives (IA5.4).

Our applied community collections research has touched the lives of young and old in dozens of indigenous communities worldwide. It has led to the recognition of new techniques working with artefacts and images in collections, but moreover has applied digital techniques and artefact repatriation to spark new interest in ancient techniques – leading both to the creation of new items of cultural importance and a renewed respect for cultural traditions. It is our hope that our collaborative work, paused by the pandemic, will continue in coming years.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Our corroborative evidence comes in three types: testimonial letters and/or voice recordings from community leaders, formal letters from museums and other organizations of cultural heritage production and media reports. The full set of evidence is organized into five impact attachments (IA) the content of which is summarized here.

IA1 is a tabular summary of the specific projects in each pathway showing the locations and population statistics of each community and the range of effects on generational groups within those communities.

IA2 consists of a collection of formal letters, testimonials, and media reports on the well-being of youth and adults in rural and indigenous environments.

IA3 consists of a collection of media reports, letters and testimonials on revival of ceremonies and educational outreach.

IA4 consists of a collection of testimonials on the impact on museum and archive professionals.

IA5 consists of a collection of formal letters on the shift in public and international perception about rural and indigenous communities