

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: York St John University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 14 Geography and Environmental Studies		
Title of case study: Enhanced participation, collaboration, and evaluation of social sustainability through musical encounters		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2017 - present		
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:
Dr Jude Parks	Senior Lecturer	August 2014 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2019 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Ongoing cross-disciplinary research at York St John University (YSJ) found that the benefits of community music encounters are embedded in non-linear, dynamic processes, rather than in simple outcomes.</p> <p>The findings have expanded understanding of 'social sustainability', broadly taken to mean fair access to opportunities for improved quality of life, as a practical and collaborative endeavour that is fostered by situated communities of practice. Application of the findings served to challenge established norms of participation, and to inform sustainable and inclusive collaboration and engagement at an international conference session in June 2019, where Parks co-organised an instant choir workshop.</p> <p>Workshop participants reported that singing enhanced their engagement with the conference session and theme, and their conference experience, enabled subsequent participant collaboration, and broadened personal outlooks.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Community music practitioners are required to evaluate outcomes from projects in order to justify existing funding and to attract future funding. They often experience challenges in identifying and evidencing intangible outcomes, and receive criticism for reporting only positive aspects of their work. This research developed a geographical analytical framework to interpret outcomes as reported by practitioners working in prison and other community settings in a way that makes space for and recognises the value of the conflictual elements of their work, and the importance of <i>process</i> in achieving benefits often implicit in claims of 'social sustainability'.</p> <p>The research is a product of Dr. Parks' ongoing work on communities and encounter. Specifically, it concerns a collaborative project since 2017 with community music practitioner researchers within and beyond YSJ. Community music as a practice is activist music education with an agenda of social change.</p> <p>A cross-disciplinary symposium in 2018 [3.1] explored social sustainability from the perspectives of community music and human geography. This led to collaboration between Parks and a community music academic colleague at the Royal Northern College of Music, to better</p>		

conceptualise the pedagogical spaces of community music programmes. The geographical conceptual framework developed by Parks was used to analyse data collected by the community music researcher via interviews with community music facilitators. The interviews were followed by an autoethnographic study whereby the community music researcher observed a week-long music programme in a prison, and partook in two follow-up reflective interviews conducted by Parks. The findings revealed that community music facilitators were simultaneously creating spaces for conflict *and* safety for participants in the way they manage the participant-participant and participant-music encounters.

The findings [3.2], by highlighting the way that community music pedagogy *uses* conflict in participants' encounters to positive ends rather than seeking to eliminate it, subvert common perceptions of moments that might appear challenging, awkward, or chaotic as negative aspects of community music work. They validate the messy and non-linear nature of the pedagogical encounters and processes involved. In the research, incidences of conflict frequently served as moments for group reflection and growth, with hidden benefits, including making learning and learning hierarchies invisible, embracing each participant's starting point, and enabling self-expression, thus increasing inclusivity. For example, as reported in [3.2] (p. 20), one community music facilitator described how she initially disagreed with the way her co-facilitator was working, until she saw the result of not intervening to calm the 'cacophony' in a music workshop. The facilitator allowed the musical conflict to play out and be resolved by unspoken agreement among participants. This led to positive transformation whereby participants collectively moved beyond the chaotic phase of music making.

The research findings revealed complex and enabling pedagogical processes that are often invisible, showing how pedagogical spaces are created and sustained by community music facilitators in prison and community settings, including the value of conflict [3.2]. The findings are useful in addressing the need for practitioners to better evidence claims of 'social sustainability' in project evaluations.

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

The underpinning research has received recognition in the form of research funding, and an article published in a high-impact international journal.

Research Funding

[3.1] Lee Higgins and **Jude Parks** (2017-18) 'Community music and social sustainability', Funds: £1,950, Research project funding, York St John University

Research Output

[3.2] Jennie Henley and **Jude Parks** (2020) The Pedagogy of a Prison and Community Music Programme: Spaces for conflict and safety. *International Journal of Community Music*. Vol. 13 (1), pp. 7-27. https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcm_00008_1

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

The findings have inspired the use of musical encounters to demonstrate how social sustainability is best understood as a process rather than as an outcome, and to foster an inclusive and self-sufficient community of practice. The primary pathway to impact was public engagement at a conference, the first of several planned impact activities with diverse stakeholders, some of which had to be postponed due to Covid 19. The impact was a first step to disseminating the findings to community music practitioners who need to evidence intangible

outcomes. The findings will enable them to enhance written evaluations and funding bids to better recognise and articulate the benefits of ‘messy’ and non-linear aspects of their work.

The impact occurred at an international geography conference session on the theme of sustainability in June 2019 (Nordic Geographers Meeting 2019). Parks co-organised a session on ‘social sustainability and creative practice’ ([Session format](#)) on the first morning of the three-day conference. Two paper presentations (one on social sustainability as conceptualised within geography, and the other mapping out the discipline of community music) were complemented by a musical intervention, in the form of an ‘instant choir’ facilitated by a community musician. The aim of this intervention was to disseminate and demonstrate the implications of the research through participation, demonstrating how social sustainability is embedded in practice and is best understood in terms of process rather than outcome, thus creating impact from the research. Live engagement with an example of how experiences of participating in community music can generate the types of benefits often implicit in claims of social sustainability produced deep engagement with the subject matter. It generated consciously felt inclusivity and self-sufficiency within the community of practice.

The beneficiaries were a group of 15 participants. Baseline anonymous responses to the format of the session, collected via Mentimeter at the start of the session [5.1], indicated unease, curiosity and openness to the unorthodox session format:

- “Nervous to be offered a music making session in this environment.”
- “Great to get out of the talky-thinky space.”
- “Fascinating focus on community stakeholders – active collaboration as a key component of social sustainability here it seems.”

Responses to the experience, collected at the end of the session [5.2], indicated the connectivity and enthusiasm that the singing generated:

- “Great! Connected to people next to me, relaxed.”
- “Nervous and excited but gradually getting into it! Wanted to sing more!”
- “Better than I thought!! Got me into the rhythm...”

Reflective survey responses [5.3], collected in October 2020, reveal that the musical intervention led to four key sets of benefits:

1) Enhanced participant engagement with the conference session and theme: Embodied, dynamic engagement was enabled, connection was felt between participants, generating deeper understanding of the subject matter, usual hierarchies were disrupted, and possibilities were made visible and embraced. These are benefits recognised by community musicians but difficult to evidence:

- “... the involvement and participatory aspects urged us to question our own social practices in relation to the themes of the session ... often conference sessions are quite static, and I often struggle to hold my attention as a listener ... The opportunity to move, use our bodies, and interact with each other in the audience was a welcome change.” [p. 2-3]
- “... the choir itself engaged me in a physical, mental, tactile, and social experience which integrated the session theme in these new ways” [p. 6]
- “It called me in to actively participate, and made me feel much more present with the other participants than I would have felt otherwise ... It gave me a different understanding of the

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discussion in the session as I could relate it directly to my own experience, which was then fresh in body and mind.” [p. 12]

- “... rather than observing as an individual, I was able to experience the ideas presented with others ... This was a fantastic way to bring audience members into the work of social sustainability ... It challenged usual behaviours of sitting (perhaps passively) and listening.” [p. 17-18]
- “... it did make me think about how social sustainability expresses itself” [p. 21]
- “A feeling of pleasure at the audacity of breaking with academic tradition to expand what academic practice could be.” [p. 23]

2) Enhanced conference experience: Participants felt socially and professionally open to the possibilities of the conference experience ahead:

- “Singing made me more apt to make professional contacts with the organizers and perhaps made me more open to the humanity of fellow conference participants.” [p. 7]
- “Conferences can certainly feel a little socially daunting for me sometimes ... so the experience of singing together in the first session ... made me feel more connected and included. I felt invigorated afterwards...” [p. 13]
- “It enabled me to engage with the conference experience more effectively and openly.” [p. 22]

3) Subsequent participant collaboration: Participants engaged creatively with the ideas and connections that the session offered, leading to a collaborative journal article submitted to *Cultural Geographies in Practice*:

- “I think it was the combined introduction to new pieces of sustainability theory with the instant choir that got me involved, and thinking about social sustainability and arts kept me intellectually engaged.” [p. 8]
- “Jude and her colleagues demonstrated creative valour in continuing the collective discussion enabled by the singing to explore how social sustainability could be manifested in and through the writing of a paper.” [p. 22]

4) Impact on participants’ personal outlook:

- “Any participation in arts and music (such as the instant choir) reminds me of arts as a personal option, and as a solution to what ails me and the world.” [p. 7]
- “... it has left a lasting impression on me that I will take inspiration from in my own academic and educational practices.” [p. 15]

This musical intervention has challenged established norms around conference practices based on individual presentations and a social and spatial division between organisers, presenters, and audience. Challenging such norms and hierarchies has led to an inclusive, creative, ‘audacious’, self-sufficient community of practice. This is a first step to rolling out the research findings to community music practitioners needing to evidence intangible outcomes from their work.

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

[5.1] Survey Data: Baseline Mentimeter responses from participants of the Nordic Geographers Meeting conference session 2019

[5.2] Survey Data: Reflective Mentimeter responses from participants of the Nordic Geographers Meeting conference session 2019

[5.3] Survey Data: Participants at the Nordic Geographers Meeting 2019, collected in October 2020