

Invitation to

# Imagine



## **Imagine... our projects**

*Imagine* had four sub-projects, which you can read about here.

### **Building individual and community resilience**

Across seven countries, co-researchers developed and tested new ways to support individuals and communities. Our approach to resilience goes well beyond individuals pulling up their socks. Adults and young people with diverse needs co-researched with practitioners, academics, community activists and many more. We did develop some new ways to build resilience and we've explained how well these worked. Check that out on the Boingboing website: [www.boingboing.org.uk](http://www.boingboing.org.uk)

### **The role of community development in local neighbourhoods**

Co-researchers worked in Tyneside (Benwell and North Shields) and Coventry (Hillfields). These areas were part of the national Community Development Project, a 1970s anti-poverty programme. We traced people involved in the 1970s and explored multiple regeneration schemes over the following 40 years. Over 15 community partner organisations undertook projects exploring the past, present, and future of their areas. They did this using film, graffiti art, photography, felted pictures and oral testimony, reclaiming their histories and challenging stigma.

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/socialjustice/imagine/>

### **The role of culture**

We researched how everyday culture shapes community participation. Through ten co-produced projects, we encountered the arts and cultures and worked with diverse communities in South Yorkshire. We found out that making and sharing through the arts can surface unheard voices, leading to new forms of knowledge to inform policy on community development.

### **The democratic context**

We were interested in how visions of the future were created in past and present communities, especially those traditionally without power. This included exploring:

- democratic decision-making
- young people's imagined futures
- black British histories
- place-making in post-industrial cities
- women's time and volunteering
- community and welfare

New forms of democratic knowledge emerged about how they change, enabling them to imagine alternative futures

*We are funded through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under the Connected Communities programme, and ran from 2013-2017*

# IMAGINE... how it began

Imagine was a five-year research programme that connected communities with universities to help them think about the context for civic engagement

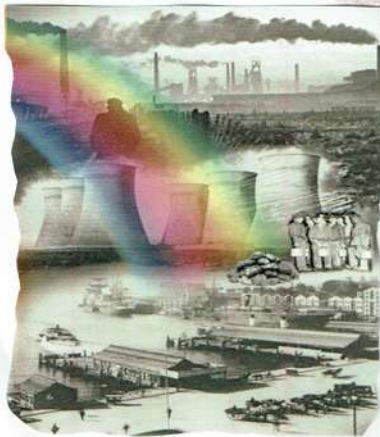


We created partnerships to imagine better futures.

Universities and communities can find it difficult to work together.

## HOPE

Researchers worked with activists in communities to deepen and enhance what they were already doing. This was a different kind of research, not tied to university disciplines or community practice.



# CHANGE



University resources enhanced community capacity to record voices, enact change, and find new ways to value and promote local knowledge.



# FUTURES

*Imagine* is a roadmap for community/university working based on finding shared values through meaningful local practice.



# HISTORY

Twenty people from *Imagine* came together for a few days to produce this booklet, in order to give you a glimpse of their journey.



main

DIFFERENT

WAYS

OF

RESEARCHING

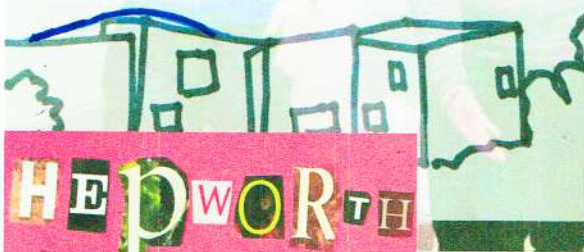
The Imagine project sought **to understand** communities – not through traditional means, such as surveys and focus groups but through a variety of **creative** methods

*Coming together in community, in solidarity... a quiet knowing, sharing*

**By collaborating we...**

engaged... listened... respected... shared...  
learned... laughed... grew... overcame...  
reflected... challenged... agreed... painted...  
disagreed... danced... cried... loved...  
laughed... moved... created... wrote...  
exhibited... quilted... created poems...  
supported artists... gave voice... enabled...  
gained confidence... **imagined...**

# FROM BRIGHTON TO THE



## HEPWORTH

### Co-Researchers from Arts Connect...

"We travelled to the Hepworth Wakefield to share our research methods with other *Imagine* young people. We **gained confidence** and **changed our attitudes** to people who were different from us, **challenged ourselves**

and learned that we **loved art galleries!** We came away feeling **appreciated**, and with a feeling of **belonging** to a national project. We were **so proud.**"

*political vision. Trying, accepting*

These methods allow us to **re-produce** the **reality** that we understand... in our own **words** and **images**, and help make the **findings** public in a way that allows audiences to access the data **differently** in a more **thought provoking** way.

**Brighton to Wakefield**  
**246 miles / 6 hours**

**i** **MAGIN** **g**

**M** **A** **K** **i** **N** **g** **it**

**Artists from diverse communities**

provide different lenses.

*Imagine* gave **opportunities** to minority ethnic artists to **showcase** their **talent**.



In Benwell **350** people from **different neighbourhoods** created multiple felt images.

The **process** enabled **dialogue** across communities and helped people

**negotiate difference.**

*Other Funding*



# I TO THE WE

I cannot be put in a tick box and narrowed down into a category. My identity is made up of my religion, my values and my morals. I am a unique human being. I am special. My family background, my community. My experience of life. I am together.  
R.K.

a voice

Poem by Zlakha, from Rotherham

Imagine provided opportunities for partner organisations and **community members** to generate **understanding** of what 'community' means – and through a process of **negotiation**, to shift from the **'I' to the 'We'**.

# Imagine ... So Much Learning

Across the five years we have learned so much about the value of community groups & universities working together as a research approach.

Effective community academic relationships are achievable.



"Community researchers found that academics weren't as scary as they thought they were"

Aiming for power sharing is important. Everyone's knowledge counts.

**FRIENDS  
NOT  
ENEMIES**

The interaction between types of different ledges is what's powerful

"Academics gained confidence by being brave and approaching local community groups"

Knowledge production happens in and between different spaces and places.

English is my second language...It had so much impact on me to express, rather than in words, with pictures and that's very important. That's the expression of my heart.



**We need spaces in research  
For all kinds of knowing  
including research  
that focuses on poetic expression, and the  
collaborative creation of knowledge  
The kinds of knowing that is  
Situating in stories, conversations,  
music and performance,  
art and laughter**

M. Laidlaw, 2015

Knowledge is not just verbal  
and in writing but in art  
forms, objects and  
embodied in people  
themselves.

Using creative methods like  
poetry, film and visual art  
forms can surface hidden  
voices.



This way of working is a vehicle for challenging stigma, & for people to reclaim positive identities

IMAG



where we can think about society but the



LINE



## Inspired by Imagine

### What next for the researchers?



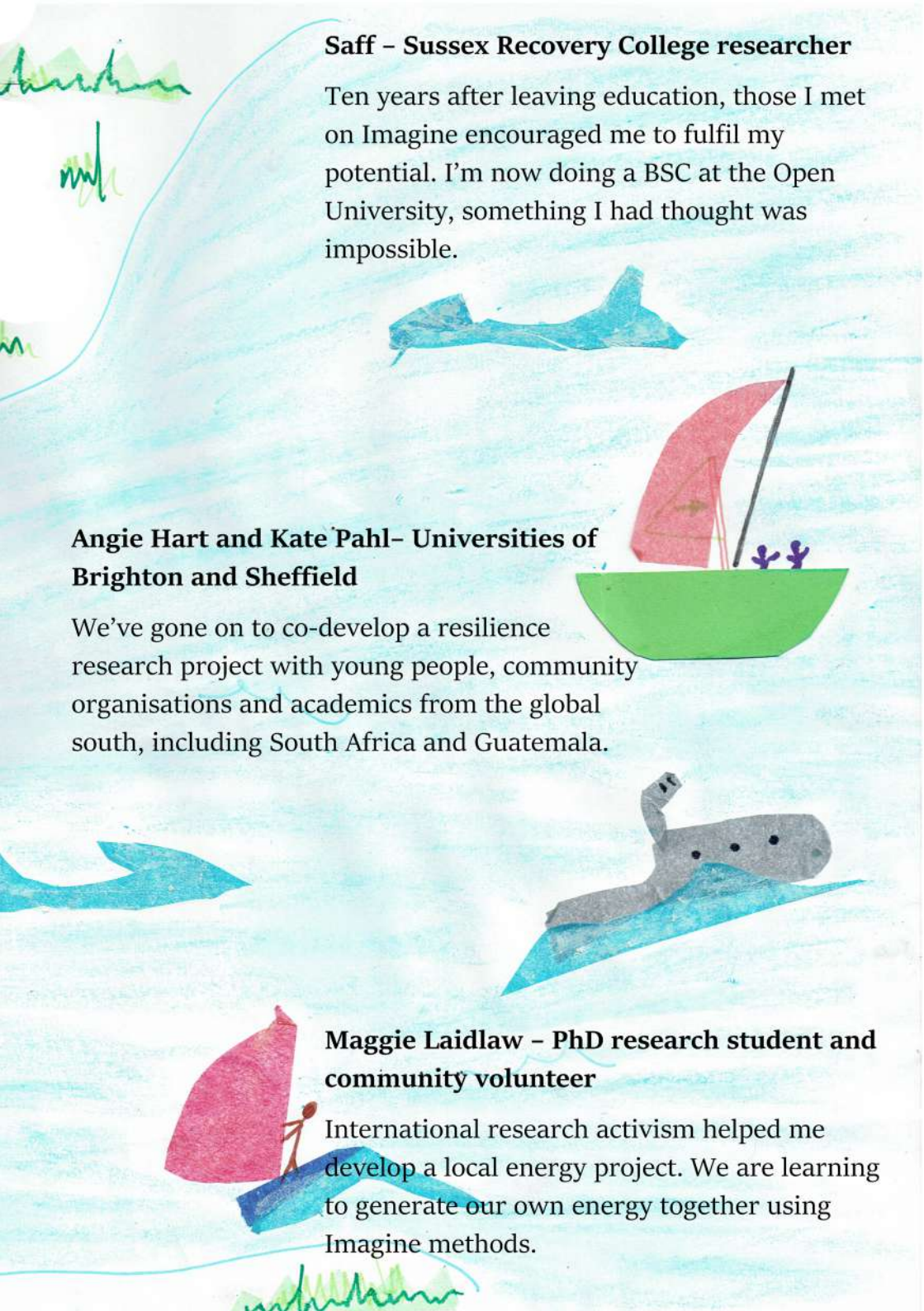
#### Judith Green – Community organiser

Imagine has inspired us to preserve our stories for future generations. We are beginning to write and archive our history to set the record straight.

#### Milton Brown – community filmmaker and PhD student

Imagine has given me a platform to get my research under the noses of government. They have asked me to speak to them about building on Imagine's work in the community.





**Saff – Sussex Recovery College researcher**

Ten years after leaving education, those I met on Imagine encouraged me to fulfil my potential. I'm now doing a BSC at the Open University, something I had thought was impossible.

**Angie Hart and Kate Pahl – Universities of Brighton and Sheffield**

We've gone on to co-develop a resilience research project with young people, community organisations and academics from the global south, including South Africa and Guatemala.

**Maggie Laidlaw – PhD research student and community volunteer**

International research activism helped me develop a local energy project. We are learning to generate our own energy together using Imagine methods.

# Imagine ... Lives changed

Tangled Boots is a group of retired women in Scotland who write, rehearse and perform pantomimes, and line dance. *Imagine* connected them with students in a local college to produce a film of their performance, premiered at a red carpet event at the local community centre.

The Cedarwood Trust in the Meadow Well Estate, North Shields, developed a lunch group. The project gave an opportunity to develop gifts and talents, increase confidence in roles such as community trustees, and to be active in other community projects.

In Sussex learning disabled people from Arts Connect (Culture Shift) explored the challenges they face in society and what can help them be resilient. Through *Imagine*, they had opportunities to travel and present to academic audiences, developing their own resilience education game and their confidence and skills.

An *Imagine* project has been working with schools across Durham to develop their own school community resilience action plans.



People from Hillfields in Coventry came together to curate a photographic exhibition that produced an alternative historical account challenging stigma about their area.

200 people facing mental health challenges have benefited from a resilience building course which was developed by a partnership involving the *Imagine* project, Sussex Recovery College, Sussex Partnership Foundation NHS Trust, and the University of Brighton.

In Sheffield residents contributed thoughts and ideas about experiences of living in Park Hill flats. They then made a film in collaboration with Museums Sheffield, which is now on permanent display.

*Imagine* worked in partnership with an American researcher funded by the Fulbright Commission to help community organisations to reflect upon and reconsider their responses to working in austerity. Sound System Culture (SSC) brings UK's vibrant reggae sound system culture to the forefront through high quality artistic and cultural experiences. The University of Huddersfield hosted an exhibition by SSC, showcasing an element of the town's Black British history.

# Imagine ideas are going

## *Imagine...*

Experimented with community-led approaches to supporting children and young people's mental health that were developed by people from Boingboing. We experimented in the UK, Greece, Malaysia and Germany.



## *Liking our stuff...*

Blackpool Council and friends (including young people) wanted to replicate and deepen what we'd done. Yippee! They won £10 million from the Big Lottery Fund. Check out HeadStart.

## *Imagine...*

Enabled Masterji, an Indian photographer, now 94, to present historical photographs of the Coventry South Asian community as part of the Hillfields exhibition.

## *Since then...*

He has been championed by Coventry's bid to be 2021 City of Culture, and has exhibited in Mumbai and New York. His first book will be published on November 2017.



# places...

*Imagine ...*

Experimented with community development approaches to address high unemployment in ethnic minority communities. This included coaching to help young people fight racism and get jobs.



*Liking our stuff...*

The government took this up and helped spread the approach across West Yorkshire. Tomorrow the world...



*Imagine...*

Got together groups of British Muslim women who'd had nothing much to do with universities to research citizen identities



*Because of this...*

Their challenging of negative national and local stereotypes of British Muslim women has been taken on board by the government



Be generous, its not  
always easy, stick  
with it, its worth it!

Try to think of yourself  
as a 'we'.

Your Voice,  
Your Knowledge  
Counts

Embrace  
the  
Unexpected

Keep putting yourself  
in other people's shoes

STAY POSITIVE & VALUE  
DIFFERENCES

Let your passion be  
your energy & hope  
in tired times.

Be brave x

Spread tales  
of what works  
when things  
seem impossible

Be Creative if things  
get difficult  
& be Prepared to  
find ideas in unexpected  
Places 😊

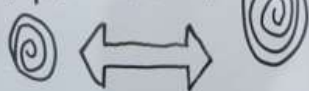
Lean in with your heart.



Always remember to think....

- Who's my audience.

NEVER LET THE  
DUST SETTLE ON  
THE PAST

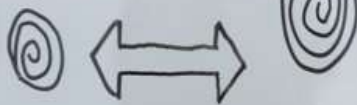


Don't be scared of disagreements and tensions - create a space where they can be aired. Use them to generate ideas and bring energy.

Co-producing research  
takes time and lots of  
commitment.

The long & winding road.

NEVER LET THE  
DUST SETTLE ON  
THE PAST



Listen

absorb

reflect

Spread out

co-create

grow

learn

change



There's no such thing as perfect  
co-production but don't let  
that stop you taking the first  
steps.





Tempted? Inspired?  
What would you do?

WHO?

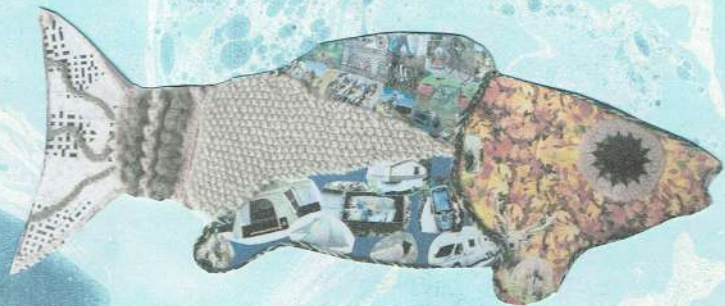
WHAT?

WHERE?

WHY?

HOW?





She said  
"If ya man was a fisherman  
ne couldn work wi the weather  
y got ne money. Ne money -  
ne food. So y said te ya  
neighbours ... Will ye feed  
me bairns"

Discover the research journey  
of a diverse group,  
travelling together,  
taking different routes  
to reach similar places,  
Overcoming challenges,  
celebrating differences -  
Exploring the past,  
Traversing the present,  
Imagining the future