

CO-PRODUCTION



10 Rules

Guy LeJeune



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EUROPEAN UNION

Investing in your future
European Regional Development Fund

HOW-TO

10 RULES OF CO-PRODUCTION

GUY LE JEUNE

How-to	2
Preface	5
What is Co-production?	7
#1. Nothing... starts on time.	12
#2. research, research, repeat...	19
#3. the 5ps: proper preparation prevents poor performance	25
#4. Find your gatekeepers	31
Door knocking etiquette	36
Meet the community	41
Right people, right place	48
#5. Whoever comes, they are the right people... even if there are only five of them	49
#6. Be human	53
Presenting the project	58
Evaluation and conversation	64
#7. Expect the unexpected	71
Process, process, process...	79
#8. Plan proactively, practice reactively	82
#9. It's OK to be human	86
Outputs and outcomes	92
#10. Listen	97
Legacy	103
Why co-produce at all?	104
Reflect and recap	112
Technology	116

PREFACE

Welcome to the start of your co-production journey. I'd like you to think of this guide as an IKEA instruction sheet. When you've read through it, you will have the Nörsjek coffee-table components, the screws and fixings, and those little bent-metal tools, but you will have to assemble the whole thing.



I don't intend these pages to be a set-in-stone doctrine, nor is my way the only way of doing things. What you are going to read, is based on my personal experience over the last ten years, the lessons I've learned and the mistakes I've made... and there have been many.

I'm not going cover co-production theory, academic discourse, nor whether there should be a hyphen or not. Those are discussions outside the scope of these pages, and although I've written this as a practical guide, I'm not suggesting you carry it with you to every community meeting.

You will undoubtedly find yourself in situations I could not possibly imagine, even with my playwright's head on, and these pages won't be much help.

That is both the terror and joy of co-production. No book, manual or guide will prepare you for everything you encounter, but within these pages I hope you will find pointers, tips, tricks and ideas to inspire you. And if you get through to the end, I also hope you'll be ready enough to start co-producing in your own communities.

Then again, maybe you're asking, 'Why should we?' or possibly 'Why would I want to do that?' I will address the question, '[Why co-produce?](#)' later on, with specific reference to the benefits for organisations and communities, but on a personal level, I can tell you this... the community engagement work in which I've been involved has given me some of the most rewarding, enjoyable and profoundly moving experiences of my life.

I hope you will find the same in your own work.

Good luck.

Guy Le Jeune, CINE Project Facilitator, Inch Island Co-Production

April 2020.

Addenda

A note or two that weren't in the first draft, but I feel I should add...

I started writing this guide before any of us had heard of social-distancing. Whatever the future holds, I hope that some of the sections on community interaction may be applicable, somewhere down the line.

And if you're reading this and English is not your first language, then I am seriously impressed. We native English speakers forget to say that sometimes.

WHAT IS CO-PRODUCTION?

We better start off by answering this, if only to be able to start somewhere. There are a multitude of definitions of co-production in articles, journals and out across the internet. Some of the definitions you will read are concise, some academic, and some theoretical. The principles of co-production may be applied across a range of disciplines, including social care, health and governmental policy, and so some definitions are inappropriate for the heritage and cultural sectors.

A quick internet search will reveal a huge amount of information that may have little or no relevance to your project...

Wiki definitions

In the context of public services and civic life: co-production is an asset-based approach that enables people providing and people receiving services to share power and responsibility, and to work together in equal, reciprocal and caring relationships.

Co-production, as a method, approach and mind-set, is very different from traditional models of service provision. As has been shown, it fundamentally alters the relationship between service providers and users; it emphasises people as active agents, not passive beneficiaries; and, in large part

because of this alternative process, it tends to lead towards better, more preventative outcomes in the long-term.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co-production_\(public_services\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co-production_(public_services))

How do we explain it?

You'll see later on how I explained this idea of co-production to the islanders of Inch, but I also feel the need to elaborate a little on the idea. I was due to lead a co-production workshop at the final CINE Project conference in Lofoten, Norway, in late April 2020. The conference was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but I'd been thinking about how I might best explore the nature of co-production.

Think of it this way...

You are a museum or heritage organisation. You want to create a new exhibit, publication or website. The curators and archivists and designers and technicians all contribute their incredible expertise.

The 'thing' is made... it might be the most incredible website, it might be a beautifully printed book, it might be glass cases containing precious artefacts. Whatever the thing is, it is remarkable. Every single professional in your organisation has contributed.

The community are invited to log-on to the website, to pick up a copy of the book, or to see those artefacts in their glass cases...

And the community are impressed. You know that, because they leave their comments on the website, or buy the copies of that beautiful publication, or scribble notes in the visitor's book at the museum's front desk.

And then they leave. There is little or no contribution from those website visitors or book readers or museum patrons to the actual 'thing'.

The museum or heritage organisation has done the job it is required to do, the public have given their approval, but neither the organisation nor the community have entered into any form of meaningful dialogue with each other.

It is very much a case of 'Us' and 'Them'.

In co-production there is no Us or Them. Co-production requires an egalitarian and democratised approach to the creation of whatever the output might be.

The organisation is suddenly obligated to engage with the community, and it's scary, if they've never done anything like this before. The professionals and their credentials must cede control of the process and outputs to the voices and wishes of the community, uncertain of the direction this new-fangled co-production might take.

And for the community, co-production is as discomfoting. They have trusted the heritage and cultural organisations to put stuff in glass cases, and now they're being asked what stuff should be. They are unsure whether their histories are interesting enough, and they are as uncertain of what this co-production thing might be as the professionals.

Sure, what would we know about that?

This probably isn't of any interest...

I don't really have any stories...

One more Wiki definition

Co-production is not just a word, it's not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution. In practice, it involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them.

The last one is probably as close to the idea of co-production we are discussing in this guide, but try using those words in a community setting, and you'll have lost them in the first 30 seconds, for it sounds very aspirational and academic.

In this guide, we need to narrow our scope to the heritage and cultural sectors, and find words we can be sure work for us, before explaining the idea of co-production the communities we hope to work with. To that end, I would like to use the following definition as starting point for all that follows.

CO-PRODUCTION IS THE PROCESS BY WHICH WE FACILITATE AND EMPOWER THE COMMUNITY, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, TO BECOME THE CURATORS, MAKERS AND PERFORMERS OF THEIR OWN STORIES.

It's not a form of words you might have seen before, but it is a close to what I believe the philosophy of co-production excellence should be. It's a philosophy that is in contrast to many of the historical outputs from heritage and cultural organisations, where the community was often regarded as either audience, footfall or visitor numbers.

That mind-set has changed, and is changing still. Methodologies have evolved, ideas have been exchanged, projects have developed.

We are now looking at our communities as equals, as teachers, as the caretakers of knowledge, and as our partners. We are no longer sitting in offices planning the next event with which to impress or entertain our audience or increase that footfall.

Co-production requires us to leave our desks, our experience, our published papers and our CVs behind us. It requires us to sit with people, not in front of them. It requires us to be human and to listen. And if we listen, then we hear amazing stories...

For heritage and culture professionals, co-production requires a mind-shift, an openness to unknown possibilities, and a willingness to accept failure. It requires hard work, long hours, endless kilometres of driving. It requires patience, stamina and care.

Co-production is challenging, ambiguous, unpredictable and scary. Outcomes and outputs will be discarded, unintended consequences will unfold, and previous evaluation methodologies will be utterly unsuited. At times, it will feel chaotic. At times, you will feel stretched in every direction. At times, you will wonder if it is worth the effort. And then there will be moments when you wonder why you ever considered doing anything else.

So now we have our definition and I've given you the pre-flight safety announcement. It's time to learn the rules.

#1. NOTHING... STARTS ON TIME.

You will find yourself sitting on a plastic chair in a cold community centre at 6.49pm, there won't be any decent coffee for several kilometres, and you will be waiting for someone to turn up and wondering whether you got the date, the location or the time wrong.



Inch Hall Community Centre... waiting.

Be patient. Take something to read, as the mobile phone signal may not be what you're used to, and the caretaker won't know the WiFi password.

Be patient. People have lives. Cars don't always start. Pets get ill. People forget. We are all human. You are (hopefully) being paid to be there, the community are there voluntarily. They are giving up their time because they're interested in participating.

Be patient.

And as corollary to the first rule...

Everything will take longer than you think.

If your project's funding only lasts three months, the work will last four. If you can only commit two days a week, the project will need three. These are immutable facts. You will inevitably work some days for free, and longer than you, or your organisation had planned. Co-production is not a 9am to 5pm, office-hours-only career choice.

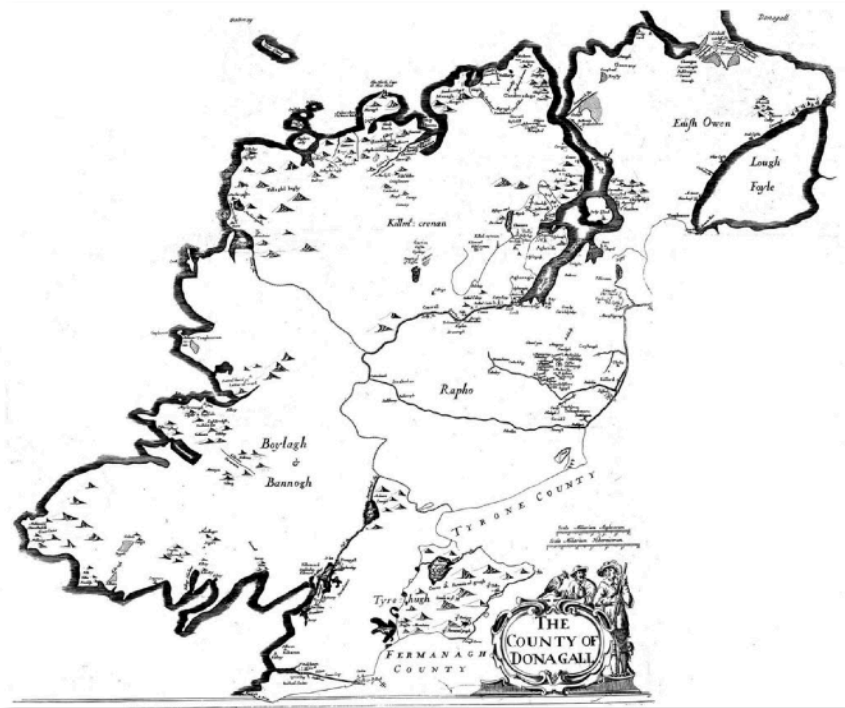
If you acknowledge the first rule and its corollary, and accept that time on any co-production project is liable to be elastic, then you are half-way to becoming an excellent co-production facilitator. Did I mention being patient?

WHO AND WHERE, AND WHY?

Once upon a time, you learned how to speak Euro-ese. You filled out your funding application. You submitted the form and your supporting documents, and then you sat, furiously checking your emails for the next three months until you finally received a response, offering you a grant, with the usual 'certain conditions'.

This email can often be found in the Spam folder, so it's always worth checking there too. This isn't a joke. This actually happened to me. I found it a week later.

You run around the room punching the air, because the Special Euro-Project Secretariat (SE-PS) has decided to give you several thousand shillings to work on a community co-production project, even though there is a distinct possibility that neither the SE-PS nor your management team know what this actually entails. You sign the documents, agree the conditions, and you are ready to go and co-produce... but with whom, where, and why?



You may have already identified your target community, and included the information in your funding application/ workplan, but please keep reading, for there are a few things still to consider before you leave the office. And if you haven't found your community, then the following suggestions may help you narrow the field.

Follow your heart. Be passionate.

Passion is an over-used term. I've even seen it applied to cardboard packaging, but there is little to be gained from community engagement if you aren't interested in that community or can't summon any enthusiasm for the project. The people you meet will feel it – the quality of the engagement will suffer, the information will dry up, and you'll be miserable. Good co-production doesn't necessarily have

to be the most exciting and fun thing you've ever done, but you are the facilitator and primary contact between the community and your organisation – if you arrive with a long-face and try to feign interest, you won't get very far.

Follow your interests. Use your expertise.

If you have a fascination for oral history, megaliths, or social and political changes in the 18th Century, use that knowledge to search for communities that lived through those histories. Find a connection you can follow through, and one which keeps you interested.

Think local.

Consider your travel time and your carbon footprint. If the community is two hours drive away, that's half a day travelling to and from them. There might be good reasons to make the journey, and those reasons outweigh other considerations, but query your choice. Ensure you look at your resources, your patience, and how many times you can survive four hours behind a steering wheel.

As set out in the application...

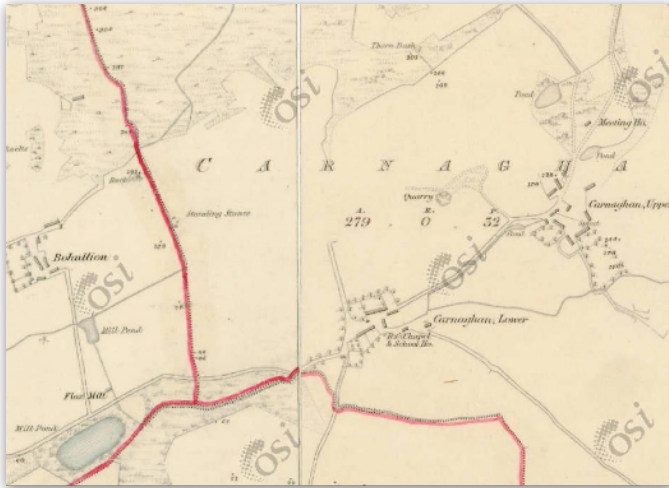
Remind yourself of what you said you were going to do in that funding application, three months ago. It's easy to forget, if like me, you are constantly filling out forms and sending them off. Balance the project's aspirations with practical and real-world considerations. If you need to go back to the funders or your organisation's management to notify them of variation, ensure you can make a good case.

Use your personal contacts.

Your friends and colleagues can be a mine of information. Ask questions. Tell people what you are hoping to do. Someone, somewhere might just have the connection you need.

Where on the map?

Get some maps, paper or online. We're lucky to have a treasure trove of maps from the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. 6" colour maps, as below, (1837-1842), made by [British Army surveyors](#), and 25" versions (1888-1913). They were some of the most accurate maps ever made with traditional surveying.



Carnaghan, Inch, Geohive

Look at the geography, look at the roads, look at those places you've never been to, or places you've heard about, but never taken too much interest in. Set yourself some parameters: Rural or Urban, Maritime or Agricultural, Geographically Isolated or High-Density. Think about socio-economic factors and cultural impacts, infrastructure, both traditional and digital. Make a list, then go back to the maps and circle some possible candidates. [Have a look at the Why? page](#), to see how we chose Inch, or rather, how it chose us.

Go there.

Visit the place, before you've made any decisions. Talk to people, but be a little circumspect. Get a sense of the place and the community. If your co-production facilitator's radar is

switched on, you'll know instantly if it's the right place. And honestly, I can't tell you what that means for you, but you will know – the community, the place, the location, all of it will just feel right.

Established or establish?

Weigh the pros and cons of working with an established group, or simply finding the right people. If you work in the museum sector and your focus is heritage, there might be an extant history group, already working on the community's history. They may be the obvious choice, but you must consider whether you might end up walking paths already trodden. On the other hand, working with a disparate group of people has its downsides...

Perspectives I

... and a few words about the last paragraph. The social, economic and political histories at play in a community markedly affect how receptive and supportive that community will be towards the co-production. And when I say politics, I mean politics with a small 'p'... who is not talking to who, who sold a field fifty years ago and still feels cheated, who borrowed a wheelbarrow and never returned it, and in Ireland, whose father may have fought on one side of the Civil War.

You will never meet everyone in the community, not everyone will engage with the project, and you will have to accept this fact.

The same is true when working with an existing heritage group. You will have to navigate the individual interests and personalities; some of the group may become evangelists for the project, but not everyone will be so welcoming, for you are both the professional and the outsider at once. In addition, demographics and convention within the group may

combine to create an idea of local history, which may not be reflected in the wider community.



Civil War graffiti, ca. 1922, Inch Fort

The enthusiastic voices of an existing group may muffle the quieter voices, and anybody working in the area of oral history will tell you those quiet voices are always the most interesting. If you hear 'Oh, I've not much to tell,' you can be sure they were probably in some special-forces unit in several wars, played at Carnegie Hall when they were 14, and lived in an Alaskan log cabin for twenty years...

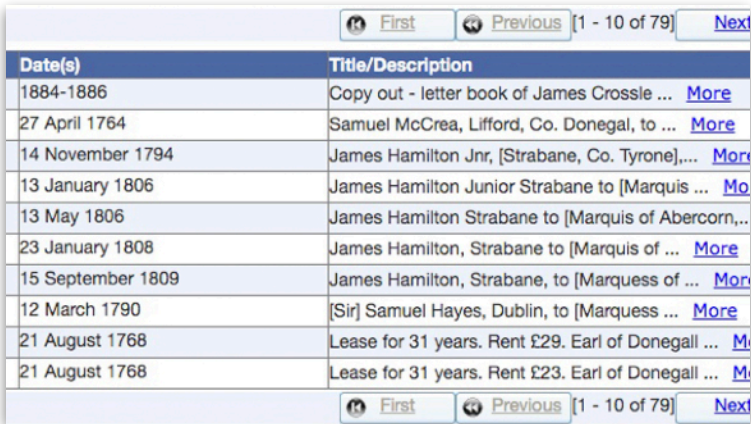
How you navigate all of these obstacles is down to you, but follow your heart, you will be half-way there. And yes, it is difficult for anyone to justify their instincts and their gut, but in my experience, the best work has started from an unconscious response to a place or community. Don't ignore that response. The unconscious mind has a way of guiding you to ideas and impulses you may never have considered, but which are created and nurtured from your life experience.

And I should add, there will always be the dissenting voice, the 'you didn't ask me' voice, the 'I didn't know anything about this' voice. There will always be someone

who, for whatever reason, feels they didn't get the opportunity to contribute or feels that you somehow snubbed them. It's just part of the tapestry of co-production...

#2. RESEARCH, RESEARCH, REPEAT...

You have found your community and you are eager to get started. It's now time to do your research. It's time to get acquainted with your community's history, and scour the sources for needles in haystacks. I'll warn you now, you might struggle to find very much at all, but you'll know your project better and where to look. Your aim is to know more about the community than they know themselves. There are plenty of places to look, and with a little time and a nose for detail, you'll become that history expert. And remember, if you work for a museum, heritage organisation or any other cultural institution, you have research contacts unavailable to the general public. You'll be able to access resources and information that the community may not have ever known about, or ever seen.



Date(s)	Title/Description
1884-1886	Copy out - letter book of James Crossle ... More
27 April 1764	Samuel McCrea, Lifford, Co. Donegal, to ... More
14 November 1794	James Hamilton Jnr, [Strabane, Co. Tyrone],... More
13 January 1806	James Hamilton Junior Strabane to [Marquis ... More
13 May 1806	James Hamilton Strabane to [Marquis of Abercorn,...
23 January 1808	James Hamilton, Strabane to [Marquis of ... More
15 September 1809	James Hamilton, Strabane, to [Marquess of ... More
12 March 1790	[Sir] Samuel Hayes, Dublin, to [Marquess ... More
21 August 1768	Lease for 31 years. Rent £29. Earl of Donegall ... More
21 August 1768	Lease for 31 years. Rent £23. Earl of Donegall ... More

PRONI Search Results: Inch Donegal

As we live in a connected age, the internet is filled with information. Inch's history, or at least parts of it, were out there, but scattered across a hundred different websites. As the co-production facilitator, I had the benefit of time to trawl through the links and dead ends. It's simply a case of searching and searching.

The sources for Inch are on the Inch research page. For your own project, I'm sure you've thought of the following links already, but just in case...

Google is your friend, but search terms need to be focused.

The island of Inch has an unfortunate name, and I'm sure you can appreciate the frustration of endless Google results that referred to the Imperial system of measurement.

Wikipedia is your unreliable friend.

Interesting to note here, the page for O'Doherty's Castle, on Inch, was edited and added to soon after we started the Inch co-production. Whether it that was coincidence or as a result of our engagement, we'll never know.



O'Doherty's Castle, Inch. Built ca. 1430

Pinterest is your equally unreliable friend.

eBay is your odd, random friend

Especially useful for old post cards or cigarette cards. You'd be amazed what you find there. This post card from the early 1960s shows the Shell T2 Tankers, laid up in Lough Swilly, off Inch. The story of how they got there was fascinating; the story of the tea-cups and plates, liberated from the ships was one of the highlights of the Inch Project. You can read a little more on the Inch project website inchheritage.org we produced as one of the outputs from the Inch community co-production.



Postcard of Lough Swilly and the Shell T2 Tankers,
laid up in 1959 – Source: eBay

The librarian is your friend.

The national newspaper archives are your friend.



Inch clippings

Museum curators are your friend.

Archivists are your friend.

Bloggers are your friends, even if you never meet them.

Pages written by local history enthusiasts, which offer an insight into different eras. They might be specific to your community or your project, but the information might be useful in adding context.

Cartographers are your best friends.

I will talk more about maps... a lot more.

You will undoubtedly know how to access these in your own country, and my apologies for being simplistic, but this is a practical guide and as I have no idea of your area of expertise and or your experience in this field, I thought it best to ensure I've included the usual suspects.

Of empires and imperialists...

If your country has some colonial history, either as colonists or the colonised, remind yourself the archives may reside in a different jurisdiction. Ireland is an obvious example, where official records of the country before 1922 are spread across the National Archives in London, the Public Record Office in Belfast, but post-1922 they are found in our own National Archives in Dublin.

Be an internationalist in your research.

Apochrypha...

Research far and wide and collect it all together. Read everything, but with a healthy dose of scepticism. Many sources of a community's history will be inauthentic, plagiarised or simply spliced together. You will also find sources of dubious provenance, wild imagination and often of complete fiction. History is not a science.

As I mentioned in the preface, I'm not a historian, but in my work, I have found there are a number of sources of history pertaining to small communities, rural or urban. These can be subdivided into primary and secondary, as per the history textbooks. Then there are tertiary sources, as in 'I heard a man tell me this story once...' And finally, there are complete fantasies; fairy-stories, my-Mother-told-me stories, my-Grandfather-always-said stories. Be sceptical, but also remember that even in these fictions, there may well be a grain of truth, buried within the flights of whimsy. Here's one from Inch, told by Boyd Bryce, of fairies at Dunfinn...

And finally...

When you have spent more hours than you care to remember, staring at a computer screen and scribbling notes... when you have read all you can read and scanned the rest... when you feel you could write a book about your chosen community's history... then, and only then can you move on to the next phase of the co-production, which will

involve you pretending you know absolutely nothing. Read on, I will explain.

Perspectives II

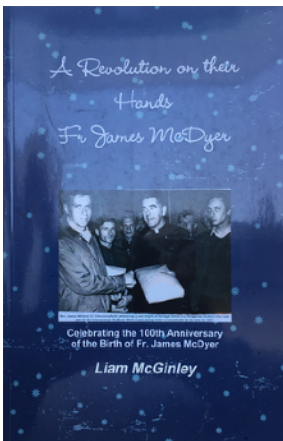
I'd also add another historical source here, and this is the Enthusiast. You might not meet him, and it's usually a him, but if you do, here are some guidance notes.

He will have written a book, and most likely has spent his own money getting it published.

He will give you a copy at the first community meeting, and apologise for it not being very good.

He will also be immensely proud of his knowledge, his writing style and won't appreciate undue criticism.

Be gracious, be effusive, be grateful. Take the proffered book home. Read it cover to cover. He will know if you haven't. His book might be brilliant and of huge importance, to your project, or it might be skewed by his own specific interests and will be of limited help.



Whatever you do with the material, however you make use of his research, do not forget to credit him in the final outputs.

The book on the left is the perfect example of a local enthusiast, Liam McGinley, writing passionately about local history. It was my go-to research reference for the play, [I Would Walk These Fields Alone](#), about the life of the Christian Communist priest, [Canon James McDyer of Glencolmille](#), a great proponent of Meitheal.

#3. THE 5PS: PROPER PREPARATION PREVENTS POOR PERFORMANCE

When I was growing up in rural Leicestershire, my best friend's father had a garage, where they fixed Audis and VWs. There was a huge sign on the wall, with these words. There was another P which I'll leave to your imagination.

Before you launch into the interviews, site visits, endless kilometres on roads with which you will become too familiar, you must consider the stuff you'll need to make all of it happen. What follows may seem a prosaic and dull list, but in my experience, these are the most important investments you'll make.

Comfortable, waterproof walking shoes and a waterproof coat

This might once have been a seasonal requirement, but given the increasing unpredictability of our climate, you're probably better having them on hand. During our work with the community of Inch, we went from bright, warm January days, through three named storms in February, and snow in March.

A comfortable rucksack

You will be carrying a lot of stuff, better to have something you can throw over your shoulders.

A notebook, pens, pencils

We live in digital age, and you may keep everything on your phone, but there will be times when a scribbled note is needed.

Business cards

Nothing fancy, just your name and contact details.

Contact sheet

I'm sure you have all the important contacts on your phone, or in an Excel spreadsheet, but make sure you have a hard copy too, because batteries, as good as they are, run out.

ID

Your organisation's ID card, national ID Card or a driving licence. Something that tells people who you are. My Donegal Council ID card came in very handy on one occasion in particular.

Mobile phone

Obviously, you'll take your mobile phone, but I include it for a couple of very specific reasons. When you visit the community, wherever you are, whatever you're doing, whatever time it is, it's selfie time. Yep, sounds a little silly, but there is a very good reason for the selfies. Your phone is tracking everything you do and everywhere you go. Take a selfie, ensure your location services are switched on, and then when you come to fill out travel claims, you can attach the selfie.



That's me at Inch Pier. EXIF data tells me: Date and Time (Original) – 2020:01:08 11:42:55

In the Meta/EXIF data of that photo, will be time, date and location. Your line manager will be delighted, the SE-PS will be satisfied you were where you said you were, and you'll know what you were doing and when for the final report. The second thing you'll need your mobile for is...

A Twitter or Instagram account

Whichever you use, and even if you have no followers, these accounts are free, simple to use, and once again show where you were, what you were doing and when. Have look at our Twitter account [@CINE_Donegal](#).

It won't have been updated recently, but it'll show how I tracked the work on the project. Treat these accounts as a diary. You don't need to post everything all the time. Be specific, be interesting and be informative. And don't forget the hashtags... For Inch, we used [#digital](#) [#heritage](#) [#CineProject](#) [#community](#) [#coproduction](#) [#Inch](#) [#Donegal](#) [#history.s](#) Be inventive with them, make up something that will identify your posts. And don't forget to add those SE-PS logos!

A camera, and a mini tripod

This doesn't have to be the latest Canon EOS, in fact it's better if it's cheap and easy to slip into a pocket. "Oh, but my mobile phone has a brilliant camera and..." I hear you say. Great, I'm impressed, but keep it for telephone calls, WhatsApps and the Twitter/Instagram posts. Batteries, as good as they are, run out.

A Flickr account

You're going to take a lot of photos, so open a free Flickr and upload them there. Memory cards get misplaced or disappear. [Our Flickr account, CINE Donegal](#), holds all the archive images and photos I took on my travels.

A laptop and portable flatbed scanner

If your intention is to collect photos and archive documents, you'll need something to scan them with and something to run the scanner.

A digital audio recorder

Again, it doesn't have to be the most expensive version. I use Zoom recorders, the [H1](#) and [H2](#), but there are plenty of other inexpensive alternatives. These are battery powered but will last a good few hours. Make sure you get the largest capacity memory card you can find. With a 64GB card, at MP3 quality, you'll get a week of recording time, at WAV quality, days.

A Soundcloud account

If you're recording oral history, then open a free Soundcloud, and upload your recordings there. Memory cards get misplaced or disappear. [Our Soundcloud](#) holds all the archive recordings I made on my travels.

Chargers, powerbanks, batteries, extension leads

That includes, car-chargers, cables, solar-chargers, more cables, spare cables, spare chargers. You will be living in your car. Be prepared. There might not be any mains electricity for kilometres. Batteries, as good as they are, run out. I'll talk more about [Technology](#) later on.

A water bottle

There might not be any mains water for kilometres either.

Dog treats

You will meet dogs, small ones, large ones, yapping ones, barking ones. If you don't like dogs, you'll have to put those feelings aside. A few dog treats in your pocket will generally win over even the surliest of canine community residents.

Perspectives III

The image at the top of this page is one of the many roads I travelled when working with the community of Inch. I drove part of the way, but walked the rest. I came upon a cottage...

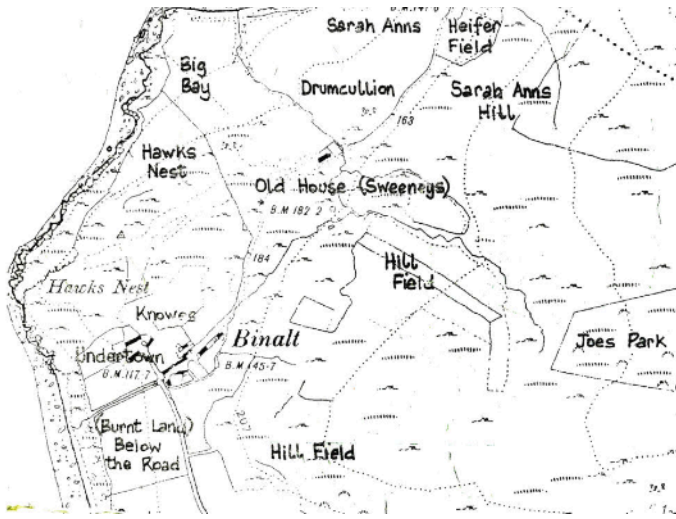


Sweeney's Cottage, Binalt, Inch.

The cottage, built between 1842 and 1913, is now in ruins, but the memory of the family who lived there is preserved in the local lore, and marked on the map of Inch field names.

On another journey, I found myself walking to the Fairy Fort at Dunfinn, and then wandering off down another boreen (from the Irish: bóithrín – little road). I came across a dry-stone wall, not unusual in some parts of west Donegal, but uncommon further east.

I wondered why this odd feature was there at all, and it was only a chance remark to a local farmer, that uncovered a tale of famine, landlords and dry-stone walls.



Detail of Inch field names map. From the work of Peter Gurrie and the islanders.

I could mention another half a dozen discoveries on Inch, and all of them would have one thing in common: I walked... across damp fields, dodging puddles and the mud along boreens, ducking under trees to dodge the hail showers, but always walking. You will discover more about a community and place by walking around it, than any other method of research. Just make sure you have good boots, a waterproof coat, a camera to capture the oddities, and a sense of adventure. But mostly the boots.

#4. FIND YOUR GATEKEEPERS

You're as prepared as you can be, you're raring to go. Your research is done, you know every road and every building, the history and stories of the community. Your phone is charged, your camera's memory card is formatted, your pencils are sharpened. It's now time to take the big step and begin talking to real people.



The keys to the Inch Fort

If you know the community you're working with, then you're going to start with telephone calls, emails, or an initial face-to-face meeting. My preference is a conversation over an email every time. If you're lucky enough to know your contacts, that's great, but you might want to read on, for future reference, so you know where to look when your next co-production project isn't as easy. And if you don't know your community, then you're probably wondering...

'Who do I actually talk to? How do I get 'in' to the community?'

Your first contact with the members of a community you intend to work with is the single most important conversation you'll have in the whole engagement/co-production. You need to find the right person, the individual who can open the doors.

Every community has its gatekeepers. They may not necessarily be that interested in what you hope to achieve, though they usually are. They open the doors, not just to buildings, but also to the social network of the place and its people. They have the keys to the community centre or church hall, they have the Community Facebook Group's password, they know the clergy, the characters, and the local [scéala](#) (Irish: news, gossip, stories) And they're not always that easy to find, especially in a rural setting.

A tale of four gatekeepers...

This is the story of finding the gatekeepers on Inch. It's an illustration of the importance of walking, knocking on doors and good boots.



Aerial view of Inch Fort

Maria

Inch Fort is a privately owned, Napoleonic-era fort, built on a rocky promontory on the north of Inch.

You'll find a lot more about it on the [Inch Heritage website](#). In December 2019, I visited the fort and the gates were locked. On the beach (left in the photo) there was a group of workmen, rebuilding the pier. I asked one of them if he knew how to get up to the fort, his reply "Dunree?" Now Dunree is another fort from the same era, 30 kms north of Inch. This man had been working below Inch Fort for two weeks and had no idea it was there. That's how private the fort is. I offered my thanks and wandered back up the road, hoping to find someone else to ask.



Maria's house

If you look at the photo again, you'll see four houses above the beach. Nobody was at home in the first house, nor the second, but as I turned to leave, I heard a shout. I looked around but couldn't see anybody. The voice shouted again and then I saw a hand waving from the trees beside the fort. I waved back and met Maria on the road, with her labrador.

She walks her dog there every day and keeps half an eye on the fort. Did she know who owned it, I asked. 'Of course, but she's a very private person. If you give me your number, I'll pass it on.' And that's how I found Maria, gatekeeper to the fort, island resident for thirty years and owner of Sandy, the labrador. And it's how I came to be the owner of a set of keys for every gate and door in Inch Fort, given to me by Patricia, the owner, but more of that later.

Martina

[Inch Hall](#) is the centre of Inch's community life. The building was converted from the old Catholic chapel when the new chapel, Our Lady of Lourdes, was built in 1922.



Knowing we were going to organise an introduction to the CINE Project open-evening, I needed to book the one place on the island that would have capacity for up to a hundred people (I was optimistic). Inch Hall is the only community building on the island, so I needed to find whoever had the keys. I drove over to Inch and stopped at the hall, but it was closed and there were no telephone numbers posted anywhere.

I noticed a man working in the graveyard of the chapel, across the road, so I asked him if he knew who might look after the hall. 'Aye, you'd need to speak to Martina. She lives in the big new house, over there.' And that's how I found Martina, key-holder of Inch Hall.

Noel and Susan

When I finally met Patricia, the owner of the fort, she suggested I should talk to Noel, who lived up the road. She had no contact number, but explained where his house was. There are around 150 houses on the island of Inch, and addresses are less postal code and more along the lines of: the bungalow, opposite the church... the white cottage, at the crossroads... the third house on the left after the bend. Noel's house is next to the forest, opposite the house with the church in the garden.

I'd noticed his driveway was narrow, and I had nowhere to turn, so I drove past his house once, turned around down the road a few hundred metres, drove past again and parked in the forest road. By the time I walked back down to knock on his door, he was out in the garden, noting my car registration number. Noel is an ex-detective, and part of the Inch Neighbourhood Watch. I said hello, and as I felt he was a little suspicious, showed him my Donegal County Council ID card. Ten minutes later, I was sitting in his living room, drinking coffee. After I'd passed the suspicious individual test and explained the project, he insisted I waited until his wife, Susan, came home, so I can tell her all about it too. And that's how I found Noel and Susan, who put me in touch with half a dozen other islanders, and with whom I've shared some fascinating conversations.

Margaret

Our first community meeting at Inch Hall was organised for the 29th of January. I was expecting Martina to open up the hall, but Margaret arrived, and explained that Martina was busy. We started chatting and she seemed really interested

but couldn't make the meeting that evening. A week earlier, I'd contacted the Inch Hall Facebook page to ask them to put the word out to the community. Margaret mentioned that she was the administrator of the hall's Facebook page. And the rest is history. Margaret's father-in-law, Paddy, had some incredible documents and artefacts, Margaret became the project's champion, and [Inch Hall's Facebook](#) page is now full of old photos, Inch history and reposted [@CINE_Donegal tweets](#).

Knock on doors, talk to people...

I can't emphasise this point enough. Meeting people face-to-face, chatting about the project, knocking on doors, walking... this is the way you open doors. And if you're introverted and find it difficult, welcome to my world. I'm painfully shy in social situations, but when I'm working, the game face goes on. Find yours.

DOOR KNOCKING ETIQUETTE



A few words about this, as you'll be doing a lot of it. There are a number of things to remember when knocking on doors. I'm 1.88 metres tall, so seeing me at the front door can be a little

intimidating. I have a little ritual which seems to be effective, and puts people at ease.

Rehearse your script

Make sure you know what you're going to say. How are you going to explain why you're at their front door? How are you going to explain the project's scope? How are you going to tell them about your organisation's role?

Breathe

Always good if you've just clambered up a steep driveway.

Have your ID ready

Just in case.

Knock or ring the door bell

Knocking is more effective. Door bells don't always work.

Take two or three steps back

This isn't just so the householder feels comfortable, it's also to avoid the barking dog behind the door feeling threatened. Remember the dog treats?

Smile

Honestly, this is the best thing you can do when you are cold-calling.

When, and if, they answer the door...

Keep your hands across your chest. Don't try to shake hands

A psychologist might be able to explain why this is important. I have no idea, but it seems to put people at ease. (And this guide was written during the Covid-19 pandemic, so by the time you read this, maybe shaking hands isn't a thing anymore).

Tell them your name, where you're from and why you're there... be human

"Oh hello. My name's Guy. I'm working with Donegal County Museum on a history project, and I wonder whether you might be able to..."

Your tone of voice, your smile, your demeanour will all help to open those doors. Have a listen to the audio below. Which would you rather hear on the doorstep?

<https://soundcloud.com/guy-le-jeune/how-to-introduce-yourself>

Don't expect everyone to be friendly or interested, but if you do these few things, most people will spare you a few minutes.

Perspectives IV

The risks of lone working.

And sadly, I must add the following caveat. As I mentioned, I'm 1.88m tall, very broad, and male. If you're a woman, the experience of knocking on a stranger's door, in a community you may not know, will be very different. How you and your organisation address this is out of my control.

I posted a tweet when I was writing this, and I received a few sobering replies...



Guy Le Jeune @GuyLeJeune · Apr 16, 2020



Just hit a brick wall. Writing about door-knocking etiquette and it struck me, I'm 6'2" and male. I've no problem knocking on a stranger's door, but if you're a woman, and you don't know the place, how would you feel? What controls would you want in place from your employer?



Rebecca Jones#FBPE

@beccimojon

I deliver to around 400-800 addresses a day when working. I have been verbally abused about 5 times in three years and can only recall one address that I got the hell out of asap. But I have met a lot of creepy people whose houses I would not go inside !

♡ 1 8:09 PM - Apr 16, 2020



Often think back to one of my first jobs. Was doing research that included some door knocking. In an inner city housing estate in Belfast around about the time of the GFA. On my own at night. Any wonder the Ma was frantic.
— M. (@for29years) [April 16, 2020](#)



Vonny

@VonnyR7

This reminds me of canvassing . From the few I did door to door . Sometimes just the look of the door would put fear into you.

♡ 1 2:03 PM - Apr 16, 2020



Siobhan Coyle

@siobhancoyle

I'd want a lone worker policy in place, to include fully charged phone, details re keeping safe, me contacting employer with details of where I'm going, length of visit, time expected back and check in texts to linemanager when visits complete.

♡ 7:06 PM - Apr 16, 2020



Angela Holohan

@angelaholohan

I was once a card carrying Census Enumerator. After a few dozen houses you get to know what kind of welcome or response to expect.

♡ 1 2:35 PM - Apr 16, 2020 · Donegal, Ireland

It is important that you think about this issue and put in place controls to reduce the potential risks to you or your employees/volunteers. [The Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#) has excellent advice, suggestions and resources for lone workers.



MEET THE COMMUNITY

You are well-researched and fully prepared. You have found the gatekeepers, so it's time to meet the community. It's time to introduce yourself, the project, and make connections.

Where is a good place?

I've met the communities I've worked with in community centres, church halls, schools, arts centres, museums, function rooms in bars and hotels, restaurants, living rooms...



First CINE Project community meeting on Inch

You simply need to find a room that can accommodate a hundred people, and that acts as a shared space at the heart of the community. There will probably be a small fee to pay, and often in cash. If you've found your gatekeepers, they'll be the ones to open these doors.

There are few things to check, when booking the venue.

How much time will you need to set-up and clear everything away?

Give yourself enough time and book the hall to take account of this.

Does it have enough chairs, tables etc?

Do you need to bring anything with you?

This could be extension leads, pop-up stands with funders logos, milk, projectors and screens, cash to pay for the hall. Make a list, check it twice. If it's a rural setting there might not be any shops nearby, as is the case on Inch.

Is the heating working? Will it be on?

Or if you're lucky enough to work in a warm climate... the AC.

Is there a mobile phone signal or WiFi? And if so, what's the password?

Don't take anyone's word on this. Go and do a recce of the hall, and make sure you can connect to the internet. At our first meeting on Inch, my iPhone was jammed into the back of my pick-up truck, parked just outside one of the hall's windows. We used it as a mobile hotspot, as it was the only way we could get an internet connection.

Are there refreshment facilities for tea/coffee?

Will the local committee organise the refreshments, or does the County Museum's Director have to be there to make the tea and coffee?

This is a hat-tip to Judith McCarthy, Donegal County Museum's Director and Curator, who served the teas, coffee and biscuits at our first meeting on Inch.

Do the recce, don't leave it to chance

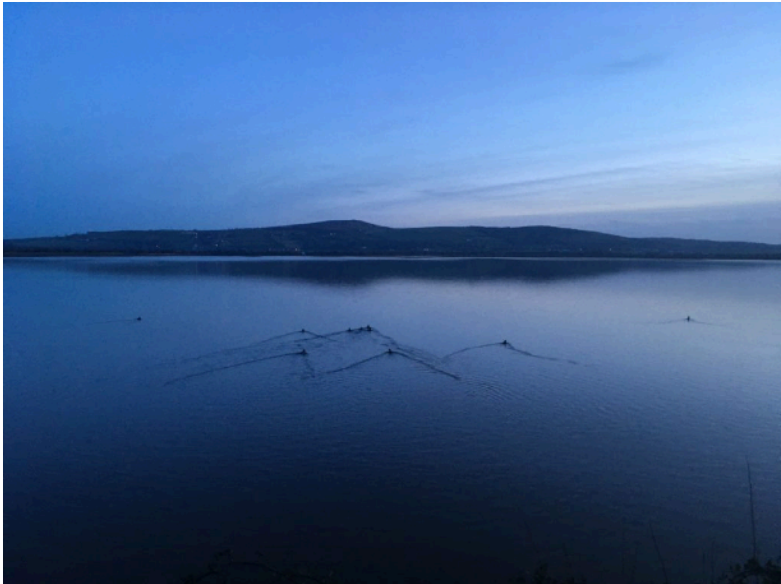
When is a good time?

You might have the luxury of time. Your project might be a year long, maybe longer, or you might have to squeeze

everything in to a few months. When you meet the community for the first time is entirely dependent on your project, but you should do it as soon as possible. Remember our definition?

CO-PRODUCTION IS THE PROCESS BY WHICH WE FACILITATE AND EMPOWER THE COMMUNITY, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, TO BECOME THE CURATORS, MAKERS AND PERFORMERS OF THEIR OWN STORIES.

This is not your project. It belongs to the community, and if you leave their participation until half-way through the project, then you do them, and the idea of co-production, a disservice. And, which is more, they'll probably feel very much like those visitors and that footfall, rather than the curators.



Inch Freshwater, January 2020.

When you have your first meeting is dependent on any number of factors. My preference is for early-evening, mid-week, but that may be a cultural response to living where I do. You'll know best, and if you don't, ask the gatekeepers, because they know the community better than you. There follows a list of things to look out for, all of which have happened to me at some point in my work, only the names have been changed.

Don't book the hall when these are happening...

Religious festivals, services, holy-days

"Oh, you can't start at seven. Mass is only just over then, and they'll not be here before half-past. Father Doherty's saying it, and he's quite slow."

Sporting matches featuring local teams

"Ah now, St Finbarr's are playing in the county semi-final on Tuesday, and there'll not be a sinner about."

Football matches, especially during World Cups etc.

Zumba, badminton, yoga, pilates, karate etc. in a different room within the community centre

"Sorry about the noise, it's Fidelma and her modern dance class. She'll be finished at nine."

When a new fishing boat arrives at her home port.

"We're a bit short on numbers this evening. The Áine's due in and everybody will be down on the quays"



School holiday or vacation weeks

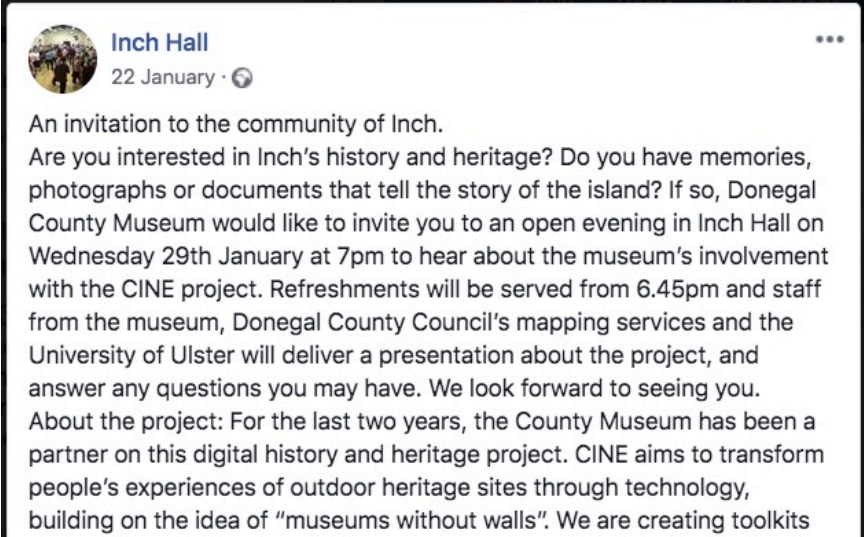
December


And I'm not being facile about December, either. Christmas is coming, people switch off, nobody is interested in community co-production while the tinsel is out.

Time and culture

In Donegal, our meals are: Breakfast in the morning, Dinner at lunchtime and Tea in the evening. The Tea is our evening meal, not the drink, and it happens at 6-6.30pm. Wherever you are, you will know the culture better than me, and what time people eat in the evening. Don't expect people to miss their 'Tea'.

Getting the word out



 **Inch Hall** · 22 January · 🌐

An invitation to the community of Inch.

Are you interested in Inch's history and heritage? Do you have memories, photographs or documents that tell the story of the island? If so, Donegal County Museum would like to invite you to an open evening in Inch Hall on Wednesday 29th January at 7pm to hear about the museum's involvement with the CINE project. Refreshments will be served from 6.45pm and staff from the museum, Donegal County Council's mapping services and the University of Ulster will deliver a presentation about the project, and answer any questions you may have. We look forward to seeing you.

About the project: For the last two years, the County Museum has been a partner on this digital history and heritage project. CINE aims to transform people's experiences of outdoor heritage sites through technology, building on the idea of "museums without walls". We are creating toolkits

Again, this a question to ask of the gatekeepers. How do we let people know that our open-evening information session is on?

On Inch, we used the Catholic parish magazine, the Presbyterian congregation newsletter, Inch Hall's Facebook

page, and most importantly, and most effectively, the gatekeepers themselves and their contacts in the community.

However you publicise the event, even if you put a leaflet through every door, inevitably there will be some people who 'didn't know about it'. There's nothing you can do about it, so don't feel you've failed in your publicity push. Everybody will know about the project soon enough.

How many people are we expecting?

Yes, of course you want to know. How many teas/coffees, packs of biscuits? How many chairs should we put out? How many feedback/response forms should I print? Honestly, if I could answer those questions then I'd be doing the lottery more often. From the gatekeepers you'll hear...

"Oh yes, everybody knows about it. We should get a good few..." or 'Now I know Mrs. Gallagher and Edie and Michael can't make it, but there should be a good crowd all the same..."

What I do know is this...

Whoever comes, they are the right people...

Perspectives V

Arranmore is another Donegal island of the west coast. It has an area of 22km² and a population of 469. It is connected to the mainland by two ferry services – The Blue Ferry and the Red Ferry. The Blue ferry is the known as the fast ferry, but it takes the same time to cross the channel from Burtonport as the Red Ferry. It's a long story. The island has an Irish-speaking school, with many students crossing from the mainland, there and back daily. I was invited to work with the local community to create a play based on the island's history and I realised very quickly that 'the local community' was not necessarily representative of the local community.



The Red Ferry

It is very easy to think of a small community as homogeneous, but the reality is that ‘the local community’ is always an aggregation of sub-sets. On Arranmore, there are those that live beyond the bridge in Aphort, and those that live on the eastern side of the island, in Leabgarrow. There are islanders, families who have lived there for generations, and there are blow-ins, people who have just moved there, even if it was 30 years ago. There are those who use the Blue ferry and those who take the Red.

On Inch Island, there are similar divisions; on an island only 7 kms long, the townland of Binalt is a cul-de-sac, nearly 10km from Inch pier in Grange. Other than meeting on the only road that joins the island to the mainland, the residents of Binalt and Grange rarely see each other. Then there are islanders whose families go back generations, and the commuters who live on the island but work in Derry, leaving the island at 7.30am and returning at 6pm. In any small community, rural or urban, you will encounter these sub-sets – we could call them micro-communities. Each of these

micro-communities will have their own needs and aspirations. Each of them will have a different idea of what is important and what they want to achieve from the co-production process, or indeed, whether they have any interest at all in the process. As the co-production facilitator, you will have to ensure you take both ferries.

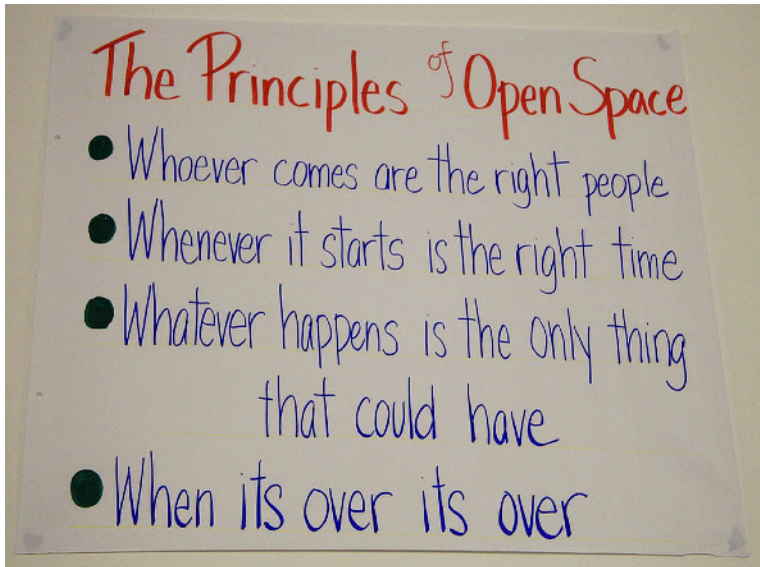
RIGHT PEOPLE, RIGHT PLACE

From the outset of the project, you'll probably have been worrying about quantitative evaluation numbers. The SE-PS like these numbers. You may have lain awake at night, fretting about whether you'll be able to 'reach-out' to the whole community, whether you'll be able to encourage cross-demographic participation, whether you'll be able to engage with hard-to-reach minority groups. In the weeks running up to the first community meeting you'll have tried every form of traditional and digital dissemination, trying to get that invitation to every individual in your chosen community. Well done. Good effort. Here's the next rule...

#5. WHOEVER COMES, THEY ARE THE RIGHT PEOPLE... EVEN IF THERE ARE ONLY FIVE OF THEM

Now it's time to remind ourselves of this from earlier...

PEOPLE HAVE LIVES. CARS DON'T ALWAYS START. PETS GET ILL. PEOPLE FORGET. WE ARE ALL HUMAN.



A good philosophy, even if there are apostrophes missing

You will never connect to everyone in the community. And even if you do, they won't necessarily turn up to that first meeting. If you get ten people, that's OK. If you get twenty, great. If you get fifty, fabulous. If you get five, that's fabulous too. I'm a firm believer in the philosophy of Open Space technology.

Maybe after ten years of waiting around in cold community centres has given me a little detached perspective. Maybe living and working in the west of Ireland, with our relaxed attitudes to time and the world in general, has allowed me to worry less and relax more. Whatever the reason, I do know that there is no point in getting stressed or anxious about who will turn up. And there is even less point getting wound up about quantitative evaluation, certainly at this stage in the project. Count the heads, for sure, but these are the community's vanguard. They will become your project's champions and evangelists.

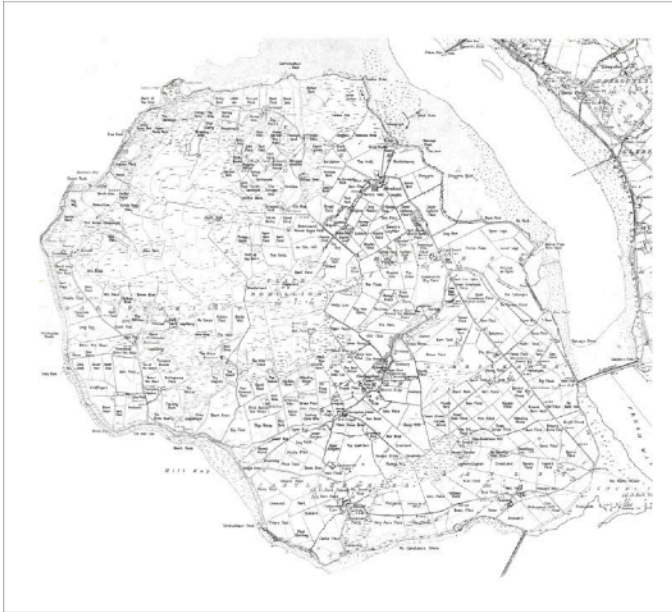


Some of our Inch evangelists, looking at the old maps

But now you have to convince them. You are leaving the area of co-production facilitation and entering the world of the theatre. You are now both actor, director and marketing manager.

Perspectives VI

On Inch, we learned very quickly of a remarkable map, showing the field and place names of the island. The map was the legacy of Peter Gurrie, a founder member of the [West Inishowen History & Heritage Society](#). Peter had worked with the islanders to make the map, and printed copies were in many houses. A PDF version [available here](#), and as part of the co-production, I began work on a digitised version on the [Donegal Mapping Portal](#), which was completed by somebody else... and I'm still not sure who did it.



Inch field and place names – from the work of Peter Gurrie

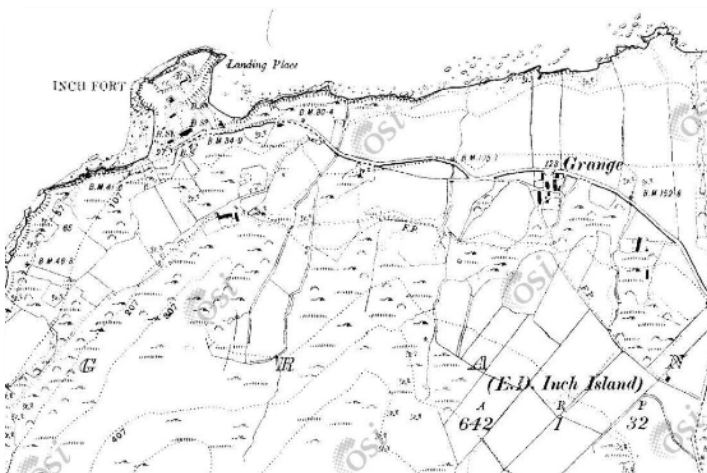
The map was the starting point for so many conversations, including three evenings spent in the company of Boyd Bryce, farmer, environmentalist and storyteller. He related the stories of some of the field names...

#6. BE HUMAN

It's 6.10pm on a cold January evening...

The kettles are filled, the water boiler is heating, the projector is working, the Powerpoint has been triple-checked... more about this on the next section. You've put the chairs out. Get used to the idea of moving chairs, you will do a lot of this, but please follow your organisation's Manual Handling guidelines. You've remembered everything because you made a list, including asking for the heating to be switched on in the hall. Your pop-up stand is displayed, with all the appropriate logos. And you brought some maps with you, mounted on corriboard. No?

If you are able to get your hands on large-format, printed maps of the place you're working in, you'll find the community drawn to them more than a hundred PowerPoint slides. I mentioned earlier about the Ordnance Survey maps of Ireland and thanks to Daragh McDonough in Donegal County Council's mapping section, we were able to display [three maps of Inch](#) at our first meeting on the island.



Grange and Inch Fort, from the 6" Cassini map of Inch

It's 6.52pm on a cold January evening...

The gatekeepers have been chatting to their friends and neighbours, the community Facebook page posted the invitation two weeks ago, the parish magazine/newsletter was handed out last Sunday. The internet connection is working, even if you've had to improvise. The tea and coffee is ready, and there are some really nice chocolate biscuits which you are desperately trying to resist eating.

And then, magically, in twos and threes, the community arrive. They're here to hear about this co-production project. They're here because they're interested. They're here because you sparked some curiosity. They're here because you've spent the last month knocking on doors. They're here because you've done everything you can to make sure the information was available as widely as possible. They're here because you've done your job.

What they are not here for...

Your professional qualifications, academic achievements, essays and articles, no matter how impressive.

To be bored, or worse, to be patronised.

You are about to stand up and talk to a group of people who are there voluntarily. They are the potential curators, makers and storytellers. They are more than just equal partners, in this co-production, they are people whose lives, experiences and interests will inform the outputs of the project. They don't really care how many letters you have after your name, but they do care about their community, its history, its heritage and its people. Remind yourself, this is not your project, this is their project. It's not about you.

Say hello to people, welcome them, chat to them as they're coming through the door. Talk about the weather. Tell them

how lovely their hall is. Ask them where they're from. Be specific. In Ireland, counties are divided into parishes, parishes into townlands. Inch has 7 townlands: Glack or Bohullion, Carnaghan, Bayelt, Castlequarter, Carrickanee, Moress, Grange and Ballynakilly. Ask them did they travel far. Be human.

It's 7.02pm on a cold January evening...

"How are you doing everybody. Thanks for coming out on such a miserable evening. We'll start in a couple of minutes, but if anybody hasn't got a cup of tea..."

Remember, you are an actor now

You'll need to work on your voice projection. There's no point in mumbling. And don't hide behind a microphone. People need to have connection with you. Yes, I'm lucky. I've spent most of my career working in the theatre industry. Projecting our voice is part of what we do. If you're not used to talking to large groups of people, then you'll need to work on it. There are [plenty of resources on the internet](#) to help you with this. It's a skill you're going to need. You'll also need to work on your self-confidence if you're a little shy or introverted. That is something I've had to overcome. I did that with my game face, and a lot of practice. Use your hands, smile, project, be confident. Be human.

It's 7.08pm on a cold January evening...

Say hello to the gatekeepers. Not all of them could make it, but hopefully some of them will be there, and they're sitting with friends who they will introduce. Say hello. Try and remember the names. Be human.

It's 7.13pm on a cold January evening...

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much for coming down here this evening. My name is Guy and I'm here tonight to tell you a little about the CINE Project and

what we'd love to be able to make with you, the community of the beautiful island of Inch..."

Compliments, if they're sincere will take you long way. A little charm and humour will take you a long way. Inhabit the role of a confident, approachable, interesting and interested human being. And then, when you see those first smiles from your audience, it's time to direct the show. For that, you're going to need a damn good presentation.

Perspectives VII

I've mentioned maps a few times. In my own mind, our first marks on the land were lines and circles, scrawled into the sand, or daubed onto the walls of a cave. We made maps to navigate our way around our world, to delineate our place from another, to find the herds and to remember the location of drinking water.



Songlines

Australian Aboriginal art is often representative of the land, seen from above, where trees are circles and lines are tribal or linguistic boundaries, rivers and creek beds. Maps seem to trigger unconscious and profound responses in all of

us. Maybe there is something about them that connects us to our past and our distant ancestors, or maybe it's just a need to know where we are. One of the most interesting and fruitful activities in my own oral history practice is the making of maps, and the naming of houses, fields and landscapes.



The women of Strabane, drawing maps of every tree and every house

During the Sense of Memory project, I had the delight of working with a group of women from Strabane, in County Tyrone. One of the sessions I facilitated was making maps of the place they lived when they were a child. For most, the exercise was easy, and an enjoyable way of reminiscing about their young lives and their families. One woman, Elsie, sat in the corner with a blank sheet of paper, looking lost. I asked her what was wrong, and she said, 'I just can't remember anything.' At that point a red flag went up. I wondered if there might be some childhood trauma or sadness. I skirted around the edges a little, and she laughed. 'No, nothing like that. I just can't remember.' I asked her about the cottage. What colour was the door? How many windows? Nothing. Elsie was a blank. 'Do you remember anything in the garden?'

Elsie's eyes lit up. 'There were walnut trees. Two walnut trees, and one is still there.' Ten minutes later, Elsie's piece of paper was filled with her entire childhood.

Maps connect us intellectually, physically and spiritually with a place. They are wired into us, like nothing else. If your interest is history, heritage, oral history, theatre, art, or whatever else, maps will lead you to the heart of a community. Maps allow us all to declare...

Here I am. This is where I live. This is where I do be1.

1 Irish English, also called Hiberno-English, can express habitual aspect in present tense by enlisting Irish (Gaelic) grammar. In Irish, tá mé (which can contract to táim) means 'I am', literally 'is me'. But bíonn mé (→ bím) means 'I (habitually) am' – a different sense of be. The distinction is so intrinsic to Irish that our ancestors refashioned English to incorporate it.

[Stan Carey's Sentence First Blog](#)

PRESENTING THE PROJECT

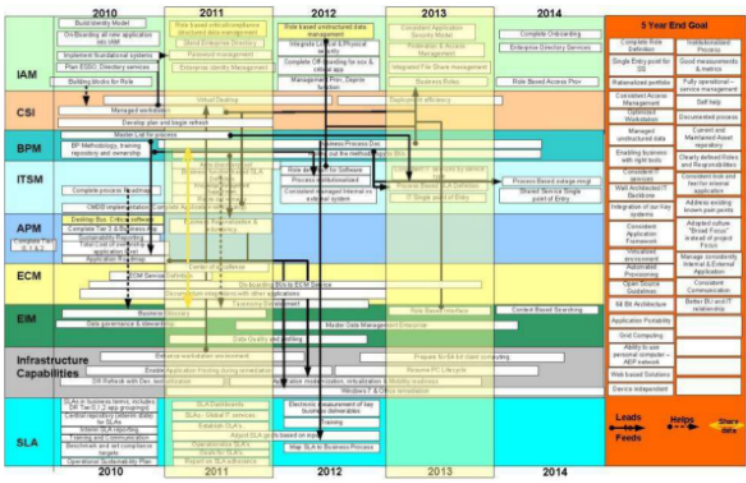
Your audience is sitting comfortably. You're researched and prepared. You have your game face on, you're confident, so it's time to launch into the presentation. Some of you might already know much of what follows, so my apologies in advance for this Presentation 101 tutorial. This page is quite long, but necessarily so.

Explaining why you're there, and presenting the project effectively will mean you gain the trust and interest of your audience, the community. Those few people in that hall will become the project's champions, or my preferred term, its **evangelists**. To get them onboard, you need to explain the project well, and so you're going to have to give a presentation, one that's best supported by technology. But this is no ordinary presentation...

PowerPointed to sleep

We've all been there, sitting in an uncomfortable chair, while a wise, erudite, but incredibly dull individual reads every line of the PowerPoint text.

IT Modernization Roadmap



The worst PowerPoint slide I could find...

They spent ages making the text as small as possible and have used every animation transition they could find in the menu. And yes, I've all been guilty of it, I'll admit. Bill Gates gave the world the most amazing presentation tool, so far removed from slide projectors and flip-charts of old. Sadly, many people have no concept of using PowerPoint effectively. This is your opportunity to present the project and inspire the community. It's the one chance you have to do it right. You've moved from being the actor in a role, to being the director of the show. So make sure your PowerPoint is simply brilliant.

Some pointers to PowerPointing properly

Rehearse your script

I spent a week, wandering around the museum's meeting room, rehearsing my script for the first meeting on Inch. Not only should you memorise what you're going to say, but also the order of the slides. By all means make few notes for yourself in presenter view, but you should know it all without reading anything. There is nothing worse than listening to somebody reading page after page of notes.

Your first slide. Don't forget the official project description, as written in that long-forgotten application form, and don't forget the logos

Stick them on the first holding screen, then you can forget about them. In your photographs of the event, the SE-PS will be delighted to see those logos on the screen.



Opening slide – Inch first meeting

Introduce yourself

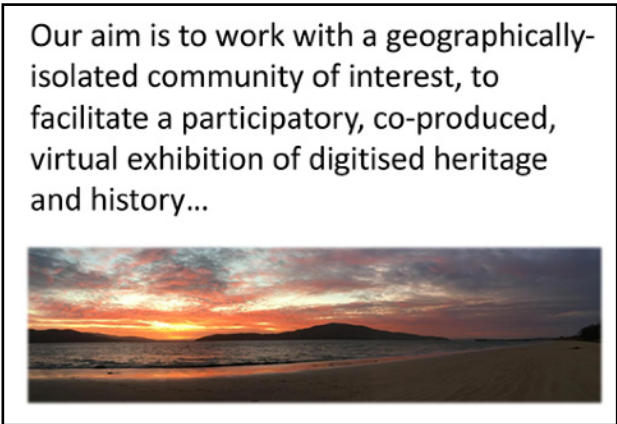
Tell your audience a little bit about yourself. Make it a personal, not a regurgitated rendition of your CV. You might have a local connection. They might know of some of the other projects you've been working on. Be human.

Tell them why you're there

Why did you choose this community? How did you make that decision? Why are you there instead of somewhere else. Tell them it's because the place is fascinating and beautiful and full of stories. Remind yourself of that passionate, unconscious urge that drew you here.

Now start explaining the project, and the nature of co-production or participatory engagement or...

OK. Here we hit a little stumbling block. You know what co-production is. The community probably don't. One of the hardest tasks you will meet on this journey is explaining why you're there and what co-production entails.




As set out in the application...

You are now the marketing manager, you're selling the show. Your audience are not necessarily academics or heritage/culture professionals, though you might be surprised. On Inch, my audience were farmers, fishermen, retirees, commuters and writers, and a couple of returning emigrant museum professionals... yes, that *was* a surprise. For the CINE Project, our focus was the use of technology to create virtual museum exhibitions. Your outputs may be very different, but I've included these slides so you can see how we presented our project to the community of Inch.

Your audience's combined knowledge and life experience will be broad and profound. Don't patronise them, but do explain in plain language what you are hoping to achieve... with their help and guidance. This is not your project, it's theirs. Don't forget the mantra.

What would you like to see in an exhibition of Inch's history?

What can the museum do to make that happen?



What do the community want?

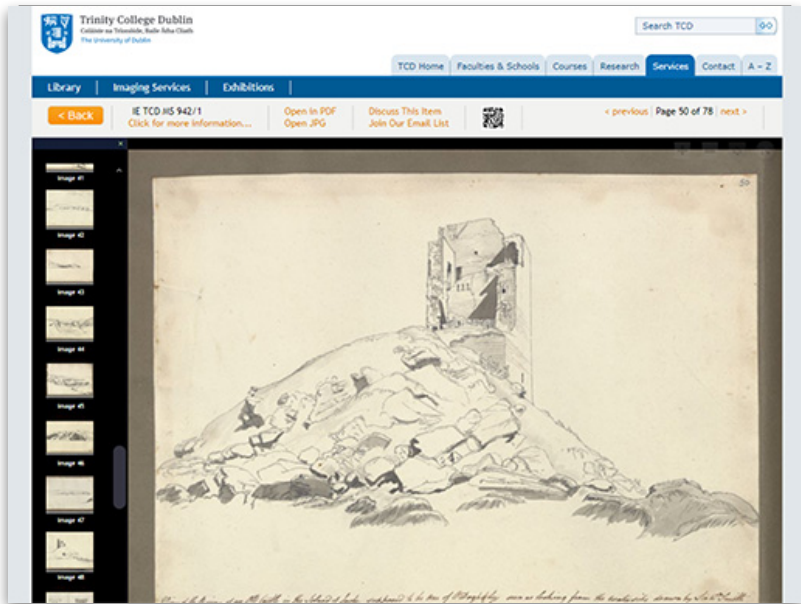
Now lose the text

As much as possible, lose the text and present images. People like pictures. People relate to pictures. Losing the text will also stop you reading the text, as our wise, erudite and dull friend above. I used some [Wordclouds](#) on Inch. They're an effective way of presenting information without the temptation...

Give them an idea of what sort of information you are looking for

A glimpse of the research

Show them some of what you've learnt of their community, but not everything. You might be the history expert, but this is the moment to forget everything you think you know. The community are the real experts now.



The sketches of Captain William Smith, Library of Trinity College Dublin

On Inch, we used some of the images above... photos from the 19th Century, sketches from the 18th Century, things we'd discovered in our research. Be creative but selective.

Keep it short

Honestly, half an hour is too long. Don't rush, but don't stand there and talk until they start shifting in their seats. Read the room. Hurry it up or end it before the last slide if you have to. I flew through some of the slides I used, took time over others. Rehearse your script and your presentation and see how long it takes.

Do they have any questions?

You have to ask, but usually the room will erupt into deafening silence at this point. Wait until the minute you switch off the projector though, for then you'll be surrounded by inquisitive interrogators.

And finally... it's free, no obligation

You might mention this somewhere near the beginning, especially if you're addressing a group of canny, farming folk. They'll want to know it's not going to cost them!

My full presentation to Inch is [available for download here](#), if you want to have a look. I added a few slides on the end because we weren't sure if our Donegal Mapping demo would work. It did, thanks to the iPhone in the jeep.

And having got to the end of writing that, perhaps I included too much detail. My intention was to impress upon you the importance of that first interface with the community. Your intention should be to appear professional, interested and approachable. Humility, curiosity and humanity are your watchwords.

EVALUATION AND CONVERSATION

Congratulations. You've just been nominated for a presentation Oscar in three categories. You could sell fjords to the Norwegian jury. And of course, you've counted how many people turned up to watch you, haven't you?

The SE-PS are very keen on numbers so don't forget to do a head count. On Inch, we had sixty people at the first meeting. The island's population is around 460, so over an eighth of the community were there. That's a pretty good percentage as a benchmark.

The SE-PS also love to see photographic evidence of what you've been up to, and so you or your glamorous assistants have taken copious snaps of your performance. And you've taken that all important, EXIF data selfie. But before you take any photos, make sure you put up some GDPR compliant disclaimer notices, along the lines of...

We will be taking photos during the course of this event for documentation purposes. Please advise us if you do not wish your photograph to be taken.

The exact wording will be dependent on your purposes, your national legislation and your organisation. Just ensure you are covered.



That's me explaining the project and my colleague, Niall McShane from the University of Ulster, School of Computing, taking photos.

Sign up, sign up...

At some point in the evening, you're also going to want to get people signed up to contribute to the project, either as respondents, or simply those who are interested in hearing how the project progresses. You'll need a clear, unambiguous, GDPR compliant sign-up sheet. Bear in mind, if your demographic are more mature, many of them will have less than perfect eyesight, so use a large font. I am in this category, anything smaller than a 10 point font and I'm lost, even with my glasses.

On Inch, we asked for their names, telephone numbers, email addresses. We also asked if they would be interested in contributing photographs, documents, artefacts or oral history. That was it. One page, large font, simple questions.

A few things to think about

Not everyone will have an email address and those that do may not check it that often.

This was the case on Inch, ask for telephone numbers, and expect to make a lot of phone calls.

Not everyone will have a mobile phone

I know it sounds odd, but once again, if your demographic is more mature, and if the rural mobile phone coverage is as appalling as it is in some parts of Donegal, that there's little point in owning a mobile phone. Ask for a landline number as well.

Ask your respondents to use block capitals when filling out those forms

If I had a shilling for every feedback, sign-up and other hand-written forms I've seen that are completely illegible, I wouldn't be writing co-production guides.

Don't expect everyone to fill out a form

Some people will be at the meeting because there was nothing on the TV that night and it was something to do. They'll sit happily and listen and then slip out the back door when you've finished. That's OK. There is no obligation on anybody to contribute to the project.

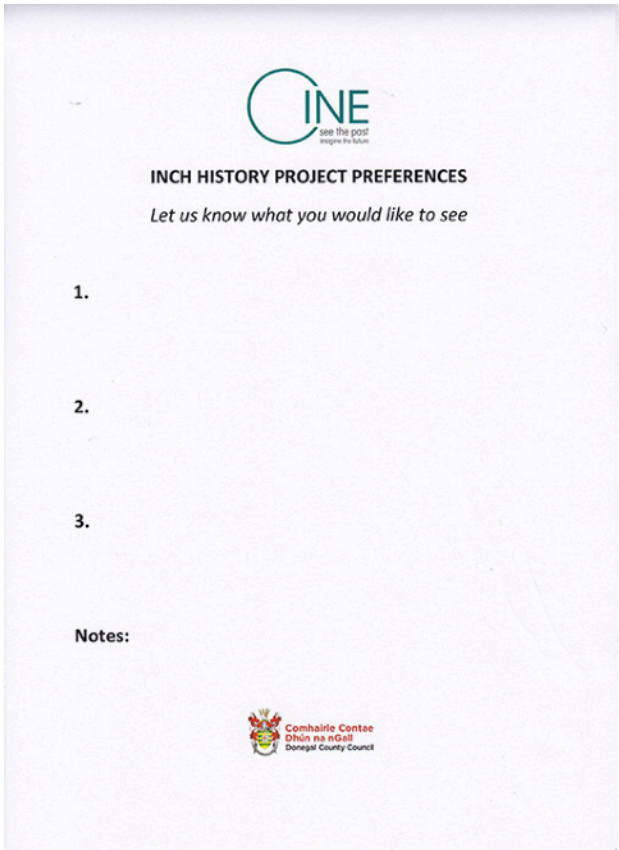
Leave out some business cards

It's unlikely anybody will call you but they'll want to know they can.

Evaluating community interest

This is a co-production. You're going to need to know what the community are interested in. You're going to need to know where your focus lies. This is their project, not yours. They are guiding it and they are the curators of whatever output is made.

You can collect this information in any number of clever digital ways, but for the community of Inch I took inspiration from the fact we were having a general election the following week, and given Ireland uses STV proportional representation electoral system, I decided on simple preference ballot paper. The paper had one question, and space for three, one-word replies.



KISS principle ballot sheet – Keep It Simple Stupid

I took the 28 completed ballots and made a spreadsheet, and that was our initial guide. We knew what the community wanted to see in the virtual exhibition of their history and heritage, and the results contained a few surprises. That's the joy of co-production. Expect the unexpected.

For example...



The lime kiln on Inch

The photograph above is of a 19th Century lime kiln on Inch. It's a rare enough industrial relic, but drive past it and blink, and you'll miss it completely. The vegetation covering it is as good a camouflage as I've seen. And it's just an old kiln. You'd not think there was much to write about, not much more than...

Freestanding lime kiln, built c. 1880, no longer in use and overgrown.

<https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/40903845/carnaghan-inch-island-co-donegal>

But when I got chatting to Boyd Bryce, suddenly the lime kiln became the Lime Kiln, with a rich history, echoing the wider socio-economic changes of the last century and a half. Below is Boyd telling a few stories about this ivy-covered Lime Kiln.

For example...



Strahack graveyard

You'd drive through [Strahack graveyard](#) and not even know it was there. It's owned by Boyd Bryce. He keeps his ewes and their lambs there, if they need some shelter from the elements. On one side are the Protestant graves, on the other the Catholic. It's a tiny plot of land. Just a graveyard...

Perspectives VIII

You'll notice I didn't mention the SE-PS Evaluation forms, or their Regulated Participant Profile forms, or their Socio-Economic Depravation Matrices.

The first meeting is not a good time to hand out four pages of anonymised data-collection and collation

Use the drop-down menus on the top to display only tasks associated to a specific session or panel.
Confirm your selection by clicking on the Display button:

Dashboard Proposals Documents Active Tasks All Tasks

Tasks overview [click here to view all Tasks](#)

Session: AGRI-Simple-Multi-2017 Step: 1

Panel: AGRI-Simple-Multi-2017 Display

Keywording COS-EYE-2017 IR EIMR EIMCR EIMSR

Overdue 3 tasks

AGRI-Simple-Multi-2017 (2 tasks in total)

You have a **Write IER** for proposal **Test_011 (608557)** to complete

You have a **Write CR** for proposal **Test_010 (608556)** to accept

COS-EYE-2017 (1 task in total)

You have a **Write CR** for proposal **Test_002 (608548)** to accept

I don't know what any of this means...

paperwork. To be honest, there is never a good time for that word-salad bureaucracy. Yes, I know we have to evaluate our projects. I've worked on EU PEACE III funded projects, and written endless, meaningless paragraphs to fulfil the stipulated evaluation criteria. I've attended evaluation workshops where evaluation handbooks were distributed as 200 page, A4 ring-binders. All of that stuff is vital for the SE-PS, but right now, this evening, when your community are relaxed and chatting away to each other, when you can hear people enthused and interested, and they're telling you tales of pier pilings and shipwrecks, and handing you photocopies of things that might be interesting... this evening is not the time for the EU to get their evaluation data.

I'm saying all of this because of a relatively recent experience of attending a 'first community meeting' for another project, in which I had no involvement. Four pages. Small font. The audience were mostly farmers, and there's one thing I know about farmers... they don't like forms, especially European ones.

#7. EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

The evening was a great success. You have a two dozen people signed up... curators, advisors, respondents, evangelists. They'll start talking about this wonderful project and the wider community will start to buy-in to the notion of co-production.

You can now start calling people and setting up individual meetings. They know who you are now, and why you're there. If you been curious, humble and human, people will be generous with their time and their histories. Informality is now the order of the day.

'Hello, it's Guy. We met the other night in the hall, and you said you might have some stories. I was wondering when would be a good time to have a chat...'

But before you lift that phone, think about the cadences, prosody and general tone of your voice. Be polite, charming and human. And be prepared to work evenings, weekends and holidays. The community have jobs and lives and family. They will fit you in when they can, which might not fit your usual working hours.

As for keeping track of who you've called and what you've said, a spreadsheet is a good idea, just to keep track of who you've arranged to meet and when. A diary is useful too, and when you're there, Tweet or Instagram those photos, take those selfies, and remember to keep a note of those kilometres.

You'll meet people in their homes, in fields, at heritage sites, in farmyards, at carparks, beside churches. You'll drink a lot tea and eat a lot of cake (if you're lucky) and you'll lose hours just talking, or more importantly, listening. Photograph

everything, record conversations if you want, with the respondent's permission obviously. Document every second of the process. Enjoy every second of the process.

At the doorstep...

You're meeting people in their homes. The door knocking etiquette applies as much now as before. How you dress, how you come across, what questions you ask, all of these are important too, and I'll address them in more detail in [On collecting histories](#), later on.

But while you are wherever you are, give yourself time to walk again. Soak up the atmosphere of the place. Take your camera, your audio recorder, for you never know what you might see or hear...

When you said unexpected, what did you mean?

It's at this point in any community engagement, I always remind myself of this quote from the German military theorist, Helmuth von Moltke the Elder..

"No battle plan survives contact with the enemy."

No, I'm not intimating for one second the community is your enemy, quite the opposite, but there is much truth in this infamous aphorism.

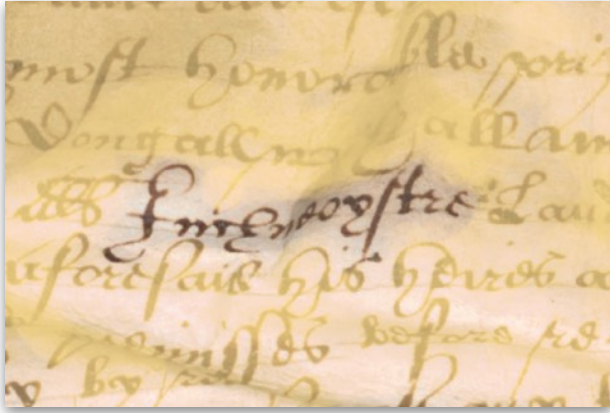
Co-production is challenging, ambiguous, unpredictable and scary. Outcomes and outputs will be discarded, unintended consequences will unfold, and previous evaluation methodologies will be utterly unsuited.

Those lines from earlier are worth repeating now. Whatever you had planned, whatever was said in your application about outputs, and whatever you thought was going to happen, all of that goes out of the window, the moment you start talking to the community. There is nothing quite so frightening and exhilarating as the sharp-end of community participatory engagement.

Here's what will happen...

What you thought you knew was wrong

Your official version of history, distilled from all that desk-based research, will evaporate in the face of tales, local stories and real people.



Bargain and Sale of Inch, 1603. Ralph Bingley, Welsh soldier sells Inch to William Fowler, makar, diplomat and spy

"Did you know, the island's original name in Irish was Inis na n-Osiri? The island of the oysters. I heard that, don't know where."

It took the discovery of a document from 1603, located in the National Archives in London, to verify that Inch was once Inchneoystre, Inis na n-Osiri.

Who you thought you should talk to were the wrong people

“Aye, I did sign up, but really you should be talking to Davy. He’s the fellah who knows about the...”

What you thought was important wasn’t

“Oh aye, the church is interesting enough, but did you know about the Flemings? Now there’s a story.”

What you thought was nothing was a lot of something

That wreck of a boat, nothing of interest there...

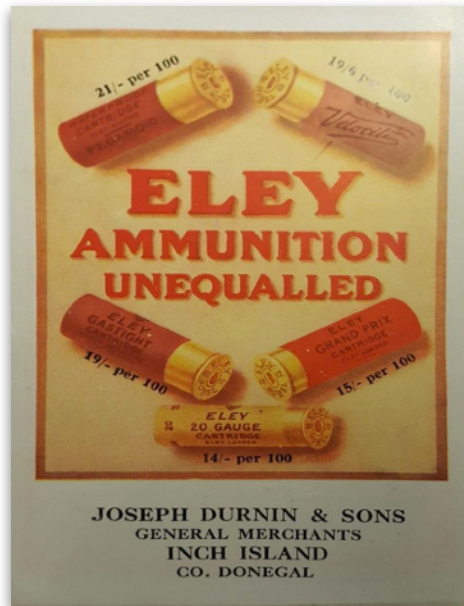


Brown’s boat, Moress Point, Inch

The photo above is of one of the Brown’s fishing boats, the Shenandoah, I think. But this one photo contains so much more history.

The buildings to the left of the boat were once owned by the Durnin family, whose shop on Inch sold everything and anything. They had three shops, one on Inch, one at Burt and the one in the photo. They were also island’s undertakers and ammunition dealers...

The sandbar to the left is where the mass rock once was, during the time of the [Penal Laws](#), and as for the story of the Helicopter... that will have to wait for another day.



Advert for Eley shotgun cartridges, found on eBay...

History will come out of the woodwork... and dusty drawers, attics, farmyards

"I have the old millstone. Nobody seemed to be that interested. And those bullauns? I built them into my garden walls. There's one down by the road."



Kenny Bryce's garden wall

Bullaun stones are stones containing one or more depressions made into the stone. They originated in the Neolithic period although most of the remains have been found in early monastic sites. They have a strong superstitious link and their original function is not clear. They were also known as 'cursing stones'.

"I was working on the old school, and I was up in the attic and I found them lying there. Nobody else wanted them and I thought they might be worth keeping."



Paddy McGrory, on finding the Inch School roll books from the 1940s

"Would that be of any interest?"

And people will be so incredibly generous, you'll feel almost embarrassed at times...

Perspectives IX

That picture of the keys to Inch Fort. You've seen it earlier. This is just one example of how generous and trusting people can be if you've done your co-production facilitator's job well, and your gatekeepers and evangelists are onboard.



Patricia, Meitheal and the Fort

Inch Fort is owned by the Meitheal Trust. Meitheal was a spiritual community, set-up in the 1980s, that bought the fort from its previous owner. It's no coincidence that this manual uses the same title.



19th Century plans of Inch Fort, courtesy of Patricia Swann

Maria, the gatekeeper, passed on my number to Patricia, one of the trustees. Patricia called me and I explained the project to her. This was before the public meeting, as I knew the fort was likely to have a fascinating history. After chatting for ten minutes, she invited me to meet her at the fort in early

January. I arrived at lunchtime, to soup and scones and the warmest welcome. I spent most of the afternoon with her, and Peace, the dog. Peace was my best friend after an hour... dog treats. Patricia had maps, plans, documents and a whole history of the fort, already researched.

We talked about the fort, about the Meitheal community, about her plans for the future, about angels and landscape acupuncture, about war and peace. We walked around the site, and I photographed everything. The history of the fort is a tale of geography, paranoia, rebellion, Imperial aggression, itinerant labour, arms-races, civil war, and more.

As I was leaving, I was hoping to organise another visit, to take further photos.

'When would be a good day? I can come over any time really, whatever suits you.'

Her answer was to hand me the keys.



The gates of Inch Fort

“Take those, then you can come and go anytime. And use the cottage if you want to stay over. Just let me know when you might be here”

Expect the unexpected... and let the process take you

PROCESS, PROCESS, PROCESS...

Time out...

I want to pause co-production for a moment and talk a little bit about this process thing. Call it a time-out, a break from history, heritage and community.

You can light some scented candles and play a few minutes of whale song, if you wish. I know there has been a lot to take in, up to now.

Or you might want to hear a little story of Inch Fort, as told by Boyd Bryce.

Process... the hardest work you'll do that doesn't include heavy lifting

The process element of any co-production or participatory engagement takes time, and by process I mean all the meetings, workshops, travel, phone calls, site visits and waiting. Pretty much all we've talked about up until now.

Before the CINE project, the last participatory project on which I worked, [The Songbirds](#), was collaboration between my local theatre, An Grianán, and the Ulster University School of Nursing. My brief was to interview people living with a dementia diagnosis, and write a play which reflected their lived experience. From inception to the opening performances, the project spanned two years, with the

majority of that period involving the interviews, research and workshops – the process.

Whatever outputs your project may aspire to, whatever publication, play or exhibition you've patiently and hopefully described in your funding applications, you will spend at least 80% of your time doing the process, and it is the hard work.

The process is the part of your job that will never be seen by the museum visitor, the audience or even your line manager. It's also the part of the project that you will have to document and record, even though it's unlikely anyone in your organisation will bother looking at your stunning photos of a cold community hall, filled with empty plastic chairs.

There is, however, a cohort of people who will appreciate the effort and the time you spend on the process, and they are the people of the community with whom you are working. If you are there when you say you'll be, if you care enough to sit waiting in those cold, plastic seats, if you give the community your hours, days and weeks, and if you show a genuine and sincere interest in them, they will begin to trust you and share their stories. Trust takes time to build, and it is the key to an effective and mutually beneficial co-production project.

Self care...

And I must mention how exhausting the process can be. If you've spent four hours talking and listening, and another two hours talking, and listening, and two hours driving, when you finally get home, you will be exhausted. Exhilarated, maybe, but exhausted.

Take care of yourself. Pace yourself. Do not try to do everything all at once. I rarely book two interviews or appointments in one day, and when I do, I give myself time to take some time. Eat something, drink something, stretch your legs, get some fresh air. Take care of you. Yawning while

you're discussing the fascinating local history will not win you any friends in the community.

Take care of yourself.

Perspectives X



Big hArt is Australia's leading arts and social change organisation, often spending years on a project with no conventional output. They call this, 'The Virtuosity of Process'. Their work and ideas challenge our notion of the 'thing' at the end of the project. We should occasionally ask the question...

Do we always have to have something to show for our work or can the process of community engagement be enough?

It may be hard to explain this notion to funders and the less enthusiastic members of our senior management team, but it is an idea which has merit. The process element of community engagement is the most important part of any work in this field. We should recognise the unique nature of process, and its inherent power to benefit the community, and the organisation which lends its time and resources to any form of co-production, whether with a specific output or with none.

#8. PLAN PROACTIVELY, PRACTICE REACTIVELY

Welcome back. Where were we?

As a confident and well-researched co-production facilitator, you have ensured every single element of the process has been proactive, right up to the moment you picked up the phone and called your first respondent or knocked on their door. You scheduled, rehearsed, prepared...

And now, the unexpected has crashed into your plans, and your co-production aspirations are in a hundred pieces. You weren't prepared for this.

Don't worry. This is normal. It's predictable in its unpredictability. Maybe I should have taken a leaf out of Douglas Adams' finest work, and put this on the front page...



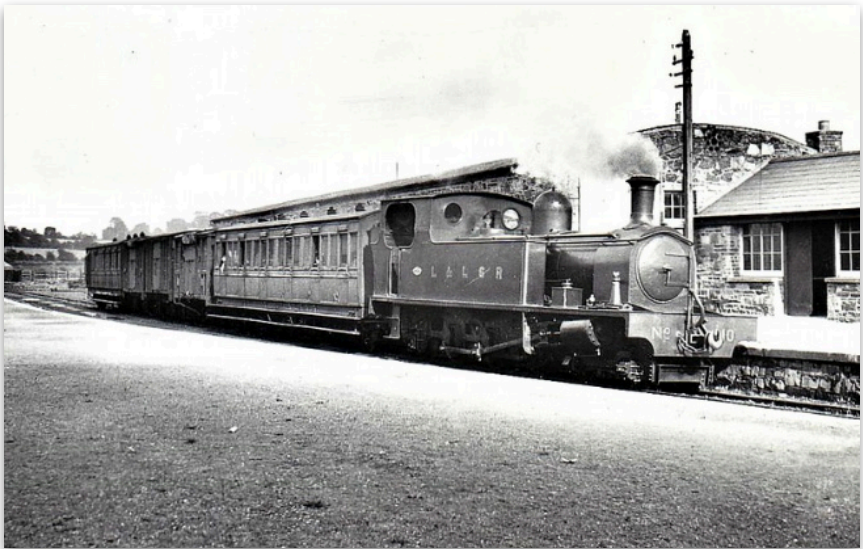
It is said that despite its many glaring (and occasionally fatal) inaccuracies, the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* itself has outsold the *Encyclopaedia Galactica* because it is slightly cheaper, and because it has the words 'DON'T PANIC' in large, friendly letters on the cover.

A little levity at this point is probably warranted. It is completely normal for things to fall apart. It is completely normal for the project to veer off from your stated aims and objectives. It is completely normal for dead-ends and new directions to magically appear.

What the community want may not be remotely in tune with what you thought you'd achieve. You will never be able to control the direction a co-production takes. You are now on the 18.15 express to an unknown destination.

There is no point in trying to steer a train.

You can apply the brakes or accelerate, but the rails are taking you in one direction only, so relax and enjoy the ride.



The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway served Inch and Donegal up until 1959, when the railways were closed.

React and improvise

This is new territory for many people. How you react, and how reactive you are, will determine the success of the

engagement. You will have to improvise, think, alter your plans. This may bring you into conflict with your organisation's management, and will certainly require some delicate negotiations on the possible outputs and outcomes. You may need to notify your funders of variation.

If you have documented your progress, and can demonstrate the reasons for your decisions, you'll be on safer ground. It won't be easy, and you may feel deflated, but remind yourself once again... this is not your project. It belongs to the community curators and they are allowed to take the project in any direction they want to.

You should have the professional knowledge to subtly nudge the project's progress, but it is not within your power to censor or deny the community's input, and you should not try. And if outside interests attempt to wrest control, then I hope the next page should give you some ammunition and comfort.

Perspectives XI

"Forum theatre is a type of theatre created by the innovative and influential practitioner [Augusto Boal](#), one of the techniques under the umbrella term of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). This relates to the engagement of spectators influencing and engaging with the performance as both spectators and actors, termed "spect-actors", with the power to stop and change the performance."
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forum_theatre

I wanted to add a few words on Forum theatre into this guide at some point and now seems appropriate. I trained with [Hector Aristabel](#), so I have both an interest, and experience, of this form of theatre performance.

To my mind, it is an analogue of co-production best practice...

Forum theatre begins with a short performance, either rehearsed or improvised, which contains demonstrations of social or political problems. At the conclusion, the play will begin again with the audience being able to replace or add to the characters on stage to present their interventions; alternate solutions to the problems faced.

Your role? Well, you are the joker.

The presentations include one person who acts as the 'joker', a facilitator for the forum theatre session. They are to hold an impartial view of the interventions, ask the audience to evaluate what happened at the end of an intervention, facilitate the interventions such that each spect-actor is able to complete their intervention before another is free to enact their intervention, and to be watching out for interventions which are implausible and ask the audience to decide whether the intervention is a 'magic' solution.

I think the key things to take away from Forum Theatre are the idea of spect-actors, being your respondents, and the notion of your role being impartial, facilitating the intervention, the conversations but there to guide, not to interfere.

In a perfect world, your impartiality and facilitation would allow the co-production to travel wherever it needed, organically and without interpretation. But we do not live in a perfect world. I've asked you to be human quite a few times. And that humanity has some surprising consequences...

#9. IT'S OK TO BE HUMAN

We are all human, with a flaws and failings, our desires and our unique personalities. The community you've been working with is a diverse, unique and extraordinary group of people. You've met them a few times now, and you've probably spent hours chatting to them about the world and life and where they went on holiday. You've laughed and drunk tea, had lunch, eaten cake and spent time in their homes.

They've showed you photographs and shared memories, personal experiences and life histories. They've taken you into their confidence as an outsider. They've told you things they'd never say to their neighbours... in fact they've probably told you about their neighbours too, and those conversations should remain private, permanently.

As much as you've tried to remain impartial and remain the outsider, your humanity has drawn you into their world.

You have made friends. You are now part of their community...

A place that was once unknown and strange is now a second home. You know you can knock on a door and there will be a warm welcome. People stop and talk to you in the street, or wave as you drive past on your way to the next appointment. You know the community better than they know themselves, and they look to you to present their stories to the best of your ability.

Workers from UNIFI, my community for three months of process

And it feels weird, I can tell you that. I can also point to the exact minute it has happened to me on any number of projects.

On Inch, it was the second meeting with Boyd Bryce. I've mentioned him a lot, and there's a [video on YouTube](#) about him if you're interested. Boyd has a thousand stories to tell, but he's not the sort of man to share them with anyone. He was a little circumspect the first time I met him...

"It'll have to be in the evening, for it's near lambing time and I'll be busy during the day."

We talked around the edges on the first evening. He was definitely sounding me out, seeing if I was who I said I was and if the project was for him. The second evening, he opened up, and for an oral historian, Boyd is a one-man archive.



Bridie and Boyd Bryce, on
Vintage Day, Inch.

I'd like to think he is a friend, but even if not, there is certainly a great deal of mutual respect between us. I know if I'm ever on Inch, I could call into the farmyard at Strahack and pass the time of day with him... as long as it's not lambing season.

And as Boyd is the custodian of much of Inch's land, and regarded as one of the island's elders, his acceptance of me was my passport to everywhere else on Inch. I was part of Inch's community and history.

That's how it works. And which is more, not only are you 'one of us' now, you will find you've also become an advocate for 'us'.

You will feel protective of the community's wishes and hopes. You will feel you want the best for them, and you'll want to defend their aspirations. Once again, this may bring you into conflict with your organisation's management or outside interests.

All I can say is it's OK to be that advocate, and leave behind the impartial facilitation, and the SE-PS aims and objectives behind. It is the community's project, and perversely, yours now too.

Your documentation, the stories you've heard and the artefacts you have uncovered will serve as witness to your professionalism, your passion and your humanity, and how much you care about the place and its people. And honestly, if you don't care by this stage, you probably shouldn't go any further.

On trust

Trust is something you build. It is constructed slowly, made of thin air and easily broken. There are simple things you can do to ensure the trust the community lends you is not misplaced.

Turn up on time

For the most part, us Donegal residents have a reasonably relaxed attitude to time, but if I'm working and say I'm going to be there at 7pm, I make sure I'm there at 6.55pm.

Communicate

Make sure people know you're coming and at what time, and if you can't make it, call, text or WhatsApp them to let them know. On Inch, I used a lot of texts, WhatsApp messages and Facebook messenger. Although there is mobile coverage, in certain places on the island, the geography meant that the signal was poor.

Give it back

If someone lends you something – books, photos, documents – make sure they get them back.

Keep the community informed

If you have to spend a couple of weeks doing something else, working on outputs or just on holiday, make sure people know.

All of these simple things will help and the trust you build will reap its rewards...

Perspectives XII

I was chatting to Paddy McGrory on Inch, and Margaret, his daughter-in-law and one of the gatekeepers, handed me a rusted, cast-iron artefact...

"Boyd said you'd know where this belongs."

I knew exactly where it belonged...



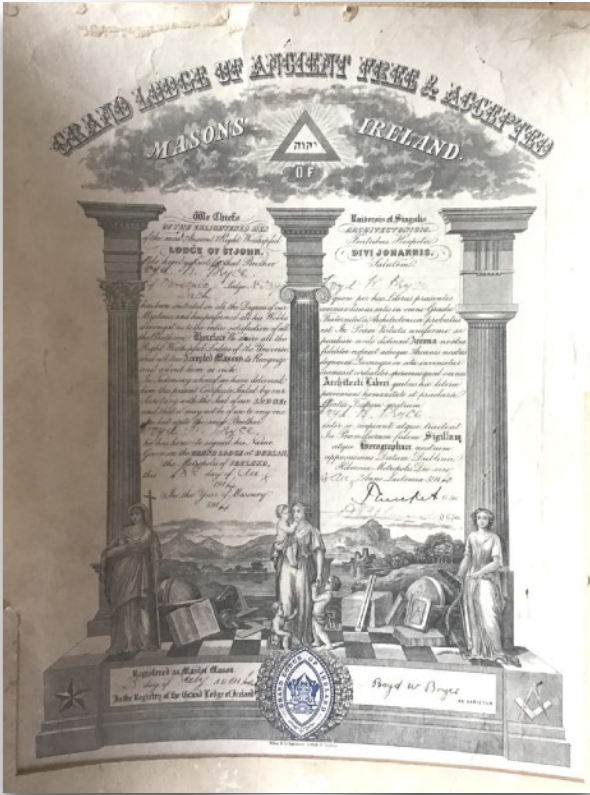
Masonic Lodge door furniture

The Island of Inch Masonic Lodge No. 589 was constituted in 1781. The building is in ruins now, having been abandoned in 1954. The Lodge still meets in Derry and three of the members attended the open meeting. They were keen



Inch Masonic Lodge

to have the Lodge's history included on the Inch heritage website. I met them at the Freemason's Hall in Derry and I had a fascinating morning talking to them. At one point they produced a faded document from 1916, with Boyd Bryce's grandfather's signature, another Boyd...



I showed a photo of this document to Boyd and he was delighted, calling to his wife...

"Bridie, come here, look. That's my signature. That's my signature. How is that possible? That's amazing."

And by way of quid pro quo, the cast-iron, Masonic door furniture, which once adorned Inch Masonic Lodge is now in the possession of the Lodge again, courtesy of Boyd. And all because of the mutual trust between us.

OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

I have no idea who you are, or what you, or your organisation does. I have no idea which are you work in. Is it heritage, museums, arts, local authority, specific projects? I have no idea of what you are hoping to achieve with your chosen community, and therefore, I have no idea what your stated outcomes and outputs are. I've written all of this with museum and heritage professionals in mind, but some of it may be completely off the mark, or it might just give you the spark of an idea. I hope it's the latter.

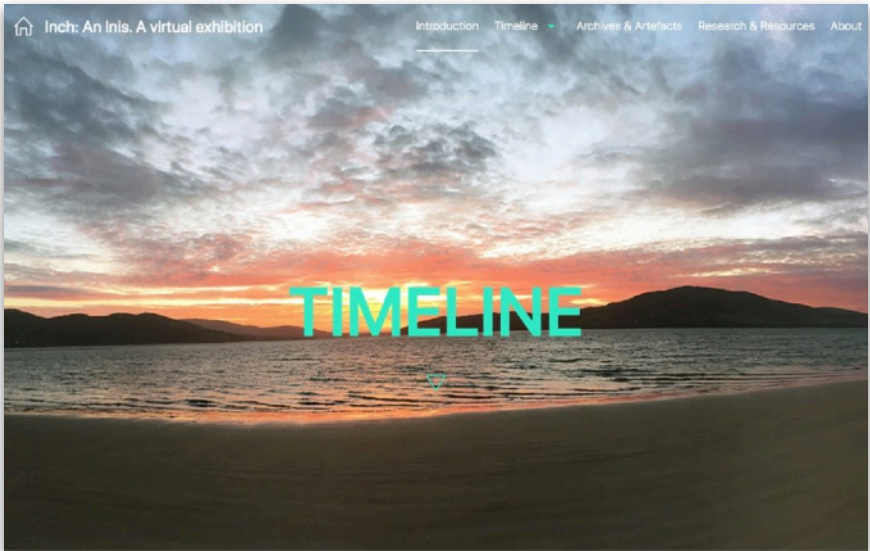
What I do know is that whatever you are thinking about doing, will need some sort of target output. You'll also be thinking about outcomes, in terms of community engagement and participatory practice.

I am going to wrap up the Practice section by looking briefly at those dull addenda to the amazing journey you've been on with the community, which you are now a member of, and an advocate for.

That SE-PS application form, all those months ago... what did you say you would do? Was it a publication, a website, an exhibition, a play, a collection of stories or oral histories? Again, I have no idea, but whatever it was, you'll need to revise your thinking.

Outputs

Our work on Inch had a clear goal. We were creating a virtual museum exhibit, to reflect then heritage of the island.



inchheritage.org

What form that took would be guided by what we found there and something else...

What I **felt** was right for the community and the project.

I can't find the words to explain this purely emotional response to the stories I heard, and people I met. Subjectivity, improvisation and gut feelings are not the best fit to the SE-PS' standard project application form.

In my experience, you will have a Eureka moment at some point in the process. Somebody will say something, or you'll pick up a photograph, or you'll be standing staring at the rocks on a promontory and the lightbulb will flicker on.

For the Inch website, I started with pages and pages of information and hundreds of images. Chatting to Niall McShane about design, we both realised that a Timeline might be the best way of presenting Inch's history. And

maybe all of that came from me staring at the strata... the layers of history on the shoreline.

DON'T IGNORE THAT RESPONSE. THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND HAS A WAY OF GUIDING YOU TO IDEAS AND IMPULSES YOU MAY NEVER HAVE CONSIDERED, BUT WHICH ARE CREATED AND NURTURED FROM YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE.

That was pages ago, but it applies here as well. Whatever form of output you anticipated will have been transformed by the community's input. How it is presented will take your inspiration, the community's consent and a lot of hard work.

The process element may have been 80% of the project. Creating the output will be the other 80%. I did warn you it would take more time than you had.

Outcomes

Ah yes, the imponderables...

What impact did your project have?

How many hard-to-reach groups did you engage with?

What metrics did you use to evaluate the impact/outcome ratio?

I can't give you the answers to these questions, and the dozen or so other ones on the SE-PS evaluation form. But if you have done half the things in this guide, twice as well as you might have done before you read it, then your engagement will have been excellent.

And if the SE-PS don't care what you've created, as long as it ticked the boxes, the community will. And they are the arbiters of excellence...

I am mightily impressed with the website, great to have so much stuff available in one place. I hope the folk in Inch are enthralled, they should be. It is a wonderful legacy.

Gosh! You have done well! Impressed.

Thanks so much for sharing... it's brilliant!

Well done to all involved!

Love it. An absolute gem!

Yes, they did like what we did

And that is almost that. I have a few more things to say, but as far as the actual doing, that's up to you now.



You have the Nörsjek coffee-table components, the screws and fixings, and those little bent-metal tools. Time to make it...

Be patient

Be passionate

Be curious

Don't panic

And one more thing, probably the most important, and something I haven't said too much about...

Listen...

#10. LISTEN

We are surrounded with noise and swamped by data. Every single day, we absorb more words and images than our ancestors did in entire years. When was the last time you went to shop where there wasn't music? When was the last time you went to a bar or a restaurant where the piped cool-jazz wasn't playing. We've become inured to noise, habituated to the constant notifications and the lure of screens.

THE SIMPLEST, AND SINGULARLY MOST IMPORTANT JOB OF ANY GOOD CO-PRODUCTION FACILITATOR IS TO LISTEN.

I've kept this until the end, because if I'd mentioned it at the beginning, I expect you would have been tired of me repeating it. But I can't emphasise the importance of this simple act enough. And when I say listen, I don't mean the half-hearted 'hearing' we do through most of our lives. This sort of listening is the active, deep and focused kind. It is a skill that takes practice, but it is a skill that can be learnt.

Whether you're collecting oral histories, documents, photographs... whether it's one on one with an individual in their living room or working with a group... whether you're on an archaeological site or wandering across a field... whatever the setting, listening is the best and most powerful thing you can do, to enable you to collect those stories.

There isn't much to it really, but it can feel like learning a new language. If you do it well, if you follow these few pointers,

then you'll not only feel two hours pass in a moment, but you'll also hear stories that will break your heart, create you with laughter or allow you a glimpse into different worlds.

How to listen

Turn your phone off

Not silent. Off.

Clear your mind

I wonder what's for tea? What was that in the news this morning? Whatever it is, forget about it. Your entire focus is this person in front of you.

Listen to the whole world

If you can hear the birdsong and the hum of the fridge in the kitchen, then you are focused.

Hold the individual's gaze, whoever is speaking

In a group or with just a couple of people, make sure you're looking at them when they're talking. And look into their eyes. It's hard, I know, but practice it with friends.

Listen with your whole body

Lean in, relaxed but attentive, calm and still. Don't fiddle with your hands or twitch.

Focus on what they are saying but also how they are saying it

In between those words will be far more texture to explore if you get the chance.

If you have to ask a question, think about the answer

— When were you born, Paddy?

'1958.'

— Where were you born, Paddy?

'Oh, well I was born in Derry, for you see my mother was there visiting, and was took into hospital sharpish. My father hadn't a clue until they got a message to him, for he was up

in the fields, ploughing the Big Knowe. And when he heard, he left the horses for Davy our neighbour and haired down the brae to get a change of clothes...'

Don't lead the conversation, allow it progress naturally

'Tell me your life story, Paddy' is far less effective than 'So Paddy, you're from the island, yes?'

Having a list of questions means you get a list of answers, not an oral history.

Listen as hard to the story of the funeral last week, as you would to the story of the funeral from 1957

Memory is not linear, nor is history, at least not when it is relayed by the individual sitting in front of you. Nor is memory accurate, and these lines from *The Songbirds* might illuminate what I mean...

I was reading all about memory. He goes on about his songbirds, but to me, our lives are written in a book. Each page is a separate moment, written as we experience it. But every time we go back to that memory, there are pencilled notes in the margins, words crossed out, those sticky post-it notes and all sorts of changes. Every time we remember, the memory is different, not false, not wrong, but changed by life and experience.

Sarah's monologue, The Songbirds

More prosaic things to consider

Is it a group session?

12 at most, but I'd be happier with 6, two hours at most, with a break. Try and do a few sessions and divide the larger group into males and females, if you can. And watch for the quiet ones. Get them on their own at some point.

I've found that men generally relate chronologies and events, whereas women generally relate how they feel/felt about what happened. It's not always the case, but that's my experience. And the quiet ones?

If you hear 'Oh, I've not much to tell,' you can be sure they were probably in some special-forces unit in several wars, played at Carnegie Hall when they were 14, and lived in an Alaskan log cabin for twenty years...

Individuals?

Again, two hours, but don't stop them mid-flow if they're still talking. My conversations with Boyd could have gone on all night...

Recording?

Ask. Make sure the light is good. A snap will do if you think you make time to scan it. More about this in [Technology](#)

On site? In a field? Up a boreen?

What did I say about a waterproof coat and boots?

When I met Kenny Bryce on Inch, we spent an hour an half wandering the fields and lanes, on a damp January day. I was glad of the investment.

And there is so much more I could say, but try the basics out on friends and family. Practice your listening skills. Practice being a listener. If you master that skill, then collecting history of any sort will be easy, enjoyable and effective.

One other thing...

This is something that has bothered me for years, and I still hear it from colleagues, peers and other projects.

"We took their stories and we made a..."

“We worked with the group and took those amazing stories to create a...”

It may be just pedantic semantics, but I never take anything from the people I work with.

I only ever borrow histories, so that I can be sure I can give them back.

Perspectives XIII

Sometimes, whatever you're talking leads from one thing to another, and then a painful memory surfaces. It doesn't happen very often. In three hundred or so interviews, I can count the occasions on one hand, but when it does, it can take you by surprise.

Have some tissues to hand. Give the individual time and support. Let them heal their grief with your support and care.

The two photos below have triggered sad memories among the older population of Inch, but they felt the images should be part of the island's story.





LEGACY

If I could go back to every project I've worked on, I would have insisted on some element of legacy to allow the participants to continue their conversations. I would have kept in touch with every single contact in my phone.

But the sad truth is it's simply not possible. They move on, you move on. Your next SE-PS funding allocation arrives and you embark on a new project. And I know, considering I have often worked with an older demographic, that some of the most amazing people I've had the pleasure of talking to have died.

I take comfort in knowing that for a few short hours, I listened to their stories, and somehow, in whatever small manner, celebrated their lives and validated their experiences. That's all we can do in the world of co-production and participatory engagement. We're not trying to change the world, we're simply trying to listen a little harder to voices that may never have been heard. More painful still for me, is the memory of working with people with dementia, some of whom are still alive but none of whom would remember me now.

All I can offer is the hope that your project will look to find some means of creating a legacy.

For Inch, we intended the website to have a blog option, for the community themselves to add additional words and images. Whether that has been successful, only time will tell.

I'm writing this on April the 23rd, and it being William Shakespeare's birthday, I thought I might a quote which seems to suit the humour of this page.

Prospero's words from the Tempest:

*You do look, my son, in a moved sort,
As if you were dismay'd: be cheerful, sir.
Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.*

We are all such stuff as dreams are made on. Every individual has a unique and extraordinary story to tell.

We do our best work by celebrating every single one of them.

WHY CO-PRODUCE AT ALL?

If I haven't convinced you by now, there probably isn't much else I can say. But I wanted to say something, if only to ensure the SE-PS criteria on metricised quantifiable impacts are fulfilled.

I'm going to get a little philosophical, so it might be time for candles and whale song again, if you feel the need.

Borrowing from Robert Pirsig, I'd like you imagine your organisation is a cathedral, temple or mosque... one of those amazing constructions dedicated to whichever Deity you worship. We'll use the following building in this analogy.

The artistry of the carvings and the stained glass, the mosaics and the decoration are a wonder to behold. You feel



Artful shot of Ard Eaglais Naomh Adhamhnain –
St. Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny

overawed and a sense of wonder when you walk through the doors. The labour of hundreds of craftsmen and women, which went into the building of this cathedral, is evident everywhere you look... the carved-oak pews, the gilded-altar, the stations of the cross around the walls.

The simple materials – stone and timber and mortar – that made this building are as truly miraculous as the faith and devotion, which fills those pews at every service. But subtract the people and their faith, remove the reason for the building's existence, and it is no longer a cathedral.

The building might be cathedral-shaped, but without a congregation to worship below its vaulted ceilings, it is nothing more than a pile of beautifully-crafted stone, mortar and timber. The congregation is what makes it a cathedral.

Now think of your organisation, without the worshippers, without that devotion to heritage and culture...

Architectural awards, glass and concrete facades, management and organisational structures, strategy documents, staff roles and grades... all of those fade into insignificance without the community you serve being part of what you do.

So what's the problem?

We can still make exhibitions and create heritage projects, and the people will still come...

If only it were that simple, but the traditional roles of Us and Them are shifting.

The congregation of the Catholic cathedral of St. Eunan's, has been getting smaller, year on year. Nowadays, the demographic of the mass-goers is ageing, and the younger generation no longer see organised religion as being relevant to their lives.

Across the world, in every sector you can imagine, we are experiencing similar paradigm shifts. What was once acceptable and 'the way we've always done it', is no longer in tune people's aspirations and versions of this new, connected world.

It is the same within the communities we serve, as heritage or culture professionals. What was once the accepted version of culture and heritage has lost its connection and meaning. Why?

The great democratisation

How are you going to compete with that amount of democratised culture, news, heritage, technology, art and community initiatives?

And this question is especially relevant given the explosion of online creativity due to Covid-19.

The simple fact is you, and your organisations, are being left behind by technology, by demographics, by YouTubers and citizen-journalists, by bloggers and community heritage groups.

Your relevance is diminishing with every tweet, every Facebook post, every [#AncestryHour](#) [#LocalHistory](#) [#LocalHeritage](#) and a hundred other hashtags. And if you keep doing what you've always done, then your connection to the community you serve will be lost in a blur of data and notifications.

So why co-produce?

Because if you don't, you will not exist in ten years time, or five, or two...

Because if you don't, you will become irrelevant to the community you serve...

Because if you don't, you'll wonder why you didn't...

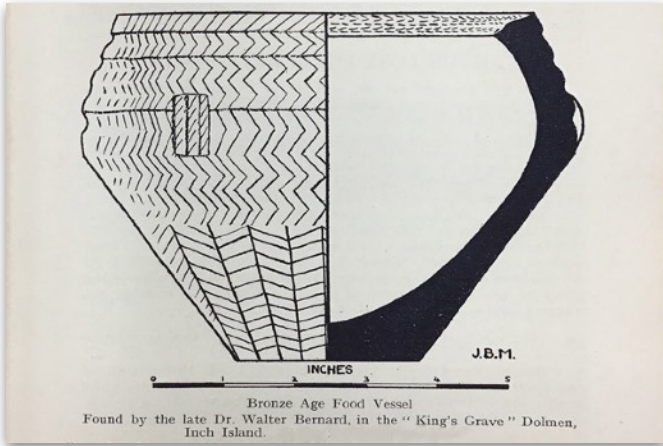
The question 'Why co-produce at all?' is, in my opinion, a fallacy. The real questions you should be asking are...

**Why aren't we co-producing?
What is stopping us from co-producing more?**

Co-production doesn't mean you stop being professional. Co-production doesn't mean you aren't excellent curators and heritage professionals. Co-production doesn't mean you have to stop doing the traditional elements of your work. Co-

production is simply a challenge to do more, and to do it differently. Here's another analogy...

Below is an image of a bowl, excavated on Inch in 1938... The bowl is in the National Museum of Ireland. It's an



important artefact. It's been preserved, stabilised, recorded. It's in the **National** Museum, that's how very important it is. But the museum is in Dublin. That's four hours or more by car or bus – the railways closed in 1959, if you recall. If someone from Inch wants to see the bowl, they have to make an appointment and stay overnight in Dublin.

This bowl was excavated on Stewart Buchanan's farm, one of our respondents. It's been preserved, stabilised, recorded. It's



in the National Museum, too. He hasn't seen the bowl since it left for Dublin. It's similar in design to the other bowl, and no, neither of them are the most beautiful examples of bronze-age ware, but they are part of Inch's heritage.

You'd think it might be easy enough to get a photo of these bowls, maybe to do some 3D photogrammetry, or even bring one back to Inch, so the community can actually see the artefact that was found on their island. You'd think... but no. They are important artefacts, very important artefacts. Forms have to be filled, requests made, the procedures have to be adhered to, and so they should for a museum that preserves the history and heritage of the nation.

The museum has done its job, and done it well, the bowls are allocated a number and sit in storage or on display, but the community has never seen the bowls. The access is limited to those who can make the trip to Dublin in a day. Think about that for a second.

I'm not singling out any one particular organisation, and maybe there's a separate conversation to be had about access to artefacts, but this story is worth time considering in terms of...

Who do you serve?

How do you make your organisation more relevant to those you serve?

Is there is a form of co-production that allows you to engage more effectively with those you serve?

And now you're probably also asking...

Who on earth does this playwright think he is?

My answer to the last question is in this photograph. These are the outlets for three hundred metres of 18th Century,



Millbay, Inch

stone-lined, underground millraces. They have lain under the fertile soil of Inch since 1750, or maybe earlier. They are forgotten relics of an almost forgotten industry, until this playwright came along one cold day in February, with my co-production facilitator's hat on.

Now this unloved, untended and forgotten history is on a Twitter feed and a website, for anyone to view and marvel at the ingenuity and craft of the builders. An integral part of an island's history is remembered, the community's heritage is celebrated, and that heritage is vibrant and relevant again. Us theatre folk have been doing 'co-production' since the 1960s. It's a recognised discipline, with specific funding streams from the Arts Council here in Ireland. We have been to every community hall. We have talked, laughed and cried with our communities. We have decades of experience in this area.

All is not lost

Your cathedrals can rise again. The stained glass will pour its light on the rich oak of the pews again, and you can be sure your congregations will return. But only if you are prepared to co-produce this new reality as equal partners with your communities, in this uncertain, unpredictable but extraordinary process.

That's the challenge. You have the tools. What are you waiting for?

At least, that's what I think. Maybe you disagree vehemently. That is an argument I would love to engage with you in, some day.

REFLECT AND RECAP

The 10 rules of co-production

Just a little reminder about the rules, so they're all in one place

#1 Nothing... starts on time

Be patient. Remember people have lives.

#2 Research, research, repeat

Know your subject backwards and then forget everything.

#3 Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance

Make sure you are tooled-up for the journey.

#4 Find your gatekeepers

Find those key-holders and password-knowers.

#5 Whoever comes, they are the right people

If it's only 5 or if it's 50, they are the right people.

#6 Be human

Smile, small talk, pass compliments.

#7 Expect the unexpected

It will happen.

#8 Plan proactively, practice reactively

Improvise and don't worry.

#9 It's OK to be human

And it's OK to care.

#10 Listen

Above everything else, listen.

#11 Make sure you have some good boots

Pretty sure I mentioned these, but just in case.



And alongside the rules, remember...

Be patient

Be passionate

Be curious

Don't panic

And what else, when all this is over?

When all is done, your outputs are out there, the community is happy, and the evaluation forms have gone, you will feel hollow and melancholic.

The community you have been a part of are your friends, and you will miss them – their voices, their laughter and those amazing cakes. This all normal. This is the part of community engagement the co-production theorists don't tell you about, but I have. I feel it every single time.

Think about what you achieved in those few short weeks or months. Remember the enthusiasm and the positivity you felt. Remember the stories you've heard and the sights you've seen.

Give yourself a round of applause or a pat on the back. Buy yourself a treat, because you deserve it. You did something

extra-human, extra-ordinary and unique. You are good human being and a great co-production facilitator.

Spend a few days thinking about what you managed to create. Think about what went wrong. And not everything will have worked. Not everything you hoped to achieve will have been possible, though you're probably not going to have been thwarted by a pandemic, as was the case with the Inch project.

Think about things you'd do different. Think about all you've read in this guide, and think about the way you'd write it, and do it better than I have.

A little reflective practice is a remarkable thing. It tunes us into future possibilities, reinforces our confidence and allows us to dream a little.

That Nörsjek coffee table is spectacular, so maybe you should try the matching Yörtvejsk cabinet next.



It's built with the same tools. That's the thing about co-production and IKEA. When you've done one, the next one is so much easier, and makes so much more sense.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology: “science of craft”, from Greek τέχνη, *techne*, “art, skill, cunning of hand”; and -λογία, *-logia*

This page is just a few things to consider if you're like me... the only one doing the facilitation, documentation, photography, scanning, oral history...

Things you need to set up – Social media and Archiving

I've covered some of this, but in case you skipped that page...

A Flickr account

Useful for uploading all those wonderful photos and scanned images.

A Twitter account or an Instagram account or both

Useful for documenting the project's progress and letting the world know what you're doing. #Don't #forget #the #s.

A Soundcloud account

Great for oral history uploads.

Possibly a Vimeo account

If you have video to upload. Flickr/Instagram and Twitter do video, but I'd advise keep your movies separately. You can buy the Pro for a month, upload everything and then drop back to the free version. And it's so much nicer to look at than YouTube.

Under certain data/image limits, these are all free, so get signed up. No, I haven't mentioned Facebook, If you must, use that to make a closed group for your respondents, but

personally I'd avoid it, other than Messenger/WhatsApp for contacts. It's up to you. You might feel it's more your thing and this isn't a proscriptive list, just my personal preference.

Oh but you shouldn't

You shouldn't use Soundcloud as an audio archive...

I got my first computer in 1987. I have lost, mislaid or discarded Terabytes of audio on floppy discs, zip-drives, CDs, DVDs, flash drives, memory cards. I archive to the cloud now, or clouds. For the Inch co-production, ease of use and access were paramount, so I used Soundcloud.

Do what you have to do to make what you have accessible.

Flickr is not a photo archive. That really should be done using .jpeg or...

See above, and if you want to do Metadata, [the CINE project have a page of resources](#)

Things you need to set up – Sharing

Dropbox, iCloud, Google Drive...

Whatever suits you, your technical knowhow and your budget. Just make sure you have somewhere to put stuff that won't disappear if your laptop dies or you desktop fries.

Things you should think about learning – if you feel the need or just have to...

WordPress

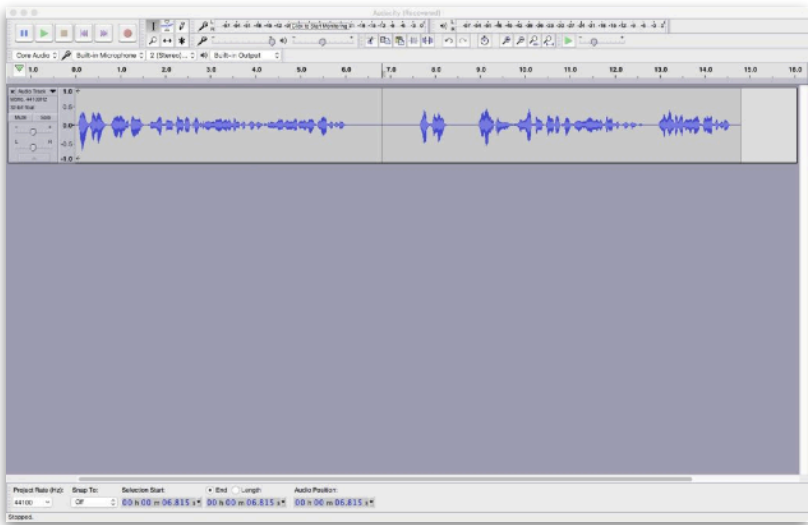
For website building and blogging.

This website is based on the WordPress 2019 theme with a few lines of custom code. I did it all myself. If you can send an email with an attached photo, you'll probably pick up the basics in an afternoon, and there are [plenty of online courses](#). You don't even need to register a domain, but I did and per year, including the hosting and domain name, this site is costing me less than you'd pay for nice meal in a decent restaurant.

Photoshop/Lightroom... or whatever you can afford and are comfortable with

Something to edit those scans and photos. There is probably a simple program already on your computer/laptop. Spend some time learning how it works and if it doesn't do what you want, then upgrade. Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom are now available on a reasonable monthly subscription. The same goes for video. Find something simple that works for you.

Audacity



Audacity screengrab

Free, easy to use, audio editing software. I have Logic on my Mac, I still use Audacity for editing the oral history recordings.

There's an app for it

Braintoss

Probably the most useful app I've ever come across. And they're not paying me for this. Capture text, audio and photos and send them automatically to your email inbox. It is a life saver for the over-stretched co-production facilitator, trying to remember what and where and why.

Maps... Apple or Google

You'll be lost without them, especially when all you have is a postcode or vague directions.

Weather apps

Wherever you are, you'll need to take account of the weather if you're a) On-site, b) Taking photos, c) Droning, or d) Meeting someone in a field.