



## 1<sup>st</sup> Project Management Board meeting

13 May 2008 at 1.30

**Present:** Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, Elizabeth Shepherd (UCL), Richard Wiltshire (LMA), Gemma Romain, Caroline Bressey (UCL), Heidi Mirza (IoE), Kelly Foster (BCA)

**Apologies:** Beverley Butler (UCL), Vic Gray (CAHG), Javier Stanziola (MLA), Judy Vaknin (Middlesex), Claire Warwick (UCL), Caroline Williams (TNA)

**Briefing papers:** methodology, case studies, website, PMB roles and responsibilities

### Minutes

#### 1. Introductions

Gemma Romain noted in introducing herself that she was also on the advisory board for Rukus! and hoped that this did not create a conflict of interest. AF assured her that it did not.

#### 2. Progress report

##### a) Background to project and chosen methodology

*Background:* AF explained the background to his interest in community archives. The Archives Task Force report (2004) made it clear that these organisations existed but no in-depth research had as yet been done. The aim of this research was to fill this evidential gap around BME community archives. Funding had been secured from the AHRC under the early career researcher scheme.

Further aims of the project were to develop a more sophisticated model for the relationship between the engagement with archival material and the construction of identities. Assessing impact in the long-term was likely to prove more problematic but it was hoped that data would nevertheless contribute to developing a more sophisticated understanding of effects of community archives in these communities.

*Methodology:* MS presented this and explained the value of a participant observation methodology for generating the kind of complex, detailed data it was hoped the project would generate.

The presentation of the methodology gave rise to a number of questions:

- How could the 'objectivity' of the research be ensured if the researchers were also acting as advocates for the sector in general, and the case study organisations in particular? At what point might the project become 'action research'? Moreover, the loss of objectivity was one of the risks

### **Community Archives & Identity: documenting and sustaining community heritage**

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associated with a participant observation methodology in general, and something that the researchers should be mindful of.

- *Anonymity*. The researchers had decided against offering participants anonymity on the basis the protection it offers is illusory and that it would be misleading to propose it. However, some board members saw the loss of anonymity as putting the research aims in jeopardy; it would be difficult to say certain things if names were publicly attached to them. People might also be less willing to communicate information if they fear that it will be publicly associated with them. There is also perhaps a greater risk of people withdrawing the right to use their data if information is directly linked to a name.

From the point of view of the research team some of the concerns raised were in fact arguments that supported their choice to reject anonymity. For example, the fear that the researchers might have to censor themselves is a good illustration of the extent to which anonymity often serves the research and the researcher at the expense of the participants. Anonymity can result in the exploitation of the subjects. Consent is also an ongoing process, to be negotiated throughout the research.

Some board members agreed that it was important publicly to acknowledge the unique work of the organisations concerned. The board recommended an ongoing dialogue with participants about this issue, particularly when project outcomes are being prepared. The appropriateness of naming participants should be considered anew for each project output.

**Action:** project document and consent forms to be revisited in the light of these recommendations. There should be a reconsideration of the use of individual pseudonyms / role descriptors whilst openly identifying organisations.

*General issues.* The board expressed the concern that ‘identity’ was a very hard concept to get at. AF conceded that it might just be a question of developing a sense of what the organizations in question ‘feel they are doing’ and how they are trying to do it. It was suggested that a future project could seek to build upon this research to explore these questions in more depth.

#### b) Appointment of RA

Mary Stevens was appointed in September 2007. The start day of the project was delayed to 1 February 2008 in order to allow her to submit her PhD thesis.

It was noted that in accordance with UCL and UCU policy RA is to stand for *Research Associate*, not assistant.

#### c) Project documentation

Board members had useful comments to make about the project document. Specific remarks (e.g. about phrasing) have been incorporated into the documents.

The board inquired about the governance structures of the organisations concerned, in order to develop a sense of who the documents were targeted at and who had the authority to negotiate consent.

#### d) Presentation of case studies

*\*Board members were reminded to treat the information about the choice of case studies in confidence since at the time of meeting none had given their formal written consent.\**

AF explained that setting up the case studies had been a more protracted and complex business than he had originally envisaged and that there had been a number of changes from the case for support. In particular, we were no longer working with an archive based in a geographically defined community.

Moreover, it was most useful to conceive of the chosen case studies as situated at particular points along a sustainability/autonomy curve.

Richard Wiltshire noted that the case studies were all now London-based. AF explained that logistical/practical constraints had imposed this limitation. Interviews would be used to situate the projects in a broader, national context.

Caroline Bressey noted that a case could be made for limiting the case studies to London on the basis that London-based organisations enjoy unusual relationships with national institutions. Restricting the studies to London also enabled the research to acknowledge the importance of place in shaping identities.

The choice of case studies was discussed. The board felt that it was important to include at least one organisation that engaged with the construction of white identities. How a community archive should be defined for the purposes of the project was also raised. Should the Huntley archive at the LMA be considered a 'community archive'? How tight do the links between an archive and the community it claims to represent have to be?

The reasons why communities might be reluctant to relinquish ownership of their records were also discussed. This was something the Casbah project was felt to have touched upon.

#### e) Website

MS received useful constructive criticism about the website.

- Need for more pictures
- More engaging font (but still sans serif, i.e. not Times New Roman for accessibility reasons)

Once the website is launched board members should be invited to contribute material.

#### f) Dissemination proposals

Discussion of this item was postponed until the next meeting.

### 3. Role of the Management Board

#### a) Membership of the board

Membership is not fixed and final. Board members were invited to suggest other members if they knew of people who could make a useful contribution.

#### b) Responsibilities

- i. Overview of responsibilities
- ii. Identification of possible risks

Board members were invited to refer to the briefing paper (available at the project website).

#### c) Communication between project team and Board

An email newsletter would be prepared by the team every three months. The first of these would go out during the summer.

The website would also help the board to stay in contact with the project team.

#### d) Supporting the project:

- i. Publicity
- ii. Dissemination suggestions
- iii. Supporting the fieldwork

The Board was invited to submit suggestions for prospective interviewees.

### 4. Appropriate terminology & culturally positive language

This item had emerged out of concerns raised by a case study about the use of the term ‘ethnic minorities’, although in fact it is not an expression used by the research team. Caroline Bressey questioned why it was necessary to use any over-arching terminology. AF explained that it was necessary in order to develop a sense of cohesion and to present the outcomes to a policy-oriented audience. Caroline Bressey argued that terminology should be allowed to emerge from usage. It was important to be attentive to usage within organisations.

## 5. Any other business

The use of the project to deliver some of the recommendations of the Archives Diversification sub-committee of the Mayor of London’s Heritage Diversity Task Force was discussed.

## 6. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place towards the middle of the project, probably in January. Exact date tbc.