

UCL Café Culture

Overview and Context

This case study outlines the learning from the UCL Café Culture series. Café Culture is an ongoing programme of evening events, where researchers from the UCL School of European Languages, Cultures & Societies (SELCS) and external speakers give short, fun talks on their research and interests. After the talks there is time for questions, activities and informal discussion. The Café Culture series started in May 2013; since then, six events have been held, topics covered have included: vampires, translation and fairy tales.

UCL Café Culture is a unique, cohesive public engagement programme co-ordinated within SELCS. This case study identifies key findings from the activities so far and makes recommendations for future events.

The specific aims of Café Cultures are to:

- increase opportunities for UCL SELCS-based researchers to explore the impact and contemporary relevance of their current research with a non-academic audience
- improve external recognition of SELCS as a place known for the discussion and research of ideas which have a bearing on the way people live their lives today
- increase the public engagement skills and expertise of SELCS-based researchers
- increase opportunities for SELCS-based researchers to work in an interdisciplinary way, across SELCS, and potentially more widely across UCL faculties

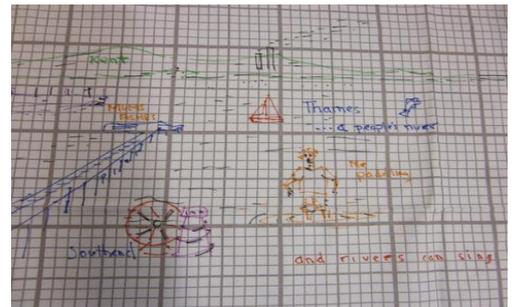
The objectives were to:

- develop a model for Café Culture activity (to include timeline, budget, resource and evaluation strategy)
- develop an audience development plan for SELCS Café Culture activity
- pilot a Café Culture event in Summer Term 2013
- evaluate the success of the Café Culture pilot

What happened?

Since May 2013, six Café Culture activities have taken place:

- **What are Fairy Tales?** Involving Mererid Puw Davies and Tom Lundskaer Nielsen, attended by 38 people
- **Vampires**, Susanne Kord and Titus Hjelm, attended by 25 people
- **London Through Different Eyes**, involving Isabelle Moreau and Wendy Bracewell, Emma Pauncefort, attended by 34 people
- **Translation: Art and Word**, involving Tim Mathews, attended by 22 people
- **Tracing Origins**, involving Jane Gilbert and Katherine Ibbett, attended by 29 people
- **Games at the Grant** involving Katherine Ibbett and Elizabeth Dearnley, attended by 34 people



Facts and Figures

Between May 2013 and July 2014
6 Café Culture events have been held

Café Culture events were attended **182** people, an average of 30 people per event

Approximately **50%** of event attendees were not UCL affiliated

12 researchers from SELCS (9), School of Slavonic and East European Studies (2) and the Slade School of Art (1) were involved in Cafe Culture

Emerging themes from the evaluation

Café Culture provides a successful, sustainable model of public engagement within SELCS. The programme is funded by SELCS and coordinated by Dr Debbie Martin, Senior Lecturer in Latin American Cultural Studies, who is assisted by two SELCS postgraduates. Café Culture provides a structure and platform for researchers in SELCS to communicate and discuss their work in an engaging way.

An ongoing process of evaluation (of audience demographics, audience experience, and researcher experience) is in place. Findings from the evaluation undertaken so far illustrate the following:

Café Culture has increased external awareness of and recognition for the research happening within UCL and SELCS, especially its impact and bearing upon how people live their lives today. Each event ends with a lively discussion, often with audience members making links between the ideas under discussion and their own lives. Audience members have remarked on how much they enjoy the events and several have returned to subsequent events. Even contributing researchers have noted how engaged the audience have been.

Café Culture plays a key role in helping SELCS become understood by its staff and by members of the public as a place for dialogue between researchers and public.

Through being involved in Café Culture SELCS staff feel that they have increased their awareness of public engagement work, developed their confidence, and have been able to put into practice innovative ideas about how to do public engagement.

SELCS researchers have also reported having research- and teaching-related ideas as a result of participation in Café Culture, as well as increased understanding of and inspiration for future public engagement work.

Due to the diverse nature of the themes covered in Café Culture events the team coordinating Café Culture have to undertake a large amount of audience research, marketing and publicity work for each event in order to target different audience groups. In most cases, the number of attendees does not justify the amount of hours spent on this aspect. In the future, then, it will be necessary, where possible, to hold Café Cultures as part of larger events such as festivals, an approach we have already used twice – and has been effective.

In summary, Café Culture has succeeded in meeting its aims and objectives that were set.

Further information about these events is available at: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/selcs/news-and-events/cafe-culture-series/past-events>

Learning from the Process

What worked well?

- involving researchers from other disciplines and external speakers (e.g. artists, writers) has enhanced the discussion at the events
- allowing time for discussion and mingling provides an opportunity for audience and researchers to explore ideas together
- the Café Culture 'brand' and the 'ongoing' programme means that a regular, repeat audience can be built up
- tablecloths (which can be drawn on and washed) have been used at several Café Culture events very successfully to capture audience comments and feedback.
- several events have involved interdisciplinary collaborations, more usually these links and partnerships are pre-existing, and therefore involvement in Café Culture may cement existing links, and may even foster new ones

What could be done differently?

- Café Culture events should be held (as far as possible) as part of wider festivals, such as Bloomsbury Festival, Being Human Festival and UCL Festival of the Arts. This will allow for the bulk of publicity and logistical work to be shared
- it is important to retain a budget for food and drink, for the events

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