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Crawshaw J, Hudson M, Rowe F. [Archives and fractures: Identifying and using tacit, minority knowledges in knowledge exchange processes](#). In: *The Knowledge Exchange: An Interactive Conference*. 2013, LICA/Lancaster University.

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Date deposited: 29th May 2014

Version of file: Published



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Archives and Fractures: Identifying and using tacit minority knowledges in knowledge exchange processes

Julie CRAWSHAW, Martyn HUDSON and Frances ROWE

Newcastle University, Newcastle University, Newcastle University

Through tracing art practice in rural development, we explore the multiple relationships of knowledge exchange (KE): reflecting on the role of the university, 'third space' researchers, and the role of art practice in support of KE itself. Drawing on art and music case studies across rural Northumberland, we re-present three short stories from recent fieldwork. Reflecting on our relational experience, we ask what these sequences of exchange contribute to our understanding of the role/s of: The University, in support of rural arts practice; the researcher, as university representative; and arts practice itself, as a *conduit* to knowledge exchange. The KE literature debates what kinds of processes, tools and insights can facilitate KE, and what kinds of digital domains are appropriate. Through reflecting on our positions – as part of rural arts practice, as part of rural economies – we develop our understanding of knowledge sources; and how they are exchanged amongst a network of relationships. In explicating these relationships the paper offers close accounts of practice, supporting reflection on future KE projects and programmes.

Keywords: Arts Practice, Knowledge Exchange, Rural Economies

Northumbrian Exchanges: models of practice

To better understand the role of the university in support of arts practice and rural economies, this paper draws on three empirical 'stories' from a range of practice settings. These close accounts span: the practice of individuals and organisations; music and visual arts; and types of activity – a music performance, accounts of a sculpture by Holy Island residents, and a structured meeting between the university researchers and directors of two of the partnership case studies. The material is drawn from the fieldwork of the Newcastle University one year pilot (Feb 2012 – Feb 2013) AHRC funded Knowledge Exchange project, *Northumbrian Exchanges*: designed to facilitate knowledge exchange surrounding the role of the arts in support of rural economies. The project is a partnership, between Newcastle University – schools of Music and Visual Arts, the Centre for Rural Economy and the Business School; in collaboration with a range of creative business, the Holy Island Partnership (HIP), Visual Arts in Rural Communities (VARC), Allenheads Contemporary Arts (ACA), and a range of music projects including the Morpeth Gathering, Alwinton Church summer concerts, Tarsset Ceilidh band and attached workshops situated in varying locations across Northumberland.

The Knowledge Exchange (KE) literature debates what kinds of processes, tools and insights can facilitate KE, and what kinds of digital domains are appropriate. To better understand knowledge exchange processes, Ward et al (2012) suggests we must examine how knowledge exchange actually works *in practice*: as a 'dynamic and fluid process which incorporates distinct forms of knowledge from multiple sources' (2012: 297). The contribution of the *Northumbrian Exchanges* project is in following practice: the practice of artists, amongst the multiple practices of the rural context. In reflecting on our descriptions of practice, as well as reflecting on the role of The University, we also explore our positions as practitioners in the field; and from our places of proximity, we additionally offer nuanced perspectives on the role of the arts as a 'mediator' (Hennion, 1998; Looseley 2006) towards knowledge exchange, itself. Finally, in reflecting on the role of art-as-mediator, we contribute raw material in support of the design of digital platforms – for mediation.

Three stories of practice: 'third space' reflection

Each research associate (RA) is attached to a place – Tarsset, Holy Island and Allenheads; as well as an area of interest – music, visual arts, and rural economies. Drawing on their research experience, each of the RAs present a particular scene from their fieldwork: the telling of a music performance, live; a tale of an artwork, as told; and a re-view of a meeting between project partners – with dogs, after scrambled eggs, sitting on Ercol armchairs, deckchairs and stools.

To trace knowledge exchange in practice, as suggested by Reichenfeld (2010) *Northumbrian Exchanges* (NX) has attempted to broker partnerships between the university and the localized organisations via 'third space professionals' (2010). The three appointed research associates (RAs) for the NX programme are each consultant-researchers. As well as academic trajectories, the RAs also encompass professional backgrounds: in community arts, and rural economic policy. The approaches by the RAs to fieldwork in each of the three places, are united by being centred around the co-development of 'work plans' between themselves and the case study partners. In reflecting on the processes of the 'work plan' development and delivery, each of the RA's acknowledge that the requirements of the fieldwork for each of the case studies draws both on their 'academic', as well as 'professional' experience.

To account for the practice of knowledge exchange, the fieldwork draws on a 'third space' approach. To examine how knowledge is understood, and the relationship of the university to this knowledge, the researchers have been positioned at a range of proximities in relation to the micro interactions of practice. To trace how knowledge exchange works, our studies follow the practices of art and music as they play out. We follow the relationships of musicians, photographers, dancers and performers, with residents, organisational administrators, directors and trustees, as part of rural life. As 'third space' researchers we both set out to support knowledge exchange; and review the future role of the university within rural development. By reflecting on our individual experiences, we are also drawn towards exploring our own roles as representative-of-the-university – as *conduits* ourselves: considering our positionality – who/where we are in practice; and our expanding responsibilities – to what and/or whom? As KE researchers, we are each part of the process/es of knowledge exchange: however each of our positions is distinct in relation to our research 'place' and perspective.

Micro movements: describing knowledge exchange

The different types of knowledge the NX partnership works with can be understood as 'embodied', 'embedded' and tacit (Blackler, 1995, Nonaka and Krogh, 2009). Minority, tacit, context-bound knowledge is what makes the practice case studies distinct and viable. The process of uncovering tacit and implicit knowledge must be noted as a complex process (Ennals et al, 2010:3); resting upon open and collaborative innovation rather than linear models of transfer (Johnston et al, 2010: 3). Central to that process is the stakeholder/individual (Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2010: 580) and the enrolment of allies and interest groups (Smith et al, 2010). As the short example of the field notes below, through sharing the texture of our individual perspectives, we reveal how knowledge exchange is a nuanced and tenuous process; a negotiation which is about power fractures, barriers, and often knowledge extinction:

During the week, quite a number of people have told me about 'the shack'. They are different versions of it. Some say 'they' wanted to knock it down because of health and safety. Bloody Natural England! Some say that it was knocked down and re-built. It is referred to as a 'shed', a 'hut', 'the bothy'. It is never called an artwork, and artists are never referred to [but I know of the artist who made it]. (Fieldnotes: April, 2012).

Through the re-presentation of these practice settings we begin to sense how different parallelograms of forces, often unperceived and unmapped, shape complex and diffused discourses around knowledge networks. How local, privatised, tacit, minority knowledge/s have discourses, bastions and defences around them. How they are protected for reasons of commerce, fear of predatory knowledge hubs and collectors (including academics and universities); or because knowledge is not perceived as something existing or worth sharing (Allen et al, 2010, Argote and Ingram, 2000). We trace how decisions on the utility of knowledge/s are profoundly complex: as multiple partners struggle to form knowledge partnerships and exchange processes. We note that, as actors ourselves, rather than collect or define knowledge (like others, as reported, before us), we hope to facilitate exchange.

Reflections: learning from KE in practice

In drawing on our close view of arts practice, we hoped in particular, to contribute to a better understanding of the question of 'knowledge extraction' and the university (Hudson 2013): What

knowledge? To do what? From whom? In the ownership of? In following art practice at the micro level, we reveal how art itself 'mediates' (Hennion, 1997) relationships in support of knowledge exchange. How art and music reveal knowledge sources; and how and why they are produced. By following the micro-relationships of art practices as part of Northumberland's rural life, we have also observed the micro-practices of organisations and individuals. At this micro level, we have found that the whole nature of knowledge and what counts as knowledge is shaped by complex networks of power and fracture; within which art and creativity perform a role. Having arrived with an intention of facilitating KE processes 'in rural communities', 'communities' are revealed as multiple discursive structures, realities and agendas: with their own 'knowledge bastions' and enclaves to defend and protect against exchange and use, by what are perceived as nefarious commercial, and academic, competitors. Each strand of fieldwork has problematized the assumptions of KE processes. We hear how the multiple relationships and discourses of landscape and community are particularly decisive in this process. The physicality and materiality of landscape, and discourses about landscape, have an important effect on knowledge, self-definition and perceptions of knowledge use. The fells, the positions of tides, the migration of birds, a perception of what is appropriately natural or historical, and what is not; the discourses of national and international governance – about communities, landscape and landscape-use. They all shape the partial knowledge/s of the individuals and frustrate and enable aspects of those subjective agendas and knowledge/s.

Our research has followed KE in practice. By co-designing a methodology based on the revelation (noticing and listening) of micro-discourse, the RAs have begun to explore the complex negotiations and contradictions of knowledge: how it is protected, shared and co-produced. By following practice, we suggest that the Northumbrian Exchanges project offers a rich opportunity for The University (Representative) to reflect on his/her role as a *conduit* to KE as an actor amongst the relational exchange.

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