

Case for Support

1. *Rationale and research context*

Disabled people's voices have been largely absent from the sustainability debate, and from environmental groups. The project develops dialogues between these two traditionally separated communities (disabled & environmental activists). Through these dialogues it seeks to understand more about different forms of resilience in support of the transition to a sustainable society. The proposed study takes a participatory action research (PAR) approach, facilitated by walking, narrative and arts-based methods. The research will take an approach of coproduction with participants, referred to here as co-researchers. We will seek to work inclusively and to maximise participation, while recognising the challenges involved in this and the ways our different knowledges are traditionally valued. We will hold two workshops for co-researchers and stakeholders, facilitated by the PI, Col and consultants in socially engaged arts practice. Twenty co-researchers, drawn from Disabled and sustainability practitioners will undertake and document walks and conversations.

A scoping study, undertaken by the PI (Abbott and Porter, forthcoming), has led us to propose that there is a 'wisdom' summarised by Leipoldt (2006: 21) as 'the experience of resilience and wellbeing in the midst of the difficult circumstances of impairment', that is drawn from the margins of lived experience which disabled people can contribute to the sustainability debate, i.e. scrutiny and negotiation of risk and barriers; problem solving; acknowledging limits; bearing up through committed relationships, with others and the environment; and, creativity in living. We wish to explore this 'wisdom' and develop dialogues between Disabled people and sustainability practitioners to surface 'wisdom' from both communities, using partnered walking to engage and stage dialogic encounters.

2. *Aims and objectives.*

The project explores the questions raised by the proposition that Disabled people have a 'wisdom' drawn from lived experience to contribute to sustainability, with the aim to understand more about different forms of resilience, so increasing knowledge for sustainability.

- By better understanding how the lived experience of Disabled people can contribute a sustainable society.
- Developing a platform to build and sustain a shared ongoing dialogue between Disability and Sustainability and Environmental activists.
- As a secondary objective we will also engage planning agencies and policy makers with the outputs from the research, to inform planning and policy agendas.
- Explore the place of mobile and arts based methods to surface embodied practices.

3. *Contribution to the Connected Communities programme and aims of the workshop*

The project recognises and works with the complex variables and community dynamics described by the AHRC scoping study 'Resilient, mutual self-help in cities of growing diversity'. This study supports our proposition that if the distinctive knowledge and experiences of disabled people are not part of the transition process, this may undermine rather than help build resilience. The relative absence of Disabled people from environmental groups points to a need to facilitate these exchanges. Our study extends the understandings of 'community' and 'culture' to include Disabled communities and culture, and includes Disabled people in debates from which they are currently excluded and/or positioned as *only* vulnerable rather than resourceful.

Our project builds new trans-disciplinary partnerships between performance studies, socially engaged arts practice and social science. Arts and humanities make a distinctive contribution to the development of these new cross disciplinary linkages through the methodology, which tests an approach, using a mix of beyond-text methods including arts-based, narrative and performative methods, which will enable participants to tap into and describe their expertise.

- Expanding the discourses/theories of walking practices by finding out how Disabled people experience walking, examining the practices of mobility.
- Using walking, arts based methods and narrative approaches to reveal and understand the everyday lived experiences of Disabled people.

This is core to the project as, one issue we anticipate building on from experience from the previous study, will be whether Disabled people have enough sense of their own agency to be able to see themselves readily as expert or 'wise'. We are therefore testing an approach, using walking

and arts based methods to surface and explore embodied practices of sustainability, that builds a sense of agency and starts a dialogue between Disabled people and sustainability practitioners.

We need better stories of adapting to unexpected change to support a transformation in the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of individuals (Dobson, 2006). We will trouble the discourses around self reliance and independence by asking has *interdependence* more to offer to developing narratives of 'living well' when the future is not what we expected (i.e due to climate change or impairment), so contributing 'narratives of loss' which are both realistic and edgy, but also hold out alternative and sustainable futures as *good stories of living well*. These stories can be drawn upon to support communities in confronting our fear of loss in relation to our desired future.

4. Description of methods and timetable of activities

Stage	Work plan
Set up period Feb - May 2013	Project set up and recruitment SP: Obtain ethical approval; partnership development; recruitment; advisory group established. AP: Recruit environmental groups; recruit co-researchers through partner organisations. SS: Develop website. SA/SP/SS/DH: Develop documentation and data gathering processes. SA develops arts-based toolkit.
Project group 1 March	Bring project team together: All: review and inform project design; form working relationships; review arts-based materials; plan workshop 1 .
Workshop 1 May 2013	Workshop: All: Use Futures/Scenarios process to introduce participants to each others knowledges. Explore methods of data collection - including viewing arts-based approaches used by others. Develop walking partnerships. Introduce blog, twitterfeed etc
Walks June - August 2013	20 participants plan and undertake local walks in pairs, each walk to documented. SA: offers support to each walking pair to find appropriate arts based methods to document their 'walk and talk'. SP: offers support re developing narratives of experience and learning. DH: Each walking pair is given a budget for their walk. Negotiating how to use the budget, where & how to undertake walk is part of the process of understanding each others perspectives. Disabled co-researchers use support workers as needed.
Project group 2 September 2013	Review project progress and data. Using recordings/documentation from walks - undertake preliminary sense making to prepare for workshop 2. Plan for workshop 2. Invite stakeholders.
Workshop 2 October 2013	Project team and Co-researchers are joined by other stakeholders to view and reflect on documented walks; tell stories, make sense of the data, identify learning and lessons for practice, planning and policy making and future collaborations, as well as to consider how to take this study further, if appropriate.
Writing up & dissemination - Feb 2014	SP/DH/plus consultants. Case study developed; documentation/data added to <i>Know Your Place</i> and community owned resources; further options for disseminating web-based resources explored; Toolkit written up; Journal paper(s). Contributions to TRN and WAN. (See also <i>Pathways to Impact</i>). Reports for AHRC

The project will use walking as a method, recognising the connection between walking, the environment and embodied experience/understanding. The project design acknowledges the differences and existing disconnects between the two communities (Disabled people and environmental activists), and supports a generative, open form of collaboration between walking participants, collaborative authorship, where the walking is a mutually devised performance, in an attempt to both recognise the value of difference and to question hierarchies of power by the removal of a single director or author figure from the process to encourage and equally value contributions from all. Walking has been chosen as a way to perform identity and support collaborative conversation and coproduction of knowledge between participants. The project uses walking as a means for 'building relations rather than escaping them' (Heddon and Turner, 2012:234). The project will explore how walks can be structured to bring forth different ways and types of being together/in company - how close can a disabled and a non disabled person get to stepping in each others' footsteps? How can this be enabled through structuring walks? In using

Case for Support

walking to develop dialogues we explore how can the difference be kept, and the empathy exchanged. Utilising participatory, mobile methodologies walking provides the conditions for acknowledging and exchanging embodied and sensory knowledge – ‘the corporeal body as an affective vehicle’ (Shelley and Urry, 2006: 216).

Socially engaged ‘arts-based’ methods employ a range of multi-sensory media to prompt engagement and cross-disciplinary dialogue, strategies proven to be complementary with interactive community participation (Cole & Knowles 2007), as adopted in AHRC Beyond Text and Connected Communities studies. Recognised arts-based methods will be used to encourage participants to explore, record and reflect on new ways of understanding the value of embodied knowledge. Examples from a variety of other projects will be viewed in workshop 1 to encourage all partners to explore their own experience in new ways, eg: traditional maps and drawn memory maps. Working in tandem with narrative approaches, we will use these methods to engage diverse audiences and deliver outcomes that reveal previously unimagined connections as well as supporting suspected links. On the walks, digital media (cameras, sound recorders) will be used by co-researchers. The creative Toolkit used will be accessible and a supportive atmosphere fostered.

Basic storytelling approaches will be shared with co-researchers, and walkers and workshop participants supported to communicate life events and experiences. The use of narrative methods will enable communication across differences (e.g. impairment) within the co-researching group. Narrative approaches will be employed in workshops and the walks, to surface the meanings attached to social practices of ‘wisdom’ and/or sustainability and the significance and value of the everyday, including collective biography (Davies and Gannon, 2006), which supports participants to focus on the similarities between their individual lived experiences, and personal/group narratives presented as digital stories, linking story telling with the visual and 3D documentation of the walks and discussion.

Elizabeth Shove’s (2003) “Three elements” framework will be utilised to understand and communicate everyday social practices of sustainability. For Shove, practices are made, sustained and reproduced through processes of making and breaking links between elements. These elements can be categorised as: *Materials* – including things, technologies, infrastructure, the body itself; *Competences* – encompassing skills, know-how, technique, understanding, routines, learnt patterns and frameworks; *Meanings* – including symbolic meanings, images, ideas, aspirations and expectations. These three elements are not independent of each other, there will be interactions. Practices can be seen as emergent properties arising from the interactions of these elements, which are already in circulation in everyday life, and appear within other social practices. They become normal through a gradual alignment of the three elements, resulting in new sets of social expectations or conventions.

5. Collaboration and engagement

Academic partners: University of Bristol (Disability studies, narrative methods, Cabot Institute), University of Glasgow (Contemporary Performance Practices, including: site-based performance; devising and collaborative forms of creation; environmentalism and performance, and walking practices), and University of West of England (Community media, socially engaged arts practice).

Community partners: The proposed project will build partnerships with WECIL, Transition Bristol, Permaculture and sustainability practitioners. **Research collaborators:** The AHRC funded Transition Research Network (TRN) and Walking Artists Network - engaged in community of inquiry via Wordpress site and blog. **Knowledge exchange partners:** Bristol City Council (who have stated their interest and offered Know Your Place as outlet), the Environment Agency (who have stated their interest) and other policy makers. **Co-researchers:** WECIL Peer Support Group, Transition Bristol, Permaculture practitioners, members of other environmental/sustainability groups. **Workshops** will include stakeholders including the City Council, the Environment Agency and other policy and planning agencies.

6. Management and co-ordination

PI. Dr Sue Porter (SP) - day to day management of project, responsible for narrative aspects; Col. Prof. Deirdre Heddon (DP) - responsible for walking and performance aspects; Dr Suze Adams (SA) - responsible for arts based approach, Toolkit; Dr Shawn Sobers (SB) - responsible for social and community media development; Alison Parfitt (AP) - sustainability consultant and facilitator.

Both Sue Porter (PI) and Alison Parfitt (partner and consultant) attended the AHRC workshop.

7. Outcomes, outputs and dissemination plans (see also Pathways to Impact)

Because of the coproduced nature of the research project it is not possible to be categorical about outputs and outcomes, but the following are indicative of what we expect to be produced.

Outcomes:

- Increased awareness and skills for transition to a sustainable society - *research participants, environmental organisations, Disabled people and organisations*
- Opportunities for Disability and Sustainability/Environmental activists and organisations to develop dialogue and ongoing relationships based on greater understanding of each other's knowledges - *participating organisations, similar organisations elsewhere*
- Partnerships: *academic;community/academia;community/environmentalists;community/agencies*
- Better informed policy and planning - *particularly emergency and environmental planning*
- Disabled community becomes visible in City Council archives and planning resources - *all*
- Develop more socially engaged photography, journalism and social science students-*universities*
- New, emerging knowledge about Disability and environment/walking experiences - *researchers.*

Outputs and Dissemination plans:

Dissemination of audio recordings, photographs, drawn images via a dedicated Wordpress site accessible to all involved in the project, co-researchers and partners are able to up-load their images/recordings and add commentary. Shared ownership of the data/imagery is vital to the ethos of the project. Blog will be connected to social media feeds, and will act as a repository and record of the project, also as a hub for exchange and further exploration by those involved in the project and those visiting the site. This will also help us reach and connect with other communities exploring similar themes/shared interests. e.g. TTs, TRN, Walking Artists Network.

- Case study report for AHRC: exploring what Disabled people can contribute to the sustainability debate; testing methodology's ability to build dialogue and access embodied practices.
- Sense making and dissemination workshop
- Build an on-line community of inquiry through Wordpress site, blog and twitter feed
- Materials to be shared with websites of key organisations, e.g. Transition Towns website
- Toolkit of participatory arts-based methods for community engagement
- Circulate via Disability Rights UK and other Disability community websites and discussion groups
- Engage with the City Council to explore adding material to 'Know Your Place' website - in this way it influences local planners as well as being available to the general public and community groups. Helps City Council to 'map' the issues and contributions of the Disabled community and add their story to the Bristol archive, from which it is currently absent.
- Walks and other material uploaded onto History Pin website and Cowbird website
- Co-authored Journal paper(s)
- Funding proposal for further study.

Abbott, D and **Porter, S.** (Forthcoming) Environmental Hazard & Disabled People: From Vulnerable to Expert to Interconnected. *Disability and Society* Special Issue.

Davies, B. and Gannon, S. (2006) Doing Collective Biography. Milton Keynes: OUP.

Dobson A. 2006. Ecological citizenship: a defence. *Environmental Politics*, vol. 15(3), 447-451.

Heddon, D., and Turner, C. 2012. Walking women. *Contemporary Theatre Review* .

Ingold T. & Vergunst, J. 2008 *Ways of Walking: Ethnography & Practice on Foot*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Keating, K and **Porter, S.** Envisioning and Accessing New Landscapes. Paper given to the Affective Landscapes Conference. University of Derby. 26th May 2012.

Knowles J & Cole A . 2007. *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*. London: Sage

Leipoldt, E.A. 2006. Disability experience: a contribution from the margins towards a sustainable future. *Journal of Futures Studies* 10, no.3: 15-32.

Shelley, M. & J. Urry (Eds.) 2006. *Mobile Technologies of the City*, London: Routledge

Shove, E. (2003) *Comfort, cleanliness and convenience: the social organization of normality*. Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers.