

# Chapter 10

## Collaborations Between Academics, Artists and Activists: Transforming Public Understandings and Representations of Migration Issues



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### 10.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on collaborations between academics, artists and activists to explore the complexity of issues of migration when seeking to engage with diverse audiences. Universities and funders increasingly urge researchers to generate ‘impact’ with their work. Yet, often such official notions of impact can be instrumental and reduce any idea of societal change to the arena of policy change, narrowly conceived as governmental policy only. Such limiting ideas of what constitutes impact are often driven by governmental policy agendas, rather than by the needs, insights and wishes of the people affected.

In contrast, the collaborations discussed in this chapter are embedded in a different ethical framework drawing on participatory action research values. While, in recent years, migration has been a constant topic of public debate, the terms of this debate often ignore the voices and viewpoints of migrants themselves. As much as researchers may wish to bring these voices and viewpoints into public debates, it can be challenging to overcome the simplifications and entrenched polarisations of public debates on migration. One avenue that I have found fruitful in bringing research findings not only to academic but also to wider public debates was to undertake these efforts in collaboration with artists and activists. As I argue in this chapter, such collaborations can help to side-step dominant discourses that draw strict boundaries between “society” and “migrants” and can enable dialogic exchanges.

The chapter begins by exploring the ethos and values of participatory action research approaches, to draw out what migration researchers can learn about engaging with research participants as well as artists, activists and non-academic

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audiences. It argues that the currently dominant public debates on migration provide problematic, often polarised representations and understandings of migration issues. Intervening in these public understandings of migration can usefully be seen as a form of socially transformative action in which migration researchers should engage together with research participants and other stakeholders. The chapter then argues that arts-based methods offer the possibility to constitute a transformative sphere for understanding issues around migration outside of established polarised discourses. It argues that these arts-based approaches are useful both for generating research and for public engagement around it. The chapter then discusses a public engagement project and presents concrete examples and reflections on how alternative spaces and formats can allow more nuanced and complex engagements with the public.

## 10.2 Participatory Action Research Ethos and Values

While there are many different reasons to engage with diverse publics on issues of migration research, my own trajectory is informed by participatory action research approaches, which I outline in this section. Participatory action research or PAR has a commitment to research which is not simply about academic debate but which also aims to engage with the people whose lives the research project addresses. PAR does not simply view research participants as providing raw data – which can then be transformed into knowledge by researchers – but, instead, values research participants’ knowledge and aims to actively involve them in the process of co-constructing knowledge. PAR emphasises that researchers and participants both create knowledge together, focusing on creating knowledge that makes a positive difference to the lives of the people with whom it works. The three terms “participatory”, “action” and “research” are all valued as important elements. This chapter focuses on how migration researchers can engage with arts and activism to enable more nuanced and productive public engagement on issues of migration.

PAR aims to create a more equal relationship between researchers and participants and often works closely with stakeholders outside academia. PAR

requires researchers to work with practitioners. Unlike conventional social science, its purpose is not primarily or solely to understand social arrangements, but also to effect desired change as a path to generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders. (Bradbury-Huang, 2010, p. 93)

This collaborative element is a value in itself but, also importantly, it can ensure that research leads to action for social transformation. While PAR researchers acknowledge that these aims cannot always be fully met, a commitment to the key values that underpin PAR research is an orientation that is likely to lead to more equitable relationships between researchers, practitioners and people involved in the process, as well as ensuring that research outcomes can encourage action and provide tools for social transformation. O’Neill and Harindranath (2006, p. 46) define the following as core values of PAR:

PAR is rooted in principles of inclusion (engaging people in the research design, process and outcomes); participation; valuing all local voices; and community driven sustainable outcomes. PAR is a process and a practice directed towards social change with the participants; it is interventionist, action-oriented and interpretive. It involves a commitment to research that develops partnership responses to developing purposeful knowledge (praxis); includes all those involved where possible, thus facilitating shared ownership of the development and outcomes of the research; uses innovative ways of consulting and working with people and facilitates change with communities and groups.

Both Bradbury-Huang (2010) and O'Neill and Harindranath (2006) emphasise the active role of practitioners as well as communities involved in the research process. As this chapter looks particularly at the ways in which researchers engage with the wider public on issues of migration, my focus is specifically on action to transform the representations of migrants and migration issues, as well as the transformation of public understandings and debates on migration.

Some of the key principles of PAR are particularly relevant for research and engagement on migration. An important aspect of PAR approaches is the way in which the relationship between researchers and participants is conceptualised. Conventional research often sees the researchers' role as accessing, systematising and interpreting data. This view presumes a clear division between the research participant – who can contribute data – and the work of turning these raw data into knowledge itself, which is done by the researcher. PAR challenges this idea of the researcher as expert in collecting and making sense of data and, instead, sees research participants, practitioners and institutions as partners in creating knowledge. PAR challenges the hierarchy between researcher and research participants, aiming for a more “symmetrical” relationship between the two (Borda, 1999). PAR sees the inclusion of participants' knowledge as an important way of improving researchers' understanding of the issue under study; however, alongside the idea of improving knowledge, PAR also acknowledges participation itself as an important value. For PAR it is important to assess the quality of participation and of collaboration between researchers and participants. In particular for migration research, often initiated by policy requirements, rather than migrants' own needs, the importance of engaging migrants as experts on their own experiences is increasingly being voiced (e.g. Flynn, 2020). PAR also has a commitment to producing knowledge that supports socially transformative action. While conventional social research often relies on a somewhat strict distinction between the researcher's knowledge and capability for social scientific thinking on the one hand and the research participants' knowledge on the other, which is seen as mainly used for practice and action and not so much for reflection and analysis. PAR, instead, insists that knowledge and action are closely interrelated. PAR researchers see their participants as already having relevant knowledge and aim to co-produce more knowledge together with their participants. This means valuing the experiences, views and practices of migrants and considering how this knowledge is useful for social action. Social action and knowledge are not strictly delimited from each other and together can construct new knowledge which values migrants' experiences and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of migration as a form of social action. In this

sense, then, the PAR research ethos is one that puts as much emphasis on action for social change as it does on knowledge. This is particularly relevant when thinking about the audiences with whom researchers engage. Bradbury-Huang (2010) notes that PAR researchers have at least two main audiences: firstly, one composed of participants and practitioners, which tends to be interested in practical outcomes and social change. Multi-media outputs are often best suited to engaging this audience via websites, short video clips or visually engaging reports and toolkits. The second audience that PAR researchers address are fellow academics, who might be interested in the theoretical, methodological and other findings of the research, addressed in academic writing such as books and journal articles.

The PAR approaches from which I am taking inspiration follow in the footsteps of the liberatory PAR developed in the Global South, such as Paulo Freire's notions of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1996), in which he emphasises the importance of involving students in both posing the questions and in finding solutions for a pedagogy which moves away from a hierarchical system whereby teachers simply transmit knowledge to their students. Orlando Fals Borda (1999) underlines that PAR ethics seek to develop a relationship based on a "symmetric reciprocity" between them. This is based on the understanding that both are "real 'thinking, feeling persons' (*sentipensantes*), whose views on the research experience could jointly be taken into account" (1999, p. 13). If we understand researchers and participants as 'thinking, feeling persons', this has consequences for the ways in which PAR researchers can communicate knowledge in a format that does not produce or reproduce hierarchies among academics and research participants. This is because academic texts and conference formats are often deeply imbued with power relations and institutional practices that militate against such an ethos of symmetric reciprocity and, instead, aim to create and reproduce academic hierarchies (Bell & Pahl, 2018). Borda (1999, p. 15) terms this a "*systematic restitution*" or "*devolution*" to develop creative and diverse ways of communicating research findings to make them "understandable to the people who had produced the data". This is an acknowledgement of the key role that research participants play in producing data and creating knowledge; it reflects a commitment to making these findings accessible and usable. Borda found that creative and artistic expressions alongside what he termed "'hardcore" data', are a fruitful way of sharing this knowledge. The next section looks at how artistic and creative expressions can contribute to our understanding of the complexities of migration issues and debates.

### **10.3 Arts-Based Methods for a More Nuanced Understanding of Migration**

Migration is an issue with high visibility in public debates. While the weight it is given in public opinion as a major political issue fluctuates, it has been a key issue of public concern and debate in the UK in recent decades. Public debates on

migration tend to be highly polarised (Broadhead, 2018), with opinions either supportive of migration, often viewing migration as enriching society economically, culturally and socially or viewing migration as a social burden. Yet researchers have also identified that there is an “anxious middle” element whose views are not fixed and whose opinions may waiver. One way in which migration researchers can engage with non-academic audiences is by challenging public debates on migration and changing the narrative on migration (for a discussion of changing narratives of inclusion see Broadhead, 2018, 2020).

Drawing on the PAR ethos and values outlined in the previous section, an important aspect of changing public narratives of migration is to challenge the ways in which much of this debate is *about* migrants. Migrants are often cast as the topic, rather than as active participants in the debate. This reinforces the idea that migrants are outsiders to society and need to prove their value, based on the assumption that their presence can be tolerated or accepted, conditional on proving their deservingness (Erel, 2016). Instead, a productive conversation on migration may start from the point of view that migrants’ experiences and views are critically important. It also needs to start from an understanding that boundaries between migrants and citizens can shift and are permeable, rather than reproducing and reifying such boundaries. Yet this is not the only challenge for a more-nuanced conversation on migration. It is also important to avoid staging such conversations as spectacles of migrants’ suffering (De Genova, 2013), while reinstating those cast as citizens as potentially policing the borders and boundaries of acceptable belonging (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019).

As Martiniello (2015) points out, the arts can be an important aspect for forming collective identities and can play a role in social and political mobilisation on issues of migration. Yet we need more evidence and research on the possibilities of the arts as part of such a socio-political mobilisation (see the chapters in the first and second part of this book). Jeffery et al. (2019) argue that arts-based research – in particular, participatory arts-based research – has the potential to address some of these challenges. These methods offer a more agentic role for migrants to shape research, debates and conversations, while also providing an opportunity for engaging with these complex issues beyond language, through “aesthetic, emotional, sensory and tacit experiences that cannot easily be expressed in words” (Jeffery et al., 2019, p. 5). Arts-based methods can also provide an opportunity for migrants to meet with others, make connections and “make themselves ‘present’ in urban landscapes, and challenge the instrumental terms that categorize” (2019, p. 5) migrants and refugees as social burdens or victims. These arts-based methods should not necessarily be seen as in opposition with other methods but can be fruitfully combined; indeed, co-production between artists and researchers can be critical to constructing new narratives on migration, which have a “transformative potential, challenging the separation of and hierarchical relationships between migrants and citizens” (2019, p. 8). Indeed, participatory arts-based research can be an opportunity for researchers and participants to try out new forms of social action which challenge racist exclusions and the subjugation of migrants (Erel et al., 2017). Collaboration between researchers, participants, artists and activists thus has the potential to open up a

space where other ways of being together can be imagined and rehearsed in the relative safety of the arts and research workshop spaces. Nunn argues that these spaces can be exceptional “in providing space and support for people to make their own claims of belonging (or non-belonging), and to amplify them through artistic presentation” (2020, p. 262). Indeed, artistic representations have a powerful role to play in reaching non-academic audiences and encouraging affective engagement – and which may be able to sidestep the polarised, well-rehearsed narratives of migration (Erel et al., 2022a; Nunn, 2020; O’Neill, 2010). Participatory arts-based research and engagement projects can thus provide “exceptional spheres of transformative belonging”, where conventional social rules and power relations are placed on hold to allow those involved (researchers, participants, artists and activists) to reflect, explore and learn together. This space provides opportunities to “develop networks, competencies, ideas and experiences” (Nunn, 2020, p. 255). that can sow seeds for transformative social action within the workshop spaces and beyond.

#### **10.4 Exceptional Spheres of Engagement: Arts-Activist-Academic Conversations on Migration**

One example of collaboration between the arts, academia and activism is the project “Migration Making Places, Making People”, which aimed to look at the ways in which migrants contribute to creating a sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, community, city and beyond. It also looked at how migration creates new forms of community, especially through the example of migrant mothers creating a sense of belonging across ethnic boundaries, for both themselves and their children. The project aimed to explore how collaboration with artists, arts institutions, activists and the voluntary sector can help to engage with diverse audiences beyond academia and to reflect on issues of migration. Such a task – reflecting on the issues raised by migration in a nuanced way that acknowledges the complex political, social, ethical and cultural issues raised by migration – has been made more challenging by longstanding negative representations of issues of migration in the media and wider public debates. These latter have often contributed to a polarisation of views around migration by portraying it either as enriching or as causing social problems. Such polarised discourses are problematic in many ways. One of the problematic aspects is that they tend to reproduce a clear division and distinction between migrants and citizens, taking an instrumentalist view of migration so that migrants are expected to be useful to the societies to which they move. One problem with this view is that it imagines a society that is not already constituted by migrations. Another problematic aspect is that it reinforces bordering practices between migrants and citizens.

This project sought to break down these boundaries, exploring how places and communities are co-constructed in processes and through histories of migration.

The project was a collaboration between the Open University and Oxford University and was led by Jacqui Broadhead, Giles Mohan and myself. The aim of the project was to explore, through arts-based methods, how we might challenge dominant narratives on migration and engage in more-nuanced debates with a wider, non-academic public. While migration research is strong in producing reflexive accounts of the complexities of migration, these accounts are not always successfully translated into public debates on migration. We collaborated with the Migration Museum, a project that organised exhibitions around topics of migration, to explore “how the movement of people to and from Britain across the ages has shaped who we are – as individuals, as communities and as a nation” and aiming to build a visitor attraction that “shines a light on who we are, where we come from and where we are going” (Migration Museum, 2020). At the time of the project, 2018–2019, the Migration Museum was located in an old firestation in south London where it welcomed visitors, many of them walk-ins attracted by the current exhibition; sometimes visitors came to attend a particular event (such as a talk, film screening, etc.) and sometimes as part of group events such as symposia, workshops or educational workshops for school and college students.

We also collaborated with Counterpoints Arts, an organisation that works with migrant artists and with artists whose work is about issues of migration. The organisation is particularly committed to participatory arts and sees them as part of a wider project of social transformation, promoting the work of artists with a lived experience of migration. Yet they emphasise that migrants.

do not only have “heart-breaking” tales to tell. With this in mind we support the development and performance of a spectrum of comic, parodic, surreal and moving stories about the migration process, reflecting the full complexities of modern life. (Counterpoints Arts, 2021)

Collaborations beyond academia are often time- and labour-intensive and, in this case, required us to work across the boundaries between the arts sector, community groups and activists. Each of these groups and sectors has its own language, approaches to work, different time lines and different ways of conceptualising a positive or successful outcome; each works towards different measures set by funders or other institutions. This is challenging, as much of what we take for granted in one sector may be very different in other settings. As academics, for example, we found that our timelines for planning, publicising events and finally producing the website or other outputs were often much slower than our partners in other sectors were used to. Another tension that can arise is when these differences in the tempo of work also coincide with different working conditions. Collaboration between academics and artists is often characterised by an asymmetry in power due to the fact that artists’ working conditions are often extremely precarious. Even though academic working conditions – in particular, for those on temporary and insecure contracts – are increasingly becoming more insecure themselves, such asymmetry can make collaboration more challenging. Pfoser and de Jong (2020), for example, point out that artists may feel instrumentalised when their time is not properly accounted and paid for and that such collaboration can end up being

exploitative rather than transformative. Recognising and naming such asymmetries is important in order to avoid idealising and romanticising participatory and collaborative work. Likewise, it is also important to recognise that collaborators can have different political positions and views. In this project, such differences were expected and our dialogic framing of the events and activities was one way in which we made such differences productive, rather than obstructive.

Working closely with both organisations, the academic team devised a programme of events consisting of a symposium with local government representatives, think-tanks and NGOs in order to discuss how to shape local and national narratives of migration at the Migration Museum. We also held several “pop-up prof” sessions (further details in Sect. 10.5.2) during the exhibition at the Migration Museum Project. This was complemented by a number of activities curated with Counterpoints Arts, which took place during a week-long series of multi-platform events named the “Who Are We? Project” at the Tate Exchange, the participatory arm of the Tate Modern Gallery in London. These events consisted of a workshop with researchers, artists, research participants/co-researchers about the meaning of participation across the arts and academia. This event built on a participatory arts-based research project for which the team had explored the uses of participatory theatre and walking methods for social research (Erel et al., 2022a), the researchers and the research participants worked together to introduce Gallery visitors to some theatre exercises and, together, they worked on constructing theatrical images of issues such as exclusion, community and family. The workshop then moved on to a reflection on these exercises and a Q&A session with a theatre maker about the uses and challenges of participatory theatre. This was complemented by a symposium with artists, academics and activists about the hostile environment against migrants. We documented these activities through film. However, rather than filming the full range of activities, we decided to conduct brief dialogues with participants of these activities which were then used for a multimedia learning resource, hosted on the Open University’s open access platform Openlearn (Erel & Broadhead, 2018). I reflect on some aspects of these activities in more detail in the next section.

## 10.5 Engaging with the Public Beyond Academia

In this section I reflect on some key aspects of public engagement which I found made a particular difference to the quality of engagement. While public engagement is often a requirement of contemporary research, it is important to question the established formats of academic dissemination that are reproduced in public engagement beyond academia. Often, academics take for granted the formats of seminars or public lectures for which academic training has prepared us. Yet these formats can be alienating and may also work to establish and reinforce boundaries between academics as experts and others such as artists or activists – seeing them as merely contributing to academic efforts in order to more widely disseminate the knowledge that they have produced. Furthermore, these formats may not be welcoming for a



non-academic public, in particular for community groups or those who are marginalised, as their social and cultural capital are devalued and their knowledge often discounted (Bell & Pahl, 2018). While academics might be committed to sharing knowledge and open to reflection, the formats we use to share this knowledge can shape a hierarchical setting in which academics are re-instated as experts while others' knowledges are not given the space to unfold and dialogically engage. Institutional spaces such as universities are shaped by the histories and current power relations in which they can operate and reproduce them. As Ahmed (2007) has pointed out, such spaces are constructed as white and only extend the offer of participation as subjects of knowledge to people of colour and to migrants on an exceptional or conditional basis.

### 10.5.1 Spaces

“Infrastructural issues” (Bell & Pahl, 2018, p. 7), such as the spaces, places, times and resources in which we share our research findings, are important in ensuring that academic research does justice to the idea of sharing knowledge widely, including with the migrant communities and others who have an interest in it. Yet, such issues often do not receive the attention they deserve, even though they are key in making research processes and engagement accessible (2018). Our collaboration with the Migration Museum and Counterpoint Arts used the arts spaces in and with which they worked for the engagement activities. This was a conscious choice, as university spaces are often not seen as accessible or welcoming by marginalised communities. Choosing to hold our events at the Migration Museum and the Tate Exchange signalled our commitment to bringing the research findings into dialogue with others.

Bell and Pahl (2018, p. 7) emphasise that “accessible and comfortable space” is key to encouraging open collaboration. We found that these arts spaces attracted different audiences to the events than those we used to see at events in university spaces, including school groups or young people. Likewise, the institutions, such as Tate Exchange, where some of the events were held, also reported that our events produced a more ethnically and age-diverse audience (Wilmott, 2018). Feedback from visitors at events also indicated that these arts spaces were seen as open and encouraging dialogue and conversations about art displays, both within a formal workshop and informally with artists or other visitors. This was an important aspect of the space, which encouraged visitors to linger, to look at displays and to engage with arts objects or in participatory activities. This lingering provided opportunities for making contact with artists but also with other visitors and researchers. At the Tate Exchange project, for example, it was important for us to provide some comfortable seating areas where visitors could just stop and reflect; we provided some reading materials – including academic writings – and invited visitors to rest, reflect and perhaps engage in conversation.

While we found that these arts spaces could be more interesting and provide occasions to linger and enter into conversation, they are, of course, also imbued by power relations and exclusions. As Sara Ahmed characterises about university spaces, these arts spaces have long been – and continue to be – white institutional spaces in which whiteness is invisible and unmarked and becomes the norm against which difference is measured and “others appear as deviants” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 157). Yet whiteness is only invisible for those who conform to its norm or those who have become so used to it that they unthinkingly accept it as the norm in these institutional spaces.

Spaces are orientated “around” whiteness, insofar as whiteness is not seen. [...] The effect of this “around whiteness” is the institutionalization of a certain “likeness”, which makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different, when they take up this space. (Ahmed, 2007, p. 157)

Thus, it is important to acknowledge that not everyone felt equally at ease in entering and claiming space for themselves in these institutionally white spaces. Participants had ambivalent reactions upon entering these spaces to seek engagement and dialogue about issues of migration. At one workshop which we held at Tate Exchange, a black female artist described the concept of institutional whiteness as follows:

When I stepped into the lift, I immediately knew that this event was going to take place on the fifth floor. In the lift there are different images of art work but only the fifth floor has images of people of colour and young people. When you see an image of people of colour and young people, it sends a signal that this is a space of learning. Images of black people are not used to advertise art work. But black people are seen in need of education, so they will always use images of black people to signal the diversity of an educational offer (author’s notes from the event).

What this artist describes is how people of colour are seen as conditionally admissible to such institutionally white spaces. The poignant observation that people of colour are only visible when their image advertises educational or participatory activities, highlights that – even though people of colour and migrants may be invited and given access – their visibility does not reach into all aspects of the institution. Indeed, artists of colour may be delimited in such pockets of educational or community engagement activity, which can make it difficult for artists to build and sustain their careers (DiMaggio & Fernández-Kelly, 2015).

Taking this critique on board is important if we are to recognise the limitations of our collaboration with arts spaces which continue to be imbued by racialised, classed, gendered and other power relations. It shows that engaging with issues of migration through the arts cannot simply compensate for exclusions and power relations within academia but, instead, comes with its own challenging exclusionary practices that need to be addressed.

Yet these arts spaces also generated feelings of recognition for some visitors and artists with whom we worked. One refugee woman who visited the Tate Exchange project shared that she found it empowering to see experiences of the refugee journey, similar to her own, displayed in artwork by refugee artists. For her, it was the

first visit to Tate Modern and she enjoyed spending time in the exhibition space, taking in the artwork. She also felt strongly that the fact that this artwork was exhibited in central London, in a well-regarded, well-established arts institution, was an important recognition that her own experiences as a refugee were valued in and by a central UK cultural institution.

Another example of how participants felt validated by the opportunity to show their skills and their work in an established arts space was a workshop we held with participants, researchers and arts practitioners from the PASAR (Participation Arts and Social Action in Research) project, which explored the uses of participatory theatre and walking methods for social research (Erel et al., 2022b; Reynolds et al., 2017). This workshop explored the meaning of participation across the arts and research (Who Are We?, 2019a). The workshop had two parts. In the first part, we offered a practical introduction to participatory theatre methods. This was conceptualised and led by the research fellow and theatre practitioner, Erene Kaptani. While she introduced the theatre games and exercises, a group of participants in the research project contributed and helped to encourage visitors to participate in these exercises. The second part of the workshop consisted of a reflection about the meaning of participation with the researchers, arts practitioner, participants and artist, theatre director and lecturer Karen Tomlin, as well as visitors to the event. One of the remarkable aspects of this workshop was that research participants acted as co-facilitators of the practical theatre games and exercises. As they had been familiarised with these exercises throughout the research project, they were able to aid visitors in engaging with them. Their feedback on the workshop was that they enjoyed participating and realised how familiar they had become with the practice, to the extent that they were able to co-facilitate.

In a similar vein, an artist and activist from Europe shared with me that she really appreciated the opportunity to be part of the events we organised, especially because they took place in a centrally validated arts space, such as Tate Exchange. When I asked her, she said that this was important for her to be able to take this back to the migrants she worked with in her artistic and activist work, as she felt that this recognition provided an important sense of validation. She also mentioned that she was planning to highlight her participation in the events when applying for funding, as she expected that this would strengthen her case.

So these arts spaces engendered ambivalent responses – on the one hand, the artist who critiqued the arts institution for delimiting artwork by and about migrants and refugees as an educational issue and, on the other, the visitor and artist who appreciated the opportunity to access these spaces in order to gain recognition and validation of their experiences and their work. This ambivalence points to how arts spaces can function as ‘consecrating’ the work of artists – that is, conveying symbolic capital to their work – and, at the same time, excluding those not deemed worthy of this consecration (Bourdieu, 1993). So while these arts spaces may be able to provide more affective, sensual and participatory modes of engagement than, perhaps, academic spaces can, it is important to keep in mind that, despite their participatory intentions, they remain central institutions which can convey symbolic recognition and, in that sense, whether intentionally or not, reproduce the ideas and

positionalities of both insider and outsider. Yet this might be felt the most acutely not so much by academics or visitors but by artists who aspire to find recognition and whose careers depend on their symbolic capital within the field of arts. For those whose careers are not dependent on this recognition, claiming space in such culturally central arts spaces can perhaps be experienced as more unproblematic.

For researchers, taking our work and research findings to an arts, rather than an academic space encouraged a range of dialogic engagements with visitors, including the invitation to linger, reflect and hold conversations. These were encouraged by mixing the forms of engagement, including talks, visual performances and other arts as well as the participatory ethos. The next section explores how these various formats aided engagements with the complexity of issues of migration.

### **10.5.2 *Formats***

In order to engage with the public beyond academia, we developed formats that encourage dialogue and avoid reproducing established hierarchies which instate academic researchers as merely disseminating knowledge. Instead, we looked to develop formats to invite and facilitate genuine dialogue between academics, artists and activists, as well as with visitors to the events. Such a dialogic ethos is inspired by a commitment to building ‘symmetric reciprocity’ where different types of knowledge are valued and all participants in a conversation are recognised as “thinking, feeling persons” (Borda, 1999, p. 13), capable of reflection, analysis and sharing their situated knowledge with each other. This was particularly guided by a commitment to learning together dialogically.

Borda’s (1999, p. 13) notion of symmetric reciprocity echoes a dialogic understanding of how knowledge is produced and shared. Bakhtin’s work (Bakhtin, 2010; Hynes, 2014) on dialogism is particularly helpful here, as it emphasises the interconnections between self and other and argues that meaning is always generated dialogically in relation to an other. Bakhtin’s work draws attention to how speakers’ utterances are always responsive to other speakers, containing the traces of others’ utterances and anticipating the understandings of addressees. In this dialogic manner, it is not only utterances but also the conceptual horizons of speakers which interact, shaping each other. Valuing such a dialogic approach to knowledge is particularly helpful for bringing together the different ways of working, thinking and speaking of academics, artists and activists.

#### ***Pop-up profs***

One successful format that we developed together with the Migration Museum, was the “Pop-up Prof” sessions. These took place during exhibitions that were held at the migration museum. A comfortable seating area was set out, with an academic present, additional seating and a sign reading “Pop-up Prof” and “Discuss any questions you have always wanted to ask around migration”. This invitation was taken

up by visitors to the exhibition, sometimes individually, sometimes in small groups who would approach an academic. Visitors would often start by asking factual questions, which sometimes opened up opportunities for academics to share wider issues, including highlighting the contested nature of much knowledge and data on migration, as well as holding conversations about the parameters of public debate on migration. These Pop-up Prof sessions were characterised by intimate and reflexive conversations, allowing interlocuters to sidestep well-rehearsed narratives on migration. Visitors gave positive feedback on these sessions – perhaps the most significant change in their views was the recognition of the problematic and contested nature of what are often presented as clear-cut facts and figures about migration. These Pop-up Prof sessions, then, were useful in initiating conversations that allowed visitors and the pop-up profs to question how much public discourse has established a limited commonsense understanding of issues of migration. The format of the Pop-up Prof sessions meant that visitors were able to engage in in-depth, small group discussions. This format was conducive to longer and deeper engagements which allowed the questioning and challenging of the very terms of the migration debate. In contrast to Q&A sessions following public talks, which are usually limited to bringing up a single issue and only allow for one short exchange, these conversations were sustained, two-way dialogues, allowing visitors and pop-up profs to explore their understandings, agreements and disagreements and perhaps to open up to challenging views.

### **Academic-Artist-Activist Symposium**

Another format which we developed was a symposium of artists, academics and activists. An example is the symposium on the hostile environment which we held in 2018 (Who Are We?, 2019b). This artist-academic-activist symposium was aimed explicitly at bringing knowledge and experience from all these sectors into dialogue with each other.<sup>1</sup> In each segment of the symposium we invited contributions from artists, academics and activists. We stressed that these contributions should be no more than 10 min long. This was accompanied by a discussion which invited reflections from the audience but which also made explicit links between each contribution.

This programme of conversations was carefully curated together with our partners, Counterpoints Arts, whose networks enabled us to identify and invite artists whose work addressed relevant issues. We also built on researchers' own networks as they had collaborated with artists and activists, sometimes developing longstanding relationships. Here it is also important to acknowledge the impossibility of drawing firm boundaries between academics, artists and activists, as many of the

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<sup>1</sup>Speakers included Gabi Kent (The Open University), Leila Sibai (SOAS), members of the Migration and Asylum Justice Forum, Monish Bhatia (Birkbeck University), Sandhya Sharma (Safety 4 Sisters), Rachel Humphris (IRIS, Birmingham University), Victoria Canning (The Open University), Umut Erel (The Open University), Abi Brunswick (Project 17), Nira Yuval Davis (Centre on Migration, Refugees and Belonging, University of East London), Migrant Artists Mutual Aid (UK), Cihan Arıkan (RFSL, LGBTQ support, Sweden), Marina Vilhelmsson (photographer, "Queering Refugee Resistance", Sweden) and John Speyer (Music in Detention).

speakers occupied more than one of these categories. What worked well in these symposia was a commitment to brief contributions. This was often complemented by discussants actively bringing speakers' work into dialogue with each other. Alongside the symposium, we also encouraged visitors to engage with a visual representation of the hostile environment against migration policies, a trail consisting of several stations, designed by Justin O'Shaughnessy, that explained the effects of these policies on everyday areas of life, such as work, housing and education.

Finally, many of the contributors were interviewed and video-recorded. We edited these brief interviews to highlight themes of the harmful impact of hostile environment policies, activism and resistance against internal borders, together with the possibilities and limits of solidarity. These were used to develop a free online learning resource, containing written and audio-visual material (Erel & Broadhead, 2018). This resource was important in broadening the reach of these engagements beyond the immediate, face-to-face audiences. Between 1 June 2019 and 6 July 2021, the resource was visited by 3516 people; these visitors were international, with the top three countries being the Philippines (29.8%), the UK (28.9%) and the United States (9.5%). This shows that such an event can draw interest and engagement beyond the day-to-day events in one location and country. We have no further in-depth data on how audiences have used these online resources, unfortunately. For future work, it would be interesting and important to design ways in which visitors to the website can leave feedback and interact with the material. In this project we did not have the resources to do so.

These formats were chosen because they build on affective, sensual and intellectual modes of understanding. As such they draw on and validate a range of knowledge that academics, artists, activists and visitors can engage with to challenge existing, often reified, polarised public debates on migration.

These formats, furthermore, encourage dialogic engagements between artists, activists and academics, where no one mode of understanding is prioritised but, instead, the engagements highlight the unfinished and partial nature of all situated knowledge (Collins, 2002). Taken together, these dialogic engagements, alongside the artwork, encourage lingering, reflection and learning together with visitors.

## 10.6 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at how migration researchers can work with artists and activists to share knowledge beyond academic audiences. I argued that the ethos and values of participatory action research are helpful in thinking about how to use research to challenge polarised well-rehearsed public debates on migration which often reify boundaries between migrants and citizens, researchers and research participants and also between researchers and artists or activists. Instead, a PAR ethos can help to think about how migration researchers can collaborate with others – research participants and practitioners – in order to transform public understandings

and representations of migration and helping to generate more complex and nuanced insights and share them with non-academic publics. The chapter argued that arts-based approaches offer one powerful path to doing so. In particular, participatory arts-based approaches view knowledge as co-created between researchers and participants; they offer research participants ways of engaging with complex issues beyond verbal discourse, enabling more reflexive and dialogic approaches to learning together. Drawing on the example of a collaboration with arts organisations, artists and activists in the “Migration Making Places, Making People” project, the chapter discussed the opportunities such approaches offer, as well as the challenges and limitations.

It is always difficult to measure the transformative effects of PAR. While the notion of research impact that is often applied by funders and higher-education institutions implies that research could lead to social change in a linear fashion, it is clear that complex issues such as views and attitudes towards migration are the product of multiple factors – which range from situational to wider political issues. I would argue, however, that what is important to note is not simply whether visitors to the events changed their views but, instead, how the quality of conversations, the length of engagement and the respectful way in which participants exchanged views and came to learn from each other provided a transformatory space. Indeed, I would argue that the idea of measuring impact to some extent runs counter to the ethos of participatory action research. While we might measure the impact of a particular event by asking participants a series of questions before and then again after the event to see whether or how their views have changed, such a research design reinstates the researcher as the source of legitimate knowledge, while positioning the visitors or participants as those whose knowledge needs to be changed and transformed. This tension between the imperatives of universities and funders to measure impact on the one hand and a participatory ethos on the other is a challenge for researchers, which needs to be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Arts-based approaches can offer collaboration with non-academic publics that engage affective, sensual and dialogic forms of knowing and learning. This can be experienced as empowering and generating new forms of skills, knowledge and networks among researchers, participants, artists, activists and visitors. Using a range of formats which break with established conventions of academic presentations can encourage such dialogic forms of generating and sharing knowledge. Yet the chapter also highlighted that these arts-based approaches are not, of course, a panacea and can also come up against the limitations of institutional spaces and practices, which can reproduce exclusions and marginalisations. Nevertheless, academics have much to learn and benefit from exploring opportunities for generating and sharing knowledge on migration through collaborative efforts.

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