

Circular Storytelling: Reimagining Stories as a Means of Doing Community Histories

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(Paper contribution; 20 mins required)

Storytelling, and oral histories more generally, have been widely used as a means of understanding communities and their (often multiple) heritages. However, few conventional projects approach difficult questions about who sets the agenda, who is - and is not - present, and who 'owns' the outputs. As a result, many communities become disenfranchised from their own histories. The Collaborative Stories Spiral (CSS) offers a new 'circular' approach, based on a recursive process of situating, generating, analysing and remediating stories. We conceptualise the CSS as a 'boundary object' (Star 2010), which allows for flexible structures, including models which do not involve (so much) academic mediation. We are particularly interested in the multiple movements and transformations of data and outputs and in what happens once community stories are remediated in a range of forms, e.g. academic report to website and archive and community artwork. In conceptualising our approach we wish to offer a model of research which allows 'interpretative flexibility' about the shared project, and which is open to and recognises the multiple ways in which collaboratively produced stories work and are worked on in the world, and continue to do so beyond the life of funded projects. We will draw on a range of our projects in outlining our methodology and our aim is that it will be transferable, and that others will take it up and find it useful.

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