

# Coproduction and the Participation of Community Organisations with Urban Policymaking: An Action Study of 'Citizen-Led' Research in London

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I, Joanna Sawkins, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own.  
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has  
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## Abstract

This thesis investigates coproduction in the context of the participation of community organisations with urban policy research. It contributes knowledge on feeling and emotion in community-based participatory policy research and engages with calls for inquiry into the causes of failure in citizen participation. The study is grounded in debates about the relationship that urban policymaking has with local knowledge. It uses theories of coproduction to analyse how and why one specific London participation programme (led by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in the period 2018–2020) failed to meaningfully involve community organisations with policymaking. It mobilises the findings of related research to recommend how failure in future London participation programmes could be averted.

This thesis uses an action research methodology and deploys a multi-method approach involving the analysis of documents, fieldnotes and journals. The empirical research describes the relationship a community organisation called You Press developed with the GLA. It shows how the author and staff in both organisations tried to work together to co-design a participatory policy research project. The analysis explains the personal and institutional challenges of working across government and community boundaries. The research findings show how frustrating, exhausting, and demoralising the work of government–community co-design can be. While the research does not overcome these problems, it does give them a grounding, showing how specific areas in the design of the GLA’s participation programme seriously limited the building of relationships between its staff and those in community organisations. The study argues for the value a coproduction ethics based on ideas of care could bring to government–community collaboration, especially in participation situations where feelings of togetherness and connection amongst people are low.

## Impact Statement

### Impact on Policy and Practice

- I became a founding member of the London Community Story Working Group, a core team exploring community engagement at the Greater London Authority (GLA). My membership of this group provided a key avenue through which to share my expertise in participation and coproduction. My work had a direct positive impact on the direction of the group and on the engagement practices of four community engagement officers working at the GLA.
- I designed and led four data analysis workshops for peer researchers working with the GLA.
- I evaluated five information and capacity-building sessions the GLA ran for community organisations that were putting in applications to run participatory and peer research projects via the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme.
- I presented my approach to learning and evaluation to leaders from 11 community organisations and went on to engage in research and evaluation work with five of these community organisations, impacting the work of seven members of staff and volunteers.
- I designed and led four workshops on listening and reflective practice for approximately 40 migrants, refugees and/or minority young people involved with/or interested in participatory research.
- I produced an evaluative policy brief in relation to the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme and presented this in a workshop for nine GLA community engagement and social policy staff. The recommendations in this report informed community engagement practice at the GLA during the pandemic and have influenced the commissioning of further evaluative work.
- I presented insights from this thesis formally at private local government events, on the topic of 'Community Research in a Global Context' and in relation to the question 'What is Peer Research?'. Audiences at these events were made up of 50 people working at the GLA and across London Borough Councils.

- I contributed to a Young Foundation report, 'Positioning Peer Research in a Policy Context'.

#### Other Impact

- *Committees*: the knowledge and expertise contained in this thesis have found an academic audience amongst members of 'Post-Grad Urbanists', a research network for PhD students studying urban topics that I support and co-deliver.
- *Conferences*: versions of chapters three and seven were reviewed by the 'Public Policy Research Network Conference' in 2018. Early drafts of the material in chapters five and six also found an audience at the 'Society for Community Research & Action' Annual Conference in 2021. A poster version of this thesis was shortlisted and presented to colleagues at UCL as part of the 'Doctoral School Competition' in 2023.
- *Teaching*: throughout the PhD I have supported taught courses at UCL and have used material from my study in lectures and seminars. I also created a 'Brilliant Club' broadening participation course, based on my research. I delivered this course, as well as 'National Tutoring Programme' learning, to secondary school pupils throughout 2019, 2020 and 2021.

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## Abbreviations

GLA: Greater London Authority

CE team: Community Engagement team

Citizen-Led: Citizen-Led Engagement Programme

Citizen-Led Pilot: pilot incarnation of the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme

Citizen-Led Two: second incarnation of the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Feeling and Failure in 'Citizen-Led' London Policy Research

This thesis studies the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking. On the one hand, my work answers a call made within the public policy scholarship for research specifically into why governments fail to advance citizen participation (Spada and Ryan, 2017; Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019). On the other, it responds to a need for urban researchers to provide 'situated' accounts of the ways in which the ambitions of urban theory are playing out (Roy and Ong, 2011, p. 3). I argue that London's participatory research programmes are failing to engage community organisations in the design of research and are failing to build the person-to-person relationships necessary to coproduce public policy. This thesis shows how a programme of community-based participatory research brought a group of community organisations *close* to policymaking but did not bring them into the policymaking process. It develops a conceptual framework through which to identify faults with the design of the programme, locating the causes of this participation failure in the programme's neglect of relationship building between individual people within community organisations and within the London government.

The research in this thesis expands current assessments of failure within studies of public participation (Gaynor, 2011; Alves and Allegretti, 2012; Kamenova and Goodman, 2015; Hughes, 2016). An avoidance of 'contestation', and an inability to work in a range of 'communicative modes', are commonly presented as culprit indicators of failure within participatory processes (Gaynor, 2011, p. 513). Similarly, when differences between people are 'downplay[ed]' in favour of 'unity' within participatory processes, further assessments of failure can be made (Hughes, 2016, p. 19). Even accomplished public participation processes can be marked by 'fragility and volatility', their success lasting only a short time and their practice vulnerable to change. Scholars show how instances of abandoning and downgrading are key indicators of failing participation, with many ambitious participation projects 'abandoned' part way through, or 'downgraded' in practice, leaving people to participate only in a 'shrinking' number of 'thematic' areas within policy (Alves and Allegretti, 2012, pp. 1–2). This thesis observes failure in line with these indicators and adds

more, arguing for mediation in the face of contestation, shared learning in the face of difference, and care ethics in the face of precarity. It provides an reflective account of the challenges facing public participation in London policy research and demonstrates the importance of studying human relationships in failing public participation processes.

The central argument in this thesis is made from the perspective of coproduction. The research approaches the concept of coproduction from an understudied angle. Research in the feminist tradition encourages inquiry at the level of the personal (Cahill, 2007; Askins, 2018). Some of the latest research has advanced theories of coproduction by studying the feelings and emotions people experience within participatory research (Brown *et al.*, 2020; Duggan, 2021; Ortiz, 2022). Established experts in coproducing knowledge emphasise the importance of reflexivity to research involving academic, government and community partners (Durose, Perry and Richardson, 2021; Perry, 2022). The research in this thesis contributes to these advancements in scholarship. I provide an investigation into the feelings and emotions people experience when engaged with government participation programmes. I propose that many participation projects fail because they do not pay adequate attention to how specific decisions make people feel. For example, in Chapter Five, I chart how decisions made around the targeting of participatory research programmes produced feelings of anger and distrust amongst people working in community organisations in London.

This thesis stresses the importance of feelings in the practice of citizen participation. I argue that participatory research training programmes could provide a site in which to nurture feelings of empathy and connection between community and government workers involved with co-design processes. For example, in Chapter Six, I show how paying inadequate attention to building trusting relationships in participation projects, generates feelings of lethargy and disengagement within community organisations tasked to work coproductively with the London government. More broadly, I argue that as well as adequately representing the feelings their projects provoke, stories of participation should account for the emotional labour upon which projects rely: the production in the coproduction. I provide an honest account of my own labour and the

experiences I had while completing this research. For example, in Chapter Seven, I reflect on my own labour and the feelings and emotions I experienced while attempting to action research coproduction.

In addition to making an important contribution to the study of coproduction, this thesis provides insight that could be used to write a new chapter within the history of public participation in the city of London. I study community participation with policymaking at the Greater London Authority (henceforth GLA). I do so while the GLA was under the leadership of Sadiq Khan, Labour Party politician and mayor of London from 2016. London scholars recount how many Labour-led London governments have been empathetic to the ambition and potential of public participation. But the strategies previous leaders have used to engage people have been described as achieving a 'performance of democracy', but not the real thing (Hatherley, 2020a, p. 97). Former London administrations have been criticised for the way they have sought to engage with London's minority communities, with particular criticism focusing on race and the successive failure to secure the 'active' participation of Black people in London (Gilroy, 1987, p. 150). It has been described how at the Greater London Council (GLC), a forerunner to the GLA, 'greater deliberation seemed to widen differences' between the government and community organisations, producing a culture wherein both parties felt 'shouted at' and unsatisfied (Mulgan, 2007, pp. 246–247). However, studies into the participatory approaches the GLA have been pursuing since Labour returned to power in London are few. I analyse the state of minority participation in an un-studied Khan-era participation programme, the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme (henceforth Citizen-Led). Citizen-Led sought to 'support Londoners[']' participation in democracy and decision making' (GLA, 2018a, p. 43). It aimed to 'improve the mayor's connections with communities that have historically had less of a voice' and to 'identify and develop leaders' in these specific communities 'to engage further with City Hall' (GLA, 2018a, p. 45).

This thesis tells a difficult story of multiple failures relating to the ways in which Citizen-Led enabled community organisations to participate with GLA policymaking. However, though Citizen-Led failed from the perspective of this thesis, its strategy for securing ethnic minority participation does represent a

departure from the old ways and could be considered a success if analysed using alternative criteria. Indeed, there are things that happened over the course of the programme that could be held as successful. Citizen-Led did support a handful of people to develop their capabilities. For example, a group of citizens was trained and supported to produce and communicate knowledge on their lived experience and that of their peers (as detailed in Chapter Four). And staff working in community organisations gained experience in trying to work with government and trying to use research to affect policymaking (Chapters Five and Six). The programme certainly helped me to develop my capabilities (Chapter Seven). However, there are important reasons why Citizen-Led is deemed a failed case by this thesis. For example, Chapter Four details the specific aims the GLA had for Citizen-Led. These are largely concerned with the value it provides as a programme through which the public can be involved with GLA policymaking and service design. Citizen-Led did not achieve these aims. Chapters Five and Six show how. Further, Citizen-Led cannot be considered a successful participatory policy research programme when analysed through the lens of coproduction.

Scholars studying the features of failed participation deem their cases failures from the perspective of the participative and deliberative theories developed within public policy and political science scholarship (for example: Gaynor, 2011; Kamenova and Goodman, 2015). They compare what theory calls for, with what they observe in their cases. For these scholars, theory provides a framework through which to assess the involvement of civic associations with the state. When deeming what they see as a failed case, they justify their decision as important work which resists 'narrowing' the concept of participation. They show, for example, how their case offers something more akin to traditional bargaining and negotiation processes (Gaynor, 2011, pp. 499 – 500). Cases can be deemed to be 'problematic' in 'design' when they do not impact upon policy decisions (Ravazzi and Pomatto, 2014, p. 2). And as 'imperfect' when government partners get to 'define and delineate the public(s)' that the projects targets (Smith, 2013, p. 462). Chapters Five and Six of this thesis show how Citizen-Led was problematic in design, and how the government partner delineated which publics could participate.



The existing scholarship has deemed public participation processes to be explicitly 'failing' when there is discord between what citizens propose and what political leaders and their administrations decide to do. The most in-depth studies of failed cases of deliberation draw attention to the need to educate elected officials as to the value of citizen participation and call for the formal 'institutionalization of deliberative forums and their decisions' (Kamenova and Goodman, 2015, p. 22). This thesis analyses the discord present in the relationship between community organisations and the GLA during Citizen-Led, revealing how this discord prevented staff at the GLA from hearing what citizens were proposing. I too call for capacity building amongst government partners involved with participation processes, showing how embedding joint learning experiences within the Citizen-Led training programme could support the development of trusting relationships between people working on either side of government–community boundaries.

This thesis has been produced within the disciplinary context of urban policy and is guided by specific research questions. In the rest of this chapter, I further introduce the thesis, firstly explaining the urban problem space from which its topical focus emerged. Then, I introduce the specific research questions this thesis has and provide a thesis summary. The summary outlines how the chapters are arranged and provides a guide as to how the main claims and contributions of this thesis have been made.

## 1.2 Problems of Participation and Democracy in the Urban Age

Policy and development scholars have found evidence that greater public participation in developing policy inputs will produce socially inclusive outputs (Ellison, 1999); that greater societal participation in the core of state activities improves government accountability (Ackerman, 2004); and that good citizen participation can lead to innovative problem-solving (Fung, 2004). Powerful public institutions can increase their accountability and produce greater public value if they are better able to bring community knowledges and public perspectives in (Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2015). But studies have shown that there are no quick wins when it comes to meaningful participation. Though it is easy

to 'rehearse' the promises that greater public participation in decision-making bring, it is difficult to avoid replaying the 'sorry sagas of misunderstandings, disagreements, misplaced idealism, and failed processes' that beset many a participatory governance project (Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019, p. 123). Though theories of coproduction developed in reaction to inequalities of knowledge and power, and strive to work against dominant configurations, coproductive approaches to knowledge production can attend to, and deepen, inequality (Bell and Pahl, 2018). Further, the United Nations have highlighted 'global governance and urban democracy' as emerging challenges facing cities (UN-Habitat *et al.*, 2018, p. 1). Addressing the serious problem that a great number of people do not trust political leaders, and do not believe their governments reflect their will, is a key task of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Mulgan, 2007, p. 6).

This thesis responds to the 'democracy deficit' (Gaventa, 2006; Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008), to problems with research (Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2015), and to challenges with urban research (Hemström *et al.*, 2021; Simon, Palmer and Riise, 2020). From the perspective of epistemic justice and equality theory, the problem of participation is profound. Scholars of (in)justice and (in)equality observe how people participate 'unequally in the practices through which social meanings are generated'. This means that 'our collective forms of understanding' the world are prejudiced in 'content and/or style' and are excluding 'the social experiences' of the many (Fricker, 2007, p. 6). This prejudice produces social exclusion which dissolves affection for liberal democratic institutions and manifests in reduced electoral participation (Mouffe, 2002). When people feel that their social experience isn't being represented or taken seriously by their elected officials, they check out of mainstream politics, or never check in. Alienation can have a devastating impact on people's wellbeing, and on the health of a democracy (White, 2017).

To enhance justice and equality, urban scholars call for democratic renewal. Observing the 'profound mismatch between scales of democracy and scales of decision-making', urban scholars present the problem of participation as a key characteristic of the growing post-democratic condition. They argue that the inequality different 'actors' experience when it comes to the 'capacity' they have

to 'interfere' in important decisions is dramatic (UN-Habitat *et al.*, 2018, pp. 138–139). Dramatic inequality is structural to the logic of the global political economy, which relies on the 'expulsion' of vast numbers of people 'from the core social and economic orders of our time' (Sassen, 2014, p. 1).

Nation states throughout the world face a serious mix of complex social challenges that are exacerbated by inequality (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012). But it is in cities where we witness the most excessive display of social disparity (Acuto, 2018) and experience the most extreme forms of social inequality (Dawson, 2017). From crime to pollution, poverty to poor health, cities face a series of serious social problems: problems that urban policy should be vitally concerned with (Cochrane, 2007, p. 2). The future growth of the world's population is predicted to be almost entirely urban (UN-Habitat *et al.*, 2018, p. 6). In the burgeoning urban age (Storper and Scott, 2016), urban injustice and inequality will be 'intimately entwined with the most fundamental of political issues', with questions of inequality intersecting with questions of democracy (Massey, 2007, p. 23). However, many important decisions take place in settings that are 'completely beyond the reach of the demos'. The capacity of different actors to influence decision-making 'varies widely' thanks to deep 'power asymmetries' (UN-Habitat *et al.*, 2018, p. 138).

Cities have long been known as 'principal sites' for the building of new social worlds. They are the places where 'established horizons' have been broken, new 'questions, initiatives, and procedures' put forward, and 'relationships of power' remapped (Roy and Ong, 2011, p. 4; p. 12). However, if we are to build just and equitable futures in cities, our 'governance systems must be radically realigned' (McPhearson *et al.*, 2021) and the 'knowledge and skills of multiple disciplines, sectors and stakeholders' must come together (Perry *et al.*, 2018, p. 189; see also Polk, 2015; and Durose and Richardson, 2016). Coproduction is considered 'a necessary condition' of our age, something required for governments to 'meet the needs of citizens' in the face of societal challenges and 'within the context of austerity' (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015, p. 1346).

The definition of coproduction I am working with in this thesis comes broadly from within urban studies, and specifically from within urban policy and urban planning (Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2015; Durose and Richardson, 2016). Though, I also draw on conceptualisations of coproduction from beyond urban studies. Within science and technology studies (STS), scholars conceptualise coproduction as ‘a critical reflection on the construction of knowledge’, associating it with epistemological positions that value ‘experiential expertise’ (Collins and Evans 2002 in; Durose *et al.*, 2021, p. 672). In STS, the focus on coproduction often comes from a concern for social context within scientific knowledge production (Jasanoff, 2004).

When it comes to knowledge production, there are similarities in how STS scholars and urban scholars view the role of the public. In a similar way to how the public are conceptualised as an ‘extended peer community’ within post-normal science (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1993, p. 739 in; Perry, 2022, p. 342), within urban studies, people, and communities with lived experience in relation to certain policy problems, are viewed as ‘citizen experts’ (Perry, 2023, p. 3). However, scholars of citizen, community and ‘DIY’ science have found the role of the ‘extended peer community’ to be ‘contributory’ rather than participatory, with most projects involving citizen ‘intelligence’ only at a distance and in limited ways (Haklay *et al.*, 2023, p. 10). Though the public are invited to contribute to scientific knowledge production within STS, the urban scholarship more forcefully recommends an approach where citizens and non-scientific communities do not simply contribute, they lead. As will be show, this thesis is concerned with citizen-led approaches to policy research and how coproduction can enable people working in community organisations to participate closely with urban policymaking and in expanded ways. It thus offers an advance to post-normal science debates which recognise the ‘shallow’ nature of the ‘extended peer community’ as a serious problem limiting advances to knowledge production (Haklay *et al.*, 2023, p. 11).

### 1.3 Research Questions

In the face of the problems set out in the previous section, this thesis uses theories of coproduction to analyse the participation of community organisations with policymaking in London.

- The main research question at the heart of this thesis asks: *How can coproduction enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking? (main RQ)*

Connected to the main research question, this thesis asks four subsidiary questions.

- The first subsidiary research question situates the main research question, contextualising the study within London. It positions Mayor Khan's vision for participation within a local practice of community-based participatory research. It translates the conceptual context of the study into a practical urban reality, asking: *How do theories of coproduction find form in a London context? (sub RQ-1)*
- The second subsidiary research question mobilises the study of coproduction in the context of a specific GLA participation programme. It investigates how staff in community organisations responded to the design of the programme, asking: *How did the design of the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme limit its coproduction capabilities, and how did people respond to these limitations? (sub RQ-2)*
- The third subsidiary research question explores relationships between people in community-based participatory research projects. It seeks to understand whether participatory research training programmes can support government and community workers to build the sort of trusting and transformative relationships coproduction imagines. It asks: *What capabilities are required for coproductive relationships between people to develop, and how can participatory research training programmes build these capabilities? (sub RQ-3)*
- The fourth research question continues inquiry into coproductive capabilities, investigating the specific behaviours, skills, and experience useful in advancing coproduction. It activates critical reflection on the

process of researching community organisation participation and urban policymaking, prompting an analysis of the use of an action research methodology. It asks: *What behaviours, skills and experience were required to research the participation of community organisations with policymaking at the GLA? (sub-RQ-4).*

#### 1.4 Thesis Summary

This chapter has introduced the thesis, outlining the problems it responds to and the questions it asks. Moving through the thesis in order, Chapter Two reviews the literature on public participation, coproduction, and community participation with government in London. The chapter grounds the thesis in debates about the connection government has with citizens and the relationship urban policy has with local knowledge. The extensive body of coproduction scholarship that is reviewed provides the thesis with a conceptual framework through which to analyse the empirical research. The review orients the study towards inquiry focused on feelings and emotions in participatory projects and programmes. Chapter Three continues this theme, demonstrating how situated approaches to action research provide an appropriate methodology for research seeking to study participation from the perspective of coproduction. Chapter Three also describes the methods used to develop a reflective action research practice and to collect and analyse the data which forms the basis of the empirical chapters in this thesis.

Four empirical chapters follow Chapter Three. These provide the thesis with a specific urban context, asking the question of how coproduction can enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking, in the context of specific people, projects, and programmes. Chapter Four situates a vision for public participation articulated by the city government in London, in the local knowledge production practices of organisations in London's community and voluntary sector. Chapter Four introduces the organisations studied in later chapters: the city government in London (the GLA) and one community organisation working to support young people in the city (You Press). The chapter shows how the GLA's vision for participation collided with You Press's

practice of knowledge production, through Citizen-Led and Roots Two, a participatory research project into crime and serious violence.

Action research undertaken within the GLA and at You Press, and within Citizen-Led and on Roots Two, provided insights upon which the inquiry of the subsequent two empirical chapters is built. Chapter Five studies the design of Citizen-Led in the context of coproduction theory, identifying a fundamental design flaw which structurally limited the programme's coproductive capability. As community organisations tried to participate in urban policy research, they found some areas of decision-making to be closed off. The GLA had already decided the topical focus of the research projects community organisations could run, and which communities the research would target for participation. The chapter reveals some of the factors driving GLA decision-making in this area and argues this fundamental flaw meant that, from the perspective of coproduction theory, Citizen-Led largely failed as a mechanism for enabling community organisations to participate in urban policymaking.

Chapter Six studies the challenges government and community practitioners face when tasked with building the coproductive relationships necessary to democratise urban policymaking. It develops an inquiry that began in Chapter Four and Five, showing what happened when You Press and the GLA began work on Roots Two. The chapter reveals how both organisations found it extremely difficult to 'co-design' work together, in the way required by coproduction. The chapter investigates the challenge, showing how the difficulties faced by people working on Roots Two stemmed from a weakness in their relationships. It reveals that government and community practitioners working on Roots Two were not supported to develop relationships of coproduction. This influenced their capacity to co-design research and prevented the translation and dissemination of knowledge from Roots Two into the urban policymaking arena. In the face of multiple failures, the chapter uses coproduction theory to imagine how things could have been otherwise.

Following the main empirical chapters, two further chapters conclude the thesis. Chapter Seven puts the methodological aims this thesis had into dialogue with the empirical experience of action research, claiming that to complete research

using the methods selected, an expanded approach to ethics grounded in feminist praxis was required. In investigating participation in the context of urban policymaking, an openness to work with others and a confidence to study failure – my own failures and those of others – were necessary parts of this praxis. The Chapter explains the learning journey I took towards research on coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking. It reflects on what this journey contributes to action research theory, and what in my story could help others follow similar paths.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. It highlights the significance of the study within the field of participation, celebrating the situated account of feeling and emotion it has provided the scholarship. The chapter summarises the claims made in the empirical chapters in relation to the subsidiary research questions. To end, Chapter Eight presents the argument that coproduction can enable community organisations to participate in urban policy research through the development of new participatory capabilities.



## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This thesis belongs to a tradition of research into public participation with urban policymaking and to feminist research into coproduction. My central research question asks: *how can coproduction enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking?* In this chapter, I introduce the concept of participation and review the evolution of its ideas (Arendt, 1958; Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999; Henkel and Stirrat, 2001; Reason and Bradbury, 2006; Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). Firstly, I show how local and lived experience-based knowledge has become central to ideas of participation (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; McFarlane, 2006; Gaventa, 2011; Simone and Pieterse, 2017) and how ideas of participation now increasingly imagine local and grassroots actors working with government to produce knowledge (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999; Gaventa, 2011). I introduce community-based participatory research as a practice that could help governments pay attention to the highly situated, context-specific forms of knowledge that exist all around them in cities (Simone and Pieterse, 2017). But I also show how the hierarchies of knowledge and power that exist in participation projects can present problems for advancing the social transformation participation imagines (Beebeejaun, 2006; Cornwall, 2008; Razavi, 2019). I review research on how London policymaking has been opened-up to involve local communities, revealing a concern within the existing scholarship with the problematic challenge of opening-up policymaking to involve specific, targeted groups of ethnic minority people (Naidoo, 2009). I present the need for further research in this area, arguing for research that studies how hierarchies of knowledge and power control the behaviour of people within government participation programmes, in the context of targeted community-based participatory research for policymaking in contemporary London.

In this thesis, I aim to advance understanding of the participation of community organisations with policymaking by studying a programme of participatory policy research. I specifically study activity within one community-based participatory policy research project, analysing the project through the lens of coproduction.

Therefore, in this chapter, I also review the extensive literature on coproduction in public policy (Durose *et al.*, 2013; Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015; Durose and Richardson, 2016; Brandsen, Verschuere and Steen, 2020; Leino and Puumala, 2021). I explore studies highlighting the role arts-informed practices play in helping citizens participate in policy research (Durose *et al.*, 2013; Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2014; McDermont *et al.*, 2020), and studies demonstrating how arts-based and social science research methods can be mixed to satisfy the needs of different stakeholders (Richardson, 2014; Dixon, Ward and Blower, 2019; Kelly *et al.*, 2020; Curran *et al.*, 2021). Then, I show how some of the most recent research into coproduction is making deep enquiries into what research processes feel like for the people involved with them (Brown *et al.*, 2022), and how scholars and practitioners are using personal and community storytelling as a starting point for new knowledge production grounded in the lived experience of people working on projects (Ortiz, 2022; Duggan, 2021). I situate the current study within this field. I explain these areas of the coproduction literature to be rooted in the critically reflexive practices associated with feminist research approaches (Askins, 2018). I explore how feminist research seeks to produce knowledge based on everyday experience (Cahill, 2007) and tries to follow an ethic of care and kindness to others (Popke, 2003). This final delve into feminist praxis uncovers areas where this thesis aims to contribute new knowledge to the existing coproduction scholarship. I argue that some of the most recent coproduction scholarship provides a useful framework through which to analyse the problems and failures of participation projects, and that feminist ethics provides coproduction theory with an important new dimension.

In this chapter, I also provide some historical context to the research in this thesis, which studies London. I review the extensive scholarship on the changing relationship between the state and citizenship in Britain (Colenutt and Cutten, 1994; Westergaard, 1999; Massey, 2007; Corbett and Walker, 2013; Minton, 2022) and explore the impact this has had on urban public participation (Colenutt, 1988; Beebeejaun, 2018). I align the research in this thesis with work by scholars studying the experiences ethnic minority communities have with public participation initiatives (Beebeejaun, 2006), especially scholars studying

ethnic minority participation in London (Naidoo, 2009). I survey historical studies documenting the history of government service provision in London (Hatherley, 2020a; 2020b) and review research which reveals how the city's first services targeted towards specific ethnic minorities were developed and run, not by local government, but by community organisations and citizen groups (Davis 2015a; 2015b). I identify scholarship celebrating what the London government has been able to achieve when working with community organisations and citizens (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987; Warbis, 2016), and scholarship which questions whether this achievement has been open to all Londoners (Sawkins, 2016). I observe how scholars are yet to explore the approach to public participation with London policymaking under Sadiq Khan's leadership. This allows me to identify the unoccupied space within the existing London scholarship where this thesis aims to take up room.

## 2.2 Participation

The 'power to participate in the social life of the community' is held as a basic capability all humans should be afforded (Sen, 2004, p. 78). But the public sphere has long been identified as an arena constituted by a politics of exclusion (Fraser, 1990). As introduced in the previous chapter, developing governance structures based on ideas of participation has been presented to 'deepen democracy' and tackle the 'democratic deficits' of inequality and the uneven distribution of power amongst people (Gaventa, 2006, p. 10).

Participation is understood as an 'egalitarian' idea which provides a lens through which to imagine democratic possibilities 'beyond the limits of actually existing democracy' (Fraser, 1990 p. 69; p. 77). Participation imagines a public sphere that is less exclusionary. In this section, I provide an overview of participation, as conceptualised within academic literatures. I argue that theories of participation have provided an avenue for philosophy and political theory to re-imagine the public sphere, formulating 'alternative social visions' and configuring 'new social universes' (Roy and Ong, 2011, p. 12). The public sphere has been re-imagined as 'civil society', a social world which offered new possibilities for minority rights and recognition (Beebeejaun, 2006) and one in which ideas of participation became increasingly connected with notions of local

and grassroots involvement with government (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999; Gaventa, 2011).

The social universe this thesis studies is one in which local communities and grassroots organisations occupy important positions as ‘knowers’ (Fricker, 2007). Further in this section, I introduce the concepts of ‘participation’ and ‘local knowledge’, arguing that valuing local and lived experience-based knowledge has become central to ideas of public participation in the twenty-first century. I show how this development within public participation presents urban policy with a challenging question: how can governments pay attention to the highly situated, context-specific forms of knowledge that exist all around them in cities (Simone and Pieterse, 2017)? I explain the moral problem public participation poses now: how can government participation projects engage marginalised people as ‘knowers’ in ways that promote ‘epistemic justice’ (Fricker, 2007)? Importantly, I review forms of local and grassroots participation currently organised through knowledge production programmes of ‘community-based participatory research’ (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). Raising these questions and introducing the practices of community-based participatory research here provides the thesis with a theoretical focus and allows the research to make a needed contribution to global debates on the practice and ethics of participation within urban policymaking.

Later in the chapter, the use of participatory methods of knowledge production, such as community-based participatory research, are shown to be under-explored within the temporal and political context of this research: contemporary policymaking in London (section 2.4). Towards the end of this section (section 2.2), I show how other studies of public participation with the London government have focused on the question of how to open-up London policymaking to involve local communities. The existing literature on this topic is centred on the problems of participation for ethnic minority people (Naidoo, 2009), with the scholarship calling for the identification of ‘fixed community groups’ within participation to be treated with caution (Beebeejaun, 2006). This is a call this thesis responds to: the empirical chapters study the knowledge and power relations which control people’s behaviour in government participation

programmes and provide a detailed exploration of the use of community-based participatory research programmes within contemporary London policymaking.

### History of public participation

In Europe, the genealogy of participation has been mapped to its early modern usage, with religious ideas providing a conceptual 'base' for the notion of participation (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001). The history of the '[a]ctive participation in the life of the chapel' is paralleled in British history by increasing public involvement in civic organisations. The British protestant ethic of participation has been said to run from participation in the Church, to nineteenth century working class participation in the '[f]riendly societies, the cooperative movement, trade unions, [and] the Labour Party'. Understanding the history of participation in the context of the Protestant Church highlights 'the suggestive power' of the concept and provides an important background to the focus participation has on building 'direct' relationships between people and power (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001, pp. 173–174). The ideology of public participation recognises the world as built of 'relationships' that people 'co-author'. It calls for these relationships to be 'democratic' and for people to become 'peers', equal to one another in the power they have to participate in and shape the world (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 7; p. 10).

In the nineteenth century, the concept of participation referred to public participation in the 'social arena' via active involvement in 'civil society' (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999, p. 1). The philosopher Hannah Arendt argued that participation is a key part of the human condition. Arendt used the category 'homo faber' to highlight that the human capacity to build common worlds is something that separates man from beast or god (Arendt, 1958). The Arendtian social arena can be understood as the places and spaces where humans express their central capacity for 'group-being', 'being together' or being in 'the constant presence of others'. As with early modern participation, Arendt's conceptualisation also provides an understanding of participation that hints towards its suggestive power. Arendt presented 'the social' as an arena within which 'action' between humans occurs (Arendt, 1958, p. 52). This action can

transform societies. In the social sites of everyday experience: for example, sites of 'parenting, school[ing], [and] shopping', humans practice co-operation and togetherness. This practice has been described as 'dialogic' and is based on face-to-face informal interaction (Sennett, 2012, p. 52). Scholars lament that we have arrived at a reality where 'the social' has been eroded so greatly, that people can live side by side but never interact and never know one another. The compression of civil society spaces, the rise of individualism and the dissolution of customary or geographical ties are just some of the issues that have resulted in a fractured social realm (White, 2017).

Civil society can be understood as a space within the social realm. In Britain it includes the secular organisations listed in the earlier paragraph: the '[f]riendly societies, the cooperative movement, trade unions, [and] the Labour Party' (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001, p. 174). Civil society has been described as the web of 'intermediate institutions' within society, which includes 'businesses, voluntary organisations, educational institutions, clubs, unions, media, charities, and churches'. It is a space in which 'culture' is made and in which the 'values and knowledge' of a society are reproduced (Fukuyama, 1996, pp. 4–5). Unlike formal government, civil society has been known to reject 'traditional models of government, state provision, and bureaucracy' (Cochrane, 2007, p. 49). In countries with a history of institutional racism, civil society has also been described as a 'key arena' for recognition and representation (Beebeejaun, 2006, p. 4). As later sections of this chapter highlight, civil society has been the site wherein ethnic and other minority groups in England have felt supported and had their needs and interests met (Beebeejaun, 2006). The research in this thesis is concerned with the important role civil society organisations currently play in shaping public participation in England and in creating democratic relationships between people belonging to minority groups and people working in government in London.

### New citizen participation

Understandings of participation in the context of civil society encouraged ideas of participation to become increasingly 'related to rights of citizenship'. During

the twentieth century, participation became linked to the state, and now often refers to 'citizen participation' with government at a 'local or grassroots level' (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999, p. 1). The turn towards public participation with state activity is understood to be the outcome of a series of constraints placed on the public sector, and the result of increasing demands for more citizen engagement from civil society actors (Fung, 2015). Development scholars John Gaventa and Camilo Valderrama thus differentiate the sort of public participation Arendt describes from the new 'citizen participation', which they describe as a turn towards 'community-based participation in the context of programmes for democratic decentralisation' (1999, p. 1). Gaventa presents the move towards increased engagement between citizens and the state as a 'reconceptualization' of the meaning of 'citizenship' in relation to local governance (Gaventa, 2011, pp. 256–258).

Though the concept of participation historically makes reference to the involvement of people 'in community affairs', some notions of public participation are more specifically about political participation (Burton, 2004, p. 194). This study is grounded in an understanding of participation in the context of citizen involvement with the state. Its focus is on the 'community-based participation' Gaventa and Valderrama describe, in the context of programmes of urban policy research. This study thus has much to learn from theories of public participation in knowledge creation, a practice often conceptualised as participatory research. Participatory research challenges uneven distributions of power and the monopoly conventional research has on knowledge production (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). It is a style of research which displays a resistance to the 'oppressive structures and hegemonic discourses' that socially 'marginalise' people within research processes. Within participatory research projects, some specific research processes aim to 'make visible' the issues of inequality that effect society: issues of 'power, inequality, voice, agency and difference' (Askins, 2018, p. 1282).

Later sections within this chapter explore specifically how participation seeks to challenge power relations in urban policy research processes, both to change the way knowledge for policy is produced, and to innovate the process through which public services are designed (section 2.3). However, it is useful to

understand here a little of how the new citizen participation Gaventa describes is conceptualised specifically as 'community participation' and mobilised within participatory research processes. Through literature review and co-inquiry workshops, the Durham Community Research Team provide a definition of community-based participatory research (CBPR). They define 'community-based' broadly to mean 'research that tackles issues relevant to people belonging to, or with interests in, a community of place, interest or identity'. These people can be citizens of a particular country but also peoples of a particular community. They can be 'local residents, community activists, [and] members of community groups'. The Durham Community Research Team define 'participatory research' as meaning the 'active involvement of a range of community stakeholders in research design, process and implementation'. In CBPR, people belonging to communities of place, interest or identity take on roles akin to those of 'research commissioners, advisory group members, co-researchers or peer researchers' (Durham Community Research Team, 2011, p. 4).

What is important to recognise within the new citizen participation, is the important role communities play as 'knowers' (Fricker, 2007). Participatory research involves those directly affected by the problem; values social, group and collective experiences within the research process; and recognises and respects that there are different ways of knowing about things (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008, p. 9). The participatory worldview has been said to be 'as much a political statement as a theory of knowledge' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 10). And participatory approaches to research have been described as strategies for 'cognitive justice', in that they affirm 'the rights of different systems of knowledge to exist' (Visvanathan, 2005, cited in Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008, p. 18). Below, I explore how a valorisation of local knowledge and lived experience has become central to understanding the worldview from which participatory research emerges.



## Primacy of local knowledge

Participation is understood to be marked by a series of common themes. These include paying attention to issues of marginality and the way in which ‘women, the poor, [and] ethnic minorities’ have been excluded from occupying powerful positions within society (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001, p. 170). As introduced in the previous chapter, the urban age is marked by injustice and inequality. The philosopher Miranda Fricker argues that there exists a specific form of injustice, where wrongs are done to a person or peoples ‘epistemically’, or, specifically in relation to them in their position as a ‘knower’. Fricker calls attention to the ethical and political power-based rules governing knowledge production, highlighting how some social groups dominate what knowledge gets produced about the social experience. Fricker describes a marginalisation situation wherein ‘the social experiences of members of [...] [some] marginalized groups’ are so ‘inadequately conceptualized’ that they do not feature within the mainstream (Fricker, 2007, p. 6). Theories of citizen participation can be said to be responding to problems this epistemic exclusion creates. One way participation does this is through a celebration of ‘local’ and ‘indigenous’ knowledge (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001, p. 171).

The drive for participation is informed by imperatives to value ‘local knowledge’ and see it as a basis for ‘local action’ (Gaventa, 2011, p. 257). Local knowledge has been described by urban scholars as the highly situated, and long-building, knowledge which exists in cities thanks to the development of ‘local economies’ and ‘popular cultures’ (Simone and Pieterse, 2017, p. 110). In public policy contexts, the conceptualisation of knowledge as being ‘local’ is used to reference the everyday, experience-based knowledge local people, residents, and community groups have (Simon, Palmer and Riise, 2020, pp. 1–3). In development contexts, the concept of local knowledge is often evoked to refer to a social group often summarised as ‘the poor’, and to the ‘situated knowledge’ this group has. Scholars call attention to ‘the different ways in which the poor know’ and argue for development to pay ‘radical attention’ to this knowledge (McFarlane, 2006, pp. 301–302). The concept of local knowledge is also used to reference the cultural and ecological knowledge belonging to ‘indigenous’ people (Agrawal, 1995). Indigenous knowledge has been

conceptualised as knowledge of the 'lived experience of [an] environment', 'the voices of marginalised people' and the 'other knowledges [...] of the people resident in particular places' (Briggs and Sharp, 2004, pp. 661–662).

Valuing local knowledge is important within theories of participation. The new citizen participation is marked by a scepticism and 'distrust' of the formal state in favour of community and voluntary service provision, alongside a parallel depreciation of expert and scientific knowledge in favour of a celebration of 'local' and 'indigenous' knowledge as a foundation for expertise (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001, pp. 170—171). The planner and urban geographer Libby Porter argues that participation should 'challenge the embedded knowledge hierarchies of the expert versus the layperson' (Porter, 2010, cited in Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2015, p. 554). Porter's conceptualisation of participation as a practice which challenges an established knowledge production hierarchy within urban planning, is shared by theorists of critical and post-development studies. Critical development scholarship reveals how 'hegemonic paradigms' direct development decision-making and policy design (Radcliffe, 2015, p. 857). Post-development theory arose from post-structuralist and post-colonial critiques of development as a strategy of Western 'cultural and social domination' (Escobar, 2012, pp. vii—viii). Post-development scholars have introduced the deconstructive epistemology of border thinking, an epistemology which re-privileges marginalised ways of knowing, including 'traditional, folkloric, religious, [and] emotional' beliefs, again valorising local knowledge for political transformation (Mignolo, 2001, p. 11, cited in Escobar, 2007, p. 187).

This thesis seeks to contribute understanding on how community-based participatory research can help city governments translate local knowledge. Knowledge translation is conceptualised as a 'dynamic and iterative process' of 'synthesis, dissemination, [and] exchange' (Huzair *et al.* 2013, p. 43). Urban theorists observe how currently, national, and municipal governments do not learn enough from local knowledge, despite it circulating all around them. That policy actors treat this knowledge as something separate, 'to be left alone', begs the question: how can local knowledge – or knowledge based on lived experience – be 're-described', 'understood' and made 'usable' in the 'arenas of

deliberation and decision-making' (Simone and Pieterse, 2017, pp. 110—111)?  
How can local knowledge be translated?

In answer to this question, development scholars have turned to processes of knowing and learning, showing learning to be a 'relational' process 'rooted in [...] interaction' (McFarlane, 2006, p. 293). The urban geographer Colin McFarlane applies the philosopher Bruno Latour's conceptualisation of translation to processes of knowing and learning. McFarlane explains how policymaking could be better understood as a process of mediation between different 'vocabularies' and the work of creating links and chains that did not exist before. Importantly for this study, the creation of these links does not leave whatever they connect unchanged. Rather, each vocabulary is altered in the translation process (Latour, 1999, p. 179, cited in McFarlane, 2006, p. 293). For Latour, processes of translation are conceptualised through ideas of 'transformation' (Latour, 1999). When local knowledge touches other forms of knowledge within policymaking, it is altered in the process, and vice versa. And it is 'not just the forms of knowledge' that are transformed: 'people and places' can be changed too (McFarlane, 2006, p. 293). This thesis investigates the processes through which local knowledge held within community organisations came into contact with institutional and technocratic forms of knowledge in the policymaking environments of the London government, and the impact this translation process had on the people involved.

The challenge of translating local knowledge is just one in a number of challenges associated with citizen participation. In the next section, I provide a review of the main problems of participation as identified within current research on the topic. The review identifies problems of power, targeting, and racial categorisation: all problems this thesis witnesses as present in the specific context of community participation with London policymaking.

### Power problems in participation

The development scholar and expert in studies of participation and democracy, Andrea Cornwall, reveals how difficult it can be to navigate problems of power in participation. By drilling down into the specific dynamics of participation that

characterised a Brazilian municipal health council, Cornwall was able to reveal the embedded 'power, political culture, and politics' at play within the activities of the council and show how difficult it is to create truly 'empowered' spaces for 'participatory governance' (Cornwall, 2008). Later studies have followed suit, examining the problems of participation through a power lens. Geographer Nasya Razavi's investigation into the politics of public participation highlighted how exclusionary government participation activities can be. Razavi's study, into the politics of water provision in Cochabamba, Bolivia, revealed how societal actors belonging to 'groups and movements' not aligned with government views were actively excluded from decision-making. Groups pushing for political reform and indigenous recognition, for example, were 'subordinated' and 'demobilized' by the state in Cochabamba (Razavi, 2019, p. 1454).

Studies of participation in the UK also identify how participation may present new problems of exclusion. The cultural studies scholar Roshi Naidoo explored democratic engagement initiatives in London in the period of the 2000s, revealing the power dynamics and political agendas driving their activities. Like Cornwall, Naidoo observed how new participatory spaces can come to mimic traditional sites of power and exclude some groups. Cornwall's study sought to understand power within the Brazilian health council through the Lefebvrian idea that every space has a 'generative past' which shapes its 'expectations, relationships and conduct' (Cornwall, 2008, p. 525). Naidoo's study provides insights into the generative past haunting democratic engagement initiatives seeking the participation of ethnic minority people with London policymaking. Naidoo highlights how the city's participation programmes have a long history of segmenting people, in what can appear to be a practice of 'crude racial categorisation' (Naidoo, 2009, p. 69). This thesis observes this phenomenon too. Chapter Five aims to analyse the impact organising people into identity categories has on building trust between community and government partners in participatory research.

Under conditions of scarcity, policymakers have been required to identify the most vulnerable or at-risk populations, and deliver highly targeted interventions (Radcliffe, 2015). Government institutions thus have been directed to create a

greater number of identity categories for people and finer distinctions of difference. In the UK, the population census and the government's statistical agency have played a role in creating and promoting ethnic group terminology and categories, and embedding them in official policy discourse and processes of administration (Aspinall, 2020, p. 2). This activity has been criticised for producing class-based and racial hierarchies amongst citizens (Radcliffe, 2015, p. 867). This is a problem within contexts of public participation and further evokes the generative past Cornwall identified as plaguing participation. For the activity of organising people and creating categories based on race is a practice that has been located as rooted in the procedures of Modern European colonialism (Serequeberhan, 2012, p. 140). During the Enlightenment, European science 'biologised' and 'geneticised' difference (Hacking, 2006), creating the identity categories used by institutions of 'political modernity' around the world (Chakrabarty, 2008). The creation of participation spaces which organise people according to race could be read as an obvious example of 'the legacy of colonialism' ruling 'the present' (Serequeberhan, 2012, p. 150). The generative past Naidoo and Cornwall identify as haunting their projects is the legacy of colonial power, grounded in the historic 'subjection' of non-European peoples by European states (Serequeberhan, 2012, p. 140).

Current research reveals that racial categorisation in London has led to participation situations where people come to be defined by their racial identity, over and instead of other intersectional identities they may have (Naidoo, 2009). Structural inequality and systemic injustice mean that ethnic minority people experience specific economic and social challenges, but do not have 'homogeneous life experiences' (Beebeejaun, 2006, p. 3). Planners and policymakers seeking to involve ethnic minority groups have been known to oversimplify things, making harmful assumptions that there is an inherent relationship between race and life experience. Therefore, questions must always be asked about the identification of 'fixed community groups' (Beebeejaun, 2006, p. 4).

Development scholars express the implication of this sort of categorisation as 'the implicit rules of intersectionality' (Radcliffe, 2015, p. 867). Intersectionality is the idea that people 'participate in more than one public' and 'the memberships

of different publics may partially overlap' (Fraser, 1990, p. 70). Policy which fails to account for the 'interrelationships and dependencies' that exist between people in the world has been described as 'simplistic', with talk of communities as existing as bounded 'coherent' entities labelled 'misleading' (Briggs and Sharp, 2004, p. 671). But it is the 'implicit' nature of assumptions made around identity that is the problem here, with policy action around social representation criticised for failing to directly express what guides decisions around targeting (Radcliffe, 2015, p. 867). When states use implicit knowledge to direct policymaking, they have been described as exerting control over communities in subtle and discrete ways (Rose, 1996, p. 328).

Within post-modernist theory, the mobilisation of state power to implicitly control communities is conceptualised as 'governmentality'. Governmentality refers to 'a range of rationalities and techniques' states use 'to govern without governing' (Rose, 1996, p. 328). The shift to governmentality is located as 'a shift within knowledge itself', falling in line with the move from modernism to post-modernism, and from more explicit to implicit forms of population control (Rose, 1996, p. 328). Urban policy scholars have read theories of governmentality within the practices of government participation, observing how the 'new governance spaces' of post-modernism are 'still inscribed with a state agenda', though this agenda is masked by a rhetoric of power sharing (Taylor, 2007, p. 314). Within practices of community participation, governmentality sees state power produced through the 'techniques' and 'knowledge' used to engage, enrol and deploy communities in 'novel programmes'. These programmes 'harness' and control the practices of the community sector, allowing the state to demonstrate power at a distance (Rose, 1999, p. 176, cited in Taylor, 2007, p. 300). In public meetings, people in community organisations come face to face with an 'ensemble' of 'institutions, procedures, analyses [...] reflections, calculations, and tactics' and a 'network' of 'knowledge and power relations' (Foucault, 1978, p. 108; 1980, p. 194, cited in Pløger, 2021, p. 427). This ensemble and the network control 'the ruling praxis' and the 'dialogues of the event'. They control what can and can't be done and said (Pløger, 2021, p. 428). This thesis studies the implicit power dynamics of state-community participation. Chapter Five explores the ensemble of knowledge and power

relations controlling what can be done and said in government participation programmes.

The racial categorisation Naidoo identified in London, and that this thesis will witness, is crude. Though it isn't represented as something entirely negative or something to be avoided. From the perspective of development studies, the London participation situation Naidoo describes exemplifies the 'targetist' worldview (Mkandawire, 2005) and the values of political 'particularism' (Ellison, 1999). Targetist policymaking practices inquire into the social and economic hierarchies that exist in society, and design targeted interventions to support those at the bottom of these hierarchies (Mkandawire, 2005). The targeting of London's participation initiatives towards ethnic minority people is presented by Naidoo as a socially just practice. In beginning with difference, state institutions can demonstrate that they 'understand and challenge structural inequalities' (Naidoo, 2009, p. 71). However, targeting state intervention towards the 'particular' mandates a political position that could be complicit in the reproduction of inequality. For if the key themes within public policy are seen as difference, diversity, and choice, some groups will fail to get the support they need (Ellison, 1999). This study investigates a targeted approach to public participation, analysing some of the factors driving the decisions urban policymakers in London make about which community organisations to work with on participatory research. Chapter Five and Chapter Six, for example, problematise Naidoo's presentation of targeting as a socially just practice. The analysis presented in these chapters remove the halo from one London participation mechanism and reveal how targeting and categorisations decisions can compromise what theories of participation seek to achieve.

Across this thesis, I aim to advance understanding in relation to the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking. I specifically study activity within one community-based participatory policy research project, analysing the ways in which staff on either side of the community–government boundary in London tried to work together. The participation literature reviewed in this section has shown that when it comes to opening-up London policymaking to involve local communities, ethnic minority groups in particular experience exclusion. Participation scholars hold the legacy of colonialism and the practice

of governmentality accountable for causing some of the strongest power problems in participation. The research in this thesis seeks to continue work begun by the cultural studies scholar Roshi Naidoo, by studying democratic engagement initiatives in London in the period 2016–2020. It seeks to expand the current participation scholarship by exploring the impact of targeting practices and the effect of governmentality tactics at the level of everyday relationships between people in projects. Research at an empirical level capable of studying the behaviours of specific people as they relate to others in participation projects does exist and can be found amongst a rich and growing body of scholarship concerning coproduction. In the next section, I review ideas of coproduction and co-design, concepts which imagine participation situations wherein community and government partners can move beyond hierarchies of knowledge and power and realise the possibilities of the new citizen participation.

### 2.3 Coproduction

In this thesis, I aim to advance understanding of the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking by studying a programme of participatory policy research through the lens of coproduction. I believe recent developments in the coproduction scholarship (Brown *et al.*, 2020; Chapman Hault *et al.*, 2020; Duggan, 2021; Groot, Haveman and Abma, 2022; Ortiz, 2022) provide a useful framework through which to analyse the problems of participation and better understand the causes of participation failures. I argue that a reflexive coproduction (Durose, Perry and Richardson, 2021), grounded in a feminist ethics of care and compassion (Popke, 2003; Hall, 2017), opens new doors for public participation research and practice. I believe this to be particularly important in the context of participation situations which require staff in community and local government organisations to form positive relationships and work well together.

Urban scholarship locates coproduction as a form of participatory research, recognising it as part of the family of consultation methods ‘developed to engage with local communities’ (Simon, Palmer and Riise, 2020, p. 2).



Traditional consultation methods ask citizens to ‘indicate preferences between options drawn up by experts’. Participatory methods, by contrast, seek to reduce ‘the narrowness of the sources of knowledge considered relevant to public policy’ (Wainwright, 2003, p. 20; p. 23). Environment and planning scholars studying coproduction draw on work by political economist Elinor Ostrom to explain the concept’s history. In the twentieth century, coproduction was presented as a means to improve the ‘effectiveness of research’. Ostrom argued that if the ‘preferences and needs’ of ‘communities’ could better inform research, then those same communities could be relied upon to participate in delivering whatever ‘outcomes and solutions’ the research proposed (Ostrom, 1996, cited in Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2015, p. 561).

Ostrom and other economists presenting coproduction primarily studied collaboration between government departments and ‘citizens’ (Brandsen and Honingh, 2020, p. 9). Contemporary scholars have continued in this tradition. Local government and politics scholars Catherine Durose and Liz Richardson, extended Ostrom’s vision of coproduction in their work on coproductive policy design. They developed an interdisciplinary conceptualisation of coproduction that moved the phenomena beyond the notion of citizens playing active roles in coproducing environmental goods and services – Ostrom is famous for writing about the management of common pool resources such as fisheries – and into the social policy arena. Durose and Richardson focus on the democratic potential coproduction holds. They argue that not only are policy solutions being imposed on people without their participation, but that many of these solutions fail in relation to the complex problems modern societies face. In response, Durose and Richardson conceptualised coproduction within public policy, presenting it as a means through which people on the inside of ‘politics and technocracy’ can work together with people on the outside, and vice versa, ‘to shape society for the better’ (Durose and Richardson, 2016, pp. 1–3).

Coproduction can be used to ‘embrace’ a range of ‘co’ ‘variants’, including ‘co-creation’ and ‘co-design’. All these variants give a name to a ‘new expectation’, ‘where the beneficiaries or users of a given intervention also participate in its design, research and implementation’ (Simon, Palmer and Riise, 2020, p. 1). Though coproduction embraces a range of variants, there are differences in the

uses of these variants within the coproduction scholarship. To begin this section, I review literature discussing the differences between co-creation and coproduction and justify the focus this thesis has on coproduction and co-design. Then, I analyse the conceptualisation of coproduction as a methodology for an approach to policymaking grounded in theories of participation. I look at the role oral and visual modes of representation play in opening-up research to local knowledge, and at the knowledge translation challenges participatory research projects face when they bring local knowledge based on lived experience into policymaking environments.

Coproduction has been heavily criticised as an approach to knowledge production which reproduces power inequalities and harms people involved (Chapman Hault *et al.*, 2020; Groot, Haveman and Abma, 2022). To overcome the problems of coproduction, scholars call for users of the methodology to approach their work with greater reflexivity and to follow a coproduction ethics (Durose, Perry and Richardson, 2021). I see great potential in what a reflexive coproduction grounded in a coproduction ethics could bring to participation research and practice. Later in this section, to explore more ethical approaches to coproduction, I review the work of scholars in the feminist tradition. I introduce scholars studying coproduction at the level of feeling and emotion (Brown *et al.*, 2020) and using 'storytelling' to bring thought and feeling together (Ortiz, 2022). I turn to proximate literature on feminist praxis (Cahill, 2007) and reflexive research (Bradbury *et al.*, 2019a) to review the 'production' involved with coproduction: the work and labour inherent to the methodology. To close the section, I move away from standard coproduction literatures and into feminist theories of reproduction and affective labour (Federici, 2012; Hall, 2017; Farrugia, Threadgold and Coffey, 2018). This foray allows me to explore and introduce an under-explored area within discussions of coproduction ethics: the role of care and compassion. My analysis paves the way for the subsequent methodological chapter (Chapter Three), in which I ground the research in this thesis in feminist approaches to situated knowledge production, and later enables me to make claims about the capabilities I believe people working on participation projects need to possess (Chapter Eight).

## Co-creation and co-design

It has been argued that the origins of coproduction's proximate concept, 'co-creation', can be found in business and marketing and the ambition to transform 'consumers into users'. As 'users', consumers become 'active contributors' or 'co-creators', who participate in producing 'extra economic value'. Public policy scholars have suggested that it was this business-based practice of co-creation that 'spread to public policy' as part of strategies for 'public service reform' (Leino and Puumala, 2021, p. 783). Coproduction and co-creation are often used interchangeably in public policy discourse (Tortzen, 2018, cited in Brandsen, Verschuere and Steen, 2020, p. 112). Both concepts refer to active input by citizens in shaping services (Brandsen and Honingh, 2020, p. 11), but scholars have reserved 'the term "co-creation" for involvement of citizens in the (co)-initiator or co-design level', and coproduction for 'the involvement of citizens in the (co)-implementation of public services' (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015, p. 1347). In this view, co-creation concerns 'the initiation and/or strategic planning of a service' and coproduction, 'the design and implementation of a service' (Brandsen and Honingh, 2020, p. 14).

Scholars and practitioners who exclusively use the terminology of co-creation often do so in the context of public sector innovation (Cottam and Leadbeater, 2004; Mulgan, 2022, pp. 47–48). Leaders in the field of design innovation place co-creation as an innovation of traditional 'formal' consultation processes, which ask 'users' to 'voice their views on a limited number of alternatives'. They celebrate co-creation in the same way scholars celebrate coproduction, seeing it as 'a more creative and interactive process which challenges the views of all parties and seeks to combine professional and local expertise in new ways' (Cottam and Leadbeater, 2004, p. 22, cited in Leino and Puumala, 2021, p. 785). Champions for using co-creation instead of coproduction, argue that co-creation emphasises the role citizens can play 'as potential initiators of co-creative processes'. Because of this, they argue, co-creation 'implies [greater] potential for fundamental change' (Leino and Puumala, 2021, p. 784).

The above public policy scholarship assumes it is possible to combine differing forms of expertise and translate local knowledge for use within policymaking. Though seductive, the idea that citizen participation could initiate the sort of

creative processes required to innovate the public sector assumes it is possible for citizens and public policy professionals to work together, and therefore accepts the power problems of participation can be overcome. But to play an initiating role, citizens would need to be in possession of the power to direct participation processes. In this thesis, the extent to which citizens could be the initiators of the participatory processes studied is contested. As will become clear, though public participation in urban policymaking in London is grounded in local community-led practices, government partners tightly control resources and hold decision-making power. Coproduction more accurately describes the level of involvement citizens had in the participation mechanism studied in this thesis: though citizens inputted into the process, they did not initiate it. Though Chapter Five and Chapter Six will problematise this claim too.

Co-design is a practice based on the principles of coproduction (Farr, 2018, p. 624). Though the term 'co-design' is increasingly used by local authorities, there are not clear definitions of co-design within the urban policy literatures (Sendra, 2023). However, proximate literature from urban design and social policy provides useful insights into the processes of co-design. For example, a study into the coproduction of 'a social impact assessment' analysing the impact of neighbourhood regeneration on the social lives of residents involved co-design. The framework of the assessment was not co-designed, but the 'alternative' plans for the regenerating neighbourhood were produced collaboratively with residents whose homes were at risk of demolition (Colombo *et al.*, 2021). Other studies highlight the focus co-design has on collective designing as key to recognising the difference between public participation and co-design (Sendra, 2023, p. 2). This is perhaps easier to understand in a field like urban design, which imagines teams of citizen and expert urban designers, designing places together.

In this thesis the focus is not on designing places but on designing research to inform social policy decisions. Social policy scholars have explored co-design within health policy, pointing to how the 'National Health Service (NHS) Five Year Forward View' of 2014 advocated for 'local co-design in the implementation of new care models' (NHS England, 2014, cited in Farr, 2018, p. 624). Within the 'Care Act', design is placed as an activity within a broader

process of production, suggesting that within health, co-design is best understood as an activity within overall processes of coproduction. The Care Act defines coproduction as ‘when individuals or groups influence the support and services that they receive, or influence how services are designed, delivered or commissioned’ (Care Act, 2014, cited in Farr, 2018, p. 624).

This thesis too studies co-design as part of overall processes of coproduction. I will reveal how the London government hoped that using processes of co-design within participatory policy research would culminate in the creation of new, perhaps alternative, policy recommendations in policing and crime. That it did not allows the thesis to contribute to current debates around the ethics of coproduction and co-design. For how ethical is it to involve people with lived experience in co-design processes when their participation can have very little effect on future outcomes? As scholars of co-design warn, there is a very real risk that communities will ‘get tired of participating’ if their ideas and contributions ‘are then not considered when making decisions’ (Sendra, 2023, p. 1). This thesis bears witness to this phenomenon. In Chapter Six, I highlight that within the GLA’s participation initiatives, many decisions were made outside of the participation process, producing frustration among people working in community organisations.

### Coproduative policy design

Much of the public policy literature on coproduction focuses on the need for policymakers to work with service users on policy and service design. In the UK, scholars of coproduction have canvassed the opinions of people working on citizen participation projects within local government and use examples from cities such as Birmingham, towns such as Bolton in Greater Manchester, and administrative districts such as the London Borough of Lambeth, to highlight best practice coproduction (Durose *et al.*, 2013). A focus on ‘creative practice’ is common, with many practitioners using mediums such as ‘music, art, theatre, photography and film’ to involve citizens in their work. Using creative practice is celebrated for the way it can draw in people who would be unlikely to attend a traditional public meeting or consultation and for how it can provide ‘salient’

insights for policy development and evaluation, and service design. Creative mediums and 'arts practice' are revered because they help citizens 'voice' their 'lived experience' and tell personal stories to policymakers (Durose *et al.*, 2013, p. 332; p. 329; Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2014; McDermont *et al.*, 2020, p. 6; p. 125). Coproduction scholars observe how some members of the public can find it easier to articulate their concerns and feelings and communicate their lived experience using oral and visual modes of expression, for example through 'film, music, visual art or song poems', and through 'rap' and 'spoken word poetry' (Chapman Houlton *et al.*, 2020, pp. 89–90).

The use of creative practice within coproductive policy design is critiqued within the coproduction literature. Local government scholars argue that when it comes to public participation in complex policy research involving government partners, the 'lived experience', expressed beyond-text, 'cannot substitute for a scientific method'. Rather than 'displace one form of knowledge and expertise with another', lived experience should be integrated 'as a form of data in the method'. It should not be a substitute (Richardson, 2014, p. 37). The research in this thesis studies the use of creative mediums in participatory policy research. The analysis will reveal some of the ways in which oral and visual modes of expression support the translation of local knowledge and lived experience into research for urban policymaking.

Outside of the coproduction literature, the participatory arts and sciences have been theorised by arts and humanities scholars as 'collaborative poetics' (Johnson *et al.*, 2017) and by ecologists as 'citizen science' (Russell, 2014). Inside the coproductive tradition, artistic and scientific methods are mixed through the qualitative research practice of 'community' or 'peer' research (Dixon, Ward and Blower, 2019; Kelly *et al.*, 2020; Curran *et al.*, 2021). In 'community' and 'peer' research, people understood as 'peers' to a project's 'research participants', work either in a paid or voluntary capacity as qualitative researchers. It is thought that peer researchers' 'status as community members' helps them to research the lives of people who policymakers and service designers often fail to reach (Thomas-Hughes, 2020, pp. 43–44). However, notions of 'privileged access' and of 'authenticity' in community representation

are contested ideas (Richardson, 2014, p. 35; Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019, p. 128).

As well as working as qualitative researchers, conducting interviews (as in Kelly *et al.*, 2020) and hosting focus groups (as in Curran *et al.*, 2021), people engaged as peer and community researchers often get involved with representing the findings from research projects. They do this creatively, exhibiting films, poems, artefacts and writing, in 'forums, festivals, [and] meetings' (as in Renold *et al.* 2020, p. 143). Using art can help citizens to share their life stories with practitioners, but it can set up a strange relational dynamic where one actor knows intimate details about another; usually this is the actor who has greater power and control. In coproduction projects, rarely are policymakers encouraged to tell personal stories, and rarely in the same creative way. This raises an ethical question. Scholars studying the use of coproduction specifically to design services for young people, argue that projects must have 'effective support mechanisms in place' to 'safeguard' people (Lushey and Munro, 2015, p. 20). However, others argue that safeguarding is not enough. In addition, there must be an 'underlying ethos' driving projects and leading to the use of creative mediums and arts-based methods. This ethos must challenge and unsettle power relations in research projects (Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2014). This thesis studies the underlying ethos driving the use of arts-based methods in community-based participatory research projects. Chapter Four aims to evaluate the use of oral and visual modes of expression in one community organisation engaging young people with participatory research.

Scholars of coproduction celebrate what coproduction theory has done to confront 'elitist and exclusionary knowledge production cultures' but question the capacity for coproduction to change practice. Can coproduction 'travel from theory and rhetoric' to 'contested and complex' application spaces (Duggan, 2021, p. 356)? Scholars of public policy observe how 'local officials struggle' to put coproduction theory 'into practice' and inclusively 'involve citizens' in 'processes of urban development' (Leino and Puumala, 2021, p. 784). Local government scholars have highlighted how it is important for community organisations to have advocates within the commissioning policymaking

organisation who can disseminate insights from participatory research to a wider group of people, advising that these advocates hold decision-making responsibility (Richardson, 2014, p. 41). Chapter Six adds evidence emphasising the importance of overcoming dissemination challenges, revealing how people working on participatory research projects can waste time disseminating their evidence to people without decision-making power and without the skills to advocate.

Scholars in healthcare research argue that despite the turn towards participatory and coproduced research, in hierarchical contexts epistemic inequalities are widely upheld and reproduced. In supposedly coproduced healthcare research, dominant logics, and ways of knowing and doing, mean that the knowledge of privileged stakeholders is adopted and supported, while less privileged others in projects find themselves silenced (Groot, Haveman and Abma, 2022). Coproduction in community settings too can reproduce inequality, with the language and format of research described as committing a 'slow violence' to community projects and the people involved with them (Chapman Houlton *et al.*, 2020, p. 88). The current study aims to add evidence to these claims, with Chapter Six analysing the co-design and knowledge translation struggles local officials and community leaders face when engaged with participation programmes. However, recognising that there is a 'reflexivity' inherent to the ethics of coproduction (Durose, Perry and Richardson, 2021, p. 671), this study seeks to explore coproduction through an ethical lens understudied within the current scholarship. In the next two sections, I review coproduction from the perspective of feminist theory, applying ideas of affective labour and care ethics to the concept of reflexivity in coproduction.

### [Feminist praxis in coproduction](#)

Feminist scholarship in the post-structuralist tradition emphasises the role of subjectivity in social transformation. In geography and across the social sciences, scholars study the relationship participatory initiatives have with personal change, arguing that through processes of participation, people engage with social justice endeavours at the level of the 'personal' (Cahill,



2007). These contributions were important to the development of coproduction because they revealed how experiences once considered 'private', 'personal', 'individual' and 'everyday' can be reframed as 'shared', 'social', and 'political'. From the perspective of this reframing, social experience can be taken as 'a basis for social theorizing' (Cahill, 2007, p. 268). As this chapter has already shown, in participation debates, local knowledge and lived experience are valorised as important knowledge sources within policymaking. Theory building from the everyday is conceptualised within feminist scholarship through the expanded practice of action and serious reflection, known as 'praxis' (Freire, 1970, cited in Cahill, 2007, p. 288). The concept of praxis promotes the idea of 'theory as practice', holding action in the world responsible for creating concepts (Askins, 2018, p. 1279).

The central role given to subjectivity within post-structural and post-modern feminist theory has influenced areas of the coproduction literature.

Coproduction scholars working in the arts and humanities commonly root their scholarship in the feelings and emotions their projects generate. They write about what it feels like for people to work together (Brown *et al.*, 2020), and use poetry as an alternative to socially scientific reporting, celebrating its ability to hear and represent voices differently (Chapman Hault *et al.*, 2020). Some present coproduction as praxis, but situate their focus on the 'everyday' within Raymond Williams' work on the cultural as 'ordinary and lived' (Williams, 1958, cited in Brown *et al.*, 2020, p. 95). This is a different tradition to that used by geographers and development scholars but is part of the long tradition of 'storytelling' within participatory research and on writing 'with' people, place, and process (Benson and Nagar, 2006, p. 582, cited in Askins, 2018, p. 1284).

In planning and critical development studies, storytelling is understood as an 'everyday practice [...] tightly connected to emotions' (Ortiz, 2022, p. 3). In planning, storytelling has been used 'as a key vehicle for self-reflection', with the 'race and place' based stories people tell forming part of an 'anti-racism' in planning education (Baum, 2017; Knapp, 2019, cited in Ortiz, 2022, p. 5). In architecture and spatial practice, scholars are encouraged to reflect on their 'position', 'standpoint' and 'situation' in relation to 'a particular instant, a moment, [or] an event', and to account for their feelings and emotions through

writing (Rendell, 2016; 2022a; 2022b). Regardless of discipline, scholarship capable of doing this is described as 'reflexive'. Authors write about the role of the researcher in knowledge production, reflecting heavily on the grids of power in which they operate (Sultana, 2007). Reflexive scholars begin inquiry from 'felt experiences' and then aim to produce a new paradigm for knowledge production through critically reflective collaborative action in the world (Bradbury *et al.*, 2019a). In an attempt to continue this tradition, this thesis will use storytelling and reflexive inquiry to study community participation with urban policymaking. Through writing, the study will account for the feelings and emotions participatory programmes provoke.

Current research on coproduction is seeking to highlight what public participation and coproductive policy design feel like in practice. These situated conceptualisations of coproduction are providing 'experience near' understandings and advance a theory of coproduction as a 'lived practice'. In conceptualising coproduction as a lived practice, meaning comes from the way coproduction is 'used, felt, and imagined' by people who have a practice-based relationship with it (Durose, Perry and Richardson, 2022, p. 5). This approach to conceptualising coproduction 'ground[s]' the concept in its 'everyday use by layperson[s]' and takes seriously 'the critical reflexive perspective of the researcher' (Thomassen *et al.*, 2018, p. 319, cited in Durose, Perry and Richardson, 2022, p. 5). Scholars in the elucidatory coproduction tradition make a 'very deliberate effort' to 'reveal' the 'hierarchy of the expert over the layperson' and the power inequities that exist between 'professionals' and 'service users' within the delivery of public services (Durose, Perry and Richardson, 2022, p. 6). This thesis is part of this tradition. The analysis will reveal a hierarchy of expertise within participatory policy research and show the knowledge inequities that exist between policy officers and project staff working on co-designed urban policy research in London.

### Care ethics

Feminist scholars have long inquired into the possibilities everyday cooperative practices provide for the realisation of a transformative politics. In the Marxist

tradition, debates have centred around the concept of 'reproduction' and 'reproductive work'. The feminist political theorist Silvia Federici explains reproduction as the means through which 'we produce our existence' (2012, p. 3). Reproduction refers to, 'the complex of activities and relations by which our life and labour are daily reconstituted'. Reproductive 'work' is conceptualised as 'housework, [and] domestic labour'. It is a reference to sexual reproduction and reproductive labour does include giving birth, but it also includes things like 'cooking' and 'smiling' (Federici, 2012, p. 5; p. 12), plus labour traditionally seen as 'women's work' (Hayden, 1981, p. 3), such as childcare, laundry, and cleaning (Choi, 2014, p. 9).

Feminist theories of reproductive labour were celebrated for expanding Marxist notions of work beyond production, and for drawing attention to work's gendered relations. However, they were critiqued for settling for too narrow a conceptualisation of reproduction (Weeks, 2007). In focusing firstly on 'unwaged housework' and later 'caring labor', the 'socialist feminisms' in fact 'confined theories of reproduction' to 'the space of the household' and 'the domestic realm'. Though perhaps unintentionally, they were complicit in 'replicating undifferentiated and naturalized models of gender' based on the binary between men and women (Weeks, 2007, pp. 235–237). Later feminisms were more successful in moving theories of reproduction out of the home and in shifting the focus of Marxism to include the production of immaterial as well as material goods. It is the contributions of post-Marxist feminist theory that are of concern to this thesis.

Post-Marxist feminism finds the 'affective labour' once described as housework, in the 'feminized, racialized, and globalized forms of waged labor in the service sector' (Weeks, 2007, p. 238). Affective labour has been theorised as a 'relational' form of production involving 'embodied sensations, subjectivities, relations and desires' (Hardt and Negri, 2004; Deleuze and Guattari, 2007, cited in Farrugia, Threadgold and Coffey, 2018, p. 275). Scholars observe how in the contemporary service sector, workers are expected 'to mobilise their entire embodied subjectivities in the course of their labour'. Under conditions of 'post-Fordist production', work now involves the whole self, and is personal, emotional, embodied, and subjective (Farrugia, Threadgold and Coffey, 2018,

p. 272). This includes the work researchers do. Knowledge workers, such as the author of this thesis, are engaged in affective labour. Qualitative inquiry involves listening, empathy, and the provision of care and companionship, and qualitative researchers sometimes find themselves playing a caring role in the relationships they develop with people in research (Hall, 2017, p. 305).

Scholars of affective labour have observed how young precariously employed service sector workers contribute to the production of 'affective atmospheres' in cities. Young people working in bars for example, create the immaterial products on sale in a city's night-time economy: feelings of 'ease, pleasure and enjoyment' (Farrugia, Threadgold and Coffey, 2018, p. 272). Studies of young and early career researchers working on university research projects similarly observe how precariously employed knowledge workers are involved with the production of immaterial affective atmospheres. Studies from the UK show how early career researchers working on qualitative and participative research projects are involved with creating immaterial 'spaces' conducive to the bringing together of 'different modes of knowledge production and contribution'. Early career researchers employ the subjective quality of 'reflexivity' and demonstrate an ability to 'mediate relations' within the production of collaborative research atmospheres (Enright and Facer, 2017, p. 627). However, knowledge workers are not alone in creating 'spaces' for collaboration. As research on affective labour in coproduction highlights, multiple stakeholders participate in the production of immaterial products. Though this participation is unequal and ultimately 'orchestrated' by the most powerful stakeholder (Kolehmainen and Mäkinen, 2021, p. 461).

Affective labour theorists have been criticised for their reliance on Marxist philosophy, with philosophers arguing feminism has more to learn from better integration of post-structuralist ideas (Oksala, 2016). Feminisms in the post-structuralist tradition have explored 'care' as an 'ethic', providing a conceptualisation of ethical practice as 'responsibility' towards 'distant others' (Popke, 2003, p. 299). In post-structuralist feminist ethics, the concept of care leaves the space of the home and the time of the working day behind. Within post-structuralism, care is conceptualised through ideas of 'being-with' others and 'being-in-common' (Nancy, 1993, p. 147, cited in Popke, 2003, p. 310).

Post-structurally, care is offered as an 'ethics of hospitality', a 'gift' that is 'offered unconditionally' between subjects (Popke, 2003, p. 313). When considered through post-structuralism, reproductive practices can look more like eastern philosophies of a shared global care ethics (Han, 1999, cited in Harrison, 2006, p. 325) or African philosophies of relational ethics (Hoffman and Metz, 2017).

As this thesis observes, under conditions of precarity it is difficult to realise the ambitions of participation and engage in the practices of coproduction.

Development scholars have observed how poverty can disrupt the capability of a person or a community to 'care for others' (Hoffman and Metz, 2017, p. 153). Similarly, feminist scholars observe how precarity can disrupt the transformative potential of the care ethic (Lorey, 2015). Scholars, writing reflexively in relation to participation projects they have been involved with, highlight how coproduction ethics can be compromised by the actions of powerful knowledge producing institutions, such as universities (Perry, 2022). In Chapter Seven of this thesis, I explain the ethical approach I developed to study coproduction, revealing how my own care ethic was threatened by the precarity of my position within the university.

A reflexive coproduction, grounded in a feminist ethics of care and compassion, opens new doors for participation research and practice. The coproduction scholarship reviewed in this section provides a useful framework through which to analyse the problems of participation present in the research in this thesis. It guides the analysis that follows towards the study of feelings and emotions in community-based participatory research projects, calling us to pay attention to the labour in the process: the relational work individual people do. The scholarship's encouragement of analysis at the level of feelings and emotions, particularly in participation situations which require staff in community and local government organisations to work together, will help this thesis to understand the causes of some precise participation failures, and how they could be averted. The learnings this thesis produces will be most relevant to London, a city sympathetic to the ambitions of public participation and one with an established history in relation to the power problems of participation. Other cities will, however, recognise that the practices and behaviours which hold

London back from achieving its participation goals are not unique. In the next section, I situate the participation this thesis studies within the specific political and social history of London.

## 2.4 London

The research in this thesis is part of a long tradition of research into the experiences communities have of participation situations involving the London government. Previous arguments highlight how, despite intentions to the opposite, it has not been possible to share power with local communities in a world city like London (Colenutt and Cutten, 1994; Massey, 2007; Corbett and Walker, 2013; Minton, 2022). They also show why previous strategies to engage minority groups with the work of the London government have failed (Gilroy, 1987; Naidoo, 2009; Atashroo, 2017). In this section, I chart the history of the London government, beginning in the mid-twentieth century and moving to the present day. I also chart the history of community participation with this government. I expand Naidoo's work on the history of ethnic minority participation with the GLA (2009), collating material which helps shed light on how we have arrived at the highly targeted community participation situation Naidoo observes in London. I explain that while the participation policies of previous London mayors have been studied in some depth (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987; Colenutt, 1988; Warbis, 2016; Hatherley, 2020a; 2020b) and from the perspective of participation and ethnic minority communities (Gilroy, 1987; Naidoo, 2009; Beebeejaun, 2006; Atashroo, 2017), the approach of the current mayor (at the time of writing) is understudied. I therefore locate exactly where this research provides unique analysis and expands the London scholarship, paving the way for a specific, local contribution to knowledge this thesis makes.

### Targeted policymaking

When it comes to policymaking and public participation in London, governments on both the left and right of the political spectrum have embraced universal and targeted approaches. In a historical study of the London government, the author

Owen Hatherley describes London as the city of 'municipal socialism', showing how for over 90 years (from the 1890s to the 1980s) socialism was the main ideology directing policymaking in the city (Hatherley, 2020b, p. 19). While Hatherley celebrates the universalist approach pursued by the London County Council (LCC) (2020a, pp. 91–92), the tools of 'conventional municipal service provision' used by the LCC have been critiqued in other studies of the London government. Scholars point particularly to the way the universal approach was 'not attuned' to the 'realities' of London. The LCC could not deal with 'multiple deprivation or social exclusion' and 'the implications of ethnic diversity' in the city (Davis, 2015b, p. 209). Later in the twentieth century, the LCC was replaced by the Greater London Council (GLC). It is often noted that London's tabloid papers coined the phrase 'loony left' to describe the Labour leaders of the GLC, precisely because of their policies on 'race, gender, and culture' (Foot, 1987; Hatherley, 2020b, p. 188). Rather than universal socialism, the GLC embraced a post-modern politics of the particular. On winning the office of mayor in 1981, Ken Livingstone explained that under the new ruling group, politics in London would be 'anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-imperialist, [and] anti-sexist' (Gyford, 1985, p. 19, cited in Hatherley, 2020a, p. 94).

To deliver on their anti-racist promise, the GLC combined art and politics through events such as 'London Against Racism' in 1984 (Hatherley, 2020b), an approach which has been heavily critiqued by cultural theorists (Gilroy, 1987; Naidoo, 2009; Atashroo, 2017). The urban planner and spatial politics scholar, Yasminah Beebeejaun provides a history of the active engagement of ethnic minority people in government activity (2006). Pointing to the civil rights movement, Beebeejaun highlights the 1960s as a time when demands for the 'recognition' of difference became part of political narratives in the UK and US. However, though some identity-based groups were able to voice their demand for recognition and be heard, not everyone came to be equally represented. Though some minority groups achieved recognition, ethnic minority people largely remained marginalised by most institutions (Beebeejaun, 2006, p. 4). Despite proclaiming to be anti-racist, Livingstone's approach was not accompanied by a new politics of ethnic minority participation. Policymaking under Livingstone 'tended to lack the active participation of large numbers of

[B]lack people' (Gilroy, 1987, p. 197). The GLC's 'Ethnic Minorities Unit' and 'Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee' have been highlighted as 'highly contentious' and 'irritating' spaces which singled out 'discrete' minorities 'for different pieces of the municipal funding pie' (Atashroo, 2017, cited in Hatherley, 2020b, p. 125). Shamefully, the targeted nature of participation under Livingstone sought to invite marginalised people into spaces their democratic right as a citizen should already have granted them access to but did not (Naidoo, 2009).

Ethnic minority participation in London is informed by events that took place in the mid-twentieth century. The historian John Davis provides some historical insight into how the first ethnic minority interest and service groups came to be established in London in the 1950s and 60s (2015a, 2015b). In response to negative race relations in the country and the obvious racial discrimination faced by London's Caribbean community in particular, a network of voluntary sector organisations aimed at supporting and representing ethnic minority people quickly developed. Davis locates this network geographically in Notting Hill and Brixton and dates it to 1954, when the Lambeth Citizens Advice Bureau began employing a social worker of Caribbean heritage specifically to support 'West Indians' (Davis 2015a, p. 126). It is likely however that an independent, informal service sector existed to support London's Caribbean community before 1954. Hubert 'Baron' Baker is a figure known to have set up an informal organisation in the 1940s. Having spent time in London during the war, Baker knew first-hand the 'colour bar' that existed in London and how hard it was for Black people to access housing. Baker would help new arrivals from the Caribbean overcome the challenge of finding a bed on their first few nights in London (Black History Walks, 2021). During the 1950s though, these type of support services certainly grew in number.

Davis explains why local groups were better placed than the government (both local and national) to support ethnic minority people (Davis, 2015b). As described, the LCC was using the tools of 'conventional municipal service provision', an approach Davis describes as 'not attuned to new realities such as multiple deprivation or social exclusion, or to the implications of ethnic diversity' (Davis, 2015b, p. 209). Davis, like Hatherley, describes the formal policy of the government towards issues of race at the time as one of 'colour blindness'. The



approach to welfare in the 1950s in London was thus one in which 'no allowance' was made for the particular difficulties 'non-white immigrant groups' encountered (Davis, 2015a, p. 126). Davis discusses how the series of violent attacks on Black people in Notting Hill in 1958, known as the Notting Hill race riots, and the later death of Kelso Cochrane in 1959, led to an 'expansion of voluntary activity'. By September 1960 there were at least 74 local groups doing 'race work' in London (Davis, 2015a, p. 126).

The voluntary agencies followed a targeted casework approach. In direct contrast to the practices of municipal socialism, the new practitioners of the style of community politics Davis identifies were pursuing action in line with trends emerging in the US and oriented towards participatory bottom-up approaches (Davis, 2015b, p. 215). Davis lists some of the voluntary organisations that were set up in the 1970s, including a range of women's refuges, people's law centres and pressure groups (Davis, 2015b, p. 213), as well as food co-ops, neighbourhood associations and community centres (Davis, 2015b, p. 215). It was organisations like this that Livingstone's GLC sought to partner with to realise their vision for participation and democracy in the city. The current research is grounded in this history. Chapter Four seeks to study the participatory practices of one voluntary organisation currently providing services for ethnic minority young people in London.

### Community participation

Though criticised for the way the institution sought to work with ethnic minority people, the GLC has been celebrated for providing lessons in producing planning strategies which extended ideas of participation and democracy (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987). In mapping the concept of 'democracy', urban policy scholar Bob Colenutt extends the idea to directly mean 'participation and public involvement', describing them as processes which re-direct 'political power to the 'grass roots' (1988, p. 119). Colenutt argues that it was this version of democracy that members of the GLC's Popular Planning Unit pursued in the early 1980s, pointing to the 'major success' of GLC 'popular planning' initiatives, and locating the success in the way community groups,

local councils and politicians came together to work collaboratively and combine expertise (Colenutt, 1988, p. 119–121). London scholars point to the strength of the community sector in the neighbourhoods the GLC targeted and argue that this developed thanks to years of ‘organised struggle on the part of local groups’ (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987, p. 280, cited in Hatherley, 2020b, p. 114).

Many on the left lament the shortness of the ‘Livingstone GLC’ five-year term, wondering if the approach to participation and democracy taken in London could have been scaled up and implemented at the national level (Foot, 1987). However, after the election of Margaret Thatcher and the ‘dissolution of the postwar social democratic settlement’, there was confrontation over what the vision for London should be (Cochrane, 2007, p. 145, cited in Massey, 2007, p. 17). Victory went to the neoliberal version of the city, and the GLC was abolished in 1986 (Massey, 2007, p. 17; p. 31). When the London mayoralty was reinstated after Labour’s national victory in 1997, Livingstone returned, this time as leader of the new ‘Greater London Authority’, the ‘GLA’ (Hatherley, 2020b, p. 149). Though the GLA continued to carry ‘an official policy of anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-homophobia and anti-imperialism’ (Hatherley, 2020b, p. 164), the London government now had fewer powers, and much of its policymaking – particularly around planning – had to be approved centrally (Hatherley, 2020b, p. 148). Urban geographers have shown how by the time the London mayoralty was reinstated, London had become a ‘world city’, ‘a global centre of command, playing a crucial role in framing the world economy in neoliberal form’ (Massey, 2007, p. 40). This was to have a drastic impact on what was possible when it comes to approaches to governing the city in equal partnership with local communities.

Writing with a colleague, Colenutt examined the concept of community in the context of inequality and poverty in cities (Colenutt and Cutten, 1994). Colenutt and Cutten date the growing use of the concept in urban policy in the UK to the 1970s, arguing that shifts in urban policy towards community can be traced to the establishment of ‘community development projects’. During the 1980s, however, urban policy in UK cities was refocused away from people and communities and towards ‘property and physical regeneration’, in line with the ambitions of Conservative ideologies. In the 1990s, Labour began embracing

partnership approaches between public, private and community interests. Although 'third way' politics focused on 'working in partnership' and was able to recognise 'the complexity and interrelated nature of urban problems', it was not able to create partnership arrangements which 'enabl[ed] each partner to have equal power'. Community partners always held less power than other players (Colenutt and Cutten, 1994, pp. 237–239). As the sociologist John Westergaard revealed, New Labour's politics failed to tackle inequality at its root, by properly regulating the market (Westergaard, 1999). After the financial crisis of 2008, 'the economics of land and real estate' in London were transformed (Minton, 2022, p. 2). This made building a socially just city based on ideas of participation and democracy an impossible task for the London government.

In advance of the Conservative return to power at the national level in 2010, London swung to the right, with Boris Johnson becoming the city's new mayor in 2008. During the 2010s, the Conservative approach to community participation was informed by the ideology of 'conservative communitarianism' (Corbett and Walker, 2013). In their coalition agreement, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat government of 2010–2015 stated their belief 'that [the coalition] can deliver radical, reforming government, a stronger society, a smaller state, and power and responsibility in the hands of every citizen' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011, p. 8). Their devolutionary ideas found form in the Localism Act of 2011. The new government attempted to move towards decentralised and bottom-up approaches to government, expressed through the idea of building a 'big society' to replace 'big government' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011, p. 7).

The idea of the 'big society' was denounced by urban scholars as a corruption of the concept of citizenship, more concerned with 'outsourcing' government responsibility than building community (Sennett, 2012). The ideology driving the approach has been said to co-opt some theories of participation and use them to fulfil neo-liberal ambitions (Dagnino, 2007). However, the GLA was involved with the delivery of 'big society' campaigns, with Johnson's 'Crowdfund London' launching 'to enable community groups to part-fund and deliver projects they deemed important in their local areas' (Warbis, 2016). But 'big society'

campaigns failed to radically empower communities (Beebeejaun, 2018, p. 95) and often resulted in further social exclusion (Purcell, 2019, p. 12). Whilst ideas of community empowerment existed long before the Localism Act was passed, the version promoted by the Conservative Coalition has been described as a 'fragmentation' of 'more established' and more 'independent' forms of 'community empowerment' (Thomas, 2016, cited in Beebeejaun, 2018, p. 89).

'Community empowerment' has been theorised as an approach to urban policy which seeks to channel investment 'into community networks', giving people 'the power and opportunity' to direct change in their city (Colenutt and Cutten, 1994, p. 250). The Conservative promotion of community empowerment came during the later phases of the financial crisis that started in 2008, a time of fiscal austerity in which states were cutting public spending. This led to a situation where though local communities were given responsibility, they were not given power (Corbett and Walker, 2013). While notions of community became central to the Conservative ideology in the 2010s, major funding cuts to local government and community services, made simultaneously, worked to erode 'the structures upon which communities depend' (Bell and Pahl, 2018, p. 108). Despite this, in London under the leadership of the Conservative mayor, Boris Johnson, new programmes of 'digital participation' were created and celebrated for pioneering a new approach to community participation in urban regeneration (Warbis, 2016). However, though GLA participation initiatives during the Johnson era may have produced programmes that worked to build the capability of local communities, this capability was often reserved for London's educated, middle-class communities, of predominantly white ethnic heritage (Sawkins, 2016).

Labour returned to power in London in 2016, with the election of Sadiq Khan. Khan inherited many of the Johnson era 'big society' participation projects, such as Crowdfund London. But quickly sought to build new ones that had greater potential when it came to the participation of ethnic minority communities. Khan had long been engaged in a mission to 'encourag[e] minority communities to get involved in [...] civic society'. Upon becoming London's first Muslim mayor, born of Pakistani parents who migrated to the city, Khan sought to position himself as 'a product of London'. Scholars have observed how Khan used his 'own story'

to imagine the existence of a new 'inclusive London' and promised to build a government 'for all Londoners' (Reed and Bramlett, 2022, p. 1; p. 4). In taking office, Khan sought to collaborate with London's communities to solve London's major challenges. Chapter Four of this thesis explores how Khan used ideas of participation to work with civil society organisation and collaborate with young Londoners involved with a major problem in the city: crime and serious violence.

One way Labour politicians have approached participation is through ideas of 'active citizenship'. Third way reform helped to construct an idea of citizen participation as centred around the construction of the 'active welfare subject'. This shift was articulated by New Labour politicians as a shift from seeing citizens as 'beneficiaries' to seeing citizens as 'consumers'. Under New Labour, no longer were people 'passive' receivers of welfare. Rather they became 'active' stakeholders with agency, interest, and autonomy, capable of making choices and participating in the design and delivery of welfare (Williams, 1999, pp. 669–671). Precise studies of Khan's politics in relation to active citizenship do not exist. However, as 'a mainstream "soft Left" Labour politician' (Hill, 2016) and someone who has been described as a 'protégé' of the Labour leaders Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband (Hatherley, 2020a, p. 108), it is likely that third way politics are part of Khan's ideology. Khan is well-known to have opposed some decisions made under New Labour, such as the decision to invade Iraq (Khan, 2008). However, it is likely he supported the partnership approach to public service delivery central to third way politics and outlined earlier in this section (Colenutt and Cutten, 1994).

While Labour was in power at the national level, third way partnership approaches could not enable public, private and community partners to have 'equal power' (Colenutt and Cutten, 1994, p. 239). However, by the time Labour returned to power in London in 2016, new ideas of power-sharing through co-creation and co-design had been circulating within strategies for public service reform (e.g. Cottam and Leadbeater, 2004; Cottam, 2018). Though specific studies do not exist, ideas around the value of coproduction could have collided with notions of active citizenship circulating within Labour's soft Left and with Khan's ambition to build a government for all Londoners.

Responding to a gap within the existing literature, this study seeks to investigate the value coproduction brings to strategies to enable community organisations to participate in London policymaking. We do not know how community organisations are currently engaging with the work of the GLA, or whether current strategies are enabling community organisations to participate in urban policymaking. Further, we do not know how people inside the GLA currently collaborate with people working in community organisations. This thesis therefore studies both the design of GLA participation mechanisms, and the practices of specific individuals, analysing the impact both these elements have on the success or failure of community-based participatory policy research projects.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This review has highlighted the need for research into the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking in London. Public participation is widely studied and faces globally recognised challenges when it comes to overcoming power inequalities and the translation of local knowledge. In London, public participation faces particular challenges related to issues of targeting and categorisation and the successful engagement of minority groups. While the participation of community organisations with London policymaking has been studied, there is little research available to date on the specific approach to participation pursued by the current mayor of London, Sadiq Khan. This research seeks to study the approach to participation taken at the GLA from 2016, under Khan's leadership.

Where established London scholars have used ideas of community participation to study how the GLA (and its forerunner, the GLC) works collaboratively with people, this study seeks to do so through the lens of coproduction. In general, coproduction is well studied. However, this study seeks to employ coproduction theory at the level of feelings and emotions, an emerging area understudied within the current coproduction literatures. To do so, it employs a feminist perspective which sees the work of coproduction as grounded in an ethics of care and compassion. This development is unique in the context of the London

scholarship and represents an important contribution to knowledge on the felt experience of coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking.

## Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

### 3.1 Introduction

How can coproduction enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking? How do theories of coproduction find form in a London context? How did the design of Citizen-Led limit its coproduction capabilities, and how did people respond to these limitations? What capabilities are required for coproductive relationships between people to develop, and how can participatory research training programmes build these capabilities? What behaviours, skills and experience were required to research the participation of community organisations with policymaking at the GLA? In this chapter, I introduce the methodological approach that has enabled me to ask and answer these main and subsidiary research questions. I argue for a living inquiry approach to action research, showing how it can provide researchers with a practice that is relevant, appropriate, and theoretically aligned with the study of coproduction.

In what follows, firstly I introduce a methodological approach informed by the theories of action research and living inquiry. Then, I describe my methods of data collection and analysis. To support inquiry into coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban research and policy, I have taken a mixed methods approach. In this chapter, I explain how I used traditional ethnographic research techniques involved with the writing of fieldnotes alongside three writing practices championed within action research: qualitative document analysis, critically reflective journalling, and creative analytical writing. I argue for the value of the mixed methods approach, showing how ethnographic techniques allowed me to create highly detailed descriptions of specific moments within my research, and how journalling allowed me to explore these moments further. I show how journalling allowed me to locate myself in the work and to study my own action and participation. Read together, years later, my journalled fieldnotes provide not just a record of what happened during the projects and programmes I studied. They provide a history of my active learning and personal development journey. In this chapter, I explain part of this journey.



### 3.2 Methodological Approach

This thesis studies the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking through the lens of coproduction. Scholars of coproduction have advised users of the methodology to approach their work with greater reflexivity and to follow a coproduction ethics (Durose, Perry and Richardson, 2021). In the previous chapter, I identified the potential brought by feminist ways of thinking to the development of a coproduction ethics. Reflexive scholarship in the feminist tradition begins inquiry at the level of the personal (Cahill, 2007). It is grounded in a belief that knowing is an embodied experience (Haraway, 1988) and seeks to create new knowledge through the analysis of 'felt experiences' (Bradbury et al., 2019a). This thesis employs a reflexive research methodology.

Reflexive scholarship is strongly concerned with the ethical analysis of the ways in which 'power entangles all of us' and holds 'the very texture of society' together (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 279). Foucault's 'genealogy' of power encouraged a knowledge production that is capable of studying the power-related origins of the 'assumptions, categories, logics, claims and modes' which govern a social context (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 306). Foucault initially used the genealogical method to study disciplining techniques within the prison system and the history of sexuality (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 306) and later, to study how power relationships create 'the self' (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 312). This 'ethical phase in Foucault's thinking' centred around the question: 'who am I?' (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 312). Feminist ethics in the post-structural tradition continually turns the focus of inquiry around to face the self, repeatedly inquiring into position and situation and asking 'who am I?' in relation to the knowledge a project is creating.

Research in the 'action research' tradition, has been engaged with reflexive processes of inquiry. Action research has been described as a 'praxiological experiment' wherein 'thinking-persons and life-experiences' come together and provide insightful explanations and understandings of complex realities (Wicks, Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 18). The research in this thesis can be understood as the result of a praxiological experiment wherein I, a thinking person with an interest in coproduction, came together with the complex reality

of participatory policymaking. Through analysis of this encounter, I came to some insightful understandings in relation to my topic, and in relation to myself. These are presented in this thesis. In this section I introduce a methodology for reflexive action research grounded in feminist epistemology and informed by ideas of living inquiry. I describe how becoming an insider action researcher within a government institution and at a community organisation, provided me with the life experiences upon which to build this thesis. I argue for the value of living inquiry action research to the study of coproduction but also discuss some of its methodological limitations.

### Action research

Situated and embodied approaches to applied research find a friend in the methodology of action research, a participatory form of research that is 'embodied', 'situated' and 'reflexive'. Fundamentally a social methodology, action research recognises that the world is built of 'relationships' that are 'co-author[ed]' by 'human persons and communities' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 7). Action research, like coproduction, is 'as much a political statement as a theory of knowledge'. It agrees with the coproductive belief that people should have the 'right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them and claim to generate knowledge about them' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 10). Like coproduction and other participatory methodologies, action research is a practice which seeks to draw on many kinds and sources of knowledge (Bradbury *et al.*, 2019a). It demands that the traditional power dynamics present in much research be deconstructed, calling for 'democratic, peer relationships' between people in research (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 10). The work of nurturing 'partnerships' that reflect 'participative values' comes as one of the seven 'choice points' used to guide contemporary action research (Bradbury *et al.*, 2019b).

Methodologically, action research is part of a wider cross-disciplinary debate concerning 'positionality' in research. Within built environment research, action research has been highlighted for making an important contribution towards helping researchers reflect on their personal 'position' in respect to 'sites'

(Rendell, 2022b). Feminist approaches to action research draw attention to the importance of relationships between 'people and place', highlighting the significance of 'meetings and interactions' between people as generative sites of knowledge production (Wicks, Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 23). The action research expansion of the concept of the 'site' to obviously include meetings and interactions makes the methodology an appropriate one for the study of projects and programmes led by organisations. As this and later chapters show, meetings and interactions are key sites of learning in relation to the practice of coproduction and public participation in urban policymaking.

Action research is most often employed as a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative social research typically focuses on meaning and context. The values of the researcher and their subjective experience is important (Robson and McCartan, 2016, pp. 19–20). Qualitative researchers have argued that for a fieldwork practice to be rigorous, researchers must reflect on their intersectional identities. The process of reflection extends understanding in relation to the 'situated' and coproduced nature of knowledge. Specific moments within fieldwork are highlighted as key sites where a researcher's 'biographical subjectivities' (all the various things that make them who they are) 'intersect' with the 'dynamics' of 'identity, place and embodiment'. These moments include 'informal meetings, observations, interviews and focus groups', understood as key sites where a reflective fieldwork practice is required (Mathijssen *et al.* 2023, p. 56; p. 66).

### Reflection and reflexivity in action research and critical ethnography

Action research most forcefully engages with the concept of positionality through the arguments it makes and the lessons it provides in the cultivation of skills in reflection and reflexivity. Reflection is key to ethics across many research methodologies, playing a role in assuring research maintains best practice in formal and informal ethics, 'keeping researchers honest and [their] investigations rigorous' (LeCompte and Schensul, 2015, p. 251). Writers on reflection in ethnography describe the practice as 'holding a mirror' up to oneself, or of putting one's work under the metaphorical 'microscope'

(LeCompte and Schensul, 2015, p. 251). The image of the mirror highlights how, through reflection, you can scrutinise your own preferences, biases, prejudices, hopes, and concerns, as well as the impact these have on your research (LeCompte and Schensul, 2015, p. 257). The image of the microscope highlights the way in which reflection allows you to zoom in and interrogate your research in immense detail. Ethnographers use a range of strategies to provoke and cultivate reflection. These include keeping 'diaries and journals' and creating text-based 'reflexive accounts' detailing evolving and changing 'emotions and feelings' (LeCompte and Schensul, 2015, p. 259). I explain how I used these strategies in later sections within this chapter (section 3.3 and 3.4).

The early texts on action research introduced how researchers must train themselves in reflection, most famously by working through an 'action-reflection-action' cycle of thinking and doing (Rahman, 1991, cited in Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008, p. 12). Later texts found ethical issues with reflection-informed action, arguing that mere reflection does not prevent researchers from engaging in harmful work, as they only know the errors of their ways after the fact. By contrast, cultivating skills in 'reflexivity' means that researchers are better able to understand the 'very values and logics that keep problematic aspects [...] in place'. With a greater awareness of these aspects, we can reflect on harmful practices and decide how to act differently from the outset (Bradbury and Catone, 2021).

Reflection and reflexivity call for researchers to turn their attentions around and interrogate themselves rather than others. This theme is developed in qualitative methodological literatures on the practice of critical and autobiographical forms of ethnography. Anthropologists chart how up until the 1960s, if you were looking to find more critical ethnographic accounts of the world, you were most likely to find texts informed by 'Marxism [and] neo-Marxist critical theory' (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005, p. 217). After the 1960s however, a different critical form of ethnography evolved. These contributed an analysis of 'modern society and its institutions' that were informed by the 'race, gender, sexual identity, and postcolonial social movements' of the 1960s, and the worldview they were promoting. Critical ethnography's shift from positivism to something more situated dates to this period. It is in this era where the aims of

the approach became twofold. Critical ethnographers now aimed ‘to produce both universalistic theoretical knowledge and local practical knowledge’ (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005, p. 217). This makes critical ethnography much like action research, which has always aimed to produce local practical action.

The research in this thesis is grounded in an action research methodology and produced local practical action in London. To conduct the study, I built relationships with people working in the GLA and in a community organisation called You Press. The GLA is a policymaking institution, and You Press is a voluntary organisation. They are connected through work they have done in the field of community-based participatory research for policy, via a programme called the ‘Citizen-Led Engagement Programme’. Both the GLA and You Press, as well as the ‘Citizen-Led Engagement Programme’, are introduced in Chapter Four. In Chapter Seven, I show how I built relationships with people at the GLA and You Press, and analyse the experience through the lens of the fourth subsidiary research question: *What behaviours, skills and experience were required to research the participation of community organisations with policymaking at the GLA?* Here, however, it is important to note that this study’s research topic and initial research questions were developed together with members of staff and volunteers at the GLA and You Press, using an action research practice reflective of the values of coproduction, studied in Chapter Two. Like coproduction, action research is a practice born of the ‘participatory worldview’. As well as providing a theory of situated, embodied and reflexive knowledge production, action research is part of a social justice agenda which demands the balance of power in research be shifted (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 10). I sought to embody these qualities, and prioritised participatory working during my study.

### **Insider action research**

Action research has many branches, one of which is action research in the ‘insider’ tradition. Insider action researchers hold formal roles within the institutions they study. But in addition to completing the (usually paid) work they are contracted to do, the insider action researcher ‘examines everything’, listens

to everything, questions everything (Coghlan and Shani, 2011, p. 651). I became an insider action researcher at the GLA and at You Press. At the GLA, I evaluated some key participatory workstreams, analysing how they were performing against the aims the GLA had for them. At You Press, I worked in a voluntary capacity as a research consultant. This saw me take on roles as a trainer, running activities as part of research training workshops, and as an evaluator, bringing staff members together to reflect on existing projects and plan new ones.

As mentioned, my work at the GLA allowed me to study activity related to the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme. Citizen-Led was a participation programme the GLA developed to help the organisation work with specific London communities and produce knowledge in relation to specific urban policy topics. During the period 2017–2020, Citizen-Led produced 17 community-based participatory research projects. All these projects followed the ideology and processes of ‘peer research’, an approach to knowledge production which sees people with lived experience of certain policy topics, become researchers and gather data from their peers (for a further discussion of peer research, see section 4.4).

I joined the GLA shortly after the conclusion of a ‘pilot’ run of the Citizen-Led programme, in which six community-based participatory research projects had been delivered. I began the research in this thesis at a time when ‘Citizen-Led Two’ was being designed and conducted most of my research while the programme was being pitched to community organisations (Chapter Five) and while community organisations were working with the GLA to co-design and deliver peer research (Chapter Six). I saw how through Citizen-Led Two, the GLA were able to deliver a further 11 community-based participatory research projects by working with community organisations in the period 2019–2020. I have selected one of these 11 projects for investigation in this thesis. This choice was methodological and relates to my decision to follow an insider action research methodology. I was able to attain ‘insider’ status in my action research with only one of the many community organisations involved with Citizen-Led Two: You Press.

In relation to the question of how coproduction can enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking, conclusions have been drawn by studying the relationship the GLA and You Press developed with one another during the Roots Two project. Some features of the GLA –You Press relationship were not unique. It is true that other community organisations, running projects via Citizen-Led, experienced similar problems to those encountered in Roots Two. As analysed in Chapter Six, engaging with individual people in the GLA on the ‘co-design’ of research questions, and communicating the knowledge the projects were producing to policymaking audiences, was a challenge across Citizen-Led Two. But, for reasons of methodology, the findings of this thesis are drawn specifically from studying the challenge as experienced by You Press.

At You Press, I worked on Roots Two. By the time I started as a research consultant, the organisation had already been involved with the GLA via the Citizen-Led Pilot. Between September 2017 and May 2018, You Press delivered a pilot community-based participatory research project (the social change agency, 2019, p. 4) and had called it ‘Roots’. I was only able to begin my in-person research at the GLA and at You Press after the conclusion of the Citizen-Led Pilot and this first ‘Roots’ project. Though it would have been advantageous to action research the pilot programme and first Roots – or other projects that took place during the pilot – the timing of Citizen-Led Two and the Roots Two project fitted much better with my own: I was granted ethical approval to begin studying the organisations from September 2018, a few months after the conclusion of the Citizen-Led and You Press pilots.

After the conclusion of the first Roots project, You Press continued to work with the GLA. Of the 11 community organisations the GLA supported to deliver research, they were the only organisation to have also participated in the Citizen-Led Pilot. But this is not why they are the sole community organisation selected for study in this thesis. The reason they are the sole community organisation studied is methodological. The journey I took to gain ‘insider’ status at You Press is analysed from an ethical perspective in Chapter Seven. Here, however, it is important to know what my work on Roots Two entailed.

## Facilitative practice

My insider action research roles at the GLA and at You Press allowed me to engage in what insider action researchers describe as 'facilitative practice' (Mackewn, 2008). From the perspective of action research, facilitators should use creative and non-verbal methods, to 'take people just outside their comfort zone but not into their panic zone'. Used well, these approaches should allow participants and facilitators to access their intuitive, as well as rational, minds and encourage them to think about their 'dreams' and 'memories', as well as any 'wisdom' and 'hunches'. Giving this knowledge a chance to come forward and be shared can lead to the production of powerful insight which can greatly benefit the group, organisation, or community (Mackewn, 2008, pp. 626–627). The way action research gives local knowledge and lived experience a chance to come forward further connects the methodology with coproduction, making it an appropriate methodology in which to ground the research in this thesis.

In action research, facilitators are understood to be responsible for making interventions within institutions (Mackewn, 2008). The activist nature of some of these interventions has led action research to be described as a methodology 'with a high potential for self-destruction' (Coghlan and Shani, 2011, p. 653). Insider action research practices in particular can be 'threatening to existing organizational norms', especially when there is a 'hierarchical control culture' (Coghlan and Shani, 2011, p. 651). To ward against self-destruction, insider action researchers are advised to 'be proactive and reflective', 'be critical and committed', 'be independent and work well with others', 'and have aspirations and be realistic about limits' (Coghlan and Shani, 2011, p. 653). As later sections of this chapter show, I used the action research method of journaling to cultivate reflexivity during research. However, despite using this and other methods, the insider action research methodology did produce problems for me at the GLA. The limitations of the methodology are discussed in Chapter Seven.

To build some of the 'meta-skills' central to action research and build a capacity for grounding and noticing, researchers are recommended to practice 'meditation' (DiStefano and Bradbury, 2022). These practices are especially



important for facilitators, who need to be able to notice feelings and behaviours, and to inquire as to the meaning of them (Mackewn, 2008). In the face of the 'self-destructive' potential of insider action research (Coghlan and Shani, 2011, p. 653), it was important for me to cultivate an expanded research practice which encouraged the making of careful interventions. Regular meditation helped me to become a more patient, less impulsive, and calmer person. Further, action research is a process of engagement 'which needs to be sustained for a significant period of time' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 12). The timelines associated with the methodology do not align with those of a traditional PhD programme. Therefore, meditation practice also helped me to embrace a slowness that is vital to research grounded in feminist philosophies but missing in much of academia (Mountz *et al.*, 2015).

### Living inquiry

Key figures within the participatory research tradition have observed how the different forms of action research achieve outcomes for different stakeholders. Development scholars highlight how 'PAR [participatory action research] serves the community, cooperative-inquiry serves the group, and action inquiry the individual practitioner' (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008, p. 9). Living inquiry forms of action research are particularly personal. The branch of action research referred to as 'living inquiry' is grounded in the feminist philosophies introduced in Chapter Two, which sees the personal as political and the self as a site of political transformation (Cahill, 2007). At heart, this thesis understands action research as a practice which engages with a range of critical perspectives not with the aim of understanding other people, but with the aim of developing your own understanding of what is happening to you, in your life (Wicks, Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Applied in the context of my study, this has meant that though I may have set out to study other people as the subjects of my inquiry, some of the most important learning has been about myself. Given its inward nature, is action inquiry really an appropriate methodology for the study of coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking? Champions of living inquiry action research would answer yes. As 'participation is fundamental to the nature of our being', I must study myself as part of my

research into the lives of others (Wicks, Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 19). Acknowledging the impossibility of disentangling one's life and one's research, living inquiry scholars take life in its whole as the site of inquiry (Marshall, 1999).

Taking the whole of life as the site of inquiry is useful in open and exploratory 'case study' research. The case study method involves defining a case as a 'single unit' of study, ahead of analysis (Gerring, 2004, p. 341). Often cases are individually defined using categories which describe them as 'typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, most similar, and most different' prior to analysis (Seawright and Gerring, 2008, pp. 297–298). But qualitative and multi-method researchers in the 'nominalist' tradition promote a more flexible approach to defining cases. For nominalists using the case study method, 'a "case" is something we make – an analytic construct that we develop through our efforts to theorize the phenomena we study' (Soss, 2021, p. 85). They argue that a priori 'casing' can foreclose possibilities and constrain research. Researchers are recommended to enter the field sooner and come to define and continually redefine what they are studying much later in the research process, depending on what they discover their cases to be 'cases of' (Soss, 2021). 'Casing' thus becomes an analytic process, rather than a job to be done before analysis can begin.

I found the challenge for the action researcher involved with open and exploratory research, and with living much of their life as a research inquiry, was one of attention. It is extremely exhausting to maintain a mindful awareness and critical analysis of everything that happens in your life. Feminist scholars advise paying attention to the bodily impact of what you do and listening with 'feminist ears' to any signs that your body 'is not coping with what you are asking' of it (Ahmed, 2017, p. 247). The action research imperative to live 'a mindful life' offers writing as a method to cultivate physical and emotional awareness. Living inquirers use notetaking and journaling as initial 'tracking' methods, and creative writing methods to analyse and communicate research (Marshall, 2016, p. xvii; pp. 57–58; pp. 101–103), and these are described in later sections of this chapter. Writing did help me to uncover both what my cases were cases of (Soss, 2018), and to listen to when my body and emotions were being strained (Ahmed, 2017), but the practice of writing itself was

exhausting and something I regularly extended my working day to do. Living a mindful life exposes action researchers to emotional risk, though from the perspective of this thesis, this isn't seen as a limitation of the methodology. Emotional risk is an inherent and important part of personal development and crucial for transformative social change (Dickens and Butcher, 2016, p. 537). Chapter Seven provides some of the reasons as to why I was able to shoulder this risk, recognising the uniqueness and privilege of my position.

The writing methods action research scholars offer make living inquiry look a lot like the autobiographical approach to ethnography: autoethnography. And, as later sections show, many of the methods I have used to produce the research contained in this thesis are also autoethnographic. Ethnography has long been criticised by action researchers as a methodological approach that does not contribute enough to social change (Argyris, Putnam and Smith, 1985, pp. 158–189). Though, it is true that more critical and action-oriented forms of ethnography do exist. As previously mentioned, critical ethnography arose in response to postmodern critiques of positivism and cultural critiques of modern society (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005, p. 217). Furthermore, 'ethnography in action' arose in response to changes in the relationship between research and practice and in answer to calls for ethnographers to work with community partners (Schensul and LeCompte, 2016, p. 35). Whereas traditional '[e]thnographic field research involves the study of groups and people' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 1) and critical ethnography, 'explores the intense self–other interaction' (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005, p. 218), the mixed methods approach of ethnography-in-action seeks to 'intervene' and produce 'outcomes' that 'change systems' (Schensul and LeCompte, 2016, p. 44). But the methodological underpinnings of this study are more action research than ethnography. This is precisely because of the action element. In my insider action research roles, I didn't just observe projects at the GLA and You Press, I was part of them. This put me in a privileged position when I came to collecting data for my study, as the next section explains. But in a problematic position when it came to ending my study, as detailed in Chapter Seven (section 7.5).

### 3.3 Methods of Collection

In this section, I describe how holding an insider action research role enabled me to compile a rich archive of public and private documents authored by the GLA and You Press. It also ensured me access to a range of private meetings and events. I show how I used ethnographic fieldnote making techniques, such as headnotes, jottings, and memos, to produce fieldnotes in relation to 41 meetings and events during my action research. I explain how, over time, I was better able to respond to action research theory in the production of fieldnotes, particularly the action research imperative to journal.

#### Documents

To support the research in this thesis, qualitative data collection methods were used to compile an archive of qualitative data sources, important components within action research (Ivankova, 2015, p. 200). The sources collected were primarily 'text based' (Flick, 2009; Yin, 2014) and should be understood as 'documents'. Documents are a commonly used qualitative data source in mixed methods action research (Ivankova, 2015, p. 201; p. 204). In action research, a 'document' is defined as 'a public or private record that may provide objective information about an issue of interest' (Ivankova, 2015, p. 204). Material that can be classed as a 'document' include 'reports; policy statements; minutes; organizational records' and 'other organizational and community documents' (Creswell, 2013; Koshy *et al.*, 2011; Stringer, 2014; Stringer and Genat, 2004, cited in Ivankova, 2015, p. 204). This thesis uses public and private reports and policy documents published by the GLA and You Press as important qualitative data sources. Key amongst these were two publicly available mayoral strategies, one publicly available funding prospectus, and two private planning documents (a completed application form to Citizen-Led and a project plan used to support the Roots Two project), all introduced in Chapter Four. The action research roles I took on alerted me to the existence of these documents and allowed me to access them. People working at the GLA and in You Press alerted me to the existence of the public documents on the internet, which were findable through a simple search. I received the private documents as attachments to emails and/or as printed objects handed out in meetings.

I used the documents I collected firstly to guide action in my research. The documents contained information I needed to know to evaluate programmes and to plan the activities I ran as a facilitator and trainer in projects. However, aside from guiding immediate action, the documents I collected provided a useful data source for further research. In preparing the chapters in this thesis, I returned to the documents, analysing them in line with the teachings of ‘content analysis’. Content analysis is an ‘unobtrusive’ method involving the qualitative analysis of documents in ‘real world’ research (Robson and McCartan, 2015, pp. 349–350; p. 357). Using documents gives me some idea as to what people in the research would have been aware of and when. For example, in analysing a GLA funding prospectus, I got to see what community organisations ‘would have seen’ (Robson and McCartan, 2015, p. 350) when deciding to apply to the organisation for funding. This helped me to better appreciate the position of applicants and to make judgements in relation to the knowledge they did or did not have. For instance, the funding prospectus promised specific training and co-working opportunities to successful organisations. Knowing this, it seems reasonable to argue that community organisations successful in their applications, would have been expecting to receive training and engage in co-working. This is just one example of how analysing the content of the documents I collected during my action research allowed me to support the claims I make in this thesis. Using evidence from documents in isolation would not have been possible. Only when used in conjunction with ethnographic fieldnote making and action research journalling did content analysis bear fruit in this thesis. As the next sections detail, insights gleaned from fieldnotes and journalling produced the main entry points into the arguments at the heart of this thesis.

### Fieldnotes I: headnotes

To keep a record of what was going on at events and in meetings at the GLA and You Press, I used ‘headnotes’ and ‘fieldnotes’, two methods of notetaking recommended by ethnographers. Writing mental headnotes is a step-by-step sensorial and feelings-based approach. It involves the researcher cultivating an intense awareness of the environment in which they find themselves.

Headnotes are a technique well suited for ethnographic researchers who are participating fully in the action they are researching (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011). To create a headnote, the researcher takes mental notes of their 'initial impressions', thinking about what they can see, feel, and hear, as well as perhaps taste and smell. The researcher is also asked to think in detail about the 'physical setting', paying attention to its 'size, space, noise, colors, equipment, and movement'. They think about the people in the setting: counting and observing their 'number, gender, race, appearance, dress, [and] movement' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011; p. 24). As well as observing, ethnographic researchers try to make headnotes about the meaning of what they are observing. They think about the 'local importance' of people and places. They do this by focusing intently on their own reactions and 'feelings', tuning in to their 'personal sense of what is significant and unexpected'. They ask, what am I having a 'strong reaction' to? When do I feel 'please, shock, or even anger'? (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 25). And by inquiry into 'member' meanings', thinking about what other 'people are concerned with from the specific ways in which they talk and act' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 168).

As well as focusing on their own feelings, in producing headnotes the ethnographer tries to capture the feelings of others. To do this they observe what seems significant or 'important' to other people in the setting. The researcher looks at others and listens, asking: '[w]hat do they stop and watch? What do they talk and gossip about? What produces strong emotional responses for them?' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 25). This involves the work of inference (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 168). For example, at events I attended I sometimes heard noises, such as tutting and sighing coming from attendees. In my headnotes I inferred tuts and sighs as emotional responses and signs of frustration and disappointment, or of discontent of some sort (section 5.2). Of course, 'an ethnography remains one author's vision of field experiences and members' worlds' thus what the ethnographer infers from what they see and hear is always necessarily interpretative (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 241). But headnote inferences did provide a useful starting point for inquiry in this study.

The awareness raising qualities of ethnographic headnote making have been theorised differently in action research. Management scholar Hilary Bradbury uses the practice of meditation to tune in and connect with the self and with others. Recently, Bradbury, together with colleagues, has been developing 'relational meditation', a method of cultivating awareness and building connection within action research (DiStefano and Bradbury, 2022). Similarly, Gretchen Ki Steidle, a non-academic author working in the field of international development, has been promoting the practice of 'mindfulness' to cultivate awareness and develop capacities for 'consciousness' (Steidle, 2017). Meditation, mindfulness, and the making of headnotes are activities that do not leave a written trace. With headnotes, you rely on your memory to remember the thought answers to the headnote questions. In ethnography, the researcher waits until the action they are participating in has concluded, and then goes away to write down the content of their remembered headnotes (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 25). Though some mindfulness practices include writing, transferring the thoughts that mindful processes provoke into text is not usually a priority. In action research, the aim of being mindful is to help the practitioner to make better decisions in action: reflexively, not reflectively.

Ethnographers developing the headnote technique do not discuss bias in the context of headnote making. In a society where race and gender hierarchies have a long history and both conscious and unconscious forms of bias exist, paying extreme attention to the outward look of a person's 'gender, race, appearance, dress, [and] movement' could be unproductive in research with a social change agenda. By contrast, the consciousness raising practices of action research have been developed in response to problems of unconscious bias. Viewing prejudice as a 'wounding', 'limiting' 'shadow' that 'distorts our perspective' and causes people 'to act unconsciously in ways that can cause harm' (Steidle, 2017, p. 41), action researchers seek to look and think beyond surface appearances. In the context of race and gender-based bias, this involves seeing differences, but seeing them for a reason. Noticing how people respond to difference, including the researcher, can be a starting point for inquiry. Chapter Five begins its inquiry by looking at how people responded to race-based differences in the design of Citizen-Led.

## Fieldnotes II: jottings

At the meetings and events I was participating in and observing at the GLA and You Press, it was very normal for everyone to have a notebook or laptop open in front of them, in which to take notes. I needed to take notes to help me complete the work I was doing in my insider action research roles, but I also had permission to take notes for the purposes of research. Though the culture of notetaking meant that everyone was usually writing, I needed to regularly remind people that the notes I was making were not just for the work but also for my 'studies'. In large events or when people I had not met before attended meetings as a one-off, I would explain who I was at the start. Usually, I would say that I was a 'research student' doing an 'evaluation as part of an applied PhD'. Most often, I did this as part of the 'round the room' introduction processes that are common in meetings and professional events. Thanks to the culture of writing that my research partners shared and to my openness and transparency in relation to who I was, most of the time I could keep a written record of my headnotes and mindful thought processes.

In the notes I made in meetings and at events, I wrote down some of the things the headnote technique encourages researchers to observe and feel. I drew quick sketches of room layouts, counting and marking people and who they were on my sketches, based on what they said, not on appearances – usually their name, job role and employer. In ethnography, the notes I made could be called 'jottings'. Jottings are 'brief written records of events and impressions captured in key words and phrases'. Jottings can be understood as 'to-be-remembered observations', which take the form of 'quickly rendered scribbles about actions and dialogue' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 29). In making my jottings, I would write notes in relation to what was happening, recording some sentences verbatim, but mostly just key words or partial snippets of dialogue. I would also note down what I could infer about people's feelings and emotions from the way they said things, using capital letters to indicate shouting and italics to indicate emphasis. If I observed non-verbal communication such as eye-rolling or heard vocal expressions such as sighs and tuts, I noted these as responses too: seeking to capture the unsaid as well as the said.



Additionally, I would mark my notes with star symbols and square brackets, layering what I had captured with my personal sense of what was important and significant, and any extra thoughts and immediate reflections.

### Fieldnotes III: memos

Whenever I had raw jottings sliding around on loose slips of paper in my bag or wandering as plain text files on my desktop, I felt anxious. The desire to turn a jotting into a memo as soon as possible after a meeting or event became an urgent need. The memo, as an ethnographic 'fieldnote', allows the experience to be preserved for the purposes of later 'deep reflection' and for later 'writing' projects (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 17). Thus, as soon as possible after the meeting or event I would type up my jottings, translating them into typed and time-stamped 'memos' and storing them in a password protected NVivo project stored on the university's secure server. The action of typing up jottings works to 'jog the memory' of the researcher (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 29) and I would always find myself able to add in lots of detail in relation to the words, phrases, and actions I had noted.

After I had created a fuller, more detailed account of the meeting or event as a fieldnote memo (for an example see figure 1), I would destroy the jotting. I remember gaining great satisfaction from tearing up the scraps of paper I had written on. Or, if it was a typed jotting, I appreciated the moment when I could drag the plain text file across my screen and drop it into the digital recycling 'bin', emptying the bin and clicking 'yes' to the pop up which asks if I really wanted to permanently delete the file. I did. Deleting the jottings was important. For speed and to aid understanding, in my jottings I used the real names of the people I worked with, usually their initials and pronouns. As I typed up my fieldnotes though, I would swap to using pseudonyms and gave everyone the same non-binary pronouns.

The presentation then, like others, covered the role of the community group and the role of the GLA. The new level of support was introduced as being something new this year, as well as greater thinking around developing 'opportunities to share (...) back to local communities (...) and in the GLA'. It was said that there would be the 'coproduction of a communications plan'.

From discussing the new levels of support and the increased thinking re. dissemination Pine moved to introduce the themes and group this year's fund is hoping to receive applications from. They said, 'we have, with this fund, always had target communities, and we do again this year'. It was an interesting framing and set the tone that the list format we are about to discuss is nothing new, it has not come from "no-where", it is there for a reason... It was perhaps thanks to this structure that the themes/groups breakout conversation was less angry/critical than in previous sessions. What was new in the debate was phrases like, 'maybe you covered this last year'. Perhaps it helped to make the initial questions on this matter more inquisitive and based around 'why' questions rather than statements and direct criticism, though this did come later.

#### Quotes

'you need to be clearer about whether core costs are covered'

(On the due diligence) 'maybe these formalities are responsible for keeping these communities "hard to reach". 'If you don't accommodate them, they don't have voice'.

*Figure 1: Fieldnote, 22nd February 2019*

Using the ethnographic techniques of headnotes, jottings, and memos, I was able to produce fieldnotes in relation to 41 meetings and events. Each meeting and event lasted between one and three hours and I gave myself an average of two hours to subsequently write each fieldnote. This equated to a total of 164 hours of ethnographic writing. There were other meetings and events that I attended where I was not able to translate my headnotes and jottings into fieldnotes, and this points to a limitation of the method. As a practice, notetaking was at times difficult to sustain. Naturally there are gaps in my notes when I was too exhausted and time poor to write it all down. In addition to the ethical challenges associated with collaborative and coproduced research, the practical challenge of ethnographic methods meant that my case selection for the thesis was constrained by my capacity to stay up late writing during an immensely busy period earlier in my research. For a discussion on limitations and the motivations driving case selection in this thesis, see Chapter Seven.

## Interventions

Ethnography has long been criticised as a methodological approach that does not contribute enough to social change (Argyris, Putnam and Smith, 1985, pp.

158–189). In using the traditional ethnographic fieldnote making techniques of headnotes, jottings and memos, my aim was to preserve action with which I was involved. Initially, the methods encouraged me towards passivity. Over time however, as my capabilities in research improved, I was able to change my aims. Whilst my early notes are very descriptive and are written almost from the perspective of an outsider, from the middle of my study onwards I write a lot about what I say and do in meetings and at events. Fieldnotes from later in my study (for examples see figure 2, and figure 3) reveal that I asked questions and made comments to intervene in the action I was observing.

I asked a question about how organisations can exit the fund which provoked concern that I knew a project who wanted to quit (I don't). Cicada's response was that it had never happened before and that they hoped it would never come to that but said it would be in the small print of their contracts. Bat said they didn't think it said anything there and that it was unfair that there was no clarity of how organisations could withdraw/defer if they face d crisis. It see me d wrong that this was an area where there was no clear knowledge from the CE team/project manager.

*Figure 2: Fieldnote, Wednesday 4th September 2019*

I made comment at the end of the meeting pointing out that the injustice I saw in comissioning such a large scale survey from (and I phrased it as a question) a private sector consultancy style organisation when there are many many community groups and small civil society organisations who want to undertake research, as well as providing services, and have the community engagement links to provide great insight.

*Figure 3: Fieldnote, Wednesday 13th November 2019*

In making interventions I took direction from the same philosophies that theoretically ground the contemporary ethnographic approaches of 'critical ethnography'. As described earlier in this chapter, critical ethnographic accounts of the world are based in a Marxism which seeks not simply to interpret the world, but to change it (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005, p. 217). This was something I was seeking to do too within my action research. To contribute to social change however, I needed to develop my capability for critical reflection and reflexivity. Again, used in isolation, traditional ethnographic methods were not going to help me: I needed to use methods more commonly associated with action research.

### 3.4 Methods of Analysis

In this section, I explain how I used a mixture of prompts from ethnographic and action research writing methods to analyse the meaning of the activities and behaviours I observed, and with which I was engaged. Firstly, I align myself with processes of ethnographic theory building, introducing the role ethnographic writing played in my analytic process. I also track the impact journal keeping had on my research practice. I argue that writing reflections in the moments between standalone events or activities – after a specific meeting but before an email exchange, after a phone call but before drafting a document, after an email exchange but before an event – helped me to develop as a ‘critically reflexive practitioner’ (Cunliffe, 2016). Through reflexivity I was able to produce immediate insight in relation to the next step to take in my action research. I was also able to create a text-based resource of tacit knowledge on coproduction, urban policymaking, and community-based participatory research. Secondly, I describe how, armed with this resource, I was able to prepare this thesis. I explain some of the decisions I had to make in the early stages of my analysis. I argue that ethical constraints particular to my project reduced my dataset hugely and are the reason why this thesis studies the relationship only *one* community organisation had with the GLA. To close the chapter, I show how I wrote a series of research vignettes. Written shortly after the conclusion of my practical work on projects, the vignettes allowed me to communicate my research experiences and discuss them with others. This process led to a further, localised process of analysis, wherein I put my empirical material into dialogue with ‘the concepts and traditions of [my] scholarly discipline’ (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 201) and developed the key arguments I propose in this thesis.

#### Journaling

Scholars of ethnography describe analysis as a ‘process’ of ‘constantly thinking about the import of previously recorded events and meanings’ (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 199). Action research is concerned with how, ‘we cultivate

our imaginative and perceptual capacities' and of 'what we allow to inform our decision-making' (Seeley and Thornhill, 2014, p. 7, cited in Warwick and Traeger, 2019, p. 2; Warwick *et al.*, 2022). Action researchers observe and seek to learn about 'how our reflexive choices [...] come to influence thought and practice' (Cunliffe, 2009; 2016, cited in Warwick and Traeger, 2019, p. 2). To understand importance and meaning, ethnography experts recommend writing 'code memos' alongside fieldnotes. Code memos are texts which contain all the associated 'ideas, issues and leads' that come up for the ethnographer during and after completing the work of producing the fieldnote (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 186). To increase consciousness in relation to their own thought and practice, and to decide what to do, action research experts recommend writing critically reflexive journal entries. In 'journaling', you put your 'lived experience' down in writing. You describe your 'feelings and frustrations' and dig into your 'assumptions', and the implications of your 'actions' (Cunliffe, 2016, p. 759). This thesis takes inspiration from both ethnographic and action research writing, using activities from both traditions to engage in analytic work.

In ethnography, the 'fieldnote memo' preserves the action the ethnographer observes for the purposes of later 'deep reflection' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 17), and the 'code memo' is the site in which that later deep reflection finds a written form (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 186). Ethnographers use code memos to record both the concerns and insights they had while observing the action, and the new concerns they have when they read through the fieldnotes after some time has passed (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 186). To begin a process of analysis in relation to the 41 fieldnotes I produced in relation to the meetings and events I attended during my action research, I engaged in the writing activities involved with creating code memos. However, rather than creating code memos in NVivo while writing my fieldnote memos, I chose to record my immediate thoughts as dated entries in documents I created in Microsoft Word. I would write my ideas and list any issues or leads the research presented. This introduced a layer of immediate analysis into my fieldnotes. Action researchers would identify this writing activity as 'journaling' and describe the layer of analysis it adds to a project as 'critical reflection' (Cunliffe, 2016).

For example, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 2019 I type out a simple description of my work (figure 4). I list my activities for the day, describing some work I was doing to research ‘community and peer-led research’ in London. And I give some hint at why I was doing this: to check that a guestlist for an event included all the organisations it should. Then, I go on to write about a frustration I had. Though the journal entry is dated to one day, it sounds like this frustration had been running for a while. I write across time, about how I had ‘been experiencing’ a ‘silence’ or perhaps multiple silences from people I wanted to be hearing from. I speculate on why things aren’t going as I want them to. In another entry, recorded five days later, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2019, the silence problem seems to have disappeared. In this entry I consider the implications of my earlier actions, critically reflecting on how previously I may have been a little ‘misguided’ (figure 5). Having come to learn about the perceived ‘silence’, I reveal something of the implications of putting the needs of my (long-term) PhD ahead of the needs of an upcoming workshop. I express feeling ‘selfish’ about having done that.<sup>1</sup> The two journal entries, written five days apart, are a record of my evolving feelings and understanding of a particular situation. Taken together, they evidence how I used journaling to record learning journeys that could be described as ‘double-loop’ (Cunliffe, 2016, p. 759). Double loop learning is an approach to knowing that lies at the heart of action research. In double loop learning ‘[s]omething is learned about the director [person acting in the world] rather than about the reality “out there”’ (Dahler-Larsen, 2012, p. 49).

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<sup>1</sup> In my journals I did not adhere to research protocols around anonymisation. I wrote openly about people, using their real names and many identifiers that would connect us with specific work. In the sections of journal entry shared in this section, the identifying information has been redacted.

**Friday 3 May**

Today I undertook desktop research into the community and peer-led research landscape in London. I searched online under search terms 'community-led research, london', 'peer-led research, london' and 'citizen-led research, london'. Through doing this I came to see most of the organisations down to either be invited to the event [redacted] on [redacted] or planning to attend, [redacted]

[...]

[redacted] I have been experiencing a 'silence' from [redacted] in relation to my involvement with this work... Could it be that [redacted] we see the aims of the event quite differently? Perhaps there are other reasons. [redacted]

[redacted] I did not hear from [redacted] yesterday [redacted]  
[redacted] I have not heard back.

Figure 4: Journal Entry, Friday 3rd May 2019

**Wednesday 8 May**

I have received feedback/comments from [redacted] These were all directed on what the paper should be *for the workshop*. Because of the looming Upgrade deadline for documents I think I had perhaps become a little misguided with this and focused more on what the paper could do for my PhD rather than what the paper could do for [redacted] project at GLA. I feel that this was a selfish direction to take.

Figure 5: Journal Entry, Wednesday 8th May 2019

Leaving the blood in

During my research I journalled about the worries I had in relation to my research, about how hard it was to establish relationships, about all the things I felt bad about, about the concerns that kept me awake at night: funding, access, skills, knowledge, identity. At the beginning of my research, I saw my journaling as something I should keep separate to my fieldnotes. As time went on, however, my approach changed. As well as learning that journaling was an accepted research method, I discovered a whole community of doctoral students celebrated for their capability to write from a position of vulnerability. Autoethnographic thesis writers promote 'leaving the blood in' and writing in a way that resists the 'positivist-informed "master" narratives' that mark so much of doctoral writing (Moriarty, 2013, p. 70). This gave me confidence to later incorporate journaling as a formal research method in my work. Later in my research, I actively respond to action research prompts in my fieldnotes. I start to enquire into what it was in a meeting or event that made me feel 'struck' (for

an example see figure 6) and I begin to describe my 'feelings and frustrations' (Cunliffe, 2016) more honestly. Importantly, I spend significantly more time writing about the possible negative implications of my actions (for an example see figure 7). These developments make my later fieldnotes a little less like the sort of fieldnotes ethnography would recognise, and a little more like critically reflexive journal writing.<sup>2</sup>

What struck me about the different responses was that they were so different: it showed me a lot about how different CE team actors understand the programme, it's aims and what it can do. It is first a foremost a tool for generating 'intelligence', or it is mainly a tool for capacity building and secondly a method for generating insight? [Is there an exercise I can do with the team on this? It is an important thing to sort out before phase 3.]

*Figure 6: Fieldnote, Wednesday 6th November 2019*

*This was great to hear but also made me a little nervous. It is the outcome I wanted however I do not want to produce inertia or a negative impact on organisations.*

*Figure 7: Fieldnote, Tuesday 21st January 2020*

### Surfacing tacit knowledge

Introducing journaling into my fieldnote-making process helped me to critically reflect on the action I was engaged with as an insider action researcher. My critically reflective fieldnotes helped me to make better decisions on what to do next in my role as an evaluator, facilitator, and trainer, and as a researcher. But, as well as being helpful in developing capabilities across my action research practice, journaling helped me to tell research stories. For, when used by practitioners, journaling can become a practical tool to capture and translate 'taken-for-granted ways' of 'everyday' 'sense making' into research data (Cunliffe, 2016, p. 751). Journals have the power to convert embodied knowledge that exists in-action, into written knowledge that exists in-text. The management scholar Ann Cunliffe draws on the social constructionist

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<sup>2</sup> I produced fieldnotes without paying attention to spelling and grammar and did not change, edit, or proof them after writing. As such, there are grammatical errors within the examples shared in this section.



philosophies of 'tacit knowing' and 'knowing from within', to argue that when people working in organisations engage in journaling, they can surface what they know tacitly (Polanyi, 1966; Shotter, 1993, p. 18, cited in Cunliffe, 2016: pp. 758–759).

The capability to surface tacit knowledge makes journaling a useful method in action research. Fellow management scholars, David Coghlan and Abraham Shani, give the journaling Cunliffe describes as a method insider action researchers can use to understand practice. If a regular journaling practice is maintained over time, action researchers can look back over their journals and 'identify gaps' in their knowledge and understanding of their applied research situations. By reading back through journal entries once some time has passed, action researchers can learn about the distances that once existed 'between what they know and what they think they know and what they find they don't know' (Coghlan and Shani, 2011, p. 648). Reading back through my own journal entries deepened my learning experience. Being greeted with the me of the past – of May 2019 or November 2019 – helped me to identify developments in my capabilities. In my notes I see the footprints of my learning journey, and these help me to appreciate how I arrived at different decisions. Each time I re-read my journal entries and fieldnotes, I am confronted with my previous frustrations and unanswered questions. Through the confrontation, it becomes clear to me that there were things I thought I knew, but had clearly misunderstood, and things I knew I did not know, and have since come to better understand. In other words, through the confrontation with my previous self, I have been able to identify the 'gaps' in my knowledge and understanding.

I recorded my reflections on my re-reading in still further journal entries. For example, in December 2019 I re-appraise something that happened earlier in the year. Using the word 'when', I navigate back to a question I raised in the past. Using the word 'since', I move to the present, describing something that has changed in the intervening months. I then go on to speculate on what in the past may have led to the present, pushing myself to think about the distance between knowledge in the here and now, and knowledge that was prior and previous. Charting the time when things change encourages me to 'wonder' about the impact of certain moments: times when I and others became aware of

things, and markers of when ‘things definitely changed’ (figure 8). I developed a habit of re-reading back through old fieldnotes and journal entries and re-appraising them considering what I had since come to know. This process helped me to identify key moments in my research. The moments acted as flags, marking areas of practice that I should investigate more deeply, through further use of ethnographic and action research writing methods, specifically, storytelling methods.

██████████ when I asked how people could exit the fund if they could no longer deliver the project touched a nerve I know. The topic obviously spread around ██████████ as other members of staff who had not been at the meeting asked me about it. Since that meeting attendance also has been much reduced, ██████████ I wonder whether ██████████ lost faith in the programme after becoming aware of some serious cracks in its foundations. Essentially, not being able to answer that question has affected ██████████. That was pretty powerful moment and things definitely changed after that.

*Figure 8: Journal Entry, December 2019*

## Storytelling

The research in this thesis is based on insight gleaned through the collection of documents and the production of fieldnotes and journal entries. Documents can contain important organisational and planning information and take the form of ‘reports’, ‘policy statements’ and ‘community documents’ (Ivankova, 2015, p. 204). Ethnographic fieldnotes allow the preservation of an experience that a researcher has, for the purposes of later ‘deep reflection’ and for later ‘writing’ projects (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 17). Action research journals aid reflection and record that which is known affectively into text, making knowledge available for use later in the research process (Coghlan and Shani, 2011). After withdrawing from practical research, I used creative writing methods to analyse my empirical material and to tell and re-tell in relation to my experiences, preparing texts which would go on to become empirical chapters in this thesis.

As my fieldnotes and journal entries demonstrate, writing methods have been key in this inquiry. In the early years of my research, I would regularly spend between one and three hours writing fieldnotes following meetings and events. I

would often journal, describing what I did in my day and my thoughts and feelings in relation to my research. But my capacity for writing while engaged practically in insider action research was somewhat constrained. I had to try to fit it in around my other activities. After withdrawing from my insider roles at the GLA and You Press, I had a greater capacity for writing. After this time, I had space to engage in what theorists of qualitative research have described as ‘descriptive presentation’ (Schreier, 2019), ‘ethnographic textwork’ (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek and Lê, 2014) and ‘creative analytical writing practices’ (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005).

Management scholar Paula Jarzabkowski, writing with colleagues, argues that ethnographic researchers, rather than relying on ‘pseudo-quantitative perceptions of proof’, should free themselves from ‘natural science writing practices’ and provide evidence for their claims through ‘the construction of convincing text[s]’ where their authenticity cannot be in doubt. The truth claims ethnographers make do not need to involve ‘the presentation of an ever-greater number of data extracts [...] or frequency counts of codes and themes’ (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek and Lê, 2014, p. 284). Similarly, sociologist Laurel Richardson explains how the process of ‘triangulation’ – the deployment of multiple methods to study the same thing – is used to ‘validate’ findings in many research traditions, across methodologies. But in creative analytical writing practices, by contrast, the central image of validity is not the triangle but the crystal. When we crystallise, Richardson says, ‘[w]hat we see depends on our angle of repose’. Creative analytical writing practices respond to the postmodern belief that knowledge is always ‘partial, local, and situational’. In postmodern telling and retelling, ‘[t]here is no such thing as “getting it right” only “getting it” differently contoured and nuanced’. Richardson’s concept of crystallisation describes how ‘there is no single truth’ but ‘texts’ are able to ‘validate themselves’ (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005, pp. 962–963). And one-way ethnographic textwork can validate itself is through ‘[c]redible and authentic storytelling’ (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek and Lê, 2014, p. 284).

## Case selection

How can coproduction enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking? This thesis's main research question enquires into the participation of community organisations – plural – with the broad field of urban policymaking. But the main conclusions are drawn from data collected on the experience *one* community organisation had while participating with *one* urban policymaking institution: the GLA.

At one point, I had ambitions to engage in a multi-city study, studying how the GLA and other metropolitan governments work with community organisations on participatory urban policymaking. However, the experience I had in setting up my study within the GLA quickly led me to reconsider these ambitions. In Chapter Seven, I detail the complex and lengthy 'getting in' process of becoming an insider action researcher within the GLA. Specific features of this process, such as having financial buy-in from the GLA via a CASE studentship (see section 7.3), could not be replicated with urban policymaking institutions in other cities. Though the empirical chapters study how the GLA worked with 11 community organisations via the second incarnation of the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme, the analysis focuses specifically the relationship the GLA had with one community organisation within Citizen-Led Two: You Press. An ethical framework played a key role in solo case selection, leading me to focus solely on how coproduction could enable You Press to participate in urban policymaking at the GLA. The nature of this framework means the 10 other projects that took place under Citizen-Led Two cannot be evaluated from the perspective of the research question guiding this study.

Developing a situated ethical approach to research that is grounded in a practice of care for others has been a key part of my learning journey towards research on coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking (Chapter Seven). This approach involves advanced ethical practices such as 'face-to-face listening'. Though I was exposed to lots of new and insightful information during my research, I decided to only consider information as data if I would have no shame or fear in recounting that information to an audience wherein its author – the person I gathered that information from – was sitting in the very front row (section 7.4). Across the

period of the PhD, I had experiences with multiple community organisations and provided facilitation support to at least five organisations involved with Citizen-Led Two. At one point, I could have produced a multi-case study of community organisation participation. But committing myself to a practice of face-to-face listening raised questions as to what in the data I collected could ethically be recounted and thus used in the thesis.

Further, of the five community organisations I provided facilitation support to, two did not formally consent to have our work together recorded for research purposes. Though verbal consent was given, no paperwork recognisable to my university's Research Ethics Committee was signed. Additionally, though some people working in three of the five organisations did give me written permission to use what we did together to produce academic work in the form of a research thesis – by filling in 'consent forms' – not every member of staff did this. People would come and go from projects, and I was not capable of following up with every person involved, to explain my study and secure consent. The only community organisation where I was able to build a relationship with every member of staff and formally confirm their consent to my study was You Press.

Many of the documents I collected and the fieldnotes and journal entries I produced contained data relating to all the organisations I had at one point thought I could study. Though I was able to produce fieldnotes in relation to 41 meetings and events during my action research, many of these fieldnotes became unusable as part of thesis writing, considering my ethical stance. Organising a specific You Press–GLA archive became an analytic task. I used NVivo to select and code material which related specifically to this relationship, creating a reduced data set for use with ethnographic and action research writing projects.

### Vignettes

After the conclusion of my fieldwork and with my reduced dataset organised, I was able to evolve my fieldnotes and journal entries in compelling, creative, and captivating ways. Following advice from ethnographic theory, I used my selected fieldnotes and journal entries as a basis from which to produce a

series of ethnographic vignettes. Vignettes are 'short evocative stories' that provide 'vivid portrayals' of 'specific incidents' and are useful for telling the story of a particular moment. They can help provide evidence to explain theoretical concepts and give empirical context, helping the reader to sense the reality of the field (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek and Lê, 2014, pp. 280–281). In writing ethnographies, writers 'construct' a narrative by weaving together 'discrete pieces of fieldnote data' and using 'literary conventions' to tell 'tales' and more meaningfully communicate an 'overall story' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 202). Each vignette I wrote described specific moments in my fieldwork. I tried to describe 'critical events' or, 'focal points' within the research, telling tales from important decisions and key actions. I used literary techniques to set the scene for each piece of fieldnote data I wanted to communicate, using a descriptive mode to paint a textual image of journeying to specific buildings and moving around inside them. Taken together and read in series, the vignettes formed a 'narrative', or story of the research (LeCompte and Schensul, 2013, pp. 284–285).

As previously mentioned, I embrace vulnerability in writing (Moriarty, 2013). In my vignettes, I tried to write as much about my own feelings as those of others, pursuing a style ethnographic theory has described as 'confessional'. Confessional vignettes are intimate, honest tales of the 'ethnographer's own behavior in the field', which include 'revelations' of the 'ethnographer's mistakes' as well as their 'successes' (Van Maanen 1988, cited in LeCompte and Schensul, 2013, p. 270). For example, in a vignette written to analyse data collected in relation to five 'Information & Capacity Building' sessions, run as part of Citizen-Led Two, I zoom in on my feelings and the feelings I observed in others in the moment before the final session is about to begin. I write about how many of us involved with the sessions were 'looking forward to being done with this stage of the project'. Writing about these feelings encourages me to question the whether the participation programme I am studying is 'as good as I initially thought it was' (figure 9), paving the way towards the arguments I put forward in Chapter Five of this thesis.

they, like me, just wanted the next few hours to hurry up and be over. I was looking forward to being done with this stage of the project. The last two weeks had seen me rise early and return home late. For 10 hours I had sat in rooms watching stressed and unprepared GLA staff deliver presentations to rooms of angry and confused citizen and community leaders. I liked the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme but putting the communication of it under the microscope through close observation at these sessions had made me wonder whether it was as good as I initially thought it was.

*Figure 9 – section of a vignette, September 2021*

The ethnographic tales confessional vignettes tell are research stories which ‘leave the blood in’ (Moriarty, 2013). They are aligned with the tradition of critical autoethnographic writing, a tradition which sees ‘the lived experience of the researcher’ placed ‘center stage’ and used as a tool for critical engagement with the world. Autobiographical ethnographers write ‘evocative accounts of their personal experiences’, making ‘analytical connections between these and broader social contexts/issues’ (Ellis, 2009; Ellis and Bochner, 2000, cited in Johnson *et al.*, 2017). Placing my lived experience in the forefront and using it as a tool for critical engagement is the way I sought to add my voice and contribute to debates on coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban research and policy.

Confessional, autoethnographic approaches to writing have been similarly theorised within action research. For Judi Marshall, the management scholar who developed living inquiry, note taking and journaling are only initial ‘tracking’ methods which make way for later ‘freefall writing’ (Marshall, 2016, p. xvii; pp. 57–58; pp. 101–103). Freefall writing is described by the writer and editor Barbara Turner-Vesselago as a process of ‘surrender’. In freefall writing, you ‘don’t change anything’, give copious ‘sensuous detail’ and go ‘fearward’, leaning in to ‘whatever feels most charged’. Freefall is an approach which promotes radical honesty in writing and through this seeks to build trust and establish credibility with readers (Turner-Vesselago, 2013, pp. 27–38).

In the vignettes I wrote, I embrace freefall, adding in extra content from memories that came up as I was writing. For example, in a vignette written to analyse a training session run as part of Citizen-Led Two, I mention feelings of nervousness. I lean into this feeling, exploring the causes of my anxiety (figure 10).

I am nervous as I approach Lumen Church, checking the time on my phone once, and then again less than a minute later. I've walked past this place numerous times, but I've not been inside before. Beyond knowing that I am to come to this converted church-come-community centre, I know very little about what I am in for today. I wait around a little, unsure who from the GLA will be on the other side of the door when I open it.

*Figure 10 – section of vignette, November 2021*

Alongside my vignette writing I also experimented with several techniques recommended to qualitative researchers who use writing as a method of inquiry. These included techniques informed by critical theory and the postmodern feminist concern to 'understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times' (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005, p. 962). To consider my position, I took inspiration from non-academic authors whose memoirs I had read. Authors such as Helen MacDonald, Afua Hirsch, and Amy Liptrot, who in their memoirs and cultural histories explore their positionality and tell specific stories from their gendered, racialised and classed lives. Though separate to my vignette writing, the private autobiographical writing I have engaged in during the PhD has helped me to become conscious of my position. For example, in one experiment I write about how my race and gender allowed me the privilege to 'float around' in traditionally white spaces, such as universities and art galleries (figure 11). Without engaging in private autobiographical writing, it would have been difficult to produce the material in Chapter Seven, particularly the discussion of position and situation (section 7.4).

The unconscious optimism that had surrounded my youth rested largely on the fact that unlike these children, I was white. Though class can sometimes be audible – revealed in a person's diction or the things they say – race is always visual. [REDACTED] Though getting to [REDACTED] wasn't necessarily a sure thing for me and in some ways I didn't always fit in. Once I was there I always blended in. [REDACTED] I could float around.

*Figure 11 – section of private writing, January 2022*

Over time I came to see my vignette writing as an 'artisanal' storytelling activity involving skills in 'creativity, craft, [and] artistry' (Sword, 2017, p. 4) and sought out online communities of practice comprised not of academics but of artists and poets. The passing of texts around in these communities was the main way I sought initial feedback and developed a set of richly descriptive stories. As is common within ethnographic writing, the set followed a chronological structure, beginning 'from the earliest events to the most recent' (LeCompte and



Schensul, 2013, p. 279). Sharing this set of stories were the main way through which I sought to communicate the experiences I had during the PhD with others working in my field. Sharing vignettes, especially with people who could be described as 'participants' in the research, is a recognised 'strategy' of 'interpretation' within ethnography (LeCompte and Schensul, 2013, p. 301–306). I shared my vignettes with supervisors and with people I had worked with at You Press and the GLA. I also read my stories aloud to peers in the Institute for Community Studies and in the Society for Community Research and Action. The feedback I received from these audiences helped me to see what was new and unique in my work and select areas to explore further in the thesis.

### Writing the thesis

After I had used ethnographic and action research writing to analyse and communicate the content of my fieldnotes and journal entries, I was able to engage in the writing of the thesis, an analytic writing process itself. Analytic writing is described within the ethnography literature as a process in which the ethnographer 'moves back and forth between specific events recounted in [their] fieldnotes and more general concepts of interest to [their] discipline' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 201). Designing the empirical chapters was a task which involved continually answering the question of how to create a dialogue between the content of my vignettes, and 'concepts of interest' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011, p. 201) to the field in which I wanted to qualify: urban policy. How could I make my writing speak to the concepts and traditions of urban policy, and specifically the concerns urban policy scholars have with projects of participation and coproduction?

To answer this question, I turned to critical writing practices associated with 'site-writing', a method which approaches critical knowledge from a feminist perspective, situating it culturally and spatially in specific ways of knowing and being (Rendell, 2016). In my writing, I scale from my situated vignettes up to strategic and theoretical critiques raised in the literature, and back down again. Through this I seek to engage in a 'shadow play', bringing in literature, critical theory, and secondary research to analyse subjects and situations from multiple

angles and perspectives (Rogoff, 2006). I model my site-writing on the post-modern practice of 'criticality', and engage with material 'performatively' (Butt, 2005, p. 7), sometimes using post-modern writing techniques such as 'speculation' (Rao, Krishnamurthy and Kuoni, 2014). Speculation helps me to situate my writing 'at an edge', not to 'reference the unknown' but rather what has been described as 'the murky, intermediate terrain of potential' (Rao, Krishnamurthy and Kuoni, 2014, p. 19). Speculation allows me to comment on what could have happened in projects, but didn't, and allows me to occupy an intermediate terrain in terms of research ethics. By raising questions and presenting multiple points of view at once, I can cloud the voices of people whose identity I want to safeguard.

As a project which focuses on the feelings and emotions associated with participation and coproduction, it was important that in drafting my prose I could communicate the 'structure of feeling' inherent to my research sites (Williams, 1977). Attempting to put feeling and thought – the data I had and the literature I read – into dialogue helped me to identify thematic categories which scholars in my field would appreciate. There were some false starts. For example, there are debates scholars and industry bodies are interested in that my dataset cannot contribute to. Audiences in the GLA and at the Institute of Community Studies wanted to know how to make a success of community organisation participation in policymaking. But I couldn't present Citizen-Led Two as an example of successful participation. Other participation facilitators, and audiences within the Society for Community Research and Action by contrast, appreciated hearing me tell tales of failure and empathised with the feeling my writing communicated. Academic mentors, supervisors and examiners helped me to find exactly what in my data my discipline was interested in, and this led me to produce a set of categories in which to organise this thesis. These topical categories are: coproduction in a London context (Chapter Four), the design of participatory policymaking programmes (Chapter Five), relationships in participatory research (Chapter Six), and issues of positionality as a university researcher at the intersection of local government–community relations (Chapter Seven).

### 3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how a living inquiry approach to insider action research provides an appropriate, theoretically aligned methodology for the study of coproduction and the question of community organisation participation in urban policymaking. Action research is a participatory approach to knowledge production, grounded in the same worldview as coproduction. As I have shown, both methodologies argue for people and communities to have control over the knowledge that is produced about them. Both prioritise active intervention over passive theory building. And both are guided by the feminist call to produce lived theory. Using action research to study coproduction is more than appropriate, from the perspective of this thesis: it is necessary.

In this chapter, I have also presented the methods I used to collect and analyse data for this study. I have shown how, through the collection of documents and the meticulous process of producing ethnographic fieldnotes, I created a rich archive of material. As well as helping me to explore my topic, the process of producing fieldnotes had a positive impact on my insider action research practice. Written over a period of one year, they provide a record of my learning in relation to the topic of coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking. In the next chapter, I introduce the two organisations I worked with during my action research, and the participatory research project and programme I study in the rest of this thesis.

## Chapter Four: Situating the London Mayor's Vision for Participation within a Local Practice of Participatory Research

### 4.1 Introduction

In partnering with community organisations, urban policymaking institutions like the GLA can become stakeholders in a local practice of participatory research. You Press are one community organisation in London who have been using the creative mediums and arts practices associated with coproduction (Durose *et al.*, 2013; Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2014; McDermont *et al.*, 2020), along with the skills of everyday storytelling (Ortiz, 2022), for over a decade. In developing models to guide their practice, You Press have been able to produce projects exploring and communicating the lived experience of young people in London. This chapter introduces and analyses who You Press are and what You Press were doing in the period 2009–2020. It explains the relationship You Press had with the GLA through their involvement with a specific GLA participation programme, the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme: Citizen-Led.

The contribution to knowledge this chapter makes comes from the work it does to analyse some of the factors which drive organisations like You Press towards doing participatory research with government partners like the GLA. I argue that changes to the arts funding landscape in the UK pushed You Press to change their understanding of what an artist is and what art should do. This led the organisation to innovate their programme models, bending them in the direction of participatory research for policymaking. These changes reflect transformations within the arts (Rancière, 2006; Bishop, 2012) but also highlight how state power can be mobilised indirectly to control what people do (Rose, 1996). I claim that in becoming a powerful stakeholder in London's community and voluntary sector, the GLA were able to direct practice and subtly engineer new experiments in line with their vision for public participation in the city.

In the late 2010s, the London government was presenting a vision for participation which saw people with lived experience of certain policy topics lead research in those areas. Though the GLA did not use the word 'coproduction' to describe the vision, this chapter locates the GLA's promotion of participatory research as evidence that the organisation was interested in the coproduction of

public policy, as it is presented by local government scholars (e.g. Durose and Richardson, 2016). This chapter argues that the GLA's conceptualisation of coproduction as participatory research relied on community and voluntary organisations to bridge boundaries and fill in the gaps that exist between governments and citizens. For example, the GLA did not seek to work with citizens directly to deliver on the mayor's vision for participation; it sought to work with community organisations, whose staff in turn would work both with policymakers in the GLA and with citizens. Analysis of You Press's mission and practices provides insight into the reasons why community organisations may be capable of serving in this role. The analysis reveals how the organisation was involved with the regular taking of 'new directions', adapting and changing its programme models throughout the 2010s depending on the availability of project funding and the possibility of new partnerships. This chapter proposes that it was only possible for the GLA to rely on You Press to bridge the gap between government and citizens in urban policy research because You Press had already shifted its programme models in the direction of participatory research.

The content of this chapter is arranged as follows:

- In section 4.2, I introduce You Press as a voluntary organisation with a social justice mission that has been producing public storytellers for over 10 years. I describe how You Press have developed as an organisation and how they support youth participation in journalism, the creative arts, and public policy research. This introduction is important to this study because in 2017, You Press began working with the GLA on a participatory research project aimed at involving young people from minority groups with policy development and decision-making at the GLA.
- In section 4.3, I look at the policies and programmes Sadiq Khan introduced after he became mayor in 2016. Of particular interest to this thesis, and to the study of You Press, is the ambition Khan had to 'support Londoners' participation in democracy and decision making' by working with 'voluntary and community organisations' (GLA, 2018a, pp. 43–44). I show how in 2017 the mayor's public engagement team began

work on a new pilot programme of participatory policy research. This programme was designed to help realise the mayor's ambitions around public participation in democracy and decision-making. My description of Citizen-Led in this and the subsequent section provides the context for the research I go on to present in Chapter Five.

- In section 4.4, I further introduce Citizen-Led and describe how You Press became involved with the programme, designing and delivering projects to help realise the mayor's participation goals. I identify the 'Roots model', a project model You Press designed in 2014 and used to archive local knowledge and record the lived experience. I highlight the model's resemblance to 'collaborative poetics', an arts-based approach to participatory social science research (Johnson *et al.*, 2017; Johnson and Wimpenny, 2019). I explain how You Press used the Roots model to deliver participatory research. I argue that the work contributed positively to a vision of coproduction which sees people with lived experience as experts in certain policy areas, but question whether the project was able to achieve the impact it desired within the GLA.
- In section 4.5, I look at what happened after the Citizen-Led pilot (referred to as Citizen-Led Pilot). What did You Press and the GLA go on to do together after the completion of their participatory research project? I reveal how the GLA continued to try to involve community organisations with policymaking via Citizen-Led and through the practices of participatory research. I introduce the second incarnation of the Citizen-Led programme (referred to as Citizen-Led Two), and a second participatory research project You Press ran (referred to as Roots Two). This project used the Roots model to explore the topic of crime and serious violence in London. My description of this project and some of the challenges it encountered provides a preliminary context for the arguments I go on to make in Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

In this chapter I make use of collected 'documents' as qualitative data sources (Ivankova, 2015; Robson and McCartan, 2015) and 'tacit knowledge' gleaned from action research 'journals' (Cunliffe, 2016). These contribute insight in relation to coproduction and the participation of community organisations with

policymaking in London (main RQ) and help to answer the first subsidiary research question this study has (sub-RQ 1). Sub-RQ 1 contextualises the study within London, asking: *How do theories of coproduction find form in a London context?* Relying on the methods of ‘qualitative content analysis’ (Schreier, 2019), I analyse an archive of documents I collected during my action research. Drawing on information from participation theory, and my own situated understanding of the projects and programmes I encountered through action research, I was able to create a set of categories to guide my sorting and reading of the archive. In the sections that follow, I provide a ‘descriptive presentation’ of the relevant material ‘in a narrative format’ (Schreier, 2019). Knowing the specific terms practitioners use to describe participation was important for judging relevance. In quotes taken from documents, the terms ‘community research’ and ‘peer research’ appear. These reference the sibling approaches of ‘community’ and ‘peer research’ theorised within the coproduction scholarship (Richardson, 2014; Dixon, Ward and Blower, 2019; Kelly *et al.*, 2020; Curran *et al.*, 2021). For my purposes, I have translated these terms in this chapter, opting to use the parent concept of ‘participatory research’ in my narrative description.

It should be noted that this chapter works with the content of a GLA policy document to explain and describe the vision for participation articulated by Khan at the beginning of his first term. Whilst it could have been useful to undertake a deeper content analysis and investigate the policy at the level of language and ideas, the words used to describe participation policy here are taken at face value. As explained in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, this research seeks to study the GLA’s approach to participation at the level of action. The thesis prioritises inquiry into the action taken to deliver participation, asking not: do the GLA mean what they say in their policy documents? But rather: what happens next? How does participation policy play out in its complex application spaces?

#### 4.2 You Press

You Press is a social enterprise running projects for young people aged 16–30. Through ‘the creative arts, media, training and writing’, You Press projects seek

to 'empower' young people, helping them to 'find their voice'. The young people You Press work with come from 'varied social and cultural backgrounds', often belonging to what the organisation describes as 'underrepresented communities'. (You Press, n.d.(a)). In this section, I introduce You Press as a voluntary organisation situated in the UK's third sector. I tell a 10-year history of the organisation, describing how, during the 2010s, You Press developed a project model which helped them to repeatedly empower groups of minority young people. I argue that the young people and staff involved with projects were coached by You Press to become public storytellers, skilled at communicating their lived experience and the lived experiences of their peers and people belonging to the social groups You Press target. To close the section, I explain that though initially supported by arts-funding bodies, such as the Arts Council, in 2017 You Press began to diversify their funding network to include regional and local government actors. This exposed You Press to the GLA, paving the way for the two organisations to collaborate.

#### [A voluntary organisation with a social justice mission](#)

You Press describes itself as a 'social enterprise', a category of organisation understood to be focused on 'the pursuit of social purpose' through 'trading' and the generation of 'earned income' (Peattie and Morley, 2008, cited in Teasdale, 2012, p. 112). Currently, social enterprises in the UK are defined as 'businesses with a social or environmental purpose' (Social Enterprise UK, 2022) but this description does not fit You Press. You Press is not a business. The organisation does not generate profit and, aside from some temporary hires made via apprenticeship schemes, has mostly been run by volunteers. This makes it more like a voluntary organisation (Halfpenny and Reid, 2002, p. 535). Perhaps You Press, in calling itself a social enterprise, is evoking the twentieth century European conceptualisation of the phenomena. This conceptualisation is one that sees social enterprises not as businesses but as 'mutual societies'. Viewed in this light, social enterprises are organisations who promote 'a sense of social justice' and work 'with the principle aim of serving the community or a specific group of people' (Anheier, 2014, p. 10).



You Press's sense of social justice and the ways in which they serve the public are significant in the context of this study. The members of You Press recognise the epistemic exclusion specific groups of people face. They are thus primarily engaged with a social justice mission to 'empower' young people from 'underrepresented communities' to 'find their voice' (You Press, n.d.(a)). They are concerned with the 'structural inequalities' young people experience, and the ways in which these inequalities are layered and exacerbated along racial, socio-economic, and gender-based lines, as well as other delineations of difference (Young, 2001, p. 2). As later sections in this chapter explain, the emphasis those at You Press place on supporting 'underrepresented communities' is specifically focused on empowering ethnic minority young people to speak, sing, and write. More broadly, You Press could be said to be responding to the problem of unfairness, a problem social justice philosophy has conceptualised as foundational to the 'basic structure of society' and which informs how 'rights and duties, income and wealth, power and opportunities' are distributed (Sandel, 2009, p. 152). As will be shown throughout this study, You Press have been mobilising their social justice mission and responding to problems of unfairness in the context of public participation with urban policy research.

As a mutual society not involved with the activities of 'trading commercially for profit', You Press goes halfway towards fitting the description of a third sector organisation (The Third Sector Research Centre, 2022). However, the extent to which You Press is independent from government is questionable. As scholars of the voluntary sector in the UK have noted, many voluntary organisations develop a fiscal 'dependence on government resources'. As shall be explained in this chapter, You Press developed a fiscal relationship with the government in London, through their partnerships with the GLA. Fiscal dependence on government can make voluntary organisations ideologically vulnerable, casting them adrift from their own social change and justice missions (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015, p. 465).

## 10 years of social change

You Press first formed in 2009, when four attendees of UpRising, a youth leadership development programme, formed a friendship and together started writing for The Guardian. (You Press, n.d.(b); UpRising, n.d.). Their online column, 'Youth Tell Us', featured stories by



*Figure 12: The You Press team in 2011 (Urban Pollinators, 2011).*

young people and were specifically about what the writers termed 'youth issues'. These took in complex problems such as 'classroom prejudices' and covered urban challenges, such as the knife crimes known as 'stabblings' and the 'riots' that took place in English cities in August 2011 (Urban Pollinators, 2011; You Press, 2011a; 2011b). Several of the UpRising alumni went on to study a course in 'Law and Community Leadership' at SOAS, University of London. During their studies they continued to write and publish together as 'You Press' and, in 2011, registered the organisation as the aforementioned, 'social enterprise'. Like with the earlier column, the newly formalised You Press social enterprise sought to give 'marginalised and invisible communities a voice', mainly through journalism. In 2014 though, the organisation took a 'new direction' and, in addition to journalism, began to pursue their goals through the wider 'creative arts' (You Press, n.d.(b)).

In the 'business plans' they wrote in 2014, the leaders of You Press developed a vision and mission which contributed to directing the work of the organisation for the subsequent six years. This ambition was articulated conceptually as a belief in 'the power of words and stories', and practically as a strategy to use the tools of the 'creative arts and writing to empower people to have a voice and be heard' (You Press, 2014a). Recognising what Paulo Freire described as a 'culture of silence' amongst 'oppressed' groups in society (Freire, 1981, cited in Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008, p. 4), You Press drew on the art of storytelling as an empowerment strategy. In this they could be said to be engaged with building solidarity amongst young people and promoting a sense of social

justice based on theories of minority rights (Kymlicka, 1995), and epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007).

To accompany the 2014 business plans, You Press designed a programme model that would support 'marginalised people' to tell 'life stories' (their own and those of others) through 'powerful poems, spoken word and music' (You Press, 2014a; 2014b). Though not formally grounded in a theorised approach to knowledge production, elements of You Press's 2014 programme model can be said to resemble 'collaborative poetics', an arts-based approach to research which results in the production of powerful creative texts. In collaborative poetics, artists and researchers use conversation and semi-structured interviews to listen to people with lived experience of certain social issues. They then reflect on what they have learnt, exploring the themes and stories through poetry and performance (Johnson *et al.*, 2017). This is the approach You Press took in 2015 with 'Voices of Redemption', a project aimed at reducing repeat offending by young people involved with – or at risk of becoming involved with – crime. Staff at You Press ran workshops and listening exercises wherein artists collaborated with ex-offenders. The project used poetry and performance to help everyone explore the stigmas people in this marginalised group face (You Press, n.d.(c)). 'Voices of Redemption' culminated in the production of what participatory arts-based research would call 'poetics', art and research that 'incorporates not just creative writing and poetry, but also visual and other art forms', such as music and film (Johnson and Wimpenny, 2019, p. 7).



*Figure 13: workshop held during 'Voices of Redemption' (You Press, 2016).*

The shape of the programme model the leaders of You Press articulate in their 2014 business planning is present in this and other projects they went on to deliver. From 2014 to 2019, the organisation ran over 10 projects that feature the model, working with young people to tell life stories related to the complex social issues of homelessness, youth offending, genocide and forced migration. In 2016, You Press ran a project called 'I Remember Srebrenica' (You Press, n.d.(d)). This challenging project saw artists collaborate with survivors of the Bosnian genocide and war, exploring and communicating their lived experience poetically. The structure of 'I Remember Srebrenica' exemplifies the 2014 You Press programme model. As one of the founders of You Press describes,

*'[We did] a learning trip to Bosnia. [...] We took those young people there to meet the survivors, the mothers, the people who lived through the horrific history – one of the biggest histories of genocide in Europe after World War II. [...] And what it is that we wanted them to do is receive that information, data, stories, the real experience of losing family members, and turn it into an original art form. [...] That's like using history and data and real stories to*

*bring it to life.’ (personal communication,  
May 2019)*

As described in Chapter Two, feminist scholarship in the post-structuralist tradition emphasises the role of subjectivity in social transformation and encourages people to engage with social change endeavours at the level of the ‘personal’ (Cahill, 2007). As explained in Chapter Three, proponents of action research call for reflexivity, asking people to begin inquiry from ‘felt experiences’, and to produce knowledge through critically reflective collaborative action (Bradbury *et al.*, 2019a). Feminist theorists and action researchers would critique the approach You Press followed in the ‘I Remember Srebrenica’ project, questioning the ethics of You Press’s approach to representation. Creating art based on other peoples’ stories, and on a lived experience quite distant to your own, could be seen as appropriation. From the perspective of participation, if You Press were working with survivors of genocide, the survivors should be the ones supported to explore and communicate their experiences, not a group of artists coming over from the UK.

Leaders in You Press recognise the critique. In 2019, You Press began ‘Truth on the Roof’, a ‘storytelling project focused on helping young artists share their opinions on meaningful social issues through music and spoken word’ (You Press, n.d.(e)). Whereas in projects like ‘I Remember Srebrenica’ young people were encouraged to tell the stories of others, in ‘Truth on the Roof’ participants were encouraged to tell their own truth, sharing stories from their own lived experience through poetics: creative writing, poetry, music, performance and film. The ‘Truth on the Roof’ poetic is grounded in autobiographic storytelling told from a first-person perspective (for an example see figure 14). This poetic still encourages the production of powerful creative texts, but from a personal, first-person perspective.

I grew up around all that madness  
sadness  
all I saw was that badness  
addicts  
huddled some on that mattress...

*Figure 14: rap poetry lyrics from 'Man Down' by Blxckcaesar, 2019, transcribed from You Tube (You Press, 2019a, 00:04).*

### A new direction

You Press was established during a period of financial fallout following the crisis of 2008. This was a time of 'rising inflation' where private income to the voluntary sector was dropping significantly. It was also a time of fiscal 'austerity'. The sharp public sector budgets cuts introduced as part of the ideology of austerity, reduced income further, making the funding landscape difficult for voluntary sector organisations to navigate (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015, p. 464; p. 468). 'Voices of Redemption', 'I Remember Srebrenica' and other projects You Press delivered in the 2010s were mostly funded through small arts grants from the National Lottery and the Arts Council, and through the European Commission's 'Erasmus +', a programme supporting activities in education, training, youth, and sport in member and non-member countries (Erasmus +, n.d.). You Press did not receive any core funding during this decade and, in line with the common experience of voluntary organisations, members of staff did not have a salary and worked mostly in a voluntary capacity (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015, p. 464). The small grants did however allow the organisation to cover the cost of projects and to pay some of the young people it worked with as freelance facilitators, photographers, videographers, and editors.

The research in this thesis takes the knowledge produced through collaborative poetic programmes as a starting point for inquiry into coproduced urban policy research. 'Voices of Redemption' and 'I Remember Srebrenica' both followed

You Press's 2014 programme model. Though many of You Press's later projects still bear traces of the 2014 model, the arts funding landscape has pushed You Press to diversify, starting a new artist development scheme specifically for musicians in 2018 and setting up an Agency for young people working as freelancers in the creative arts in 2019 (You Press, n.d.(b)). In 2017, You Press diversified their funding efforts and began putting in applications to receive small grant project funding from organisations they hadn't been supported by before, including the GLA. The projects they pitched continued to be based around their 2014 collaborative poetic model, suggesting that though by 2017 their funding efforts were diversifying, You Press's practice wasn't changing too much. But they were pitching their arts-based projects to grant-making bodies that fell outside the traditional arts funding landscape. In the next section, I introduce participation at the GLA during Khan's first term, and the funding programme which brought You Press's practice and the mayor's vision for participation together.

#### 4.3 Greater London Authority

In this section, I introduce the GLA's public participation policy in the period of Khan's first mayoral term (2016–2021). I describe how Khan sought to overcome the challenges past participation initiatives encountered, by working with community and voluntary organisations on a new programme designed to support greater participation amongst communities previously excluded from policy development. I look at Khan's social integration strategy, zooming in on a particular policy made in relation to participation. The GLA do not use the phrase 'coproduction' to describe the way they want to work with community organisations. However, as explained in the literature, there is 'no clear boundary between co-production and participation' if the intention in using co-production is to make stakeholder engagement a more meaningful, democratic, and empowering process (Simon, Palmer and Riise, 2020, p. 2). In alignment with existing literature, participation becomes the portal through which to investigate coproduction in this study.

## Public engagement

The mechanisms previous mayors in London have used to encourage public participation, namely 'festivals, concerts and events', are criticised as achieving a 'performance of democracy and accessibility', but not the real thing (Hatherley, 2020a, p. 97). After being elected as mayor in 2016, Khan created a new deputy mayoral role with responsibility for public engagement (GLA, 2018a, p. 4).<sup>3</sup> The new deputy was responsible for achieving the mayor's participation goals 'across his whole remit', 'including [in] housing, planning, regeneration, environment, policing, culture, business, early years and health'. Going beyond festivals and events, this deputy would 'create new programmes' with public engagement 'at their heart' (GLA, 2018a, p. 7).

Early in Khan's first term in office, a new public engagement team was set up within the GLA. The Community Engagement team (henceforth CE team) was introduced to 'bridge the gap between City Hall and London's communities'. The team aim to give London's communities 'a platform to be seen, heard, resourced, and to be more actively engaged in the City's decision making' (GLA, n.d.). During Khan's first term, the CE team were involved with running some of the 'new programmes', recently given the go ahead by the new mayor and his deputy. Of particular interest to this thesis was the work they did in relation to formal social integration policy, as it is communicated in 'All of Us: The Mayor's Social Integration Strategy' (GLA, 2018a). Policy 2.2 of the Social Integration Strategy reveals Khan's ambition to 'support Londoners' participation in democracy and decision making' (GLA, 2018a, p. 43). The policy states:

'The Mayor recognises the need for systems which ensure that Londoners can play an active role in decisions that affect their lives. He also recognises that, when it comes to decision making, some voices have been heard less than others. The horrors of Grenfell Tower<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This role was initially called the Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement. It has since changed and in 2022, was known as the role of the Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice.

<sup>4</sup> The 'horrors of Grenfell Tower' makes reference to the fire that broke out in June 2017 in Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey residential tower block in North



highlighted what can happen when certain communities are ignored and their voices drowned out. This needs to change. The Mayor is committed to tackling inequalities in voice and power. He is actively seeking to support groups to share their experiences and insights, so that he can better respond to their views. London's civil society plays a vital role in making this happen. City Hall will work closely with voluntary and community organisations to support their role in improving the lives of Londoners' (GLA, 2018a, p. 44).

The CE team became the primary team in the GLA responsible for creating the 'systems' that would ensure people in London could participate and be heard in decision-making. And they would be responsible for making that participation fairer and more equal, with previously unheard voices given a platform to speak. The new systems should involve London's 'civil society', and building them would, as the policy describes, entail working 'closely with voluntary and community organisations' (GLA, 2018a, p. 44).

#### [A more participatory approach to developing and delivering policies and programmes](#)

A series of 'actions' follow policy 2.2, on 'support[ing] Londoners' participation in democracy and decision making' (GLA, 2018a, p. 43). From creating a 'London Curriculum resource' to teach 'political literacy' as part of 'citizenship education' in schools, to embedding more 'register to vote' opportunities into the citizenship ceremonies new Brits attend, the mayor planned to build awareness of participation at key moments in people's lives. From developing a new 'Civil Society Strategy' that would support London's communities to 'lead change', to improving 'Talk London' (a digital consultation tool developed under the previous mayor), Khan aimed to improve the inclusivity of participation initiatives, broadening who gets to take part (GLA, 2018a, p. 44–45).

The GLA's 2018 plans to support participation were wide ranging and for a researcher interested in studying participation, offer an exciting array of possible

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Kensington, west London. More than 72 people died in the fire, which is understood to have been an avoidable tragedy.

research projects. This study, however, chooses to focus on the outcomes of the fourth action pledged in response to policy 2.2: the mayor seeks to ‘support Londoners’ participation in democracy and decision making’ through ‘citizen-led action’ and ‘a more participatory approach to developing and delivering policies and programmes’ (GLA, 2018a, pp. 43–45). In relation to the fourth action, a specific programme is introduced: the ‘Citizen Led Engagement Programme’ (GLA, 2018a, p. 45). Where the people-led planning initiatives championed by previous London mayors had been criticised for engaging only with already existing strong and empowered local groups (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987, p. 280 , cited in Hatherley, 2020b, p. 114), and prior public engagement initiatives had been criticised for lacking the active participation of ethnic minority people (Gilroy, 1987, p. 197), this new programme promised to be better. Citizen-Led would ‘improve the mayor’s connections with communities that have historically had less of a voice’ and would ‘identify and develop leaders’ in these specific communities ‘to engage further with City Hall’ (GLA, 2018a, p. 45). The new programme captured the attention of You Press. In the next section, I further describe Citizen-Led and explain how You Press became involved with the mayor’s new programme.

#### 4.4 Participatory Research with Citizens and GLA Officers

In this section, I describe Citizen-Led and the methodology it supports, arguing that the programme relies on a conceptualisation of coproduction as community-based participatory research. I show how You Press became engaged with Citizen-Led, and how their involvement led them to evolve the 2014 programme model (described earlier in this chapter). In establishing a partnership with the GLA, You Press became a stakeholder in the delivery of the mayor’s participation policies, with responsibility for turning policy 2.2’s planned-for action into delivered outcomes. I argue that through the programme You Press developed an interest in public policy and an ambition to influence mayoral decision-making. I show how this interest led them to further evolve their 2014 programme model, bending it in the direction of participatory research and using it to run a range of Roots research projects. A specific Roots project is introduced in section 4.5.

### Citizen-Led: peer research

Citizen-Led was a programme of participatory research undertaken with specific communities and in relation to specific urban policy topics during the period 2017–2020. The topical areas it studied were chosen by GLA officers but the research it undertook was led by citizens and staff in London's community and voluntary sector. Citizen-Led has an affinity with 'community-based participatory research' and 'citizen science', two research-based public engagement approaches used by regional and local governments in the UK during the 2010s. Community-based participatory research and citizen science offer alternatives to the dominant 'elite' model of policy research and are helpful, democratic engagement methodologies (Richardson, 2014). Community-based participatory research 'tackles issues relevant to people belonging to, or with interests in, a community of place, interest or identity' and actively involves 'community stakeholders in research design, process and implementation'. With the community stakeholders taking on roles akin to those of 'research commissioners, advisory group members, co-researchers or peer researchers' (Durham Community Research Team, 2011, p. 4). Citizen science is the scientific research that gets done thanks to the efforts of 'thousands of everyday people participating in the production of scientific knowledge by counting, collecting, monitoring and photographing elements of the world and then sharing this data' (Russell, 2014, pp. 9–11).

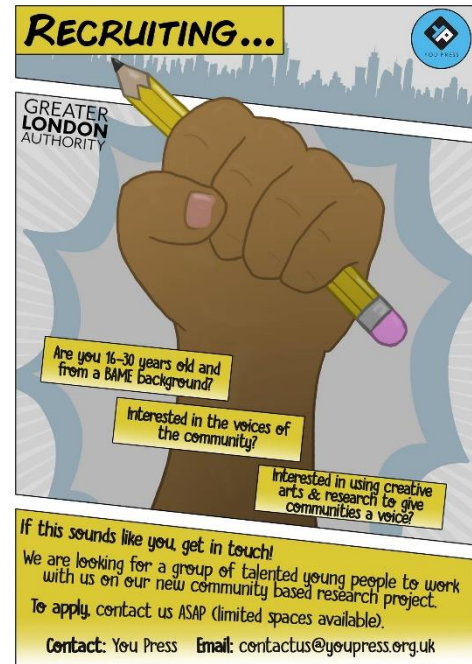
The designers of Citizen-Led positioned their participatory programme on a particular branch of the community-based participatory research tree, using the ideology and processes of 'peer research' to guide activity. Scholars have placed 'peer research' on a continuum which runs from participation through social action, to consultation-based approaches, onwards to peer research and then finally to coproduction (Dixon, Ward and Blower, 2019). Peer research is best understood as a method that can be used to conduct inquiry in line with coproductive methodologies (Kelly *et al.*, 2020; Curran *et al.*, 2021). Peer research programmes focus on training 'lay individuals' in research methods and supporting them to conduct qualitative research as 'peer researchers' (Woodall *et al.*, 2019). Peer researchers begin inquiry untrained in research but

usually have a high level of lived experience in relation to complex social policy topics, such as homelessness, substance misuse, mental health, and/or state services, such as the criminal justice system (Woodall *et al.*, 2019, p. 179). As the word ‘peer’ suggests, peer researchers are positioned as ‘peers’ to a project’s research participants, sharing at least one ‘lived experience’. This position is thought to put peer researchers in a privileged position in terms of access, with their status as community members locating them in close personal proximity to people other research processes may find ‘hard to reach’ (Thomas-Hughes, 2020, pp. 43–44).

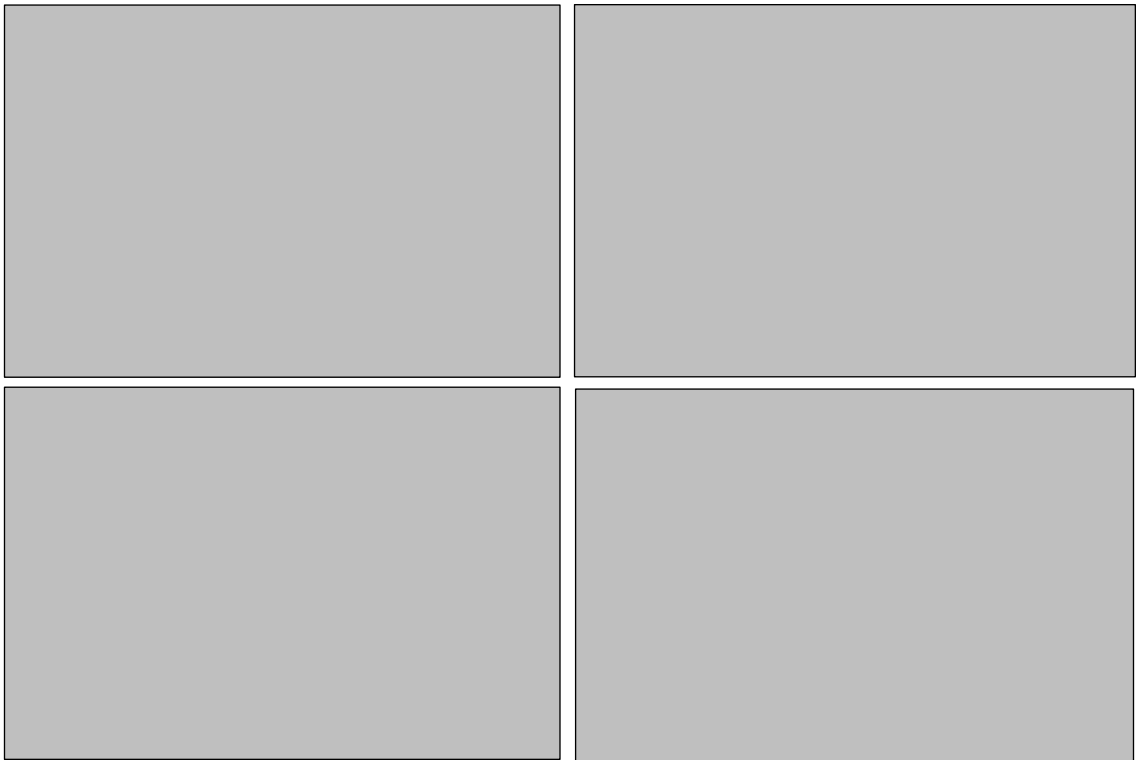
Peer research has been celebrated for its capacity to create mutual dialogue and provide a positive learning opportunity for all involved with the research (Kelly *et al.*, 2020). Some UK-based peer research projects are also revered for the way they have been able to impact policy and produce social change. For example, when peer research was used to deliver an evaluation of services supporting young people leaving care, researchers were able to put the findings from their project into dialogue with the findings of other campaigns, and together these efforts resulted in a policy change related to what happens to care leavers in the UK when they turn 18 (Lushey and Munro, 2015). More often though, peer research processes include very little policy engagement and much of the impact of projects is small-scale and stays within projects. This is a problem as, if the knowledge produced goes unused, the people who were involved with producing it can be left feeling alienated, used, and undermined (Richardson, 2014). As later sections in this chapter reveal, peer researchers often want their efforts to result in tangible action, such as a policy change like that described above. However, this rarely happens. I argue the struggle to produce action exists precisely because the action peer researchers desire is predicated on successful processes of knowledge translation. As explained in Chapter Two, coproductive methodologies struggle to ‘travel’ into the ‘contested and complex’ application spaces of social policy (Duggan, 2021, p. 356). Often the findings from peer research struggle to land within policymaking institutions, as demonstrated by You Press’s experience of trying to disseminate peer research to decision-makers within the GLA as part of the Roots project, to which I now turn.

## Roots One

Citizen-Led was born at a time when You Press had been empowering young people from underrepresented communities to find their voice for almost a decade. In 2017, the GLA began taking applications from community groups and voluntary and community organisations wanting to ‘co-produce an engagement programme’ through the running of ‘community based research’, ‘with citizens and GLA officers’ (GLA, 2017, pp. 1–3, cited in You Press, 2017). In late 2017, You Press were successful with an application they made to bring young people they described as being from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds together with ‘GLA officers’ via a participatory research project. According to a project brief staff at You Press wrote at the start of the project in 2018, the plan was to recruit 12 young people. They would be trained in qualitative research and would interview five family members on the topic of ‘social integration’ and ‘sense of belonging’, and the question of ‘how different family members want their voices to be heard’ by people in positions of power. The plan gives an indication of who these powerful people were, pointing to the ‘London Mayor’ Sadiq Khan, and to ‘Matthew Ryder’, the ‘Deputy Mayor’ for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement in 2018 (You Press, 2018a). The plan did not, however, indicate how the ‘citizens and GLA officers’ would be brought together, a problem explored in Chapter Six of this thesis.



*Figure 145: Graphic used to recruit young people to You Press’s participatory research project (You Press, 2018d).*



*Figure 16: workshops held during You Press's participatory research project (You Press, 2018e; 2018f; 2018g; 2018h).*

You Press's 2014 'collaborative poetics' programme model is strongly visible in the project they designed for Citizen-Led. The recruited young people would be responsible for 'capturing the stories' their family members told and for re-telling them, through 'prose, poetry, photography, short films [and] visual comics' (You Press, 2018a). Like with previous You Press projects, the young people involved would attend a series of creative workshops over a 10-week period. During the project, they would develop their 'confidence, management and communication skills' through training and the practical activities of listening to, discussing, and representing the 'all too often silent stories of the BAME community' (You Press, 2018a, 'output and benefit', para. 2; para. 3). But these well-practiced elements of the project were followed by something that was new to You Press but is a common feature of research: aggregating data and producing findings for policy and decision-making audiences.

The GLA had ambitions to 'support' and work 'in partnership' with You Press during Citizen-Led. Arguably, as the policy partner, with more power and a tacit understanding of mayoral decision-making, they wanted to be particularly close to You Press as they undertook the unfamiliar work of 'gathering' and

‘aggregating’ data (GLA, 2017, pp. 1–3, cited in You Press, 2017). The level of support they provided to the organisation at this critical time was surprisingly low. When staff at You Press undertook a month-long period of ‘data analysis’, re-



Figure 17: data presentation, from You Press’s participatory research project (You Press, 2018b, p. 16)

analysing the interviews the young people conducted, they did this independently, without the involvement of GLA officers. Using the methods of basic statistics, You Press staff collated the projects findings and published them graphically, alongside some of the artistic outputs, in a final report (You Press, 2018a; 2018b). In line with plans made at the start of the project, the creative work was performed and the report presented, at a ‘recognition event’, held at City Hall (You Press, 2017, ‘project process’, para. 8). At the event, You Press staff handed a copy of the report to deputy mayor, Matthew Ryder. They were pleased their research had made it into the hands of a senior leader, and ‘hoped’ he would read it.

You Press found a name for the project which blended elements of their 2014 collaborative poetic model with the practices of participatory research: ‘ROOTS LDN’. In the evaluative report they produced internally and sent to the GLA, a justification is given for the choice of name. Not only were the activities of the project providing insight in relation to the London focused research topic and question, but the young people (in this project called ‘young researchers’) were also ‘learning about the[ir] roots’ from the stories they were hearing ‘their family members’ tell (You Press, 2018c, “new project name”, para. 1). The abbreviated suffix, ‘LDN’, points to the situated nature of the programme (in London) and perhaps to the partnership You Press had with the mayor of London via the GLA. Over time the ‘LDN’ suffix was dropped conversationally, with those most involved referring to it simply as ‘Roots’.



## Pilot concerns

In handing the Roots report (You Press, 2018b) over to the deputy mayor at the end of Citizen-Led, You Press wanted and expected something to happen. They wanted the work they had done to be read and for its readers to change their behaviour in some way. Action could have taken the form of further presentations of the research within the GLA. For example, the young researchers could have been invited to take on formal roles within different advisory groups and could have shared the things they had learnt within these settings. It is true that a few of the young people involved with Roots One did go on to work as 'community researchers' within the GLA, conducting surveys at a handful of 'Mayor of London' branded events. These same researchers also participated in a listening project within the GLA. This saw them work with a 15-hour audio archive of Londoners talking about their experience of community in the city. Their job was to theme the content of the archive and prepare key quotes for use within another GLA project that was getting underway, called the London Community Story. Though these opportunities provided the young people with an avenue through which to develop as researchers, they did not provide opportunities for knowledge from the Roots One project to be disseminated more widely.

Though it would be unfair to say that nothing happened because of Roots One, the project certainly didn't achieve the sort of policy impact or social change people involved with participatory research have come to expect and want. Later chapters in this thesis seek to uncover why this might be. At this stage it is important to note that though the Citizen-Led Pilot envisaged GLA officers and citizens working together, You Press pursued many of the key research elements of their project without the involvement of GLA officers. They worked independently from the GLA on most elements of Roots One. Did they reject or ignore invitations made by GLA officers? Or were no invitations made? As Chapter Six reveals, it was certainly more complex than this, though, as this chapter argues, a degree of failure in relation to the coproductive ambitions of Citizen-Led was noticeable within Roots One.

Citizen-Led's shortcomings were experienced by a range of stakeholders during its pilot rollout, which was evaluated in 2018. Consultants at an agency



interviewed people involved with six participatory research projects the programme had so far supported, including staff at You Press. The evaluative report the agency produced uses a quote from these interviews in its title, ‘From “what can the Mayor do about it?” to “what can we do about it together?”’ (the social change agency, 2019). The first question speaks to the desire many peer researchers have to see policy changes made in response to the knowledge they share. Asking ‘what is the mayor going to do about it?’, imagines that the outcome of the project is handing a final report over to a deputy mayor and expecting a policy change will be made because of its contents; the second, ‘what can we do about it together?’, speaks to coproduction. Scholars of coproduction see the concept as valuable precisely for the capacity it has to create a ‘shared sense of collective ownership’ among partners in projects. It is valuable in that it creates a ‘joint experience’, bringing forth conditions in which all partners (should) have responsibility for achieving outcomes (Simon, Palmer and Riise, 2020, p. 4). From the perspective of coproduction, You Press should not have been waiting for the mayor to act on the findings from Roots One. Rather, You Press and the GLA should both have been responsible for taking action in relation to the knowledge the project uncovered. In the next section, I look at what did happen next for You Press and their relationship with the GLA. I argue that an outcome of Roots One was further research for You Press and a second Roots project: Roots Two.

#### 4.5 Citizen-Led Two

The first Roots project formally came to an end in mid-2018, with the publishing of the research booklet and an album on the music streaming platform Spotify. But both You Press and the GLA had ambitions for the partnership they had developed via Citizen-Led to continue (GLA, 2017, p. 3, cited in You Press, 2017). The GLA stressed that a sub-aim of the programme was to ‘identify and develop leaders who want to engage further with the GLA’ (GLA, 2018a, p. 45) and the evaluation recommended ‘longer term engagement[s] [by the GLA] with existing partner community organisations’ (the social change agency, 2019, p. 14). In 2019, the GLA described their plan to continue working with people involved with the Citizen-Led Pilot, including them with work to further develop

Citizen-Led as a public participation model within the GLA (GLA, 2019a). Later that year, the GLA launched Citizen-Led in post-pilot form, announcing 'we are once again inviting community groups to apply for grant funding to facilitate their own community-led research projects, in collaboration with [us]' (GLA, 2019b, para. 1).

With the second roll out of Citizen-Led, the GLA still wanted to 'strengthen connections and engagement with communities whose voice and influence on public policy is under-represented' (GLA, 2019b, 'aims of the programme', para. 1). But there were new features to Citizen-Led post-pilot. As it entered its new phase, Citizen-Led Two had 'identified communities affected by a specific social/political challenge or issue' (GLA, 2019a, para. 3). For example, rather than engage people through broad topics like identity, social integration and belonging, as they had done in the Citizen-Led Pilot, in Citizen-Led Two the GLA wanted to engage people with lived experience of specific London challenges, such as 'serious youth violence' and 'trust and confidence in the police' (GLA, 2019c, p. 3). Participatory research, again articulated as 'community' and 'peer research', would still be the method through which to engage and build relations with the target communities (GLA, 2019a). Participatory research would continue to be one of the main ways the mayor would 'support Londoners' participation in democracy and decision making' (GLA, 2018a, p. 43). In this section, I describe the appetite the GLA and You Press had to continue working together, introducing a further Citizen-Led project You Press designed on the topic of serious youth violence: Roots Two.

### [A second Roots project](#)

After trying out participatory research with a policy partner during Roots One, You Press wanted to continue. Through the project they had innovated their 2014 programme model, bending it in the direction of research but retaining the collaborative poetic approach. This would have a longstanding impact on the direction of the organisation. In a squeezed funding landscape, the new model enabled You Press to secure funding from local government, something they hadn't done before Roots One, but would go on to do repeatedly following this.

For example, shortly after the conclusion of Roots One, You Press began working with the City of Westminster (You Press, n.d.(b)). Then they returned to work with the GLA again on a second Roots project responding to the GLA's stipulated need for participatory research on specific social and political challenges and issues (GLA, 2019a).

In 2019, the GLA re-launched Citizen-Led. Whereas the pilot programme had focused on social integration, in year two the programme expanded to cover multiple urban policy themes. Community organisations were invited to pitch participatory research projects involving people with a specific social identity, or projects which responded to a particular chosen theme (GLA, 2019c, p. 3). You Press were successful with an application they made to take their Roots One research further through a second Roots project (referred to in this thesis as 'Roots Two'). Their data analysis activities during Roots One had revealed 'crime' as 'the biggest concern' held by 'the BAME community' in London, with the increase in 'criminal activity' such as 'acid attacks, domestic violence and drugs' being the main worry. The project participants had seen a link between levels of policing, the closure of youth centres, challenges in the equal access to education and 'the increase of gang culture' and the rising 'vulnerability of young people' (You Press, 2019b, p. 2). You Press therefore answered the GLA's call for proposals for research on the theme of 'serious youth violence' with a proposal for a participatory research project into 'the root causes of youth violence in London' (You Press, 2019b, p. 2). Roots Two would work with ethnic minority young people. This was an audience You Press had long been supporting, a group who had been targeted by the GLA within the Citizen-Led Pilot, and one whose engagement was important for the GLA as part of their mission to improve equality, diversity, and inclusion in the city (GLA, 2018b, pp. 10—16).

In Roots Two, You Press set out to use the Roots model to explore the 'impact' and 'effects' of 'youth violence and crime' (You Press, 2019b). In the context of urban policy, youth violence is understood as crime involving teenagers and the use of sharp instruments, such as knives (Williams *et al.*, 2020, p. 15). In 2019, the number of recorded offences involving knives across England and Wales had been growing by 7% year on year since 2011, hitting an 11-year high in

London (Mackintosh and Lee, 2019; Youth Justice Board, 2021). The increases in instances of 'homicide, knife and gun crime' were accompanied by decreases in the average age of people involved, with 'a shift towards younger victims and perpetrators' (Densley, Deuchar and Harding, 2020, p. 3). Working with young people with lived experience of violent crime was not completely new for You Press. As highlighted earlier, in the 'Voices of Redemption' project, You Press had worked with ex-offenders and people with experience of the criminal justice system. As with the previous project, You Press planned to seek the support of partners with expertise in challenging inequalities within the criminal justice system (You Press, 2019b). They also brought on new facilitators who could bring skills in research design, ethics and safeguarding to a participatory research project on a highly sensitive subject.

In Roots Two, 15 young people from ethnic minority backgrounds were engaged in workshop-based training and completed practical activities to conduct research and 'create artistic pieces inspired by the research'. Over a 10-week period the researchers engaged in research activities to listen to the stories of people 'concern[ed] with Youth Violence and Crime' (You Press, 2020c, Key Research Findings, para. 1). In line with the previously developed Roots model, the project included a period of 'data analysis' (You Press, 2020c, Key Research Findings, para. 3). Again, staff at You Press rendered the conversations as statistical data. At the end of the project, the statistical analysis was published alongside some of the artworks in another research report, this time published and disseminated in an online-only format (You Press, 2020c; 2020d). In the next section, I further describe Roots Two, sharing insight into the activities that formed the project.

### Roots Two

Roots Two followed the same programme model as Roots One. You Press organised four workshops to support a group of young people to become researchers and complete a participatory research project. The first two workshops focused on building skills in research and the second two on developing the young people as artists. I was involved with designing and

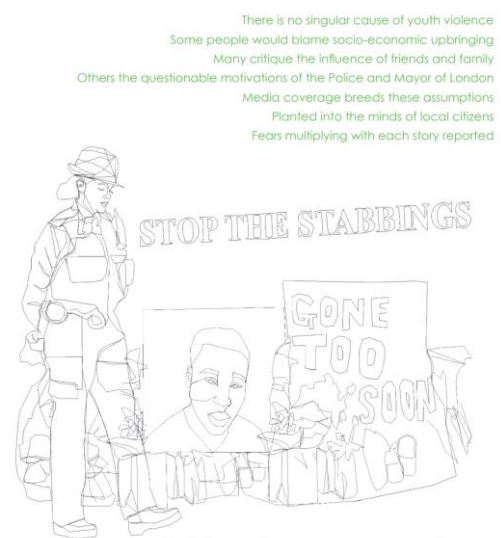
facilitating the research workshops. I attended the art workshops as a guest. The research workshops encouraged the researchers to think carefully about 'what' they were doing in the project, 'why' they were engaging in research, and 'how' they were collecting and producing knowledge on the topic of crime and serious violence (You Press, 2019c, p. 1). The workshop activities prepared the young people to engage in interview conversations with peers and with family members. The emotional and potentially traumatising topic of knife crime was addressed, with staff and facilitators leading the young people in scenario-based research preparation activities. The young people were presented with a series of fictional situations. For example, one scenario asked the young people to discuss in small groups what they would do if, while they were interviewing someone as part their research on the Roots Two project, they learned that the person had 'been a victim of violent crime and they begin to talk about the crime in detail'. Another asked them what they would do if someone they were interviewing became 'upset and visibly stressed'. A third asked what they would do if they themselves began to 'feel uncomfortable' part way through an interview. In hearing what the researchers would do in these scenarios, You Press staff were able to explain elements of the project's 'safeguarding' policy and facilitators were able to give advice on what they thought was the most ethical thing to do in each situation (You Press, 2019c, p. 2).

Alongside the research training and the support activities of the workshops, the young people involved with Roots Two stepped into their roles as researchers within the project. They each held interviews with a minimum of five friends and family members on the topic of crime and serious violence. The interviews mostly took the form of conversations. They mostly went unrecorded, though some of the researchers recorded what was said on their phones or wrote down what people said as notes. As part of the interviews, the researchers asked their participants to fill out an 'electronic questionnaire' containing a set of 'open-ended questions' (You Press, 2020d, p. 16). 87 people filled out the survey, asking questions including: '[h]ow has youth violence affected your community?'; '[w]hat concerns you about crime in your community?'; '[h]ow would you describe the relationships between young people in your community and the police?'; and '[w]hat efforts would you like to see from the mayor of

London to welcome the voices of your community?’ (You Press, 2020d, pp. 18–30). Some of the researchers transcribed content from their interviews and pasted sections of their notes into the electronic survey. The 87 responses were taken as a dataset and were analysed by You Press staff. The questions and a description of common responses were written up as part of a research report (for an example see figure 18) (You Press, 2020d). Meanwhile, the researchers went on to produce ‘artwork, poems, songs and short films’ based on the stories they had heard in the interviews. Representations of these artworks were also included in the research report (for an example see figure 19) (You Press, 2020d, p. 32).

There are a variety of different things that the participants want to see from the Mayor of London. One of the key requests is for the Mayor to communicate with people. They want to see Mr. Khan get involved with communities and have direct discussions, especially with the youth, in order to build a relationship and show transparency. A lot of people want the Mayor to actively discuss and listen to the concerns of general public.

*Figure 18: text presented in a research booklet produced in relation to Roots Two (You Press, 2020d, p. 28).*



*Figure 19: artwork presented in a research booklet produced as part of Roots Two (You Press, 2020d, p. 33)*

The Roots Two project found that young people ‘are scared of becoming a target [for violence] in their local area’ and that the ‘worry’ parents face in

relation to knife crime results in behaviours which try to keep children indoors at night (You Press, 2020a, ROOTS LDN 2019, para. 3). Of the people surveyed in Roots Two, 60% carried 'negative feelings' towards the police, using words like 'mistrust' and concepts like 'hostility' to describe their feelings (You Press, 2020a, ROOTS LDN 2019, para. 4).

Roots Two began in 2019 and activities connected to the project ran into 2020. After the restrictions on social gatherings introduced in March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, work on Roots Two stalled for a few months. However, in June 2020, with a possible lifting of pandemic restrictions in sight, You Press aimed to organise an event to celebrate and share the work completed in Roots Two. The organisation wanted to book a 'studio session' and allow the young people to record some of the music and rap poetry they had produced as part of the project. Staff at You Press also planned to 'print physical copies of the research report' they had written and formatted digitally, wanting to distribute this report widely (You Press, 2020b, p. 1). Later chapters in this thesis address the impact the pandemic had on the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking (see Chapter Seven). It is important to note here, however, that the translation of knowledge from the Roots Two project into policymaking environments was impacted by the pandemic. Nevertheless, the pandemic was not responsible for every knowledge translation challenge You Press encountered when trying to find an audience with which to share the Roots Two findings within the GLA (see Chapter Six).

At the start of Roots Two, there had been plans for You Press and other community organisations involved with Citizen-Led Two to be involved with a 'showcase of findings at GLA' and 'celebration event' (GLA, 2019c, pp. 4–5). This was originally scheduled for March 2020 however a specific date was not formally set. In mid-March 2020, the GLA closed the doors to London's City Hall and discussion of when to hold the showcase, or what the format should be, did not continue. The idea of participating in a showcase stuck with You Press however who saw it as their main opportunity to share what they had learnt with policymakers. As soon as the pandemic restrictions of 2020 began to ease, You Press planned to 'find out [the] GLA's plans for a final report showcase' (You

Press, 2020b, p. 1). As the pandemic progressed however and time passed, this became less of a priority. The final report was never printed, and the showcase was never held. To round off their work on Roots Two, You Press presented their 'key research findings' and shared it with subscribers to their email newsletter in July 2020 (You Press, 2020c, 'Key Research Findings' section).

#### 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a base understanding of practice at the intersection of community and government in relation to participatory policymaking in London during the late 2010s. It has provided a needed description of Mayor Khan's vision for participation, arguing that elements of the vision relied on an understanding of participation as achievable by working with community and voluntary organisations on participatory research projects. This chapter has also introduced You Press, a voluntary organisation who began working with the GLA to deliver participatory research. The You Press project models analysed in this chapter have revealed that the organisation was engaged in a form of knowledge coproduction with minority young people. Using the creative arts, You Press supported young people to listen to, discuss, and represent the lived experiences of their peers. You Press are thus revealed in this chapter to be one community organisation committed to a local practice of participatory research during the time of this study.

By looking at London integration and inclusion policy, this chapter has revealed the ambition of the Citizen-Led programme, designed as a key mechanism through which the GLA would 'support Londoners' participation in democracy and decision making' (GLA, 2018a, p. 43). Though public participation under Khan likely involved many 'versions' of participation, this thesis focuses on the 'version' enacted by Citizen-Led and realised through projects like Roots One and Roots Two. Chapter Three and Chapter Seven provide the methodological justification for studying this programme and no other version of participation imagined and/or enacted by the GLA during the time of this study. As an insider action researcher working with You Press, I was able to participate in delivering



the Roots Two project, facilitating some of the workshop-based training the young people received and supporting the project as an evaluator. Through my work, I was able to observe activity across the project partnership: hearing stories of Roots Two at You Press and within the GLA. Roots Two therefore provides this study with a practical lens through which to study the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking.

The Roots Two project occupies a position of interest in relation to the question of how coproduction can enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking (main RQ). As later chapters will highlight, Roots Two was not an easy project. The design of Citizen-Led Two limited its coproduction capabilities, creating stressful situations for You Press staff and volunteers to navigate (see Chapter Five). Citizen-Led Two asked You Press staff to engage in processes of co-design with GLA officers, but it was difficult for people to work together across difference, develop a common language to use in the project, and to build strong relationships (see Chapter Six). This makes Roots Two an interesting case through which to study some of the challenges of community participation, uncovering insight in relation to the reality of public participation with urban policymaking in London.

## Chapter Five: Designing for Coproduction: Stakeholder Responses to Limitation by Design in the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme

### 5.1 Introduction

Citizen-Led proposed to be a programme of participatory research led by community organisations. However, vast areas of the programme were designed without the participation of people working in the community and voluntary sector. This contradicted the mayor's vision for participation and betrayed the foundational ideology of participation, which produced negative feelings amongst people the GLA sought to partner with. In this chapter, I investigate the design of Citizen-Led Two. Firstly, in relation to coproduction and the participation of community organisations with policymaking in London (main research question). And secondly, in response to the second subsidiary research question this study has: *How did the design of the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme limit its coproduction capabilities, and how did people respond to these limitations?*

In 2019, the GLA launched Citizen-Led Two with a series of information sessions aimed at engaging organisations in London's community and voluntary sector and supporting them to put in applications to deliver participatory research projects in partnership with the GLA. By zooming in on events that took place in these sessions, I am able to contribute knowledge to debates concerning 'grammar' in designing public policy for coproduction (Durose and Richardson, 2016). Grammar, in the context of public policy, is a concept evoked to describe 'the activities used in [...] pursuit' of the policy 'visions' leaders have (Durose and Richardson, 2016, p. 11). This thesis is concerned with the 2018 vision the mayor of London had for 'a more participatory approach to delivering policies and programmes' (GLA, 2018a, p. 45). In this context, this chapter reveals how some of the 'activities' and 'institutional arrangements' (Durose and Richardson, 2016, p. 14) within the design of Citizen-Led Two worked to hinder the participation of community organisations with London policymaking.

While the mayor's vision for community participation evokes a universalism based on urban citizenship – talking of the 'Londoner' – the actual delivery of

the vision followed what is explained in Chapter Two as a targeted practice (Mkandawire, 2005). This chapter investigates the politics of ‘particularism’ (Ellison, 1999) demonstrated in Citizen-Led. Scholars who have previously studied the GLA’s approach to community engagement point to the irony of ‘targeted’ and ‘particular’ outreach activities, highlighting how they seek to invite marginalised people into spaces to which their democratic right as a citizen should already grant them access (Naidoo, 2009). This chapter contributes knowledge in relation to the GLA’s targeted approach to public participation. The existing scholarship has criticised the GLA for designing ‘instrumentalist’ programmes, arguing they ‘straitjacket people into being defined primarily by their racial identities’, at the expense of other identities they may have (Naidoo, 2009, p. 68). There is little research to date however, on how current targeting practices at the GLA can at once account for structural inequalities like racism and respond to intersectionality. This chapter analyses how staff at the GLA are responding to current participation problems. It argues staff can use the skills of reflexivity and mediation to respond to the ‘generative past’ that haunts participation projects (Cornwall, 2008), and navigate the colonial legacy present in the language of targeting (Naidoo, 2009).

Ethnographic data, in the form of fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011), were used as source material in the production of this chapter. A series of research vignettes, provide a ‘vivid portrayal’ of ‘specific incidents’ (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek and Lê, 2014, p. 280) within the Citizen-Led Two information sessions. These highly descriptive accounts of activity at two of the sessions reveal how big decisions around research topics and target participants for Citizen-Led Two projects were made behind closed doors. The analysis I conduct using ‘creative analytical writing practices’ (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005) shows how key stages of the Citizen-Led Two design process were completed before community organisations got involved with the programme. When it was presented to people at the information sessions, some noticed this and were dissatisfied. They made their dissatisfaction with the design of the programme known, narrowing in on the GLA’s targeting approach, questioning and criticising a list of preset topics and communities the GLA had attached to Citizen-Led Two. I argue that though the community hooked their

dissatisfaction onto this precise decision the GLA had made, which they felt had been made without them, their criticism likely stems from a deeper concern with the level of control the GLA had over the design of a programme proposing to be citizen- and community-led.

The chapter is arranged as follows:

- In section 5.2, I present two vignettes. The first and final of five information sessions ran as part of Citizen-Led Two provide the setting for these vignettes. The first session was chosen thanks to its location in a community setting where, for reasons explained in the text, I occupied the position of an 'insider action researcher' (Coghlan and Shani, 2011). Feeling at home at the site allowed me greater depth of access and thus, from the perspective of action research theory, the ability to tell a richer story of 'living inquiry' (Marshall, 1999; 2016). The fifth and final session is chosen for the potential role it had to play as a 'critical' case study within qualitative research and social inquiry theory (Prezeworski and Teune, 1970; George and Bennett, 2005, cited in Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, p. 242). The fifth session, coming after the preceding four, provided a critical opportunity for the GLA to demonstrate learning in relation to the events and happenings of the previous four sessions. Thus, the fifth session is chosen for the story of 'tacit learning' (Cunliffe, 2016) it contributes to the broader thesis. The stakeholder responses communicated via the information session vignettes reveal the design limitations of Citizen-Led Two.
- In section 5.3, I analyse the response leaders in the community and voluntary sector had to a list of communities and issues designed to target community research proposed as part of Citizen-Led Two. My analysis is centred around the vehement dislike attendees at the information sessions had in relation to the use of the term 'BAME', as well as the frustration some felt that Citizen-Led Two was not targeted towards engaging the communities they represented. I show how some members of staff within the CE team were able to mediate tensions in the information sessions, extending arguments as to the value 'reflexive'

'boundary spanners' bring to processes of policymaking informed by theories of coproduction (Durose and Richardson, 2016).

- Even when possessed with the mediation capabilities described in the previous point, the CE team could not overcome the problem at the heart of this chapter: that by the time the GLA reached out to community and voluntary organisations and invited them to make applications to run projects as part of Citizen-Led, the big decisions around research topics and target communities had already been made. In section 5.4, I explore this problem further, making proposals as to how it could have been otherwise.

It should be noted that throughout this chapter I use the terms 'ethnic minority', 'Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic' and the abbreviation 'BAME'. It is not because I believe them to be appropriate terms to use to reference a grouped identity. Rather, I use them because they were the terms used by the people and organisations involved with the research this thesis contains. As the GLA describe, 'BAME stands for black, Asian and minority ethnic and is used to refer to members of nonwhite communities in the UK' (GLA, 2018b, p. 157). One of the reasons the GLA give for using a simplistic non white/white binary relates to the way the organisation works with 'evidence'. They say that while they do try to be more specific when they talk about ethnic groups, 'often data only exists at a high level, for instance relating to a broad BAME group' (GLA, 2018b, p. 161, footnote 334). Studies have shown that the acronyms 'BME' and 'BAME', along with other collective terms commonly used within policy discourse in Britain, are not accepted by those they describe and are 'offensive' and 'ethnocentric' (Aspinall, 2020). The impact of the GLA's use of the term 'BAME' is considered as part of the text in this chapter.

## 5.2 Information Sessions

In early 2019, the GLA re-committed to supporting 'Londoners' participation in democracy and decision making' through 'citizen-led action' and 'a more participatory approach to developing and delivering policies and programmes' (GLA, 2018a, p. 45). The organisation launched Citizen-Led Two, announcing,

'we are once again inviting community groups to apply for grant funding to facilitate their own community-led research projects, in collaboration with the [GLA]'. Interested community groups were invited to attend an 'information session', 'to find out more about the programme' (GLA, 2019b). The GLA held five information sessions across a two-week period in February 2019. In these sessions, GLA officers aimed to provide an '[o]verview of the Citizen Led Engagement Programme' and to host an '[a]pplication form workshop' and a 'Q&A' related to the fund (Eventbrite, 2019).

Each information session planned to cover the same agenda. The point of running five repeated sessions was to reach people in a different part of the city – some of the sessions were held in the north and west, others in the south and east of London. To further maximise attendance across the five sessions, each was held at a different time of day – morning, afternoon, and evening. Most took place in community locations, others in more formal contemporary events spaces, and one in a committee room at London's City Hall. Paying attention to how 'space' works to 'set' the 'relational and material condition' for collaboration is important (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 64) and experts on coproducing research with communities stress the value of community libraries and community centres, as places for people and community knowledge (Brown *et al.*, 2020, p. 97). Beyond physical space, 'one of the challenges' of coproduction is creating a relational space where people feel 'comfortable', can 'explore their differences' and can 'collaborate productively' (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 64).

The use of physical space in the information sessions was carefully considered, and the variety in location, setting and time had a positive quantitative engagement effect. In total, representatives from over 80 different community groups and civil society organisations attended at least one of the five information sessions. This number suggests that the sessions were in some way physically accessible to the voluntary and community sector, but they tell us little about the emotional and relational quality of the engagement space.

Following the information sessions, only 25% of the groups and organisations in attendance went on to prepare and submit applications to facilitate projects via Citizen-Led Two. The majority ended their engagement with the programme.

This section uses living inquiry and a storytelling approach to explore this

problem, looking beyond the numbers to investigate the 'grammar' of the 'emotional' and 'relational' spaces (Durose and Richardson, 2016; Hemström *et al.*, 2021) of the Citizen-Led Two information sessions. I write in the first-person to describe the goings on at the first and fifth information sessions. I do this to paint a picture of what the information sessions were like for at least three groups of people: the GLA officers running the sessions, the community and voluntary sector staff in attendance, and me, the action researcher studying the programme.

As described in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, the research on which this thesis is based was conducted using an action research methodology and ethnographic research methods. Action-wise, one of the reasons I was present at the five information sessions was because I was writing a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document to accompany the Citizen-Led Two webpages on london.gov. I was responsible for recording every question asked by attendees at the information sessions, then for organising the questions into thematic categories, and passing them on to the GLA staff members who were organising the programme and running the sessions.

### Selby session: Monday morning

The first information session was held on a Monday morning at the Selby Centre, a community centre in Tottenham, north London. The Selby Centre is in a residential area and is not an easy place to get to unless you are in-tune with north London's suburban bus routes or have your own transport. To attend the first information session that February morning, I travelled to Selby by bike. I carefully pedalled my route up the roads from home, cutting along the frozen footpaths through the cemetery, across White Hart Lane, onto Selby Road and into the Selby carpark, where I lock my bike. As I enter the Centre, I know which door to push, which way to turn. Before the session starts, I go to the desk I have been renting for the past four months in a shared office. I say hello to my friends and make myself a tea in the staff room. This settling in means that the final stage of my journey to the information session is a short walk along a corridor. I feel at home in the Centre but am nervous as I enter the room that is

booked for the information session. It had been hard to get to this stage in my research. Following the pilot, I had waited months for Citizen-Led Two to start up. During this time, I had tried hard to make sure that when Citizen-Led Two began, I was liked and trusted enough to play an active role as an 'insider action researcher', delivering the work alongside GLA officers. As highlighted in Chapter Three, action researchers working on the inside of organisation must be able to 'work well with others' (Coghlan and Shani, 2011, p. 653). I knew I had to establish a positive working relationship with the GLA officers working on Citizen-Led Two and the community leaders who would become engaged with it. I knew establishing trust was a prerequisite for developing and maintaining partnerships in community-based participatory research (Durham Community Research Team, 2011, pp. 7–8).

I wanted to study Citizen-Led Two using ethnographic notetaking and journaling methods, specifically for research purposes and to produce this thesis. I felt I had managed to immerse myself in the world of Citizen-Led Two but having the dual aims of working on it like a colleague and studying it like an ethnographer were hard to balance. As I arrive for the information session, I am aware that my latest email to the GLA had gone unanswered. This email was the first time I had spoken concretely about the legal requirements of my research. I had sent the organiser of the information sessions a copy of a poster I wanted to hand out or display at each session. In line with the data collection plans I had had approved by UCL's ethics committee, I needed to notify attendees that I was there and that I was 'collecting data'. I wasn't going to record any names or personal information in my ethnographic fieldnotes, but people did have the right to tell me if they didn't want anything they said to be written down – they just needed to tell me, and then I would know to put my pen down when they started speaking. In community research, this practice is understood as one in which the challenges of 'anonymity, privacy and confidentiality; institutional ethical review processes; and blurred boundaries between researcher and researched, academic and activist' make themselves known (Durham Community Research Team, 2011, p. 10).

When I arrive for the information session, I see that the room is arranged with round tables dotted about and a top table at one end. There is a projector ready



and it projects PowerPoint slides against a wall. The first slide confirms that attendees are in the right place for learning about the 'Citizen Led Fund' (GLA, 2019d). I make a beeline for the GLA officer standing at the front of the room. They are pleased to see me and apologise for not replying to my email. Don't put your poster up, they tell me. I shudder. We can introduce you at the beginning and you can tell everyone verbally what it is you are here for! Relieved, I take a seat at one of the tables that have people already sitting at them. The person I sit next to hands me a leaflet advertising the community group they run. It provides a service to African and Caribbean women experiencing domestic violence. They tell me that they go to a lot of 'these things' and I learn that 'these things' are events related to funding. 'We come', they say, 'and see how the system wants us to do it', it being the work of supporting the women. When it is my turn to introduce myself, I have my own poster to point to. As I lay it on the table, I say that I am a student and that I am here to also learn about 'the system' and 'these things'.

We listen as Citizen-Led Two is introduced. It is a presentation I will hear five different versions of across the five information sessions. Each time, the things the staff members say are familiar. Their words and the content of the slides are all written in the various planning documents that have come into my inbox in the last few months. Everyone tells of how the Citizen-Led Pilot was launched in response to a problem the mayor had. This problem was that 'there are some communities in London that historically are not engaged with City Hall, and this has led to a gap in the GLA's insight and relationships with these communities.' Everyone tells of how in 2019 the programme was entering its second phase, following pilot work in 2017/18. Citizen-Led Two aimed to 'continue to focus on communities which have historically been less represented at City Hall' but had also 'identified communities affected by a specific social/political challenge or issue' (GLA, 2019a). In the funding prospectus released ahead of the information sessions, the GLA announced that they were 'inviting community groups to apply to the programme to fund projects which focus on either a 'Community' or a 'Theme' listed in [a] table' (GLA, 2019c, p. 3). I include an edited version of this table here:

<b>Communities</b>
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups
European communities
East Asian communities
Refugee, migrant and asylum seeker communities
Deaf Londoners
BAME LGBT+ Londoners
<b>Themes</b>
Health and young people, under 25 in the criminal justice system (including young women)
The impact of Brexit on Londoners
Serious youth violence
Victims of hate crime
Trust and confidence in policing
Barriers to accessing green spaces

*Figure 20: In Citizen-Led Two, the GLA asked ‘community groups to apply to the programme to fund projects which focus on either a ‘Community’ or a ‘Theme’ listed in [this] table’ (GLA, 2019c, p. 3).*

New in 2019 was the introduction of specific social/political challenge issues. Whereas before Citizen-Led’s main aim had been to engage specific under-represented communities based on ethnicity, now organisations could also apply to run projects based on preset research topics. Six themes had been identified for projects to apply under: ‘serious youth violence’ being one of them, ‘trust and confidence in policing’ being another. In its second year, the initiative had developed a second aim: wanting to engage people based on their experience of a particular issue regardless of ethnicity was new.

At the first information session at the Selby Centre, the projector beamed a list of communities and themes from the funding prospectus up onto the wall and the staff explained that applicants could apply to work with one of the specified communities, or under a specific theme. Until this point the audience had been listening quietly. I had seen people nodding in agreement to earlier slides and taking notes of what was said. With this slide though, the atmosphere in the room changed. A wave of whispering broke out around the tables at Selby. From beside me I heard sighs, tuts and a mutter of 'yep, going to leave now'. Quickly the whispering swelled the room. Soon it crashed over the presentation. Staff had to pause their presentation as the questions and criticisms flooded in.

A similar thing happened in the subsequent four sessions. Despite the sessions taking place in different locations, with different attendees, and with different members of GLA staff, whenever the slide containing the list of communities and issues came up, the discontent that brewed at Selby would swell again. And nowhere was the flood more destructive than in the fifth and final information session, held in a committee room at London's City Hall. In the next section, I describe the space of the fifth session and the flood of criticism that engulfed it.

#### [City Hall session: Friday evening](#)

The fifth and final of the five sessions was held on a Friday in a committee room in City Hall, in Bermondsey, southeast London. It was still very much winter, and darkness was starting to fall as I made my way through the revolving entrance doors and towards the building's security gate. Passing through security at City Hall is an ordeal and feels strange the first few times you do it. But for me it was a routine I had become accustomed to. People are encouraged to remove any metals, but their bangles, buckles and belts continue to set off the sensors, which beep as they walk through the security arch. I wait patiently in the queue, gazing outside. It's late afternoon and the streetlamps have come on and the glass walled offices and eateries of the More London estate are glowing. Attending this information session is the final thing on my research agenda this week and comes at the end of a period of intense

fieldwork that started at the first information session at the Selby Centre two weeks ago. I am tired and relieved that in a few hours I will have attended all five sessions. Though I still needed to type up my notes this evening, at least there would be a weekend and some chance of rest tomorrow.

Though the previous four sessions had been held in community locations and in events spaces not connected to government, the CE team wanted to hold one of the sessions at City Hall because they know that some people do like visiting the London landmark. After I have removed my coat and unbagged my laptop, it is my turn to pass through the security arch. It does feel special to be on the inside. At the reception desk I collect a visitors pass, hook it around my neck and make my way down the spiral slope that leads to the Committee Rooms at City Hall.

Upon entering the Committee Room, I am greeted with a table of sandwiches and a line of cups, neatly laid out ready for taking and being pumped full of City Hall coffee. I glance around the room, looking for someone I know. Three staff members from the CE team stand at a screen pulled down over the wall at the front of the room. They are coordinating with each other, trying to project PowerPoint slides from a laptop onto the screen. Currently, it is only displaying a rectangle of blue light. Glancing around the room I recognise two people sitting at the back. They are sitting quietly, staring at the blue screen.

*Hello, you two are from You Press right?*

In early 2019 I was in the process of building a research partnership with You Press, the voluntary organisation introduced in the previous chapter. As part of early PhD research, I had gone to meet with one of the founders of You Press and we had discussed ways to formally involve me with the organisation. I had also started working on my own participatory research project, which involved two young people who were You Press trained: they had participated in the first Roots and in other You Press projects. Scholars of coproduction mention how doing pre and pilot projects, can bring you 'into a co-productive partnership' from which later coproductive projects can emerge. I understood that to make coproductive partnerships with members of the public and community organisations, it is helpful to be already working with these people, either as a

member of the public yourself or a volunteer, or through your career and professional roles you have held in the community and voluntary sector (Thomas-Hughes, 2017, p. 231). With that in mind I had pushed forward with many projects, making myself an active member of London's participatory research scene.

As I settle into the seat next to the two from You Press, we chat, and I learn that the nearer of the pair had been involved with You Press for a few years and had worked freelance as a coordinator on the first Roots project. The farther away is an undergraduate student at the University of Westminster, interning at You Press via a student placement scheme. In the text that follows, I will refer to these two people as 'the Coordinator' and 'the Intern'. As we chat, the Coordinator nods to the blue screen at the front of the room and I learn that the pair are here today to give a presentation about the first Roots project. 'We're planning to show the Roots videos', the Coordinator explained.

This was the fifth information session and, having attended the previous four, I knew that the sessions were planned to begin with a presentation from the CE team, accompanied by PowerPoint slides. The session would then continue with various organisations from the Citizen-Led Pilot showing videos and passing round outputs from the participatory research projects they did when their organisations were receiving Citizen-Led Pilot funding and support. It seemed that today it was You Press's turn. The failure of the audio-visual setup would mean that both the GLA staff and the two from You Press would need to speak without slides and without videos. Rather than make a verbal presentation to an audience, the Coordinator and the Intern had been planning to show two videos. As it became clear from the projector problems that there would be no visuals or sound, the pair began scribbling notes. Public speaking was something they did not want to do and hadn't planned for. 'I haven't done anything like this before' the Coordinator told me, with worry in their eyes. Already knowing a bit about You Press and the approach of the organisation, I tried to ease their worries.

*Think of it as though you are telling the story of what you did in Roots*

The Coordinator was feeling the stress of being asked to give a presentation ‘off the cuff’ to a room full of people they did not know. Introducing stress like this into community engagement processes is risky and can have a negative impact on people. A study undertaken in Adelaide, Australia inquired into the impact of community engagement on the health and wellbeing of the citizens involved. It revealed that most people involved with a community engagement project experienced ‘negative physical and psychological health effects, such as exhaustion and stress’. For some people, the stresses they were exposed to in community engagement meetings led them to experience ruminating thoughts and insomnia (Ziersch and Baum 2004, p. 497, cited in Attree *et al.*, 2011, p. 6).

Stress and exhaustion are feelings community engagement officers share with citizens. The work of presenting the opening presentation in the five information sessions had been distributed amongst the GLA’s CE team, with no one person presenting twice. The presentations had varied in style, and I had observed that some members of the team were more comfortable with public speaking than others. In the fifth session, the opening presentation would be given by a part time officer who had been away for a few days. They hadn’t worked on the Citizen-Led Pilot, hadn’t attended any previous information session, and looked a little anxious as they skimmed through a pile of papers laid out in front of them. After the issues with the projector, the presentation slides had been printed off and copies were being handed around the room. It is likely that this officer wished they had more time to prepare for the presentation they were about to give. But, as researchers studying the practices of public officials in the City of Cape Town, South Africa, have noted, city officials are often pulled away from what they aim to do by the ‘constant crises’ they are required to deal with in the short term (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 136). I felt bad as I approached them, stealing the last moments of their preparation time. Please can you introduce me at the start of the session? Just like at the first session, before the presentation got underway, I needed to notify the room that I was there as both a GLA colleague and a researcher.

In this section, I have used vignettes to introduce my research activities at two sites. I have presented material collected at information sessions to begin to show how stakeholders were responding to Citizen-Led Two. In the next

section, I continue the story of the above vignette to identify a specific design challenge, which is analysed through the lens of targeted participation. I raise questions about the language used to target interventions and provide new insight into how participation practitioners at the GLA mediate emotions and work productively with the complex feelings that targeted design decisions can generate.

### 5.3 Targeted Participation

Strategies to meaningfully involve people in urban policy and decision-making are beset by a tyrannical quest to find authentically representative people to participate. This 'tyranny of authenticity' creates a hierarchy, which positions some people as more authentic than others. It is a process which 'devalues or dismisses the experience of those who do not fit or comply with such expectations' (Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019, p. 128). When it comes to authenticity in community-based participatory research, there are recurring questions as to 'what counts as a 'community' and 'who best represents a group or community' (Durham Community Research Team, 2011, p. 7–8). The study undertaken into health and wellbeing during community engagement processes in Adelaide, Australia (encountered earlier), found that when there was 'conflict' in meetings, this was particularly stressful for participants, and had adverse psychological health effects for some people (Ziersch and Baum, 2004, p. 497). As this section reveals, questions of authenticity between partners in coproduction can be a source of conflict.

In this section, I look at the response to the targeted engagement approach expressed in Citizen-Led. Firstly, I describe the attitude attendees at the fifth information session had towards a specified set of research topics and social groups. These were identified by the GLA as 'themes' and 'communities' and were what community and voluntary organisations were invited to design community research projects in relation to. Next, I show how my research revealed a desire for specificity when it comes to targeting approaches and a preference for the use of ethnic sub-groups in place of 'BAME' classification. My research reveals that when ethnic specificity must be used as part of a targeted

engagement programme (for example Citizen-Led Two wanted to target East Asian communities) the programme should be front loaded with appropriate pre-engagement activities to ensure those communities are aware they are being targeted and why. Later in the section, I look at some of the ‘boundary spanning’ and ‘mediation’ capabilities GLA community engagement staff demonstrated within the information sessions. I show how these capabilities helped the GLA navigate the ‘BAME’ categorisation, particularly when working with people who vehemently oppose it and find it offensive. Finally, I argue that by the time the GLA reached out to community and voluntary organisations and invited them to make applications to run participatory research as part of Citizen-Led Two, the big decisions around research topics and target communities had already been made.

#### [You call me BAME, I feel offended](#)

In the previous section, I introduced a presentation given as part of a series of five information sessions held by the GLA in relation to Citizen-Led Two. Despite having no accompanying slideshow, the presentation in the fifth information session followed a similar format to the previous four. At the beginning, the aims and rationale for Citizen-Led Two were explained. The community engagement officer presenting told of how Citizen-Led Two responded to the GLA’s felt need of ‘speaking directly to Londoners and hearing the challenges facing them’. When they got to the point where they introduced the list of communities and research ‘themes’, they checked the printouts of the slide containing the list had been passed around and prefixed their introduction of the list with a statement. ‘We have, with this [programme], always had target communities, and we do again this year’. This was a different and more direct framing to that presented at the prior sessions and could have been one of the reasons why the initial questions that came from the audience in relation to the list were more polite ‘why’ type questions. Though more obviously critical comments did come later.

There were more people than there were slide printouts, so we huddled, sharing one between two or three. I shared with someone I didn’t already know, who



had slipped into the chair beside me just before the presentation had started. They held the list tightly, studying it. I pretended to read it, having seen it many times before, and waited. I knew a lengthy discussion would take place in relation to this list. Today that discussion would focus on the programme's desire to run projects with people who were part of two broad identity categories: not either/or categories but intersecting one/and categories. Of the six identity-based target groups, one was targeting people from Black, Asian, or other Minority Ethnic backgrounds, described using the acronym 'BAME'. At the same time, these same people were also targeted to have a Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual sexual identity and/or be Transgender or identifying as another minority gender, described using the acronym 'LGBT+'. Not long after the list had been referenced, a hand went up and I heard a clarifying question come from a few rows in front of me.

*Why does it say 'BAME' and 'LGBT+'? Why are they placed together?*

*Because there is a lack of representation at City Hall of members of BAME groups who are also LGBT+.*

The answer came not from the presenter but from a colleague of theirs, another member of the CE team, sitting to the side of the room. From watching the different staff members across the four prior sessions, I had seen that when the presenter looked, appearance-wise, capable of falling into one of the target communities themselves, the audience was calmer, more polite, and less critical. I knew nothing of the sexuality of the staff member who stepped forward to answer the question. But of their heritage? Both from their race and the things they had told me of their ethnicity I knew some things. They were, in their employer's terminology and framing, 'BAME'.

After the initial question in relation to the list was asked, a lengthy discussion took place. The fifth session had been supposed to start at 4pm. We started a little late, but by 5pm we were still on the topic of the list. There were other things on the agenda for the session: an icebreaker networking activity to help the attendees get to know one another; a capability building exercise designed to help attendees with the actual format of the application form; the presentation by the Coordinator and Intern sitting quietly beside me. But by 5pm, at a time on

a Friday when most people in City Hall were probably thinking about wrapping up for the weekend, we were debating a set of identity categories designed to target public participation policy.

The audience debate contained two main points of conflict. One was centred around a defence of the inclusion of the intersectional BAME LGBT+ category and included personal contributions from attendees. 'As a Black Queer man, I do feel there is a gap', said one attendee in relation to the question of whether the representation of BAME groups at City Hall had enough LGBT+ representation. A clarifying question had been asked about what the '+' meant in LGBT+ and the asking of this question was picked up and referenced as clear evidence that not enough was understood about sexuality and gender in 'the Black community'. Another point of conflict was centred around the programme's inclusion of 'East Asian communities' as a standalone target group, and this was positioned against the intersectional group 'BAME LGBT+'. '[BAME] refers to a very big community, [it] shouldn't be lumped together as within that group you have African, Caribbean...'. The discontent with the use of the broad category of 'BAME' rather than African ethnic subgroups was expressed by the late arrival sitting next to me. Gripping our one-between-two copy of the list tightly, this person sat up straight and called out: 'if you call me BAME I feel offended, I am a Black African'.

When it comes to use of the broad category 'BAME', feelings of offence are common. The term 'BAME' has been critiqued for 'homogenising' people with very different ethnic and cultural backgrounds; for reproducing ideas that 'Whiteness' is a 'privileged identity'; and for 'masking inequality' between different ethnic and racial groups (Aspinall, 2020, p. 7). One of the factors contributing to the low levels of acceptance of the term in Britain relates to the way it was developed by 'observers' and outsiders such as 'government bodies, public and statutory agencies, and the media'. Its development and use did not involve 'the people the terminology describes' (Aspinall, 2020, pp. 6–7). Its status as a term outsiders use was highlighted in the information sessions: its use caused offense. This could happen in any government, statutory, or media environment, but that it happened in the context of a participatory research

programme proposing to be community-led was furthermore offensive, and changed the atmosphere within the information sessions.

Citizen-Led Two was specifically targeted at the London communities the GLA knew they were not engaging with. One of these within the overall 'BAME' subgroup was 'East Asian communities' (GLA, 2019c, p. 3). Within the UK, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and people with other East Asian heritages are marginalised as an 'Asian Other' ethnic group (Southeast and East Asian Centre, 2022). This is despite some of these groups having called London home since the 1860s (Loo, 2022, p. 23). In a GLA policy discussion about the high levels of theft 'BAME' communities experience, an error is made. Though 'Chinese' and 'Japanese' communities are clearly distinguished as different to 'South Asian communities', they are wrongly co-located as 'other South-East Asian groups', when China and Japan are clearly East Asian countries (GLA, 2018b, p. 112). That this inaccurate reference is the only mention of East Asian communities in a diversity and inclusion strategy further highlights the lack of understanding policymaking teams at the GLA had of this minority ethnic group in 2019. However, since 2019, the picture may have improved somewhat, with the Mayor suggesting that 'East Asian' communities have been involved with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) via the 'Together Against Hate' programme, and via a policing forum specifically for Chinese, East and Southeast Asian communities (GLA, 2022).

Representatives from London's East Asian community may not have engaged with Citizen-Led Two because they did not hear about it. The programme and the associated information sessions were promoted using a mailing list of people and organisations who had worked with the GLA before and on 147ondon.gov, Eventbrite and Twitter. More could have been done to promote the programme, though this would not have ensured the participation of London's East Asian communities. As a study into a community engagement project working with 'Chinese older people' to design services discovered, when East Asian people do get involved with projects, they can experience 'disapproval, criticism and even bullying from other community members, who assumed that their primary motive for involvement [is] financial' (Chau, 2007, cited in Attree *et al.*, 2011, p. 257).

In an evaluation I produced as part of my insider action research, I measured the number of applications that came in under each target community or suggested theme in Citizen-Led Two. Looking back at that document, what is significant was that zero applications were made for projects that sought to work with East Asian communities. Fear of experiencing racism at the information sessions and in the wider programme, could have prevented the participation of East Asian communities. As sociologists of race and racism have highlighted, 'racism manifests in various forms, and is not only experienced as explicitly racist verbal or physical violence or dehumanizing treatment' (Karlsen and Nelson, 2021, p. 3). More commonly, racism manifests as subtle 'everyday racism' (Essed, 2008): daily injustices that emotionally impact minoritized people. These 'daily hassles' lead many ethnic minority people to modify their behaviour to protect their wellbeing (Karlsen and Nelson, 2021, p. 3). It could be argued that in not getting involved with Citizen-Led Two, London's East Asian community – like many other invisible communities in the city – were protecting themselves from anticipated discrimination.

### The Mediator

When participatory programmes produce feelings of discrimination and offence, staff members can intervene and take action to mitigate. The debate on the use of the term 'BAME' within Citizen-Led Two raged on at the Friday afternoon information session, in the City Hall Committee Room, until a member of staff stopped it. I will refer to the team member – who had previously stepped in to answer the question about the programme's intersectional targeting of 'BAME LGBT+' communities – as 'the Mediator'. Finding a space in the debate in which to insert themselves, the Mediator, clutching their GLA lanyard as they spoke, tamed the room.

*I don't like the term BAME either. But it is the term the GLA are using, so we are going to use it, for now*

The Mediator was able to authentically empathise with the anger people felt about the overall 'BAME' categorisation. Visually being someone the GLA would

I place in the 'BAME' category gave them credibility as they placed emphasis on the 'I' in their sentence, 'I don't like the term BAME either'. They were honest that Citizen-Led Two uses this term because the GLA uses the term, but signalled that it might not always be this way: we are using the term, but only 'for now'. They pointed to the participatory research projects the people in the room might design for Citizen-Led Two as a space in which community organisations can help the GLA to understand identity better.

To quell people's disappointment at not seeing their community singled out for targeted engagement, the Mediator directed attention to the thematic areas that projects could also engage with, regardless of ethnicity and race. They highlighted that it did not matter if engaging the listed specific communities was not work your organisations could do. Instead, you could apply under a theme. This final suggestion was made by numerous members of community engagement staff in all five of the information sessions and had the effect of placating people who had become angry during the presentation. It felt significant that people who had been threatening to leave the sessions decided to stay after hearing this.

In turning an area of concern into energy for a research project, the Mediator successfully managed to navigate a choppy situation. They demonstrated the qualities described in the coproduction literature as those possessed by a reflexive boundary spanner who can mediate. Reflexivity is a capability which promotes consciousness and self-awareness. It is a quality presented by coproduction scholars as fundamental to managing coproduction processes. Good 'mediation' too is key within the 'messy' processes of coproduction and should be practiced with the aim of helping people from different social worlds (e.g. the government and the community and voluntary sector) to work together, eventually becoming one group, sharing in a coproduced 'thought style' (Durose and Richardson, 2016, pp. 44–45). Boundary spanners are 'creative, innovative and entrepreneurial' people (Williams, 2002, p. 119, cited in Durose and Richardson, 2016, p. 45). They are 'excellent at listening empathically, building relationships and sustaining them, and managing conflict' (Durose and Richardson, 2016, p. 45). In the Committee Room that Friday afternoon, the Mediator was able to tackle the criticism around the programme's use of 'BAME'

terminology head on, saying they didn't like it either. They had authority because they had empathy and credibility. They were honest about the situation (that the GLA are using this term) but also imaginative (suggesting the GLA aren't committed to it forever). They tried to present their dissatisfaction with the term as a sign that they and the community were on the 'same side' and could and should work together to make the GLA – and other organisations relying on the notion of 'BAME' groups – change their ways.

However, though it said it in the funding prospectus and on slides presented in the workshops, staff were never vocally explicit that projects applying under the theme would need to be capable of engaging groups directly affected by the issue. Perhaps this was because it was obvious. Or perhaps it was because the moment to discuss this caveat always seemed to come following a heated room discussion on the list of communities and the use of the term 'BAME'. Or perhaps it was because the staff themselves did not fully understand the new approach and were not confident to explain it. When asked whether projects could mix and match, working for example with East Asian communities on a project on serious youth violence, the Mediator had replied that the answer was yes, mixing and matching was fine. Looking back, I worry that giving answers like this was a mistake. The answer should have been 'yes, but if you have already chosen to work with one of the target communities, perhaps they should choose the topic of the research?'

#### 5.4 Decision-Making

By the time the GLA reached out to community and voluntary organisations and invited them to make applications to run projects as part of Citizen-Led Two, the big decisions around research topics and target communities had already been made. From the perspective of participatory theory, the timeline for starting participation within Citizen-Led Two presents a problem. Scholars of participation give some indication of the timeline best practice participation can follow, showing that 'the earlier societal actors are involved in the design process the more effective participatory measures tend to be' (Ackerman, 2004, p. 459). One can assume that there is therefore correlation between the timeline

for involvement and the building of trust between community and government partners within participation programmes. This section explores the steps the GLA followed in engaging with community organisations via Citizen-Led Two, highlighting problems with the approach to decision-making and the timeline followed, and proposing how processes could have been otherwise. I continue to use living inquiry and a storytelling approach, returning to the information session vignettes, and turning to analyse the activities and conversations that happened after the public activity had ended and attendees had left.

### Set lines

After the first information session at the Selby Centre ended, I hung back. As the session had finished shortly before lunch, the GLA had paid for the Selby café to provide some food for everyone. Large serving dishes filled with salad and rice had been brought out. I queued up with the other attendees to help myself to the buffet, taking a small plate as, though I was hungry, I knew the food wasn't really for me. By this time, I feel more host than guest, having rented a desk within the Selby Centre for four months. I know that, if there is any food left, the platters would eventually make their way to the shared office space and me and the other staff members would have a chance to fill up on leftovers. Over their food, event attendees sat together back at the round tables they had watched the presentation from or stood and ate one handed, nodding and chatting to others when the opportunity arose. When the food was done, the room started to empty. Calls of 'come and see us' and 'stay in touch' followed people as they left. Though the desk where I was going back to complete my work for the day was only down the corridor, the pile of papers I was summarising for my literature review had little appeal. Instead, I gathered the empty plates and tucked in chairs, accompanying Selby and GLA staff as they tidied up. As we put things straight, we reflected on what had happened in the session and speculated on how things could be otherwise.

For some attendees at the information sessions, it was very clear that Citizen-Led Two was a programme they were well-placed to get involved with. Some organisations were already working with 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups'

and wanted to run a community research project with them. Others were already looking at '[t]he impact of Brexit' on the three million European 'Londoners' their organisation was representing. For these organisations, doing participatory research with the GLA provided a perfect opportunity. There was frustration however, from those for whom there was not a clear link between their organisation and the targeted engagement decisions around communities and themes that had already been made. Across the five information sessions, a vocal minority made it clear that rather than being conduits to the GLA's targeted engagement strategy, they would prefer an 'open call' for participatory research. As we cleared the room after the first session, the Selby and GLA staff and I reflected on how we could reduce the frustration the programme provoked.

*there should be greater clarity on why the 'list' is as it is  
we should have set lines on what is not included and why terminology is as it is*

*if it is a specific ask, there should be a  
clear call*

*otherwise make it an open call for subject matter also?*

While we could speculate on the value of an 'open call', the reality was that neither of the two GLA staff who had come to the Selby Centre to present Citizen-Led Two that Monday morning had control over the design of the programme. Perhaps their distance from its design meant that, though they were presenting Citizen-Led Two publicly, they didn't really know why the list was 'as it is'. When the pair presented again, at one of the later information sessions, they would distance themselves from explaining the list. Beyond repeating the statement that the GLA was targeting these communities '[t]o strengthen the relationship between these communities and policy teams at City Hall', they said very little. Maybe they feared that that if they repeated what they had said in the first session, that these communities were 'under-represented at City Hall', they would risk receiving questions asking for evidence to support this claim – evidence they couldn't provide – or a barrage of criticism from the many more communities that are under-represented but were not included in the list. What they did add to their later presentation was a new slide presenting a range



of other GLA funded programmes community groups could apply to. These were still targeted, but to different or less specific communities.

As scholars of coproduction note, it is often the more junior, early career people in projects who are sent out to develop relationships and bring people on board with a coproduction vision (Enright and Facer, 2017, p. 627). They are required to maintain a high level of 'ethical responsibility' to the community, creating 'spaces for different modes of knowledge production and contribution', and to 'mediate relations between large corporate structures' and the 'small-scale independent or charitable organisations'. They must do all these things as precariously employed people, with little power and who occupy a low position in project hierarchies (Enright and Facer, 2017, p. 627). The pair presenting at Selby that morning wanted to be inclusive and provide an opportunity for all people to get involved with London policymaking. But the design of Citizen-Led Two constrained their ability to be inclusive. Arguably, the mediating role they were required to play was made harder to perform because the larger, more powerful stakeholder (the GLA) had already made decisions around the focus of the research projects that community and voluntary organisations were being asked to co-deliver. As an analysis of the practices of early career people working with 'transdisciplinary' stakeholders revealed, staff in coproduction are 'largely left to develop their own responses' to the dilemmas they find themselves facing (Felt *et al.*, 2013, cited in Enright and Facer, 2017, p. 627).

### As it is

As we tidied up the room at the Selby Centre, putting chairs and tables straight after the first information session, we speculated about whether public perceptions of Citizen-Led Two would be improved if the subject matter could be selected via an open call. An open call would entail community and voluntary organisations themselves presenting the community and/or theme they would like to carry out research on. Over the subsequent year I spent studying Citizen-Led Two, I came to learn of many reasons why an open call wouldn't be something the GLA would pursue. In this section I focus in on one of these

reasons, looking at how the funding structure for Citizen-Led Two pushed the programme toward greater targeting.

When it launched in 2019, Citizen-Led Two had wanted to support eight participatory research projects and would contribute funding of up to £12,000 towards each one (GLA, 2019c, p. 3). Attendees at the information sessions wanted to know how the GLA had arrived at the figure of £12,000. The answer staff gave was that they had analysed spending in the Citizen-Led Pilot and compared this with the money available for the programme internally. In the fourth session, presenters explained that two GLA policy teams had 'commissioned' projects. The Equalities and Fairness team had commissioned four projects, and the Health team, three. In the first session, presenters described how these policy teams were 'bought-in', signalling that they were contributing funding. The CE team too had earmarked budget to support projects.

When I heard this in the information sessions, I already knew a little about how, following the Citizen-Led Pilot, the community engagement officers managing Citizen-Led Two had promoted the programme internally at the GLA. In 2018, they had presented Citizen-Led Two at a GLA 'lunch and learn', holding follow up meetings with colleagues from policy teams who had shown interest in the programme at this event. In the months running up to the launch of Citizen-Led Two, the manager of the programme met with and secured the support of two policy officers working in the Equality and Fairness policy team, and one policy officer working in the Health policy team. The policy officers explained which communities and what topics they would be wanting to work with and on through Citizen-Led Two, and how much budget they could allocate. Their choices around communities and themes were translated into the Citizen-Led Two planning documents, and later the Funding Prospectus and the information sessions slides. The choices they made were motivated by the needs of their policy remit and appear in the list as decisions to support projects which 'focus' on 'Deaf Londoners', 'BAME LGBT+ Londoners', 'Health and young people, under 25 in the criminal justice system (including young women)' and 'Trust and confidence in policing' (GLA, 2019c, p. 3). The programme did not end up funding any projects with '[v]ictims of hate crime' or focused on '[b]arriers to

accessing green spaces' (GLA, 2019c, p. 3), making it harder for me to trace the history of their inclusion in the list. It may be that other focus areas in the list came to be included thanks to the buy-in the CE team secured from further policy teams in the GLA.

Though it could be argued that each policy officer's remit at the GLA is the product of a public engagement process, with each GLA strategy having received democratic scrutiny, having policy officers select topics in research that is supposed to be community-led is problematic. Scholars of coproduction have provided evidence of the alternative processes managers of participatory research programmes can use to open up decision-making in the design stages of projects. In the city of Gothenburg, Sweden, for example, a 'Research Forum' involving 'local authorities, the business sector, residents, civil society, and academia' was created. The forum provided a space from which ideas for projects could emerge and helped the group's projects to come 'from real-life problems' rather than from the 'formal' 'project goals' partners had (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 140). In Greater Manchester, England, researchers set up an 'Action Research Collective' comprised of people with 'diverse expertise and connections' working in charities, voluntary organisations and community interest companies. The 'Action Research Collective' worked with the initiating researchers as 'co-researchers'. Together they 'co-initiated 10 action research projects' based on a longlist of 'project possibilities' (Perry *et al.*, 2019, pp. 9–10; p. 52). Perhaps the organisers of Citizen-Led Two could have established as similar style forum or research collective through which to generate ideas for participatory research projects.

### Pushing forward

In the information sessions, the CE team were able to verbally explain that projects did not need to select a community *and* a theme to run a project. It was an either/or situation. For example, an organisation could pitch to do a project on anything with 'BAME LGBT+ Londoners', choosing a topic of their choice or leaving the topic open. On the other hand, an organisation could pitch to do a project on, for example, 'barriers to accessing green spaces' and choose not to

pre-select a specific community with which to do the research. Some organisations working with specific ethnic sub-groups not listed as target communities realised this and went on to pitch projects on topics in line with the pre-chosen, listed themes.

A few weeks after the information sessions, applications to run participatory research projects started to come in and these applications were shortlisted by the CE team. In March, the makers of these applications were invited to City Hall to be interviewed. Following the interviews, 11 projects were granted Citizen-Led Two funding. During this time, I was able to further observe the activities of the CE team and ask questions related to Citizen-Led Two. In early April, I attended a meeting to present an evaluation I had done as part of my action research at the information sessions and during the elements of the shortlisting process that I had been involved with. In the meeting, I was able to share a finding that a large proportion of the organisations granted funding had applied to do projects focusing on two of the listed themes: serious youth violence and trust and confidence in policing. I was able to ask: what was driving this decision to support so many projects in these two areas?

In response, I was told that serious youth violence is a mayoral priority area, that there was a lot of additional resource available, and that work was being encouraged, across the organisation, in this area. I was told that the CE team specifically had been given extra resource and that an additional role had been created in the team specifically in relation to tackling serious youth violence. I was reminded that team members involved with Citizen-Led Two had been heavily involved with the creation of the GLA's Violence Reduction Unit, with previous team members now working in this unit. I was assured that the CE team were well-placed to work in relation to knife crime policymaking: they had strong links with communities, particularly 'BAME' communities, which issues like knife crime were disproportionately affecting. Finally, I was told that the CE team had been working closely with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and had found themselves leading on a way of working with communities that was different to how MOPAC traditionally did things.

Amidst all the reasons I was given in answer to my question about what was driving decisions to support many participatory projects researching serious youth violence and trust and confidence in policing, nowhere did anyone in the GLA say: 'because we know there are many community and voluntary organisations wanting to do research on this topic and we believe they are well-placed to do it'. Whether the appetite for conducting research on violent crime and relations with the police truly existed among the community organisations should have been an influencing factor. That it was not verbalised in the list of decision-making factors I was given could have been because this reason was so obvious it should be taken as a given. Or it could have been because the question of whether community organisations really wanted to do participatory research on policing and crime, and whether it was ethical to ask them to do it, had not been considered during the design of the Citizen-Led Two.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The second subsidiary research question of this thesis enquired into stakeholder responses to a key GLA participation programme. It asked: *How did the design of the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme limit its coproduction capabilities, and how did people respond to these limitations?* In answer to this question, this chapter has explored how community and voluntary organisations wanting to run community research via Citizen-Led Two, could choose only from a preset list of 'focus' communities and research themes. This chapter has shown that when faced with the list of communities and themes in the information sessions, attendees became frustrated. I have argued that the list closed off participation in important decision-making, producing conflict; I have shown how navigating the conflict took a lot of skill and effort. The research I have presented in this chapter has revealed how, even when community engagement officers are boundary spanners in possession of reflexive mediation capabilities, conflict arising in response to the language of targeted engagement can only be dampened and redirected, not completely resolved. This chapter has focused on one design aspect limiting the coproduction capability of Citizen-Led, but other aspects of the programme's design are also

likely to have limited what the programme could achieve, especially from the perspective of coproduction. For example, there were funding delays in Citizen-Led Two. The programme's design meant that in getting involved, community organisations would need to be in a position to begin delivering their participatory research projects before any money came in from the GLA. The impact of the delayed release of funds is not studied within this thesis, and thus presents an opportunity for further research. Further, in line with the methodological aims of the thesis, this chapter has focused on design limitations within Citizen-Led Two only. It is not known how responses to targeting were managed within the Citizen-Led Pilot. As part of an evaluation of the pilot programme, the views of staff working in the six community organisations running participatory research projects were published as a report (the social change agency, 2019). The report does not mention there being any issue with the targeting of the programme, which also relied on a pre-set list of target groups. This absence of evidence, however, does not mean that staff working in community and voluntary organisations wanting to run community research via the Citizen-Led Pilot did not also experience feelings of frustration with the targeted approach. Studying how people felt about targeting within the Pilot, whether positive or negative, this therefore another area where further research is required.

The list of communities and themes was something that wasn't possible to change in Citizen-Led Two, and scholars of coproduction would see this as a design error. Coproductive policymaking should be 'dynamic and amendable in response to rapid feedback' (Durose and Richardson, 2016, p. 47).

Coproduction uses the concept of 'incompleteness' to highlight and argue that all participants have a role to play in all areas of the policy design process. This includes setting the 'scope' for dialogue in the project around things like 'policy options'. Citizens should not find any element of the process 'closed off'. The work should be incomplete enough for everyone to be involved in 'the dialogue about policy priorities and methods of achieving them' (Durose and Richardson, 2016, pp. 45–46). In Citizen-Led Two however, people working in community organisations found a fixed programme, closed off to designing for coproduction.

In this chapter, I have presented Citizen-Led as a London participation programme failing to engage community organisations in the design of research. In my analysis, I have shown the impact this failure had on community organisations looking to get involved with the GLA via Citizen-Led. I have pinpointed how the GLA created feelings of anger and distrust in people working in community organisations. Significantly, I have highlighted how the failure to engage was accompanied by a parallel failure to attend adequately to how the faulty design decision-making process made people feel. Some staff involved with Citizen-Led could mediate, but never completely resolve the anger and distrust the failure to engage created. Therefore, in this chapter, I have argued that within London's participatory research programmes, it is imperative that staff have the capability to work reflexively to authentically empathise-with and mediate-through the inevitable tensions that arise. In my analysis, I have shown the positive impact strong mediation had within Citizen-Led Two.

In April 2019, 11 community organisations pushed forward with participatory research supported by Citizen-Led Two. In the next chapter, I present findings specifically from the Roots Two project, designed in response to Citizen-Led Two's call for community research focusing on 'serious youth violence'. I tell a relational story of practice within this supposedly collaborative government–community research endeavour, exposing the actions that supported, as well as those that impeded, the development of coproductive relationships between government and community partners (sub-RQ 3).

## Chapter Six: Building Relational Capability: Collaboration and Dissemination in Roots Two

### 6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the participation of community organisations with policymaking at the GLA, by inquiring further into Citizen-Led Two and the Roots Two project. I respond to the third subsidiary research question of this thesis, which asks: *What capabilities are required for coproductive relationships between people to develop, and how can participatory research training programmes build these capabilities?* I argue that by building close relationships in the learning-oriented settings of a training programme, people working across Citizen-Led Two and the Roots Two project – within community organisations and within the GLA – could have built the sort of trusting relationships required by coproduction. In making this argument, I join coproduction scholars who claim that in participatory research, often it is not the research itself that produces new knowledge. Rather, it is the relationships and ongoing ‘communities of practice’ that form in the process (Bell and Pahl, 2018, p. 106).

The scholarship reviewed in this thesis has revealed encounters between decision-makers and the recipients of services as important for the coproduction of public policy (Durose and Richardson, 2016). Coproduction scholars argue that when these encounters contain ‘humanising experiences’ – experiences which draw on emotion and provoke reflection – they are more likely to have an impact on policy decisions (Perry *et al.*, 2019, p. 22). ‘Elucidating’ coproduction research provides insight into what coproduction feels like for people who have a practice-based relationship with it (Durose, Perry and Richardson, 2022, p. 5). This chapter adds evidence to these debates, explaining what it feels like when staff in community organisations are tasked with building relationships with people working in government institutions. The arguments in this chapter contribute to debates calling for community research programmes that bring government and community stakeholders together to have humanising joint learning experiences. I claim that these experiences are necessary for enabling community organisations to participate with urban policymaking.



As with the previous empirical chapters, this one studies Citizen-Led Two, the second incarnation of a GLA participatory research programme. The chapter also analyses Roots Two, a participatory research project run by the community organisation You Press. Ethnographic data, in the form of fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011), are used as source material in the production of this chapter. A series of research vignettes, provide a ‘vivid portrayal’ of ‘specific incidents’ (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek and Lê, 2014, p. 280). By analysing a series of encounters that occurred between government and community workers, this chapter reveals what co-working can be like in participatory research projects. It shows how people in the GLA and You Press approached the practice of ‘co-design’ (Sendra, 2023) within the Roots Two project. My ‘living inquiry’ (Wicks, Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Marshall, 2016) allows me to build on the work of coproduction scholars who have studied ‘emotions’ in coproduction from a first-person perspective (Brown *et al.*, 2020) and adds evidence that it is indeed the ‘small things’ that happen between people in projects that produces strong relationships and builds the ‘coproductive imagination’ (Duggan, 2021).

The arguments I make in this chapter have been built via investigation into what I would now describe as very ‘ordinary’ (Appadurai, 2014, p. 207) participation situations: they are not anything ‘exceptional’ (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). In selecting Citizen-Led Two and the associated Roots Two project, I answer calls to investigate ‘failure’ in democratic innovation (Spada and Ryan, 2017, pp. 772–773, cited in Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019, p. 271). Although it should be understood as a ‘negative’ case in relation to the capabilities required for building coproductive relationships, the Roots Two project was selected following the ‘possibility principal’ (Mahoney and Goertz, 2004). In other words, those of us involved with Roots Two – myself included – were under the impression starting out that staff at You Press and the GLA would be able to work together, forming nice relationships. We, perhaps naively, thought that it would be possible for our project to make a success of the call Citizen-Led Two made to co-design. That it did not works to emphasise the ‘sensory’, ‘ordinary’ and ‘lived’ nature of this study. Through my analysis of what went wrong, I seek to engage in a ‘speculative’ practice and ‘re-imagine’ what was, ‘in the image of what could have been’ (Appadurai, 2014, pp. 207–208).

The chapter is structured as follows.

- In section 6.2, I justify selecting the Citizen-Led Two training programme as a site of inquiry. I describe how in designing and delivering the training programme, the GLA sought to support community organisations run participatory research projects, situating the content within a world of similar participatory research training programmes (Lushey and Munro, 2015; Revolving Doors, 2016; Borysik, 2019; Curran *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2020; Young Foundation, 2020a). I analyse the training programme from the perspective of coproduction, (Perry *et al.*, 2019; Brown *et al.*, 2020; Hemström *et al.*, 2021) arguing that it should have brought community and government staff together, providing them with a facilitated space conducive to building trusting relationships. I argue that opportunities to bring stakeholders together in Citizen-Led Two were not just missed but, for the GLA were completely unimaginable.
- In section 6.3, I describe some of the interactions that occurred between community and government workers during the Roots Two project, investigating how staff at You Press and in the GLA tried and failed to work with one another on the co-design of a set of survey questions. I explain how the Roots Two project had been allocated a policy lead, a specific person referred to in the text that follows as 'the Policy Lead'. I highlight the knowledge sharing opportunities the creation of this role had from the perspective of coproduction (Perry *et al.*, 2019). I argue that while the Policy Lead *could* have provided important formal and tacit policy knowledge to the Roots Two project, serious relational and organisational barriers plus co-working challenges prevented the realisation of this opportunity within the project.
- In section 6.4, I study the impact the failed co-design process had on the translation and dissemination of knowledge out of the Roots Two project (May and Perry, 2017; Perry *et al.*, 2019). I further analyse Roots Two, identifying additional issues which halted the building of relational capability within the project. I argue that a 'common language' should have been developed to help community and government workers engage in co-design (Bussu and Galanti, 2018; Sendra, 2023). Finally, I

move to analyse a proximate disseminative moment within Citizen-Led Two. This final analysis emphasises how hard it can be for community organisations to share the insights from participatory research with government partners. This final section paves the way for further research into the emotional challenges of disseminating participatory research within urban policymaking environments.

## 6.2 Laying a Foundation for Coproduction through Training

Citizen-Led Two was designed to ‘strengthen connections and engagement with communities whose voice and influence on public policy is under-represented’ (GLA, 2019b). On making applications to run participatory research projects as part of the programme, community and voluntary organisations were promised that they would be supported by the GLA to influence policy. One way the GLA had planned to provide support was via ‘3 capacity-building workshops’. The first of these three workshops aimed to provide training in ‘community research’, and the second on ‘qualitative data analysis’ (GLA, 2019c, p. 5). Once funding had been granted, staff managing Citizen-Led Two went ahead and organised the ‘community research’ training workshop. This was one session, repeated four times across a week in June 2019. The ‘qualitative data analysis’ workshop was held a month later, with two sessions repeated across one week. The final of the three ‘capacity building workshops’ was designed to provide training in effective storytelling. This was held a few months later, in October 2019.

In this section I make two arguments. Firstly, I argue that the design of Citizen-Led Two should have brought community and government staff together regularly, providing them with a facilitated space conducive to coproduction. I show how facilitated spaces were missing in Citizen-Led Two. I zoom in on moments where encounters could have happened, selecting the so-called ‘capacity-building workshops’ (GLA, 2019c, p. 5) as sites for inquiry. Secondly, I argue that although the workshops may have built the ‘peer research’ capability of staff working in the programme’s partner community organisations, they didn’t do anything to develop the ‘peer research’ capability of staff working in

the GLA. This was a serious oversight in Citizen-Led Two, and one with significant consequences.

Though I have drawn on my experiences across all sessions, I select only the first workshop – on ‘community research’ – to discuss in detail. I do this because the focus of this thesis is the relationship that developed between the GLA and one community organisation involved with Citizen-Led Two: You Press. Staff from both You Press and the GLA attended the first workshop. Nobody from You Press attended the second ‘qualitative data analysis’ training workshop and nobody from the GLA attended the effective storytelling training. As this chapter inquires specifically into the relationship staff at the GLA and You Press had with one another, it follows that I would select a moment where both organisations were present to participate in training as a site for analysis. I am aware that simply putting people from partner organisations in a room together does little to build relationships. Who the people are and what role they have in the project matters, as do the activities people are asked to complete together while they are there. However, the workshop is still chosen, believing that getting government and community partners in a room together is a valuable starting point.

#### Citizen-Led Two: who learns?

As with the information sessions discussed in the previous chapter, to maximise attendance the training workshops were repeated in different London locations at different times of day. The first session was held in a community centre attached to Lumen church in Bloomsbury in June 2019. A day on which Lumen church was illuminated: its floor to ceiling windows reflecting the light pouring out of the summer sky. As I walked up to the entrance, I saw my colleagues from You Press – the Coordinator and the Intern – sitting together in the lobby. After I entered the building, I waited patiently with them, enjoying the coolness of the inside air and the calmness of the surroundings. We discussed the activities the Coordinator and I would run together as part of a Roots Two workshop, which we had planned the previous week, and which would take place the following one. Then a cheerful voice announced that the room was

ready, and we could come in now. Our feet followed the sound of their cheerful voice. They introduced themselves. In the text that follows, I will refer to this person as 'the Manager'.

The Manager stood chatting with another person, soon introduced as our trainer for the day. I will refer to this person as 'the Trainer'. The Trainer had been involved with the design of the Citizen-Led Pilot and had worked with the Manager before, holding a temporary role at the GLA the year previously. As a pair, the Manager and the Trainer stood at one end of the training room, their slideshow projecting behind them. As they chatted, it seemed they were waiting for the 30 or so chairs arranged in front of them to fill up. On my walk through the church and into the room, I had passed by a table laden with piles of sandwiches, salads, and cakes, all neatly presented on platters with lids sealed on. But if the Manager and the Trainer were expecting to feed a crowd that day, the crowd never came. Though in the plans for the programme it had said that '[c]ommunity researchers [would] receive training from GLA' (GLA, 2019c, p. 4), organisations had been told they could send a maximum of three people each along to the capacity-building workshops. The organisations had done what they were told and only sent a few people. Staff from four of the eleven community research projects attended Lumen church that day, meaning that as an audience we hardly filled the back row. We numbered just seven people and the buffet table remained laden long after the workshop finished. The empty seats and piles of food suggests there was a disconnect between the expectations of Citizen-Led Two organisers and the reality of what was happening in the programme. A disconnect this chapter explores through the theme of relationships.

The training session at Lumen church provided the seven community research organisers, coordinators, and various helpers who came along, with an 'overview' of 'peer research'. As explained in Chapter Four, in the Citizen-Led Pilot and Citizen-Led Two, and in both Roots projects (the first Roots and Roots Two), the terms 'peer research' and 'community research' were used interchangeably to describe the research method the programme applied. Many community organisations involved with participatory research in London were opting to use the term 'peer research' in the late 2010s and early 2020s. For

example, 'peer research' was the method used by third sector organisations to conduct research on 'the needs of older people in Tower Hamlets' in 2018 (Toynbee Hall, 2018); and on the experience of people on 'probation' within the criminal justice system in 2019 (Revolving Doors, 2016).

Like their contemporaries, the Trainer leading the session described peer research as 'participatory' research with 'a community development perspective' (Borysik, 2019, p. 6). They explained how, in peer research, 'people with lived experience of the issues being studied take part in directing and conducting the research' (Young Foundation, 2020b, p. 6). As industry champions of peer research have highlighted, the Trainer explained that positive personal development outcomes can be achieved for people who become peer researchers. They aligned themselves with the argument that because peer researchers 'are already in the world of those being researched and share a common language and experiences', they can be 'perceived as credible' due to their 'personal experience'. More credible than an external 'authority' or 'educational' researchers (Borysik, 2019, p. 6).

The Trainer went on to deliver a session recognisable as peer research training. Peer research training programmes often cover the 'study context and theoretical framework; research ethics; [...] developing interview questions [...] [and] how to manage fieldwork'. They include activities such as 'role play' and 'scenarios' (Kelly *et al.*, 2020, p. 112). Over the course of the session, we were taken through role play activities on how to 'build rapport', and how to 'ask open questions'. We were also presented with scenarios relevant to the 'ethics' of research and the protocols around research 'safeguarding'. After peer research training, people usually go on to conduct qualitative research by running one-to-one interviews with their peers (as in: Lushey and Munro, 2015; Kelly *et al.*, 2020), or by using focus-group style methods like 'world café' to speak with their peers in groups (as in: Curran *et al.*, 2020). In planning, Citizen-Led Two didn't require the participatory research projects it supported to use specific qualitative research methods. In the training however, the Trainer asked rhetorical questions about what 'survey questions' each project would use. Their presumption that each project would work with survey-based methods could

have contributed to the majority of Citizen-Led Two projects running structured interviews and surveys.

As mentioned, the training in Lumen church wasn't anticipated as being for community researchers. Rather the session was aimed at organisers, coordinators, and helpers within the projects. The training also was not anticipated as being for any member of GLA staff involved with Citizen-Led. The Manager was there to support the Trainer, not to be trained themselves. The idea was that staff occupying a 'project lead' type role would come to learn about peer research, and then go back and deliver their own in-house 'training for community researchers' (GLA, 2019c, p. 5). This is exactly what the Coordinator and I went on to do at You Press: we used some of the activity ideas to provide training to the young people involved with Roots Two. Therefore, it is fair to say that the learning the training provided did eventually make its way to where it needed to go. But from the perspective of coproduction, this approach to training represents a missed opportunity.

Scholars of coproduction have long argued that community and academic researchers should be more equal partners in coproduced research (Minkler, 2004, cited in Richardson, 2014, p. 34). Experts in public policy coproduction highlight the power encounters between decision-makers and the recipients of services can have (Perry *et al.*, 2019, p. 22). Re-designing the Citizen-Led Two training programme in ways that allowed community researchers to be involved could have been a leveller, equalising opportunities within the project and developing relationships between project partners at the same time. Further, re-designing the training programme to also include people from policymaking teams at the GLA – people commissioning the research – could have been transformative. In the next section, I draw on research produced as part of proximate participation projects. These projects are informed by the theory and practices of coproduction. The insight they provide allows me to evaluate the shortfalls of the GLA's approach to participatory research training and make recommendations as to how a greater diversity of people could have been included.

## The possibilities of learning together

Proximate UK-based coproduction projects recognise how relationships of coproduction have the capacity to change future practice. The Imagine project explored the topic of 'civic engagement' in partnership with academics, artists, and community organisations (Bell and Pahl, 2018, p. 105). Imagine enabled members of staff in universities to develop close relationships with counterparts working in community organisations. During the project, one worker reported that they felt differently when they participated in the routine things their job had always required them to do. They described how they would metaphorically 'take you', the community partner, 'into meetings because you (and other community partners) are inside my head and can tell me what I need to say and do!' (Brown *et al.*, 2020, p. 104). It is significant that channelling voices from the community sector had not been something this person had done before participating in the Imagine project. Rather, the change in their practice had come thanks to the relationships they developed with community partners during the project.

Imagine gives us some idea how staff on either side of the community–government partnership could have been nurtured to develop relations with each other in Citizen-Led Two. Scholars writing about Imagine have provided a set of questions facilitators could use to structure a conversation between team members on any kind of community research project. They include questions such as, '[w]ho holds the power in [this] research?' and, '[w]hat [does] working together feel like?' (Brown *et al.*, 2020, p. 95). The kind of honesty that can come from asking questions like this in small group settings could have helped the community and government partners in Citizen-Led Two begin to build trusting relationships. Trust has played an important role in studies of public participation with urban policymaking. From participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to police and school reform in Chicago, USA, 'trust' and the 'active' involvement of '[b]oth state and societal actors' has been shown to be crucial to the development of 'each participation mechanism' in every successful participation case (Ackerman, 2004, p. 454).

The Jam and Justice project was a collaboration between university researchers, the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations, a



group of 15 co-researchers, described as being from 'diverse walks of life', and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (Perry *et al.*, 2019, p. 3; p. 42; p. 46). It too highlighted the relational nature of coproduction practice, revealing how it is important to recognise and create space for emotions, and arguing that it is vital to take the time to explore differences and create spaces for individual and collective reflection (Perry *et al.*, 2019, pp. 22–23). I have highlighted the capacity-building workshops for the opportunity they presented to organisers of Citizen-Led Two. Through the capacity-building workshops, organisers of Citizen-Led Two could have created a space for people working in different organisations but on the same project to get to know each other and learn together. Towards the end of the workshop held in Lumen church, the Trainer ran an activity called 'Hopes and Concerns'. We were each given some post-it notes and a pen and were asked to write down one 'hope' we had in relation to our participatory research project and one 'concern'. The Trainer then invited each of us to explain the content of our post-it notes verbally and to move forward, sticking our post-it notes up onto a wall for all to see.

To properly share their feelings in activities like 'Hopes and Concerns', people in coproduction projects must feel comfortable. As scholars of coproduction observe, '[o]ne of the challenges in transdisciplinary coproduction is bringing partners from different organizations together in a way that makes them comfortable and encourages them to explore their differences and then to collaborate productively' (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 64). I recognise that in Lumen church, people may not have been feeling comfortable enough to share their true concerns. They may have felt even less comfortable had more members of staff from the GLA also been present. But giving staff inside the GLA a chance to hear some suggestion of hope and concern, and to voice their own, could have worked to provoke a 'humanising experience' in Citizen-Led Two. Humanising experiences draw on emotion and provoke reflection (Perry *et al.*, 2019, p. 22). They can provide greater understanding about what is emotionally moving people in projects.

At Lumen church, staff from community organisations involved with leading participatory research were confident to share their fear that despite their hard work, nothing in policy would change because of their project. Knowing that the

leaders of projects were thinking about policy changes may have helped people with policymaking responsibility to see how they could act to support this. Similarly, giving GLA staff members a chance to voice their own hopes and fears in front of their community partners could have created a humanising experience. In finding empathy, perhaps the distance and remoteness of community and government experiences within Citizen-Led Two could have felt reduced. A feeling that was much needed within the programme. As the next section demonstrates, people working on the participatory research projects connected to Citizen-Led Two were finding it difficult to turn an on-paper partnership into an in-practice relationship. Staff on either side of the community–government boundary were finding it difficult to communicate with one another, let alone respond to an important call Citizen-Led Two made: for government and community partners to engage in processes of co-design.

### 6.3 Real Responses to a Call to Co-Design

In Chapter Four, I introduced You Press, a voluntary organisation with a social justice mission. I discussed how You Press began working with the GLA on participatory research and explained how they began work on Roots Two, a project supported by Citizen-Led Two. Roots Two responded to the GLA’s need for participatory research on the topic of serious youth violence. During the late spring months of 2019, staff at You Press recruited young people and trained them in research and creative interpretation. Over the summer, they followed the Roots model, supporting the young people to hold interview conversations with family and friends and produce creative responses to the stories they heard. As part of the interview conversations, the young people would also conduct a survey (see section 4.5).

I supported the Roots Two project as a facilitator, collaborating with the Coordinator on the design and delivery of in-house research training. Later, I would become a (volunteer) research consultant to the organisation, and further support the Roots Two project to have greater policy impact within the GLA. Before we could get started with the design and delivery of the in-house training, You Press needed ‘[t]o work with the GLA to co-design the project’

(GLA, 2019c, p. 5). As the previous chapter revealed, the topic had already been chosen by the GLA. Roots Two would be themed around ‘serious youth violence’ (GLA, 2019c, p. 3), or, as You Press phrased it, the root causes of youth violence in London (You Press, 2019b, p. 2). Beyond this however, the GLA wanted to ‘co-design’ further elements of the project, such as the set of questions the young people would ask in the survey. In this section, I investigate the form collaboration took in Roots Two, arguing that more could have been done on the part of the GLA to foster co-design. I look at the form co-working took in the early stages of the project, zooming in on how the survey questions were co-edited. I reveal the relational challenges that worked to prevent co-production through co-design, and analyse the impact these challenges had on You Press staff and the wider Roots Two project.

### You Press HQ

In 2019, You Press were running workshops and events, and administering the organisation, from Paddington Arts, a charity and youth centre in west London. You Press have since left Paddington Arts and, at the time of writing, had relocated to a site in Newham, east London. But in 2019, the simple room staff lovingly referred to as ‘You Press HQ’ was nestled into the loft space of a three-storey building, renovated and extended by Paddington Arts in the 1990s. Sandwiched by Kilburn to the north and divided from Notting Hill in the south by the Westway (an elevated trunk road that cuts through west London), Paddington Arts lies on a cobbled street one road back from the Grand Union Canal. The loft space You Press called home rises in a pyramid shape from Paddington Arts’ upper floors. The youth centre is clad in dull beige panels interrupted only by metal window and door frames, coloured in municipal red and mustard yellow.

When I visited You Press during my action research, I would navigate crossing under the Westway, walk over the canal and make my way along the cobbles to arrive at the building. Upon arrival, I would pass through the red doors and climb the stairs up to the loft space. On days when there had been heavy rain in London, I would pass buckets laid out on the stairs up to the top floor. Cracks in

the pyramid roof meant water would enter the building, drip down and stain the walls. I saw the buckets, so carefully laid out along the stairs, as a symbol that maintaining Paddington Arts since its Lottery funded renovations in the 1990s hadn't been easy. Paddington Arts were not a wealthy charity and austerity had been reducing their income stream for a decade before I started visiting the building. At the top of the stairs, you turn left to enter You Press HQ, comprised of one square room. A kitchen area filled one corner: sink, microwave, fridge. A large desk and swivel chair filled another: a workstation for the director. Along one of the walls ran a bank of Mac computers. Along another there were sliding patio doors which opened out onto a roof terrace and then a flat roof topped with straggly pot plants and damp beehives. Tables and chairs filled the central space of the room. By day they were used as hot desks for You Press staff. At night the room was rearranged. The central space became the location for the training and events You Press ran as part of projects like Roots Two. The training sessions You Press ran took the form of workshops. Workshops were the format I used when I worked with the Coordinator to design and deliver our in-house research training for Roots Two.

#### [“Co”-design in practice](#)

On a cloudy day in June 2019, I visited You Press HQ to meet with a senior leader within the organisation, referred to in the text that follows as the Director. Together with the Coordinator and the Intern, the Director and I would organise and plan the research training workshop we would deliver for the Roots Two project in July. During our planning meeting I got an insight into the process through which the questions that would direct the research in the Roots Two project were designed. I was aware that the GLA were keen to work most closely with their community partner on this element of the project. The GLA wanted to ensure that the questions directing the project were questions that were relevant to their interests and knowledge needs, and appropriate in relation to the city-level nature of the mayor's powers. Previous experience in participatory research had taught staff organising Citizen-Led that it was important that the questions projects asked would generate the sort of

recommendations that the mayor could act on (the social change agency, 2019).

As scholars of coproduction have highlighted, when it comes to ensuring urban research has the capacity to create social change, ‘connecting with formal policy and decision-making’ by knowing the right people and having them involved early on is key. These contacts will bring both formal and tacit knowledge into a project, helping people working on it to make use of any windows that might be open in terms of policy impact and change (Perry *et al.*, 2019, pp. 26–27). During the research in this thesis, colleagues at the GLA and I developed a tacit understanding as to some of the reasons why many community-led participatory research projects were not having the sort of impact they hoped for or imagined. Though it would be a major advantage, community organisations rarely have detailed knowledge as to what the mayor can and cannot do, or the sort of connection with policymakers that would be conducive to effecting change. For this reason, the Roots Two project on youth crime and serious violence in the city, had, in addition to being allocated funding to do the work, been allocated a policy lead. This was a specific named person at the GLA who, it was hoped, could share a tacit understanding of the mayor’s powers with You Press and help them to make use of any opportunities to influence policymaking in policing, crime, and community engagement. The idea was that staff at You Press would collaborate with their policy lead and co-design a set of survey questions for use within the Roots Two project.

On my visit to You Press HQ in June 2019, the focus of the research and the content of the survey questions came up. The Coordinator and I were planning the research training workshop and had moved some chairs so we could sit with the Director around their desk in the far corner of the loft. Laptop’s balanced on knees, the three of us had been editing a session outline, dividing up tasks and brainstorming activity ideas. The Intern was in the loft too, quietly working at one of the tables in the middle of the room. When the survey questions came up in our conversation, the Director called upon the Intern to come over and join the meeting. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Intern was an undergraduate student doing a work placement at You Press. Since our meeting at the information session, we had met a few further times at events

related to Citizen-Led Two. We had begun to get to know each other. As they came over, they brought with them an iPad and began to busy themselves with dismissing the lock screen. I learnt that the Director had tasked the Intern with the job of writing the survey questions. A big job for someone so junior, I thought. Sitting beside me they tilted the iPad screen and showed me a list of questions open in a Google Form. We sat together peering through the screen, which was cloudy with finger grease, dragged in lines across the glass. I asked them to read the questions to me aloud, to see how the words would sound if the survey was conducted verbally.

The Intern began reading out the questions. The brainstorm I had just had with the Director and Coordinator included an activity where the young people would practice their listening skills by interviewing one another. We'll use real questions, I had said, knowing the young people would want to adapt the questions to make asking them with peers less awkward. They'll make the questions their own, we agreed, and that should be encouraged. Looking through the iPad screen at a set of actual questions from the project, I saw they were littered with government acronyms. As the Intern spoke, I knew there was work to be done to improve the survey questions. One of the questions didn't work being read out loud and the Intern's voice tripped over the text. It followed a 'what efforts would you like to see from...' theme and ended with the acronym 'the GLA'. Looking down at this question I paused. 'Hmm', you can say, 'the Greater London Authority, but not many people will know what this means. What do you mean when you say "GLA"?'

### [What do you mean when you say 'GLA'?](#)

Since coming to know You Press, I had observed the use of at least three different phrases to reference the London government. In relation to funding and the project partnership we talked about 'the GLA'. But in a video about the first Roots project, the term 'City Hall' had been used. 'City Hall' was used to talk about the government but had been illustrated in the video with a drawing of a building. Leaning back in my chair and using my arms to gesticulate, I made eye contact with the Intern.

*You could talk about City Hall, like in the last project, but that is really a reference to the building. The one we go to in London Bridge.*

In response, the Intern explained to me that they didn't mean the building, they meant the people inside. Ok, I thought, so let's learn how to describe the GLA in layman's terms. I offered some language I had picked up in other community settings and translated it into what I thought a business and management student might find motivating and familiar.

*We can talk about the mayor of London as a person. As in, the man Sadiq Khan. We can also talk about the man Sadiq Khan and all the other people and things he is responsible for. He is the top boss of the people we have meetings with at City Hall. He is also the top boss of the things in London we know and talk about in this project: the Metropolitan Police, for example. The mayor of London can be thought of as a brand, if you like? It can mean him but it can also mean his people and his things.*

The Intern listened to me, and I later learnt that they changed the question. In the final version of the Google Form used to record survey responses, 'What efforts would you like to see from the GLA' had become, 'what efforts would you like to see from the Mayor of London?'. In a research booklet published to accompany the project, 'the Mayor', 'Mr. Khan' and 'the Mayor of London' are the terms used to describe the London government (You Press, 2020d, p. 28).

Sitting in You Press HQ, still gathered around the Director's desk, I could have coached the Intern further. Though I felt this would risk losing the political education lesson that had just landed. One win was enough. While we had been talking, the iPad screen had dimmed and then darkened itself to sleep. The Intern had laid it flat on the desk, its smeary surface now blurrily reflected a set of clouds in the sky outside the windows. 'Have you sent the questions to –', I asked, and said the name of the person at the GLA who had been allocated as You Press's policy lead? They had. After the question about efforts from the GLA, the words 'local' and 'national' had been included in brackets. I was told it was the Policy Lead who had suggested adding in the different levels.

*They said we should put that in.*

I remember sitting with the Intern and knowing that they found what they had been tasked with difficult. Not the actual writing of the questions themselves, which, aside from the jargon, they could clearly do. But collaborating with a government partner? This they were finding harder. They said it had taken two weeks for an email reply to come back from the Policy Lead. I never saw this email, only the Intern's interpretation of their feedback in these bracketed words: 'local' and 'national'. From what the Intern said, it sounded like the Policy Lead had suggested the 'what efforts would you like to see' themed question should be edited to speak to different levels at which action could occur. I suspected the Intern had not been able to translate what they heard into a new question or set of questions, so they had put the words 'local' and 'national' beside the existing question.

Explaining to the Intern about the different levels of government and the different levels at which social action can take place was not something I felt I could do there and then. Trying to articulate how the Policy Lead's suggestion of including 'local' probably meant that the project needed to ask interviewees what they thought community organisations, like You Press, could do to stop knife crime. But in trying to communicate this I felt like I would be setting myself up for misunderstanding. If asked, interviewees could give answers that would be useful for gaining funding for future projects. They could say, 'You Press should do more of what they're doing!' and, 'You Press should expand their services to more people!' But there was a risk that I would be heard as saying that I thought the responsibility for change lay at the hands of the grassroots. Had I been talking to someone with more experience of the sector, or less experience but more enthusiasm, maybe I would have engaged in the work of articulating what the Policy Lead's suggestion meant. But I was aware that the Intern was tiring of the questions. The iPad was still laying asleep, reflecting clouds. I was aware too that the planning meeting I had come to You Press HQ for, needed to continue. I asked the Intern whether they thought there was more editing to do? I didn't know them well enough to read an answer in their facial expression. They just looked tired. 'I think it's ready to go', the Director had chimed in from the side. To their boss, the work had been done: the feedback



had been implemented and the survey questions were ready for use in the next stage of the project. The 'efforts' themed question remained focused around city-level efforts from the mayor. Efforts from other actors, such as government or community, or at other levels, such as national and local, were not mentioned.

Despite Citizen-Led Two asking for co-design, the programme's capacity-building workshop package didn't take responsibility for developing the coproductive capabilities of staff members in the GLA, or in the community organisations running participatory research projects as part of Citizen-Led Two. Learning in relation to co-design didn't come from anywhere else within the programme. When encouraged to co-design a set of survey questions to guide research within the Roots Two project, staff in the GLA and in You Press turned away from one another. They feebly tried to collaborate via email, sending one email and one response, but couldn't work together. This problem highlights a fundamental flaw in the design of Citizen-Led Two, and drastically reduced the coproductive potential of the programme. In the next section I investigate this problem further, naming it as a problem of knowledge translation.

#### 6.4 The Translation Challenge in Citizen-Led Two

Interactions between the producers and users of knowledge are a key condition informing the process of translating knowledge into action (May and Perry, 2017). Translation is highlighted as one of the seven strategies for social innovation to support citizen participation. It involves the communication of 'existing and new ideas' and is 'important in ensuring the ideas can be acted on' (Perry *et al.*, 2019, p. 35). Issues of 'power, expectation and the capacity to achieve changes' arise within interactions between different audiences, making 'trust' a vital foundation for knowledge translation. Core to trust building is an 'embeddedness' between groups (May and Perry, 2017, p. 31). As this chapter has been showing, trust between community and government workers was missing in Citizen-Led Two. The package of capacity building workshops discussed in section 6.2 failed to bring community and government workers

together and thus failed to lay a foundation necessary for coproductive relationships to form.

As section 6.3 highlighted, Citizen-Led Two asked community and government workers to engage in the coproductive practice of co-design but failed to provide an environment conducive to it. By the time the Roots Two project began producing knowledge on the topic of serious youth violence in London, there was little 'embeddedness' between You Press and the GLA, and thus little trust. This was to present problems elsewhere in Roots Two. To investigate these, this section uses a question policy 'enactment' scholars ask as a guide: What happened next (Purcell, 2019)? After facing the challenges described in the previous two sections, what happened next in Roots Two? In the next section, I further analyse the relational challenges the Intern and Policy Lead faced. I trace the impact these earlier failures had on the translation and dissemination of knowledge produced within Roots Two. Finally, I identify the existence of further relational challenges which could be explored in future work.

### Developing a common language

The use of digital spaces within coproduction requires some fundamental levels of 'trust' be established via face-to-face interaction first (Perry *et al.*, 2019, pp. 18–19). The use of email by the Intern and the Policy Lead – relative strangers within the project – to co-design interview questions was a bad idea. The Intern was clearly unimpressed that it had taken two weeks to hear back from the Policy Lead and was frustrated that the email reply contained ideas and concepts they didn't know how to incorporate into their question set. Scholars of coproduction have argued that the work of 'developing a common language' within coproduction projects is vital, and something that people, regardless of their place in a project hierarchy, can take responsibility for (Bussu and Galanti, 2018, pp. 356–357). The Intern could have said that they did not understand what the feedback around local and national policymaking meant. Had the reply come quicker, and had the Intern had a trusting relationship with the Policy Lead, they may have done so. If the Intern had voiced their lack of understanding, perhaps they could have pushed the Policy Lead to explain

themselves and supported the development of a question that used language all partners understood. This would have been a positive step towards creating a common language between partners within the Roots Two project. However, as the more powerful partner, the GLA should have made more effort to develop a common language to use with You Press, not the other way round.

Coproduction 'depends on personal relationships of trust and reciprocity'. Building relationships and committing to long-term partnerships requires 'time, capacity' and an ability to manage 'competing pressures' (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, pp. 22–23). There is little doubt that whoever was on the end of the Intern's email, faced competing pressures in their role at the GLA. Lack of time is cited as 'the key issue in different forms of collaborative research impacting on the type, scale, and quality of interactions' (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 32) and they could indeed have been too time pressed. Maybe they saw the Intern's email come in and, despite their wishes to read and respond earlier, had not been able to get to it until two weeks later. But many motivations could lay behind their decision and it is important to be alive to the idea that there could be other factors impacting on the quality of interaction between the Intern and the Policy Lead. Perhaps the Policy Lead was delayed in their response because they lacked communicative capabilities and did not know what to say. Perhaps they just worked slower than their community partner and two weeks was a normal time frame for them to reply to an email. Or perhaps something else was going on.

Having observed GLA practitioners at work on this and other projects, I would argue that for the Policy Lead it was not a communicative capability challenge. They likely knew what to say and do. I would argue that they delayed action because they were dissatisfied by the project in some other way. It may have been that they disagreed with the call to 'co-design', believing that the GLA should not be meddling so much in a research project that proposed to be 'citizen-led'. However, that they did eventually send through feedback and their recommended changes puts this suggestion into doubt. Rather, they may have disagreed not with the call to co-design, but with the way responsibility had fallen on them to manage the process. It could be that they were feeling

unsupported by the programme infrastructure the organisers of Citizen-Led Two had put in place, and/or by their colleagues or manager in their wider team.

### The impact of failure

Successful and ethical co-design processes have been shown to require moments of 'collective intelligence', where people come to think collectively rather than as individuals (Di Siena, 2019, cited in Sendra, 2023, p. 5).

Encouraging moments of collective intelligence in co-design processes requires facilitation, time, and resources, as well as a commitment to seeing the job of creating the relational partnerships between people and organisations as essential, valuable work (Sendra, 2023, p. 5). These are all things that were missing from the process towards creating the Roots Two research questions. The failure to build relationships through co-design during the early stages of Roots Two, had an impact on the later stages of the project. After the You Press young people had completed their interviews, collated the survey responses, and produced a collection of artworks informed by the research, the organisation wanted to share what they had learnt.

When it came to sharing the work of their organisation with people within the GLA, You Press regularly invited GLA staff to come to You Press HQ to attend Roots Two workshops and events. After the workshops had concluded, they tried to organise formal meetings where they could explain the findings from Roots Two. Throughout 2019, staff at You Press invited deputy mayors and senior people in the GLA's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) to attend meetings. In early 2020, after much emailing and rescheduling by the GLA, eventually two members of staff from the VRU did visit You Press. Staff and volunteers involved with the Roots Two project prepared diligently for the meeting but in the end felt that it was a bit of a 'let down'. The Director had prepared to meet with someone senior, but instead welcomed someone who was brand new to the GLA, someone with little power or authority. The job they had started at the GLA, was the first job of their career. As part of the visit, You Press staff members asked the VRU colleague how they would like to receive information about Roots Two, including the insights and findings. They didn't have an

answer, and this made it seem like they didn't know. You Press asked them again, suggesting 'like in a policy brief?' They still couldn't say. In discussing this situation, the Director put the VRU's staff members muteness down to them being 'fairly new', 'young' and 'less experienced'. As scholars of coproduction warn, if the knowledge community organisations produce in participatory research project goes unused, people will be left feeling alienated, used, and undermined (Richardson, 2014). For You Press, the meeting with the young colleague felt like a waste of time. In sending someone so junior, the GLA had undermined You Press's efforts. This experience, combined with other factors related to the coming pandemic (discussed in 4.5. and 7.5.) impacted the organisation's appetite for doing more dissemination work at the GLA.

The Policy Lead found it difficult to connect with staff at You Press, and staff at You Press found it difficult to connect with policy teams and disseminate knowledge from Roots Two within the GLA. This section has investigated an attempt You Press made to share their work with a policymaking audience, showing how an attempt to engage with the VRU left the Director feeling their efforts had been undermined. In the next section, evidence from a proximate project is presented. The proximate project allows me to imagine a possible dissemination opportunity that could have existed for Roots Two, had the relational context been a little different. It also allows me to uncover further challenges community organisations face when they seek to participate in urban policymaking. Challenges that could be explored as part of future research.

### Disseminating across difference

Roots Two was one of 11 participatory research projects running as part of Citizen-Led Two. The other 10 projects were also allocated a policy lead. As part of my insider action research at the GLA, I attended a series of policy lead 'check-in' meetings, held internally at City Hall. These monthly meetings provided a space for the organisers of Citizen-Led Two to talk with policy leads and monitor how the participatory research projects they were involved with were going, and how they themselves were finding the work. Not every policy lead attended every meeting, and sometimes the check-ins were cancelled due

to low numbers. But when they did go ahead, everyone would filter from their desks into one of City Hall's internal meeting rooms and take a seat around a large grey table. During the meeting we would do a 'round the room' check in. One by one each policy lead would update their peers on the status of the participatory research project they were involved with.

In attending these meetings, I learnt that many policy leads were surprised that, when it came to delivering the project, they faced a common challenge of communicating with an unknown other at the end of an email address. I learnt that email was the method of communication commonly used to make introductions between policymakers at the GLA and staff and volunteers in community organisations involved with Citizen-Led Two. In the meetings held in August and September 2019, policy leads spoke proudly of how they were making 'email introductions', connecting their project leads with people working in health, policing, and crime, and suggesting that they meet to share insights from their participatory research. Though the policy leads saw this as a good thing to do, it wasn't having the outcome they expected. In the meetings, policy leads talked about how it was frustrating that often their emails to project leads went un-answered and the meetups they suggested rarely took place.

There were reasons why project leads were reluctant to respond and sign themselves up for meetings with the people their policy leads introduced them to. In November 2019, a policy lead organised a meeting for a couple of project leads they were collaborating with on participatory research via Citizen-Led Two. In this proximate project, staff and volunteers in community organisations were invited into City Hall to meet with senior members of staff within the Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC). When initially contacted about the meeting via email, the project leads were reluctant to attend. Some questioned the value of 'yet another meeting' that would pull them away from the more direct work they were doing to support researchers in their projects. Others did not want to engage in work they knew would be difficult and would push them far out of their comfort zone. The policy lead however was persistent. I too thought the meeting was a good idea, presenting a good opportunity for research dissemination. The policy lead and I went to meet with

the reluctant project leads face-to-face, to talk about why we thought the meeting was important and to invite them again.

Though a good dissemination opportunity for their research, project leads were right to be wary of attending the meeting. Some of the fears they had around attending were realised when, in a dull meeting room in City Hall they were forced to pitch their research to smartly dressed, stern people, confident as to the value of the large-scale surveys they commissioned and sceptical of participatory forms of research led by community organisations. I found the corporate vibe of the meeting and the competitive style with which the senior staff members in MOPAC talked about the research they commissioned to be off-putting. They told of the 'Youth Voice Survey', an online survey they had done with young people the year previously, for which they received almost 8,000 responses (see: Ramshaw *et al.*, 2018). The number of survey respondents and the scale of MOPAC's survey endeavour alienated the project leads. In the notes I made during the meeting I describe how and when MOPAC spoke about their research. Their contribution came immediately after a project lead had described a series of focus groups they had held with 12 young people. Hearing the high number of almost 8,000 responses, the project lead who had just been speaking looked down and did not raise their eyes up again. But the value of their participatory research had nothing to do with numbers. Angry with the direction the meeting was taking, I intervened, highlighting to the MOPAC officer that there are many community groups and small civil society organisations working hard to undertake research, as well as providing services. These 'many community groups' were sitting right there next to them. When I spoke on the phone with the project lead who had been silenced by the scale of the 'Youth Voice Survey' a few days later, they sounded beaten. We reflected on the meeting.

*I think what we are doing and what they are doing is quite different.*

Policy scholars have highlighted how 'professional cultures' can 'dilute' the impact of public participation (Purcell, 2019, p. 24). When processes that encourage the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking encounter people with 'little or no understanding of the concept' of

participation, the model upon which the processes are based can be 'confounded' (Purcell, 2019, p. 24; p. 4). The research projects supported by Citizen-Led Two used participatory research methods to valorise local knowledge and lived experience. They were small-scale and focused on telling the situated stories of, in the case described above, just 12 people. The project lead's response in the above encounter, shares a small insight in the way participatory approaches to knowledge production can clash with the dominant way of doing things in the GLA.

This section has revealed that staff in community organisations found it difficult to engage with policymakers at the GLA. Without a relational project infrastructure in place, policy leads and project leads often used email to try to collaborate with one another. Collaboration was a struggle. The Roots Two project was plagued by communicative challenges, namely a feeling that people at the GLA were not as engaged with the project as You Press staff expected them to be. When it came to disseminating knowledge from participatory research projects proximate to Roots Two, communicative challenges persisted but took a different form. When other community organisations running participatory research as part of Citizen-Led Two tried to share knowledge from their projects with policymakers, they experienced alienation. Within processes of engagement, feelings of alienation are a sign that engagement has failed (Richardson 2014). The long-term impact of this alienation on further dissemination is not studied here. However, the example illustrates the following. Had people involved with Roots Two been able to engineer similar meetings with senior policymakers, other challenges could have presented themselves. You Press could very well have encountered people and projects unclear on, or even hostile to, the 'participatory worldview' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006).

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that if Citizen-Led Two wanted partners to 'co-design' participatory research, as well as teaching them research the programme should have taught them co-design. As my analysis has shown,



teaching co-design wouldn't have required a separate training programme. At the start of this chapter, I described a capacity building workshop the GLA organised for community organisations participating in Citizen-Led Two. I revealed the training as a missed opportunity from the perspective of coproduction, and argued the Policy Lead to Roots Two could have been invited to attend and learn together with staff at You Press. Had the Policy Lead been present, the Trainer could have facilitated a conversation between the Policy Lead and the Intern, using questions such as those used by facilitators in other coproduction projects. Questions like '[w]hat [does] working together feel like?' (Brown *et al.*, 2020, p. 95). Being facilitated in this way could have allowed people to say how they felt in relation to things that were happening in Roots Two.

The training programme format is just one of several ways that learning can be organised in participatory research projects. As introduced in the previous chapter, 'Research Forums' and 'Action Research Collectives' are useful in bringing different stakeholders together to design projects (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 140; Perry *et al.*, 2019, pp. 9–10). But these forums and collectives can continue to meet throughout a project's lifecycle, providing a space conducive to collaborative learning. In this chapter, I have shown how the Jam and Justice 'Action Research Collective' was mobilised to support design, but also to support the delivery of projects and their evaluation. It saw the same group of people from local government, the community sector, and academia come together to reflect and learn, for over three years (Perry *et al.*, 2019). In this chapter, I have presented the collective model as an alternative to the training programme format, showing the other ways collaborative learning could have been organised in Citizen-Led Two.

Scholars writing on co-design present the provision of information and the nurturing of adequate skills as a key principle for ethical co-design (Sendra, 2023, p. 5). In the co-design process studied in this chapter, skills were lacking on both sides of the government–community partnership. The focus was on the action of making the questions and didn't include activities for learning in relation to policy, research, and decision-making, or for relationship development. An embedded power dynamic led to a situation where the

possibility that government workers had capability gaps that needed to be filled wasn't taken seriously enough to have an impact on the programme. From the programme's cultural perspective, if anyone needed to learn something to do participatory research for urban policy, it was people working in the community. The need to train policy leads was not recognised. Opportunities to bring policy and project leads together were invisible opportunities, opportunities that could not be imagined from the perspective of the programme.

Scholars of coproduction highlight how the repeated act of being 'together' enables people to cumulatively build relationships. '[B]eing busy, doing things – turning up together, laughing at jokes, [and] caring for one another' are all events in a process which help projects 'tend' 'eventfully' towards coproduction (Duggan, 2021, p. 361). Though these social events were present in my life with You Press, they were missing from processes involving the GLA and Roots Two. As I have shown in this chapter, in their attempts to co-design the questions directing the project, there was little togetherness between people working at You Press and people working at the GLA. Because feedback was sought via email and people were never in the same room together, it was hard to show humour or care, impactful factors in building relationships of coproduction.

Further, in coproduction, scholars emphasise that practitioners must be able to 'cross' the divides that exist between 'disciplines, sectors, organizations, and social and personal worlds' (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 28). But 'boundary spanning' skills do not come naturally to all people. Practitioners wanting to engage in coproduction but who do not possess 'boundary spanning' skills already, must have 'a preparedness to learn' (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 32). I would argue that in Citizen-Led Two, though policy leads could have been open and had a preparedness to learn, this was not demonstrated, and they did not become boundary spanners. The Policy Lead working with the Intern to co-design the interview questions for the Roots Two project never crossed the divide that exists between the government and the community sector; between policy and youth work; between the world of the GLA and the world of You Press. '[F]requent interactions' between people can 'generate longstanding relationships, networks, and alliances'. These relationships make it easy for

seemingly once 'disparate actors' to get in touch and 'approach one another again' (Hemström *et al.*, 2021, p. 52). The capacity-building workshops delivered as part of Citizen-Led Two could have laid the foundations for these interactions to occur. But to see this space as the site of opportunity that it is, a significant mind shift would be required on the part of government partners. They would need to believe that if anyone needed to learn something to do community research for urban policy, it was the people working inside their own institution.

This thesis locates the GLA's neglect of relationship building between individual people within community organisations and within the London government as a key factor causing the London government to fail to advance citizen participation. My analysis in this and the previous chapter has shown how the relational ethics of coproduction and its associated practices offer a way for the GLA to move forward. Significantly, I have revealed the moments that 'matter' (Duggan, 2021) in programmes like Citizen-Led, highlighting where within Citizen-Led Two there were opportunities to build ethical and caring relationships of coproduction.

## Chapter Seven: From 'Getting Started' to 'Pandemic PhD', a Learning Journey towards Research on Coproduction and the Participation of Community Organisations with Urban Policymaking

### 7.1 Introduction

The research in this thesis has uncovered problems in the GLA's approach to participation and with the action the organisation took to involve community organisations with urban policymaking. Having gleaned as much as I can from the data that I collected by studying what others did within specific participation situations, in this final empirical chapter I tell a different story. Reflecting on my use of the action research methodology introduced in Chapter Three, I explain how I succeeded in building trusting relationships with people at You Press and with some GLA staff members. I continue inquiry into coproductive capabilities, this time investigating the specific behaviours, skills, and experience I enacted during the process of researching community organisation participation and urban policymaking. I respond to the fourth subsidiary research question of this thesis, which asks: *What behaviours, skills and experience were required to research the participation of community organisations with policymaking at the GLA?* Answering the question allows me to share details of the specific approach I took to doing action research, and the process this enabled. In showing the details of the methodological process I took to produce the empirical research in this thesis, I contribute my recipe for 'cooking with action research' (Bradbury, 2017). I illuminate how I cultivated specific behaviours and learnt specific skills, arguing that it would be possible for others to repeat the process in their own recipes for research within government and with community organisations.

The chapter is arranged as follows:

- In the section 7.2, I discuss the previous experience I brought with me into my action research study, arguing that this experience was a vital prerequisite for conducting the research. It taught me how to 'take care' whilst working with others in precarious work environments, laying the foundations for an ethical approach to action research grounded in Marxist feminist theories of reproduction (Federici, 2012; Choi and

Tanaka, 2014) and a post-structuralist ethics of care (Popke, 2003; Oksala, 2016).

- In section 7.3, I describe how I got started with my action research study. I give some background to my studentship and explain the collaborative arrangement I had with the GLA. I argue that the studentship's partnership structure was a key piece of the puzzle, creating the conditions that allowed me to research a government participation programme. However, though the studentship helped me with 'getting in' to the GLA, finding a focus and repeatedly 'showing up' for people I met was what enabled me to build the trust necessary for 'getting on' with the research (Buchanan, Boddy and McCalman, 2013).
- In section 7.4, I explain how applying ideas of situated and feminist ethics (Haraway, 1988; Reason and Bradbury, 2006; Bradbury *et al.*, 2019a; Rendell, 2022b) helped me attend to my positionality and build research relationships with care and respect (England, 1994; McDowell, 2001; Popke, 2003; Hall, 2017). I discuss some of the ethical challenges I faced, theming these around notions of role, recognition, and writing (Dickens and Butcher, 2016; Hall, 2017; Chapman Houlton *et al.*, 2020). I discuss how understanding the causes of the stresses and anxiety I had during my research has furthered my capacity for ethical practice in higher education (Fisher, 2011; Loveday, 2018).

Some of the research in this thesis was conducted during the pandemic. This huge global event and its local implications had an impact on research and researchers (UKRI, 2021; Marinoni, van't Land and Jensen, 2020). The impact the pandemic had on the research in this thesis is discussed in this chapter.

- In section 7.5, I consider the implications of the pandemic on public participation (Pantić *et al.*, 2021) alongside the implications of other challenges I faced during the PhD. I locate the main causes of my 'action research ending' (McArdle, 2011) as unconnected to the coming pandemic. I pinpoint my moment of ending as coming exactly 12 months after my moment of beginning.

## 7.2 Previous Experience of Relational Labouring

As highlighted in Chapter Two, a foundational commitment to a feminist 'care' ethic is vital for participatory and coproduced research projects (Askins, 2018, p. 1277). This commitment was something I brought with me to my research career from my previous experience and training outside of academia. Prior to starting the research in this thesis, I worked at a public arts centre managing a visitor services team and a volunteering programme. My six years working at the arts centre were formative to the development of my professional conduct and working practices. I learnt how to manage my time, how to work in a hierarchical structure, how to look after myself and others in an often difficult, sometimes joyful, and always precarious, working environment. I learnt how to get the best out of work, when work involved fleeting experiences with people and projects, precarious operational processes, and bitter organisational politics. Looking back, much of the work I did prior to starting my academic career was relational. Labouring in this way was excellent preparation for collaborative research in organisational settings. In this section, I trace how the relational work I did at the arts centre manifested itself in my research practice. I argue that others wanting to conduct ethical insider action research into coproduction, should prioritise developing skills in relational labour. This paves the way for a later argument I make in this chapter: that a capability to care is an ethical prerequisite in action researching coproduction.

### Taking care

At the arts centre, I regularly got involved with and helped organise informal staff and volunteer development events. As part of a staff-led reading group, I came to read and take guidance from a text a colleague suggested to the group, called 'Take Care'. Informed by a ten-point list of instructions on how to be a better colleague and a better collaborator, 'Take Care' spoke to ideas of nurture and kindness towards others (figure 21) (Huberman, 2011). 'Take Care' voiced a desire the staff and volunteers in our reading group had: to be kind people in the arts, an industry we found to be often unkind and exploitative. We sought to resist the exploitation and precarity we faced in the arts by following

the feminist imperative to engage in collective care practices and ‘the everyday work of reproduction’ (Choi, 2014, p. 11).

- 1 REMEMBER THAT YOU  
DON'T KNOW
- 2 LEARN TO CARE
- 3 SAY THANK YOU
- 4 WEAR YOUR HEART ON  
YOUR SLEEVE
- 5 INSIST ON TALKING  
FACE TO FACE
- 6 FOLLOW THE LIFE OF  
AN IDEA
- 7 SPEAK FRANKLY
- 8 TAKE YOUR TIME
- 9 BE MALADJUSTED
- 10 TOAST

*Figure 21: 'Take Care' concludes with a ten-point list of instructions on 'How to Behave Better' (Huberman, 2011, p. 17).*

My desire to be kind found form in the interactions I had with people at work. In my later years at the arts centre colleagues prefixed my name with the nickname ‘nana’. ‘Nana’ is an informal English word people use for grandmother and the use of it by my colleagues suggests that I was a provider of some form of ‘other than mother’ pastoral support. The nickname referenced my role in the organisation: I took care of people; I took care of a building; and I took care of art objects. And it also referenced my position: though only in my twenties at the time, I was a longstanding member of staff within visitor services – I could remember things that had happened years back. And I was a ‘manager’, a senior figure within the team. The nickname also references behaviours I consciously sought to develop as part of my professional practice. Being a ‘nana’ allowed me to live my values at work and participate in feminist ways of being-with others. I played a caring role, which involved listening and empathy

(Hall, 2017). I tried to make being at work feel more enjoyable, creating 'affective atmospheres' filled with love and kindness (Farrugia, Threadgold and Coffey, 2018). When I left the arts centre, I pinned a photocopy of the ten-point list from 'Take Care' to the walls around my desk and the inside covers of my notebooks, keeping them there as talismans to symbolise who I am and how I work.

When I moved into academia, my professional practice found an afterlife in my research practice. To work on Citizen-Led Two and the Roots Two project, I resurrected my previous professional conduct from the arts centre. During my insider action research, I was engaged in a range of activities common to people who work in teams delivering the various visions of the future their organisations have. Once again, I was having fleeting encounters with people and projects, navigating the processes and politics of work in an organisation. Some of the tasks I engaged in were different to those I undertook at the arts centre; some were the same. Much of the work involved the sorts of cognitive and emotional labour common to 'the precariat', precarious workers in knowledge and affect economies (Mitropoulos, 2005; Federici, 2008; Weeks, 2007; Berardi, 2010, p. 31; Lorey, 2015). I could be found listening to people, speaking to people; writing emails, responding to emails; reading WhatsApp messages, reading word documents, reading spreadsheets; preparing for meetings, sitting in meetings, chatting in meetings, facilitating meetings, communicating my thoughts and the thoughts of others verbally or in writing; organising for things to happen, re-organising things that couldn't happen; justifying what I was doing, justifying what others were doing; energising myself, energising others. Between all this, I could be found eating, drinking, laughing, crying, tidying, washing, and engaging in everything related to reproduction, the maintenance of life and the sustaining of affective atmospheres.

Qualitative inquiry involves listening, empathy, and the provision of care and companionship (Hall, 2017). As reviewed in Chapter Two, from the perspective of post-structural ethics, care is offered as 'hospitality', it is a 'gift' 'offered unconditionally' between subjects (Popke, 2003, p. 313). However, feminist scholars have shown how precarity can disrupt the transformative potential of the care ethic (Lorey, 2015). At the arts centre and during the research in this



thesis, though I wanted to establish 'relations of equality and autonomy', often I was trying to offer this in contexts more familiar with relations of 'hierarchy and command' (Weeks, 2007, p. 247). Though I was a 'nana' in the arts, I could not create the conditions for my colleagues to have the security of permanent employment. Though I 'took care' at the GLA and at You Press, I could not create a culture that would have enabled my colleagues in the Roots Two project to participate with decision-making at the GLA. However, the feminist care ethic did provide an ontological foundation for me, supporting the production of all the research in this thesis.

This section has suggested that an ability to take care could be a vital prerequisite for conducting insider action research. In it, I have shown how I gained experience in relational labouring from my early career working as a 'nana' in the arts. Though there are likely many other routes researchers can take to develop feminist sensibilities, this chapter argues for the value of this one in journeys towards action researching coproduction. Further, a commitment to feminist ethics alone may not be enough to open doors to researching coproduction in government settings and in relation to government–community partnerships. In the next section, I give some background to my studentship and explain the partnership I developed with the GLA and with You Press. I argue that enrolling on a degree programme that required a policy partner created the conditions which allowed me to research a government participation programme. Getting in and getting on inside the GLA was a key step in my journey towards action researching coproduction.

### 7.3 Showing Up

I held a formal role as an evaluator within Citizen-Led Two and as a facilitator and trainer within the Roots Two project. These roles allowed me to observe and participate in the action of a participatory research programme and a participatory research project. In this section, I describe some of the steps I took to secure these roles, arguing that a funded studentship gave me some legitimacy as I sought to build relationships with individual staff members in the GLA and at You Press, and participate in their work. But as my analysis shows,

while the scholarship allowed me to 'get in' to the GLA and find where my research interests were welcomed, other factors were more important in enabling me to 'get on', both there and elsewhere. I argue that attending events and networking were key activities that helped me to find and form relationships with individual people working at the GLA and at You Press. Keeping any promises I made to prospective partners, and 'showing up' again and again over the course of Citizen-Led Two and the Roots Two project, allowed me to build trust. I argue that establishing and maintaining trust with people was a required activity, necessary for engaging in the research in this thesis.

### Getting in

I first came to UCL to undertake an internship as a research assistant. Shortly after starting, I was made aware of an available 'CASE' PhD studentship and was encouraged to apply. In a 'CASE' studentship, funding comes from UK Research and Innovation via an Industrial Cooperative Award in Science and Technology (a CASE award). Students in receipt of a CASE award undertake their doctoral training in an academic institution but are also involved with 'industry or policy-making bodies'. Through their PhD project, they seek to develop a 'mutually beneficial research collaboration' between their host university and industry (UKRI, 2022). I secured a CASE award despite initially not having a CASE partner. There was an understanding that the main task of my first year as a PhD student would be to find one. And so, shortly after starting on the doctoral training programme, this became the focus of my research activity: I began working with my supervisors to find an industry partner. Though at least three organisations were approached formally, in this thesis I have only named and discussed the organisation I did go on to partner with. The organisation I approached and was successful in establishing a CASE partnership with was the GLA.

Prior to securing the CASE award, the most I had interacted with the work of the GLA was as a payer of council tax and a voter in the mayoral elections. I was familiar with City Hall, I had seen the outside of the building from street-level and from neighbouring offices, but I had never been inside. This was to change

however when, in the second term of my first year, I took a module where the final assessment was a group project involving the GLA as policy partner. This project brought me into contact with the work of the organisation and with specific people. Following a request from me, the module tutor together with my supervisor worked with these people to secure what was needed for my CASE award and the GLA became the policymaking partner to my PhD.

In a research context, these contacts could be seen as 'organisational gatekeepers' within the GLA. They were part of the module tutor's professional network and had worked with UCL and other universities before. Approaching people through 'organisational gatekeepers' is a method of 'getting in', commonly used within empirical organisational research (Buchanan, Boddy and McCalman, 2013). In 'getting in' as a student with a CASE award, I was aware that there were papers to be signed and invoices to be paid. But I was shielded from most of the CASE paperwork: this fell to my supervisor. My main task was to introduce myself and my research interests to the gatekeepers formally and in writing. I did this, preparing a one-page document introducing a possible study. The study argued 'for the value of accessing alternative sources of knowledge for policy', specifically, knowledge belonging to 'groups excluded from dominant publics' (Sawkins, 2018).

One of the 'organisational gatekeepers' (Buchanan, Boddy and McCalman, 2013) helped me to set up a series of short meetings where I could introduce myself and my research interests to staff at the GLA. The gatekeeper approached people who they thought it would be useful for me to speak with, drawing colleagues from across the organisation. The meetings were an important part of establishing a partnership with the GLA beyond the initial agreement related to the CASE award. The gatekeeper played a key role in enabling them to happen. Colleagues may have granted the request the gatekeeper made based on a one-page document I had written. More likely though, they agreed because they had a relationship with the gatekeeper. By preparing the document and talking it through with people the gatekeeper introduced me to, I was engaging in an activity that tested whether my research interest in 'alternative sources of knowledge for policy' was recognisable to the

organisation. It helped me to answer a necessary pre-research question: Who, in the GLA, could I approach with this topic?

One of the people who met with me early in my research was a senior member of staff within the CE team. I visited City Hall for a meeting with them in the summer between my first and second years of study. City Hall was heavily air conditioned that summer but, despite the chill in the air, my hands were clammy as I greeted and nervously shook hands with this senior member of staff. I had prepared diligently for our arranged meeting, looking at this person's LinkedIn and reading what I could about the work they were involved with. They were kind, putting me at ease and answering the questions I had about the GLA in layman's terms. They were interested in what I had to share. I told them how I was interested in the question of how 'local knowledge' can better inform policy. They were patient as I found the words to express myself and made connections between my academic concerns, their own, those of the mayor, and projects and programmes at the GLA.

We talked about the ways in which organisations like the GLA were trying to engage with members of the public at the time. We had a shared history of working previously in the arts. Our LinkedIn profiles showed we had friends and previous collaborators in common. At the beginning of our meeting, we discussed these people and throughout our time together we made casual references to the engagement approaches used by arts organisations. I left this meeting with a new friend and with pages of notes filled with references to different strategies, policies, and programmes; and with a list of community and voluntary organisations the CE team were working with. I followed up with the references, which led me to study the two policy documents discussed in Chapter Four: 'All of Us', the Mayor's Social Integration Strategy (GLA, 2018a), and 'Inclusive London', the Mayor's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy (GLA, 2018b).

### Getting on

Being open to attending events and getting involved with facilitated networking early on in my research was an important part of my learning journey. It paved

the way for later engagements with people and organisations, engagements which provided the empirical material on which this thesis is built. They provided insights which led to my research into the mayor's vision for participation in London. They also led me to sign up to mailing lists related to Citizen-Led. As I entered my second year of study, an email invitation came through, inviting me to attend a training and networking event for members of the public who had been affiliated with the Citizen-Led Pilot programme. Though the Citizen-Led Pilot had concluded, this event (billed as training and networking) was a further development opportunity for people who had been involved with the programme. The training and networking were designed to be exclusively for Citizen-Led affiliated peer researchers, but the email invitation to the event reached my inbox too. In this section, I describe how I attended the event and met some of the key people in this thesis: specific members of the CE team and staff and volunteers from You Press.

The training took place in an event space at the top of City Hall: a vast semi-circular space with views out across south London. The room was set up with circular tables, at which an audience of around 30 people sat and watched a presentation on how the GLA conduct street surveys and hold group interviews. There were small group activities and tasks to do: active learning elements to complement the presentation. After the training, we went to a different room in City Hall to drink juice, eat sandwiches and engage in some networking. A member of the CE team led attendees in ice breaker activities, helping us talk to each other. I spoke with someone and during our conversation they handed me a slim square pamphlet filled with pie charts and poems. We spoke for a short while about the poems and about an album that had been produced as part of a participatory research project they had run during the Citizen-Led Pilot. 'You should come and see us one day,' they ventured. 'I would love to,' I responded. This person was the Coordinator from You Press, and this was our first meeting.

As well as meeting the Coordinator at this event, I also met someone in the CE team who I would go on to work very closely with. During the event, I had seen that one person had been quite active in organising much of the activities. After the networking, I went to thank them for the work they had done. They were

pouring out a final few glasses of orange juice, and, as I was saying thank you, they offered me one and we spoke for a short while. In our conversation I told them about my research interests, and they told me about the projects they were working on. We shared our concern about how the stories people told as part of participatory research initiatives struggled to land as evidence in a place like the GLA. As highlighted at the end of Chapter Six, insights from small-scale participatory research are not what people in the GLA are used to seeing when they ask for 'data'. My new GLA friend and I talked about how we felt that often the impact of participation projects largely stays within the projects.

Programmes, like Citizen-Led, seemed to be producing outcomes for the individuals involved. Some of the people I had just attended the training with were looking to start new jobs as survey researchers. But participatory research itself has quite a low impact on the work of the GLA. Leaning against the window, cups of orange juice in hand, we discussed the problem.

*The findings from these projects struggle to travel the distance from community to government –*

*any insight that does land, is slow to move across the organisation –*

*insights from most projects are never mobilised beyond their immediate context.*

*A shame –*

*complex.*

Our conversation didn't move towards suggesting any solutions to this problem. We just looked at one another, nodding. I thanked them for the event again and then, before I left, offered them my PhD as a space in which to explore this problem. It was a bold offer as, at the time, I could not see clearly how using the space of a PhD to explore a problem like this would work. However, I set about taking some time to get to know Citizen-Led and the participatory research projects it supported in detail. They invited me to come and see them another day. I would love to, I responded, for the second time in one hour.

Turning the 'I would love to' promises I made to the Coordinator at You Press and the CE team member at the GLA into visits was something it was not hard

for me to do. For most of the research in this thesis I was a full-time, funded student, without any dependents, in good health and living in London. I had a stipend and a generous research budget to spend on activities related to my research. In the beginning, I was not teaching or working on anything other than my PhD; my days stretched out in front of me, I had energy and it felt like time was always on my side. This allowed me the freedom to follow my research wherever it took me and to be available for my collaborators.

I was able to provide extra capacity to participatory and peer research workstreams at the GLA and at You Press and in other community organisations connected to the GLA via Citizen-Led. As time went on and I became more embedded in projects like Roots Two, opportunities arose for me to engage in important boundary spanning work. In Chapter Six I described how as part of my action research I was able to plug some of the gaps the You Press staff team had in their knowledge of the GLA (section 6.3) and some of the gaps the GLA had about community-based participatory research (section 6.4). In my role at You Press I utilised 'active listening', a form of communication that allows boundary spanners to hear meaning within communication and to share appropriate knowledge (Beechler *et al.*, 2017, p. 128). For example, in my interactions with the Intern at You Press, I used what I was hearing in their words and their body language to decide what knowledge to share, and what to keep to myself (section 6.3). In my role at the GLA, I used 'mediating' boundary spanning 'strategies' to bring staff working on Citizen-Led Two projects together with policymakers in the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime. To 'persuade' policymakers that community groups and small civil society organisations could be called upon to undertake research, as well as provide services (section 6.4), I replicated the specific boundary spanning activity of using 'argument to change viewpoints' (Nederhand, Van Der Steen and Van Twist, 2019, p. 234).

I was able to support You Press and other community organisations thanks to the PhD and the time it afforded for open and exploratory research and self-led learning in relation to urban policy and participation. As the PhD progressed, my energy and the freeness of my time reduced. Naturally, the courses I was allocated to teach on started up and the university began asking for written work in relation to my research. After some time, my funding ran out, I took on part-

time work, I had familial responsibilities, I lost access to the research budget, I moved outside of London. But being supported and available during the very early stages of my research allowed me to develop habits and relationships that lasted years. As a facilitator, trainer, and evaluator, I provided extra capacity and boundary spanner services to the You Press staff team for over 18 months.

Continuing to 'show up' for my collaborators was a vital piece of the puzzle when it came to producing this thesis. As Chapter Four, Five and Six all highlight, showing up was something I had to do over and over. I had to have the energy to criss-cross London, showing up to Selby, to City Hall, to Lumen, to Paddington Arts at any time of day. I had to be a good colleague, showing up for my collaborators at You Press and the GLA, and for the young people that were part of the Roots Two project. By repeatedly showing up, I proved that I was dependable and could be relied on. Through this, my collaborators and I developed the level of 'trust' that has shown to be required for developing and maintaining partnerships in community-based coproductive research (Durham Community Research Team, 2011, pp. 7–8). Showing up was a practice that 'mattered' in research on coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking. It created opportunities for the work my collaborators and I later did, to 'eventfully realise' (Duggan, 2021, p. 361).

A capability to care and a commitment to showing up were vital ingredients in my action research recipe (Bradbury, 2017). They paved the way for the research in this thesis and for participation in a range of other community and policy projects. However, the practice produced a range of ethical challenges I have had to navigate on an almost daily basis. In the next section, I explain these challenges, theming them into challenges of position and situation; challenges of role, recognition, and writing; and challenges of stress, anxiety, and failure. Action researching coproduction is not something people should engage with lightly. It can be a highly problematic form of research, that pushes at ethical limits.



## 7.4 Ethical Challenges

The ethical guidelines university-based researchers follow are traditionally drawn from medical research and involve the principles of 'informed consent', 'confidentiality', and 'benefit not harm' (Rendell, 2020, p. 413). Informed consent is the principle that researchers must confirm that the people they are studying 'are willing collaborators' with 'a clear understanding of the research and what it will mean to them'. Confidentiality is the rule that researchers must not reveal 'confidential information either to the people in the setting or to other researchers'. And 'benefit not harm' is the philosophy that 'researchers must conduct their work so as to do as much good for and as little harm to the people they are studying' (LeCompte and Schensul, 2015, p. 3). Scholars of social justice and community action have criticised 'institutional ethical review processes', describing them as creating challenges for community-based participatory action research. Participatory research has an 'openness, fluidity and unpredictability' to it, which cannot, and should not, be controlled or reduced by university ethical review processes (Durham Community Research Team, 2011, p. 10). Feminist scholars have critiqued the 'codes' research councils use to direct ethical research, describing them as 'no substitute for respect for and empathy with the participants of any social research project' (McDowell, 2001, p. 98).

The research in this thesis was approved by the UCL Ethics Committee based on predictions I made in 2018 as to the direction it might take and the methods I might use. In 2019, the committee approved amendments I made as the focus of my research became clearer and as my methods shifted away from ethnography and towards action research (see 3.4.). As collaborators, staff at the GLA and You Press had an idea of what they were getting themselves into when we formed our research partnerships. Formal contracts, letters of agreement and engagement, and a non-disclosure agreement, all made in addition to the participant ethnography consent forms I provided, helped make that feeling possible. I have not released or accidentally communicated any information I have held in confidence and, so far, nobody has been harmed in the making of my study. But, as I argue in this section, this is not what made the study ethical.

The ethical credibility this study has stems from my engagement with situated feminist ethics. The research in this thesis is grounded in situated and embodied approaches to knowledge production (Haraway, 1988; Reason and Bradbury, 2006; Bradbury *et al.*, 2019a; Rendell, 2022b). Architects, architectural historians, and scholars of development have brought questions of situated knowledge production into dialogue with questions of research ethics, asking whether the ethical guidelines universities have adopted for running research involving people are appropriate for scholars engaging in participatory and coproductive forms of research (Practising Ethics, 2022). In this section, I discuss how the practices of situated feminist ethics helped me to navigate ethical challenges during the PhD. I argue that without additional ethical guidance from feminism, I would not have been able to build the research capabilities required to engage in the research in this thesis. In this section, I also present dealing with stress and anxiety as a situated ethical practice that researchers can use to understand the powers and privileges of higher education. My discussion of stress and anxiety is brief because I was not able to collect adequate data in relation to these topics during this study. They are signalled as an area within action research that requires new methods and further study.

### Position and situation

Positionality, or the practice of interrogating one's own position, standpoint, and situation, is a key practice within feminist research. As Chapter Three described, action researchers practice reflexivity, which helps them attend to their subjectivity. In 'Practising Ethics', researchers developed an alternative research ethics based on everyday practice and research as it is lived and experienced (Rendell, 2020, p. 414). The alternative approach is drawn from critical theory and involves principles such as 'situatedness', 'positionality', and 'reflexivity' (Practising Ethics, 2022). 'Practising Ethics' involves taking a situated approach and requires that the researcher engages with the 'particularities' of the 'sites' they are researching. This involves paying particular attention to their 'position' and 'location' and attending to 'the material, political,

and emotional qualities of [their] own subjectivity' in relation to those 'sites' (Rendell, 2022a).

The 'sites' the research in this thesis took me to were immaterial relational spaces. Spaces which required me to build relationships with people often quite different from me and whose lived experience I did not share. As a trainer on the Roots Two project, I delivered research training to groups of young people who had experienced racism and who had been directly affected by crime and serious violence in the city. Alongside engaging in qualitative research, the young people involved with Roots Two were encouraged to make art. In a workshop they were given prompts and space to explore what had been said in the interviews and what they had come to know through the project. Later, they presented their work in progress artworks. I listened to sad songs from sisters concerned for brothers who come home late; heard spoken word poetry telling of London as a depressing and exclusionary place; and was played music which showed violence as a key, unlocking feelings of belonging and creating rebel and group identities in the city. I also saw digital drawings of what can come next: on-street memorials; outlines of candles, cards; pictures of young victims of violent crime; pictures of police; an eye with tears coming down.

The artworks expressed the lived experience the young people and their peers had of crime and serious violence in the city. This was not a lived experience I could share in. I have never had to put up with racism, and the fear of violence does not affect my day-to-day life. Though I have experienced some challenges in the city, overall London has always provided me with opportunity. I have never felt that I don't belong. This is a privileged position, given to me by the circumstances of my birth, and put me at a distance to the people I was working with in Roots Two. It introduced a further layer of difference into an action research relationship that already had a hierarchy. I was not attending workshops with the young people as a peer; I was facilitating the workshops for them, as a trainer.

Scholars have observed how their own 'class, gender, ethnic[ity], age and other social characteristics' play a role in building relationships in research (McDowell, 2001). As an older woman, of white ethnic heritage and middle-

class socio-economic status, Linda McDowell was quite different to the young men she interviewed in her research. But, through repeated interaction, she argued that it was possible to build familiarity. Though she had different life experiences to her 'participants', eventually she became just 'that Linda' (McDowell, 2001). Similarly, in my repeated interactions with the young researchers in the Roots Two project, I became known and the more obvious differences between us – age, ethnicity, religion, mattered less. McDowell's work suggests that to overcome differences in research, these differences, and perhaps even the researcher herself, should blur into the background. Perhaps through familiarity I became just 'that Joanna', though this was not a phrase I heard the You Press young people use. In the rest of this section, I show how combining an ethics of familiarity with an ethics of vulnerability helped me to build a relational space at You Press.

During my action research with You Press, the organisation started running a careers development programme called Aspire. Aspire helps young people 'to develop their skills and talents in order to access the creative industry' (You Press, 2023). Through my action research, I was engaged primarily to work on Roots Two, but Roots and Aspire were running concurrently. Many of the young people engaged with Roots Two were also being trained through Aspire. Knowing that I was available, that I wanted to continue supporting the young people, and that I had worked in the arts before, the Director asked me to run an Aspire workshop. The topic of the workshop was to be on succeeding in job interviews. The workshop offered me an opportunity to build better relationships within the Roots Two project. I approached the topic of the workshop a little sideways, focusing on failure as a step in a journey towards success.

As part of the workshop, I shared around printed copies of all the rejection emails I had received following unsuccessful interviews for jobs in the arts. I explained to the young people that I was unemployed for a long time. Or I worked in jobs I didn't care about, doing tasks I hated. I wanted better jobs, I told them, but confessed I didn't know what I was doing in interviews. My point was to show how many jobs I had to interview for before I got better at interviews. The effect was that the young people I had been working with on Roots Two realised I hadn't always had it easy. In reading the feedback one

potential employer had given me after attending an interview, one young person interrupted the session to defend me, calling out things they saw as unfair, prejudiced, and downright rude. The workshop gave me a chance to explain my background and discuss the challenges I faced when I was starting out in the arts sector. It helped the young people to see me as someone not the same as them but somewhat similar, and, more importantly, as someone they would want to look after.

In wanting to defend me and help when I displayed vulnerability, the You Press young people themselves could be observed as practicing a form of feminist ethics. During the Roots Two project we worked together from a position of kindness and respect. I wasn't 'just Joanna'; I was 'Joanna': valued mentor and friend. When my bike was stolen, they were angry with me. When I didn't have heating in my flat, they were worried with me. More than familiar, the young people I worked with at You Press were kind. I thanked them for their empathetic emotions and welcomed their care. However, being close to people and sharing personal details in research could be criticised for introducing unnecessary power dynamics into research processes. In the next section, I explain how situated and relational ethics helped me to navigate the power-based challenges closeness in research presents. I explain the route I charted through issues of role, recognition, and writing, suggesting my practice could be replicated by other researchers seeking an ethical way through complex challenges.

### [Role, recognition, and writing](#)

Traditional ethical guidelines have been criticised for privileging 'the individual over the communal group or collective' (Rendell, 2020, p. 414). Geographers writing about the ethics of participatory 'praxis', argue that participatory research should also be guided by an ethics of recognition. Beyond the conventional risk assessments research projects undertake as to the potential harm participation poses to participants, researchers should see creating the conditions for participants to be listened to and heard by 'remote others' as a more important ethical imperative (Dickens and Butcher, 2016, p. 537). Ethnographers have

highlighted the relational qualities of research, showing when a researcher is young, female and researching social policy topics, they can often find themselves providing companionship and a sounding board to the people they work with (their 'participants') (Hall, 2017, p. 305).

During my research, people would try to speak to two versions of me: me the friend and confidante, and me the researcher collecting data. With me the friend, they wanted to share knowledge privately, with the added foregrounding of phrases like, 'keep this to yourself' and, 'between you and me'. This happened more often in community settings. In government, people were more guarded, but still on a handful of occasions would go 'off-record' in front of me, prefixing frustrated outbursts with phrases such as, 'this is completely unprofessional but'. Often people would lower their voice to talk to the 'me' version of myself: their whispering being the clearest indicator that though they were speaking, they wanted nobody else to hear. Nobody, including the researcher version of myself. Though I have kept some of the things I heard private, you cannot unhear things or undo the influence they have on your thinking.

In response to this problem, it was important to develop a listening practice and live by it during my research. To engage in the research in this thesis, I decided only to record, save, and consciously consider as data, things I would have no problem saying to an audience wherein the person I gathered that data from was sitting in the very front row. The origins of this practice lie in the instruction to talk 'face-to-face' (Huberman, 2011). To evolve the practice, I took influence from theories of leadership and social change, such as advice to connect with others from a place of 'empathy and compassion' (Steidle, 2017, p. 57). This resulted in my insistence on not just talking face-to-face, but on 'listening' face-to-face as well (Sawkins 2018, cited in Agbetu, 2018, p. 7).

Because people were very open with me, I put a lot of effort into ensuring that my data was anonymised so no individuals or organisations could be traced or identified. But this move was often in conflict with the wishes of the people involved. The community organisations I worked with were not concerned with being anonymised and often opposed it. They wanted to publicly promote the

good things about their work and wanted authorship in relation to any ideas they had about how things could be better. In line with the ethical codes my university encouraged me to follow, I offered You Press an ethics of 'protection'. What they wanted, however, was an ethics of 'recognition' (Dickens and Butcher, 2016). I haven't named individuals in this thesis, though I made the decision to forefront the organisation and their projects, naming them as they are in real life. In this I hope I have been able to create visibility for You Press, fulfilling an alternative ethical responsibility to create the conditions for participants to be listened to and heard by 'remote others' (Dickens and Butcher, 2016, p. 537).

Though my collaborators wanted their stories recognised by a wider audience, we did not present our work in public forums or publish writing about what we did together. As I began writing up my research experiences, I shared drafts of papers I hoped to develop with my collaborators at both You Press and in the GLA. By this time, I was aware of arguments circulating within the coproduction scholarship that the writing up of coproduced research commits acts of 'slow violence' towards projects and the people involved with them. Inspiring scholars were presenting poetry as an alternative to socially scientific reporting, celebrating its ability to hear and represent voices differently (Chapman Hault *et al.*, 2020). These contributions encouraged me towards creative writing and the draft papers I produced were poetic and story-based. In my writing I was able to build on the capacity-building work I was informally engaging in with staff at You Press. I wrote about how I had explained to the Intern writing the Roots Two survey questions who the GLA are, who the Mayor is, and what we mean when we say GLA (section 6.3). In telling the story of my interactions with the Intern, I was able to show the Director where knowledge gaps existed within Roots Two.

Using creative writing practices meant my writing was well received by my collaborators. It had a positive effect in terms of capacity-building, providing a follow up to the political education lessons I had been able to provide informally in meetings. It also supported relationship development. Sharing descriptions of the Roots Two project using creative techniques helped me feel more a part of the You Press staff team, itself made up of people trained as artists and poets. But we did not start any co-writing projects. Though I had the time and support

to shift from practical delivery work towards writing and publishing, writing for publication was not part of my collaborator's working lives. Though some who read my writing expressed a desire to contribute, attend conferences and try to publish together, the conditions that would have allowed them to do so never arrived. To stay in touch and continue working together, my collaborators offered me roles on new projects. Though the new roles would have allowed me to continue to play a capacity-building role within You Press, the requirements of the PhD guided me away from taking them up. I opted instead to direct my energy and attention to organising and developing single author chapters that would become parts of this thesis. That we did not write together, and that communication of our work together exists only in this thesis, remains an ethical concern.

### Stress, anxiety, and failure

Previous professional experience informed my relational approach to work and research as I started out with my study. However, as time went on, I turned to other developmental traditions to build a situated ethical research practice. In Chapter Three, I drew a connection between the situated practices associated with feminist epistemology and the mindfulness practices of action research. I discussed 'meditation', a recommended practice for action researchers seeking to build their capacity for noticing feelings and behaviours: the sort of noticing that is necessary for inquiry into meaning (Mackewn, 2011, pp. 17–18). In Chapter Five and Chapter Six, I presented situated accounts of the meetings and events I attended while working on Citizen-Led and Roots Two. I was able to write the detailed vignettes precisely because I heightened my awareness in those meetings and events. To do so, I sought guidance from meditation teachers who practice action research (for example: DiStefano and Bradbury, 2022) and from popular self-help literature in leadership, personal development, and social change (for example: Steidle, 2017).

In total, I recorded my experiences in 41 meetings and events during my insider action research on Citizen-Led Two and the Roots Two project. As discussed in Chapter Three, my fieldnotes and journal entries provide an important record of



my development as a researcher. In them, I wrote openly about the concerns, worries, and fears I had during my research. But they do not tell the full story of the way I felt as an insider action researcher. Though I write about feeling tired, I do not write about the insomnia I had during the PhD and the steps I had to take to recover from long term anxious sleeplessness. In not writing the full story of the stress and anxiety I experienced during research, I participated in a culture which has been critiqued for promoting 'looking inwards' and for the 'privatisation of stress' (Fisher, 2011). During the PhD I kept most of my stress private. In this, I went against the recommendations provided by the feminist ethical framework I was using to guide action in my study.

Practices of dwelling-with, rather than banishing, anxiety have been presented as micropolitical 'tactics' to be used against 'neuro-liberal' forms of power (Loveday, 2018). The teachings of developmental leadership provided methods I used to interrogate my own position within systems of power and privilege (Steidle, 2017, pp. 91–92; p. 121) and dwell with the anxieties I had. In using them, I came to learn that much of the stress I experienced in my research came from my position in the university and my involvement with higher education as a person going through a PhD programme. Engaging in developmental leadership to look at the academy critically, manifested as a turn towards a conscious ongoing examination of my own practice and positionality within systems of power and privilege. This furthered my capacity for situated ethics and helped me make decisions about what stories to tell in the thesis.

In the first draft of this thesis, I wrote about a different GLA participation project I was involved with. Considering the design limitations uncovered in Chapter Five, and the relational difficulties revealed in Chapter Six, I saw Citizen-Led Two as a failure of coproduction and did not recognise the importance of the story I could tell about it. This is unsurprising as in studies of democratic innovation 'there is not a single article analysing a failure in any of the top 5 journals in political science' (Spada and Ryan, 2017, pp. 772–773, cited in Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019, p. 271). This has led to a situation where attention is only brought to 'exceptional outcomes'. Rarely do we see the reality of typical cases, meaning that we do not know what typical cases of democratic innovations are like (Spada and Ryan, 2017, p. 774, cited in Richardson,

Durose and Perry, 2019, p. 271). However, the feminist focus on subjectivity and reflexivity in research means the stories that feminist research projects tell are likely to be incomplete stories of failure or abandonment (England, 1994). In choosing to analyse 'failed' and 'abandoned' research projects, feminist scholars can make important interventions in the social science 'lore', which focuses on success and completeness (England, 1994, p. 82). In reflecting on my position within higher education research, I came to see the value I could add in telling a story of failure. Recently, the coproduction scholarship has become honest about the negative outcomes of coproduction and stories from failed projects have begun to be published (e.g. Groot, Haveman and Abma, 2022).

So far in this chapter, I have argued for a feminist approach to action researching coproduction. I have shown how my previous experience in relational labouring helped me to ground the research in this thesis in a situated ethics of care. This ethical approach helped me to 'show up' for my collaborators, and 'get on' in both government and community settings. With these foundations in place, I was able to overcome challenges and engage in ethical insider action research for a period of 12 months. In the next section, I analyse what happened at the end of those 12 months. This final empirical section of the thesis explains how my learning journey towards research on coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking came to an end.

### 7.5 Action Research Endings

Scholars of action research describe a range of possible 'endings' commonly effecting action research inquiries. The notion of an 'ending' signifies much more than the limit of any planned project timeline. Marked membership changes and a dissolution of collaborative working can signify that the purpose of a project has shifted, indicating that for the members of the group, 'it no longer makes sense [...] to work together' (McArdle, 2011, p. 211). The endings I experienced in my action research all occurred well outside any planned for or proposed conclusion. In this section, I describe how the research in this thesis

came to an end. As detailed in Chapter Three, I used journaling as a method to collect data for this thesis. My last journal entry is dated to 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020. After this time, I stopped recording my experiences. January 2020 was well in advance of my planned-for end. On paper and procedurally, Citizen-Led Two was very much still running, with the planned 'project closure' dated to March 2020 (GLA, 2019c). The Roots Two project was also still running. But although I continued to work with You Press well into 2020, in January I stopped writing things down. Taking the date of the final journal entry I made in relation to Citizen-Led Two as a starting point, I summarise the moment where my action research ended and something else began.

### Staff changes

Whilst I was working on Citizen-Led Two, a marked membership change occurred within the CE team: the programme's manager found a new role within the organisation and moved teams. When they moved, their workload was redistributed amongst remaining members of the team. This created many challenges, but methodologically, the challenge it created for me was one of access. Many of these other people were not colleagues with whom I had been able to cultivate a strong relationship. My initial access to Citizen-Led from inside the GLA was granted thanks to the strong connection I had made with the member of CE staff leading the project. My continued access relied on my capability to maintain a positive working relationship with them, and my capacity to deliver work in line with their expectations and energies. This, perhaps overreliance on one person, created a precarious environment for my research, and, as time progressed, I began to feel the pain of this precarity. Scholars of action research recognise that as time moves on in organisations, researchers are likely to encounter relational challenges connected to staff turnover (Buchanan, Boddy and McCalman, 2013, p. 66). Staff turnover in Citizen-Led Two influenced the decisions I made within my action research, and the direction I took in preparing empirical material for use in this thesis.

When the trusted individual moved on, I found it much harder to be included in the strategic design and evaluation of the programme. Feeling less connected

to the action of the programme, I began looking for ways to formally exit the work. In preparing empirical material for use in this thesis, I took a journal entry dated to 21<sup>st</sup> January as my final journal entry. It is number 41 in the 41 meetings and events I produced fieldnotes in relation to. In the journal entry, I describe a workshop I ran to help the CE team 'to think together about how Citizen-Led is performing in relation to our aims'. The workshop had been in the morning, and I had to be back at City Hall for an event unrelated to Citizen-Led later that day. At earlier stages in my research, I had been happy to spend full days in City Hall. But, after 12 months of action research and after losing an important colleague, I was tired of it and didn't want to be there anymore. Rather than hang around, after the workshop I made a quick exit and walked south.

My route led me into Southwark Library, a place I knew I could get a cheap cup of tea and then find a desk in the library and spend a couple of hours writing. After the tea, I took a seat and in long and descriptive paragraphs, I recount what I did in the workshop chronologically, inserting reflections in italics beneath each moment. In my writing, I detail how I felt about what I asked people to do in the workshop, the language I used, and what I would do differently if given the opportunity to do something similar again. I reflect on how the day felt significant, coming almost exactly one year after I signed an agreement to evaluate Citizen-Led Two. I conclude the entry by saying that today:

*I felt proud of what I was able to do [over the year] and feel I have delivered on the explicit and implicit ask and personal ambitions I had [...]. What next?*

Sitting there in Southwark Library, I felt the need that soon I should stop my action research and try to return to the university to engage in other activities that would help me towards completing the PhD. The 21<sup>st</sup> January marked the beginning of what would in reality be a slow exit from the projects and programmes studied in this thesis, but it marked a hard departure from the methods I had been using to record my experiences. Though I would continue working on the Roots Two project for many months more, I wasn't so concerned with writing fieldnotes and producing regular journal entries. Perhaps I felt I had

done enough. Though I do not provide an answer to the question I ask in my final journal entry, the feeling my notes communicate is of a desire to end my research on Citizen-Led Two and begin something else. In January 2020, I gave myself a few more months to finish the things I was doing at the GLA, signalling that by the end of March, I should be gone.

### Pandemic PhD

Like many UK institutions, London's City Hall closed in March 2020 and the GLA sent much of its workforce home during the most dangerous periods of the pandemic. As the lights were switched off for the final time over the CE team's office area, the staff, like many in local government, were redeployed. From their separate homes, they worked to deliver new services to support London through the pandemic. Or they did other work, taking care of themselves, their families, and people local to them in their neighbourhoods. All the projects I had been involved with paused during the first government lockdown of 2020. The Covid virus had arrived in the city during a series of evaluation workshops I had been facilitating as part of research I was doing into a different GLA participation programme. My colleagues and I left City Hall for the last time and put our projects to the back of our minds. We waved goodbye to the reflections we had started to pin to the walls of a third-floor office. We would never return to complete the workshops. The glue would slowly degrade on the post-it note ideas, tacked to an in-progress feedback wall. The colour of the bright blue tape I had pulled out and pressed against the wall to connect themes and recurring worries would fade. The post-it notes would drop one by one to the floor, leaving a criss-cross of faded lines, a fossil of a pre-pandemic workshop.

Though all my collaborators were redeployed during the early stages of the pandemic, I didn't try to follow them into their new work. As explained in the previous section, I earmarked March 2020 as the month when I would start stepping back from my action research activities inside the GLA. I anticipated that the getting out process would be a long one: I was still involved with evaluating other participation projects and would be attending industry conferences with colleagues later in the spring and summer. All this however

was postponed or cancelled. I had thought the mayoral elections, scheduled for May 2020, and the purdah period – a time when local government activity is restricted in an attempt not to influence the outcome of the election (Local Government Association, 2022) – would provide a good moment to end my slow exit. However, it was the sudden changes to life brought on by the pandemic that brought my research activities inside the GLA to an abrupt end.

During the pandemic, the doors also closed to the loft at the top of Paddington Arts: You Press HQ. On a Thursday in mid-March 2020, I joined the Director, Coordinator, and other members of staff at You Press for what turned out to be our final team dinner. We piled into a restaurant in Shepherd's Bush, ordered lots of food and raised our sugary drinks to say goodbye to people who were leaving London, going home. The following week the Director closed You Press HQ and moved the organisation into a new digital space. I followed my collaborators into this new space, and we continued to deliver some elements of Roots Two on the internet. As the pandemic progressed, the funding landscape for research changed and the topics around which You Press focused their projects shifted. They moved away from researching serious youth violence and began new participatory research into young people's experience of the 'lockdowns' and of the virus. Concerned with the need to start writing this thesis and dealing with my own challenges during the pandemic, I didn't try to follow my collaborators into their new work.

Participation scholars recount how during the Covid-19 pandemic, public participation processes were firstly suspended and then moved into a virtual space (Pantić *et al.*, 2021). The pandemic 'caused timeline, deadline, and process delays' and virtual participation 'suffered' the same 'insufficiencies' as traditional methods. Namely this was an inability to reach marginalised and vulnerable groups (Pantić *et al.*, 2021, p. 7). A handful of policy reports were published during the pandemic outlining some of the local practices of citizen participation cities were using (e.g. Falanga, 2020) and the challenges associated with the new forms of engagement (e.g. Iroz-Elardo *et al.*, 2021). Investigating public participation in virtual spaces during and after the pandemic fell outside the scope of this study, though could be considered an area for future investigation.

## 7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how my previous work experiences helped me to develop the behaviours and skills necessary for ethical action research. I have explained my learning journey and the steps I took to be able to eventually contribute new knowledge on how the GLA work with community organisations on participatory policy research. I have shown how my journey into the topic of this thesis began with the establishment of a formal partnership. Beyond this however, my success in accessing people and projects to study came because of my professional conduct, itself formed over years of working collaboratively and precariously with people in the arts. Guided by my previous experience of being kind and 'taking care', I developed and followed a feminist approach to insider action research.

At the GLA and in You Press, I repeated behaviours that I have associated in this chapter with the idea of 'showing up'. Showing up involved attending events and networking; saying yes to invitations; and using the privileges my full-time PhD programme afforded to produce research useful to people working on live participation projects. The research required me to develop my existing skill set, enhancing what I was able to offer potential collaborators so I could work practically, usefully, and authentically with them on projects. Achieving authenticity in this research came a result of me attending to my position and situation, a personal process that I navigated using a combined ethics of familiarity and vulnerability. I am aware that the ethical credibility of the research in this thesis could be contested, and therefore in this chapter I have taken the time to zoom in on three areas of difficulty and dilemma that arose within the study. I have argued for the value of situated approaches to research ethics and shown how situated ethics helped me to find a way through the ethical challenges action research presented me.

As the final sections of this chapter have emphasised, ending an action research inquiry can be difficult. I described how staff changes reduced my access to Citizen-Led Two and led me to end my action research earlier than planned. After my action research ending, I initially turned away from much of

the research I had done on Citizen-Led Two. Frustrated with its shortcomings, I shelved it as a failed case. Over time however, I came to see tremendous value in studying failure and chose to centre my experiences with Citizen-Led in this thesis. Therefore, I take from the research new skills relevant to the study of incomplete and failed projects. Studying an incomplete, messy, and failed case of action research required me to carry emotional risk and produced feelings of stress and anxiety. However, it has been by exploring these emotions that I have found meaning and new knowledge. In the next chapter, I summarise the discoveries revealed by the research in this thesis and make a case for its significance and importance.



## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

### 8.1 This Study

I have completed an action study into the ways in which one community organisation participated in urban policymaking in London via a GLA programme of participatory research. I have studied participation through the lens of coproduction, analysing participatory research at the level of feeling and emotion. I have followed an action research methodology, inserting myself practically into Citizen-Led and into one participatory project the programme supported: the Roots Two project, led by community organisation You Press. As an evaluator, facilitator, and trainer I was able to observe and participate in the work, collecting documents and using ethnographic fieldnote making and journalling research methods to record data, reflect and learn. I have been able to successfully translate this research for use in this thesis, analysing documents I have collected and vignettes I have written. I have been able to mobilise theories of coproduction within this analysis, putting my data into dialogue with practical insights gleaned from scholars who coproduce research. My analysis has allowed me to answer the four subsidiary research questions this thesis had. I have made arguments in relation to the London vision for participation and the local practice of participatory research; the design limitations of Citizen-Led; the challenges of building relationships between different people in Roots Two; and the use of an action research methodology to study coproduction and the participation of community organisations with urban policymaking.

In this final chapter, I present the main knowledge claims of this thesis and explain the significant and original contribution this new knowledge makes to the field of urban policy and the methodology of action research. In section 8.2, the main and subsidiary knowledge contributions of the study are explained. The contributions are divided along topical and methodological lines, with contributions to theories of participation and coproduction, and London policymaking coming first, followed by contributions to action research. In section 8.3, the claims of the study are presented. The claims are arranged into four areas which align thematically with the four subsidiary research questions this study had, and chronologically with the four empirical chapters this study

created to present the original research (Chapter Four, Five, Six and Seven). The conclusion, section 8.4, provides a final answer to the main research question this thesis asked. It brings the topical and methodological contributions together to further highlight the significance and originality of this study.

## 8.2 Contributions

This thesis responds to the call urban theory makes to provide situated accounts (Roy and Ong, 2011) of the ways in which city governments attempt to respond to context-specific, local knowledge (Simone and Pieterse, 2017) by becoming stakeholders in community-based participatory research (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999; Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). Through this thesis, I contribute a series of situated accounts on the reality of public participation with local government decision-making in London. Participatory research in the feminist tradition encourages the production of reflexive research subjectivities (Cahill, 2007; Askins, 2018). Recent work on coproduction calls for scholars to conduct their inquiries at the level of feeling and emotion (Brown *et al.*, 2020; Ortiz, 2022). I combine these calls and respond to them, providing a significant and original contribution to knowledge. In this thesis, I have oriented my study of participatory research projects in the direction of the everyday experience of people within projects (Cahill, 2007; Duggan, 2021). I have told stories from a less than perfect case of public participation, providing the participation literature with the 'failed' case it requests (Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019). I have shown the key factors holding the London government back from advancing citizen participation, proposing that Citizen-Led failed to adequately attend to how people involved with the programme were feeling.

This thesis does not excuse or ignore the structural problems affecting participation, but it does personalise some of the problems, locating specific areas within practice where failure could have been averted. Therefore, the research in this thesis makes some unique contributions to practice. These contributions are specific to practice at the GLA but will have relevance in policymaking settings beyond London and outside city-level governance. Wherever there is a participatory project failing to engage community

organisations with urban policymaking, this thesis is likely to have relevance. As a result of my study, we now know that in the face of challenging participation situations, it is imperative that staff at the GLA have the capability to play the role of the reflexive boundary spanner. This requires advanced mediation skills and an ability to authentically connect with the lived experience of marginalisation in London (see section 5.3). Further, thanks to my study, we have evidence that when the co-design processes the GLA are involved with fail, the drivers of failure are often to do with the difficulties people have in building relationships across government–community boundaries (see sections 6.3 and 6.4). Training opportunities for both government and community workers that are aimed towards collaborative learning could help the GLA to turn its failed co-design processes in the direction of success (see section 6.2).

Some of the factors driving London’s ambitions for participation are unique to the city. But the practices and behaviours which hold London back from achieving its participation goals are not exclusive to London. Not involving community organisations in the design of the research and failing to establish the conditions from which trusting relationships could form between staff in community and government organisations are commonly experienced co-design challenges (Sendra, 2023). It seems that though cities can embark on participatory policymaking endeavours for different reasons, the design and relational challenges they face can be shared. Advanced mediation and the ability to authentically connect are skills that could increase the capabilities of boundary spanners in London, but also in other cities. These skills will be vital for community engagement professionals seeking to meaningfully involve people with lived experience with urban policy and planning, wherever they are. Shared learning experiences could help community and government actors working in UK and international contexts to build more trusting relationships. As city governments around the world make commitments to deepen citizen participation with local government, decision makers will be required to look ‘outwards and upwards’ to ‘the lessons learned from existing citizen engagement initiatives’ (Ortiz et al., 2021, p. 331).

This thesis shows how participatory research and co-design processes involving local government and community partners have a lot to learn from the

ethics and practices of coproduction. Coproduction theory has been criticised for not travelling well into complex application spaces (Duggan, 2021); for often upholding epistemic inequality (Groot, Haveman and Abma, 2022); and regularly doing more harm than good (Chapman Houlst *et al.*, 2020). However, in the face of the significant failure of the GLA's current participatory research and co-design processes, coproduction practices offer a way for the organisation to move forward. The current focus coproduction has on building very human, trusting relationships as a foundation for research (Duggan, 2021; Hemström *et al.*, 2021), means the scholarship offers important solutions to the GLA's participation problems.

The research in this thesis extends the conceptualisation of coproduction within public policy. I have responded to the call coproduction scholars make to recognise the value of 'ideas, affects and relational capacities' – the things people think and feel when they work with others (Duggan, 2021, p. 355). In responding to this call, I have extended existing scholarship. I have brought a well-known framework for coproducing public policy, one which presented the set of activities and behaviours known as the 'grammar' of coproduction (Durose and Richardson, 2016), together with some of the latest scholarship on affect in community research (Brown *et al.*, 2020; Duggan, 2021). Before this study, we knew that coproduction required people to make a 'credible commitment' to each other; and we knew of the importance of reflexivity in building reciprocal, boundary spanning relationships (Durose and Richardson, 2016: pp. 43–44). Now, as result of this study, we have research able to account for the 'imagination' within these relationships – the feelings and emotions the relationships produce for the people involved. The series of imaginative, 'eventful moments' I have analysed in the empirical chapters, have created new knowledge as to the moments which 'matter' (Duggan, 2021, p. 361) in building ethical and caring relationships of coproduction.

These contributions should be understood as the main contributions this thesis makes to theory and practice. However, with this work, I also make a series of minor contributions. In the remainder of this section, I present these minor contributions.

Firstly, this thesis can be understood to make a small contribution to the scholarship that studies community participation with the London government across time (Colenutt, 1988; Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987; Colenutt and Cutten, 1994; Naidoo, 2009; Davis, 2015b; Atashroo, 2017; Beebeejaun, 2018; Hatherley, 2020a; 2020b). This thesis reveals how under the leadership of the current mayor, Sadiq Khan, the approach to public participation in London involved the use of community-based participatory research. In 2018, the mayor had a vision for participation and the GLA tried to use a participatory research programme to deliver that vision. The programme had not been researched before, so this thesis is the first piece of scholarship to study it. From the perspective of this study, the programme failed to engage community organisations in urban policymaking. Community organisations were not involved with the design of research, and the staff involved with projects were not able to build the person-to-person relationships necessary to coproduce public policy. When I embarked on this study, there was a gap in the urban policy literature in relation to the state of community participation with GLA policymaking under Khan and how it was performing. Now, thanks to this thesis, that gap has been narrowed.

Secondly, while the above topical insights should be understood as the main contributions this thesis makes to urban policy research, I do also make a series of smaller contributions to the methodological theories of action research. My study is an example of how a doctoral student can conduct insider action research and work on participation projects involving government and community partners. My relational research practice provides a model for ethical and impactful research, that could be replicated by other scholars committed to feminist research practice. The learning journey I tell is particularly relevant for urban scholars interested in pursuing action research within an institution they already have formed a partnership with (e.g. a CASE student), but it is also relevant to people looking to set up research partnerships from scratch. I have provided a range of practices people can try, including commitments to 'take care' of (section 7.2) and 'show up' for (section 7.3) the people in their research. I have also provided insight on overcoming ethical challenges (section 7.4). Finally, it is significant that I used ethnographic

methods to study a government–community partnership. Many researchers insert themselves into community projects but few ‘study up’ (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005). I found it possible to work productively at both levels, conducting insider research on practice at You Press and at the GLA. Thus, one argument for the originality of my work concerns the boundary spanning capability it possesses. As more and more researchers seek to complete applied studies, the methodological contributions I provide in this thesis will come to be seen as increasingly significant and original.

### 8.3 Research Claims

In this section, I review the four subsidiary research questions used to guide inquiry in this thesis and summarise the arguments this thesis has made in response.

- *How do theories of coproduction find form in a London context? (sub-RQ 1)*

One way coproduction found form in London during the time of this study was through a local practice of participatory research (Chapter Four). Participatory research was promoted as part of Mayor Khan’s vision for public participation in policymaking. But its delivery took place thanks to the efforts of organisations working in London’s community, voluntary and social enterprise sector. Through this research, I have shown You Press to be one community organisation who have long been committed to local knowledge production practices. My exploration of You Press projects such as Roots Two reveals how theories of coproduction were finding form in a London context in the late 2010s. In this work, I have also shown how Citizen-Led enabled the GLA to partner with community and voluntary organisations and become stakeholders within projects. I claim that Citizen-Led enabled the GLA to become involved with an already existing ‘collaborative poetic’ scene and produce projects exploring and communicating the lived experience of young people in London. I argue that in becoming a stakeholder in London’s community and voluntary sector, the GLA were able to direct practice and subtly engineer new experiments in line with

Khan's vision for public participation in the city. Theories of coproduction were finding form within Roots Two, warranting further study of the project within this research.

- *How did the design of the Citizen-Led Engagement Programme limit its coproduction capabilities, and how did people respond to these limitations? (sub-RQ 2)*

The design of the mayor's programmes for public participation limited their coproduction capabilities (Chapter Five). I have shown how the design of Citizen-Led Two contradicted what scholarship on coproductive policymaking advises programmes should do. In Citizen-Led Two, people working in community organisations found a fixed programme that was closed off to participation. My research has revealed how community and voluntary organisations wanting to run participatory research via Citizen-Led Two could choose only from a preset list of 'focus' communities and research themes. I have shown how this design choice closed off participation in important decision-making, and how it produced conflict. Whilst I have claimed that it is possible to navigate conflict in coproduction, I caveat this claim with research showing how even when government officers are boundary spanners in possession of reflexive mediation capabilities, conflict arising in response to the language of targeted engagement can only be dampened and redirected, not completely resolved. Flexibility and an openness to work with community organisations on the design as well as the delivery of research, would expand the potential for coproduction in Citizen-Led.

- *What capabilities are required for coproductive relationships between people to develop, and how can participatory research training programmes build these capabilities? (sub-RQ 3)*

The training programme organised to support people in Citizen-Led Two represents a missed opportunity to develop coproductive relationships in participatory urban policy research, (Chapter Six) making it difficult to answer

this question. Through this research, I have shown how there was little togetherness between the You Press and GLA staff working together on the Roots Two project. I have revealed the causes of this problem, highlighting how the design of Citizen-Led Two did not contain opportunities for people to connect with each other on a human level and did not work to build the boundary spanning capabilities necessary for people to be able to develop trust and understanding within the Roots Two project. As a result, attempts to co-design research in Roots Two were plagued by translation and dissemination challenges. The project and policy leads communicated intermittently and worked on their respective project tasks at a distance from one another. When staff in You Press tried to find a policymaking audience for their research within the GLA, their efforts were undermined. These processes further affected each partner's capability to build coproductive relationships. For You Press, working with the GLA was not a positive experience. Faced with this situation, I have shown how participatory research training programmes could be improved. By creating opportunities for people to be together and to learn together, the GLA could have created better conditions for relational coproductive capabilities to develop within Citizen-Led Two. I have speculated on what a facilitated learning space could have looked like, presenting examples from practice in other UK-based coproduction projects to re-imagine practice in Citizen-Led Two.

- *What behaviours, skills and experience were required to research the participation of community organisations with policymaking at the GLA? (sub-RQ 4)*

When I began the research in this thesis, I knew little about public participation in urban policymaking and did not enter the field with a clear research question, only an academic research interest in local knowledge. I came into the study experienced in relational labouring and with an awareness of how to behave when working with people in projects. Guided by a feminist ethical imperative to take care and pay attention to position and situation, I followed an open research design, and put energy into building relationships and acting ethically in my government and community encounters. I developed skills in relational



listening and used the privilege of my position to repeatedly show up for people and projects (Chapter Seven). This practice saw me become an insider action researcher within a range of participation projects, including Citizen-Led Two and the Roots Two project. Action researching these projects required me to develop the skills necessary for navigating ethical and emotional challenges in research, an experience which has advanced and reaffirmed the ethical commitment I have to feminist care ethics. When I returned to the university and set about writing this thesis, theories of coproduction helped me to analyse my research experience. Learning new approaches to writing about failure in coproduction helped me to centre the research I did and tell a story of how one community organisation participated with policymaking at the GLA.

#### 8.4 Conclusion

This thesis's central research question looked to theories of coproduction to find ways through the challenges of public participation with policymaking in London. It asked: *How can coproduction enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking?*

The research has observed how in London during the late 2010s, community organisations were engaging with the work of the GLA through community-based participatory research. Participatory research enabled community organisations to communicate the lived experience of people they work hard to provide support and services for, along with their peers. Participatory research also enabled community organisations to explore complex urban challenges that had direct relevance to London policymaking: challenges such as crime and youth violence. But, from the perspective of this thesis, participatory research did not enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking. The community organisation studied in this research encountered a series of challenges when it came to collaborating with people inside the GLA and to communicating the knowledge their research projects were collating to decision-makers within the London government.

In response to the above situation, this thesis has studied coproduction, employing the concept in a specific participation setting. Where community-

based participatory research runs up against barriers, the coproduction scholarship provides a way around. When people in community organisations in London were confronted with the processes and mechanisms designed to realise the mayor's participation ambitions, they were frustrated and made their dissatisfaction known (Chapter Five). When staff and volunteers leading community-based participatory research tried to work with people on the inside of government, both sides struggled to connect the experience they were having with that of the other (Chapter Six). This too produced unsatisfying and even harmful community–government relations. The people who needed to come together to work collaboratively within Citizen-Led Two and on the Roots Two project couldn't do it, and the project and programme failed as a result. Coproduction provides a way to overcome these relational challenges. In response to the question: *How can coproduction enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking?* I argue that the values of coproduction can enable community organisations to participate in urban policymaking by providing a guide as to the development of new participatory capabilities: ways of being and behaving that produce people who can relate and processes that make room for care (Chapter Five, Six and Seven).

People in possession of participatory capabilities embody the values of coproduction and can authentically relate to the experiences of others. As this thesis has learnt, they are the staff working in community organisations successfully supporting people to understand and communicate their lived experience (as staff at You Press were shown to do in section 4.2). People in possession of participatory capabilities can also be found in government. They are the government workers able to authentically understand the injustices that can emotionally impact people. They have advanced mediation skills, so can facilitate through the inevitable tensions that arise when community and government organisations come together (as the Mediator at the GLA was able to in section 5.3). And they can also be found in action research. People in possession of participatory capabilities are also the researchers who can cross boundaries and build trusting relationships with people working in community and in government (as I shared evidence of myself doing in section 7.4).

Based on these findings about capabilities, this thesis encourages future work that pays attention to production in coproduction: the labour in the process. Participation initiatives like Citizen-Led and the Roots Two project must be approached with a careful critical honesty. In turning towards failure and examining the problems of participation at the level of affect and relationships, this thesis provides a question for participation scholars and practitioners to ask of themselves: how does my work make people feel? It provides a question for government institutions to ask too: how does working with us make people in community organisations feel? We will know new participatory capabilities are being developed when the work results in feelings of being valued, recognised, and heard by individuals and of being cared for, supported, and enabled by institutions.

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