

Project Title: Home-City-Street

Background

Home-city-street is a research project funded by the Centre for Public Engagement lead by Alison Blunt (PI) with Casper Laing Ebbenshard (PDRA), based at the Centre for the Studies of Home and in collaboration with The Geffrye Museum of the Home, Eastside Community Heritage and artists Sue Mayo and Torange Khonsari. The project involves collecting home-city biographies from current and former residents on or near the Kingsland road in Hackney.

The students were involved in the project's launch event, collecting oral histories with Casper Laing Ebbenshard, transcribed interviews, edited a video interview, worked with the The Geffrye Museum of the Home, Eastside Community Heritage, learned about cataloguing transcripts and audio visual material in a museum's archive and collections.

One of the project aims was to develop the project into a QM Model module in collaboration with The Geffrye Museum of the Home and Eastside Community Heritage.

Project leads

Principal Investigator: Professor Alison Blunt

Post Doctoral Research associate: Dr Casper Laing Ebbenshard

Undergraduate Researchers

A 3rd year, Human Geography

A 2nd year, History

A 2nd year, History and film (withdrew)

Selection process

No selection process was required because only three students applied.

One student left the project halfway through because she had found a part-time job that gave her more hours. This was quite disruptive for the team and they had anticipated that students were committed to the project and wouldn't be permitted or want to do this. However, because they were on temporary contracts administered by QTemps students were perfectly within their rights to leave at short notice. This is not such a consideration once these kinds of projects become QM Model Modules as no payment is involved. However, does consideration need to be given to the possibility for students dropping out of EBL/RBL type projects even when they are modules?

Student researchers' views on the research experience

In one of the focus groups, the two students who participated in the project made the following observations:

Managing the timing and fitting in the work around their schedules was often quite challenging because they were conducting interviews with members of the public and had to work with their availability (and they would often cancel).

They valued the real world opportunities, for example, their work with the Geffrye Museum and the Eastside Community heritage archive.

For one student, the project felt quite similar to the 2nd year Research Methods module in Geography, in which they worked with specific groups in the local area, interview them and produce a piece of research (all of which is done in groups).

For both, making the videos was the most rewarding part of the project. Although initially they didn't realise that they were supposed to be in charge, only when pushed to take the lead they found it difficult but rewarding.

For one student, the project gave her insight into a new area of geography, specifically human geography, that she wouldn't have thought of following. The project, she realised, also connected in interesting ways with an area she is keen to develop: policy. As a result her interest in this area of human geography has grown.

For the other student, it enabled him to dip his toe in the academic field, meeting charities and talking about fund raising showed him the resale ties of actually putting together these kinds of projects. He is particularly interested in oral history so the project gave him lots of useful skills, direction and insight into this area.

Student researchers' views on assessment

The objectives setting in Component 1 (and which should have come a little earlier, nearer the beginning) gave a shape to the project, and helped them to think about what they might do after university. It helped to have Alison there as she has the overview. They did revisit their objectives. Casper regularly gave them bullet points on certain areas to help them reflect on the project. These gave them direction and helped them with self-direction.

They weren't very clear about how to do the reflective commentary (a weakness in our design of the assessment). They liked the balance of the assessment and the variety/mixed assessment (one student likes this way of doing it and in particular opportunities to do presentations). They felt it was achievable but also pushed them intellectually.

Key challenges identified by the project leads

Because the work involved interviewing members of the general public, timings and schedules could be a challenge to fit into the structure of a module; it would require very careful planning. A module of this kind would it be better if it is stretched over two semesters.