



## **EXPLORING MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

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- 1. What is the impact of the community media sector on the media industry, formal education and social systems? (measured by progression stats, attainment levels, evaluation tracking and cross fertilisation of ways of working and personnel.)**

### **Why do I want to know this?**

I want to know why I (and others) bother doing the things I (we) do. Does it have any impact at all, or am I just wasting someone else's money? In some ways I already know it has an impact on all three of the areas mentioned in the question. The man behind Video Nation and the Community Programming Unit at the BBC came out of the community media sector, which has been very influential. In my website about this research;

[www.firstborn-creatives.co.uk/community-media/index.htm](http://www.firstborn-creatives.co.uk/community-media/index.htm)

I included a chart I made looking at the hierarchies which exist within moving image work. I'm interested in knowing what the skills & breadth of experience of the facilitators who work in the sector have. I know people who used to work for the BBC who now work in community media, and also ex-community media people who now work for the BBC. Also people who got inspired to work in the media from community projects who are now in either university or working in the industry. The impact is there, the problem is....

### **How will I get to know this?**

I admit I don't think there's any realistic way of measuring this impact. Any evaluation would have to be incredibly longitudinal to track any impact, and /or have to rely on anecdotal or teleological evidence. The question is far too broad.

### **Who will benefit from knowing this?**

Educators, community workers, youth workers, media students and community based media practitioners and artists.

### **Supervisor comments:**

Rephrase this question, to look at the relationship between the community media sector and the other sectors mentioned.

### **TASK:**

Define what the Community Media sector is, and what it isn't. Does the Community Media sector include cable tv channels that exist to make money?

Also define the sector in terms of who the participatory groups are.

2. **Is the community media sector sustainable, effective and viable in and of itself?**

**Why do I want to know this?**

I'm quite interested in the structure and businesses practices of the sector. Whether it's a growing market, or if the actual funding is coming from such a range of sources with different criteria that is cannot be clearly defined as a self-sustaining sector at all.

**How will I get to know this?**

I don't think I will. It's an impossible question with no clear ways of measuring anything. It doesn't actually mean anything.

**Who will benefit from knowing this?**

Much more narrow than question #1. Basically other media facilitators, production companies, and organisations such as the South West Regional development Agency.

**Supervisor comments:**

Sustainability has to be more than financial, to include knowledge and skills.

**TASK:**

To analyse Case Studies of media projects that have existed for years as an example of good practice. Examples include *Somerset Film & Video Project* and the *Workers Film Association* (see Barbara) which have been going for over 20 years.

3. **What are the most recurring aims & objectives of community media projects, and how are these set and agreed by the groups who run them?**

**Why do I want to know this?**

This now feels like a chapter heading rather than a whole body of research. I'm interested in the intention of projects and how that determines the way they facilitate. One media company or facilitator might be involved in a media project which has an aim to inspire the participants to become future filmmakers, and exactly the same project might be delivered which has the aim of raising levels of literacy. It's won't need a whole study to tell me that though.

**How will I get to know this?**

Could be done by interviews and making statistics from data, but seems a bit too narrow and not very inspiring.

**Who will benefit from knowing this?**

Maybe only other facilitators.

**Supervisor comments:**

This question is central to the research. Linked to setting definitions and defining terms, as it identifies what the different sections of the sector are, and how they define their “ideology”? When considering the “recurring” aims & objectives, go back at least 20 years in literature. Look at annual reports and mission statements, etc.

**4. How have new emerging technologies influenced and enhanced how community media projects are delivered and exhibited?**

**Why do I want to know this?**

I’m not very interested in technology so I’m not very keen on this question anyway. I never have been, and was always a bit of a red herring. There’s definitely something there, but not for me, it’s too blatantly anthropological and passive.

**Supervisor comments:**

25 years ago the “ideologies” and many of the aims & objectives may have been the same as today, but technology has radically enhanced access and the potential for dissemination of the work.

New technologies may also a motivating factor of why these projects are so popular. Technology is now a lot cheaper and accessible. If community media projects are no longer about providing access to equipment, then what is its purpose?

**5. Does the wider community media sector have an underlying / unsaid ethos or set of principles? (e.g. access to technology, platform for opinion, platform for education, self sufficiency, being in control of representation, etc, etc)**

**Why do I want to know this?**

Really this is an extension of question #3. Mildly more interesting as it points back to asking ourselves ‘why are we doing this thing called media education?’ Again though, it’s not a Phd question and could be covered quite quickly as a chapter, if appropriate.

**Supervisor comments:**

Essentially the same as question #3.

6. **How / Does the produced work get shown in a wider context, and what are the mechanisms for this to happen effectively? If none, what could those mechanisms be?**

### **Why do I want to know this?**

In short, because I know there is a lot of damn good work out there stuck in the dusty vaults of community media facilitators that will never get seen again. This raises further questions though; how valid is that work outside of the context in which it was produced? What value would be added for that work to be screened again?, What has happened to the model of the process of the projects which generated this good final work?, If emphasis is placed on the end product, does this not in some cases undermine the process, which is surely where the learning happens, not in the end product? I feel it's still an important question though, as these productions are in many ways important cultural artefacts. The setting up of a National Community Media Archive would be a good thing!

### **How will I get to know this?**

When I started doing some digging I found an online archive of community media video, radio and websites, hosted by the Community Media Association (CMA). I was pleased to see this as the CMA are mainly community broadcast led with a leaning towards radio, and (I think) with little consideration towards the education activity happening in Community Media. It now turns out they have a Learning Skills department, which had developed The Showcase, the online archive.

<http://showcase.commedia.org.uk>

I've sent them a Firstborn web project to see how they operate, and I was told that the selection process might take "months" as it has to go through various committees, etc. Even though website looks very accessible, the process doesn't sound very democratic or inclusive, which I thought were the buzzwords of the Community Media sector.

If I were to treat this question as it is, then I could find out the information quite easily by interviews, and looking t viable exhibition and archiving options, but I feel it needs to be re-written to take the emphasis solely off the production, to include the sustainability of the process, knowledge and skills.

### **Who will benefit from knowing this?**

Other community media facilitators, amateur media producers, short film enthusiasts, media educationalists, not sure who else. It needs lots of work, but it's in the environment of this question that I'm inspired to pursue my research, as it seems to be in this area where there are gaps in research and knowledge.

### **Supervisor comments:**

(Commenting on the additional notes I wrote in my report about this question)  
– The comments about 'process' are very important, as it is not always about the product.

Also, what is the main activity of the Community Media Association (CMA)? They are the official organisation for this sector, but I need to find out more about what they do. Needs further research and discussion.

### **ADDITIONAL SUPERVISOR COMMENTS**

- Again advising to treat the above questions as content for some of the chapters of the thesis.
- Commenting on additional questions I noted in the update report - see below - which arose after exploring various research questions.

#### **Other questions this raises for me are;**

1. What (if any) attitudes & behaviours do media education projects actually aim to enhance and/or change in the participant communities?
2. What realistic impacts do project facilitators think any one project will have on the participant group?
3. What is the prime motivating factor to carry out community based work? (Especially with a media approach.)
4. What examples of knowledge, practices & skills can a participant of such a project expect to gain from the experience?
5. Are any attempts made by facilitators at present to make their media projects sustainable or do any follow-up work?
6. What/is there a need to make the knowledge gained from projects sustainable? Who gains from this? Does it need any extra resources or funding, or can it be woven into the core structure of the project?
7. How will this new question affect my reading list? – project structures, educational strategies, needs analysis, pedagogic methodologies, philosophies of education, the role/potential and limitations of evaluation process, the culture of informal education sector, also research into how other sectors and industries encourage sustainability of their work to cross reference and inform.

Advised that questions 1 & 3, 2 & 4 and 5 & 6 are all linked in pairs, and they provide the theoretical framework of some of the chapters. She also said that the insight that will come out of question 7 will constitute the 'new knowledge' that this research has to contribute, in order to be worthy of PhD status.

- **AGREED (for the moment) RESEARCH QUESTION FOR OVERALL RESEARCH PROJECT:**

**“An enquiry into the sustainability of knowledge, skills and productions from community media education projects.”**

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