Heritage and Identity

Co-production and Wellbeing in Heritage Projects

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit Building on History, ein Projekt, das von Historic England (HE) und Historic Environment Scotland (HES) entwickelt wurde. Das Projekt war Teil des Programms Outreach to Ownership Pilot, das vom Arts and Humanities Research Council (England und Schottland) finanziert wurde. Building on History war ein Partnerschaftsprojekt im Zeitraum 2021–2023, das gemeinschaftsgeleitete Forschung unterstützte und darauf abzielte, den Wert der Künste und Geisteswissenschaften für minorisierte Gruppen zu erforschen und integrativere Formen der Beschäftigung mit Kultur und Kulturerbe zu fördern. Die Hauptakteure waren Heritage Lincolnshire (HL), das die Finanzierung sicherstellte und das Projekt verwaltete und leitete, sowie Gemeindeleiter und ihre Gruppen, mit denen das Format und der Inhalt von Workshops gemeinsam entwickelt wurden, sowie Wissenschaftler*innen und Student*innen der Nottingham Trent University (NTU), die die gemeinsame Entwicklung und Durchführung von Gemeinde-Workshops und Projektergebnissen wie Fragebögen und Websites unterstützten.

Durch die Durchführung von geförderten Projekten haben HL und NTU demokratischere Ansätze für die Beteiligung der Gemeinschaft am kulturellen Erbe spezifiziert, die die Förderung von Community Pride, Wellbeing und kultureller Identität unterstützen. In diesem Beitrag stellen Mitglieder von HL und NTU ihre Ansätze zur Koproduktion und zum Engagement im Projekt Building on History vor. Diese reichen von der Entwicklung von Strategien zur Vermittlung (Outreach) bis hin zur gemeinsamen Entwicklung zugänglicher digitaler Tools, die die Anerkennung des vielfältigen kulturellen Erbes ermöglichen (Ownership). Diese Methoden sind anpassungsfähig, flexibel und inklusiv und ermöglichen es den Gemeinschaften, ihre Orte und damit ihr Erbe zu gestalten und in Wert zu setzen.

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on Building on History, a project developed through Historic England (HE) and Historic Environment Scotland (HES), the main public bodies looking after the historic environment of England and Scotland. The project formed part of the umbrella programme Outreach to Ownership Pilot, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (England and Scotland). Building on History (delivered in two phases during 2021–2023) was a partnership project that supported community-led research, aiming to explore the value of the arts and humanities for minoritised communities, and promoted more inclusive forms of engagement with culture and heritage. The main stakeholders were Heritage Lincolnshire (HL), who secured the funding, and managed and led the project; community leaders and their groups, with whom the format was co-designed and the content of the workshops co-created; and academics and students from Nottingham Trent University (NTU), who facilitated the co-design and delivery of community workshops and project outputs such as questionnaires and websites.

Through the delivery of funded projects, HL and NTU have honed more democratic approaches to community participation in heritage, encouraging the promotion of cultural pride and identity and resulting in better wellbeing outcomes. In this paper, members of HL and NTU share their approaches to co-production and engagement on the Building on *History* project, within the *Outreach to Ownership* Pilot Programme – ranging from the development of heritage engagement strategies (outreach) to the co-creation of accessible digital tools that enabled the recognition of diverse heritage(s) (ownership). These methodologies are adaptable, flexible, and inclusive and enable communities to shape their places and recognise, as they did during the workshops, what they value – in other words, their heritage.

Introduction

This paper presents the *Building on History* project, which explored the potential for co-creating a digital tool to aid in simplifying and demystifying the heritage designation process and other routes to recognising the heritage of diverse communities. This idea was tested through the delivery of workshops involving several community groups from diverse backgrounds and with varied needs, based in Nottingham and Lincolnshire, UK. The workshops were facilitated by community members, and involved collecting qualitative and quantitative data to determine the efficacy of a digital approach, and whether the project's prototype digital tool met the needs of multiple different communities.

The project embraced a democratic process by encouraging a bottom-up strategy designed by community leaders, who pushed boundaries to include alternative narratives of intangible heritage representing communities from Nottingham and Lincolnshire. The process began by unpacking institutional structures, narratives, and language around what is and is not "heritage", using a range of engagement strategies to reach and empower audiences that have not traditionally engaged with heritage projects. Through their participation, what is considered heritage by established institutions was democratised, and people's wellbeing was boosted through greater inclusion and visibility. This paper presents a summary of the two phases. This first phase included several groups across Lincolnshire and Nottingham, and was designed to test a digital tool to encourage heritage designation. The communities identified to participate in this phase were considered 'minoritised' for different reasons: age, ethnic and cultural background, learning difficulties, and other characteristics. The goal was to explore whether the heritage of these 'minoritised' communities could be part of heritage designation, by using the toolkit (website). This led to highlighting the relevance of heritage assets connected to these communities. Phase 2 followed this up, highlighting the role of heritage (and its recognition) in improving mental health through sense of pride and belonging. Only two groups took part in the second phase: Angolan Women's Voice (a charity based in Nottingham), and communities connected to the Windrush generations in Nottingham.

The main aim of the project was to develop a novel approach to workshop delivery, transferring power and ownership from HL/NTU to the com-



Fig. 1: Film screening at *Skate Nottingham* workshop during Phase 1 of the project (2022).

munities participating. Instead of managing and organising the workshops in our premises (HL/NTU), we invited the community leaders to decide how to use the budget allocated, acknowledging their knowledge of the different groups involved. Each group - Angolan Women (with Angolan Women's Voice charity); Nottingham's skateboarding community (with Skate Nottingham) and graffiti artists (with Montana Shop); Ukrainian refugee children in Nottingham; Hollygirt Primary School; Linkage (a charity that works with people with learning disabilities in Lincolnshire); military veterans; and a church group in Lincolnshire - was given a budget to run community workshops where they would test the website. Each group used their budget to cover venue hire, food, workshop materials, gifts for participation, and payment for facilitation accordingly. Each workshop was evaluated by HL/NTU by observation, and using (with written consent) data received from the participants.

The celebration of these workshops explored people's heritage from very different perspectives, and non-traditional ideas of heritage were represented by participants' responses throughout the research. This aligned with the identities of the invited communities, which can be considered 'minoritised' for different reasons, and which represent the diversity of our society. Consequently, a significant amount of helpful feedback was received on the digital tool, which will feed into a revised co-created version ready for future use with other communities.

Methodology

At the core of the methodology resides the philosophy of Participatory Action Research (PAR): "committed to democratic principles of justice and equality. It is an inclusive practice of research defined both by participation and a determination to produce knowledge in the interest of social change." Like other Action Research approaches, PAR is a way of "doing research with people, not on them",2 which reinforces a democratic framework for our research. Following Phase 1 of the study (detailed below), a key element of community engagement for the project was that the workshops were all facilitator-led by a member of the relevant community. These facilitators were identified by community connectors and by the community groups themselves. Their involvement was essential to creating an open environment where people felt welcome to fully participate; as well as for avoiding consultation fatigue and embracing the emergent nature of PAR: all stakeholders guide the project.3 As a legacy of the project, it was planned for the communities to have ongoing ownership of their contributions. This also placed control of delivering the workshops entirely in the hands of the community and enabled them to make all decisions, such as appropriate venues and refreshments, and paying community facilitators for their time to recognise their contribution. Facilitators were offered support with promoting the workshops, and invoices from venues and caterers were paid directly through *HL*.

Alongside PAR, our research approach embraces the philosophy of Students as Partners: "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis."4 Several summer internships were funded through the project so that NTU students could support the development of workshop activities alongside the community groups. Students and facilitators were given training virtually through HL and Catherine Bloodworth at Bright Culture (evaluation consultants for Outreach to Ownership). The training focused on providing tools to successfully deliver their workshops, and guidance on the evaluation of heritage activities and how to measure its impact on participants' wellbeing. Ana Souto, Penelope Siebert (academics from NTU), and NTU students were also present at workshops – supporting delivery as well as observing responses and conducting data collection. The training included an example workshop structure and listed the types of expenditure that the budget could be used for.

Each facilitator was given a budget of £800 to



Fig. 2: Activities at Skate Nottingham workshop during Phase 1 of the project (2022).

cover their time contribution to the project, venue hire, catering, and participant rewards for each workshop. This meant that not only was the community providing data for this research project, but that under-represented communities were being paid for their time, appropriately recognising the value of their time, views, and expertise. The workshops in Phase 1 were designed flexibly with each facilitator to suit the needs of the project (i.e., answering the research questions through data capture) while accommodating the specific needs and requirements of each community. The basic structure required time to allow the workshop participants to reflect on the meaning and significance of heritage, and also time to try out the website with the prototype digital tool, provide feedback on any issues, and suggest changes. Co-design was an essential part of creating the digital tool, arranging the workshops, and of all other stages in the project's progress.

As part of the workshops, facilitators were accompanied by observers from HL or Nottingham community connectors. Their roles were to take notes on the results of the workshops and support the facilitators and community groups in the workshop activities. These observers worked with the facilitators to provide feedback and data to HL for the research project. Standardised feedback and consent forms were provided for each workshop. However, aligning with the values of co-production, and given the different workshop activities, the format of this feedback was unique to each workshop.

In Phase 2 we worked with two communities that demonstrated a clear interest in participating in a discussion on: (group 1) their diasporic identity, and (group 2) how to address the Windrush scandal⁵ (and trauma) with celebration and dissemination of their heritage. Similar ideas of heritage came to the fore: music, dance, food, community engagement, memories, etc. The oral testimonies dwell on these issues, which the participants were happy to share with a broader audience.

Phase 1: Outreach

Using existing collaborations between HL and NTU, the first phase of what became a two-phase project focused on co-creating a digital tool that recognises the diverse heritage and communities present in Nottingham and Lincolnshire. The project was granted up to £30,000 from HE/HES to develop a prototype digital tool (a website) to be tested during the workshops.⁶

As part of the research project, workshops were organised in the UK city of Nottingham and the neighbouring county of Lincolnshire. Although the initial goal was to host an equal number of events in each location, ultimately, five workshops took place in Lincolnshire and seven in Nottingham. A total of eight different communities took part in the project. The participants were of diverse backgrounds, including People with Black, Asian, or other minority ethnic heritage; young people under 25 (schoolaged children and young people aged 16-25 outside of school); people with disabilities; and people who are disadvantaged by their social and/or economic background, circumstances, or by where they live (refugees, some of whom had escaped active war zones a week prior). Data were not collected to determine whether this project engaged with the LG-BTQ+ community. A workshop was designed for delivery specifically by the LGBTQ+ community in Nottingham; however, this was not possible within the timeframe.

Working with communities from the inception of the project helped make the toolkit as accessible as possible. For example, for the *Angolan Woman's Centre* the toolkit was translated into Portuguese to enable understanding by all workshop participants (Fig. 3). Linkage supported the creation of a Makaton version of the toolkit and consent form, enabling engagement by all workshop participants.

Linkage Community Trust Workshop, Lincolnshire

Several accessibility issues were identified by the facilitator before the event took place, and *Linkage* produced a set of worksheets that included more accessible images and formatting so that more of the group could participate fully in the activities. This is a vital consideration when reviewing the toolkit – it cannot rely upon images that are easily misinterpreted.

The group identified a range of types of heritage and used 'widget cards' as a basis for discussion. The group identified prawns (in the context of Grimsby's fishing heritage), castles, and Lincoln cathedral as heritage. On a more personal level, participants identified themes around their own heritage. The group talked a lot about family history, the history of woodlands, heritage of football, the history of castles, a little about archaeology and what can be found below the ground, as well as the history of food and what can be grown in Lincolnshire.

BEM-ESTAR E HERAÇA Estamos olhando para a conexão entre patrimônio e bem-estar. Estamos usando os 5 caminhos para o bem-estar para explorar a conexão. Por favor, marque ✓a resposta com a qual você concorda. De qual maneira falar e compartilhar a sua herança com outras pessoas afetaria seu bem-estar? Eu já faço Não, eu não faria Não tenho Sim eu iria Você se conectaria mais com as pessoas ao seu redor? Você prestaria mais atenção nas coisas e refletiria sobre o que é importante para você? Você seria mais ativo? Você aprenderia mais ou redescobriria um antigo interesse? Você se voluntariaria e contribuiria mais para a comunidade?

WELLBEING AND HERITAGE

We are looking at the connection between heritage and wellbeing. We are using the 5 ways to wellbeing to explore the connection. Please tick \checkmark the answer you agree with.

In what way would talking and sharing your heritage with others impact on your wellbeing?

		No, I would not	I am not sure	Yes, I would	I already do	
	Would you connect more with people around you?					
ФФ	Would you take more notice on things and reflect on what is important to you?					
	Would you be more active?					
A	Would you learn more or rediscover an old interest?					
	Would you volunteer your time and contribute to the community more?					

Fig. 3: Postcard activities from Phase 2 of the project in both English (1a) and Portuguese (1b).

There was enthusiasm around recognising things of value locally, and the group was interested in finding out more — especially about archaeology. It was recorded that participants' understanding of heritage did change during the workshop. However, the toolkit was of extremely limited potential for this group, due to several concerns that would need to be addressed for it to be effective for future exploration.

Graffiti Workshop, Montana Shop, Nottingham

This workshop was attended by approximately 15 families, some of whom also attended the *Skate Nottingham* workshop (see below).

Given the significant overlap between the graffiti and skateboarding communities, the workshops were scheduled for the same day and were also located in the same Nottingham suburb (Sneinton) as a Street Art Festival, which drew in additional participants and enriched the activities of both workshops.

The graffiti workshop was facilitated by the Montana Shop in Sneinton Market. The shop hosted a small exhibition of 1980s spray cans and pictures, which prompted a talk about the importance of these objects of graffiti heritage. A masterclass was also delivered, teaching participants how to write graffiti on paper and contribute to a mural co-designed by the children attending the event.

Data were collected from 12 participants who completed consent forms, mostly by mothers of children participating in the activities. Three responses came from graffiti artists. Answers were similar across the group, emphasising the importance of heritage for the graffiti community in Nottingham. Key themes mentioned for graffiti heritage included art styles, 1970s and 1980s New York, skateboarding, music, and locations of heritage significance such as Montana Shop and Sneinton Market. Responses indicated that participants would either use the digital tool to recognise their heritage, or they would like to think about it further. Most responded that their idea of heritage had changed during the workshop.

Skate Nottingham Workshop, Nottingham

Many discussions in the workshop concerned Nottingham's rich skating heritage and the lack of recognition of this important part of the city's culture. The workshop also included a skate session, and a film screening of an iconic skate edit from a local skater and videographer (Figs. 1 and 2), which fuelled discussions about heritage and how it should be valued, with special attention to how it can be recorded.

Luke Groom (NTU, student) was pivotal in the design of the questionnaires for the skating community, since he was a member of this group and had worked previously with the workshop facilitator, Chris Lawton (Skate Nottingham). His insight aligns with the main understanding of heritage from this group: "One of the most essential ideas behind skateboarding is its ever-present transitory nature. To skate is to explore the city, find new spots, enjoy them as a community, and then move on. [Thinking] of skating heritage as a transitory notion. Spaces and places that pass into history should be valued as heritage and therefore protected; [...] since it will become the heritage for new generations."

Participants were enthusiastic about the digital tool and were pleased that such a tool existed to recognise different types of heritage outside the traditional. One key piece of feedback was that, in using the tool, many found it difficult to assign their heritage to the categories provided, and that skating did not fit comfortably in that iteration of the tool. The feedback showed that 20% had no intention of using the tool, but 66% stated that they would definitely use it in the future to record their heritage.

Hollygirt Primary School Y4 Workshop, Nottingham

The primary school pupils who participated in this workshop stated that they were very comfortable using the digital tool and that it was useful for information, but noted that they might need an adult's help. An important piece of feedback came from a student who had learning difficulties, who struggled to follow along with the website and did not understand it. Pupils generally agreed that they would use the tool to recognise something they value. Two barriers were identified in the use of the tool: difficulty finding it, and needing permission from an adult to use it. Pupils responded unanimously that they understood more about heritage after the workshop.

Angolan Community Group, Nottingham

Two sessions were delivered by *Angolan Women's Voice* in Nottingham on 21 and 23 July 2022. The first was incorporated into a recurring community event, which was attended by people from the Angolan community, Nottingham residents, and other community members. There were 20 participants at this event.

Participants were invited to wear traditional Angolan dresses; a presentation was given on Angolan heritage, and the digital tool was introduced to the group. Participants were asked to raise their hands if they would be interested in using the tool to recognise their heritage, and most responded in the affirmative. Participants were also invited to complete a questionnaire, and a lunch of Angolan food and music with Angolan dance took place afterwards.

Twelve participants consented to the inclusion of their questionnaire responses in the research. Participants understood heritage in different ways, including: "Heritage can be objects/ways of life that are passed down between generations. These things could be clothes, hairstyles, and mannerisms" and "An African nation that symbolises the happiness and wellbeing of its children, through brotherhood." Participants were invited to draw their heritage. These drawings included food, dancing; and the Angolan flag, animals, and other artefacts. With regards to Angolan heritage in Nottingham, participants emphasised the importance of Mojatu (the site of their community meetings) as a heritage location central to the community.

The first workshop was followed the next weekend by an event for Angolan children, attended by 18 children and their families. Five participants

completed the consent forms. Most participants were Portuguese, British, and/or Angolan, and they usually attended these events to learn Portuguese, learn about Angola, or simply be in touch with other members of the community. Children were invited to wear traditional Angolan clothes, and a presentation on Angolan heritage was delivered before they were asked to complete the questionnaires. Their definitions showed a good understanding of what heritage is: "something you care for: language, food"; and the majority felt they had a connection with Angolan heritage. Like the adults, the children also highlighted food, language, and hairstyles as Angolan heritage.

Most participants identified food as an essential element of Angolan heritage, which was supported by the lunch offered during the event. Other key elements of Angolan heritage were music, hairstyles, and family. Language was identified as a key element prior to the event, which was therefore made accessible to all participants in both English and Portuguese (as was the website).

Phase 2: Ownership

Of the groups that participated in Phase 1, two – Windrush generations and *Angolan Women's Voice* charity – were invited to take part in Phase 2 as a

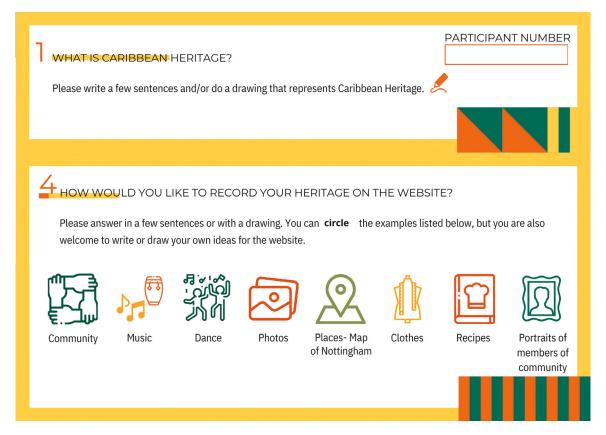


Fig. 3: Postcard activities from Phase 2 of the project in both English (1a) and Portuguese (1b).

means to further develop their agency and embrace the ownership of their diasporic intangible heritage. Academics and students from NTU supported the co-production of knowledge by collecting and recording their intangible heritage through a new website.⁷

These workshops allowed participants to design the delivery of a second workshop, to co-create the material to be included in the website, recognising the importance of recording their heritage, not only for their community in the diaspora, but also for others to learn about their identity and customs (Fig. 4). This project embraced an inclusive approach in order to enhance the sense of belonging and wellbeing; a recording of diasporic identities, to promote a pluralistic heritage that represents our multicultural society. We recognise the need to support more inclusive definitions that reflect "everyday heritage". This is embedded in diasporic cultural practices, such as food, dance, traditional dress, and language.

Angolan Women's Voice, Nottingham

Paula Pontes assisted in facilitating workshops through her connection with the Angolan Women's Voice charity, following on from Phase 1. Sentiments of trust and enthusiasm to collaborate were visible and palpable among the group. The community welcomed the project and were happy to participate. They understood the intentions and aims of the team and the project as a whole: connecting heritage, and its impact on wellbeing (sense of belonging). During the first workshop, aimed at planning what could be recorded through an online tool as Angolan heritage, the participants were asked to what extent the session impacted their wellbeing. Their responses were analysed using the Five Ways to Wellbeing10 toolkit (minus the "staying active" component). Of the 19 participants in the first workshop, 18 rated their participation in the project as having an impact of 3-4 (out of 5) for promoting connections, taking notice, learning, and giving to their community.

The final output of this co-created project was a website that captured the main elements that these communities identified at the core of their diasporic intangible heritage. For the Angolan community, this included fashion, food and cuisine, arts and crafts, music and dance, and the dissemination of individual stories that represented oral testimonies from the community.

Windrush Generations, Nottingham

A set of three previous workshops involving the Windrush community demonstrated a clear interest in discussing their diasporic identity, and how to address the Windrush scandal (and trauma) with celebration and dissemination of their heritage. These workshops were organised by the community leader Clive Foster, to explore and celebrate the history and culture of the Windrush era. Through this, we wanted to raise awareness of its importance to British society and to ensure that the stories of this time are never forgotten.

Participants claimed that "our heritage includes everything that we have inherited from the past. These can be physical (tangible) objects such as buildings or artefacts, to intangible objects such as traditions, customs, and dance." As per the Angolan women's group, similar ideas of heritage came to the fore: music, dance, food, community engagement, memories, etc. The oral testimonies dwell on these issues, and participants were happy to share these with a broader audience. The story of Louise, a member of the community, reflected on her personal journey, as well as the broader issues that encompass being part of a diasporic community. The website also records events held to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Windrush migration to the UK.¹¹

Conclusion

Providing the opportunity to work with minoritised communities is always meaningful: participants were grateful and excited to disseminate their heritage; academics and students, together with the community leaders, believe that this is a very important project and, as a result, have found a way to continue with the work beyond the timeframe and budget of the funded project. One legacy of this project is the completion of the website, which summarises the research gathered so far from these communities. Further contributions were produced by a group of students from Karnavati University, Gandhinagar, India, who completed a semester at Nottingham Trent University. One of the groups designed MascararE, a DIY mask-making kit inspired by Angolan masks that were traditionally made for rituals and to signify social status. The term combines the words "mascarar" ("mask" in Portuguese) and "rare", as the kit aims to give the Angolan community a unique identity of its own. The kit provides a unique interactive, hands-on experience and knowledge about the cultures and traditions of Angola. It is customisable to the level that users can create their own accessories and hairstyles.¹²

The students' feedback highlights the importance of working on authentic projects with members of the community: "This experience has reinforced the importance of user-centred design and the value of involving diverse voices in the decision-making process." For the academics at *NTU*, this project highlights the importance of working on live research projects¹³ – especially those with and for communities – using the PAR methodology. The approach was recognised as an example of good practice by the 2024 *Open Research Awards* at *Nottingham Trent University*.¹⁴

Offering a budget to communities made the work much more meaningful and enabled communities to be in control of the delivery of their workshops through their nominated facilitator. This process helped to navigate potential community sensitivities that the project delivery team might not have understood. The result was a more comfortable environment for community participation during the workshops and a sense of ownership of the results and outputs.

Participatory research such as in this project is a time-consuming process, but creates a democratic environment, incredibly meaningful results, and more in-depth engagement. Participants feel they can contribute to the project on an equal basis rather than the traditional hierarchy that places researchers above research subjects. However, it may also be accompanied by certain ethical issues. For

example, participants were invited to participate in the workshops, but not all of them wished to sign the consent forms, thereby making a significant part of the data inadmissible. Consent was given verbally in all workshops, but not formally in every instance. What can be reported is that all participants were excited to be involved in the projects, for the acknowledgement of their community heritage to be further shared and celebrated. This will eventually lead to more communities using the toolkit designed in Phase 1, to recognise and share their heritage.

Overall, participants agreed that there is a very close connection between heritage and wellbeing, and that a concise template for a two-phase workshop structure (firstly for planning; secondly for enacting, recording, and disseminating heritage) could be shared with the *UK National Health Service* (NHS) as a model of social prescribing.

Our main objectives recognised the significance of working with minoritised communities to explore a common understanding of the value of the arts and humanities, which led, in turn, to more inclusive forms of engagement with culture and heritage. We believe that sharing the ownership of the design and delivery of the workshops supported the promotion of cultural pride and identity (bottom-up approach), thereby resulting in better wellbeing outcomes. Finally, we would like to encourage other researchers and community leaders to embrace similar approaches to outreach and co-production of initiatives that celebrate heritage diversity.

Figures

- 1 Skate Nottingham.
- 2 Skate Nottingham.
- 3 Nottingham Trent University.
- 4 Nottingham Trent University.

Endnotes

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