

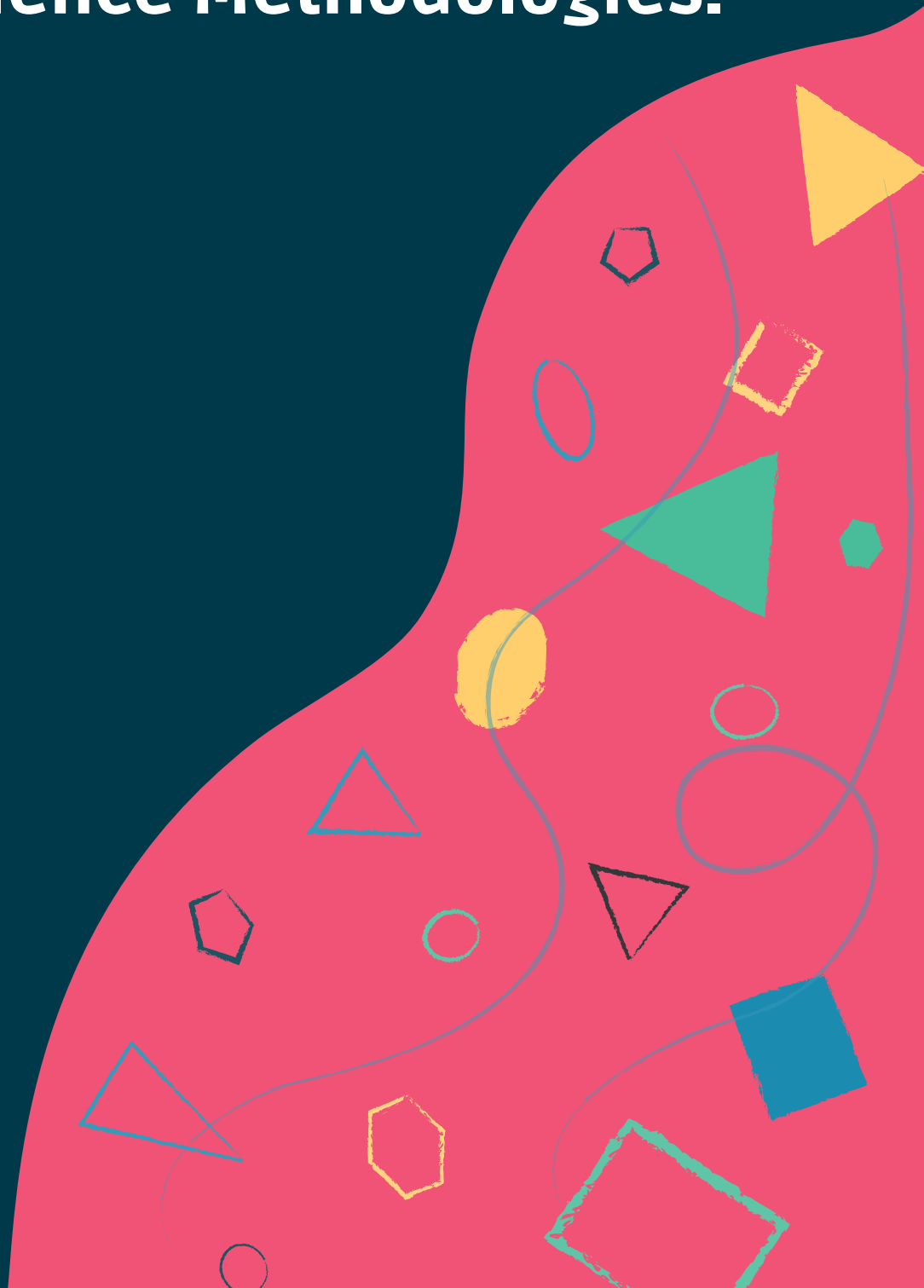
# Aspect

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The University of Manchester

## Methods for Change: Showcasing Innovative Social Science Methodologies.

Final Report  
2020 – 2021



# Authors and Acknowledgements

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**Disclaimer:** The findings in this report do not express the opinions of the businesses, charities and organisations we have spoken with.

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# 1. Executive Summary

Methods for Change is an Aspect (a Social Sciences Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation) funded project, supported by Research England, UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) which took place over the course of 2020–21. The Methods for Change team comprises project leads Dr Alison L. Browne and Dr Sarah Marie Hall with Research Associates Dr Laura Pottinger (co-investigator), Dr Amy Barron, Dr Ulrike Ehgartner, Dr Jonathan Ritson, and Sawyer Phinney; alongside 37 academic contributors from nine higher education institutions within the Aspect network.

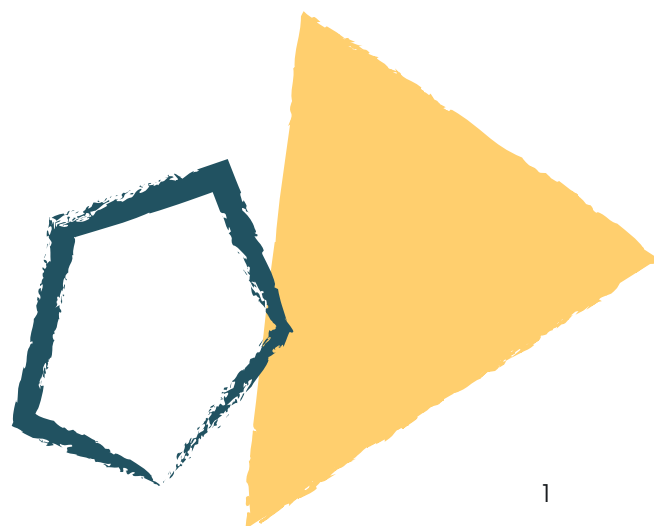
The Methods for Change project seeks to highlight the value of social science methodologies to the wider world. It aims to amplify methodologies developed by social scientists researching pressing societal issues, and to make a case for their wider application beyond academia. The project has collated innovative and transformative social science methods and demonstrated how they could be used to create change in diverse, non-academic contexts.

Society is facing major environmental and social challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, economic and social care crises in the UK and globally. Given these complex and interconnected problems, there has never been a more opportune moment to demonstrate the significant ways that social scientific methods and methodologies can help us to understand, and provide pathways towards, more positive social and environmental change.

The Methods for Change research team have worked closely with academic contributors who utilise innovative methods in their research with businesses, third sector organisations, governments, and other non-academic groups and individuals. These conversations and collaborations have helped us to identify pathways for expanding and applying social science methodological expertise across different sectors beyond academia.

Together, we have experimented with jargon-free written and audio-visual how-to guides to communicate the potential of social science methodologies to a range of non-academic audiences. To apply, represent, and communicate their methods our academic contributors have worked with creatives and designers to develop creative materials such as videos, comics and exhibitions. The how-to guides and creative outputs produced as part of the Methods for Change project demonstrate and showcase the potential for social science methodologies to lead to transformative change within non-academic sectors in a range of areas. These include, but are not limited to: household consumption practices, infrastructures, waste, health and wellbeing, food, cities and sustainable cities, economic change, gender, age, race and ethnicity.

Across 2020–21 we enacted a range of training events for postgraduate (PGR) and early career (ECR) researchers, academics, and other professional stakeholders (see Appendix and Section 3). We have initiated a range of professional dialogues with people across governmental, charity and business sectors in the UK about how social science methodologies are currently used within their organisations, and what barriers and opportunities exist for their further uptake within these institutional settings. We also developed a Rapid Evidence Review to explore how social science methods (particularly those from interpretive, creative and qualitative traditions) are used across various sectors, and how social science methods are conceptualised within framings of research ‘transformation, commercialisation and entrepreneurialism’ (key themes of the Aspect Network).



# Our headline findings were:

- **There is great potential for social science methods and methodologies to be much more widely understood and used to create transformative change.**

There is demand for specific methodological skills offered by social scientists as a way to coproduce policy-relevant and policy-ready research-with-impact. Science commercialisation can also be reframed to include social science concepts and methods as a way of deepening company/industry service design. For example, there are an increasing number of Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) being led by social science teams.

While researchers often want their work to influence large scale changes (regulation, policy), social science methods matter for other forms of transformative change: changing policy, institutional and business processes; the relationships developed between researcher and participants; changes to everyday practices; or enabling people and communities to get their voices heard by the public or policy makers about things that matter to them.

- **Social scientists need to value and communicate the role of methods themselves in creating change across the entire process of research.**

Social scientists are often trained to talk about research results, and common understandings of research impact tend to locate change at the point when published research results are taken up and used outside academia. The Methods for Change project has turned this understanding on its head, to place the emphasis on method. There is increasing recognition across research networks that how social scientists do research matters in creating societal change. This project has demonstrated the importance communicating 'where, how and when' social change takes place within the wide research process itself.

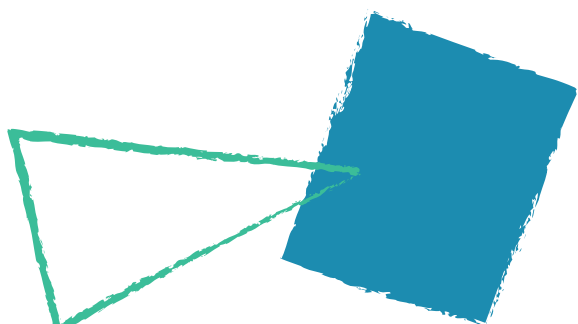
- **Accessible methods guides, creative outputs and creative research techniques are useful for understanding and sharing transformative methods.**

How-to guides provide additional support and insight for researchers and teams working in a variety of ways, including in research projects, policy research and design, programme monitoring and evaluation, staff training, and in teaching research design and methodology. How-to guides and creative outputs also operate as teaching resources. This is particularly significant as students are the future workers and leaders within a range of sectors. These guides will increasingly be used across the Aspect network to train socially responsible graduates to have a deep awareness of how social science research methods may be used and what value different methods hold in different non-academic settings. Methods, metaphors, objects and how-to instructions are useful for animating and enlivening methods discussions, and can extend researchers' own understanding and appreciation of the approaches they use.

- **Building long-term supportive relationships between academics and social scientists working across sectors is critical for embedding transformative methods.**

Connecting and communicating with social scientists and methods networks outside academia is essential as this is where discussions emerge, and decisions are made, about the importance, and legitimacy, of social science methods in understanding policy problems and creating policy change. There are a range of strategies for developing this impact at various career stages.

Our Rapid Evidence Review revealed that discussions around the transformative potentials of social science methods are predominantly limited to academia. This highlights scope for government, industry and civil society organisations to more closely engage with the 'transformative potential' of methods, rather than using them primarily as 'tools' with which to collect data. Methods for Change has started to develop these conversations across institutional contexts.



## 2. About the Project

Methods for Change ran between April 2020 and July 2021, and can be divided into four phases.

### Phase 1, April 2020 – August 2020: Establishing the team, mapping methods and designing the research process

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This initial phase involved recruiting and establishing the Methods for Change research team, made up of two project leads (Alison Browne and Sarah Marie Hall) and three Research Associates (Laura Pottinger – Co-I, Amy Barron and Ulrike Ehgartner) and our initial collaborators at Cardiff, Glasgow, Sheffield and Sussex. A significant part of our early work was recalibrating planned project activities for online research and collaboration, given restrictions on face to face working due to COVID-19.

In June 2020, the team organised a project workshop with 14 academics from a range of Aspect institutions (Manchester, Cardiff, Sheffield, Sussex, Bristol, Glasgow and Oxford), kicking off the Methods for Change contributor network. Collaborating academics were invited to introduce themselves and their methods, and to contribute ideas for the development of a project framework.

Together, we designed a research process for data collection and translation of materials that aimed to reflect the ethos, creativity and collaboration of approaches we would be communicating.

This first phase of the project also involved extensive mapping of skills and activities across the institutions to identify individuals working with a range of different disciplines, approaches and methods. We also aimed to build a diverse set of contributors in terms of career stage, gender and race. Further contributors were identified within the Aspect network, extending formal collaboration to the Universities of Oxford, Bristol, York, and LSE (London School of Economics).

In August 2020, with the core Methods for Change Team in post, we wrote a [blog](#)<sup>1</sup> introducing the project.

### Phase 2, September 2020 – January 2021: Gathering data, developing materials and sharing early findings

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In Phase 2 of the project, we continued developing tools for supporting a research team during a pandemic. This included holding weekly writing groups to progress team working, casual cups of tea, and setting up a reading group. Starting in September 2020, each of the Methods for Change Research Associates wrote a blog to introduce their own methodological approaches, with [Amy Barron](#)<sup>2</sup> discussing the arts-based, ethnographic methods that she draws upon, [Laura Pottinger](#)<sup>3</sup> highlighting the ethnographic, participatory and ‘gentle’ methodologies used in her work and [Ulrike Ehgartner](#)<sup>4</sup> writing about her research using discourse analytical methodologies.

In October 2020, Pottinger, Barron and Ehgartner began interviewing initial contributors. The aim was to gather rich data on contributors’ research methods and the transformative potential of each approach, and to translate this into accessible how-to guides written collaboratively with contributors. Interviews usually lasted around one hour, took place online and were audio recorded, and where possible a second member of the team joined to take notes. During interviews, participants were asked a range of questions to elicit key details about their methodological approaches, changes observed as a result of their work and ideas about where their methods could be used in future. Aiming to reflect the creativity of the methods we were researching, our interview schedule also included more creative elicitations, specifically asking participants to talk about their method through an object and to think about methods as animals.

1 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-showcasing-innovative-social-sciences-methodologies/>

2 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-team-profile-amy-barron/>

3 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-team-profile-laura-pottinger/>

4 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-team-profile-ulrike-ehgartner/>

After carrying out the first round of interviews, we developed the how-to guide format, with each guide containing details on:

- How does this method create or contribute to change?
- What ideas or concepts influence this method?
- Why might I want to use this method?
- A step-by-step guide to using this method
- Examples of this method in social science research
- Where else could this method be used?
- Top tips
- Further reading

Each of the thirty guides was first drafted by Pottinger, Barron and Ehgartner drawing on the interview data, with input from contributors to complete the guide in an iterative, co-authorship and editorial process. Browne, Hall and Ritson assisted as editors across the how-to guide collection.

Drawing on our early interviews, two 'Method in the Spotlight' blogs were published, written by project contributors: Jen Owen (Cardiff University) discussed [Object-oriented Interviews](#)<sup>5</sup> and Alison Browne (The University of Manchester) introduced the [Change Points toolkit](#)<sup>6</sup> developed with colleagues across Universities of Manchester, Bristol and Sheffield.

Alongside the methods interviews with the first cohort, we also expanded the network of contributors, broadening the variety of disciplines and methods covered by the guides across a wider range of Aspect institutions (see final list of contributors in Appendix 1).

All contributors were also asked to produce a 'creative output'. Released alongside the how-to guides, these aim to provide a flavour of each method in a thought-provoking way. Contributors were given a budget to explore a creative idea alongside an artist, creative, or designer of their choice. For many contributors this was an opportunity to identify an element of their method to explore in more detail, and to think about the different audiences that may be reached through a creative piece. As a team, we worked to establish connections with a network of artists working across different mediums including illustration, film making and visual anthropology, animation, printmaking and more (see final list in Appendix 1). We also organised a series of informal, online, creative drop-in sessions for academic contributors to discuss their ideas with one another and the Methods for Change team.

Two key achievements within this phase were related to training (see details in Appendix), with the Methods for Change Team contributing to: 1) the ESRC Festival of Social Science and 2) a training session aimed at Early Career Researchers through the University of Manchester Humanities New Academics Programme (HNAP).

The team applied for and secured additional funding from the ESRC to host an event at the ESRC Festival of Social Science. Across 10th – 12th November 2020 the Methods for Change team ran a series of online workshops focusing on the role of social science methods in tackling social and environmental challenges and creating positive change in diverse social contexts. Free to attend, the three intimate and interactive sessions focused on visual, participatory and policy-led methods, each cultivating dialogue between academics as well as policy makers, government advisors, businesses, charities and NGOs including Natural England, WWF UK and Northumbrian Water. It was attended by approximately 48 attendees. The events featured ten speakers who are Methods for Change contributing academics including Cheryl McGeachan (University of Glasgow), Jennifer Owen (Kings College London), Kersty Hobson (Cardiff University), Jenny Pickerill (The University of Sheffield), Megan Blake (The University of Sheffield) and Ralitsa Hiteva (Sussex University). A visual record of the sessions was created by More Than Minutes. Our [reflections](#)<sup>7</sup> and visual minutes from the event can be found in this blog.

Our HNAP session, entitled 'Research Methods for Social Change: Sharing Knowledge, Engaging Stakeholders', was delivered on 16th November by the full project team, and attended by 21 academics from across the faculty of Humanities. The session offered opportunities for colleagues to discuss the different creative ways they could communicate their research, in terms of outputs, audiences and legacies. We also introduced our project's creative methodological and engagement techniques, asking participants: *If your method/approach to research was an animal, what animal would it be?* We wrote about the training in a [blog](#)<sup>8</sup>, featuring animal illustrations by Jack Brougham, and reflections from Stephanie Sodero, Lecturer in Responses to Climate Crises at the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute, University of Manchester, and Robert Meckin, Presidential Fellow in Sociology at the University of Manchester, who attended the session. We have been invited to deliver the same session in the HNAP programme for the 21/22 academic year.

5 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/method-in-the-spotlight-object-orientated-interviews/>

6 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/method-in-the-spotlight-change-points/>

7 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-at-the-esrc-festival-of-social-science/>

8 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/if-your-research-method-were-an-animal-what-would-it-be/>



### Phase 3, February 2021 - May 2021: Showcasing the project, engaging with policymakers

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In Phase 3 of the project we continued to expand the network of collaborators to a total of 37 academics from across the growing Aspect membership, bringing us to 30 method contributions, all co-authored with members of the Methods for Change team. The team completed the remaining interviews and finalised the how-to guides in collaboration with contributors. Together we continued to develop tools for career development and to support of team members, maintaining weekly writing groups to progress key tasks and begin developing academic outputs.

In March, we began releasing the how-to guides and creative outputs via Aspect's website where the [full collection](#)<sup>9</sup> can now be viewed. At the start of April, the team wrote a [blog](#)<sup>10</sup> reflecting on key lessons and challenges faced in the project so far, providing an insight into the outputs that had been launched to-date, and sharing details of the Final Methods for Change showcase event.

We also held a series of twelve dedicated discussions with 15 representatives from business, industry, policy (government departments and agencies) and the third and public sectors. In these 'policy chats' we sought to: understand how different organisations currently use social science methods; the challenges to using these methods and the findings from social science research more broadly; potential training needs and other opportunities for the use of social science methods within various sectors; and to deepen an understanding of the transformative potential of social sciences methods outside of academia. Simultaneously we begun a Rapid Evidence Review (led by Sawyer Phinney) to explore how social science methods are conceptualised, and mobilised, within approaches to academic research 'commercialisation, transformation and entrepreneurship'. Our discussions with these professionals has helped us to further understand the significance of our project and approach in the research and research commercialisation landscape in the UK and globally, to scope out the development of future follow-on work, and to shape a co-authored commentary piece currently being written by the team.

On 12th May 2021, The Methods for Change Showcase [Event](#)<sup>11</sup> brought together academic contributors from the Methods for Change project with professionals from policy, charity, business, and creative sectors. Panellists representing Groundwork, The Greater Manchester Combined Authority, National Parks and Wildlife Service Australia, Natural England, The Women's Budget Group and the Department for Work and Pensions as well as 12 Aspect academics and three artists involved in developing the creative outputs, led discussion in a series of interactive sessions. Themed around 'Transforming Communities', 'Environmental Change', 'Socio-economic Inequalities' and 'Creative Outputs Exchange', each panel, chaired by Amy Barron, Alison Browne, Sarah Marie Hall, and Ulrike Ehgartner, aimed to unpick the importance and opportunities for social science methods to create change in a variety of different ways. As well as the Methods for Change Team and presenters, each session had approximately 25 – 35 participants; some of whom were involved with multiple sessions across the day. Participants were a mixture of academic (from PGR through to Professorial level), government and business representatives.

The day began with the 'Creative Methods Zoo', chaired by Laura Pottinger and co-hosted by Jennie Middleton (University of Oxford), Sawyer Phinney, Penny Tinkler and Stephanie Sodero (The University of Manchester). In this training and networking event, Early Career Researchers were invited to think creatively about the methods used in their research in response to the question: If your research method were an animal, what would it be? Ten participants met contributing academics from the Methods for Change project and shared their 'method animals' in small group discussions. The animals were then illustrated by Jack Brougham (Figure 1). Session participants and postgraduate researchers [Heather Miles](#)<sup>12</sup> (The University of Manchester) and [Lauren White](#)<sup>13</sup> (University of Sheffield) each wrote a blog reflecting on what they had learnt about their methods through this technique.

9 <https://aspect.ac.uk/about/aspect-funded-projects/methods-for-change/>

10 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-project-update-march-2021/>

11 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/reflecting-on-the-methods-for-change-showcase-event/>

12 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-mapping-as-octopus/>

13 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/bumble-bees-and-creativities-methodological-musings-on-the-methods-for-change-showcase-event/>





**Figure 1: Creative Methods Zoo ECR Training/Networking 12th May 2020. If your research method were an animal, what would it be? (Illustration by Jack Brougham).**

The event also featured a [Postgraduate Methods Gallery](#)<sup>14</sup>, displaying six posters created by PGRs from Aspect institutions about a fascinating range of social science methods and topics. Each of the six poster gallery contributors were offered further training and development (supported by

Laura Pottinger) and given the opportunity to work with one of the Methods for Change contributing artists, India Joseph, Samuel De Tomasi and Alastair Lomas to develop succinct methodological statements and assemble a creative output to communicate their work beyond academia.

## Phase 4, end May 2021 - July 2021: Consolidating Methods for Change

Phase 4 centred on consolidating key tasks and public facing outputs, and early evaluation of the project. In addition to finalising and releasing the remaining how-to guides and creative outputs, efforts continued to focus on maintaining a team during in a pandemic through weekly writing groups feeding into a series of academic outputs.

Our internal project discussions and wider engagements increasingly turned to the contribution of the project within the Aspect Network, and the uniqueness of this project in a national and international research landscape. These ideas, conceptualisations and reflections have since been drafted into two journal articles (to be submitted for review autumn 2021). This includes an academic

article co-authored by the team entitled '*Talking methods, talking about methods*', looking at the creative talking techniques used in our interviews with academic researchers. Research Associates Amy Barron and Laura Pottinger presented a draft of this paper at an international conference: Spaces of Possibility: Communities and Places in Times of Social and Environmental Uncertainty Confex, Brussels, on 8<sup>th</sup> June. We also combined our insights from the policy chats and Rapid Evidence Review into a commentary piece to position the project within the wider research policy landscape, which we will submit for review in autumn 2021.

<sup>14</sup> <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-poster-gallery/>

A [blog](#)<sup>15</sup> co-authored by the six PGR poster gallery contributors reflects on their experiences of working with Methods for Change artists to develop the creative communication of methods.

The Methods for Change Team also contributed to the [Aspect Final Event \(Aspect21\)](#)<sup>16</sup> on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> June. The team (led by Ali) co-hosted an innovative and fun session with [DNAYS \(Do Not Adjust Your Stage\)](#)<sup>17</sup> – bringing together insights from the Methods for Change project with an improv comedy group to think together about how improv and comedy might help social scientists to improve their listening, creativity, and communication skills (with 10 participants).

Project team members Amy Barron and Sarah Marie Hall are leading two linked events as part of the NCRM (National Centre for Research Methods) Methods Festival in October 2021, on the topic of Creative Approaches to Researching Memory. This includes an introductory training session delivered by Amy, Sarah and Methods for Change collaborator Jen Owen (Kings College, London), and an expert panel including Amy, Jen, Laura Fenton (The University of Manchester, and also a project collaborator)

and Melanie Lovatt (Stirling University), chaired by Sarah.

In July 2020 we also began the first phases of a summative and impact evaluation to understand how the project has been used and received by various audiences. In July 2021, we hosted a final Methods for Change academic contributor feedback session, and mobilised a formal evaluation and impact survey to academic contributors, creatives and artists involved in the project, and wider project participants (including people who have attended our events). The first stage of formal impact monitoring and evaluation of the Methods for Change project will be reported on in the final quarter of 2021.

We have sought and received a range of feedback and (formative, process) evaluative insights from project participants (contributors, stakeholders) through the course of the project. Scoping and writing the two academic papers has also enabled us to reflect on the contribution and impact of the project to academic and non-academic sectors. To give voice to participants, early evaluative insights are woven as quotes where relevant into section 3.

## 3. Findings

### General Reflections and Insights

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An important contribution of the Methods for Change project has been clarifying the relationship between methodologies and social change. Rather than concentrating on research results, this project understands social change to occur throughout the whole research process, with a focus on the role of methodologies and methods in enacting various types of change. Insights gained from this perspective could improve the potential of research to create social change in the future.

Our academic contributors and the wider network of professionals interested in this project recognise that it is this distinction that makes Methods for Change unique. The project has spotlighted social science research methodologies (the overall strategies and principles guiding research design) and specific methods. Within Methods for Change we are not

only interested in communicating or disseminating findings of social science research to influence different sectoral or policy debates. We are driven by an understanding that to create transformative change from the social sciences, our methodologies and methods need to be much more widely understood and used. Within the project we have demonstrated how methodology and methods create change, and invoked deep reflections about where and *how* social science methods may be usefully applied in the future.

There are three ways this project has influenced these dynamics:

- 1 The how-to guides and other project materials are useful tools for invoking new ways of thinking about collaborative and co-produced research across academic and other professional communities.

<sup>15</sup> <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-creative-collaborations-for-sharing-postgraduate-research/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://aspect.ac.uk/aspect-festival21/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://dnays.com/>

**II** The materials produced in the project can be used by multi-sectoral stakeholders who already engage with social science methods. We anticipate that they will be used to communicate the legitimacy of, and transformative potentials held within, social science methods within a variety of professional spheres. Doing so will enable these colleagues to increase the visibility and legitimacy of the social science methods they are using, deepen the training around social science methods within these institutional contexts, and potentially experiment with a more expansive set of approaches.

**III** For professionals who currently do not engage with social science research and methods, the materials and conversations from Methods for Change help to generate ideas and insights about where and how to embed these new approaches within their own toolbox of professional processes, methods and practices.

Most academics within our Methods for Change network are already working with partners outside higher education, with their research influencing various societal problems and debates in deep and meaningful ways. Across these sectors – environment, community, social policy and more – there is a strong recognition of the importance of social science theory and conceptual approaches in helping to reframe problems and questions. Common understandings of research impact tend to locate change at the point when published research results are taken up and used outside academia. The Methods for Change project has turned this understanding on its head.

There is also a recognition within these networks that how social scientists *do* research matters: for getting at nuance and detail, for understanding social difference or inequalities, for invoking different understandings of policy and sectoral ‘problems’. There is a recognition that while social science methods such as the survey/questionnaire, the semi-structured interview, and focus groups have their place, that more creative, playful, or design focused approaches may open up different ways of understanding societal problems, and can shed new light on the pathways needed to create transformative change.

It has been evident in this first phase of the Methods for Change project that there is high demand from academics and non-academic sectors to communicate across

higher education and other sectorial boundaries the importance of social science methods in creating transformative change. Within the project we have found there is substantial appetite for deep and sustained engagement to bring insights about social science methods to bear on the methods, practices and processes of non-higher education sectors. This has been seen in the levels of engagement at events, our policy and professional interviews, and examples of emerging projects and consultancies (Appendix 2).

Transformative change (or impact) from research is often understood as change at a very large scale. However, our project highlights that transformative change is also about changing policy and business processes themselves (e.g. by influencing the social science methods taken up in an institutional context), the relationships developed between researcher and participants (e.g. capacity building in developing research skills and capabilities of participants and communities), mundane and everyday changes (e.g. creating spaces for connection, play and hope), or offering participants a way to get their voices heard by the public or policy makers about things that matter to them (e.g. by amplifying participants’ engagements with, and needs for change within social, material, environmental and political worlds). There is recognition across academic and non-academic communities that methods often matter for mobilising these types of change.

However, communicating social science research methodologies is complex. We are often trained as social scientists to talk about our research results. Methods and methodology are primarily considered in relation to the specific phenomena that researchers are interested in studying, and it can be difficult to abstract methods from the contexts in which they are used. Within Methods for Change we have been interested in disentangling method or methodology (the way data is collected, analysed, reported) from wider research discussions and to broaden understandings of where in the research process social change can be envisioned or enacted. We have been thinking with our academic colleagues about how we communicate ‘where, how and when’ social change takes place within the wider research process itself, and we have explored how we can take insights drawn from across the whole research process into other settings, topics, and societal challenges.





### A Researching Methods

Our focus on *methods* for change – as opposed to a particular theoretical approach, central issue or disciplinary perspective – has led to a set of unique discussions and original findings. Starting with method and placing this at the forefront of conversations about transformational research is a process we also mirrored in our own techniques for carrying out research in this project.

Knowing that, on the one hand, discussing method can be considered sometimes uninspiring, and on the other, that discussing transformational change can feel abstract, we developed a series of creative talking techniques which shaped the process of data gathering in the project. In our online interviews with social scientists from a diverse range of disciplines three such techniques were used,

i) 'how-to' instructions; ii) object interviewing; and iii) methods as animals. Each of these techniques aimed to unearth often overlooked processes and decisions involved in methodologies for change.

An important reflection is that starting with method was considered by participants to be an innovative and refreshing approach. It was a technique for unveiling research motivations that most of the experienced researchers we interviewed had not before encountered. In many ways, this was a learning experience for all involved; it required participants to re-encounter their own epistemological positions on how knowledge, in this case transformational research methods, is developed. The research also inspired academics to new understandings of their own research processes through engagement as contributors with the various activities. One of our collaborators, Nik Brown (University of York) noted:

*“It was unexpectedly moving seeing the material form of the participants experiences (water colour drawings on top of maps and architectural plans). It made me much warmer to the creative and other methods to use beyond those I have been engaging with in my research. Methods for Change is a brilliant showcase of all the possibilities of methods and using them in a much more creative and compelling way than we had ever done.”*

Furthermore, the interviews were a learning space in which participants talked with and about method alongside a member the research team, taking them through the various decision-making practices and experiences that shaped their choice of method. One contributor, Megan Blake (University of Sheffield) indicated:

*“This has been a really interesting process. It gave me time to think about my research in a really different way and I found that very rewarding. I tend to think about my research as a method, but not really the methods I used to develop the method if that makes sense.”*

Interviews were framed by the research team as a collaborative process of talking together and working across multiple iterations on the co-authored how-to guide. The creative talking techniques played an important role in shaping the interviews as an open, constructive and convivial space for talking and learning about method. In addition to describing the how-to process of their method, participants were asked in advance to choose an object around which they could talk about their method. This encouraged playful, metaphorical and material reflections, while foregrounding method, rather than research problems or findings. Participants were also asked, ‘if your method were an animal, what would it be?’, which extended metaphorical thinking and worked to animate and enliven the methods under discussion, extending participants’ own understanding and appreciation of the approaches they use.

Our training sessions (see above and Appendix 2 for full list) have built on this idea of the interview as learning space, and talking with method as a technique, by applying creative talking techniques as interactive teaching tools for supporting other Early Career Researchers to develop the transformative potential of their research. For example, the H NAP session delivered by the team was rated good or excellent by 74% of training participants, with 80% rating the session as good or excellent in its engagement. Qualitative comments confirmed these findings about the interviewing method as a useful, interactive technique for thinking with method, as well as for thinking more deeply about how knowledge is constructed. Comments included:

*“great to exchange ideas with other researchers [and] hear how other researchers conceptualise their methods, and therefore think about reality and what they investigate’.”*

*“focussing on critical/creative thinking about research methods and innovative communication methods [...] was very interesting though as it helped me to think about the many possibilities.”*

*“What I enjoyed most was [...] the unfolding realisation of how, as they explained how their animal and method were linked, other researchers understood their methods and how they fitted within their wider research worlds.”*

Similar reflections came from participants of the Creative Methods Zoo, held as part of the Methods for Change Showcase Event in May 2020.

In two published guest blogs by [Lauren White](#)<sup>18</sup> and [Heather Miles](#)<sup>19</sup>, attendees have reflected on the value of the activities developed in this session, particularly using creative techniques to talk about methods:

*“Seeing and considering our research methods as an animal in the Creative Methods Zoo session further required us to consider broader orientations of what grounds our research and how our research methods allow us to connect the dots. [...] such metaphorical work – seeing our research through and with an animal in mind – offers an analytical process in positioning research and re-centring what matters in our research cultures and environments.” –Lauren White*

*“conceptualising research methods in terms of animal personalities led to considerations of ethics. How might a research method look and feel to research participants? Dogs and cats, for example, particularly emphasised sensitivity in research and building rapport. In addition, what sort of demands might a method place on participants? And how might a method care for the communities involved? We all felt that the activity somehow brought our research methods to life.” –Heather Miles*

Other participants at the session have described how the technique ‘animated’ and ‘enlivened’ the way they thought about their research method, and ultimately how to communicate this with others. The section below now turns to this topic of communicating research methods.

## **B Communicating Research Methods**

For the transformative potential of social science methods to be realised within non-academic policy, third sector, and business spaces, there is a need to communicate not only concepts and empirical findings arising from research, but also the role of social science methods in achieving such impacts. Our research with academics has highlighted the importance of communicating clearly why methods matter in creating change to the global challenges that pique our interest. This entails sharing the potentials and practicalities of carrying out social science methods with diverse audiences, in a variety of creative ways. It also means stating more clearly how methods in themselves can create or contribute to change.

The Methods for Change project approached these challenges in several ways. As discussed in the previous section, across the project a network of academics collaborated with Research Associates to produce 30 written how-to guides, each focusing on an innovative, creative, transformative social science method. The individual guides are hosted on [Aspect’s website](#)<sup>20</sup> and each has been launched via social media between March and July 2021.

All the guides are written in an accessible, jargon-free style, and are designed in a bold, colourful format to be downloaded or read online. Each provides a bite-sized overview of a method used in the social sciences, case study examples from real-world research, and ideas for how these methods could be used in future. The guides aim to equip the reader with an understanding of how to use the method in practice, in a range of settings. Step-by-step guidelines are included to give a sense of the types of practical and ethical considerations as well as activities and equipment to consider when using each approach. These guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive, but instead invite the reader to think about how the method could be reinterpreted in different contexts. Participants have commented:

*“It has been so helpful having the support from the Methods for Change team to develop my ideas. You have helped and pushed me to work out what my method is and now I know that it is something worth celebrating, knowing that my method has its own purpose and its own value.”*  
–Jen Owen, project feedback session 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021

<sup>18</sup> <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/bumble-bees-and-creativities-methodological-musings-on-the-methods-for-change-showcase-event/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-mapping-as-octopus/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://aspect.ac.uk/about/aspect-funded-projects/methods-for-change/>



Recognising that change does not always have to be dramatic or large-scale to make a difference to peoples' lived experience, the how-to guides focus on a range of methods that invoke change at a variety of scales – from large-scale environmental, social or economic changes through to organisational, community and personal change. The guides aim to introduce readers to new and exciting methodologies for researching social, environmental and political change, and to inspire readers to innovate with these methodologies themselves (See Appendix 3 for the full list with links to the accompanying creative outputs). We are also in the process of collating the full 30 guides in an online ebook structure (for a copy of *Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21<sup>st</sup> century problems* click [here](#)<sup>21</sup>).

Early feedback from contributors indicates that the guides have already been useful in introducing the fundamentals of a range of different methodological approaches in research methods training for students. Many of the resources have already been shared with Undergraduate Taught (UGT) and Masters/ Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students within the programmes of various Aspect institutions. We anticipate that these guides will be useful to researchers and teams working in a variety of ways, including in research projects, policy research and design, programme monitoring and evaluation, staff training, and in teaching research design and methodology at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The identification of these guides and creative outputs as potential teaching resources is particularly significant if we see students within higher education sectors as the future workers and leaders within a range of sectors. These guides have been identified as useful in training socially responsible graduates to have a deep awareness of how social science research methods may be used, their potential to create and contribute to change, and the value they hold in different non-academic settings. Participants have commented:

*“I’ve shared my guide and creative output with my project partners [Care and Repair Wales] as well as in a seminar at Kings College London on creative methods where I spoke about how creative methods can be used by non-governmental organisations and health care professionals. The guide really helped to explain that final step – what is the value of this method to non-academics, and that has been really useful.”* –Jen Owen, project feedback session 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021

*“I am planning to use the methods for change resources in my teaching, particularly for undergraduate sustainability module where students come from different disciplines. The guides would be useful to introduce students from natural science disciplines to social science methods.”*

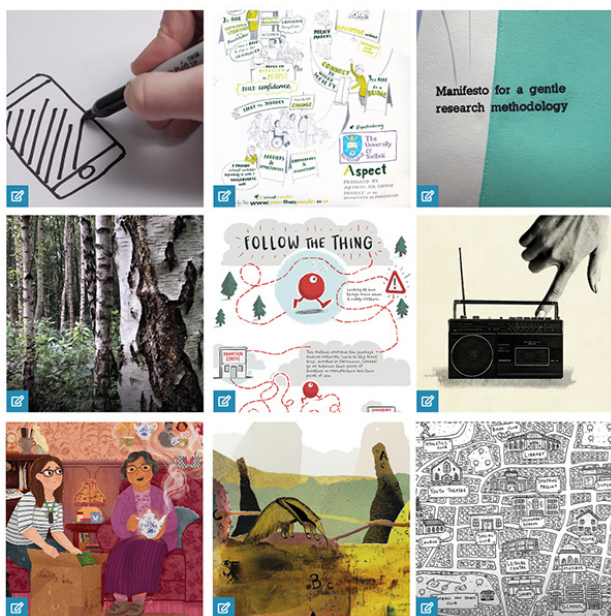
–Divya Sharma, project feedback session 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021



**Figure 3: How-to guide icon – Walk-along Interviews. (Illustration: Mandy Tootill)**

To complement the how-to guides, we have worked closely with our collaborators and a network of designers and artists to develop creative outputs to accompany each guide to communicate methods in thought provoking, visually captivating ways (see Figure 3, Appendix 1, and refer to the Aspect website for the full list of authors and illustrators). This includes hand-printed pamphlets, animations, short films, illustrated stories, comics, posters and interactive webpages. Each of these creative pieces aims to give a flavour of the method profiled in the how-to guide, communicated in a fun, engaging format.

21 [https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/methods-for-change\(524678f7-edb0-4699-9ff4-756da619b63b\).html](https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/methods-for-change(524678f7-edb0-4699-9ff4-756da619b63b).html)



**Figure 4: A snapshot of creative outputs from the Methods for Change project. (Various Artists)**

For many contributors, this aspect of the project provided a chance to think about their methods in creative and novel ways in conversation with professional designers and artists, and to reflect on potential new audiences to engage. In some cases, our academics used this opportunity to work with a designer or artist with whom they had previously collaborated, and so the project enabled them to strengthen these relationships. For others, Methods for Change provided an opportunity to seek out new creative collaborations, to develop their own skills of translation, and to widen understandings of the possibilities for creative communication of research. Participants commented:

*“It was fantastic to be able to work with an artist. Through that collaboration, I didn’t necessarily get what I thought I wanted, but I certainly got what I needed. I am currently writing a report for DEFRA using this output and have also shared it in presentations with Natural England and the Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education; and in a training session for Shelter UK staff looking to engage with people with lived experiences of cancer.”* –Joanne Tippet, project feedback session 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021



It is important for academics to cultivate connections with creative professionals who have skills in research and policy translation. This allows often abstract academic theoretical and methodological ideas to be communicated beyond the academy, to translate into meaningful social, economic and environmental change. Within the Methods for Change project, our approach to generating creative outputs and facilitating these collaborations was experimental, and contributors valued the opportunity to pursue a creative idea and try a new approach. Creative outputs have already been used by contributors to communicate methods to diverse audiences, including Amy Barron who showed her video on photo go-alongs in a presentation for the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) Novel Communications Workshop; Laura Pottinger who shared her film on Gentle Methodologies at the methods@manchester Methods Fair 2020 and the Spaces of Possibility Confex, Brussels; and Jenna Ashton, who used her [creative piece](#)<sup>22</sup> to engage communities in Manchester around climate issues. Building on this, there is potential to further formalise the creative network to support researchers interested in developing such collaborations, and to understand how creative communications of research methods can be targeted most effectively to increase their uptake beyond academia.

The [Methods for Change Showcase event](#)<sup>23</sup> provided another opportunity to creatively communicate research methods. In addition to the Creative Methods Zoo which encouraged Early Career Researchers to think and talk together about methods through projective techniques, metaphor and imagination, the event also included a Creative Output Exchange Panel and [PGR Poster Gallery](#)<sup>24</sup>. The panel brought together academic contributors and artists to discuss how to forge successful creative academic collaborations and whether some artforms work better for communicating methods than others.

During the panel, academics reflected on how their involvement in the project, particularly the assembling of a creative output, allowed them to become more engaged with their method and to reflect critically on the potential changes and possibilities therein. Collaborating with academics in research projects can also be meaningful, interesting, and thought-provoking work for creative practitioners. Panellists suggested that successful collaborations involve trust, flexibility, strong communication and listening skills and that ideally, artists should be involved as early as possible in the research

22 <https://twitter.com/heritagemcr/status/1404911960005746697>

23 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/reflecting-on-the-methods-for-change-showcase-event/>

24 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-poster-gallery/>

as new findings and ideas can themselves be generated through the process of working together creatively. Academics were advised to have a clear and concise idea of what they want an artwork to communicate, but to then have the confidence to trust the artist to realise that idea.

Participants in the Showcase event equally reflected on the value of creativity in both conducting and communicating research. In her [blog](#)<sup>25</sup> about the Showcase Event, Lauren White reflected:

*“From all the sessions attended, I pieced together and reflected upon the role of creativity, fun, and collaboration with a strong reminder of the role of these as a form of listening and of care, especially when researching societal change and structural inequalities. Further to this, was the recognition that such sensitivities sit alongside, and can even be enhanced, through multiple mediums of creative work and collaboration.”* –Lauren White

The PGR Poster competition invited social science Post-graduate Researchers from Aspect institutions to submit a poster based around their research methods. Six posters were featured in the [Gallery](#)<sup>26</sup>, and each of the PGR contributors were offered further training and development through the opportunity to work with Laura Pottinger and one of the Methods for Change contributing artists to develop a [creative output](#)<sup>27</sup> (Figure 4) to communicate their research beyond academia. The PGRs involved in this work reflected on the creative communication skills they developed and how the process of involvement in Methods for Change and further training provided has itself made them reflect in more detail on their own methods, capacities and potential uses.

First year PhD researcher and children's book author Chantal Bright comments:

*“I will use creative pieces in the future to explain the complexities of global water issues to wider audiences in non-traditional formats. My advice to anyone thinking of producing a creative piece for communicating their research is to just go for it... Even if creative methods do not seem possible in your field, consider creative ways to share data as this will expand the potential reach of your research. I challenge researchers to explore film, art, photography, or creative writing to showcase their work.”* –Chantal V. Bright

Another first year PhD researcher, Poppy Budworth reflects:

*“As well as understanding more about making creative outputs, co-designing the gif allowed me to get to know the method more intimately. Discussing ‘multi-format’ and ‘culturally credible’ diary methods with Sam [De Tomasi – the designer] revealed the multiple advantages of adopting flexible methodologies. It became clear that such tasks could improve the research experience for people with individual skillsets and access needs, as well as enhancing the process for those who speak different languages, have caring responsibilities and/or people who lead very busy lifestyles....The creative output can be used with participants to demonstrate how flexible diary methods look in practice, as well as in academic settings when introducing the methodological approach utilised in my PhD.”* –Poppy Budworth

Second year PhD researcher Juliet Ye also notes:

*“I use Padlet as an online platform for remote ethnography, which is already very visualised, so Ally (my collaborator) and I naturally thought that making a video demonstrating how Padlet works would be the most straightforward way to go about it. During scriptwriting and shooting, I got to learn how to effectively showcase the flow and interactivity of the tool using my research design template, and really pinpoint the honeypots – why other social scientists and ethnographers should consider using it for their ethnography work. In the future I would expect to use this piece to introduce Padlet to my participants, and to connect to other researchers or professionals who are interested in the method as well.”* –Juliet Ye

Illustrator India Joseph worked across the Methods for Change project with collaborating academics, and also worked with three of the Postgraduate Poster contributors to visualise their methods. She reflects on her involvement with the project:

*“As an illustrator, art as a method of communication has always been important to me. Being a part of the Methods For Change project has been a great experience because it's clear that art is a powerful communication tool for others too. It can be challenging initially to convey somebody else's ideas, but with communication and trust, we've been able to produce some wonderful pieces. It's rewarding to work in a collaborative environment to enhance the social science research methodologies”* –India Joseph

25 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/bumble-bees-and-creativities-methodological-musings-on-the-methods-for-change-showcase-event/>

26 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-poster-gallery/>

27 <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/methods-for-change-creative-collaborations-for-sharing-postgraduate-research/>





Figure 5: A snapshot of the PGR Contributor Creative Outputs. (Various Artists)

## Applying social Science Research Methods

There have been key moments and opportunities in Methods for Change to think deeply about how professionals outside of higher education currently use social science research methods, and what opportunities and challenges exist for their more substantial uptake within different sectorial contexts. These have taken the form of a range of formal activities: a series of policy interviews; a rapid evidence review; and discussion and feedback at a range of outward facing events led by the Methods for Change Team. In this section we summarise these activities, and highlight some of the key lessons (opportunities, challenges) about how social science research and methods might be taken up in various non-higher education professional settings.

### A Professional 'Chats'

Across March – May 2021 we engaged in a range of 'chats' with professionals from local government/city councils, government departments, government agencies, large businesses, charities and not-for-profits, and cultural institutions. We conducted short interviews with 15 participants across 12 different organisations in the UK to gauge reflections on the following topics and questions about social science research and methods:

### Current priorities and research

- How are social science research and methods used and understood within your organisation?
- What are your organisation's current priorities, and how do social science methods help you meet these? Are there any examples of current/previous research projects you can tell us about?

### Future priorities and research

- What research areas are priorities for your organisation/sector moving forwards, and what could social science methods add?
- Are there any specific projects in development where social science methods could be applied/piloted further?

### Challenges and training needs

- Are there any challenges to engaging with social science research and methods within your sector/organisation/division?
- Is there any further training that would be useful? Or anything else that would support wider use of social science methods?

All interviewees showed a strong support for social science methods. Across all sectors, academic collaborations were generally used to provide an evidence base for specific policy programmes, usually in the form of literature reviews, to push and develop already-established research agendas. Traditional social science research methods – such as interviews, surveys and focus groups – were understood as being the 'safest option' in terms of data collection, analysis and presentation. This perception speaks to wider external pressures and perspectives on what kind of work is fundable and acceptable. Often quantifiable data can more readily be crafted into a compelling case for support; with interviews and focus groups often seen to be enough to provide an illustrative context.

Qualitative methods were understood as allowing government, industry and third sector organisations to understand why: to tell a story and provide contextual nuance. These narratives are then often used to substantiate and add depth to quantitative evidence. Qualitative methods were also understood as being able to foreground

overlooked voices and perspectives. There was, however, a general sense that relying on quantitative data alone does not allow organisations to delve into why the numbers are as such to begin with, or to fathom what the recommendations or solutions to an issue might be. More specifically, in businesses that work with behaviour change, a substantial opportunity to engage with new social science approaches (such as social practice theories, as well as sociological and geographical concepts) was identified, but interviewees cautioned that there was very limited advice available on how to translate new theoretical or methodological approaches into business practices.

Resource (time and money) and expertise were identified as two primary barriers to adopting more creative qualitative social science methods (such as photo go-alongs or life mapping, for instance). The importance of adequate resourcing and supportive infrastructures were highlighted as particularly important to doing good quality, interesting work. Supporting infrastructures might come in the form of developing training processes. Moreover, there was a general sense that experience is needed to be able to use more creative methods and to be able to verbalise how these different forms of data can be understood as evidence. For some organisations they indicated that when they are caught up with gathering evidence (e.g., for evidence based policy making), *how* that evidence is gathered and with what method becomes far less important than the questions being asked within the policy process. Such an assertion, however, overlooks that methods are not just tools for data collection. But i) are ways to create change in and of themselves; ii) shape the kinds of questions that can be asked; iii) shape how questions can be framed and iv) shape how they are received and understood by participants and respondents.

Within some of the policy, NGO, civil society and business communities that Methods for Change engaged with, it was identified that social scientists should try to engage more deeply with the networks of social science professionals, methods and policy research advisory boards and scientific advisory committees that exist in different sectors. Connecting and communicating with people in these networks is essential as this is where discussions emerge, and decisions are made,

about the importance and legitimacy of social science methods in understanding policy problems and creating policy change. These are important places for social scientists to make a difference to increase the recognition, valuing and uptake of social science research and methods. In a similar vein, it was identified that more social scientists with diverse

professional skills and backgrounds should seek out places in these 'advisory' roles. Doing so would help to build trusting relationships and allow academics to offer support and contribution to informal and formal processes where decisions about methods and research are being made in various institutions.

Connecting and encouraging communication between academic researchers and social science and methods networks outside of academia is essential as this is where discussions emerge, and decisions are made, about the importance, and legitimacy, of social science methods in understanding policy problems and creating policy change. Examples in the UK include the Department for Work and Pensions Methods Advisory Group, the Whitehall Anthropology Network, and the newly formed Natural England Social Science Expert Panel. These are important places for social scientists to make a difference to increase the recognition, valuing and uptake of social science research and methods. Within our policy chats and during the Showcase Event it was identified that more social scientists with diverse professional skills and backgrounds should seek out places in these 'advisory' roles. There is recognition that this may take different forms at different career stages (PGR/ECR versus mid to late career). However, at all stages, this is about building trusted relationships. Seek connections, maintain conversations, offer to support and contribute to informal and formal processes where decisions about methods and research are being made in various institutions.

## **B Rapid Evidence Review on Social Science Methods, Transformation, Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship**

Across May to June 2021 Sawyer Phinney joined our team to develop a Rapid Evidence Review to investigate the ways in which social science research methods (particularly those from interpretive, creative and qualitative traditions) are used across various sectors, and to explore how social science methods are conceptualised within framings of research 'transformation, commercialisation and entrepreneurialism' (key themes of the Aspect Network). The review explored how social science research and methods are used in consultancy, business and spin-off companies, in charity and third sector organisations, and in government departments to shape local or national policy. The intention of the review was to combine evidence and research from academic, policy and grey literatures to help us to think more deeply about the insights emerging from our project about the transformative potential of social science methods outside academia.

The Rapid Evidence Review found that conversations around method do not feature heavily beyond the academy. This raises important questions surrounding how method is understood and suggests that government, industry and civil society organisations may

not see the 'transformative potential' of methods, understanding them primarily as 'tools' with which to collect data. This is not to undermine work that is currently happening on methods and those who are thinking creatively about method in these different institutional structures, but rather to argue that their full potential has not yet been reached. There are separate literatures which each discuss how government, industry and civil society organisations use social science research (and to a far lesser extent methods), but there is currently no literature which considers these different institutional contexts together.

The review enabled us to contextualise the significance and impact of the Methods for Change project more fully in relation to existing literatures. The Methods for Change project contributes to and advances these debates by: i) analysing these siloes as one corpus, ii) understanding and highlighting the connecting themes between debates happening in different sectors and iii) supplementing these debates with a range of material to show why methods and research processes matter to creating transformative change across and within sectors. We have identified a need to open the instrumental way of thinking about 'evidence' (particularly in the context of policy making) to a more encompassing way of thinking about



transformative potential. We argue that government, industry and civil society organisations are missing a trick to not think about the transformative potential of methods. Moreover, while transformative change (or impact) from research is often understood as change at a very large scale, Methods for Change has highlighted how transformative change can also encompass changes to policy and business processes themselves; the relationships developed between researcher and participants; mundane and everyday changes; or by offering participants a way to get their voices heard by the public or policy makers about things that matter to them. There is recognition across academic and non-academic communities that methods often matter for mobilising these types of change.

### **© Training and Events/Dissemination and Engagement**

Our outwards facing events (ESRC Festival of Social Science, The Methods for Change Phase 1 Final Showcase Event) involved a range of professionals from non-academic sectors and have led to a number of key reflections about the transformative potential of social science methods.

Headline findings from the events include adequate resourcing and supportive infrastructures as being particularly important to doing good quality, interesting work. Supporting infrastructures might come in the form of developing training processes to create communities of care.

In the showcase event, participants in the 'Transforming Communities' panel reflected on some of the tensions and challenges of collaboration, including working to different timescales and access to resources. It was agreed that there are structural barriers to fostering community change, and that this often stems from funding bodies wanting to pin-down the impacts and outcomes of research before it has taken place. Often, the most productive community-based research is adaptive, responsive, and participatory, working from the ground-up.

The 'Environmental Change' session revealed that there is often a bias towards quantitative methods beyond the academy, and that it can take a long time to convince people to do things differently and take risks. However social science is currently 'having a moment' in natural environment sectors. There is clear appetite to work across sectoral boundaries and to use the interesting and creative skills that social science academics have (qualitative and creative methods, such as video and film) to understand environmental change. Key points emerged about social scientists planning for dissemination and co-production methods in their research project timelines, and the importance of social scientists being present in environmental organisations' decision-making processes (advisory panels, hiring committees).

The 'Creative Outputs Exchange' panel brought together artists, creatives and academics involved in the project. Artists highlighted the need for academics to have a clear idea of what they want an artwork to communicate, but to also then have the confidence to trust the artists to realise that idea.

Think creatively about where to get funding for activities that push the traditional boundaries of research>dissemination>impact. Funding sources such as Innovate UK's Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) offer interesting opportunities for embedding social science concepts and methods within business, industry, charities, (and government departments). While science commercialisation is often framed as a 'product' and 'technology transfer', with a small reframing social science concepts and methods can be conceptualised as a way of deepening company/industry service design. There are increasing examples of KTPs being led by social science teams. ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) IAAs (Impact Accelerator Accounts), and responding to government tenders for social research that require specific methodological skills, were also identified by a number of our participants as a way to co-produce policy-relevant and policy-ready research-with-impact.



## 4. Conclusions

Methods for Change has worked towards creating a community-of-practice across academic and non-academic sectors who are interested in engaging in deep debate about how social science research can underpin societal transformation, entrepreneurship and innovation. Within our network we are aware that if we wish to create transformative change from the social sciences within a range of sectors, social science methodologies and methods need to be much more widely understood and used.

The project had three aims: (1) to showcase innovative social science research methods; (2) to highlight how social science methodologies facilitate social transformation; (3) to demonstrate how social science research methods can be applied and create change across a range of non-academic sectors. Addressing our three aims, in this project we have:

### 1 Showcased innovative social science research methods

We undertook a range of activities with 37 academic researchers to produce 30 how to guides and 30 creative outputs plus six PGR contributions which detail how social science research methods have been used with different government, industry and civil society organisations. These are live on the Aspect website and will be collated into an e-book which will be available in autumn 2021. We undertook a range of training events (see Appendix for full list) including the ESRC Festival of Social Science and our own Methods for Change Showcase event which profiled the work of many of our contributors within the Aspect Network, highlighting how social science methods are currently used in professional roles across a range of diverse sectors.

Our commitment to public communication of our project activities and outputs through 13 blogs have enabled us to report on the progress made on the project and reflect on events organised (such as the ESRC Festival of Social Science and the final showcase event); to showcase and profile different social science research methods (Object-oriented Interviews by Jen Owen, for instance); and in others, attendees have reflected on the value of attending the event, with the focus of their blog being on the transformative potential of method.

This showcasing revealed that how-to guides are useful to researchers and teams working in a variety of ways, including in research projects, policy research and design, programme monitoring and evaluation, staff training, and in teaching research design and methodology.

Talking metaphorically and using creative elicitation techniques (such as asking '*if your method were an animal, what would it be?*') is useful for animating and enlivening methods discussion, and extends participants' own understanding and appreciation of the approaches they use.

### 2 Highlighted how social science methodologies facilitate social transformation

Common understandings of research impact tend to locate change at the point when published research results are taken up and used outside academia. The Methods for Change project has turned this understanding on its head. There is increasing recognition within these networks that how social scientists do research matters in creating societal change.

While researchers often want their work to influence large scale changes (regulation, policy), there is recognition that social science methods matter for other forms of transformative change: changing policy, institutional and business processes; the relationships developed between researcher and participants; mundane and everyday changes; or offering participants a way to get their voices heard by the public or policy makers about things that matter to them.

We are often trained as social scientists to talk about our research results. This project has demonstrated that it is important to think through how we communicate 'where, how and when' social change takes place within the wider research process itself.

As well as their potential as communicative devices to colleagues across a range of sectors, the how-to guides and creative outputs were identified as potential teaching resources. This is particularly significant as students are the future workers and leaders within a range of sectors. These guides will increasingly be

used across the Aspect network to train socially responsible graduates to have a deep awareness of how social science research methods may be used and what value different methods hold in different non-academic settings.

### 3 Demonstrated how social science research methods can be applied and create change across a range of non-academic sectors.

Our Rapid Evidence Review revealed that discussions around the transformative potentials of social science methods do not feature heavily beyond the academy. This raises important questions surrounding how method is understood and suggests that government, industry and civil society organisations may not see the 'transformative potential' of methods, rather understanding them primarily as 'tools' with which to collect data. This is not to undermine work that is currently happening on methods and those who are thinking creatively about method in these different institutional structures, but rather to argue that their full potential has not yet been reached.

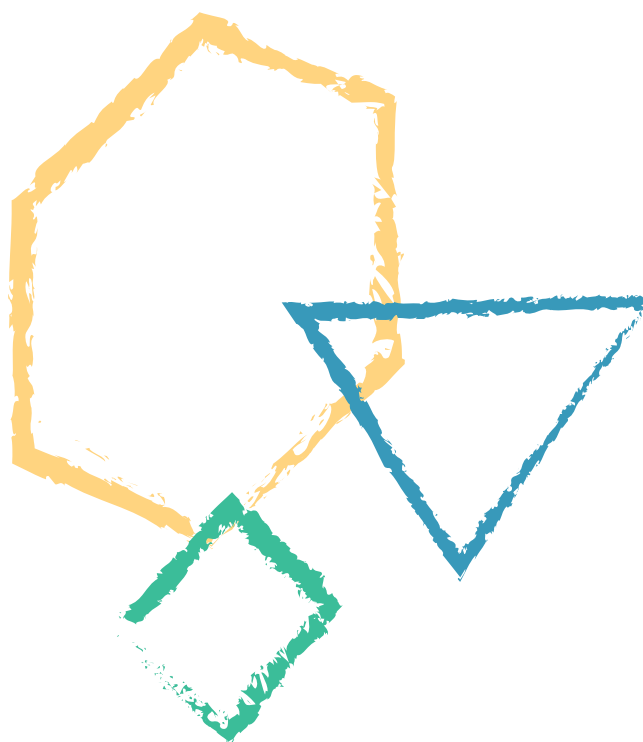
Connecting and encouraging communication between academic researchers and social science and methods networks outside of academia is essential as this is where discussions emerge, and decisions are made, about the importance and legitimacy of social science methods in understanding policy problems and creating policy change. There are a range of strategies for developing this impact at various career stages.

Our engagements with colleagues from a range of sectors identified there is substantial appetite for deep and sustained engagement to bring insights about social science methods to bear on the methods, practices and processes of non-higher education sectors.



**Figure 6: Interviews method-animal.**  
(‘Bird’ illustration: Jack Brougham)

The how-to guides include a specific section on how different social science research methods have been used across non-academic sectors and suggestions of where else the method might be usefully applied. We invite professionals from within academia and other institutional contexts to explore the range of material produced in Phase 1 of the Aspect Network, and to think collaboratively and creatively about where these social science methods could be mobilised in the future to create deep, transformative, and innovative approaches to societal problems.



# APPENDIX 1:

## Methods for Change Contributors

### **We would like to acknowledge the work of our academic contributors to the project:**

|                                                   |                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Dr Jenna C. Ashton, The University of Manchester  | Nenio Mbazima, University of the Witwatersrand     |
| Dr Amy Barron, The University of Manchester       | Dr Cheryl McGeachan, University of Glasgow         |
| Dr Rashida Bibi, The University of Manchester     | Dr Jennie Middleton, University of Oxford          |
| Dr Megan Blake, The University of Sheffield       | Dr Mayra Morales, The University of Manchester     |
| Prof. Nik Brown, University of York               | Dr Jennifer Owen, Kings College London             |
| Dr Alison L. Browne, The University of Manchester | Dr Jessica Paddock, University of Bristol          |
| Dr Christina Buse, University of York             | Dr Andrea E. Pia, London School of Economics       |
| Dr Ulrike Ehgartner, The University of Manchester | Prof. Jenny Pickerill, The University of Sheffield |
| Dr Laura Fenton, The University of Manchester     | Dr Laura Pottinger, The University of Manchester   |
| Dr Jan Flaherty, Kings College London             | Dr Deborah Ralls, The University of Manchester     |
| Dr Elisabeth Garratt, The University of Sheffield | Prof. Jude Robinson, University of Glasgow         |
| Dr Sarah Marie Hall, The University of Manchester | Dr Divya Sharma, University of Sussex              |
| Dr Ralitsa Hiteva, University of Sussex           | Dr Stephanie Sodero, The University of Manchester  |
| Dr Kersty Hobson, Cardiff University              | Robyn Swannack, University of the Witwatersrand    |
| Dr Claire Hoolohan, The University of Manchester  | Prof. Penny Tinkler, The University of Manchester  |
| Fraser How, Ketso trainer and facilitator         | Dr Joanne Tippet, The University of Manchester     |
| Prof. Andrew Irving, The University of Manchester | Prof. Stephen Walker, The University of Manchester |
| Dr Lucy Jackson, The University of Sheffield      | Dr Matt Watson, The University of Sheffield        |
| Prof. Stephen Linstead, University of York        |                                                    |

### **We would like to acknowledge the work of the professionals who helped to develop the creative outputs on the project:**

|                                                     |                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Alastair Lomas                                      | Irene Solé Canet  |
| Andrew Robinson                                     | Jack Brougham     |
| Anna White, Sneaky Raccoon                          | Joe Blakey        |
| Bryan Ledgard                                       | Jonathan Wakeford |
| Chris Murray and Claire Stringer, More Than Minutes | Maddy Vian        |
| Chris Stewart                                       | Nell Smith        |
| Dave Draws                                          | Samuel De Tomasi  |
| Hugh Goldring and Nicola Burton, Petroglyph Comics  | Stephen Miller    |
| India Joseph, Moon and Moth Studio                  | Tom Young         |

# APPENDIX 2: Key Performance Indicator Data (KPI)

The KPIs of the Methods for Change project were:

Aspect Network KPI 01 Training Academics

Aspect Network KPI 07 Leveraged Funding

## KPI 01 Training (totals, types, ECR/PGRs)

| Training Type/<br>Event                                                  | Training Title                                                               | Delivered By                                                  | Dates                          | Participants                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ESRC Festival of Social Science                                          | Methods for Change                                                           | Hosts: Barron, Browne, Eghartner, Hall, Pottinger             |                                | Total Participants: 48                                               |
|                                                                          | Session 1 – Visual Methods                                                   | Amy Barron, Cheryl McGeachan, Jennifer Owen                   | 10 <sup>th</sup> November 2020 | Visual Methods : 14 participants (8 non-academic participants)       |
|                                                                          | Session 2 – Participatory Methods                                            | Jenny Pickerill, Laura Pottinger, Kersty Hobson, Megan Blake  | 11 <sup>th</sup> November 2020 | Participatory Methods: 16 participants (5 non-academic participants) |
|                                                                          | Session 3 – Policy Methods                                                   | Ulrike Ehgartner, Alison Browne, Ralitsa Hiteva               | 12 <sup>th</sup> November 2020 | Policy Methods: 18 (11 non-academic participants)                    |
| Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) Novel Communication Workshop | Photo go-alongs                                                              | Amy Barron (presenter, sharing creative output from M4C)      | 18 <sup>th</sup> November 2020 | 73 academics and professionals from the environment sector           |
| Methods@manchester – Methods Fair 2020                                   | Gentle Methodologies                                                         | Laura Pottinger (presenter, sharing creative output from M4C) | 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2020 | 20 academics (staff and postgraduate students)                       |
| Humanities New Academic Programme (HNAP), The University of Manchester   | Research Methods for Social Change: Sharing Knowledge, Engaging Stakeholders | Hall (lead), Browne, Pottinger, Barron, Eghartner             | 16 <sup>th</sup> December 2020 | 21 participants on the HNAP programme.                               |

| Training Type/<br>Event                          | Training Title                                                            | Delivered By                                                                                                                                                                                    | Dates                       | Participants                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| University of Edinburgh Research Training Centre | Oral Histories and Futures: Methodological Innovations in Times of Crisis | Sarah Marie Hall                                                                                                                                                                                | 27 <sup>th</sup> April 2021 | 100 registrations:<br>16 university staff<br>1 undergraduate student<br>78 postgraduate students<br>3 professionals<br>2 other |
| Methods for Change Final Showcase Event          | Methods for Change Showcase Event                                         | Barron, Browne, Pottinger, Eghartner, Phinney                                                                                                                                                   | 12 <sup>th</sup> May 2021   |                                                                                                                                |
|                                                  | Creative Methods Zoo ECR Networking Session                               | Hosts Laura Pottinger, Sawyer Phinney, Stephanie Sodero, Penny Tinkler, Jennie Middleton                                                                                                        |                             | 10 ECRs trained                                                                                                                |
|                                                  | Transforming Communities Session (Panel 1)                                | Amy Barron, Jenna Ashton, Megan Blake, Julie McCarthy (GMCA), Jon Hutchinson (Groundwork)                                                                                                       |                             | 32 attendees                                                                                                                   |
|                                                  | Environmental Change Session (Panel 2)                                    | Ali Browne, Dr Beth Brocket, Natural England, Joanne Tippet, Matt Watson, Carrie Wilkinson (Project Officer, Bushfire Risk and Evaluation Unit, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Australia) |                             | 27 Attendees                                                                                                                   |
|                                                  | Socio-Economic Inequalities (Panel 3)                                     | Sarah Marie Hall, Sara Reis (Women's Budget Group), Patrick Myers (DWP), Lucy Jackson, Jude Robinson                                                                                            |                             | 33 attendees                                                                                                                   |
|                                                  | Creative Outputs Exchange (Panel 4)                                       | Ulrike Eghartner, Cheryl McGeachan, Nik Brown, Stephen Linstead, Ally Lomas (visual anthropologist), India Joseph (Illustrator), Nell Smith (Artist)                                            |                             | 26 attendees                                                                                                                   |



| Training Type/<br>Event                                          | Training Title                                              | Delivered By                                                                                                                                | Dates                                                      | Participants                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Methods for Change Showcase – PGR Methods Gallery (asynchronous) | PGR Methods Gallery and Creative Outputs                    | Laura Pottinger (lead)                                                                                                                      | May – June 2021 with final materials released August 2021. | 6 Postgraduate researchers at the University of Manchester                   |
| Spaces of Possibility Confex, Brussels                           |                                                             | Amy Barron and Laura Pottinger (presenters, sharing 'Talking Methods' paper based on M4C interviews and creative techniques)                | 8 <sup>th</sup> June 2021                                  | International audience of 12 academics                                       |
| Spaces of Possibility Confex, Brussels                           | Gentle Methodologies                                        | Laura Pottinger (presenter, sharing creative output from M4C)                                                                               | 9 <sup>th</sup> June 2021                                  | International audience of 18 academics                                       |
| Aspect21 Festival                                                | Comedy training workshop                                    | Alison Browne, Laura Pottinger with Do Not Adjust Your Stage (DNAYS)                                                                        | 18 <sup>th</sup> June 2021                                 | 10 academic and business engagement representatives from Aspect Universities |
| National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)                      | Creative Approaches to Researching Memory: Training session | Amy Barron, Sarah Marie Hall and M4C collaborator Jen Owen (Kings College, London). Laura Fenton (University of Manchester)                 | Autumn/Winter 2021                                         | <20 participants                                                             |
|                                                                  | Creative Approaches to Researching Memory: Panel            | Amy Barron, M4C collaborator Laura Fenton (University of Manchester), and Melanie Lovatt (Stirling University), chaired by Sarah Marie Hall |                                                            | <20 participants                                                             |

**KPI 07 Leveraged Funding (awarded and funded research) leading to examples of applications of methods (phase 1), collaborations:**

| Funding – Awarded                                                                                                  | Awarded to                                                                                                                                     | Total                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ESRC Festival of Social Science 2020                                                                               | Methods for Change team, University of Manchester                                                                                              | £1500 (ended)                                                                      |
| UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship – building on Oral Histories and Futures                                            | Sarah Marie Hall (PI)                                                                                                                          | £1.5 Million (Feb 2021 – Jan 2025)                                                 |
| Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) – Peak Water with Artesia Consulting                              | Alison Browne (PI) and Claire Hoolohan (Co-I) (Change Points team), University of Manchester                                                   | £189,486 (1st May 2021 – 31st April 2023)                                          |
| Research England Aspect Network Phase 2 – Methods for Change                                                       | Alison Browne and Sarah Marie Hall (PIs), Methods for Change team, University of Manchester                                                    | £250,000 (one of only two committed projects, 1st October 2021 – 31st August 2023) |
| Northumbrian Water – Change Points: Designing new intervention pathways to reduce water use in high-use households | Claire Hoolohan (PI) and Alison Browne (Co-I), University of Manchester and Liz Sharp (Co-I) University of Sheffield – Change Points workshops | £12,750 (ex. VAT; August – October 2021)                                           |
| University of Manchester Simon Early Career Research Fellowship – building on Gentle Methodologies                 | Laura Pottinger (PI)                                                                                                                           | £150,000 (October 2021 – September 2027)                                           |
| Online research with children, young people and families, Methods NW (North West) Collaborative Innovation Grant   | Sarah Marie Hall, Mark Reilly, Nadia von Benzon and 12 doctoral students                                                                       | £2000 (September 2021 – September 2022)                                            |
| <b>Total Leveraged:</b>                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                | <b>£2,105,736</b>                                                                  |

**KPI 07 Examples of further applications of related methods across various sectors, new collaborations, funding applications**

| Activity                                                                                                                                                               | Applicants/Who Involved                                                                                                                                          | Total                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Methodological Discontents: Creative approaches to inclusive, decolonising and interdisciplinary methods in times of crises, Methods NW Collaborative Innovation Grant | Allie Hui (Lancaster – lead) with Ali Browne, and a range of PGRs, ECRs and colleagues within and outside of the Aspect network.                                 | £2000 submitted June 2021       |
| NERC-AHRC Hidden Histories of Environmental Science bid 'Cottonopolis                                                                                                  | New collaboration between Alison Browne (Co-PI), Aditya Ramesh (Co-PI), Jenna Ashton (co-I) and other colleagues at UoM using materials from Methods for Change. | £100K To be submitted Sept 2021 |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Total Amount</b>                                                                                                                                              | £102,000                        |

# APPENDIX 3: Full List with Links of How-to Guides with Accompanying Creative Outputs

[A Comprehensive Qualitative Approach to Evaluation](#)

[A Place-based Case Study Approach](#)

[Biographical Mapping](#)

[Digitised Ethnography: Creating Interactive Stories](#)

[Elliptical Methodologies](#)

[Engaged Capacity-building Workshops](#)

[Follow the Thing](#)

[Gentle Methodologies](#)

[Geographical Biographies](#)

[Graphic Interviews](#)

[Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso](#)

[Life Histories](#)

[Life Mapping](#)

[Mobile Visual Methods](#)

[Object-oriented Interviews](#)

[Open Interviews](#)

[Oral Histories and Futures](#)

[Participant Packs](#)

[Participatory Activist Research](#)

[Participatory Film Making](#)

[Participatory Mapping](#)

[Participatory Qualitative Interviews](#)

[Photo Go-alongs](#)

[Playing Games as Method](#)

[Social Practice Art as Research](#)

[Sociological Discourse Analysis](#)

[Systems Origami](#)

[The Change Points Toolkit](#)

[Visual Organisational Ethnography](#)

[Walk-along Interviews](#)



## **Transforming Society Through Social Science Innovation**

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