Recognizing and harnessing the transformational power of persistent identifiers (PIDs) for publicly-engaged scholars

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Abstract. While more recognizable publishing models continue to be favored across academic research and publishing systems, the diverse forms of knowledge emerging from publicly-engaged projects derived from working directly with and for communities requires novel and more dynamic publishing solutions. This article considers how the appropriate application of metadata and persistent identifiers to the processes and outputs of engaged scholarship are required to support the goals of the publicly-engaged humanities, and potentially lead to faster and more effective forms of impact for the people and places involved.

Keywords: Publicly-engaged scholarship, humanities, persistent identifiers, scholarly communications

1. Introduction

Publicly-engaged scholars in the humanities are engaging in wide-ranging conversations with collaborators outside the university, driven by the desire to respond to a specific problem defined by their partners and the goal of having a significant social impact. The projects arising from publicly-engaged scholarship in the humanities are therefore naturally values-focused and community-driven. That means they feature many voices and diverse participants, and they produce a wide range of outputs. Moreover, works arising from these projects are about process and methodology, including failures and adjustments, as much as they are about outcomes. Some of these projects can fit into the standard journal article or monograph, while others take more variable, open, and interconnected forms. All of them aim at readerships broader than scholars in a particular discipline.

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One of the many challenges facing publicly-engaged humanities work is how to ensure that all its variable, process-oriented, messy outputs can be found and linked to each other in ways that serve the multiple audiences for these publications. Using Persistent identifiers (PIDs) for the scholar(s) involved (such as Open Researcher and Contributor ID [ORCID]) and for the various artifacts of research, such as a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) or Archival Resource Key (ARK), can help others working in similar contexts find the work, aid in preservation and dissemination by establishing persistent links to content for libraries and aggregators, and help those interested to easily find contact information for those involved. PIDs offer a solution, if public humanities scholars can be educated in them and convinced of their value, perhaps through closer collaboration with librarians.

2. What is publicly-engaged scholarship?

Publicly-engaged scholarship encompasses humanities research, teaching, preservation, and programming conducted in partnership with diverse individuals and communities outside of the university. Its research aims and methods are collaboratively conceived and designed with the aim of benefiting all participants. It is integral to a faculty member or student's academic discipline, deepening and broadening the horizons of their scholarship. It also serves the public good in both its processes and outcomes, directing the resources of the humanities to address society's most pressing challenges.

For publicly-engaged work to realize its potential to benefit all, across communities and disciplines, it must be published in some way - traditional or unconventional - and be discoverable. For partnering communities, publication can help convey the impact of their efforts and help seed and inform future projects, programming, research, and teaching. It can inform contemporary debates, amplify community voices and histories, and preserve culture in times of crisis and change. For scholars, publicly-engaged work holds the potential to lead to - and indeed to enhance - academic publication, thus contributing to scholarly conversations and sustaining a scholar's career.

But these collaborative research projects often call for publications quite different from the standard academic journal article or book. Works that incorporate multiple voices, are broadly accessible, and are designed to intervene in public issues may not fit easily into the highly-conventional design of scholarly products. The multivocal, collaborative nature of publicly-engaged work poses challenges for linear, author-driven, print-based publications. Exhibits, performances, community archives, and other participatory, visual, and collective activities may be more appealing and effective ways of "making public" the work of a publicly-engaged project. The capacity of digital publication to combine audiovisual and textual elements, accommodate both linear and nonlinear story lines, provide diverse paths that address multiple distinct audiences, and offer continual updating, make it an attractive option - but one that does not yet fit comfortably within systems of valuing and discovering scholarly work.

PIDs aid in the availability and discoverability of this work by using a well-established framework already in use by the larger scholarly publishing ecosystem, and can be created by scholars, collaborators, and participants at no cost. For example, ORCID IDs can be created by each individual by visiting ORCID.org and entering in information such as basic demographic information, affiliation, and educational background. DOIs can be created through depositing artifacts such as articles, blog posts, images, and charts, and even podcasts into an open access repository such as Humanities Commons CORE[1] or

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[1]See: https://hcommons.org/core/, accessed September 24, 2023.

Zenodo[2]. There is a simple process to register to create ARKs through the Archival Resource Key[3] website. Those identifiers are then easily findable through internet searches, and artifacts deposited to repositories are also cataloged in various aggregators including Google Scholar and Core.ac.uk[4]. Librarians may assist in the collection and encoding of any metadata required for the project by determining what information is required and what format needs to be established.

3. Measuring the success of publicly-engaged work

In many ways, the publishing goals of publicly-engaged humanities communities are shared across all disciplines – the distribution of knowledge and sharing of ideas. The increased metrification of research assessment has presented challenges for Humanities and Social Science (HSS) researchers and the wider community, and even more so for engaged scholars. Although using quantifiable metrics such as citations, grant funding, and publication counts make it easier to assess the ripple effect of research and researchers, these measures also provide a narrow concept of impact largely confined within the academic enterprise. Especially for community-based research partnerships, these metrics do not capture the real value or contribution of research and often do not even recognize its diverse outputs. Existing quantitative metrics downplay the value of publicly- engaged humanities because they can't easily encompass the messy, open-ended, and hugely valuable qualitative research emerging from humanities communities.

By their nature, publicly-engaged projects are about embodying community values and affecting the wider world. "Success" in part means demonstrating throughout the project what values are embedded in the design and what outcomes it has achieved. Describing in rich detail the many and multimodal outputs that emerge from engaged work helps to broadcast the many successful aspects of a project, and indexing can obviously improve access and discoverability. Unless, of course, it is a project concerned with asserting control over and protecting cultural heritage (as with Indigenous knowledge and artifacts), in which case standards such as CARE[5] provide essential guidelines for classifying that work and guiding usage of it.

This rich research often has significant value and impact on local communities, on health and well-being, and on broader quality of life. It can move public policy, amplify the voices of the marginalized and disempowered, and recover histories lost to neglect or suppression. For instance, a historian working alongside a community to inform sustainable development of their resources may collect and analyze oral history interviews, produce documents, and help curate traveling exhibitions based on their lived experiences. The historian may also produce and maintain a blog alongside the project that incorporates videos and other multimedia content of and about their research and/or created by participants.

However, little of this work - and the many hours of conversation, negotiation, and just plain hanging out required to do this work – may be incorporated into a traditional academic book or journal article. Even if the scholar does publish in those conventional formats, they represent partial and highly-specialized outputs of a much larger corpus co-authored by and addressing highly-diverse, non-academic readers.

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[2]See https://zenodo.org, accessed September 24, 2023.

[3]See: https://arks.org, accessed September 24, 2023.

[4]See: https://core.ac.uk, accessed September 24, 2023

[5]See: https://www.gida-global.org/care, accessed September 23, 2023.

4. The unique products of engaged scholarship: *Baltimore Traces*

Recognizing all facets of publicly-engaged work via publication may not always be possible. However, applying PIDs to the diversity of products emerging from projects offers one way to better identify, recognize, and potentially reward scholars' labor, as well as enhancing preservation and re-use possibilities.

As the unique features of publicly-engaged scholarship are not always documented in more traditional evaluation frameworks, adopting a specific classification framework that foregrounds those unique features might support greater understanding of the value and impact of this research. Applying PIDs to the unique features would further embed these outputs alongside more easily recognized forms of scholarship and support greater preservation and discovery.

A simple exploratory framework, such as the one noted below, serves as a guide to support greater understanding of the underlying purpose, as well as the products, that emerge from engaged work and is based around a core set of questions:

- What defines this project as publicly-engaged scholarship?
- What values motivate and are expressed through this project?
- What outputs have emerged from this project?

Applying this framework to a specific example Baltimore Traces[6] highlights how this project embodies the goals, facets, and outputs of publicly-engaged scholarship:

4.1. What defines this project as publicly-engaged scholarship?

It brings together faculty and students at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County with community members (see the people and organizations listed in the right-hand navigation: https://humanitiesforall. org/projects/baltimore-traces) to create media (short films, zines, digital maps, podcasts, a radio series, a website) and public programming about Baltimore's changing neighborhoods.

4.2. What values motivate and are expressed through this project?

Central to the project is a basic commitment to the common good and to listening to the community.

4.3. What outputs have emerged from this project?

- Podcasts[7] on specific project themes
- Short films on key events in Baltimore history[8]
- Digital maps (see the Mapping Baybrook[9] project)
- Zines
- Radio series[10]

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[6]See: https://baltimoretraces.umbc.edu/, accessed September 24, 2023.

[7]See: https://baltimoretraces.umbc.edu/baltimore-green-space-podcasts/, accessed September 24, 2023.

[8]See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpR9_gio-AQ, accessed September 24, 2023.

[9]See: https://mappingbaybrook.org/about/, accessed September 24, 2023.

[10]See: https://baltimoretraces.umbc.edu/projects/stories-of-deindustrialization-on-the-marc-steiner-show/, accessed September 24, 2023.

- Website

It is clear from reviewing the framework in action that publishing and distributing for maximum impact present greater challenges for scholars whose work emerges from engaged projects. In the case of Baltimore Traces, the project is not only documented in 'traditional' scholarly outputs[11], but also in many other "publications" that are digitally and openly available, in multiple formats beyond journal article or book chapters, and produced and held outside of regular evaluation systems and publishing workflows. As a result, few, if any of the rich products from Baltimore Traces have any classification assigned and none use PIDs. How can we move towards a system that adopts better PID practices to benefit publicly-engaged scholars and their partners in the way that PIDs support research and publishing workflows for other scholars?

The preservation of the artifacts supporting these more conventional formats may be crucial in gaining a full understanding of the impact of the project. By partnering with librarians who specialize in the production of metadata and the cataloging and preservation of materials and using the growing number of open access repositories and public collections, scholars may make this work widely available and recognized. Depositing work into a repository or special collection provides for the creation of PIDs which are then aggregated and disseminated worldwide. One important solution to the challenges facing public humanities scholars is finding ways to use PIDs to link and make discoverable all the messy outputs emerging from engaged work.

5. Connecting values and next-gen library publishing

The challenges facing public humanities partnerships are, of course, not unique to them – there are plenty of science blogs out there, for instance, that are also not discoverable and valued by existing systems, even though they play a key role in translating scientific information for broad readerships.

In both cases, university-based librarians have important roles to play in creating systems of discoverability that extend beyond the journal article and monograph. For humanities scholars doing engaged work, libraries obviously offer crucial resources for conducting research, and some may also be able to provide resources to community organizations. Libraries can support public engagement efforts and facilitate connections between community organizations and scholars in many ways–for example, by hosting reading groups that bridge distinct communities; collaborating to create digital or material exhibits; consulting on issues of privacy and intellectual property; offering space, design assistance, and tools for digital projects, as well as flexible print publishing opportunities; and providing repositories for long-term access and preservation.

During 2022, a group of publishers, librarians and digital publishing experts started a conversation about the challenges associated with publishing engaged research in the humanities that was kindly funded by the Scholarly Communication Notebook (SCN)[12]. This collaboration has resulted in the publication of an Open Educational Resource (OER), *Publishing Values-based Scholarly Communication* [13], that follows the SCN's community of practice approach to spotlight the case of public scholarship in the humanities and start a conversation around a community of practice for publicly engaged scholars and their partners.

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[11]See: https://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/jheoe/article/view/2066/2642, accessed September 24, 2023.

[12]See: https://oercommons.org/hubs/SCN, accessed September 24, 2023.

[13]See: https://publiclyengagedpublishing.org/, accessed September 24, 2023.

The Resource addresses a wide-range of Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) students and Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals based at universities, especially those whose mission explicitly encompasses engaged scholarship initiatives. The resource also provides examples of publicly-engaged publishing initiatives with social justice values such as equity, access, fairness, inclusivity, respect, ethics, and trust deeply embedded in their design. Their multiple outputs, voices, and storylines demonstrate the richness and challenges such work poses to the existing publication and classification systems.

And taking inspiration from the SCN's community of practice approach, the OER has been designed to encourage community-led inputs so that the resource grows dynamically over time, linking to supporting initiatives as and when they arise.

Perhaps most important, as professionals focused on the broad circulation of knowledge, librarians can help scholars think through what it means to produce research in service to public, rather than solely disciplinary, aims. Among other things, they can guide the partners in community-engaged research in creating appropriate metadata and circulating it effectively.

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About the corresponding author

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