



INTERPRETATION

AHI Conference Cardiff 2009 – Community mapping notes

These notes are to accompany a presentation I made at this year's AHI conference. They relate to a new technique I have developed for use in interpretive planning work with challenging audiences, called **community mapping**. I have now applied it to three very different writing/planning contracts at Dunoon (Argyll), Merkinch (Inverness) and Ledmore & Migdale (Sutherland). Communities have been responsive and clients enthusiastic.

Community mapping works particularly well with people who do not respond well to normal community engagement activity, for example those who have or have experienced:

- Experience of previous failure
- Low self-esteem
- Drug/alcohol issues
- Poverty
- Lack of education
- Literacy issues
- Poor thinking skills
- Resentment
- A sense of disconnection within their community or family
- Issues with authority

For anyone interested in taking this further, I now offer a training workshop in community mapping (successfully piloted at the Visitor Study Group Conference this year). If you decide to apply the technique to a project of your own, I would be interested to hear from you how it went for future research.

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1. How to make your consultation fail in an apathy-rich community:

- Stick up some posters about a 'drop-in workshop for community engagement to help establish theming for the Blimpton Heritage Project'
- Place the cheapest possible ad in the local freesheet
- Call a meeting in Blimpton church hall
- Spend hours working on a detailed powerpoint explaining everything
- Photocopy 200 16-page handouts
- Complain bitterly to the three folk who do come along about 'local people'
- Make them sit through 45 minutes of powerpoint and waffle anyway

2. How to stand some chance of success in consultation with an apathy-rich community

- Spend time getting to know the Blimpton community and its issues (and budget for this in time and money!): you will often need to go back years
- Come at first without hardware or handouts
- Find out where different groups gather and join them (within reason!): The Blimpton Arms, Blimpton bowls club, Blimpton Mums and Toddlers...
- Get to know who the key people/families are within the community and tap into them
- When they are beginning to recognise you when you show up, try community mapping
- **Ask, don't tell**

3. Who can help map a community (sample list from Merkinch Local Nature Reserve in Inverness)?

NB At different times and places, never all together:

- Local individuals of all ages and mental/physical ability encountered on streets and in shops
- Community police
- Local BTCV team
- Primary school
- Rural Skills High School students
- Mums & Toddlers
- Lunch Club for elderly people
- Local mental health unit patients and staff
- Local sports co-ordinator
- Playscheme co-ordinator
- Local Traveller community
- Local community newsletter/paper
- Local community radio
- Greenspace team
- Local charity/church groups

And they named the places and told me their stories, here are just a few:

Witches Coffin Pool: muddy pool with the remains of a puggy line where fruit and veg was dumped by a local store by rail – looks like a coffin!

Sailors Grave: relates to local ferry disaster, bodies may have washed into this heavily tidal drain

Willie-the-Carse Walk: local farmer with no nose (blown off in First World War), tormented by children – sold land for Merkinch estates to council

Midgey Lane: every LNR visitor between June and September understands this one!

The Swamp: new name used by local primary school children for brackish woodland area

Deep Mud Drain: name coined by team for dangerous area of muddy estuary – desire to avoid labelling it dangerous on site which would increase curiosity – DMD simply makes it sound unattractive

Heron Pool: local dog-walkers call it this as there are always lots of herons there

The Snakey: local rural skills students call this slightly sinister winding path by this name

Monkey-puzzle Corner: local lunch club ladies aged 80+ recall a huge monkey puzzle tree by the canal bank which they used to swing from and land in the mud

