



A photo taken during Dr Duggan and Dr Andrews' research in New Orleans: School buses carrying Mardi Gras krewes in New Orleans (2022). Photo credit: Dr Patrick Duggan

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Arts research inspires new approaches to emergency planning

As the UK Covid-19 inquiry gets underway and the country's pandemic preparedness is examined, new performance research is making a significant impact on the future of emergency planning in the UK and beyond.

The Covid-19 pandemic challenged the country's resilience in ways that most of the population have never witnessed. It also brought to the fore the vital role that emergency planning plays in preparing for, responding to and

recovering from crises.

With that came calls for new ideas - ways of identifying and responding to local and city challenges both at speed and creatively.

To address this need for innovation, academics from Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Brunel University London investigated the ways in which arts, culture, and performance can open up new perspectives on city emergency and resilience strategy and practice, both in the context of Covid-19 and for future emergencies.

[Dr Patrick Duggan](#) and [Dr Stuart Andrews](#)' 21-month project, *Social Distancing and Reimagining City Life: Performative strategies and practices for response and recovery in and beyond lockdown*, started in December 2020. Since then, their research, which was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), has helped several organisations and councils, such as those in Bristol, Cumbria, Newham, Northumberland and North Tyneside, to think and work differently – in both day-to-day practice and long-term strategy.

New ways of debriefing

The Emergency Planning Society (EPS), began working with Dr Duggan and Dr Andrews after reading their [interim project report](#). With over 1200 members across the UK and internationally, the EPS is the UK's leading membership body for professionals working or studying in disaster management, emergency response and resilience.

Jeannie Barr, Interim Chair, Emergency Planning Society, said: "Andrews' and Duggan's research has had a swift impact on our work that contributes to the future of emergency planning in the UK and internationally.

"Their work has led to several key changes that will be of significant benefit to the Society's membership, and to our understandings of what good emergency planning looks like. This positively impacts on how we might help support our members to develop their professional practice, which will have significant wider societal benefits.

"The research revealed a critical gap in the ways resilience address approaches to coping with workplaces stresses in emergency planning. Our

members were collectively experiencing a need for processes and practices of decompressing from work and means of taking breaks even during live events.”

Responding to this newly identified need, the academics were invited to develop what they termed ‘[A Toolkit of Creative Strategies for Personal Debriefing](#)’. Existing procedures for debriefing after a particular incident are normally conducted at organisational or inter-agency levels, not with individuals or at team level.

Jeannie Barr explained that conventional debriefs “focus on the technical aspects of any response and would not consider the human element of any response or rather how an individual reacts to a crisis situation before, during or after that crisis. This in turn resulted in lessons gathered during the debrief process [being] identified but not learnt.

“To learn to do something differently, whether process, procedure or action requires a change specifically to things like routine, behaviours, muscle memory and learned behaviours etc. The toolkit provides an enormously beneficial new approach to debriefing that centres on individuals and teams, that opens the space for individuals to consider things from a different perspective, to use things like creative thinking as an approach to problem solving, that reduces fear of change and provides some tools that will support an individual with the emotional aspects of crisis and acceptance of the need for change. So important is this contribution that it has been integrated into our recently updated core competencies framework.”

Valuing creative practice

Northumberland County Council and Bristol City Council have been Involved in the research project from its inception. Both have noted how rewarding the work has been and the positive impact it has had and will continue to have on their respective councils and communities.

Bristol City Council’s Corporate Strategy identifies ‘resilience’ as one of its building blocks. Jim Gillman, City Operational Planning and Response Manager, Bristol City Council, said: “As we move from a pandemic to cost of living crisis and we increasingly understand emergencies as wider than ‘no notice, immediate impact events’... [Andrews’ and Duggan’s] research offers valuable new ‘access routes’ into communities to talk about risk and

resilience. Routes that leave behind the 'dry', top down, traditional emergency planning approach and allow a more democratic conversation, driven by the communities and articulated through cultural, performative and artistic networks, organisations and the content of their outputs. Far more effective than a 'Community Resilience Plan'!"

Helen Hinds, Business Resilience and Emergency Planning Lead, Northumberland County Council, said: "Andrews' and Duggan's findings reveal that performance methodologies provide what I think of as the interconnective tissue between what, on the surface, seem like disparate skills and activities. Performance can enable difficult conversations and engender a new approach to how we work. It reinforces the need for diverse voices and provides new methods to try something different, to challenge and to not be afraid to be creative."

In Newham, the research has directly influenced the development of public policy that will have a substantial, material, and long-term impact on the cultural environment of the London Borough and on the wellbeing of its population of over 350,000 people. It has also had an impact on the way the Council understands the importance of and develops future policy for culture, creativity, and the arts in Newham.

Dr Duggan and Dr Andrews have also been invited to be involved in the development of North Tyneside Council's new cultural strategy.

Head of Culture, Steve Bishop, said that their work had triggered new conversations within the Authority about the positioning of culture as a service area and also how it should be embedded in the Council's approach to priorities around the climate change, equalities, community engagement and place agendas.

Professor Andy Long, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive at Northumbria University, said: "Northumbria is developing a strong reputation for driving research which delivers real impact. It's great to see this interdisciplinary project make such an impact on the future of emergency planning. Andrews' and Duggan's research highlights the need for new approaches to emergency planning and resilience work, especially given the breadth of unprecedented events that hazard mitigation, sustainability and resilience professionals have had to deal with in recent years. It's also fantastic to see arts research at the forefront of innovations in these essential and complex fields."

Professor Andrew Jones, Brunel University London's Vice-Chancellor and President, said: "This project shines a spotlight on the impact of the arts in our society, and on the value of arts research as part of an interdisciplinary approach to tackling the challenges we face."

The impact of Dr Duggan and Dr Andrews' research in this area has also been seen internationally. In February 2022, Austin Feldbaum, Hazard Mitigation Administrator at City of New Orleans, said that Dr Duggan and Dr Andrews' [earlier research](#) helped the city of New Orleans to understand the importance of leveraging the city's 'cultural vernacular' as a means of pandemic response. Their research encouraged the city to recognise the need to 'lift up the work' of cultural practitioners in New Orleans as a means of communicating Covid-19 public health messages 'with citizens in terms they could understand'.

The team presented the newly launched toolkit and wider findings from the research at the [Emergency Services Show](#) and the [International Security Expo](#) in September.

For more information about the project please visit www.performingcityresilience.com

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Emergency Planning Society

Cumbria County Council

North Tyneside Council

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Bristol Council

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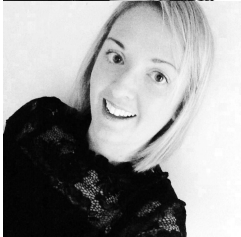


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