

**Karen Foley:**

Hello and welcome to the PodMag the audio news magazine from the Faculty of Arts & Social Science at the Open University.

I'm Karen Foley and in this edition we focus on OU BBC co-production and television programmes. 'The Met' and 'Crossrail' are both available on iPlayer and content for LGBT History Month is in July this year.

You may know that we have nominated academics who work with the production teams on co-produced programmes and I'm going to talk to Louise Westmarland, George Revill and Jacqui Gabb about their involvement in each programme.

First, I spoke to Dr Louise Westmarland who is a Senior Lecturer from the Department of Social Policy & Criminology.

Louise, you've been one of the nominated academics that's been working on The Met that's recently had its second series on BBC 1. Can you tell us what it's been like working with the programmers on these two series?

**Louise Westmarland:**

It's been really, really interesting. It's such an unusual and enlightening experience for an academic because normally our lives are involved with exams and writing books and so on and to see this other world where these programmes are actually being made. And the processes behind the scenes of how the filming's done, how the cuts are made, how they decide what's going to be interesting. And what's going to be sort of really interesting for the viewers.

It's completely different to academic work where we can sit for hours writing boring books. This has to be really exciting and engaging. And it's a real lesson for an academic because really all of our work should be interesting and accessible and make people want to read it. But the filmmakers who were preparing the programmes had that at the front of their mind. They needed something that was interesting.

So I might raise an issue of something that I thought might be interesting to have on the programme, you know, why don't we go in to some depth about this, that and the other, you know. And they'd look at me and say, hmm well yeah, we need people to keep on watching this Louise, it's no good having anything sustained in that way because it won't be interesting for the viewers. This is a television programme not a book.

**Karen Foley:**

And there's this balance I guess between something that people are going to watch and is going to inform the public and your academic interests. And you told me that one of the things you were most interested in was the methods that they were using to generate the content for the programme.

**Louise Westmarland:**

Yeah. And it's incredibly difficult because you can imagine these are real life scenes that are actually happening, you know, it's a bit like being a researcher, an ethnographer. You're there when it's happening and you actually see the action, you know, there and then. Now how do you make that into a television programme because you've got all the difficulties of people as witnesses. And there's quite often a legal case going on at the same time that hasn't been resolved yet. You've got to get permission from the people who are being filmed. And if you're in the middle of some, you know, terrible crisis in your family and there's a camera there and suddenly someone from the programme comes up and says, oh and can we use that so that three million viewers can see it next year please. Is that OK? You know, you can imagine the difficulties that the programme makers have.

And then of course people sometimes change their minds. So they might say, yeah that's fine, you know, I'm happy for that to be on television. And then six months later they think, hmm do I really want that to be on television. And then they might go back to the programme makers and say, hmm I don't think I want that. So then they've got to re-jig all of their five or six programmes so that that all fits in. You know, you sit there watching a programme for an hour and you think, oh that's very smooth and slick. But you don't see, you know, what's going on behind that process really until you're an academic consultant.

**Karen Foley:**

You face the issue of ethics there and you can see how some of those might be fairly obvious and come in to play. But you're Chair of the Ethics Committee and you're very aware and mindful of other ethical considerations. Were there things that as an academic may be the police haven't factored into the programme or things that you raise that you think from an academic perspective added a different angle?

**Louise Westmarland:**

Yeah. There was a programme where there was a child being filmed and when I saw the first cut of the programme I raised with the director, what's the ethical, you know, role surrounding showing a child because at 13 or twelve, twelve or 13 the child's age, who gives permission for that? And the programme maker said, oh that's OK, you know, under the rules of television it's anybody under 16 is fine if their parents give consent. And I said well that's different to what we'd say at the university because we'd say that someone of 13 would have the capacity to make their own minds up as to whether they wanted to be on a programme. And we'd be very careful because at 13 you might think it's fine but then that programme is still in existence when you're 21 it might not be fine with you then, you know. So you have to be especially careful with ethical issues around children.

So, yeah, I was quite surprised that they would be able to do that. And, you know, whereas we probably wouldn't have used that footage at the university in a research project for instance.

**Karen Foley:**

You spoke about the university context but you're also involved with the wider context and you've got a new position?

**Louise Westmarland:**

Oh yes, I've just been appointed to the National Crime Agency as part of a scrutiny group looking at the ethical practices of the National Crime Agency and how they work. It's still early stages yet, I've just been appointed. We've only had one or two meetings so far. But it's very interesting because the National Crime Agency they're working with counter-terrorism, some of the very, very high end crimes and very, very dangerous people and a lot of undercover work. So I'm really keen to see what it is they're doing and to have an input in to their ethical processes and thoughts.

**Karen Foley:**

It sounds very exciting and a very interesting change from a summer day in the office.

**Louise Westmarland:**

Yes.

**Karen Foley:**

Louise Westmarland thank you very much.

**Louise Westmarland:**

Brilliant, thank you.

**Karen Foley:**

George Revill, Senior Lecturer in Geography has been involved with Crossrail. George why have you called the poster associated with the Crossrail series A City in the Making?

**George Revill:**

Well, cities depend on circulations, they depend on the movement of materials, goods, people. And today it's information and energy flows, electricity, gas, etc. And that's the kind of stuff that makes a city tick. So clearly London is a very complicated, very large global city and it depends on its communications infrastructure and a lot of that is getting quite old and a bit rickety. And there are a number of initiatives. There's Crossrail and there's another Crossrail coming along in order to try and ease the flow of people through the city.

So we felt that would be a very useful thing to look at the city as always in the process of being constructed and reconstructed. And by looking at the way in which it's being reconstructed it tells us not only something about where we are now but where we might be in the future.

**Karen Foley:**

So why do you think that social scientists concerned with the environment should be interested in infrastructure?

**George Revill:**

Well I think there are two sort of approaches to that. The first thing is infrastructure is often thought of in environmental terms, in terms of engineering exercises such as building breakwaters and dams and things like that. And that's a solution to problems but as environmental scientists and social scientists concerned with the environment will tell us it can also create a whole series of unintended problems. So, for instance, build a breakwater by the sea and that causes erosion to the north or south or to the end of that. Or one might build a dam and the dam silts up and takes water from the villages and

towns downstream of the dam. So there are all sorts of things that happen when we construct an engineering solution which is unintended.

And the other version of infrastructure is very much about those kind of things which are not really thought about. So about those kind of things that happen in the background. So the version of infrastructure that that takes us to is the kind of thing which comes in to the foreground when things break down. Or there's an accident of some description which shows us all those things we never really took in to consideration suddenly start to come in to play.

So, for instance, well when the electricity goes off and then the temperature rises because we've got no air conditioning. Or when a water main bursts and not only does it flood the streets but it scours great holes in the ground and cars might fall in to those.

So it's about all those things which we take for granted and which in actual fact if we were to create better engineering solutions, a better infrastructure we would need to take the first version of infrastructure, the solutions, and think about it in terms of all those things that run in the background, all the unintended consequences.

And so for social scientists it's that bringing the solution and the taken for granted together to think them through at the same time.

**Karen Foley:**

It's very applied, and I wondered if we could focus a little bit on the module that you're working on, DD213, Environment and Society. Can you tell me where this all fits then in to the module that you're working on?

**George Revill:**

Yes. It fits in to Block 4 out of 6 which is a block on the Social. The module's called Environment and Society and there's an Introduction block. And then there's a block on Culture, Economy, Society, Politics and then the Synthesis block.

The module takes its starting point the idea that particularly during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, nature - the environment, and culture - the social, have been separated artificially. And that that thinking which we think of as modernist thinking, separating nature and culture, is part of the problem when it comes to the environmental issues of today such as global warming.

And that if we were able to think about the unintended consequences, if we were able to put nature and culture back together again and the term is entangled. They're entangled and they've been artificially separated through scientific reasoning and other forms of modernist thought. If we were able to put those back together we might stand a better chance of addressing issues such as climate change.

So in Block 4 which is about the Social, the notion of infrastructure is a key component of that block. And thinking that through in terms of urban environments and that which is taken for granted. And how the contemporary urban environment has to manage and come up against the natural material world in terms of geology, hydrology, climate, etc. And the accommodations and ongoing accommodations that need to be made in order to

avoid those very unintended consequences that we have been prone to through the 1960s and 70s, 80s in particular.

**Karen Foley:**

It sounds really interesting. So George when will the module be available to study?

**George Revill:**

The module's coming out for 2018J, that's September 2018 start.

**Karen Foley:**

George Revill, thank you very much.

**George Revill:**

Thank you very much indeed.

**Karen Foley:**

Finally, I spoke to Professor Jacqui Gabb from the Department of Social Policy & Criminology.

Jacqui, I wanted to talk you about LGBT History Month which is coming up. Now often this kind of timely event is aimed at raising awareness, campaigning for something where there may not have been equal rights or to promote some kind of change. But in the last 50 years things have come a long way. So do you think that this kind of event is warranted now?

**Jacqui Gabb:**

I think what's interesting about all equality right issues is that we presume we've reached some sense of equality. We're all there, everything's great, you've now got same sex marriage so what inequality can there be?

One, there is still gross inequality in lots of spheres and certainly still stigma, certainly still homophobic crime at a disadvantage. But more than that it is about saying where's the history. So what have we come from and where are we going to? So it's also a marking process of what is the history of that community and where might we be looking forward?

**Karen Foley:**

Now as part of this month you've been involved with a People's History of the LGBT Britain which is a programme that's been made for the BBC. Now what's interesting about this is that it was crowd sourced. What makes that way of programming and generating content for a programme different to something that's may be created by programmers?

**Jacqui Gabb:**

What we're used to seeing on television when you see a documentary, for example, and the OU documentaries are cases in point here is that you have an expert. So someone walks around, you have an academic expert quite often giving their opinion. You have interviews, you have some filler scenery shots and that's your programme. What crowd sourcing does is try and show the stories from the bottom up. So these are people's lives. So it's called A People's History because it is, anyone could have put their story in.

So there's a website, people uploaded their stories and that's how they did the research for it. So the stories that emerged were the ones that came from people saying, yeah, this happened to me. They were done through memorabilia. So people had a sticker that they used to wear to a demonstration. Or they had a legal document, or they had something, a symbol of their time over these past 50 years.

**Karen Foley:**

Is there an example of something that came out of that you can share?

**Jacqui Gabb:**

There were many. I mean the two programmes are delightful obviously and there are stories. I said I watched it and I laughed. And I watched along with it and I fondly remembered. And I cried for a lot of the time as well. So there are lots of stories in there which are very poignant. Because of my own research interest the one that had most salience was the one on lesbian parenthood.

And in the first programme there's a woman who talks about going through the court system and losing custody of her two daughters. So she could keep her son but because she was a lesbian she was told she could not raise her two daughters because she would corrupt them. So she told this very poignant story of how it feels losing custody because of your sexual orientation.

**Karen Foley:**

And I guess those sorts of stories and bringing things to life and making them more personable is going to hopefully tackle some of those areas where people may not understand?

**Jacqui Gabb:**

Absolutely. And because it's the 50 year history what you've got is you've got that story which is incredibly sad, to a story of people talking about Section 28 where we campaigned against the criminalisation of teaching about homosexual relationships and *quote* pretended family relationships in schools, to a family there where two men are talking about their son who they brought up quite happily. And their son talks about having the best parents in the world, because why wouldn't he.

So it shows you across that 50 year period.

**Karen Foley:**

You mentioned before that you were choosing an example that linked to your research interests and I wonder if we could end by talking about how some of these aspects relate back to teaching?

**Jacqui Gabb:**

I think in the OU we've always been committed to using our research in our teaching. And so what I've been doing is thinking, well my work around lesbian parenthood has been taking place over the last 25 years. And to actually feed that back in to curriculum to criminology curriculum in particular, which is my home discipline, how do we actually feed that in? Well it shows students real life examples. It brings things to life. It shows that the research that we're doing is vibrant. It shows that we're actually shaping the field

that they are reading about. So it's not just that we write course materials but it brings that curriculum to life. And it allows us to provide much needed depth in to particular dimensions of curriculum. So, for example, in criminology we might not think about parenthood and parenting rights as part of criminology curriculum very easily. But actually just using one case study brings something to life which may then help students to think about another area which they want to bring to life through their own research, through their independent research at postgraduate level.

**Karen Foley:**

Jacqui Gabb thank you very much.

**Jacqui Gabb:**

Thank you.

**Karen Foley:**

Well unfortunately that is all we have time for in this edition. Our next two episodes will feature the new modules from the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences that begin this autumn.

Until then keep up-to-date with us on Facebook and Twitter and if you'd like to be interviewed for a future edition please do get in touch.