

Final Report of 'Just Knowledge' project

GO-GN Fellowship Final Report 2022

by Catherine Cronin

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Introduction

This final report describes the aims, outcomes, and impact of the GO-GN fellowship research project 'Just Knowledge'. Just Knowledge was an exploratory, community-focused, open knowledge research project undertaken by Dr Catherine Cronin in Galway, Ireland, between March and September 2022. Just Knowledge sought to partner with community organisations in order to understand and support their open knowledge practices. The motivation was to make visible vital knowledge (e.g. educational resources, expertise, histories) being shared in and across local communities and help to build open capabilities in community organisations, where needed.

Description

The aim of Just Knowledge was to work with community-based knowledge initiatives to: (i) understand their current aims and challenges, (ii) study their use of digital and open approaches to accomplish those aims, and (iii) together explore ideas for context-appropriate, equity-focused, open approaches to knowledge sharing.

The simplest definition of open knowledge is knowledge that is free to access, use, modify and share, thus unlocking its social value and potential for action and impact (Colmer & Stanley, 2015; Open Knowledge Foundation, n.d.). However, simply opening knowledge is no guarantee of producing social value or of ensuring equity (Bali et al., 2020; Cronin, 2017). Therefore, rather than leading with a goal of openness, Just Knowledge was guided by three core ideals: justice, equity and openness. To ensure this, the underlying principles of the project were drawn from *Data Feminism*, an approach to data ethics informed by intersectional feminism (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020a & 2020b). These seven principles are: Examine power; Challenge power; Elevate emotion and embodiment; Rethink binaries and hierarchies; Embrace pluralism; Consider context; and Make labour visible. As D'Ignazio and Klein (2020a) note:

Data feminism can help to remind us that before there are data, there are people—people who offer up their experiences to be counted and analysed... There are also, always, people who go uncounted—for better or worse. And there are problems that cannot be represented—or addressed—by data alone. And so data feminism, like justice, must remain both a goal and a process, one that guides our thoughts and actions as we move toward our goal of remaking the world. (p. 10)

Guided by this approach, three community organisations/initiatives were invited to be research partners in the Just Knowledge project. This partnership approach included building reciprocal relationships, co-learning, collaboration, challenging power and sharing decision-making.

Research aims and questions

As an exploratory research project, the Just Knowledge research objective was to engage with community partners to understand their aims, challenges, and current digital/open approaches, and then to work together to develop context-appropriate, equity-focused, open approaches to knowledge sharing, relevant to those aims. Prior to engaging with each

community initiative/research partner, I developed the following list of guiding questions to prompt our initial discussions:

1. What community does your organisation and/or project serve/support?
2. What is the aim of your organisation/project?
3. What knowledge is being shared, and who has access to that knowledge?
4. How are you currently sharing this knowledge?
5. What additional knowledge or data would you like to share?
6. Are there any potential new audiences with whom you'd like to share?
7. Are there any restrictions you believe should be in place with respect to what you are sharing, or with whom?
8. How do you make decisions regarding what to share and how to share it, in the context of your organisation's values and overall engagement with community?
9. In relation to knowledge sharing, what challenges do you experience now, and what challenges do you anticipate in the future?
10. How were these challenges exacerbated, if at all, during the pandemic?

These questions were helpful not just in identifying each community partner's aims and challenges, but also in building relationships of trust, an important foundation for ensuring a mutually beneficial partnership approach.

Research partners and outcomes

Just Knowledge partnered with three community organisations in the wider Galway area: the Galway Traveller Movement, Green Sod Ireland, and Swift Conservation Ireland. The process of finding research partners was facilitated by contacting university-based initiatives that have established relationships with community organisations. In the case of the Galway Traveller Movement and Green Sod Ireland, these contacts were facilitated by the [Community Knowledge Initiative](#) at the University of Galway. In the case of Swift Conservation Ireland, this contact was facilitated by known contacts engaged in a wider [Sustainability in the Community](#) network at Atlantic Technological University (ATU). The partners and respective outcomes are described below.

Galway Traveller Movement: Open mapping project

Partner: The [Galway Traveller Movement](#) (GTM) is an independent charitable organisation – a partnership of Travellers and non-Travellers– working to achieve full equality, social justice and human rights for members of the Traveller community in Galway and meaningful participation of Travellers in social, economic, political and cultural life. The mission of GTM is “to challenge discrimination and racism experienced by the Traveller community in Galway city and county, to challenge the status quo, and to empower members of the Traveller community to take action to realise Traveller rights”.

Project: The GTM/Just Knowledge project was part of a larger GTM community mapping project 'Reimagining Life on the Road', documenting Traveller heritage. The aim of the GTM mapping project is to gather and document Traveller heritage related to traditional camping sites in Galway city and county, including capturing the community's memories and stories before they are lost. The first phase of this work was completed in 2019, producing a physical (oil cloth) map showing 42 traditional camping sites. The 2022 project with Just

Knowledge was to convert this from a physical to a digital map, incorporate additional metadata, and consider broader issues related to digital mapping, open sharing, and archiving of community knowledge.

Outcomes: Ongoing conversations with the GTM team helped to clarify how integral the mapping project is to the culture and heritage work of GTM, residing clearly within a human rights framework. In addition, studying [other examples of Indigenous and community mapping](#) projects provided a useful knowledge base for understanding broader issues regarding digital mapping, open sharing, and archiving of community knowledge, particularly for marginalised communities. Together, the project team explored ideas for creating a context-appropriate, equity-focused digital map which could be shared publicly. We have created a “proof of concept” open online map (using Google maps, see Figure 1) showing 51 locations of traditional Traveller camping sites in Galway, including associated metadata (e.g. photographs, audio stories).

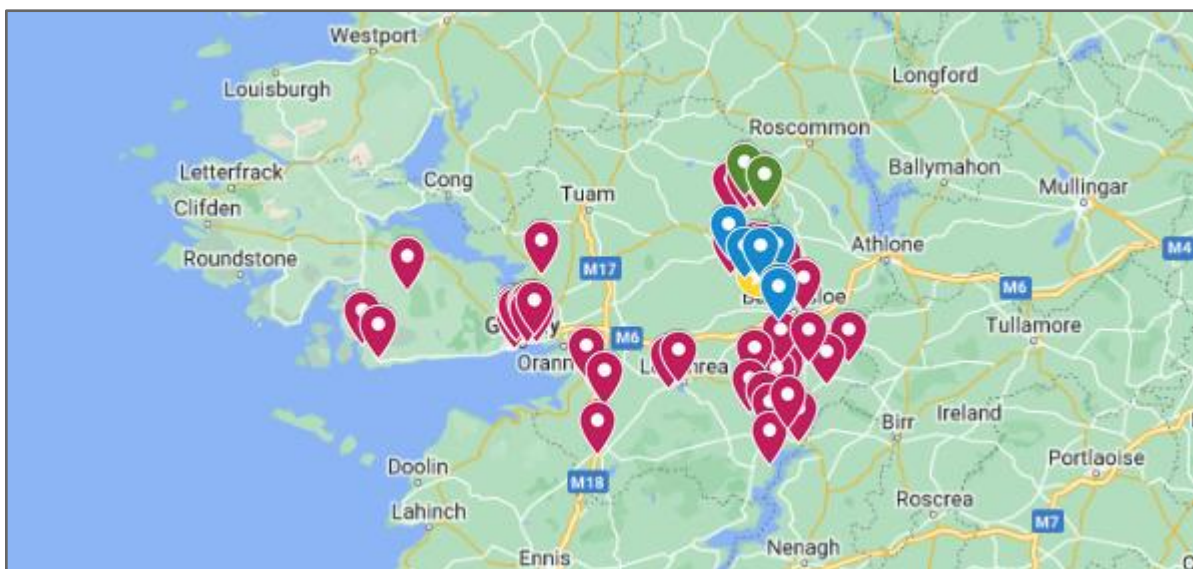


Figure 1. Zoomed-out image of ‘Reimagining Life on the Road’ map, showing locations of 51 traditional Traveller camping sites, across Galway city and county

I worked closely with the GTM team to consider important issues such as copyright and open licensing, consent for open publishing, and long-term archiving of open maps and open data¹. The collective decision was to publish a public, but not open access, map. The copyright will be held by GTM and the GTM team will continue to gather data and develop the map, as a living resource. The digital map was shared publicly for the first time at the [Irish Travellers/Mincéirs and the State 1922-2022 Conference](#) at the University of Galway on 17 September 2022, and at the [Misleór Festival of Nomadic Cultures](#), also at the University of Galway, on 1 October 2022.

¹ Additional information can be found in this GO-GN blog post: [Just Knowledge research partner: Galway Traveller Movement & community mapping project](#)

Green Sod Ireland: Openly licensed course

Partner: [Green Sod Ireland](#) is a registered charity and land trust working to protect and conserve Irish land and its biodiversity for the sake of nature and people. Its vision is an Ireland where ecosystems both thrive and flourish. Green Sod Ireland focuses its efforts in three areas: protecting land, ecological education, and community engagement. In the area of ecological education, Green Sod Ireland has developed [five courses](#) for diverse groups including primary schools, second-level schools and adult education.

Project: Prior to March 2020, all Green Sod Ireland education initiatives were offered on-site and in-person at schools. COVID changed all of this, however, and the organisation and its volunteers had to adapt. Green Sod Ireland holds the copyright to all their course offerings. While not aware of the specific details of open licensing, the Green Sod Ireland partners had already realised that copyright was an impediment to fully sharing their work in the ways that they wished. The Green Sod Ireland/Just Knowledge project considered the potential of open licensing one of their existing courses in order to reach wider communities of teachers and students, as well as to further Green Sod Ireland's overall mission².

Outcomes: Green Sod Ireland chose one of its most requested education offerings as a good candidate for sharing openly online. 'The Story of the Universe' fosters an understanding in children—through the medium of drama—of our place in the Universe and how all life is interconnected and interdependent. Green Sod Ireland clarified that they wanted to ensure that others could choose how to present the story, without changing the core of the story, but also that no commercial entities would profit by resharing their work. After exploring the various Creative Commons licensing options, a CC BY-NC-SA licence was chosen. The existing classroom-based lesson was adapted to create an online, openly licensed lesson pack (see Figure 2). Any teacher with internet access will be able to download the lesson pack to adapt and use in their own classrooms.

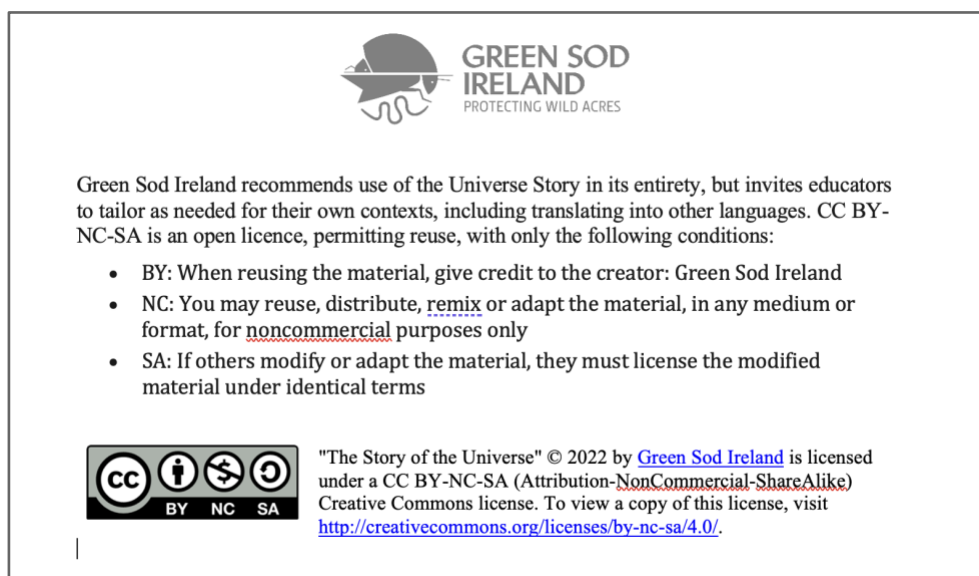


Figure 2. Extract from "The Story of the Universe" lesson pack, showing CC licence information

² Additional information can be found in this GO-GN blog post: [Just Knowledge research partner: Green Sod Ireland & biodiversity](#)

The open access lesson pack was published in October 2022 on the Green Sod Ireland blog post. The [announcement](#) describes the release as follows:

Green Sod Ireland is sharing *The Story of the Universe* lesson materials as an Open Educational Resource (OER) to encourage sharing and reuse by teachers, across Ireland and globally. By sharing these lesson materials openly, Green Sod Ireland is acting in support of [UNESCO's 2020 Call for Joint Action](#) by the global education community.

Swift Conservation Ireland: Openly licensed publications

Partner: [Swift Conservation Ireland](#) is a volunteer-led initiative providing advice and information about conservation actions for Swifts across Ireland. The Common Swift is a [Red-listed](#) bird of conservation concern in Ireland. Their population has declined by nearly 50% in the past 30 years, due mostly to loss of traditional nest sites (i.e. old buildings). Recovery of the Swift population is helped by providing permanent nest sites where they can breed.

Project: Swift Conservation Ireland has developed and published a guide: [Building Nest Boxes for the Swift: Guidance on Best Practice](#). Although Swift Conservation Ireland holds the copyright to this guide, they make it available to builders in Ireland and to the broader Swift conservation network in Europe. The project with Just Knowledge was to explore openly licensing the existing guide in order to facilitate adaptation (including translation to other languages) and sharing the resources across all regions where Swifts migrate to nest, in Ireland and across Europe.

Outcomes: After collaboratively exploring the various open licensing options for existing publications, it was decided to use a CC BY-NC-SA licence for the Swift Nest Box guide. Following this decision, detailed discussions were held about appropriate ways to display and describe the CC licence, and how best to release the booklet as an OER to share with Irish and international colleagues. Presently, the Swift Nest Box guide is being adapted by the designer in preparation for publication on the Swift Conservation Ireland website. In the meantime, another guide (How to Build a Nesting Wall for Sand Martins, see Figure 3) has been openly licensed, and further open publications are planned by the group.

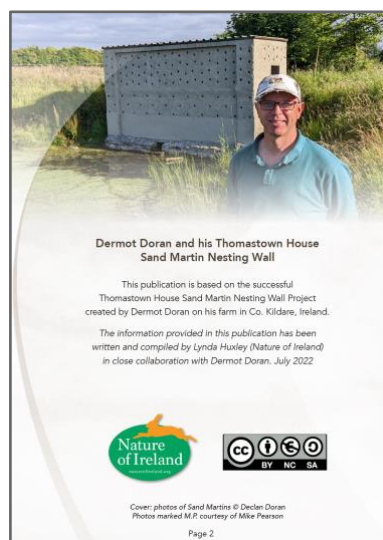


Figure 3. Extract from “How to Build a Nesting Wall for Sand Martins” showing CC licence information

Risks/challenges

Just Knowledge was designed to engage with and support the current objectives of community-based organisations re sharing knowledge. This meant (a) finding such organisations, and (b) finding individuals within these organisations who had the capacity to collaborate for six months in 2022. Considerable risks, from the start, were that such organisations might not be found, might take some time to locate, and/or might not have the capacity to participate in the Just Knowledge project. The two latter risks were encountered, and managed, though it took nearly three months to reach the goal of three partner organisations.

As described in the 'Research partners and research outcomes' section, I sought to make contact with community organisations through community-focused units at universities in the Galway area, i.e. the Community Knowledge Initiative at the University of Galway and the Sustainability in the Community network at ATU. I also engaged with the coordinators of [University of Sanctuary](#) programmes at two local universities, University of Galway and Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) Athlone. In all cases, my aim was to partner with equity-focused initiatives, particularly those working with marginalised communities, in keeping with the aims of the Just Knowledge project as well as the overall DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) ethos of GO-GN. With respect to the Just Knowledge project, initial conversations with eight individuals resulted in three successful community partnerships. All conversations were worthwhile and may yet result in future engagement regarding open knowledge projects.

GO-GN promotion and support

Support from the GO-GN team at The Open University was crucial to the initiation, progress, and successful completion of the Just Knowledge project. Likewise, the Just Knowledge project was useful in promoting the GO-GN network more widely. The initial [Introducing GO-GN Fellows 2022](#) webinar in March was an opportunity to share initial plans for the project ([link](#) to presentation) and to obtain valuable feedback from the GO-GN network. I regularly shared posts about Just Knowledge in the [GO-GN Fellowship blog series](#) and cross-posted these on [my own blog](#) and on Twitter in order to share the information and promote GO-GN as widely as possible.

In addition, with sponsorship from GO-GN I participated in the [Open Education Conference](#) (OER22) in April where I shared information about Just Knowledge (overview [here](#)) and invited feedback from the wider open education community. Specifically, I noted that the Galway Traveller Movement was interested in learning about other Indigenous mapping projects. The open education and GO-GN communities were enormously helpful, offering feedback via multiple channels. I collated all links and suggestions in a post on my blog: [Just Knowledge: Sharing Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous maps](#). These suggestions, along with other digital mapping projects, have provided a useful knowledge base for understanding broader issues re community mapping, particularly for marginalised communities.

I also see an opportunity to share updates from Just Knowledge project partners as work on these projects continues in 2022 and beyond. It would be helpful to share updates with and invite feedback/suggestions from the GO-GN network, at least occasionally, in the future.

Impact

This short report has described the aims of three Just Knowledge community partners, the three collaborative projects, and the outcomes of each. The relationships, co-learning and collaboration are more difficult to capture. I invited each of the community partners to share their own feedback about our project work. Below are excerpts from each partner's feedback.

Galway Traveller Movement:

"The researcher's work is informed by Data Feminism an approach to data ethics which really compliments GTM's own approach which include principles of examining and challenging power.

"Prior to our meeting with the researcher we would have had limited understanding of open education /open university. It was an additional benefit to be introduced to the concept and broaden our horizons in relation to sharing of knowledge.

"We have developed new relationships with departments within NUI Galway [University of Galway] that potentially will add value to our initiative. Working with the Library in the university to explore the hosting of the data. There is an opportunity to embed Justice and equity in all future initiatives."

Green Sod Ireland:

"Voluntary/Community groups are often far removed from researchers/Universities. We now understand more about working digitally and securely. Catherine showed us how we can achieve a much greater impact online, compared to the immense work involved in traditional publication. She encouraged our creativity and supported us to do what we have wanted to do for a long time, but didn't know how. Catherine has facilitated us to make this work available for posterity.

"Working on behalf of Green Sod Ireland with Catherine has opened up an area for us, hitherto unknown. Our aim is to educate, in ecology and environment. Our scope was naturally limited by the people who could deliver and whatever promotion we could do online ourselves. Now we are gone world-wide! Such a great gift. We don't know who and in what small or big ways someone will benefit from what has taken place between Green Sod Ireland and Dr. Catherine Cronin and the Open University and for that we are very grateful."

Swift Conservation Ireland:

"It was beneficial to learn about the open access and Creative Commons as I wasn't aware of this and it fits in with the type of voluntary conservation work I do.

"All voluntary organisations who are producing guidance and literature would benefit from this.

"Also, the county Public Participation Networks should be made aware because they run free courses for voluntary community groups."

Conclusions

Most research in open education, open access and open knowledge is focused on the higher education sector. The value of this work is undeniable, but attention should also be paid to the vital knowledge developed and shared by community organisations, often the lifeblood of local communities. Such knowledge is, by definition, attentive to local needs and priorities. In our present time of multiple and intersecting crises —e.g. deepening inequality, climate and ecological emergency, austerity, rising authoritarianism— and reasonable expectations of ongoing instability, it is vital to support knowledge sharing among and between local communities, as well as to strengthen connections between local communities and higher education institutions.

Community organisations already share knowledge in digital ways, increasingly so in the ‘post’-pandemic context. Most community organisations and initiatives operate with severely limited resources and therefore engage in knowledge and education work with little (and sometimes no) support. There is an opportunity for existing community engagement initiatives (university-based and otherwise) to include support for open knowledge sharing – recognising, of course, the extreme resource constraints on these units already.

Although this was small and exploratory research project, the findings suggest that community organisations can benefit greatly from support for their open knowledge activities. The findings also suggest that such engagement re open knowledge/open publishing is most fruitful when connected to existing knowledge (e.g. publications, courses and other resources) that community organisations are already sharing. Such work requires time, trust, and ideally, a true partnership approach.

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- Green Sod Ireland: Melissa Griffith and Jenny Cunningham
- Swift Conservation Ireland: Lynda Huxley

Finally, I thank my “fellow fellows” of 2022, Dr. Michael Paskevicius and Dr. Vivienne Vladimirschi, and the entire GO-GN network. Tuko Pamoja!

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