




Activism by the Numbers retreat Summary

30-31 January 2020
Lancaster University

A collaboration between Remembering Resistance and DSI at Lancaster University



Activism by the Numbers

This report provides a summary of the activities that took place at the Activism by the Numbers retreat on 30 & 31 January 2020 in the ImaginationLab at Lancaster University.

On the following pages, you will see a short description and aims of the retreat, a schedule for the two days, information on who attended, summaries of each of the four sessions we had and what we discussed at the end of the retreat.

Activism by the Numbers: Description

The retreat was an opportunity to explore the relationships between activism, storytelling and data science in a relaxed and creative space.

Over the two days, we explored four themes:


- **Discover:** How can we find information to bring about positive change?
- **Delve:** How can we make sense of stories & data relating to activism?
- **Democratise:** How can we make stories & data more accessible?
- **Deploy:** How can we use data & storytelling in activism?

For each of the first three themes, contributors – an activist, a storyteller and a data scientist(s) – responded to these questions together and spoke about their research or practice. We then opened it up to discussion.

Activism by the Numbers: Aims

- To create time and space in the workshop for discussion around data science, storytelling and activism
- To increase understanding of data literacy
- To build a network(s) of people interested in data science, storytelling and activism
- To democratise the process of knowledge collection, access and sharing so activists feel empowered to tell their stories using data(-driven techniques)
- To nurture, and participate in, the development of ideas and outputs to take forward
- To relax and have fun!

Time	Activity
09.30-10.15	Refreshments
10.15-10.40	Welcome and introductions
10.40-11.00	Data literacy talk
11.00-12.15	DISCOVER session
12.15-13.15	Lunch
13.15-14.30	DELVE session
14.30-14.45	Break
14.45-16.00	Campfire stories and sharing
16.00-18.00	Time off (check in to accommodation)
18.00-	Food, social and games



Activism by the Numbers: Day 1

Time	Activity
09.30-10.00	Refreshments
10.00-11.30	DEMOCRATISE session
11.30-13.00	DEPLOY session
13.00-14.00	Lunch + feedback and retreat summary
14.00	Close

Activism by
the
Numbers:
Day 2

Activism by the Numbers: Who attended?

Including the 4 organisers and the 10 contributors, 45 people signed up for the retreat.

Of this group:


- 5 self-identified as **activists**
- 8 self-identified as **data scientists**
- 8 self-identified as **storytellers**
- 6 self-identified as a **mix of these**
- 21 **did not self-identify** as any of these

During the retreat, we found that many people chose to self-identify with more than one group

Activism by the Numbers: Data literacy



"Not about
making data
public, but the
public making
data"
Usman Haque



Activism by the Numbers: Data literacy

Contributor: Adrian McEwen

Adrian introduced the concept of data to the participants and debunked the myth that data = truth. He mentioned that data does not have to be perfect; rather, it should be accessible and interactive.

To start, we need to find and gather data, and there are different tools to help us, like sensors. We then need to understand what we've got in a format that makes sense to us (HTML, CSV etc.) Once we've done that, we can begin to process data and explore it (more cool tools). Adrian suggested finding local maker or hack(er) spaces or friendly, neighbourhood geeks.

He ended by saying that activists can learn from geeks on the data front, but so, too, can geeks learn from activists.

Activism by the Numbers: Discover





Activism by the Numbers: Discover

Contributors: Yvonne Battle-Felton,
Beth Knowles, Georgia Newmarch

In this session, the contributors spoke about the importance of discovering and gaining narratives with, and from, people to tell their stories. In order to do this, people need to be given permission and safe spaces need to be created.

Everyone collects their own data through memories and experiences; their presentation of this data *is* their story. For those who cannot tell their own stories, we have a responsibility, through our research and practice, to share and have their stories remembered.

Activism by the Numbers: Delve





Activism by the Numbers: Delve

Contributors: Alison Lloyd-Williams,
Tass Sharkawi & Ross Dalziel

In this session, the contributors spoke about the power of stories to build trust and communities. Giving voice to hidden stories, by discovering and sharing them, or providing spaces for people to tell their own is really important.

Stories have power across borders, cultures and time. Carefully considering how knowledge and stories are shared, identifying core values and messages are key. Giving people something physical to hold or make can encourage participation.

Activism by the Numbers: Democratis

Air Transformed
Mikael Quirk +
Stefanie Pásztor





Activism by the Numbers: Democratise

Contributors: Jo Catlow-Morris,
Laura Conerney, Miriam Quick &
Melis Cin

The overarching theme from the contributors in this session was on creative forms of collecting and sharing information:

- **Jo** spoke about her theatre practice as a non-formal way to share stories
 - **Laura** talked about how hackathons and pop-up shops can connect communities to data
 - **Melis** uses photos to learn about and share stories across languages
 - **Miriam** helps people to understand complex forms of information through physical and digital visualisations
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Activism
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Digital
Campfire



Activism by the Numbers

Digital campfire

As the afternoon wore on, we made a 'digital campfire' in the ImaginationLab!

Everyone got hot chocolate in DSI mugs and sat around the crackling fire, telling stories or saying what they gained from the retreat.

After the campfire, we had some time to ourselves before meeting up for dinner in the Chaplaincy. We then had an amazing session on breathing and making a collective sound bath from Jo Catlow-Morris.

Activism by the Numbers: Deploy



Activism by the Numbers: Deploy

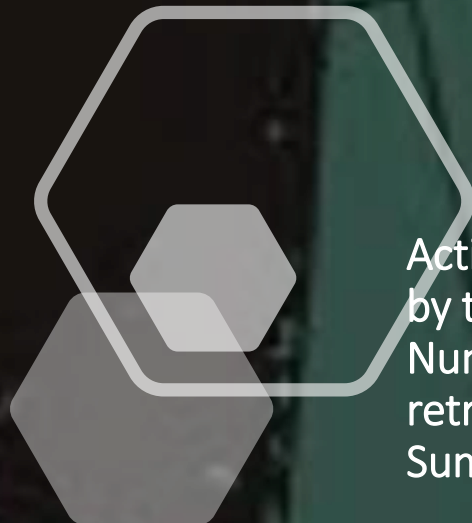
In this last session, participants worked in groups to come up with ideas that used data and storytelling in activism. Here are their ideas:

- **A baby blanket** that focuses on positive futures, as a resistance to climate change, or a light-hearted and funny boardgame
- **‘Geek in a box’**, a data scientist (or person interested in data) who can be contacted when an activist or storyteller would like help/creative problem-solving with data
- **A paper fortune teller** (and oracle!) that can help people think about an issue differently and create opportunities for suggested actions
- **Acknowledging complex stories** with multiple layers of meaning and the importance of engaging with these ethically and thoughtfully

Activism by the Numbers: Wrap-up

Before we ended, we had a discussion about what to do next. This is what we said:

- We need to **share ideas**, to have a **space to hold ideas**, to **ask for capacity** and to **make things happen**
- A **'deploy+ retreat'** to start piloting the ideas that were buzzing around in our head after the retreat
- **Match-making sessions** to help geeks find activists and storytellers (and the other way around)
- Set up a pop-up **repair/prepare café**, a safe space to make a to-do list with a Geek-in-a-Box/data hobbyist, make quilts etc.
- Create spaces to **meet online** via Slack or monthly Zoom sessions



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Numbers
retreat
Summary

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