



Cultural engagement



Dr John Troyer
Director of the Centre for
Death & Society

Department of
Social & Policy Sciences





What is cultural engagement?

Cultural engagement involves collaborating with organisations, such as museums, galleries, and theatres, on public engagement projects. Research is presented through exhibitions and events to engage the organisation's staff and visitors.

How I use this method of engagement in my research

I worked with Bristol Museum as a co-investigator and special advisor on a two-part exhibition over two-years: *Death: The Human Experience*, and *Death: Is it Your Right to Choose?*

This project united all of my research activities. The museum used my research and suggestions on how best to publically display different kinds of death objects. Public visitors interacted with my research through several public lectures, and through my participation in an assisted dying debate. The museum also took on board my suggestion to make the exhibition free, so that people could see it as many times as they liked.

The exhibition attracted over 65,000 visitors and was shortlisted for a prestigious Museums and Heritage award.

Working with Bristol Museum on this long-term engagement project has led to new research ideas, new research questions, and opened up new dissemination opportunities. Together we've come up with a new book proposal on museum displays about human death, and we're proposing another exhibition on animal extinction that will feature extinct taxidermied specimens.

My research

My research focuses on locating and defining the concept of the dead body in relation to science and technology.



Other types of engagement I'm interested in

I worked on a project with young people identified as NEET (not in employment, education, or training) on arts-based activities to explore issues related to death and alternative burial processes. The project resulted in a professionally curated exhibition of the young people's art.

I'm also regularly invited to give talks, lectures, presentations and interviews for the public, and find that the more of this I do, the more I get approached by people with other ideas and opportunities.

How public engagement benefits me

My public engagement work has raised my profile and helped me develop a network of contacts and advocates. I just recently signed a contract with MIT press for a book about death, dying, and technology. MIT approached me because they saw a tweet about a talk I was giving in New York about Future Death Technology. You just never know who is in the audience, or who will hear about your work!

Public engagement will be vital in helping me with content for my book. I want to make the book accessible. Public engagement helps with this because I've learnt how to talk about my research with the public – what works and what doesn't.

