KNITTING TOGETHER ARTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Jocelyn Cunningham

RSA
Action and Research Centre

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

PETERBOROUGH
CITY COUNCIL

CITIZEN POWER
PETERBOROUGH
People. Create. Change.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Knitting Together Arts and Social Change completes a set of five case studies on the Arts and Social Change programme within Citizen Power Peterborough, a two and a half year partnership between Peterborough City Council, Arts Council England, East, the RSA and the citizens of Peterborough. There are a suite of papers, evaluations and films to be found on the RSA website. This document will not repeat the intentions of those documents nor act as an advocate for the programme. It is instead, a 'call to arms' that arises from the learning in Arts and Social Change and is directed towards local policy makers and those in the arts communities with the view that this particular partnership is sorely needed for a thriving society.

This paper explores how the arts can open up new ways of working which impact upon social capital, the identity of a place and our attachment to it and encourage active citizenship. It argues for a central role in ensuring sustainable systemic change and offers examples of how creative practice strengthens a willingness for people to engage with each other and build co-productive behaviour, and critically reflects on the challenges uncovered by this kind of work. Of course, innovation is about understanding barriers and stopping what is not working as much as about trying new things. One of the key lessons from the Citizen Power programme and other similarly ambitious programmes lies in the consistent underestimation of the resistance to innovation and change. This paper explores some of the ways we need to take this resistance on board through how we invite new interventions into places to address challenges and the need to build legacy in from the outset with all the key actors engaged in re-imagining new scenarios and solutions. It explores the conditions that are necessary to sustain new kinds of creative partnerships between the arts and public sectors and stresses that sustainability for any inspiring arts project relies upon the active participation of those already working within the public arena. It finishes with a set of practical recommendations. An impatient reader may wish to skip straight to these recommendations and take advantage of the many resources in the footnotes and appendix.

The gradual systemic shift from industrial and transactional models (arts products for consumption) to knowledge based ones (experiences and partnerships) has profoundly opened up opportunities for creative practitioners. There are now increasing numbers of arts organisations that have long-term relationships with both a local authority and an academic institution and are capable of acting as a kind of laboratory and meeting place for new approaches. Over the lifetime of the Citizen Power programme, it has become clear that there is a real appetite in the public sector for working in creative ways to find new solutions. This requires a strategic and holistic view, and not a piecemeal approach that addresses a particular social challenge through exciting and effective projects (be they arts or otherwise) but then fail to embed within delivery systems. What role can our understanding of artistic processes play in evolving creative solutions as a part of systemic

We have to start as we mean to go on, not continually fix what we knew was inadequate at the beginning.

change and how can the application of this understanding bring benefits back to all who take part? This paper explores these key questions and argues for placing the underlying dynamics of strong creative practice at the forefront of systemic social change. The paper's connecting threads assert the 'art' in invitation and engagement and stress the importance of different sectors investigating shared values and outcomes. It perceives a place as a creative ecology in which each part affects another. Much as all this might seem ridiculously optimistic and even unrealistic in these times, it offers some simple steps to start on this long-term journey to a positive future. We have to start as we mean to go on, not continually fix what we knew was inadequate at the beginning.

For creativity to truly act as a generator of lasting change, we need to be able to tell a collective story about value and this is hopefully beginning to happen in the cultural sector within many initiatives. But beyond the narrative and new more robust and inclusive forms of evaluation, we must develop a willingness to work with the 'other', because this brings whichever sector we work and create within, meaning and dare I say it, some joy.

CONTENTS

KNITTING TOGETHER ARTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE
INTRODUCTION

" The twentieth century has transformed the entire planet from a finite world of certainties to an infinite world of questioning and doubt. So if ever there was a need to stimulate creative imagination and initiative on the part of individuals, communities and whole societies the time is now. The notion of creativity can no longer be restricted to the arts. It must be applied across the full spectrum of human problem-solving. "

World Commission on Culture and Development[1]

Knitting Together Arts and Social Change arises from the learning in the Arts and Social Change programme in Citizen Power Peterborough, a two and a half year partnership between Peterborough City Council, Arts Council England, East, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) and the people who worked with us. Arts and Social Change aimed to improve citizen participation in Peterborough, but it was also an action research project – aiming to create new ways of working through and with the arts and understand the underlying conditions that lead to systemic change. During the same period, the Arts and Society department within the RSA's Action and Research Centre initiated roundtables and other projects that responded to the many current debates concerning arts and social change that explored how artists, academics, policy

makers and citizens could reshape models of collaboration. This paper emerges from the learning and activity during the lifetime of Arts and Society at the RSA.

Creative practice can create and support innovative collaborations that, in turn, tackle intransigent social challenges but it is necessary to critically reflect on the many dimensions such work uncovers. This paper will address how the Arts and Social Change programme and similar socially engaged arts programmes can foster and maintain the conditions for collaboratively created and sustainable change and will outline the key components and advantages of such work. The programme lay within the context of a local authority that wished to address these issues and furthermore, supported the arts as an effective methodology to do so and therein lay a core element of its influence and success.

This paper is written primarily for the two key partners in the Arts and Social Change programme in Citizen Power: those delivering public services at a local level and those that are part of a local cultural ecology, in particular, the arts communities, in appreciation that there is not a common language and set of references. These kinds of partnerships are not easy. They are necessarily complex because they represent profoundly different ways of working and

↙ Participants at a Creative Gathering in Peterborough use images to reflect on an issue

1   From web summary of WCCD Our Creative Diversity. UNESCO 1995. See: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15019&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

thinking. The mantra about excellence, the last 15 years of focus upon value, be this economic or social and the consultancy culture have been debilitating for many reasons but a combination of all of these factors has prevented us looking at partnerships in ways that allow all partners to offer and learn. What if we simply had a different starting point? In these times of multiple crises, is there also an opportunity for using our imaginations more collectively, not as problem solvers or inspirers but as partners working alongside? Knitting Together Arts and Social Change is a policy reflection based on experience and builds upon national and international theory and evidence in hopes that this will supply refreshing and relevant resources for those seeking new ways of doing things. I will close with some recommendations for ways forward for local policy makers and the arts communities.

If we are going to tackle reinventing local services, do we not also need to take seriously the capabilities that lead to imaginative

There is an urgent need to develop the capacity to 'imagine the world as otherwise'

solutions and collaborative behaviour? Is it not critical for us as a society in grave need of re-imagining, not to lose this opportunity and resource? This is not to suggest that our collaborative capacities are entirely dependent upon our imaginative ones, but rather to highlight and re-position the value of the imagination and working in creative ways to create change.

> 'A society in which arts practice is not endemic risks its future. The support of professional artists is a laudable policy but far more important is offering all citizens, and their offspring, the opportunity to actively participate in arts practice – to make their own culture'.[2]

There is a remarkable opportunity in these uncertain and financially anxious times for artists to reshape a space for new ways of doing things in the public arena; to bring what is known from creative practice and introduce these approaches to those attempting to find ways of collaborating, innovating, and finding imaginative solutions. Initiatives such as participatory decision-making offer remarkable opportunities for local people, elected representatives, and council

2   J Hawkes. *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability*. Cultural Development Network. Victoria Australia 2001.

↖ Shelagh Smith at a Creative Gathering in Peterborough exploring an issue in the city from many perspectives

and public sector officials to work together but need the skills that creative practice can generate.

There is an urgent need to develop the capacity to 'imagine the world as otherwise'.[3] With this imperative to collaborate, be it economically, politically or creatively driven, the arts and public sectors have much to offer each other. They also share similar challenges and endemic fears.[4] Only new forms of genuine collaboration and different working habits will enable the breakdown of siloed working practices to actually happen. There is a distinct opportunity for multiple intersections between the cultural sector and everyone else; less about individual projects to service needs and more about a different kind of on-going dialogue. This can also be about claiming a role for the artist as a citizen and civic leader and developing a localised civic creativity where citizen, artist and public sector official exercise their own creativity. In order to do this, it would be necessary to:

3   Many academics have referred to this concept, chiefly John Dewey, Maxine Greene and many in the field of aesthetic education.
4   Arts Council's North East regional director Alison Jenkins-Clark refers to the fear of homogenisation in the growing cultural consortia in http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/may/21/cultural-consortia-liverpool-newcastle-gateshead?INTCMP=SRCH

- address culture change (in part through the arts and creative practice) with local policy makers and public service leaders

- re-calibrate traditional views and methodologies of engagement (from policy and arts perspectives) and

- examine the capabilities needed to unlock imaginative responses to change

A mighty and complex agenda indeed and one that Arts and Social Change sought to understand better in order to create the conditions that could generate such ambition.

Dame Liz Forgan, former Chair of Arts Council England opened the first State of the Arts conference in 2010 saying 'We must find partners we never knew we had'. The future needs to be about finding partners (the word partners is used to imply co-creators as opposed to those who fund only) who may seem initially unlikely as playmates but together can generate rich artistic and social outcomes. This was a central focus of our work in the Arts and Social Change programme and required courage and a willingness to leave the familiar behind for all partners. It is through arts and social change that new ways of responding to our wide variety of global crises may emerge. After all, we know that the old ways do not work, nor do the tired debates lead to change. There are too many circular arguments. This paper will unpick some of the ideas that lead to this call for change from a consciously hopeful perspective. Disillusionment leads us nowhere and the arts offer hope, not only to others but also to ourselves.

The Arts and Social Change project explored the role of arts and imagination in creating new connections between people and where they live in order to strengthen participation in community life in Peterborough.

THE PRIMARY AIMS:

To deliver high quality creative experiences through the arts that builds and extends community engagement (and social capital)

To support and build a self-sustaining network of locally based artists who can both contribute to the artistic aspirations of Peterborough and play an active role in the arts community regionally and nationally

To foster an appetite to establish the city as a place for creative engagement

THE 7 SUB-PROJECTS

1 **CREATIVE GATHERINGS** (building an inclusive network of locally based creative practitioners)

2 **EXPERIMENTS IN PLACE MAKING** (locally based artists working within neighbourhoods)

3 **DIALOGUE IN ACTION** (public sector innovation with locally based artists)

4 **CONTEXT MATTERS** (two artists selected and hosted by two voluntary groups)

5 **MADE IN PETERBOROUGH** (two commissions bookending Citizen Power)

6 **TALKING ARTS** (curated events of relevance to the city's aspirations)

7 **THE EMISSARY PROJECT** (exchanging practice with relevant arts practitioners across the U.K.)

ABOUT ARTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

A summary of the aims and projects within the Arts and Social Change programme are on the previous page. We wished to explore the intersections between the arts and citizenship; what it means to belong in a place and connect with others in order to make it better. We didn't want it to be a series of disconnected arts projects, nor a research project that 'used' the arts, but a strategic programme that explored practical and imaginative tools for working together to create positive social change for both the arts and non-arts communities.

Arts and Social Change adopted the long-standing principles from socially engaged arts practice to achieve these aims. This practice embodies the principle that 'we all have the capacity, need, right, responsibility and desire to be actively involved in making our own culture'.[5] The capacity for creativity lies with everyone and is not unique to the arts. It is equally fundamental in all areas of everyday life. Some further definitions might be useful to contextualise how these terms are being used. A starting point would be Sir Ken Robinson's definition of creativity as 'imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value'.[6] Robinson expands on the concept of imaginative activity as being 'essentially generative; in which we attempt to expand on the possibilities of a given situation; to look at it afresh or from a new perspective, envisaging alternatives to the routine or expected'. Creativity also arises through diverse components coming together in new patterns. 'The creative act… does not create something out of nothing; it uncovers, selects, re-shuffles, combines, synthesizes already existing facts, ideas, faculties, skills. The more familiar the parts, the more striking the new whole'.[7] The creative process is not about the application of a formula[8] and therefore can present

challenges for replicability and scaling up however these can be surmounted if attention is on the process and not the project itself.

Creative practice draws on the thinking, process and structures of the arts (meaning all art forms) as channels and catalysts for prompting new ways of working, learning and being in the world however this does not imply that all creative practitioners would be artists. And of course, not all artists wish to be translators of practice. The wider cultural community (comprising voluntary groups and networks, museums and libraries) play a part in this as well.

Toby Lowe of Helix Arts[9] defines a community as 'a group of people who share identity-forming narratives', a definition which lends itself well to exploring a more complex environment of multiple motivations

It has the capacity to change the rules of engagement in how we work together

for engagement. Peter Block defines civic engagement as 'action through which citizens join in new conversations that have the capacity to alter the future'.[10] This interpretation of engagement highlights action, new ways of working and imagining things to be otherwise, all characteristics of working with creative practice. Collaborative creative activity can act as the primary building block for:

- developing connections (especially between those who might not normally engage with each other)

- strengthening a sense of purpose and personal meaning

- encouraging civic engagement and a willingness to change things

It has the capacity to change the rules of engagement in how we work together and this paper will describe some of the many ways it does this, not diminishing the vital motivating factor of it being inviting and joyful.

Arts and Social Change created a scaffolding structure around these key ideas in order to affect change, with each project offering a different approach to achieving the Citizen Power aims of increased

5   J Hawkes. *Why This Stuff is Important*. CANWA 2012. see www.canwa.com.au
6   K Robinson. *All our Futures*. National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education 1999. See: www.sirkenrobinson.com/skr/pdf/allourfutures.pdf
7   A Koestler. *The Act of Creation*. Penguin Group.1964.
8   Jeff Barnum in *Social Sculpture: Enabling Society to Change Itself* builds on this idea of artistic process as necessarily emergent. See http://jeffbarnum.com/writing/social-sculpture-enabling-society-change-itself

9   Toby Lowe, CEO of Helix Arts in Newcastle outlines principles for participatory arts projects in www.helixarts.com/…/Helix%20Arts%20Quality%20Framework%20
10 P Block. *Civic Engagement and the Restoration of Community*. A Small Group 2007.

civic participation, innovation and a stronger sense of belonging. The programme also addressed two key themes alongside these drivers: supporting the development of networks and strengthening a local capacity for partnerships. Each project aimed to create an effective 'invited disturbance' [11] that addressed social outcomes and was grounded in strong artistic practice. Perhaps a unique aspect of Arts and Social Change was the requirement to have influence within three distinct groups of people: the local arts community, the citizens in the city and those in local government and service delivery. In short, most of it worked, some of it struggled hard to work and one project is still being negotiated to be realised;[12] each of these projects is an interesting story with much to learn in its own right, but what is more important is that Citizen Power was committed to learning, experimenting and generating the conditions for change in Peterborough as opposed to delivering change itself.

At the beginning of the Citizen Power programme, the RSA published a pamphlet on Arts Funding and the Big Society[13] leading with the notion of re-inventing instrumentalism and asking 'How can the arts build individual and community engagement, resilience and reciprocity?' and 'We need to think more deeply about how to re-imagine engagement'. The re-imagining of how to build these capabilities lay at the core of every project in Arts and Social Change. So often this manifested itself in a greater willingness to say yes to something new and different. A prominent local gallery owner attended one of the Talking Arts events we produced and afterwards said that she almost didn't come, that she had become used to always saying no, that Peterborough had become a place that said 'no, no point'. But at the last minute she thought why not, was glad she did and expressed that she felt this was happening across the city. A place where 'yes' was being said more frequently; a deceptively simple but overlooked dynamic.

The Arts and Social Change programme was launched at a particularly noteworthy moment when local authorities were grappling with how to increase meaningful civic engagement at the same time as quickly needing to learn how to collaborate more effectively to deliver 'more for less'. The need for the arts community to build resilience and strengthen collaboration also became more urgent

11 Interestingly, a term used by both arts and public policy commentators.
12 Please see the five case studies on the Arts and Social Change programme at http://www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/public-services-arts-social-change/citizen-power/arts-and-social-change
13 J Knell, M Taylor. *Arts Funding, Austerity and the Big Society: Remaking the case for the arts*. RSA 2011.

with wholesale cuts to both programmes and companies. The trick was to find new approaches to working together, artists and public servants, for mutual benefit.

↙ Participants at a Creative Gathering explored what not to do to enable change
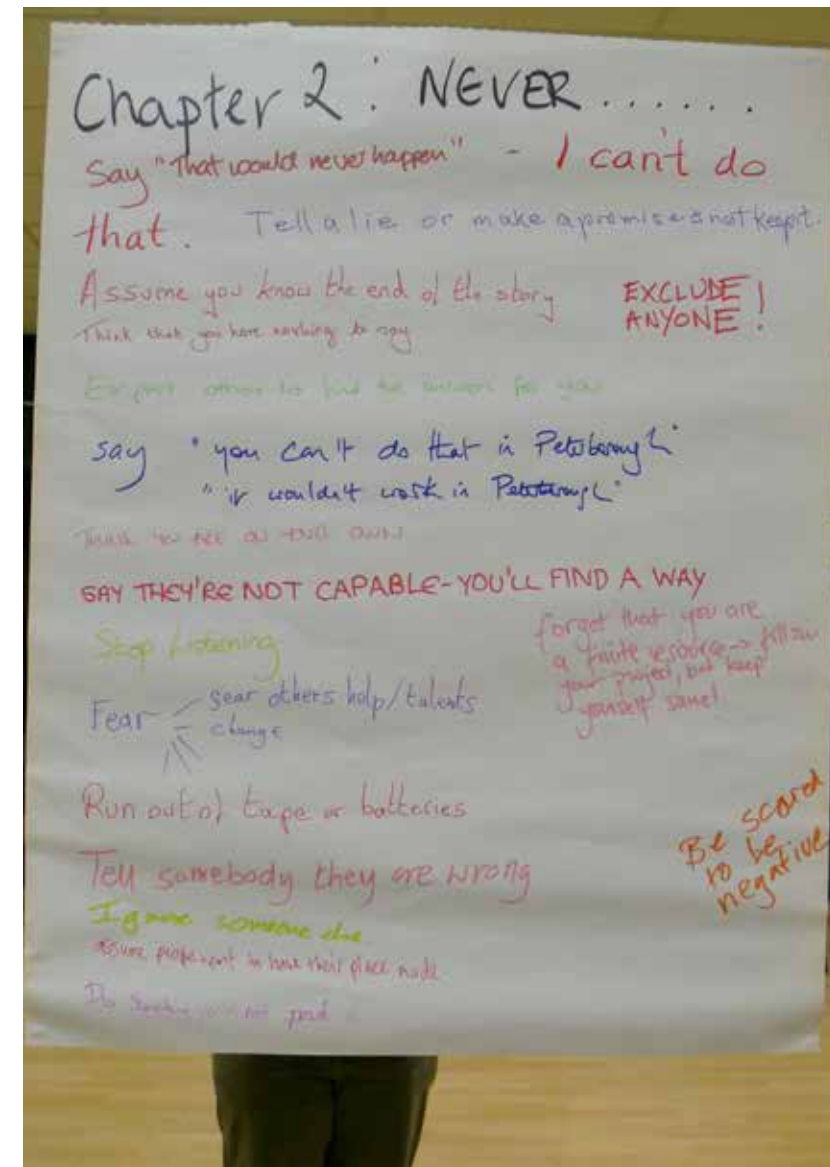
WHY BOTHER WORKING WITH CREATIVE PRACTICE?

❝If knowledge were only rational, humanity would not have invented art.❞

The Art of Uncertainty[14]

Many would argue that in strained funding climates, anything to do with the arts could be seen to be frivolous. In times of crisis, the arts underpin human capital and economic growth through stimulating our imagination and build our capacity for innovation and resilience. As we shift ever more decisively into a knowledge and experienced-based economy, we need to build our capacity

In times of crisis, the arts underpin human capital and economic growth through stimulating our imagination and build our capacity for innovation and resilience.

for creativity in all walks of life. Rather than divisive arguments that seek funding for one area rather than another, is it not time to seek what advantages we gain by working with our existing innovative assets? The traditional model of arts organisations delivering core programming with public engagement as an outreach mechanism has 'marginalised the concept of culture and denied theorists and practitioners an extremely effective tool'.[15] It has also been divisive in the arts community; those that do socially engaged or participatory practice and those that don't.

As Matarasso critiques in The Art of Uncertainty, the belief that we all act rationally in predictable systems has been well and truly demolished with the economic crises. Nevertheless, this notion that intervening in a social context with an arts or cultural intervention of whatever shape will result in a single (or predictable) outcome persists. As public services shift further away from a target culture towards one of shared outcomes, there are opportunities for the arts sector to contribute towards a more sophisticated agenda. What if

14 F Matarasso. *The Art of Uncertainty*, Version 4.4. 2010. http://web.me.com/matarasso
15 Hawkes 2001 Op cit

creative practice provided a frame for shared experiences that could develop the skillsets necessary for co-creation and the capabilities needed for tackling intransigent problems? Three well-documented features of creative practice, those of making meaning, innovative communication channels and attitudinal change are illustrated in two examples from Peterborough.

In the project Experiments in Place Making, two artists worked with a neighbourhood manager to address a significant lack of community engagement in one particular street in the city. The artists delivered a series of cards with a single word written on each (love, community, hope, faith and goodwill) to each household in the middle of the night. A letter asked each householder to place the word in their window, which held the most meaning for them, much as one might request pints of milk not so long ago. There was a surprisingly high uptake of this offer and perhaps unsurprisingly, no one put up the word community. The project created a starting point for action in community engagement, but more importantly, it offered a new kind of experience for all concerned to view each other and how community is communicated. In another project, the Innovation Forum, civic leaders were taking part in a forum that took place in the local museum. Each was asked to explore the use of metaphor in examining the ways curators had engaged with the public on the museum's artefacts and investigate how these

What if creative practice provided a frame for shared experiences that could develop the skillsets necessary for co-creation and the capabilities needed for tackling intransigent problems?

strategies might apply to their work with the public. I remember a powerful conversation with a leader of regeneration in the city as he was inspired by the cast of a dinosaur, which led him to ponder the long-term implications of the decisions of his department. In both cases, the playfulness that lay at the heart of the activities invited new perspectives.

Through these activities it is not possible to control the meaning that is generated however experiences in the arts can create personal discoveries that ultimately belong to the discoverers themselves and lead to a deeper sense of ownership. Both projects

created experiences for people that led to new ways of seeing something, alternate forms of communicating that in turn, led to different actions.[16] Murray Edelman in From Art to Politics suggests that 'because art creates something different from conventional perceptions, works of art are the medium through which new meanings emerge'.[17] The opportunity to reframe meaning can come from new reference points and alternate experiences and of course, not only from the arts!

Research from Involve has shown that it is 'only by personally experiencing these interactions that decision makers can fully appreciate the richness of discussions and the value of the participants' insights, in a way that a consultation report or a list of recommendations simply cannot convey'.[18] In the case of the Innovation Forum, this involved city leaders as participants, driving change through personal experience and conviction but also, importantly, alongside each other as part of a collective endeavour. The final recommendations in this paper help to signpost how to make this happen.

A core aspect of the Arts and Social Change programme revolved around increasing civic engagement as part of Citizen Power. 'If we are interested in promoting civil renewal, we need to support activities that are collective and participative'.[19] With increasing emphases on public decision-making on significant and far-reaching issues, it is not only imperative to strengthen collaborative working practices between services and sectors but with the public as well. And this necessitates the abilities to work with difference and a capacity for empathy, another distinct outcome in working with creative practice.[20] It is no longer possible to leave engagement to others.

A joined up working culture requires a culture change in working practices and the encouragement of a willingness to leave one's comfort zone. Fortunately creative practice makes culture change much easier to absorb and can do this, in part, through blurring the boundaries of sectoral domains and hierarchies and offering a

shared emotional experience that can lead to a new way of thinking and behaving. In the Innovation Forum leadership development programme in Peterborough, the participating leadership group characterised this as: 'Learning to be together differently in order to do together differently'. Edelman articulates the ephemeral effectiveness of the form: 'People perceive and conceive in the light of narratives, pictures and images. That is why art is central to politics, just as it is central to social relationships and to beliefs about nature'.[21] This was continually borne out in our work in Peterborough. People often did not perceive the things they did as art but their experiences through the arts clearly had meaning for them and generated new realities, be they the chief executive of the city, an artist or resident.

The arts have the potential to influence culture change, in part, through holding a space that contains tensions and opposing views within it and yet, are flexible and inviting enough for people to maintain that complexity. There is much written on the need for appreciating the diversity of sectoral languages and references whilst needing to develop an openness and clarity that can cross working practices. There is always the challenge of one language and mode of communication dominating another. Maintaining the complexity can be built through what Richard Sennett refers to as rehearsals of possibilities.[22] How could our ways of working together open up a use of language that invites trust and experimentation? Sennett suggests there is traction within the subjunctive mood: 'what if?', 'might', 'could', and so on but there is also the strength of the seemingly informal conversations that can (with applied skills) become powerful avenues to effective decision-making. The fundamental building block for any change in the way we work together is trust, too often seen as an easy win. The Demos paper, Trust in Practice, [23] makes an excellent case for trust being the starting point for any new way forward.

> 'Local government cannot view an approach based on trust as a luxury reserved for better times… In fact, greater trust could result in greater savings in the long run. The absence of trust can necessitate spending time and money on accountability measures instead of public services'.

16 Creative projects that address belonging and social cohesion can be found in every large city. Here is another, done in partnership with a local authority: http://smallthings.org.uk/public-projects/every-street-has-a-story-to-tell/
17 M Edelman. From Art to Politics. University of Chicago 1995.
18 http //www.invo.org.uk ; see Participatory budgeting and the arts and Everybody needs Good Neighbours at http://participationcompass.org/article/show/273
19 E Keaney. From Access to Participation; cultural policy and civic renewal. IPPR 2006.
20 This is a frequently cited outcome of many socially engaged arts projects, evidenced also in our case studies.

21 Edelman 1995 Op cit
22 R Sennett. Together; the rituals, pleasures and politics of cooperation. Allen Lane 2012.
23 J Birdwell, F Farook, S Jones. Trust in Practice. DEMOS 2010.

It may be very challenging to state that a particular art experience created a particular social impact but we can say that the experience itself was able to (or not) generate a range of positive conditions that are critical for change and encourage new capacities and skills that lead to a shift in the way we behave with each other. There are many evaluations of arts programmes that point to remarkable behavioural change, however a long-term view is essential in order to assess how these changes affected choices and wider outcomes in order for us to recognise culture change.

There is an additional win for the cultural community in that it is possible for such work to encourage the growth of new audiences as well as the potential stimulation for artistic creation. There are many examples of arts organisations[24] exploring the art of engagement with communities that artistically feed their own organisations and directly influence the work produced.

Creative practice opens up dialogue but also provokes new responses, sometimes uncomfortable ones, exposing uncertainty and anxiety. Civic creativity, as practiced by both artists and those in the public sector, requires courage, especially if we are serious about localised democracy and greater participation in public services. It is not merely an issue for leadership. Any of the co-words, co-design, co-location, co-production, co-creation demand a willingness to relinquish some control – a challenging brief in these times of austerity and fragility in the job markets. Is there a real role for the arts in helping to open this up while not burdening it with imposed and unrealistic expectations? The current interest in co-production and social productivity should include arts practice and cultural activity as a matter of course. "Co-produced knowledge is not about finding consensus; it recognizes the vast potential that lies beneath the surface of things. Rather than cultivating fruit, it identifies and promotes the conditions for growth."[25] We need to harness the capacity to create, not only for problem solving and entrepreneurial ideas but for the rich well being that creativity unlocks, be this in the form of physical and/or mental health or fundamentally in making our lives more worthwhile.

There is also the need to consider where to position such work to generate change and avoid the danger of projects not reaching beyond the participants lucky enough to have had the experiences. In Citizen Power Peterborough, the most effective work was with leadership and local residents and struggled to reach those in the middle. Thoughtful consideration regarding strategic engagement, possibly through network analysis might help to position creative work for maximum benefit. Some of the most exciting creative projects have involved a wide range of roles and diverse perspectives and this more inclusive approach can be down to whom we are talking to right at the beginning.

We need to harness the capacity to create, not only for problem solving and entrepreneurial ideas but for the rich well being that creativity unlocks, be this in the form of physical and/or mental health or fundamentally in making our lives more worthwhile

24   See examples of this in London Bubble's http://www.londonbubble.org.uk/projects/ and the National Theatre of Wales http://community.nationaltheatrewales.org
25   Artist Steve Pool, who is part of an AHRC Connected Communities programme on Civic Engagement entitled Imagine has written an essay on co-production of knowledge of which this is a part.

THE ART OF INVITATION

❝We're all in it together, whether we like it or not.**❞**

Peterborough resident

The best of socially engaged arts practice takes into account the motivating factors that tempt people to take part in something and can be highly effective in understanding the allure of imaginative invitation. In recognising the motivations for engagement we also need to take account of the multi-faceted ways we engage and the barriers that make participation more difficult.[26]

Take Me To[27] was the first commission in the Arts and Social Change programme and was created by arts organisation Encounters. Artists conducted a selection process with council and voluntary services staff to identify residents who might not normally engage in civic or city-wide activities but this was supplemented by a range of open invitations, deliberately constructed to be intriguing and personally rewarding. After a series of artfully conducted 'getting to know you' workshops, participants were invited to host a very personal tour for others in their small groups – visiting places in their neighbourhoods that mattered to them and sharing their stories. Rather than looking at the city as defined by geographical, civic or even community-created boundaries, the city was 'mapped' by individuals and their experiences. The stories to emerge from the tours ranged from humorous to incredibly moving, and reflected the history of Peterborough and its future aspirations. I saw it as a set of curated personal interactions between people who would not be relating to each other in everyday circumstances. A couple of typical comments from participants reflect the power of such a simple idea:

"You only have to scratch the surface a little bit to see what's here. We're all in our own bubble but the tours have shown me that you don't have to do much to get out of it. My biggest hope is that this tour can be spread further so more people can share this… I can now view Peterborough as somewhere that I could find my space in, a home, belonging."

"Participating has made me challenge myself about how I connect with others in the community… and how I can carry on doing this. I find myself making sure that I make the most of the encounters that I have with people who come and chat to me… "[28]

Several of the participants in the project also held civic roles, such as neighbourhood managers, community support police officers and a councillor, but although this variety of functional roles allowed for a diversity of reach, support also had to be given to formally open up avenues of continuing influence. In order for such projects to have a wider life beyond those rich individual and often-profound experiences, attention must be paid to enable decision-making and policy creation as a result. There are inspiring creative projects in most places but there is a gap between the project and what happens afterwards. We must link action and strategy with a real

In order for such projects to have a wider life beyond those rich individual and often-profound experiences, attention must be paid to enable decision-making and policy creation as a result

understanding of the work otherwise we continue to burden our already heavy shelves with more reports that fail to lead to change.

Take Me To highlighted the crucial aspect of invitation – creating the conditions in which new experiences could be welcomed into a community or a place – but this first commission also emphasised the critical factor of working with and not for a community. The project revealed hidden networks and assets and built new ones. Notice that Take Me To began with building trust in a workshop that set the scene for doing things differently. For the most part, participants had never engaged with the arts previously and generally didn't regard this as an arts project – it just meant a great deal to them. Projects similar to Take Me To are proliferating; have a look

---

26 Barriers to participation are excellently outlined in the National Council for Voluntary Organisation's paper *Pathways to Participation*. See: http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/
27 See a presentation on Take Me To with photographs at http://www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/public-services-arts-social-change/citizen-power/arts-and-social-change

28 These comments as part of the evaluation report on Take Me To, available upon request.

22 | Case study 6 | Knitting Together Arts and Social Change

Case study 6 | Knitting Together Arts and Social Change | 23

at People United's work in Herne Bay in Kent or the Albert Drive Project in Glasgow.

Such projects can appear deceptively simple – if done well, the art of engagement can be essentially invisible and consequently subject to criticism for the artists' costs, or easily replicable without artists, but this would be misunderstanding the skills needed to curate, shape and direct collective experiences. Educational philosophers have

It is time to take the process of engagement seriously

articulated the difference between an experience and the quality of that experience [29] and it is strange that there is so little attention as to what a quality engagement experience in the arts looks like or how a high quality of engagement adds value. The quality issue tends to focus only upon the art form product or the numbers reached. It is time to take the process of engagement seriously.

Prioritising the concept of invitation also addresses the earlier point about resistance to change, particularly with regard to those who have not been a part of the creative experience. Common assumptions about who the work is for can get in the way of its breadth of influence and create opposition and resistance. '…a new settlement is needed between the citizen and the expert. State arts body experts have a very particular view of the arts and neither citizen nor artist has been adequately involved in framing understanding of the arts or research into them'.[30]

Sitting alongside the economic drivers for cutting back on public spending are drivers for collaboration and the need to learn how to work with new and possibly unlikely partners. This harkens back to the earlier reference to finding partners we never knew we had. We also need to recognise who is not in the conversation. All too frequently it is the voluntary sector, a vastly underestimated source of learning for the motivations for engagement. Sport England effectively links amateur sport, emerging athletes and elite sport in order to create a 'sporting habit for life'.[31] An 'arts habit for life' would need to take account of all aspects of how the arts influences

our lives. Francois Matarasso in a recent blog within his website, Parliament of Dreams,[32] touches on the crucial importance of voluntary arts and how counter productive it is to separate the fields of professional, community, participatory or voluntary:

> "It's a grave mistake to think that those things we are not obliged to do are not important to us. On the contrary, their importance arises precisely from the fact that we're not obliged to do them. They're important because we choose to do them, because we want to do them, because we wouldn't feel ourselves if we couldn't do them."

Recent research has revealed that countries with higher levels of cultural engagement also have higher levels of social and institutional trust.[33] Matthew Taylor speaks of a social aspiration gap as that of the difference between what we say we want and what we actually do to make that happen. But how do we expose this gap that invites a willingness to change this? Public policy, by itself does not motivate change in personal behaviour; this happens through personal interactions, from an emotional experience – again, something that creative practice can generate. It can help to build a 'deeper understanding of what binds people together and how social networks and shared values can be mobilised for progressive ends'.[34]

This was tested in Arts and Social Change. Attention to invitation and how this enhanced the quality of engagement was particularly evident in Context Matters, the residencies programme in Arts and Social Change. Simon Grennan of Grennan and Sperandio spent time going out with the voluntary group, Street Pastors in Peterborough, and illustrated in a series of cartoons, volunteers' perspectives on their motivations to work within the local night-time economy that were then published in the local paper. Joshua Sofaer worked with a residents association and together they carried out a competition for an imaginative story on how the building got its name. Both brought to light the everyday stories of people in Peterborough through working with them and agreeing with their hosts the forms that this would take. Both worked with the real

29 As in John Dewey, Maxine Greene and others.
30 T Joss. *New Flow, A Better Future for Artists, Citizens and the State.* Mission, Models, Money 2008.
31 Creating a sporting habit for life at http://www.sportengland.org/about_us/what_we_do.aspx
32 [33] http://parliamentofdreams.com
33 See IPPR: http://www.ippr.org/uploadedFiles/research/projects/Arts_and_Culture/Culture%20briefing.pdf
34 M Taylor. Where are the big solutions our big problems call for? Guardian. September 9, 2012. See: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/sep/09/matthew-taylor-big-problems-big-solutions

factors on the ground in the city as opposed to designing and implementing a project that could be anywhere. As in Take Me To, both residencies explored the notion of invitation, being invited (and in part, selected) by the hosts who had never had contact with the arts previously and were asked to support them in solving something important to them through their arts practice. The art itself was directly influenced by all of these factors. All three projects also addressed Lowe's identity-forming narratives in the earlier definition of community; Take Me To explored how these narratives overlap, Grennan's residency helped to capture the narrative and thereby strengthen it and Sofaer's residency sought to evolve the narrative.

this can be about welcoming the arts into new ways of doing things, into cultural norms of how we operate as a society in crisis and in desperate need of new ideas

With increasing interest in understanding the conditions necessary for healthier, happier, more engaged communities, there are more opportunities for creative practitioners to reconceive what this might look like. Emphasis must lie in building trust and opening up attitudes to collective working from the very beginning. Participatory budget making, for example, could be incompatible with innovation and risk taking if there were not strong relationships in place with shared values and approaches. If the principles of invitation and co-production are prioritized in making things happen, then the role of creative practice is central to making this work. This would represent a shift in situating experiences in the arts to the beginning of work and as a connecting thread throughout it, rather than the problem-solving end of it with its attendant issues of how to measure impact, and whether there is a causal effect to this kind of work. This can be about welcoming the arts into new ways of doing things, into cultural norms of how we operate as a society in crisis and in desperate need of new ideas. We need not only to identify the problem and commission work to address it, but much more of re-imagining the whole picture together.

MEETING IN THE MIDDLE

"If we accept that the arts are central to the well-being of our communities then we have a responsibility to be engaged in broader agendas – civic leadership."

Michael Eakin; Let's Work Together conference, 2011[35]

In his inaugural address at the RSA, Arts Council England's Chair, Peter Bazalgette, referred to the need for a 'grand partnership' between business, policy and the arts in order to enable arts and culture to be perceived as an essential service. The word 'service' maintains the paradigm of arts and culture being 'used' to achieve a social aim; after all this was Arts and Social Change not Arts for Social Change. I think it is more about meeting in the middle as only by doing so will we realise meaningful change and this involves perceiving the boundaries of what we do differently. I prefer Eakin's notion in the above quote referring to the arts community's responsibility to be engaged with civic agendas and to see arts and cultural leaders as civic leaders playing an essential role within a broader ecology. Writer and artist Dan Thompson who was pivotal after the summer riots of 2011 in instigating community clean-ups, identifies the need to not act as 'artists in the community but as part of the community'.

Over the lifetime of the work in Peterborough, the discourse of engagement has shifted in mainstream practice. Terms such as 'hard to reach communities' are subtly changing to 'those previously ignored', 'troubled families' to 'connecting families'. Seeing people and communities, whatever their challenges, as assets is now increasingly established practice. Arts and Society at the RSA hosted a roundtable in 2012 with a diverse range of arts leaders, artists and academics entitled 'From Spectatorship to Engagement' that addressed this sea change. One of the participants at this roundtable, Leila Jancovich, in Great Art for Everyone refers to the

35 Let's Work Together was a national conference held at the RSA in June 2011 of leading arts sector figures interested in sharing good practice and addressing future opportunities for collaboration, both within and beyond the sector. http://www.larc.uk.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/09/Final-Conference-Note.pdf

traditional models of audience engagement targets, so prominent over the last decade, as continuing to address a gap (as in the recent references to 'cultural cold spots') rather than the possibility that the arts themselves might be missing the mark. Failure to engage can be two-way. 'The challenge, therefore, is not the quality of what is engaged with, but the act of engagement itself'. [36] There is a lingering 'us and them' dynamic – one in which experts, be they highly skilled artists or thinkers, come into a place to work with a group of people (particularly the vulnerable) to inspire, provoke or provide solutions. All parties can fall into these patterns and expectations with the best of intentions.

Is there an 'art' to engagement or is it merely a set of best practices and good project management?

John Holden argues for a mature relationship built on mutual respect. "Culture should be something that we all own and make, not something that is 'given', 'offered' or delivered' by one section of 'us' to another." [37] Could engagement happen not only as a result of great art or inspirational speakers but because of the process itself? Is there an 'art' to engagement or is it merely a set of best practices and good project management? Should we be talking about (and measuring) a quality of engagement and if so, what comprises such a thing? In considering the art in engagement, we acknowledge a set of ephemeral characteristics that take the depth of engagement to a deeper level.

CULTURAL ECOLOGIES

"It is astonishing how closely a country's capacity to learn as a whole, rather than any individual genius, affects national levels of creativity and innovation.**"**

John Howkins, Creative Ecologies[38]

The analogy of an ecosystem to describe how a place works or doesn't can be useful in appreciating how culture and creativity can play a part. If we are interconnected and interdependent, does this not fundamentally shift working cultures and expectations? If the motivation for change is based upon mutual survival, then this necessitates the creation of deeper relationships between quite diverse bodies; reciprocal exchanges between institutional bodies and tiny enterprises. The strength of networks, and their sustainability, rests upon their resilience and openness to change. But this also means a real change in attitudes much more so than structural or policy change. This means engendering a willingness to learn together. If the term 'cultural ecology' is used to describe the rich set of relationships amongst all those taking part in some way in a localised culture then this is something that could be strengthened and consequently measured in ways that the RSA already employs with social network analysis. Complex systems require a flexible kind of support that allows for multi-dimensional ways of maintaining that complexity in order to avoid the imposition of simpler and dominant systems to make it more palatable.

Discussions on cultural value, what this represents, how it is created and whom it is for, are everywhere now[39] but it is also critical to consider the nature of how we have these discussions and whom they are with. Traditional approaches are being questioned and boundaries of professional, voluntary, academic and community are being spanned in a delicious variety of programmes. There are now many arts organisations that have long term relationships with both a local authority and an academic institution and are capable of acting

36 L Jancovitch. Great Art for Everyone? Engagement and participation policy in the arts in Cultural Trends. Routledge 2011.
37 J Holden. *Democratic culture, opening up the arts to everyone*. Demos 2008.

38 J Howkins. *Creative Ecologies*. Transaction Publishers 2009.
39 In particular, see http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project/Pages/default.aspx

as a kind of laboratory and meeting place for new approaches.[40] Often, however, there is an inherent challenge in reconciling the distinct offers of the large and small arts organisation or with individual creative practitioners with a role to play within this ecology. Recognising the interdependence of each player within the wider picture necessitates a generosity from all partners. Seeing a place as a cultural ecology requiring a complex range of organisations and individuals contributing to a rich public offer rather than a single agency or two delivering culture is the way forward and evaluating this as part of the whole context of a place with perspectives from all players is now needed.

The arts are an intrinsic part of a society and part of the daily needs of its citizens, however the terminology can distance many – people can perceive the arts quite differently to their opportunities to listen to music, watch a film or take a drawing class. It is necessary to normalise their presence in everyday life. Perceiving them as a luxury means that other sectors fail to reach their full value; it can never be just a housing policy without consideration as to what creates community in order for the policy to have longevity, good health without consideration of what creates a happy life. We must also engage with the many intangible but crucial aspects of a good life such as well being, identity, community, empathy, aspiration and hope. There is an urgency to strengthen this fragile cultural ecosystem in times of stress.[41] Local public policy makers have the opportunity to bring culture into the filters for policy making, to join the economic, social and environmental considerations, not just with a view to the formal cultural offers in a place but to include the overarching cultural ecology of a place. Does a policy engage with the formal and informal cultural sector in a meaningful way? How can new ways of working access the local skill base to open up new avenues of communication? Here are two examples from Peterborough.

---

40   Amongst many others, the Watershed in Bristol and Helix Arts in Newcastle, and the new partnership between Derby Theatre and the University of Derby, addressing the responsibility of theatre to its community.
41   National initiatives are addressing an ecosystem approach, such as Arts Council England's Creative People Places, but there is also a burgeoning arts and health field that necessarily takes into account a wide range of influencing factors. There are also increasing numbers of networks, either place based ones such http://www.creategloucestershire.co.uk/about-us/ or sector based ones such as the independent producers network http://thebest-soupintown.tumblr.com

WHOSE CULTURE CHANGE?

"We are learning to be together differently in order to do together differently.**"**

Participants, Peterborough's Innovation Forum

Halfway through the Citizen Power programme in Peterborough in 2011, the Local Strategic Partnership felt that creative practice could play an integral role in a leadership development programme that explored how to restructure services (both statutory and voluntary) in a more joined up way. The Map Consortium led a team to facilitate this. Over 40 senior leaders from across all sectors in the city, including the head of the arts trust, gave considerable amounts of time (and contributed from their own budgets) to create a forum in order to explore how creativity and learning from the arts could develop their own working practices. This work continues for a second year and has resulted in significant changes, both in new enhanced relationships between service providers but also in new cross-sectoral projects, which in many cases, engage with local artists. In this case, creative practice has opened and maintained a space for dialogue and incubation that was not there previously and many would say, would simply not have happened otherwise. Leaders underwent a series of small, incremental changes with quite profound personal impacts and now are at the stage of cascading their learning and creating new models of delivery. What made this work was the commitment to shared experiences, and a real willingness to take risks and this included the creative practitioners who took part. It was less of the paradigm of artists servicing a public agenda and more about meeting in the middle with the essential tools and processes of the arts. Our case study, Doing Together Differently, expands on this.

Another RSA programme that has creative practice at the core of its social transformation work would be the partnership with Wiltshire Council, which is engaged in a radical county-wide programme of re-location of pubic services and the subsequent reshaping of these services to meet local needs and aspirations. This locally based model requires that those running the services and local people must work together in order for it to thrive. Again, as with the

Peterborough leadership forum, it is fundamental to address culture change and create a new space for dialogue. Creative practice lies at the heart of what might help to make this happen and indeed, is significantly challenging if one considers how to bring so many different ways of working together to create a coherent public space for all. Both local authorities have engaged in long term change processes and it is the long-term aspect that particularly enables creative practice to have a central role.

What has been so refreshing is that both Peterborough and Wiltshire leaders know that answers can be found from within the arts community and they are not alone. Kent Council advertised for a creative advisor to work across services earlier this year. A town in Wiltshire recently advertised for the same. I imagine there are more. What are the skills and capacities needed for these roles and what is the role and responsibility of the cultural community in this opportunity? To service and provide workshops or join in these discussions? I would hope the latter. Civic activist Peter Block contends that cultural change is only possible when it is preceded by the development of relationships and interconnectedness and writes: 'The shift we seek in the public conversation is from speaking about what others should do, to speaking into the possibilities that we as citizens have the capacity to create'.[42]

This is not without challenges, many of which we came across during Arts and Social Change.[43] One of these was the degree to which an artist gives up a certain amount of control in order to offer a sense of control to others and the potential compromise to the quality of aesthetic, be this within the artistic process or product.[44] This would be a similar risk however taken by any collaborator, especially in cross-sectoral work. How do you meet in the middle and produce high quality work? What if co-design and co-production seem to vie with artistic expertise? It's also important to acknowledge the international debate on the relationship (and ethics) between participation and art, [45] which will not be addressed in this paper but which raise intriguing questions about whether art neutralises or enables community voices, or if artistic rigour is diminished with public engagement. Another challenge would lie in the inevitable disparity of scale, both in terms of expectations of

time needed to make things happen and the numbers reached with projects. This can be resolved with partners actively appreciating the opportunities present in these differences of scale. For example, small local arts organisations can be fleet of foot and more responsive in a way that a public service or local authority simply cannot be. There is also the challenge of meeting with the middle. The familiar dynamic of initiatives partnering with local authorities, such as Citizen Power, is the lack of real engagement with those in middle management roles who can feel that their capacity to engage is compromised by cuts and an undermining of their expertise. [46]

42   Block 2007 Op cit
43   See the Arts and Social Change evaluation at http://www.thersa.org/action-re-search-centre/public-services-arts-social-change/citizen-power/arts-and-social-change
44   Further explored in the case study on residencies: Context Matters.
45   Critical literature on public art and relational art abound; Nicolas Bourriaud, Suzanne Lacy, Claire Bishop, Grant Kester, Claire Doherty are a good start.

46   The evaluation conducted by AHRC Fellow Mark Roberts is particularly illuminating on this trap. See RSA website.

CONDITIONS FOR GENERATING NEW KINDS OF CAPABILITIES

"We have found that this approach to theatre-making both enables and requires a set of behaviours worth looking at, because they create our conditions – what we call the conditions for creativity. And they also create the conditions for community."

Michael Boyd, recent artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company as quoted in All Together [47]

So, how are the capabilities that are needed to unlock collective and imaginative responses to the imperative for change generated? In Arts and Social Change, I have referenced the core capabilities as trust and a willingness to engage, learn and change as well as a curiosity and genuine interest in partnering with new people, organisations and ideas. What we hoped would give rise to these capabilities were the interconnecting threads throughout the programme such as:

Experimentation: The RSA's way of working employs innovative thinking and applies it through an action research model. Given the nature of creative practice, this could be interpreted in an experimental frame; learning from trying things, avoiding the 'project' paradigm, which tends to avoid experimentation and is more rooted in top down forms of implementation.[48] We are all familiar with disconnected projects that build dependence upon further intervention and lend themselves to the notion of servicing – that of coming in to solve others' problems, however brilliant those projects might be. A working culture that was receptive to experimenting with seemingly unlikely partners might generate effective and surprising results. An example of this in Peterborough could be the work done in learning groups within the leadership forum referred to earlier; I was facilitating a group comprising of leaders from the police and

fire services, the director of the Local Strategic Partnership, the head of the regional SERCO partnership and the chief executive of the large park in the city and was accompanied by a filmmaker who was making an evaluative film for Arts and Social Change with its participants.[49] The group conducted an experiment about new uses of existing spaces through making a film that addressed how engagement with the park might enhance their own services. This experiment resulted in the chief executive of the park significantly adjusting the brief for a new building in the park and generated an enthusiasm for filmmaking to address particular needs in the police service. Another example could be the remarkable work done by Art at Work in Portland, Maine that has embedded poetry making within the police service, resulting in tangible outcomes for the service.[50] As with Arts and Social Change, the organisation sits alongside local government to identify challenges and then designs the relevant creative engagement. Both of these examples are with leaders experimenting in new creative approaches and just as vital, is the permission given to middle managers and staff at all levels to do the same.

Valuing everyday experiences: John Dewey identified the centrality of experience through the arts for the benefit of a better understanding. 'We learn and fully understand something through experiencing it, and art is experience'.[51] Creative practice works from and with people's daily lives, be this in homes, neighborhoods or places of work and it is this universal connection with a 'lived' reality that enables recognition and personal meaning and creates new connections between people. Ideally, such creative practice honours and makes visible everyday experiences and the environment of such experiences. The key factor in both the residencies and the two commissions of Arts and Social Change was that the artists and participants met through the artwork.

'The primary value of the work (…) lies in the way artists try to provide such experiences through the opportunities they offer for taking part, and the way in which the work they commission and produce enables the discovery of new forms for feeling which connect selves and communities. When aesthetic form is found to

47 R Hewison, J Holden, S Jones. *All together: a creative approach to organisational change*. DEMOS 2010.
48 A term coined by Professor Patrick Humphreys of the Institute of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics to illustrate how single projects if they are not embedded within their working environment fail to have long term influence and are therefore unsustainable.

49 See Edwin Minguard's film at http://www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/public-services-arts-social-change/citizen-power/arts-and-social-change
50 ART AT WORK is a national initiative based in Portland Maine and works within local government. See: http://www.artatwork.us/projects/project.php?category=3
51 J Dewey. *Art as Experience*. Carbondale and Edwardsville Southern Illinois University Press 1934.

contain otherwise inchoate or inexpressible feeling, it can become a 'force' that 'moves' individuals or becomes a driver of social change'.[52]

The shared experience in the arts offers a powerful reference point for dialogue, as it touches upon deeper (often non verbal) starting points.

Two-way exchange: A feature of strong and inclusive creative practice is the insistence upon mutual exchange with everyone feeling they have something distinct to gain and offer. This, in turn, enables a flat landscape through shared learning. The question of what any one partner is going to get out of collaborative activity is heard more frequently in project planning, as is recognising the value of knowledge exchange and reciprocal networks. There are also increasing efforts to break down the commissioner- practitioner divide within the arts community at large and national research programmes that position arts leaders and community partners alongside academic researchers.[53] There is a need to create an environment wherein all partners (commissioners, delivery agencies and participants) take the risks of experimentation together, thereby highlighting a more mutual learning environment, which can, in turn enhance a capacity to learn together. This approach also means that the work can remain flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. Of course this is complex and difficult as we learned in Peterborough, but the fact that relevant public service leads were in the field alongside artists and participants meant relationships were deepened and learning was shared.

Uncommon ground: This phrase is borrowed from David Garcia from the Chelsea College of Art and suggests a space 'in which different disciplines play' and overtly values a diversity of participants.[54] Working within collaborative networks composed of 'difference' takes us outside our assumptions. Translating cultures of working from one discipline to another, from one arts practice to another, from one sector to another generates new discoveries and can lead to new ways of being together that then lead to new ways

of working together. This builds upon Koestler's concept of creativity involving a bisociation of two or more apparently incompatible frames of thought.[55] One barrier to developing uncommon ground is the prevalent working culture of sourcing expertise as and when it is needed, either internally or externally, formally or informally. The benefits of gathering needed knowledge through a long-term partnership are far less valued, especially in a climate of recession and can seem like a luxury. The dynamic of 'getting what you need from friends and colleagues' is far stronger than seeking new relationships. There is also a failure to grasp what the 'other' has to offer simply due to a lack of meaningful contact. What are the conditions that generate self-organised and diversely composed groups and how can we learn from recent examples of this such as the Save our Forests campaign that arose informally through a sense of urgency and shared values? Perhaps creating a coherent and collective voice is finally happening in the emerging What Next? movement.[56]

There are increasing numbers of cross-sectoral leadership development programmes such as those described in Peterborough, but there is a need to ensure that this does not remain in the bubble of training and 'away-days' and is capable of reaching into everyday working practice. Research refers to high levels of partnerships failing through the unwillingness to unlearn traditional management behaviour and the necessity of tackling personal capacities such as trust and willingness to 'get beyond the comfort of your own tribe.[57] If it is too uncomfortable, people won't bother. Working through the arts can bring surprise and the feeling of a 'safe' environment to an otherwise untenable experience.

---

52   L Froggett, R Little, A Roy, I Whitaker. *New Model Visual Arts Organisations*. University of Central Lancashire 2011.
53   See both the ArtWorks initiative that links commissioners, academics, institutions and participatory artists in http://www.artworksphf.org.uk and the AHRC's Connected Communities programme at http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Connected-Communities/Pages/Connected-Communities.aspx
54   In *Uncommon Ground, Creative Encounters across Sectors and Disciplines* Garcia outlines the barriers to cross sector strategies and suggests 'creative estrangement' from familiar working assumptions.

---

55   Koestler 1964 Op cit.
56   'What Next? is different from previous attempts at lobbying for the arts in that it brings together leaders from all parts of the cultural world, including the commercial sector, education, heritage and creative industries'. http://www.whatnextculture.co.uk/whatis/
57   An exploration into complexity literature would refer to this issue repeatedly but this is also prevalent in management development. See: D Archer, A Cameron. *Collaborative Leadership; how to succeed in an interconnected world*. Routledge 2008.

NEXT STEPS

> **"We keep our ideas alive by telling each other about them."**

The approach taken by all of our partners in Arts and Social Change addressed these aspects of uncommon ground, two-way exchange and valuing everyday experiences and experimentation in different ways within their practices and small and informal networks emerged as a result. Given that Citizen Power was committed to understanding the conditions for change, it was possible to create environments where creative practitioners were given permission to learn, whether this was a high profile artist coming to the city, or a resident artist or for ourselves in curating the programme. This learning partnership model will now be played out in the three-year programme in Wiltshire.

The gradual shift from industrial and transactional models (arts products for consumption) to knowledge based ones (experiences and partnerships) has profoundly opened up opportunities for creative practitioners. And with this shift, we need to start devising an economics based on ideas and have these ideas be generated from all quarters, not just the political and policy-making classes.

As outlined in the introduction, this paper has been aimed towards the arts communities as well as local policy makers. There are practical steps that can be taken to enable a meeting space between these communities and suggestions are offered below that have been directly informed by the work in Peterborough. The bibliography will also identify publications and websites that offer support and ideas for ways forward.

TOWARDS MEETING IN THE MIDDLE – BUILDING NETWORKS

- It is an act of faith to set aside time to build new relationships in such a way that openly explores new intersection points as opposed to fitting new partners into existing plans. It is a challenge with the potential for

long term gain but agreeing shared values, principles and rules of engagement, and desired outcomes and priorities together at the beginning creates valuable space for unintended benefits and has the additional benefit of reducing risk.

- Pay attention to and nurture existing relationships, as it is tempting in this climate to seek new ones at the expense of those you already have, especially if they are not always easy.

- Build networks that have a generosity of spirit, an emotive phrase that has real and practicable impact. Those networks will be places that people want to be. The cornerstones of positivity, collegiality and generosity cannot be underestimated.[58]

- Find things to be curious about with each other's work. Curiosity feeds partnership.

FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICE LEADERS

- As identified at the outset of this paper, the embedded context of the Arts and Social Change programme within the local authority's wider ambitions for change enabled a more sustainable legacy. This meant that it was not limited to a cultural strategy only and therefore perceived within that single agenda but had the potential for greater reach and influence. Sometimes, in practice, this can simply mean ensuring council or service staff also play a part in the work and are enabled to make the links from their experiences back into their own working practices.

- Invest in an overview of how your local ecosystem works and map how systems work to identify blockages and repeated patterns of entrenched behaviour. This provides the groundwork to assess opportunities for strategically introducing creative 'invited disturbances' and professional development within a creative framework.

- Take part! The sustainability of these projects rests upon an understanding that only participation will genuinely

58 Courtesy of artistic director of the Young Vic, David Lan's speech at the What Next conference in London April 2013. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPYpWRDeWNU

unlock change, as research continually demonstrates. Consider who would be best placed for this participation in order to embed the learning and the project's outcomes.

• Actively seek the rich resources available within your own locale and be aware that many of these will not necessarily exist within the cultural institutions. The voluntary sector and participatory artists working within public services can be hidden assets. Look for strengths on the ground not weaknesses or gaps, and build on those. Not only does this bring your work greater sustainability, but you are contributing to a local creative and cultural ecology.

• Consider creative practice as a means of strengthening capacities to collaborate.

• Situate experiences in the arts at the beginning of work and as a connecting thread throughout it, rather than the problem-solving end of it.

• Consider strategies for obtaining middle management support at the beginning of planning.

• Commit to a long-term set of relationships and avoid one off projects that do not embed within delivery practices.

• Remember the 'art' of invitation for projects and avoiding setting up projects for people and then expecting engagement to follow. Attention to invitation prior to the core design of the project supports a genuine level of engagement.

• Involve creative practitioners from the outset not just in the delivery. They will influence the design and thinking of the project and will be more invested in the project as a result.

• Consider the advantages of smaller organisations working in partnerships as well as the incentives for them to do so.

FOR THE CREATIVE AND CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

• Look 'sideways' not 'up' or just where the funding is. Don't consider yourself as isolated. Who are your natural and/or unlikely allies?

• Get to know your local community and voluntary arts organisations, not just those you might already be working with. Having a strong understanding of local needs as a result of good relationships positions your work for bids you might not be aware of through normal arts channels. The changes in the public sector offer opportunities not only for funding, but also for raising profile and advocating on behalf of the value of the arts at a local level. Be aware of what your own artistic work and thinking can gain as a result of these new partnerships.

• Begin dialogue that seeks to uncover shared values, both personal and professional. Discover what is non-negotiable (for yourself as well).

• Develop locally based networks that cross art form and sectoral divides (for example, actively link arts and heritage, museums in with arts centres). Build a network that is rich with the voluntary sector and student artists. Strengthen these networks through developing shared visions and values and avoid the traps of simply seeing these as avenues for advocacy and funding.

• Consider who is making decisions in the bigger picture at a local level such as the Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) and how you or your organisation, especially if you are a smaller player, can engage with this through networks and alliances. What is your unique place in the cultural ecosystem and how do you add benefit to it?

• There is an obvious challenge for the individual artist/ practitioner in this changing landscape and it is essential for networks and the larger arts organisations to take this into account in such a way that invites artists in on their own terms and includes wider agendas. It is much more challenging for smaller organisations to develop relationships with other sectors and it is of mutual benefit

to find solutions for this. And of course, it is necessary for individual artists to enter these opportunities and not expect the institutions to sort it out.

• Be on the front foot and engage with the civic debate. The arts and cultural communities have an opportunity for engaging with this vortex of change and influencing how it plays out. To simply see this time of change as an opportunity to bid for commissions in the public sector would miss the remarkable opportunity of being at the table itself and being part of the change. We do not have to have all the answers but we do need to be alongside others in asking the questions.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Additional references not already present in footnotes. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of resources, but more a signposting for those not familiar with socially engaged arts programmes or public participation. Along with the many footnotes, it is the thinking that has informed this paper.

E Belfiore. *The Social Impact of the Arts – An intellectual history*. Palgrave 2010.

N Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*. Les Presses Du Reel 1998.

R Finnegan. *The Hidden Musicians in an English Town*. Cambridge University Press 1989.

A Gilchrist. *The Well-Connected Community*. A networking approach to community development. The Policy Press 2004.

J Holden. *Democratic culture; opening up the arts to everyone*. DEMOS 2008.

IFFACCA D'ART REPORT No 41 (International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies) March 2012.

S Jackson. *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. Routledge 2011.

C Landry. *The Art of City Making*. Earthscan 2006.

C Leadbeater. *WE-THINK*. Profile 2008.

G Leicester, B Sharpe. Producing the Future: Understanding Watershed's role in Ecosystems of Cultural Innovation. International Futures Forum, Watershed 2010.

F Matarasso. *Use or Ornament?: The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*. Comedia 1997.

J Williams. *A Quiet Evolution, Creative Practice in Social Change*. Centre for Creative Communities 2007.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Jeff Bishop's paper Infrastructure for Engagement proposes dynamic strategic ideas for integrating engagement into local policy and is available at: http://www.bdor.co.uk/publications.htm

A very helpful resource for case studies and information: http://artsdevelopmentuk.org

A significant academic project exploring participation and cultural value with case studies from across the UK: http://www.everydayparticipation.org/about/

The RSA website has an animation based on the evaluation of Citizen Power that unpicks citizen participation, theory and practice at: http://www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/public-services-arts-social-change/citizen-power

http://www.voluntaryarts.org

Arts Council of Wales addresses participation on their website: http://www.artswales.org.uk/arts-in-wales/arts-creativity/participation

The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation in the USA has created a set of You principles for public engagement that can be endorsed formally by organisations at: http://ncdd.org/rc/item/3643

The Creative City Index, developed by Charles Landry and Jonathan Hyams, is a method for assessing cities holistically. This helps assess their creative abilities and potential, a precondition for downstream innovations and economic and cultural vigour. See: http://charleslandry.com/themes/creative-cities-index/

LARC, the Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium, has a useful blog that introduces some of their work in: http://blog.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/arts-council-england-blog/working-together-or-putting-wagons-ring but have a look at their extensive work in wellbeing at: http://www.larc.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/LARCTellingstorieswebjob.pdf

National alliance for arts, health and wellbeing at: http://www.lahf.org.uk/national-alliance-arts-health-and-wellbeing-%E2%80%93-charter-arts-and-health

NESTA's Creative Council's programme: http://www.nesta.org.uk/areas_of_work/public_services_lab/local_public_services/creative_councils

Participation Works has a basic guide for organisations beginning to work with creativity: http://www.participationworks.org.uk/resources/how-to-use-creative-methods-for-participation

NOTES