

# USE OR ORNAMENT?

The social impact of participation in the arts

There is no reason for thinking

That, if you give a chance for people to think or live,

The arts of thought or life will suffer and become rougher,

And not return more than you could ever give

Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Journal*, 1939

François Matarasso

**COMEDIA**

1997

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*Use or Ornament?*

*The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*

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# FOREWORD

Evaluating the social impact of participating in the arts has long been a sort of *terra incognita*, a continent whose existence is known, but which remains unexplored. Travelers' tales, where they existed, were full of mystery and menace, implying a land filled with dangers for the unwary. The sketchiness of the information encouraged some to argue that *El Dorado* lay there, while others asserted it was a desert, a wasteland best avoided. Our research has sought to throw some light on this shadowy region by establishing a base for further exploration. We have cleared some ground and begun to open up routes to the interior, some of which may prove to be dead ends. If the flora and fauna are unfamiliar, we have at least encountered no monsters.

This report offers an account of the evidence we have found of social impacts arising from participation in the arts, and of some of the methods used in the research. It is the first large-scale attempt, in the UK at least, to come to grips with these issues, and our intention has not been to give definitive answers but, as Brian Eno put it in a similar context, to ask the questions more clearly (Eno 1996: 14). If others, and especially those who work in the field, are encouraged to take forward this general study into more specific areas, it will have succeeded in its purpose.

The study is primarily targeted at policy makers in the arts and social fields, though we hope that arts practitioners and the academic community will also find it useful. We have focused on areas of impact which relate to broad public policy objectives, and methods which are workable in everyday use. It was felt by members of the advisory group and by those involved in the arts projects that the outcomes of the study should include practical mechanisms through which the social impact of arts work could be assessed. We have therefore leaned towards simple evaluation models, and forms of evidence which provide acceptable guidance for public policy development and planning.

The study also reflects the perspectives and experiences of those involved: recognising the elusiveness of objectivity, it aspires to accuracy, balance and questioning. It has pursued understanding rather than 'the truth', and uncovered more questions for each one it has answered. Equally, each reader will bring his or her own values to bear on it: for one concerned for the integrity of the artist will be another who questions the value of art in addressing social problems.

*Use or Ornament?* addresses the social impact of *participation* because it is to this area of the arts that social benefits are most commonly attributed in policy discussion. But participation is not a euphemism for community arts: the study interprets the word broadly, embracing work with many different values and motivations, but always with the active participation of non-professionals. The terms of engagement range from work controlled by arts professionals, such as the York Mystery Plays, to projects where there may be no professionals involved at all, as is the case with many fèis activities. This breadth of character is important not just to the study but to the communities involved.

That said, and perhaps unfashionably, we recognise the social and cultural value of community arts itself. There is nothing reprehensible in artists seeking to extend cultural democracy by opening their practice to others, by sharing their creativity and experience – even, perhaps, by learning from people uninitiated into the mysteries of con-

temporary cultural discourse. There is obviously bad community art: there is, after all, no shortage of bad art, (or bad education, medicine or government, if it comes to that). The argument that community art debases standards raises questions which lie at the heart of the present study: who defines quality, value, meaning? A refusal to engage with the ethical and political reality of such questions cannot help the arts community develop a healthy dialogue with the wider society on whose money it so often depends.

The election of a Government committed to tackling problems like youth unemployment, fear of crime and social exclusion is the right moment to start talking about what the arts can do for society, rather than what society can do for the arts. Unfettered by ideology, the new pragmatism can extend its principle of inclusiveness to the arts by embracing their creative approaches to problem-solving. Britain deserves better than the exhausted prejudices of post-war debates over state support for the arts.

It should also be stressed that *Use or Ornament?* does not mark the end of Comedia's interest in the social impact of the arts, only of the first stage. We are now addressing issues beyond participation, notably in a study of the relationship between arts and social policy in Glasgow, as well as looking at ways to address aspects such as training and employability. Work is also underway on a practical handbook of evaluation methods for the arts, and we would be very happy to hear from anyone with experience in this area. In short, this report is just the end of the beginning.

Finally, the co-operative nature of this project must be recognised. Literally thousands of people have contributed in one way or another – by completing questionnaires, by participating in discussion groups, by being interviewed or simply by allowing their work to be observed. Others have helped by opening doors, making arrangements and contributing ideas: as many as possible are recognised in the acknowledgements. The study itself was undertaken by a team, and the contribution of Chris Burton, Timo Cantell, John Chell, Helen Denniston, Owen Kelly and Eva Wojdat was invaluable. Without the help of Naseem Khan, who managed the Hounslow and digital technology studies, and Charles Landry who developed the original idea and gave unstinting support, the study would have been impossible. None the less, responsibility for the final report rests with the author.

François Matarasso

May 1997

# SUMMARY

Britain has seen an increasing use of arts initiatives to address socio-economic problems in recent years, ranging from major capital projects to local participatory projects. While the economic value of these has been researched, albeit narrowly, there has been no large scale study of their social benefits. Between September 1995 and March 1997, Comedia, a leading independent research centre, undertook the first phase of a study into the social impact of arts programmes. This concentrated on participation in the arts, as the area most widely claimed to support personal and community development. This paper describes the findings of the research, which found that:

- Participation in the arts is an effective route for personal growth, leading to enhanced confidence, skill-building and educational developments which can improve people's social contacts and employability.
- It can contribute to social cohesion by developing networks and understanding, and building local capacity for organisation and self-determination.
- It brings benefits in other areas such as environmental renewal and health promotion, and injects an element of creativity into organisational planning.
- It produces social change which can be seen, evaluated and broadly planned.
- It represents a flexible, responsive and cost-effective element of a community development strategy.
- It strengthens rather than dilutes Britain's cultural life, and forms a vital factor of success rather than a soft option in social policy.

The study concludes that a marginal adjustment of priorities in cultural and social policy could deliver real socio-economic benefits to people and communities, and recommends a framework for developing the role of participatory arts initiatives in public policy.

## **Background**

Over the last 10 years it has become increasingly accepted that the arts play an important role in the economic life of the country. These arguments have informed public policy, especially in urban renewal, and underpin much recent political thinking on the arts. But they have two flaws:

- They tend to focus on financial issues rather than on economics in its deeper sense as the management of society's resources;
- They miss the real purpose of the arts, which is not to create wealth but to contribute to a stable, confident and creative society.

Those who work in the arts, especially in the participatory sector, have long argued that they produce positive social impacts. But they have had very little independent evidence with which to support that contention. Indeed, some argue that such qualitative benefits cannot be evaluated at all.

This research was designed to add a dimension to existing economic and aesthetic rationales for the arts by looking at their role in social development and cohesion. Given the complexity involved, the study was undertaken as a first step into this area, with two aims:

- To identify evidence of the social impact of participation in the arts at amateur or community level;
- To identify ways of assessing social impact which are helpful and workable for policy-makers and those working in the arts or social fields.

To this end, case study research was undertaken in Batley, Bolton, Hounslow, London, Nottingham, Sandwell, Portsmouth, Northern Scotland, Derry, Helsinki and New York. Additional research included the use of a questionnaire for participants (from which figures in this paper are drawn). A series of working papers on various aspects of social impact of the arts, including research in Australia and the USA, was published. The methodology included questionnaires, interviews, formal and informal discussion groups, participant observation, agreed indicators, observer groups and other survey techniques, as well as desk research. None was satisfactory in itself, but each contributed to a multi-dimensional understanding of project outcomes.

### **Principal research findings**

The research divided the social impact of participation in the arts into six different themes, relating to people as individuals or community change; there is obviously a degree of overlap between them.

#### Personal development

Participation in the arts can have a significant impact on people's self-confidence, and as a result on their social lives. Many participants go on to become involved in other community activities or personal development through training. In some cases, like the V&A Mughal Tent project, people feel they have gained more control over how they are seen by friends and family. In others, the arts work has provided groups with an opportunity to think about their rights and social responsibilities. Most participants have gained practical and social skills which they feel will help them in their working and home lives. Teachers identified educational benefits to schoolchildren in several areas including language development, creativity and social skills. A significant proportion of adult participants have been encouraged to take up training or education opportunities. Some people, especially those working with digital technology, have found work as a result of being involved, while many more believe that their new skills and confidence will make it easier for them to get jobs. The research found that among adult participants:

- 84% feel more confident about what they can do
- 37% have decided to take up training or a course
- 80% have learnt new skills by being involved

#### Social cohesion

Participatory arts projects can contribute to social cohesion in several ways. At a basic level, they bring people together, and provide neutral spaces in which friendships can develop. They encourage partnership and co-operation. Some projects, like Portsmouth's home festival, promote intercultural understanding and help recognise the contribution of all sections of the community. The arts are also important means of

bringing young and old together, and projects in Batley showed the value of these intergenerational contacts, especially in reducing anxiety about young people. There was also evidence that the community development aspects of participatory arts projects could help reduce fear of crime and promote neighbourhood security. Projects involving offenders in the UK, the United States and Australia also show important rehabilitation benefits. The research found that among adult participants:

- 91% have made new friends
- 54% have learnt about other people's cultures
- 84% have become interested in something new.

#### Community empowerment and self-determination

Taking part in local arts projects is a popular way of becoming involved in community activities; (it is one of the top 6 reasons for volunteering in the UK). As a result it helps build organisational skills and capacity, as seen, for example, in almost 30 fèisean (Gaelic festivals) which have grown up recently across the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Skills learnt in the arts can be applied to other local projects: in South Uist, the fèis organiser has gone on to establish a major women's training organisation with EU funding. Participatory arts projects can also be empowering, and help people gain control over their lives – sometimes, as with Acting Up's work with severely disabled people, in a very practical sense. They can also play a vital role in the regeneration process, facilitating consultation and partnership between residents and public agencies. Arts projects can nurture local democracy. They encourage people to become more active citizens, and strengthen support for local and self-help projects. The research found that among adult participants:

- 86% want to be involved in further projects.
- 21% have a new sense of their rights.

#### Local image and identity

Participatory arts projects have an important role in celebrating local cultures and traditions such as the York Mystery Plays. In new areas they can help develop local identity and belonging, as the Living Archive project in Milton Keynes has sought to do. The arts can affirm the pride of marginalised groups, and help improve their local image. Participatory projects can encourage people to become involved in environmental improvements and make them feel better about where they live. They can also help transform perceptions of public agencies and local authorities, renewing the public image of cities for their own citizens, as well as outsiders. The study found that among adult participants:

- 40% feel more positive about where they live.
- 63% have become keen to help in local projects.

#### Imagination and vision

Participating in the arts made a big difference in developing people's creativity and confidence about the arts. For many, this was simply enjoyable and liberating, but professionals in teaching, social services, health, housing, countryside services and other areas said it had changed how they saw their work. Workers in Batley, Nottingham, Portsmouth and elsewhere intended to change their practice to use the arts in future. Projects had also helped public bodies to be more responsive to the views and interests of their users. Their creativity and openness encouraged people to take positive risks, both



personally and organisationally, with far-reaching benefits. Arts projects could embody people's values and raise their expectations. The study found that:

- 86% of adult participants have tried things they haven't done before.
- 49% think taking part has changed their ideas.
- 81% say being creative was important to them.

#### Health and well-being

The research did not look at arts in health care, but there was considerable evidence that participating in arts projects could make people feel better. Projects in Nottingham, Durham and Portsmouth were making very positive contributions to supporting mental health service users and other vulnerable people. In Batley, Sandwell and London, arts work with young people produced important health education resources. Finally, it was very clear that people derived great pleasure from being involved in arts activities, and that it added greatly to their quality of life. The study found that among adult participants:

- 52% feel better or healthier
- 73% have been happier since being involved.

#### Other findings

##### Counterweight

The study found some costs and problems to set against these positive impacts. Participatory arts projects can fail or underachieve for a variety of reasons, including inexperience and under-resourcing. Since they are part of a continuum of experience, positive outcomes can turn sour if the work is not built on. It must also be recognised that people can experience personal costs, (e.g. in relationships) especially where their lives do change and growth puts existing situations under pressure.

##### Economic impacts

Although the study did not address economic impacts, some issues arose, including the contribution to local economies made by the invisible voluntary labour of all the people who make participation in the arts possible. At a time when the education and training are at the top of the political agenda, this represents a boost to the country's education resources worth hundreds of millions of pounds. It is also a significant contributor to other public services, including child care, social services, health promotion and crime prevention, sometimes directly and sometimes through expenditure savings. The work is often paid for (where there is a financial transaction) out of communities' existing resources, with marginal support from the state.

##### Social policy and the arts

The study concludes that participatory arts projects are essential components of successful social policy, helping to turn houses into homes. They can open critical dialogue between service users and providers, and avert costly mistakes. They involve people missed by other initiatives and introduce creativity, meaning and communication into the equation. They offer flexible, responsive and cost-effective solutions: a creative, not a soft option. Social policy would benefit from a marginal repositioning of priorities to make use of them.

### The arts and social policy

The arts also have a responsibility, at least so long as they are in receipt of public funds, to consider their existing or potential contribution to society's wider goals. They should recognise their dependence on the audiences, new talent and creative ideas which the participatory sector develops. They have nothing to fear from such projects, especially not falling standards: a culture which needs protecting from people's participation is not worth the name.

### Conclusions

The study reached a number of conclusions about the social impact of participation in the arts, the most important of which being that:

- Participation in arts activities brings social benefits;
- The benefits are integral to the act of participation;
- The social impacts are complex but understandable;
- Social impacts can be assessed and planned for.

In short, it concludes that the arts have a serious contribution to addressing contemporary social challenges. Rather than the cherry on the policy cake to which they are so often compared, they should be seen as the yeast without which it fails to rise to expectations.

### Building a creative environment

The study sees the creativity, openness and elasticity of the arts as the roots of their social impacts. Since these may appear hard to integrate within public policy the study recommends focusing on planning an environment in which participatory arts projects can succeed. It suggests that this could be based on seven core principles.

- 1 Clear objectives
- 2 Equitable partnership
- 3 Good planning
- 4 Shared ethical principles
- 5 Excellence
- 6 Proportional expectations
- 7 Joint evaluation

Participatory arts projects built on these principles lay sound foundations of internal success and are most likely to produce positive social outcomes. Indicators of social impact are not difficult to establish or use in this framework, and arts projects can be evaluated consistently and integrated with mainstream public policy.

### The future

The study is the first stage of an ongoing research programme, not a definitive response to these issues. If it raises as many questions as it answers, others may wish to address them in the context of practical work. To this end, the main report sets out the evaluation methods used, and a practical handbook on evaluation of arts projects will be published later by Comedia. Further case studies are also being planned, including a study of the arts and social policy in Glasgow. Comedia is very happy to receive responses to the study or suggestions for its further development.

## THE STUDY SHOWS THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS CAN

- 1 Increase people's confidence and sense of self-worth
- 2 Extend involvement in social activity
- 3 Give people influence over how they are seen by others
- 4 Stimulate interest and confidence in the arts
- 5 Provide a forum to explore personal rights and responsibilities
- 6 Contribute to the educational development of children
- 7 Encourage adults to take up education and training opportunities
- 8 Help build new skills and work experience
- 9 Contribute to people's employability
- 10 Help people take up or develop careers in the arts
- 11 Reduce isolation by helping people to make friends
- 12 Develop community networks and sociability
- 13 Promote tolerance and contribute to conflict resolution
- 14 Provide a forum for intercultural understanding and friendship
- 15 Help validate the contribution of a whole community
- 16 Promote intercultural contact and co-operation
- 17 Develop contact between the generations
- 18 Help offenders and victims address issues of crime
- 19 Provide a route to rehabilitation and integration for offenders
- 20 Build community organisational capacity
- 21 Encourage local self-reliance and project management
- 22 Help people extend control over their own lives
- 23 Be a means of gaining insight into political and social ideas
- 24 Facilitate effective public consultation and participation
- 25 Help involve local people in the regeneration process
- 26 Facilitate the development of partnership
- 27 Build support for community projects
- 28 Strengthen community co-operation and networking
- 29 Develop pride in local traditions and cultures
- 30 Help people feel a sense of belonging and involvement
- 31 Create community traditions in new towns or neighbourhoods
- 32 Involve residents in environmental improvements
- 33 Provide reasons for people to develop community activities
- 34 Improve perceptions of marginalised groups
- 35 Help transform the image of public bodies
- 36 Make people feel better about where they live
- 37 Help people develop their creativity
- 38 Erode the distinction between consumer and creator
- 39 Allow people to explore their values, meanings and dreams
- 40 Enrich the practice of professionals in the public and voluntary sectors
- 41 Transform the responsiveness of public service organisations
- 42 Encourage people to accept risk positively
- 43 Help community groups raise their vision beyond the immediate
- 44 Challenge conventional service delivery
- 45 Raise expectations about what is possible and desirable
- 46 Have a positive impact on how people feel
- 47 Be an effective means of health education
- 48 Contribute to a more relaxed atmosphere in health centres
- 49 Help improve the quality of life of people with poor health
- 50 Provide a unique and deep source of enjoyment

## 50 SOCIAL IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS

This list has been drawn up to give a sense of the range of social outcomes which the study has shown can be produced by participatory arts projects. Naturally, it is not complete, and there are many others which might emerge from a different analysis. Equally, no single project should be expected to deliver all of them, or to produce outcomes in the same way or to the same degree.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 IT'S ONLY ROCK 'N' ROLL BUT...

An August evening in 1995: Helsinki's main square is packed with 70,000 people for a concert. The opening sounds of the evening – Sibelius' national hymn, 'Finlandia' – pass away, and Finland's anarchist rock band, the Leningrad Cowboys, fire up Jagger & Richard's celebration of rock 'n' roll. As the horns build for the chorus, the sound suddenly swells with the full-throated roar of the Red Army Choir singing '*I know, it's only rock 'n' roll, but I like it, like it, yes I do!*' in a rich Russian accent. The moment is exhilarating, joyful and almost unbelievable. The particular resonances for Fenno-Russian relations have been explored in depth by Timo Cantell (Cantell 1996), but the power of this moment can be understood and shared by any European who has lived through the Cold War. It's only rock 'n' roll, but it can change the course of history...

It is beyond question that art has a profound impact on society. Despite or because of its apparent uselessness, art is produced by all human societies. It has reached unprecedented levels of social importance in contemporary Western society as product of, and sometimes antidote to, the consumer society. The socially-engaged audiences uncovered by Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo at the birth of industrial age have turned to artists of all kinds for relief from and guidance in our modern times: even in the concentration camps, after which Adorno famously said there could be no more poetry, people sought understanding through art. More superficially, the development of British post-war society without pop music is unthinkable. Beatlemania took America, it is argued, in reaction to the shock of Kennedy's assassination three months earlier.<sup>1</sup> The history of the 20th century could be described and, more significantly, understood in relation to a series of cultural movements, events and individuals: that social change is often rooted in popular culture is a problem only for those who use the term.

### **The arts and British social policy**

The social impact of the arts and of the wider cultural forces of which they are part must surely be conceded by most observers. Why then is it that they form such a small component of British social policy?

The good reason is that attempts to use art and culture for social purposes has been the prerogative of totalitarianism in the 20th century. From exhibitions of degenerate art to Soviet Realism, from the Cultural Revolution to Year Zero, the evidence suggests that control of art is as bad for culture as it is for democracy. More to the point, perhaps, it fails, as even the benign BBC has learnt from attempts to ban records like 'God Save The Queen'. These experiences have the unfortunate side-effect of appearing to justify those who prefer to leave art to its own devices. The right argues that they confirm the superiority of market forces, while the left resists what it sees as censorship and state control. In fact, the small place accorded to culture in social policy is probably due more to British scepticism of the arts and intellectualism than to anything else: it is just not to be taken seriously.

Arts professionals themselves have been wary of getting involved in these debates, afraid of seeming to claim too much for their work or, perhaps, of encouraging outsiders to raise questions of value and meaning from which they have increasingly been ex-

cluded. As art replaces religion as the faith of Western post-war democracies, its priesthood becomes increasingly jealous of its power. The idea of harnessing the forces of art for social democratic purposes is seen by many arts professionals as a debasement of the currency. These are not waters to be casually stirred.

In truth, the arts sector has already compromised its principles by embracing an economic case for public funding. In 1988, at the height of the Lawson boom, when money (and greed) was good, the Arts Council produced *A Great British Success Story* and the Policy Studies Institute published *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*.<sup>2</sup> Suddenly the arts world had, or thought it had, arguments which a monetarist government would listen to. The terms of discussion became investment, tourism, ‘arts multipliers’, the cultural industries and job creation. The arts were good because they made money. Local authorities struggling to restructure city economies have proved equally receptive to these ideas, and the cultural industries have become increasingly important. The Labour Party’s cultural strategy, *Create the Future*, launched in March 1997, reflects this confidence in the economic value of the arts. As Mark Fisher MP said at the launch, ‘*The Labour government will be sympathetic because we know the cultural economy is not only good for the cities but it affects investment. Culture creates jobs.*’<sup>3</sup>

### **The limitations of the economic argument**

But there are limitations to this argument. Sanjiv Lingayah, Alex MacGillivray and Peter Raynard of the New Economics Foundation explore some of these, arguing that it is more concerned with financial than economic performance, since it takes little account of economic issues like health, education or social cohesion (Lingayah *et al.* 1996). Financial indicators can show how the arts compete for people’s disposable income, but struggle to account for non-financial resources, or savings in public expenditure which result from arts activities. Yet these are also part of what Adam Smith called ‘the art of managing the resources of a people and its government’. Even where they are reliable, ‘economic indicators tell a partial story [...] from the macroeconomic level, all the way down to the project level’ (Lingayah *et al.* 1996: 37). The economic importance of the arts is increasingly appreciated, but to consider only the financial impact of cultural activities is to produce a distorted picture of their actual value to society. In fact, they deliver a range of wider economic benefits (as briefly touched on in Appendix I), through their associated social impacts.

These limitations of the present economic argument are important enough, but artists and others working in the cultural sector also have concerns about the consequences for the arts of these debates, as articulated by Lucy Phillips in her working paper:

If it were found tomorrow that laying brick walls had exactly the same [...] success in producing the kind of results outlined above then laying brick walls would win hands down: it would be easier to implement brick-laying programs than arts programs and undoubtedly cheaper. The missing element is an articulation of what is different about the arts. (Phillips 1997: 20)

Or again, as the journalist Ian Watson puts it:

If the only things that politicians can say in favour of the arts are that they employ people, attract investment, yield taxes and regenerate urban landscapes, then we may as well accept that these things are usually better done by other means – the arms industry, for instance – and stop arguing for better state support of the arts. (AMW, 28 February 1997)<sup>4</sup>

To some extent, both these views represent attempts to pull the bedcovers back towards an aesthetic valuation of art, now feeling the policy chill. But while the ugly sisters argue over the duvet, the social dimension of the arts sits ignored in the kitchen, until it is time to clean something up.

### **A place for social values**

British cultural policy has been hindered by decades of protectionist infighting between opposing special interests (Hewison 1995). Instead we need a more balanced understanding of the role and worth of the arts in our society – one which simultaneously embraces their aesthetic, cultural, economic and social values, and allows for the different judgements inevitable in a pluralist society. We need to understand that the arts produce impacts as complex as the human beings who create and enjoy them, and that to respect their different manifestations and purposes is neither an abandonment of values nor a sop to liberalism. This study is intended to make a contribution to that aim by beginning to explore some of the social impacts which result from participation in the arts. The aesthetic, cultural and now the economic rationales have been widely and well advocated. The social benefits, with the exception of health, have not been addressed in depth despite the gradual inclusion of social goals in some areas of cultural policy (and the use of artistic methods in some areas of social policy). The study lays a foundation on which that process can develop.

## **1.2 THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

The principal strands of this research are evaluation and evidence: this section addresses how these have been treated, and how the findings are organised.

### **Evaluation**

Because of the lack of existing research, and the widespread view that qualitative changes in the arts cannot be evaluated, the study has focused on how evidence of impact is sought and assessed. Part of its purpose has been to test different approaches to evaluation of participatory arts projects. We have not been concerned with established methods like market research, financial performance or art criticism, but rather with social research methodologies. We have wanted to know how participation in arts activity has changed people's social lives, if at all. Specifically, the research asked the following questions:

- a. What social impacts is the programme intended to achieve, and how have these been identified in relation to local needs?
- b. By what process has the arts initiative been designed to achieve them?
- c. Are participants aware of the social impacts which have been identified?
- d. Are they able to participate in this process, from setting objectives and indicators to evaluating and explaining results?
- e. What indicators and standards of performance are to be used and why?
- f. What methods will be used to evaluate the programme's impact?
- g. How does it integrate and compare with other social programmes sponsored by the same agency (where appropriate)?
- h. How does the return on investment compare with that delivered by other social programmes?
- i. What is the threshold of success?
- j. What does the take-up rate say about giving people services they want?

The ethical and practical issues raised by trying to answer these were explored in more detail in the first working paper and will be the subject of a forthcoming practical handbook. The research methods used in the study itself are described in Appendix II, but it may be helpful to summarise here some of the key principles which underlie it.

### Objectivity

First of all, the research does not aspire to objectivity which, as argued in *Defining Values*, is almost impossible to attain even in clinical drug trials, and an inappropriate aspiration in evaluation of social policy, (Matarasso 1996a). Its pursuit can paralyse inquiry: if no research appears to be objective enough, people may feel absolved from the responsibility of evaluating their work at all. More worryingly, this approach can allow decision-makers to abdicate responsibility in the face of complex issues (the BSE crisis, for example):

Evaluation is thus a matter of subjectivity, since no scientism allows us to pretend to objectivity, an objectivity aspired to on the illusory grounds that it would support taking a decision without the decision-maker simultaneously taking a risk or responsibility. (Montfort & de Varine 1995: 16, *my translation*)

Instead, the study accepts the subjective views of people within and outside each project as an appropriate response to the nature of the arts and the complexity of its social outcomes. The views of participants about how their own lives have changed are pre-eminent in this context, and are reflected quantitatively through the questionnaire statistics and qualitatively in their own words. But the views of other stakeholders are also essential. In different case studies these have been artists and cultural workers; professionals in public services including health, education, youth service, the police, housing, social services and planning; parents, relatives and friends; neighbours and local residents; funding agencies; and, on a few occasions, local business and media. The range of observers included has reflected local circumstances, as has the nature of their participation in the research.

The research methods have also varied, including the use of several types of questionnaire, interviews, formal and informal discussion groups, participant observation, agreed indicators, observer groups and other survey techniques, as well as desk research. None was adequate or reliable in itself, but each contributed to our understanding of a project. The key point is that, in identifying and analysing social impacts, the study has drawn on a range of different perspectives and a range of techniques. This kind of triangulation, as it might be termed by social researchers, means that the analysis of social impact which forms the body of this report is based in each case on more than one source: any complexity is outweighed by increased reliability.

### Workability

The other key factor in planning and carrying out the research was the practicality of the methods used. Since our intention is to contribute to policy debates by helping develop ideas and techniques which others can adapt to their own use, they must be workable in everyday practice. There is a trade-off between precision and detail on the one hand, and control of evaluation by those involved in an activity on the other. Methods which appear suitable to social scientists cannot easily be used by arts workers and community groups, for whom evaluation, however important, is always secondary to achieving a programme. Impact assessment is only of value if it gets done; it will only get done if it is simple, valuable and integrated into normal arts practice.

### Indicators

At this point it may be worth stressing that, perhaps contrary to our expectations, it did not prove difficult to identify or use indicators of social impact. Appendix II concludes with a list of the indicators associated with the Batley Carr public arts project. They were agreed during the course of one meeting with the various partners involved, and were mostly effective measures of the impact of the project. The experience of the research confirms that arts projects of all kinds could use social impact indicators for evaluation and to build local partnerships without much difficulty.

Finally it should be understood that impact assessment does not necessarily involve evaluation of particular organisations or projects. Its primary interest is not ‘How did we do?’ but ‘What happened as a result of what we did, and how much does it matter?’ Why impacts were produced and how they might be replicated in different circumstances are vital planning and management issues, and sometimes touch on ‘how we did’, but they are addressed in general terms in this report.

### Evidence

The study looks at social impact experienced by individuals, groups and communities, using six themes to help organise and analyse the material. The detail of this, and the projects included in the research, are discussed in chapter 2, but it may be helpful to explain the two kinds of evidence on which the study draws: people’s views of what has happened to themselves or to others, and concrete outcomes.

The views of participants, professionals, observers and others have been a key source for the study, informing every aspect of the analysis and of the judgements reached. Their comments appear throughout the report, reflecting the voices of women and men of all ages and social backgrounds. They are often only identified by the place they come from, although sometimes gender and an indication of age are also given. With a bias towards understanding, it has sometimes been necessary to give a person’s relationship to a project – e.g. as participant, staff member or observer – or other information which is important to the sense: for example, in some projects it is a central fact that participants are mental health service users, and their views are thus recorded. However, we have avoided qualifying people’s words with such information, so that people can speak, as much as possible, on their own behalf. The disadvantage of such qualitative data is that it is not easily quantified or compared. People’s views are therefore also reflected in percentages drawn from the participants’ questionnaire and, in some cases, from questionnaires used by observer groups. Neither approach is wholly satisfactory, but together they give a fair sense of how those most involved see participation in the arts.

### Outcomes

Wherever possible, we have identified outcomes which are attributable to the project – for example, the Portsmouth HOME festival resulted in several further events, the adoption of a cultural diversity strategy and strengthening of local groups. These tangible outcomes are often specific to circumstances, and so may be hard to compare, but they are the social impacts. The biggest problem, in relation to this evidence, is showing that a particular outcome is the result of an arts activity – i.e. establishing a causal link. Those involved may say that something happened as a result of an arts project; we, as outsiders, may believe them: but is it so? This, in miniature, reflects one of the central issues not just of this study, but of social research itself, and each reader must reach her or his own conclusion. However, it cannot be denied that there is a cumulative power



in the hundreds of voices we have heard over the past 18 months, in vastly different circumstances, explaining again and again how important they feel participation in arts projects has been for them. How many swallows does it take to make a summer?

**The structure of the report**

The rest of this report falls into 5 parts. Chapter 2 describes the case studies and other research on which it is based. Chapters 3 to 8 set out the findings of the study, organised under six broad themes. Chapter 9 considers counter-arguments and the evidence of negative impacts. Chapter 10 summarises the conclusions of the study, and suggests how an environment for successful projects might be established. Appendices deal with evidence of economic impacts, details of research methodology, the participants' questionnaire and relevant literature.

**SOME DEFINITIONS**

The term 'art' is used here to include all art forms and media; 'Artist' as used here means people employed in the arts; 'Participation' refers here to involvement in making art.

## 2 THE RESEARCH

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The social impact of arts programmes is one of a number of studies undertaken by Comedia since 1990, the others addressing town centre vitality (*Out of Hours*, 1991), public libraries (*Borrowed Time?* 1993) and parks (*Park Life*, 1995); a study of the Creative City is ongoing. They are linked by Comedia's long-standing interest in the role of culture in urban vitality and quality of life. Each has included a programme of case studies involving new research, contextual analysis and working papers. The origin of this study was a short project which Comedia undertook for the Arts Council in 1993. Its purpose was to look at how cultural bodies in the UK measured the social impact of their work in a wider context of social research. It concluded that no substantive work in this area existed and that further research was needed (Landry *et al.* 1993); this report is the next stage in that process.

This is probably the most extensive British research into the social impact of participation in the arts yet undertaken. Some 60 projects were looked at closely with over 30 others involved more peripherally. They ran from the Western Isles to the Channel, with excursions to Helsinki, Derry and New York, and included rural, small town, suburban, city and metropolitan situations. Their character and purpose was equally varied, embracing amateur work, education and outreach of professional companies, community arts and more. Some 600 people contributed through interviews and discussion groups, and many more were observed or took part more informally. In total, 513 participants' questionnaires were completed, divided fairly equally between adults and children. Other types of questionnaire were completed by over 500 people involved in the various case studies.

Of course, this sample is only the tip of a very, very big iceberg. All over the country, in places large and small, millions of people participate in arts activities. As Sanjiv Lingayah and his colleagues point out, drawing on research by RSGB for the Voluntary Arts Network (VAN):

The voluntary arts sector is a major provider of the arts. In 1989/90 established drama and operatic societies (excluding youth theatres, school plays, choirs, orchestras and choral societies) gave over 66,000 performances to an estimated audience of 11.9 million. The figure for all professional productions of drama, musicals, opera and dance were 63,000 performances to an audience of 27 million. (Lingayah *et al.* 1996: 31)

VAN estimates that 23 million people regularly pursue arts and crafts activities, including 19% of adults who take part in photography, 12% in music and 8% in painting and drawing (VAN 1994: 24). One of the case studies, the fèisean, shows how these general statistics appear on the ground: in 1995/6, there were over 2,000 participants (apart from artists, organisers, committee members, volunteers and audiences), at a cost of some £200,000, over half of it raised within the communities (Matarasso 1996b: 14).

Most of the work is voluntary, developed and managed independently of the arts funding system. Where professional support does exist, it attracts a small fraction of total spending on the arts. None the less the contribution of voluntary and participatory arts to individual and community well-being, and to the vitality of contemporary cul-

ture, is very significant. The scale and breadth of this unpaid participation in arts activities should be borne in mind: if the study provides a fair representation of the field, it still reflects no more than a tiny proportion, and readers may be familiar with other work which has produced equally telling examples of social impact.

## 2.2 THE CASE STUDIES

### **Bolton City Challenge, Greater Manchester**

Bolton is an industrial town to the north west of Manchester, an area of mills which has seen considerable industrial decline in the past twenty years. Bolton City Challenge (BCC) was established in 1993 to address this decline and the associated problems, and it has had a visible impact. From the start, BCC had a strong commitment to using the arts in the context of local regeneration, and a number of projects have been developed with this end in view. Preceding the main body of research, and resourced at a lower level, this case study was seen as a pilot through which initial thinking and elements such as the participants' questionnaire could be tested. The projects reviewed were all complete, most having finished some months earlier, and underlined the serious obstacles to *post hoc* research in this field. They included public consultation about Mere Hall and South Halliwell Greens (*It's Up To You*), *On The Street 94* and *Shoot Back*. The first two used arts techniques to involve local residents in discussion about the future of a derelict Victorian mansion and an area of parkland. *On The Street 94* was a large-scale carnival event with a residency by Welfare State as its driving force. *Shoot Back* was a video training project intended to produce local material with an environmental theme. Some attention was also given to BCC youth arts projects, among other work.

Partners: Bolton City Challenge,  
Bolton Metro & North West Arts.

### **The fèisean (Gaelic festivals) movement, North West Scotland**

The fèisean are community-based festivals which take place in over 20 places across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Mostly geared to passing on traditional arts – especially music, singing and dance – to children through aural tuition, the fèisean also involve many adults as students, tutors and organisers. They have grown rapidly since 1990 and have reached Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh, though they remain rooted in the Gaelic-speaking rural heartlands and several are conducted entirely or partly in Gaelic. Each is different, but all centre on an annual intensive festival (often a week long) during one or other holiday period. In addition, most fèisean support tuition, ceilidhs and other activities on a regular basis throughout the year. They draw on a huge voluntary commitment, with very few paid organisers, though the tutors (who include many of the country's finest traditional musicians) are all professionally contracted. The case study was inspired by the rapid growth and cultural significance of the movement and focused on 3 fèisean: Fèis Bharraigh (Isle of Barra), Fèis Rois (Ross and Cromarty) and Fèis na h'Oige (a Gaelic-language fèis in Inverness). Fèisean in North and South Uist and on the mainland were also involved, and the research looked at associated activities such as Cèolas, the first intensive tuition for tutors, hosted by Proiseact nan Ealan, the National Gaelic Arts Project (Matarasso 1996b).

Partner: Scottish Arts Council

### **Nottingham Museums Outreach Programme**

Nottingham is a city with relatively high levels of deprivation in which unemployment and poverty are reflected in a raft of depressing indicators.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the City Council expects all its departments to contribute to an overarching anti-poverty strategy. Outreach work is seen by the Museums Service as a way of responding to these so-

Partner: Nottingham City Council

cio-economic challenges. In 1991 the first Visual Arts and Community Outreach officer was appointed, funded by Nottingham City Council and the Arts Council. Staffing has stayed at this level over the initial phase, supported by sessional workers and freelance artists. After a period developing contacts, the work has concentrated on reflecting the cultural diversity of the city, and working towards improved accessibility – in every sense – for disabled people and people with mental health problems. The case study focused on projects with mental health service users (including the Variety Society and People & Places) and reminiscence work with African-Caribbean elders. Other projects and aspects of the museums' work were included as appropriate. Adjustments were made to the planned research because both outreach workers moved to other posts early in the process; outreach work in Spring and Summer 1996 was therefore limited.

### **Redlees Arts and Crafts Stables, Hounslow, London**

Hounslow is a large suburban Borough on the western side of London, with a culturally diverse population and the usual challenges of earning its living in an increasingly competitive world. The Borough Council has a long track record of supporting local leisure and arts opportunities, including high quality facilities such as Waterman's Arts Centre, and a raft of community activities like the Older People's Festival. At Redlees Art & Craft Stables in Isleworth, the Council has developed a prototype for an innovative kind of artists' resource. Adapting an 18th century stable block set in a local park, it has sought to create a dynamic visual arts facility which reaches out into the local community to offer activities and education. The building has been turned into studios, let to a wide range of artists at different stages in their careers. In return for low-rent space, the artists commit themselves to offering an hour's tuition or other work each week. The case study looked at the impact which this new initiative had achieved in its first 12 months of operation, focusing on the artists, the Stables' programme and connections with local people. An important event was the first anniversary in July 1996, which attracted some 1,500 people to children's art workshops, craft stalls and other activities.

Partner: Hounslow Borough Council

### **The Arts using Digital Technology, UK, Ireland, Finland and Helsinki**

The largest of the case studies looked at the creative use of digital technology, focusing on nine projects in the UK and abroad:

Partner: The Carnegie UK Trust

**Acting Up, London, UK:** An integrated group of media artists, trainers and people with severe learning disabilities;

**Artec, London, UK:** A production and training group which created a CD-ROM, *Think Positive*, with local people and health professionals;

**Jubilee, Sandwell, West Midlands, UK:** A community arts centre which has produced multimedia work on HIV/AIDS, *Sex Gets Serious*;

**Knot at the Cable, Helsinki:** A self-help group providing arts development opportunities through cheap Internet access;

**Muu ry, Helsinki, Finland:** A flexible, self-help organisation encouraging exploration of the arts through computers;

**The Nerve Centre, Derry, Northern Ireland:** A multimedia self-help group providing a range of opportunities to young people;

**Playing to Win, New York, USA:** A new technology training resource centre working with disadvantaged young people;

**Pseudo On-Line Radio, New York, USA:** An Internet radio station, run by volunteers but working towards commercial viability;

**Raw Material, London, UK:** A media arts training and consultancy group, working particularly with young people.

The case study explored both the nature of these initiatives and the new ways of working they have developed, and the impact they produced for the people involved. Particular attention was given to general lessons about the value of and support of such initiatives (Kelly *et al.* 1997).

#### **Batley Cultural Fund, Kirklees, West Yorkshire**

Batley is a small town between Huddersfield and Leeds which has experienced great economic and social change over the past thirty years. Kirklees Metropolitan Council secured City Challenge funding in 1993 to address these problems and many improvement strategies have been initiated, including new transport links, environmental schemes and an extensive public art programme. In 1994 the Cultural Fund was added with the aim of using the arts and leisure in the regeneration process. The case study assessed the social impact of the arts projects supported by the Cultural Fund and identified ways of sustaining it after City Challenge. It included a number of participatory arts projects which took place in the town between April and September 1996, with detailed research undertaken in respect of three initiatives: the Batley Carr estate public arts project, the LAB community arts training scheme and a series of arts projects initiated by the youth service through Young Batley Arts Development (YBAD).<sup>6</sup>

Partners: Batley Action, Kirklees Metropolitan Council and Yorkshire & Humberside Arts

#### **Public and participatory arts in Portsmouth**

Portsmouth is a dense urban area which covers Portsea Island and spills onto the mainland at Paulsgrove, Wymering, Cosham and elsewhere. Although not characterised by the same level of industrial decline as Bolton or Batley, Portsmouth is experiencing its own substantial change following sharp reductions in the naval presence which has defined the city for centuries. It is also one of the cities which has secured unitary status in the latest round of local government re-organisation. Responsibility for important services, including education and social services, is passing from Hampshire County Council to Portsmouth City Council in April 1997. The Council has an established commitment to the arts, and particularly to community-based developments, and is notable for the four seasons it promotes annually to extend access and participation in key areas. The case study looked at several of these (at least in part), and at two public arts initiatives. The main seasons were *Home – Cultural Diversity in Portsmouth*; *Learning by Art – Live Arts in Portsmouth Schools*; and *Arts with Confidence, Lifting the Barriers – A Season of Arts in Social Services*. The last two were planned by the City Arts team to prepare for the new responsibilities of being a unitary authority. Each included a complex programme of events and activities over a three week period, so research involved a degree of sampling. The study looked at the arts in playschemes element of the 1996 *Summer Arts in Portsmouth* season; public art work associated with a new community centre in Wymering and with housing redevelopment in Landport was also included.

Partners: City Arts, Portsmouth Leisure Services, with Southern Arts and Landport SRB

#### **Social arts projects in Helsinki**

The Helsinki case study was smaller than most of the others, but was invaluable in providing a very different political and social context for socially-oriented projects. The project was developed in partnership with the City Information Management Centre

Partner: City of Helsinki

and was undertaken partly by local researchers. The research focused on an environmental arts project with heavy drinkers in the northern suburb of Pihlajisto, and on the new Festival of Light (*Valon Voimat*), now in its third year and rapidly becoming an integral part of the city's winter life. Other initiatives and venues, including the Eevasusi programme, were studied; the city also contributed to the digital technology case study through Muury and Knot at the Cable. A review of literature in Finnish was conducted, together with a seminar at the House of Skills to explore the social context of cultural participation in Finland with a range of arts and public sector workers.

### 2.3 ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Additional research was undertaken or commissioned, including the use of the participants' questionnaire in arts projects not in the case studies, a series of working papers and research into the published literature.

#### **The participants' questionnaire**

In the absence of existing quantitative data about the views of participants, it was decided to use a standard questionnaire in all the projects, to gain a sense of the proportions of people with similar experiences or feelings. The questionnaire was piloted in Bolton, and slightly revised for the main project. It was not concerned with project management but with people's views of the experiences they had gone through: its strengths and weaknesses are discussed in more detail in Appendix II. Projects around the country were invited to use the questionnaire between March 1996 and March 1997 through direct contact, publicity in *Mailout*, and Regional Arts Boards networks. Interest was encouraging, although many of the projects which took questionnaires did not, in the event, use them. The figures cited in the report include responses from participants in the case studies and from this wider trawl. They normally include all participants, although they often took part in very different activities, because the size of the sample (513) is statistically more reliable. Separate figures for adults and children are given in Appendix II and, where useful, in the text. Where significant differences exist between projects or groups of projects (e.g. the proportion who are new to the arts, which varies hugely) these are noted in the text. The key point is that the figures offer guidance, rather than precise measures. The questionnaire is necessarily simple, but until it can be improved, perhaps by those directly involved in projects, these figures are the only general indication of the social impact of participating in the arts, in the judgement of those most closely involved.

#### **Project visits and telephone interviews**

Planning the distribution of questionnaires brought us into contact with arts projects throughout the UK. As knowledge of the study spread through the sector, people also took the trouble to let us know about their work. As a result, visits were made to a few additional projects and a number of telephone interviews were conducted. These are also reflected in the findings. Research was also undertaken into the use of the arts by 23 City Challenge companies.

#### **Working papers**

Working papers were commissioned from experts in various fields, enabling us to target particular areas of concern and broaden the field of research to include material from the USA and Australia. They were:

- 1 *Defining Values, Evaluating Arts Programmes*, by François Matarasso, explores some of the practical and ethical issues involved in evaluating the arts.
- 2 *Creative Accounting: Beyond the Bottom Line*, by Sanjiv Lingayah, Alex McGillivray and Peter Raynard of the New Economics Foundation looks at the limitations of 'hard' economic indicators.
- 3 *The Art of Survival, Investigating creativity in humanitarian aid and development*, by Helen Gould, is the first account of the use of the arts in addressing some of the most urgent development problems of the South.
- 4 *The Tent that Covered the World: Multiculturalism and the V&A Textile Project*, by Naseem Khan, uses an ambitious initiative in museum education to question the nature of what we mean by multiculturalism.
- 5 In *The Total Balalaika Show: Shifting Spaces, Shifting Identities*, Timo Cantell looks at how a single event can reflect and mark fundamental shifts in politics, society and international relations.
- 6 *Northern Lights, The Social Impact of the Fèisean (Gaelic Festivals)*, by François Matarasso, reports the detailed findings of the fèisean case study.
- 7 In *Taliruni's Travellers: An arts worker's view of evaluation*, Gerri Moriarty uses her long experience as a community theatre worker to explore the problems of evaluation and offer practical advice.
- 8 *How The Arts Measure Up: Australian research into the Social Impact of the Arts*, by Deidre Williams draws on her recent research into Australian community arts to underline the social importance of the work.
- 9 *In The Public Interest: Making art that makes a difference in the United States*, by Lucy Phillips of BAAA, looks at recent American debates about public funding and the different roles of art in society.

*The Creative Bits*, a report on the social impact of arts projects using digital technology by Owen Kelly, Eva Wojdat and Naseem Khan, was also published. These papers are an invaluable context and source for the research, and they have been drawn on freely in this report. Further working papers will be published as the social impact project continues to develop.

## 2.4 THE RESEARCH THEMES

In planning the study, six broad themes were identified as a framework through which to organise the material:

- **Personal development**, dealing with change at an individual level, including confidence, education, skills, social networks etc.
- **Social cohesion** concerns connections between people and groups, intercultural and intergenerational understanding and fear of crime.
- **Community empowerment and self-determination** addresses organisational capacity building, consultation and involvement in democratic processes and support for community-led initiatives.
- **Local image and identity** deals with sense of place and belonging, local distinctiveness and the image of groups or public bodies.

- **Imagination and vision** concerns creativity, professional practice, positive risk-taking and touches on expectations and symbols.
- **Health and well-being** looks at health benefits and education through the arts, and at people's enjoyment of life.

There is inevitably a certain amount of overlap between these categories, and there may be other areas of impact which have not been adequately recognised, but they allow consistency of approach to the very different projects studied, and enable the report to focus on themes which are important to public social policy, rather than the characteristics of individual arts projects.

In doing so, it draws more on some case studies than others, because they vary so much in scale: research in Nottingham, Bolton and Hounslow focused in depth on one or two projects, while studies like Portsmouth or Batley included much larger samples, with a wider range of different activities. All, however, have contributed valuable understanding to the research, adding to the range of cultural activity and of approaches to participation.



## 3 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

### THE STUDY SHOWS THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS CAN

- Increase people's confidence and sense of self-worth
- Extend involvement in social activity
- Give people influence over how they are seen by others
- Stimulate interest and confidence in the arts
- Provide a forum to explore personal rights and responsibilities
- Contribute to the educational development of children
- Encourage adults to take up education and training opportunities
- Help build new skills and work experience
- Contribute to people's employability
- Help people take up or develop careers in the arts

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Every artist or arts worker will be familiar with the way in which participating in the arts can have a transformative effect on individual lives: after all, that is much of what art is about. The study found many individually dramatic stories but they resist generalisation except in the broad sense of changing lives. Yet these multiple personal changes are the building blocks of wider social impact which the arts are said to produce. In fact, in moving beyond the story of the young man saved from a life of crime by dance, for example, to the less stark experiences of most participants, consistent themes do emerge. The research identified several of these, including the boost to people's self confidence, the development of social contacts, acquisition of new skills and a take up of training or education opportunities. It should be noted that the high level of impact in these areas cannot be ascribed to the 'intake', since many of the projects involved targeted disadvantaged individuals or groups, and people with low levels of past educational attainment.

### 3.2 INCREASING CONFIDENCE

Overall, 80% of questionnaire respondents said that they felt more confident as a result of their involvement in the arts, a figure which was consistent across the projects. Whatever else the arts might or might not offer, they are a highly effective route to enhanced confidence. This was obvious among children and young people, who spoke easily about it: *'I'm definitely more confident speaking to children and adults, and I'm more patient in awkward situations,'* said a teenager at Fèis Rois, and she was echoed by many other children involved in fèisean activities. Parents here and elsewhere were quick to stress the impact on their children's confidence, as were teachers, youth workers and other adults.

It is, of course, to be expected that children will develop in this way through participation in all sorts of activities. But the adults felt this even more strongly, with 84% saying that participation had given them confidence, compared to 77% of children. Sometimes this touches on the arts but most people related it to life and the situations it throws up: *'It is different to normal, everyday activities: you learn new skills and ideas, you also build confidence,'* explained a participant in a Yorkshire crafts group.

*'I will be able to work on things at home now I have more confidence'*

Participation in a project changed many people's feelings about their capacities, and it was common to hear that they intended to take a greater role in future projects. Nor is it always necessary to be directly involved in the creative process to benefit: people with organisational roles spoke of new confidence, like a man who worked backstage on the York Mystery Plays and felt that his contribution had been essential to the success of the production. In Portsmouth, the Committee of Wymering Community Association had been primarily concerned in planning a public art project but the management process had been a powerful boost to the group's self-confidence.

*'It made me realise that I'm capable of doing anything I put my mind to, whereas before I never thought that I could do anything.'*

### **Confidence through co-operation and achievement**

There was a widespread recognition that confidence came through a sense of achievement, of having done something worthwhile, but it was striking that this did not have to be personal: being part of a collective success gave people the same sort of pride as having made something of their own. Participants repeatedly stressed the value of a supportive and co-operative atmosphere, where everyone's efforts and ideas were appreciated. Children at Fèis na h'Oige and Fèis Rois spoke of an openness which encouraged them not be afraid to speak up and contribute their ideas. This was important for almost everyone: thousands of miles away, in urban and high-tech projects in New York, London and Helsinki, participants felt just as strongly about co-operative and mutually-supportive values. It was clear from the digital technology projects that achievement could contribute to people's sense of self-worth:

*'It's good to have your opinion shared.'*

Perhaps the most convincing demonstration of the effects of these projects on the self-confidence of the participants [was] that almost all of them felt that any scorn they received for their involvement reflected badly on the people showing it. None of them said that this had made them reconsider their involvement. (Kelly *et al.* 1997: 28)

Elsewhere we met people, like Muslim women in Batley, who felt that their status in the family and community was growing. In her working paper on the Mughal Tent project, Naseem Khan noted the new respect

*'Our children think in a different way about us because they see us doing new work.'*

That women have been given by their husbands, families and friends – something the women reported with great satisfaction. The husband of one Tower Hamlets woman had been very disinterested in her embroidery work until one day he noticed the quality of the work and, she said, *'he suddenly became enthusiastic.'* [...] Even the children could be impressed. *'My children are proud of me and want me to participate,'* said one woman in Mitcham, *'And I've been able to tell them all about the history of the Mughal Tent.'* One Leicester group impressed a whole primary school. They were asked to describe and present their work at a morning assembly. *'The kids were so proud to see what their mums were up to .And the teachers too came to know that the mums were talented.'* (Khan 1996: 12)

This kind of change is not always without cost, and we met people whose existing relationships had been put under strain as a result of their development. This is addressed in chapter 9, but it may be noted here that none of the interviewees expressed regret over difficulties they had overcome.

### **Confidence about personal creativity**

Many adults spoke of their former sense of inadequacy in the face of the arts: they could not draw, paint, sing or play and felt disappointed, even hurt, by this perceived failure. Participating in arts projects had changed this, helping them to feel that the arts do not belong only to other people. Two women from different parts of the country, and very different social backgrounds, describe similar feelings: *'College was a negative*

*I learnt, possibly for the first time in my life, that I had the ability to be creative.'*

*experience for me, and this has “repaired” that feeling’ – ‘I always advocated that I was no way artistic. Now I know, with help, I can achieve a piece of work that will last into the future.’*

### 3.3 ENRICHING SOCIAL LIVES

#### Widening horizons

People described how their social lives had been subtly changed and extended as a result of their participation in arts projects. This was partly a result of increased confidence, but equally of new experiences, new ideas and new contacts. For example 88% of respondents reported that they had tried something that they had not done before, while an even greater proportion (92%) said that they had made new friends as a result of their involvement. As might be expected, many had taken their initial arts experience further by enjoying a wide range of other creative activities, including involvement in amateur drama, choral singing, home-based craft work and much more. For some, this meant renewing an existing interest in the arts, but for others it was a new element in their lives. It was equally common to meet people who had become involved in unrelated pursuits (swimming lessons, a computer course, first aid, etc.), while others had become active in the community. In some cases these social changes were personally significant:

A young Bedford girl, for instance, managed to get the courage to have her eyes tested. Some women [went on] to do word processing courses. Two others passed their driving tests. And at least one of a Leicester group was so impressed by the lessons of the project that she started to encourage her daughter actively to go for higher education rather than settle for early marriage. (Khan 1996: 12)

For others involved in the Mughal Tent Project social change was more subtle, but still important:

*‘Before it was unthinkable I could come out on my own,’* said one Leicester woman: now her husband has enrolled her on another practical course. When the Leicester women showed their panels in the city’s Museum and Art gallery, the husbands’ support increased. A number offered to baby-sit so their wives could finish their work. (Khan 1996: 12)

#### Personal benefits for young people

Young people were particularly forthcoming about how they had benefited from arts projects, though change is natural at this time in people’s lives and it is not always easy to know how much should be attributed to their participation. There were certainly many young people who had used the framework offered by an arts project to extend themselves, to break with existing habits or social links, and to move on a stage in their lives. Although for some this had produced tension or conflict, those interviewed felt that it had been positive, a necessary part of dealing with the criticism of schoolmates or parents who did not like the way their involvement in the arts was changing them.

Success in the arts, however, could just as easily enhance an individual’s position, especially where they had not previously been seen by their peers as being talented. Nowhere was this more true than in digital technology projects, where being able to control the new medium conferred great kudos. Indeed, those involved were so confident of their status as explorers that they tended to view those who did not admire their adventures with the same condescension that artists have traditionally reserved for the

*‘It completely takes over my mind, my soul, everything, and I’m not thinking about anything else. I’ve been very busy all my life, so now I’m getting older, I need another interest in life and this has been great. Wonderful.’*

*‘It’s encouraged me to use my imagination ; it makes me feel I can use my own ideas.’*

bourgeoisie. Interviews with young people involved in most projects confirmed that their involvement and commitment had often been secured *specifically* by the arts project. There were a range of other opportunities available – sport, outdoor activities, training etc. – which had not attracted them.

#### CRAZY GIRLS IN LAHTI

'Crazy Girls' began life in 1993 as a response by the youth service in the Finnish city of Lahti to increasing misuse of alcohol and drugs by young girls, especially at weekends. The idea behind the project was summed up in the slogan 'You can be crazy without intoxicants', and the members of the group agreed not to use alcohol or drugs for the three month duration. Fifteen girls took part, aged between 12 and 16, and explored ways of giving rein to their ideas through a variety of creative media. In the most successful project, they took on the personas of stars from the world of film, theatre and music, studying their heroines in depth before getting dressed and made up as them for a photo-session. The new stars' portraits, dripping with glamour and drama, were exhibited in a city gallery, attracting local and national publicity. The project was judged very successful by those involved. At a basic level, the members of the group all managed to lead a drug-free life for the duration, though it was very difficult for some. According to the girls, the experience helped them re-assess their lives, contacts and the future, and had a very positive impact on their relationships with parents. The project has since been copied in other Finnish cities.

### 3.4 FINDING A VOICE

For many adults we spoke to, one of the most important outcomes of their involvement in the arts was finding their own voice or, perhaps, the courage to use it. Indeed, 62% of adults said that the opportunity to express their ideas through an arts project was important to them: as one Londoner said: '*It's taken a long time to have the privilege*'. This kind of empowerment is often claimed by community arts projects: it is, in part at least, an outcome of cultural democracy. The study consistently found adults who felt that they had benefited from being taken seriously and having their ideas recognised: '*It helps heal my wounded childhood when I was squashed by my education, not listened to and not taken seriously*'.

Participants in the V&A Mughal Tent project found themselves being listened to, quite literally, with new respect:

Women in some groups – most notably Birmingham and Leicester – had come to take on the role of quasi ambassadors. Increasingly, as the project became known, invitations arrived asking for women to talk about it at conferences, festivals, seminars: to go to schools to demonstrate techniques. The women had been nervous about this at first, but gradually a rota developed in Birmingham in which a pair of women were sent out on each assignment, one experienced and the other less so. (Khan 1996: 17)

At a very practical level, the work of Acting Up has helped severely disabled people to articulate their wishes, likes and dislikes in a much more effective way (Kelly *et al.* 1997: 36). Interestingly this has also had an empowering effect for families of service users, who felt that their views were taken more seriously by health professionals than before.

#### A sense of one's rights

Participatory arts projects, with some exceptions, are more effective in building people's confidence than in translating it into political consciousness, (if that is a project's purpose). While many participants found the experience of being heard and taken seriously broadly empowering, a much smaller proportion (21% of adults, 12% of children) felt the project had given them a more positive sense of their rights. Where people did

*'Women's voices are seldom heard or listened to, so creating opportunities for women to express themselves is important, and being involved in making that happen is important to me.'*

*'As I am 11, nobody listens to me; if I sing or rap, my ideas get across.'*

*'As a mother I don't have to just work or look after my child; my interests and skills are valid and deserve time and dedication'*

feel differently about their rights, the feeling was usually shared by everyone involved in the project. In other words, most arts projects do not change people's views of their rights, but those which do, do it effectively. Where it did happen, it was because the project consciously addressed rights issues, as in the example of a Young Batley project about democracy which resulted in a play called *VOTE*. This engaged young people with little previous knowledge of or interest in politics, helping them become much more aware of political structure they were part of and their power within it. '*The project changed my views on politics*,' reported one participant. '*At first I thought it was boring and only involved middle-aged people in suits, but it actually involves everyone.*' The play has been performed widely to very positive responses from young and adult audiences.

In Nottingham, the developing relationship between the Museums Service and local Black and Asian communities has had an impact on participants' sense of their right to be included and to be heard: several African-Caribbean people spoke about the importance of the Museums' recognition of their culture. Elsewhere, projects involving mental health service users had had a direct impact on participants' sense of their rights. One person from Leicestershire spoke of how a forum theatre project had made him more aware of the difficulty of protecting his rights, experience he put to use in a presentation to the National Arts In Mental Health Forum. His view was echoed by participants with mental health problems in several other projects. Issues of rights and responsibilities were important elements in a number of projects including women, disabled people and young people. It was also notable that several people who spoke about their changing attitudes to their rights had also thought, perhaps for the first time, about the rights of others: a man in Batley explained that he had been '*challenged on subjects I have never properly understood before, e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia etc.*', saying that his views had been deeply changed since being involved in a series of arts projects.

*'I know now that rights are learnt and not a privilege.'*

### 3.5 EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

The relationship between the arts and educational attainment has been widely debated, and addressed by academics. For example, Martin Gardiner and colleagues from Rhode Island, USA, noted improvements in the school performance of 5 to 7 year olds who participated in a music and visual art curriculum.<sup>7</sup> Of these children 75% were at, or above, grade level in mathematics, compared to 55% in control groups; progress was also made in reading and behaviour, with the level of achievement being sustained the following year. He suggests that:

When students discover that participation in arts activities is pleasurable, they become motivated to acquire skills in the arts [...] with two types of result. First, from learning that they can learn such challenging but desirable skills, students' general attitude towards learning and school can improve. Second, learning arts skills forces mental 'stretching' useful to other areas of learning. (Gardiner *et al.* 1996)<sup>8</sup>

In this country, Gerri Moriarty describes how the evaluation of science and drama work in a Salford school has gradually persuaded staff and local authority of its value, with the result that there is now a full-time member of staff for the performing arts, and money for after-school activities (Moriarty 1997: 16) While the present study did not focus on educational benefits, or apply this kind of test, a number of the case studies included work with an educational context, or where educational benefits were an outcome.

### ‘Learning by Art’: Portsmouth Schools

In February and March 1997, Portsmouth City Council promoted a season of arts activities in the city’s schools, as part of preparations for taking over education from Hampshire County Council. Over 30 schools, from infants to the 6th form, took part in projects with some 20 artists or performance groups. The core of the programme was a series of participatory activities, from half-day art workshops for infant classes to week-long residencies aimed at creating new work like a mural for Farlington Marshes Nature Reserve. Although the emphasis was on art as a part of the curriculum, the season also offered an opportunity to look at the contribution which participation in the arts might make to the general development of school students.

Teachers were asked to consider the progress made by a random sample of their pupils in five areas: developing language skills, physical co-ordination, observation skill, creativity and imagination and social skills development. Forms were completed by teachers at 9 schools, for a total of 88 pupils (drawn fairly evenly from Infant and Junior classes, with a few older children):

	Positive	Slight	No impact	Negative
Developing language skills	60%	24%	15%	1%
Physical co-ordination	62%	16%	22%	-
Observation skills	53%	30%	17%	-
Creativity and imagination	83%	9%	7%	1%
Social skills development	56%	31%	13%	-

#### LEARNING BY ART ACTIVITIES:

Batik, ceramics, dance, junk funk, mask-making, mixed-media, mural, music, photography, poetry, puppetry, sand-painting, screenprinting, sculpture, steel drums, storytelling, textiles, theatre, visual art, carving.

Table 1: Impact of arts activities on students, as assessed by teachers

These simple figures, like others in this report, should be seen as broad guides rather than exact measures, but two important points emerge. First, although the sample is small, teachers do consider that the arts activities had a positive educational impact on most children. According to the educationalists who know them best, participating in the arts had a positive impact on at least 3 out of every 4 children; in the area of creativity and imagination 9 out of 10 children benefited. These are not art specialists, but general teachers who were often initially sceptical of the benefits of the activity. Whatever value the arts have in their own right in the curriculum (and they have much), their potential for supporting broad educational goals should be recognised. The fact that children may enjoy these activities more than other work should not obscure their real contribution to development.

Secondly, as might be expected, the nature and extent of that impact varied between children and the activities they have taken part in. Within each class, most teachers recognised different levels of benefit, depending on the interests or situation of individual children. Equally, the activities themselves produced different outcomes: working with Kokuma dance company was seen to benefit physical co-ordination and observation, while the work of the storyteller, Joan Barr, had more impact on language skills.

These indicators were confirmed by discussions with teachers and pupils. Indeed rarely during the course of the study was it so difficult to find a dissonant voice, or someone who felt that the experience had not been worthwhile. There were of course some pupils who did not enjoy the activities they took part in, but 87% (96/112) of junior children questioned wanted to do the activity again. Across the age range most children were filled with enthusiasm for the new techniques and ideas they had explored. They specially enjoyed the artists’ style: ‘he didn’t criticise by saying “That’s absolutely

*‘The best thing was that you could do things that you have never tried before.’*

*‘It gave me more self-confidence because I saw that I could write poems quite well.’*

*rubbish” he said it in a kind sort of way, but getting the message over that it could be better’. As a result many tried things they had previously been wary of and benefited from doing so.*

Teachers were often surprised at the level of concentration and effort their pupils were prepared to give to art activities and at the engagement of unexpected children. They spoke at length about the new self-confidence which some of the quieter members of the class had acquired as a result of shining in the art sessions. The benefits were not confined to individuals: whole groups could be inspired, according to several teachers who came back to classes fired up with unwonted creative energy. The effects could reach other teachers, assistants and parents: one project *‘encouraged all adult helpers to become more enthusiastic and confident’* about future art work. Working with artists had also encouraged teachers to adopt more creative approaches to their professional practice (see 7.2). This success lay partly in that artists had the luxury (in school terms) of working with smaller groups. But they also offered things which teachers recognised that they could not have done themselves, including technical expertise and vision. The readiness of many artists to be ambitious and work on a large scale gave confidence to the teaching staff as well as the children: *‘I certainly never would have undertaken anything like the science mural – I don’t have the skills’*. The experience was often as inspiring for teachers as for pupils, and many felt the project was an effective starting point for follow-up work.

*‘His delight in what he had created was a pleasure to see, and increased his self esteem a great deal.’*

### **Other school experiences**

The Portsmouth experience was the largest project of its kind in the study, but its findings were reflected by other school projects. For example, work with children and retired people by Proper Job Theatre at the Bagshaw Museum, drew very positive responses from all involved. One teacher whose class took part said *‘I’ve taught for 25 years and I have never taken my children [to an activity] which so involved them for so long: their behaviour was excellent throughout and this is not an easy class.’*

### **Children’s learning outside formal education**

Several of the arts projects involved children in learning activities outside school. The Gallery Gang, a fortnightly art workshop for disabled children and their friends at Redlees Art and Craft Stables in Hounslow, is typical of many of these. Both children and parents were very positive about the benefits, and reported improvements not just in their arts skills but in social development. One child who did not normally respond well to organised activities, behaved differently at Redlees: *‘Usually he just can’t settle, and so there’s not much open to him, but he enjoys it here and he’s well-behaved’*.

Perhaps because they involve so many children, the fèisean were especially impressive in this respect, and the degree of concentration they drew upon was obvious. As the report points out, the abstract patterns of melody and dance are a real challenge, and *‘there are few occasions in which children of 8 or 10 are challenged to concentrate as hard for as long as during a fèis’* (Matarasso 1996b: 14). Although the value of such opportunities could not be assessed, they are among the personal benefits of participating in the arts.

### **Life-long learning**

Increasing attention is being paid to education and training, given the need to help people keep pace with a rapidly changing work environment. The phrase ‘life-long learning’ has become a shorthand for this:

Industry, the government and many individual members of the public in the United Kingdom now recognise the importance of lifelong learning. We are currently witnessing an explosive development of learning, particularly among adults, that has no precedent in this century. One-third of all adults in the United Kingdom are now engaged in study or have been so in the previous three years. Of these, nearly half are learning independently of formal educational institutions. (Anderson 1997: 3)

Whether this growth is spurred by insecurity or by a wish for personal development, education is a major and expanding industry. It has been argued (e.g. the recent DNH report on museums and learning from which this quote is taken) that the arts have a role to play here, both in building confidence and in the acquisition of what are sometimes called 'transferable' skills – for example, performance skills which can be applied to a range of commercial uses.

The findings of the study do indeed suggest that this is true: participating in the arts is a major confidence builder (as already illustrated) and a means of developing people's skills. The projects also showed an ability to involve people who have not been reached, or may have rejected, conventional education and training opportunities. The arts projects of Young Batley, for example, have attracted young people which other local initiatives have passed by.

#### **An alternative route to education**

Thirty seven per cent of adults said that participating in the arts had encouraged them to take up new training or educational courses. A marked interest in further arts training might be anticipated, and there was certainly a significant number of people who had decided to improve their skills: for example, one young woman used the York Mystery Plays as a platform 'to take up singing lessons again, if I can afford it'. Most of the children and adults involved in the fèisean affirmed a similar commitment to sustaining their arts tuition beyond the fèis itself, and many do so. For a few, like a lecturer in Bolton who had decided to re-train as a drama therapist, an interest in the arts had led them to take on full-time further education or, in one or two cases, Open University courses.

But the numbers of people who had taken up training in areas with no connection to the arts was as striking as it was unexpected. These included first aid, crafts work, accountancy, youth work, outdoor pursuits, word processing and other equally diverse subjects. It would seem that growing self-confidence gave some people the courage to take up new challenges. Some arts projects, like the Harlem Community Computing Centre in New York or Raw Material and Artec in London, are themselves training providers. In these computer-based projects, it was obvious that the attractions of the technology often combined with the free atmosphere to attract people who had not taken up other training opportunities; as one young man in Belfast put it: 'At first I'd come in and muck about on the Net – then I started finding out how to make my own stuff on the Web. Me and my friends have got our own Website now...'

The degree to which people were encouraged to take their own training seriously varied from project to project: certainly it includes people who do not experience difficulty in accessing training or feel a need for it. But there is no doubt that arts projects can be highly successful in making training attractive to people who had not previously been reached by education initiatives.

*'As far as I can see, I will never finish my training, because as soon as I learn something then the software changes and I have to begin again.'*



### 3.6 SKILL-BUILDING AND EMPLOYMENT

#### Skill development

According to participants, arts projects are an effective and enjoyable way of learning new skills: 80% of adults and 77% of children say they have acquired new skills since being involved. These skills were valued, and most people saw how they would help in school, in creative careers, in finding work or in other aspects of their lives. The most obvious areas of skill development were arts-related – drama, visual art, computers, video etc. – and were seen to help in pursuing creative interests and further involvement in the arts, ranging from personal work to community projects. Some thought that their new skills would help with arts careers. Aspirations of this kind were naturally more common among young people, though there were also adults with their hopes set on a new career.

*New skills might help me in future projects and to get into a stage school easier.'*

But far more often adults identified new skills which were not directly creative, while being gained through participation in the arts. A typical example is the man involved in community drama in Wales who said he had learnt about *'confidence, public speaking and interacting with people'* and that this would help him in situations at home and at work. Others said that they had learnt about organising events, administration or managing people. This was particularly obvious among the *fèisean*, which depend so much on local skills and commitment, and where organisers said:

how far they had come since they first became involved. Their new skills range from organisation and contracts, to finance and negotiation. They have learnt to write reports and applications, and to argue their case with local authorities and LECs. On a more pedestrian level, they have learnt basic office skills: when she took on the *fèis*, one organiser stressed that *'at the time I couldn't type or use the computer – I couldn't do anything'*. (Matarasso 1996b: 19)

More domestically, several parents felt that what they had learnt would enable them to help their children with schoolwork or simply, as one woman put it, in *'enriching my children's experience'*.

#### Employability

In the case studies, only the LAB project (a full-time community arts training course by Proper Job Theatre in Batley) had a primary employment aim. The course offered innovative training and career development to people wishing to work in community arts, and a creditable 31% of participants have secured employment or further education places. Given the high level of disadvantage among the course intake, and the fact that not all the benefits will be clear in the few weeks following, this is a very positive outcome.

We encountered a small number of people who had used their participation in an arts project as a springboard towards work, commonly self-employment, and often part-time as they tried to develop a business. Sometimes there was a connection with the project they had been involved in – e.g. Infocus Video, formed after work with First Take in Bolton – but not always. For example, in Batley we met someone who had decided to become a youth worker as a result of his participation in an arts project. Other projects have allowed people to test their commitment to working in the field. It may be noted in passing that the arts have always depended on the kind of self-reliance and flexibility in employment which is becoming increasingly important in the employment market. Participation in arts projects may have lessons about approaches to working for us all, whatever our own employment situation.

*'I am now going into business in the field in which I worked during the play, having been greatly encouraged by the professionals.'*

The digital technology projects were often important routes to employment, enabling and encouraging the acquisition of high level and relatively rare skills. As a result, many of those involved – who also tended to be young, and not to have previous success in education or employment – found themselves in possession of highly marketable skills. Many Playing To Win trainees had found employment in areas ranging from word processing to graphic design and desktop publishing; in the last year, five teenagers had left the project to take up programming. Across the various projects, about 40% of staff were former volunteers or users, and it is a testament to their commitment to the ethos of the groups that they preferred to work there than to find more lucrative employment in the commercial sector (Kelly *et al.* 1997: 26)

*'I used to come in here after school to use the computers. I didn't realise how much I'd learned until I found myself helping other kids...'*

#### NON-VOCATIONAL ARTS TRAINING FOR UNEMPLOYED YOUNG PEOPLE

In Finland, the Eevasusi arts project has proved to be an effective vehicle for building skills and confidence among the young unemployed. From its start as a building renovation project in 1994 in Espoo (near Helsinki), it has grown to include 23 workshops in various parts of Finland. Funded by the Ministries of Labour and Employment, the European Social Fund and local budgets, each Eevasusi project provides media and theatre experience for 10-15 young people, working with 2 supervisors. Media work focuses on the bi-monthly magazine *Periferia* which participants have a virtually free hand in editing, designing and writing, as well as working with the private sector through advertising sales: there is also a *Periferia* website ([www.freeneit.hut.fi/periferia](http://www.freeneit.hut.fi/periferia)). Theatre projects include new work for schools, youth clubs, residential homes and similar community settings. To date more than 600 young people have taken part in these workshops, for a fee of 118 FMK (£15) a day. Although the training does not lead to jobs in every case, it often encourages young people back into education, and the scheme is considered a success by its sponsors. The emphasis on skill development through creative projects, rather than vocational training, has been difficult for the public bureaucracies to accept. But the success of Eevasusi in building young people's skills and employment opportunities is gradually being accepted and is reflected in increasing funding. Some will find echoes of the UK's old Community Programme, but the scheme's success in Finland and its recent expansion to Estonia and Karelia region of Russia suggests that it continues to have value in addressing youth unemployment.

#### Transferable skills

If the market for arts workers is necessarily limited, arts training has huge potential as a grounding for employment in other areas although, as Rick Rylance has pointed out, this view runs counter to conventional thinking about the relationship between education, vocational training and employment.<sup>9</sup> His research into the records of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has shown that English graduates are as successful in gaining employment as their counterparts in Business and Administrative Studies (the HESA category which includes accountancy, financial management and similar vocational areas). In 1994/5, 12% of the latter group were still seeking work six months after graduation, compared to 12.1% of English graduates. The kinds of work secured by English graduates also defied expectations, with a greater proportion of them going into manufacturing than business and administrative studies graduates (16.8% compared to 15.8%). He concludes:

We need therefore to reject the false opposition between specific skills and general intellectual development implied by notions of crude 'vocational relevance'. We have to think about our graduates' skills – of information analysis, intellectual initiative and flexibility, team-working, communication and problem-solving – as a crucial part of the intellectual rigour of a higher education in the humanities within an information economy.<sup>10</sup>

The point is well made that many employers, and perhaps especially those in the growing service and information sectors, are more interested in adaptable, creative and self-motivating staff, than in particular skills which they can develop in-house to meet their specific needs. This study was too short to be able to record changes in participants' employment prospects, and the evidence of impact is therefore incidental – albeit very important to those concerned – but there is evidence that the experience of English graduates in this area is paralleled by that of arts trainees. In a 1988 report, Paul Collard suggested that Community Programme arts trainees had good general employment prospects:

Gazebo was a Wolverhampton based theatre company funded through the Community Programme. MSC officers reported that 80% of participants were in full time employment within three years of completing their time on the project, the majority in non arts related activities. The MSC further reported that the success rate was as high as for any project (including non arts projects) within their district. (Collard 1988: 9)

More recently, Helen Gould described similar experiences arising from the Dance In Action programme supported by Newcastle City Challenge, whose director reported that:

'These are the kids who were branded by the school as dregs. But we're not trying to make them all into dancers. One of our dance students has gone on to join the police force. One has decided they want to be a teacher. One person wants to be a dancer. One person wants to run a shop. It's about turning them into better people.' (Gould 1996: 10)

Sometimes the skills people gained from an arts project were directly marketable: some of the women who worked on the V&A Mughal Tent project used their new technical competence of embroidery to do outwork for clothing firms, while one went on to establish a dress-making course (Khan 1996: 18). These indicators are encouraging and suggest the need for a full-scale study of the development of transferable skills and employability through participation in arts activities.

### **Benefits to artists**

It is also worth noting that involvement in arts activities can have a positive impact on the confidence, skills and training of the artists themselves. Much of the work under review was undertaken by freelance artists, rather than by specialist, employed community arts workers, and there was considerable evidence of benefits to this group. Freelance artists often work alone; they also take risks each time they perform or show their work. Many of the case study artists, and especially those with less workshop experience, benefited greatly in terms of enhanced confidence in their own work and abilities.

This was certainly the case at Redlees Art & Craft Stables in Hounslow, a project established in part to support the professional development of artists. Several of the artists in residence and on the waiting list had been encouraged to review their own training needs in working with the public, as well as their wider careers. Individuals were planning to take up courses in teaching, public art administration and the fine arts with the intention of enhancing their employability. They benefited through exchange, co-operation and picking up new techniques or bits of know-how. One person had been nervous about not having had a formal arts training, but learnt it was not crucial, which knowledge gave her growing confidence in her work: *'I've got a bit bolder, more courageous, as a result of seeing how the others put things together.'* The artists also benefited from honing their skills in working with the public, and from having room in which they could grow

creatively as well as professionally. This was especially the case for those who had previously worked at home, having to share space and perhaps having to clear away when family members returned.

In North West Scotland, the fèisean are important sources of work, experience and support to musicians of all kinds. It is a notable strength of the fèisean that they can attract, for low professional fees, many of the finest Scottish traditional musicians. But that recognition should not be allowed to obscure their invaluable support for less high-profile artists, living in remote areas. The contribution of groups like Fèis Rois to people's economic survival is no more important than their support, training, career development and friendship. The mutually-supportive relationship between artists and people participating in the arts as non-professionals is easily overlooked, but it is crucial to the growth of individuals and to sustaining cultured and creative communities.

#### **UNEXPECTED BENEFITS FOR THE LENINGRAD COWBOYS ...**

The Total Balalaika Show has radically transformed the careers of both the Ensembles involved in the show. [...] The Leningrad Cowboys have been used in various Finnish marketing campaigns and their quiffs and winklepickers are a familiar sight. They have also launched their own beer and vodka brands – the first rock band in the world to do so. (Cantell 1996: 15)

## 4 SOCIAL COHESION

### THE STUDY SHOWS THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS CAN

- Reduce isolation by helping people to make friends
- Develop community networks and sociability
- Promote tolerance and contribute to conflict resolution
- Provide a forum for intercultural understanding and friendship
- Help validate the contribution of a whole community
- Promote intercultural contact and co-operation
- Develop contact between the generations
- Help offenders and victims address issues of crime
- Provide a route to rehabilitation and integration for offenders

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion has become an increasingly familiar phrase in policy discussion of all kinds, though its meaning sometimes remains opaque. In some contexts, like Denmark's 'New Partnership for Social Cohesion', it has a world-wide range embracing population growth and demographic change, social exclusion, refugees and environmental challenges.<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere it is used to refer to quite localised issues in specific places. In this report, the term describes a broad goal of public policy – the promotion of stable, co-operative and sustainable communities. Therefore, this chapter looks at the extent to which participation in the arts has helped reduce social exclusion and isolation, foster good relationships between individuals and groups and promote understanding of different cultures and lifestyles. As in the other themes, we are conscious of the ground not covered (for example exclusion through poverty), but accept the inevitable limitations of the study.

'Museums were also given the task of unifying society: they were seen as suitable places where all classes of people might meet on common ground. Thus museums were seen as ideal institutions; institutions that offered radical potential for social equality achieved through learning.'

(Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 9)

### 4.2 BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Almost without exception, the projects studied have made a significant contribution to bringing people together. At a simple level, more than nine out of ten respondents made new friends as a result of their involvement. This is such an ordinary outcome of participating in the arts that it can easily be underestimated: making friends sounds so lightweight. But in urban, suburban and rural areas, poverty and isolation can make friendship hard to sustain: it is a vital asset, if possessed at all. This low key, informal relationship-building is no less powerful an agent of social cohesion for being largely unseen.

*'It helps to create a good social life and network of friends.'*

#### Isolation in the city

The degree of personal isolation experienced by participants in some projects was sharp, and many included people for whom the session was not just a creative highlight of the week, but a social one. For mental health service users in Nottingham, Durham and Portsmouth, arts projects had represented a valued and supportive environment in which to relax and get to know other people. Several elderly people attending St John's day centre in Portsmouth came on particular days just to take part in arts activities. Sometimes arts projects helped people articulate their feelings about isolation. Also in

*'For the company: you're not so lonely as you would be stuck in your room.'*

the city, a project with homeless people by Solent People's Theatre resulted in the construction of a paper house outside the city centre Tesco. Its walls, covered with work from a series of writing workshops, made silent pleas for the attention of passing shoppers: *'I too have the right to belong'*.<sup>12</sup>

But new friendships grew in every project, whatever the social or economic background of those involved. For example, one young newcomer to York found her involvement in the Mystery Plays valuable in developing social contacts. For an older resident, the plays were a way of starting again: *'My husband died in January this year and I wanted to fill the void'*. Many people spoke of knowing more people in the community, or local clubs and societies, and experiencing a new sense of togetherness or belonging as a result. Project leaders, too, have made new friendships and sometimes feel they have won a better place in their community: *'It's nice to walk down the road and be acknowledged by name by the children and parents'*.

People belonging to minority groups have also been able to extend their social circles, within and beyond their own cultural communities. Deidre Williams has shown how recent Spanish-speaking immigrants to Australia met others in the same situation through a writing project in Sydney, and created wider social networks through public readings of their work: *'I didn't feel alone [any more]. Because all the time I [had] felt alone – in the car, on the train, even if I went out with people – I felt alone. I felt terrible because I couldn't express myself well'* (Williams 1997: 15). Similar outcomes from the Mughal tent project were recorded by Naseem Khan.

In Batley, observer groups felt strongly that the arts work had had an impact on developing community networks. As one woman put it, *'It has given me a chance to meet new people, new friends, and see that there are lots of nice people about.'* YBAD has successfully built relationships between groups of young people from different areas. In a town where the young have few supported networks, it is seen by those involved as providing rare opportunities to develop groups which meet their needs. All the young people interviewed greatly valued these art projects, several mentioning them as one of the few benefits of living in Batley.

### Rural connections

Bringing people together is also important in the rural communities of North West Scotland. The contribution of the fèisean to bridging social divisions is valuable and was very evident in interviews. There are many fèis friendships: here 96% of participants made new friends as a result of being involved, and these friendships are often lasting. The opportunity to get to know new people is significant: public policy in Ross and Cromarty, for instance, has long sought to strengthen links between communities on the east and west coasts. Fèis Rois, with annual events in Ullapool, Gairloch and Dingwall in addition to regular classes, makes an important contribution to diminishing the relative isolation of communities separated from each other – never mind anywhere else – by a hour or more of driving.

Remoteness is relative: in Helsinki, computers help members of the Knot at the Cable feel part of civic and international dialogue. Other digital projects have made connections in Brazil and the Gambia while black teenagers from New York have worked with young people in South Africa (Kelly *et al.* 1997).

### Developing sociability

The contribution of arts activities to local sociability should not be undervalued: there are places where sociability has been almost extinguished by poverty, crime and mis-

*'I feel as if I am a more active member of the community.'*

*'We all learnt about different customs and cultures. It was very valuable in breaking down barriers. It got people talking together who wouldn't normally sit down and talk.'*

*'It's nice that the kids are all coming from different areas to Inverness. It reminds them that they aren't a funny wee bunch.'*

trust. Participatory arts have made a difference on Batley Carr Estate, where support for community activities was at a low ebb: for example, the 1995 Christmas party for elders attracted just 12 people. The arts project has played a valuable role in revitalising these social links, helping bring about a Summer Gala involving half of all residents in 1996, in addition to its regular programmes of workshops for adults and children. Elsewhere in the town, arts activities have been a peg for the creation of new social networks, like the young mothers' group Crafty Thursdays.

### Developing co-operation and tolerance

All this social interaction did have lasting impacts: 63% of adults said they had become keen to help in local projects. In Southsea, a teacher explained how an arts project had provided a space for teachers and parents to work together as equals under the direction of an artist. She felt that some parents had become involved because it was art, when they would have been unwilling to help with classroom maths or language work. Many also discovered the value of working co-operatively with others: one grandmother described her surprise at what a group could achieve, while a woman involved in a London carnival event felt that *'Because we worked as a team, it helped us to share our ideas and learn to compromise'*.

People frequently spoke about how they had learnt to get on with a wider range of people. A resident of a Portsmouth estate felt that she had greater insight into local families, and was consequently more tolerant. Elsewhere a participant in a village project said that she could *'see the potential in local people and places; I feel more part of a community, having seen people come together to work and become friends, develop partnerships and talk about things they didn't know they had in common'*. In Belfast and Derry, music and community theatre have provided valuable opportunities for people to meet others from different traditions and work together on projects which often touch directly on their social situations.

### THE ARTS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In some situations, participatory arts activities have been used to bring together people divided to the point of hostility or even conflict. Derry's Nerve Centre in Northern Ireland sees itself as offering a third choice to young people who feel trapped by their city's definition of itself in terms of two cultural traditions. In the same city, the writer Dave Duggan uses visual arts and other techniques in conflict resolution workshops with voluntary and community groups engaged in the reconciliation process (Liebmann 1996). In Africa Helen Gould reports on the work of Peace Circus Mozambique, whose 12 artist-educators pass on creative and conflict resolution skills to young people and teachers. In Burundi, UNICEF has used puppet shows about the hatred between cats and dogs to try to promote tolerance among Hutu and Tutsi refugees from Rwanda.<sup>10</sup>

## 4.3 COMMUNITY LINKS

The extent to which arts projects contribute directly to contact and understanding between different groups or sections of the community varies widely with local circumstances. If there is a general conclusion to be drawn from the diverse projects in this research, it is that, except at an individual level, few projects directly assist cultural integration unless they actually intend to do so: intercultural understanding is not an incidental by-product which can be left to look after itself. Overall, about half the adult respondents (54%) felt that they had learnt about other people's cultures since being involved, but this figure obscures big differences between projects: just 12% of participants in the York Mystery Plays said they had learnt about other people's cultures,

*'I was becoming a typical moaning middle-aged zombie: now I feel needed.'*

*'It's not just the Aboriginal people learning Western ways, it's the other way round as well. It's hard for Western culture to understand those things.'*

Elder, Yipirinya, Australia<sup>11</sup>

compared to 65% in Bolton and 76% in Batley, variations which reflect the content, purpose and demography of the different projects.

Many projects do succeed in bringing together people from different cultural groups on a one-to-one basis, as the Batley Carr arts project did for local young people. Friendships across ethnic boundaries which many had enjoyed during school, were subsequently more difficult to sustain, as the social focus moved to family or street. The arts project opened up opportunities for these friendships to be renewed and strengthened, informally and through the consciously multicultural character of the Summer Gala. Other projects work with and support particular sections of the community, or are controlled by them (e.g. the African-Caribbean reminiscence work of Nottingham Museums, Batley's well-established Urdu Mushairas or the Arts Connection's drama work with people with learning disabilities in Portsmouth). This type of project is most significant in building group confidence, identity and a sense of empowerment, issues which are dealt with in detail elsewhere.

A much smaller proportion bring different groups together, and where they do, it is usually because they set out to do so. Naseem Khan describes how the Mughal tent project, which involved people with very different cultural and religious backgrounds, had provided opportunities to learn and understand:

Working on the projects and stitching the panels also served, in some cases, to question religious assumptions and stereotypes. The groups were sometimes very diverse – Punjabi next to Bengali and Gujarati, Hindus next to Muslims and Sikhs. The Mitcham group – who devised a panel about religions – also contained Somalis and Chinese. In the case of the two Leicester groups, whose work had begun as part of a local response to the Muslim World exhibition locally, religion was very much to the fore. It was a cause for urgent debate. How permissible was it, for instance, to sew Koranic texts into the work? How did Islamic restrictions, when women had periods, affect the sewing work? But the groups also contained non-Muslims. *'I never thought that I, a Hindu, would work on an Islamic thing,'* marvelled one woman. The way in which the work encouraged cohesion was noticed by the Somerset women, though here no religious divisions featured. *'We were a social group with differing views, yet the finished work comes across as being very coherent.'* (Khan 1996: 11)

Another significant project, which has begun to make a contribution to intercultural understanding in the city, took place in Portsmouth.

### **HOME: A Celebration of Cultural Diversity in Portsmouth**

The HOME festival was the most conscious attempt to promote understanding between culturally diverse communities encountered during the research. Promoted by Portsmouth City Council, it sought to celebrate the contribution and cultures of ethnic minority residents who form about 5% of the city's 188,000 inhabitants. As the Chair of the Arts, Museums and Festivals Committee, Cllr. David Giles, expressed it, the festival was to be 'a positive and reassuring step forward in ensuring that the valuable contributions our ethnic communities are already making [...] throughout all aspects of City life are fully visible and applauded'.<sup>15</sup> City Arts appointed a consultant to co-ordinate the festival and support the activities of African, Bangladeshi, Caribbean, Chinese, Indian, Punjabi, Vietnamese and other community groups.

The festival itself included a major exhibition at Portsmouth Museum, community events, workshops and other activities. It was launched in March 1996 at the Museum, in the presence of the mayor, councillors members and 200 representatives of community and arts organisations. In the following month 25 artists and 12 arts companies were employed, attracting audiences ranging from a dozen for individual workshops to

#### **HOME festival events:**

African dance; At The Edge seminar; Baboma Combat; Carnival; Chandalika Dance Theatre; Chinese Lion Dance street performances; 'Distant Voices' exhibition; Fashion show; 'Home' exhibition; Multicultural market; Poetry readings; Punjabi folk Songs; Raqs Sharqi demonstration; School projects; Sitar recitals; Storytelling; Tobago Crusoe; Vaisakhi celebrations; Vietnamese Music Band; Visual arts project; Visual Mistris Choir; Writing.



over 400 for a 'multicultural market' at the New Theatre Royal; more than 3,000 people visited the HOME exhibition at the Museum. The heart of the programme was a series of events planned and managed by community groups, with advice, assistance and financial support from City Arts. The festival attracted local television, press and especially radio coverage, giving several groups their first such opportunity to raise their profile in the city.

In the year since the HOME festival, a range of impacts has become apparent, of which perhaps the most obvious is the enhanced profile and confidence of the city's ethnic communities. Although festival participation by people from the majority culture was sometimes seen as disappointing, it provided groups with a platform on which to build links and develop their audience. In September 1996 a follow-up was staged on the seafront by the Multicultural Group. This involved Latin American, Asian and African-Caribbean artists and groups and attracted several thousand people to performances, workshops and food stalls, achieving a much greater mix of communities a bigger event is planned for August 1997. The confidence and experience gained has helped bring about a long-standing ambition to have a multicultural centre, opened late in 1996. Several community groups gained the confidence to develop: the Harmony Group, for example, supports Black and Asian women with mental health problems, and is one of a number of community groups which have organised further arts activities, securing funding from sources like Southern Arts, the City Council and Hampshire Social Services. Following workshops with Joyoti Grech they are establishing a writing and oral history group.

Equally important are the new relationships and contacts which have strengthened networking at community level and with public and voluntary organisations. New mailing lists have been drawn up, with a much wider range of contacts. Sometimes networking has been fortuitous, as with the Bangladeshi and Vietnamese associations which have moved into offices at the Arts Centre since the festival and begun to play a role in its activities.

There has been a substantial impact on the City's institutions and arts bodies. The City Council has drafted and adopted its first cultural diversity strategy, with funding for projects and a part-time officer. Portsmouth Museum, which attracted many Asian and Black visitors during HOME, is committed to developing its relationship with these new audiences. In the short term this includes a further exhibition with objects collected for the festival, but it is also recreating its 'History of Portsmouth' exhibition on a thematic basis to include all the city's communities in time for the Millennium. At Portsmouth College plans are in hand to develop arts taster sessions aimed particularly at Asian students and, in a significant move, for their non-enrolled friends. Arts groups have similarly been helped to form links with ethnic minority communities: Solent People's Theatre, for example, are planning a theatre project called 'Passages West' in consultation with community groups. Local Black, Asian and Chinese artists were identified and offered workshop training and experience.

Most respondents agreed that the festival had improved contacts, confidence and understanding between cultures, but several felt it was important to recognise that community cultural activities, networks and organisational capacity had existed a long time. People agreed that the festival was of high quality, and had encouraged further interest in the arts, though it was felt that some events had not succeeded in reaching far enough into the city's white community. There was no consensus about positive impact on the city as a place to live, and some respondents stressed that there was still a long way to go in tackling racism. But these are major changes which cannot be reached

*'HOME gave publicity and recognition to community identity and social and historical experiences, challenging racist perceptions of the black/ethnic community and involving individuals.'*

in one bound, nor made the responsibility of the arts and cultural sector alone. A festival cannot, of itself, produce lasting social change except in association with longer-term cultural and social policy initiatives (as the Council has recognised through the steps it has taken to sustain the impact of HOME). Its impact will always be in proportion to the investment made. Whatever else it achieved, the HOME festival was a cost-effective way of raising awareness, and confidence in the possibility of change. Its success demands to be built on if it is to be sustained, but the festival was a strong foundation for development.

### **Crossing cultural boundaries**

HOME was not the only project which had crossed cultural boundaries. The Batley Bash, for example, has successfully brought many of the town's different community groups together, in celebration of their cultures and values. In Hounslow, the Redlees Art & Craft Stables Anniversary Day attracted a mixed audience broadly representative of Borough demographics. Cultural diversity, of course, exists almost everywhere, and the arts play their part in developing understanding of different cultural groups in the Highlands and Islands.

When the Lewis-based youth drama group, Na Rudhaic, performed at Fèis Bharraigh a few years ago, it transpired that only 2 of the youngsters (of over 20) had been to Uist, and none had ever been in Barra before. After their visit the following year, 1991, they returned to Lewis and set up Fèis Eilan an Fhraoich, now one of the most successful fèisean of all with over 200 participants. According to some, bringing the spirit of the fèis north from the Catholic island of Barra to the Protestant administrative centre of the Hebrides was a turning point in helping people understand its value and securing the support of the Islands Council. (Matarasso 1996b: 20)

### **Managing anniversaries: The Siege of Derry**

In Northern Ireland, tension between cultural traditions has long been a source of political instability and violence. Here, art and culture are often seen to be inseparable from identity, making them at once difficult to handle, and powerful tools for understanding. The city of Derry, or Londonderry according to allegiance, is the major urban centre of North West Ireland and, according to Brian Lacy, director of its museums, 'a theatre in which the mythologised pasts of the two communities, Catholic and Protestant, have been acted out'.<sup>16</sup> The City Council, controlled by Catholic members, has seen culture as vital to both communities and, among other initiatives, it established an Interpretative and Museums Service in 1986. This was soon faced with a major challenge in the forthcoming tercentenary of the Siege of Derry, an event fundamental to Protestant identity, and yet whose marking was the responsibility of Catholic councillors. Its exemplary peaceful celebration in 1988/89 through exhibitions, concerts and other cultural events was a triumph for all involved, proving, as the journalist Fintan O'Toole wrote, 'the importance of art in the real world [because of] its ability to articulate desires and despairs that cannot be expressed in language other than that of metaphor.'<sup>17</sup>

### GETTING TO KNOW THE NEIGHBOURS...

Timo Cantell has shown how the Total Balalaika Show contributed to changing perceptions of their powerful neighbours. 'For Finns, 'Soviets' have become 'Russians'. Former enemies have been transformed into a position where they do not fall into clear-cut categories; enemies they are no longer, but not yet quite friends either. ' (Cantell 1996: 9). The concert helped relieve some of these doubts, not least through the very public friendships which grew between the Leningrad Cowboys and members of the Red Army Ensemble. There has even been a new interest in the Russian language among Finns, and one of the Cowboys' lead singers, Mato Valkonen, is improving his grasp of the language in a Finnish TV series.

### Multiculturalism and social change

In her paper on the Mughal Tent project, Naseem Khan explored the development of black arts in Britain since the 1950s and questioned the meaning and values of the term multiculturalism itself (Khan 1996). Although her evaluation of the Tent project highlights the many social benefits which participants derived from it, it also raises some of the wider social impacts of Britain's cultural diversity. In particular, she argues that the way in which artists are increasingly challenging cultural boundaries is a powerful act of social change:

Not only have many artists made a nonsense of boundaries – leaping over them with such insouciance as to make one wonder if indeed they exist at all – but an entirely new product has been formed by wild mixes and intercultural unions. They are not minority forms: they are accessible and familiar, speaking to large swathes of the new generation [...] Offspring of the new cultural unions, these events are not bastards; they are thoroughgoing Britishers. They mark the way in which human creativity can take hold of change, and turn it into a contemporary voice. This cannot be regarded as a culturally diverse capacity, but a human capacity: a transformational power that is vital in shaping and interpreting experience. Something far more than 'cultural diversity' or 'multiculturalism' is involved. (Khan 1996: 23)

In their recent account of new Asian dance music, Sanjay Sharma, John Hutnyk and Ashwani Sharma give an insight into some of these social and political changes in just one area of contemporary culture (Sharma *et al.* 1997). Whatever the social value of the community-level changes this study has been able to identify, it is worth stepping back for a moment, and recognising the revolutionary tumult which is sweeping through our cultural boulevards, coalescing around ways of seeing and being as yet undreamed of.

## 4.4 INTERGENERATIONAL CONTACT

### *'If you give respect you get it, whatever your age'*

If positive impacts on community relations were usually evident only where this was part of a project's purpose, new contacts across the ages was a common incidental outcome. The relative scarcity of opportunities for young and old to mix socially (for example the increasing 'theming' of pubs to attract market sectors) makes this a valuable contribution to social cohesion.<sup>18</sup> In several of the case studies there was evidence that arts projects had contributed to the development of understanding, sympathy and relationships between the ends of the age spectrum: children and young people on the one hand, and older and retired residents on the other.

*'It's changed the way I see children: they're not as bad as the older generation think.'*

In Batley, projects have directly sought to create links between the generations. The 3i project, whose purpose was described by one participant as being ‘*to let us correspond with a group of children by computer, to tell them about our lives and learn about theirs*’ is one example; Proper Job Theatre’s work with children and pensioners at Bagshaw Museum is another. These projects made a real contribution to changing the minds of young and old about each other, and participants from both ends of the spectrum spoke with warmth about each other. In other Batley projects these links were also important. For example, several schools-based projects had involved reminiscence sessions with local older people, many of whom were coming into school for the first time. On Batley Carr, the art project helped transform perceptions of local children: formerly seen as nuisances and a drain on time and attention, they became one of the resources that helped rejuvenate the estate. Building on her work with children, the artist developed an initiative on the theme of Batley Carr, past and future, which created ongoing positive contact between the generations.

This kind of intergenerational contact was evident, and valued, in other projects, especially those based primarily on a geographical area, like Wymering in Portsmouth, where art workshops had enabled young and old to work together. The fèisean offered similar opportunities:

The people involved in organising, teaching and helping at a fèis are of all ages, from young adults who were recently participants, to people well past retirement age. At ceilidhs children of five sit stilled by the singing of their, or someone else’s, grandparents. In some cases (e.g. Fèis Bharraigh) the fèis includes a recital or concert specially for senior citizens, or in a residential home. The fèis is a highlight of the holidays for many urban children who spend the summer with grandparents in island or rural communities. [...] The oral and traditional nature of much Gaelic culture, places the contribution of elders and the relationship between young and old at the heart of what happens in a fèis. (Matarasso 1996b: 21)

The positive impact of participatory arts projects on contact and understanding between generations are valuable and may, as suggested in the next section, contribute to reducing anxiety and the fear of crime among older people.

#### 4.5 CRIME, FEAR AND OFFENDING

Criminality, and people’s fear of it, were not major themes in any of the programmes included in the research, though some of the estate-based projects did more or less explicitly recognise these problems as part of the context in which they operated. People on Hounslow’s Worton Bridge Estate, for example, felt that arts activities for young people could reduce vandalism, citing local enthusiasm for a Waterman’s Arts Centre outreach initiative which created a fashion show. One area where people did relate crime to arts activity, and where there was some evidence of impact, was Batley Carr Estate.

##### **Crime rates and the fear of crime at Batley Carr Estate**

When it was designated for renewal, Batley Carr was a local byword for crime and degradation. Poor housing conditions were made worse by increasing vandalism, open drug-dealing and reports of violence. A Neighbourhood Safety Project established in 1993 was abandoned after less than 12 months, when the worker found local cynicism and divisions too much. It might be argued that Home Office criteria for the project – that it should work in an area without either environmental schemes or locally-based community workers – almost guaranteed its failure. The work of the artist in residence,

*Meeting the young people made me realise the area I live in is not a complete loss. There is help out there, and more youths seem to be switching on and getting involved.’*

*My granddaughter came and she loved it. She’s 8 and I’m 60-odd, and we enjoyed it with all those years gap.’*

on the other hand, was not expected to have an impact on the crime, yet things have improved in the time she has been there.

Although problems remain, City Challenge research shows that 67% of people on the estate now feel safe from crime, a rise of 11% since the Baseline Study. There has also been a dramatic fall in Council expenditure on repairing vandalism: current annual costs of £3-4,000 are estimated by the Housing Department to be about 10% of former levels. It is not suggested that these positive changes should be ascribed just to the arts project, given that £5.7m has been spent on building and environmental improvements, but there is evidence that it played a part that should not be casually discounted. The community police officer argued that the active participation of residents in the life of their community was essential to maintaining order on the estate, and to its long-term viability as a successful community. He valued the arts project's contribution to this and believed that continued progress depended on the community believing it was worth taking action.

At the same time, older residents, who had often felt anxious or threatened by local young people, said they felt differently after working alongside them in the arts activities. Several spoke of a new respect and sympathy for young people. Although the potential of arts work to reduce fear of the young among older people remains untested, the very positive response encountered here and elsewhere suggests that projects which bring young and old together should be taken seriously as a means of addressing these problems.

#### COMPELLING EVIDENCE : IMPOSSIBLE THEATRE

*The Evidence Room* was installed by Impossible Theatre in a bleak and half-empty shopping arcade which links Batley High Street with the town car park, during October 1996. Behind a shop grille lay a sitting room with inflating furniture arranged round a TV monitor activated by members of the public. This played a series of short films made with young offenders and victims, and describing the circumstances of crimes such as burglary from both perspectives. The project's aim was to reduce anxiety about crime by expressing its frequent banality, and by helping offenders examine the consequences of their actions. Interest in the installation was substantial: it was triggered 806 times in 3 weeks, playing for about 80% of the time the arcade was open, and the responses of audiences and participants suggest that it was a thought-provoking experience. If it still requires a fuller evaluation before being compared with other programmes, this approach to offending is at least a constructive way of promoting understanding and helping offenders to confront the consequences of their crimes.

#### The arts and offenders

If the evidence about the arts and crime from the case studies remains equivocal, it is worth broadening the picture by drawing on two programmes addressing criminality described in the working papers: the California Arts-In-Correction Program, and Somebody's Daughter, an ex-offender's theatre company from Melbourne.

##### Arts-in-Correction Program

The Californian Prison Arts Programme is described by Lucy Phillips in her paper, *In The Public Interest*. Although it is now internationally famous it began on a small scale in 1976, thanks to funding from the California Arts Council, and the involvement of its former director, Eloise Smith. Its success ensured steady expansion from its first base in Vacaville Prison so that by 1988/9:

43,000 hours of arts instruction were provided to 8,019 inmates by 279 professional artists[...] in 18 institutions. Inmates were learning over 100 different artforms and crafts. Over 200 performances of dance, music and theatre were presented, 56 murals and 3 sculptures completed for their institutions and surrounding communities. (Phillips 1997: 16)

The reasoning behind this vast expenditure of effort and money was economic and social, not aesthetic. Immediate benefits (and cost reductions) accrued from a reduction in prison incidents among inmates on the arts program; longer-term benefits were claimed in terms of rehabilitation and lower recidivism. These economic arguments were persuasive: 'to send someone to jail for life in the US costs around \$30,000 per year. With figures like these to use as bargaining tools, artists working in prisons can afford to be strident in their lobbying for funding and support' (ibid.: 16).

Somebody's Daughter, Melbourne

In *How The Arts Measure Up*, Deidre Williams describes the impact of Somebody's Daughter, a theatre group of women ex-offenders, originally formed at Fairlea Prison with the support of visiting arts workers. Their re-formation outside the prison was a major step forward and was used to put together a play which dealt with their own experiences of drug addiction and its costs. The production connected immediately with young people and the company soon found itself in demand by drug education programmes, though it had as much to say about the character of offenders, as one woman explained:

*'For us, it was an opportunity to use our skills to reach a lot of people and [try] to break down some of those stereotyped beliefs... We haven't got two heads – we're normal everyday human beings. You know 80% of women go to prison because of drug related offences. But when did their sentence start? Usually way back when they are in their early teens or being abused as children. People need to know that.'* (Williams 1997: 18)

The group's impact has been lasting and profound, and not only on the members. Their children were able to use its structure to explore their own feelings and misconceptions about their mothers and prison itself, work which was collected in a book entitled *When I Grew Up I Understood Everything*. Somebody's Daughter have become a focus for women in prison and, on occasion, their political voice. The groups' profile enabled it to mobilise a successful campaign of opposition to plans to merge Fairlea Prison with a men's institution.

### A British context

Mention must also be made of the growing use of the arts in British prisons, including the work of organisations such as Geese Theatre, Clean Break and others, described by Anne Peaker and Jill Vincent of Loughborough University (Peaker & Vincent 1991). Their research helped to show that there are significant benefits to the individual, in terms of education and rehabilitation, and to the institutions and their internal working and communication, and led to the establishment of a Prison Service Standing Committee on the Arts in Prisons in 1995. It has also seen the creation of the Unit for Arts and Offenders as an advisory and information service (Peaker & Pratt 1996).

*'It made me think about why people won't employ us and we've got to break that circle, otherwise we'll never get out of crime.'*

Young offender<sup>9</sup>

### Prevention or cure?

The success of these initiatives, and others like them, has led some of those involved to ask some uncomfortable questions about the place of the arts not just in prison, but in society:

In the Harris County juvenile probation department the artists were reporting back: 'These programs are great. The kids are eating it up. But why didn't they get this in school? Why didn't they have this opportunity before?' If they'd had this opportunity then they probably wouldn't have wound up in this setting. (Hillman in Phillips 1997: 17)<sup>20</sup>

Participatory arts projects may not sound as if they are tough on the causes of crime, but they may just be effective.

## 5 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-DETERMINATION

### THE STUDY SHOWS THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS CAN

- Build community organisational capacity
- Encourage local self-reliance and project management
- Help people extend control over their own lives
- Be a means of gaining insight into political and social ideas
- Facilitate effective public consultation and participation
- Help involve local people in the regeneration process
- Facilitate the development of partnership
- Build support for community projects
- Strengthen community co-operation and networking

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The term empowerment is used to express, or mask, such a wide range of attitudes that it is in danger of completely losing its meaning. The problem is that it is inseparable from political concepts based on different analyses of society: one person's empowerment is another's democracy, and still another's revolution. It all depends on where you stand in relation to the centres of power which make up society. We have taken a fairly narrow view of empowerment in the hope of avoiding some of these problems, and sought evidence that, as a result of participating in arts activities, people and community groups had developed more equitable relationships, taken further self-determined action or gained control over their own affairs. It is particularly difficult to make comparisons between the different projects, since they vary so widely in the degree of empowerment they intend. Some are planned and managed entirely by community groups, others are negotiated partnerships, while in a few cases participants make almost no contribution to the decision-making process. If there is a generalisation to be made, it is that those programmes which offer participants genuine (if shared) control over the creative processes, and not just their own involvement, are those which show the impacts described above. In other words, there is nothing automatically empowering about participating in the arts: it's not what you do but the way that you do it.

### 5.2 BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

Although it is the artistic product, or perhaps the creative process itself, which generally draws the attention of outsiders, the management processes which support a community-based project can have their own outcomes. Helping to plan or organise a project offers routes not just for personal development, but also for strengthening community institutions and voluntary groups. The participants' responses were very interesting in this respect: at a basic level, 84% of respondents were able to describe what each project was meant to achieve, generally with complete accuracy and, in many cases, a clear appreciation of its social value. This shows a high degree of involvement in the purposes of the activity, which is confirmed by the fact that almost half (49%) said they had been involved in planning what had happened. There were some differences here



between projects, with higher proportions of people involved in planning in community arts-style projects like those in Bolton, or Estover Percussion Project in Plymouth:

	York	Fèis Rois	Estover	Bolton
Proportion involved in planning	12%	21%	44%	65%

Table 2: Proportion of adults helping to plan the projects they took part in

The questionnaire also reveals that 49% of respondents wanted to be involved in the *organisation* of future activities, and of these 63% thought they could do so better than before. Again, these general figures vary widely, with only 32% of Mystery Play participants wanting to be involved in future organisation, compared over 90% of trainees on First Take's video project in Bolton. These figures confirm that arts projects can inspire people to become involved in project organisation, and equip them to do so – when they intend to.

### Strengthening and creating community groups

The development of Wymering Community Association is a case in point. In order to manage a major programme of public arts projects, committee members have had to acquire a range of new skills and competencies, including fundraising and negotiation with contractors. Although the work is far from complete, it has already strengthened the Association. In Batley, several community groups had been strengthened through working on arts activities: for example, members of the Tenants & Residents Association on Batley Carr credited the project with developing their team-work skills and experience. Here, local people had also come together to establish a support group for the artist-in-residence. Elsewhere in the town a young women's support group was developed around an interest in craft activities. Projects working in digital technology were very effective in promoting new spin-off groups as people outgrew the original scheme and used new skills and confidence to set up autonomously. The Knot at the Cable itself was the lasting outcome of a temporary Helsinki library service initiative. Both Jubilee Arts' CD-ROM project, *Sex Get Serious*, and Pseudo On-line in New York, have led to the formation of successful performance groups.

#### DO IT YOURSELF IN DERRY

The Nerve Centre is a classic example of a self-help initiative which has grown through the tenacity of its members. From its origins in the late 1980s as a musicians' collective, it has developed to include an arts centre, a training resource and a social focus for over 800 mainly young people who use it each week. They have made records, animation, computer-generated art and much more: their cartoon *Cú Chulainn* was made on a kitchen table and screened on BBC Northern Ireland. The members have taught themselves the fundraising, managerial and administrative skills to manage a major cultural organisation, and brought a wealth of new opportunities and competence to the city as a result.

### Community management of the fèisean

The fèisean are notable in this respect because, almost without exception, they have emerged within local communities and are managed on a voluntary basis by residents who often have no previous experience of such work, (the arms-length support of community education, councils, Fèisean nan Gaidheal or the Scottish Arts Council notwithstanding). Many people have become effective local activists through their involvement. New organisers, perhaps fortunately, do not always realise how much they

*'I learnt through a lot of mistakes, by speaking to people, and by sitting down and trying to work it out. And just laughing it off a lot of the time.'*

Fèis organiser, Scotland

are taking on, but they learn quickly: *I learned how difficult musicians can be, and how I would have to respect them if I wanted them to work with me. I learned that if you're doing something for the community's children, you'll have the parents on your side. I also learned the art of talking to people in corridors of power. And I learned that if I was kind to people, and quite generous, and at the same time quite direct – I found that worked well.*<sup>21</sup> Committees are becoming more competent and professional in their management, according to artists, organisers and volunteers. This development of organisational capacity does not only benefit a community through the fèis itself:

It is not unusual for people to move on to other things with the new skills and confidence they have won. Mairi MacInnes, original driving force behind Fèis Tir a' Mhurain, went on to establish Cothrom, a women's training organisation in South Uist. She secured a redundant building for its home, and the money to repair it, before winning a £250,000 European Union grant to run courses in computer skills, tailoring and child care. Now a member of the Board of Directors of a thriving community enterprise, she says unequivocally that *'Cothrom came out of the confidence I had learned through the fèis'*. (Matarasso 1996b: 22)

### Self-management by Batley bands

The success of YBAD in encouraging young people to take responsibility for managing the arts projects offers further evidence of the potential of arts projects to strengthen community organisation. In Batley Bands Co-op, for example, groups sign an agreement on joining which details the rights and responsibilities of members. The organisation is run almost entirely by its members and advises bands on skills development, promoting gigs, marketing and management, as well as running workshops and events: it is now raising its own funding. Young people said that the Co-op had lent them idealism. It had changed their lives, giving them faith in their own abilities and enabling them to value their own struggle for recognition. Crucially, it had inspired them to help develop similar opportunities for other people in the town. Forming a band had been a struggle; having reclaimed their own self-esteem, they were fired up to fight back on behalf of the town. Batley had become a place where they had the opportunity, as someone put it, *'to live with their dreams'*.

## 5.3 SUPPORT FOR LOCAL PROJECTS

New skills and confidence, experience of co-operative work and a sense of achievement crystallised in many cases into an enhanced commitment to local activism, and support for local projects. This is reflected in the responses to the questionnaire, both in the 63% of adults who say they have become keen to help in local projects, and in the accounts individuals give of the new activities they are involved in. Even if allowance is made for enthusiasm not always translating into action, it is clear that many people *want* to be involved in their community. They represent an important source of skills, voluntary work and, at the simplest level, goodwill. A key factor in that goodwill seems to be the shared feeling of being part of what is going on. *'I feel more connected to the community and wider culture of the Highlands,'* said one young woman involved with the fèis. Similar responses were made by many others, like a man in Aberystwyth who felt he *'was giving something back to the local community'*.

Hobbies, recreation and the arts is one of the top 6 reasons for volunteering.

(VAN 1994: 6)

### Networking and practical support

The support for local activities generated by the most successful arts projects is not limited to feelings. The fèisean, for example, have made a practical contribution by

helping build the resources and networks on which they depend. One local resident (not herself involved in a fèis) believed that *'the infrastructure of venues, tutors and organisers developed by Fèisean means that opportunities to learn, participate and appreciate are now available to children and adults, locals and tourists, throughout the year'*. In other words, they have developed the social and cultural infrastructure of North West Scotland – no mean achievement for voluntary groups with a collective annual turnover of just over £200,000.<sup>22</sup>

Elsewhere, we encountered less dramatic but still valuable examples of the way in which arts projects had helped develop support for local projects. The work of arts officers in Hounslow, Portsmouth and Batley, for example, has supported networking among arts and community groups; events like HOME or the Bash have led to further contact and projects between groups who did not know each other before. In rural Derbyshire a tree-dressing event by People Express had a similar impact on local groups. While the lasting impact of such initiatives often remains to be seen, arts projects are evidently successful in laying foundations on which others may build.

*'Various groups of the community are able to work together for one cause and not just their own particular one.'*

#### CHORAL SOCIETIES AS AN INDICATOR OF SOCIAL HEALTH

A benchmark study of Italian regions found that membership of choral societies is one of the three best predictors of a robust and effective local democracy and economy – alongside membership of soccer clubs and co-operatives. According to Harvard Professor Robert Putnam: 'Communities don't have choral societies because they are wealthy; they are wealthy because they have choral societies – or more precisely, the traditions of engagement, trust and reciprocity that choral societies symbolise'. (Lingayah *et al.* 1996: 31)

### 5.4 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN REGENERATION

The growing use of the arts in British urban regeneration initiatives over the past 15 years, from flagship projects to investment in the cultural industries and community initiatives – has been documented elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> Before the launch of the National Lottery, this area of arts funding was perhaps the most rapidly expanding and flexible in the UK. Both the Bolton and Batley case studies included work developed by City Challenge, while the Portsmouth study included a project funded through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). It was possible therefore, to look specifically at the contribution of participatory arts programmes to the regeneration process, at least in these areas.

*'I'm contributing rather than being a passive observer.'*

#### The context

A short survey of City Challenge companies was undertaken between December 1995 and February 1996 to establish a context for the case studies. More than half (23) the initiatives then operating responded, and it may be concluded that most of the others did not invest significantly in the arts. None the less, for the 23 respondents, the arts were generally seen as a significant component:

Survey respondents: Barnsley, Batley, Bethnal Green, Bolton, Bootle, Bradford, Brixton, Dalston, Dearne Valley, Deptford, Derby, Harlesden, Hartlepool, Liverpool, Newcastle, North Kensington, Nottingham, Sunderland, Tipton, Walsall, Wigan, Wirral, Wolverhampton

- Only 2 reported no arts component to their work, while 16 described it as a major element of their strategy.
- Most of these developments (20/23) include both capital projects and revenue support for arts organisations and activities.
- The amount being spent was substantial. Among capital projects, seven had budgets exceeding £500,000, including 4 over £1m. Revenue expenditure was less, but six were spending more than £200,000 and one exceeding £1m.

In general this work was closely linked to local communities, with companies planning cultural animation as well as capital projects. The survey gave some insight into the management and evaluation of the initiatives. Most of the companies recognised that they did not have expertise in the arts: 20 were using professional external advisers, generally independent consultants. It was the more surprising therefore, to find that only three had used external evaluators to look at the impact of their arts expenditure; 7 had incorporated their arts programmes into standard DoE reporting procedures, while the rest had not yet undertaken any evaluation at all.

### **Bolton: the arts and public consultation**

In 1992, Bolton Metropolitan Council commissioned arts consultants L4a to facilitate community discussion about the future of Mere Hall, an important Victorian house and park in the Halliwell district. L4a ran a series of arts workshops and planning meetings during the spring, using 'a synthesis of work undertaken in the fields of arts, management and business training, community action and development and informal education.'<sup>24</sup> The style encouraged wide, equitable and open participation by local people. Sketches, photographs, plans and notes were collated to form an exhibition of ideas which became the cornerstone of the Council's successful City Challenge bid:

'Some of the ideas include community rooms for hire, youth facilities, a cafe, relocation of Bolton Registry Office, a redeveloped nursery, a library, an arts resource and many more. Mere Hall is currently a focus for community interest and in the future will become a positive symbol for change in Halliwell. (Bolton's City Challenge 1993: 33)

30 months later the process was still seen by community representatives and professionals alike as a turning point in the future of the area. The Tenants Association had initially been sceptical of the motives and outcomes, and reluctant to become involved: it was the skill and integrity of the artists which brought them into the process, laying the foundations of future co-operation between them, the local authority and, eventually, City Challenge itself.

Fired by the success of this element of the regeneration process (which was commended by the DoE), Bolton City Challenge used the arts again as a way of opening a dialogue about the future of an important area of local green space, South Halliwell Greens. A community video company, First Take, worked with volunteers during the summer of 1994. The first stages were brainstorming sessions, facilitated once again by L4a, and exploring issues touching on the environment of the Greens. These were followed by a scripting and filming process, through which a core group of eight made a video entitled *It's Up To You*. Perhaps 100 more were involved at various stages in the process, with schools and community facilities drafted in as locations. The film was edited by the participants and a local TV personality provided a narrative. There was a public screening in August 1994, after which it was made available for rental through local video outlets with an attached questionnaire.

The cost-effectiveness of the arts approach can be compared with an earlier conventional evaluation exercise. This had used a caravan to raise awareness and distribute leaflets, T-shirts and questionnaires: the high-profile campaign elicited 241 responses at a cost of £2,000, in addition to substantial officer time. This was seen as disappointing by City Challenge, and the video project was set up to supplement it, particularly by involving new sections of the community. With its training element, *It's Up To You* was more expensive (£9,660) but did not use existing staff. However, it reached more people and engaged them more deeply: City Challenge estimated that more than 1,000 peo-

ple had contact through the project and video, and felt that responses were '*more eager, imaginative and committed*'. The lead officer thought the project improved his relationship with local people. First Take also considered the work a success, both in terms of stimulating debate and training.

### **Consultation leading to empowerment**

The use of the arts to facilitate public consultation becomes a genuinely empowering process when it addresses local political issues and decision-making. In her paper, Helen Gould has shown that such work is increasingly used in development by aid agencies and charities:

Rapid and Participatory Rural Appraisals (RRAs/PRAs)[...] draw on such tools as drama, visual art, photography, video making, music in order to elicit key information from a community, and thus plan appropriate and sustainable programmes of action. They crop up in agriculture, natural resource management, urban planning, health education, domestic situations and family planning. [...] Because they adopt a kind of DIY approach to development, they fit in with the drive towards self-sufficiency and sustainability. Artistic activities have proved particularly useful where there is less dependence on literacy and more on the spoken word. The argument is that by using their own creative resources to map, review and resolve problems, the community gains an understanding of its present situation, and control over its future development. (Gould 1996: 12)

She points to the use of visual artists by Action Aid in El Salvador and a theatre group in Uganda to illustrate that this kind of approach produces appropriate local solutions which are, almost by definition, more sustainable in the long term. Chuck Mike has used theatre in this way in Nigerian villages, helping people find solutions to local agricultural and developmental problems.

#### **THE BIRKIN VIEWFINDER**

Birkin Patch is a run-down residential area, just north of Nottingham city centre. It comprises a mix of public and private sector housing, much of it in poor condition or derelict. Designated by the County Council as having extreme social need, the area is home to some of the city's poorest residents, with male unemployment estimated at over 50%, and 28% of householders being lone parents. Crime is high: more than half the residents had been victims of crime in a 6-month period in 1995. Facilities are poor, especially for children and young people who make up more than a third of the population. The Improvement Association contacted Nottingham Community Arts and the Community Support Team and asked for their help in devising plans for improving the area. With the CST, local people surveyed the occupants of the 400-odd houses, and secured a 62% rate of return on their questionnaire. Nottingham Community Arts developed a new approach to consultation which they called the Birkin Viewfinder, and which used maps, games, drawings and photography to help people identify problems and imagine possible changes. Five local viewfinder sessions were held, as well as a larger one bringing all the ideas together. A tape-slide presentation drawing on all this work was made and shown to the MP, councillors and officials. The work, undertaken in 1995, has already produced change. Some environmental and other improvements have been undertaken by the Council, despite limited resources being available. The lives of some of those involved have also changed: one has become a school governor, another is pursuing a new interest in photography and computer technology. The Improvement Association itself has become more confident and more effective in its work. In 1996 it won an award of £196,000 from the National Lottery Charities Board for development of a youth and community centre. The Housing Department asked Nottingham Community Arts to repeat its work in another area where improvement money was about to be spent, and has begun training staff to understand this approach

to community consultation. It has also commissioned an interactive training day for elected members from NCA.

#### Pinda Street Mural

Deidre Williams describes a mural project in a suburb of Adelaide which was used as a way to persuade the council to develop a piece of derelict land as a community recreation area (Williams 1997: 10). The project became the focus for extensive discussion about local environmental and recreational concerns, and was so successful that it obliged a previously unwilling council to become involved in formal consultation, and led to the creation of the new recreation reserve. Participants have continued to work on local developments. Williams found that 90% of those involved believed the project had improved consultation between government and community.

#### Batley Carr: oiling the wheels

Batley Carr estate's artist in residence, Lesley Fallais, was not asked to facilitate local consultation, but to work with tenants on creative improvements to the fabric and environment. The project will, on completion, leave a substantial body of useful and decorative work: there are already 90 tiled house numbers and other signs, 12 litter bins, 100 sculpted paving stones and 25 cast iron seats. The style is small-scale, unobtrusive and yet noticeable, particularly to residents. It avoids rhetoric in favour of quiet confidence in the estate's individuality, and the care its residents have for it.

Hand-made house numbers, easily overlooked by an outsider, are crucial indicators of change in an area where house numbers were often painted straight onto the walls. The impact of this subtle improvement in the quality of the fabric of the estate is recognised by tenants: the arts project seemed to residents and professionals alike to have offered people many different ways of 'owning' change and sharing in its success. Although it is difficult to separate elements of a holistic renewal programme it was evident that the arts were integral to its success. Without them, refurbishments would still have taken place, but the development of community relationships and activity which turn houses into homes would not have been so effective. It is one thing to keep people warm and safe: quite another to make them proud of where they live. This is where the arts work has made itself felt: participants in observer groups, including residents and professionals, felt the arts project made an important contribution by:

- Benefiting young people;
- Establishing community networks of ongoing value;
- Developing the community's identity and sense of itself;
- Improving leisure and recreational opportunities; and
- Increasing appreciation of the value of community activities.

But perhaps its greatest contribution was in enabling people to become involved in the regeneration process by metaphorically reshaping their community. If the arts can bring out 150 people (of 450 residents) for a puppet show, or a hundred more for a Summer Gala, they are vital to an area where the Tenants and Residents Association's best-attended public meeting about the renewal can attract just 38. The successful use of an artist in residence at Batley Carr has begun to be reproduced by Batley Action in other parts of the town, including mixed housing neighbourhoods. According to housing officers involved, the use of the arts is already proving itself to be successful.

*'It's like improvements in your house: do you really need to spend all that money on that curtain pole? Yes, because it looks nicer and it makes me feel better. You can't measure it in numbers of screws produced at the end of the week, but if it makes you feel more confident about yourself and happier in your surroundings, it does as much good as anything.'*

*'She's made it a lot easier for us to do our work because they're not directly involved in it, so it's almost like work is being done to them, rather than them participating. The work that the artist is doing is turning that on its head; it's letting people get involved and showing us what they're capable of doing.'*

Housing officer, Batley

### **Making partnership a reality**

The principle of partnership has become something of a nostrum in recent years, but making it a reality demands skills and experience which people do not always have. Community-based arts work is not an infallible answer in this respect – indeed, the poorest work we saw was characterised in part by failure to create partnership – but it has the potential to transform the quality of partnerships between communities and agencies seeking to bring about their regeneration.

## **5.5 EMPOWERMENT**

Empowerment may be over-claimed in the community arts world: the case studies suggest that participation in local arts activities is not always, of itself, an empowering process. Only about a fifth of adults said that they felt differently about their rights, and it was clear from interviews and discussion groups that most people did not, as a matter of course, extend new found confidence, skills or interests into a rethinking of their political position. This is not surprising: no-one said changing the world was easy or quick, but it suggests that practitioners should reconsider either the place they give to empowerment, or the ways in which they are trying to achieve it.

There are important exceptions: what is happening to the 21% of adults who *do* feel differently about their rights is important and needs to be understood. There seem to be two alternative but complementary routes to empowerment through participation in the arts. The first is the route of individuals, of all ages and backgrounds, for whom the experience is simply life-changing. Perhaps because they are already at a point where they are looking for growth, they use the creative process as a springboard to a different way of seeing themselves, which leads them to make real changes in their life. This may be positive, or may, as Gerri Moriarty has pointed out (Moriarty 1997: 17), be a mixed experience where relationships fall by the wayside as an individual moves forward. In either event, it is unpredictable, and cannot be deliberately engineered by an arts process, even were it safe or right to do so. We are, in any case, on the edge of tipping over into the realm of art therapy.

### **Empowerment through co-operation**

The other route towards empowerment, collective, co-operative and often conscious, exists within the non-therapeutic framework of a conventional art project. This is broader, and less distinct than the issue of rights, but it is every bit as real to those involved. Like a background noise so constant that it is easily overlooked, many of the participants spoke about feeling more in control since they had been involved, especially in the projects at the community arts end of the spectrum. These were the ones where quite high proportions of people said they had helped to plan what had happened: Bolton (65%) for example, or Estover Percussion Project in Plymouth (44%).

These projects tended to prioritise the active involvement of participants in all levels of decision-making associated with the work, including administration and management. In fact, so permeable were the boundaries between tasks or areas of responsibility that people often ignored them, and simply lent their hand to whatever needed to be done at a given time. There were inevitable limits to this, however, in the form of conceptual boundaries, but many artists were prepared to be flexible. Many of the projects under review were almost unconsciously successful at empowering people within the context of their work, through the co-operative approaches they adopted. On the other hand, participants were not often able to take an equal role in determining the

principles of evaluation, and there remains the challenge, for artists with empowerment on the agenda, of enabling people to contribute to shaping the values of a project itself.

### **Empowerment through ideas**

Where rights themselves were concerned, the research did include projects which had addressed issues faced more or less in common by participants who saw the process as empowering. Some of these – e.g. the Batley *VOTE* theatre project – have already been touched on in discussion about individual rights above. But there was also evidence that the creative process could inspire a sense of empowerment in the people involved *as a group*. For instance members of some projects, especially those involving young people like Meadow Well Drama Group, argued that they were reaching an audience others could not access, because the message was coming from within a particular peer group. This was echoed by members of other theatre projects, including Fifty Something Theatre Group run by Full Circle Arts in Lancashire, and The Underdogs, a music group in South Wales. Similar experiences were encountered among Belfast community theatre groups, and young people in Derry.

*'They have listened to our ideas: we are doing a big play about drugs and how dangerous they are.'*

'We're the first people doing this stuff – ever'

Among groups involved in computer-based work, there was a strong sense of empowerment, often related to a sense of knowledge shared within the group, but denied to those outside. In Finland, members of both projects felt that their involvement in computer-based arts work mitigated against a sense of literal and metaphorical isolation. Digital technology re-draws the world map, scrambling old hierarchies of scale and power, and allows the citizens of places like Finland to redefine their positions. Being able to publish material on the World Wide Web was seen as an empowering act in its implied equality between contributors.

### **Creativity as a route to empowerment among disabled people**

The growth of the disability arts movement over the past 15 years is an aspect of British social and cultural life which is of genuinely international significance. The changes in people's perceptions, attitudes, employment practice and even in legislation which have been spearheaded first by Graeae Theatre, and subsequently by a swelling host of artists and performers, are in themselves a prime example of the social impact of arts programmes. Most of the case study projects which included disabled people were relatively new. For example, Portsmouth City Council's Arts with Confidence season (February-March 1997) was its first major attempt to extend cultural services to disabled people and other users of social services, in advance of becoming a unitary authority. Participants spoke of enhanced confidence and social lives, but not, as yet, of a wider sense of group empowerment. Similar personal development was evident among mental health service users involved in Nottingham museums, and in theatre work in Melton Mowbray. One older project however, established in Newcastle 11 years ago, illustrates the potential of the arts in empowering disabled people.

### **The Lawnmowers: Theatre is for Everyone**

The Lawnmowers are a theatre company of five members, all of whom have learning disabilities. Founded in 1986, they have established a unique reputation for high-quality productions which address issues of concern to people with learning disabilities. In 1995, the Lawnmowers produced a video to fill a gap in existing sex education resources. *The Big Sex Show* is a 30 minute video which tackles relationships, feelings and

*'We do shows for people like ourselves and that is important because there is not much of that work about.'*



safe sex in a straightforward and accessible manner. It tells the story of two learning disabled people who fall in love, and the personal and social hurdles they have to cross as a result. It includes plenty of information about sex, contraception, HIV/AIDS, but also offers insights into coping with feelings, and the expectations of others. It involved much detailed research, and close co-operation with health workers. The Lawnmowers have performed *The Big Sex Show* all over Britain, from Brighton to the Edinburgh Festival, and have toured in Poland. The video, accompanied by booklets aimed at non-readers, has been sold and hired to many groups of people with learning disabilities and others. The company's new show, *The Right Wrong* explores the issue of disabled people's political rights, as one member explains:

*'This play is about asking Parliament to change things and how different people look at people with disabilities. I play the part of someone who wants to be an MP. I would in my real life like to be an MP. The shows prove to people that we can work like anyone else in the theatre.'*

Forming and running the company has been a fundamentally empowering process for the members, who are now planning to become independent of their sponsoring body, Them Wives. The actors run weekly drama workshops for other people with learning disabilities, and are seasoned travellers. Two members have worked for the BBC, introducing education programmes, and they are all seasoned interviewees. The Lawnmowers experience provides a benchmark of empowerment, but the time and commitment such achievements demand should not be underestimated.

*'We go to places to find out information we can use in the play, like a housing place; we went to the family planning and to the courts.'*

#### CARDBOARD CITIZENS

Britain has changed a lot since a TV play like *Cathy Come Home* could shock the country and galvanise politicians into action. Homelessness is now part of the (street) furniture, and cultural responses require more patience and tenacity if they are to help. Among them, perhaps the most famous and influential is the *Big Issue*, the magazine which represents a voice of homeless people while helping them earn an income and gain independence. Another important project is Cardboard Citizens, the country's only professional theatre company whose members all have experience of homelessness. Through forum theatre (which involves the audience in shaping the direction of a play), Cardboard Citizens have brought issues of homelessness to a wide audience including hostels, schools, day centres and theatres. It advertises for members in day centres, and the calibre of the work is getting better and better, but at a cost: as one actor explained 'It is a paid job and getting more professional. We run the risk of losing touch with today's reality at grass-roots level.'<sup>2</sup> Cardboard Citizens' ongoing success is rooted in balancing empowerment and growth with the ability to remain close to its origins.

#### Empowerment and inclusion

It was argued at the beginning of this section that participation in arts activities did not automatically lead people to review their political situation, but it is equally clear that it has the *capacity* to do so. Change among individuals can become change among groups and communities. Its relationship with inclusion and citizenship may be the most important aspect of participation in art and is dealt with in detail in the final chapter.

## 6 LOCAL IMAGE AND IDENTITY

### THE STUDY SHOWS THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS CAN

- Develop pride in local traditions and cultures
- Help people feel a sense of belonging and involvement
- Create community traditions in new towns or neighbourhoods
- Involve residents in environmental improvements
- Provide reasons for people to develop community activities
- Improve perceptions of marginalised groups
- Help transform the image of public bodies
- Make people feel better about where they live

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The local image and identity theme brings together material which touches on people's perceptions about where they live, and how they connect with it and with others who live there. Numerous landmark buildings and environmental schemes testify to the increasing attention these issues have received in recent years, especially from local authorities. But the importance of image, identity and belonging is not confined to such concrete expressions, as Tim Lott points out in his personal exploration of suburban depression:

Suicide, for Durkheim, was all about a sense of place, of identity. [...] It wasn't personal circumstance that set people on the path to self-destruction, it was the stress of adaptation and change. [...] Being stable and integrated was the great inoculation against despair. To lose your fixed point of reference, at whatever level, was to be in danger of losing your mind.<sup>26</sup>

This chapter goes beyond the appearance of places to more complex issues like belonging, sense of place and personal or group identity: areas where there are obvious connections with the social cohesion theme. There is little consistency here between the different projects in the study. In some cases, e.g. the fêisean, a localised cultural identity was the driving force; elsewhere, like York or Milton Keynes, it was the place and its cultural heritage. But for others cultural identity lay in common experience rather than place: this was true, for example, of groups like the Lawnmowers. The differences between projects arise from one of the characteristics which distinguishes arts work from other forms of leisure activity or community development – it deals in meanings. The subject and means of addressing it was individual to all the projects, springing from the concerns of those involved. While there were areas of impact where people's responses were very similar (e.g. confidence or skill-building) there were others, of which this is one, where the outcomes were dictated by the nature of the project itself.

### 6.2 STRENGTHENING A SENSE OF PLACE

Overall, 27% respondents said that their feelings about where they lived had changed for the better, but the gap between figures for children (15%) and adults (40%) reflects their different kind of engagement with place. It probably also reflects confusion about the meaning of the question which was sometimes apparent: the wording was certainly

ambiguous. But there were also big variations between projects, in keeping with the argument that any impact on sense of place relates directly to the content of an activity.

### Local pride and belonging

The York Mystery Plays, which tell the Christian story from creation to redemption, are perhaps the finest cycle of English medieval plays to have survived. They are now produced every three years, in a partnership between professional actors and local people: mild controversy was caused in 1996 when it emerged that a local woman had been cast to play God. The scale of the enterprise, and its unique place in the local community, accounts for the 56% of respondents who said that they felt differently about the city as a result of being involved. In fact several of those who did not, said that it was because they already felt very positive about York.<sup>27</sup> The woman who said she was *'more involved in the local community'* and had *'a greater sense of belonging, having contributed'* spoke for most of the respondents.

### The image of Batley Carr

Although change on Batley Carr estate must be largely attributed to housing improvements, the art project was credited by many residents with having improved the feel of the place. One spoke of having felt embarrassed to live there but, she had become involved in the arts project through her children and now believed that, if the Housing department had given her a decent place to live, it was the arts project which had given her a role in the community and confidence in the future. If arts interventions were often small scale, they were the more successful for it, as one former tenant explained: *'To be perfectly honest, Batley Carr was depressing, the environment wasn't nice; you didn't feel nice. Now there's all these nicely-designed ceramic numbers, and all the new signs, and it has lifted the area.'* From the dispassionate viewpoint of the *Batley News* offices, the editor confirmed that the estate was seen very differently in the town, and that the arts project had been central to changing its image locally and further afield.

*'We used to be worst – now we're the best.'*

### The Batley Bash

On the surface, the Batley Bash is an image-building initiative like street carnivals all over the country, but of course it is unique to the town, its character shaped by local people and cultures and beginning to belong to them, despite its City Challenge origins. The 1996 Bash was only the second, but it attracted more than 1 in 5 people living in the City Challenge area, building on the first as people wanted to be part of its success. Dozens of arts and music workshops were held during the spring and early summer to prepare for the procession. Not all of these were obvious: one women's group wanted to make a banner which connected them with the Bash, though they did not want to join the event itself. Community groups, clubs and schools from across the town got involved in a genuinely multi-cultural event. A final measure of the value of the Bash may be gained from the resident who said after the 1996 event, *'It's becoming a tradition; there'd be a bit of an outcry if there wasn't one.'*

*'I went along as a spectator and ended up carrying one of the floats.'*

### The Living Archive

In Milton Keynes it is not just local traditions which have been established, but the city itself, built over the past 30 years in the Buckinghamshire countryside to re-house Londoners. The pattern of existing and imported heritage is therefore especially complex, and the arts have been a significant force in helping to develop a sense of community. The Living Archive Project grew out of a strong local interest in community documen-

*'In this new town, the arts provide a huge amount of the social cement which is necessary to bring the population together.'*

tary drama to record, explore and articulate local people's history through theatre, publications and other means. The purpose, as one participant put it, is *'to impart to young minds a sense of continuity in the midst of rapid change [and] to reassure them'*. The value of the Living Archive's contribution to local image and identity is clearly expressed by another respondent: *'Ours is a "new" city and many people who do not live here make jokes about it; we often felt embarrassed to say where we lived. Finding out about the history and culture of this area has helped me to feel proud of it'*.

Developing interest in recent local history is also a key objective for the Wymering public art project and, though it is still early days, the response has been very positive. An exhibition held in a disused school attracted almost 200 people over a weekend, generating deep interest. There were many lower key examples of how arts initiatives had changed people's sense of local belonging for the better. At Redlees Art and Craft Stables, for instance, a substantial proportion of participants surveyed thought that the building provided a stronger community focus, and made them feel better about the area.

Even projects which did not have an environmental focus sometimes had an impact on people's perceptions of the place. This was especially true of visual arts projects, which often had an impact on participants' visual sensitivity, as reflected by a person who said that she had become *'unsatisfied with the environment: there's not enough thought about local communities' involvement in creating environments that are interesting, comfortable and beautiful to live in'*.

*'People are still saying when they see me on a Saturday or Sunday – Have you got any workshops?'*

*'Now I can see different pictures, and I want to have the places I see looked after, whereas before I couldn't care less.'*

### Misplaced

A positive impact on people's sense of place is not the inevitable outcome of every arts project which sets out with such intentions. We looked at one event which produced no identifiable benefits for the local community despite (or perhaps because of) the scale of its ambitions and resources. A key to its failure to achieve its aim of 'celebrating the local community' is probably the fact that the location was selected 2 years after the first planning meeting, and only 4 months before the event itself. In this case, the research simply confirmed the ineffectiveness and potential damage to local confidence of failing to root projects properly by working with local communities.

### Public art and the local environment

The impact of public art has been addressed elsewhere (Selwood 1995) and did not form part of the study, though the processes of public participation in planning environmental art were considered in Batley and Portsmouth. In both places, despite the less advanced positions of the Portsmouth projects, there was evidence that the artists had created a new focus of interest in the local fabric and wider environment.

In Portsmouth, for example, the Wymering public art initiative began with an intensive planning weekend facilitated by Peter Dunn of The Art of Change. This took place in March 1996 and was a turning point for those involved, especially the members of the Community Association. They had come as sceptics, but the process had no room for non-committal responses: by Sunday afternoon the Association had taken on a major environmental art project through which they hoped to mark community ownership of the planned Sports and Community Centre. Since then, and with help from the Council and artists, they have raised money for planning workshops and an exhibition, employed a co-ordinator, taken on redundant school buildings, submitted a major lottery application and begun to raise local support for their project. In doing so, they have had to cope with difficulties and delays and local scepticism, but they remain un-

*'I thought it was going to be a load of cobblers.'*

daunted by the challenge they have taken on: they are determined to achieve success which can challenge negative stereotyping of the area and build pride among tenants and residents.

Since 1993, and in partnership with the agency, Public Arts, Batley Action has commissioned some 20 artists to site work in the town, ranging from landmark pieces like the monumental Batley Bats, to much less obvious work in public buildings like a stained glass window at the Well Centre, or curtains and mosaics at Park Road school. The quality is uniformly high, and the work has changed the appearance of the town, adding a layer to its character. Although most of the larger projects have not been participatory, there has been extensive consultation and dialogue and this may be one of its lasting social impacts. As advocates of public art have found elsewhere, people are keen to engage in debates around issues of meaning, place and aesthetics, and Batley has been no exception. The Batley Bats, opened in 1995 as a gateway to the Station Road conservation area, remains a focus of passionate argument on both sides. Handled well, as in this case where even opponents are good-humoured about the sculpture, such controversies can be enriching.

*'It has created an idea. You can go on Commercial Street and talk about the quality of the environment or whatever, and it wouldn't have happened before. I think this awareness allows communication but the positive benefits have to be measured in years.'*

### **Outer and inner renewal: Pihlajisto, Helsinki**

In Pihlajisto, a suburb of Helsinki, we encountered a smaller-scale project which had produced significant local environmental change, and had social benefits for those involved. In an ugly shopping precinct, whose only life seemed to centre on a pub used by hard drinkers, was an unfinished area, literally a hole in the ground, which the artist Ritva Harle thought had potential. The Fountain, as the pub was called, provided her with a recruiting ground where she planned its transformation through landscaping, planting and sculpture with the customers. Over several months in 1995, 15 men worked with her, using materials provided by private sponsorship and the City Council, which also granted the relevant permits. A key part of the contract was that the participants should reduce their drinking, and all agreed to attend a health centre for check-ups and education about the dangers of their current levels of consumption. They kept their word, and none of the alcoholics was hospitalised during the project. The environmental improvements were a great success, (even helping the owner of The Fountain to sell up for a good price). With renewed confidence and building skills five of the men have found steady jobs, and others learnt to control their drinking. The art work remains as testimony to these small but significant changes.

### **VALON VOIMAT: THE POWER OF LIGHT**

Helsinki staged its first Festival of Light in November and December 1995, in the darkest part of the Finnish winter. This is the time when the Northern Lights illuminate Lapland, when the quality of light is changed by the first snow and when candles are traditionally placed in windows to mark Independence Day. But Valon Voimat, as the festival is called, is a conscious, artificial creation, albeit one which draws on deep roots to affirm the power of light. Sponsored by Phillips, the festival is an amalgam of events involving people from all walks of life. Many of the high-profile projects are the work of artists, including installations and performances. Business is involved through a trade fair and sponsorship of events such as the illuminated island which spread huge bands of colour across Helsinki Bay in 1995. Community groups also participate: in the suburb of Puistola, residents animated the courtyard of their flats with a series of ice candleholders. The emphasis is on inclusion, with people being encouraged to bring their own ideas to the festival director, Isse Karsten. So, in 1996, a couple of art students came up with the idea of a dark tram which toured the streets unlit, allowing passengers to look out on the illuminated city. The cost of the festival – about £30,000 a year – is low in proportion to the number of events and installations and, al-

though only in its third year, it has already become an important date in the city calendar and is a key part of the celebration of Helsinki as a City of Culture in the year 2000. It has encouraged City Council officials to think differently about the winter life of Helsinki, and created public-private sector partnerships unusual in Finland. But perhaps most important is the indefinable value of events which, in the words of one spectator, evoke 'some feeling like I never felt: sacred, but without religious pressure'.

It is worth remembering, in passing, that public art need not be permanent or even physical. Solent Peoples Theatre's work with homeless people, 'Writing on the Walls', which led to the installation of a temporary house outside a Portsmouth supermarket is a good example of a passing intervention. In January 1996 the fèisean concert at Eden Court theatre in Inverness brought to a wider public something which they had perhaps only known of in theory, and became a benchmark event in developing local support.

### 6.3 IDENTITY AND CULTURE

The sense of identity and belonging which comes from affirming, exploring and sharing a common culture was a factor in many of the projects. Among the less obvious examples were the computer culture of many participants in digital technology projects, or the working class youth culture of some of the bands. People define and redefine their cultural identities in far too much complexity for them to be explored adequately here. But there are a few examples where a group's common cultural identity has not only driven a project, but become inseparable from it and the social impact it has produced.

#### The fèisean and Gaelic culture

The growth and success of the fèisean is inseparable from the forms and values of the Gaelic culture they celebrate, and people's attachment to it. Of course, the enthusiasm of its supporters is to be expected, and it was no surprise to hear that someone felt 'more aware of the cultural heritage which will be eroded if we don't endeavour to sustain and develop it'. But, as the case study report pointed out:

*'being creative within the Gaelic culture is an expression of my attitude to my cultural roots and community'.*

Not all came as champions of Gaelic culture. Many were beginners or relatively new to it: some were incomers. For these people, participating in the fèis was an important development in their sense of identity and culture. 'It has changed my ideas about the community in which I live, and the importance of culture within that community,' said one woman. (Matarasso 1996b: 24)

The study also recorded a significant impact by the fèisean on children's perceptions of Gaelic culture and their identity in relation to it and Scotland itself:

One girl from Dingwall said the fèis had made her feel 'Kind of different because in school or on TV hardly anything relates to our cultures, and it's kind of sad because it's like they never even happened, and if more people don't learn Gaelic then it may end up like Latin, a dead language'. She realised now that 'There is way more to Scotland than tartan and kilts and other younger and older people should learn about it'. Her views were echoed by many other children in fèisean across the region. 'It helps me understand about the Highlands,' explained another child, while a third argued that 'We should learn more about our country and its culture in school'. (Matarasso 1996b: 25)

It should be stressed that the projects visited were not in any sense manipulative about these matters: the fèis is a cultural not a political activity. It is just that the cultural riches of the Highlands and Islands remains strongly localised and so connected to place and to people.

### **Yipirinya School, Alice Springs**

Deidre Williams' research offers a contrasting Australian example of the importance of cultural identity among a rural minority – an Aboriginal community in Alice Springs. A council of elders representing the town camp runs Yipirinya, a bilingual, bicultural Aboriginal school, 90% of whose pupils have English as a second language. With funding from the Australia Council, the school brought in three artists to work on a large-scale music and theatre project. The impact was clear:

The experience left them feeling strong and united. The event was an icebreaker with the local media and as a result the school received greater media support. This was important as it generated goodwill and communicated the bicultural philosophy of the school, locally, at a regional level, and within the network of people concerned with education and Aboriginal affairs. (Williams 1997: 14)

The project had a marked impact on the confidence of the participating children, as might be expected, and on the local Aboriginal community. Mothers who made crafts-work were encouraged to overcome their traditional reserve and show work in public. The children themselves have been invited to perform in other places, and the elders are committed to continuing the use of the arts within the school and at public venues.

### **Respect for other cultures**

Participation in the arts can also provide opportunities for people to share their cultures with others – as exemplified by the HOME festival – or to demonstrate their interest in cultures which are not their own. Naseem Khan touched on this when she described the dilemma faced by a group of non-Asian women in Somerset, who had been invited to work on the Victoria & Albert Museum's Mughal Tent project:

How, the women wondered dubiously, could they tune into the idea of Indian culture without being superficial or patronising? However, after long discussion, a link was found between the women's English culture and the Mughals', in a common love of gardens and water. Their fresh and lively dual-culture panel came to show a juxtaposed pair of idealised landscapes – cottage England and peacocked India. (Khan 1996: 9)

These women, like others in Dublin and elsewhere, used the tent project, in part at least, as an opportunity to demonstrate their respect for other cultural traditions. The fêisean offer a similar opportunity for people from outside the region to make their commitment to the Highlands and their culture explicit. Some of those involved, as organisers, volunteers or students, have come to live in the region from other parts of the UK or from abroad. Their participation enables them to make their commitment clear and gradually have it accepted: as one explained, *'I felt I became part of things'*.

#### **CREATING A LOCAL CULTURAL IDENTITY: ESTOVER PERCUSSION PROJECT**

Estover Percussion Project was founded in 1991 on a windswept Plymouth housing estate by a youth and community worker and the head of music at Estover Community College. Starting as a simple steel band project it aimed to offer a positive and creative outlet for local young people, but it has grown to embrace a much wider range of ages, musical styles and activities. By 1997 some 450 people were involved in steel, junk and samba bands; workshops and informal music groups; designing and producing low-tech instruments; an annual street festival and the administration required to support all these activities. Bands like Real Steel, Jam Samba and Weapons of Sound have performed all over the country, sometimes alongside groups like The Levellers, and appeared in the media through Blue Peter, the Big Breakfast and the Andy Kershaw show. They are in demand from the Glastonbury Festival to the Albert Hall. The success of the project in giving people a sense of direction is evident in the members' very high commitment to it: 'Being in

Weapons of Sound has been a much more fulfilling experience than any of us could ever have hoped for.' (Fisher 1995: 22) The Percussion Project, now developing a £1.4 million community music centre to support its ongoing work, has given a cultural identity to the estate, and something to be proud of. It is significant that two thirds of respondents (67%) felt more positive about where they live – a higher proportion than any other study project.

#### 6.4 THE CITY SEEN FROM WITHIN

The contribution that the arts and local cultures can make to the image of cities has been widely discussed (Bianchini & Parkinson 1993), often in terms of place marketing and competing for business relocation. Less thought seems to be given to how the city's own inhabitants interpret the new messages through which they are represented, but the arts can be equally effective in repositioning the internal identity of places. They retain a perceived 'specialness': they require care and attention, and both their processes and their products are often seen as enshrining lasting values. As one local resident in Hounslow put it during a visit to Redlees Art & Craft Stables: '*The kids need something like this: it'll teach them to make things and not buy things or just watch TV.*'

In a society increasingly confused about what matters, the arts offer a positive way of expressing not only personal or group values, but political vision. An obvious example is the re-orientation of Greater London Council's arts policy after 1981, but this kind of dramatic change is exceptional, and its effectiveness has been questioned (Lewis *et al.* 1986). More common in recent years is the kind of shift of policy emphasis exemplified by Nottingham City Council's re-positioning of the Museum Service since the early 1990s.

##### Towards an inclusive Museum Service

When the administration passed from Conservative to Labour control in 1990, the new ruling group inherited the 25th most disadvantaged council district in England. Today, unemployment in Nottingham stands at 15.5% (a good 6 points above the national average), rising to 40% among young African-Caribbean men and 47% for young Pakistani men; 42% of households are in receipt of Council Tax and/or Housing Benefits.<sup>29</sup> In response, the new Council prioritised an Anti-Poverty Strategy designed to focus all services on alleviating these problems by:

'Channelling resources to those most in need; making services easier to use; improving co-ordination of services; involving people in decision-making; providing services which are sensitive to people's needs and hardship; and raising awareness of and commenting/campaigning on issues.'<sup>30</sup>

In this context the role of the city's museums, which were seen by some to have been relatively favoured in previous years, came under scrutiny. They faced accusations of elitism, and it was not easy to show how they addressed social deprivation. At public meetings in the early 1990s, anger was expressed by members of the city's Black and Asian communities at displays which were seen as 'imperialist and racist'. Part of the reason this was so important is the sense, rooted in their 19th century origins, that museums enshrine what a community believes is most valuable about itself. At the same time, and partly because of this, a museum is seen as belonging to local people (many of whom will have contributed to its collection over the decades) in a way that more recent cultural institutions do not. Getting it right matters.

The appointment of an outreach officer in 1991, and her subsequent work and partnership with the marketing department, began to transform that situation by devel-

'When you prepare for visitors, be sure that the choices you make also improve your community for the long term. Plan to win the war, not just the battle.'

National Trust for Historic Preservation, USA<sup>31</sup>

Nottingham's Museums: Castle Museum; Brewhouse Yard Museum; Natural History Museum (Wollaton Hall); Green's Mill Science Centre; Canal Museum; Newstead Abbey; Industrial Museum (Wollaton Hall); Museum of Costume and Textiles



oping links not just with Nottingham's culturally-diverse communities, but also with many other disadvantaged groups. The Circle of Life gallery, which opened in 1993 and looks at life stages through the cultural artefacts of all the city's communities, has been a milestone in this evolution. At the Social History Museum the *Tracing the Trailblazers* exhibition – about the first immigrants to Nottingham from Jamaica – was a popular and important validation of local African-Caribbean culture and its contribution to the city. Alongside these the outreach worker has run a programme of participatory activities, often led by artists, to introduce new visitors to the museum: weekday use by groups of older or disabled people is now common. The advice of a disability consultancy group had a marked impact on access in physical and other terms.

All this has begun to have an impact on how the museums (and by extension the city which they represent) are perceived, at least among their new audience. Surveys show that most black visitors see the Circle of Life as the best display at the Castle museum, though they feel still see room for improvement. Interviews with African-Caribbean people involved through outreach work confirmed these broadly positive views: as one person said *'It was an eye opener to see what they offered to the community. It's nice that they try to incorporate different activities'*, although, she added, *'maybe they didn't have as much as they could have had'*.

Outreach work with mental health service users addressed different, more personal than cultural, concerns, but were if anything even more successful in encouraging them to visit the museums independently. Reviews of marketing initiatives with other marginalised groups also suggest that new users are changing their feelings about the museums.<sup>31</sup> As with the HOME festival, it must be stressed that this is a relatively small-scale programme with a partly symbolic purpose entirely appropriate to a museum initiative. The impact is no less important for being currently focused on new and existing museum users (and the museum service itself). Expectations of its potential to change how people feel about their museums should be in proportion to the resources at its disposal, but it illustrates the potential of developing a participatory element in museums to renew relationships with local people.

*'It's very good: you could spend a couple of days here. My brother came from Australia and we spent the day here'*.

#### PEOPLES OF EDINBURGH

A similar commitment to demonstrating an inclusive care for local cultures was made in the mid 1980s by Edinburgh City Council. Following the appointment of a new Keeper of Social History, the service developed links with many community groups and bodies like the WEA to create a series of innovative projects. These include the People's Story museum, which opened in 1989, following a major oral history project. It was followed in 1995 by the Peoples of Edinburgh project which aimed to 'raise awareness of the richness of multi-cultural society' in the city by involving local people in recording and sharing their cultures. The Peoples of Edinburgh was co-ordinated by three part-time workers and regular museum staff, and was overseen by a steering group of about 20 local people. It made contact with over 200 groups in the city, and involved an oral history project (50 one-to-one interviews and 35 group reminiscence sessions were held) and a needle-work project. The latter produced a textile tent reflecting the cultures of eight groups working with a community artist. The project resulted in a major exhibition held at the City Arts Centre in the winter of 1996-97, visited by some 27,000 people. It has resulted not only in raising awareness of the 18 cultural groups who took part, but in building new relationships between them and the City's Museum service.<sup>32</sup>

Beyond museums, events like Hounslow's festival of older people, have demonstrated the Council's inclusive approach to the local community. The Redlees Art & Craft Stables project served a similar function on a smaller scale, with parents who were highly

appreciative of its activities for children: *'It makes Hounslow a pleasant place to be'*, thought a young man visiting with his children. Although it is still at an early stage in its life, it was attracting a high proportion of local people.

The Total Balalaika Show has helped Helsinki City Council begin to develop the city's conventional Scandinavian image to reflect a much more adventurous mix of a sophistication and closeness to elemental nature. The event has been widely used by the City authorities in marketing and tourism development, but is equally important in changing how local people feel about their city (Cantell 1996). It is one of the symbols of a gradually relaxing lifestyle, along with initiatives like the Festival of Light and the Night of the Arts, which have changed how people use the city.

# 7 IMAGINATION AND VISION

## THE STUDY SHOWS THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS CAN

- Help people develop their creativity
- Erode the distinction between consumer and creator
- Allow people to explore their values, meanings and dreams
- Enrich the practice of professionals in the public and voluntary sectors
- Transform the responsiveness of public service organisations
- Encourage people to accept risk positively
- Help community groups raise their vision beyond the immediate
- Challenge conventional service delivery
- Raise expectations about what is possible and desirable

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

There are areas where participation in the arts has similar impact to good community development work or involvement in sport or volunteering, but there are important aspects which are unique to it. The particular impact of participation in the arts (of which more is said in the final chapter) are different in many respects from other forms of community activity, and this is nowhere clearer than in the imagination and vision theme. This deals with issues close to the nature of arts activity, including creativity, vision and taking risks positively: other aspects could certainly be included.

### 7.2 DEVELOPING CREATIVITY

#### Personal creativity

People who participate in the arts fall into two broad groups – those already committed to the arts and for whom creativity is a major appeal, and those whose involvement is more recent, more tentative and, perhaps, more varied in its motivation. Some of the latter may have had to overcome considerable personal or social scepticism in agreeing to take part. The first group includes many who might be thought of, or think of themselves, as amateur artists, and who represent a creative core in communities across the country. For example, a large proportion of the adults who attend Fèis Rois Inbhich each May are amateur musicians for whom the chance to learn from professionals and to play with others has become an important date in their personal calendar. It is significant that 98% of respondents at this event said that the opportunity to be creative was important to them, and 96% want to do it again.

Similar responses were encountered in a number of other projects. For example, several of the local people who became involved in the 1996 York Mystery Plays spoke of creativity as a side of themselves for which there was little scope in their working or home lives. Again a high proportion (76%) of this group said that being creative was important to them; this contrasts sharply with work in Bolton, for example, where only 30% of respondents felt that it mattered. Although it is dangerous to generalise, the research suggests that fewer people among the amateurs and enthusiasts come from disadvantaged groups. If nothing else, their existing commitment to the arts implies previous experience and, perhaps, a degree of confidence in their own creative abilities.

*'My 9-5 job that doesn't involve being particularly creative – the Fèis is therefore a highlight of the year.'*

But, even if such a broad-brush statement is true, it does not diminish the importance of the opportunity to those involved, or the benefit they (and the community through them) derive from their creative energy.

### Discovering creativity

However, and this is partly a result of the kind of work chosen, much the larger proportion of people involved in the case study projects would not have described themselves as amateurs in any sense. Overall, 27% of questionnaire respondents had not been involved in an arts activity before, but this masks big differences between projects:

	Fèis Rois	York	Batley	Bolton
No previous involvement in an arts activity	6%	21%	55%	65%

Table 3: Previous involvement in an arts activity

Among the reasons for taking part, a love of art for its own sake was exceptional: only a few people spoke of a long-standing ambition to write, act or pursue some other creative interest. Much more common were those who approached a project with a degree of scepticism, or who, insuring themselves against disappointment, came with low expectations of what it would deliver or they might achieve. However, perhaps because the experience was often relatively new, many people described how their ideas about the arts, and specifically about their own creative abilities, had been transformed through their participation. For a substantial number, the revelation that they could do something artistic which other people would truly value produced a lasting change. Such experiences were encountered time after time in all the case study projects. In Australia, Deidre Williams found that some nine out of ten people said they had ‘developed creative talents’ and had an ‘increased appreciation of community arts projects’.<sup>33</sup> It seems that whatever else it achieves, participation in them changes people’s minds about the arts themselves.

*‘I did this picture, and when it was in the exhibition. I thought “Wow, that’s the first time I’ve ever, ever had anything like that put up”, because I’ve never considered I was any good at art. But I thought “Gosh, that’s lovely”, so I was very, very chuffed, thoroughly enjoyed it, and went away feeling that the few hours I was doing that, my mind was completely cut off from anything else with this lovely time we had here.’*

### Demystifying the arts

Working with artists was normally a demystifying process. Participants in all projects from Hounslow to the Hebrides spoke about their changing view of artists and the arts themselves, often with the sense that something intimidating had been faced up to and found quite friendly. In the digital technology case study it was common for young people to develop creative interests as a result of an initial attraction to the technology itself. As Tim Brown, director of Raw Material, says, *‘the kids get general abuse, fights, aggro. [...] But when they come in here they can soften up and be creative’* (Gould 1996: 10). At Redlees Art & Craft Stables, it was not only the children actually attending the Gallery Gang sessions, but their parents whose views of the building and the arts had developed: a small, but telling, illustration was provided by a disabled girl who had begun drawing at home and watching arts programmes on television, with a knock-on effect on her parents’ views of the arts.

*‘Everything to do with the theatre seems more accessible and less of a closed shop.’*

Since this is something which many community-based arts projects consciously set out to do, as a necessary element of cultural democracy, it was satisfying to find evidence that it does happen, again and again. However, in one or two projects, it did not appear that the artists were as ready as they might be to allow people to participate equitably. One young woman said that the community production she was involved in

*‘You think an artist is just someone who paints pictures, and it’s all clever stuff, but it starts right from the bottom level of people like us.’*

was directed in such a way that participants had little input: *'I felt that this was a shame; any questions or suggestions the cast had were not taken seriously.'*

### Cultural development

If it is not a strictly social impact, it is none the less worth noting that many participatory arts projects contribute to the continuing evolution of contemporary culture. Sometimes this is a recognised extension of mainstream forms, as, for example, in the case of community plays. The large casts required by the York Mystery Plays or Noel Coward's recently revived *Cavalcade* are often beyond the pocket of today's professional theatre: without volunteers such productions would rarely be seen outside the West End. In other cases, such as the computer-based arts work of groups like Jubilee Arts or Raw Material, artistic idioms are being developed through media not foreseen by previous generations. Elsewhere, it is ideas – social, political, aesthetic – which butt against existing boundaries, as with the junk instruments developed at Estover Percussion Project to explore a new aural and visual aesthetic (as well as make an environmental statement). It is unfortunate, to say the least, that an arts establishment which has made so much of (and from) iconoclasm, has so little interest in the cultural and aesthetic experiments which can emerge from participatory arts activity.

### Professional development

The involvement in arts activities of professionals in other fields (health, education, environment etc.) often had a marked impact on them. In every case study, we encountered people whose ideas about their own professional practice had been fundamentally changed as they had seen the contribution the arts could make. For example, several youth workers had decided to make much more use of the arts in future, as have all the teachers interviewed: *'I want to use much more drama with the children because I have seen through this a means of raising self-esteem and a very useful vehicle for getting across important issues'*. In Nottingham, the impact of the museum outreach work was not confined to participants with mental health problems, but extended to health workers who had recognised the value of the arts to their programmes.

More surprisingly, this extended to professionals who work much less closely with people: housing officers, environmental workers, police, planning officers, social workers and others all said they would welcome opportunities to work with artists in future. While it would be naïve to take all this commitment at face value, or to neglect to invest in supporting it, there is no doubt that arts projects contribute to understanding of and support for creative, holistic approaches to problem-solving. The co-operation and professional generosity of many artists was an important factor in this. Although there were instances of artistic arrogance towards other professional cultures, much more common was the pleasure and surprise expressed at artists' open way of working: *'We were really pleased that the people who came were so willing to share their ideas, that they didn't mind teachers sitting at the back: now everybody in the school is doing masks.'*

### Impact on Nottingham Museums Service

The impact of outreach work on the museums' audience has already been described, but the initiative also produced a lasting change in the service itself, playing an important role in the development of new exhibitions and the re-design of old ones. A key event in this area were complaints from members of the Sikh community about the inappropriate juxtaposition of culturally-significant objects, leading to a wholesale reappraisal of Sikh artefacts, including those in store, and the creation of a new exhibition.

*'We should not seek to extend a ready-made culture to the benighted masses. We should accept, frankly, that if we extend our culture we shall change it: some that is offered will be rejected, other parts will be radically criticised'*.

Raymond Williams<sup>28</sup>

*'I'm very positive about the use of the arts as long as it's not art for arts' sake: it's a tool. You've got to have clear determined aim and objectives, and have an end product.'*

*'As a countryside worker I was quite cynical when I started the arts project. I couldn't see the value of it, because I was from a traditional environmental background, but I've seen that it can change attitudes and people can get benefits from it.'*

*'The outreach are taking quite a central role in the spark and then we all react.'*

Museum curator

Among other benefits, the museum gained knowledge about its collection. The development of outreach work has also encouraged curators to *'collect in certain areas, which is changing our way of thinking about acquisitions, not always easily...'* The Circle of Life Gallery and NatureQuest – two of the most popular exhibitions – also benefited from the input of the outreach department.

These changes would have been impossible without the commitment of staff, who acknowledged how much further the work has gone in making the collection relevant and accessible than had been anticipated. Acting as mediators between community groups and museum staff, outreach workers helped the latter understand their audience better, influencing the planning and design of new displays. They also contributed to the development of thinking about evaluation because of their close connection with the museum's new audiences, something which was also welcomed by professional staff.

### **Creativity in the workplace**

Many of the arts projects used non-hierarchical and co-operative structures to promote a creative work environment. This was especially evident among the digital technology projects where, although there was often a central figure, there was also a high level of delegation and autonomy, with minimal reporting required (Kelly *et al.* 1997: 34). Structures were fluid, with people taking on roles according to need, and moving easily between employment, contract work and volunteering. As a result, the projects were adaptable, and willing to give people their head, allowing them to follow an idea in the knowledge that it might fail. The results are not only a series of innovative projects like person-centred profiling, or Internet radio, but new organisational models which allow creativity to thrive.

## **7.3 POSITIVE RISK-TAKING**

Encouraging people to take risks may not seem to be the most useful impact the arts could claim, but risk is fundamental to the human condition, and learning to live with it is a prerequisite for growth and development. It is increasingly recognised that the economic and social challenges of the coming century will favour those cultures which are flexible and risk-competent. Almost all the projects required people to take personal and social risks of different kinds – not involving physical injury or financial loss, but risks associated with self, identity, capacity, ability, relationships and similar intangibles. It is not easy to generalise about these, since they are individual and often private, but overcoming them is a major source of confidence and growth. One story may illustrate the point: in Batley, we met a young unemployed man who had invested his redundancy pay in a drum kit and become involved with the Bands Co-op. Through it he has made contacts, fulfilled ambitions, earned money and given new meaning to his life: he and his band recently turned down a tour of Germany to stay in Batley and help build up the Co-op.

### **Mind-forged manacles**

The challenge was often internal, arising from a person's existing sense of themselves and what they could (or should) do. This ranged from feelings of incompetence in the face of art's mysteries, to more personal doubts which interviewees often glided over. But the risks were also more external, or seen as such, rooted in the attitudes of family or society. Young people often had to overcome real or imagined peer pressure: revealing ideas, enthusiasm, even enjoyment can make people feel very vulnerable. A

*'If I told blokes down Cosham what I've done up here they'd say "You're a poof." They would. Let's be honest, they'd think you were a cissy.'*

mask-making project at the Brook Youth Club in Portsmouth had to deal with just these sorts of fears to engage the young men, and the similar experiences of participants in Young Batley's arts projects have already been mentioned. Several of the digital technology case studies illustrated a kind of trade-off as new, strong peer groups were formed within the project to replace old friendships outside.

The ability of our feelings to police our actions was most obvious in projects which involved users of social services, where participation had often been a serious personal challenge requiring courage to overcome. Mental health service users attending workshops at Portsmouth Arts Centre, the Aspex Gallery and Nottingham museums all experienced such difficulties, but seemed to accept a degree of personal risk because the arts workshop offered a focused, supportive and enjoyable activity without therapeutic purpose. This issue of risk should not be underestimated: it is real and inseparable from the benefits many people derive from participation in the arts. With the exception of one or two mental health service users, who might have felt differently on a better day, we did not meet people who regretted having taken the plunge. But there are people who do, and wish that they had not: those who leave lose touch with the project and rarely appear in any evaluation. A drop-out rate is unavoidable – if everyone was happy, there would be no risk and no benefit – and arts projects are not normally to be held responsible. However, they can mitigate the consequences by recognising and being open about the risks involved, and ensuring support appropriate to the situation.

### **Believing in success**

The benefit derived by individuals from positive risk-taking is mirrored by groups and institutions. At a community level, groups often have to live with individual and collective anxieties about the process. Wymering Community Association, which has taken on the management of a public art programme costing over £100,000, is a case in point. Members have their own concerns to deal with, but also the risk that they are taking as a group: *'If this was all to fall through now, if we didn't get the arts bid, there'd be a full scale riot which won't be aimed at councillors. It'll be aimed at the committee'*. Many other community groups – from the fêisean to self-help groups in Batley, Newcastle and elsewhere – developed arts projects on a similar level of faith in their ability to achieve a successful outcome. The support of arts workers or other professionals was often a factor in encouraging groups to be ambitious: the HOME festival co-ordinator helped community groups without link workers like Pescara and Caribbean Island to take on and succeed with projects of a scale they had not tried before.

### **Risks for artists**

Artists are natural risk-takers. None the less, many of the artists involved in these projects had met new challenges both to their practice and to themselves as individuals. At Redlees Arts and Craft Stables, the project facilitated considerable professional development for the artists within a supportive environment. While this was true across the board, it was particularly so for those, like some of the musicians who teach at fêisean, whose work is not mainly concerned with participation. None of those interviewed expressed any doubt about their involvement, although it had been challenging and had sometimes required them to rethink their approach. This appears to be one area of risk where those involved have little to fear. In the digital technology projects there was almost a pride in the organisations' ability to take a risk, because of an acceptance that they worked in an unpredictable field:

*'It was difficult to meet people – I'm not always made welcome – but I've been made very welcome. It's helped me tremendously. It's got me out of the house, I'm meeting different people. I'm really enjoying it and I really feel as though I'm getting somewhere. I'm much more confident: when I first came I wouldn't say anything to anybody.'*

All the groups we spoke to were unworried by failure, in that they all argued that the very nature of their work meant that some projects would fail. [They] categorised themselves as risk-takers, and were willing to bet the whole organisation on a good idea. (Kelly *et al.* 1997: 34-5)

If Microsoft could get things like demand for the Internet wrong, they argued, there was little point in trying to play safe by double-guessing the future. They were not casual about the organisations to which they had contributed so much: but nor were they hidebound by them.

### Responsible risk

Arts projects also encouraged people with responsibility for others – teachers, youth workers, care staff – to accept risks they had not previously envisaged. Many teachers described taking on arts projects fairly hesitantly, and feeling that they were moving into uncharted territory. Sometimes working with an arts agency or local authority officer was very helpful, though it could add to the school's doubts if the partner was not sensitive to their anxieties. But their doubts were almost always unfounded: the project at Brook Youth Club was tremendously successful, with the most unlikely young men taking part in mask-making, and enthusiasm generated for further arts projects. As a result of such experiences, the expectations of teachers and other workers were frequently overturned. People who were well-known to them achieved in ways and to degrees they had not anticipated because the artists had no prior expectation of how they would respond. Teachers' comments from the Portsmouth season underline the point:

*'Staff would never have used hot wax with children in their wildest dreams, and they were totally amazed at the work these children have produced, and how they've been able to do it. They're now thinking "Really we ought to have batik on our art curriculum as a permanent thing."'*

*'It was interesting to see year 5 working and seeing the level of decision making that it demanded of them. I was really quite amazed by their co-operation: I think they were very challenged It's very much freer than a lot of the work they produce.'*

Similar comments were made by care staff working with elderly people in several projects. For instance workshops by LAB trainees at Age Concern day centres at Mirfield and Saviletown helped staff renew relationships with clients and learn more about the people they were caring for. This opportunity to refresh contacts between people who spend long periods of time together may be one of the most valuable impacts which arts projects bring to many educational and caring situations.

### BEACON HOUSE: CHANGING PEOPLE BY CHANGING THE ENVIRONMENT

Beacon House is a hostel for homeless people in the east end of London, a few streets from the Tower and St Katherine's Dock. It provides accommodation and support for almost 170 people, many of whom have problems with employment and substance dependency, as well as homelessness. In 1995, the housing association which runs the hostel appointed two artists-in-residence, Tamar Arnon and Helen Carey, for 3 days a week between them. In March that year, they were asked to oversee the refurbishment of the residents' coffee bar and pool room, using a £15,000 end-of-year maintenance underspend. Working with residents, the artists achieved a comprehensive transformation in less than 3 weeks, replacing grey lino with handmade floor tiles, and plastic chairs with beaten aluminium furniture. New artworks were bought from a range of artists and art students, chosen by residents from Polaroid samples. The coffee bar has proved to be only the first of a series of dramatic initiatives, which have included the refurbishment of 4 television rooms, the establishment of a basement print studio and redesign of the hostel entrance. Arnon and Carey quickly realised that they needed to follow residents' interests as much as lead them, and have willingly become involved in a wide range of apparently unconnected activities –

*'I have to say it felt quite risky, given the 'challenging' behaviour from some members of the club.'*

Youth worker, Portsmouth



including creative writing and a football team. Materials have been sourced from the best suppliers – Fired Earth, the Conran Shop, local craftspeople etc. – but, by using ends of lines and imagination, the cost has been kept to a minimum. In the two years since the artists began work, the cost has been more than recouped in reduced maintenance expenditure. Televisions which were once caged now stand open in rooms: Beacon House has not lost a single item of the new art work or furnishings. But the new, positive relationships are perhaps the most important impact: homeless people now work with the artists and children at a local school. Within the hostel, staff who previously circulated only in pairs with walkie-talkies now move about at will.

### **Institutional risks**

But perhaps it is public bodies, institutions and large administrations which have most to gain from learning to take risks creatively – precisely because they spend so much effort trying to eliminate it from their work, not being used to seeing unpredictability as an asset. But the best laid plans go adrift:

When British Coal invested £320 million in Asfordby Mine, they did not expect it to be sold into the private sector; nor did the new owners expect to find that, six months after cutting the first coal, geological faults would jeopardise the viability of the entire operation.<sup>35</sup>

Risk is unavoidable in public service, as it is in business, and the wisest response may be to allow for it and reap the benefits where we can. Large institutions are prone to a furring up of their administrative arteries, and their responses can become automatic, eventually preventing them from even seeing new problems or opportunities. Taking creative risks can be positive not just in terms of the outcomes but in improving the circulation of the institutions involved. In 1989, Richard Wilding said that ‘art is resistant to bureaucratic planning’ (VAN 1994: 12). He was quite right, and it is *because* it can be an irritant to bureaucracy that it is so important.

Participatory projects have changed access, programming and displays in Nottingham, and proposals now exist for a large permanent gallery for exhibitions developed with the community. Similar changes have been noted at other museums. Arts organisations are not immune from creative cholesterol, and participatory projects had presented challenges to a number of the more traditionally-focused institutions encountered during the study. It may be that participatory arts projects can help institutions of all kinds to accept the imperfections which come with creativity, and which ‘let the light get in’.

*Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in*  
Leonard Cohen<sup>36</sup>

## **7.4 VISION**

### **Raising expectations**

Several of the arts projects had an impact simply by raising people’s expectations. This was often personal and has already been addressed, but sometimes related to people’s wider expectations of how things should be. In Nottingham, staff worried that the standard of presentation they could offer did not match what people had come to expect: museums were dowdy, they felt, and lacked investment compared with retail outlets. But that was not the view of visitors with mental health problems, several of whom were impressed by the environment and for whom part of the value of the experience was having access to quality facilities and being treated with respect. The renewal of Batley Carr was not just about better housing, but people’s new sense of the quality which could form part of their homes. The low-key artworks were crucial indicators of change, recognised as such by tenants.

### A sense of mission

Mission statements have become a fashionable management tool in recent years: it is scarcely possible to enter a reception area without being confronted with a list of service objectives written in an oddly similar style. But they are not needed in most participatory arts projects where the sense of shared mission is almost palpable. It was evident among groups of all kinds across the country, but most strongly among those with a common culture, like Fèis Bharraigh, a common experience, like the Lawnmowers, or a common purpose, like Weapons of Sound. Participating in arts projects can be a remarkable motivator, and many community groups had found a lasting sense of mission through their commitment to arts work.

### Symbols

The symbolism of the arts was an important, if sometimes elusive element in many projects, as the Nottingham Museums experience has underlined. In Batley, Wymering and elsewhere, artworks are concrete symbols of care and renewal. In Loganlea, a suburb of Brisbane, Deidre Williams researched a project in which local people worked with an artist on landscape and public art at a community centre:

Upon completion the centre was surrounded with a beautiful landscaped garden, play areas for children, ceramic tile pathways and verandas, small sculptures nestling into the garden, a stunning sculptured fence, and a community vegetable patch and orchard. (Williams 1997: 15)

The project created an important symbol of what the community could achieve, especially in a relatively poor area with few such symbols to be proud of. The group's subsequent failure to secure ongoing community development support was a classic example of highly positive impact being eroded by what comes (or fails to come) afterwards, and added a layer of poignancy to the symbolism of the artwork (Williams 1995: 104).

In Scotland, each fèis provides a less tangible but no less powerful symbol of the community's commitment to its underlying values and vision of the future. Only art has quite this capacity to encapsulate and symbolise the deeper collective feelings, perhaps never otherwise articulated, of a community or group of people.

#### ACCOMMODATING THE SYMBOLS OF THE PAST IN SOUTH AFRICA

One of the less obvious problems faced by the first post-Apartheid government of South Africa was what to do with the many symbols of British Imperialism and Afrikaner Nationalism which litter the country. Many of these were deeply revered by the white population (some sites were occupied by militants who proclaimed their intention of defending them to the death), and simultaneously despised and loathed as symbols of oppression by black people. (Thomaseli *et al.* 1995:6). Unlike Eastern Europe which made such a bonfire of its statues, South Africa has chose a more oblique course: Louis Botha Airport is now renamed Durban Airport, but the dedication stone remains. Little by little, as the reality changes, its symbols are losing their potency, to the extent that the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, or statues of Queen Victoria and Paul Kruger, have found their way into advertising and even pornography. Learning to accommodate the symbols of enmity and hatred is a lesson which Europeans could usefully acquire.

## 8 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

### THE STUDY SHOWS THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS CAN

- Have a positive impact on how people feel
- Be an effective means of health education
- Contribute to a more relaxed atmosphere in health centres
- Help improve the quality of life of people with poor health
- Provide a unique and deep source of enjoyment

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

The link between the arts and health has a long and distinguished history ranging from the clinical use of creativity and arts techniques to recreation and the environmental use of the arts. This is reflected in an extensive literature, and by the existence of specialist agencies such as Arts for Health and the British Health Care Arts Centre, and it was not considered necessary to add to this substantial debate. The case studies therefore avoided work in health care settings or with primary therapeutic aims. None the less some of the projects included partners with broad health objectives, and a few which specifically address the care, if not the health status, of individuals. Principal among these was support for vulnerable people in the community, personal empowerment and health promotion through education. This chapter reports on the evidence of impact of these projects, and on the incidental health benefits which were recorded. In some cases there is an overlap with other areas of personal development: people do not always feel a clear division between increased confidence, better social contacts and improved health.

### 8.2 HEALTH BENEFITS

In most projects health concerns were neither a primary issue, nor a common experience among participants, so impacts have tended to be personal and hard to identify. The number of people who spoke directly of feeling better was small, though the question was often inappropriate. Among questionnaire respondents, about half (48%) reported feeling better or healthier since becoming involved, a figure consistent in most projects. Batley, where City Challenge records 29% of residents as having felt unwell with anxiety or depression in a 6 month period<sup>37</sup>, was an exception: here, 72% of adults said that they felt better or healthier, and though the sample was small (29 people), the difference may relate to the fact that City Challenge has supported several arts projects with health education themes.

Discussions suggest that the key word here is 'feeling': people were not thinking of physical cures, but an improved sense of well-being, often related to increased levels of confidence, activity and social contact. Fairly representative was a man from Portsmouth, off work with depression, who said of his involvement in a local project '*I loved it, I lost a stone running round*'. Another interviewee described how new friendships and confidence gained through the arts had helped her put aside feelings she described as '*suicidal*'. It would be unwise to build too much on individual cases, but any contribution which participation in the arts can make to alleviating such feelings, however difficult to measure, is obviously valuable.

In February 1997, the British Medical Journal reported the findings of a Swedish study of lifestyle and health. Lars Olav Bygren and colleagues at the University of Umea found that people who regularly attend cultural events live longer. They attribute this not to better health among those with higher incomes, but suggest that the arts can stimulate the immune system...

### Targeted improvements in health

If health benefits of participation in the arts are difficult to identify in the population at large, there is clearer evidence of impact in projects like those in Nottingham museums with mental health service users. The aim has been cultural, but there is no rigid distinction between enhanced confidence and improved health for many of the participants. Certainly, members of the Variety Society did feel more confident, and the outreach workers were mostly successful in helping people to take part fully. Although numbers fluctuate, participants increasingly come to the Castle Museum under their own steam. One person, however, said that attending the sessions had not helped him, explaining, *'I've got no faith in myself. You know that frightened thing that you feel? I've got that bugger? – a salutary indication of how long a journey some people are making.'*

*'Since I've come I've been more outspoken: before, I was reluctant to come forward. It's the friendly atmosphere that's done it.'*

People with mental health problems who attended workshops at South Tyneside Arts Studios also felt that the project had helped with confidence: *'I feel I am more outgoing'*, said one older woman, going on to suggest that her new-found skills would help her feel more confident in her everyday life. Portsmouth City Council's 1997 *Arts With Confidence* season produced similar benefits for participants: people attending an arts workshop for mental health service users spoke of the value of the social contact, the opportunity to be creative, the recreation, and the therapeutic benefits – the combination works differently for everyone, and there is little to be gained from trying to be prescriptive. Similar benefits were produced by the Mughal Tent Project:

One group contained a couple of women who were clinically depressed and were attending a psychiatric day centre. The effect on one was particularly marked. *'She has come back to her own life,'* reported the co-ordinator. *'She has started taking an interest in lots of things. Before she used to wear dark colours all the time. Now she comes in bright colours in her saris and puts jewellery on.'* (Khan 1996: 12)

In another Nottingham outreach project – reminiscence work with elderly African-Caribbean people – care staff felt there were marked, if transitory, health benefits. There was highly animated discussions after the workshops, especially one which had used objects to talk about traditional healing and medicine in the Caribbean: according to a carer, it had successfully rekindled memories of youth in the West Indies. Members of this group also enjoyed learning from natural history exhibits at Wollaton Hall.

### Alcohol dependency

In Helsinki, a city with significant problems of alcohol misuse, involvement in an arts project by Ritva Harle helped a group of heavy drinkers commit to reducing their intake and attending a health centre. During the project, all kept out of hospital, with incidental savings of thousands of Finnmarks. The healthier lifestyle was sustained by most of the men, some of whom were able to get jobs as a result.

### HEALING THROUGH ART IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Helen Gould chronicles the healing use of arts projects in some of the world's most desperate crises, including refugee camps of former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Ethiopia. *'Oxfam paid for a mobile theatre to visit victims of the Mount Pinatubo eruption, in the Philippines, to allow evacuees to express their fears and frustrations and plan their future – many thousands were still living in temporary centres two years after the disaster with no hope of resettlement.'* (Gould 1996: 14).

### Multimedia profiling

A different kind of benefit, albeit not strictly health-related, could be seen in Acting Up's work with people with profound communication difficulties. This London group

have worked with disabled people, care staff and carers to produce personal multimedia profiles of individuals to help them gain a greater degree of control over their lives.

Multimedia profiling not only challenges existing institutional methods of documenting the personal history and care of service users but also switches the emphasis of care around to encourage a practical person centred planning (PCP) approach where the service user is at the centre of her/his own personal care. (Kelly *et al.* 1997: 17)

These ideas have huge potential in the development of services for disabled people, and perhaps even for health services generally, and may yet lead to far-reaching social benefits.

It is worth recording, in passing, the marginal health benefits observed by various health workers in areas like communication, concentration and everyday skills. A typical view was that day centre members were *'better able to communicate their needs and opinions, and better at socialising: one particular member has changed quite dramatically – it has been the only thing to work.'* Several elderly people had found the stimulation from using their hands in a visual arts project, or even just joining in with a music performance made them feel better. Small-scale, certainly, unpredictable, probably: but none the less valuable to the individual.

*'My doctor says I should work with my hands to improve my arthritis.'*

### Health education

The arts have been widely used in health education and promotion in the UK and other countries. Helen Gould has documented the use of theatre, puppetry and visual arts to pass on information about child care and sexual health by organisations such as the Overseas Development Agency, Save The Children and Marie Stopes International.<sup>8</sup> A number of projects in the present study also had health education objectives, including the CD-ROMs *Think Positive* (by Artec) and *Sex Get Serious* (by Jubilee Arts). In both cases, the CD was the result of a partnership between artists, health services and young people, and intended to reach a young audience. Each resulted in a wide range of positive outcomes for those involved, but whatever else they achieved, they were effective education tools:

Research carried out for Artec's *Think Positive* project showed that the use of a multimedia presentation interested and attracted groups of young people who were resistant to 'traditional' health education programmes. This was backed up by evidence from Jubilee's *Sex Get Serious*, where again it was felt the project had attracted young people, both as participants and as users, who would otherwise have ignored sex education material. (Kelly *et al.* 1997)

The work has been taken up by others concerned with young people's health: *Sex Get Serious* has been adapted for Shropshire Probation to the particular situation of young offenders. Each project has been recognised by awards from the computing and health sectors: Artec, won the Prix Moebius for innovation in multimedia design and Jubilee an IBM award; both groups were also successful in the Health of the Nation Awards.

But not all health education initiatives are so ambitious. Among the Batley projects, was 'Batley's Beanos' a year-long programme by Chol International Arts with many health-oriented elements. Purlwell Girls Club, for example, took part in a healthy eating project which the participants were very positive about. They had enjoyed the creative work, and felt that they had learnt a lot about their lifestyles: whilst one might not accept every claim of changed habits, arts work proved to be an effective medium for carrying ideas. The arts were also brought to health clinics with noticeable benefits to the atmosphere, as a health worker explained: *'People still talk about the day those people came*

*'It made introducing the subject of healthy eating a lot easier because they talked about it in a more social way.'*

*in and made big papier-maché strawberries. Kids remember having gone to the child health clinics as a result'. Although the projects were short, they had helped a friendly atmosphere develop between patients and health workers.*

Interactors Theatre developed an HIV/AIDS awareness programme in HMP Brixton which has subsequently been used in prisons across England, with interest from schools, colleges and health authorities.<sup>39</sup> Young people involved in drama work on Meadow Well estate in Newcastle also said that the experience had developed their ideas about health issues, particularly taking drugs and teenage pregnancy.

### 8.3 ENJOYMENT

Finally, lest it be thought that this study takes an unremittingly worthy view of the arts, restricting them to dutiful service in the alleviation of mankind's problems, a place should be made for hedonism. There is overwhelming evidence from the study that people do actually enjoy being involved in arts projects – 73% of adults and 80% of children say that being involved made them happier. More tellingly perhaps, 85% overall want to do it again. A different indicator of people's desire to participate in the arts is provided by London's evening classes in 1996/7, where more 'practical' forms of self improvement are left far behind by creative courses:

Rank	No. of courses	Subject of course
1.	690	Practical art, including calligraphy
2.	669	Music
3.	476	French
4.	416	Dance
5.	364	Spanish
12.	274	Business studies
17.	235	Information technology

Table 4: Top evening classes in London, Autumn, 1996 (Source IoS<sup>40</sup>)

#### 'It's my chance to play.'

But these figures reveal little that is news to anyone who takes the time to visit arts projects and talk to those involved – even to take part. At the fèisean, for example, the fun is obvious in

...the laughter of 140 children 'stripping the willow', the thunderous applause which greets ceilidh performances or the faces of performers as they receive it. The enjoyment and delight which the fèisean produce was continually reinforced by all involved. One teenager pointed out that *'the best part is that the TV in the main room has not been switched on once: Everyone has been playing tunes and learning new ones'*. (Matarasso 1996b: 28)

The arts are a delight and enrichment to the lives of millions of people: that is why they participate, in countless ways, in countless places, on countless occasions. It would be possible to quote people's expressions of enjoyment *ad infinitum*, but one comment may serve for all: *'Meeting other people, and being a small part of the whole, gives me pleasure – an important element in anyone's life'*.

## 9 COUNTERWEIGHT

### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

The research has referred to impact rather than benefit because its purpose was to try to uncover the outcomes of participation in the arts, good and bad. In proposing and then undertaking the study, we were led by experience to expect that a wide spectrum of positive impact would be identified. We were also aware that there would be costs and drawbacks, and that sometimes the forces unleashed by creativity could result in damage. There is still, after all, a real shortage of free lunch, and this chapter represents the bill. However, if the costs need to be itemised, it must also be said that none of the people we met felt that they had got less than value for money. None of those who spoke about the difficulties they had encountered as a result of participating regretted having done so – at least in the great majority of projects which could be considered well-run and effective in themselves. On the one or two occasions where people did question the wisdom of their involvement, it was in the context of a project which itself had gone badly at a very fundamental level. But before addressing particular difficulties, a few general points about how participatory arts projects function may usefully be summarised. The fact that the various social impacts reported in the previous sections can occur, does not mean that they always do, and where projects fail there may be avoidable reasons.

### 9.2 FALLIBILITY

#### **Project failure**

It is self-evident that poor practice exists in community and participatory arts work, as it does in opera houses, merchant banks and legislatures, but it was not part of our purpose to anatomise it in detail. In fact, given the number of projects under review, there was a very low failure rate: only one seemed really to have failed to produce any lasting benefit at all, while perhaps half a dozen might be termed as underachieving for a variety of reasons. This, out of 50 or more examined in some detail, is not a bad rate, (though the sample was not picked at random). It would be invidious and misleading to single out those projects which seemed to have encountered problems: some are long past, others may have turned the corner since they were visited. But two or three general themes emerge.

The first of these is the situation of many professionals in the field of participatory arts. Overall, at least in the projects under review, workers showed a high level of skill and commitment. But employment conditions among artists who work with people are lamentable: pay, contracts, work environment, training, career development, management, professional support – there is no area which does not need improvement. It is a testament to the commitment of these cultural Cinderellas that they stick with it as long as they do, but it is not surprising that more attractive employment prospects whisk many from their kitchens as they get older. There was evidence that limited resources (time, materials, equipment, premises etc.) put pressure on the performance of some projects. Once or twice problems seemed to arise from inexperience of the artist(s)

concerned – something which could be avoided with better support. It will be obvious that not all artists are suited to working with amateurs or community groups, and not all those who are, can tackle every situation or project: there is a general need for effective planning.

Incompetence exists in every profession, though we witnessed few examples during the research. There was, however, a certain amount of indifferent work, neither good nor bad, producing marginal benefits for those involved. Limited resources could only partly account for it; sometimes it owed as much to limited inspiration and limited energy. As we found in at least one case, it can cost as much to deliver a bad project as a good one, to say nothing of the social costs. Because there is still not much understanding of the participatory arts beyond those involved in it, and in the absence of anything approaching standard expectations, it is possible for such work to drift along unquestioned, especially if projects are short-term and have no stated outcomes. More effective evaluation, conducted on the basis of equitable partnership, is one factor which could contribute to reducing the number of under-achieving projects.

### **Confusion of purpose**

An inclusive and creative approach to evaluation could have a significant impact on another area of perhaps greater significance – the clarification of the objectives of participatory arts projects. As soon as an artist agrees to work with someone else, a partnership of sorts is created. In practice the relationship between artist and project participant is complicated by a range of other stakeholders, including funding agencies, institutions, public sector agencies and many more. Each has different levels of interest in, and commitment to, the process, and the demands they make of it may bear no relation to the extent of their investment in it. Gerri Moriarty touched on the need to be clear about purpose in her account of a Belfast community play:

At least this project had coherent objectives, which could be explained, examined and discussed. It wasn't designed on the back of an envelope as a means of convincing a funder of one's undying commitment to the under-privileged, wherever they may be found, or of claiming a business development grant in a particular geographical locality or of ensuring that the organisation works at least once a year in the ward of the most influential local councillor – the kind of objectives which, once discerned, might have caused uproar. There was no need, in this case, to re-write retrospectively to justify events or to hide elements of a budget that could have caused raised eyebrows. (Moriarty 1997: 7)

The least effective project reviewed was dogged, among other failings, by an inability on the part of those involved not just to create an effective programme based on commonly-agreed goals, but apparently even to realise that they held widely divergent ideas of what they were doing, and why. The growing interest of public agencies in the potential of arts programmes has introduced players who may have limited understanding of the actual outcomes of cultural action, and less of the processes by which they are achieved. The relative wealth of most of these bodies (at least in the eyes of local arts groups) makes it as difficult for artists or community groups to argue against them, as it is tempting to get involved with them in the first place. If there is a single lesson to be learned from this research it is that successful projects are based on fair and open partnerships between all the players.



### Positive into negative

One problem with management-oriented evaluations of arts projects (apart from the absence of previously-stated objectives against which to measure progress) is that they usually confine themselves to reporting what happened up to the end of the project. As a result, even when they touch on outcomes rather than outputs, they do not allow for the fact that all such events are part of a sequence, affected by what occurs before and after. A positive outcome can easily become a negative one as a result of subsequent events. The greater the impact of a project, especially in terms of empowerment and raised expectations, the greater the potential for things to turn sour if promises are not delivered (cf. Loganlea community centre above). In one or two cases where projects had occurred a number of months before, the research revealed that initial confidence and optimism had dissolved and been replaced by a further layer of cynicism about the possibility of change, because nothing had happened since. There is clearly a need to take account of the changeable nature of social impacts, and to employ the sort of open processes which can help all those involved to ensure that their work and aspirations are not invalidated, even when things do not subsequently go according to plan.

It can be very tempting for social agencies to move on to the next thing after a successful arts project – especially if they themselves have a limited lifespan – rather than go back and build on a successful project. There are fashions in social policy as in everything else. It can be equally difficult to stick with work which seems to be delivering slowly, even when the need to build trust is recognised. Avoiding such mistakes, which can so easily turn positive impacts sour, requires experience and judgement in the arts as well as social planning.

### Dissenting voices

Finally, some dissent must be recorded. The research did encounter a small number of people – almost all professionals in fields outside the arts, rather than project participants or other local people – who expressed doubts about whether the projects could make a real difference. Their reservations, perhaps surprisingly, did not focus on the impact of the activities themselves, but on whether such localised change could have any effect on the scale of problems like poverty, unemployment or crime. In one area regeneration project, a development worker said that *‘The ones who were reasonably skilled when [we] first started have accessed what there is. There’s still this layer underneath who are developing, but because we’ve targets and we must deliver, we’re just not delivering to the people underneath who we might have worked with had [the] money not been there.’* This person, among others, argued that the value of arts initiatives to personal and community development was stifled by the requirements of Government bureaucracy. The concern about how far a community development process (arts-led or not) could reach, and how it might be distorted by the need to deliver outputs was reflected by others. But even among these sceptics, it was not doubt about the value of the projects they had seen which worried them, but about their significance in relation to social problems and the structures within which they worked.

*‘The whole idea of developing the community has been tacked on – yes, it’s something we should do, but what’s more important is delivering your outputs.’*

## 9.3 THE COST OF CHANGE

Before looking at the kinds of difficulties which people experience, it is worth trying to gauge the size of this problem. Here there is an interesting difference between the adults and the children who responded to the questionnaire: only 7% of the under 15s said that taking part had bad effects for them, compared to 21% of adults. Moreover, when children explained their difficulties, it was often something which a grown up

would find easier to put into perspective: children's complaints at Fèis Rois Oigridh, a residential week in Ullapool, mostly touched on the quality of their beds, with the occasional reference to homesickness. Although children did experience more serious difficulties, as discussed below, the general impression from all the projects is that participation in the arts was a generally happy experience for them.

The higher proportion of adults who felt that taking part had negative impacts may be partly a factor of their greater articulacy, confidence and experience. While it would be unwise to make too much of it, there appears to be some correlation between the proportions of participants with previous experience of the arts, and those reporting negative impacts:

	Fèis Rois	York	Batley	Bolton
Previous involvement in an arts activity	94%	76%	41%	25%
Reported negative effects	17%	44%	10%	0%

Table 5: Negative impacts and previous involvement in an arts activity

This may be partly explained by higher expectations among those who have been involved in the past. But the generally higher figure for adults also reflects the greater importance their participation had for them. The more an activity matters, and the greater the benefits and challenge it offers, the greater too is the risk of something going wrong or failing to live up to expectations. From this perspective, costs of participation in the arts, as in life, may be indicators of richness and engagement.

### Practical and physical costs

Among the difficulties reported, the most common relate to practical matters, like the degree of comfort offered by Ullapool B&Bs, the occasional lost instrument or minor injury sustained. This kind of problem has no direct relation to participation in the arts but, like getting behind with gardening, housework or studies, missing loved ones or child-care arrangements, can arise in any activity. The same is largely true of the tiredness and stress some people spoke of, like the man in York who was mixing shifts in the health service with backstage work at the Theatre Royal. At the adult fèis in Dingwall, there was at least a direct link between the activity and rueful complaints of *'too much alcohol and not enough sleep'*, but whether it is fair to blame the arts for this is a moot point.

### The costs of learning

Participation in the arts was a learning experience for almost all those interviewed and, as already discussed, the acquisition of new skills and competence was a major source of confidence, pride and pleasure. But there will always be some who, rightly or wrongly, feel disappointed with their progress. One or two spoke of what they saw as a failure to reach the standard of others in the group, but they often recognised that this was based on false expectations. A few technical problems arose for musicians grappling with the particular approach of different tutors, but there were as many who welcomed the variety. But all these problems were exceptional: discovering unsuspected abilities was the norm in every project.

*'I'm a bit demoralised because I was far less able than anyone else in my group, and so found it quite stressful at times.'*

### Emotional costs

It is when people talk about feelings that a relationship between the arts project and their difficulties often becomes apparent. At one level, this may be a natural result of their enjoyment, and there were many people who expressed sadness and even sense of loss at the end of a project. More serious is the problem, particularly perhaps in communities with narrow horizons, that having the courage to step forward may invite attack. Children occasionally spoke of being teased, as did young people who sometimes felt looked down on by their friends for their involvement. Even in the more affluent circles of York, some people found themselves criticised for getting above themselves, like the woman who had been on the receiving end of *'sour grapes comments from unexpected quarters and out of the blue. e.g. "However did someone like you get involved in something like this?"*. The personal cost of such comments, or occasionally more acute hostility, is rarely recognised, but it can be deep for those concerned.

*I've been threatened, had nuisance calls, horrible things in the post [because] I try to stand up for my rights, my friends and my estate.'*

### The costs of change

Also significant were the occasions when their involvement had placed people's existing relationships under stress: one man explained: *'At first my involvement caused difficulties at home. It took a while for my partner to accept what I wanted to do. I take my son with me quite a lot, and the positive effect it seems to have had on him certainly helped my problems at home.'* Young people in Batley also spoke of the tensions their developing confidence and changing values had produced among family and friends: they had become more assertive and not everyone was happy about it. Spending time in an arts project was very positive when there were few constructive alternatives, but it could also separate someone from their peers. Similar tension could be seen in several of the digital technology projects, though *'almost all of them felt that any scorn they received for their involvement reflected badly on the people showing it. None of them said that this had made them reconsider their involvement'* (Kelly *et al.* 1997: 28).

There is of course a direct link between personal difficulties of growth and the nature of empowerment – the expressed aim of much participatory arts work. In her working paper Gerri Moriarty showed that these costs can run much higher than lost friendships and, in doing so, raised the fundamental question of how much empowerment the state is prepared to encourage if it produces results which it may, for political or other reasons, consider undesirable:

In the mid-Seventies, the project for which I was working ran a small creative writing group, which was mostly attended by young women. At the end of the first year, I was surprised to notice that at least 50% of the group had either separated from their husbands/partners during that period, or were considering doing so. It took me a little while to understand that if women are working regularly in a context that is challenging and affirming, they may not confine their increased self-confidence and self-esteem to three hours on a Wednesday afternoon. The possible verdict in terms of advocacy of the transformative powers of the arts: high for those agencies interested in self-actualisation, low for those promoting traditional family values. As our major funders at that time were the Arts Council of Great Britain and Devonshire County Council, I did not feel it was the most useful statistic to highlight in the annual report. (Moriarty 1997: 17)

### Political tensions

There are two kinds of political risk associated with the social impact of participatory arts project: real ones, and fabricated ones. The latter, which may be disposed of first, arise from the status of the arts as a popular political football. British politicians and

commentators long ago identified that a certain kind of cheer could be raised by portraying the arts as privileged, frivolous, absurd or even dangerous. In 1995, plans to celebrate the opening of Wansbeck General Hospital in Northumberland with a specially commissioned song performed by local choirs were abandoned in the face of a summer storm generated in the press. The fact that no health service money was being spent on the event, which was seen as an effective way of developing local ownership of a hospital with a 60 mile catchment area, was not allowed to get in the way of a good story. Politically, it may be easier for a Health Trust to commission PR consultants than with local artists, despite the social benefits which may accrue.

Fortunately, such crises are rare, and many public authorities do have the courage to take creative risks, and reap the rewards: the courage of the Helsinki city authorities in allowing the Total Balalaika Show to take place was well rewarded in terms of positive publicity. But there are real political issues to be addressed. It has to be faced that successful participatory arts projects which promote the sorts of personal and social benefits already described can have complex and unpredictable results in the short term. At an individual level, these may be distressing. At a community or organisational level they may become politically uncomfortable. How far does the state really want to empower or raise the expectations of its citizens? The research cannot, of course, answer such questions which are proper subjects for political debate. But if the impact of participating in the arts can change people and communities they have the potential to change society. It is therefore essential to admit this work into the heart of the political debate and policy formulation.

# 10 CONCLUSIONS

## 10.1 THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS

The study has included a wide range of arts projects and approaches to participation, each with its distinctive character and values. Such diversity resists easy generalisation, but it is important to draw some conclusions if policy-makers and planners are to be able to make use of its findings. This chapter sets out the main conclusions, and looks at issues they may raise in the field of social policy and the arts themselves, before setting out some proposals which may help future development.

### **Participation in arts activities brings social benefits**

Participation in the arts does bring benefits to individuals and communities. On a personal level these touch people's confidence, creative and transferable skills and human growth, as well as their social lives through friendships, involvement in the community and enjoyment. Individual benefits translate into wider social impact by building the confidence of minority and marginalised groups, promoting contact and contributing to social cohesion. New skills and confidence can be empowering as community groups become more (and more equitably) involved in local affairs. Arts projects can strengthen people's commitment to places and their engagement in tackling problems, especially in the context of urban regeneration. They encourage and provide mechanisms for creative approaches to development and problem solving, and offer opportunities for communities and institutions to take risks in a positive way. They have the capacity to contribute to health and social support of vulnerable people, and to education. There are undoubtedly other aspects which this study has not identified, but there is more than enough evidence to show that participation in the arts offers us, as people and communities, a wide and valuable range of benefits which we would be foolish to disregard.

There is no good reason for the public sector to disregard the community development benefits of participation in the arts.

### **The experience of participation is unique and significant**

There is an important difference between the experiences of participants in the arts and those of audiences; the impacts described in this report relate principally to the former. This distinction is significant because participation is the main interface between the arts, volunteering and community activism. Some (but, as explained below, by no means all) of the social impacts described in this report arise as much from people taking an active part in their own development, and in the lives of their communities, as from the arts themselves. Although all forms of artistic experience result in social outcomes – how else can a thousand people collectively engage with feelings and ideas about human experience than in a theatre? – others must await further studies. For present purposes it is sufficient to recognise that the social benefits of participation in the arts are different in nature and extent from other aspects of arts activity, and are inseparable from the experience and its outcomes.

Effective cultural and social policies will recognise the different roles played by participatory and other arts programmes in local development.

### **Relationship is more significant than form**

The study involved artforms ranging from unaccompanied Gaelic song to emerging computer-based media whose future is unknowable. It encompassed equally diverse approaches to participation, from formal tuition and amateur involvement in professional productions, to activities with no professional artists. The genesis of projects was also varied, including those sponsored by local authorities, by arts organisations, by community groups without previous experience in the arts and by many partnerships. But it is not possible to say that any media, any style, any approach to management was inherently more effective in terms of social impact (though some guidance for success is offered below). In other words, community arts is not more 'effective' than amateur or professional arts. The fiddle is neither a better nor a worse instrument of social change than the computer: they are different, appropriate to particular circumstances and goals. What matters in all of this are the relationships, between participant and professional, between intention and means, between decider and decided, between art and society.

Existing mechanisms of support for the arts in Britain enshrine values which are insensitive to the developing relationship of art and society.

### **The social impacts of the arts are complex**

The outcomes of participation in the arts are highly complex. The structure we have adopted to organise the evidence from the case studies is only one approach, and others could be devised. But none could net everything, and there would still be change which in its multi-dimensionality would demand recognition in different areas. This should remind us that people, their creativity and culture, remain elusive, always partly beyond the range of conventional inquiry. There are intangible factors at work, invisible changes and unquantifiable benefits. There are positive and negative outcomes, and some which are both, or change from one to the other. If we recognise that this is *why* the arts are important to social development, rather than becoming frustrated at our inability to fit them into an established frame, we are more likely to use them successfully and to recognise the outcomes.

The arts are not fast-food, predictable in content in every place and on every occasion.

### **Social impacts are inevitable but not necessarily positive**

Participation in the arts inevitably produces impacts on those involved, and by extension, on the wider community. Because most projects are well-conceived and managed, outcomes are largely positive, but this cannot be taken for granted. Badly planned or executed arts projects can damage personal and community confidence and produce other negative outcomes. The growing interest of non-specialist agencies in this area is to be welcomed, but it must be matched by a commitment to professional standards and partnerships. The national Arts Councils have an essential leadership role to play here, as do Regional Arts Boards, local authorities and specialist agencies at local level, especially in developing links between communities, artists and public bodies.

Bad projects are much worse than nothing at all.

### **Participating in the arts brings risks and costs**

Arts projects are no more risk-free than any other form of action, and they present challenges to the individuals taking part, to artists, to community groups, to public agencies and others. But, properly managed, they do so in a constructive environment where the outcome can almost always remain positive, even if things do not go according to expectation. One of their best lessons is in teaching us how to live with risk and to turn it to our advantage. Learning to accept unpredictability in our individual and corporate actions is an indicator of a mature democracy. But it is equally important to recognise that participation in arts projects is not cost-free. If development and change are the desired outcomes, one should expect growing pains. Participants may

Using risk creatively as an element of public policy can increase the effectiveness of social programmes.

find their attitudes and relationships put under strain, and artists that their audience is more questioning than they expected. Professionals in all fields may discover weaknesses in their practice, and public bodies that their constituents and users make different demands upon them. None of these things need be damaging, if anticipated and planned for: they are the outcomes of change.

### Arts projects can provide cost-effective solutions

The arts have many purposes, and play many social roles. The reasons for public subsidy are therefore varied, though current thinking has focused on the duty of the state to intervene in cases of 'market failure' (Casey *et al.*, 1996). In *economic* terms the case for supporting participatory arts projects arises principally from their contribution to social policy objectives. Many of the outcomes described already can be related directly to such objectives. Others, touching on empowerment and creativity, suggest that social goals might usefully be enlarged by the arts. Questions arise about whether they do so more cost-effectively than more established methods, or through different routes. These issues demand to be considered in very specific terms: for example, how do arts activities compare with more traditional approaches in day services for elderly people as a means of supporting autonomy and independence? People working in the arts and in social fields may wish to consider how evaluation of their work might contribute to tackling such questions. For now we can say only that participatory arts projects are different, effective and cost very little in the context of spending on social goals. They represent an insignificant financial risk to public services, but can produce impacts (social *and* economic) out of proportion to their cost.

Arts projects can be cheap, flexible, responsive, quick to deliver results and effective.

### Social impacts are demonstrable

If it does nothing else, this study has shown that many of the social impacts of participatory arts work can be identified and demonstrated. Although the methods used in the present study leave room for development, and others could be deployed, it cannot be argued that the arts, and the benefits they return for the public money invested in them, are beyond evaluation other than in aesthetic terms. Arts organisations which justify their grants, in whole or in part, through the value of their work to society, must be prepared to demonstrate the nature and extent of that value.

Arts organisations should report on the social impacts of their work.

## 10.2 PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Poverty in Britain is growing perniciously. Between 1979 and 1989 the number of poor people rose from 5 to 12 million, to about 22% of the population (Jones 1994:344) The income of the poorest tenth, after housing costs, fell by 14% in real terms between 1979 and 1991 (Hill 1994: 82). Among the resulting social and economic damage is the spread of isolation and effective disenfranchisement of people as citizens:

Living in deepest poverty isolates people from social contacts, from sharing in the common experience of the majority of the population, and from effective membership of the community. (Hill, 1994: 84)

Pervasive cynicism about the political process, though perhaps now on the cusp, signals that these problems are not contained by any geography of deprivation, but risk damaging the fabric of society as a whole. However, if few of those concerned with social policy underestimate the problem of poverty, fewer recognise that the arts may have a contribution to make in addressing it, and especially the exclusion from participation in society of those who experience it. New confidence and skills; new friendships and

'Poverty is not only lack of an adequate income to live on, it is being classed as of little or no value to society, and as such, having one's capacity for self-fulfilment crippled from birth.'

(Crummy 1992: 10)

social opportunities; co-operation towards achievement; involvement in consultation and local democracy; affirmation and questioning of identity; strengthening commitment to place; intercultural links; positive risk-taking – these and the other social impacts which this study has identified are crucial means of fighting social exclusion. Participation in the arts does this partly by building individual and community competence, but more importantly by building belief in the possibility of positive change, so that people can acquire ‘the sense and reality of moral responsibility and political effectiveness in a universe where remote galaxies of leaders spin on in courses mysterious and unfathomable to the ordinary citizen’ (Dahl & Tufte in Hill 1994: 247).

### Active, engaged citizens

What matters so much about participation in the arts is not just that it gives people the personal and practical skills to help themselves and become involved in society – though it does – but that it opens routes into the wider democratic process and encourages people to *want* to take part. Participation is habit-forming. These issues do not apply only to urban estates in crisis. Poverty is not confined to groups or neighbourhoods, any more than the enfranchising effects of participation in the arts are confined to projects which target areas of social need – what many people still think of as community arts. The locally-managed, traditional cultural work of the *fèisean* – in many ways the antithesis of stereotypical community arts – has proven impact on the problems of exclusion and disenfranchisement caused by poverty in remote rural districts of the Scottish Highlands and Islands.

All the evidence of this study suggests that participation in the arts has the capacity, in partnership with other initiatives, to tackle serious social problems and the disempowerment which results from them. The paradox of this, however, is that among the other things which poverty excludes people from is participation in the arts, as the latest research from Ireland demonstrates once again (Moore 1997). Whatever their social or economic situation, people do, and always will, develop their own creative resources. But they need support and access into wider cultural and civic discourse. As Dilys Hill concludes in her study of urban policy and citizenship: ‘The argument is not that people must or will be involved, but that means should exist to ensure that they can’ (Hill 1994: 249). She argues for involvement in the democratic process: despite the prejudices of many people, participatory arts projects are one of the best means at our disposal of securing people’s involvement.

### 10.3 COULD IT BE DONE WITHOUT ART?

If it is accepted that the social benefits identified here can be produced by participation in the arts, the question arises whether they could not be as effectively secured through more established, non-creative approaches to social policy. Is not this simply an example of the arts trying to justify their public funds by getting a ride on someone else’s ticket? It is certainly true that some could be achieved through other means: if the 160 children who spent Easter week with *Fèis Rois* had spent it on a camping expedition in the Cromalt Hills, they would probably have shown equal growth in self confidence, friendships and happiness (though complaints about the quality of the beds would undoubtedly have shot up). Doing things is good for people, and there is value in the contributions of sport, charitable work, outdoor pursuits, credit unions, craft fairs, food co-ops and all the rest in personal and community development. But arts projects are different because of those whom they engage, and the quality of that engagement.

‘Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.’

Article 27, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights



### The arts attract different people

The first is less important and easier to explain. At a very basic level, there are people who enjoy and benefit from involvement in cultural activity, in exactly the same way as there are those who enjoy sport, voluntary work, or neighbourhood watch (and, of course, some who enjoy all these things). It is a measure of our anti-cultural political values that participation in, and state support for, sport goes largely unquestioned while the arts are subjected to regular fitness checks. Sport is rightly seen as a public good which promotes health, confidence and teamwork, while enriching society as a whole: it is innocent until occasionally proven guilty by drug tests or violence. Art on the other hand, belongs to the cast of usual suspects rounded up by the police chief in *Casablanca*: disreputable, untrustworthy and assumed guilty, unless it can talk its way out again, probably with the help of a dodgy lawyer. This is not an argument *against* sport, or any other (legal) form of human activity: it is an argument *for* recognition that there are many people to whom participation in the arts offers daily enrichment and a route for engagement with society. A social policy or community development strategy which ignores this is simply reducing its potential effectiveness by a substantial margin.

5% of the adult population play a musical instrument – as many as play football. (VAN 1994)

But the arts are not only effective in engaging people who are already interested: in Batley and Bolton between 55% and 65% of adults involved had no previous experience of the arts. Participatory arts activities can be extraordinarily effective at drawing in people with no previous intention of becoming involved, and perhaps antipathy to some idea of ‘the arts’:

It is one of the qualities of the fêis idea that it does not seem a frightening prospect to take on [...] It is an approachable way of getting involved in community activities, and the difficult bits are easily offset by the excitement, the social contact and the sense of achievement. (Matarasso: 1996: 22)

The roots of this ability to draw in bystanders, sceptics and even adversaries lie in the other fundamental social difference between the arts and other activities: they trade in meanings.

### Meanings are the currency of the arts

More than any other human activity, culture – and art as its most highly-charged expression – is concerned with values and meanings. Art without meaning (internal, external, relational) is inconceivable, though it may be as simple as a pop song, or as complex and renegotiable as the postmodern novel. Without it, the object itself would in some senses cease to be, and so would we. Joop Doorman, Professor of Philosophy at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, argues that ‘the most special part of the human being is the ability to create values. Values don’t fall out of the sky. They aren’t given to us. We don’t find them in nature. We create them ourselves.’<sup>41</sup>

We confer our values on the things, tangible and intangible, that we produce, our cultural artefacts. They become the repositories of what matters to us, which is why, for example, what is displayed in a Museum, or what language a song is in, or how a space is looked after, can be so important to people. The passage of time, which operates predictably on the objects themselves, can do strange things to their meanings, and the importance of some will change as a result. Our relationship with cultural artefacts, mediated by values, is forever shifting. Art as activity, process and object, is central to how people experience, understand and then shape the world: ‘Culture is where we live our shared mental lives. We need a way of understanding this habitat, of treating it with the respect and care it deserves’ (Eno 1996: 20).

Implementing a social policy without reference to its cultural dimension is like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle in the dark with gloves on. This has not always been our approach: in Britain's booming Victorian cities, the role of culture was widely appreciated not only as a civilising force, but in places like Bourneville and Port Sunlight as an essential component of a stable, cohesive community. The absence of such perspectives during the 1950s and 1960s – when it was possible to see slum clearance as merely an issue of housing and sanitation – had consequences which are still evident. The pendulum has swung back towards more holistic approaches which seek to address local needs through effective partnerships, but there is a long way to go before the apparently frivolous, but actually essential, role of culture is appreciated. Since what is often described as the cherry on the cake is actually the yeast, it is not surprising that social schemes sometimes fail to rise to expectations.

The greatest social impacts of participation in the arts – and the ones which other programmes cannot achieve – arise from their ability to help people think critically about and question their experiences and those of others, not in a discussion group but with all the excitement, danger, magic, colour, symbolism, feeling, metaphor and creativity that the arts offer. It is in the act of creativity that empowerment lies, and through sharing creativity that understanding and social inclusiveness are promoted.

The wish to participate is rooted in cultural meaning. In the Highlands and Western Isles it is Gaelic culture, identity and values which have made people become involved. In Batley, Hounslow, Nottingham and Portsmouth existing or emerging cultural meanings lie behind the commitment of individuals and community groups. Wymering Community Association have become involved because the arts give them a chance to create their own physical and symbolic definition of the area, in the face of unfair and negative images promoted by outsiders. Again and again, it is the opportunity to get involved in – indeed to define – what matters that motivates people, transforming them from passive consumers of culture and social policy into engaged participants in arts projects and, by extension, in local democratic processes.

### **Arts projects are no panacea**

Returning a moment from these heady ideals, it is necessary to stress that participation in the arts is not being advocated as a form of, still less an alternative to, social policy. The current problems of British society will not be solved if we all learn to make large objects out of papier-maché, play the accordion or sing Gilbert and Sullivan. Nor will British culture be improved by being sold into bonded labour to a social policy master. But a marginal repositioning of social policy priorities could be very significant: a little art can go a very long way. Some of this could happen at an operational level, in the context of day care services, community development, education, housing renewal, leisure services, tourism management, youth work and so on. Some is more conceptual, requiring a review of the cultural dimension of social policy by local authorities and other major agencies. This report has sought to show that the arts can and do make a valuable contribution to social policy objectives. While there is still a long way to go in understanding these forces and the ways in which they work, it is time that social policy makers took up the challenge of thinking how they might be harnessed.

## 10.4 USE OR ORNAMENT?

### A social context to the arts represents no threat

Any reluctance on the part of social policy makers to take the arts seriously is matched by the reluctance of the arts establishment to get involved. Indeed, it has been convincingly argued that modernism in literature was expressly designed to exclude a newly-educated working class from what Eliot called ‘our ancient edifices’ (Carey: 1992). The post-war struggle between liberal and reactionary forces in the arts establishment has been equally well documented (Hewison 1995). Its polarisation of the issues between access and standards – encapsulated in Kingsley Amis’s dictum ‘More will mean worse’<sup>42</sup> – ultimately frustrates progress, resting as it does on a false premise. Louis MacNeice, a better poet and a better democrat, was right when he argued that ‘there is no reason for thinking that, if you give a chance for people to think or live, the arts of thought or life will suffer and become rougher, and not return more than you could ever give’ (MacNeice 1939).

The truth is that, despite a wider participation in cultural activity than ever before (if only because more people have more leisure than ever before), British culture at the close of the 20th century is in no worse a condition than it was at the close of the 19th, or the 18th or the 15th. The explosion of popular cultures, in new media and with new forms of distribution, has not damaged established artforms at all. On the contrary, more people enjoy, appreciate and are active in the arts, including the cherished canon, than ever before. None the less, there are understandable worries that the currency of the arts may be debased if they are continually to be used as means to other ends, as John Tusa, Director of the Barbican Centre, argued in an interview:

*‘Since 1982 we have tried to argue for arts funding wholly in financial terms – trying to justify the arts in terms of the number of people they employ, or the tax they bring in, or because they are supposed to help urban regeneration. The trouble is that sort of language is all wrong. The argument we have used too seldom is the crucial argument that art is worthwhile as art.’<sup>43</sup>*

Art is indeed worthwhile as art, and that is an argument which must be made to Government, local authorities and the public by its supporters – though recent attempts to do so in the USA have been less than successful (Phillips 1997). But this aesthetic or cultural argument is not undermined by thinking about social impacts, which do exist and are part of the reason why art *is* worthwhile as art. As is made clear in the next section, arts *programmes* can be used to achieve social objectives, even if the arts themselves cannot. Enabling structures – programmes and projects – can be established without damage to the arts, which are, in any case, old enough to look after themselves.

As with the social policy, the implications of this report are not an overturning of existing approaches to the arts, but a marginal repositioning of cultural priorities to recognise their social impact. Again, this may entail some rethinking of programmes, both by arts organisations and by their Arts Council, RAB and local authority sponsors. But it also demands an engagement with social policy, and an acceptance of a common responsibility for social development with other public agencies, both of which may be unwelcome to some artists as limiting their creative autonomy. But how much creative autonomy can you have with someone else’s money?

### Neither use nor ornament...

The title of this report reflects two of the poles between which debates around the relationship of art with society run. At one extreme stands Le Corbusier, conjuring up de-

*‘[Our main goals] are access and excellence. Paradoxically the two ideals seem to feed into each other and it is that combination which I feel gives our project its momentum – something which is felt on both a social and creative level.’*

Arts worker, Plymouth

The intangible and magical aesthetic of art is its greatest use.

mons of social engineering and Soviet Realism; at the other is the refuge of Huysmans' neurasthenic anti-hero, whose artistic sensibility requires protection from the pollution of modern life. Both, of course, are bogeymen, used by people who should know better to frighten us into our places. If social and aesthetic value systems can be opposed, they do not have to be: for generations artists have sought the balance of form and function. It is perfectly possible to combine high aesthetic standards with lasting social value, as does much of the work reviewed in this study: tradition is safeguarded and extended by the *feisean*, the mainstream by York Mystery Plays while aesthetic boundaries are challenged by *Weapons of Sound* or *Jubilee Arts*. This diversity is literally vital, not only enriching in its own right, but guaranteeing the future strength of our culture and our society. The beauty, the intangible and magical aesthetic of art, is its greatest use. Brian Eno points out the apparent paradox when he defines culture as 'everything we don't have to do', before going on to say that 'as a good neo-Darwinian, I assume that for such a persistent activity to have evolved at all, it has to be doing something of tremendous importance for us' (Eno 1996: 16-17). In other words, it is because we don't have to do it that we need it so much. Usefulness can be beautiful, and beauty useful. Neither use nor ornament, but both.

## 10.5 AN ENVIRONMENT FOR SOCIAL ARTS PROGRAMMES

### Planning the creative environment

It is both a characteristic and a strength of the arts that they are elusive, beyond the control not just of policy-makers and managers but very often of artists themselves. Even Hollywood studios cannot guarantee that a film will be successful in artistic or financial terms. We have argued that this unpredictability is inseparable from creativity, and a component to be accommodated in public policy. It is one reason why the arts are so important. It is also the ultimate guarantor, for those who care about the arts, that they will continue to flourish even as we seek to harness them for social development.

But the impacts and benefits described above will not be secured without planning and management. Fortunately, the frameworks within which the arts operate and which support them are within the control of policy-makers and planners. If it is not possible to foresee the outcomes of a participatory arts project in detail, it is possible to create the right conditions for success. The following principles are intended to help guide anyone proposing to use arts projects as a way of achieving social objectives. They are not definitive: other issues might be considered. Nor are they prescriptive: a project might run counter to most of them and still be successful in its own terms. But participatory arts activities are more likely to produce positive social impacts if they subscribe to these principles. In each case, some indicators against which success might be assessed are suggested.

#### 1 Clear objectives

Most participatory arts projects have clear management objectives (they state what they intend to do), but relatively few have precise social goals: what they intend should happen as a result of what they have done. It therefore is much harder to evaluate the work, since no measurable goal is identified and no benchmarks for success established. Ideally, projects with social aspirations should address specific needs identified in partnership with those who are intended to benefit. Although in practice this may be difficult, since the processes are developmental and there will always be a need to build

trust and understanding, it must be the intention. The effectiveness of arts work with social aims might be assessed in relation to:

- The clarity of its creative and social objectives.
- The understanding of and support for those objectives among participants and partner organisations.
- The extent to which it achieves its objectives .

## **2 Equitable partnership**

Successful projects must be based on a fair partnership between all those involved – participants, artists, sponsor agencies, funders and so on. If this is like advocating motherhood and apple pie, it should be remembered that partnerships are not, in fact, always fair or effective. They always involve a degree of power-sharing, and it is not unusual for good intentions to collapse under pressure. Partnerships are inevitably different, and thus difficult to define, but they must be open and honest about the rights and responsibilities of different partners. They should not offer more than they can deliver. A stable partnership with limitations is better than one which is dishonest and unsustainable. Partnership in this case also means integration with other social programmes. Without it, arts projects cannot produce lasting benefits except for individuals: they cannot solve deep-rooted social problems on their own: their place, in this context, is alongside other forms of intervention. The effectiveness of arts work with social aims might be assessed in relation to:

- The quality of the partnership on which it is developed.
- The commitment it gains from public and independent social organisations.
- Its integration with other social programmes.

## **3 Good planning**

To judge from the present research, participatory arts groups plan their work effectively. Where problems arise, it is more likely to be in the integration of the work in the strategic planning of local authorities or public agencies. Arts projects are often seen as isolated events, unconnected with others and having neither past nor future. But positive social impact cannot be sustained without a strategic vision. The options for subsequent stages of a programme should be being planned before the first begins, and regularly reviewed as work develops. The issue of replicability must also be addressed: success depends not only on the quality of a programme but its appropriateness to the situation in which it is being deployed. Since each is different, it is more useful to look at the underlying factors which brought about social impacts in earlier projects, than at the more obvious surface elements. The effectiveness of arts work with social aims might be assessed in relation to:

- The realism, flexibility and clarity of its planning.
- The involvement of participants in the planning process.

## **4 Shared ethical principles**

It was argued in the first working paper that it is unethical to seek to produce change in another person without their informed consent (Matarasso 1996a: 24). Unclear, unex-

pressed objectives allow a project's sponsors and managers, consciously or not, to speak of different values to different constituencies and work to unstated agendas, with the effect of disempowering participants. There is also a need for honesty about what can and cannot be achieved and what risks may be involved for individuals or institutions. Not every project will be successful and it is important that people have thought about the meaning and consequences of failure. The effectiveness of arts work with social aims might be assessed in relation to:

- The openness of its aims and principles.
- Its ability to acknowledge and deal with risk and failure.

## **5 Excellence**

Participatory arts projects with social goals do not receive the funding allocated either to mainstream arts organisations, or to social programmes, for understandable reasons. While they should be adequately resourced to meet the expectations placed on them, it is not suggested that they require parity in this area with other sectors. More serious, however, is the fact that their low cost is often equated with low expectations of standards and success on the part of their funders. The fact that they regularly confound those expectations is not the issue. What matters is that sponsors should expect the highest agreed standards in terms of quality and of process, and in return accord the work the same degree of excellence in support and management. The effectiveness of arts work with social aims might be assessed in relation to:

- The quality of the artistic processes and outputs.
- The effectiveness of its management.
- The response it receives from professionals in other fields.

## **6 Proportional expectations**

Compared to many other forms of social programme, arts projects are relatively low-cost. Even a few hundred pounds spent on a youth arts project can (but will not necessarily) have a profound impact on those involved. However, in arguing for support, it is not uncommon for its advocates to claim wholly unrealistic outcomes. Participatory arts work is an effective tool of social development in proportion to its resources and vision. It is essential to be realistic about what can be achieved with the resources available in a particular situation, and to include that assessment in planning discussions. A good benchmark might be to ask what outcomes would be expected from spending a comparable amount of money on a community development worker, or an environmental scheme. Arts projects have a contribution to make, but most of them change the world in small ways. Unrealistic expectations are a short cut to a sense of failure. The effectiveness of arts work with social aims might be assessed in relation to:

- The realism and precision of its objectives.
- The indicators and benchmarks for success.
- Its effectiveness compared to other forms of social intervention.

## 7 Joint evaluation

Evaluation in the arts is only an extension of what artists do all the time, namely to question and assess their progress towards their goals. It is central to the nature and act of creativity. Concerns about involving other people in that process are natural, since they may not understand or share an artist's goals even where s/he can explain them, and there will always be some who are not prepared to do so. But artists who depend on public money, and/or who engage other people in their work, inevitably open a dialogue about assessment with their funders. Participatory arts projects, more than any, should see evaluation as an integral part of the creative process which fully involves all the partners (not just those who may have commissioned or funded it). In *Defining Values* this was described as a five-stage cyclical process, and this approach was used in some of the research (see Appendix II). Others may be appropriate to different circumstances, but the underlying principles of evaluation set out there remain sound:

- Projects intended to produce social benefits should address stated needs or aspirations.
- It is unethical to seek to produce change without the informed consent of those involved.
- The needs and aspirations of individuals or communities are best identified by them, often in partnership with others, such as local authorities, public agencies and arts bodies.
- Partnership requires the agreement of common objectives and commitments (though not all goals need be shared by all partners).
- Those who have identified a goal are best placed to ascertain when it has been met.
- An arts project may not be the most appropriate means of achieving a given goal. (Matarasso 1996a: 24)

Apart from being more equitable, if evaluation of participatory arts projects with social goals conforms to these broad principles, it is more likely to produce a balanced insight into what has occurred and contribute to planning and carrying out a successful programme. The effectiveness of arts work with social aims might be assessed in relation to:

- The involvement of participants in setting objectives
- The quality and equity of its evaluation procedures
- Its ability to use the results of evaluation effectively

## 10.6 NEXT STEPS

These general principles can do no more than suggest how an environment in which arts programmes with social goals can succeed, might be developed. The more detailed practical guidance which may be needed, especially in the social policy field, must await further work in this field. However, the outcomes which this study has been able to identify, and which are listed at the end of the summary, provide a further framework for planning.

### Indicators

Public policy loves indicators, neat measures of success which can be applied across the board. Helpful as they may be, there is a danger that the outcomes of projects will be stretched or trimmed to fit them, like Procrustes' unfortunate guests. Participatory arts projects, along with the human beings who make them happen, come in all shapes and

sizes, and not all can be accommodated off the peg. The 50 outcomes in this report could be used as indicators, a menu from which the social benefits of particular activities can be selected, but they would only suit some situations. They should be seen as a starting point for planning a project intended to address social needs. Some may be the foundations of indicators for new projects, but only with the informed agreement of all those involved, and to them must be added specific indicators rooted in the activity to be undertaken. Sustainable social benefits depend on common ownership of goals and programmes, as the growing move towards social auditing and sustainable development underlines:

‘The idea of citizens choosing their own indicators is something new under the sun – something intensely democratic. The indicators a society chooses to report to itself about itself are surprisingly powerful. They reflect collective values and inform collective decisions.’ (Donella Meadows, quoted in Lingayah *et al.*, 1996: 32)

Participatory arts projects are wholly in accord with these new, inclusive approaches to community and social development, and have a great contribution to make. All that matters is to look beyond the surface, to see not only an amateur drama production or a video project, but also the positive social change which is being facilitated.

### **The future of the research**

This report marks the end of the first phase of Comedia’s work on the social impact of the arts. Having, to some extent, mapped out the territory, we will continue to explore particular areas. Of immediate interest are the connections between art and employability and creative approaches to public consultation. A case study is looking at the interface of arts policy and social policy in Glasgow, and others are planned. Work is also being undertaken on a handbook of evaluation ideas suitable for use in looking at the social impact of the arts.

But Comedia can only act as a catalyst, raising questions about these issues. Ultimately, the development of thinking and practice in this area depends on the hundreds of thousands of people working on the arts and social fields. We can only hope that the ideas in the present report will be useful to them in assessing their work and communicating its value more widely.



The study was undertaken to extend the parameters of debate about the use of the arts in social development. There are consequently many areas it does not address because they already form bases of discussion, and among these is the issue of economic impact. But in the introduction it was argued that the current focus of such work is actually more concerned with the *financial* impact of the arts. There are many questions about the economic impact of the arts which need to be addressed, for example:

- What contribution can they make to the training and employability of the workforce, especially for new forms of work?
- What is the economic value of the unpaid labour they draw on?
- To what extent can they reduce public expenditure by alleviating social problems which the state would otherwise be obliged to put right?
- How effective are the arts in attracting international investment or in redistributing internal investment from wealthy regions to poor ones?

Although the study could not address these issues except in passing, it was clear that participatory arts projects do have a significant economic impact in these terms; two or three points may be made.

### **Voluntary labour and donations**

The economic profile of participatory arts projects is recorded, if at all, in their annual accounts, or in relation to their funding by the arts system. Neither of these is capable of putting an economic value on the vast amount of unpaid labour on which such activities depend. Take the example of a *fêis*: the accounts might show annual income of perhaps £5,000, divided equally between public sector grants and fees from participants, and spent principally on fees and expenses to tutors, venue hire and similar costs. But no *fêis* could happen without the huge commitment of unpaid time, throughout the year, by local people, spent in planning, fundraising, management and administration. During the *fêis* week itself many people will work full-time, taking responsibility for organising and feeding groups of children, liaising with parents, supporting artists etc. In many cases, the *fêis* is further supported within the local community by donations of food and materials, and the uncharged use of private resources like cars and telephones. The true cost and value of the *fêis* is simply not reflected by conventional financial indicators. If that single project is multiplied across the country, it is possible to get a glimpse of the huge economic impact of participatory arts activities at a community level.

### **Consumer spending**

The Sports Council estimates annual consumer expenditure on clothing and footwear for football alone at £150 million (VAN 1994: 27). It has already been noted that as many people play musical instruments as football: it is not fanciful to suggest that they must spend a comparable amount on their interest, often in small local shops, (arts suppliers have yet to make their presence felt in retail parks). The expenditure of participatory arts projects is very wide, embracing not just arts suppliers, but services like printers, equipment hire, transport, food outlets etc. and

invisible costs such as utilities, insurance and tax. People who participate in the arts also contribute to consumer support for the non-participatory arts sector.

### **Employment and training for work**

Some of that consumer spending keeps people in work, but participatory arts projects also enable many artists to survive financially, by supplementing their earnings from commissions, sales and performance. The fêisean support the equivalent of at least 10 posts, but because these are not full-time, they actually help keep afloat a much larger number of musicians and performers, mostly in remote areas with high unemployment. The contribution of participatory arts projects to employability has been touched on in the body of the report: it must be recognised that these activities represent a huge training and education resource at very low cost to the public sector.

### **Investing in local communities**

Participatory arts projects are also effective means of supporting and investing in local communities. In most projects the greatest cost is staff, followed by materials and services. The artists who undertake such work are not often international stars, spending their fees in Switzerland. Almost all the people employed on the various Portsmouth projects in the study live in the city, and sometimes in the estates or streets where they are working. Likewise, arts projects tend to use local suppliers and services as much as possible, retaining much of their cash in the local area.

### **Savings in public expenditure**

It is not unreasonable to suggest that the social benefits identified in this report will produce savings in public expenditure. People who are confident and capable get or create jobs. People who have active social lives do not ask their GPs for support. People who know their neighbours do not normally attack them. People who feel involved in their neighbourhood do not smash it up, and people who are optimistic about their future do not look for destructive ways to change it. The presumption must be that the social impacts which arise from participating in arts projects will translate into savings: the challenge lies in proving this invisible benefit.

This brief sketch of some areas in which the social impact of participation in the arts connects with the economy suggests that existing assessments are not able to record the added value they offer. There is an urgent need to extend research into this area if the full contribution of the arts to British social and economic policy is to be understood.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND ASSESSMENT

## APPENDIX II

Although sophisticated evaluation in the form of criticism is continually applied to the arts, there have been few attempts to assess their social impacts. It is therefore more than usually necessary to explain the methods used in the study to help the reader in assessing its findings, and because they may be helpful to people concerned to develop impact assessment of their own work; (a handbook of arts evaluation techniques is also in preparation).

### The framework of research

While recognising that audiences can be considered participants in the creative process, projects where people are actively engaged in shaping their own arts work (alone or in partnership with professional artists) are fundamentally different. The implications of this for planning how to assess the outcomes of projects led to a decision to focus this stage of the research on participatory arts projects, but taking an inclusive approach with room not just for community arts but for voluntary and amateur activity. The intentions and degree of social purpose of projects vary, but all have a social impact. The eight areas of social impact identified in the 1993 pilot study were rethought and reduced to six broad themes:

- Personal development;
- Social cohesion;
- Community empowerment and self-determination;
- Local image and identity;
- Imagination and vision;
- Health and well-being.

This list is not comprehensive and there is obvious overlap between the categories as the report shows. However, it begins to group the diverse outcomes of participatory arts projects and relate them to broad areas of public policy. In addition to these themes, a list of key questions was drawn up to form a common framework of inquiry in each case study:<sup>44</sup>

- a. What social impacts is the programme intended to achieve, and how have these been identified in relation to local needs?
- b. By what process has the arts initiative been designed to achieve them?
- c. Are project participants aware of the social impacts which have been identified?
- d. Are they able to participate in this process, from setting objectives and indicators to evaluating and explaining results?
- e. What indicators and standards of performance are to be used and why?
- f. What systems and processes will be used to evaluate the programme's impact?
- g. How does it integrate and compare with other social programmes (whether arts-based or not) being sponsored by the same agency?
- h. How does the return on investment compare with that delivered by other social programmes?
- i. What is the threshold of success?
- j. What does the take-up rate say about providing people with services they want?

One of the study's earliest findings was how difficult it was to answer even the first of these questions in relation to most projects. That these considerations should be absent in much amateur or voluntary work is to be expected; but that the thinking which underlies many explicitly socially-

oriented arts should be so vague as to make it impossible to answer any of these questions is a cause of genuine surprise and concern.

It was also decided not to use the often interesting methods of gathering material which some arts projects have developed – video boxes, creative planning sessions, drama games etc. Given the elusive nature of the subject matter it was thought preferable, at this stage, to use methods which were generally understood and accepted. The rest of this section describes the research methods in more detail, with short assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of each. The study acknowledges its own subjectivity and places only limited confidence in each investigative process used. It is the combination of the perspectives they offer which assist in the search for understanding and a more accurate analysis of the social impact of participatory arts projects.

### The participants' questionnaire

The value of questionnaires has been widely debated in the context of social research, and this is not the place to review those arguments.<sup>45</sup> Their use in this study accepts the political value of quantitative evidence, while recognising the limitations of the methods. The participants' questionnaire attempts to quantify some of the qualitative evidence which evaluation of participatory arts work normally produces. It explores ways of translating this into the kind of comparable statistical data which policy makers have in other fields and in which they place such confidence. The questionnaire was piloted during the Bolton case study, and a slightly revised version used in the other case studies.

The language and ideas of the questionnaire were simple, so that it could be used as widely as possible. This, and the search for broadly neutral wording, produced difficulties which would be less significant in a questionnaire for a particular activity. However, in the present study, while responses from individual projects were analysed, the intention was always that they should be aggregated. This has the drawback of amalgamating the responses of people participating in widely different activities, but the size of the sample is thereby statistically more reliable and individual differences play a much smaller role. What all the respondents have in common is their participation in arts activities during 1996-7. In total 243 adults and 270 children completed questionnaires, and the detail of their responses are reproduced in Appendix III.

The effort to strike a neutral tone also produced problems with the phrasing of some of the questions. For example, people were asked 'Do you feel differently about where you live?' and, if they did, in what way. The intention was to get a sense of whether arts projects had any impact on sense of place, feelings of belonging and so on. But the phrasing failed to take into account how people might have felt before they became involved: so some respondents in York and Scotland answered no, going on to explain that they loved the place where they lived and, in some cases, that its cultural life was part of the reason why. There was no apparent change, and yet their involvement in local arts work was an important part of how they saw their home. Questionnaires have to be supplemented with other research methods.

A number of useful lessons emerged from the questionnaire exercise, the first being simply the difficulty of encouraging its use. It was designed to be used at the end of a discussion session, to help people record, for themselves, their ideas in a consistent and comparable format. This worked well where a researcher was present at a discussion. However, to extend its inclusiveness, the questionnaire was offered to a number of projects not in the case studies and from these there was an overall low rate of return. Some managed very well, but perhaps 75% of the projects which agreed to use the questionnaire did not actually do so. This is understandable and underlines the dangers of underestimating the support required by people, especially workers who stand as gatekeepers, if they are to make effective use of such tools.

With appropriate support, children *were* able to use the questionnaires effectively, though 4 questions got a high proportion of ‘don’t knows’ from the under 15s, suggesting that they found them difficult:

- Has it made you feel differently about your rights?
- Has the project changed your ideas about anything?
- Was being able to express your ideas important to you?
- Was doing something creative important to you?

It also must be recognised that some people are more articulate than others, and the fullness of comments may reflect only that. For some people, especially non-readers and those who do not feel comfortable with forms, written questionnaires are clearly inappropriate. A pictorial questionnaire was tested in Portsmouth playschemes and schools, but mostly it has to be accepted that these situations must be addressed in other ways. It may be argued that the questionnaires are bound to show positive results, since they are completed by supporters of the arts. But about a third of all respondents said that they had not been involved in an arts activity before. It was also clear, from the variations in their answers that most had given careful thought to it, and treated the process critically. The use of the same questionnaire with people engaged in a range of other leisure activities was considered but not pursued largely because of time constraints and the difficulty of identifying appropriate control groups.

That said, it is striking that the responses to many of the questions from different projects are broadly consistent. The proportion who say they feel more self-confident (75-85%), for example, or who want to take up further training (30-35%), does not vary much between projects. Where there are big differences – in questions about people’s rights or feelings about where they live – comments and interviews suggest that these reflect the content and meanings of the work they have been involved in. Indeed, the issue of meaning is thereby underlined as a key element in the social impact of the arts.

If the figures are not seen as precise measures but as broad indicators of the impact of participating in the arts, they should be helpful both to arts organisations and to the broader policy world. It is not important that *exactly* 80% of people say they are more confident, but that about 4 out of 5 participants feel more confident. It does not follow that every project should expect to achieve that result: the nature of the activity, the people involved and many other variables will affect the outcomes. But the figure may help those involved ask questions about why their work has produced the outcomes it has, and what that reveals about the way it worked and its values. The questionnaire exercise itself proved to be highly instructive. It could certainly now be done better, though the value of repeating such a broad process is debatable. Instead further development could be undertaken by individual arts projects, as a way of quantifying success according to their own agreed objectives,

#### Other types of questionnaire

Other questionnaires were used in several case studies, in addition to the main one for participants. A pictorial form, to be completed by colouring in, was tried at several Portsmouth playschemes. It enabled sometimes very young children and those with low levels of literacy to contribute even in fairly hectic circumstances, but was limited to very simple matters. Not all the images were clear, and there was clearly a temptation to carry on colouring to complete a picture. None the less, it was successful enough to encourage further explorations of pictorial questionnaires.

Questionnaires were also used with observers (as opposed to participants), including the formal observer groups discussed below, and teachers in Portsmouth. In each case people were asked to rate a project’s impact in different areas. These questionnaires produced useful material,

but were much harder to get completed. They reflect the ever-present tension between the wish to get the most complete information on the one hand, and the need to use workable systems on the other. While any evaluation methodology can only be as good as its ability to produce data, one has to ask when bad data becomes worse than no data.

#### Project visits and participant observation

Between 50 and 100 different projects and workshops were visited in the course of the research for discussions with those involved and observation. There is nothing very scientific about the latter, but it is an invaluable reference point, enabling the experienced observer to get a feel for what is happening, and a sense of reality which can never be got from reports (including this one). Visits, and especially participant observation, are often time-consuming, but help build trust and open dialogue; they generally included a review of documentary sources relevant to each project.

#### Formal interviews and focus discussion groups

Interviews and discussion groups with participants, artists, project workers, funding bodies, community leaders and others, were widely used. Varying in formality with the circumstances, they were often taped and provided a core of attitudes, stories and facts on which to draw. They were supplemented by many informal contacts: conversations over a meal, while watching a rehearsal, or waiting for a meeting can be revealing in their lack of prescribed direction. Efforts were made to extend the net beyond the enthusiasts, and speak with those who, so to speak, were inclined to slip away silently. Neutral and dissenting views were actively sought from (ex-)participants, members of the local community and professionals with knowledge of the projects.

#### Observer groups in Batley and Portsmouth

In addition to the well-tried research methods outlined above, the study tested two other approaches – observer groups and assessment against agreed objectives. The idea of observer groups was developed from Deidre Williams' pioneering Australian study into the benefits of community arts funding published in 1995 as *Creating Social Capital*. Williams looked at 9 projects in detail, using various survey and research methods, including observer groups composed of 25 people, chosen for their relationship to the original project. She included equal numbers of people who were:

- In positions of community leadership or business;
- Only involved in the artistic work;
- Audience members or who only saw the finished product;
- Family members of the participants;
- Supporters of the project without getting involved.<sup>46</sup>

Observers were asked to assess the social, educational, artistic and economic benefits of the projects according to a series of indicators. This approach was piloted in Batley Carr and with the Portsmouth HOME festival, with adaptations to suit the methodology and concerns of this study, and local circumstances. We did not manage to involve 25 people in each case, but observer groups proved to be an effective way of engaging with a wide range of people in terms of their relationship to the project. The numbers involved, however, do not make the figures from observer group questionnaires statistically reliable, so we have preferred instead to use terms like 'most' or 'a few' which give a sense of people's responses without suggesting a greater degree of accuracy than can be secured. The use of observer groups needs further development but have the potential to be an effective assessment tool which reflects a balance of interests.

With the Portsmouth *Arts in Education* season, observation was used slightly differently. Class teachers were asked to assess the impact of the activity on the development of a random sample

of pupils in five previously-agreed areas: developing language skills, physical co-ordination, observation skills, creativity and imagination, and social skills development. This was done for a total of 80 children, and the results are given in the body of the report. (Pupils completed self-assessment forms appropriate to their age groups, which were supplemented by discussions with pupils, teachers and artists, and by project visits.) Again, this seemed to have the beginnings of a workable and effective method of impact assessment appropriate to some projects.

### Agreed indicators

The study also piloted the approach to evaluation set out in the first working paper, which sought to take account of the different objectives which project partners might have, and set out a five stage process by which people involved in socially-oriented arts work could jointly establish and monitor their goals.<sup>47</sup> This was done in the case of Batley Carr estate, Wymering public art project and Portsmouth playschemes, with varying degrees of success. It proved too complex for the short-term playschemes work, but on the estates it may prove to be of value in its own right and to the arts process. The Wymering project is still at too early a stage to be assessed against the agreed indicators, but on Batley Carr, the study was able to make effective use of them

The Batley Carr indicators were drawn up during a meeting with representatives from the Tenants & Residents Association, the housing department, Batley Cultural Fund and Public Arts, with the artist, Lesley Fallais. Having clarified the aspirations of the different groups, a new statement of aim and objectives was drawn up, and from this the group were able, quite quickly, to decide on a number of indicators against which they could collectively assess their progress. These indicators, reproduced below, formed the basis of the study. As anticipated, not all proved useful. In the case of four, including the size of the waiting list (which did in fact grow substantially), it was not possible to establish a causal link with the arts project. For two others, the way in which the local authority records data made it impossible to record change. The rest of the indicators provided a workable framework against which to assess the impact of the arts work.

#### 1 Making life on Batley Carr better:

- Size of waiting list for tenancies on Batley Carr.
- Average length of tenancies.
- Number of transfers/relocations within the estate.
- Opinions and views of tenants and residents.
- Expenditure on repairing vandalism.

#### 2 Creating public arts projects:

- Number of art objects sited in the estate.
- Response of tenants to art work.
- Peer assessment of art work.
- Incidence of vandalism of new art work.
- Number of temporary arts activities and workshops.
- Number of estate residents involved in arts projects beyond the estate.

#### 3 Involving local people

- Numbers of people involved in projects and participating in the planning.
- Success in involving all sections of the community.
- Number of people making new friends as a result of being involved.
- Development of children's skills and confidence.
- Use of play area and other new public spaces by local people.

#### Agreed Indicators of success for Batley Carr Estate

The headings relate to the aim and objectives of the project.

**4 Developing people's skills and resources**

- Developing skills in the Tenants and Residents Association.
- Increasing membership and activity of TRA.
- Number of new proposals & community initiatives developed within the estate.
- Individuals reporting life changes resulting from their involvement.
- Knowledge and perceptions of Batley Carr Estate among Kirklees Councillors.
- Knowledge and perceptions of the estate among Council officers.

**5 Strengthening partnerships**

- Numbers of stakeholders involved
- Nature and frequency of contacts between stakeholders.
- Amount of project and activity money being invested in Batley Carr.
- Nature and extent of various departmental plans for the estate.

**Conclusion**

While none of the methods used to assess the social impact of participating in the arts was internally or independently satisfactory, collectively they have produced a substantial body of evidence on which to build.



## PARTICIPANTS' QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

## APPENDIX III

**Introduction**

The following tables list the results of the questionnaire completed by participants in arts projects, as described in detail in Chapter 2 and Appendix II. The first gives complete figures for the whole sample, including the negative and uncertain responses. The second gives the positive responses for adults (15 and over) and children (under 15). The final table gives a broad indication of the age, gender, disability and ethnic origin on the sample.

OVERALL TOTALS	YES	NO	Don't know
Have you been involved an arts activity before?	65%	27%	8%
Did you help to plan what happened?	49%	38%	13%
Since being involved I have...			
...made new friends	92%	4%	4%
...become interested in something new	87%	8%	5%
...learnt about other people's cultures	56%	26%	18%
...been to new places	54%	41%	5%
...tried things I haven't done before	88%	9%	3%
...become more confident about what I can do	80%	8%	12%
...decided to do some training or course	34%	45%	21%
...felt better or healthier	48%	29%	23%
...become keen to help in local projects	53%	21%	26%
...been happier	77%	7%	16%
Has taking part had any bad effects for you?	13%	80%	7%
Has taking part encouraged you to try anything else?	60%	22%	18%
Has it made you feel differently about your rights?	16%	50%	34%
Have you learnt any skills by being involved?	79%	12%	9%
Do you feel differently about the place where you live?	27%	61%	12%
Would you like to be involved in more work like this?	85%	4%	11%
If yes, would you like to help organise it?	49%	21%	30%
Could you do it better than you could have before?	57%	14%	29%
Has the project changed your ideas about anything?	36%	34%	30%
Was being able to express your ideas important to you?	44%	21%	35%
Was doing something creative important to you?	56%	18%	26%

Table 6: Participants questionnaire, total results, (sample size 513 adults and children).

Adults and Children	Adults	Children	Total
Have you been involved an arts activity before?	67%	64%	65%
Did you help to plan what happened?	43%	53%	49%
Since being involved I have...			
...made new friends	91%	93%	92%
...become interested in something new	84%	90%	87%
...learnt about other people's cultures	54%	58%	56%
...been to new places	55%	53%	54%
...tried things I haven't done before	86%	89%	88%
...become more confident about what I can do	84%	77%	80%
...decided to do some training or course	37%	32%	34%
...felt better or healthier	52%	45%	48%
...become keen to help in local projects	63%	44%	53%
...been happier	73%	80%	77%
Has taking part had any bad effects for you?	21%	7%	13%
Has taking part encouraged you to try anything else?	68%	52%	60%
Has it made you feel differently about your rights?	21%	12%	16%
Have you learnt any skills by being involved?	80%	77%	79%
Do you feel differently about the place where you live?	40%	15%	27%
Would you like to be involved in more work like this?	86%	84%	85%
If yes, would you like to help organise it?	50%	47%	49%
Could you do it better than you could have before?	63%	52%	57%
Has the project changed your ideas about anything?	49%	25%	36%
Was being able to express your ideas important to you?	62%	28%	44%
Was doing something creative important to you?	81%	34%	56%

Table 8: Participants questionnaire, respondents characteristics, (sample 243 adults, 270 children ).

Sample characteristics	Adults	Children	Total
Female	63%	64%	63%
Male	37%	36%	37%
Disabled	12%	1%	7%
Non-disabled	88%	99%	93%
Under 15 years old	-	100%	53%
15-24 years old	23%	-	11%
25-34 years old	21%	-	10%
35-44 years old	19%	-	9%
45-54 years old	20%	-	9%
55-64 years old	10%	-	5%
65+ years old	8%	-	4%
African-Caribbean	2%	1%	2%
Asian	2%	3%	3%
White	93%	94%	93%
Other	3%	1%	2%

Table 7: Participants questionnaire, adults' and children's results, (sample size 243 adults, 270 children ).

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## APPENDIX IV

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