Great Art for Everyone?

An examination of arts policy on participation and participatory decision making in England from 1997-2013

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines government policy on participation in the arts and participation in decision making from 1997-2013, which it has been claimed in both academic literature and arts policy discourse, was a significant feature of this period. It explores the gap between policy and practice and investigates the drivers and barriers to change in the arts. It further considers the implications broadening the range of voices involved in decision making may have on artistic practice and on the people who engage with the arts. The research takes as its starting point the analysis of contradictory views on power, recognising that some argue that dominant voices are always able to force out alternative viewpoints while others argue that that changing the agents involved in decision making will not only change the structures and practices, but the decisions themselves.

Through analysis of grey literature, surveys of local authorities and elite interviews with cultural policy makers and advisers, consideration is given to whose voices are heard in policy making in the arts in England and how policy is interpreted and implemented. In addition, three case studies where participatory decision making has been used are analysed, in order to examine whether engaging a wider range of voices does yield different outcomes. The weight of empirical data collected moves this thesis beyond the theoretical perspectives described in the literature to examine the specifics of practice. By so doing it extends knowledge on the decision making process in the arts in England and fills a gap in research by illuminating the attitudes to and outcomes of different participatory decision making practices.

The research reveals that a narrow range of voices has been involved in decision making in the arts, and that the arm's length principle has contributed to a crisis of legitimacy for arts funding, by reducing both the accountability and transparency of arts policy. Strategies to widen the range of voices involved, to include members of the general public not only in consultation, but in decision making, have met with resistance within the arts sector. There is a common perception, among professional arts practitioners, that such practices would undermine expertise, limit creative risk, and that the arts sector could face a hostile public response. The case studies of participatory decision making examined here demonstrate that

such fears need not be realised. Rather, such participatory practices can have powerful outcomes in terms of both building public value in the arts, and developing and broadening artistic practice.

I confirm that the thesis is my own work; and that all published or other sources of material consulted have been acknowledged in notes to the text or the bibliography.

I confirm that thesis has not been submitted for a comparable academic award.

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ii. List of abbreviations

ACE – Arts Council England

ACGB – Arts Council of Great Britain

CEMA - Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts

DCLG - Department for Communities and Local Government

DCMS - Department for Culture Media and Sport

ENSA - Entertainment National Services Association

GLC – Greater London Council

WMDC – Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

iii. Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

Since the formation of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946 British arts policy has attempted to reconcile the tensions between three objectives to: preserve the established arts canon; provide development opportunities for contemporary artists; engage a wider audience in arts activity (Hewison 1995). It is argued that, until the later 1990s, the priorities for policy makers focused heavily on the production, or supply, of art characterised by the first two, at the expense of the consumption, or demand, by the audience (Bunting, 2006).

When the New Labour government came to power, in the UK in 1997, their first secretary of state for culture declared the aim of democratizing culture "through a process generated from the bottom rather than imposed from the top" (Smith, 1998 pg 18). Leading figures in the arts sector argue that this led to a significant shift in arts policy during New Labour's time in office between 1997-2010 away from the professional production of high quality art (Tusa, 2000, McMaster, 2008). Instead policy discourse developed around increasing participation in the arts from a wider cross section of people than had engaged hitherto. National surveys were introduced to examine who was taking part in the arts (DCMS, 2006) and targets were set to increase levels of participation (DCMS, 2008).

Policy discourse around increasing participation is argued by many to have been a cornerstone of New Labour policy, not just in the arts, but across public policy more generally. For some this is seen as a matter of equity, ensuring universal access to public services (Coates and Lawler, 2000). For others it is about increasing instrumental benefits, such as improving civic engagement (Keaney, 2006a) or as a means to reduce crime or improve healthy lifestyles (Cap Gemini Ernst & Young UK, 2003, Cantle, 2006). Within the arts it also became about marketing and survival strategies, for organisations faced with declining audience numbers and interest (Kolb, 2005).

Some argue that the discourse on participation did not derive from New Labour, but was a feature of neo-liberal trends internationally, that pre-dated, but were continued by them while in government. Such trends are described as the increased devolvement of responsibility for public

services, from state control to the private or voluntary sectors (McGuigan, 2005). But it is significant to note that, under New Labour, rather than reducing responsibility and investment in public services, such investment increased, in the arts quite significantly (Arts Council England, 2009, Gilmore, 2011).

I was working, first as an arts manager and then as a policy maker, during much of New Labour's term of office. It seemed fair to expect that if arts policy had shifted in the ways described by commentators and as investment had certainly increased, then changes should be identifiable both in artistic practice and in audience engagement during this period. What is apparent, from within the arts policy literature, is that despite the rhetoric of democratisation and participation in the arts, this increased investment largely went to the same organisations that had been in receipt of it before New Labour came to power (Frayling, 2005, Arts Council England, 2009, Arts Council England, 2013). Throughout New Labour's time in office arts funding continued to prioritise, what it had previously been said to have always done (Evans, 2001), namely physical infrastructure over grassroots activity, professional artists over amateur participation, and high art over popular.

The targets to increase participation and engagement were consistently missed and a direct correlation is found, in government surveys, between those taking part in cultural activity and their socio-economic status, with the most well off being the most likely to take part and to take part most regularly (DCMS, 2011). Public surveys further suggest that the subsidised arts were often described by the general public as exclusive and not for them (Opinion Leader, 2007, Arts Council England, 2012a). It is argued that as a consequence there was a "crisis of legitimacy" (Holden, 2006) in the arts funding sector.

Elsewhere in the public sector one of the ways that the perception of a crisis was addressed was through strategies to increase involvement in service delivery and to widen the range of voices consulted with. This is well documented in relation to the concept of public value, although the concept is widely criticised for its ambiguity (O'Brien, 2013, Lee et al., 2011). But referring to the development of the idea of public value by Mark Moore in America (Moore, 1995) much of the academic literature links it to

the neo-liberal trends mentioned. As such it is defined as part of the public management reform of the public sector, that has involved a reduction in state involvement in public services (Cooke and Kothari, 2009, O'Brien, 2013). In the cultural sector it is also accused of offering little more than "consumer research" to legitimise the current distribution of funding (Lee et al., 2011 pg 293).

But other strategies to address the crisis and build public value, involved the public not only in consultation, but in decision making. Co-production (Ostrom, 1996) and participatory budgeting (Community Pride Initiative, 2003) were actively promoted in the UK during the second half of New Labour's time in office (DCLG, 2008, Lent, 2006). Working with the Arts Council at the time, it became of increasing interest to me how these concepts, which are defined here more broadly as participatory decision making, might be applied in the arts.

The starting point for this research therefore is an examination into how the arts sector responded to the growth in participatory decision making and what implications such processes may have on artistic practice and on the audiences who engage with the arts. There is considerable work on participatory decision making in public policy generally (Dryzek and List, 2003, Brodie et al., 2009, Barnes et al., 2004). Within the arts, while there is an increase of work on public value and consultation (Lee et al., 2011, Keaney, 2006b, O'Brien, 2013), the adoption of participatory decision making processes is less common. Indeed, it is argued, that it has been met with considerable resistance (Fennell et al., 2009).

While the government's Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) were setting targets for all public sector deliverers to involve the public in some form of decision making (DCLG, 2008), Tessa Jowell, the second of New Labour's culture secretaries was arguing that the focus on increasing participation should not go too far in the arts, in case it reduced opportunities for artistic risk taking and innovation (Jowell, 2004).

Despite the claims that New Labour arts policy created a shift in focus, from supply to demand, it may be argued instead that there was a rebalancing in the policy rhetoric, away from participation, let alone decision making, towards a reaffirmation of the values of expertise and excellence in the

second half of New Labour's time in office, most noticeable in the DCMS' own policy review (McMaster, 2008).

The research for this thesis examines the apparent disjuncture between policy rhetoric and practice. It questions whether the perceived shift in emphasis, towards participation in the arts, ever really took place under New Labour and what the barriers to change were in the adoption of participatory decision making.

In order to do this the discourse on participation in the arts is explored, from 1997 when New Labour came to power, until they left in 2010. This includes an examination of the purpose and priorities given to different concepts by different delivery agents. These include the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), Arts Council England, local authorities and arts practitioners. The aim is to assess whether interpretations and values are shared between different delivery agents within the policy making structures, or whether the ambiguity noted in relation to public value also applies to the participation agenda more broadly.

Furthermore it has been noticed, that participatory arts organisations were the worst hit in the first round of the Arts Council and local authority funding cuts that took place when the Conservative Liberal-Democrat Coalition government (hereafter referred to as the Coalition) came to power in 2010 (Jancovich, 2013). The research therefore also considers the extent to which there was policy continuity under the Coalition government, between 2010 and 2013, when the empirical research for this thesis was completed.

In the limited number of cases where participatory decision making practices have been undertaken in the arts, either as short-term experiments or locally based initiatives, there is limited research. This thesis therefore fills a knowledge gap in relation to research in this area. It offers a theoretically informed critique of the debates around participation in the arts in general and participatory decision making in particular. This is supported by extensive empirical research and analysis of models of participatory practice to test some of the opportunities from and resistance to such activities in the arts.

The key questions therefore that are examined in this thesis are:

- to what extent the perceived shift in arts policy under New Labour took place
- what the drivers and barriers to change are within the arts sector
- where changes are apparent whether this is attributable to the New Labour government or whether there is ideological continuity under the Coalition
- how participation and participatory practices are defined and interpreted within policy discourses and whether there is shared understanding between delivery agents
- the nature of participatory decision making processes and its implications both for artistic practice and audience development

While the focus for the research for this thesis is 1997-2013, any assessment of policy development during this period requires an analysis of the history of and assumptions underpinning arts policy in England over a longer period. This is necessary not only to set a context for the research, but also to develop an understanding of the different interests operating within the arts sector and how these are played out in both the policy discourse and the implementation of strategic initiatives.

The next chapter (chapter 2) involves a literature review, which charts some of the key issues and themes that have been contested by policy makers, practitioners and academics in the fields of arts and cultural policy over a longer period than that covered by this thesis. The cultural policy environment is examined, from both academic literature, and from policy documents.

The literature review starts by laying out some of the historical context of arts policy in the UK, in order to examine the origins of theories and ideologies underpinning the formation of arts policy today. The writings of key cultural thinkers from the 19th and earlier 20th century are considered to assess how their ideas have influenced the structures within which New Labour were operating. This contextualisation also helps to determine how much the government determined new policy directions and how much they were influenced by other factors.

In particular the writings of the nineteenth century cultural commentators, Matthew Arnold (Collini, 2007) and William Morris (Morris, 1882), are

explored, who it is argued influence two different strands of cultural policy today. Consideration is also given to the views of the Bloomsbury Set and one of its members, John Maynard Keynes, who was the first Chair of the Arts Council (Upchurch, 2004). This is contrasted with the notion of cultural relativism that developed both in academia and artistic practice from the 1960s (Williams, 1958).

In addition to developing an understanding of the influence of different ideologies in arts policy, this section also explores the extent to which the individuals concerned influenced the institutional frameworks created for the delivery of cultural policy. This allows for an assessment and critique of the role of cultural elites, in influencing policy formation and implementation in the arts arena, which some argue still prevail today (Griffiths et al., 2008).

The second section of the literature review undertakes an analysis of policy formation during the New Labour years of government (1997-2010) in relation to its mission of finding a third way between neo-liberal retrenchment from the state and old Labour's centralised state control (Giddens, 2000). This section considers the extent to which this approach changed the nature of how policy was formed and whose voices were heard, during this period. This section also focuses on the growing interest in measuring and increasing rates of participation and engagement in cultural activity (DCMS, 2011).

Next the literature review considers the rising trends in participatory decision making, which is the main area of this research. It explores its conceptual origins, in theories on public value (Moore, 1995), deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1994) and co-production (Ostrom, 1996). As there is little research in this area, specific to the arts sector, this section draws from political science and public policy literature. The aim is to consider the value of such practices and their application under New Labour.

Finally the literature review examines the limited amount of research that has been done to date to examine where such thinking has had an impact on arts policy, in relation to both public value (Holden, 2006, Keaney, 2006b, Lee et al., 2011) and participatory budgeting (Fennell et al., 2009). The aim of this is to assess how significant a feature the participation agenda in general, and participatory decision making in particular, was in

arts policy discourse during this period. This section in particular begins to examine some of the levers and barriers to participatory decision making taking a more central role in the arts, and helps define some of the themes to be examined in the primary research for this thesis, which are discussed in the methodology in chapter 3.

The methodology chapter builds on a number of key theories outlined in chapter 2. It takes as its starting point the theories on, and origins of, participatory decision making. It then charts how the debates about the effectiveness of such mechanisms are used to create a foundation for analysis of the primary data, which involves interviews with policy makers and three case studies of participatory decision making in practice.

In particular theoretical perspectives on the role of cultural elites and the exertion of power are examined throughout the primary research undertaken for this thesis. The key principle underlying deliberative democracy and participatory decision making practices is that changing the agents involved in decision making will not only change the structures and practises but the decisions themselves (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010). This is assessed in relation to opposing views on the influence of power relationships within groups (Lukes, 2005) or the role of institutions (Gray, 2000) which may limit the potential of participatory decision making processes as a means to democratise the arts.

The nature of policy making is examined through analysis of interviews with staff within the main cultural policy organisations (DCMS, Arts Council and local authorities) as well as a number of cultural policy advisers and academic experts. The aim of this is to examine what are commonly argued to be the main interests in policy discourse, "advocates, analysts and critics" (O' Brien, 2009 pg 7). Findings from this data are examined in chapter 4. Consideration is also given to the background of the sample of policy makers and analysts, to assess whether they represent a narrow or wide range of voices and perspectives. This chapter also explores the power relationships between the different units of study, to determine whether different voices are heard equally in policy formation.

Analysis is interpretive, in order to examine the values of individuals (Alasuutari, 1995), and assess the importance different agents give to the

participation agenda. The aim is to determine the extent to which they have shared or disparate understandings of key concepts such as "art" and "participation", and by so doing to make assessments about the nature of resistance to participatory decision making in the arts.

It is noted that analysis based on expert interviews tends to ignore the specifics of practice (O' Brien, 2009). To this end, in addition to the interviews with policy makers, chapters 5, 6 and 7 analyse three case studies where participatory decision making has been used in practice. Each provides an example of an initiative in a different context in order to understand commonalities and difference within such projects. One was chosen as an arts-led initiative, one a local authority initiative and one driven by a community association. As the foundation of this research is to examine the implications of engaging a wider range of voices in arts policy, it seemed necessary that this research should also hear from a wider range of voices. The three case studies therefore involve interviews, not only with arts professionals and policy makers but also with members of the public engaged in participatory decision making.

In each case study consideration is given to what impact such practices have on both members of the public and on artists taking part. The aim is to assess whether such practices are able to democratise the arts and what affect this has on art form development. Consideration is also given to whether such practices have a wider impact on the arts and whether there are lessons to be learnt for transferring such practices more widely.

The findings from expert interviews and each case study are synthesised in chapter 8, in order to draw some conclusions and answer the core questions outlined above. Key issues and learning points are drawn out in order to identify common and contrasting processes and outcomes between the different units of study.

Finally chapter 9 draws together key themes and findings from the literature review and the primary research to highlight the contributions to knowledge this thesis offers. It also makes recommendations for future research and for policy development.

2.   Literature review

Literature on public policy in the arts is most commonly discussed with reference to the setting up of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946 and the regulations to allow local authorities to subsidise "entertainment" for their constituents in 1948 (Hewison, 1995).   As highlighted in the introduction many of the core concepts that were contested during this period may be dated back to the debates on culture of the nineteenth century. The participation agenda has also been in evidence since at least this time.

The growth of the public museums in the nineteenth century was built on the premise that there was value in providing access for the public to collections, which had hitherto been the preserve of the ruling classes. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution the arts were increasingly also being patronised by wealthy industrial collectors who were keen to show off their acquisitions (Appleton, 2001). Furthermore as Britain was becoming more socially divided, but also more geographically concentrated through urbanisation, there was a growing discourse about the role of a shared culture in preserving social unity against the threat of anarchy (Collini, 2007).

The public museums therefore provided greater access to the arts, but also sought to define the arts and a shared cultural heritage. This desire to create a cultural hegemony, which would legitimise an unstable state, played a central role in the formation of "cultural elites" which are defined as "over-representation of old elite schools, clubs and universities" (Griffiths et al., 2008 pg 198), who would define an artistic tradition for the nation.

While this notion of a shared culture might serve the needs of the state, this does not mean that the cultural philanthropists who opened public museums or the Bloomsbury Set who influenced the formation of the Arts Council were not critical of the state. But any analysis of arts policy needs to consider the thinking behind and influence of these self-appointed cultural elites, who have been central in the development of British arts policy ever since (Hutchison, 1982, Griffiths et al., 2008). To this end my literature review begins with a review of some of the key thinkers who have influenced arts policy in the UK.

2.1   The origins of arts policy in the UK

In the nineteenth century writers such as Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) argued the case for the importance of an elite of "academy-trained gentleman artist[s] of the middle or upper classes" (Upchurch, 2005 pg 510), who paternalistically granted access to the arts for wider society. Arnold is critical of British society and of what he sees as the "barbarism" of the English aristocracy, the "philistinism" of the middle classes and the ignorance and mediocrity of the "populace". He sees the artist as a case apart, representing "the best that has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold quoted in Collini, 2007 pg 78).

He promotes the role of the artistic and intellectual commentator, who he argues, will have a civilising effect on all mankind but only if artists are awarded a level of independence from the social conditions around them and a status in society. The arts and the artist therefore are defined as having value outside their social context and therefore beyond politics.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that across Europe the importance of the romantic tradition in the arts during this period, and its interest in the "artists' intention" (Bourdieu, 1984 pg 3), also created increasing division between the professional intellectual artists and the craftsman or artisan. This he argues reinforced the class-based nature of the growth of a cultural elite, which continued into the twentieth century. This may be demonstrated in England through the influence of the Bloomsbury Set in the formation of the Arts Council.   One of its members, Clive Bell, similarly defines the importance of "a leisured class with plenty of time and nothing required of them" to create and define art (Upchurch, 2004 pg 206). He vehemently argues against anyone outside this class interfering in the artistic process.

The first chair of the Arts Council, John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), who significantly was also chair of Covent Garden Trust, which campaigned for the reopening of the Royal Opera House, states that his avowed aim was to support the reopening of the London metropolitan houses of elite culture and bring "death to Hollywood" (or popular culture) (Edgar, 2012 pg 1). The crossover of Board memberships between the main arts organisation, funded by the Arts Council and the Arts Council itself, is argued to present

a consistent conflict of interest, which has existed since the formation of the Arts Council to more recent times (Hutchison, 1982).

Raymond Williams (1958) discusses how this focus on the independent artist became embedded in the education system, where arts education largely focused on textual analysis and the artists' intentions, rather than on a socio-historical understanding of the role the arts played in society. It was embedded in arts institutions where the cult of the artist, the vision of the artistic director and the supremacy of taste focused attention on production and supply, over the audience experience or the goals and outcomes of the arts themselves. It was also clearly at play when the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) was formed in 1946, as a state-sponsored but semi-autonomous agency, informed and influenced in its decision making less by the politicians or the public and more by the vested interest within the artistic community itself (Hunt, 2010).

Arts policy and funding from this perspective therefore is concerned with supporting artistic independence for a professional class of artists, not universal creativity or access. But Arnold's contemporaries such as William Morris (1834-1896) offer a different view on the role of the arts and arts policy, and this thinking has equally permeated an alternative strand of policy and practice since.

Morris believed in the powers of universal creative expression, or art in the everyday as "an expression of the society amongst which it exists" (Morris, 1915 pg 84). For Morris artistic practice is at least as much about the process, as about the final artefact, and as such his definition of art covers a very broad range of different practices, which include crafts.

Morris' work harks back to a view of the artist not as someone from a privileged elite, but as an artisan or worker, He believed that every member of society had inherent creative potential and should be encouraged to use it (Morris, 1882). This thinking is also present in the work of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels who describe an ideal society as one "in which there are no painters but … people who engage in painting [or art]" (Marx and Engels quoted in Bourdieu, 1984 pg 397). Politically, rather than wanting to maintain the social order, Morris, Marx and Engels wanted to change society and the social conditions within which people

lived and Morris in particular believed that the arts are central in this process of change.

Morris is himself criticised for having been part of the cultural elite he condemned and for an idealised nostalgic view of working class crafts, that ignored the contemporary popular culture of his time, which he disparages (Upchurch, 2005). But in relation to this thesis, his views on cultural decision making are pertinent.

Morris writes in favour of community ownership, to replace capitalism and the power of the industrialists. He argues for factories to become places of creativity and learning as well as places of work (Upchurch, 2005). Such thinking is said to have influenced a long tradition of grassroots participatory practices and workers' education classes that grew up within the Labour movement and gave rise to high levels of creative engagement in Britain throughout the twentieth century (Keaney, 2006a, Dodd et al., 2008). Nationalised industrial organisations, such as the National Coal Board, were significant funders of creative activity among the working classes, until their demise in the mid-1980s (Ashworth and Pegg, 1986).

Although much of the research in this area looks more at education than creativity, there is some evidence that despite concerns about levels of civic engagement since the break-up of traditional industries, trade unions and workers education associations in the 1980s, when using this broader notion of culture, cultural participation had not reduced in the UK, when New Labour came to power, as much as other forms of civic engagement, such as voting, nor as has been seen in other countries such as the United States (Keaney, 2006a).

Indeed figures suggest that, during the period under review in this thesis, between one fifth and one third of cultural participation was still undertaken by voluntary and amateur groups who are commonly "embedded in the grassroots of local communities" (Dodd et al., 2008 pg 12). As such they involve at least an interface between, if not a blurring of distinctions between, the amateur and the professional artists. Furthermore Fiona Dodd, Andrew Graves and Karen Taws (2008) found that some of the highest levels of engagement in the voluntary arts exist in geographical areas otherwise defined as low in terms of engagement in professional arts.

But while voluntary arts may be widespread, national arts policy is more commonly associated with an interest in professional practice and prestige arts, focusing predominantly on provision of the arts and creating opportunities to see work rather than support for amateur creative expression (Evans, 2001). Debates about how many, and who the people are, who participate in the arts mainly revolve around policies aimed at increasing the number and range of people attending professional arts events. There is less discourse around redistribution of funding to support the work being done in the vibrant voluntary and amateur sectors. This clearly suggests that the voices of those within professional arts practice hold more sway than those within the voluntary arts.

The marginalisation of grassroots voices from arts policy may be related to the marginalisation of oppositional voices from the wider political sphere and what Steven Lukes (2005) defines as the ruling class's capacity to wield power over alternative viewpoints. This can be clearly seen in the setting up of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), which was formed in 1946 as a successor to two wartime organisations, the Entertainment National Services Association (ENSA) and the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) (Hewison, 1995). Both had operated independently during the Second World War, but their focuses had been different. ENSA's main activities in wartime had been the entertainment of troops, touring to improve public morale and setting up local arts clubs and associations where people could participate in artistic practice. CEMA in contrast, had focused on protecting cultural heritage through storing and preserving national treasures and providing work for actors and artists during troubled times.

When the Arts Council was formed at the end of the war and absorbed the duties of both organisations, one of their first acts was to stop ENSA's support for touring and amateur arts clubs. This happened despite protestations from some leading British artists, such as the composer Vaughan Williams, that such action would "lose the vitality in English art which comes from making it creative from the top to the bottom" (Vaughan Williams quoted in Hutchison, 1982 pg 46).

It is widely acknowledged that the direction the newly formed Arts Council took was shaped by the personal and political influence of the founders (Upchurch, 2004). As identified, John Maynard Keynes and the Bloomsbury Set followed culturally in the Matthew Arnold tradition. But significantly Keynes and Arnold also followed the same political traditions. As liberals, both were distrustful of an overarching state, but also equally uncomfortable with the reliance on the commercial market to define quality and taste.

Keynes developed the economic case for government funding for artists that the market did not recognise. But significantly he also separated the decision making process from government, arguing instead for an approach which trusts a small administration informed by peer review to determine the direction of arts policy (Upchurch, 2011). The arm's length principle that has existed since, it may be argued, reinforces the power of a cultural elite over government in the implementation of arts policy. From the beginning many of the Arts Council officers and peer reviewers, who were brought in to advise them, sat on the Boards of existing arts organisations. From the outset therefore the Arts Council's decision making processes were riddled with vested interests at best and outright conflicts of interest at worst (Hutchison, 1982).

This in turn made it possible for the Arts Council to ignore the opportunities for wider cultural democracy offered by the existence of a strong voluntary arts and touring sector, whose voices are not heard around the table. Instead a policy was instigated that became known as "few but roses" (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1951 pg 51), whereby arts policy and funding was concentrated on a small number of culturally elite institutions, which were mainly based in London, rather than being distributed more widely.

This was not just a practical response to limited finance; as the Arts Council's 1961-62 annual report says "even if [our] income were larger [we] would still prefer to consolidate…than to dissipate…resources" (Arts Council Great Britain 1961 quoted in Hutchison, 1982 pg 61). The role of the Arts Council as defined within the Royal Charter was also limited to "the fine arts exclusively" (quoted in Hewison, 1995) reinforcing the role of the cultural elite further in defining what constituted the arts. But since the 1960s the Keynesian tradition and its cultural elitist approach has come

under continued and increasing scrutiny. The Arts Council has been criticised by artists for "indifference, ignorance, and irrelevance to the real needs of living artists" let alone audiences (Hutchison, 1982 pg 106).

The growth in the number of Universities providing higher education in the 1960s and the development of cultural studies within universities began to challenge the nature of arts education. The cultural hegemony created by a predefined great tradition was increasingly questioned in the context of a society that was itself becoming increasingly heterogeneous (Williams, 1958, Willis, 1990, Hall and Jefferson, 1993). Challenges to the focus on the artists' intention re-orientated academic debate towards an examination of the way that the public interpret the work, rooted in socio-economic conditions of both the artist and the audience. This more relativist definition encourages a broader notion of culture than the narrow focus on the arts, which coincided with broader social and cultural changes.

In the 1970s, in an increasingly multi-cultural Britain, there were newer voices wanting to be heard. Increasingly there was talk not of one culture but many cultures. The arts were increasingly said not to follow one tradition, generating one artistic canon, but many traditions, representing many voices which were, it is argued, being ignored by the Arts Council (Khan, 1978). Alongside this, a new generation of young artists, experimenting with new art forms, had developed. This led to the growth of arts labs and arts centres which worked across art forms more than the traditional theatres and galleries had before them. But they also felt excluded from the Arts Council's definitions (Hutchison, 1982).

A politically active and articulate community arts movement grew up. This was partly in response to the decline of workplace-based creative activity, which resulted from the privatistation or closure of many traditional industries, such as the coal industry, which as highlighted above had supported such practice through the National Coal Board. Practitioners working within this context responded more directly to their audience or constituents. They called for arts policy to respond likewise, by changing their support for the self-interest of the arts institutions, to providing a service to a broader public, (Braden, 1978). The community arts movement shares a belief that artistic work needs to be not only accessible in terms of availability to a broader audience (through provision) but

accessible in content, and relevance to people's lives. Crucially, many argue that this should be created with people not just for them (McGrath, 1984).

All of these perspectives challenged the narrow cultural elite that had been involved in decision making up until that time. Some within the community arts movement argue that Government involvement in the arts by its nature seeks to legitimise an unfair and repressive state. Radical artists therefore should not seek approval from policy makers in the form of funding or other acceptance (Kelly, 1984). Despite this, these new voices did increasingly enter into arts policy discourse.

In the late 1960s the Arts Council dropped the word "exclusively" from its definition of supporting the "fine arts" to allow a broader range of art forms to be considered. Significantly they chose not to drop the reference to "fine arts" altogether (Hewison, 1995). As a result they maintained their role as the arbiters of taste, choosing for example to start funding jazz and photography, although not folk or amateur arts. While some argue that this opening up of the Arts Council aimed to do little more than "to increase the pool of financial resources available to the arts rather than to … redistribute the available resources" (Hutchison, 1982 pg 20), this period did mark some shift in terms of the voices being involved in arts policy.

One such shift during the 1970s, in response to criticism of the London bias of the Arts Council, was the strengthening of Regional Arts Associations supported by local authorities. By dint of their accountability to an electorate through their local authority members, many were much more open to a dialogue with local artists and community groups. Despite initially having less money available to spend than the Arts Council this created a two-tier approach to cultural policy (Hutchison, 1982). This became increasingly significant as local authorities increased investment.

Particularly during the period of the Conservative governments, who were in power form 1979-1997, many Labour councils and regional arts boards used the more democratic definitions of arts and culture as a tool in political opposition. Even within London, where the majority of arts funding was distributed, the Greater London Council (GLC), challenged the national arts policy prioritisation of classical institutions by supporting greater cultural

pluralism and increased grassroots activity locally. They started funding culturally diverse artists, engaged with community groups, and developed new artists working in new art forms. This was an attempt to form a rainbow coalition of diverse interests in contrast to the small band of voices that had been heard hitherto (Mulgan and Worpole, 1986).

The Arts Council also developed its first ever ten-year strategy during this period, to review and articulate its policy. *The Glory of the Garden* (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1984) recommends redistribution of funds from the more traditional regional repertory theatres, who were accused of offering access to what it defines as a conservative diet of traditional texts, for an ageing middle class audience. It sets out plans to re-route this money to touring companies who were experimenting with new art forms and which it is argued could reach a more diverse audience. Significantly however, the strategy exempted the national institutions, based in London, who took up most of the funding.

Strong opposition to the strategy came from the funded arts organisations, which wielded power via their membership of art form panels at the Arts Council. Opposition also came from the Regional Arts Associations who resisted any reductions in funding in their own region. The plans were not only overturned but the regional theatres actually secured increases in funding at the expense of touring companies (Jancovich, 1999). The gap between policy and practice is clearly visible and the influence of vested interest palpable.

It may be argued that the fact that the Arts Council wrote this strategy at all owed less to the changes happening within the arts, and more to the need to remake the case for government support for the arts. The Conservative governments of the 1980s decisively shifted policy discourse from subsidy for the arts (whether to support artists, creativity or audiences) to investment in the arts with an anticipated economic return to justify the spending. It was no longer enough to assume that the arts were worthy in their own right as the justification for public financing.

From this point on the subsidised arts needed to clearly demonstrate their worth against other agendas. All funded arts organisations were forced to take a more management and market driven approach. Once market

analysis was introduced in the arts it also became apparent that audiences in the most heavily subsidised art forms (theatre, classical music and opera) were in decline and ageing (Kolb, 2005). To combat this many education and outreach departments were set up as part of audience development strategies for venues (Tusa, 2000), which predated new Labour's perceived shift in focus towards participation.

By the 1990s when the next ten year strategy, was put together under John Major's Conservative government, the creation of the National Arts and Media Strategy Monitoring Group (1992) ensured that a wider constituency than the traditional arts institutions was involved. Policies were written on a range of different cultural practices, suggesting a shift towards greater cultural pluralism. Small project funding was introduced for the first time for community arts and festivals. But it is argued that while this suggests that new faces may have been added to the cultural elite, the nature of power and decision making within the arts remained unchanged (McGuigan, 1996). An "interminable circuit of inter-legitimation" between art and artists (Bourdieu, 1984 pg 53) was perpetuated through the arm's length principle. This encouraged a self-interested arts sector, to respond to new policy directives, not through ideological discourse, but by trying to redefine existing practices, against shifting agendas. A central interest in this thesis is to examine the extent to which this was a barrier to the implementation of new policy initiatives under the New Labour government from 1997.

2.2   New Labour cultural policy

When the New Labour government came to power, in 1997, they attempted to define the arts and culture, in which they had an interest, more broadly than hitherto. Starting within Government, the Department of National Heritage, which clearly suggests a bias in favour of traditional artistic practice, was renamed under the more broad ranging title of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

The first incumbent of this new department, Chris Smith, wrote a cultural policy manifesto, which includes the arts, but takes a more inclusive approach to the cultural practice that falls within its remit. This includes the whole of the creative industries, amateur and commercial work, high art to popular culture (Smith, 1998). This clearly suggests a shift away from the

narrow definitions of "the arts" which define some practices as more legitimate and worthwhile than others, towards culture as a way of life, that is inclusive of all practices (Williams, 1958). It sets the agenda for the democratisation of culture, outlined in the introduction to this thesis, and appears to advocate a shift of power from the narrow band of voices from a small number of arts institutions that had determined cultural policy previously.

New Labour also looked beyond the traditional arts agencies, such as the Arts Council, to broader public policy agents, such as its social inclusion unit, for guidance on the development of cultural policy (Policy Action Team 10, 1999). Not only the arts practices currently funded, but the decision making structures that supported these were thereby brought into question.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, from the outset New Labour arts policy was lambasted by some within the arts establishment. John Tusa, who ran the Barbican Centre, wrote a series of articles in the press which were compiled into a highly influential book (Tusa, 2000). In this he challenges Chris Smith's failure to guarantee the preservation of the established arts canon. He bemoans what he describes as the crass populism of widening the voices involved in policy formation to include the commercial and popular arts sector and in particular celebrity figures from the music industry. He calls for a reassertion of the absolute values of art, and artistic independence, which became a recurring theme throughout the New Labour government.

In relation to the core principles within Chris Smith's manifesto, it is worth noting that while presented as a new direction for cultural policy, in reality the thinking behind it draws from much of the existing and at times contradictory sources outlined in the previous section. Through the specific priorities outlined of access, excellence, education and economic value, Smith tries to find a compromise between both the thinking of Morris and the art in the everyday (Morris, 1915) and that of Arnold's high culture (Collini, 2007). Both concepts are drawn on and in fact referenced in his text (Smith, 1998). Likewise much of the text, is almost indistinguishable from the ideas expressed in the National Arts and Media Strategy, developed in 1991 under the Conservative government (National Arts and Media Strategy Monitoring Group, 1992).

Furthermore, despite the claims of democratising the arts, the access and excellence agendas continue to be dealt with together in the new DCMS policy documents. The new department's aim is defined as "making the best things in life available to the largest number of people" (DCMS, 1998). This is heavily reminiscent of the top-down delivery of culture to the masses, which had come before, rather than the bottom-up approach which Chris Smith claims in his book *Creative Britain* (1998). While the book received much attention at the time, in reality policy continued to fudge the questions of what people are being provided access to and who defines excellence.

This balancing of different policy objectives may be found throughout New Labour's agenda as a central tenet of the concept of finding a third way. One of the chief architects of the Third Way, Anthony Giddens, defines this as finding an alternative both to the top-down state control identified with socialism and the neo-liberal retrenchment from state involvement, identified with the British Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher (Giddens, 2000). This was to be achieved through partnership working, whether through continuing the combinations of private and public investment that started under the Conservatives, or wider consultation between users and deliverers of public services, which is the main interest of this thesis.

The arm's length principle, that operates in arts policy between the British government and its delivery agents, whether the Arts Council or local authorities, is well suited to some of the principles of the Third Way. By avoiding the direct government intervention in the arts of the ministries of culture more prevalent in Europe, or the more limited state involvement of the United States of America, it fits the first principle of partnership working outside state control.

Indeed Keynes himself argued for private investment alongside public subsidy back in the 1940s. He also believed that funding for the very institutions he supported would be short-lived, needed only until they become financially independent (Upchurch, 2004). This was never achieved, with levels of funding for the same arts institutions, increasing

over time rather than diminishing, thereby limiting the potential for new voices to benefit from public funding.

The arm's length principle also highlights one of the problems with the Third Way. Inherent in the notion of partnership, as put forward by New Labour, is an attempt to govern by consensus between different interest groups. This requires consultation with a wider range of voices than may be defined by top-down government, or indeed than make up the cultural elite who had been so influential in cultural policy since the Second World War. But while the government might suggest the need for a wider range of voices to be involved in decision making in the arts, the arm's length principle limits DCMS' capacity to determine in what way this should be implemented. Instead the way policy would be implemented under New Labour was left to agencies such as the Arts Council themselves to determine.

The Third Way concept is criticised for trying to take the politics out of political decisions, and suggesting technical solutions rather than ideological differences are the business of government (Fairclough, 2000). It is suggested that by its nature the requirements of consensus politics ignore the influence of the specific agents actually involved in interpreting and implementing policy, such as the Arts Council or the cultural leaders of key organisations. Anthony Giddens, acknowledges that the Third Way cannot work "where one…set of institutions is dominant" (Giddens, 2000 pg 56). As shown in the previous section, inequalities of power were already in existence between different interest groups within the arts. When ignored, it is argued that this leads to a built-in bias towards maintaining the status quo (Lukes, 2005).

A fuller discussion on the role of power and consultation in decision making follows in the next section. But it is worth noting by way of example, that even in the early years of New Labour, Chris Smith responded to the attacks from the cultural elite such as John Tusa (2000) not by challenging their power, but by inviting the main art leaders to consult on the way his arts policy was developed in practice. By so doing he reinforced the dominance and the continuation of the self-interest of the established industry in informing policy formation, rather than opening up decision making as he had proposed (Garnham, 2005).

Research on the make-up of Board membership and senior management in the arts shows that the actual numerical representation of a cultural elite, as defined at the start of this chapter, reduced both before and during this period, and particularly in the regions. But this is found to be less so within the Arts Council itself and within the larger London based arts organisations who continue to receive the majority of funding (Griffiths et al., 2008). In addition, the research findings suggest that despite individual numerical changes, cross referencing the make-up of decision makers between organisations, shows a clear network of interest that may be able to overpower any newer voices.

The continued influence of the major cultural institutions in determining the formation of policy, as well as the interpretation and implementation of such policy, therefore may be seen to have retained the same "structural defects" (Gray, 2000 pg 145) within the arts policy bureaucracy under New Labour, that had existed since the formation of the Arts Council. Understanding the key conceptual and ideological differences within the range of artistic practices, rather than trying to find consensus in what was increasingly talked about as a unified cultural sector, may therefore be central to avoid ignoring the 'insidious and often hidden connections between culture and power' (McGuigan, 2004 pg 141).

However, it would be unfair to say that more voices were not heard at all in the arts under New Labour. The Arts Council undertook their first public value survey in 2007, which for the first time consulted the public on their views about the arts (Opinion Leader, 2007). It also explores their opinions on and understanding of the decision making processes that determine what artistic practices are ultimately funded. The findings from this are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Local authorities, which played such a central role in promoting an alternative cultural strategy during the Conservative years of government, also used increased investment under New Labour to broaden the dialogue. They increasingly linked the arts with other public policy departments such as health, education, community and even economic development (NALGAO, 2010, Keaney, 2006b). Regional cultural consortiums were also formed under New Labour with the aim of providing opportunities for a wider range of interests to be heard (Gilmore, 2011).

These used the broader definitions of the cultural industries to define the constituents with whom they talked, rather than the narrow definitions of the arts. The thinking from all of these certainly created new policy rhetoric during New Labour.

There were concerns from some in the arts that the discourse under New Labour would challenge existing funding for the arts (Tusa, 2000). This was coupled with fear that engaging a wider range of voices was part of a retrenchment of the state from arts policy (McGuigan, 2005). It is also commonly criticised for instrumentalising policy at the expense of recognising culture's own intrinsic value (Belfiore, 2012). But, as mentioned in the introduction, in practice this wider discourse reaped considerable financial benefits for the arts under New Labour.

The arts sector saw significant increases in levels of investment through Treasury grant-in-aid to the Arts Council which almost doubled from £186 million when New Labour came to power, to £350 million when they left (Arts Council England, 2009). The National Lottery, although started by the Conservative government, really only began to have a significant financial impact on the arts under New Labour. Local authority spending also grew to a level at least equal to, if not greater than, that of the Arts Council (Gilmore, 2011).

Such levels of funding were achieved because of increased Treasury investment across the whole of the public sector. But within DCMS it required this shift in the discourse, from the intrinsic worth of engaging with the arts, to the instrumental value in meeting other policy objectives, such as health and well-being and social inclusion (Policy Action Team 10, 1999). This allowed the arts to make a stronger case for investment and to draw in money from different sources than it had before New Labour was in power. But it also required the arts to demonstrate their value based on its relationship to a wider number of social agendas. Policy rhetoric was increasingly refocused towards the needs of the public, as discussed in the introduction (Bunting, 2006).

But during this period the benefits of participation and engagement are advocated less for their power to change social conditions as expressed by the community arts movement (Kelly, 1984), or indeed the New Labour

local authorities in opposition (Mulgan and Worpole, 1986), but increasingly for the benefits to the individual participant, as a means to increase social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984, Putnam, 2000).

The concept of an individual's capital, shared by Robert Putnam and Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates how individuals are empowered not only through economic capital (wealth) but equally through other forms of capital (education, social status and culture). But their concepts have significant differences. For Bourdieu (1984) all forms of capital are by definition finite and kept in short supply under capitalism. He argues that differences in levels of capital are why social divisions exist, separating those with and those without. In terms of the arts he argues that the valuing of high art over popular practice serves the function of maintaining this difference and creating the self-appointed elite identified earlier. Increasing access to the arts, therefore, does not reduce these social divisions, but rather the value placed on the artistic practice itself becomes devalued.

Evidence to support Bourdieu's claims may be found in the fear of the dumbing down of elite art by popular culture, and in particular Hollywood, expressed by John Maynard Keynes when the Arts Council was formed (Edgar, 2012). It is also apparent more recently in criticisms of the popularisation of classical music through radio stations such as Classic FM, seen by some as debasing the work rather than developing new audiences and building capacity (Tusa, 2000).

But New Labour's interest in consensus politics meant that they drew more from the American reformist Robert Putnam, rather than the more radical views of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Putnam's (2000) argument that social capital is not finite and social integration can be improved by greater engagement in society is what New Labour adopted. Increasing one's social capital was seen as something that every citizen can aspire to and achieve through taking part in civic or cultural activities. Failure to do so therefore implies a deficit, not in the service provided but in the individual participant. In order to support the growth of social and cultural capital DCMS' aim was to increase participation and engagement from a wider socio-economic demographic (Collins, 1999) and government performance targets were created to assess how their agencies were achieving this goal (DCMS, 2001).

In academic research there was also an increasing number of studies aimed at measuring the effectiveness of policy. They attempted to address what is described as the previously limited ability of cultural studies to inform policy and practice through its emphasis on theory over evidence (Bennett, 1992). Researchers increasingly analysed cultural policy through investigation of the growing amount of grey literature generated by DCMS, the Arts Council and local authorities (Selwood, 2002) or impact studies of particular initiatives, assessing the ways in which they are meeting these same policy aims (Matarasso, 1997, García, 2004).

Not only the policy makers and academics, but the cultural organisations themselves also increasingly used the language of instrumentalism to raise their own profile through policy attachment to the more high profile areas of public discourse (Gray 2002).

But much of this research may be read as advocacy for the arts in general, justifying how they can meet social and economic aims, rather than as a comparison of different arts practices, or indeed as a comparison between arts policy and other policy interventions. Even in relation to the data the Government collected themselves there is limited evidence to support either the success of individual strategies or the justification of continued support for the same institutions.

While such data collection is claimed to increase evidence-based policy there is no evidence that it is used to redistribute funding from one area of the arts to another. Where it is applied it is used to help make the case for arts funding generally. This is particularly apparent in relation to the targets and measurements on participation in the arts.

From 2006 DCMS started collecting data on who participates in cultural activity in order to measure the success of their arm's length agencies in achieving increased engagement from different socio-economic and cultural groups (DCMS, 2006). What the Taking Part survey identifies is that, during the period studied, over a quarter of the UK population were not attending any arts events at all and those that were did so only very occasionally. Nearly half of those people who engaged in the arts only did so once or twice over the course of a year. Nor was the hoped for

engagement of a broad social constituency being realised. Participation rates remained clearly correlated with socio-economic position (the middle classes and more affluent being much more likely to participate).

Perhaps most significantly the main barriers to engagement were identified as being a psychological feeling of exclusion or lack of interest in the arts on offer, rather than the practical limitations of wanting to, but being unable to participate (Bunting et al., 2008). This failure may be related to problems with the nature of the data collection for the Taking Part survey itself, which is challenged for continuing to measure the lack of engagement in the same value laden notion of the arts that has been shown to be so problematic.

Earlier work done by Paul Willis (1990) demonstrates how people were actively engaged in their own cultural practices, rather than those prescribed by arts policy. Building on this, research under New Labour shows how engagement targets identify the problem to be addressed as people's lack of engagement in art that is defined as such by the arts sector and policy makers. The results would be different if arts policy valued the cultural activities that people do engage in, rather than trying to make them engage in those they do not (Miles, 2013).

As outlined in relation to participatory arts, levels of participation in everyday culture were still vibrant in the UK during this time, but such culture remained undervalued by policy makers. Rates of participation therefore may only be a problem when conceived through the elitist lens, as an attempt to justify funding for some practices over other practices. Policy to increase participation therefore may be argued to continue to define the problem as engagement in, rather than a critique of, the subsidised arts sector itself. This directly links to the idea of participant deficit identified in relation to New Labour's desire for individuals to build their social and cultural capital, rather than changing the social (or cultural) structures that create divisions.

DCMS responded to the findings of the Taking Part survey by setting specific cultural engagement targets, albeit as a voluntary national indicator (NI11), for local authorities for the first time in 2008 (DCMS, 2008). These included modest targets to measure the impact of cultural investment

based on increasing the numbers of those engaged in the arts by 1% per year over the next three years. But the implementation of the participation policy relied on partnership with the existing funded arts institutions. The work that was carried out was commonly positioned within marketing and education departments, seeking to increase numbers of attendances rather than the range of participants.

The short-lived Arts Nation project, for example, was planned by the Arts Council and its audience development agencies, whose members were from the same mainstream funded organisations. Although never implemented because of the change of government in 2010, this aimed to address New Labour's participation targets by marketing to generic family audiences or the middle class "dinner and show" visits, to increase regularity of attendance rather than attracting those identified as non-participants in the Taking Part survey (Arts Council England, 2011a).

Despite the three year pilot of the national indicator to increase participation and increased levels of investment within both the Arts Council and local authorities to support this, the participation figures showed no signs of changing when New Labour ended their term of office (DCMS, 2011). The focus on the very institutions towards which the data suggests there are psychological barriers, and a concentration on excellence over participation, may in fact have reinforced disengagement.

It is also important to note that there were changes in emphasis within DCMS even during New Labour's term of office. Chris Smith's successor, Tessa Jowell, who became Secretary of State for Culture in 2001, felt the need to reassert support for what she terms "complex culture" as distinct from popular culture. She reassured the mainstream arts sector that "…in seeking access, we want to make sure we are supplying access to the best" (Jowell, 2004), supporting the claims of the likes of John Tusa (2000) that democratising culture would in fact dumb it down. But there is no evidence in the literature to support this.

Evidence on social impacts, where they exist, are most easily attributed to participatory work rather than attendance as a spectator (Edgar, 2012). Active engagement also seems to create the greatest increases in wider engagement, with nearly eighty per cent of those who participate in creative

activity, also engaging in other activity according to the government's own findings (DCMS, 2006). This is supported by earlier impact studies, which find that once people of any age are engaged in one activity it increases the likelihood of them engaging in other activities (Matarasso, 1997). The challenge to increase participation therefore does not appear to be the quality of what is engaged with, as suggested by DCMS (Jowell, 2004, McMaster, 2008) but the act of engagement itself.

Despite Chris Smith's initial claims that New Labour would broaden the cultural offer and the voices engaged in the arts, in reality the cultural organisations in receipt of funds broadly remained the same throughout New Labour's term of office. Nearly a decade after they came to power eighty-five per cent of Arts Council funding was going to the same organisations (Frayling, 2005).

In 2008 the Arts Council undertook their first review of their portfolio of regularly funded organisations. This attempted to respond to New Labour's drive to increase participation, alongside DCMS' reassertion of the intrinsic value of the arts (Jowell, 2004). They promised a departure from the historic funding patterns of the past which had favoured maintaining the status quo in funding decisions. But in reality seventy six per cent of those previously in receipt of funding gained an increase in the level of funding they received and there is no evidence that the other 24% were chosen specifically to address the participation agenda (Arts Council England, 2009).

Yet, even though the review offered very modest changes, the Arts Council was faced with threats of legal action through the court. Its competence and legitimacy, in removing funding from the small number of established organisations affected, was challenged. The Arts Council's own independently commissioned report into the funding review criticises the organisation for having lost its connection to the arts sector. It calls on the Arts Council to re-engage with its key constituents to increase the legitimacy of future decision making (McIntosh, 2008). In other words it asserts that the arts organisations and not the Arts Council, let alone government, know what is best for arts policy.

This acutely brings into question where decision making lies within the arts and in whose interest. Significantly the document defines the arts sector entirely comprising of those working in the subsidised sector. Neither the wider cultural sector, including those areas of the arts that exist without public funding, nor the audiences or users of the arts, is included. While the public were increasingly being involved in decision making in other parts of the public sector, within the Arts Council at least, the attempt to broaden the range of voices involved in decision making had not only not been realised, but was steadfastly being resisted.

DCMS' own commissioned report, which was produced at the same time (McMaster, 2008) argues that the focus on broadening the definitions of culture under New Labour damaged cultural activity in the UK. But the damage seen to have been done to the arts by New Labour's earlier policies, described by both Baroness Genista McIntosh (2008) and Sir Brian McMaster (2008), is highly questionable. As is identified from the previous evidence the sector saw both increased levels of funding and continuation of funding to the same organisations. The fact that the concerns are taken seriously supports the claim that policy is still dictated by a cultural elite, demonstrated by the fact that both writers, McIntosh and McMaster, worked for the major art institutions.

The only significant changes in funding under New Labour were in relation to the additional new money available to the arts through the Lottery and local authority investment, rather than the historical Arts Council grant-in-aid. Through the Lottery project funding scheme, Grants for the Arts, fifty per cent of expenditure went to first time applicants in its first year of operation (Jackson and Devlin, 2005). This brought new artists and new art forms into the fold, some of which also brought new audiences with them. But Grants for the Arts offered short term project funding, which made up only twenty five per cent of the total Arts Council funding at its peak (reduced to ten per cent by the time New Labour left office). In contrast the regularly funded organisations were then and remained at sixty per cent when this research was completed in 2013 (Arts Council England, 2009, Arts Council England, 2013).

Furthermore within a local authority context there is no evidence that the new money brought into the arts through other public sector departments,

such as health, community development, economic regeneration, saw a reduction in investment for the existing local arts infrastructure, in favour of newer organisations. Conversely there is evidence that it in fact saw increases in many instances (NALGAO, 2010).

The changes which are so vilified by Brian McMaster (2008), John Tusa (2000) and others therefore appear as illusory as the democratisation of audiences for the arts. Furthermore, despite New Labour's policy of increasing public involvement in decision making across the public sector (DCLG, 2008), there is also little evidence that this had much impact on arts policy. The next two sections therefore examine, first the aims and issues associated with moves towards participatory decision making generally, followed by a section on the implications for the arts themselves.

2.3   The participation agenda in public policy

The crisis of legitimacy identified in the arts (Holden, 2006) is not just seen in relation to cultural policy but to the more general perception of an increased democratic deficit, both within the UK and abroad (Keaney, 2006a). The response to this under New Labour was a growing interest not only in measuring, but also increasing participation and participatory decision making, in public services in all areas delivered or funded by governments. In order to understand the movements towards participatory decision making in the arts it is important therefore first to understand the debates about such practices within the broader public policy arena.

The reduction of top-down delivery of services by central government and their provision through contract and partnership with independent agencies, as part of both the earlier Conservative government's Neo-liberalism and New Labour's Third Way, has been extensively studied. For many theorists the participation agenda is seen as part of this process, and an international trend towards what is described as a shift from government to governance (Goss, 2001), where the state has less control over decisions.

As shown, in many senses the arm's length principle within cultural policy has meant that the arts have always been delivered through an agency approach rather than direct government control. But along with the rest of the public services it is the increase in the "choice and voice agenda" (Bevir

and Rhodes, 2010 pg 210) and participation in decision making by a wider range of voices that includes not only professionals but users (Brodie et al., 2009) that is of interest in this thesis. If the aim of this is, as described, an attempt to increase the value the public places on such public services (Keaney, 2006b), it may be argued that this is more relevant to arm's length bodies funded by the state, but with less accountability than those over which the state has direct control.

The principles of participatory decision making have their roots in the work on deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1994) and co-production (Ostrom, 1996) both of which are discussed below.

Jürgen Habermas argues that policy is derived through rational choices that grow out of deliberation and debate. John Parkinson develops this to define the concept and purpose of deliberation as "public reasoning between citizens, rather than counting the votes or authority of representatives" (2006 pg 1). In other words, the deliberative democracy concept emphasises the importance of the process of discussion itself and not just the outcomes of the decisions made. This is in contrast to representative democracy, which is only concerned with the outcomes of a large-scale vote.

It is argued that one of the requirements of deliberative democracy is that "participants must be amenable to scrutinising and changing their preferences in the light of persuasion [but not manipulation, deception or coercion] from other participants" (Dryzek and List, 2003 pg 8), which may be directly related to New Labour'spolitics of consensus (Fairclough, 2000). But some argue that the "rational" within Habermas's concept may lead to the expert always outweighing other and particularly newer voices in the group. It also assumes that consensus can be reached between different parties, which ignores the plurality of interests and power relationships within decision making groups (Lukes, 2005).

Indeed in his later work Habermas himself acknowledges this problem in his discussion of the "life world" of ordinary people in contrast to the "systems world" of professional policy makers (Baxter, 1987). The systems world may mean that the range of options may be pre-determined by institutional requirements (Moini, 2011). By focusing on the supply end, of

existing organisational structures trying to engage people, it is therefore argued that it may be impossible for such processes to do more than legitimise the status quo. This in turn may prove counterproductive and in fact increase cynicism rather than engagement.

Echoes of this may clearly be seen in the limitations of New Labour's approach to participation in the arts, based on asking existing funded institutions to increase participation, rather than redistributing funds to those who already engaged a wider public. It is also argued that this may be a risk of the increased use of consultation surveys under the Coalition government, where the public are only able to respond to a limited range of options (Wilson, 2010).

But Mark Bevir and R.A.W Rhodes (2010) argue that policy is formed not by institutional structures, but through the actions of individual actors. This implies therefore that if the actors are changed in arts policy discourse, this would in turn change policy. Elinor Ostrom (1996) argues that this requires not only consultation but co-production of services between users and suppliers. She argues for co-production, based on the principles that both parties contribute equally to the process and there are real options for change, rather than pre-set agendas. It is argued that, by working in this way, not only policy may be changed, but those engaged in policy formation may also change (Lowndes, 1995). This would seem to suggest that New Labour's aims of opening up decision making and building capacity may both be achieved through such processes.

The evidence in the previous sections demonstrate that a narrow range of voices engaged in decision making in the arts both before and during New Labour's time in government (Gray, 2000, Opinion Leader, 2007). A particular question that is examined in this thesis therefore is whether changing the individual actors, who are engaged in debates on the arts, does change practice or whether power relationships and institutional structures limit this. This is tested in the analysis of the case studies discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The process for inclusion of these voices is also paramount. In contrast to Jürgen Habermas's rational choice theory, dissent, rather than consensus, is seen by some as a more effective means to challenge thinking and to

examine policy from alternative perspectives. The inclusion of other forms of discourse such as argument, rhetoric, humour, emotion, testimony or storytelling, and gossip (Markovits, 2006), rather than the rational, may not only increase levels of engagement, but equally offer a mechanism for hearing less powerful voices. This is seen as a mechanism to avoid the "path dependency" (Kay, 2005) of organisations finding it easier to replicate the ways things have always been done.

This is demonstrated through research on what happens when policy makers are made to hear dissenting voices through community activism. It is suggested that in this context there is increased evidence of change, rather than just the legitimisation of existing decisions (Dryzek and List, 2003). This research does not consider whether the same results are found when the policy makers, rather than the activists steer the process, as is the case under New Labour. It may also be at odds with New Labour's approach to consensus politics (Fairclough, 2000)

But, as highlighted, the application of participatory decision making under New Labour, draws on theories of participation from different sources. There is also evidence that the concept was successful in "gaining endorsement from both left and right of the political spectrum with its appeal to self–help and efficiency gains, as well as active citizenship and community participation" (Durose et al., 2014 pg 2). The specific forms that participatory decision making took both under New Labour and the Coalition therefore need examination.

The public value approach, of the American, Mark Moore (1995), comes from management theory and suggests strategies for public managers to increase their legitimacy and efficiency. His approach still involves decision making with experts, albeit experts drawn from a larger pool than the state institutions that had previously run the public sector. Moore does not refer to inclusion of the general public themselves. This may directly be associated with the neo-liberal approach, and the shift from government to governance.

This approach is apparent under New Labour in relation to the growth in public private partnerships, as they neither reversed nor even halted the privatisation of public services that started under Margaret Thatcher's

Conservative government who were in power from 1979. In the arts sector this approach is also seen in organisations such as the regional cultural consortium, which purported to devolve power to the regions (Gilmore, 2011). But these consortia may equally be accused of diminishing the power of local democracy, hearing from professional stakeholders rather than elected members in local authorities.

But the work on public value, under New Labour, also advanced this earlier work, promoting the importance of extending engagement beyond experts and commercial interest, to include the public or community, (Kelly et al., 2002). It is also apparent under the Coalition, in a focus on engaging people with existing expertise, rather than capacity building, in the Localism bill (DCLG, 2011b) and the promotion of community asset transfers, which were started under New Labour, but developed greatly under the Coalition (Quirk, 2007).

The community asset transfer model is not merely a partnership between the public sector and the electorate, but devolvement of power from one to the other. This is built on the principle of a return to nineteenth century models of "civil society", where the public and not the state organised local institutions. But while New Labour argued that heavy investment, both to build local capacity and to deliver such services, was still needed from the state, under the Coalition the same principle that "one cannot have a vibrant culture disseminated from the top down" (Blond, 2010 pg 9) was used to reduce state investment.

More prevalent in the New Labour approach to public value, is a partnership approach that engages professionals and those who use the services but have hitherto had a marginalised voice (Barnes et al., 2004). In a number of areas of the public sector, including the BBC and the Arts Council (Lee et al., 2011), this led to greater consultation, and at times decision making, with the wider public. The aim is articulated as bringing about "greater social justice, more effective public services and a society of self-confident citizens" (Beetham et al., 2002 p11, Brodie et al., 2009). This suggests, that the aim is that both the individuals involved and the organisational structures within which they operate, would be changed by the process, but significantly it also assumes continued state involvement and investment.

The work is heavily influenced by the Brazilian model of participatory budgeting, which may be related less to a neo-liberal approach and more to a neo-communitarian approach (Jessop, 2002), that not only includes users in the discussions, but sees community activists setting the initial agenda (Community Pride Initiative, 2003). The Brazilian model goes much further than the European model of neo-communitarianism. It grew out of community activism and its development is influenced by radical liberation theory and popular education from the likes of Augusto Boal (1979) and PauloFreire (1996). As such it contains political objectives to change the status quo in public funding, rather than just to legitimise it.

When the Brazilian model of participatory budgeting was exported internationally and became a key component of New Labour policy (Lent, 2006) it is questioned whether a bottom-up community-led model can ever be effectively implemented as a top-down approach by governments. The fact that participatory policy is increasingly being developed by Government, it is argued, is at odds with the very principles of devolving power, which require the community to take the lead (Hay, 2007).

Furthermore whether the public are involved in decision making, or take the lead, the conceptual basis for the participatory decision making agenda is also contested for making claims of democracy without addressing whose voices within the public are really represented (Cooke and Kothari, 2009). It is argued that while such processes might include numerically more voices, it could easily be hijacked by pressure groups that could dominate meetings, increasing disengagement by the less vociferous.

Within the Brazilian context there is evidence to suggest that participatory budgeting has engaged large numbers and those levels of engagement continue to increase over time. In Porto Alegre, where participatory budgeting is claimed to have originated in 1989, public involvement increased over twelve years (1989-2001) from 100 to 26,000 people, albeit still only representing 2% of the local population (Community Pride Initiative, 2003). Even with the top-down approach in England under New Labour, increases in numbers engaged have been identified where participatory budgeting initiatives are repeated in local authorities over a number of years (SQW Consulting, 2010). It is suggested therefore that

longevity of the process may improve engagement and representation. More significant than the numbers perhaps is the evidence, from the same reports, that in both Brazil and England engagement includes a broad cross section of participants from different backgrounds. The main difference is in relation to the outcomes of the different processes.

In Brazil participatory budgeting is claimed to have resulted in significant redistribution of funding away from the richer communities, who traditionally soaked up the majority of public expenditure. Instead funding has become concentrated in poorer areas (Community Pride Initiative, 2003). However, this change is less apparent in England. In England where the model is initiated by governments and local authorities rather than grassroots activity, the focus is on responding to a perceived need to make decision making processes transparent, rather than necessarily changing the decision. This is evidenced by an examination of Government reports on participatory budgeting which shows repeated reference to the aim of increasing legitimacy, and consensus, and only rare references to changing policy (Lent, 2006, DCLG, 2008).

Within such a context it may be argued that participatory budgeting was being used for what has been described as New Labour's concentration on finding a language within which to communicate policy, as an act of public relations (Fairclough, 2000), rather than allowing for the kind of disagreement identified as important. Under the Coalition government from 2010, it is argued that this was increasingly the case. Participatory decision making is said to have increasingly relied on on-line budget simulators which provide a predetermined list of choices on which the public are asked to vote, rather than encouraging more lengthy deliberative processes of debate to inform decisions (Wilson, 2010).

Jamie Peck (2009) argues that consultation on existing policy, informed by the top-down approach, will always seek legitimisation of the decision making process. He claims that policy shifts can only come about where there is involvement in the formation of the policy agenda rather than discussion on a pre-determined agenda. To this end he argues that participants need to be involved not just in decision making but also in agenda setting. This relates to templates on the ladder of participatory practices that have existed since the 1960s (Arnstein, 1969), but are still in

use today. The ladder climbs through "inform; consult; involve; collaborate; empower" (Brodie et al., 2009 pg 17), and is claimed to explain the complexity in understanding the different approaches and outcomes under New Labour, and the Coalition, as different agents, let alone political parties, have used the same language of participation in relation to every step on the ladder.

While New Labour have been criticised for providing consultation which more often sits at the inform end of the scale (Fairclough, 2000) later New Labour policy shows a desire to move along the scale. The introduction in 2008 of policy on public engagement, which included a "duty to involve" the public in decision making, required all public bodies to engage people "to discuss spending priorities, make spending proposals, and vote on them…[as well as having a] role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process" (DCLG, 2008 pg 1). This clearly demonstrates a commitment to the public not just being consulted on a pre-existing policy agenda, but engaged in the formation of that agenda, by discussing priorities and in reviewing the impact of their decisions, by monitoring outcomes. Heather Blakey (2009) argues that rather than focusing on the levels of representation, it is the process of knowledge exchange between public agents and the community that has value, promoting change.

When the policy was introduced it was made a requirement for every public body to identify how they would implement such practices. It also included an aspiration for every local authority to undertake some form of participatory budgeting by 2012. But the policy only lasted two years, as the Coalition removed the targets in their first year in office.

In that time it is argued that, as with many participatory practices, public engagement was only done as marginal rather than core activity (McKenna, 2011). This is demonstrated in the evaluation of New Labour's participatory budgeting experiment, which identifies that there is as much to separate the projects that implemented it as to unite them. But what such projects largely have in common is that they were limited to the devolving of small discretionary pots of money, for local neighbourhood initiatives, with little evidence of adoption into mainstream or district-wide budgeting (SQW Consulting, 2010), as happened in Brazil.

The participatory budgeting evaluation report examines initiatives that adopted various forms of public engagement, from longstanding resident committee groups to mass postal ballots, involving no deliberation at all. The report argues that the introduction of participatory budgeting into mainstream budgeting is necessary if it is to have significant impact. It says that implementing the strategy in piecemeal ways limits the potential that this has for transformational policy. This may perhaps explain why such processes have not had the same redistributive impact in England as the model did in Brazil.

Other researchers express concern that the inclusion of such practices in mainstream funding may in fact make it more limited in power, encouraging consultation rather than actual decision making to be delegated through these processes (Whitehead, 2012). This appears to be the case under the Coalition. Despite making claims of increasing public involvement in mainstream decision making, the Localism Bill describes a return to consultation rather than decision making (DCLG, 2011b). Delivery agents and government retain power over both the agenda and the outcomes. This reinforces the fact that the same language and terminology may be used differently by different agents. The final section of this literature review therefore explores the discourse around this specifically within the arts, to see how the arm's length delivery agents interpret New Labour's policy in this area.

2.4   Participatory decision making in the arts

As mentioned, the introduction of the "duty to involve", by New Labour in 2008, placed a requirement on all public bodies, which included both the Arts Council and local authorities, to involve the public in some form of decision making (DCLG, 2008). It was therefore inevitable that the arts would have to not only address, but also articulate, the way in which the subsidised sector engaged with the public. Participatory decision making, rather than just access and participation, therefore informed some of the thinking on the direction of policy within the arts from 2008 when the duty was introduced until 2013 when this research was completed.

But despite evidence, in the previous section, of the implementation of participatory budgeting initiatives, albeit in relation to small pots of money,

by a number of local authorities, there is limited evidence of it being trialled with specific arts budgets either within the local authorities or at the Arts Council itself (Fennell et al., 2009).

It is significant to note that the policy was instigated by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). There is nothing explicitly written by DCMS about what it should mean for the cultural sector. But the Arts Council did undertake three pieces of research around participatory decision making. These are explored below, in turn, in order to not only analyse their findings, but also to explore what implications the findings have for policy and practice.

The first and most written about research, relates to the Arts Council's work on public value which uses deliberative consultation techniques to "bring public opinion closer to the centre of Arts Council England's strategic decision making process" (Lee et al., 2011 pg 295). The public value strand is informed by John Holden's work on cultural value, which argues that "the answer to the question 'why fund culture?' should be 'because the public want it'" (Holden, 2006 pg 13).

John Holden draws an equilateral triangle to define the relationship between policy makers, practitioners and the public, and his research supports the calls for more public engagement in policy discourse identified in the previous section. This research clearly implies that such processes may help to legitimise policy decisions and build public support. But it says nothing about how such practices may be used to challenge existing practice.

Furthermore Holden's model implies that each stakeholder has an equal stake. This has been shown, in the previous section, to ignore the inequality of power relationships in this process (Lukes, 2005) and thereby runs the risk of reinforcing inequalities and disengagement. Holden also commonly equates the public with the existing audience for the arts and thereby ignores what others argue is the importance of consultation with those who are not and are never likely to engage. This is argued to be vital within the articulation of public value, in order to be able to compare the value of different actions (Kelly et al., 2002).

Emily Keaney (2006b), who was working at the Arts Council at the time the public value research was being carried out, undertook further work on the implications of public involvement. Within this she acknowledges the long-standing tension between artistic independence and public benefit discussed earlier in this chapter. She argues that while "public value does not mean that the focus should shift away from artists and arts organisations completely….artists and arts organisations are not the ultimate beneficiaries" and therefore should not be the only stakeholders involved in consultation and decision making (Keaney, 2006b pg 35). She sees public value as an opportunity to reduce the power of cultural elites and create a more equal, but crucially learning relationship between producers and consumers.

She critiques John Holden's work for offering a means to measure the value stakeholders currently have of the arts. But she argues that it misses the point about it being a learning process that may change both the value and indeed the practice of an organisation. "Holden's model does not explain what the organisation does to create value or whether the organisation might create more or different value if it did things differently" (Keaney, 2006b pg 40).

In other words, while John Holden is more interested in continuing the long tradition in arts policy of helping advocate for the sector, this is done in a way that maintains the status quo within arts policy. Emily Keaney, in contrast, sees public value having the potential to offer a process from which the arts themselves might change. It may be argued that while Keaney's employment at the Arts Council at this time meant that her research fed directly into the design of the Arts Council's first public consultation (Opinion Leader, 2007), it is Holden's advocacy style that informed how the findings from the research were used.

The public value survey undertaken demonstrates that the public consulted were largely supportive of arts funding, but they largely saw policy making as too insular and self-referential (Opinion Leader, 2007). There is a widely articulated view, in the research, that the Arts Council only heard from a limited number of people working professionally in the arts and there is support for the concept of wider public involvement in decision making, specifically for the distribution of funds.

But the public value research did not only include deliberation with a sample from the public. It also consulted both Arts Council staff and arts practitioners, the findings from which demonstrate a lack of consensus about the role of policy makers. This difference replicates the separate theoretical strands in cultural theory identified in the first section of this literature review and may demonstrate some of the barriers to the implementation of the views of the public.

About half of those interviewed from the Arts Council supported the views of the public. Most of these argued that arts policy should exist within the broader framework of social policy. As Emily Keaney argues, they saw the beneficiaries of arts policy as being the public who use these services. But an equal number argued that the arts are different from all other areas of public policy and therefore the Arts Council are there to serve the needs of the artist and not the public. For many the public value work was seen to undermine the arm's length principle and the independence of arts policy from the vagaries of public opinion.

Despite the research on public value by both Emily Keaney and John Holden, the Arts Council's public value survey is said to have only ever been done in an opportunistic manner (Lee et al., 2011), with little evidence that the Arts Council really used it as a learning tool in the way Keaney envisaged. There is little or no evidence that it changed practice but rather that it changed the language of communication within the Arts Council. The Arts Council made much use of the support there was for the principles of arts funding. There was less of an attempt to address the concerns about the current decision making processes in arts policy.

The second wave of public value research that was completed in 2012 (Arts Council England, 2012a) suggests that levels of support for funding of the arts had dropped significantly since the first survey in 2007-8. This may relate to the changed economic climate when this piece of research was undertaken, and a feeling that tough choices needed to be made as the public sector was being cut. It may also support the argument, made in the previous section, that where there is not a clear link between consultation and actual decision making disengagement and cynicism may in fact increase rather than decrease (Kelly et al., 2002). However, despite the

limited impact on practice, the findings of the first public value survey did lead to the commissioning and writing of two reports at the Arts Council.

The first report relates to the growth of participatory budgeting in local authorities (Fennell et al., 2009). Significantly, although commissioned by the Arts Council, the authors say that the brief did not come from a desire to adopt participatory budgeting in the Arts Council's own funding decisions. Instead it came from a concern about such practices being implemented within local authorities' discretionary pots of funding.

As the arts are a non-statutory area of funding, there was a belief that such practice may take away funding for the arts. The report shows such concerns to be largely unfounded. In terms of levels of funding the arts are shown, on the whole, to have done well within participatory budgeting schemes particularly "where they are seen to benefit the community directly" (Fennell et al., 2009 pg 4). However the report identifies more resistance than support for the concept of participatory budgeting from those working in the arts.

The key concerns identified include a presumption that the public are risk-averse and therefore any form of participatory decision making would limit the creative potential and experimentation of the arts. But the report states that much of the concern around risk taking and artistic independence is dispelled once an artist or arts organisation has actually engaged in the process. This finding may of course be distorted by the fact that those who engage are likely to be more predisposed to do so in the first place, which is a consideration in the analysis of the primary research for this thesis.

The report identifies that there is also a concern within the arts that such practices may reduce the role of experts in policy making. But it says there is less resistance to the concept in more complex and abstract areas, such as scientific research, where expertise is more commonly seen to be central. While it does acknowledge that the arts may be different from other areas of public policy, in the way that they can challenge and inspire, they conclude that "the notion that arts decision making is too intricate for the average citizen to engage with does not hold up and can come across as elitist and even slightly reactionary" (Fennell et al., 2009 pg 14).

The authors further suggest that the arm's length approach is becoming increasingly untenable, for arts policy, as there is increased pressure for transparency in all areas of public funding. While participatory decision making is criticised in the previous section for its lack of representativeness, or for reducing the role of the state, within the context of the Arts Council, where there is currently no democracy and limited accountability, it may be argued that participatory decision making has more of a role. Conversely it is within elected local government that to date it has had more impact.

In response to both the public value and the participatory budgeting research discussed, the second report was done, by the Arts Council's research and audience development teams (Hatzihrysidis and Bunting, 2009). The aim of this document was to summarise what the Arts Council had learnt from the public value research and the report into the implications of participatory budgeting. It also provides recommendations on how the Arts Council should report back on the duty to involve. The document outlines alternative strategies that the Arts Council might adopt in delivering its duties to engage the public and as the title of the report suggests, to widen the range of people involved in consultation and decision making within arts policy (Hatzihrysidis and Bunting, 2009).

The recommendations offer a gold, silver and bronze standard for engagement, which by definition suggests a hierarchy to the choices. While the bronze merely seeks to communicate the ways in which the Arts Council already engages people, the silver suggests greater engagement with those working in the arts. Only the gold scheme involves the public in the process. Significantly, despite the evidence from both the public value survey and the participatory budgeting report, the gold standard was not adopted within the Arts Council's own work. There were suggestions that funding might be given directly to local authorities to trial participatory budgeting specifically in art project budgets, but these were cancelled when the Coalition came to power.

The silver scheme, engaging with those that the Arts Council already fund was adopted. This model directly reflects the recommendations made by Baroness Genista McIntosh, in her review of the Arts Council's 2008 funding decisions (McIntosh, 2008). This reinforces the arguments made

earlier that the Arts Council was more willing to listen to those within the cultural elite, than government or in this case independent researchers, from outside the arts sector, let alone the public.

However, within practice there are some examples of a growing number of local authorities, arts organisations, projects and initiatives that were engaging with the public in new ways, involving different forms of participatory decision making. Analysis of such practice forms the basis of the primary research.

Although there is a limited amount of existing research in this area it is worth mentioning two high profile schemes, the Big Art Project (Channel 4, 2005) and the Castleford Project (Channel 4, 2009). Both attracted media attention and documentary film crews to follow pilots in community allocations of funds for public art commissions. The programmes attempt to consider not just the outcomes of such schemes but the processes. They offer useful insights into the potential and limitations of participatory decision making in practice, which informed the questions explored in the primary research. The Castleford Project was also selected as one of the case studies for this thesis.

The key conclusion of both programmes is that the outcomes, both in terms of artistic development and public engagement, are inextricably linked to each other. Where such processes break down it might equally be as a result of a controlling artist or a controlling community, who are unable to communicate with other stakeholders. Under such circumstances people are reluctant to deliberate and retreat to their original positions, rather than being open to new ideas. Where there is willingness of all parties to not just feed into, but also learn from the process and hear other people's opinions, the artists feel more able to express themselves and take risks. The public also feel more ownership of the outcomes.

The Arts Council were involved in both projects but it may be questioned whether, without the obligation for a response to the duty to involve, any of the research discussed in this section would have been carried out. When the Coalition came to power and dropped the duty to involve, as a requirement (DCLG, 2011b) the Arts Council immediately dropped both the investment they were putting into the cultural engagement targets and the

planned pilot in participatory budgeting. This was replaced with the Creative People and Places initiative, which was introduced in 2012 (Arts Council England, 2012b). Although this contains some of the thinking that had come from the work discussed, it significantly removes the requirement for participatory budgeting, although some public involvement in planning is retained. While this project could provide some useful insights for this thesis the timing of its introduction was too late for inclusion in this research. It offers an avenue for future research in this field.

Although the Coalition dropped the duty to involve, there is evidence of continued use of community consultation between 2010-2013 (Wilson, 2010, DCLG, 2011b). This may suggest some continuity in policy discourse between governments in the area of public engagement, even if the practices applied may differ. This suggests therefore that there is a continued relevance to this research and its aim to consider the implications of public engagement in arts policy decision making, despite the requirement for the Arts Council to report on this being removed.

Furthermore, the Coalition government's first spending review saw a thirty percentage cut in grant-in-aid to the Arts Council. This was not all passed on to the regularly funded organisations, as money was drawn from the National Lottery, which had previously only contributed to short term projects, to cover much of the shortfall (Arts Council England, 2011b). Unlike grant-in-aid, which has always allowed the Arts Council to use their own discretion over decision making, the National Lottery regulations require all money distributed from them to use an open application process. They are also increasingly calling on their distribution partners, such as the Arts Council, to involve the public in decisions on grants (National Lottery Commission, 2012). By becoming more reliant on the Lottery to fund not only project based but also core activity of the Arts Council, the influence of experts and a cultural elite may continue to be challenged.

The primary research for this thesis therefore examines views of arts policy makers about the New Labour years in particular but consideration is also given to the first years of the Coalition, to examine whether the thinking discussed in this section crossed over between governments. It also examines examples of participatory decision making in practice to consider

what implications this has for audience development and artistic practice and how transferable such models are elsewhere in the arts.

2.5   Conclusions

This chapter has explored research on some of the assumptions inherent within arts policy in the UK since the 19th century in relation to the central debates around a desire for universal creativity in contrast to a celebration of the professional artist. It considers the evidence of how such thinking has continued to influence arts policy and practice at the same time as being contested in a number of arenas, as socially and culturally Britain has embraced greater cultural pluralism. It considers how the exercise of power may have resulted in the reduction rather than the growth of more democratic models of artistic practice as developed by the arts labs and community arts movements.

The chapter has focused on research on the specifics of arts policy since the New Labour government came to power in 1997. It charts the attempt to balance the agendas of access and excellence with those of greater cultural democracy. It examines the way that the arts are described in policy discourse, in relation to the instrumental benefits they have on broader society, rather than their own intrinsic worth. It considers evidence of a gap between the policy rhetoric that seeks to democratise the arts, and the practice, which it is argued saw little change in either the arts organisations in receipt of funding or the audiences taking part in cultural activity.

It considers arguments from research about why, despite this limited change, there was retrenchment from the participation and engagement policy in the arts, in the latter part of the New Labour government. It has introduced evidence that many of the claims that the focus on increasing participation in the arts damaged practice are unfounded. It further explores whether the arm's length principle encourages the vested interests of a cultural elite within arts policy, which may be a barrier to change. This, it is argued, directly relates to similar problems identified in New Labour's Third Way. But it is equally argued that New Labour themselves drew not only from this work but also from a range of other influences.

The chapter examines these issues within the broader arena of public policy in relation to theory and practice around deliberative democracy, co-production and public value. It identifies a growing trend towards participatory decision making, which has had an impact, albeit a limited one, within arts policy. Although much of this has been top-down, government-led, based on a requirement to increase the legitimacy of public policy, the literature review highlights different models and practices and considers their implications for the arts. It concludes that the importance of greater transparency in policy decisions remains of importance, albeit differently framed and with different problems, under the new Coalition government.

The analysis of the findings of the primary research that follow fill a gap in the research in relation to differences in theory and practice under New Labour and the Coalition government. It further contributes to knowledge by providing an in-depth assessment of the thinking of policy makers and also includes an examination of three case studies, which have used participatory decision making in different contexts and using different methods. The analysis examines some of the conclusions of the literature review and considers in more detail the potential and limitations of such practice for the arts. The methods used to conduct the research and the selection of case studies are explained in detail in the next chapter.

3 Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis developed from a personal interest in research, which would allow me to reflect on my previous career in the arts. Throughout a twenty-year period working in the arts from the late 1980s, until I entered academia in 2007, my work brought me into contact with issues around ways of increasing participation and engagement in the arts. This experience informed the formulation of the research questions described in this chapter. My reading for the literature review set the theoretical frameworks that allowed me to place this reflection in the context of broader policy analysis.

3.1 Framing the research question

Like many of my peers, who left University in the 1980s, the first decade of my working life was under Conservative governments, in a period of cuts in arts funding. I felt a sense of opportunity when the New Labour government came to power in 1997. The changing policy discourse, alongside significant increases in the funding available to the arts, as outlined, offered the potential of a transformational impact on the arts sector.

In research I undertook, while working in the arts, I identified how the subsidised arts sector needed to address the perceived problems of catering only for an ageing middle class audience. I argued for a change in cultural policy to increase opportunities for new artists and new art forms (Jancovich, 1999). The New Labour discourse seemed to support this, by broadening the range of practice included within the cultural policy remit, and the types of audience who would be engaged in the arts in England.

When I left working in the arts to enter academia, following a decade of New Labour in power, I was keen to investigate what, of significance, beyond my own personal experiences, had changed. Through the literature review for this thesis I became interested in how the policy discourse and the implementation of initiatives that I had observed in practice, were informed by different theoretical positions, both historical and current.

I was selected to become a council member for Arts Council England, Yorkshire, a voluntary post advising on policy and decision making, between 2007-2012. Through my role at the Arts Council, I was aware of the internal discussions taking place about the introduction of the "duty to involve" (DCLG, 2008). I became particularly interested in the opportunities and threats posed by introducing a participatory approach to the way decisions were made, which are discussed in the literature review.

The more I looked into it, the more it became clear that while there was a body of research about participatory decision making in other areas of public policy, there was very limited academic literature on the subject in specific relation to the arts. This made it all the more interesting to me personally and justified its relevance as my area of study for this thesis.

I had been accepted as a council member from an open access application process that had required the perceived expertise that my long track record of working in the arts offered. My reading on the power of cultural elites (Griffiths et al., 2008, Lukes, 2005) made me question my own position of authority and the status of my own expertise and of those around me.

The focus for this research therefore became an examination of the relationship between the policy rhetoric and practice I experienced under New Labour, in relation to the agenda to increase participation and engagement in the arts in general and to introduce participatory decision making in particular.

The literature review identifies that the policies to increase participation, developed by DCMS at the start of the New Labour government, did not bring about the democratisation promised. My research therefore aims to gain a deeper understanding as to why this was the case. It further aims to examine whether participatory decision making provides a more useful tool for addressing the perceived "crisis of legitimacy" (Holden, 2006) in the arts, or whether it is merely another mechanism to maintain the status quo or reduce state involvement in public policy (Cooke and Kothari, 2009).

The focus for my research is New Labour policy. However claims in the literature that participatory decision making is part of a broader agenda, and a change in government while this research was being conducted,

made it relevant to look beyond New Labour. The research therefore also considers if there is policy continuity under the new Conservative Liberal-Democrat Coalition government that came to power in 2010.

The central question this research explores, is whether participatory decision making can not only act as a tool for advocacy within the arts, but whether it can in fact become a learning mechanism for artists as well as audiences as suggested by Emily Keaney (2006b). It further examines what the implications of this are for the public, artists and arts organisations and policy makers.

3.2   Research rationale

Cultural policy analysis exists as a sub category of cultural studies within the humanities, as well as being a part of broader public policy research within sociology and political science. As such this research is necessarily interdisciplinary. Within both public and cultural policy there are two very different trends. The critical stance of academics such as Jim McGuigan (2005), examines the limitations in policy making and its relation to wider socio-economic forces. Such an approach is discussed, in relation to the link between participation policy and neo-liberalism. But such work is criticised for taking an over deterministic view of cultural policy that does not consider local variations or the specifics of how policy works in practice.

Instead Peter John (1998) suggests a managerial approach in research, in relation to public policy more generally which examines the impacts of different modes of implementation, often following a positivist framework. In cultural policy this is seen in the growth in impact studies discussed in the literature review. It is argued that this has resulted in a growing influence of the language of management, that ignores the underlying ideologies in policy formation and reduces our understanding of the different interests at play (Fairclough, 2000). This aim in this thesis is to bridge this gap in policy studies.

It undertakes a critical analysis of policy rhetoric around participation and engagement in general and participatory decision making in particular. The aim of this is to consider the ideologies underlying government policy and the way that these were interpreted and implemented by arts policy

makers, in order to understand some of the levers and barriers to change. The findings demonstrate that ideologies were not universally shared either within government, or between government and its delivery agents. This research therefore undertakes a more managerial analysis of different case studies, which explores specific examples of participatory decision making in practice. The aim of this is to understand the processes of decision making and how this affects the outcomes of such initiatives.

In order to achieve both these objectives it has been necessary to use an inductive research approach, which is underpinned by theory but also seeks to describe and reflect on what specific policy initiatives say they will do, and what, how and why is actually implemented (Alasuutari, 1995). This involved an analysis both of the individual background of the people interviewed as well as their role within the organisation or project within which they were operating during the period under review.

In response to the claims in the literature review of the overarching power of a cultural elite (Griffiths et al., 2008) I examined whether those involved in arts policy, in my sample, did represent a narrow range of self-interest. In addition I examined whether there were shared values between different agents and if not whether there were hierarchies at work within policy formation, which influenced whose voices were heard.

Secondly, I considered the mechanisms that have been used in the implementation of participatory practices. The aim of this is to assess how consistently concepts were interpreted in practice, at the same time as testing some of the assumptions about such practices, identified in the literature review. In addition this also informed the conclusions and recommendations I make at the end of the thesis. Finally the analysis considered the outcomes of the participatory process, both in terms of who engaged in the processes and how this affected artistic practice. The aim here is to consider the extent to which different practices achieve the same or different outcomes.

3.3   Theoretical frameworks

To develop a context for analysing the findings from this research, theoretical frameworks explored in the literature review were used. In particular this research draws on theories on the exercise of power.

In the literature review some theorists identify the power of institutional frameworks in setting agendas for decision making and the structural defects within arts policy which may constrain how decisions are made and limit change (Gray, 2000). The focus on the context within which policy is formed and implemented therefore may help develop an understanding of the disparity between discourse and action. But such theory is accused of ignoring situational particularities (Giddens, 2000). Anthony Giddens argues that individuals make structures as well as structures influencing people, and the attitudes and actions of individuals are equally valid objects of study. This study therefore analyses the individual subjects identified for study by the sampling methods outlined below and the institutional context within which they were operating simultaneously in order to examine the extent that the individual influences the organisation or vice versa.

Participatory decision making has also been shown to take as its starting point the belief that changing the people involved in the decisions would change the decisions and the people themselves would also be changed through the process (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010, Lowndes, 1995). This assumes that people's voices are not just heard, but that they are able to assert their interests over those of others, and learn through the process. This is strongly contested by other theorists who argue that the cultural elite continue to dominate, even when newer voices are brought into organisations (Lukes, 2005, Griffiths et al., 2008).

This research examines the extent to which the views of different units of study had equal status in the decision making process. This aims to assess whether alternative viewpoints can change the discourse and practice or whether they merely become subsumed into existing attitudes and actions. Consideration is also given to the extent to which actors believed they had changed their views, through the process of involvement in policy making, and whether as suggested in the literature there was less resistance to such a process once people had engaged (Fennell et al., 2009).

The use of these theoretical frameworks supports the interpretative approach and allows this thesis to move beyond a review of how written policy is or isn't implemented. Instead it helps develop an understanding of how the agendas for decisions are set and what areas participatory

decision making is deemed appropriate for and which areas it is not. This allows for analysis of the potential and limitations of participatory power.

By considering the role of individual agents in the decision making process, alongside the institutions within which they operate, this research project does not stake a claim to making these contexts generalisable. Neither is it able to assess the long-term impact of the processes on the individuals involved. Instead it looks at the attitudes of individuals involved in decision making, and what affect this has both on their power to influence decisions and on their willingness to be influenced by others.

3.4   Data collection

The research for this thesis started in 2009, in what turned out to be the last months of the New Labour government. This meant that all primary data was collected when the Coalition government were in power. As the focus for the research is on New Labour policy it was therefore a priority to collect data before the policy context changed too much. To this end most of the data was collected in 2010-11. A small amount of additional data was captured in 2012-13 to assess whether there were significant changes introduced by the Coalition while the thesis was being written.

In order to undertake this research in the multi-disciplinary way described, multiple methods were used in the analysis. Pre-existing quantitative datasets, from the Taking Part survey (DCMS, 2011) were used, which have been discussed in the literature review, to examine the evidence for levels of participation and engagement on which much of New Labour arts policy was based, and which continued to be collected under the Coalition. Quantitative data on funding levels, from annual reports of Arts Council England and from the National Association of Local Government Arts Officers, were also examined. The aim of this is specifically to compare the policy discourse with the actual levels of funding provision.

In addition there is a review of grey literature produced by DCMS, the Arts Council, a select number of local authorities and the case studies. This includes a large amount of publicly available documentation in the form of policy statements and reports. I was also granted access to a number of internally produced reports, including the unpublished Arts Council report

on participatory decision making which is discussed in the literature review and a number of evaluations produced for the case studies I selected.

I also reviewed a limited number of applications from arts organisations who applied for Arts Council England's new national portfolio funding in 2010. I originally asked the Arts Council for access to all applications made in the North of England (including the North East, the North West and Yorkshire), as this is the sample area for all units of study. I chose this area because in government surveys the North of England has the lowest levels of arts engagement in the country (DCMS, 2011) but high levels of engagement in voluntary arts and further education (Dodd et al., 2008). Furthermore it felt useful to compare findings where a similar policy context was operating and where my personal knowledge of the sector in the North, could be utilised. The aim is to assess the importance given to the participation agenda by the applicant and the Arts Council.

The Arts Council was unwilling to provide the full sample requested, and instead only offered access to applications made in Yorkshire. They also limited the information provided to the comments made by applicants and Arts Council staff addressing "goal 2", which addresses how the organisation will ensure "more people experience and [are] inspired by the arts [putting] the arts are at the centre of people's lives – [so that] more people are involved in arts in their communities and are enriched and inspired by arts experiences" (Arts Council England, 2010 pg 7). The name of the organisation and the outcome of the application were also removed.

This decision itself demonstrates the lack of transparency in the Arts Council's decision making processes. Furthermore it demonstrates a shift within government in relation to the Freedom of Information Act (Information Commissioner, 2000). While the act, brought in under New Labour in 2000, granted public access to all data collected by public bodies, an amendment by the Coalition government allowing agents to deny access to anything defined as commercially sensitive was used to restrict my access. This, it is argued, suggests both a practical and ideological shift in emphasis between the two governments in relation to public involvement and transparency.

The restrictions in the data provided, limited its usefulness.   No comparisons could be undertaken to assess whether there were similarities or differences of approach between different regions.   Furthermore the fact that applications could not be analysed according to their success rate prevented an assessment of whether different discourses had different outcomes.   However the data still proved useful as it provided an insight into how many arts organisations prioritised goal 2.   It was also possible to assess the variety of interpretations of the participation agenda by different applicants, and from this the extent to which there was a shared understanding of the language of the participation goal.   Furthermore by examining the Arts Council's response to the answers, it also allowed me to consider whether the Arts Council comments suggested a priority for one definition, over another.

A survey questionnaire was sent to a selection of twenty local authority arts officers in the North of England in 2011, just after the Coalition government completed their first year in office (Appendix 1).   The sample was chosen from those who had identified themselves as having an interest in participation by adopting the national cultural indicator under New Labour, the largest number of whom nationally were in the North (DCMS, 2008).

It is recognised that questionnaires do not provide the depth of material of the one to one interviews, but if constructed well they can provide a useful tool for more general comparisons (Long, 2007).   The aim of the survey questionnaire of local authorities is to evaluate the level of local distinctiveness in policy making, by considering the similarities and differences between the strategies of different local authorities.

The sample represented councils under different political leadership: six came from Labour-controlled, three Conservative-controlled and two Conservative minority councils.   This allowed some assessment of whether there were differences between those under the same political leadership locally as well as nationally, and those who were not.   The survey also allowed some consideration of how widespread participatory decision making was in the arts, and this informed the selection of case studies.

The survey questionnaire consisted of five short questions, giving a yes/no option for easy quantitative comparison, along with a free text box to collect

more detailed and individualised responses. In addition, local authority representatives were asked to send any relevant grey literature, such as cultural policy or strategy documents.

The first question asked the local authority to describe their approach to the national indicator on cultural engagement as a council target. The second and third questions asked the arts officer within the local authority to reflect personally on the impact of the New Labour government on cultural policy in general and in relation to public engagement in particular. Question four addressed changes that were seen when the Coalition government first came to power in 2010. Question five asked the respondent to reflect on what changes they expected to see and what they would like to see over the life of the new government.

The surveys were distributed by email, and followed up with a phone call giving respondents the opportunity to answer the questions over the phone where necessary. Over the telephone I restricted the conversation to the same structured questionnaire, reading out the set questions and writing responses verbatim, rather than broadening the scope to that of a semi-structured interview. The reason for limiting responses in this way was in order to ensure that responses were easily comparable, which was the purpose of this stage of the research.

I had hoped to get responses from the whole sample of twenty local authorities, but in practice only eleven surveys were completed and a further three phoned to say that they were not permitted to respond, due to departmental rules. The other six proved impossible to contact due to the timing coinciding with local authority restructuring. The data that was collected helped assess the impact of the legislative changes through the duty to involve, financial changes through government funding levels, and the way discourse was shared or not across local authorities and between New Labour and the new Coalition government. In addition, the data provided a snapshot of how widespread thinking or action around participatory decision making was within the cultural sector in the North of England during the period of research. This was compared with the views of those working in the Arts Council through the interviews.

The final and by far the largest area of primary research undertaken involved in-depth one to one interviews with a range of policy makers, arts organisations, individual artists and community participants involved in the selected projects. Mark Bevir and R.A.W Rhodes (2003) recommend that interviews should involve a range of actors, if the researcher wants to be able to assess similarities and differences in response, rather than treating each interview individually.

However, Pertti Alasuutari (1995) urges caution when comparing findings from a small sample. He says that a sample of similar people is useful for comparing differences of opinion but he argues that a sample of many different types of people is more useful in finding similarities. The sample selected attempted to address this concern by ensuring that while covering a range of different types of people, more than one person was selected in each category to ensure that conclusions were not drawn purely on the basis of what might be peculiar to one person. As a result a total of over sixty interviews were conducted as can be seen in Appendix 2.

The sample included national policy makers from central government and Arts Council England. Local authorities were not only represented by the survey but an interview was held with the administrator of the National Association of Local Government Arts Officers and with local authority staff in each of the case studies.   Interviews were chosen over the more discursive form of focus groups, out of a desire to identify subtle differences between approaches and definitions which may have become obscured by the tendency for focus groups to move towards consensus or become dominated by one voice (Long, 2007). While focus groups of staff teams within organisations under review may have allowed me to increase the sample size, they may have reinforced existing hierarchies, which could be more easily broken down in a series of one to one interviews, where a more open and honest response may be given.

All New Labour's former secretaries of state for culture and the Coalition's secretary at the time of the research were also contacted. But the only one available to be interviewed was Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture from 1997-2001, and author of the New Labour cultural manifesto discussed in the literature review (Smith, 1998). One civil servant from DCMS and two consultants from DCMS and DCLG respectively were

interviewed. Nine members of staff were selected from Arts Council England, which included four participation and engagement officers.

In addition six academics or arts consultants and three directors of Arts Council funded audience development agencies (although they lost their funding during the period of this research) were also interviewed. These were selected as people with advisory roles to the arts policy sector, in order to gain an external perspective on policy making and to consider the external influences on policy formulation. They included Baroness Genista McIntosh who wrote the review of the Arts Council's 2008 and 2010 funding reviews discussed in the literature review (McIntosh, 2008, McIntosh, 2011). The responses from all of these subjects are triangulated in order to develop an understanding of the extent to which policy priorities were shared between different individuals and agencies.

The interviewees were identified through purposive sampling (Silverman, 2006), to ensure that they included staff at different levels in the arts policy hierarchy from advisers to senior management to officer level. In addition job titles of those working at the Arts Council were considered, to gain a balance of participation and engagement officers and those with a more general art form focus. The aim is to identify the extent to which the participation and engagement agenda extended beyond those for whom it was a specified function in their job description and how much it was shared across the organisation.

I chose not to use random or snowball sampling based on recommendations as it is argued that the former may not provide the full range of perspectives and the latter may provide biased results in terms of only identifying those with an existing interest in this area of study (Silverman, 2006). This would have limited the capacity to assess how much consensus or variance existed between the views of different people involved in arts policy. Furthermore it was important to identify the role of hierarchy in policy implementation, and gain an understanding of how much policy was "imposed" from on high or shared across all parties.

All these interviews helped me gain an understanding of the way different policy makers defined the participation agenda, the priority it was given in policy implementation and the issues that affected its realisation. In

addition they proved useful in determining whose voices held most sway within national arts policy.

Three case studies were also selected of projects that involved some participatory decision making, to not only consider the views of arts policy makers but also to examine artistic and community practice.

As stated in the literature review approaches to participatory decision making have different aims. The asset transfer model was described as devolving power and reducing state involvement in institutions (Quirk, 2007, Blond, 2010) while both the public value work (Keaney, 2006b) and participatory budgeting (Fennell et al., 2009) assume shared power between professionals and public, that requires ongoing state investment. The case studies therefore sought to consider this range of approaches.

3.5 Case studies

As mentioned in the literature review, when this research started there were plans within the Arts Council to pilot some participatory budgeting, which it was at first intended would be used as case studies. However this did not materialise. As a result the selection of case studies was restricted by the limited number of examples of participatory decision making operating within individual organisations. The case studies were therefore chosen from those whom policy makers commonly cited as models of success in the interviews and local authority surveys. An analysis of what success meant to these different agents was explored, alongside consideration of how transferable such practices might be elsewhere in the arts sector.

A case study is defined as a detailed examination of a particular subject, in this instance arts projects, which takes account of a number of perspectives (Yin, 2009). In each of my case studies, I undertook a review of the existing literature on the projects, which included project plans and evaluations. I also recognised the need to look outside of those directly engaged in the projects in order to gain an holistic view (Long, 2007). Thus I interviewed a range of people including not only those involved in the project, but also people involved in other arts organisations in each of the locations under analysis. This included those who did not have a direct connection with the project. A full list of interviewees can be found at

Appendix 2. By triangulating the findings from different data I am able to examine each project in much greater detail.

While case studies are commonly criticised for providing too subjective an account of the topic, they have been argued to be of particular value when studying decision making and individual programmes of activity (Durose et al., 2014), as it allows the same subject to be studied from multiple perspectives and allows individual perspectives to be heard (Yin, 2009). I do not lay claim to the findings from the case studies offering proof of the cause and effect of participatory decision making in these projects, nor do I claim them as models that can be generalised to all practice. But the case study method allows this research to move beyond an analysis of policy rhetoric or quantitative facts and figures about the impact of such policy. It provides a narrative of policy in action, with some consideration of how such practices may be transferable in other contexts. It also allows me to compare perceptions of those who have actively engaged in participatory decision making and those who have not.

The case studies selected were chosen not for their similarity to each other but for their difference. *Contact* in Manchester is an initiative led by an arts organisation, for which participatory decision making was embedded within their artistic vision before it became an explicit feature of cultural policy. *The Castleford Project* in contrast was chosen as an example of a New Labour local authority-led initiative, which was directly responding to the New Labour policy agenda to increase public engagement. *Hebden Bridge Town Hall and Picture House* was selected as an example of an initiative responding to changing priorities under the Coalition government and in particular in relation to the emerging localism agenda. This initiative had grown from community groups within the town attempting to safeguard what were seen as public assets at a time of government cuts in funding.

At Contact a total of fifteen people were interviewed. These included the artistic director who initiated the participatory practices and his successor, in order to gain an understanding of how consistently the approach had been applied by the leadership. Members of staff and users who engaged in participatory decision making processes were also interviewed. These included the manager and four members of Contact's participatory programming team, Recon. Recon provides a complete sample of the

participatory group who most directly influenced the choice of artistic product seen on stage.

The theatre also supplied their current business plan (Contact, 2011). Interviewees also included the venue's main funding partners, the Arts Council and Manchester City Council. A number of artists and arts organisations around Manchester were also interviewed to understand external perceptions of the building. Finally, as Contact was regularly cited in the interviews with policy makers and arts consultants nationally, their perspectives on Contact were also taken into account in the analysis for this chapter.

Fifteen people were also interviewed from Castleford. These included two local authority officers with responsibility for the council's engagement strategy, one of whom worked on the project. It included the Arts Council representative who sat on the steering committee for the project, two artists who worked on it and three who did not, and seven local people with varying levels of involvement in the project.

In addition grey literature was examined. This included the original business case made for the project (ABROS, 2003) and the council's long term regeneration strategy, which is said to have informed its development (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council et al., 2005). The four part television documentary (Channel 4, 2009) was also viewed, along with the two evaluations of the project (Lewis, 2009, Young Foundation, 2009). Finally the council's engagement strategy for the whole of the district was examined (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, 2010), as this was said to have been informed by learning from the project.

Finally in Hebden Bridge interviews were conducted with twelve people. Six of these were with local people who had joined an online forum to discuss the future of the town's assets. Some also worked for local arts organisations in Hebden Bridge itself, and therefore offered a perspective on how the initiative was having an impact on the wider arts sector.

The Leader from Calderdale Council, one local authority officer, the Town Clerk for Hebden Royd Town Council, and the chair of the Community Association were also interviewed. In addition two consultants were

interviewed. One had specialist knowledge of asset transfer and was a board member of Locality, an organisation set up in 2011, under the Coalition, to advice on asset transfers. The second consultant had specialist knowledge of the arts, and advised the Picture House on programming and management.

All those interviewed in Hebden Bridge said they lived in Calderdale and so also defined themselves as community members, although not all were from Hebden Bridge. Two had been involved in participatory decision making initiatives in other parts of the public sector.

Town consultation meetings in Hebden Bridge were also attended and observational notes taken and used for this analysis. Literature provided by the Community Association was also examined, this included the applications made to Calderdale for the two asset transfers (Hebden Royd Town Council and Hebden Bridge Community Association, 2011, Bibby, n.d.) and the approval minutes for the Picture House from Calderdale Council (Calderdale Council, 2012). The town partnership's two action plans, created at the start and end of this research period (Hebden Royd Partnership, 2005, Hebden Bridge Partnership, 2013) and two policy documents from the Community association (Hebden Bridge Community Assocation, n.d.-a, Hebden Bridge Community Assocation, n.d.-b) were also reviewed.

In each of the three case studies the ideologies underpinning the projects are explored alongside the different interests of those being interviewed and the relationships between different constituents.

3.6   Limitations

Scheduling became a difficulty in carrying out this research, owing to the change of government and a speedy change in priorities and personnel. The interviews and surveys had to be carried out at an early stage of the research process while people were still in post and while New Labour's policy was still a focus. Within local authorities it proved difficult to collect as many survey responses as planned, due to restructuring of departments in the first year of the Coalition government.

The backdrop of a changing policy landscape provided some advantages as participants were reflective about New Labour policy and how the change of government affected policy priorities, but it also posed challenges of assessing the potential of New Labour policy in action. In particular the "duty to involve" (DCLG, 2008) which initially provided the legislative driver towards participatory decision making was removed within a year of the Coalition government being in power. This made it impossible to assess what impact the legislation might have had longer term.

At the same time it did allow for an examination of the differing views on policy directives, as distinct from policy guidelines. It also allowed for greater consideration of the extent to which participation policy was a feature of New Labour or wider trends, as suggested by some in the literature review. This would have been less possible without the change of government.

It is recognised that the selection of case studies also imposes some limitations, as the projects were at different stages of development. While participatory decision making at Contact had been a policy over more than ten years, the Castleford Project had been completed by the start of my research, and Hebden Bridge was an initiative in progress when the interviews were conducted. This produced challenges in comparing the findings; at the same time the particularities and differences also add depth to the analysis.

It was initially planned that the research would include participant observation to gain deeper involvement in the projects under consideration but this proved impossible, except in the case of Hebden Bridge, because of the different stages of the programmes. While it is recognised that this might have reduced my capacity to observe processes, this also had the benefit of preventing me from being too closely associated with the projects. Such association might have created social desirability bias (Nederhof, 1985) which can arise where respondents recognise the researcher. Such situations may reduce some of the more critical commentary from participants, making them more likely to answer in the way they think I want them to.

This is also a concern with the interviews. All respondents knew they were being interviewed for research on participation policy. This may therefore have affected their answers, making them prone to overemphasise the importance they placed on this agenda. This is taken into account throughout the analysis of the data.

It is also noted that participants at Contact were less critical of the organisation than in the other case studies. This may demonstrate the amount of ownership those involved have in the building, although it would not be possible to identify from this research whether this is because of the success of the process or because the selection process only encourages likeminded individuals to become involved. Participants were introduced to me via members of staff and were also younger than me, unlike the other case studies. As a result the interviewees at Contact might have seen me as more of an authority figure than a peer and this may have made those interviewed cautious in their responses.

In order to address some of the challenges outlined in relation to the interviewer/interviewee relationship, the interview process aimed to create an informal discursive atmosphere where the interviewees felt engaged in debate rather than interrogated (Long, 2007).

3.7   Structure of the interviews

The structure for the interviews was consistent across all categories of those interviewed, including policy makers and case studies. A standard question format was used to provide prompts but also allow additional questions and the chance to tease out complex answers rather than standard responses (Arskey and Knight, 1999). The similarities in topic areas allowed me to compare broad areas of consensus along with personal difference.

The structure was explained at the beginning of the interview, to allow the respondents to understand why questions were being asked. All interviewees were then asked questions about their personal background and values, their first arts experiences, their current level of engagement, and the role they saw art playing both in their lives and the lives of others. This served two functions. The first helped to put the interviewee at their

ease; talking about themselves ensured that they all had something to say at the start. The second function was to test the core values of the interviewee in relation to the arts and the importance they placed on the participation and engagement agenda. The aim of this is to assess whether there are correlations between the personal background and their values, which might help determine whether they can be classified as part of a pre-existing cultural elite (Griffiths et al., 2008).

They were all asked to define what they understood by key terminology, such as "art" and "participation". This allowed the responses to be compared and contrasted in order to analyse whether there were shared understandings of the terminology. In addition it allowed for analysis of whether the correlations and differences between attitudes of people related to either their personal background or the organisational structure within which they operated. Those who worked for an arts organisation were also asked to define their role in that organisation and consider how much they believed that their responses represented the views of the team or their own personal opinion.

The second section of the interview focused more specifically on cultural policy, asking people to identify what they believed the key features of policy to have been under New Labour. They were also asked about the extent to which they believed these were distinct from what came before and after. Interviewees were then asked to reflect on the effectiveness of the policy and the relationship between stated aims and what practically had been done to increase participation and engagement. The aim of this is both to determine the importance people placed on party politics, and also the extent to which there appeared to be policy continuity between New Labour and the Coalition.

They were also asked to comment on how much they agreed with the findings and interpretations of the Taking Part survey (DCMS, 2011) and the public value research (Bunting, 2007, Opinion Leader, 2007) about levels of engagement and perceptions of elitism in the arts, and whether they agreed with current priorities on participation and engagement.

The third section of the interviews specifically addressed the area of participatory decision making, asking people to talk about their personal

experiences as well as identify the pros and cons of such a process for the arts. The level of detail in this section was determined by the interviewees' own experiences. Where they were engaged in one of the case studies they were encouraged to go into a lot of detail about the processes they were involved in. Where they did not have direct experience of participatory decision making, the focus was more on their perceptions of what role it might play and the risks attached to it.

Finally, as with the local authorities surveyed, they were asked to reflect on what they thought would happen in the next five to ten years and what they hoped would happen. This allowed them to offer both political and personal perspectives on the future. It allowed me to analyse the differences between ideals and practicalities. It also offered a useful commentary on the perceived relevance of this research under the Coalition government.

A conversational style was encouraged throughout. This gave respondents a sense of control, and time within the interview to reflect or change their mind (Ruane, 2005). It also allowed me to probe and interrogate meanings behind claims, thereby making the interviewees' implicit assumptions explicit (Arskey and Knight, 1999). In this way I was able to gently challenge respondents who diverted from the subject or contradicted themselves at different points of this interview.

It is recognised that an informal conversational style may lead the interviewer to ask leading questions, directing the respondents rather than merely probing their responses. Therefore I endeavoured to interject as rarely as possible. When I had to do so I restricted myself to questions of clarification if they contradicted themselves or I was unclear of their meaning. I also pushed them when I wanted to challenge or make explicit underlying assumptions based on what they seemed to take for granted or ignore. In such cases I offered them views expressed in the literature, for comment, thereby avoiding my own directly expressed personal opinions.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed to avoid "specific listening" on my part (Hill, 2006), to ensure that the analysis is based on definitions provided by respondents and not by my own assumptions or recollections.

3.8   Data analysis

When analysing the data collected I recognise that my own background as a practitioner and policy maker may influence the thinking and underlying assumptions I bring to the subject. It is therefore acknowledged that it is important to reflect on theories outlined in the literature review rather than my own assumptions (Alasuutari, 1995). This was also useful in shaping the questions for primary data collection and probing during interviews. The mixed methods approach to data collection, combining published text, unpublished applications, survey data and interviews also aims to increase the reliability of the data, by allowing the triangulation of findings from different sources at the analysis stage.

To this end the survey data collected from local authorities and the applications from the arts organisations were analysed to gain an overview of the level of importance the agendas investigated in this research had in the cultural sector. These findings were used in conjunction with the findings from the literature review and analysis of the grey literature, in order to identify key themes and terminology used in practice, to aid the analysis of the more detailed qualitative responses from the interviews.

These themes included questions of power as identified in the theoretical frameworks, but in addition themes were identified in terms of the process of participatory decision making. These were used as the first stage in creating codes to interrogate the data more closely and cross reference findings in a number of ways (Robson, 1993).   Some of these themes were:

- questions of language and definition and how much these were shared between those surveyed or interviewed
- the personal background of the person interviewed and the extent to which they felt able to influence policy
- core values in relation to both defining the arts and the role of public subsidy
- attitudes to the decision making process, and the perceived opportunities and threats, including the role of experts and risk taking

- the relationship between processes and outcomes, including the length of the participatory process and the extent of knowledge exchange
- the extent to which participatory practices aimed for consensus or allowed dissent and the level of decision making involved
- the influence of the individual and the organisational structure and on the wider arts sector
- changing ideologies and policies in the shift from New Labour to the Coalition government

At the same time the coding process allowed for minority views to be captured. Speculative analysis continued through the data collection phase, by way of taking notes on other emerging themes and relationships and building on the codes. This allowed the analysis to be structured and comparative at the same time as allowing new themes to emerge throughout.

Once all the data was collected the respondents were also grouped according to their category for interview (e.g. Arts Council staff, local authority officer, artist, arts organisation, and participant) and according to their background (level of arts participation from childhood, any arts training, and level of arts engagement currently). This allowed for some comparison between theoretical positions and practical experience.

To make the coding and grouping process manageable all qualitative data was entered into Nvivo research software, which is specifically designed to support qualitative research analysis (QSR International, nd). This allows for more precise and rigorous analysis of the similarities and differences of responses to the coded themes (appendix 3). It proved invaluable in developing a deeper understanding of how the core themes may be interpreted differently by different respondents, as it was easier to examine relationships between findings and similarities or differences between the different data sources and between different survey and interview subjects. It was also easier to analyse how widely issues were shared by capturing data under codes.

This was particularly relevant when looking at terminology such as the use of the word participation, which meant very different things to different

people. For example each of the four participation and engagement officers at the Arts Council provided a different definition for this term. It was important therefore to cross reference codes to see how the way people defined core concepts related to their role, their experience or their personal value system.

3.9   Ethics

Not all of the written documents used for this research were public documents. The Arts Council's *Wider Range of Voices* report (Hatzihrysidis and Bunting, 2009) and the funding applications supplied were both unpublished. The case studies also provided internal reports. However, the data was all provided with full knowledge of how it would be used. There was the opportunity to remove any names or commercially sensitive data from these documents before I was given them. Although in the case of the Arts Council applications for funding this did limit the analysis of the data that was undertaken, it also limited the ethical issues in the use of the written data.

Ethical issues were more of an issue in the interviews, in relation to my background working in the arts sector and my role as an Arts Council board member while carrying out the data collection. This was specifically discussed both with the Arts Council and my research supervisory team before conducting any interviews.

Although my role gave me access to the internal documents and discussions, and was a practical aid in gaining access to interviewees there was some concern that it might influence the way people answered the questions, making people feel pressured to be involved in the research lest they jeopardise future applications or being wary of what they said in case it was fed back to the Arts Council (Hill, 2006).

It was therefore agreed that my case studies should all be organisations I had had no direct involvement with in my role at the Arts Council. I also endeavoured to never directly use my position at the Arts Council as a way of gaining access to the interviewees, except where pre-existing personal contact with the interviewee inevitably had an influence. In such cases I explained clearly at the start of the interview that the research was not

being done on behalf of the Arts Council and that it would include a critical analysis of policy.

I was also aware of the need to create a safe environment for the respondents, both physically and psychologically (Ruane, 2005). To this end all interviews were held at the location of the respondent's choosing, usually their place of work or at home. In exceptional circumstances some interviews were conducted by telephone, where the participant did not feel able to meet in person.

To put the respondents at ease at the start of each interview I explained the purpose of the interview and its structure and gave the respondent the opportunity to ask any questions. The respondents were then given an information sheet outlining the project and providing my contact details if they had any questions or concerns after the interview. They were asked to sign a form specifying if they wished to remain anonymous or whether they were happy for their name, job title, or both to be used in the research. Finally they were asked whether they wanted to see a copy of the transcript before it is used. If they ticked "yes" to this a copy of the full transcript was sent to them with an email asking them to say if there were any changes that they wished to make before the analysis began.

The signed consent forms served both to reassure the interviewee and to encourage them to be relaxed in the interview, with the option of retracting specific statements later if they so wished. This worked well as a method to encourage openness but it posed risks for my analysis, as the valuable evidence gained might have become unusable at a later stage. However, although most participants did tick the box to see a transcript, only a very small number sent revisions. In the event nobody asked for their interview to be removed from the analysis but I was asked to anonymise some.

For consistency all names have been removed from the analysis, except where naming the individual is crucial to the point being made, and they have given consent. This applies to Chris Smith, as former Secretary of State for Culture and the two Artistic Directors of Contact whose approaches are directly compared. All Arts Council and local authority staff are anonymised, as are all public participants.

3.10   Conclusions

The purpose in the research analysis discussed in the following chapters is to examine the levers and barriers to policy implementation, in relation to New Labour's aims to increase participation in general and the growth in participatory decision making in particular. The aim is to see how practice is shaped by its context and by the individuals taking part.

The research I have undertaken investigates this through analysis of the agents involved in both policy and practice. It explores the organisational structures within which such agents operate, alongside an examination of the attitudes and beliefs of individuals surveyed, in order to assess the extent to which individuals create organisational structures or vice versa.

The case studies do not seek to create models of best practice or suggest that outcomes are replicable in other situations, but rather to examine different approaches and outcomes. That said some conclusions are drawn from the data about how effective participants perceive the processes they have worked through to be. Consideration is also given to whether people believe their values or skills have been changed by the process in order to examine the claims in the literature review that such processes build capacity (Lowndes, 1995).

The research focuses on analysing the similarities and differences between discourses from different individuals, and examines practice to understand the delivery processes of participatory decision making initiatives. It takes an interdisciplinary approach, informed by work from cultural theory on the role of the arts in society, from sociology on cultural democracy and from political science on power and decision making.

Mixed methods were used in data collection and analysis, including a study of grey literature from policy makers and the case studies, to examine the specific interpretation of the areas under investigation by different parties and shifts in thinking during the period of study. Surveys and interviews were also analysed, with a range of people from different perspectives both with a direct and indirect interest in the subject area.   The data was analysed by identifying core themes and triangulation of different data sets.

This included a qualitative narrative analysis of the development of case studies,from which it was possible to tease out specific issues.

A challenge throughout the research process was my role as an external and independent researcher, who retained some elements of insider status because of my past work in the arts and my continuing involvement with the Arts Council. As a result I had to wrestle with the implications for what I was doing for the creation of knowledge.

There is no doubt that this provided benefits in terms of access and ease of relationships with those interviewed. I was also aware not only from my reading of literature but also from my own experience of some of the questions that needed to be asked in interview and felt confident in probing and interpreting what people said. At the same time throughout I was mindful of the extent to which social desirability bias (Nederhof, 1985) may have influenced respondents who already knew me or my background. The following chapters present the findings from my research, first from the policy makers and then from the three case studies in turn, before a chapter synthesising findings from all four. These are used to draw conclusions for this thesis in the final chapter.

4. Analysis of findings from policy makers and commentators

As outlined in the methodology this first chapter of analysis of empirical research includes data captured from interviews with policy makers and commentators, the survey of local authorities and the Arts Council applications for funding. The recurring themes identified in the literature review were directly addressed through the choice of research questions directed at the interviewees, in order to assess the extent to which issues were shared or understood by those working in the policy arena.

The analysis is divided into four sections. The first addresses the concern identified in the literature review over the influence of "cultural elites" within cultural policy decision making processes (Griffiths et al., 2008). The personal background of all interviewees is examined to identify the extent to which they might be defined as part of such an elite. The aim of this is to assess whether there is evidence, from this sample, that an elite exists. In addition the aim is to consider whether the background of those interviewed influences their level of power in policy formation and implementation, or whether all subjects exercise equal influence.

For the second section an analysis is undertaken into how policy makers define their priorities, and their attitudes to the debates around participation and excellence. The aim here is to examine the extent to which language is shared or contested on key issues among the sample group (Fairclough, 2003).

The third section considers the barriers to policy implementation and the current decision making processes in the arts, in order to consider whether the perceived focus on participation is real or whether there is a gap, as has been suggested in the literature review between rhetoric and practice (Belfiore, 2012).

The fourth section in this chapter explores the core question of the research around the implications of democratising the decision making process. The analysis takes account of the key issues identified in the literature in relation to: the role of the expert within participatory decision making (Dryzek and List, 2003); the extent to which participatory practices challenge the status quo or merely legitimise predetermined policy

objectives (Hay, 2007); the perceived opportunities and threats for the arts sector as a result of adopting more participatory decision making (Fennell et al., 2009); and issues relating to levels of representation in participatory decision making processes (Cooke and Kothari, 2009).

As the data was all collected in the first year of the new Conservative-Liberal Coalition government which came to power in May 2010, the final section considers any shift in attitudes or priorities over the period of study.

4.1   Background of subject

All interviewees were asked to describe their background in the arts and their education. All who responded said they had been introduced to the arts when young and described practices such as going to theatre or galleries, more commonly than participatory practices or popular culture. The few that had not had a family experience identified a significant individual, usually a teacher, who influenced their career path. Significantly a number felt that their personal background provided them with the connections to get "a foot in the door" to working in the arts (Audience Development Agency manager A). This was seen as a prerequisite to being accepted as a professional in the arts. This may imply the existence of a cultural elite based on having arts-based contacts, rather than purely educational background.

While some defined this as invaluable arts expertise it demonstrates a lack of diversity of perspectives within arts policy, which one person argued "tend to produce organisations that have certain sorts of people in certain sorts of roles, which can be…stultifying" (Arts Council England senior manager A). This supports the case for involving a wider range of voices in policy making as discussed in the literature review (Hatzihrysidis and Bunting, 2009).

In terms of education, all the policy makers and advisers interviewed described themselves as university educated but they were neither all from public school, nor Oxbridge, the definition used within the research of Dave Griffiths, Andrew Miles and Mike Savage, discussed in the literature review (Griffiths et al., 2008). In line with their research the balance of public school and Oxbridge did appear to increase when comparing those working

for or advising central government and London institutions, with those working in the regions.

As this data was not collected from local authority staff surveyed, and the numbers interviewed are not representative of all arts policy makers, it is not possible to generalise the extent to which this is a reflection of the total make up and influence of cultural elites during the period being studied. But it is interesting to note that, from the responses given from those interviewed for this research, the course studied and the career history of the individual had more significance than the place of study.

There appears to be a clear correlation between an artist-centred approach and those who had studied arts degrees. One respondent characterised this in terms of art schools following "a modernist tradition that was about you and about expressing what you wanted [which] wasn't terribly interested in the audiences" (arts policy commentator A). This contrasts with a more public-centred approach among those who studied other courses (the majority being humanities and social sciences) and those that had not gone straight from university into the arts. A number had been involved in community work which gave them a "history of working with people [that] wasn't defined by the arts [but] bringing people together, but nine times out of ten they were arts based, in some way" (Arts Council England, senior manager B).

More significant than personal background or education, the distinction between the artist focus and the audience focus is most apparent when comparing those working within local and central government and those working for, or advising, the Arts Council. All the local authority surveys described the arts as a tool for "working towards wider outcomes" (local authority survey) and one said they were "not interested in artists [but only] in the role that artists play" (local authority survey). This clearly relates to the instrumental agenda developed across the public sector, which is identified in the literature review (Belfiore, 2012).

Those working at and advising the Arts Council in contrast "tended to focus on the production of new work by a selected array of artists and arts organisations" (Arts Council England senior manager C), which was shown

in the literature review to have been the Arts Council's focus since it was formed (Upchurch, 2004).

This difference in focus may be to do with the fact that local and central government are accountable to an electorate, and therefore more public facing by nature. In contrast, by virtue of the arm's length principle, the Arts Council has not historically been required to consider the audience so directly.

Most of those at the Arts Council felt that it was appropriate for their focus to be different to that of local authorities, as the only organisation that puts the interests of the artists first. One policy commentator expressed "a sort of missionary zeal" (Audience Development Agency manager B) among those who work in the arts, for the arts over other cultural activities, which they said contributed to the dynamism of the sector. But those interviewed from central government were concerned that those in the arts sector always operate in the role of self-advocates rather than self-critics ignoring the fact that "art is not the only way you can become a more rounded individual….I wouldn't necessarily think that the arts do it better than other activities" (government policy adviser A).

The background of the interviewees therefore does suggest a limited range of experiences among those involved in arts policy but more relevant appears to be the career path of the individual since starting to work in the arts, and the priorities of the organisations within which they operate. This supports the claims in the literature review that institutional structures may influence behaviour, reducing the power of the individual (Gray, 2000). The following section therefore considers the relationship between the core values and priorities of the individuals interviewed and the organisations within which they operated. It also examines interpretations of key terminology to understand the levers and barriers to the implementation of policy in the arts.

4.2   Arts policy focus

The arts and audience focus mentioned was described by some as a difference not only between the Arts Council and local government, but equally between the Arts Council and central government. This difference

was characterised as an interest in "what activity are we supporting [versus] what's the benefit of the activity that we're supporting" (government policy adviser B).

There was a concern voiced by all of those interviewed from central government that not only the Arts Council, but the broader arts sector focused too much on the product. This, coupled with the insularity of those working in the arts, was seen to contribute to an inability to respond positively to government policy generally and participation policy in particular. This was argued to mean that the arts missed opportunities to be "mainstreamed" as a government priority under New Labour, in the way that other parts of the cultural sector, such as sport had been mainstreamed. There was a clear sense of irritation expressed by those interviewed from central government, which suggests an unhealthy relationship between government and the arts sector, which the Arts Council was seen to be failing to resolve.

The local authorities surveyed and interviewed supported these views. But unlike those interviewed from central government who tended to define the arts sector as one unit, many local authorities felt that there were arts organisations that were able to respond to instrumental requirements. But there was concern that these were not necessarily the larger, better funded arts organisations, nor a joined up approach that the Arts Council was behind.

These differences are of significance to this research in considering how the views within organisations reflect the voices being heard by different policy makers. DCMS tend to consult with the larger, mainly London based traditional arts institutions, and as such their perception of the arts sector is influenced by them. Local authorities in contrast may have much closer affiliations with grassroots artistic practice in their areas and thereby see a different range of practice. This may therefore support the argument that the agents involved in policy dialogue do have a significant influence over policy formulation and implementation and therefore changing the people with whom policy makers discuss may change practice (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010).

However everyone interviewed at the Arts Council criticised the local and central government approach. There was widespread concern that government policy under New Labour was too directive. This was seen as at odds with the arm's length principle which allows policy to be informed by practice and not vice versa. One person justified their focus on artists and production on the grounds that "it's entirely reasonable for artists to say 'actually I'm only interested in my own experience'…and not engage more broadly" (Arts Council England, senior manager B).

But most of the arts policy commentators who were interviewed considered that the views expressed by Arts Council staff were over simplistic. The Arts Council's conflation of artists and arts organisations was queried, on the basis that in practice neither local authorities nor the Arts Council truly focus support on individual artists, as most funding goes to arts institutions. Most policy commentators felt that while it might be legitimate for an artist to be insular for creative reasons, organisations have a greater obligation to engage the public as "you're running this institution on behalf of the wider public" (Audience Development Agency manager B). Many felt that the influence of art institutions outweighed that of the individual artists and their influence was one of the main barriers to change.

The need for change was defined by one commentator who challenged the notion that the instrumental link between the arts and the wider public sector, being contested, was in fact new. They argued that it has existed since the Arts Council was formed alongside the welfare state, but was being weakened, rather than strengthened, so that the value of "having free access to the NHS and having free access to education is understood in a way that it is not for the arts" (arts policy commentator C).

In the context of the reductions in government spending on the arts, being made while this research was being undertaken, it was acknowledged by another commentator that "the reason why some of the decisions about library closures are beginning to be retracted is because of the strength of public opinion" (arts policy commentator D) in contrast to the arts sector which, as has been shown in the literature review, has seen a significant drop in public support during this period (Arts Council England, 2012a).

The perception of those from government that the Arts Council was focused solely on the activity funded hides some complexity in relation to people's individual views. Almost all of those interviewed at the Arts Council did see the importance of participation, as well as the arts development agenda and acknowledged that public money required a more public facing attitude than there had been hitherto. But increasing participation was commonly described, not as a tool to increase social inclusion as suggested in the literature review (Policy Action Team 10, 1999) but as a tool both to justify state involvement in the arts and to garner public support. Many of the senior managers in particular acknowledged the importance of the participation agenda, but identified a tension around increasing participation while maintaining excellence, which was discussed in the literature review and therefore is discussed in the following section.

4.2.1 Participation and excellence

One policy commentator and some senior managers interviewed at the Arts Council were more driven by the need for policy makers to talk to those working in the arts, than in talking to the public, but most stated that their personal opinion was that participation either already was or should be central to thinking within arts policy and practice. Although most recognised the image and influence of "the kind of old fashioned cultural snobs,…who see themselves as defining what culture is [or] the avant-garde argument that people will never understand it en masse" (arts policy commentator D), nobody owned the view as their own. All the staff at the Arts Council also pointed to participation as a key stated goal in their ten year strategy (Arts Council England, 2010). But most were less clear about what the level of priority given to this was or what the barriers had been to increasing participation rates identified in the literature review (DCMS, 2011).

Although most people stated that they personally saw participation as a priority, when asked how much people felt that their views were shared across their organisation, there were differences of opinion. There was an even division between those who felt that what was described as a split "between people driven by participation and people driven by supporting the arts sector" (Arts Council England senior manager B) had narrowed and those that felt that views were polarising, particularly since the Coalition had come to power.

The view that the "pendulum was swinging too far" in favour of participation, (government policy adviser B) was in the minority among this sample, but where it was expressed it was done so by those with influence. It was described as a political shift between secretaries of state for culture. While Chris Smith was said to have ensured that DCMS were putting "efforts going into driving up rates of participation…a shift more towards excellence…was going to be [James Purnell's] thing" (government policy adviser B). This shift was also said to be the continued direction of travel under the Coalition government.

One person described the refocus on excellence as "an attempt to reassure certain sectors of the cultural world" that they retained their influence in policy making (arts policy adviser E). This is demonstrated by the fact that many claimed that the reports by Baroness Genista McIntosh and Sir Brian McMaster discussed in the literature review (McIntosh, 2008, McIntosh, 2011, McMaster, 2008) held more sway in the reaffirmation of the excellence agenda than either New Labour's wider policy objectives on participation, or the individual perspectives of those working at the Arts Council. One person even suggested that what they say becomes "policy edict" (Audience Development Manager B).

This is demonstrated by the fact that despite rhetoric around prioritising participation from many interviewed, the language of excellence was acknowledged to have been more common in the last years of New Labour. The local authority surveys also noted what one described as the "uncharacteristic speed" with which the Arts Council dropped New Labour's participation targets (DCMS, 2008) as soon as they were able to when the Coalition government came to power.

As both Baroness Genista McIntosh's and Sir Brian McMaster's professional experiences have been within the major national organisations this may support the view that certain voices wield greater power than others in decision making (Lukes, 2005). In this case those from the funded organisations having greater influence than those working in the organisations which fund them.

The Arts Council's slogan of "great art for everyone" (Arts Council England, 2010), which was also adopted by many of the local authorities surveyed, was described in most of the interviews as an attempt to bridge the gap between excellence and participation. It was equally seen by one person to exacerbate the problem by

> "defin[ing] quality in a certain way [which] is about the highly polished, professional, technically excellent, slick product… [that ignores] the benefits in terms of freshness, in terms of different perspectives on truth" (Arts Council England senior manager A).

It was also argued, by many of the policy commentators, that although the term great was claimed to distinguish quality and excellence, both the Arts Council and the wider arts sector were unwilling to enter into a dialogue about how to and who defines this, and instead used it to ignore what some saw as the "moral imperative" for work to be accessible if you are in receipt of public money (arts policy commentator A).

Another said there was a tendency for some people in the arts to define the quality of art by its inaccessibility to the general public. This can be seen through comments by the one policy commentator who argued that although "people go on endlessly about [participation]…frankly I think that a lot of [art] is stuff which takes you a while to acclimatise to" (arts policy commentator B). It is also demonstrated in the views on the dumbing down of culture by widening participation expressed in the literature review (Tusa, 2000). One government adviser argued that such attitudes meant many arts organisations thought that its "ok to have empty houses as long as the work within them was good" (government policy adviser), which he saw as indefensible when in receipt of public money.

Chris Smith, the only acting or former Secretary of State for Culture who agreed to be interviewed, was the only person to claim that New Labour policy actually resulted in increased participation. He claimed that they had successfully removed elitism in the arts as

> "attendance at those museums which had previously been charging, and went free, [went up by] over 75% [and] more people [now] go to

the theatre every year than go to football matches (Lord Chris Smith Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport 1997-2001).

More commonly, people acknowledged the findings of the Taking Part survey (DCMS, 2011) that the arts still attracted an elite minority of the public, which had remained largely unchanged despite policy rhetoric. When Chris Smith was asked to respond to this he claimed that he had not examined the evidence from the Taking Part survey.

Evidence was cited, by one of the policy commentators, that showed that the increases in numbers of attendances under New Labour was largely down to more visits by the same type of people, or increases in tourism, and not a greater democracy of the types of people attending. There was a consensus with the view that "at many of the cultural events that I go to I see an audience of white, middle-aged, middle-class people - actually not even middle-aged, but even older" (arts policy commentator A).

This was identified as most apparent where work was from western classical traditions, which some Arts Council staff felt infected the public's views on the whole of the arts sector too much, and did not reflect the diversity of artistic practice. It was also acknowledged that this was in part due to the fact that such work took by far the largest proportion of arts funding during this time.

In line with work on everyday participation (Belfiore et al., 2011) mentioned in the literature review there was a view expressed by some that the problem was not that people do not want to participate in the arts, but not in the subsidised arts. The low opinion the public have of the arts therefore was said to be "about programming, there's a problem with the attitude of people in the arts organisation" (arts policy adviser A) who have a superior attitude to the general public, rather than a problem with the public themselves.

Many local authorities and policy commentators argued that arts funding needed to be redistributed. One government adviser also questioned the Arts Council's policy of only giving regular funding to organisations where the local authority was already committed to the arts. The view that

> "if your council has got a leader who is keen on the arts … [the Arts Council will] work with them. If there is a council who has got some major social problems, and huge gaps in terms of participation in the arts in their communities, sorry, [they're] not interested" (government policy adviser A)

was argued to exacerbate elitism within the arts and reinforce the areas of low engagement. This is particularly pertinent within a context where a number of local authorities were considering 100% cuts in their arts budgets in 2013-14 when this thesis wascompleted (Smith, 2013).

The findings support the argument that there was a disparity between rhetoric and practice within arts policy. Most people argued that increasing participation was important but did not see this being implemented in practice. This may in part relate to the differences of opinion on why participation was seen as important. It was acknowledged that it was "really difficult to…defin[e]...because everybody's interpretation of what it is…is different." (Arts Council England, participation and engagement officer A). The definition of participation is therefore examined in detail in the next section.

4.2.2   Defining participation

A number of people interviewed admitted that definitions of participation and engagement (the job titles of four of those interviewed) were "kind of hazy" (Arts Council England, senior manager C). Although some described participation and engagement as being the same thing, others saw them as distinct. Some said participation is about being active creatively, and engagement is about being a passive audience. For others participation is about taking part as an audience and engagement is about the depth of experience. Some people saw participation as a driver to increase engagement, for others they were unconnected and different experiences. It was also said that the term participation was being replaced by the emerging terminology of reach and engagement, where "reach [is] the kind of short hand for the numbers game… engagement particularly about the quality of that experience" (Arts Council England, participation and engagement officer B).

For some policy commentators the downgrading or omission of the word participation was at the heart of the problem, as it suggested a move away from definitions that include the "very positive association around creative participation" (Audience Development Manager A) and instead focused on the more passive audience experience. This is supported by evidence cited in the literature review that active participation is less socially divided and has more tangible social benefits than attendance at art events (Edgar, 2012, Dodd et al., 2008).

Just as the move from community arts to participatory arts was argued by one person to have depoliticised the terms, from a focus on collective action to personal experience, so the shift from participation to engagement may therefore be seen as a shift from an active to a passive relationship with the participant, which runs counter to the trend towards more active participation elsewhere in the public sector which is the focus for this study (Kelly et al., 2002).

To test how the term participation was used in practice the sample of applications from Yorkshire supplied by the Arts Council, was analysed. Although the sample only provided a snapshot of one region, as these applications were from the most established organisations (those applying to be regularly funded) they do represent the range of organisations that the Arts Council fund, many of whom are also funded by their local authorities.

Applicants are asked to demonstrate which of the Arts Council's five goals they are responding to in all funding requests to the Arts Council. Goal two relates to participation and engagement by getting "more people [to] experience and [be] inspired by the arts" (Arts Council England, 2010 pg 7). While applicants are only required to respond to one of the goals, only six of the sample of eighty applications provided chose not to respond to goal two. This might be seen to support the findings from the interviews that participation was considered a high priority. It could equally be argued that as the goal only really asks people if they are taking the public into account at all it is surprising that everyone would not address it when applying for public money.

The chart demonstrates the difficulty in pinning down a definition, as it is defined in multiple ways. Indeed within any one application the term is often used in different ways.

Figure 1: Arts Council NPO applications for Yorkshire goal 2
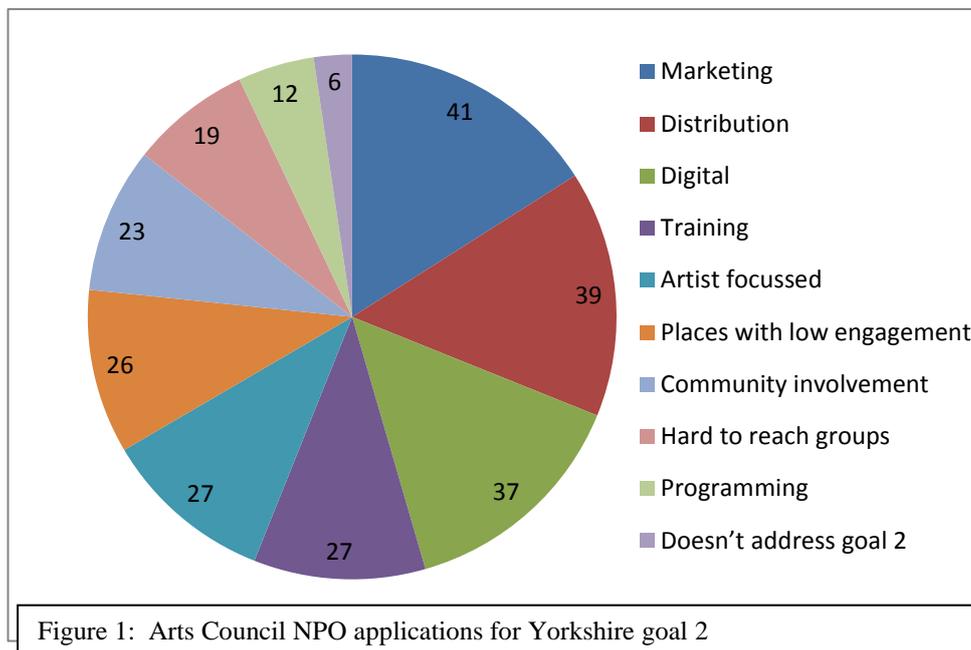
As can be seen the most common definitions of goal two related to marketing and distribution. The comments under each were often interchangeable. Both refer to presenting and advertising an artistic programme widely to reach the largest number of people. There was little detail in the descriptions from applicants about how this would be done, who would be targeted, or how achieving this aim would be measured. Despite the apparent importance given to marketing in the applications one of the interviewees questioned how effective current practice was within arts marketing; asking

> "if you weren't already involved in these organisations…how many [leaflets] would make you want to turn the page, or even look inside? Now you can argue that the Health Service ones aren't particularly stylish, or Italian looking or designer-y, but wow, they have a kind of democracy around them, which so many of ours don't" (Arts Council England senior manager D).

Furthermore all the audience development managers agreed with the view that in practice organisations were increasingly targeting "audiences that are already attending and already have an interest" (Audience development

agency manager C), to get them to attend more regularly, rather than reaching out to people who were not already interested in the arts. This is in stark contrast to the social inclusion aims associated with New Labour's participation agenda, discussed in the literature review (Policy Action Team 10, 1999). This may suggest a shift in policy focus since the Coalition came to office, more likely it is argued that this suggests that the arts sector are adept at interpreting policy agendas to fit what they already do.

The next largest category, digital participation, contained a breadth of sub-divisions, from artworks created digitally, to live streaming performances, to simply using websites and emails for marketing. Many of the comments in this section assumed that by being online, the work was more accessible, rather than demonstrating how people would be driven to engage with the work, nor how the diversity of the online audience would be measured.

A smaller number talked about each of the categories of working with a community, engaging particular people or places, and capacity building, which were features of New Labour's aims from increasing participation as discussed in the literature review. When grouped together they do represent a larger number than digital, although a smaller number than marketing and distribution.

As stated in the methodology, as the Arts Council did not provide evidence of the outcomes of the applications it is impossible to assess whether there is a correlation between the success of the application and the definition of participation used. An analysis of the Arts Council assessment comments on the applications does however provide a hint as to how the applications were viewed. These comments do not provide any sense that the Arts Council prioritised one definition over another in the decision making process.

Furthermore despite many of the claims lacking evidence to support how the plans would be achieved, or targets for measurement, the assessors' comments did not address this problem or suggest conditions based on them achieving what they proposed. Instead the willingness to take the organisations' claims at face value, suggests a tendency to define anything as participation. This runs the risk of making the word meaningless. This supports the claims in the literature review that policy discourse may be

interpreted in so many ways that it loses its meaning (Fairclough, 2000) or even create a rhetoric that has a

> "kind of inverse proportionality…between how things are presented, and … actual decision making, [which is not] rooted in evidence … research, [or] in policy, but [in a] deep seated belief in Western culture and civilizations" (arts policy commentator C).

Many of the local authorities surveyed felt that unlike the Arts Council, they prioritised active participation over audience engagement, but the response to the question on what they implemented to address the government cultural engagement target (DCMS, 2008) challenges this. It is clear that local authority strategies also focused on getting current audiences to attend more regularly rather than attracting new audiences or developing new creative opportunities.

There is also evidence from the surveys that many local authorities were concentrating "funding in a few, high profile organisations which is destroying grass-roots arts delivery" (local authority survey), which as with the findings from the Arts Council is at odds with the perceived focus on participation. Some local authorities argued that this was because the nature of the targets under New Labour encouraged easy wins to increase numbers, and ignored the fact that reaching new people is much slower, but it further demonstrates the gap between the priority people stated was being given to participation and the reality of funding levels. This is further evidenced by the acknowledgement by many interviewees that participatory organisations had been hit hardest in the Arts Council funding review and local authority cuts in 2010.

It is important to recognise that all the interviewees for this research knew that they were being interviewed about participation policy, which may have influenced their responses, creating social desirability bias as discussed in the methodology (Nederhof, 1985). This may have meant that people prioritised the agenda, in interviews for this research, more than might otherwise have been the case. One person argued that the only reason participation was addressed in the arts at all under New Labour was because "the whole budget was growing so hugely that they could quite comfortably be generous to those forms that the more conservative forces

within it would see as marginal" (arts policy commentator E). The return to the excellence agenda therefore may be seen as a retrenchment to coincide with a reduction in monies available.

This does not fully explain the fact that despite a disparity between the views of local authorities' and the Arts Council both in practice operated in similar ways, protecting arts institutions over grassroots activity.   The barriers to change and the nature of decision making, therefore needs investigating.

4.3   Barriers to change and the decision making processes

While one person argued that the greatest barrier to change within arts funding is that government funding is too short term to encourage strategic planning, let alone radical change, another argued that the problem is that "programmes are designed by white middle class men…if you set things up in a skewed way, you end up with skewed results (Arts Council England senior manager A).

It was further acknowledged that within the Arts Council "decisions are often made quite high up within the organisation…ultimately a small number of people will make those decisions" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer A).   This suggests that despite individuals' own viewpoints, many people in practice did not feel empowered to make or own decisions themselves.   This supports the argument that broadening the range of voices involved in decision making does not necessarily shift power (Lukes, 2005).

Furthermore, although some recognised that putting participation policy into practice meant being "brave enough to consider that [funding] will look very different for some people from what we have done for a long long time" (Arts Council England senior manager E), there was no sense of a real appetite for this change, either within the Arts Council or the local authorities. Instead there was a sense of resignation that social inequalities will continue to be replicated in arts funding where "80% of our funding goes to 20% of our clients…[and] the people who participate and attend the most make up about 9% of the population" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer B).

There was a commonly held reluctance to being prescriptive about policy implementation and an acknowledgement that while "certain development agencies set their stall out very clearly…want[ing] equitable benefit for the investment" arts funding has never been distributed like that (Arts Council England senior manager A). It was also acknowledged that although arts policy advocated risk taking in art form, policy makers were very risk averse in terms of leadership and management, preferring to fund institutions with a track record and a formal structure to informal cooperative structures which might grow from the community. The larger arts institutions therefore always have an advantage over grassroots arts activity.

Change therefore was seen by many when it does take place, to do so at an inevitably slow pace "incorporated into what people do" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer B) rather than through a redistribution of funds. But an acceptance of slow rather than revolutionary change may be seen to serve no other purpose but to maintain the status quo.

There was acceptance among almost everyone interviewed of what a number of people refer to as "the opera question", that the large national institutions are untouchable, even if the Arts Council wished to redistribute funding. One person said DCMS' priority was to support the "incredible tradition…that you absolutely don't want to lose [and that the question of participation was about] how do we make sure that what we are talking about doesn't **appear** to be elitist" (government policy adviser B). This suggests, in line with the literature review, that arts policy was more interested in legitimising decisions rather than in changing them (Fennell et al., 2009).

Indeed one government adviser went further to question whether elitism in the arts mattered. "As a friend of mine says, he has no kids, he likes the opera, so if [public funding for the arts] is the one way he gets his tax back...it might be worth it if it is enough to make them [the middle class] happier to pay their tax." (government policy adviser C).

Despite increasing participation being cited as a New Labour priority, as well as a personal priority for most of the individuals interviewed, the

findings from this research seem to suggest that in reality the protection of the higher profile and visible mainstream organisations, overrode any policy that might have required the redistribution of funding to help deliver policy goals. The reason for this was argued by one person to be because "it's very difficult to close a theatre isn't it…development has been hit incredibly hard, because it's the soft option, it's the underbelly (government policy adviser A).

It should be noted that while some felt that the lack of funding to participatory organisations and the cuts to development were a backward step in policy terms others argued that change was happening within the elite organisations who were in receipt of funding. The strength of outreach programmes within some organisations was cited as an example of how policy fed into the mainstream. But this was challenged by others who said that most arts organisations would cut their education programmes, rather than their main house programmes if they themselves were cut.

The barriers to change noted may be seen as an illustration of "path dependency" (Kay, 2005) which is discussed in the literature review, and the complexity of implementing policy changes against a backdrop of "the orthodoxy of 60 years" (Arts Council England senior manager E). It may also demonstrate an example of institutional behaviour (John, 1998) where despite the individual perspectives of the majority of staff

> "when you work in an organisation you're kind of immediately saying you are a person who doesn't mind compromising…the world changes very quickly, people's views and attitudes change quickly, and sometimes an institution is – because it's an institution – is slower to catch up" (Arts Council England senior manager B).

It also has been demonstrated that there were "powerful organisations that have a strong stake at the table" (Audience Development agency manager A) who militated against change and through the arm's length principle limited the capacity of governments to create the "legislative impetus… which is about stick more than carrot" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer B), which may be needed for change to occur.

The following section examines the response to the legislative impetus imposed by the duty to involve a wider range of voices in policy making and delivery (DCLG, 2008), which is the central focus for this thesis.

4.4   Participatory decision making

It was clear from the interviews that, despite the "duty to involve" (DCLG, 2008) and the "wider range of voices" (Hatzihrysidis and Bunting, 2009) report done within the Arts Council in response to this, both discussed in the literature review, some people interviewed had little knowledge of, let alone involvement in, either piece of work. The staff member from DCMS said that "there are all sorts of internal government…things that are happening, [but] it's not something that we took an active lead in" (government policy adviser B).   There was therefore no directive from DCMS about how the duty to involve might be applied. Likewise some people at the Arts Council supported the claim that it was "a question still to be looked at seriously. We haven't gone down that route thus far" (Arts Council England senior manager C). This demonstrates the limitations of all policy, where even within government information is not always shared between departments, let alone external agencies.

There was also not much awareness around this work among all of the policy commentators interviewed, some of whom said it was something to which they had not given any thought. However, all of the local authorities surveyed and some at the Arts Council, particularly those for whom participation and engagement was in their job title, were not only aware of the work but believed that it was growing in significance and would continue to do so even though the requirement had been dropped by the Coalition.

Even without the duty to involve, one person argued that the big expansion of funding for the arts through the national lottery since 1994 (National Lottery Commission, 2012) included

> "directives which say to involve the public in making policy, setting priorities, and distributing money. Every Lottery distributor has to report on that" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer B).

As the Arts Council were seen to be increasingly reliant on lottery funds, as grant-in-aid was reduced under the Coalition, it was argued to be more important than ever that they review the way they make decisions.

A "trend towards the co-production of things" (arts policy commentator D) was also identified, through which other parts of the cultural sector, such as English Heritage, had gained considerable profile and increased public support, through projects, which were sometimes televised where "there's an audience vote for what should get the money" (Lord Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport 1997-2001). The Arts Council was said to be lagging behind.

Others argued that the arts sector as a whole was not behind, but that there was evidence of arts organisations involving their audiences better in dialogue than they had historically. This was argued to be happening independently of policy directives. All the local authorities surveyed also said that the duty to involve merely made explicit what they already did, and that "it isn't just policy it's crucial to delivery" (local authority survey).

But the apparent growth in public involvement expressed by local authorities and a small number of people in the arts is challenged by the fact that it was acknowledged that "we use the same five kind of examples at the moment" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer B), whenever providing specifics of practice. This is supported through this research, by the fact that even those who said it was more widespread were unable to think of many examples when pushed.

This difference of opinion may relate to the level of public involvement being described. It is clear from the language used that for those who felt such practices were common their definition was closer to the concept of "inform and consult", as defined in the literature review (Brodie et al., 2009). While those who were more sceptical of how many organisations involved the public in decision making, tended to refer more specifically to the definition outlined in the duty to involve (DCLG, 2008) which involves public participation from agenda setting through to monitoring outcomes. This is supported by the findings in the literature review that demonstrated that although consultation might not be unusual, decision making itself had to

date impacted more in other public policy areas than in the arts (Fennell et al., 2009, SQW Consulting, 2010).

In the few examples where participatory decision making was cited it is further worth noting that the organisations or individual cultural leaders involved, seemed to often have grown out of the community arts movement, which some suggested meant that nothing much had changed in wider practice.

One of the most cited examples was Contact, Manchester, where the artistic director from 1999-2009, had a background in community and youth work, as well as experimental theatre. Over the decade he involved "users" in every part of decision making in the building. This involvement was described as coming "from a creative drive...[that] isn't just about audience development it's about the range of work you are putting out there" (Artistic Director of Contact 1999-2009). This supports the argument that such practices were happening independently of policy directives. The regularity with which Contact was mentioned and the acknowledgement that it was unusual in its practice also supports the argument that it follows in the community arts tradition more than being an example of wider changes within the arts.

Because of being cited so often, this venue was selected as one of the case studies for further research and is discussed in detail in the next chapter. Before this, in order to better understand the variance in knowledge and engagement in the topic of participatory decision making, the following section considers the attitude towards such practices becoming more widespread in the arts, from the sample for this research.

4.4.1   Attitudes towards participatory decision making in the arts

Despite one person describing participatory decision making, as "a bit like motherhood and apple pie…who would be against more people having more say?" (arts policy adviser commentator E) in practice there was considerable opposition to the concept among both policy commentators and Arts Council staff. This is in contrast to the number of people interviewed who almost all accepted the importance of the broader (if more vaguely defined) area of participation discussed.

Some questioned whether there was any evidence that the public wanted to get involved in the formation or implementation of arts policy. But the evidence for this is demonstrated in the literature review, through the arts debate in which the public asked for greater involvement in decision making (Opinion Leader, 2007). It is also demonstrated by the growing numbers of people that have engaged in participatory budgeting initiatives within the UK and overseas, the longer the initiative has lasted (SQW Consulting, 2010, Community Pride Initiative, 2003).

A small number of people interviewed also felt that it was the inevitable direction of travel as people were increasingly debating the arts along with other areas of public life, through the internet and other forms of mass media, whether the arts organisations liked it or not. Therefore one person argued that "there's not really an argument for or against it, it's a bit like arguing for or against oxygen…it's not about if, it's about how [it should be implemented]" (participation consultant).

But more commonly those interviewed expressed concerns about the assumptions inherent in the principles of participatory decision making. There were criticisms that the concept ignores the fact that there is not one definition of the public. The failure to identify the complexity in the notion of "the public" and the unrepresentative nature of participatory practices, is one of the main concerns expressed in the literature review (Cooke and Kothari, 2009). This was replicated through the interviews where some feared that "there are communities that are much more able, through confidence, skills, money, attitude, to engage … than others" (Arts Council England senior manager) or that "there could be the most reactionary and conservative forces within communities" (Arts Council England senior officer E) who could hijack such processes. This challenges the legitimacy of decisions taken through such processes.

However the small number of policy makers or commentators who had experience of participatory decision making in practice were confident that although "you're always going to get the people with an interest who will come forward…you have to put in the effort to go beyond the vested interests…to make it meaningful" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer B). Within local authorities there was also evidence cited from the research described in the literature review (SQW Consulting,

2010) that where they "genuinely made an effort and went to different venues that you weren't normally seen in…people turned up who hadn't normally turned up" (government policy adviser C).

Furthermore as discussed earlier the Arts Council in particular, by virtue of the arm's length principle and the background of those currently involved in the arts, and in arts policy decisions, is totally unrepresentative of the broader public. Vested interest has always influenced decisions, so for them to resist participatory decision making on these grounds seems untenable. Yet there was less concern about representation expressed by the local authorities surveyed. There was a view that local councillors themselves, rather than the staff who completed the surveys, were often less supportive as many felt that "we are the democratically elected people, it is up to us to choose…what we prioritise in this community, it is not up to [those] who are not elected" (government policy adviser A).

Electoral representation was itself questioned by one person who queried whether "any form of government or democracy in this country is getting close to being representative… for a local authority councillor, if you've got like 5, 10% of the population voting for you, you are doing pretty well" (participation consultant). For some the resistance from both the Arts Council and the local councillors was therefore seen as an attempt to hold onto power for themselves rather than based on a commitment to representation.

An overemphasis on representation is also challenged in the literature review as the process of shared learning within participatory decision making is argued to be more important than who the individual participants are (Blakey, 2009). Within the context of this research, where the question is whether involving a broader range of voices in policy would change the policy, the artistic practice and the make-up of those who engage in the arts, it is clearly important to assess whether the voices heard are limited to those who currently engage in the arts, or reach out beyond this. Through each of the case studies, therefore a key question is to determine who the participants are in the participatory processes described, as well as what shared learning takes place between the arts organisation and the participants.

The other main concern over public involvement, expressed by arts policy makers, related to the importance of expertise. The arts professional was described by one person as important to "protect us from ourselves" (arts policy adviser B). Arts expertise was also seen to be necessary to avoid the "potential for dumbing down content if you allow the public to choose" (Audience Development Agency manager C).

This was evidenced by one person, with the example, from public art, of the Angel of the North which it was claimed "everyone hated…when it went up [now there's a] feeling of 'this is ours, so therefore we want to protect it' (Arts Council England participation and engagement manager C). A number of Arts Council staff and arts policy commentators agreed that while participatory decision making may not have seen art, such as the Angel of the North, created in the first place, public value was something that might be developed over time.

However, a smaller number of people interviewed felt that rather than replacing expertise participatory decision making is "that role enhanced" (Arts Council England participation and engagement manager B). One person pointed out that rather than ignoring expertise it should be recognised that the public "would be experts in being audience members…and that's an expertise that would be useful to have round the table" (Arts Council England senior manager C).

In the case of the Angel of the North, rather than believing that it would not have been created if consultation had taken place, some argued that the public value created over time, could have in fact been shortcut by engaging the public earlier. This was based on specific examples where participatory decision making had been used, which suggested that the risks described were not borne out in practice. This is also said to be the case in the research on some practices in the literature review (Fennell et al., 2009).

The argument about "reactionary forces" was itself questioned by the person who made the statement as he also acknowledged that the Arts Council's own public value research

"actually found that by and large people got the notion of 'you invest in innovation', and that arguably the edgy stuff is a legitimate thing to create that, which I think maybe is at odds with my concern about conservatism" (Arts Council England senior manager E).

The fear of dumbing down was also countered by the argument that "you can't generalise about how risk averse the public is or how challenging the arts are" (government policy adviser C). A number of people were uncomfortable with what they saw as paternalism within some sections of the arts, which may be characterised by the resistance outlined.

One person felt that such attitudes demonstrated "a fear that the great unwashed are not able to make artistic judgements" (Arts Council England senior manager B). One commentator described some arts leaders as having a "kind of contempt for the ignorant public, who have to pay for [the arts], but have no right to comment on it and its quality" (arts policy commentator C). It was acknowledged when addressing practical examples where the public were involved in decision making that often "the most unusual and radical of those solutions was the one that was successful" (Arts Council England senior manager B).

One such example, where the public were involved in the commissioning of public art, is the Castleford Project, which is mentioned in the literature review (Channel 4, 2009) and is discussed in detail in the second case study chapter. The analysis of this case study considers not only what work was commissioned and who was involved in the process, but also how such processes were embedded in the longer term. This is particularly relevant to this case study as it was devised as a one off "urban experiment with the community as the client" (Channel 4, 2009) but aimed to build on a longer term local authority strategy which was developed in direct response to the duty to involve.

It is worth noting that all the examples cited by people interviewed, where public involvement was said to have had radical outcomes, were based on a slow process of deliberation between the arts organisation and the public. There was an overriding sense that "it's useless if there's any sense of quick win...it only delivers for the community and for the work if there is an

on-going dialogue" (Arts Council England senior manager C) which allows for learning to be shared between the participant and the arts organisation.

This may run counter to the idea of running an initiative such as the Castleford Project as a one off experiment. It certainly challenges the idea of raising the profile and the number of people involved in decision making through processes like the television votes on heritage projects mentioned earlier. However, it was acknowledged that as "more people are likely to go online first" (participation consultant), so online engagement could be a useful tool to reach out to people who are not the usual suspects.

But while such practices might reach more people and therefore potentially be more representative, there were concerns over the "danger of tabloidisation of things [if surveys are] asking people a single question and getting a single answer, off the cuff [rather than] involving them in the detail of what is proposed, and asking them to make choices." (Lord Chris Smith Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport 1997-2001). This was further supported by the view, based on evidence from research into deliberative democracy that "deliberative processes do seem to support more progressive outcomes" (participation consultant) than tick box approaches to voting. This is also suggested in the literature review (Parkinson, 2006) and may in part explain the disparity between the concerns about a conservative public described and the reality of a more risk taking public in practice, where such practices have been deliberative.

There were doubts about the practicalities of implementing lengthy deliberative processes, which were seen to be resource intensive at a time of reducing funding. This is supported by the research into participatory budgeting which found that it was costly and time consuming to implement (SQW Consulting, 2010). While one person believed that mainstreaming such practices can "save [arts organisations] money, because, by talking to their audience about what they're putting on, [arts organisations] can programme…with much more precision than they used to" (arts policy commentator D), this was not a common view.

The evidence in the literature review is that an increasing number of participatory decision making initiatives in local authorities are employing online engagement and voting (Wilson, 2010). The growth of mass media

interactive processes was cited as one driver towards this but it was also seen as "because of the confluence of recession, to cuts, and people's excitement with technology" (participation consultant).

However, an ideological shift, as mentioned in the literature review, is also apparent between New Labour's focus on capacity building in the duty to involve (DCLG, 2008), which relied on investment of time and money. In contrast the Coalition's aims to reduce state involvement in the public sector, in the localism bill (DCLG, 2011b, DCLG, 2011a) may be seen to discourage investment.

Furthermore the fact that participatory decision making, through deliberative processes, is by definition both long term and, as demonstrated, more likely to generate more risk taking and progressive outcomes, may be at odds with a policy that is looking for efficiency savings.

The growth in budget simulators may be more likely to confirm the worst fears of some working in the arts that participatory decision making, without detailed deliberation, may indeed reduce risk taking. It is further argued that it may affect overall levels of investment in the arts, if arts budgets are compared with other parts of the public sector through such tick box processes. There was common consensus that within local authorities the arts would not end up in the "top ten priorities about what councils should do" (government policy adviser A) if using such techniques.

While arts budgets, as non-statutory funding, were clearly insecure, in the council budget cuts of 2012 (Smith, 2013) there is no evidence that this has been more or less true where participatory decision making was used to inform decisions. Indeed a number of people cited examples where the arts had been protected from cuts because of public support. It was also said that when using deliberative techniques

> "where [budgets] were allocated to a ward and they could spend it on anything, then depending on how broad your definition of arts [they did well]. But it was funding because [of outputs] rather than because people wanted art or some artistic output in their area" (government policy adviser C).

A number of local authority surveys confirmed this. One person who had pitched many times for funding in front of participatory panels also said they had never had a negative response to the arts. This supports the case made earlier that the arts may struggle if they define the benefits to themselves rather than to the public, but does not support the case against participatory decision making as a mechanism for decision making.

One person also mentioned examples where local authorities had threatened to cut cultural assets but when "the local people all got together…to keep it open…the council just had to sit up and listen" (Audience Development Agency manager C) and in some cases this had resulted in the cultural asset being transferred to community control. This suggests that participatory decision making may help the arts advocate for investment. But as mentioned in the literature review community asset transfer, which is the biggest growth areas in participatory decision making under the Coalition, involves the devolvement of power from professionals to the community rather than the sharing of power between the two, which is the basis of other forms of participatory decision making. The final case study in this research, therefore involves an example of this process.

Managed by the Hebden Bridge Community Association, this case study explores a community initiative which saw a Conservative-Liberal coalition local authority transfer ownership of the cinema and the town hall (to be turned into a cultural hub) as a direct attempt by the community to "safeguard public assets" from the cuts (Hebden Bridge Community Association). It therefore offers an example both of a community-led approach and one taking place under the Coalition, locally and nationally, rather than New Labour.

What is clear from the attitudes described in this chapter, in line with the findings in the literature review (Fennell et al., 2009) is that there was a disparity in perceptions between those who have engaged in participatory decision making practices and those who have not. The greatest resistance to the concept existed where there was least experience of it in operation.

This may suggest that the initial fears and perceptions were misplaced, and may be eradicated over time. But it may also merely reflect that those who

have engaged are likely to be those who are already predisposed to believe in its potential rather than its risks. The next section considers examples of participatory decision making in practice to assess how much processes impacted on the outcomes. This will be examined in more detail in the three case studies examined in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

4.4.2 Participatory decision making processes

Most people interviewed at the Arts Council saw participatory decision making, if it had any relevance in the arts, as a process for arts organisations to use to manage their venues or inform their programming. There was a lack of confidence in public involvement in funding decisions, even among most of those who supported the concept, although an increase in peer review to inform decisions was commonly accepted. As demonstrated in the literature review the wider range of voices with whom the Arts Council planned to engage with, in response to the duty to involve, was broadly defined as those working professionally within the arts (Hatzihrysidis and Bunting, 2009).

One person criticised this and argued that participatory decision making has

> "to be about the money, because it is the money that makes those strategies and policies happen…you have to ask them about how they want that money spent, to achieve the strategy that they've been consulted on," (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer B).

Involving people in the organisations' programming decisions once funding has already been allocated may be argued to be valuable and transformational for that organisation, but it does little to challenge the status quo in arts funding.

But the only example of participatory decision making being tested within the Arts Council was in the North East office. An experiment had been run that involved young people in mock funding decision panels along with Arts Council staff. It was said that it was not possible to engage the young people in real funding decisions, without the agreement of the Arts Council national office, which was not forthcoming. But even so it did lead those

involved to believe that there was an appetite for such engagement. The decisions were said to have been treated with the utmost care and seriousness by those taking part and "if managed well it could be dealt with on a much broader level" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer C).

Elsewhere in the interviews, most people questioned how and whether participatory decision making could work on anything except where the activity had a local focus. National decision making was seen as problematic. If you invited people to engage from across the country it was believed that you would only attract those to participate who already had a pre-existing interest in the arts. In contrast when you engaged people locally it was believed to be easier to reach people who "might not have an interest in the arts, but are very passionate about their area" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer A). If local people were involved in national decisions there was a common concern that "you'd end up with lots of fantastic community projects but no national art institutions" (government policy adviser B).

But one commentator argued that without involvement in national decisions "funding decisions remain ineffective because they're done in the old usual way. So I think you couldn't separate [national and local decisions] either you involve the public in all of it or you don't." (arts policy commentator C). This is in line with the view expressed in the literature review that it is pointless doing participatory decision making on a project basis only at the margins of activities (Stoker and Wilson, 2004). But it is at odds with evidence that in practice most initiatives have been done on a local project basis and have still had transformational impacts, albeit on a smaller scale (SQW Consulting, 2010).

Within the arts most often where examples of participatory decision making were described, they involved galleries and theatres involving the public in co-curation rather than budgeting, and often on one off projects rather year round.   Examples cited included the Baltic programming team in Newcastle-Gateshead (www.balticmill.com), and York Theatre Royal's Takeover Festival (www.takeoverfestival.co.uk). In both cases young people programmed short seasons of work. Despite their short term nature everyone interviewed, who had had experience of them, believed such

projects had been very successful, challenging thinking about artistic practice and bringing in new audiences.

From a marketing perspective it was recognised that such practices both increased attendance and improved public opinion on the arts. It was also argued that "we know now through research, that…the more [audiences] know about [the arts] the more they get out of it, in many different kinds of ways" (arts policy adviser D).

One person argued that this marketing approach may focus too much on legitimising what the arts organisations are already doing, and increase knowledge and understanding among the audience. This may ignore the potential for the organisation to learn through the process and in so doing, to influence organisational change so that "you would have a sector that is more relevant to the culture of the country – the actual culture of the country not what people at the big national organisations think is the culture of the country" (arts policy commentator C).

Any participatory decision making process was seen to require "the humility to accept that you might learn something from your community as opposed to knowing best about what they want" (Arts Council England senior manager A) which was seen to be at odds with the traditional view that

> "if you are a curator, or an artistic director, that very title, …suggests that you are the authority, and…it can only be your vision that drives the organisation…and if you involve other people…it potentially dilutes, weakens" (Audience Development Agency manager B).

The resistance to participatory decision making therefore may be argued to be less to do with the process and more to do with the need for organisational change and an appropriate leadership style, to facilitate such processes. Over a longer period of time, those who had some involvement in such processes felt that whatever approach were taken "inevitably arts practice would change if the kind of involvement ideas or techniques filtered through a lot of arts organisations" (Arts Council England senior manager A). This is supported with evidence from the national evaluation of participatory budgeting that

"as people bedded into the process and they trusted that it was going to be there next year and the year after…the priorities changed…so a snapshot might not show fundamental change, in how people in an area interact with institutions, it takes time to build trust" (government policy adviser C).

But this potential for change clearly relies on the project being on-going. Within the galleries and theatres, mentioned, the activities were more often one off projects and restricted to specific events, separate from mainstream programming, rather than a way of rethinking the whole programme, let alone organisational structure.

For participatory decision making to have a significant impact in an arts organisation one person argued that "you wouldn't have separate educators and curators, they would all be the same…all that calls for changes of attitude at the top. The public ought to become the most important thing in curatorial decision making (arts policy commentator A).

Key to the process of embedding such processes is the question of how directive such a policy intervention should be. Even those who supported such practices were concerned that imposing such practices on arts organisations "could lead to a narrow tick box way of addressing it" (Audience Development Agency Manager B) which would be counter-productive. There was a widely held view within the research that participatory decision making is only effective where "people genuinely want to change the power relationships in the organisation [and] expect the outcomes to be different than it is" (government policy adviser C). Where the commitment is not in place it was said that it is worse than useless, often reinforcing disengagement.

The policy shift during the period of this research from the "duty" to involve the public under New Labour to the removal of the obligation and an ending of the targets to increase engagement, under the Coalition, was therefore seen by some as a positive move to allow arts organisations to lead any change, in their own time. Others, particularly within local authorities, felt that as it is "no longer required and because of restructuring it has made it more difficult to work in this way" (local authority survey) and therefore the likelihood of such practices continuing was reduced.

Furthermore as local authorities said they were increasingly contracting out or commissioning external deliverers there was seen to be less accountability, or ability to insist on participatory practices. As with the concerns over the accountability of the arm's length principle which the Arts Council works under, this demonstrates some support for policy to be more, rather than less directive, in order to ensure its implementation.

In light of the policy shift from New Labour to the Coalition identified, the final section of this chapter considers how constant the drivers were towards participatory decision making and what the implications are of shifts in government and policy before concluding this chapter.

4.5   The future of participatory decision making in UK arts policy

Despite the claim that the change of government saw a reduction in the obligation to involve the public, in line with the literature review not everyone interviewed saw either the broader participation agenda or the specific area of participatory decision making as specific to the New Labour agenda. Instead some believed that such policies arose from international policy debates and broader social change which would continue irrespective of which government was in power.

Indeed one person argued that "what [any] cultural minister does – is find in the cultural landscape the things that they are in tune with…but they can't go around making such things happen" (arts policy adviser E). As has been demonstrated both with the broader participation agenda and the definition of participatory decision making, the same language and policy can take on very different meanings when interpreted by different agents.

As shown while both New Labour and the Coalition government used similar rhetoric about involving the public in decision making, the Coalition were said to "desire to see quick wins" (Arts Council England senior manager C). This was not just seen as an ideological shift, as suggested, from capacity building to reduced state involvement, but also "because it is being used by areas that haven't necessarily committed to the concept [of participatory decision making] and part of it is because they genuinely have

to make the cuts this financial year and they can't afford the time" (government policy adviser C).

But ideological shifts are demonstrated by the view that the Coalition government were more interested in engaging with "organisations with an interest in the sector [and] with the people who can actively deliver things, rather than a citizen level engagement" (government policy adviser B). This demonstrates a significant shift from the community-led approach from the example of Brazil (Community Pride Initiative, 2003), which influenced the duty to involve to the American stakeholder version of public value (Moore, 1995), both described in the literature review.

The fact that when the Coalition dropped the duty to involve, within the first year in office, the thinking was also said to have "gone away as a concept" within the Arts Council plans (Arts Council England senior manager A), further supports the argument that such practices were not embedded within the arts policy framework. One person interviewed questioned if the Arts Council "would have done [anything] without all this debate going on around it? They say yes, but I don't know" (arts policy adviser D). This may therefore suggest that much of the work done in this area over the New Labour years may be lost.

Furthermore, whether ideological or practical, it seems doubtful within the context of austerity, during which this research was being undertaken, whether either the deliberative process, or the long term engagement, identified as crucial success factors for participatory decision making, would be adopted as part of the process going forward.

In line with the issues of language and interpretation identified in relation to the broader participation agenda, it is clear therefore that the concept of participatory decision making has also been interpreted broadly, covering a wide range of possibilities whereby the terms, like participation more generally, may begin to become meaningless.

4.6   Conclusions

This chapter considered the attitudes of a range of policy makers to the key questions identified in the literature review both in relation to arts policy generally and participatory decision making in particular.

An analysis of the background of the subjects interviewed for this research supports the case made in the literature review that a narrow band of voices determined arts policy in the UK during the period covered by this research. Although there were differences of opinion, among those interviewed, about the benefits and drawbacks of this, across the board there was acknowledgement of the need for change within the arts both to help make the case to government for continued state investment and to build public support for and engagement in the arts.

In terms of the role of different policy agents there was a widely held view that there was a disparity between those working in the Arts Council and those working within both local and national government. These organisational differences were in part argued to relate to the different organisational structures. For the Arts Council, the arm's length principle allows them to be less focused on the public, as their core constituents, than the electoral accountability of the government demands.

When analysing the opinions of individuals it is clear that there was greater complexity in terms of individual perspectives, than at first suggested by the different organisational structures, but that certain attitudes are more influential than others. Some saw this as the result of the power of organisational structures, others saw path dependency as limiting change and others highlighted the inequalities of power between individuals involved. All these perspectives challenge the claim in the literature review that changing the agents alone would change the policy (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010) which may in turn question the effectiveness of participatory decision making as being able to do more than increase legitimacy of decisions.

On further investigation it is also clear that there was a lack of appetite by all policy makers to be directive in bringing about change and a resignation to what many saw as slow progress rather than radical reform.

In practice both the literature review and some of those interviewed, demonstrate that there was in fact a retrenchment from the very agendas for change, such as increasing participation, which so many claimed to support. Despite this there are some signs through this research that such practices were becoming more widespread, and as in the literature review

(Fennell et al., 2009) this research suggests that those who have actually engaged in the process of participatory decision making were far more positive about its potential than those who have not.

But there remained concerns among those working in or commentating on the arts, even those committed to participatory decision making, that "there has to be clear boundaries [so] that input has to still respect freedom of expression" (arts policy commentator C), which might suggest that the arts need to be viewed differently to other parts of the public sector.

However, the concerns expressed about the outcomes of participatory decision making in terms of the role of expert knowledge and artistic risk-taking were not demonstrated with reference to specific examples. Where examples were given they generally refuted such claims. The most important component of participatory decision making in any context was said by some to be "about organisational culture, it's about mind-set, it's not about methods, it's not about techniques" (participation consultant). A long term commitment to such practices, embedding them at the core of organisation, rather than on the margins, is therefore essential.

The biggest barrier to change may be the way that the arts respond to policy by interpreting new concepts and terminology in a way that minimises change, legitimises existing practices and makes policy become meaningless. This it is argued is where the real gap between policy rhetoric and practice lies. This research argues that this is the result of the disproportionate power of the larger organisations which is a barrier to development, let alone change within the arts sector. This supports the premise of this research that a wider range of voices need to be involved in both the arts sector and policy making.

The following chapters look in detail at the three case studies to examine some of the issues and concerns raised in both the literature review and this chapter in relation to the processes of implementing participatory decision making. In particular these consider the original drivers for the change in decision making processes within each case study; who the public are that engage in such processes and the impact this has on artistic practice. These findings are then drawn together with the findings from the rest of this thesis to form conclusions to the whole thesis

5 Participatory decision making in practice – a case study of Contact, Manchester

The first case study, which is discussed in this chapter, is Contact, in Manchester. Contact is a regional theatre for young people, which was selected as an example of an arts organisation which chose to open up the voices involved in decisions to theatre users, as a long term artistic strategy. The aim of this chapter is to examine the impact of the participatory decision making processes used, on the organisation and the artistic programme, as well as the wider arts ecology in its home city. Consideration is also given to how the theatre defines its users, in order to analyse the extent to which it engaged new audiences or to what extent it gave a greater voice to those already engaged.

The following section explores the background to Contact Theatre and the values underpinning its adoption of participatory decision making, before examining the processes that the theatre used.

5.1 Background

Contact Theatre started life in 1972, out of the University of Manchester and for many years existed as what was described by one respondent as a "repertory theatre in bright colours" (Arts Council England senior manager A) attracting school parties to productions of set texts from the school curriculum. After a major refurbishment a new Artistic Director, John McGrath, took over in 1999 and stayed for ten years.

Influenced by his background in both experimental theatre and youth work within New York, Liverpool and East London, in interview John described his artistic aim of making the venue more contemporary in style, more diverse in outlook and more inclusive in atmosphere. From the beginning he worked on the assumption not that the audience had a deficit in understanding or appreciation of the arts, but that the artistic product itself needed refreshment.

From all the interviews conducted, both within the organisation and across the city, there was consensus that under his tenure the organisation went through a transformation. The theatre was described, at the time of this

research, as being a cross art form laboratory which had "vibrancy, whatever time of day or night, and the vibrancy is about the different types of people walking in there" (Audience Development Agency manager A). According to the venues website it aimed to offer:

> "a dynamic space where young people, artists, and staff boldly re-imagine how a theatre for young people should look and feel. Our programme is fluid, flexible and diverse. We welcome theatre, art, music, spoken word, dance, and DJs into all of our spaces. We are not simply a producing house or a presenting venue but a space where artistic experiments are explored, developed, and completed. We have an expansive notion of what theatre can be" (http://contactmcr.com/about/what-we-do/programming/)

Key to this is a notion of partnership and shared learning between users and producers, which informs the artistic process of what goes on stage and delivers a diverse programme of work.

Many people interviewed commented that as a result Contact's audience was very different; not only from what it was previously, but also from the theatre audiences that attended most venues. It was said to have significantly higher engagement from ethnic minorities and a wider socio-economic mix than elsewhere. This is supported by evidence from the theatre's business plan which states that 36% of the theatre audiences, 57% of those participating in workshops and 29% of their Board were from Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds. In addition 65% of their audiences and 93% of participants in workshops were aged 13-30 (Contact, 2011). This is in stark contrast to average theatre audiences, which have been found through research to be predominantly white and middle aged, with the under 30s being the least likely to attend (Chan et al., 2008).

It was further claimed in interview that not only had Contact's own practice changed, but that the theatre had "transformed the arts ecology; the number of organisations that have been influenced by Contact is huge" (Baba Israel, Artistic Director 2009-2012). This is demonstrated by the fact that, in the interviews with policy makers discussed in the last chapter, it was one of the most cited examples of successful practice in increasing participation in the arts.

While much of this change was credited, by those interviewed, to the vision of John McGrath, as the first artistic director after the refurbishment, he said that the change was only possible because of the governance structures and recruitment practices which meant that he was recruited with the express aim of "put[ting] young people at the heart of this organisation" (John McGrath, Artistic Director 1999-2009).

It is first worth noting that not only John, but many members of the board of Contact came from a community arts tradition, with a strong conviction that the arts can have "powerful outcomes [not of itself but]…by widening the concept of what art is and can be" (Contact Board Member). John McGrath doubted whether an individual could have so transformative an impact without such a supportive organisational structure.

But it was also his interpretation that the heart should not be defined by "people on payroll, which is what it often becomes, [but be] much more about a community of users, which include artists and young people, as well" (John McGrath, Artistic Director 1999-2009) that makes this case of interest to this thesis.

Under John McGrath participatory decision making became core to everything the theatre did, from recruitment of staff to programming decisions. The organisational structure, placed the Artistic Director, Board and Young People advisers all at the centre of the organisation, with staff, volunteers and participants on an outer ring (Contact, 2011), embedding such practices across the whole organisation. This is very different to the project based participatory activity, which was demonstrated to be more common practice for arts venues, in the previous chapter.

Figure 2; Contacts organisational structure adapted from company business plan

The organisational commitment to this strategy was further demonstrated, through interviews with other staff at Contact, by the fact that it was clear that such values were shared. The words "our remit" and "core" were used repeatedly by staff, in relation to participatory decision making. No one interviewed voiced resistance to the concept, nor demonstrated the concerns expressed in the previous chapter.

Baba Israel, the artistic director, who succeeded John McGrath, was selected for his commitment to carry on the company ethos. He described his leadership role as harnessing the "real creative benefit [of] a wider range of voices having agency in the creative process" (Baba Israel, Artistic Director 2009-2012). He, like John McGrath and many board members, had experience both in youth and community work as well as, as a theatre artist.

Significantly Baba stated that his aim was not just to increase access for audiences to the work that the theatre wants to do. He wanted to change artistic practice and create a larger pool of more diverse artists and managers, who could work within the organisation, but also beyond. He defined the theatre's long term aim as "bringing new people into theatre…as people, as part of the community, as leaders" (Baba Israel, Artistic Director 2009-2012). A key question is whether such practice challenged the existence of the cultural elite, as discussed in the previous chapter, or merely infiltrated it with new members.

Contact's remit was said to have been influenced by the Arts Lab movement mentioned in the literature review (Hutchison, 1982), which encourages the development of multi-use spaces, cross art form practices, as well as arts and community activity existing side by side. These principles were adopted by all of those interviewed at Contact, who felt that arts buildings have a responsibility for a broader remit than that offered by working within a narrow art form definition. Significantly Contact Theatre's rebrand after refurbishment dropped the word theatre from its name, becoming just Contact, in order to distance itself from what the limitations of working with the narrow art form definitions of theatre buildings.

This is in contrast to the view expressed by the Chief Executive of one of the largest subsidised arts venues in Manchester that "it's really hard for a building to become all things to all people, and actually whether they should or not…I think that weakens an offer" (arts manager A). She made a case for her venue to retain its art form distinctiveness and clear artistic style, as part of a broader arts ecology. But this defence was seen by many others interviewed, both at Contact and artists working elsewhere in the city, as offering a narrow programme for a narrow audience.

Many felt that single art form venues led by the vision of one Artistic Director, were not justifiable if the organisation is in receipt of public money, at least if the organisation is in receipt of a high proportion of funding in the city. Furthermore one participant at Contact argued that while an arts ecology might exist within the bigger cities, this was not the case within smaller towns, where there might only be one arts venue, and their offer therefore might be the only arts offer available to the community.

Contact's values, seeing their beneficiaries as the city as much as the professional arts community may be argued to be closer to those espoused by the local authorities, than the views of Arts Council England or many arts advisers, discussed in the last chapter. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that Contact got much of its funding from non-arts sources, during the period being studied. Apart from the local authority, it also received money from a range of public services, including health, social services, youth services and trusts and foundations (Contact, 2011).

At the same time, when interviewed, both the previous Artistic Directors of Contact identified clear artistic drives, which were not dictated by the instrumental agenda discussed in earlier chapters, but by the desire "to make sense through art of the life that you're in" (John McGrath, Artistic Director from 1999-2009). They were both critical of over instrumentalisation of the arts and sceptical of funds that aimed at direct social outcomes, such as social inclusion and crime reduction.

But the change that they brought about through a combination of their own defined artistic and social objectives, do seem to suggest that changing the agents involved in decisions, starting with the board and the director themselves, can truly change an arts organisation internally. To understand how this was done, the following section considers how those at Contact defined artistic practice, before considering the Contact model of participatory decision making.

5.2   The arts and artistic practice

In order to analyse how the arts were defined by people at Contact, and how these were similar or different from other artistic practice in the city, all the people interviewed for this case study, were asked to define the term "art". Significantly, there was a clear distinction in terminology used within this sample. Those interviewed from elsewhere in the city, used words such as 'canon', 'polish', 'quality', to define art, which relate to a finished, and arguably financially well supported, product. In contrast the words used by people at Contact were conviction, passion, intensity, intention, discipline, commitment and connectivity, which may be categorised as all relating to the artistic process.

Despite this difference John McGrath argued that he wanted Contact "to be judged against the same aesthetic criteria" as any other theatre (John McGrath, Artistic Director 1999-2009). He claimed that the theatre's work could stand up to scrutiny under any definition of quality. Others questioned this, arguing that Contact's practice was "really good work…made out of raw material, which is not professional arts material" (local authority A) and therefore it was hard to compare to the wider arts sector.

Some staff at Contact also contradicted John McGrath's view, arguing that any attempt to define and judge art is subjective. There was support for the view discussed in the last chapter that the focus on quality and judgement within the Art's Council's notion of "great art" was limiting to artistic practice and disadvantaged organisations such as Contact. It was also argued by some to reinforce elitism in the arts and create a barrier to participation, which was not

seen, by those interviewed, to exist in popular culture.

The work defined as high quality by the Arts Council and many theatre reviewers was viewed by the young people interviewed at Contact, as dull and formulaic. This is supported by findings in the literature review, even among the theatre elite, of a growing rhetoric in the media that theatre programming was becoming less experimental and increasingly conservative (Stafford-Clark, 2012, Gardner, 2012).

Some staff at Contact argued that the regular format of three to four week runs in producing theatres encouraged programming that was safe enough to attract a large audience of repeat attenders. Contact's creative development model, in contrast, was described as allowing them to support work which could be test run for a couple of nights and make its financial returns by touring outside the building. This was said to allow the venue to focus on giving a wide range of people space for experimenting with their creative practice.   By so doing it was also credited by local authority and Arts Council staff with providing richer variety for a more diverse audience.

There was also a feeling expressed by some of the freelance artists interviewed, that too much mainstream art talks about itself, to itself. One person wanted "to see the arts engaging with the bigger problems in society" (local artist A) instead of the self-interest of the arts themselves. This was seen as another factor behind the failure of the participation agenda in the arts as a whole. Contact's work in contrast was said to have a relevance and contemporary feel that made it more immediate and accessible.
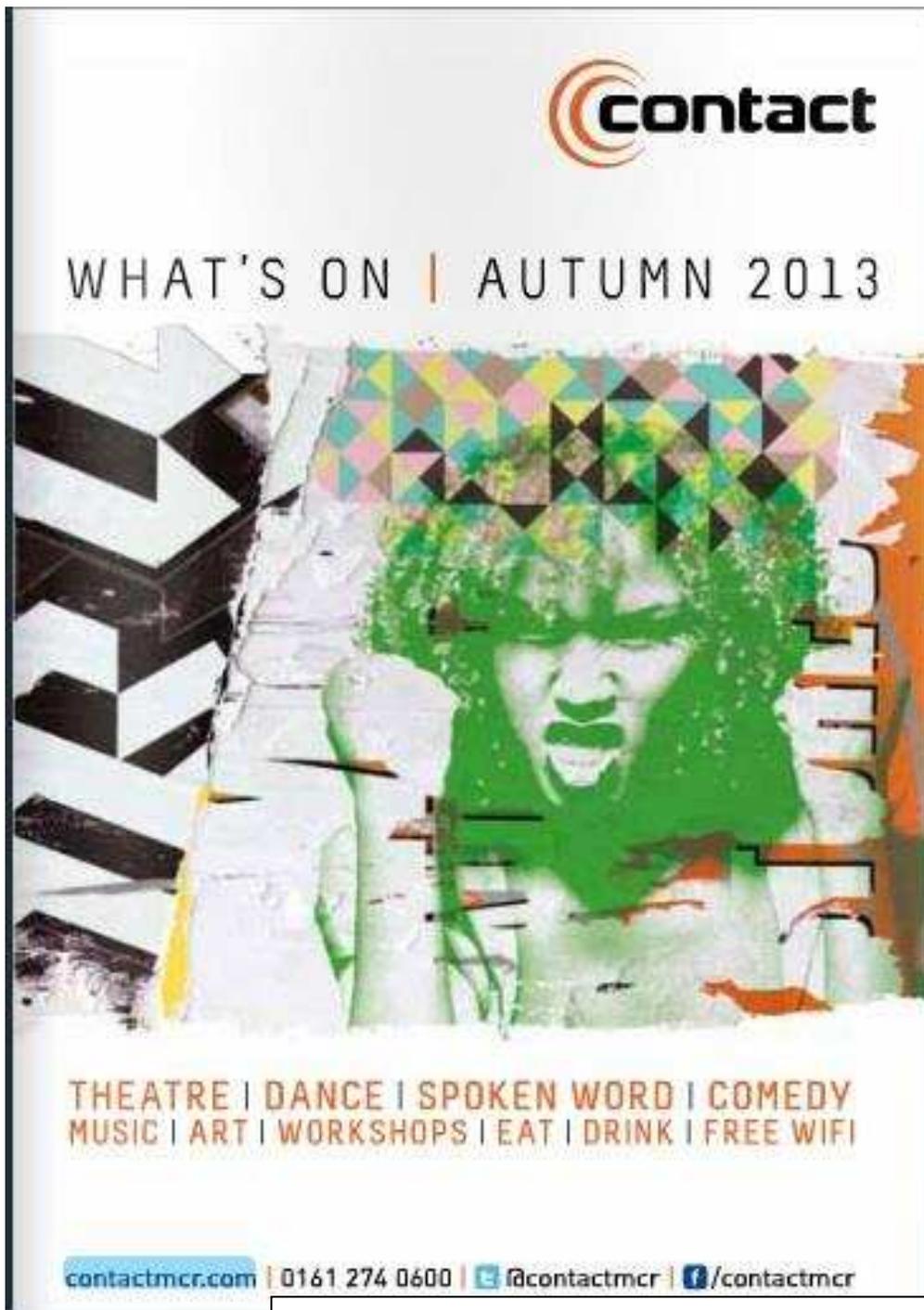
Figure 3 - Contact brochure – supplied by theatre

Music was widely seen by the young people interviewed at Contact to be less elitist than theatre, because it used much broader definitions than theatre, and it was argued there was better cross-fertilisation between genres. One person argued that this was because music encourages a continuum between listening on the radio, playing in a group and going to a concert. Even in

classical music they claimed there was less snobbery towards amateur choirs than there was towards amateur theatre.

Theatre in contrast was said to create elitism even through the use of the term theatre, rather than drama. While drama was seen as something many related to, through engagement at school, amateur dramatics and even television drama, professional theatre makers were accused of consciously distancing themselves from such practice. This supports the argument that elitism may exist because it suits the elite to differentiate themselves through culture (Bourdieu, 1984). This was cited as one of the reasons Contact dropped the word theatre from its name.

Yet there appears to be a contradiction between the views of many of those interviewed at Contact. Despite acknowledging a disparity between traditional theatre practices and those at Contact, both Artistic Directors defined their aim as acting as a "bridging place" (Baba Israel, Artistic Director 2009-2012) between artistic worlds. Most of the young people interviewed also said that although they themselves didn't like much of the work they saw in other theatres which were described "as these stuffy places that don't really have anything of interest" (Re-con programmer A), they still felt they had to be evangelists persuading their friends that theatre in general was worthwhile.

It was important to those at Contact that the bridge took people in both directions, providing pathways for young people into the arts, as well as influencing mainstream arts practice by encouraging fresh voices to be heard. But some of the local artists interviewed felt that even though Contact may have seen itself as a bridge, far from encouraging participation and bridge building, many theatres may not have wanted the bridge to be crossed as their practices were said to be deliberately "up there and out of reach" (local artist B).

The rhetoric of a united arts sector, increasing participation by building bridges between practices, may be argued to serve the purposes of the larger arts organisations better than the smaller ones. It was argued by one person that the notion of "trickle down" from the large organisations to the small was as

false in the arts, as it was seen to be false in the wider economy. Nor was Contact's role as a bridge to provide "trickle up" seen to be recognised in funding levels but instead it may support an unequal ecology, that safeguards the mainstream while the grassroots is being squeezed, as is evidenced in the last chapter and the literature review (Jancovich, 2013).

The following section therefore explores how Contact operated in detail, before considering its impact on the wider arts sector's approach to participation in Manchester to see if bridge building or bridge crossing really took place, or whether the transformations Contact are credited with were limited to their own practice.

5.3   The Contact model

As stated, Contact's strategy had been to widen the voices involved in decision making throughout the whole organisation over many years. Most of the staff interviewed were clear that it was not the responsibility of one department within the organisation, but involved every member of staff, from a deep seated belief that "if one member of staff…just doesn't get it, it can just ruin the whole reputation" of the organisation (Contact staff member A). It was said that this was achieved by having "a real street presence" (local artist C), outside the theatre, as well as within. All the staff, including the Artistic Director were said to be accessible and both marketing and programming reflected a deep knowledge and understanding of a wider range of cultural practices, as demonstrated, rather than just theatre.

Within the building the ethos was described as creating "a place to get involved" (Re-con programmer B) or a "hub, where a lot of young people feel comfortable going into and just hanging out" (Re-Con programmer A). In contrast to other theatres where people only really use the building to go to see the show on the stage in the evening, observation on the days when the interviews were conducted showed that at Contact the bar was full of people chatting all day long.

This was said by participants interviewed to be a place to talk about art and this in turn encouraged more risk taking in terms of what the regular audiences were willing to go and see on the stage, as well as encouraging people to engage with the building even if they were not already theatre attendees. This was further argued to play an important role in ensuring that the voices heard were not just those of young people interested in the arts

Figure 4 Contact lounge, photo by Joel Chester Fildes

At the same time, central to Contact's process was providing development opportunities for young people, who had a real interest in making the transition from participant to artist. This was done through support to young artists who wanted to research new ideas and present them in the most appropriate

spaces for the work, whether that was the main stage, a studio or outdoors. By so doing Contact's directors said that the work challenged art form definitions and blurred the distinctions between amateur and professional.

As a result it was claimed that "lots of new companies form through young people who have met through this building and how we support them" (Contact staff member A). This is very different from the model described in the previous chapter, where most theatres' education and outreach departments were seen as separate from the professional artistic creation, and where "most of the money still goes on what is put on the main stage" (arts Manager A).

In the previous chapter, many of those interviewed were concerned that engaging non-arts specialists in decision making, let alone putting them on the stage, may lead to conservative or populist programming, thereby reducing the quality of the cultural offer. Everyone interviewed within Contact strongly refuted this, with examples from their own practice of artists who had experimented at Contact and then gone on to have international reputations. Established artists such as Benji Reid (www.benjireid.com) cited Contact as important in their development. Emerging artists, getting much acclaim at time of writing this thesis, included 20 Stories High (www.20storieshigh.org.uk) and Yusra Warsama (www.yusrawarsama.com) who were said to have directly grown out of the processes discussed here.

Those interviewed externally also acknowledged that Contact's practices were risk taking both artistically and managerially. The organisation was praised for being "able to hold faith, with a degree of risk management, which is beyond the experience of many arts organisations (Arts Council England senior manager A), despite the view in the last chapter that risk and innovation was at the heart of the arts sector.

Counter to the belief of many in the last chapter, that knowledge and expertise are necessary for decision making, some of those at Contact argued that where participatory decision making may be affected detrimentally is where theatres are working with specialist arts audiences, because "if you're asking the sort of audiences that have come to your theatre for years who have

enjoyed classic shows, they might only reference what they know" (Re-con programmer B).

Time and again the staff at Contact demonstrated, from their experiences, that those new to the arts were more open to risk taking and new ideas, precisely because they were less conditioned in their responses than regular audiences and did not have as many preconceptions, so "don't go down the obvious routes…quite far removed from what people's prejudices or expectations of what they would be interested in." (Contact staff member A).

The findings from Contact therefore, not only challenge the fear of a risk averse public expressed in the previous chapter but also the concern to maintain the role of the expert. Although no one interviewed wanted to see the end to artistic vision, most of the staff interviewed at Contact were confident in the notion that "we want to share that expertise, it's not about people holding on to expertise, is it?" (Contact staff member B). This relates to the concept of the "expert plus" described in the last chapter.

Some went further and questioned what they saw as self-appointed experts in programming and curation, who didn't necessarily have any more knowledge than anyone else. One person argued that what is seen as expertise is often a narrow specialism which in turn narrows choices rather than provides opportunities. It was argued that as the arts are "a fluid, changing thing" (Contact staff member C), a wider range of voices than one director is needed to help keep programming fluid like the arts. This directly challenges the traditional image of the "transformational" single vision of an artistic director and supports the concept of a "relational leadership" (Hewison, 2004) which is able to work with others.

Rather than having deskilled the staff or ignored expertise, the involvement of young people across the organisation was said, even by those outside Contact, to allow them "to build a complement of professional staff who are quite remarkable, and in a lot of ways very different from what you might expect in a complement of staff of a producing theatre" (Arts Council England senior manager A). The process of participatory decision making was therefore

seen to have learning benefits for staff as well as participants, which the funders of Contact argued that other arts organisations could and should learn from.

The extent to which this practice was seen as participatory decision making was questioned by some. One person saw it more as "a different relationship between provider and the audience" (local authority A), based on listening rather than decision making. This is partially supported by the fact that among the young people interviewed, the most common word used to describe the process of engagement at Contact was "conversation". But the importance of these conversations was described in terms of "a level of respect that our opinions are being taken seriously" (Re-con programmer A) and confidence that this did lead to decisions that affected the planning and development of the organisation. This was reinforced by both Artistic Directors who stated that their processes ensured follow through on the recommendations of the young people.

It was clear to both the young people and the staff that this did not mean handing over responsibility for decisions entirely to the young people in an x-factor style popularity contest but that Contact's "genius is not in the right answers; the genius is in the right questions" (local artist C). This supports the case for deliberative processes, rather than tick box voting, as discussed earlier (Wilson, 2010). It also places the emphasises on the "participatory" nature of decision making, shared between experts and users which is evident in the duty to involve (DCLG, 2008) rather than the devolvement of power more apparent in the asset transfer model (Quirk, 2007), which is discussed in more detail in the final case study in chapter 7.

There was no expectation, among the participants interviewed, that the venue could or should do everything that was discussed or even recommended through lengthy deliberation. Instead emphasis was placed on the importance of a mechanism of feeding forward and feeding back between managers and users, on how decisions had been arrived at, and "a long term, authentic commitment to work with people and give away power" (Audience Development Agency manager B). This supports the argument in the literature

review about the value of developing long term practices rather than the short term project based work, such as the co-commissioning projects mentioned in the previous chapter. It also highlights the fact that managing dissent is as important as finding consensus (Markovits, 2006). Building dialogue and trust was shown to be as important as the actual outcome of the processes.

It was acknowledged by all the staff at Contact that this was not an easy process. Staff members commented that working in this way was very time consuming. This reaffirms one of the concerns raised in the last chapter, about how sustainable such practices are, particularly within a context where funding levels were reducing rather than increasing, which was happening at the time of writing this thesis.

It was also acknowledged that "it's really hard to keep the momentum going …there's real ebbs and flows [as the young people have] got so many other things happening in their lives (Contact staff member C). Engaging on young people's terms was seen to be demanding as it often meant the staff had to work anti-social hours to fit in with the young people's commitments, rather than vice versa. It could also be emotionally demanding, dealing with the individual needs of a very diverse audience. At times this was said to require pastoral care and at others a leap of faith to entrust other people to deliver. But across the board those interviewed at Contact were committed to the principles of working in this way. Where there were differences of opinion was on how to manage the recruitment of those engaged.

Despite the open access ethos of the theatre, encouraging young people to not just use the building to see work, there were differences of opinion about how much those involved in participatory decision making should be current users and how much the theatre should look to engage non-users. While some members of staff believed that long term involvement with the venue was necessary to understand the ethos, for others this ran the risk of becoming "very insular and very internal" (Contact staff member C). This difference is particularly pertinent to this research in order to understand the extent to which participatory practices engage new people or give voice to those already engaged, which is discussed in the next section.

5.4   Selection of participants

John McGrath argued that the success Contact had in increasing the range of people who participated in the building, was due to a policy of ensuring a visible diversity in the building, from ushers to board members.   This was done through staff recruitment and artistic programming, as much as participatory decision making processes.

He supported the view that "the longer we engage with a young person, the more we encourage them into processes that are more structured and more defined" (Contact staff member A), rather than recruiting people from outside the theatre to engage in participatory processes.   Coupled with the other processes that focused on getting a wider range of people involved in the theatre in the first place, he strongly asserted that the theatre was reaching new people rather than giving a voice to those already engaged.   This is backed up by the statistics on audiences demographics in the business plan, already mentioned (Contact, 2011).

He described the processes he operated as "informal" and "organic", often asking for volunteers from those using the building, to come forward to sit on decision making panels or go out to review touring artistic work.   There were no criteria for selection other than ensuring that the same faces did not sit on panels each time.   The theatre also paid the young people taking part wherever possible.   The aim of this was to ensure that a large number of people were engaged in such processes, to ensure that the theatre did not only hear from a narrow range of voices.   It was acknowledged that "obviously some young people's availability is more than others" (Contact staff member A), so long term involvement may have limited the range of people who felt they could get involved.

This is a similar process to that most commonly used in participatory budgeting, whereby people are offered an invitation to take part, rather than a formal position within a decision making panel (SQW Consulting, 2010). But it is acknowledged that individuals may find it harder to influence decisions

through informal committees. Being involved on an occasional basis may also limit the potential to build the capacity of the participants.

Figure 5 – Contact pitch party, photo by Joel Chester Fildes

Despite this many young people at Contact developed their skills through this process and some of those interviewed had gained their first employment through the theatre, including some becoming the staff at the theatre. One member of staff tracked their progress over four years from joining "the young actors company, and then as soon as I finished...I got a job on the bar,…and during that time I got different acting roles around the city, different opportunities in Contact, and then [a full time] job opened up" (staff member B). This is very different to the view expressed in the last chapter that those interviewed had gained entry into the professional arts world through pre-existing arts contacts and education.

One staff member also identified the importance of not only providing access to the profession but also hearing from people who had "never done theatre, ever before in his entire life…and [don't] necessarily want to continue [but still helping] people who haven't got a voice and giving them a voice (staff member C). This relates to the importance of giving the audience, who may be casual attenders, a voice, as well as those who wanted to work in the arts.

But John McGrath's successor argued that although Contact was, what he described as, the most diverse company he had ever experienced, he recognised that there were always as many people excluded as included in the venue. Under his tenure, he felt that it was too easy to fall into the trap of repeatedly working with the artists and audience that the theatre already knew. He said he wanted processes that could engage young people who would not otherwise use the building at all. To this end he set up formal working groups of young people who met regularly, to advise the theatre on such areas as programming and marketing. Unlike John's informal invitation, these posts were advertised and young people were recruited through application and interview, with stated criteria to select some who had not previously had an engagement with Contact.

The more formal processes he instigated were seen by all the young people in the Re-Con team, who were selected through these mechanisms, as providing them with professional development opportunities to help them develop careers in the arts. They were aware that recruitment was about "gathering people who had very different artistic interests" (Re-con programmer A) but they all said that what motivated them to apply was that they saw themselves as would be artists, looking for an entry point into the profession. All were confident that Contact would provide them with, what they saw as, the necessary networks and contacts to realise their ambition. This seems to tally with the views expressed in the last chapter about how to become accepted in the professional arts world, rather than how to challenge the way that world operates.

Significantly none of them saw their role as representing or speaking for all young people, rather they saw it that they "were the young people that were being spoken to" (Re-con programme team B). Unlike under John McGrath, participants were not paid for their involvement in these groups, although they still received expenses to go out and review work. They may have been offered opportunities to work in other areas of the organisation, such as the bar or ushering, to support them financially, but there seemed to be weaker relationships between these different roles, than was described under John McGrath.

While the earlier process focused only on engaging "users" it could be argued that it was able to provide opportunities for a wide number of voices to be heard, with a wider range of interests and experiences. The more formal recruitment process in contrast reached people new to Contact, but did so for a much smaller number of people. Furthermore the formal recruitment process and long term unpaid commitment expected of those selected may also have limited the types of people who got involved. While John McGrath saw the importance of processes engaging all the different people in the building in different ways, when Baba Israel was asked to what extent he saw the voices he was engaging with as being "new artists" or "new audiences" he acknowledged that he had not provided mechanisms for the latter.

This therefore suggests a shift between the two directors from a participatory decision making process towards a training process for young artists. The aim of this was described as "enabling young people to become experts…to shape and nurture, and help to develop the next creative leaders" (Contact staff member C). But while focusing on the next generation of artists, rather than on wider participation, may infiltrate the cultural elite it is unlikely it would remove it. Instead some people interviewed believed Contact had just created an alternative orthodoxy. One person referred to the cliquey-ness of the venue, others said you could recognise work from Contact as it had its own distinctive artistic style. One person argued that "they don't all come from traditional routes, but I suppose they do have certain common elements" (Arts Council England senior manager A).

It was acknowledged that there is a real risk within all participatory decision making that "people who come into these programmes almost become native by the end of the process" and therefore are co-opted into the same ways of doing things (Audience Development Agency manager B). This was reinforced at Contact, by the number of young people interviewed who said they only had positive things to say about the organisation, and that they saw themselves as champions for the building. But it may be argued that this is less the case in the more informal processes, where the voices are constantly refreshed, rather

than the more formal processes, where a smaller number of people are regularly engaged with.

Some people interviewed defended the idea of "cliqueyness", arguing that Contact was creating "a bit of a movement, like the Liverpool Everyman in the 80s [which] created very much an identity and style", which had an impact beyond its own walls (local artist A). Such a movement out of Contact was argued to be more able to influence artistic practice across the North West, rather than just creating a unique organisation that operated in isolation.

Under both Artistic Directors, Contact was credited with engaging very different people from those participating in artistic work in other theatres, and it was because of this that their model was cited by so many people as important. However, the differences between processes under John McGrath and Baba Israel demonstrate that while principles may be embedded in an organisation, the way that key individuals interpret these principles may significantly alter the outcomes. This further supports the case that individuals can be at least as important, if not more, than the organisations within which they operate if the structures allow them to be.

But the principle being tested in this thesis is whether "ultimately it's about people having a voice and being given the power to express what it is that they want from the arts" (Arts Council England participation and engagement officer B), which may transform the range of people who participate in the arts. The following section therefore explores the backgrounds of those involved in more detail, to examine whether they were different from those interviewed in the last chapter.

5.5   A wider range of voices

Comparing the people interviewed for this case study, with the policy makers and advisers, interviewed for the last chapter, it is clear that all the staff and the young people interviewed had been introduced to the arts, usually through their family, when a child, just as the they had in the previous chapter. Most described their relationship with the arts as a passion, rather than a passing

interest, which may suggest that those involved in participatory decision making still came from a narrow group. One person interviewed challenged the aspiration to get people not interested in the arts involved, "as it is an arts organisation after all, not a youth club" (local artist A). This supports the concerns raised earlier about how representative of "the public" participatory decision making is. It also supports the comments made by members of staff at the Arts Council, in the last chapter, that such processes are only relevant to those with a direct interest in the area under discussion, whether in the arts or other areas of policy.

But while all of those interviewed had a pre-existing interest in the arts, when examining what that interest was the answers were very different, both from those in the last chapter and between those at Contact and those interviewed as part of the case study elsewhere in Manchester. Although many people interviewed, talked about a commitment to Contact, many said that their passion for the arts had been developed through their engagement in Contact, rather than being the reason they engaged in the first place. This is in contrast to those interviewed in the last chapter, who had largely gone into the arts with a pre-existing commitment or professional training.

Furthermore, while the professional artists involved in Contact all defined themselves as having arts backgrounds these tended to be through political and popular artistic practices, rather than the fine art or arts education route that most of those in the last chapter had experience of. Baba Israel grew up in an artists' commune with Living Theatre (www.livingtheatre.org) a seminal political theatre company which influenced the 1960s' community arts tradition in America. The board member interviewed was a refugee and defined her early arts experiences in relation to retaining part of her family's cultural heritage. Many of the staff talked of music festivals as their entry into the arts, rather than theatre. Most of the young people interviewed, had got into theatre through performing at school, but many had only ever been to see pantomime before. Despite the variety of experiences, all those interviewed at Contact described their backgrounds as rich in culture.

Significantly those interviewed in Manchester, but from outside Contact, in line with the interviews with policy makers in the last chapter, tended to define their cultural backgrounds much more in relation to classical culture. One even said that they did not consider they had engaged in the arts as a child, because while her parents "appreciated art and music…we didn't go to lots of concerts or anything like that" (arts manager A). Non-formal arts therefore were not seen as arts experiences in the same way outside Contact, as they were within. This is pertinent to criticisms in the literature review that the participation agenda under New Labour, may have measured participation in the arts only in the practices valued by funders and not those valued by audiences.

The range of artistic practices that people had engaged in while at Contact was also described broadly, in line with the way the venue described their programme, covering spoken word poetry, hip hop, dance, theatre and music among others. Again this was in contrast to the experiences of many of the "experts" interviewed in the last chapter who defined their arts experiences very much by their specialist interests, with visual artists admitting to little engagement in performing arts and vice versa. The value placed on different practices at Contact therefore may be argued to not only have diversified who was taking part, but equally to have increased the diversity of arts experiences that people had.

There was also significantly more variance in the social and cultural backgrounds of those interviewed at Contact than was identified from the others interviewed in Manchester, or in the last chapter. From the interviews with the staff and young people engaged in decision making, while many were university educated some credited Contact as the reason they became motivated to study, having got into University because of their involvement at Contact and not vice versa. In contrast all those interviewed elsewhere in Manchester, like those in the last chapter, were not only university educated but assumed that this was a prerequisite of the position they were in. The idea that "obviously I went to University" was not an uncommon response.

While this evidence may suggest that theatre attracts a certain type of people to engage it may equally be argued that the participatory process at Contact provided a learning experience for those who did engage, which impacted not only on the lives of the individuals involved but also on the broader arts sector. It was claimed by people interviewed from other arts organisations in the city, that if a wider sample of those working in the arts was taken, Contact's influence would be seen. It was claimed they had broadened the range of people working in the arts in Manchester, from what was previously described as a university educated arts community, to a cultural sector which more accurately reflects the culture and diversity of the city.

However this was not supported by the comments on the formulaic, staid nature of much of the rest of the arts ecology in Manchester discussed earlier. Nor was there evidence from any of those interviewed in Manchester that the audience base was shifting anywhere except Contact, which suggests that other arts organisations in the city were not changing significantly. Furthermore, when staff at Contact were asked to name people who had gone on to work elsewhere a small number of the same names recurred. The following section therefore considers the wider arts sector in Manchester, to assess how much participatory practices were becoming commonplace.

5.6   Contact and the wider arts sector

It was commonly accepted by everyone interviewed that most arts organisations had been "thinking through how the community could be part of the theatre" more and more since the 1980s (arts manager A). But as in the previous chapter, most people interviewed felt that most venues responded to the participation agenda through education and outreach programmes, rather than participatory decision making.

One person echoed the findings of the Taking Part survey, that good participatory projects should encourage audience development, because "if you are a doer it encourages you to want to do the seeing as well, …So if you're a child that sings in a choir, you might want to hear other people's choirs, or see what other people are singing, it's all linked." (Contact board

Member). But it was widely felt that most participatory work was not embedded as well within many arts organisations as it was seen to be at Contact. A separation between participation and main house programming was blamed by many people interviewed at Contact for the boring programming on the main stages of other theatres.

It was also acknowledged that while some well-funded organisations might want to implement change, much of what was talked about in relation to participation was "driven by financial needs, [rather than] a need to make sure that your theatre is accessible to the widest number of people" (arts manager A). In other words participation was used, as demonstrated in the last chapter, as audience development, from a marketing perspective to increase "bums on seats" rather than to increase social equity. One person commented that complacent marketing techniques, within most theatres, only targeted traditional theatre audiences, because they were easy wins. This is very much in line with the findings in the last chapter about how the Arts Council, local authorities and some arts organisations responded to New Labour's targets to increase participation through strategies aimed at getting existing audiences to attend more regularly.

In Manchester the result was said to be that outside of Contact, even most of those engaging in participatory activities such as youth theatres, were the same demographic as the normal audience. One person described the clientele for most of the highest funded organisations in Manchester as a "user base of mainly pretty well off people…not actually from the city itself" (local authority A) which may have value for economic or tourism objectives but did nothing to increase participation from a wider cross section of the community.

However, while many people felt that in order to increase participation, there was a need to see greater diversity of artistic practice in the theatre, most argued that this should be led by the vision of the Artistic Director and not by policy makers. But the fact that the desire of Contact's Artistic Directors, to influence artistic practice, was seen to be the exception rather than the norm, casts doubt about whether the slow change discussed in the last chapter was taking place.

It was accepted by one arts manager that "what can drive things isn't [vision or policy] on its own, but funding….I think very often it depends on individuals who have the money and have the power to make decisions around what they want to spend it on" (arts manager A). Policy not driven by cash investment may be therefore argued to be pointless. Despite this everyone interviewed was averse to top-down policy directives, let alone redistribution of funding to address the participation agenda. Despite the praise for Contact's work there was also strong resistance to the concept of participatory decision making being used elsewhere, particularly in decisions on funding. One person defended the ways decisions were normally made on the grounds that

> "when you apply for money from the Arts Council there's a kind of understanding that …they understand your work, they understand your reasons behind it, they've seen your work, …Whereas, if some decision making is given to the public, how on earth do you convey all of that to them?" (local artist B).

But this was not supported by everyone. Other local artists felt that the Arts Council's knowledge base was too narrow, that they did not get out to see a range of work and that this would become even more the case as the Arts Council itself was reducing in size while this research was being done. Despite this no-one opposed to participatory decision making suggested an alternative mechanism for hearing from a wider range of voices.

Some people also questioned the extent to which the Contact model, which had been used in a venue specifically for young people, was transferable to other venues with a less specific catchment. John McGrath acknowledged that

> "Contact was blessed and cursed with a very real challenge…its target audience ages 13-30, is the most fluid part of the population…it perpetually has to reinvent and re-find its audience in ways which most venues actually don't." (John McGrath, Artistic Director from 1999-2009).

This suggests that the process of engagement is both necessary as well as desirable at Contact, as the audience grows up and moves on. This is not the same for a venue that relies on a regular audience. But one staff member pointed out that while participants at Contact were all young; volunteering in other sectors is often undertaken by older people. Older people were also said to take part in many participatory budgeting experiments within local authority contexts (SQW Consulting, 2010). It follows then that other arts organisations, who have a much older clientele than Contact, should not assume a barrier to engaging people from different audience segments.

But the problem of balancing continuity and refreshment of participants was recognised as a greater problem with a more stable audience profile. Venues with a loyal regular audience, built over many years were recognised as more at risk of getting stuck with the same people engaging every time. The friends associations and subscription audiences that many traditional theatres had were said to be largely populated by older conservative audiences that did not want change. This factor, along with the fact that older audiences are less likely to be looking for professional development opportunities, suggests that the more organic and informal processes used by Contact under John McGrath, constantly refreshing those taking part, seem more transferable than the more formal positions offered under Baba Israel.

It is worth noting as a final point, that the changes at Contact were also said to have been made easier because the building had been closed for refurbishment (1998-1999) and so the new vision could be implemented as if for a new organisation. John McGrath argued that many of the changes that have been credited as being implemented in Brazil, though participatory budgeting, were also possible because of a lack of historical state involvement. A new government and the rising economic wealth of the country may have been a more significant reason for the level of change, rather than the introduction of participatory decision making itself. In England, with its long tradition of arts funding, the public may be able to be easily mobilised by groups who already hold power. In 2008 when the Arts Council tried to cut some theatres, the public were said to have "come out around those theatre buildings, which in some cases were ones which were on relatively shaky

grounds, and they were 'saved for the people'" (John McGrath, Artistic Director from 1999-2009).

Campaigns to save the arts, irrespective of what art is being saved, or the suggested unifying terms of "great arts for everyone" may therefore be seen to operate in favour of the status quo and path dependency may be too strong to overcome for individual organisations or agents, unless there is structural change in the distribution of funding within the arts, or organisational change such as that at Contact as a result of the major refurbishment.

In England, under New Labour, a new government and significant increases in money available to the arts, as mentioned in the literature review (Arts Council England, 2009, Gilmore, 2011) may have made more funding available to new artists, but as has been shown, it did not see a significant redistribution of core funds to ensure the implementation of new policy. This was argued to be in part due to the fact that under New Labour while supporting a broad participation agenda, the concept of participatory decision making "was something that actually wasn't really understood or recognised in the New Labour arts agenda, until the very dying days" (John McGrath, Artistic Director from 1999-2009).

This challenges the findings elsewhere in this research that the arts were slow adopters of participatory policy, and suggests that New Labour themselves were ambivalent in their approach. The following case study therefore examines participatory decision making in the last days of New Labour to consider whether such policy did become the key focus suggested in the previous chapter.

5.7   Conclusions

The example of Contact demonstrates both the difficulty of challenging the status quo and the potential for change where participatory practices are embedded across the whole organisation, rather than as a marginal activity. Both Contact's audiences and artistic practices have been demonstrated to have been transformed by the practices described.

But despite the fact that as an organisation they were praised for this work by a range of people interviewed for this research, such practices were still resisted by many other arts organisations, which were seen by many at Contact as insular and conservative. This is at odds with the arts sector's own perception of itself, expressed in the last chapter, as risk taking and challenging.

The findings from this case study demonstrate the complexity of defining participatory decision making practices in the arts, and the importance of the processes in determining who takes part in such activities. The example of Contact reinforces the views expressed in both the literature review and the chapter on policy makers, that deliberative processes create both more ownership of decisions by participants at the same time as the opportunity for shared learning between the participant and the arts organisation, than tick box approaches to decisions.

It is further apparent from Contact's experience that it is important to "be clear about what the parameters are, because obviously you can't do everything" (Contact staff member A). Feeding forward and feeding back between professionals and participants, on how discussions influenced decisions, was seen to be a key part of the relationship building that Contact undertook, and a means of managing dissenting voices, rather than looking for consensus.

Significantly participatory decision making was seen not in isolation at Contact, but formed part of an overall strategy to increase the diversity of the organisation, not just in terms of the voices with which the theatre consulted, but in terms of who they employed and the work they put on stage. The one without the other was seen as counterproductive.

This case study also demonstrates the importance of constant refreshment of the participatory group, to ensure that a new "elite" does not form, to replace the old one. Rather than removing the cultural elite it may be argued that the change of Artistic Director meant that their practices increasingly involved infiltration into and absorption by that elite, which may serve the purposes of maintaining the status quo in the wider arts sector, more than changing it.

Despite Contact attracting a broader demographic, some questions remain about the extent to which they fully attracted people who were not already engaged in the arts.

While there were differences of opinion about whether participatory decision making would or should become more common in the arts there was a strong conviction from some that "you can no longer be an organisation that sits within four walls and decides of its own volition what programmes are going to be put on, and sell that to an audience" (local authority A). There was however, as in the previous chapter, resistance to the idea of participatory practices being imposed on arts organisations. This was both for conceptual and practical reasons.

Conceptually the concerns replicated those in the previous chapter, in terms of the creative limitations such practices might put on artists, thereby devaluing expertise. These views were shared by those elsewhere in Manchester, but were not shared by those interviewed at Contact. But from a practical point of view people at Contact recognised that "there's a whole process that would need to be built upon in order to do that at other venues" (Re-Con programmer B), which the theatre had developed over more than a decade. It was not seen possible or useful to "drop the exact model somewhere else" (Contact staff member A).

There were differences of opinion about how important it was that Contact was a young people's venue. This is explored in more detail in the other two case studies, which involve a very different age range.

There were also concerns about the time and cost for such practices and doubts about how sustainable they are in a more austere economic climate. This was already said to be impacting on Contact as "in the previous funding climate we were able to give lots and lots of stuff away for free [to young people] we can't just do that [because of] the pressures to generate revenue" (Contact staff member A). This means that Contact increasingly had to make tough choices between providing support or space for those who needed it and those who could pay. Under the Coalition, one person said that the policy drive

had moved to one where "we've had to do it for ourselves" because the state is no longer providing, rather than a partnership (Contact Board Member). This relates to the difference between New Labour's investment in participation and the Coalition's reduced investment, which is discussed in the final case study of Hebden Bridge.

The case of Contact therefore may be argued to both offer a compelling case for the opportunities provided by participatory decision making as well as the pitfalls and barriers to its implementation in the arts more broadly. Central to its premise was the belief that such participatory practices should be led by the arts organisation rather than by policy directives, but as discussed this also has been shown to have limited its potential to be transferred elsewhere and hence limited its impact in challenging the status quo.

The following case study of the Castleford Project was therefore chosen as an example of an initiative that did not come from an artistic drive, but was a direct response to New Labour policy. The aim is to test the effectiveness of a more directive policy approach.

6 Participatory decision making in practice – a case study of the Castleford Project

As stated the previous chapter provides a discussion of an arts-led approach to participatory decision making. This identified the transformational impact that such practices can have on an arts organisation, when embedded over the long term, in terms of both the artistic programme and the audience profile. It also considered some of the challenges in making such practices more widespread across other arts organisations. One of these challenges related to the opposition to top-down policy directives, such as the "duty to involve" discussed in the literature review (DCLG, 2008).

This second case study, of the Castleford project, was therefore selected as one such, top-down initiative rather than an example of a comparative arts organisation. It provides an example of a project initiated by a local authority, in this case Wakefield Metropolitan District Council (Wakefield MDC), which had been under Labour leadership since its formation in 1972.

Although the Castleford project started before the introduction of the "duty to involve" (DCLG, 2008), in the interviews, with local authority staff undertaken for this case study, it was stated that the project was a direct response to New Labour's emerging policy. Like the "duty" the aim was to increase participatory decision making in both planning and delivery of the project. As a result of the high profile that the scheme received, through being documented for a four part television programme (Channel 4, 2009), it was also cited in some of the interviews with policy makers in chapter four, as playing a role in informing the development of later government policy under both New Labour and the Coalition. It may therefore be seen as an example of New Labour policy in action.

Despite its high profile and the fact that most people interviewed described it as a highly successful initiative, there was criticism from one person that it offered little more than a "short term make over" (architect A). The project therefore also provides an interesting comparison with Contact's long term

commitment, which was described as a key success factor for participatory decision making in the last chapter.

The Castleford project used participatory decision making as part of a broader plan to regenerate a town. Despite being managed by the urban and regeneration team, within planning at Wakefield MDC, instead of the culture and leisure services, I have defined the project as an example of participatory decision making in the arts, due to its focus on commissioning public artworks for the town. As such it provides an example of the arts being used as a vehicle to deliver social agendas, rather than as an initiative emerging from a primary artistic drive, as in Contact's case.

The aim of the project was defined as using "inspirational design to bring out the aspiration of the local people" (local authority B). Many of those interviewed stated that the project raised the profile of the arts in the district and helped draw down money from non-arts funders, for both itself and as a legacy for the arts sector in the district. This supports the research findings, discussed in the literature review, that despite the perception of some of those working in the arts, that participatory decision making may reduce opportunities for arts funding, it also has the potential to increase it (Fennell et al., 2009).

As a project rooted in its location the following section explores the background to Castleford the place, as well as the project, in order to consider the particularities of place in this case study. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the participatory processes employed and by an examination of how the project was perceived both in the immediate local area, and by arts organisations across the district.

6.1   Background

Castleford is an ex-mining community, on the outskirts of the city of Wakefield, which along with four other neighbouring towns, Featherstone, Knottingley, Normanton and Pontefract (hereafter referred to as the five towns) had its own Urban Borough Council until 1974 when it was absorbed into Wakefield MDC (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council et al., 2005).

Following its absorption into the district and the subsequent closure of the pits, where the majority of the population worked until the 1980s, Castleford was identified by the council, at the start of the Millennium, as now being home to some of the highest levels of deprivation in England with all four wards being placed in the bottom 15% in the country; poor health among residents standing at 41% compared with a national average of 27%; lack of educational qualifications at 48% compared with 29%; and similar discrepancies in terms of affluence, skills and employment (ABROS, 2003).

When the New Labour government came to power in 1997, according to the local residents interviewed, Wakefield MDC was identified as a failing council in terms of service delivery, engagement and leadership. As a Labour-led council, in a district which had elected two Labour MPs with ministerial responsibility (Ed Balls and Yvette Cooper) central government were said to have been quick to impose a new administration. A new Chief Executive was recruited who prioritised participatory decision making as a mechanism to rebuild trust between the council and residents.

Although the council staff interviewed recognised that there was some opposition to this from local councillors, all the staff and residents interviewed were positive about the process of participatory decision making. But some questioned whether it would have been introduced if it had not been a priority of New Labour nationally and unlike those interviewed in the previous chapters believed that, even if unpopular, policy without enforcement may be pointless. Only one person queried the sense in imposing policy, as "a decent officer will be able to bend the policies to suit what he likes" (local artist C). Others did question how effectively New Labour policy would be adopted in local authorities run by other political parties, where there was not the same political will to make it a success. This supports the evidence in chapter four that artists and policy makers may interpret policy agendas very differently, in order to suit their own values. It was recognised that this might limit the change that such interventions may have, even when imposed, where there isn't a personal commitment to the agenda from those implementing it.

The grey literature provided by the council further demonstrates that even within Wakefield MDC the prioritisation of participatory decision making is complex. Within council documents two approaches to regeneration can be seen to have been operating at the same time. On the one hand a business case for the Castleford Project was made for retail led regeneration (ABROS, 2003) which it was argued could transform Castleford from an ex-mining town to commuter belt for Leeds. This document makes no reference to participatory decision making, but rather focuses on the need to attract new people into the district. In contrast, the five town strategy (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council et al., 2005), which was developed almost concurrently and informed the project planning, makes it clear that its priorities were to engage with the current constituents (and voters) and it distanced itself from plans to attract commuters.

This tension between a regeneration strategy focused on attracting newcomers, and one based on improvements for residents clearly raises questions about how the public were defined. Both local authority officers interviewed acknowledged that there were concerns within the council that their participatory decision making processes tended to engage long term residents. It proved harder to recruit people who were new to the area, let alone people from outside the district, who the council might want to attract to move to Castleford as commuters, once the work had been completed.

Residents and officers believed that an element of self-interest was required to motivate people to take part and therefore it would be ineffective where people had less investment in an area or did not see direct benefits for themselves. The local council officers argued, in line with the views of policy makers discussed in chapter four, that participatory decision making therefore could make it harder for councils to make large strategic decisions across a district, rather than those with a local focus or interest. These views were supported by one of the artists who said "consultation is at its most effective when it's local and it's affecting local areas" (architect B). It is further evidenced by the fact that most residents acknowledged that they only attended planning meetings about Castleford rather than those in all the five towns.

However, some residents argued that there is a role for participatory decision making on district-wide decisions, and that without it the processes become tokenistic. This replicates the findings in the literature review, that a lack of mainstreaming of such processes in other local authorities was the main limitation to their effectiveness (SQW Consulting, 2010). Some residents also argued that, particularly in the arts, organisations are more effective where they have a local rather than wider remit, but that this is not prioritised enough by policy makers. There was said to be too much focus on regional and national initiatives and that participatory decision making was useful precisely because it redresses the balance by thinking more locally.

Many of the community members also questioned whether Wakefield MDC did in fact have any overarching district strategy. One pointed to the fact that "they say that the arts in Wakefield are important and close the gallery for five years, so it couldn't have been that important" (local artist D). Some accused the council (and indeed electoral democracy) of always thinking about short term solutions or high profile initiatives, because of the need to chase votes, which limit opportunities for local policy delivery.

Many residents interviewed believed that they had the long term interests of the district at heart, more than the elected council members. Castleford's rich cultural and community traditions, and high levels of grassroots political activism, were cited frequently. It was claimed by residents that this had developed from the days when people were organised through the mining unions. As a result community pressure groups were already active and influential in the district, demanding that their voices were heard, before New Labour's policy focus on participation.

This supports the arguments in the literature review that civic traditions play a vital role in terms of levels of participation (Keaney, 2006a). While participation policy was seen to be a catalyst to make the council take residents' views more seriously, the pre-existing activism was believed to have played its role in helping Castleford to get the ear of the council more easily than the other four towns.

One council officer argued that this posed problems as it meant that some people felt that the loudest voices were the ones who held sway. In some cases, in the Castleford Project, the choice of projects was said to have been influenced by where activism was strongest rather than need was greatest. For example according to the economic evaluation of the project, the most frequently used parks, in the poorest areas, were not necessarily those chosen for regeneration (Young Foundation, 2009).

But it was clear to everyone interviewed that it was the combination of national policy, council commitment and community activism, which meant that, when Channel 4 got in touch with Yorkshire Forward, looking for a regeneration scheme to document, Castleford was an obvious choice. The television company were seen to be able to "harness the town's key assets – the commitment of its people and existing regeneration activity" (Young Foundation, 2009 pg 3). There was also consensus that once the television company was on board it also became a catalyst for making the plans a reality.

Residents commented that, although the local authority had developed a twenty five year strategy with the residents of the five towns (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council et al., 2005), this would have been "a document on a shelf and no more" (resident and community champion A) without the intervention of Channel 4. The changes proposed had been talked about "for donkey's years, even when me mum were alive….since I were a little girl. I'm now coming up to 69" (resident and community champion B) without any signs of progress. One of the architects agreed that council regeneration plans often are not implemented because "when a strategy gets wide enough it's sort of meaningless" (architect A) without the "quick wins" that the television project provided.

These quick wins included eleven pubic art commissions, where in many cases the public were involved in the selection of the artists, and in some cases worked alongside them from design to delivery. The project cost over £9million, which was provided by twenty one different funding streams, representing considerably more investment than the town had seen since the closure of the coal mines (Lewis, 2009).

Significantly the steering group member from the Arts Council also argued that it was the combination of artistic excellence and community engagement which was key to drawing down this funding. The following section therefore examines the way "art" and "excellence" is defined in this project before examining the participatory decision making processes involved.

The Footbridge	create a new heart to the town which will be an attraction its own right	**£4.8 million** Yorkshire Forward, English Partnerships, WMDC
Riverside development	create a new heart to the town which will be an attraction its own right	Including above
Wilson Street Triangle	improve security, generate community ownership and provide image enhancement	**£119,062** Living Places, Home Office Gate-It, WMDC Housing & Highways
Cutsyke Play Forest	re-use of 'dead' open space for development and community open space	**£150,000 from** Wakefield MDC
The Green, Ferry Fryston	community leisure and sports focus to be at the heart of the community	**£326,867** Surestart, SRB4 Aireldale, English Partnerships, ERDF, CRT, WREN, Landfill tax, Ibstock Cory, Living Places, WMDC, Castleford Project fund, SRB Community Chest, WDH Community Chest, CDPP, Big Lottery Fund
2 Sagar Street	community resource facility for residents	**£15,000 per annum** Wakefield MDC
Relocation of the market	elevate the trading potential of the market and hence number of visits to the town	**£1.1 million** Wakefield MDC
Tittle Cott/ Tickle Cock Bridge	improved access into the town and change perceptions of Castleford	**£188,000** Wakefield MDC, Yorkshire Forward, Arts Council
Carlton Square	create a square that will be the retailing focus and create a sense of identity	Not known
New Ferry Fryston	design process to deliver improved open space to facilitate housing-led neighbourhood expansion	**£800,000** English Partnerships
Arts & events programme	community engagement into facilities to enable involvement, ownership and capacity building	Not known
Figure 6: Summary of projects and events adapted from Castleford Project Evaluation (Young Foundation, 2009, Lewis, 2009)		

6.2   The arts and artistic practice

Art and creative skills were identified by all residents as being core to Castleford's traditions. It was said that they had been encouraged within education since the early twentieth century, because "artistic skills were necessary because we had the potteries [where many people had worked] where it's all about hand painting" (resident and community champion A).

Many also cited the importance of Yorkshire Arts Circus, a local community arts organisation, which in the 1980s trained and supported many mine workers, as the industry was being dismantled. The founder and some of the miners, who now defined themselves as artists, were among the residents interviewed for this research. There were also said to be a wealth of choirs, brass bands and art groups which had formed out of the mines, but still existed. There is evidence that over thirty five voluntary arts groups were active in the town before the Castleford Project started and over eighty by the time it finished (Lewis, 2009). Council officers and residents both attributed this growth to the success of the project.

Despite this pride in the town's rich cultural traditions, many of the residents interviewed believed that this was the case in every town. Art was commonly defined as important "in every walk of life….you can't do without art…as regards clothes, furniture or anything (resident and community champion B). One resident said that "in every class that I've ever taught there have been people that you could have drawn out more of their artistic talent" (resident and community champion A). Significantly the notion of universal creativity and seeing "art in everything" (local artist C), which some directly related back to the writings of William Morris, was valued more highly than the notion of a professional artistic elite.

The view of the professional artist was less than positive, even among residents who defined themselves as creative practitioners. One local artist said they preferred to be called a painter, rather than an artist because the art world had become so elitist. One of the architects interviewed questioned the very concept of the professional artist stating that "people who are

independently wealthy quite often call themselves artists because nobody can prove you're not" (architect A). A number of residents supported the view that "let's face it the artist can come up with some crap can't they and you know we're a town, we're not something for them to experiment on" (resident and community champion A).

This gap between engagement in creative practices and perceptions of the professional arts, supports the argument in the literature review that the perceived low levels of arts engagement identified in the Taking Park survey (DCMS, 2011) may be to do with the way the arts are defined rather than with a cultural deficit in the population. This is demonstrated by the fact that in contrast to the pride of residents in their cultural heritage, the television programme describes the town as having no cultural assets (Channel 4, 2009) and the Active People Survey describes the district as having one of the lowest rates of arts participation in England (Sport England, n.d.). The Arts Council representative who sat on the steering group for the project further described his role in the Castleford Project as ensuring that "great artists could be brought to this project" (Arts Council England senior manager C) which he believed would not have happened if left in the hands of the community, due to their lack of knowledge of the arts.

But like the participants at Contact, there was a view among the majority of residents interviewed that the professional arts sector was too narrow in focus, both in terms of art form (Wakefield is home to two large galleries but its theatre lost its funding during the period of this research) and programme. Curators were accused by one person of using "judgement [which] comes from a group of self-funding friends" (local artist A) which in turn created a vested interest in the arts. This was seen to reinforce elitism and create distance between the artist and the public.

The Arts Council was also criticised by almost everyone interviewed in Castleford for focusing on "money hungry projects, [when they should] be feeding from the bottom" (resident E). The representatives of some of the district-wide arts organisations also felt that the funding crisis in 2010 was "an opportunity to have some high profile sacrifices in favour of some more

egalitarian redistribution" (arts manager B) but as demonstrated in the literature review, this had not happened.

A representative of one of the larger arts organisations, who gained increased funding during this period, agreed that the Arts Council redistribution had not gone far enough, but unlike the majority interviewed, he called for a return to the arts policy of "few but roses" (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1951) discussed earlier, which would have seen more money going to the big organisations, rather than the egalitarian distribution called for by others in the district. He saw this as a means of ensuring excellence rather than as reinforcing elitism, and he described his organisation as providing the "role of the connoisseur" (arts manager C) in the district.

He also identified a hierarchy within arts policy and "the political reality to the art world…where the directors of [big] organisations get together on a very regular basis" (arts manager C) and influence policy implementation. As a nationally significant venue, he said he bypassed the regional office of the Arts Council to talk directly to national office. He even suggested that where possible he would prefer to talk directly to DCMS as "a body that government are going to pay more attention to" (arts manager C).

These differences between the Castleford residents and local artists referencing everyday culture and the alternative view of connoisseurship demonstrate the fundamental questions about what constitutes art and culture, that have been identified in the literature review, as existing since the 19th century (Morris, 1915, Collini, 2007). As in chapter 4, the fact that the minority view, of one person from a major arts institution, appeared to have more influence at the Arts Council and DCMS than any other voices further provides evidence of the continuing influence of a narrow range of voices on cultural policy discourses while this research was being undertaken.

Significantly, in relation to the Castleford Project, public art (defined here as both architecture and street art) was viewed as more egalitarian. One person argued that "it's not so loaded as high art. [If] its public space people react to it differently and I think they're more willing to take it to their heart" (architect A).

This was supported by one of the local arts organisations, who argued that more art outdoors and less within buildings would lead to a more open relationship between the artist and the public, with "community work informing the professional work and the professional work being informed by the community work" (local artist D). There was also a consensus that participatory decision making was more widespread and more accepted in public art, than elsewhere in the arts sector.

The architects and local street artist interviewed did not see this as a new departure related to New Labour policy, but argued that, just as at Contact, this was the way they had worked for a long time. They supported the arguments made by some of those interviewed in chapter four that such trends came from wider social factors, rather than just from policy shifts that the local authority and residents identified at the start of this chapter. This may question whether this case study does demonstrate a top-down initiative as clearly as at first seemed, or as suggested at the end of the last chapter, whether New Labour were themselves responding to a change that was happening anyway.

The two architects interviewed supported the claims of staff at Contact that participatory decision making can improve the artistic process rather than limiting it and that "you can consult properly, you can have real involvement of the community and get a really good high quality project that … doesn't just satisfy a local need, it rises above it" (architect A). This challenges the concerns raised in chapter four that such practices would diminish artistic quality. At the same time it was acknowledged that "every community engagement process is different, it comes down to personalities, what kind of interest groups are already set up, how enthusiastic people are" (architect B). The following section therefore considers the factors that were responsible for the perceived success of the Castleford Project and the challenges identified in the process.

6.3   The Castleford model

As suggested earlier, the first stage in the process of developing the Castleford project was the development of the five towns' strategy. This had already

involved large scale public meetings where in excess of five hundred people were said to regularly attend, whatever the weather (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council et al., 2005).

It was said by a number of people interviewed that the project ideas, which formed part of the Castleford project, had come through the five towns strategy process although "not one of the ideas which were originally put forward was the scheme that was done at the end of the day…there was so much shaping through the process" (local authority B). But the principle of having people involved in agenda setting and shaping the ideas rather than just delivery, was seen as a key element of the participatory decision making process, to ensure that it was not just about legitimising what the council wanted to do anyway.

It is worth noting that despite this much of the language in the council documents refers to capacity building and increasing the social capital of the residents rather than a desire by the council to learn from the residents and change their practices and policies through these processes. Indeed one of the council officers interviewed acknowledged that mainstream practice at the council "was very much about giving the community information, building the profile of the council, more like a PR exercise in some ways" (local authority officer C).

But the strength of the community activists and the presence of the television crew in Castleford were said, to have "railroaded" the council into new working practices (architect A), in a way that moved the project up the ladder of participation, discussed in the literature review, from consultation to power and decision making (Arnstein, 1969, Brodie et al., 2009). The cameras were also said to have increased levels of participation by ensuring that "local people knew something special was happening" (Young Foundation, 2009 pg 4), thereby being more effective at engaging a wider range of voices than a council initiative might have achieved on its own.

There were some concerns that the process raised unrealistic expectations in local communities and confused "the chain of command [because] the community can't give instructions…it can suggest something" (architect B) but

the council had to hold the purse strings. At times it was said that the architects got stuck between disagreements between the council and the community which were unhelpful and made the process slower than it would otherwise have been.

In theory the chain of command and the overview of the whole project was via a steering group, which included "all interested parties" (local authority B). This term was said to usually only refer to stakeholders putting money on the table, such as funders, commercial businesses and council members, as identified in the American model of public value discussed in the literature review (Moore, 1995). But for the first time in Wakefield, community representatives were involved in the steering group from the beginning. Furthermore community champions from each of the areas that made up the Castleford Project were brought together to meet on the same day as each steering group meeting, to ensure "they got the view of everybody at the same time" (local authority B). It was acknowledged that this inevitably meant that some decisions took longer to arrive at, but the process was seen to be important and worthwhile, by the council.

The champions were said by all those interviewed to have played a crucial role in the success of the project and they "said it as it was, as they saw it, they didn't pull any punches and more than occasionally this resulted in fundamental changes in what was being suggested and what being planned" (local authority B). This was said to be a model that was being used more widely both in Castleford and further afield.

The community champions were also "a clear point of contact and a clear point of reference to get feedback from" (architect B) for the artists, rather than them always having to address mass meetings. This served the purpose of resolving some of the concerns identified in chapter four that artists cannot create to committee, at the same time as allowing the community an involvement in the decision making process, from agenda setting to delivery. But it also raises questions about how these champions represented the wider views of their communities.

In practice some people felt that Channel 4 and the Arts Council overrode both the community champions and the council by claiming to be the expert and "criticised [others] for being not inspirational or aspirational" (local authority B) everyone time there was disagreement. This was said by both council and residents to mean that the participatory processes at times felt tokenistic.

There was some disagreement between those interviewed about how effective Wakefield MDC's role was. One person interviewed said that "at every juncture [the council] got it wrong" (architect A) and another felt that the local councillors were obstructive of the process that had been created because they "didn't believe in local community having a say because they're not elected" (resident and community champion A). But others said that the council "acted as a great facilitator" (architect B) and as a result of the project some of the residents felt there were now much better relationships between councillors and community groups. This difference of views may relate to the different outcomes of the projects people were involved in, or the different personalities involved.

In terms of the different outcomes, many acknowledged that the quick wins that the project offered "only deliver for the community and for the work if there is an on-going dialogue" beyond the life of the project (Arts Council England senior manager C). Several residents questioned how much this was happening once the camera crews were not watching. At the same time some argued that the time pressures imposed by the television company meant that only those projects which resulted in tangible short term results were adopted in the first place. One person even argued that "Channel 4 just wanted to raise expectations, film that, film the design and film the dashing of those expectations, because that makes a good TV programme" (architect A) and that they weren't at all interested in helping regeneration.

But many residents criticised the council for raising expectations, without embedding such practices in decision making over the longer term. The project identified by a number of residents as their highest priority was *the Forum*. This would have involved refurbishing the library, and adding on a museum and art gallery but it was never implemented. The idea was subject

to consultation during the period of the Castleford Project. A Cuban artist, Carlos Garaicoa (www.carlosgaraicoa.com), was commissioned to work with the community and develop a vision for a new arts space. This led to some ambitious thinking, culminating in a high profile exhibition of how Castleford might be transformed, but his proposals went no further.

Carlos became involved in the project because he was working in the district, with Yorkshire Sculpture Park. He was described in one of the evaluations of the Castleford project as being to Cuba what Tracy Emin was to England (Lewis, 2009). But there were mixed responses among those interviewed to his involvement. While some of the community champions praised the inspiration he brought to the town, others questioned the sense in commissioning an artist to come up with a vision if there was no money or will to follow through on this vision. One argued that "it's ok asking people what they want but unless you're prepared to actually give it to them it's a pointless exercise. It's quite damaging in some respects" (resident C). It was said by the Arts Council representative that Channel 4 thought his ideas would be too time consuming to implement in time for them to broadcast the programme and whist "[the forum] was championed by the Heritage group….it simply didn't have the political clout" in the council to make it happen (Arts Council England senior manager C).

In the previous chapter, staff and participants at Contact acknowledged that participatory decision making did not mean that every idea explored could be delivered. Wakefield MDC defended the failure to realise *the Forum* on the same grounds. By the time the project was said to have been proposed a reduced funding climate and new priorities meant that it was not possible. The council officers also questioned the practicality of Carlos' suggestions. This may be argued to demonstrate the risk in short term projects raising expectations that either cannot, or are chosen not to be implemented. But the complaints of residents in Castleford were also about the lack of transparency for deciding these priorities. The recession was argued, by residents, to be a poor excuse for the project not to go ahead as "the money's there, look how much [the council's] spending on the Hepworth Gallery…the difference is elitism" (resident and community champion A).

The Hepworth Gallery, as a large district-wide initiative, was being built during the same period, without participatory decision making. While the council argued that this demonstrated the difference in geographical scale; others felt that it called into question the council's real commitment to engaging the public. This is explored in more detail in relation to the extent that participatory decision making had influenced arts policy across the district, but first the projects that were delivered as part of the Castleford Project are discussed.

Despite claims that it was impossible to get total agreement on any project, in terms of those interviewed for this research; one project selected through this mechanism was unanimously cited as the most successful. *The Footbridge* was designed by London based architect Renato Benedetti (www.mcdowellbenedetti.com), who, while never having built a bridge before, had been shortlisted for the Millennium Bridge in London. He was selected by a vote at a public meeting.

Once selected, he worked closely with two community champions from design concept to delivery. It was clear from interviews that this process was seen positively both by the architect and the residents. Residents said he was chosen, not for the quality of his design ideas, but for his willingness to listen and learn. The artistic vision for the bridge he built across the River Aire was said to have come "as much from the community who identified that the river is the theme, not the bridge [and] they wanted a "destination" not just a bridge" (local artist A), as from the artist.

But it was the mutual respect in the relationship which was most noticeable from people's comments. The residents were more than happy to credit the expertise and skill of the architect; "if we hadn't had Renato do you think we would have had that beautiful bridge? No we wouldn't" (resident and community champion A). But the architect also believed that the combination of the community's enthusiasm and his artistic and technical knowledge "didn't just help it..it absolutely fundamentally made the project" (architect A). Good communication, willingness to learn and artistic vision were all crucial success

factors to delivering something that met the needs of the community, the council and the art world.

Figure 7 Castleford Footbridge, photo by Paul Floyd Blake

The bridge physically linked two parts of town that had previously only been reachable via a road bridge with a narrow pavement for pedestrians.   It was seen as creating an iconic landmark in its own right and a meeting place for people in the town. But it was also said to attract visitors into town and had won international awards for its design quality and innovation, including being nominated for the internationally renowned Stirling Prize for architecture (http://ribastirlingprize.architecture.com/). This, may be argued to demonstrate the fact that creating something through community centred regeneration can have wider impacts that could also deliver the council's other aim of attracting newcomers into town.

Another success story was said to be *Cutsyke Playforest.* Cutsyke is a large council estate in Castleford, where there were considerable tensions within the community. As a result a community action group had already formed before the Castleford project started. This group developed the idea for a play area for the children off the estate and pushed this as part of the Five Towns Plan (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council et al., 2005).

Figure 8: Cutsyke Playforest – photo by Paul Floyd Blake

When the scheme was adopted as part of the Castleford Project the community association selected Estell Warren Landscape Architects, one of the few Yorkshire based designers off Channel 4's shortlist (www.estellwarren.co.uk). Working with a locally based agency it was said allowed the community to be much more hands on in the design process. A community champion took groups of the young people who would be using the space "to the offices of the designers [and] out on day trips with designers to see different play areas" (resident and community champion D). This was seen as a model for building the relationship and the knowledge base for both the designer and the community.

While the television company focuses on the disagreements that arose from this project, the community champion, the architect and the council identified it as a success story in shared learning both about how to engage communities but also about how to design leisure amenity. But not all projects ran smoothly. *The Wilson Street Project*, followed the same process of a community vote for an architect, followed by selection of community champions to work closely with them, but this relationship was not seen to have been successful.

The project involved Allen Tod Architects (www.allentod.co.uk), also from Yorkshire, developing street furniture and public art for a residential area in the

centre of town. Although the community association acknowledged that the artist's profile brought investment to their area, which they would not have received on their own, there was a breakdown in trust between the two parties. The architect accused residents of being resistant to all the creative ideas they were shown and the community accused the architect of not listening to their views.

The project which was finally settled on was said to have been designed more by the community than by the experts and it was largely discredited by Channel 4 and the Arts Council from a design point of view. But a number of residents and the council officials interviewed argued that it had still worked from a regeneration point of view. The quality of workmanship meant it had stood the test of time, in a way that *The Ticklecock Underpass,* discussed below, had not. This clearly identifies the tension between the artistic and the regeneration aims of the project.

Figure 9: Wilson Street – photo by Paul Floyd Blake

The Ticklecock Underpass was mentioned as one project where the pitching process was not used and no community champion was identified. The designer Deborah Saunt (www.dsdha.co.uk) had pitched for other contracts in Castleford but residents had not chosen her. It was claimed that as she had

been put on the shortlist by Channel 4 they overrode the community and gave her a project anyway. Financial and technical constraints meant that her initial ideas to completely reconstruct the underpass were impossible. Instead she worked with what was there, recovering the surface with fabric "flocking" and installing a light design and benches to make it a welcoming destination rather than a threatening tunnel.
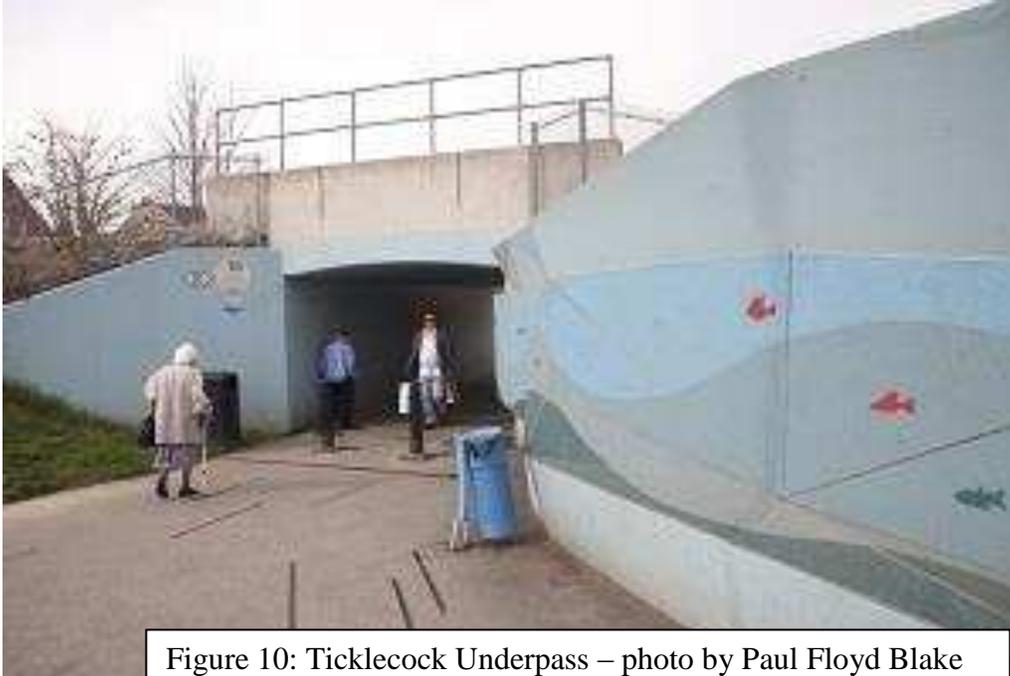
Figure 10: Ticklecock Underpass – photo by Paul Floyd Blake

Although the artist had a national reputation for working in the public realm many of those interviewed in Castleford said that she was not interested in the views of the community. Lack of community engagement was blamed for the fact that it was quickly vandalised after completion, unlike the projects where the community was involved. Both the local authority officer and the evaluation of the social impact of the project (Lewis, 2009) also accused the artist of putting her artistic vision over the practicalities of the design. Materials were used that were not designed for outdoors and drainage was not included in the construction. It was claimed by the council officer that although it looked good while the cameras were on, it fell apart shortly after and had cost them heavily in maintenance bills.

Similarly for *Fryston Village Green* another artist was imposed. New Fryston is

"a residual colliery village" (Lewis, 2009 pg 102). Where there was once a large and thriving community, there were now a small number of houses. English Partnership's aim was to attract inward investment and new housing development. They therefore selected American based Martha Schwartz (www.marthaschwartz.com) due to her international reputation for urban design, without consultation with the community. On camera Martha Schwartz says her community were not the residents already living there, but the imagined community who would be attracted from elsewhere. She further argues that "it's impossible to come up with anything of excellence through consultation….the artists are the expert" (Martha Schwartz quoted in Channel 4, 2009).

The council officer interviewed said she had turned up with ready-made designs before she had seen the space where she would be working, or met the residents. As a result the design was described as "dropped in and looking like it's been dropped in" (local authority B) and it was named locally as "the finger" because that "monument is sticking a finger up at the community" (resident and community champion A).

Figure 11 Fryston Village Green – design by Martha Schwartz, photo by Paul Floyd Blake

The design was not just unpopular with the residents but other commissioned artists also argued that far from adding to the area she took what "was a piece

of grass that community used…they did things on it…they've actually lost a resource not gained one" (architect B).   While the Arts Council defended the artistic merit of the work, it was said by residents to have remained unpopular and unused and had not attracted the new developments which it was intended to. It is acknowledged that this is at least in part due to the recession, but it may also be argued that this demonstrates the risk of policy aimed at attracting inward investment, rather than investing in what is already there. This is in complete contrast to the success of *the Footbridge* which worked the other way around.

Arts Council England also commissioned a series of artworks that did not go through the pitching process, but they did allow local artists to apply. As a result although much of the work proved controversial, this controversy was not always seen as a bad thing. *The Cratehouse*, for example, a temporary sculptural installation created by two German artists Wolfgang Winter and Berthold Horbelt (winter-hoerbelt.de), was widely compared to the work by local artist Harry Malkin.

Figure 12 left Harry Malkin's Fryston Wall – right Winter-Horbelt Cratehouse
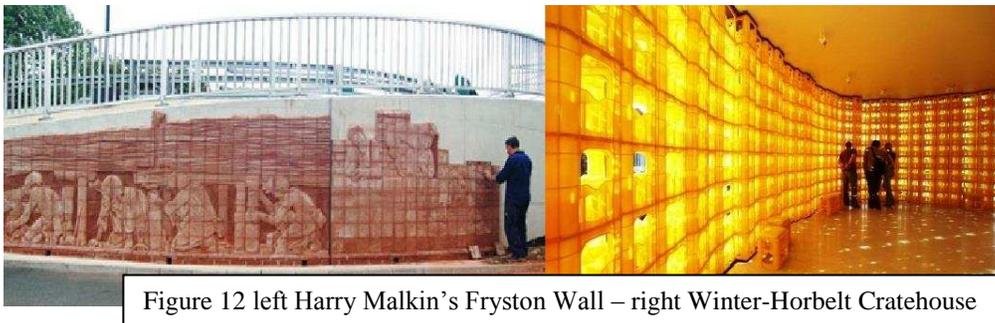
The work was said to have created "the liveliest and largest and longest debate on art ever in the local paper" (Arts Council England senior manager C). While much of the media coverage was negative, criticising the waste of money on both works some saw the level of debate about art as positive, as "it's good isn't it because…..they're standing looking and talking about it, as you would not get a person thinking about art" (local artist A). On balance it was also felt by those interviewed that within Castleford opinions on the work were more equally divided between positive and negative, than suggested in the media.   But Harry Malkin's piece was more widely accepted by the

residents interviewed because of the fact that the artist was local and the work was permanent. The lack of community engagement, along with the temporary nature of *the Cratehouse* made it an easy target for criticism.

The Arts Council member of the steering group argued that this demonstrates the dangers of participatory decision making, as local residents might always favour artists that they know. He defended the approach with the Cratehouse as bringing in work that would challenge taste. But most residents felt that involving the public more at the commissioning stage would have reduced hostilities to the work and made people more open to being challenged. It was acknowledged that it would be unlikely that any art work would be universally liked but that "it was the process [as much as] the actual physical outcome" (local authority B) that was important. The importance of process in participatory decision making, in building public value is also reflected in the literature review (Blakey, 2009) and in the comments about the Angel of the North in the interviews with policy makers.

As at Contact, many people argued that the process of deliberation with community champions, once the artists were selected, was more worthwhile, than the initial voting on which artists were selected, as it helped people to understand the work within a context. In all cases the public were said to have chosen "the artist they felt comfortable with rather than because of what they were proposing" (local authority B), with the intention of shaping the project through discussion. This highlights the importance of personality in participatory decision making, which the representative of the Arts Council was concerned might mean that the "best" design did not win. But it equally demonstrates the problem with defining quality or what is "best". While Channel 4 and the Arts Council tended to define quality in terms of the reputation of the artists, residents clearly placed more value on the participatory process.

It is important to note that, unlike the artists, the community champions were not voted for but self-nominated and so there were some questions raised about how representative they were of their communities. Although one resident who had become a champion argued that "locals said….you speak for

us, so although there wasn't an election….everybody sort of chose if you like" (resident an community champion A), it was acknowledged that this had been controversial, particularly with a number of councillors who felt that they should have been the community champions as they had already been elected to be so. As the focus in this thesis is on the extent to which participatory decision making engages a wider range of voices, the backgrounds of those selected or choosing to take part is discussed in the following section.

6.4   Selection of participants and artists

The Castleford Project was launched at a weekend event that was held in a local park, which attracted over three thousand people. Attendees were asked "to put their names down and state what they were interested in and we created a database" (local authority B). After this regular meetings (every six weeks) were advertised to everyone on the database and open to anyone in the community.

These meetings were seen as not just a vehicle to provide information, but to encourage discussion and, in some cases, vote on decisions. Many of the artists discussed were selected through this route, they "would have to come and pitch to the community and there would be a debate and the community decided which one they wanted" (Arts Council England senior manager C). Although it was acknowledged that it was hard to keep everyone interested, these meetings were said to have regularly attracted about two hundred people. The size of turnout was believed to be directly related to the fact the community saw real decisions taking place at the meetings.

As elsewhere in this thesis, there was a concern that the voting process was itself problematic, as "you start to diminish the value of the work if you go through a process of…voting at each point" (Arts Council England senior manager C). In interview some residents accused the council of packing meetings, where there was a vote taking place, to influence decisions. This controversy is also visible on the recording of the television programme, which shows that where there were disagreements about the outcomes, community members doubted the authenticity of the results (Channel 4, 2009).

Despite these concerns the council officers observed that since the Castleford Project, Wakefield MDC were doing more "what we call the optivote system which is like remote control voting, so gathering their views, like Who Wants to be a Millionaire ask the audience approach" (local authority C). Although it was said that it was only used, or useful as part of a larger participatory process there were concerns from residents that, as it is cheaper to do than deliberative forms of engagement, it might be used more in the future. This has already been shown to be an increasing trend in other towns (Wilson, 2010).

Of more concern than the voting process, to the residents and council staff, was the fact that Channel 4 identified the shortlist of artists, for the community to select from. Despite one of the early policy statements from the council including the importance of "buying locally" (Lewis, 2009 pg 62) it was acknowledged by both the local authority and the Arts Council that no local artists made it onto the short list for the larger projects. One local artist, who was commissioned for a smaller project, described how "there were five artists shortlisted and one dropped out…I said seeing as one's dropped out can I put a proposal forward? [But] basically it was [treated as] a joke" (local artist D).

The Arts Council supported Channel 4's selection on the basis that they brought in the expertise to identify a wider shortlist than the community would have had access to. One council officer commented that although they agreed that the designers should be of a quality to be aspirational, they disputed, as a London-based company, whether Channel 4 knew anything about local artists. Nor was it felt that they had any interest in doing a trawl of what there was locally, before making the assumption that nothing existed. This relates back to the disparity mentioned earlier between the community's view of artistic traditions and Channel 4's view that they had no cultural assets. One of the few designers from Yorkshire selected, had at first planned not to put their name forward because when Channel 4 said "we want the best designers in the UK, in the world…we just thought that's so up your own arse…just to throw good designers at a place does not automatically create a good product" (architect B).

The process at Contact of sending people out to research and create a shortlist for themselves, was also cited to have been a key success factor in building local capacity, at *Cutsyke*, where the community went to look at other designs. This is also more in keeping with the principles of participatory decision making, than imposing the agenda through a previously defined shortlist. But once the shortlist was identified there was consensus that in most cases the community did have the final say. This was supported by the artists selected, who were interviewed. Both felt that "Channel 4 didn't want us to win" (architect A) but that the local community did. However, it is impossible to measure who the community might have found or selected if they had not been restricted to this list.

In terms of the selection of the community champions, as identified, there was no electoral process, but "the people that got involved are the people that wanted to make a difference and wanted to get involved" (resident and community champion B). In total the group of champions was only about twenty people. Although some were already leaders of community associations, they were not generally people that were already known to the council. All the residents interviewed said that they had never been active before. The process was universally seen to have built their capacity and confidence and they had all become more active in their community afterwards. The council had not used champions before but it was said that this was considered one of the most effective aspects of the project and was being used across the district.

Unlike at Contact, where the young people did not see themselves as representing anyone except themselves, the community champions interviewed all argued that they did represent wider communities and they made sure that they included "representatives of a variety of different groups in the town…so we can easily get the views of others" (resident C). Although the numbers of activists was small it is significant to note from the economic evaluation that twelve per cent of the population of the town were identified to have been involved in meetings about the project at some point and eighty six per cent of the population were aware of the project and believed that

participatory decision making had made a difference to the outcomes (Young Foundation, 2009).

Awareness itself is identified in the literature review as a factor in getting more people to engage if the project is embedded in practice in the longer term (SQW Consulting, 2010). But the external evaluation also acknowledged that it was the creative dimension to the regeneration that really "reach[ed] out to people who would not otherwise have become involved [as] creativity, art and design [are a vehicle to] stimulate a great deal of public debate" (Young Foundation, 2009 pg 4). The arts therefore it is argued were not only made more relevant through these processes, but were also an effective tool to develop participatory processes and deliver the regeneration agenda.

In terms of transferring such practices elsewhere the artists interviewed argued that, from their experiences elsewhere, participatory decision making does "rely on the networks that are there" (architect B), which may suggest that such practices are not effective in areas where there is not existing community activism. One council officer acknowledged that this created a tension between the value of working with

> "those key individuals that really do build up these networks and really do carry forward the community and inspire other people to get involved and demonstrate that engagement does make a difference [alongside] a risk of reinforcing inequalities because we're only listening to people who are already fairly empowered" (local authority C).

But all the residents interviewed believed that "every community has [activists], but nobody looks for them" (local artist A). As such, it was argued, that Wakefield's success was not just the result of existing activism, but because they made the effort to engage a wider range of people. Balancing the need to work with a small number of activists, at the same time as maintaining a role for a larger number to engage in votes through open meetings, was seen as crucial. The following section therefore examines the backgrounds of those involved in the Castleford Project and the wider arts sector in Wakefield in more detail to consider who these people were.

6.5   A wider range of voices

Unlike Contact, which entirely engaged young people, within the Castleford Project it was acknowledged that there was a tendency for the activists to come from the older generation. Some argued that this is the norm in participatory decision making in many communities, because retired people have time on their hands. The older residents also argued that the younger generation is not imbued with the same sense of community that they had from working in the mines. This is in direct contrast to Contact, where people believed the processes were effective because they exclusively focused on engaging young people. This may suggest that assumptions about age are not accurate in either case. It may also demonstrate a tendency in participatory decision making projects for one group to dominate, drowning out other voices.

In terms of social background, all the residents interviewed lived in Castleford, and all came from white working class families. Most had been born there, although a few had moved because of marrying someone from the area. All remembered when the town had been more prosperous. This was seen as an important factor both in terms of the participants having a vision for the town and also the commitment to stay no matter what.

Some residents contrasted their commitment to the town with that of the professional artists and even council officers who were accused of coming into town to make a name for themselves, but not having the long term interests of the town at heart. However, many of those interviewed from arts organisations across the district had also been with their organisation, and in Wakefield, for a very long time. This was seen by them, as important in developing their understanding of the particularities of place in arts development work. The exception to this was the newly opened Hepworth where the Director of the organisation stated that he did not see an advantage of employing locally, but wanted to attract the best expertise he could nationally. He himself was from London and public school educated.

In terms of the educational backgrounds of the rest of those interviewed there was a clear distinction between the professionals, from the Arts Council, local authority and arts managers who were all university educated and the residents who were largely not. Some of the local artists, who were also residents, were also not university educated. One said that they "had the opportunity to go to arts college [when at school] but it wasn't a serious option" (local artist C) because they were expected by their family to go out to work as soon as they were able. Where residents interviewed had studied they had mainly done so as mature students after the mines closed in the 1980s.

Despite not being university educated many residents and local artists talked about the lifelong learning experiences they'd had. They talked about the creative hobbies they chose to do in their own time, as part of their self-education. One argued that the working class are more likely to be artistic because "your mum kept you occupied with giving you pens and drawing paper" (local artist D) because they couldn't afford more expensive pursuits, but that the professional art world creates an unhealthy hierarchy that separates rather than unites practices.

All the artists who were also residents talked about formal engagement through community arts groups such as Yorkshire Arts Circus, as the catalyst which reignited the community's connections with art during the miners' strike. This was said to have given them the confidence to pursue the arts as a career. The power of art in communities in the 1980s was said to be very different to the arts today, which were seen as separate from people's lives.

Many were highly articulate in discussing and describing the arts and their experience of art but most did not engage significantly with the district's arts organisations let alone further afield because "it's got to the point where the middle class have taken over again, so working class doesn't really involve themselves too much…I'd never been to the art gallery" (local artist D). This clearly is at odds with the claims of Chris Smith in chapter 4, that New Labour's participation policy had successfully removed elitism in the arts.

As in Manchester, in contrast to the way residents talked of their engagement

with culture, those who worked in arts organisations in Wakefield did not define their backgrounds as "arty" unless they had engaged with formal practices. Most professionals also defined their arts specialism more narrowly. The theatre manager interviewed acknowledged he had little engagement in the visual arts and the gallery manager said the same about performing arts. Both acknowledged that among their peers "most people go to [their specialism] and nothing else" (arts manager B). This supports the claim earlier in this chapter and in the last, that those working in the arts may in fact have narrower tastes than their public.

In terms of understanding whether the Castleford Project engaged new people in the arts, or gave a voice to those already active, it is worth noting that despite the high levels of community activism in the town, which have already been discussed; residents and council staff credited the project as having left a significant legacy within Castleford. As stated there is clear evidence that there was an increase in the number of active community groups since the project started, as well as an increase in numbers within existing groups. Furthermore many of those interviewed commented that there were now better connections between these groups.

On an individual level the community champions were described as having "very distinct and often times contested local characteristics and cultures" (Arts Council England senior manager C). This suggests that they did not all come from the same background or interests. A number of the residents said they had not been engaged in any groups before the Castleford Project and had not met the other people they worked with during the project beforehand. This does suggest that the process did not just give a voice to those already active, nor allow existing groups to dominate, but that through this process individuals and groups became not only more confident to act themselves, but had a network to call on for help. As this research only interviewed people who were involved in the project, it is not possible to comment on members of the community who may have been excluded, or felt excluded, from these processes. What this does suggest however is that for those who took part the process was new and empowering.

As at Contact it was widely accepted that participatory decision making is not an easy process as it is "pretty involved, complicated and often contentious" (Arts Council England senior manager C). This was cited as one of the reasons under pressure arts organisations resist it, whereas architecture projects with much larger budgets are more able to do it. But one council officer recognised that even though

> "you will never persuade some people that art is a good thing, I think [the people of Castleford] are more pre-disposed to arts generally…we'd never had an arts centre in Castleford before, now people go there, there's always some sort of activity going on there and that's development" (local authority B).

The economic evaluation of the project claims that not only had the levels of community engagement changed but that there was also an impact on artistic practice as "many of the designers involved…became 'hooked' on the process" (Young Foundation, 2009 pg 3). It concludes that "this sort of community involvement ought to be routine good practice rather than considered innovative or exceptional (Young Foundation, 2009 pg 18). The next section therefore considers the extent to which this has had a longer term affect, on the arts provision across the district.

6.6   Castleford and the wider arts sector

There is no doubt that the Castleford Project had come to be seen by many policy makers as a model of good practice in community planning, both within Wakefield and further afield, as evidenced by the many invites for the residents to talk to other districts about their experiences. It was also selected as a case study for the government backed Living Places initiative (Living Places, n.d).

Wakefield MDC also embedded these practices in an engagement strategy, delivered across the whole district which put participatory decision making at its heart (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, 2010). Furthermore both council officers interviewed for this research argued that the Castleford Project

helped make the arts become more of a priority for Wakefield MDC, as demonstrated by increased funding levels for arts activities across the district.

But the council officers acknowledged that the cultural sector had not really engaged either in participatory processes, or the engagement strategy. Many of the arts professionals interviewed, while positive about the project remained sceptical of the value of public involvement in their own work. One voiced concern that "politicians would love there to be a model solution to everything in life [but] if everything followed a model path you'd never end up with any sparks or imagination" (architect B).

Although many people felt that the project was successful because it worked locally and "included lots of separate ideas…not just one large idea" (Lewis, 2009 pg 29) most residents felt that Wakefield's increased investment in the arts had reversed this process, draining money from smaller local community arts projects to fund district-wide provision. The Hepworth Gallery was said by residents to represent a change in policy, which had taken place without any public consultation.

This concern was reiterated by the other arts organisations in the city who were interviewed. Despite the council's claims that the overall level of funding had increased for the arts, the theatre had lost all their funding, the city centre gallery had closed down and local artists said that money was being squeezed for locally based projects. Bridge Arts in Castleford, a direct legacy of the Castleford project, said that they struggled to get the "£15,000 per year they are talking about being gracious enough to give us…and it's going to cost 2.5 million for the Hepworth and I don't think [they] do half as much hard work and community benefit" (resident and community champion A). This is in line with the findings in chapter four that community arts has suffered disproportionately in the recession, while mainstream arts institutions have been protected or even enhanced.

Some people defended the investment in the Hepworth as "a building that is bigger than Wakefield" (architect A) that exists as a means of bringing in tourists and economic benefits to the district, rather than merely responding to

the views of local residents. But most residents questioned the economic case, and the value of district wide development. The economic evaluation about the Castleford Project (Young Foundation, 2009) also questions the relationship of district wide schemes and local schemes with reference to Xscape (www.xscape.co.uk/yorkshire), a leisure complex on the edge of Castleford, which is said to be the most visited paid for attraction after the Millennium wheel in London, employing more people than the mine which had previously been on the same site (Lewis, 2009).

There is clear evidence that rather than bringing revenue to the town, through increased visitor numbers, or trickle down of wealth through job creation, Xscape has in fact damaged retail trade and taken people away from the town centre (Young Foundation, 2009). Some of the residents of Castleford strongly believed that "if we can't attract [visitors into the town centre] from [Xscape] a mile up the road, we're not going to attract them from [the Hepworth] Wakefield" (resident C).

The only resident to praise the investment in the Hepworth, did so on the grounds that "if you're going to spend millions on a gallery you might as well spend it in our locality" (local artist D). But he still questioned the limited curatorial approach which was seen as "more interested in celebrating the dead, than discovering the living" (local artist D). He argued that although it might be difficult to engage the community in a decision about whether the building should be created in the first place, he agreed with the other residents of Castleford that there should be some participatory decision making in the management and programming of the building.

The Arts Council officer who had been on the steering group, for both the Castleford Project and the development of the Hepworth Gallery, also acknowledged that even if

> "a significant proportion travel from outside the location nevertheless the potential audience that is always present is the local community….maybe it is reasonable to think they should have an opportunity to influence some proportion of what is on offer and indeed

maybe the offer is stronger and more interesting if they do" (Arts Council England senior manager C)

But he was opposed to the idea of imposing this on the gallery, as he supported the views expressed in chapter 4 that the Arts Council's role should be supportive and not directive. But it is clear that without a more directive approach there is no likelihood of this happening. The two arts managers interviewed from Wakefield, both held similar views that maintained their role as independent experts. One argued that "the public don't often know what they don't want….so someone needs to carry a banner [for the arts]" (arts manger A). The other clearly said "I don't know if great art comes out of democratic process…I wouldn't run [the venue] if it was. I make the decision about what art gets shown here…I don't run a democracy" (arts manager C). This is at odds with the claims in previous chapters that arts managers were increasingly taking on board these working practices.

As discussed throughout this thesis artists freedom of expression is often confused with the notion of accountability for the management of arts organisations. The residents interviewed in Castleford demonstrated trust and respect for the expertise of the artists with whom they had worked. But they voiced concern about the lack of transparency in publicly funded arts organisations and the unwillingness of funders to impose conditions to funding.

One person also commented that unlike the council art gallery that had been closed; the Hepworth and Yorkshire Sculpture Park were less accountable to the community because they were set up as trusts, despite being reliant on significant investment from the council. The council were strongly criticised for having given the galleries what had been public collections of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth because "the collection belongs to Wakefield citizens" (resident C).

Despite these concerns there was acknowledgement, both by those interviewed in Castleford and in the literature review that under the Coalition government there was a growth in the number of trusts taking over activities which were previously under council control. Many people voiced concerns

that participatory decision making was increasingly being used to encourage volunteers not only to be involved in decision making but to take on the management of organisations, as mentioned in relation to asset transfers in the literature review (Quirk, 2007).

For many this ignored the fact that volunteers still require "the expertise of a professional….because if you want something to happen and to grow and develop volunteer time doesn't do it" (local artist D). This was supported by all the Castleford residents who were interviewed, who despite being volunteers themselves, said that they couldn't operate without support form professionals. For this reason the community asset transfer model is examined in the final case study in the next chapter.

6.7   Conclusions

As suggested at the start of the chapter this case study was chosen as an example of New Labour policy in action. But in practice the Castleford Project has been shown to be equally the product of pre-existing community activism, and media attention. The artists who were selected questioned whether such working practices were in fact new, claiming that they were already commonplace within architecture, if not in the arts.

But the project has been widely cited as a model of good practice, both in terms of the recognition some of the art works received outside of Castleford and for the public value created locally. The arts were said to have a stronger place in the lives of residents and in the minds of the local authority as a result. The process had changed policy, made the council invest in a neglected part of the borough and created some iconic public artworks. Some of those involved in the project also felt that the process had developed trust between residents and the council and built capacity locally.

This clearly demonstrates the benefits of involving the public in the commissioning process and in some cases, the risks associated where they are not. The findings also demonstrate the fact that having artists and

community members involved in such processes who want to listen and learn is as important, if not more, than the process employed.

As elsewhere in this thesis a wide divergence is noted between belief of those in the professional arts sector in their own expertise and connoisseurship, and the residents' belief that cultural practices need to be less elitist and more inclusive of the activities already happening locally. The concept of "art in the everyday" was both implicitly and explicitly linked to the ideas of William Morris by a number of residents in Castleford who challenged the very concept of low participation rates for culture which informed so much of New Labour policy.

They did acknowledge a lack of engagement in the mainstream funded arts infrastructure, but saw this as a problem with what was funded and not with the public who were not engaging. There was a strong feeling from residents that funding should prioritise the local and a broader spectrum of practice rather than what were seen as the practices of a small elite. But despite the residents' desire for participatory decision making to become a condition of funding for arts organisations, to ensure that the voices of the community continued to be taken seriously, those working professionally in the arts, resisted any kind of policy imposition on their independence.

There were also differences of opinion as elsewhere about the appropriateness of such practices for district-wide decisions. While professionals all felt that such practices worked best locally, residents saw this as a failure to embed the practices in the mainstream. This was demonstrated by the lack of an impact participatory decision making was seen to be having on the arts sector more widely. There were also concerns that as a result the project had raised expectations that were not being met.

The concerns about whether participatory decision making truly engages a wider range of voices, or merely gives voice to those already engaged, was also raised in Castleford. The local authority officers interviewed identified resistance from some councillors who felt that their representative mandate through the ballot box could never be matched through an open meeting or citizens' panel. But the evidence from those who did take part suggests that

not only did the processes engage a wider range of people but that such practices played an important role in building capacity at individual and community level.

Most contentious was the issue about whether such practices could be used on a district level rather than purely within a very localised community and the sense that under the Coalition government such practices were becoming even more localised, which is explored in more detail in the next chapter.

7 Participatory decision making in practice – a case study of Hebden Bridge Asset Transfers

Both the case studies of Contact and the Castleford Project took place in Labour run local authorities, while New Labour was in power nationally. In the case of Castleford, where the project was also led by the council, it was described as an example of Labour policy in action. Many of those interviewed doubted whether participatory decision making would be prioritised under different political leadership. This is evidenced by the fact that the duty to involve was dropped by the Coalition (DCLG, 2011a). The council staff interviewed also felt that, even when the duty was in place, in local authorities under different political leadership "public involvement was sort of filtered through the views of the leadership who seemed to be only doing what they thought they really had to do" (local authority D).

However, others argued that there was ideological commitment to the concept of participatory decision making across all political parties. A number of Liberal Democrat-run local authorities employed participatory budgeting (SQW Consulting, 2010), and references to participatory budgeting can be found in pre-election speeches of Prime Minister David Cameron (2010b). Post-election the Coalition's language of the "big society" and "localism" also made reference to participatory decision making (DCLG, 2011b).

But as shown in the literature review the language of the Coalition was heavily influenced by the conservative policy commentator Phillip Blond (2010), who argues for devolvement of power from central state control, to local decision making, rather than the shared power more characteristic of New Labour. The idea of community asset transfers, where not just dialogue is involved, but the ownership and control of the institutions (Quirk, 2007) became the preferred method for engaging the public. The Coalition created a unit, called Locality (http://locality.org.uk/) specifically to promote such practice.

This final case study therefore examines the asset transfer model, in order to consider the similarities and differences, in theory and practice, between this model and the concept of participatory decision making discussed earlier. The

case study chosen is that of the town of Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire, where in 2011, a community association successfully applied for and received control of two buildings, the Town Hall and the Picture House, both of which had previously been under local authority ownership.

The consultation with the local authority started in 2006 while New Labour were still in office nationally, if not locally, but was completed under the Coalition. This chapter therefore provides an opportunity to consider whether the approach to participatory decision making was seen to change under New Labour and the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government.

As with the Castleford Project, Hebden Bridge's community asset transfers were not dealt with by the arts officers within the council, but in this case by the Safer and Stronger Communities team of Calderdale Council. The application and business plan for the Town Hall described the vision for the new building as a "creative quarter" (Bibby, n.d.), providing workspace for the town's creative workers and a community resource centre. The Picture House, which had previously been managed by the Department of Arts and Libraries of Calderdale was also transferred with the proviso that it retained its purpose as an art house cinema (Hebden Royd Town Council and Hebden Bridge Community Association, 2011). It is therefore argued that this initiative still falls within the definition of participatory decision making in the arts, which is the focus of this thesis.

The section below describes Hebden Bridge as a location, to consider the particularities of this case study. This is followed by analysis of the asset transfer model, to compare it with the previous case studies.

7.1   Background

In the early 20th century Hebden Bridge was a prosperous mill town of approximately fifteen thousand residents. From the 1960s onwards, as British manufacturing declined, mills closed and in consequence the population reduced dramatically (Spencer, 1999). The local council at the time (Hebden Royd Urban Council) attempted to "regenerate itself as a centre for tourism,

small craft businesses and creative industries" (Hebden Royd Partnership, 2005 pg 3) by reducing the housing stock, creating more green space and allowing artists to squat. This started the process of transformation from a depressed post-industrial working class town, to an affluent middle class commuter town, which became associated with arts and culture practices, albeit with a reduced population of approximately five thousand residents (Hebden Bridge Partnership, 2013).

Large inequalities of wealth between the incoming commuters and the more long standing working class communities were said to have worsened during a second wave of decline in the 1970s (Hebden Royd Partnership, 2005). This coincided with the demise of the town's urban council. As in the case of Castleford, Hebden Bridge became absorbed into Calderdale District Council in 1974 creating a long standing disagreement between the town and the district (Hebden Royd Partnership, 2005). Unlike Castleford, since its creation party political control of Calderdale council had changed at each election. During the period under review in this thesis (1997-2013) the balance of power shifted several times between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats (Calderdale Council, n.d).

Although Hebden Bridge did retain a town council to promote local interests (Hebden Royd Town Council), many of those interviewed voiced resentment that the regeneration begun in the 1960s did not continue in the 1970s under the control of Calderdale Council. The town's public and cultural assets were said to have been particularly neglected. The Town Hall, which some argued was architecturally and historically significant, lost its public purpose with the loss of the urban district council which had been based there. As a result it was said that "Calderdale hadn't spent a bloody penny on it since…it's 30 years of neglect and mismanagement" (local authority E).
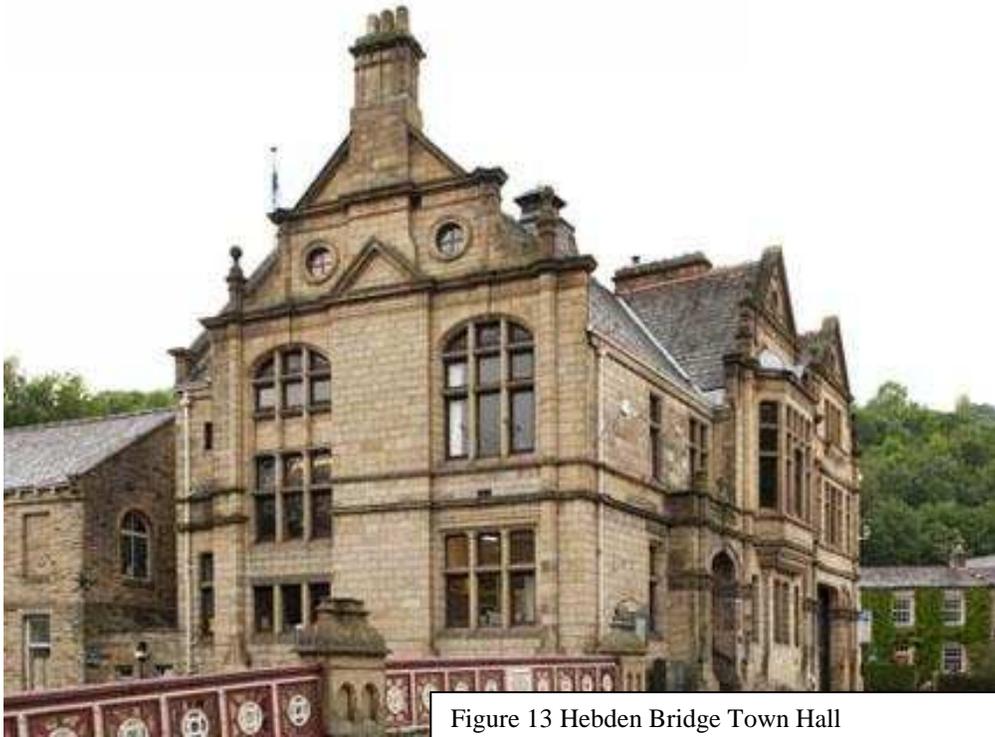
Figure 13 Hebden Bridge Town Hall
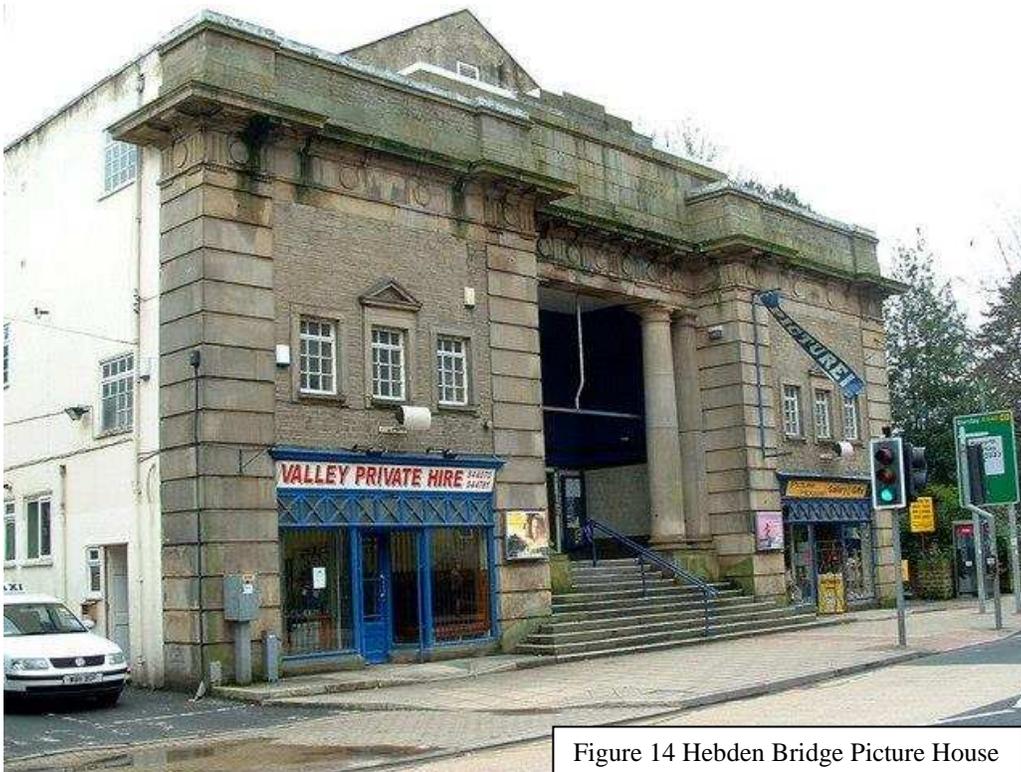
Figure 14 Hebden Bridge Picture House

The Picture House had faced several threats of closure and selling-off, but while Hebden Royd urban council had taken control of it in the 1960s to

prevent closure, Calderdale Council were accused by residents interviewed, of trying to sell it as a carpet warehouse in the 1990s. The Friends of Hebden Bridge Picture House had been set up as a pressure group at this time. This, not only prevented the sale, but resulted in the council commissioning a freelance art house programmer who developed the mixed programme it had when the asset transfer was applied for "ranging from mainstream Hollywood to art-house and foreign language films" (Hebden Royd Town Council and Hebden Bridge Community Association, 2011).

Pitt Street community college, another town asset, was sold by the council in 2005. It was said that "in a matter of a few weeks the 'for sale' sign went up and before, really, the community knew what had happened it had been sold without public consultation" (resident and elected community representative F). This was argued by those interviewed to have increased bad feeling between the town and the council, to the point where some people in Hebden Bridge decided to take action.

A community association was therefore formed in 2006. Through a membership scheme community representatives were elected to produce two policy documents (Hebden Bridge Community Assocation, n.d.-a, Hebden Royd Partnership, 2005) both of which called for greater local control of the town's own assets. The documents were developed with the support of the town council, who argued that as "the level of government closest to the people" (local authority E) the town should have more decision making powers than they currently did.

But most of those interviewed from Hebden Bridge said "they'd rather [assets] stayed with the council" rather than being fully devolved to community ownership (resident G). Even the chair of the community association who coordinated both asset transfer bids said "in an ideal world…it would be the local authority which could continue to hold buildings like this, because there is that formal element of democracy built in, through the ballot box" (resident and elected community representative F). But there was concern from many, over the lack of statutory obligations for public and cultural assets, when under local authority control, whether by town or district council.

The aim of the community association was therefore to "safeguard public realm" (resident and elected community representative F) from what some saw as a more long term shift away from government involvement in such assets, whether locally, district-wide or nationally. This supports the argument that asset transfers have more to do with the shift from government to governance discussed in the literature review (Goss, 2001) than to do with the concept of participatory decision making, which involves shared dialogue and responsibility between public sector professionals and their users.

Although asset transfers were a feature of New Labour policy, as well as the Coalition, a significant difference in approach was identified between the two governments. The organisers of the asset transfer process in Hebden Bridge said the process had only begun because under New Labour they had been "given a boost by some government money which was routed through the lottery" (resident and elected community representative F). Funding was argued to be crucial both to the ability of communities to get councils to engage with the process and to the later success of such projects.

Under the Coalition the principle of asset transfer was said to have shifted to one where there was "no net financial gain or loss to council and no on-going grant-funding" (Bibby, n.d.). This caused concern from the community association about how to ensure that what was happening was "asset transfer and not a liability transfer" (Hebden Bridge Community Assocation, n.d.-b pg 7).

But while the community association described the transfers as a necessary evil, some of those interviewed argued that they were a mistake and that the community association had jumped the gun, seeing a threat that wasn't there. By so doing some people said that the community association had let the local authority off its responsibilities for culture. The two people interviewed from Calderdale Council, acknowledged that due to the cuts in local authority budgets, under the Coalition government, it was in their interests to dispose of assets.

The local authority staff also said that neither building was in immediate danger, but they acknowledged that new investment for repairs, let alone development, would not have been forthcoming. This was said to be particularly pertinent for the Picture House which required a cash injection to purchase new equipment due to the increase in digital film distribution. The low priority that culture had for the council is also demonstrated by the comment that "when times are hard and we're trying to sustain services for, adults and children in care, why on earth are we running a Picture House?" (local authority D). One local authority officer also said that since the Town Hall and the Picture House had been transferred Calderdale Council was shifting away from asset transfers, where no money changed hands, to direct commercial sale of assets. This may have seen the total loss of the assets for the town, as had happened with Pitt Street Community College. The perceived threat that the community association identified, may demonstrate some foresight on their part.

As the interest in this thesis is to examine the implications of such practices for the arts, the following section considers how the arts and artistic practice are defined in this initiative and the extent to which the asset transfers had an impact on the cultural sector.

7.2   The arts and artistic practice

As highlighted, since the 1960s, Hebden Bridge has become defined by its strong artistic community. It was described as home to artists' studios and "galleries, exhibitions, performances, events, festival and individual presentations, in addition to the more traditional amateur dramatics, cinema and wide variety of local groups" (Hebden Royd Partnership, 2005 pg 21). Unlike Castleford where external perception was that it did not have much cultural life, Hebden Bridge had attracted national and even international attention as a culturally rich town, described in hyperbolic terms variously as the "fourth funkiest town in the world" (Hebweb, 2005) and best high street in Britain for independent shops (Potts et al., 2005).

In recognition of this, the plan for the development of the Town Hall was said to

have been articulated as a creative quarter "because Hebden's quite strong in that respect" (resident and elected community representative F) and not because of any belief in the intrinsic value of the arts. The concept of "public realm...what we as a community have together" (resident and elected community representative F) was seen, by those who initiated the asset transfer, as more important than whether this manifested itself through art or something else. This raised concerns among the residents interviewed, many of whom worked in the arts, that if other sectors were able to pay more for the use of the Town Hall, the cultural sector might be squeezed out. This was evidenced by the fact that, one year after the Town Hall opened, it was said to be full of micro businesses from other sectors.

Some argued that this criticism was based on a very narrow definition of what constitutes the cultural sector, as the micro businesses were described as design agencies, and other creative industries. One person argued that the Town Hall was therefore achieving its aims if you believe "creativity can be all sorts of things, it can be entrepreneurship, it can be how people approach problems – so I'm not just thinking of the arts" (participation consultant B). Furthermore it was argued that just focusing on artists was unsustainable, as it relied on home workers wanting an outside office. One person said "if they wanted an office they'd probably be in Manchester. They're in Hebden because these creative businesses, many of them, can operate from home really easily" (participation consultant B). But this is not supported by the evidence that cheaper artists' studios in the town were all said to be full to capacity, together with waiting lists.

In regard to the Picture House there were also differences of opinion. Some people argued that the cinema was important to the town "because [it's] the most accessible art form. Where people might not want to go to a gallery they'll go to a cinema" (resident and elected community representative H). Others argued that, precisely for that reason, cinemas could survive commercially, without council or community control, in a way that other artistic practices could not and therefore safeguarding them should not be a priority.

In relation to wider cultural policy priorities there were similar differences of

opinion. The priority for one person was "that local areas sort of hold the body of the past of the area…held safely and that it's accessible" (local authority D), focusing on the preservation of cultural heritage. A local arts manager argued that "we couldn't possibly be without [the national institutions] in terms of our place in the world" (resident I) focusing on the extrinsic value in increasing international prestige. Others felt there is too much focus on "big projects [which] is just so paternalistic" (participation consultant B) and questioned how either heritage or international prestige responds to people's broader creativity or the cultural changes evident in society.

Some people argued that cultural policy should focus more on investing in new creative businesses that might be commercialised, such as those based in the Town Hall. Some wanted support for the types of small venues and individual artists in the town that were less likely to ever be commercially viable, rather than the bigger institutions, commercial creative industries or indeed cinema, which many felt could be. This demonstrates, as in previous chapters, the lack of consensus about priorities, and the different interests at play, among what is commonly called the arts and cultural sector.

Many of the same concerns expressed in other chapters were also evident in relation to the participation agenda. Most of those working in the arts expressed the view that due to the focus on participation under New Labour "art's become somewhat diluted [which does] not help artistic practice" (resident I). Others disagreed, arguing that, under New Labour, despite rhetoric on participation nothing much changed. As in the case study of Contact some accused the arts sector of using the excuse of safeguarding quality to avoid changing their practices, where quality often meant little more than being "expertly technical…quality isn't necessarily the be all and end all of it…if it's not cutting any edges I don't really see the point in it" (resident G).

There were criticisms, from council staff with a wider remit than the arts, that many "arts are not very touchable" (local authority E) or accessible to the wider public. Some commented on the arrogance and narrowness of those working in the arts, who were said to value their practices over the cultural practices of others. One person, who had worked in participatory practices over many

years, argued that the arts sector was part of a process which had been "doing [its] best to destroy white working class culture by humiliating it" (resident G). The views of many of those who worked in the arts sector therefore rather than supporting the view "[we all] have some creativity" (participation consultant B), was seen as deliberately elitist in its definitions of art, which was a view shared by participants in both Contact and Castleford.

This is supported by the fact that while a couple of people interviewed, who worked in the arts, believed that "at the end of the day [taste] is all subjective" (arts manager D), and that an arts programmer should find the common ground with their audience and not dictate what their tastes should be, most of those working in the arts in Hebden Bridge did not support this view. Instead one person claimed that "if you've billed it as art and culture [people won't come] so the way to move away from that is to have people involved in it without them realising that it's art and culture" (resident I).

This supports the views expressed earlier in the thesis that the participation agenda often becomes about overcoming a deficit on the part of the consumer in appreciating great art (Miles, 2013) rather than a willingness, let alone desire, from arts organisations to understand wider cultural practices in their communities. As one person said "I like the idea that art should be there and it is for everybody, but…we don't know what's good for us sometimes" (resident I).

Unlike elsewhere in the research, some of those working in the arts in Hebden Bridge were comfortable with the idea of the arts as elitist. One person expressed the view that "to me elite is good. I like the best…all too often we provide third-rate experiences in the arts" (art consultant). Another argued that "half the population won't be able to appreciate good literature, but I don't think that means that we should stop producing good literature, and if that means that it's elitist then so be it, I think art is more important than people" (resident J). This suggests that the policy focus on greater cultural democracy under New Labour was not supported by many of those interviewed in Hebden Bridge.

Some also challenged the perception that art is the preserve of an elite, citing their own working class backgrounds as evidence of "the number of people who come from these backgrounds and are supposedly excluded" (resident K) who engage with high culture. As shown in the literature review this is not supported by the findings of the Taking Part Survey that shows a direct correlation between participation and socio-economic position, which is at its most acute for the traditional western art forms that are in receipt of the highest levels of state funding (DCMS, 2011).

Where there was consensus in all of the interviews in this case study, was the view that the balance of arts funding was wrong, with too much being spent in London and not enough in the regions. This may justify the concerns, expressed by policy makers in chapter 4, that participatory decision making encourages parochial responses and local self-interest that would make it hard to make the case for national institutions. It may equally reflect the genuine inequalities in distribution of funds, which saw over fifty per cent of Arts Council's grant-in-aid being spent in London in 2011/12 (Arts Council England, 2013) or when including national museums a ratio of £69 per head in London, compared to £4.60 per head for the rest of the country (Stark et al., 2013).

Most people interviewed also agreed that the arts had never been a government priority and were becoming even less so under the Coalition. This is demonstrated by the fact that even in an age of austerity "it's always amazed me how much money we can find to repair a road…but when it comes to putting on fantastic events…it's not a priority, it's not on their radar (local authority E).

One council representative still argued that as a democratically elected body they should maintain responsibility for overall cultural strategy, and manage the "many public services [that] have to be run on a larger scale, and need a bigger area to make it viable" (local authority D). But this is contradicted by the view, expressed by the same person above, that culture was not a priority in comparison with other statutory areas of responsibility. Furthermore many residents interviewed felt it was hard to see how the council could still be involved in strategic decisions once they had disposed of cultural assets. This

supports the concerns in Castleford that it was harder for policy makers to intervene in independent arts organisations or trusts than when they delivered activities themselves.

There was consensus among residents with the view that the asset transfers were not part of a policy to develop the cultural sector in Hebden Bridge, but rather a way of the council reducing its obligations in cultural policy. As such the asset transfer model may increase the fears from the arts sector expressed earlier in the thesis that community involvement may reduce opportunities in the arts rather than increase them. The following section therefore examines what happened in practice in Hebden Bridge to assess whether this fear was justified.

7.3 The Hebden Bridge model

As outlined the asset transfer model was adopted in Hebden Bridge not from a desire for artistic refreshment as at Contact, nor to rebuild community trust as in Wakefield, but from a concern that cultural and public assets would be lost otherwise. The approach taken may therefore be seen as pragmatic rather than artistic.

The choice of buildings, and focus on culture was itself described as almost accidental, based on the success of the two applications. The community association also "discussed with Calderdale various other things including public toilets, the parks and allotments" (resident and elected community representative F) but only the cultural asset transfers had gone through. Those involved in the process, both within the council and within the community were less concerned with what was being transferred and more with the concept of transferal itself. The process therefore had a pre-determined desired outcome rather than an open agenda, as is a principle of participatory decision making.

This suggests that the opportunity for learning for the arts and cultural sector may not be as great as has been shown to be possible with participatory decision making in previous chapters. The focus in Hebden Bridge was that

practice "should remain fundamentally as it is" (arts manager D) rather than being changed through the process. Other options for how the assets might be run were not considered. This is at odds with the principles expressed in previous chapters, and demonstrated here by someone who had worked in participatory decision making, that the best solutions are when people "redefine their own solutions to their own issues" (resident G).

The success of the two asset transfer applications was seen by some as, at least in part, due to wider community involvement and an interest in culture from community activists in the town. Everyone interviewed was committed to saving the Picture House and said that they got involved because of this commitment. With the Town Hall it was said that "there were not hundreds of people clambering, to get this building moved into community ownership" (local authority F), but a smaller number of committed people had pushed things through. Once the asset transfer was agreed the organisers did respond to calls from wider community consultation to develop the Town Hall into a cultural hub. The parks, toilets and allotments in contrast did not garner the same interest from the community and so the applications for their transfer were not taken further. This therefore demonstrates that the public can be a powerful force in making the case for cultural assets.

But despite the level of community involvement in discussions the success of the applications, for the Town Hall and Picture House, was said by one of the local authority staff, to be influenced, less by the level of community engagement and more by the Council's confidence in specific "high capacity individuals" with time on their hands, who were named in the specific asset transfer applications (local authority F). The principles of asset transfer were seen to require a more formal managerial structure to take control of the building, than those normally employed in participatory decision making. This was due to the requirement for the buildings to be commercially driven and self-financing.   As such they required engagement with people in the community with pre-existing skills. Consultation and capacity building were therefore argued to be less important.

As a result some described the Town Hall and Picture House as "an asset transfer to a section of the community, an articulate middle class, professional, done well in education section of the community" rather than the diverse communities who live in the town (resident G). But some of those who were defined as already having "high capacity" argued that their ability was not just to do with their class or educational backgrounds, but was a legacy of their involvement in the town teams created by the Upper Calder Valley Renaissance, funded by Yorkshire Forward between 2002-2010, (Upper Calder Valley Renaissance, n.d). New Labour's investment through local authorities, and regional development agencies was said to have played a key role in building capacity in local areas, as a necessary precursor to the implementation of policy.

It is interesting to note that while the town action plan, developed under New Labour, was said to have involved public consultation and setting development priorities, unlike Castleford discussed in the last chapter, there was little awareness of either the consultation or the recommendations, among the people interviewed, except those who were elected community representatives. A significant difference between the two towns was that while Castleford engaged with individuals in the community, the Hebden Bridge Town Team was described as "a sort of cross-organisational organisation" (Janet Battye, Calderdale Council Leader) where professional interest groups, rather than wider community involvement seemed to be the basis to Hebden Bridge's community involvement. As a result the action plan acknowledges "the absence of a clear consensus on the future direction of the town" (Hebden Royd Partnership, 2005 pg 5) which limited the ability of the town teams to implement the recommendations beyond the asset transfers discussed in this chapter.

This difference between Castleford and Calderdale may itself demonstrate the difference in approach between a New Labour council committed to the principles of New Labour national policy and one with a different political party in power as suggested earlier. On the basis of one example of each it is impossible to confirm if this is the case. It does however demonstrate that, in practice, some of the investment in capacity building, under New Labour,

reinforced the power of those already active in communities, rather than engaging new people. As demonstrated elsewhere in this thesis the nature of community engagement may therefore owe as much, if not more, to the values and principles of the individuals employing it, rather than the effectiveness of policy interventions. But in terms of the effectiveness of the community asset transfer model there was concern that

> "the council [had] transfer[red] assets to groups who are well-meaning but don't have the capacity to see these things through for the long term, and that some of those buildings will come back to council ownership and then get sold" (local authority F).

Of the nine community asset transfers that Calderdale Council had undertaken since the Coalition came to power only the Picture House was said to be coping well financially after only two years. The contract for all the asset transfers was a long term leasehold agreement at nil cost to either party. Whereas the other assets had all relied on some grant funding to operate previously, the Picture House already operated on a more financially sustainable model before the transfer. The council therefore had chosen to transfer it not to save money from revenue grant support, but to reduce its obligations to the staff team and for future maintenance and development, such as the need for digitilisation already mentioned.

Despite the concerns that the models should not be "liability transfer" the Town Hall required significant fundraising to develop it. The intention was that, as a community organisation, it could lever in money from charitable sources that the council could not access. But in practice much of the development was achieved as loans, leaving the new management structure debts in the region of £1.25 million (Bibby, n.d.). This required them to charge commercial rents, thereby reinforcing the problem identified earlier, of pricing out many of the individual creatives and community groups, for whom it was intended. Although the Town Hall had defined "key principles" for the staff to adhere to, including being not for profit and programming in the public interest, the original cultural aspirations were said to be limited to non-existent, with

programming reliant on commercial events, weddings and non-arts activities including a highly controversial Burlesque Festival.

Furthermore although professionals were initially employed to run the organisation, it was further acknowledged that within the first year the Town Hall was "definitely showing signs of strain" (local authority E) with paid staff being laid off and a greater reliance being placed on volunteers. Many of those interviewed were unhappy with this. One person argued that "someone's still got to do the volunteer management" (resident J) which many people said was not happening. As a result there were said to be increasing complaints about the lack of commercial service standards from tenants, which it was feared could lead to vacant offices and further financial difficulties. The volunteers were also said to be demotivated as many had originally volunteered "to build [their own] capacity…seeing it as an opportunity" to find paid work (local authority E). It was proving far harder to recruit them without offering the support and training provided by a permanent staff team.

There was also a more generalised concern from some of those interviewed "about giving stuff over to the community, it's okay when it's new and exciting and people are setting it up, and then kind of numbers dwindle" (resident J). This is not supported by evidence from the literature review that when participatory processes involve real decision making, supported by paid staff who can implement plans, engagement may increase over time (SQW Consulting, 2010). Conversely, as in the case of the Town Hall and the community asset transfer model, devolving power completely away from professionals to the community to manage themselves, may limit people's desire to engage, due to the levels of responsibility placed on them.

Despite the label of community asset transfers some people felt that the very concept meant that assets become less accountable to the community and "the only people they're really accountable to are their funders" (local authority E). This was demonstrated by what some people said was a ludicrous situation in the town, whereby another organisation, the Birchcliffe Centre, had received money to demolish a functioning performance space, while the Town Hall were fundraising to create a new one. The need for commercial viability of

the asset transfers was further said to mean that organisations in the town were competing for the same bookings in a way that they had not done before, risking the sustainability of all the community run venues.

In regard to the Picture House once the asset transfer was agreed, the community association said they did not have the capacity to manage it, due to the level of responsibilities they found themselves to have with the Town Hall. As a result it was acknowledged that the Picture House was "not really a community transfer at all, it's transferring to the town council…moving it to a community group might make the most sense, but there is no community group that's willing to take it on" (local authority F). Far from supporting the case for asset transfers and participatory decision making, this may be argued to make the case for keeping Council control, albeit in this case, in more localised form.

But the Town Council argued that their ability to take on the Picture House was the result of the increased capacity and confidence they had gained through involvement in the Town Hall transfer, which in turn they hoped to pass on to other groups so that in time they could "turn around and say "right we've had our period of custodianship, let the community have it, they wanted it, sort it out" (local authority E). This further supports the argument that asset transfer is about a longer term strategy to reduce local authority responsibilities.

The management structure at the Picture House was described as remaining much as it was, but under new ownership. The staff had their contracts transferred and there was little evidence of increased participatory decision making. As elsewhere in this thesis there was a lack of confidence, among those working in the arts, in involving the public in artistic programming as there was a sense that the public would have limited knowledge about what films are available and this would limit choice. It was therefore said that "the community have had no influence on [the programme] before and it's had no influence since we've taken over and that's how it should be. We pay somebody to do it." (local authority E)

However, it was also acknowledged, by the person with most expertise in cinema programming, that most professional programmers are themselves

"sluggish" in their choices and rely on attendance at industry events where they would see a range of the films on offer. While he believed that cinemas "wouldn't actually pay for volunteers to go to the festival instead" (arts manager D), he did acknowledge that amateur film societies also visit and programme from the same events. This clearly challenges the notion of professional expertise in film programming, and suggests that it is possible to engage a wider range of voices, but that it is those working in the arts that resist such opportunities. As identified in the chapter on Contact, broadening the range of people sent to see work may help, not hinder the programming for a diverse audience.

Despite the problems identified at the Town Hall and the relative stability at the Picture House, it is interesting to note that it was the Town Hall, which was said to have been promoted by the Coalition government, with visits from government ministers and guests from "twenty different countries [including] an African group…one from Eastern Europe" (local authority E). The Town Hall was also regularly cited, as a model of excellence, by the advisory group on asset transfers, Locality (http://locality.org.uk), and has received positive media coverage in the broadsheets (Bibby, 2013).

The Picture House in contrast was said to be ignored on such visits because it was still run by the Town Council. This was despite the view locally that the Town Hall was "not a community asset transfer because the community hasn't been consulted" (resident K), whereas the Picture House was still seen to be community owned. This demonstrates the power of government rhetoric in promoting a model whether it is working or not. As the main focus for this thesis is to examine how the public are involved in such processes and whether they do engage a wider range of voices than other practices, the way that people were engaged in the process, is discussed in the next section.

7.4   Selection of participants and artists

At the start of the application process for both asset transfers open public meetings were held. The aim was to make these meetings as "attractive as possible…lively in terms of the debate and discussion" (resident and elected

community representative F) in order to reach a wide range of people. Four consultation days were held to discuss the proposed Town Hall developments. These were said to have attracted between fifty and two hundred participants to each one, which are comparable figures to those achieved in the early stages at Castleford. One of the organisers claimed that these meetings directly informed the writing of the plan for the building and even though

> "not everyone agrees with the decision, we did try and reflect the majority view [and] unusually for a big development in Hebden there were more people formally supporting the application than against [when it went to the planning committee]" (resident and elected community representative F).

But some people interviewed felt that their views, expressed in these meetings, had not been listened to and that the participants were not asked to start with a blank canvas and work up ideas, but were presented with a range of pre-determined options.

The difference of opinion may in part result from the challenge of dealing with dissenting views and the importance of explaining how final decisions have been reached. But one of the key principles of participatory decision making discussed elsewhere in this thesis is that of involving participants in agenda setting. The lack of ownership people in Hebden Bridge felt in the process may therefore relate to the process having a pre-set agenda. This was justified by the claim from the council officer that "you have to give people a limited number of choices….you can't let it direct your policies" (local authority F), but this may merely demonstrate the low importance given to participatory decision making in the asset transfer process.

The transfer of the Picture House also involved a public meeting at the start of the process, again attracting about two hundred people. From observation at it, it was clear that this was not a deliberative process, but one designed to provide information and build public support. A series of speakers presented their arguments in favour of the asset transfer to the audience. No one was invited to make the case against. One speaker named a number of key local

arts organisations who had signed up to the idea, to demonstrate the breadth of support the initiative had already received. But representatives from some of these same arts organisations accused the speaker, of setting himself up as the "representation from the arts [without) coming back to us to … support or decline" (resident I). He was described as an unelected member of a number of arts boards in the town, but did not represent those groups at that meeting.

Many speakers from the audience accused the organisers of trying to steamroll the public and use the public meetings not to make decisions but to legitimise decisions already made. This claim is supported by the fact that the application for transfer had already been written before the public meeting took place. Members of the audience also questioned how the community could make a judgement without understanding the financial implications of the transfer, which had been deleted from the papers provided on-line as "commercially sensitive" (Hebden Royd Town Council and Hebden Bridge Community Association, 2011). This demonstrates the importance of transparency and the dangers that consultation, without real delegation of power, may decrease engagement rather than increasing it.

Furthermore the process of open meetings was challenged by one of those interviewed who had worked in participatory decision making. He argued that "it's difficult to organise processes that include…an awful lot of those running [these processes] don't do the difficult thing" (resident G) and so such processes were doomed to failure from the outset. "Face to face consultation….see people out on the streets…a random selection of the population" (local authority E) rather than the people who tend to turn up to meetings, were mentioned as ways of increasing engagement but none of these had happened in either case. Instead the meetings were said to have attracted the same faces that were engaged in all decisions in the town. This may suggest the existence of a local cultural elite, operating in a similar way to the cultural elite said to be influencing policy on a national basis (Griffiths et al., 2008).

In the case of the Picture House some wider consultation was done with audiences, via a questionnaire about what they would like to stay the same or

what they would like to change. This was presented as a series of closed questions, such as "are you happy with the current mix of programming" and on a scale "how important are the following elements". As such the survey avoided the deliberative format of an open discussion. It also failed to attract those who are not already engaged, as the questionnaires were handed out to people attending the Picture House.

Figure 15 – Hebden Bridge Picture House survey
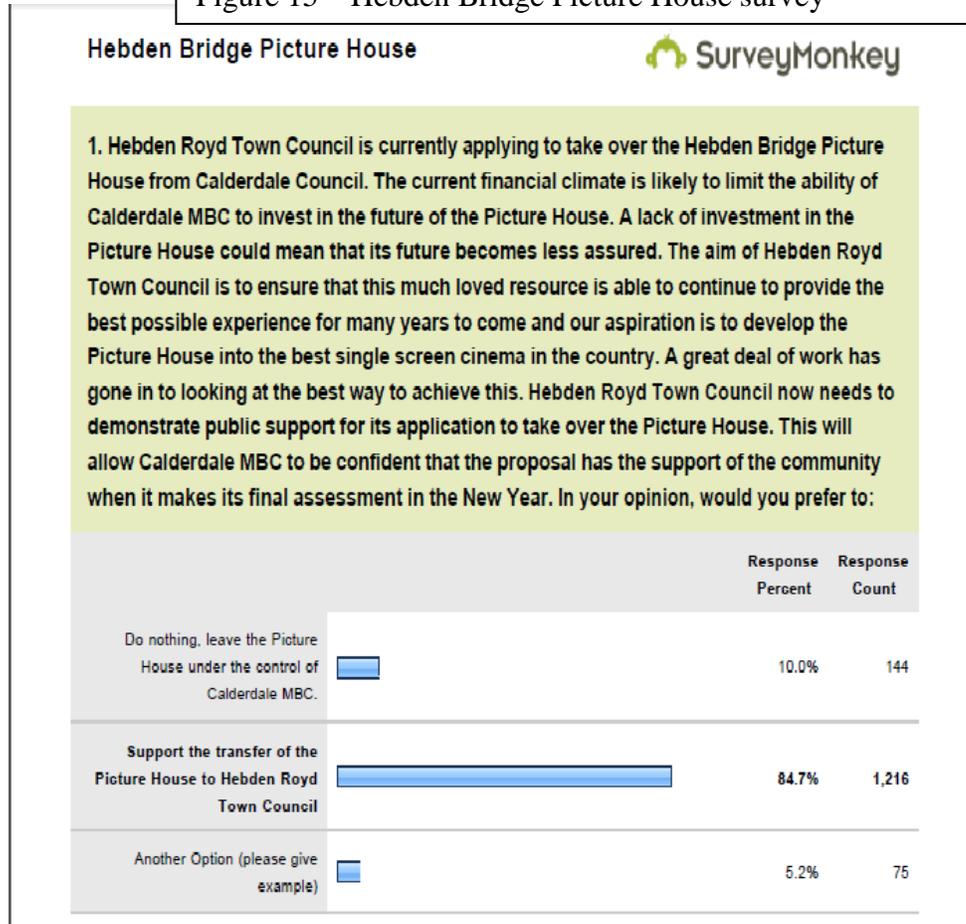
Although it attracted nearly one and a half thousand responses, as has been shown elsewhere, such tick box participatory mechanisms are likely to yield conservative outcomes, which serve to legitimise the status quo, rather than offer real opportunities for the organisation to learn and grow from the process. This is supported by the fact that ninety two per cent of respondents said they were happy with things as they are.

Once both the asset transfers were confirmed there is little evidence of continued open public meetings, let alone face to face engagement. Instead committees were formed to run the buildings and employ professionals "with experience in running arts venues" (resident K) to do the day to day management.

A form of democracy was introduced into the process for selection of committee members for the Town Hall and Picture House. This was done in both cases through the creation of a friend's membership scheme, where each member could vote for committee members. Structures were also put in place to prevent committees "becoming a self-perpetuating group….we serve for a maximum of 6 years" (resident and elected community representative F). The aim of this was to ensure that the management structures of the new community assets were "directly accountable to the whole community" (resident and elected community representative F) and to encourage refreshment of people involved.

For the Town Hall there was a campaign to get people to sign up as members, which involved "fill[ing] an application form in, and they pay their ten quid and for the ten quid they got a mug…our ambition was to get a mug in every kitchen in Hebden Bridge (local authority D). While this did generate over five hundred members (approximately ten per cent of the town's population), this was half of the target of one thousand. Furthermore many people queried whether most people knew they were members, rather than just buying a mug as part of the Town Hall fundraising scheme. Only one hundred and forty votes were cast for the committee members, which challenges the notion that they were representative, as claimed. There may also arguably be ethical issues with votes being dependent on people paying for membership.

Figure 16: Town Hall membership mug

At the Picture House all sixteen hundred people on the cinema mailing list had the right to vote for people to sit on a Friends' Committee. Although this did not require people to pay for membership it did require that people had to actively make the choice to sign up for membership. It also included many people who were on the mailing list but not from the Town. As such it has more in common with Contact's approach to engaging users, than Castleford's approach to engaging a wider community who may not be engaged in the arts.

Significantly the Friends' Committee only had an advisory role in the Picture House. All decision making was retained by the Town Council, who some argued was more democratic because "you don't have to opt in to have a vote" (local authority E), but whom others argued meant that the concept of community asset transfer was meaningless.

The very notion of voting for committees was also challenged, as elsewhere in this thesis on the grounds that voting does not really empower communities, or increase accountability but seeks to legitimise the existing power structures. This was evidenced by the fact that many of the names on the shortlists for committee members were said to be the same people who already sat on all the boards of arts and community organisations across the town. It was unclear to many interviewed how the nominations for the committees were made or what you would need to do if you wanted to stand for election. The residents interviewed who were members said they were not involved in

creating the initial shortlist and had to rely on short printed biographical details on which to make their decision. Votes may therefore be said to be about who was selected from the existing elite, rather than challenging the existence of an elite.

But a number of people criticised the "perverse understanding of democracy" (arts manager D) which saw the need for elections to the committees to take place in the first place. One person argued that trusting professional expertise was better than "some pretend democratic model that has actually no legitimacy [and] can be so easily manipulated" (participation consultant B). He cited the fact that most arts boards are chosen by the management team of the company, rather than being elected by a community vote or membership group and this was important to the artistic independence of the organisations. But this may be argued to be part of the problem of insularity in the cultural sector and may reinforce the cultural elites discussed throughout this thesis (Griffiths et al., 2008).

There was acknowledgement from one person that while "it only takes a few people to really drive [a cultural organisation]…you have to get the whole community to buy into it, otherwise it's not going to succeed" (local authority E). The following section therefore discusses whether the accusation that those involved represent a limited number, from a cultural elite, is born out in practice by the backgrounds of those interviewed.

7.5   A wider range of voices

Hebden Bridge was described as "a well-resourced community, not necessarily particularly affluent…but in terms of human capital there's…a lot of people with skills, who live here" (resident and elected community representative F), which it was said by many people interviewed to mean that there were high levels of active community engagement.

Furthermore many people argued that due to the town attracting people to settle down and bring up families it has very little transient population. A stable community was seen by most of those interviewed as a key ingredient in

determining how community-focused residents were. This was also identified as a factor, in community engagement, in relation to Castleford in the last chapter, although transience was not seen as a problem at Contact. But the residents interviewed in Castleford believed that their commitment came from the fact that most of the community activists had been born and bred in Castleford. In contrast most of those interviewed in Hebden Bridge had moved to the area from elsewhere because of its reputation as an arty place. None of the residents in Hebden Bridge interviewed had been born there and many claimed that by choosing the town, they had greater buy in than those who had been born there.

Many described their community involvement as much in terms of socialising and networking as wanting to contribute to the town's development. As such many did not perceive a need to increase the range of voices involved in decision making but wanted to meet like-minded people. The lack of effort suggested, in reaching out to those not already engaged, may be a symptom of this attitude.

Significantly most of the local arts organisations were also run by people who were new to the area, who had set up practices to give themselves work locally but expressed more interest in gaining recognition from their peers outside of town than from the community within which the work is delivered.

Everyone interviewed in Hebden Bridge was university educated. While some described their parents as working class they all had a background in the arts from an early age. In line with those interviewed in Castleford some said their working class backgrounds "were not devoid of the arts" (arts manager D) but others said they had been starved of culture at home and had got into the arts at school, as a means of escape. There is a correlation between those who had positive family experiences, who demonstrated themselves to be more open to engaging a wider range of voices in interview. Those who had less positive family experiences were more sceptical about involving others.

It is also clear from examining the names of people involved and assessing the background of those interviewed that the same names appeared on both

applications for asset transfers, and as suggested earlier that many of the same people sat on boards of all the cultural organisations in town. There was neither representation from working class members of the community, nor diversity in terms of age or racial origins. One person argued that this is because those who control everything do not want to give up power "to the [so-called] chavs…I'd have more faith in the people who are living on my council estate …particularly if we are allowed to discuss it in advance" (resident G). However, this was disputed by others on the grounds that "every single group wants people to come to their meetings, to be involved, and people who moan that they can't get involved are talking rubbish because they can, they just can't be arsed" (local authority E).

A campaign to recruit more people was cited as evidence that those who do not engage choose not to, rather than being excluded by the processes. Many people saw it as inevitable that "what happens…in a small town like Hebden Bridge is that it's the same people volunteering for everything" (resident I) and that these tend to be the high capacity individuals discussed earlier. This is clearly contradicted by the previous case studies. In Castleford it was mainly older working class participants who engaged. Contact engaged young culturally diverse participants. This would seem to suggest that it is the processes that determine who engages rather than the desire for engagement of different sectors of the community. It may equally suggest that all processes tend to attract people with similarities to the people who set them up.

One person further argued that "nobody actually does want to get involved in the delivery of the arts unless they have to…most people I think would rather just go and buy their ticket" (arts manager D). It is interesting to note that the same person said that they had got involved themselves because of a belief that it was an exciting area to be involved in and they had developed their expertise on the job. It therefore seems unlikely that given the opportunity a broader cross-section of the public would not be interested. This interest is also identified in the literature, where the Arts Council's public value research identified that the public would like more involvement in decision making (Opinion Leader, 2007).

Furthermore almost everyone interviewed who worked in the arts agreed with the view that they had "got involved because of [an] interest [and] gained expertise and knowledge by doing" (resident G), rather than having expertise to begin with. This further supports the case that community engagement may be a vehicle to share expertise and build capacity. The resistance to engaging a wider range of voices may therefore be, as the leader of the council acknowledged, due to a desire to hold onto expertise among a narrow band of professionals, which has been argued elsewhere in this thesis needs to be broken down.

The asset transfer process in Hebden Bridge therefore does not appear to have delivered the principles of participatory decision making, in engaging a wider range of voices. Many of the processes of engagement used encouraged those who were already active, or legitimised decisions that had already been made. Far from increasing capacity in the town there were concerns expressed that competition between organisations had increased as a result of the asset transfers. This was seen as risking the sustainability of some artistic practice and damaging relationships between community groups. This is in complete contrast with the benefits ascribed to the process at Contact and Castleford.

The following section therefore examines the effect of the asset transfers more widely across Calderdale and considers whether participatory decision making has had any purchase elsewhere in the district.

7.6   Wider implications for asset transfer and participatory decision making in Calderdale

As identified the aim of the asset transfers was not to develop the arts, but to safeguard existing infrastructure. Not surprisingly therefore there is little evidence that it was seen as a model by the wider arts sector in Calderdale. In terms of participatory decision making more generally, most of those interviewed, who worked in the arts, were resistant to the concept, as in previous chapters.

As elsewhere those who believed that participatory decision making had value were also those who had engaged in it. This may support the case made earlier that "when you do encourage [organisations to engage more], I think sometimes they're pleasantly surprised" (local authority D). It may also merely demonstrate that those who engage in such processes are those who see its value in the first place. As such trends in participatory decision making may owe as much, if not more, to the values of individual agents involved, rather than to policy formation.

As elsewhere in the thesis, the doubts expressed related both to the de-valuing of expertise and the lack of accountability of those involved. In terms of the role of expertise one person voiced a concern that both the asset transfer model and participatory decision making would "de-professionalise the arts [through] a Big Society model where the arts are run by volunteers, and I think that's a real pity" (arts manager D). This was supported by the views expressed earlier that the Town Hall had been unable to sustain a paid workforce and was suffering from its reliance on untrained volunteers. This was not supported by the example of the Picture House where the staff team had remained intact. It is also not demonstrated by the other case studies, where professionals were seen as important in the process. There was also some concern expressed that such practices were being employed unevenly. In the arts in particular, it was argued that "why should huge amounts of money be poured into Covent Garden for example…and then you make the rest of the country a voluntary structure" (arts manager D). This supports findings elsewhere in the thesis that national institutions were not seen to be adopting, nor being expected to adopt, such practices.

The lack of accountability of such practices has already been demonstrated in relation to the tendency in Hebden Bridge to attract a small group of activists to engage in all the community committees. The only case in the town where an arts organisation seemed to engage a wider range of voices, albeit informally, was in the case of the Trades Club (http://thetradesclub.com/), which had a live music programme. While the Labour origins of the club meant that it was run via a membership, who elected a management committee (much as the asset transfers) nothing in the constitution requires wider participatory decision

making. Despite this the music programmer from 2004-2010 argued that while
he

> "ultimately made the decisions about the bookings [he] was always
> keen to hear people express opinions…several of the bookings…were
> done on the basis of someone coming back [from seeing a band
> elsewhere] purely pragmatic reasons" (resident G).

This had not been continued by his replacement, who took over in 2010.

There was some scepticism about how transferable any of the experiences in
Hebden Bridge were to other locations as "Hebden Bridge is what it is now
because of the people of Hebden Bridge" (resident and elected community
representative H) and it was claimed that "we don't see them in other places"
(local authority F). This supports the argument that such processes, where left
to the community to lead, may rely on existing activism. However, this view
was not supported by interviews at Contact or in Castleford where those
interviewed argued that you can find active and committed people anywhere; it
depends on people having the will to look for them.

More broadly across the district, unlike Wakefield MDC which developed a
participation strategy, backed up with staff working at ward level, Calderdale
Council were accused by some of being more interested in being accountable
to their funders than their constituents. In the case of the Piece Hall in Halifax
(www.thepiecehall.co.uk), which had been an important part of the creative
industries in Calderdale since 1970s, development plans started in 2010 were
said to have included public consultation, but only because this was a
requirement of the Heritage Lottery Fund who were the funder.

One of the local authority staff confirmed that the council would not have
undertaken the consultation otherwise and said the whole project was only
"sitting with Safer and Stronger Communities…because it's a heritage lottery
fund project and if we didn't have that funder potentially on board it would just
go immediately to the economic development guys" (local authority F), which
would not require the same engagement with residents. This demonstrates

the power of funders and policy directives in ensuring such practices are embedded in practice. But it also demonstrates the limitations of policy implementation. Without a real conviction to the process many felt, as elsewhere in this thesis, that such processes could be tokenistic and therefore pointless.

There was a clear sense from those interviewed from the council that "there's still a lot of other things that public sector organisations like councils have got to do, other than consulting with the public" (local authority D). Interestingly, resistance to the concept was said by those who worked in the council, to be most evident among officers, who felt it hindered their ability to work effectively. The council leader in contrast was said by officers, and by herself, to support the principles and encourage it in the council. One of her initiatives had been to introduce "public question time…it's important that we listen and just every so often it might stop us in our tracks" (local authority D). This is in direct contrast to Castleford where council officers supported the practice but it was claimed that there was resistance from councillors and in particular the leader.

As the leader in Wakefield is a Labour councillor and the leader in Calderdale a Liberal-Democrat this suggests that the acceptance of such practices is not directly associated with New Labour's policy. Indeed the Liberal Leader in Calderdale argued that the Liberals historically were more in favour of decentralised power than old Labour's centralised state control. But as demonstrated in practice the approach to the asset transfers in Calderdale were less about de-centralising power and more about devolving it completely from state control. Furthermore, despite the opportunity afforded by "public question time" in Calderdale there was no evidence that this had resulted in any changes in policy.

The council's most common method of engagement was said to be surveys, rather than discussion. One council officer acknowledged that such surveys were "mainly used for information….it has directly influenced a decision once…the decision was….put on hold shall we say" (local authority F). The case in point was the relocation of the public library in 2011. This was postponed, but not stopped, due to public opposition to the council plans.

Despite receiving two thousand responses the council questioned the representativeness of its own survey and argued that it was difficult to engage people in district-wide decisions as "people … aren't bothered about what's happening elsewhere in the borough" (local authority E). But residents in Hebden Bridge said they had not completed the survey because of the way that questions were constructed, not because it was to do with issues elsewhere in the district.

The survey was accused of increasing competition within the cultural sector and between culture and other public services as "you're asking people 'do you want to lose your cinema or do you want to lose your library?' well what if you don't want to lose either of them…there are questions that we're not allowed to ask and not allowed to answer" (resident G). This supports the argument that how surveys are formulated may be a significant factor in increasing or decreasing engagement.

Participatory decision making therefore seems not be have been prioritised more broadly across the district, and as identified Calderdale Council had already started "a move to sell assets rather than transfer them in future" (local authority C) by the time the empirical research for this thesis was completed in 2013. Nor had the experiment in Hebden Bridge seen participatory decision making involved in the asset transfers themselves, let alone across the wider arts sector. This suggests that the trend described in earlier chapters was not evident in Calderdale. While the Town Hall in particular had been cited as a model of success by the Coalition government, by virtue it seems just of its existence, it does not appear that the approach defined under New Labour had achieved its aim of building partnerships between the local authority and the community. Rather as suggested it had reduced council involvement.

7.7   Conclusions

As outlined at the start of this chapter this case study was chosen as a community-led initiative in a local authority not under Labour leadership. This was done in order to contrast it with both the previous case studies which had a more top-down approach. In addition this chapter aimed to consider whether

asset transfer offers a form of participatory decision making, as is claimed in the Localism Bill (DCLG, 2011b) introduced by the Coalition government, or a different ideological approach.

It has been shown that the concept of asset transfer in Hebden Bridge required a pragmatic and managerial approach, to safeguard assets, rather than a value based approach, to engage the community. As such the process in Hebden Bridge, while initially conceived of by the community association and not a top-down policy intervention, did not encourage deliberative processes with a wider range of people. Instead Hebden Bridge relied on high capacity individuals to lead the process. It may be argued therefore that the community asset transfers were community only in name and did not provide an example of participatory decision making, as defined elsewhere in this thesis.

Furthermore despite this case study involving two cultural organisations, it is clear that the arts were not central to the aims of either the community association or the council. In some cases it was claimed that they were squeezed out by other commercial interests. But it is also clear that public support for the arts in Hebden Bridge was a key factor in the process; albeit that this public were an active minority. The case study therefore does offer an example of how public engagement can be used to advocate for the arts, as has been suggested elsewhere in this thesis.

Despite this, resistance to the concept was voiced by many of those working in the arts sector, in Hebden Bridge, much as it was in other chapters. There was concern that it undermines the expertise of professionals. This unwillingness to share and build expertise, let alone believe that such expertise might exist elsewhere in the community, suggests a high level of protectionism within the arts sector.

As elsewhere, those who had experience of engaging in participatory decision making had a more positive experience of it. This may suggest that people are won over by seeing participatory processes work in practice, or that individuals who already have a commitment to the principles of engaging a wider range of voices are more likely to implement such processes in the first place. Either

way it suggests that the individual values and experiences of those involved are important in the implementation of policy.

Most people interviewed did not see differences in the policies between the different political parties. Participatory decision making was said to be a feature of the Coalition's policy just as it had been under New Labour. But investment under New Labour was shown to have helped to build capacity in Hebden Bridge, while the reduction in funds under the Coalition meant that practices were increasingly only able to engage with people who already have the capacity. The very aim of participatory decision making, to increase the range of voices involved, is therefore reduced by lack of investment to make this possible.

One person argued that any such differences were less to do with differences in ideology and more due to the implementation of policy as all policy "starts with a bright idea, and then…you see some of the sorts of corners being knocked off" (local authority D). But despite the claims for policy consistency between political parties, the language under New Labour emphasised partnerships between communities and institutions, and shared power. The Coalition's version in contrast has been shown to encourage complete devolution of power away from the public sector. It could be argued therefore, as discussed elsewhere in the thesis, that the same terminology of participatory decision making may mean very different things, to different people or political parties (Fairclough, 2003).

The next chapter compares the findings from all the case studies, plus the chapter of analysis on policy makers to assess whether there is a shared understanding of the terminology and whether lessons can be learned and transferred for wider participatory decision making.

8. Comparative analysis

The previous four chapters analysed the findings from interviews, surveys, policy documents and industry reports. They examined the data collected from policy makers and case studies, one by one, to consider the particularities of each. This chapter provides a comparative analysis of all four previous chapters in order to summarise findings and consider the extent to which they provide consistent or contradictory perspectives on the topic.

The chapter starts with an analysis of how the findings relate to conflicting theories about the exercise of power, outlined in the literature review. In particular it considers whether widening the range of voices involved in decision making can bring about transformative change in policy and practice (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010) or whether the powerful always dominate and override weaker voices, due to the uneven distribution of power in decision making groups (Lukes, 2005).

This analysis is done through an examination of the views of the range of voices involved in arts policy through interviews with: DCMS and local government; Arts Council England; policy commentators and advisers; arts practitioners from organisations large and small; and members of the public who have been involved in participatory decision making. Consideration is given to whether values are shared between those involved, and how much individuals are able to influence decisions.

Each of the case studies discussed in chapters 5-7 offers an example of participatory decision making in practice, within very different contexts. Contact is an arts-led initiative where participatory decision making has been implemented over a long period, in order to refresh artistic practice. Castleford and Hebden Bridge, in contrast, are projects in market towns, with different histories and political leadership, who have directly responded to national policy guidelines. The three case-studies therefore provide an opportunity to examine how the context of the projects, and the organisational structures that delivered them, affect the outcomes.

Key issues identified both in interviews with policy makers in chapter 4, and in the literature (Fennell et al., 2009) are also tested in practice. These relate to issues of policy implementation, while maintaining creative independence for professional artists; the extent to which public involvement may help or hinder the arts sector in advocating for public funding; how important it is to embed processes over the long term; whether such practices should be used for mainstream planning or only for local initiatives; the role of expertise; the level of risk taking within the arts sector and whether this is increased or decreased through participatory decision making; tools and processes for participatory decision making; the range of people involved in decision making in the arts and the extent to which participatory decision making engages a wider range of voices.

Finally as there was a change of government, while this research was undertaken, I consider whether there was policy continuity between political parties or to what extent participatory decision making was a historical experiment under New Labour

8.1   Policy making – values and implementation

In the literature review a clear disparity was identified between arts policy makers who largely focused on the artist as beneficiary and the public who saw themselves as the beneficiaries (Opinion Leader, 2007). But it was claimed that during the period analysed for this research (1997-2013) there was a shift in emphasis from the former to the latter (Bunting, 2007). What chapters 4-7 demonstrate is that, the differing opinions on this exist, not only between the professional arts sector and the public, but equally among those working within the sector.

Through the data collected for this thesis local authority officers and the public participants interviewed were the most likely to focus on the public. Most supported the view that policies should address the social value of the arts, and focus on increasing opportunities for public participation generally and participatory decision making in particular. But the majority of Arts Council officers also believed that the policy focus on increasing participation in the

arts, under New Labour, identified both in the literature review and the interviews was a good thing. Although in relation to the specific area of participatory decision making, there was more opposition.

From deeper analysis of the data, it is clear that the term participation meant different things to different people. Some people argued that there were so many different interpretations of the word that it had become meaningless as a concept. Most public participants defined it in terms of their own creative expression, which in both Contact and Castleford, those interviewed argued was still strong in their communities, but were under-invested in.

Arts Council and local authority staff in contrast suggested that it related more to the need to overcome barriers to engagement with the professional arts, and a marketing focus on increasing audience size, rather than the range of people actively involved. An examination of funding applications from arts organisation also showed that the most common definitions of participation related to marketing, with a smaller number referring to community engagement. It was clear from the Arts Council's comments on the applications that they did not prioritise one definition over another.

But a minority of Arts Council staff and some of the leaders of arts organisations interviewed argued that the focus on this broad participation agenda, let alone participatory decision making, was damaging to the independence and quality of artistic expression. It is also apparent in both the interviews and the literature review that in practice there was a retrenchment from this focus in the latter half of New Labour's time in office (Jowell, 2004, McMaster, 2008). It was said this continued under the Coalition, as targets to increase participation in the arts were dropped and there is evidence that many organisations cut back on their education and outreach programmes.

The fact that the majority interviewed said they believed that arts policy should move towards a public focus, and the evidence suggesting the reverse was the case, does seem to suggest from this sample that the minority voices held more sway. This supports Steven Lukes' (2005) theory that some voices may be more powerful than others in decision making. Indeed some staff within the

Arts Council demonstrated this by saying that recommendations from staff were often overturned, with final decisions being made by a very small number of people, mainly at national office.

This was said, by some, to be the reason that participatory arts organisations had been hit hardest by the reductions in government funding introduced by the Coalition government in 2010. In many cases it was said that the cuts had been implemented very differently from what was suggested by regional officers, who had recommended alternative ways of distributing reduced funding.

If majority views are overturned by decision makers this may undermine the very premise of participatory decision making that changing the agents involved in policy may change practice (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010), which is at the core of this thesis. It may equally make the case for why a broader range of voices need to be not only heard in policy making, but be involved in decision making, to redress the uneven distribution of power.

Most people interviewed for this thesis believed that while there might be some voices that dominate national policy making, individuals and organisational structures were equally important in influencing how policies were implemented. In the case of Contact the transformation of the venue was said by observers to have been the result of the vision of the artistic director. Practices in both Castleford and Hebden Bridge were also said to be influenced by the community activism of a few key individuals.

But this was disputed by those who were most actively engaged in the processes. John McGrath, at Contact, claimed that his artistic vision was only able to be realised because of the support of the board of directors. In both Castleford and Hebden Bridge the activists likewise said that they were only listened to by the local authority because of policy directives from their managers. In practice therefore, organisational structures appear to be at least as important as individuals. This is supported by theories in the literature review about the power of institutions in influencing outcomes (Gray, 2000, Moini, 2011).

John McGrath also acknowledged the fact that Contact was closed for refurbishment when he became artistic director. As such it offered a blank canvas that removed resistance from staff to continuing old practices. At the Arts Council in contrast people felt that the nature of working in a large organisation, with a long history, meant that all views became diluted and compromised, which in turn limited the capacity for organisational change. This supports the theory discussed in the literature review, that "path dependency" (Kay, 2005) within organisational structures may be as much of a barrier to change in the arts as the exertion of power by an elite.

This research suggests therefore, through analysis of the data, that it is both the dominance of certain voices within the arts sector, alongside the barriers within organisational structures that limit policy implementation. For significant change to be implemented, both the redistribution of power and new organisational models are required to deliver it. This thesis examines participatory decision making as one such model to achieve this.

8.2 Participatory decision making - policy implementation

As stated, differences of opinion between those interviewed were more clearly divided on participatory decision making than on the broader agenda of increasing participation in the arts. Where local authorities and the public were broadly supportive of such practices, those working in the arts and at the Arts Council, with few exceptions, were resistant.

For many, resistance related to a distrust of policy directives imposed on the sector, rather than developed from within. In fact with the exception of two officers in Labour-run Wakefield MDC, objections to policy directives were common across all those interviewed, whether advocates or opponents of participatory decision making. This may explain the limited impact of the "duty to involve" (DCLG, 2008) in the arts and the lack of opposition to (or even awareness of) its removal under the Coalition.

Some theorists, discussed in the literature review, argued that the notion of top-down directives to impose bottom-up participatory processes may be counterproductive (Peck, 2009, Hay, 2007). This was supported by many of those interviewed who argued that participatory processes should be practice-based or community-led, rather than policy impositions. In line with my findings throughout this work, on the limited impact of the broader participation agenda, this thesis questions whether policy without imposition can significantly challenge the status quo. Despite the opposition to policy-led approaches, the commitment of the local authorities was still seen as a key success factor in relation to Castleford and Hebden Bridge, without which many felt the projects would not have been realised.

The Castleford Project was part of a strategy to use the arts in the regeneration of the town. The participatory decision making processes directly responded to New Labour policy and aimed to build trust between the community and the local authority, while also building capacity within the community. This was argued to have been successful, to a greater or lesser extent, by everyone interviewed. Many acknowledged that the community had been arguing for such changes for years but that until New Labour's policy on public engagement came into force (DCLG, 2008) their voices were not heard.

In the case of Hebden Bridge the aim was to safeguard public assets, but again it was recognised that assets had been lost in the past, despite community opposition. The community asset transfers, which are the subject of this thesis, were said to have only been possible to achieve because of a national strategy, first introduced under New Labour (Quirk, 2007) but continued under the Coalition (DCLG, 2011b) to reduce council responsibility for assets and hand these over to voluntary sector control.

Although Contact's process was not directly a product of national policy, it was still identified that New Labour's triangulation of social policy, which saw the arts being used to address a range of issues: from economic development to social inclusion; from crime reduction to healthy lifestyles (Policy Action Team 10, 1999) helped the venue attract funding from a range of non-arts sources in the public sector, which it was recognised were drying up under the Coalition.

In fact all three cases attracted public funding from a range of sources (in the case in Hebden Bridge this came through loans not grants) and the processes of participatory decision making were seen as crucial in helping draw down this money from other parts of the public sector. Furthermore, from the interviews with Arts Council staff and local authorities surveyed, there was no evidence that the arts suffered more from cuts in areas where participatory decision making has been implemented, than in those where it has not.

While further research may be required to confirm whether this is true across the whole country, the evidence does seem to contradict the perception expressed in the literature review (Fennell et al., 2009) that participatory decision making was a threat to the levels of arts funding. Although, if employed more widely, the choices that the public make about what is funded may result in redistribution of where the money is spent.

Many of those involved at Contact and in the Castleford Project argued that both the distribution of funding and the nature of the artistic offer would and should be altered. But while those at Contact still largely saw this change as being led by artists, the public participants in Castleford wanted to see more money devolved to communities, to determine their cultural lives. In Hebden Bridge there were not the same calls for artistic practice to change. Many of those interviewed were less uncomfortable with the idea that the arts were elitist than were the other groups interviewed, including Arts Council staff, and leaders of major arts institutions. The differences here may be to do with the individuals interviewed, but it may equally be due to the need for community asset transfers, as employed in Hebden Bridge, to have a management structure to maintain a sustainable business. The evidence in this thesis has suggested that this may encourage more conservative outcomes than the participatory processes at Contact and Castleford, which shared decision making between professionals and public.

Despite the almost universal resistance to policy directives therefore, the policies discussed in this thesis do seem to have been a significant factor in the implementation of each of the case studies. At the same time a desire to

implement the processes, rather than the imposition of such processes, was also clearly seen as a necessary feature of their success.

Across all four chapters of analysis of primary research, it was clear that once people had been involved in participatory decision making practices they were more positive about its potential than before. There was evidence in the interviews that the process changed people's opinions rather than reinforcing them. This may be argued to demonstrate the potential of participatory decision making. At the same time it highlights the limitations of transferring such practice more widely across the arts sector, where the same values and interpretations on art and participation are not shared. The following sections therefore consider some of the concerns and resistance to participatory decision making which may limit its use and how these play out in practice.

8.3 Embedding participatory decision making long term

One of the key issues identified in the literature review was the importance of longevity in participatory decision making processes (SQW Consulting, 2010). This was also replicated by many of those interviewed both for the chapter on policy makers and for the case study on Contact, who identified the venue's success in transforming its audience and its practice over more than a decade. The long term commitment to deliberative processes was cited as the main reason for this achievement.

Furthermore the values of participatory decision making were said by staff at Contact, to have become so embedded in the culture of the organisation that they were confident that this would not change with a change of leadership. Although nuances of difference were seen between the practices of the two artistic directors interviewed for this research, the key values remained constant.

Unlike Contact, the Castleford Project was devised as a short term "experiment". Although the council stated that there was an ongoing commitment to participatory decision making in their neighbourhood strategy, they did not see it as of use for the long term direction of cultural policy, nor for

district-wide decisions. But many argued that long term impacts were still evident. Despite the short term nature of the Castleford Project, the focus on capacity building was shown to have led to increased community activism and growth in the number of local art groups operating in the town in the years after the project was completed. This suggests that participatory projects can lead to increased community engagement even when the project is of short duration.

In the cases of both Castleford and Contact the process and the participants were invested in, both in terms of time and money. Furthermore both cases also involved building partnerships and sharing power between professionals and public participants, rather than devolving power from one to the other, as was the case in Hebden Bridge. Investment and leadership were cited by some people interviewed as of equal importance in embedding participatory processes as longevity.

In contrast to the two case studies above, in Hebden Bridge the reliance on the expertise of participants in the asset transfer model was felt to lead to reduced interest over time. There were concerns from both the council and the community association, that it was harder to get volunteers or committee members once the transfer had taken place, than it was when the dialogue with the council was still ongoing. Participatory processes that devolve rather than share power therefore may appear to lead to decreased engagement over time.

What both Contact and Castleford also had in common, but what differed in Hebden Bridge, was that the process in the first two cases included participation from agenda setting to delivery. In line with the literature review, people's confidence and trust in the process was shown to have also developed, as they saw they made a difference (SQW Consulting, 2010). In the cases within Castleford where the community felt that their decisions were not adhered to this trust quickly broke down. Likewise at the public meetings in Hebden Bridge it was clear that the terms of reference were pre-set, which were observed to lead to mistrust in the processes. It also led to less transformational outcomes in practice.

While those interviewed in Castleford and at Contact were broadly more positive about the principles of participatory processes, than those interviewed in Hebden Bridge, residents in Castleford were also sceptical about the practice. There were concerns that participatory processes could raise unrealistic expectations when limited in their use, to local and not district-wide decisions. This was seen to limit their effectiveness in the literature review (SQW Consulting, 2010). Some policy commentators also argued that unless participatory decision making was used across all decisions, including the distribution of funding, it could never do more than legitimise the status quo.

8.4 Mainstreaming participatory decision making

At Contact, it was claimed that participants were involved in decision making in every part of the management of the building, rather than restricted to certain activities. The fact that their voice was not limited to certain areas of the organisation was seen as one of the main reasons the venue had transformed its audience and artistic practice. Although participants at Contact did not directly influence how much funding the venue received from the Arts Council or local authority their involvement did influence the allocation of the venue's budget and appear to make it easier for the venue to advocate for more funding.

This was not the case in examples of other arts organisations cited, where practice was restricted to the public co-curating or programming a single exhibition or season of work. Nor was there support, within the Arts Council, for introducing participatory decision making in the allocation of funding for the arts. The majority of local authority respondents also felt that such practices were only feasible for local decisions, such as Hebden Bridge and Castleford, rather than direct-wide. In all cases policy makers voiced concerns about how to define the constituency for district-wide, let alone national decision making.

Staff at Calderdale Council argued that offering the community asset transfer model across the district had encouraged communities to apply, who did not have the capacity to deliver. Many existing community assets were said to be

failing as a result and the council acknowledged a retrenchment from the policy. While this may suggest the danger of a community engagement model being replicated in different locations, it may equally demonstrate the problem in the policy of asset transfers under the Coalition. A shift from providing support to build capacity, as was said to be the case under New Labour, to a reliance on existing capacity in a community may be more significant.

Even in the Castleford Project where capacity building was said to have been invested in and developed, participants were not involved in district-wide decision making. While residents thought they should be, the council staff in Wakefield argued that they should not. This difference was demonstrated most acutely with reference to the Hepworth (www.hepworthwakefield.org), a new gallery which opened in Wakefield in 2011, during the time that this research was being conducted.

Many of the Castleford residents accused the gallery of being "money hungry" and diverting funds from locally based arts activity. They expressed dissatisfaction that they were neither consulted on whether the building should have been built, nor involved in the programming of the building once it opened. Wakefield Council, the Arts Council and staff at the gallery all agreed that as the building had a wider catchment than just local audiences there was no public with whom to engage in its building. But despite this with the exception of staff at the gallery, they didn't see why the public could not be involved in the programming.

It is unclear if the people of Wakefield were not considered to be the key constituents to decide if the building was built, despite paying for it, why they should then be considered appropriate constituents to determine its programme. This does seem to demonstrate the fact that for many policy makers, participatory decision making is seen as a useful tool to legitimise decisions already made, rather than to influence the decisions themselves. The Director of the Hepworth did not see the value of engaging the public in programming at all and argued that doing so ignored the role of the expert.

8.5 Risk and expertise

The most common concern about participatory decision making among those working at the Arts Council and those working in the arts sector, was that it devalued their role as experts.   Many said that they felt the quality of art and the level of risk taking would be reduced as a consequence. This was also a concern expressed by many working in the arts, in the report on participatory budgeting discussed in the literature review (Fennell et al., 2009).

This was not demonstrated to be true in practice. In the case studies of Contact and Castleford artists and staff said that such processes had allowed them to take more, not fewer risks. Many described the process as allowing them to share their expertise while also broadening their knowledge and experience. Contact was described as having changed from a theatre with a safe, conservative programme, to a laboratory that generated risky cutting edge cross art form work, which broadened definitions of theatre to include art, music, spoken word, dance, and DJing. Risk taking is defined as a core value on their website (http://contactmcr.com/about/what-we-do/values/) and most people interviewed in Manchester acknowledged that both the management and programme at Contact was less risk averse than its peers.

Several people interviewed in each case study questioned whether risk taking was as common practice within the arts sector as was often claimed by those working the arts. This was reinforced in the literature review, where many theatres nationally were accused of increasingly conservative programming (Stafford-Clark, 2012, Gardner, 2012). Young participants at Contact argued that this was because it was traditional arts audiences who were less willing to take risks, than the new audiences that they were developing, where over half their participants came from Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds and 65% of their audiences were aged 13-30 (Contact, 2011).   These are the very audiences that the Taking Part survey identifies as least likely to participate in the arts (DCMS, 2011).

Many public participants also criticised the professional arts for focusing on rigid art form definitions, creating silos of practice. The pre-eminence given to

the vision of artistic directors and curators was seen by some to be a barrier to participation. This reinforces the view identified in the literature review that the arts sector is trapped by self-interest and protectionism (Hutchison, 1982, Gray, 2000).

Many of those interviewed in Castleford, in particular, argued that the arts in England had lost their purpose compared with the past, where many believed they had more social relevance. As a result some felt that the arts were becoming more, not less elitist, despite the participation agenda. The problem of participation may indeed only be a problem when addressing the question of participation in specific practices to justify the distribution of funding, which currently favours elite practices.

Many of the public participants in the case studies accused arts professionals of using expertise as an excuse, to override decisions made by participatory processes, when they did not like the outcomes. Many also questioned the extent of the knowledge of the professionals, referring to them as self-appointed experts. This was supported by an analysis of the backgrounds of the "experts" interviewed, many of whom had narrow experiences, and most knew little about art forms outside their specialism.

In relation to people's personal background in the arts, those working in the arts, with the exception of those at Contact, tended to say that they had not engaged in the arts when young unless it was in classical arts. The public and staff at Contact in contrast were more likely to cite everyday culture such as drawing and reading at home, as evidence of a cultured childhood. This suggests a clear difference between those who defined arts and culture broadly to include creative participation and those who defined them more narrowly, focusing only on professional practice.

Furthermore all the professionals interviewed acknowledged that they had developed their own expertise through experience. It therefore follows that giving more people experience through participatory decision making may build the capacity of others. The resistance to participatory processes from many in the arts sector may therefore be argued to have more to do with a

reluctance to give up power and become accountable, rather than based on any evidence of the effectiveness of such processes. The following section therefore considers the processes used for decision making in the case studies.

8.6 Participatory decision making processes

In terms of the practice of participatory decision making, it was noted that at Contact the most common word used for the process was "conversation" rather than decision making. While it was acknowledged, by both artistic directors interviewed, that public engagement was meaningless unless decisions were not only influenced by these conversations but seen to be so, the director still reserved the right to make the ultimate decision. It was argued that this was necessary for the integrity of the artistic process. As such participants sat on every decision making panel, although they did not vote on decisions. Instead there was said to always be detailed "feeding forward and feeding back" between participants and staff, to make explicit and transparent how the final decision had been arrived at.

In Castleford, the process of shaping through discussion also took place. Representatives (or community champions) sat in on meetings to inform decisions. But in addition in both Castleford and Hebden Bridge public votes were held at open meetings. In the case of Hebden Bridge the public elected people to sit on the management committees of the community assets. In Castleford they voted on selection of some of the artists.

While those elected at Hebden Bridge were said to be the same people who sat on every board in town, the local authority officer in Castleford said that neither the original plans of the council, nor the community nor the artists were what was often voted on in practice. This was argued to be because the process of debate and dissent, before the vote, was as important as the outcome of the vote itself.

Furthermore it was believed that even though every art commission in Castleford had been contested to some degree, those that involved the most

discussion within the participatory processes were the ones most accepted by the community. This comparison clearly suggests that tick box voting alone, as in the case of Hebden Bridge, may get more conservative outcomes than voting combined with deliberative processes as in Castleford, or debate without a defined vote as at Contact. This was also demonstrated to be a principle of participatory decision making, in the literature review (Fennell et al., 2009, Blakey, 2009, SQW Consulting, 2010)

In the chapter analysing the views of policy makers there were also concerns that voting led to "tabloidisation" of decisions, which would be damaging to the range of work offered. In each of the case studies, public participants voiced concerns that voting could be rigged. In Castleford and Hebden Bridge, where it had been used, there were also concerns that people felt that they were often merely voting on an existing short list rather than determining who was on this list to begin with. Across the district in both Wakefield and Calderdale where on-line surveys were used to consult the public, there were also concerns that these were constructed in such a way that they biased the outcomes, which in turn created resistance to completing them.

While staff at Wakefield Council acknowledged the limitations of surveys and argued that they were only used due to financial constraints, as they are cheaper than lengthy deliberation, staff in Calderdale did not see this as merely a monetary decision. Instead they argued that although consultation with the public was worthwhile they did not believe that decisions should be made in this way.

This research suggests therefore that while Labour-run Wakefield council aspired to reach the top of the ladder of participation defined in the literature review (Arnstein, 1969, Brodie et al., 2009), through participation in decision making, Liberal-Democrat run Calderdale demonstrated a shift down the ladder to using participatory processes for information and consultation only. These two case studies cannot be claimed to prove an ideological shift in party politics on their own, but there is evidence in the literature that this shift was happening across the country from the "duty to involve" under New Labour, to the growth in consultation and budget simulators since the Coalition came to

power, (Wilson, 2010). This shift from participatory decision making processes that require state involvement to build capacity and partnerships, under New Labour, towards a model that aims to reduce state involvement under the Coalition may therefore be seen to reinforce inequalities and reduce participation, rather than increase it.

The budget simulator model has also been claimed to offer legitimacy for decisions by more closely replicating representative democracy. In the interviews there were repeated questions about who the people were who engaged in participatory decision making and how representative they were of their communities. The following section therefore considers the nature of representation in the participatory processes analysed for this research.

8.7   Representation

The concern, with the unrepresentative nature of participatory decision making, is a key issue identified in the literature review. While some saw this as a barrier to the legitimacy of such processes (Cooke and Kothari, 2009) others did not. For some the shared learning that could be achieved through deliberative processes between users and service providers is more important than how representative participants are of their communities (Blakey, 2009). This division is replicated in all four of the chapters of analysis.

In the local authority surveys a small number of respondents questioned the status of participatory decision making in comparison with the democratic electoral process. In the case of people interviewed in Castleford this was seen to be more of an issue for elected councillors than for council staff. In Hebden Bridge it was staff at Calderdale Council who challenged the legitimacy of participatory groups, more than the elected leader of the council. Despite this concern, most local authorities surveyed still saw some value in the processes for hearing a range of views and also said that such practices were commonplace.

Among those working at the Arts Council participatory decision making was seen as both less common practice and more widely criticised for being

unrepresentative. As shown in the literature review, by virtue of the arm's length principle, the Arts Council may be said to have a problem with representativeness and accountability to government and the public (Hutchison, 1982, Holden, 2006). It may therefore be argued that, in order to increase the legitimacy of their decisions, participatory processes are more relevant to the Arts Council than they are in local authorities.

In all three case studies a tension can be identified around the issue of representation. On the one hand all three devised engagement strategies to attract large numbers of participants, to represent the diversity of their communities. On the other hand, as identified tick box voting mechanisms, which might reach a more representative sample, were seen as much less effective mechanisms, for learning, than working in depth with a small number of people. Providing depth in the participatory experience, while also ensuring breadth of people engaged, is the challenge at the centre of all participation policy.

In terms of strategies to address breadth of participation Contact was praised by almost everyone interviewed in Manchester for its strong "street presence" and the visibility and availability of staff at Contact, to both current users and non-users across the city. This was seen as crucial to encourage people to get involved in participatory decision making processes who were not already active arts attenders.

For the staff at Contact mirroring the diversity of the target audience in recruitment to permanent jobs and programming on stage was seen as equally important to the creation of participatory panels. The aim, which many people interviewed in Manchester agreed had been achieved, was to embed, not only participation but, visible representation in every aspect of the management of the venue. This was said to be the reason Contact's audience profile bucked the trend of other theatres by engaging younger, more culturally diverse audiences.

In both Castleford and Hebden Bridge breadth of public representation was attempted through public meetings. These were advertised in local press and

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via existing community associations. Despite using the same mechanism the outcomes appear to be very different in the two towns. Significantly no decisions were taken at the open meetings in Hebden Bridge, but people were invited to become members of the community association or the cinema mailing list. Members were then given a postal vote to select people to take over management responsibility of the community assets. Everyone interviewed accepted that the people that engaged were predominantly people who were already active in town. There were divergent opinions about why this was the case.

Some criticised the focus on open meetings and membership that people had to opt into as mechanisms that would always fail to attract people who were not already engaged. Some suggested that the street presence, identified as a success at Contact, was missing in Hebden Bridge. Others argued that processes were open to all but that apathy was the greatest barrier to engagement. But the same level of apathy was not apparent in Castleford.

The evaluation of the Castleford Project claimed that the open meetings attracted large levels of engagement from those who had not previously been active (Young Foundation, 2009). It was said that the involvement of Channel 4, filming the process, raised awareness. The open meetings were also used as an opportunity for the public to make decisions on commissions for public art works, further raising the stakes of engagement in the meetings. In addition the council staff said that they were proactive in building a database of people who turned up to meetings. This was used to facilitate communication throughout the project, and was said to have successfully increased engagement. This supports the claims made in the literature review that breadth of participation from a diverse range of people, is related to both the effort put into engaging people and the level of decision making in which people are invited to engage (SQW Consulting, 2010).

In Hebden Bridge and Castleford, any representativeness in the participatory processes was seen to be undermined by a similar lack of representativeness in the community management teams elected in Hebden Bridge and the artists shortlisted for Castleford. In Hebden Bridge the shortlists, for the management

teams, were said to have been pre-determined and were made up of the same names that sat on the boards of many local voluntary organisations. In addition many of these people already worked in the arts in some capacity. The shortlists were justified by the organiser of the community association and the local authority staff, on the grounds that certain skills were required to deliver management competence to run the community assets. As a result there is limited evidence of a wider range of voices being involved in the processes or of capacity building of those taking part.

In Castleford, Channel 4 and the Arts Council were said to have decided on a long list of artists, from which the community could vote. Participants and the local authority were unhappy that no local artists had been included on this list. This was said by the Arts Council officer involved to have been done in order to guarantee artistic excellence. The local authority staff interviewed doubted whether enough research had been done to confirm whether excellence existed locally. At Contact, in contrast, the commitment to provide opportunities for new local artists was seen as an essential part of the process of developing artistic practice alongside public engagement. Staff and participants at Contact identified clear pathways from participant to professional within the organisation. Without these processes, it was argued to run the risk of reinforcing inequalities rather than challenging them.

A key difference between the two artistic directors interviewed at Contact was that, while John McGrath provided a large number of people one-off paid opportunities to attend decision making panels, his successor, Baba Israel, advertised year-long unpaid internships. Although Baba Israel argued that those selected were still chosen to represent diversity, more than for their particular experience, all the interns interviewed for this research acknowledged that they applied because they already wanted to work in the arts. Although they believed that without Contact they would not have been able to make this a reality, this does raise the question of whether, rather than replacing the cultural elite, such practices may just seek to infiltrate it.

In Castleford like the internships at Contact, community champions were selected to work with the artists from commission to delivery. They were not

elected as the management teams were in Hebden Bridge, nor recruited from an application process as in Contact. Instead they nominated themselves from attendance at public meetings. The local authority said most of the community champions were people who had not been active before and none of the champions interviewed said that they got involved because they wanted a career in the arts. They did acknowledge that there was still an element of self-interest to their involvement, but this was a commitment to the town that they lived in, and not to the arts. Where these relationships worked best, it was said that there was a real shared learning between the community champions and the artists with whom they worked, which built the capacity of both. It was said that it also raised the profile of the arts in the town.

At both Contact and Castleford a willingness to learn on both sides was seen as the key element of success in terms of artistic delivery as well as participation. The element of self-interest involved for the participant, whether that was the desire to work in theatre at Contact, or to improve your town, in Castleford and Hebden Bridge, does raise the question of whose voices are heard in such processes. Although as demonstrated the case studies all engaged a wider range of voices in decision making. The following considers whether the people involved offer new perspectives or merely give more voice to those already active.

Throughout all four chapters, almost a definition of being a "professional" for those who worked in the art sector was seen to be the fact that they were university educated. Furthermore the vast majority of policy makers, advisers and staff within arts organisations interviewed had been introduced to the arts when they were young by family or school and had either studied the arts or humanities. The people working in the arts across all case studies and within the policy chapter did therefore suggest that a very narrow range of people work in the arts.

Most of the public participants interviewed for this research, with the exception of those from Castleford, were also university educated. But among the participants there was much more variance in backgrounds than for those who worked in the arts professionally. While all the professionals said they worked

in the arts because of a passion that had existed since childhood, participants at Contact and Castleford had commonly developed their passion as adults through their involvement in participatory processes. In the case of Contact a number of people said they had got interested in the arts, and even gone to University because of gaining confidence through their involvement in Contact and not vice versa. In Castleford very few had gone to University, but some ex-miners had become interested in the arts during the miners' strike in the 1980s because of activities run by Yorkshire Arts Circus, a participatory arts group which had been active in the town during that time. Participatory practices therefore do seem to increase people's interest in the arts.

In Hebden Bridge, where the organisers assumed that you needed high capacity individuals to run things, their processes attracted people who were already professionals. This may suggest that assumptions about who participatory processes will attract may become self-fulfilling, unless processes are actively employed to challenge assumptions. This was further demonstrated through a more detailed comparison between the expectations in the three case studies and the people that were engaged.

At Contact the very reason for participatory processes was argued by the artistic director to be predicated on the assumption that the theatre's audience was young and transient. The venue therefore needed to constantly reinvent itself along with its audience. As a result the people engaged at Contact were indeed young and transient. Some people at Contact acknowledged that retired people have more time on their hands and so might be willing participants but some were concerned that participatory decision making involving an older static audience, might lead an organisation to become less, rather than more risk taking. Friends associations in some theatres were cited as examples where a vocal minority could make it hard for an organisation to offer a diverse programme at risk of alienating an established audience. This was acknowledged to be a challenge by the director of the Royal Exchange Theatre in the city.

In both Hebden Bridge and Castleford transience was seen as a barrier to engagement. The high levels of engagement in both towns were seen as

directly related to the long term investment of residents to the place where they lived. Most of the community champions in Castleford had been born in the town and were retired. They questioned the commitment of young people to engaging in such processes, because they were transient. The assumptions in both Castleford and Contact therefore directly contradict one another. This was also the case in Hebden Bridge.

While those interviewed in Castleford doubted if you could get the same level of commitment from middle class, middle aged incomers, particularly if commuters, it was these very groups who were most active in Hebden Bridge. Incomers in Hebden Bridge claimed that they had more energy and commitment to the town because they had chosen to move there. Long term residents were believed to be more apathetic and difficult to engage.

The variety of those engaged in the case studies from transient multi-cultural young people at Contact; retired white working class people born in the town in Castleford; and middle aged, middle class commuters in Hebden Bridge does challenge the prejudices voiced about what type of people might be willing or unwilling to engage in participatory practices. But while this demonstrates that the stereotypes of who is likely to engage may be unfounded, it also suggests that all three case studies seemed to attract likeminded participants that fulfilled their assumptions. This clearly demonstrates the difficulty of creating processes that do not reinforce expectations and thereby become exclusionary.

At the same time both Contact and Castleford do demonstrate not only that a wider range of voices were interested in being engaged in participatory decision making in the arts, but that when the agents involved in decision making are changed this can both support artistic development and build public support for the arts. The question for the final section of this chapter therefore is to consider whether this was happening more widely than within the case studies examined.

8.8   Wider impact

When I started this research the government had set an aspiration that every public body would introduce some form of participatory budgeting by 2012 (DCLG, 2008). The Arts Council planned to pilot this in the allocation of some local project funds. But both these initiatives were dropped when the Coalition came to power.

There were differences of opinion among policy makers and commentators interviewed in chapter 4 about whether such practices would continue. Those who were resistant to the process were most likely to equate it with New Labour policy and therefore saw its relevance diminishing without them in power. Others did not relate it to government policy, but saw it as part of wider social trends happening irrespective of party politics. This was demonstrated by reference to the continued use of participatory democracy in the language of the Coalition's Localism Bill discussed in the literature review (DCLG, 2011b), although it was acknowledged that participatory democracy was more developed in other parts of the cultural sector, such as heritage, rather than the arts.

The use of such processes in the management of arts venues was shown to be a useful mechanism to make organisations become more porous to a wider range of people. This may particularly be argued to be the case in towns such as Hebden Bridge and Castleford who could not afford the wider arts ecology of a city. The one arts organisation in a town may be seen to have a greater obligation to represent the diversity of its community, rather than the tastes of its director. But in practice the people interviewed struggled to come up with concrete examples of where this was happening. Where examples were cited the same ones came up time and again. Many also referred more to consultation exercises than to decision making. This suggests, as with the broader agenda of participation in the arts, that the rhetoric of change may be much greater than the reality.

In all three case studies, despite being cited as models of success their wider impact was limited. Contact was said to have influenced the wider arts sector

by creating a new generation of artists who worked in a different way to the traditional arts sector. This was seen, particularly by those at the Arts Council, as the most effective way for a slow evolutionary process of change to occur in the arts. But their impact was not evidenced by the interviews elsewhere in the city, where practice remained unchanged. Moreover when asked to name any of the new generation of artists who had come from Contact who had made an impact in the wider arts sector people found it hard to think of specific examples. In fact despite universal praise for what Contact had achieved it was very much seen as the exception both within the city and nationwide.

In Castleford, the evaluation and the press coverage that followed the project envisaged that the success of the model would lead to such practices becoming the norm (Young Foundation, 2009). This was demonstrated by the fact that many of the participants from Castleford said they were regularly asked to talk to other local authorities about their experiences. Despite this they did not see the practices being widely adopted within Wakefield as a whole, let alone further afield.

In Hebden Bridge the council staff interviewed said that they were retreating from the asset transfer model as many organisations in the district were struggling to survive. The Community Association in Hebden Bridge, who had made the applications for transfer, acknowledged that they would have preferred the assets to stay with the council, but with greater local say in how they were run. Despite this, it is the asset transfer model, which is most widely cited as a success by the Coalition government. There was clear evidence that the model was being used with increasing frequency elsewhere in the country, with government agencies set up to promote it.

It may be argued that this is the result of an ideological shift from New Labour's investment in participatory decision making. The New Labour governments' aim was to increase the range of voices with whom the public sector engages, through deliberative processes and capacity building. Under the Coalition, in contrast, processes have been shown to increasingly involve tick box surveys, aimed at increasing legitimacy for decisions and transferring responsibility for cultural assets from the public sector to the voluntary sector. This neither

encourages deliberation, which this research has identified provides more transformational outcomes, nor capacity building which would increase the range of voices engaged in decisions.

The processes in Contact and Castleford have been clearly identified to have required investment, to build the capacity of people who had not previously engaged. Without this investment in Hebden Bridge participation only came from those who already had capacity. Both Contact and Castleford were described as partnerships between the community and the theatre or council on the delivery and management of the project. This replicates the language of New Labour's duty to involve. With the asset transfer model in Hebden Bridge in contrast the focus was on reducing the responsibilities of the local authority. Staff at Calderdale Council identified this as a priority for them and for national government under the Coalition.

Despite the majority of those interviewed therefore arguing that there was not a policy shift between governments, the evidence for this research suggests that a shift did take place. While much of the language may be the same, at first sight suggesting policy continuity, in reality the asset transfer model is very different in aims and outcomes from the duty to involve model.

This offers an example of how the same language may be used to mean very different things, resulting in very different outcomes (Fairclough, 2003). As such, many of the claims that link the participation agenda to neo-liberal trends mentioned in the literature review (McGuigan, 2005) may be linked to one definition of "participation" but may not apply to others. Participatory decision making may equally be seen as a tool to engage a wider range of voices; challenge and transform artistic practice; or merely improve the legitimacy of the arts. Through analysis of practice it has been shown that it is at times able to do each of these or all at the same time, but in order for this to have an impact across the wider arts sector it is not the public that need to be encouraged to participate, but it is the mind-set of those working in the arts that needs to change.

9   Conclusions

This research started from a personal desire to investigate why, after years of working in the arts, as a producer, researcher and policy maker, the subsidised arts sector that I left in 2007 seemed to look much the same as the one I had entered in 1987.   A decade of Conservative governments, followed by a decade of Labour governments, had created a wealth of new policies and seen the expansion of cultural policy as a research area. New art forms and new technologies were also changing the landscape of arts practice, yet the organisations in receipt of funding at the end of the period appeared to be largely unchanged from those at the beginning (Frayling, 2005, Arts Council England, 2009).

This thesis has examined cultural policy literature on the shifts in discourse during this period. Of most particular relevance for my research, in the period after New Labour came to power in 1997, was the discourse on the instrumentalisation of cultural policy, and evidence based policy, which required the arts sector to demonstrate its value against social and economic agendas. As a result there was a growth in impact studies to demonstrate how the arts met these aims.   But despite much of the literature referring to individual examples of practice, it is largely uncritical of failures to deliver. Rather than being used to differentiate or compare different practices, to provide evidence of the effectiveness of different strategies, it was commonly used to advocate for the arts sector as a whole.

More critical cultural policy research examines the relationship of cultural policy to broader socio-political trends, and the institutional barriers to change within the organisational structures, but this is also limited in its application to the specifics of and divergence between practices.   Nor does it commonly recommend solutions specific to the sector, rather focusing on the need for broader structural change in society.

Most of the literature on cultural policy also describes the arts, as if it is one united sector. This is reinforced by a common rhetoric within practice of an arts ecology which works in some kind of natural balance. This was very

different from the reality of the socially constructed sector I had worked in, within which individuals and organisations were working towards very different aims and under very different value systems, which in turn provided very different outcomes for policy makers.

The research approach of this thesis therefore aimed not just to define the arts as one sector but to highlight the differences in policy and practice, in order to consider in whose interests policy formation and implementation was being made. This was done through an analysis of the opinions and experiences of a range of different agents within the arts sector by collecting data in a mixed methods approach. This included an analysis of grey literature alongside interviews and surveys with policy makers and practitioners, to consider whether there were shared or disparate values operating between different agents. Case studies were identified through interviews with policy makers and were then examined as examples of practice in very different contexts, in order to further identify where the values and principles, were similar or different.

By necessity the analysis is interpretive (Alasuutari, 1995), as it is concerned with the value systems of the different units of study. I am also aware of my role as a researcher, as someone who has worked in arts practice. This inevitably meant that I had my own value system in relation to the issues explored and I therefore not only brought insights into how the sector operates, from past experience, but also potential bias in how the data was interpreted. But by triangulating findings from a range of sources, the aim was to challenge my own assumptions and test both my own thinking and that of those interviewed. There is no doubt that as a result of this research my personal views were very different at the end of the process from what they were at the beginning.

I was also interested in assessing what the 'rules of the game' (Lowndes, 2005 pg 279) were within arts policy decision making between 1997-2013 and how this affected policy outcomes. I therefore analysed not just what people said, but how much the views of individuals influenced policy and practice. The

focus for this research is therefore not just why decisions are made, but how policy is formed, how decisions are implemented and in whose interests.

While this research was being undertaken (2009-2013) the discourse about participatory decision making was part of cultural policy debates, following the introduction, in 2008, of the duty to involve the public in public service delivery (DCLG, 2008). As the focus of interest for the thesis was on the nature of decision making it therefore became an obvious connection to consider what would happen if the people involved in decision making were changed. What the case studies have in common therefore is that they are projects which were implementing some form of participatory decision making. This therefore allows for a consideration of how such processes may change both artistic practice and audience engagement.

Due to a lack of research in this area within the arts, literature from the field of political science offered the theoretical framework for this study. As highlighted throughout, the theories underpinning my thesis focus on the two conflicting views of Mark Bevir and R.A.W Rhodes (2010) on the one hand and of Steven Lukes (2005) on the other, which question whether the make-up of the policy making unit affects decision making, or whether differences in power relationships between individuals mean that certain voices will always wield more influence. This research tested these theoretical claims in practice, by examining the values of individuals and assessing the influence they have on decisions.

Furthermore, in order to move beyond the role of the individual in decision making, this thesis also examined some of the structural levers and barriers to effective implementation. Many public policy commentators talk about the relationship of individual agents and the institutional structures within which they operate (John, 1998). Some argue that limitations are imposed on decision-makers by path dependency, which always favours the status quo over change in decision making (Kay, 2005). Consideration was therefore given to the operating structures within which arts policy had been developed during this period.

Others examine the importance of the way language is used to implement or limit the implementation of policy. The vagueness of language was described by Norman Fairclough as a key feature of New Labour policy which encouraged a policy rhetoric that was not realised in practice (Fairclough, 2000). This research therefore also paid close attention to the specifics of language in relation to how key terms such as "art" and "participation" were defined within arts policy, which demonstrated a similar vagueness about meaning.

The following section uses the theoretical frameworks discussed to draw together all the findings from the research undertaken. Consideration is then given to the contribution this thesis makes to knowledge both in cultural policy and in public policy decision making and potential areas for future research. This is followed by a final section with recommendations for future arts policy making.

9.1 Summary of findings and discussion of their implications

The key questions that this thesis aimed to address were laid out in the introduction in relation to the drivers and barriers to change within the arts sector between 1997-2013. In particular these related to the gap between policy and rhetoric in arts policy; definitions and interpretations of participation in the arts; the implications of participatory decision making processes in the arts; and ideological continuity or policy shifts between the New Labour governments (1997-2010) and the Conservative-Liberal Coalition government which took office in 2010. These are considered each in turn below.

9.1.1 Gap between policy and practice in arts policy

There are claims in the literature produced by both DCMS and the Arts Council that, during the period being analysed for this research, there was a shift from an art form focus, which saw the artist as the beneficiary of arts funding, to a focus on the public as the beneficiary (Bunting, 2006). The majority of policy makers interviewed for this research also said that increasing participation was a priority for them personally. But as shown throughout this thesis there is no evidence to support claims that the shift ever really took place in practice.

There is no sign of redistributive funding during this period (Frayling, 2005, Arts Council England, 2009), which might have supported the case that there was a shift in focus. Where participatory organisations did receive investment this represented a small percentage of the overall increase in public investment in the arts under New Labour and proved most vulnerable to cuts in expenditure under the Coalition, both nationally and locally.

While some people interviewed argued that there was a growth in practices to increase participation in the arts within the existing funded institutions, they struggled to find specific examples. Where examples were found, these tended to be the same ones in every case, suggesting that they were the exception not the rule. The failure to reach the participation targets, that were both set and measured by government (DCMS, 2008, DCMS, 2011), further suggests that such a strategy was either a failure or was never really embedded within the core funded arts institutions. It is clear from the analysis in this thesis therefore that there was indeed a gap between policy rhetoric and practice in regard to participation in the arts.

The research for this thesis supports the claims that this is due to "structural defects" (Gray, 2000 pg 145) within arts policy. Powerful vested interests have been shown, in the literature review, to have influenced both policy formation and implementation since the formation of the Arts Council in 1946. Peer review and assessment ensured that a narrow range of voices has been heard in decision making (Hutchison, 1982). An analysis of the background of those interviewed, who worked in the arts further demonstrated this to be true in the sample studied for this research. All were University educated, and defined their engagement in the arts in relation to engagement with the classical tradition. The contacts that professional respondents had made when young were seen as a necessity for a career in the arts and there was little acknowledgement that broader cultural practices could also be defined as art.

Furthermore while the majority of the policy makers and commentators interviewed said participation was a priority for them personally, they were less sure that such views were shared across their institutions. The small number of interviewees who commented that the "pendulum was swinging too far" in favour of participation under New Labour (government policy adviser B) identified a retrenchment from participation policy, even while New Labour

were still in government, which was also found in the literature (Jowell, 2004, McMaster, 2008). The research for this thesis has shown that this was in part a result of discontinuity even within New Labour policy, between Chris Smith as Secretary of State for culture, media and sport from 1997-2001 and Tessa Jowell and James Purnell who followed him in office.

But the findings from those interviewed also highlight the power of some voices over others. The small number of people who did not believe that participation should be prioritised was shown to be those from major arts institutions. While the minority in this sample, their opinions appear to have been more influential than those in the majority in the sample. One person said that the words of certain individuals from certain national art organisations become "policy edict" (Audience Development Manager B). This supports the theory that merely changing the agents involved in policy making may not mean that all voices have equal influence in decision making (Lukes, 2005).

Furthermore from the interviews for this thesis it was clear that, despite the personal priorities expressed, there was a lack of appetite for change among those interviewed at the Arts Council and in mainstream practice, and a resignation to the "orthodoxy of 60 years" of doing things the same way (Arts Council England senior manager E). This is argued to have led to "inertia in the system" (government policy adviser A) of arts policy and practice, which limited both artistic development, leading to increasingly conservative programming in many large institutions, as well as audience development, with a growing gap between the arts sector and the public. The findings for this research suggest that the failures in the arts to deliver against the participation policy are in part due to ignoring the possibility of redistributing funds to organisations endowed with an ethos which embraced participatory objectives.

It is further argued, based on the findings from interviews with policy makers, that resistance to change is an inherent danger of the arm's length principle. The principle of insulating policy makers from political interference (Matarasso and Landry, 1999) implies that the choices made by policy makers are not themselves political. It also reduces the accountability to and therefore legitimacy with the public and encourages a managerial approach to decision making which ignores power relationships within the decision making unit.

The aim of the arm's length principle may have been to allow artists to take risks and challenge the status quo, but whether or not it has done that, it hasserved to prioritise some practices over others. Arts Council staff interviewed acknowledged that in practice, far from encouraging risky and challenging work, arts funding had become risk averse in its distribution and many of those most heavily funded were described as becoming increasingly conservative in their programming. Far from being radical and independent, parts of the Arts Council's decision making processes have been shown to be conservative and protectionist, with a growing separation between the individual artist and the art establishment. Furthermore there was limited confidence that most funded arts organisations were able to either engage with the public or challenge their own working practices.

The principles of participatory decision making and widening the range of voices involved in the arts, may therefore be argued to be more important in organisations operating under the arm's length principle than within central or local government, where there is some accountability. Yet it is those who were most accountable who were least resistant to the idea, with local authorities suggesting that participatory decision making was becoming common practice. Even where people at the Arts Council demonstrated a commitment to change within the arts sector there was resistance to the idea of participatory decision making.

But even those within local authorities or arts practice who supported the principles of participatory decision making still resisted the idea that it should be imposed on the arts sector by policy makers. However those interviewed within central government cited the resistance, to national policy interference, as one of the reasons that the arts had not been "mainstreamed", in government thinking, in the way that sport had. Far from safeguarding the interests of the arts sector therefore, the arm's length principle and the narrow range of voices involved in decision making may in part be damaging it.

9.1.2 Definitions and interpretations of arts and participation

In terms of the language of arts policy this has been shown to be problematic throughout this thesis. There was a clear difference between those interviewed in their definitions of the arts, which it is argued reflected power relationships.

While those who came from the Arts Council, or the best funded organisations, tended to describe art in relation to polish and slickness, those who came from less funded organisations described it as raw and cutting edge. This is shown both in relation to how people defined their early engagement in the arts and in the role they saw for the artistic leadership.

This may merely demonstrate the fact that people define art in relation to their own cultural practices, but it also highlights the problem of identifying quality and excellence, which is inherent in the Arts Council's definition of "great art" by which it seeks to judge applicants. The correlation between the Arts Council's definition and those in receipt of the highest level of funding may support the status quo, but it may not encourage risk and innovation.

Significantly the public participants and some local individual artists, involved in the case studies, supported the views of the less funded organisations, describing the arts less as polished and more as something constantly changing. There was criticism of arts institutions who were "more interested in celebrating the dead, than discovering the living" (local artist D). This belies the claims from those resistant to increasing participation, that the public are risk averse and that widening participation would have a dumbing down effect. In fact many of the public participants interviewed argued that the opposite was the case and that regular art audiences were more conservative than those new to the arts, who have fewer preconceptions. This is supported by claims in the literature review, that theatre programming is increasingly conservative when focused on preserving its regular audience and at its most experimental when trying to attract new audiences (Stafford-Clark, 2012, Gardner, 2012).

In terms of defining participation differences are also apparent. Where those interviewed from arts organisations tended to define it in terms of engagement with the artistic practices which they delivered, those who were not arts practitioners tended to define it in broader cultural terms. It is therefore not surprising, that the subsidised arts sector tends to address the participation agenda from the perspective that the problem is people's lack of engagement in what the arts sector considers as valuable, rather than addressing the problem as being the cultural offer itself.

Multiple interpretations, in the Arts Council applications for funding, were also shown to have allowed arts organisations to assimilate terms to reflect what organisations already did rather than adapting their practice to address new policy. Some respondents commented that as a consequence there were so many different definitions of participation being used that the word had become meaningless. It is argued that these findings support Norman Fairclough's (2000) claim that the vague use of language under New Labour encouraged a hollow policy rhetoric, which it is argued provides another example of how the subsidised arts sector protects vested interests, but does little to develop practice or build public value. Clear and specific definitions of language in contrast may help implement policy and encourage change.

9.1.3 The implications of participatory decision making processes in the arts

With regard to participatory decision making, which is the main focus of this thesis, there is clear evidence in the literature that this became more common across public policy more generally, but there were differences of opinion among those interviewed, about whether this was also becoming widespread in the cultural sector. On closer inspection the people who believed that there were signs of growth in this area tended to talk about consultation rather than decision making. In terms of expanding, let alone changing the decision making unit, it was clear that practice has been limited to isolated cases in the arts. In relation to the case studies, while two were shown to be transformational in their localised practice, Contact and Castleford, there was no evidence that this had a broader impact on arts policy at local or national level. In contrast, there were signs that the Coalition government favoured the asset transfer model use by the third case study of Hebden Bridge and which the findings from this thesis suggests was most problematic in practice.

Unlike the broader participation policy there was a widely held resistance to participatory decision making among respondents who were not directly involved in the case studies, the reasons for which were consistent, both in the literature (Fennell et al., 2009) and among those interviewed. These involved issues of representation; expertise; risk taking; and the potential impact it might

have on overall funding for the arts. However, in all cases, the concerns were demonstrated not to be true when analysing the practice in the case studies.

In regard to representation, there was some evidence in the literature that participatory budgeting under New Labour did engage a wide variety of people (SQW Consulting, 2010). This challenges some people's assumptions that "the usual suspects" would always be the ones to engage. This was also demonstrated to be true in the case studies, each of which attracted very different types of people. In the cases of both Contact and Castleford the participants were shown to be very different to the types of people normally involved in the professional arts, let alone in decision making. Only in Hebden Bridge, where the necessity of finding "high capacity individuals" (local authority F), who could not just make decisions alongside professionals, but implement delivery in the place of professionals, were the people engaged more similar to the profile of the narrow range of voices discussed earlier.

But despite each case study attracting different types of people, it is acknowledged that within each participatory decision making group there was still a tendency to attract like-minded individuals. In the case of Contact they engaged young urbanites, in the case of Castleford older working class residents and in Hebden Bridge middle class incomers. The findings for this thesis therefore demonstrate the necessity of actively reaching out to different groups and not making assumptions about who will engage to truly widen the range of voices involved in decision making. Furthermore it is argued that it is vital to offer informal processes for engagement such as those introduced under John McGrath at Contact, constantly refreshing the decision making unit, in order to avoid the risk of one elite merely being replaced by another.

It is interesting to note however, that the people most vocal in their concerns about representation and accountability, within participatory decision making, were those least accountable themselves. The local authorities, surveyed and interviewed, who have some accountability through electoral democracy, were broadly unconcerned about the levels of representation. Most believed, in line with the case studies and some of the literature (Blakey, 2009), that the process of participatory decision making was more important than the level of representation. Those interviewed at the Arts Council and within mainstream arts organisations, while more unrepresentative themselves, were more

concerned about the lack of representation among others. This suggests that the concern may have more to do with unwillingness to hand over power than with a real commitment to accountability.

This also relates to the concern expressed by some respondents in the interviews about participatory decision making undermining the role of expertise in policy making. Many of those interviewed, who worked in the arts, doubted if the public had the knowledge to inform policy. However, many public participants accused the art world of being full of self-appointed experts, who offered little more than a narrow specialism. Furthermore, as expertise is by definition something that is developed through practice, not something that one is born with, it follows that engaging a wider range of people would build a wider range of expertise. Expertise, as with representation, it is therefore argued, may be used as a means of exclusion. Instead, within participatory decision making practice, expertise is seen as something to be shared.

In terms of risk taking, as identified above, there was a clear sense that regular audiences could be more risk averse than new audiences, rather than less. But in all cases, where participatory decision making had used deliberative processes, there was a feeling afterwards, from those involved who were interviewed, that "the most unusual and radical of those solutions was the one that was successful" (Arts Council England senior manager B). This suggests that involvement in the decision making process may make audiences more open to risk. In contrast, concerns about risk aversion were realised where tick box voting processes were used. Both in the literature (Parkinson, 2006) and the interviews, such processes were said to encourage more conservative outcomes. The evidence for this thesis therefore suggests that for participatory processes to offer transformative results, rather than merely legitimise the status quo, deliberation is essential.

Finally, the concern that the public might not support arts funding, was also not borne out in practice. The public value surveys, which the Arts Council commissioned, broadly found that the public were supportive of the concept of arts funding, even if they were less confident in the decision making that determined what was chosen for funding (Opinion Leader, 2007, Arts Council England, 2012a). Evidence from both the review of participatory budgeting

(Fennell et al., 2009) and the case studies examined for this thesis, demonstrate that participatory decision making made it easier for arts organisations to draw down increased funds, and from a wider range of sources. This, it is argued, reduces the risk when cuts are made to arts budgets as funds may come from different sources.

Those in local authorities also acknowledged that, depending on how the questions were asked, the arts normally did well when put to the public vote. But in all cases it was the benefits that the arts delivered that made people vote, whether it was community engagement, providing a leisure activity, or something else, rather than the intrinsic value of art. The shift from a focus on artists and their work to a focus on public value, suggested in the literature review (Bunting, 2006), is necessary if the arts want to garner public support.

9.1.4 Ideological continuity or shifts between governments

There were differences of opinion about how much continuity there was between the New Labour governments from 1997-2010 and the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government who came to power in 2010. Those who opposed the participation policy largely saw it as a feature of New Labour and therefore something that could be forgotten about from 2010 onwards. But most of those who supported the policy argued that there was policy continuity between governments. However the findings in this thesis have clearly shown that not only was there not continuity between governments, there was not even continuity within New Labour.

Under New Labour participation policy itself was shown to initially take a deficit approach, in relation to the importance of building people's social and cultural capital, rather than recognising a need for government to tackle structural change. The participation targets also encouraged the quick wins of engaging the engaged more often, rather than finding mechanisms to attract new audiences. Equal opportunity rather than increased equality was the focus of New Labour, much as the democratisation of culture rather than cultural democracy was the focus of arts policy.

However in the latter years of New Labour participatory decision making did in part encourage some redistribution of power. But even in relation to this, New

Labour demonstrated different approaches. While the duty to involve (DCLG, 2008) has been shown to have been directly influenced by the radical South American approach to participatory budgeting (Lent, 2006), the asset transfer approach (Quirk, 2007) related more to 19th Century models of mutualism. This suggests that, even under New Labour, there were different models being promoted and experimented with.

Although the language of participatory budgeting might have been retained in some Coalition documents (Cameron, 2010b) in practice there was a decisive shift away from constructive deliberative processes towards tick box budget simulators under the Coalition government (Wilson, 2010). There was also a growth in the asset transfer model. While the South American model has both the aims and a demonstrable ability to bring about real social change, the Coalition model, influenced by the writings of Phillip Blond (Blond, 2010) merely encourages the reductions in state responsibility for the public sector in general, and the arts in particular.

9.2   Contribution to knowledge

Existing research on participation in the arts has focussed on initiatives and policies that involve participants in creative practice, or strive towards audience development for existing cultural programmes. But as identified at the start of this thesis, while there is research on participatory decision making in other areas of public policy, there is a lack of available studies of this kind in relation to the arts. This thesis aims to begin to fill this gap, and to demonstrate how the arts are distinct in terms of participatory decision making.

As highlighted at the start of this chapter, the research for this thesis has taken a multi-disciplinary approach to arts policy, drawing on theories from public policy and political science as well as cultural policy studies to examine uses of power and language in decision making. But it has moved beyond these theoretical positions by collecting a weight of empirical data in order to examine the specifics of how policy is played out in practice. The triangulation of data from different sources has considered not just what is said and written but the values and status of those saying and writing such things. This

provides a rich narrative alongside an in-depth analysis of the potential of participatory decision making in the arts.

In relation to political science and the role of power in decision making, analysis of grey literature from arts policy makers and arts organisations, survey data from local authorities and in depth interviews with policy makers and arts practitioners, have tested the contradictory claims of Lukes (2005) and Bevir and Rhodes (2010) about the role of agency in decision making. The thesis explores whether changing the agents does change practice or whether inequalities of power mean that dominant discourses prevail. This work has found that inequalities of power do exist within the arts, just as they do in wider society, but that changing the agents involved in decision making can have transformational effects on the people who take part and on the artistic process. However the research has also demonstrated that there is resistance to change embedded in the arts policy structures, which limit the potential for such participatory practices to become more mainstream.

Theories derived from public policy, on path dependency (Kay, 2005) and institutionalism (John, 1998) have been considered as explanations of this resistance. Such theories have been shown, through the interviews with policy makers, to be commonly adopted as a justification for the slow process of change within the arts, and a barrier to policy implementation. But I argue, based on the evidence I have collected, that both theories offer an overly determinist view of the sector, that ignores the particularities of practice and support existing inequalities of power, rather than challenge them. Instead a greater barrier to change has been shown to be the vague use of language which is adopted and adapted in the arts sector. In relation to the concepts of participation and participatory decision making, existing definitions and practices support the theories of Norman Fairclough (2000) that, during the period under consideration, language was used as a tool more to advocate for existing practices, than to change them. However, this thesis argues that this is less due to the nature of New Labour policy, as Fairclough suggests, but was already embedded into arts policy institutions and into the arm's length principle in particular.

In regard to the specific research focus of this thesis, on participatory decision making in the arts, the only other study on the topic identifies resistance to the concept both among arts policy makers and practitioners (Fennell et al., 2009). My research supports claims, made in this earlier study, that this is based on common concerns about how participatory practices might undermine the role of artistic expertise, and how a risk averse public might damage artistic quality or support reduced levels of arts funding. But my case study approach, by examining three very different programmes, has demonstrated that such concerns are not borne out by evidence from practice.

In each of the case studies the participatory process was demonstrated to work best where expertise was valued but shared with participants. Where professionals try to hold on to power, or where power is devolved totally from the professional to the participant, both are shown to be counterproductive in terms of allowing for artistic development and engaging participants. Conversely where arts professionals were open to learning, as well as teaching, the participants were found to be open to risk and supported artistic innovation. This, in turn, helped draw down increased funding for the arts.

However the selection of case studies was chosen not only to identify models of "best" practice in participatory decision making, but equally to illuminate the significance of adopting a different ethos and implementing different processes. As such each of the case studies provides an example of different ideological positions and practices. This has allowed for a consideration of whether policy on participatory decision making follows neo-liberal trends, which aim to reduce State involvement in the arts (McGuigan, 2005), or whether it offers the potential for a new relationship between policy makers and public, based on challenging the current cultural elite in arts policy and engaging with a wider range of voices. The research evidence indicates that both approaches were apparent under New Labour but that there was a clear shift towards the neo-liberal approach under the coalition. Without the investment under New Labour, both in the arts and in capacity building of participants, and without a commitment by arts professionals to proactively engage with a wider range of voices, such practices reinforce the power of those with "high capacity" and the exclusion of those already excluded. As

such this research not only shines a light on a historical experiment but provides evidence to support the recommendations for future policy making at the end of this chapter, following the recommendations for future research below.

9.3 Recommendations for future research

The research has demonstrated that a narrow range of voices were being heard in arts policy, during the period of this research. This work also shows that a combination of the vested interest built into the arm's length principle, and path dependency within organisational structures, limit the impact of policy interventions in the arts. However, although those interviewed for this research were significant players in the arts, it is recognised that the sample size of policy makers interviewed for this research may not be representative of the whole of arts policy in England. It may over or under estimate the commitment to the participation agenda or the suggested narrowness of perspectives influencing policy on a national basis.

The selection of case studies was in part dictated by the limited examples of participatory decision making in the arts: as such the focus on particular case studies may obscure the level of change that is or is not happening elsewhere in the arts. This does not limit the worth of the analysis in relation to the aim of this thesis, to examine examples of very different models. However, some longitudinal quantitative analysis of arts leadership and participatory practice may provide a useful additional study into how widely change is happening in the arts sector.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, despite the fact that the 'Duty to Involve' and the cultural participation targets were dropped by the Coalition, and that participatory arts were said to be worst hit by the Government cuts in 2010, at the time of doing this research Arts Council England was developing a new initiative, called Creative People and Places (Arts Council England, 2012b). At the time of writing £37 million had been allocated to specified geographical areas, defined by the Active People survey as being in the bottom 20% in the country for arts engagement (Sport England, n.d.). Each area was

encouraged to involve some form of participatory decision making in the delivery of its projects. It was too late to conduct research on this for this thesis, although one of those interviewed did argue that there was already a tension about whether the project would

> "change the way organisations in an area take decisions, so that the public do shape the arts provision in their area in a way that they didn't before [or whether] the priority of the programme actually [becomes] to get more people either as audience members or practitioners or artists to just engage in the arts [as defined by the current local arts providers]" (government policy adviser C).

Future research on how the recipients of Creative People and Places funding define and implement participatory decision making would therefore be worthwhile. It will also be interesting to monitor whether the programme provides a model of place-based funding, which survives beyond its three year pilot phase.

9.4 Policy recommendations

While some people interviewed suggested that participatory decision making would end in 2010, with the end of New Labour, I argue that it may be more important than ever, as demonstrated in the research for this thesis, in a context of reduced public expenditure, if the arts are to enhance their public value and make the case for continued public funding. However, a more holistic approach is required, that is about not just introducing participatory decision making within arts organisations, but equally involves a re-evaluation of the principles of arts policy and arts funding.

In line with the findings of the Arts Council's report on participatory budgeting (Fennell et al., 2009), I argue, as a consequence of the research I have undertaken for this thesis, that the arm's length principle is increasingly untenable. Furthermore I have shown that it may actually damage the capacity of the arts to be risk taking and challenging and instead supports self-interest

and protectionism from a narrow range of practices, engaging a narrow range of audiences.

The tendency for policy initiatives, such as increasing participation, to be delivered by organisations and leaders who do not embrace such values has been shown, through my research, to limit the capacity for policy implementation. If arts policy is to be relevant to the cultural landscape of the twenty-first century redistribution of funding is required. This should be based less on narrow art form definitions and linked more directly to the policy makers' stated goals. Rather than relying on the existing arts infrastructure to lead the change, power must also be redistributed and participatory decision making offers a model of how this may be achieved, by engaging a wider range of voices than the narrow interests currently represented.

This thesis has demonstrated the potentially transformative impact of participatory decision making, in the cases of both Contact and Castleford, where both artistic practice and community engagement were shown to have developed. While many of those interviewed argued that such change requires a long term commitment to participatory processes, as was the case at Contact, this thesis has produced some evidence to suggest that even short term processes, such as the Castleford Project may build long term capacity. Leadership style has been shown to be at least as important as policy, in terms of the implementation of such practices.

As a consequence it is therefore argued that for participatory practices to become embedded within practice, the notion of "relational leadership" (Hewison, 2004) needs to be developed, where artistic leaders are willing to share expertise, rather than hold onto it. This challenges the supremacy of the artistic director and curator, who throughout this thesis it has been shown can reinforce a narrow taste and narrow practices. This requires organisational change, both within arts policy and practice, and an acceptance that public funding for the arts needs a more public facing approach. In return the public may become a much more powerful voice to advocate for public funding of the arts.

Where this departs from previous research on building public value in the arts is in the suggestion that such advocacy may not necessarily build support for

the arts that are currently funded, but may challenge current artistic practice and historical funding patterns. But in reality it has been shown that policy has focused for too long on the interests of those currently in receipt of funding. The notion of an arts ecology is all too reminiscent of the Coalition's claims of "we're all in this together" (Cameron, 2010a) and has been used to justify cuts to grassroots activities, while defending the elite institutions of power. The rhetoric of trickle down from the large institutions to the small, or from London to the regions is also argued to be as false in the arts as it is in the economy. Ridding arts policy of such determinist language, which merely seeks to protect the status quo and recognising that all policy choices are political choices, is necessary for policy to be more than rhetorical.

10.   References

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11   Appendices

Appendix 1 – Survey sample of local authorities in the North of England in
order of response

Name	Local authority	Response	Date
Mary Nash, Arts Officer	Doncaster	Completed	31/5/11
Gill Cooper, Head of Arts and Heritage	York City Council	Completed	6/6/11
Gillian Wall, Arts Officer	North Yorkshire County Council	Completed	14/6/11
Andrew Rothwell	Newcastle	Completed	14/6/11
Helen Paton	Cheshire East		
Yvette Turnbull, Creative Economy Officer	Ryedale District Council	Completed	11/8/11
David Wilson, Cultural Programmes Manager	Bradford City Council	Completed	10/11/11
David Worthington, cultural Services Manager	Hartlepool	Completed	18/11/11
Cherie Trelogan	Cumbria County Council	Completed	21/11/11
Jo Johnston	Manchester City Council	Completed	21/11/11
Dinah Clark, Programme Manager	Leeds City Council	Completed	21/12/11
Annie O'Neill, NALGAO rep	Oldham	Replied unable to comment	
Gemma Weedon, NALGAO rep	Warrington	Replied unable to comment	
Adele Poppleton, Arts Manager	Kirklees	Replied unable to comment	
	Sunderland	No response	
James Brunt	Barnsley	No response	
June Mitchell	East Riding	No response	
Lisa Moran	North Lincs	No response	
Nigel Walsh	Northumberland	No response	
Jan Doherty	Stockton-on-Tees	No response	
Lyndsey Anderson	Darlington	No response	
Anne Beresford	Middlesbrough	No response	

Appendix 2 – Interviews in date order

1) Arts Council staff

Name and role	Department	Location of interview	Date of interview
Helen Featherstone, Relationship Manager	Participation and Engagement, Yorkshire	Leeds Metropolitan University	1/6/10
Iain Tabbron, Senior Manager	Performing Arts, North West	North West regional office	7/12/10
Anna Hassan, Relationship manager	Participation and engagement, North West	North West regional office	7/12/10
Jim Tough, Director	Northern area	Yorkshire regional office	23/3/11
Cluny Macpherson, Director	Yorkshire Member of public value board	Yorkshire regional office	23/3/11
Adrian Friedli, Director	Visual Arts and Literature	National office	31/3/11
Meli Hatzihrysidis Principal Officer	Participation and Engagement, national	National office	31/3/11
Kate Parkin, Relationship manager	Participation and engagement, North East	North East regional office	12/4/11
Andrew Nairne, Executive Director	Arts	Telephone interview	20/7/11
Helen Featherstone, Relationship manager	Participation and engagement, Yorkshire	Yorkshire regional office	13/1/12

1. Local and national government

Name and role	Organisation	Location of interview	Date of interview
Portia Simpson, Local Authority Officer	York City Council and NALGAO regional rep	Café in York	38/3/11
Martyn Allison, Adviser	Local Government Association	Café, Manchester Piccadilly Station	10/5/11
Pete Bryan, Administrator	NALGAO	His home in Wales	2/6/11
Nick Pontefract, Head of Arts	DCMS	Telephone interview	22/6/11
Former Secretary of State	DCMS	Telephone interview	27/10/11
Scott Dickinson, Adviser	DCLG	Café, Media Museum, Bradford	8/5/12

3) Policy commentators

Name	Job area	Location of interview	Date of interview
Richard Wilson	Izwe Project	Offices in London	30/3/11
Sara Selwood	Policy commentator	At home in London	30/3/11
John Holden	Policy commentator	Café in London	30/3/11
Ivan Wadeson, Director	Arts About Manchester	Café, Manchester City Centre	8/7/11
Francois Matarrasso	Policy commentator	By telephone	10/7/11
Eleanora Belfiore, Associate professor in cultural policy	University of Warwick	By telephone	19/7/11
Baroness Genista McIntosh	Policy commentator	Telephone interview	25/7/11
Alison Edbury, Director	All About Audiences	Café, Leeds City Centre	30/8/11
Caroline Greener, Director	Audiences North East	Telephone interview	26/10/11

4) Case study 1 – Contact

Name and job	Organisation	Location of interview	Date of interview
John McGrath, Artistic Director 1999-2009	Contact	National theatre of Wales offices	29/3/11
Sophie Willan	Local artist	Contact	5/4/11
Suzie Henderson, Head of Creative Devleopment	Contact staff member	Cointact Lounge	5/4/11
Philip Brankin	Re-con volunteer	Contact Lounge	5/4/11
Benji Reid	Local artist	Offices in Manchester	8/7/11
Cilla Baynes, Board Member	Contact	Offices in Manchester	8/7/11
Fiona Gasper, Chief Executive	Royal Exchange Theatre	Offices in Manchester	8/7/11
Baba Israel, Artistic Director 2009-2013	Contact	Contact Lounge	6/9/11
Lynn Barbour	Manchester City Council	Café in Manchester	31/10/11
Stephen Vickers, Project Manager	Contact staff member	Contact	31/10/11
Kate Catling, Programme Manager	Contact staff member	Contact Lounge	31/10/11
Wendy Hesketh	Local artist	Telephone interview	Autumn 2011
Rachel Moorhouse	Re-con volunteer	Contact Lounge	2/11/11
Jennifer Gaskell	Local artist	Contact Lounge	13/11/11

5) Case study 2 – Castleford Project

Name and role	Organisation	Location of interview	Date of interview
Andrew Golding, Development Manger	WMDC	Council offices	28/9/10
Lucy Holmes, Engagement and cohesion manager	WMDC	Council offices	28/3/11
Alison Drake	Resident/community champion	Bridge Art Centre	28/3/11
Wendy Raynor	Resident/community champion	At home in Castleford	28/3/11
Rheta Davison	Resident/community champion	Cutsyke Community Centre	28/3/11
Bev Adams, Director	Local artist	Offices in Wakefield	28/3/11
Murray Edwards, Executive Director	Wakefield Theatre	Theatre bar	21/6/11
Simon Wallis, Director	Hepworth Gallery	Offices at gallery	21/6/11
Steve Warren, Architect	Estell Warren	Offices in Leeds	7/7/11
Renato Benedetti		Offices in London	25/8/11
David Wilders	Resident	Bridge Arts Centre	18/10/11
Harry Malkin	Resident/ local artist	Bridge Arts Centre	18/10/11
Lorna Malkin	Resident	Bridge Arts Centre	18/10/11
Brian Lewis	Resident/local artist	Art House, Wakefield	18/10/11

6) Case study 3 – Hebden Bridge picture house (12)

Name and role	Organisation	Location of interview	Date of interview
Jason Boom, Town Clerk	Hebden Royd Council	Hebden Bridge Town Hall	14/6/11
Andrew Bibby	Community Association	Hebden Bridge Town Hall	14/6/11
Jen Skinner	Resident and arts manager	At home in Hebden Bridge	17/6/11
Rebecca Yorke	Resident and arts manager	Café in Hebden Bridge	27/9/11
Dave Boardman	Resident and arts manager	At home in Hebden Bridge	1/10/11
Janet Battye, Council Leader	Calderdale Council	Hebden Bridge Town Hall	31/8/11
Barbara Harbinson	Chair of locality	Offices in Halifax	4/10/11
Oliver Moor	Calderdale Council	Council offices	4/10/11
John Sharp	Resident	Bar in Hebden Bridge	17/10/11
Anon	Resident	Telephone interview	11/11/11
Bill Lawrence, Executive Director	Reel Solutions	Café in Halifax	2/12/11
Jason Boom, Town Clerk	Hebden Royd Council	Hebden Bridge Town Hall	30/7/13

The following codes demonstrate the classifications for analysis through Nvivo qualitative analysis software

Hierarchical Name	Item Type	Created By	Created On
Extracts\\Coding Summary By Node Extract	Extract	Leila	27/09/2012
Extracts\\Coding Summary By Source	Extract	Leila	27/09/2012
Extracts\\Node Classification Summary	Extract	Leila	27/09/2012
Extracts\\Project Summary Extract	Extract	Leila	27/09/2012
Extracts\\Source Classification Summary	Extract	Leila	27/09/2012
Extracts\\Source Summary Extract	Extract	Leila	27/09/2012
Internals\\Castleford with comments	Document	Jancovich	15/01/2014
Internals\\Contact	Document	Jancovich	15/01/2014
Internals\\Hebden	Document	Jancovich	15/01/2014
Internals\\Policy Makers	Document	Jancovich	15/01/2014
Internals\\Applications\\NPO applications	Dataset	Leila	14/08/2012
Internals\\Interviews\\Arts Council\\Adrian	Document	Leila	15/06/2012
Internals\\Interviews\\Arts Council\\Andrew	Document	Jancovich	29/01/2013
Internals\\Interviews\\Arts Council\\Anna	Document	Jancovich	29/01/2013
Internals\\Interviews\\Arts	Document	Jancovich	29/01/2013
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Internals\\Interviews\\Castleford\\Brian Lewis	Document	Leila	15/06/2012
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Internals\\Interviews\\Castleford\\Lorna	Document	Leila	15/06/2012
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Memos\\more positive afterwards	Memo	Jancovich	18/09/2013
Memos\\project background	Memo	Jancovich	18/09/2013
Memos\\resistance	Memo	Jancovich	18/09/2013
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Nodes\\Case studies\Hebden/ party politics	Node	Jancovich	27/02/2014
Nodes\\Case studies\Hebden\backgrounds	Node	Jancovich	27/02/2014
Nodes\\Case studies\Hebden\Hebden	Node	Jancovich	27/02/2014
Nodes\\Case studies\Hebden\	Node	Jancovich	27/02/2014
Nodes\\Case studies\Hebden\risks	Node	Jancovich	27/02/2014
Nodes\\Case studies\Hebden/ transferability	Node	Jancovich	27/02/2014
Nodes\\Case studies\Hebden\values	Node	Jancovich	27/02/2014
Nodes\\Local Authority survey	Node	Leila	16/08/2012
Nodes\\Local Authority survey\duty	Node	Leila	16/08/2012
Nodes\\Local Authority survey\ NI11	Node	Leila	16/08/2012
Nodes\\Local Authority survey\New Labour	Node	Leila	16/08/2012
Nodes\\Local Authority survey\Coalition	Node	Leila	16/08/2012
Nodes\\Local Authority survey\Future	Node	Leila	16/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications	Node	Leila	16/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\Artist focused	Node	Leila	15/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\Community	Node	Leila	15/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\Digital	Node	Leila	15/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\Distribution	Node	Leila	15/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\Does not address	Node	Leila	15/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\Marketing	Node	Leila	15/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\Programming	Node	Leila	16/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\Training	Node	Leila	15/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\ places with low	Node	Leila	16/08/2012
Nodes\\NPO applications\hard to reach	Node	Leila	15/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context	Node	Jancovich	18/03/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\Achievements	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\Artists/ audience	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\ACE decision making	Node	Jancovich	07/02/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\Ace priorities	Node	Jancovich	15/10/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\ACE vs LA	Node	Leila	26/09/2012

Nodes\\Policy context\Barriers	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\the cuts	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\Defining core values	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\Definitions	Node	Jancovich	15/10/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\Drivers for change	Node	Jancovich	29/01/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\Elitism in the arts	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\ participation	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\experiences	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\excellence access	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\PB	Node	Jancovich	20/02/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\PB\ benefits	Node	Jancovich	01/02/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\PB\ drawbacks	Node	Jancovich	01/02/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\PB\ initiatives	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\PB\Processes	Node	Jancovich	07/02/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\PB\Representation	Node	Jancovich	07/02/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\PB\Risk	Node	Jancovich	22/01/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\PB\role of expert	Node	Jancovich	15/10/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\PB\Selection	Node	Jancovich	15/10/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\New Labour shifts	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\Coalition	Node	Leila	26/09/2012
Nodes\\Policy context\Visions	Node	Jancovich	01/02/2013
Nodes\\Policy context\Future worries	Node	Leila	22/08/2012
Nodes\\Synthesis	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\accountability and arms	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\art v access	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\barriers	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\context	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\duty	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\great art	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\outcomes	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\participation agenda	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\party politics	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\pb processes	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\recruitment	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\wider impact	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Nodes\\Synthesis\ cultural elites	Node	Jancovich	28/02/2014
Relationship Types\\Associated	Relations	Leila	15/06/2012
Relationship Types\\Qualification	Relations	Jancovich	01/02/2013
Reports\\Coding Summary By Node	Report	Leila	27/09/2012
Reports\\Coding Summary By Source	Report	Leila	27/09/2012
Reports\\Node Classification Summary	Report	Leila	27/09/2012
Reports\\Project Summary Report	Report	Leila	27/09/2012
Reports\\Source Classification Summary	Report	Leila	27/09/2012
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