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Creative People and Places - an experiment in place-based funding

ABSTRACT

There is a long-standing tradition in cultural policy of measuring the numbers of people who take part in subsidised arts practices. The data collected has informed strategies to remove individual barriers to participation, such as price, access or education. But researchers have increasingly challenged the deficit approach which defines non-participation as a "problem" which rests with those not participating rather than with how the cultural sector operates.

This paper draws on the growing body of research which has shown how inequalities in participation relate to inequalities within the cultural sector itself, with a narrow range of people working in and defining what culture is valued, for the rest. It examines the concept of place-based funding as a lens through which to consider cultural provision and participation from an asset-based approach to understanding local specificity. Its focus is on Creative People and Places: an action research programme, in which Arts Council England targeted investment into local districts which were defined by a population survey as having low levels of arts participation.

What the research demonstrates are the tensions inherent in national policy makers' responses to local cultural needs. It considers the relationship between policy and implementation through consideration of the different governance models operating in the different places and argues for increased accountability of the cultural sector through participatory governance at a local level.

Introduction

Since 1980s there has been a well-documented international shift across the public policy arena from government to governance (Rhodes, 1996). Such an approach is characterised by reduced centralised power of state ministries run by public servants and increased networks, consortia and public-private partnerships. But in countries where cultural policy is delivered through an arm's length approach, with the specific aim of maintaining artistic independence from government control, this approach has operated for much longer (Upchurch, 2016; Jancovich, 2017). But both the newer governance agenda and the long-established arm's length principle have been criticised for creating non-accountable elite decision-making networks and partnerships based on vested interest.

In the cultural sector it is claimed that a narrow range of voices is involved in decision-making, demonstrated, for example, by the cross-over membership of decision-making boards between Arts Council England and the organisations they fund (Griffiths, Miles and Savage, 2008). Their influence has become increasingly problematic as research has shown evidence of inequalities in who participates both

as workers within the creative industries and among audiences and participants who engage in different cultural activities (EUROSTAT, 2016). Furthermore, in England, which is the focus of this study, these inequalities are exacerbated by the fact that rates of participation and are closely correlated with inequalities in distribution of cultural investment (GPS Culture, 2014).

Historically cultural policy is often characterised by the principle of "few but roses" (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1951, p. 51) prioritising notions of excellence in cultural production over equitable distribution of cultural resources. But latterly there has been a growing policy interest in the concept of place-based funding as an alternative approach to cultural provision. For example both Sweden and Scotland developed Creative Places programmes at the same time as England developed the Creative People and Places initiative (CPP) which is the focus of analysis in this article. CPP's peer learning network has also interacted with delegates from all the Nordic countries, Australia, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy and Syria. Within England it also influenced English Heritage's Great Places scheme and has received much government and media attention. This paper, therefore, offers an examination of a policy intervention that has had much traction.

CPP is an action research programme, in which Arts Council England targeted investment into local districts which were defined by a population survey as having low levels of arts participation, (Sport England, no date) in order to address the inequities described above. It is this English approach and the inclusion of the word people in the project name, alongside place, that is most pertinent to this article. The article starts with a review of the literature on culture and place. It then outlines the methodology employed to examine CPP, as an example of place-based policy in practice. By taking a situated approach to research, this article moves beyond a theory based approach to policy to one grounded in understanding how policy plays out in practice, which it is argued is crucial to understand the politics of policy making. The key question asked therefore is: what can we learn from CPP as an experiment in place-based funding? It examines this by further asking what forms of governance are in evidence within CPP and how the programme might challenge understandings of participation and culture, to support more equitable cultural policy.

From creative cities to creative places

The importance of place within cultural policy is well established. The creative cities theories that developed from the 1980s (Landry and Bianchini, 1995) have become ubiquitous internationally. Since UNESCO set up the Creative Cities Network in 2004, for example, it has gained 180 cities in membership from 72 countries. What underpins these approaches is an interest in the role of culture in local development and the presumed agglomeration effect of a "creative class" (Florida, 2003).

But while the theories that underpin creative city approaches focus on broad definitions of culture and creativity, the practice often employs the narrower cultural policy view of culture as professional art form practice. Inequality in the cultural sector is blamed on people's lack of participation in the "great art" on offer, and weak local development on lack of entrepreneurial drive from creatives within locales (Huggins and Thompson, 2015).

Furthermore, while the creative cities approach may lay claim to address inequality and post–industrial decline in western countries, in practice it has been shown that, much like the economic growth models on which it is based, its implementation has focused on competition, rather than collaboration between places (Hildreth and Bailey, 2013). As a result, there has been increased concentration of resources in some locations at the expense of others (Peck, 2005; Pratt, 2008). For example, in England, where the Arts Council has historically had agreements with local authorities to match fund the same provision, it has resulted in a situation where

> "if your council has a leader who is keen on the arts [the Arts Council will] work with them; [if it has] major social problems, and huge gaps in terms of participation in the arts, sorry, [they're] not interested" (government policy adviser quoted in Jancovich, 2014)

Such an approach, it may be claimed, invests in where activity is already happening rather than subsidising places that may be most in need. This may lead to what Massey (2004) describes as the reproduction of inequality between places. Even in those places which the evidence suggests have benefited, far from addressing structural inequality, the creative class have aggravated it by attracting the very critical mass whose presence gentrifies an area without the benefits trickling down to local people. There have, therefore, been calls for new approaches and more localized provision, including a levelling out of investment to create more sustainable and equitable communities, with culture playing a key role in the process (Nurse, 2006).

Broadly, approaches to local development have been defined as being "place-based versus place-neutral" (Barca, Mccann and Rodríguez-Pose, 2012). The place-based approach recognises the need for and possibility of equity, not competition between places. It assumes that policy implementation is situated and therefore should not rely on top down expertise at the expense of local knowledge creation (Hildreth and Bailey, 2014). In practice many argue for more investment in places and "building community structures and the fusing of politics with everyday life" (Nettleingham, 2018, p. 599). The place-neutral approach, or people based approach, in contrast suggests that as we live in a global and mobile world, people are less defined by place. Furthermore it argues that, as inequality persists within, as well as between, places, a capabilities approach is needed to build capacity of individuals, often to operate within existing structures (Sen, 2003). But key questions arise within both processes about who is part of local decision-making groups and how decisions are agreed (Pike, Rodriguez-Pose and Tomaney, 2016).

Much like the creative cities approach, localism has supporters across the political spectrum: from community activists aiming to increase investment in their local area to free market thinkers arguing for places to be more self-sufficient; from governments, keen to increase local power, to those wishing to reduce state responsibilities. In Brazil, the cultura viva approach aimed to use principles from participatory budgeting to give local places the resources to define culture and resource cultural provision themselves (Turino, Heritage and Hunter, 2013). In England the asset transfer model has encouraged voluntary run community groups to take over responsibility from the state, for community services such as libraries, public parks (Quirk, 2007). Not surprisingly, therefore, analysis of localism, as a

policy approach to address inequality, requires analysis of the specific practice under investigation.

The governance model, mentioned in the introduction, involving networks and partnerships of "independent" experts is based on the "third way" approach to policy and politics (Giddens, 2000). This assumes rational decisions can be made through finding consensus among those with a vested interest in decision-making. In the cultural sector, examples include not only the arm's length funding structures but internationally a trend towards the devolution of state run museums and galleries to independent trusts, and local authority arts services and events programmes being managed by independent companies. They take a managerial and technocratic approach to local governance which protects the vested interests of services providers. But it is argued this decreases accountability to service users and ignores the politics and economic inequalities that may exist within (not just between) places (Mohan and Stokke, 2000, p. 249). In other words, not only places, but people within places may have different capacity to participate. Without redistribution of resources and capacity building of citizens, therefore, localism can further reinforce inequality (Gaventa, 2004).

The concept of participatory governance or participatory decision-making attempts to address these concerns. In contrast to governance by experts, it aims to give voice to the beneficiaries of services, rather than just those that deliver them and thereby challenge the normative bias built into traditional governance models (Fischer, 2012). With adequate resourcing to deliver on community aspirations it is argued that participatory governance has potential to support more meaningful local development. Not only do such approaches engage a wider range of voices in decision-making, but it is argued that they encourage space for dissenting voices, rather than assuming decisions should always come from consensus. A core principle in such work is that participants are involved in setting the agenda for discussion, rather than just making choices between a range of pre-determined options. Such approaches therefore have the potential to redefine what culture might mean locally. But far from reducing state involvement, as is implied in the governance agenda, participatory governance requires state involvement to ensure not only equitable distribution of resources, but processes which reach beyond the usual suspects of decision makers and allow opportunity for real change to take place.

Both approaches are evident in the interest in the relationship between cultural participation and place which sits at the heart of the combining of people and place in CPP, which this article is examining. The following section, therefore, outlines the methodological the analysis of CPP as a case, in order to consider the implications of different policy approaches in practice.

Methodology

This article examines CPP between 2012-2016 which was when the programme was conceived and during the first phase of delivery. During these years, the researcher was a critical friend to one place, Doncaster, and a member of the national steering group for CPP. While the potential for personal bias is acknowledged, the researcher's role was always as an independent adviser, rather than a programme

designer or deliverer. The aim of the paper is not to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme but rather, in line with theories of local development described above, to understand the relationship between national policy-making and its situated practice. It does so using a case study approach to examine the programme from a range of perspectives.

The first stage of data collection involves contextual analysis of CPP, through an examination of policy papers, and interviews with Arts Council staff. These included internal Arts Council meetings notes, guidance documents and reports (hereafter referred to as Arts Council documents). In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with four of the current or ex Arts Council staff who developed the programme. The aim of the interviews was to understand the principles underpinning the programme and the extent to which these were embedded within the Arts Council during the time under investigation. As some requested to remain anonymous all are referred to as Arts Council staff members in the findings. In addition, stage one included note taking and reflection on observations at CPP meetings and peer learning events, to consider what shifts in thinking took place over the period under investigation.

The second stage of data collection involved the CPP funded projects. Twenty one places were funded by Arts Council England during Phase 1. All were contacted to ask if they would supply the business plans which were required by the Arts Council to draw down funding and if they were willing to take part in a semi structured interview. All places submitted their plans and fourteen agreed to be interviewed, as shown below, including some project directors and some engagement officers. As with Arts Council staff members, to anonymise them they are referred to as CPP staff member in the findings, but the places themselves are listed below.

Table 1 - CPP places – data collected

Places	Consortium members	
Ashfield, Bolsover, Mansfield and North East Derbyshire http://www.firstart.org.uk	Creswell Heritage Trust, The Prince's Trust, Junction Arts, City Arts (Nottingham)	Business plan only
Barking and Dagenham http://www.creativebd.org.uk	Studio 3 Arts, A New Direction, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Barking and Dagenham College, Barking and Dagenham Council for Voluntary Service, Barking Enterprise Centre, Independent artistic advisors and our local resident Cultural Connectors	Business plan and interview
Black Country https://www.creativeblackcountry.co.uk	Black Country Touring, Multistory, Black Country Together CIC comprising: Sandwell Voluntary Council, Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council, One Walsall	Business plan and interview
Blackpool and Wyre https://www.leftcoast.org.uk	Blackpool Coastal Housing Ltd, Grand Theatre Blackpool, Merlin Entertainments, Blackpool Council, Wyre Borough Council, Better Start, Regenda	Business plan and interview
Boston and South Holland https://www.transportedart.com	arts NK	Business plan and interview

Corby http://www.madeincorby.co.uk	Groundwork Northamptonshire, Corby Cube Theatre Trust, Corby Community Arts, Corby Unity, Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership	Business plan and interview
Doncaster http://rightupourstreet.org.uk	Doncaster Community Arts (darts), Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust, Cast, Doncaster Voluntary Arts Network, Balby Community Library	Business plan and interview
East Durham http://eastdurhamcreates.co.uk	East Durham Creates is based at East Durham Trust in Peterlee and managed by a group of partners – East Durham Trust, Beamish Museum, East Durham Area Action Partnership and Culture and Sport, Durham County Council.	Business plan only
Fenland and Forest Heath https://www.cppmarketplace.co.uk	ADeC (Arts Development East Cambridge), 20Twenty Productions CIC, New Wolsey Theatre, Norfolk and Norwich Festival Bridge	Business plan only
Hounslow https://www.watermans.org.uk/impact/creative-people-places/	Watermans, Feltham Arts Association, Hounslow Music Service, Hounslow Community Network, TW4 Community Development Trust; London Borough of Hounslow, Cerillion	Business plan only
Hull http://goodwintrust.org/arts	Goodwin Development Trust, University of Hull, Freedom Festival Arts Trust, Hull UK City of Culture 2017, Hull Culture and Leisure (Libraries Service).	Business plan only
Luton https://www.revolutonarts.com	Luton Culture, Luton Borough Council, UK Centre for Carnival Arts, University of Bedfordshire	Business plan only
North Kirklees http://www.creativescene.org.uk	Lawrence Batley Theatre, Batley Festival, Kirklees Council	Business plan and interview
Pennine Lancashire http://superslowway.org.uk	Canal & River Trust (CRT), Newground, Arts Partners Pennine Lancashire (APPL) University College Lancashire, Marketing Lancashire and the district authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn and Burnley and Pendle.	Business plan and interview
Peterborough https://www.peterboroughpresents.org	Vivacity Peterborough Culture and Leisure, Metal, Nene Park Trust, Eastern Angles Theatre Company, Peterborough City Council, Voluntary Arts England	Business plan and interview
St Helens http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/project/heart-glass	Helena Partnerships, FACT (Foundation for Art + Creative Technology), St Helens Council and St Helens Arts Partnership (The Citadel, The World of Glass, Platform Artist Studios), St Helens College	Business plan and interview
Slough https://homeslough.org.uk	Rifco Arts, Creative Junction CIC, Slough Borough Council, Slough Museum, SCVS	Business plan and interview
Southeast Northumberland http://www.baittime.to/home	Woodhorn Charitable Trust (lead body), Northumberland County Council Public Health and Cultural Services, Northumberland CVA, Northumberland College and Queens Hall Arts.	Business plan and interview
Stoke on Trent http://www.appetitestoke.co.uk	New Vic Theatre, Partners in Creative Learning, 6 Towns Radio and Staffordshire University.	Business plan and interview

Sunderland and South Tyneside http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/project/cultural-spring	The Customs House, The University of Sunderland, The Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust and Sangini	Business plan only
Swale and Medway http://www.ideastest.co.uk	Swale Community and Voluntary Service, Medway Voluntary Action, Creek Creative, Whitstable Bienniale, Sheppey Matters, Gulbenkian Theatre	Business plan and interview

Business plans were reviewed to examine how often and in what way governance and participatory decision-making were articulated in the programme design stage. The interviews then investigated the relationship of the plans to practice, the approach to local and cultural development, the challenges faced in delivery and the learning from Phase 1. As one of the key features of the programme was that projects would create bespoke approaches in each place, they offer a range of place-based versus place-neutral approaches.

It would have been informative to interview local artists and participants in a number of places, to get a range of different perspectives on the programmes. However, the aim was not to evaluate the programmes themselves, but rather to understand the approach to governance and artists and participants were not part of the governance structures. Instead, the researcher followed the programme in one place, Doncaster, for the full three years of Phase 1; observing consortium meetings; interviewing staff members and running focus groups with local artists and community participants. An evaluation of the programme is published separately (Jancovich, 2016) but some examples and participant voices are drawn from its findings. In addition, a wealth of evaluative material and case studies have been generated by the CPP programme. These were also subject to analysis, to identify what CPP itself articulated as the key learning from the programme and whose voices were represented (hereafter called learning documents).

Finally, to examine the relationship of CPP to other place initiatives, five people were interviewed who were not directly involved in CPP but addressed ideas about culture, people and place through their practice (hereafter referred to as voluntary/community arts worker).

The analysis that follows examines CPP as a national policy approach to support local cultural needs. It examines the inherent tensions between the national and the local and considers the different approaches in different places.

Findings

As stated in the introduction this research asks what we can learn from CPP as an experiment in place-based funding. The following analysis therefore investigates how the programme was developed and what forms of governance are in evidence in order to critically examine the policy process. It then considers how this approach might challenge our understanding of both participation and culture before considering the learning this might offer place based approaches.

How Creative People and Places developed

CPP was developed at a time when there was a growing interest at government level in the participatory governance concept described above. New Labour, like many governments internationally, challenged public service providers, including the Arts Council and local councils, to consider how they might involve the public more in decision-making processes (DCLG, 2008). The following section therefore considers how Arts Council England responded to the government's agenda and what the implications were for the development of CPP.

Some of the people interviewed for this research had been part of a policy exchange visit to Brazil to see their approach to participatory budgeting, which it is claimed had significant redistributive impact on local investment (Community Pride Initiative, 2003). In response, the Arts Council "looked at how absolutely every function [of that they did]…could involve the public…it was quite revolutionary if you even accepted 10% of it" (Arts Council staff member). Ideas suggested included putting the Arts Council's own funding decisions through a participatory budgeting process, but all the Arts Council staff interviewed agreed that the government's challenge to their decision-making structures was highly contentious and as a result the participatory decision-making approaches adopted devolved responsibility from the Arts Council to the organisations they fund.

However, one of the staff interviewed believed that the Arts Council had already started taking a more proactive approach to "not just manage demand for our funding but develop and drive demand" in places which had historically not been recipients of much cultural investment (Arts Council staff member). An initiative called Priority Places involved Arts Council, local government and regional development agencies discussing place-based funding. The programme invested in several cultural regeneration initiatives.   But some of those interviewed criticised the approach, in line with the literature above, for taking a top down agency-led approach without understanding local specifics and without participation from people who lived in the places.

CPP grew out of this context, as an initiative which both sought to address geographic inequalities in funding and involve the public in decision-making. But while everyone interviewed acknowledged that it was a good fit with government policy, it was also said that its adoption by the Arts Council was more down to the personal passion of the then Director for Arts Council North, Jim Tough.

In interview Jim Tough described his aspiration for the programme as being about redistribution of Arts Council funding to places which lacked investment, to build more local provision and develop a nationwide sustainable community arts infrastructure. Such an approach fits with the place-based approach to development described in the literature. But the documents provided by the Arts Council show that although the relationship between deprivation and investment was known about, it was the Active People survey, which measured engagement in arts activity down to a ward or neighbourhood level, that provided "a clear narrative" on participation, which influenced the policy direction.   More particularly, the data identified 71 locations, which represented 20% of the population, that appeared to have significantly lower rates of cultural engagement (Sport England, no date). These data became the benchmark on which Arts Council England invested

£37million in Phase 1 of Creative People and Places to 21 projects in some of these locations.

In practice "the areas of least engagement…tend to correlate with the most deprived part of the country [so CPP did put] investment in the more deprived part of the country that haven't previously had investment" (Arts Council staff member). However, the shift to a focus on the level of participation in these places, rather than levels of investment, suggests a shift from a place-based approach to a people based approach, as discussed above.

From the outset, there were differences of opinion about the governance of these projects. While some wanted distribution of funding to be through the local government structures, to increase their potential resources for arts development, others were concerned that such money would be beyond Arts Council control. As one of the aims of CPP was to "allow [Arts Council] to support small-scale activity in areas where local authorities and other partners do not" (Arts Council documents), there were concerns about the commitment and capacity within some local government organisations. At the time that the programme was developed, England was also responding to a worldwide financial crisis by implementing austerity within public services. CPP investment was therefore being made within a context in which there were cuts to both the Arts Council and local government budgets. There were therefore also concerns that the money should be ring-fenced for culture, for fear it would be absorbed into other policy area budgets.

Far from investing in local authorities, therefore the CPP funding guidelines precluded them from leading the initiatives. Furthermore, Arts Council England identified the "need to think about exit strategies before making any commitments" (Art Council documents). Rather than offering sustained redistribution of investment, CPP was therefore described as a time limited action research programme. While this approach was seen by many as a pragmatic choice, it may also be seen to reinforce the governance trend in reducing, rather than enhancing, local government power. The preclusion of local government leadership inevitably raises questions about what alternative governance models were employed. The following section will therefore examine governance within CPP in more detail.

What forms of governance are in evidence within CPP?

The criteria set by Arts Council England required all applicants for CPP to be made by a consortium of local organisations, rather than a single organisation, and for the public to be involved in some way in decision-making. The original intention was that "the lead partner might be a health organisation, an education organisation or a social care organisation,…that was key in making a difference from simply another fund that the establishment and the arts community could tap into" (Arts Council staff member). As a result the consortia moved beyond the traditional approach to cultural governance by cultural experts, with non-arts partners involved in many consortia: in Blackpool and Wyre the housing association were involved; in Boston and South Holland a haulage transport company; in St Helens the Rugby Club and in Southeast Northumberland the National Health Service for example.

However, despite an aspiration, expressed in the guidelines, to allow local places to define culture themselves, the Arts Council also required a level of arts expertise from applicants. In practice, despite the wider membership of consortia over 50% of members were from arts organisations and two thirds of lead partners, of which 50% were already regularly funded by the Arts Council (Bunting and Fleming, 2015). From the beginning, the existing arts sector therefore had continued influence on the governance of the programme.

Many of the CPP staff interviewed argued that the nature of the consortia and the level of community involvement was also constrained by a lack of time. Once the programme was announced, places had only a few months to prepare their applications for the first round of funding. In the case of Doncaster, an advisory group involved members of the local community, including artists and residents, in the writing of the bid. Community consultation therefore was part of the programme's ethos, but it was limited to only a couple of meetings due to time pressures to complete the application.

Once places were told their application was successful, but before funding was released, the Arts Council required a development period to

> "strengthen the partnerships…and governance structure…and confirm methodology for community engagement, confirm audience development plans and targets, ensuring an understanding of existing arts opportunities and considering options to ensure excellence" (Arts Council documents).

This period could have provided the time for participation that the application stage did not. But the necessity of getting a business plan signed off before money was released meant that consortia were often "organisations coming together because there is money to be brought into the town as opposed to having a desire to work together in the first place" (CPP staff member). In a number of places staff members interviewed also said their business plans were "knocked back first time because there was not enough arts expertise feeding into the bid" (CPP staff member). The role of consortia therefore became largely technocratic, focused on financial accountability and monitoring rather than the more deliberative process of programme development.

In practice, once the business plans were signed off, the process of delivery was left to the staff team who, in most cases, were appointed after the business plan was written and the consortium formed. In theory, this should have ensured that the plans were developed in a participatory manner and that staff recruited would buy into these plans, contributing their expertise by finding ways to meet the local need identified. However, many of the staff interviewed said that, because of their lack of involvement in the planning stages, they did not feel ownership over the plan and in a small number of cases they had completely re-rewritten it, reverting to a curated or artistic director led approach. This meant that participatory governance was not always embedded in the programme delivery.

All staff interviewed acknowledged issues around how to balance the decision-making powers of consortia, public and staff members. That said, most supported the idea that "it takes more than one person to make a good decision" and most had

participatory decision-making groups of one kind or another. Barking and Dagenham created a pool of cultural connectors from across the community who advised on programming and acted as advocates in their communities; Doncaster created a number of community teams in localised areas who both wrote briefs for artists and delivered activity themselves, and in North Kirklees and Boston and South Holland staff from local business selected and worked with artists.

It was widely acknowledged that the best processes were where community members were not only involved in selecting artists but were also involved in the delivery stage. This supports a key principle of participatory decision making that people should be involved throughout the process from agenda setting to evaluation (Fischer, 2012).   But most participatory decision-making groups were limited to the commissioning of artists for specific projects rather than the design of the programmes themselves.

In practice the governance requirements set by the Arts Council, along with recruitment processes, often reinforced the importance of expertise in the arts rather than expertise in community development. As a result, as one person acknowledged, "whether it actually is giving away power or not is another matter" (CPP staff member). The following section therefore considers how much CPP challenged or reinforced normative definitions of participation and culture to provide a truly place-based response.

How might CPP places challenge understandings of participation and culture?

The place-based approach is evident through the Arts Council's stated aim to allow programmes to "reflect a community's understanding of what art is" (Arts Council documents). One person described the aspiration as a "revolutionary concept, the local communities to be the Artistic Directors" (CPP staff). For some CPP staff "our work is about saying to the public you can be part of the process, artists aren't special". But as demonstrated above the Arts Council also put up barriers to giving away too much power, by insisting on arts expertise at the bid writing stage. It appears therefore that from the beginning the Arts Council wanted to give away control and hold it at same time. This demonstrates the tensions inherent in national policy maker's responses to local cultural needs.

On the ground, CPP staff found the places were not the "cold spots" or cultural deserts that the Active People survey had implied (Sport England, no date). Most places had a wealth of creative activity happening before CPP started work. As projects developed activities it also became apparent that there was a real enthusiasm to engage from local people who might not have previously engaged in the arts. This challenges the very concept that such places had a participation deficit, on which the programme was founded. Instead, lack of opportunities and resources were said to be to blame for the lower than average recorded rates of participation. This supports the case for a place-based approach to exploring local assets, rather than the place-neutral approach to building capacities of individuals who, it is assumed, lack the skills to participate.

But most CPP staff interviewed struggled between on the one hand, being encouraged to invite the public in to define the cultural offer, and on the other

reporting on how they were meeting the Arts Council's excellence agenda, which was accused of too often being associated with professionalism. What was apparent to CPP staff was that most people engaged because of interest in their community rather than an interest in the professional arts. Some capitalised on this by focusing publicity around the social interaction rather than artform practice. Stoke on Trent's Appetite programme, for example, used food as both a tool and a metaphor to invite people in. In East Durham they went one step further as the staff member interviewed said they were less interested in whether people participated in the arts and more interested in using creative activity to challenge poverty. For example, by putting activities in food banks they aimed to break down the stigma for those using them and create space for conversation "not just about the arts but in general [about] what they do in their lives" (CPP staff member). This represents a key distinction between areas which is at the heart of defining participation: whether their programme aimed to build participation in culture, to develop audiences for the arts, or whether it aimed to increase participation through culture to aid community development.

These two forms of participation are both inherent in the CPP programme. On the hand by defining the programme according to areas perceived to have low rates of cultural participation the programme defined a focus on participation as taking part in creative or cultural activity. This not only built in an assumed deficit approach but also the need to engage large numbers of people to increase rates of participation. As a result a number of staff members felt that "it all comes down to numbers in the end" (CPP staff member). Many business plans included ambitious targets for the number of people the programme would engage, requiring staff to plan activities with mass appeal. The evaluation of the programme also increasingly draws on generic demographic tools, including post code analysis to define the likelihood of engagement by different demographics. Findings such as the fact that a "disproportionately high level of people from places of low engagement are being involved" (Ecorys, 2017, p. 8) are hardly surprising when based on post code data for places already defined by their perceived low engagement. Consequently, a rhetoric of success is built on the deficit model that CPP originally sought to challenge.

However, most areas agreed that they learnt most from participatory approaches which came from working in depth with small numbers. But they often found it difficult to feed "intelligence" gathered through participatory processes into decision-making. Many recognised that it was hard to find the balance between providing support for people who were not used to having their voice heard, let alone being involved in decision-making, and over influencing them so that group think developed. The learning documents also illustrate the risk that professional voices subsume other voices in the room. There were also different definitions of who CPP staff wanted to participate with (Consilium Research and consultancy and Thinking Practice, 2016).

Places such as North Kirklees said they were interested in consultation with "informed voices" such as local businesses, established groups and artists who could help them to curate programmes that challenged local expectations. Such an approach fits with the more traditional governance or agency approach discussed above. Barking and Dagenham said their role was to facilitate people's agency in

choosing for themselves, by giving them opportunities to go and see work and thereby build their knowledge base, thereby adopting the capabilities approach. Others, such as Doncaster, asked local people to write briefs of what they wanted and then helped translate these into commissions or open calls for artists, which more closely reflects the approach to participatory governance.

It was felt by those interviewed that all these approaches had merits and problems. While the curated approach was seen by those involved as transformational in pushing people's boundaries others felt this was the most conventional arts approach. It assumes a level of knowledge and superiority from the artists which may be argued to be one of the barriers to arts participation. Those who took the go and see approach felt this improved people's knowledge base and confidence but several said that participants deferred to the group leaders view on work seen. Those who facilitated communities developing briefs and putting out open calls felt this offered the greatest opportunity for community decision making but it was recognised that participants often wanted reassurance from the professional facilitator in the room that they were doing it right. But all approaches had a tendency towards consensus building rather than encouraging dissenting voices. CPP staff clearly adopted different approaches in different places, but it is less clear whether this was in response to local needs or the expertise and interests of the CPP staff employed.

However, what all demonstrated was that there was hunger for localised provision. Many said that when they put things on, even in the own town centre it either did not engage as many people or those it did were more traditional arts audiences, than when they put work at a hyper local level within community settings. In Doncaster, there is evidence, from survey data, that the more local the activity was the more it reached those new to the arts. A community based event, Balby by Sea, for example attracted over 80% of people who said they had not engaged in any other cultural activity in the last year. The Colour of Time, a high profile free international event in the town centre, only attracted 50% who were new to the arts. Significantly, both also attracted about the same total numbers of audiences. Staff in other places said "something that we picked up quite early on that people just don't want to travel" (CPP staff member) or as another said it was clear people were "wanting to do stuff in the area, on their doorstep" (CPP staff member).

Despite this a couple of CPP staff members said that their aspiration was to have their own arts centre in the town as a "signal to everyone around" about what was happening. This was less to do with the benefits of participation however and more to do with the visibility of themselves as a professional and the sustainability of the CPP team. The next section therefore will consider the learning from CPP and its implications for the future of place-based funding.

his paper argues that an audience development approach does nothing to challenge inequalities in the cultural sector, but rather seeks to legitimise them.

Learning from CPP as an experiment in place-based funding

As has been shown above, throughout the CPP programme a place-based approach, which acknowledges the need for bespoke approaches in different places

and a people based approach based on building the capacity of individuals to engage with mainstream practice are in tension.

One ex member of Arts Council staff was clear that CPP was "not remediation, that the arts will cure stuff, it's about saying people have got a right to that investment" (Arts Council staff member). But the construct of using the Active People survey to define places with low cultural participation inevitably played into the deficit approach. This is reinforced by the many learning documents which focus on well-being measurements or case studies on the transformational impact on individuals of engaging in the arts or the skills development provided by the programmes to manage professional cultural activity. This is clearly problematic when a key finding from CPP was that people are engaged in all sorts of things and that the participation deficit is a myth, but under resourced places are a reality.

While CPP provides a potential through-line from the cultural democracy discourse and community arts movement of the 1970s (Braden, 1978; Kelly, 1984), in practice the community artists working outside of CPP felt that there was a limited "concept of community" built into the programme (Voluntary/community arts worker) and many of the CPP staff interviewed supported this view. In some cases CPP staff reported lack of knowledge of the history of community arts practice. Others said they did not want to be associated with it "as the arts sector don't associate this with quality" (CPP team member), and this might damage their future career opportunities. As a result, most approaches could be said to be reinventing the wheel and defining practices as new because they were new to the staff within CPP. However, the paper argues that CPP does provide evidence of the value of turning the deficit approach on its head. If offers the opportunity to explore an asset-based approach that focuses on giving support to develop what a community already has, rather than assuming something is missing.

It is acknowledged that "the ongoing challenge of sustainability in a wider landscape of local authority cuts [is] harder now than at the start" (Ecorys, 2016, p. 48), but while the action research approach has tested the value of place-based funding in a small number of places, the challenge remains to roll it out more widely. In practice, despite the Arts Council's rhetoric of the success of the programme, in Phase 2, places were required to plan for decreasing levels of investment if they wish to reapply for funding and to increase matched income, often through ticket sales in places where it has already been acknowledged people have low income.

Significantly, many of the CPP staff interviewed suggested the funding pattern should have been reversed. Rather than putting large sums of money into places from the outset, it might have been better "starting with less funding, and then seeing [what's] working and then increasing funding" (CPP staff member). Such an approach might better manage expectation and identify the real needs in a place. Others from voluntary or community arts practice supported this and went further, suggesting that it is not the arts activity that needed funding in these places. Instead, it is the community infrastructure within which cultural activity might take place, such as community centres, village halls and libraries, which needs support. Funding another arts organisation, which is what the CPP teams had become, could detract from rather than add value to such resources, at a time when they were already in decline because of austerity budgets.

At their best CPP not only deliver an arts programme, but support the development of community infrastructure. Many places did work in non-arts spaces, such as working men's clubs, libraries or community centres and in so doing were said to have increased the viability of these spaces. But the aspiration of some CPP staff to sustain themselves as the arts development broker in the town, or even offer up their services to other towns, runs the risk of making the programme about professionalising the local arts sector, rather than helping to make the case for investment in the town.

The fact that most CPP directors were arts professionals, many of whom were new to the places in which they worked, may encourage this approach. But as one person said, CPP was

> "set up in a way that the Arts Council think about the arts, which is you need to have a company, you need to have full time roles…what if instead they'd funded with the same amount of money, a thousand people in different areas …with a very small budget that could just kind of help people to start stuff themselves…or go to places where there was a little tiny thing already happening and help them to build on it" (Voluntary/community arts worker).

One of the Arts Council staff interviewed acknowledged that just such a "light touch approach…which would allow us to have a much broader impact over many more places" (Arts Council staff) was discussed but was not followed through. This paper argues such an approach should be explored further. While it is outside the remit of this research paper, it is interesting to note that in Scotland the Creative Places programme has ring fenced money to places, but given each area the freedom to draw down only what is necessary each year, allowing the programmes to develop slowly.

One of the biggest challenges for many CPP directors was to give time and space for participatory decision-making processes, against the pressure of spending the money and meeting the number of targets they set themselves within a short time frame. Without the time and space to define projects according to local specificity, far from providing a place-based approach, CPP runs the risk of creating a one size fits all approach, which is counter to the very concept of local decision making. The franchise model encouraged in the third round of CPP funding, where "consortiums do not necessarily have to be based in the place they are applying to cover" (Arts Council documents), therefore seems a particularly unhelpful approach. Especially in the context where the learning documents found that "the best partnerships were locally relevant and had the capacity to be flexible and responsive" (Ecorys, 2017, p. 17). It would appear therefore that rather than changing the wider cultural landscape, CPP may increasingly be appropriated into it, and, as a result of this, some of the community artists interviewed accused CPP of being used to legitimise the balance of investment, rather than redistribute it. Increasingly the Arts Council cites CPP as the example of what they are doing in the regions, rather than considering the place-based and participatory approach as "relevant to other cultural organisations [as] all organisations exist in a place" (Arts Council staff).

<u>Conclusion</u>

CPP provides a complex case from which to examine the issues of place-based funding and governance, through developing an understanding about the policy process and the development of bespoke approaches in different places.

This paper has demonstrated that CPP represents a shift from the long-standing tradition of cultural governance being limited to those from within the cultural sector, through the participation of other voices in consortium bids and programming groups. However, the reliance on existing arts expertise, at both levels, also fails to deliver more radical forms of participatory governance. By doing so it replicates the imbalance of power between service providers and beneficiaries. In addition the exclusion of local government partners may limit the longevity of the programmes, or at least make them more accountable to the Arts Council rather than their communities which limits the learning from them and the ability to challenge the current arts funding model.

That said, inevitably the investment has provided opportunities for people in places which hitherto had received limited cultural (or indeed any) investment. The evidence from the programmes themselves dispels myths about lack of participation and instead demonstrates the enthusiasm from people who want to be involved in defining what happens in their communities. This paper argues therefore that the there is a need to reframe discourse on participation away from a focus on participation in arts activity to one around participation in governance and decision-making, to create a more equitable cultural sector.

The bespoke nature of the projects in each place provides a rich picture of the different approaches and the way policy may be implemented in many ways. Some places such as Barking and Dagenham with their cultural connectors or Doncaster's community teams, involved the community in defining the cultural offer for themselves. Some areas such as Stoke on Trent took an audience development approach, by introducing people to a range of activities, to build their appetite for the arts; St Helen's took an approach based on supporting socially engaged practice; while Blackpool and North Kirklees curated a programme with business and other local partner organisations. The peer learning between places demonstrates a collaborative approach which has the potential to develop a deeper understanding of how these different approaches play out in practice. However, this paper argues that without robust comparative analysis of which practices most deliver local needs, learning fails to inform policy development. An example of this is the Arts Council's approach to franchising models from one place to another, despite there being no justification for this approach in the learning documents. This paper argues that such an approach could replicate the very problems CPP has been addressing and demonstrates the risk of participatory processes being appropriated to legitimise the status quo.

The tension between allowing new definitions of culture to be explored while also operating within the arts "excellence" framework offers one example of how cultural policy makers may both aim to share and hold onto power at the same time. From the projects themselves, despite much rhetoric of including participant voices, the learning documents rely largely on the opinions of the professionals, while the

participant experience appears mainly as sentimental stories in case studies, rather than being central to learning.

CPP makes the case for place-based funding and provides evidence of the value of investment in community infrastructure and work at a hyper local level rather than the development of a new centralised professional arts infrastructure. There is, however, a shift in discourse from thinking about how to make the places more sustainable to how to sustain CPP as new cultural organisations. This paper argues instead for an asset-based approach that aims to support existing initiatives and activism within places and take a more patient approach to investment, that supports different groups within the community to deliver and which builds over time rather than declining.

However, it is hard to see how CPP can be more than an interesting experiment or have wider impact on wider arts sector without more widespread redistributive funding rather than a small designated project pot. One person interviewed claimed that "the Arts Council see everyday creativity as part of this brief now but it isn't entirely sure what its role is" (Voluntary/community arts worker). It is hoped that cultural policy makers worldwide will address this challenge. But to do so it is vital to avoid the deficit model of participation, which merely presents opportunities for people to take part in the arts, on the promise of a transformational impact. Rather there is the need for investment to challenge social injustice and structural inequalities in places. It should also be remembered that the "aspiration to get more people participating or increasing the infrastructure…it's not revolutionary…it's what local authorities do (or did)" (Arts Council staff member). The question is whether the cultural policy makers are willing to champion more equitable distribution of arts investment or continue an approach that only supports those places that already have the capacity to support themselves.

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