Mission-driven arts organisations and initiatives:

Surviving and thriving locally in a time of rupture

Elizabeth Carnegie, The University of Sheffield, e.carnegie@sheffield.ac.uk

and

Andreana Drencheva, The University of Sheffield, a.drencheva@sheffield.ac.uk

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine how mission-driven arts organisations respond to the complex set of economic and social conditions that the authors here term as a significant point of rupture. Drawing on the papers that form a part of the special section of this issue, the authors critically examine how the intersection of globalisation and neoliberalism creates multidimensional uncertainty that shapes the opportunities, responsibilities, work arrangements, and lived experiences of artists and artist-led initiatives and organisations.

Design/methodology/approach – In this introduction to the symposium on mission-driven arts organisations and initiatives, the authors explore how the included articles question and introduce key concerns that govern, limit and support mission-driven arts organisations.

Findings – Drawing on the papers in this set, the authors note that mission-driven arts organisations are diverse and employ numerous organising forms. However, at their core is the pursuit of social objectives, which also requires the management of often conflicting artistic, economic, cultural and social demands. The authors explicate how mission-driven arts organisations respond to local agendas and work best at the community level. As such, they may not play a key role in tourism or large-scale cultural regeneration of spaces, but rather seek to make creative use of sunken and redundant, often inner city spaces to address local

needs. Yet, the uncertainty that these organisations face shapes temporary solutions that may enhance the precarity and pressures for artists and creative producers with likely impact on wellbeing.

Originality/value – This paper brings together original insights into how mission-drive organisations seek to overcome and indeed flourish in a time of rupture. It moves beyond the notion of cultural regeneration as an instrument of tourism, and tourism as a focus of regeneration, to consider the value such organisations bring to localities evidenced in both creative practices and as local cultural engagement beyond economic impact. In doing so, mission-driven arts organisations play a vital role in a time of rapid change.

Keywords – Mission-driven arts organisations, temporary space, funding approaches, precarity, community value, localism strategies

Paper type – Conceptual paper

We introduce this special section on mission-driven arts organisations at a point of rupture for the arts; at a point of intersection of globalisation, nationalism and neoliberalism that creates multidimensional uncertainty that shapes the opportunities, responsibilities, work arrangements, and lived experiences of artists, artist-led initiatives and cultural organisations. Increasingly, limited access to funding with shifting priorities, market fragmentation and public policy place demands on arts organisations to change their business models and become more "entrepreneurial" and "resilient".

As the landscape for local, national, and international art and artists' spaces has changed considerably in recent years, arts organisations and initiatives are increasingly being, and indeed required to be, mission driven to survive in the current climate, but also to challenge it. We use "mission-driven arts organisations and initiatives" as an umbrella term to refer to organisations and initiatives that simultaneously pursue artistic and social missions while managing the arising conflicting economic and relational demands. Thus, mission-driven arts organisations and initiatives are diverse and employ numerous organising forms, such as social enterprises, community interest companies, co-operatives, autonomous cultural spaces, social movements, temporary spaces and initiatives (Hudson and Donkin, 2019; Murray, 2019; Perry, 2019). In this context, artists' lived experiences are marked by tensions and contradictions as they negotiate precarious careers, develop their creative and artistic values within a challenging marketplace (Lingo and Tepper, 2013), and sustain the missions and activities of their organisations. The papers that comprise this special section take a broad approach to explicating some of those conflicting demands across different settings.

Of course, we do not argue that what we here term "rupture" as the set of conditions that inspire these papers is unique as the crisis for funding in the arts is always cyclical at best. Nonetheless, we are experiencing a greater degree of self-awareness in the organising and funding of what can broadly be termed art and its role in society with all sides of the debate

keen to define and determine what "value" the arts brings to creators, providers and to those who experience and consume art (Walmsley, 2012). "Value" in this context clearly means different things to different groups, from challenging the status quo to create space to make art to a justification of funding based on metrics (ticket sales, visitor numbers) and the greatest benefit to the greatest numbers, which masks the iniquity in funding and asset transfer decisions (Rex, 2019). What the papers in this special section all share is the certainty that arts matter, with or without significant or state funding to support creative and artistic endeavour. For mission-driven individuals and organisations this means having an ethical frame for the art – in its myriad of forms – in the way it is produced and in the way it is consumed.

What the papers in this special section propose collectively is that mission-driven arts organisations and individuals serve smaller communities of artists and audiences. They desire or seek to work with artists and audiences less served by mainstream approaches, beyond tourist hubs or within peripheral zones or smaller cities. It may seem trite to remember that funding of the arts is rarely a mandatory service for local authorities juggling to support deprived communities and fund essential services (Mendoza, 2017; NAO, 2018). However, as noted above, the "value" of the arts is a much debated and slippery term which serves the needs of the political present. Funders are increasingly aware of the role that creativity and arts participation can play in multiple agendas: from mental health and well-being to job creation and supporting young people, as exemplified by the recent announcement of a £250m Culture Investment Fund in the UK (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2019).

In this introduction to the special section on mission-driven arts organisations and initiatives, we explore how the included articles question and introduce key concerns that govern, limit and support mission-driven arts organisations. Indeed, all included articles make salient two main themes: localism and co-responding creative (re-)use of space with temporal and long-term initiatives and the challenges of mission-driven arts organisations towards

resilience and sustainability. At the same time, an ethical frame for the art in the way it is produced and in the way it is consumed creates a foundation for, and indeed demonstrates the need for, future research on inclusive governance of mission-driven arts organisations and initiatives and on the lived experiences of artists in mission-driven arts organisations in relation to temporality and well-being.

Localism and creative (re-)use of space

In response to localism agendas and rupture, mission-driven arts organisations develop local solutions through creative (re-)use of space rendered redundant by rupture. At the same time, the organisations examined in the included articles demonstrate the overlaps between place based and mission driven whereby arts organisations pursue social missions that are locally based. Mission-driven arts organisations are place-based arts organisations. Two articles in the special section (Hudson and Donkin, 2019; Perry, 2019) discuss the UK context and offer different approaches to how space is (re-)used. Hudson and Donkin's longitudinal study of The Empty Shop Think Tank as a part of a non-profit arts organisation, ironically housed in a former job centre above the bus station in Durham, provides a physical environment for contemporary artists to come together, create, exhibit and develop relationships with each other. In the Durham case contemporary art itself reflects a change in society in a town that has undergone rapid cultural change as the move to post-industrial university town has forged an image based on its less recent history and World Heritage Site status. We are told the building is both inaccessible, hard to find and not ideal, that is it is based on offering temporary respite and security to the lives of the artists who use it. It does not offer long-term solutions, nor it is suggested it would seek to. We are told that artists who use the space often go on to exhibit and sell, and importantly both build their own reputation through their engagement with the space and build the reputation of the host space through their association with it.

The organisation builds a memory bank of how and who used the space, filming each encounter, ensuring the transient nature of creating and exhibiting is formalised and given a kind of longevity. There is a clear and intended legacy for artists and town in this memory bank, and the opportunity for artists to develop and share experiences, growing the contemporary arts scene overall. This paper does argue that though not ideal, temporality can serve a purpose at the point of need and serves to move the risk of uncertainly onto the cultural space providers allowing creativity to happen. Artists can experience and risk failure, a necessary part of the creative process. There is no suggestion that re-use of this site is intended to form part of cultural regeneration within the region as such, given the small scale of the project. It is intended to be "a meanwhile" space (Hudson and Donkin, 2019).

Risk taking and the right to, even the need to fail is a necessary part of the creative process often lost to austerity measures that view success as achievement of tangible KPIs. Mission-driven theatre company Slung Low Theatre in Leeds (Perry, 2019) takes a different approach. Rather than bring artists and performers within a neutral space, they took the decision to move to where they can best serve the diverse and, at the time of the move, unknown needs of the community. They bought and decided to run a working man's club in Leeds (there is again some irony in the re-use of a building rendered redundant by rapid cultural change and rupture). As the title of the article by Perry (2019) suggests they determined that for the first six months at least they would say "yes" to everything, shaping the space and their relationship with it according to their emerging relationships within the locality. "Rupture" in the context of Slung Low Theatre is not just welcomed, but sought, offering as it does the chance to revaluate the mission, to change and to take risks. Slung Low established a community college offering skills that sit alongside practices that are more creative. For many organisations, this would have been viewed as mission drift, as an undesirable outcome of inconsistent strategic decision making (Cornforth, 2014; Grimes et al., 2019). However, for successful theatre

company Slung Low such a shift in action is essential in an environment of complexity and uncertainty. Indeed, what might be seen as mission drift from an external perspective is internally considered essential to remain authentic in line with the organisation's mission to meet, rather than to assume, the needs of the locality.

While Slung Low provides an example of mission renewal in positive and meaningful ways, the risk of mission drift in response of the financial constraints that placed-based (and) mission-driven arts organisations face remains. Murray's (2019) study of a small and decreasing number of autonomous cultural spaces in Spain highlights the struggle that small-scale and localised organisations face in attracting and sustaining funding for initiatives not supported by national funding and facing shrinking local support seen as consequence of political uncertainty as well as austerity measures. She points out that even large-scale and flagship institutions have seen a withdrawal of state funding in recent years. Her study confirmed that organisations with some public funding are more resilient and more effective in attracting sponsors and other funders. In common with the other papers in this special section, Murray (2019) notes that it is the arts organisations very localism that makes funding problematic as they do not function as tourist spaces, and are intended to serve local needs. However, she notes there is a new regionalisation at play in national and local authorities approach to funding in the Spanish context, similarly to regionalisation of funding in the UK context. Yet, in part the moving of funds and cultural organisations to the regions (i.e. out of London) plays a role in regeneration agendas shaped by or for tourism with those regions already deemed to offer successful post-industrial models, such as Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham, being the likely beneficiaries of inequalities in funding (Bryson, 2007). Access to support for arts organisations in rural areas is more problematic and most of the examined organisations in the included articles here are based in inner cities or town developments where support may be more accessible.

Tourism drives many "high art" initiatives and indeed forces the re-use of brownfield gap sites to minimise "eye-sores" as much as to offer creative spaces that serve the needs of tourist economies (Cameron and Coaffee, 2005). Prime real estate is rarely offered up to local initiatives and when it is, it usually serves agendas for change in the form of "meanwhile spaces" (Hudson and Donkin, 2019). Indeed, as funding for the arts has diminished at local level (NAO, 2018), a significant number of major government supported or endorsed initiatives have resulted in major investments in "bricks and mortar" with the intention of regenerating or repositioning cities, often within designated "cultural zones". Thus, contemporary art galleries have been developed in major cities and coastal resorts that have been in decline, aimed at cultural and economic regeneration of post-industrial and sunken spaces, attracting tourists while adding a certain cultural cachet to regions (Ponzini and Nastasi, 2016). Yet, as exemplified by Southend Council's recently abandoned plans for their own seaside museum on grounds of cost, such approaches seem unlikely to provide sustainable models for future development, amidst concerns about how they support local artists' work (Sklair, 2017). Thus, the post-industrial landscape has supported the development of "brownfield sites", housing studios and artists' collectives with (at least temporarily) subsidised spaces that allow for cultural encounters within constructed creative industry quarters. While such temporary access to subsidised space to make art and enable cultural encounters may be seen as better than the alternative of not having any space for art, its temporary nature also creates a sense of personal uncertainty. Such insecurity in how long the support and the space will be available forces artists and arts organisations to seek peer support and solutions, often becoming the nucleus of informal creative clusters, at least in the short term (Hudson and Donkin, 2019).

Challenges of mission-driven organisations: embrace change to be resilient

There are inevitably constant challenges to the role that arts organisations "should" have to deem them fundable within the political present, in any cultural context. Arts funding has long been criticised for a poor geographical spread, with, as discussed above, large and tourist cities, those cultural hubs that reflect a nations soft power, receiving more of the public purse. Funding iniquity is also the process by which access to participation is restricted for potential performers. Given limited funding, the need to prove "value", the inherent funding biases in favour of certain forms of art, within certain places, and the demands on organisations that compete for or are dependent on funding, mission-driven arts organisations need to think in terms of being resilient (Walmsley, 2012).

Resilience here is used to mean to "weather the storm" of the present and to be able to continue into the future. A key question then is how resilience might be understood and developed within mission-driven arts organisations and individuals at local, national or international level? Does it mean more than simply "keep going" or can it mean "rise above" the context of arts in its creation at a time of rupture, bringing together organisations and individuals to create, inspire and provide a platform for celebration and debate? Rupture has negative connotations of forced change, yet the articles included here suggest that mission-driven arts organisations can and do find creative responses – finding even inspiration in forced change. In line with notions of entrepreneurship, mission-driven arts organisations take action in the face of uncertainty (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006) by making do with what is at hand, (re-)combining resources in new ways and leveraging relationships (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Sarasvathy, 2001) to address local needs as social bricoleurs and social constructionists (Zahra et al., 2009). Indeed, as placed-based organisations, mission-driven arts organisations have been forced into entrepreneurial thinking and activities to find creative responses to funding dilemmas when cash starved local authorities are forced to choose between mandatory provisions, such as health, security and education, and yet may appreciate the value of arts

organisation but still be unable to offer a sustainable level of support. The use of readily available empty spaces in struggling post-industrial as temporary solutions is not surprising (Hudson and Donkin, 2019).

What all of these placed-based (and) mission-driven arts organisations under discussion (Hudson and Donkin, 2019; Perry, 2019) have in common is that they exist because of the determination and dedication of small teams who navigate financial constraints. At the same time, working at skeleton staffing levels also relies on a committed volunteer workforce drawn from their localities. Such goodwill is dependent on offering the "right product" and opportunities to develop a sense of belonging. In many ways, mission-driven arts organisations promote a kind of citizenship through the involvement of volunteers in response to funding dilemmas.

Recent initiatives go a step further in their entrepreneurial approaches by asking stakeholders to support fundraising in a number of ways. Such approaches bring together local support with the use of technology to reach the widest possible number of potential stakeholders. One such initiative is crowdfunding where members of the public are requested to pledge financial support for specific products or services, relying on a large number of small donations instead of on a small number of large donations (Foa, 2019). Potential supporters need to be convinced that individuals or organisations deserve funding and this can limit risk taking and the chance to fail as part of the creative process. As well as mission risk there is the reputational risk of public failure which limits the chances of further funding support.

As such initiatives become a legitimate, even normalised and expected way to source funding, "traditional" funding sources that guarantee longer-term capital funding become rarer. This can create a vicious cycle leading to a "from project to project" precarity that impacts on the potential for mission-driven organisations to sustainably work within localities. Such funding precarity relates to loss of spaces for and support for creativity in its many forms, with

its impact on the social and cultural well-being of places, individuals and communities hard to quantify. Indeed as all the papers in this special section touch on, value is hard to define as a positive impact, making the loss of creative encounters and access to arts on emotional, intellectual and social levels impossible to define in the negative. However, loss of place and loss of identity are key factors in post-industrial and sunken communities seeking to make sense of the present day. With their placed-based approach and community involvement, mission-driven arts organisations go some way to counter this negative impact.

At the same time, new funding approaches, such as crowdfunding, are poorly suited to serve the needs of placed-based mission-driven arts organisations and indeed may replicate existing power dynamics. Success of crowdfunding campaigns relies on already existing privilege and access to resources. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the factors behind successful crowdfunding campaigns include social capital, third-party endorsements and linguistic styles that help potential funders to feel emotionally connected and related to the campaign and the initiators (Butticè et al., 2017; Calic and Mosakowski, 2016; Parhankangas and Renko, 2017). Yet, by their very nature as placed-based organisations that serve local needs, often outside major cities, may struggle to leverage these success factors.

A platform for future research: an ethical frame for the art

Adopting an ethical frame for the art – in its myriad of forms – in the way it is produced and in the way it is consumed – as well as recognising the lived experiences of individuals in mission-driven arts organisations also creates a platform for fruitful future research that bridges diverse disciplines in relation to temporal work, artists' well-being and inclusive governance.

First, future research can explore how mission-driven arts organisations engage in temporal work towards sustainability of the organisation. The lived experiences and strategic directions of mission-driven arts organisations embed temporal structures, norms and

assumptions about time (e.g. events, schedules, deadlines, funding periods, relations between past, present and future, etc.) that are often taken for granted, yet are produced and reproduced through ongoing activities and social interaction (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002). Thus, as mission-driven arts organisations are forced to engage in creative (re-)use of space to provide temporary solutions, the risk is that "temporary" becomes the norm. Temporary as the norm can create new types of challenges for mission-driven arts organisations where the lack of tangible artefacts hinders a common identity, belonging and "future making". Individuals and organisations rely on artefacts from the past as shared symbols that create a common identity and serve as inspiration for future strategies and action (Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Ravasi et al., 2018; Schultz and Hernes, 2013). Indeed, materiality is essential for "future making" as artefacts are mobilised for imagining, testing, stabilising and reifying abstract ideas into specific projects (Comi and Whyte, 2018). Thus, while temporary solutions may work in the present, they may also limit mission-driven arts organisations' future work towards social and artistic values. Future research is thus needed to explore how individuals and organisations influence and challenge taken-for-granted temporal assumptions and structures to reorient thinking about the sustainability of mission-driven arts organisations. At the same time, tensions and trade-offs between the short term and long term are inherent to key strategic decisions about sustainability (e.g. Laverty, 1996; Slawinski and Bansal, 2015). How do artists and mission-driven arts organisations manage these tensions? How do the small teams behind mission-driven arts organisations maintain a future focussed time perspective when uncertainty, complexity and scarcity force attention to the present?

Second, future research needs to explore how the increasing temporary nature of the solutions that mission-driven arts organisations engage in influences the well-being of the artists embedded in and working with these organisations. The temporary nature of solutions and organising practices in mission-driven arts organisations introduces insecurity and

uncertainty for individual artists with increasing demands and little social or institutional support at a time when funding for local mental health services is insufficient (The King's Fund, 2015). Yet, such poor work characteristics with increased levels of uncertainty are detrimental to mental health amongst artists (Tuisku et al., 2016). While art is promoted as a way to maintain well-being (Crone et al., 2012), little attention is paid to the well-being of artists. Yet, previous research has found high levels of poor mental health amongst artists (Andreasen, 1987; Andreasen and Canter, 1974; Jamison, 1989; Ludwig, 1995; Post, 1994; Nettle, 2006). While individuals with poor mental health might self-select into artistic careers, the changing nature of their work with increasingly temporary arrangements and high uncertainty is an additional risk factor. What factors, work practices and organisational arrangement can support artists to maintain their well-being in a time of rupture? How do mission-driven arts organisations develop support mechanisms for the artists that they work with?

Finally, future research is needed to investigate how mission-driven arts organisations create mechanisms for inclusive governance. Mission-driven arts organisations pursue multiple goals and serve the needs of their communities by engaging with diverse stakeholders, such as volunteers, crowdfunding backers, artists, community members and funders. Thus, they require the careful management and governance of multiple and divergent goals, values and stakeholders. Indeed, mission-driven arts organisations may also experience pressure from internal and external stakeholders to meet certain goals or expectations (as in the study by Murray, 2019) and as such these salient expectations need to be managed through governance mechanisms.

Governance is recognised as important for the organisational sustainability and performance of commercial and non-profit organisations in the academic literature (e.g. Kosnik, 1987; Cornforth and Brown, 2014) and in practice (e.g. Charity Governance Code,

2017). Governance refers to the mechanisms that ensure accountability, direction and control of the organisation (Cornforth and Brown, 2014). This includes formal governance, such as the legal form of organisations (e.g. community interest company as in the case of Hudson and Donkin, 2019) and governing boards, and informal governance, such as stakeholder meetings, consultations and online tools (e.g. Di Domenico et al., 2010; Ramus and Vaccaro, 2017). While governance is essential to support organisations and help them avoid mission drift (Ebrahim et al., 2014; Cornforth, 2014), the broader governance research suggests that small non-profit organisations face challenges in developing and maintaining effective governance mechanisms to meet their distinctive needs (Rochester, 2003).

At the same time, these challenges to develop effective governance mechanisms are intensified by the temporary nature of solutions developed by mission-driven arts organisations and the hybrid nature of the organisations (Battilana and Lee, 2014). How do mission-driven arts organisations develop effective formal and informal governance mechanisms? How do mission-driven arts organisations develop mechanisms for inclusive governance where those who are involved in governance are not just funders or in positions of power, but also artists, volunteers and community members who may not have the skills or desire to be involved in formal governance mechanisms but whose lived experiences can shape the direction of mission-driven arts organisations?

Concluding remarks

Collectively, these papers offer a snapshot of mission-driven arts organisations and engagements in Europe at a time of rapid change. They highlight that at the very least creative spaces and artists and performers working together can create a new legitimacy for people and places, develop and re-shape pride in locality, improve health and well-being, offer a sense of ownership of space and creative products. What all the papers here agree on is that mission-

driven organisations genuinely support localities struggling with the impact of cultural change, often at the point of need. They do so in a variety of ways by providing an albeit temporary home for artists shaping and enhancing the lived experiences and impact of artists embedded in local communities through the use of temporary spaces and artistic residencies. They provide a locus for community artistic endeavours and skills development or by bringing art and creative performances to new audiences do so because they feel passionately that they have a role to play in shaping creative futures.

As the case of Slung Low as detained by Perry (2019), they do so while faced with the demands of multiple stakeholders and financial constraints and accept mission drift as a necessary part of the process. Rather, they see their mission to support the needs of the locality and by prioritising this, they enhance their mission. Cultural and political change, which we here term as "rupture", is more readily understood as "a state of flux" where continuing change is going to constantly impact on funding, policy and will challenge priorities. Individuals and small-scale organisations that remain determined to, can "make a difference" to, the lived experience of local artists and communities; and that by accepting the need to become more "entrepreneurial" and "resilient" can continue to develop creative responses within an increasing complex and fast changing political and funding climate. In doing so they have a vital role to play at local and regional level in particular, working in places and spaces rendered problematic, unfashionable or unprofitable in the political present.

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