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At the Coalface

Sustaining cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation in County Durham, North East England

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

of

Northumbria University

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This research has been developed as part of a collaborative PhD with New Writing North, at Northumbria University. New Writing North is the writing and reading development agency for the North of England. From 2015 to 2018 the agency undertook a Strategic Touring Programme to make and tour high-quality children's theatres to local communities in non-traditional venues across the North of England where, previously, arts and culture provision had been limited. The programme was centred on a development model that involved working closely with community centre managers and library services on an audience development plan which aimed to encourage greater participation in cultural activities amongst the under 7s and their families and to create an embedded model of participation that would be sustained once the touring programme was complete.

The aim of this research has been twofold. First, to assess how successful New Writing North's partnership model has been in terms of sustaining arts and culture provision in those disadvantaged communities. Secondly, to research a wider question about why sustaining arts and culture provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation has proved so challenging for the cultural sector.

The central research question asks:

What can the partnership model between New Writing North and community centres tell us about supporting sustained cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?

Case studies are drawn from five former mining communities in County Durham with a focus placed on the community venues: in particular, the views and experiences of venue managers themselves – those working at the coalface.

The research is underpinned by a methodology of Pragmatism which supports working in a dynamic case study environment where both the delivery of the work and the partnership model continued to develop and evolve. Pragmatism asserts that beliefs should be judged against outcomes – by how useful they are in terms of a guide to present and future action. What has worked well in the past provides us with a guide to what is likely to work well in the present and future.

Therefore, the issue of sustaining provision of arts and culture in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation is further explored by a combination of historical policy analysis and a theoretical analysis of the paradigm incapsulated by the notion of Cultural Democracy, whilst an examination of the contemporary experiences of venue managers remains central to the research.

The research makes the case that the role of community centre managers is fundamental to achieving sustained cultural provision and yet, despite this, the manager's role remains largely hidden in traditional ways of understanding arts activity in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. Moreover, the thesis asserts that there is a disjoint and a lack of communication between policymakers and communities which means that there is an over-dependence on arts organisations as decision-makers. It argues that community centre managers are well-placed within the ecosystem of arts provision to achieve sustained arts and cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. However, they can only do this once their position is acknowledged and the wider sector, particularly policymakers and funders, are prepared to offer the right level of support.

The research concludes with some thoughts and recommendations of how this can be made possible, of how to better approach the challenge of sustained provision, an issue that has long been a challenge for the arts and culture sector and its policymakers (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017).

Author's Declaration

I declare that no component of the work contained in this thesis has been submitted in support of any other application for another qualification, for this or any other university or institute of learning.

Statement of Ethics

All participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the doctoral research prior to its commencement. A statement of confidentiality was made explicit ensuring each participant of her anonymity, with written consent completed and retained for each participant. Ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee on 3rd May 2017.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 83,027 words.

Name: Mo Lovatt

Signature:

Date: 29th May 2021

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Chapter 1: From impact to sustainability

1.1 Introduction

New Writing North is the writing and reading development agency for the North of England. The central aim of its Strategic Touring Programme (2015-2018) was to make and tour high-quality children's theatre to local communities in non-traditional venues across the North East of England where, previously, arts and culture provision has been limited – in what are termed "areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation". The shows were adaptations of popular children's books with a new one being produced each year. Young audiences were able to join an alien fan-club and follow Astronaut Bob as he travelled to the moon to pick up litter dropped by space-tourists; or enjoy the adventures of Monty the magician-dog who became the star of his own TV show, then let fame go to his head, before ultimately discovering the true meaning of friendship with his magical partner, Presto the cat. They were delightful shows, complete with original, sing-along tunes and plenty of opportunity for audience interaction.

The productions were directed, designed, produced, and performed by professional theatre-makers, usually from the North East of England, and the shows toured to local communities with little experience of programming theatre. The production values were such that they were easily adapted to non-theatre spaces such as community centres and libraries, with minimal technical, get-in and get-out requirements, whilst retaining a commitment to theatricality and with high-quality production values.

The programme built upon a model developed in a previous Strategic Touring funded project (2013-14) and drew upon the learning from that to effectively build audiences amongst irregular arts attenders and disengaged families. A full marketing pack was provided to venues, along with advice for managers on how to market the production, should they need it. Alongside the performances, New Writing North offered one-off participatory workshops in music and craft at numerous venues to support the audience development for the shows. They also worked with the venues to devise bespoke projects according to the venue's own interests and needs. Projects included reading development initiatives in and around libraries, youth theatre projects in community centres, and creative writing projects in urban libraries with refugee and asylum seeker women. These

initiatives aimed to support the venues to view the arts as a way of further engaging their local community, and to provide them with the skills and experience to take these sorts of projects on themselves if they wished, thus sustaining a wider-ranging and deeper cultural provision. As the evaluation (at Appendix B) demonstrates, they have been well-received with a high level of positive responses recorded in audience questionnaires, and with venues regularly boasting sell-out shows and repeat-attenders year on year.

This PhD thesis was commissioned to consider whether the emerging partnership model between New Writing North and the libraries and community centres had had an impact on participation in, and the sustainability of, the arts and cultural programmes of those venues. Therefore, this research began as an exploration into both the **impact** and **sustainability** of the New Writing North programme for the under 7s and their families in non-traditional performance spaces. An initial pilot survey was conducted throughout November and December 2016 by means of a series of informal interviews with three community centre managers, two librarians and one library service area manager; some additional interviews with parents, grandparents and children attending the performances; as well as several exploratory meetings with the show's producers, New Writing North.

The initial pilot phase, and an attendant literature review, made two important findings: First, that measuring the impact of the programme on the under 7s and their families would not contribute significantly to, or offer a particularly original insight into, the wealth of knowledge already contained within the existing body of 'impact' research within the Arts and Culture sector. From the early work of Charles Landry and his cultural research organisation, Comedia (Landry et al., 1993), from which the seminal *Use or Ornament: the Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (Matarasso, 1997) emerged, through to more current research such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) supported *Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture* (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016) and *Everyday Participation and Cultural Value in Place* (Miles and Gibson, 2017), the potential for a new piece of research which would provide a unique contribution to knowledge seemed limited. This was predominantly due to the provision of the New Writing North programme itself which comprised of one show (plus an optional workshop) per year. Moreover, it became clear that it would not be possible to assess the impact of the programme itself without a wider consideration of the range of provision

and experiences that impacted on the lives of the under 7s and their families because this would be beyond the scope of the research. As Belfiore and Bennett (2007b) argue, 'current methods for assessing the impact of the arts are largely based on a fragmented and incomplete understanding of the cognitive, psychological and socio-cultural dynamics that govern the aesthetic experience… a better grasp of the interaction between the individual and the work of art is the necessary foundation for a genuine understanding of *how* the arts can affect people.' In other words, the potential to make this thesis an original contribution to knowledge in terms of assessing **impact** appeared limited.

Secondly, what emerged more pertinently from the pilot phase was the pivotal role played by venue managers as providers of cultural opportunities in their communities. The way in which they understood the needs and preferences of their local users, the way they negotiated that demand with the cultural offer from the arts sector, and the way this was incorporated into the day-to-day running and programming of their venue appeared to be an under-researched area. It was noted how the managers themselves might become part of the picture in terms of ensuring sustainability of provision at the end of the five-year funded New Writing North programme. The fact there was a lack of academic literature on the role of non-traditional arts venue managers in providing arts and cultural opportunities to a particular cohort of arts users (in this case the under 7s and their families) seemed to offer a tantalising starting point for research – an opportunity to analyse the question of **sustainability** of provision, as well as being able to offer a unique contribution to knowledge.

As such, the pilot phase became an effective opportunity to test the waters of the research environment, it helped to frame the more precise nature of the research, which would henceforth focus on the question of sustainability of provision, rather than impact. It was also a useful trust-building exercise between the researcher and the subsequent focus of the research – the venue managers.

1.2 A framework for understanding sustainability.

From the pilot phase, a framework for conducting further research was constructed. This would comprise of a return to the literature to specifically examine the question of sustainability, a data collection process that would be facilitated by means of semi-

structured one-to-one interviews with the producer and venue managers, and a series of focus group sessions with the venue managers as a sample cohort.

A process of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select a cohort of venue managers to form the basis of this newly orientated case study. Although the initial New Writing North programme had focused on both community centres and libraries and had, on average, programmed at approximately 40 venues per year, it was decided to focus on six community centre managers venues only and that each of them would be based in County Durham. The rational for this choice is fully outlined in Chapter 4. However, in brief, they were selected on the basis they would provide information-rich responses and, due to their longer-term involvement in the New Writing North programme, they would be better placed to help address the issue of sustainability. Whilst the 2015-2018 Strategic Touring Programme had been delivered to venues across the wider North East region, the initial programme in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 was delivered solely within County Durham meaning that those selected venue managers had been engaged in the partnership with New Writing North for a five-year duration.

According to researcher David L Morgan (2014), the rule of thumb with regard to an optimum number for a focus group study is 6-10 members. This number of quantitative responses, according to Morgan, provides a sufficient variety of data without rending the group size too large to analyse responses in depth. On the other hand, Wisker (2008) suggests that this number is too small to provide credible basis for generalisation and for identifying trends. These methodological issues are explored in Chapter 4, but the cohort size could be viewed as a limitation of the current research. However, this is mitigated by the overall aim of this thesis which is to make a qualitative and unique contribution to the body of research, as a whole, by providing deliberately information-rich case study material, rather than having an aim of uncovering generalisable trends. In addition, the six-venue cohort represents 12% of the overall research field (40 venues per year) so it is not necessarily an unusually small sample size.

Libraries, who had been part of the pilot study, were discounted from the case study on the grounds that their organisational structure provided a less clear route to understanding the issue of sustainability. Whilst librarians, working at the coalface, were

knowledgeable with regard to their audiences and users, area managers were responsible for taking programming and budgetary decisions. With community centres, the venue managers had an overview of both and were well-placed to understand the relationship between policy, provision, and audience. It was further surmised that, by being part of local authority provision, sustainability of provision for libraries was more likely related to the budgets and priorities of their local authority than it was with their relationship with New Writing North.

In addition to one-to-one interviews with venue managers, three focus group sessions were envisaged and planned with all six venues invited to participate. This was designed to create a dynamic research environment where conversations between venue managers might spark creative responses through the facilitation of more naturalistic conversations (Madriz, 2003). Whilst the dynamic of one-to-one interviews often means the researcher's role is more prominent, eliciting responses that have been at least partly choreographed, a focus group setting can dilute the researcher's voice and give a more powerful voice to the respondents, yielding more in-depth answers, given more naturally, and less consciously from an eliciting process. Focus group sessions were to be designed around three areas of interest to the community centre managers: Fundraising and Sponsorship; Programming; Marketing, PR and Audience Development – themes identified in the pilot phase that were of particular significance to both the venue managers and to the question of sustainability.

This reframing of the research necessitated a return to the literature to analyse the broader question of how to sustain arts and culture provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation, particularly those which don't have a history of embedded provision, and – indeed – the question of whether it is in fact possible to do so. This widening of the inquiry involved an analysis of policy discourse, examining both historical and contemporary attempts to embed provision, and went on to consider why such attempts have been deemed (largely) unsuccessful (Jancovich, 2017). It became necessary to understand the structural relationships between what is termed the '**supply** (artists/organisations) and **demand** (audience)' sides of cultural provision (McGuigan, 2005) – this included both material structures in terms of policies, procedures and financial models, and metaphysical structures in terms of relationships of power and

authority, as well as perceptions of entitlement (Bunting et al., 2008). This supply and demand relationship is examined in more detail in Chapter 4 and the assumptions it embodies in terms of who are the suppliers and demanders and who are the intermediaries at play within this model. Most specifically:

- Where does the community venue (and its manager) sit within the model of provision?
- What role do they play in terms of supporting cultural participation?

This thesis argues that their role is fundamental to achieving sustained cultural provision and yet, despite this, they remain largely hidden in traditional ways of understanding arts activity in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. Moreover, that there is a disjoint between policymakers and communities which means that the supply side is over-dependent on arts organisations as decision-makers, which has implications for the concept of Cultural Democracy (Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017). It further argues that venue managers are often as well placed to sustain arts and culture provision, more so given they know their audiences well. But this positioning is dependent upon being given the right support within the ecosystem of arts provision and this is examined through the partnership model between New Writing North and the venues that form the case study of this research.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the research

The issue of sustained provision of Arts and Culture in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation is examined using a combination of historical policy analysis, a theoretical analysis of the paradigm incapsulated by the notion of Cultural Democracy, and an exploration of the contemporary experiences of venue managers – those working 'at the coalface'. The research aims to provide a democratic orientation towards knowledge. In doing so, it has found a natural home within the philosophical framework of John Dewey's Instrumental Pragmatism which finds truth to be rooted in the experiences of everyday people and advances a warrant for future action based upon those beliefs. Pragmatism is a learning-orientated methodology which aims to generate useful learning points for the participants as well as the researcher and the wider arts and arts-academic

sectors. It is also a methodology with the flexibility and resilience to support research carried out in a dynamic, constantly evolving environment, which is also impacted by the continued research process. The methodology is further explored in Chapter 4.

By analysing the issue of sustaining provision through a pragmatic paradigm, this thesis offers a critique of the contemporary Cultural Democracy discourse aimed at widening access. It concludes with some recommendations of how to better approach the challenge of sustained provision, an issue that has long been a challenge for the arts and culture sector and its policymakers (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017).

As noted, for the Strategic Touring Partnership (2015-2018), New Writing North worked in partnership with community centres and library services to present the programme, building upon the work of a previous Strategic Touring Partnership in 2013 and 2014. The idea behind the current research was to ascertain how sustainable this programme would be after a cultural investment of five years, and to examine how this specific project model – arts organisation and community venue working together – contributed to the likelihood of sustained cultural activity.

As such, the first task of this enquiry was to examine the question of, *what constitutes a successful, sustained programme*. What works, what doesn't, and what needs to be in place to ensure sustainability? In short, *what standard or set of criteria does the particular programme under analysis need to be assessed against?* It was held that, without a fuller understanding of this criteria, the current enquiry could not determine in any meaningful way whether sustainability was likely to be achieved.

However, during the literature review phase and after conducting a historical review of similar programmes as well as related policy arenas, it soon became clear that the research needed to spread its net still further. It needed to ask why many such programmes have failed in the past (Jancovich, 2017). Despite well-received, well-funded and well-resourced programmes, why is sustaining cultural provision in certain areas – those often classed as areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation – still proving such a challenge, 70 years after the inception of the Arts Council (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017)?

So, although in the first instance, this research represents an analysis of a particular partnership model aimed at embedding and sustaining cultural activity, it is then used as a catalyst to explore the wider issue of why sustaining provision continues to be a challenge for the sector. The research question is thus: What *can the partnership model between New Writing North and community centres tell us about supporting sustained cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?*

As such, the inquiry begins with a series of ontologically prior questions:

- What is the history of cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?
- What are the rationales for providing such provision?

It then progresses to include one final question, affirming the methodological demands of Pragmatism to find a 'unified whole' in terms of understanding the issue:

- What are the community centre managers' understanding of the barriers to sustaining provision?

These questions, and the central area under investigation, build upon a trajectory of enquiry that has gained currency in recent years. In 2006, the results of the first Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) *Taking Part* survey revealed that, despite increased investment and a focus on 'engagement', only 15% of the population regularly engage in publicly funded arts and cultural activities whilst only 8% access these through publicly funded cultural organisations and, moreover, that those who do so are overwhelmingly wealthy, well-educated and white (Hewison, 2014; The Warwick Commission, 2015; Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). Since then, there has been a wealth of interesting initiatives and research aimed at tackling the 'deficit model' of arts and culture provision.

In a term borrowed from the social sciences, and explored more in Chapter 3, the 'deficit model', as applied to arts and culture, is a pejorative term for those who place the job of 'increasing participation' firmly at the door of publicly funded arts providers without

acknowledging that these are precisely the sort of organisations that a large proportion of the population doesn't use.

In recent years, critics of the deficit model (The Warwick Commission, 2015; Evans, 2016; Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017) have been actively engaged in promoting a range of 'grassroots' initiatives such as Understanding Everyday Participation (http://www.everydayparticipation.org/), 64 Million Artists (http://64millionartists.com/), Fun Palaces (http://funpalaces.co.uk/) and the BBC's Get Creative Campaign (http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/sections/get-creative) which are aimed at promoting and valuing non-traditional (or non-elitist, or non-state sanctioned) forms of creative participation. These initiatives largely happen in community settings and form part of a broad arts and arts-academic focus upon 'Cultural Democracy' – ensuring equality of access to culture and creativity and ensuring all forms of cultural expression are valued equally.

There are, of course, large pockets of vibrant and sustained cultural activity in many economically disadvantaged parts of the country (Matarasso, 2015.) However, that the 'problem' of sustaining arts and culture activity remains a challenge is acknowledged in Arts Council England's Advice for Applicants to the Strategic Touring Programme:

> *We acknowledge that despite public investment, there remain significant disparities in the level of arts and cultural opportunities across the country.* (Arts Council England, 2015)

This can be regarded as problematic for those who believe that everyone has a democratic right to access, and to contribute to, the arts and culture of their society – including children and young people who the New Writing North programme is aimed at. The notion of 'democratic right' is supported by Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

> *1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.*

> *2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities.*
>
> Article 31. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As noted above, the idea of 'Cultural Democracy' is one that has gained currency over the past few years, culminating in a range of publications on the subject, such as the King's College, London's *Towards Cultural Democracy: Promoting Cultural Capabilities for Everyone* (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017) and *Culture Democracy in Practice* (Hunter, Micklem and Ikin, 2018) - a report by 64 Million Artists with Arts Council England. As Hunter et al note, "[Culture Democracy] is not a new concept, but it's one that seems to be gaining focus across arts and culture." (Hunter et al, 2018, p2.). They go on to suggest that it is a term that is often "misunderstood and misused" within the arts and culture sector. This points to the fact that it is contested term; a contestation which most notably centres on the dichotomy between what is termed *Democratisation of Culture* (seen as a top-down formulation) and *Cultural Democracy (*seen as a bottom-up formulation). Yves Evrard (2010), on the other hand, sees the dichotomy as a paradigmatic shift from a modernist to a post-modernist outlook and largely confined to within the Arts and Culture sector itself.

These arguments will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3, along with a central assertion within this thesis that we need to rethink the concept of 'democratic provision' that lies at the centre of arts policy to better answer the question of how to sustain cultural provision in communities which have little access to the arts. This assertion is underscored by Pragmatist John Dewey's belief that the very concept of democracy itself "has to be constantly discovered, and rediscovered, remade and reorganised." (Dewey cited in Biesta, 2006, p122).

This inquiry, then, sits within that current body of research concerned with 'Cultural Democracy' whilst simultaneously using a Pragmatic research methodology to challenge some of the core assumptions at the heart of that theory, specifically in terms of its ability to deliver truly sustainable provision. In doing so, and by examining a bespoke programme of activity and its specific partnership model, this current thesis will offer a

unique contribution to knowledge which aims to be useful within the fields of arts policy, the relevant academic debate, arts organisations and for those working at the coalface.

1.4 Research questions

In summary, the primary research question is:

What can the partnership model between New Writing North and community centres tell us about supporting sustained cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?

This is addressed alongside four research sub questions which are:

- What is the history of cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?
- What are the rationales for providing such provision?
- What are the community centre managers' understanding of the barriers to sustaining provision?

It is an obvious point but perhaps necessary to state that sustaining provision can only happen where there is some kind of provision to be sustained in the first place. It has been noted that this is a challenge more pertinent to areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. The phrase 'areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation' is a modern one; one which developed out of the term 'socially excluded' – itself a polite word for 'poverty' (Hewison, 2014, p70), and therefore it is phrase which makes an appearance rather late in the history of cultural policy discourse. However, the idea that the cultural offer should be more widely available and accessible *is* a continuous part of the discussion, and often with an implicit suggestion that this widening of access/provision should include those areas we now class as 'areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation'. The following chapter aims to chart this journey and will use the term 'areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation' where its retrospective application might be useful for analysis but with an awareness that the language and concepts contained in the last 70 years of discourse have not always been expressed in the same terms.

Chapter 2. Every Town Should Have One

2.1 Cultural activity and cultural policy in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation

"…despite public investment, there remain significant disparities in the level of arts and cultural opportunities across the country."

(ACE, 2015)

Arts Council England's advice to applicants for the 2015 *Strategic Touring Partnership* fund acknowledges an ongoing concern within the arts sector that, although there are many economically disadvantaged parts of the country where cultural activity is vibrant and sustained (Matarasso, 2015), there are many more areas where there are no flourishing hubs of cultural activity and no history of embedded arts provision.

To understand why the issue of sustainability is such a difficult one, why embedding arts and culture in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation is proving so challenging, it will be useful to look at some of the historical reasons as to why this might be the case. As Graham (1993) has argued, "Understanding the institutions that drive the policy process – their personality and culture, their values and memory, the legacy of their leaders – this above all demands historical analysis, and this task lies at the heart of policy history." (Graham, 1993, pp35-26 in Upchurch, 2016, p199).

This chapter aims to provide such an analysis. It is divided into two sections, reflecting two time periods which, it will be argued, are underpinned by different ideas about cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation – that of, *cultural provision as a public good* (1940s to the mid-70s) and that of, *cultural provision as a social or economic benefit* (the mid-70s to the present). These periods broadly map onto the economic systems of those times, to the political ideologies that accompanied them and, it will be argued, to a broader philosophical paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism. **Fig 1** (below) sets this out diagrammatically and it also acknowledges the recent Coronavirus pandemic as a phenomenon that may impact on the economic

system, political ideology and the philosophical underpinning of thought in the UK (and beyond), although it is outside the scope of this research to predict what that might be.

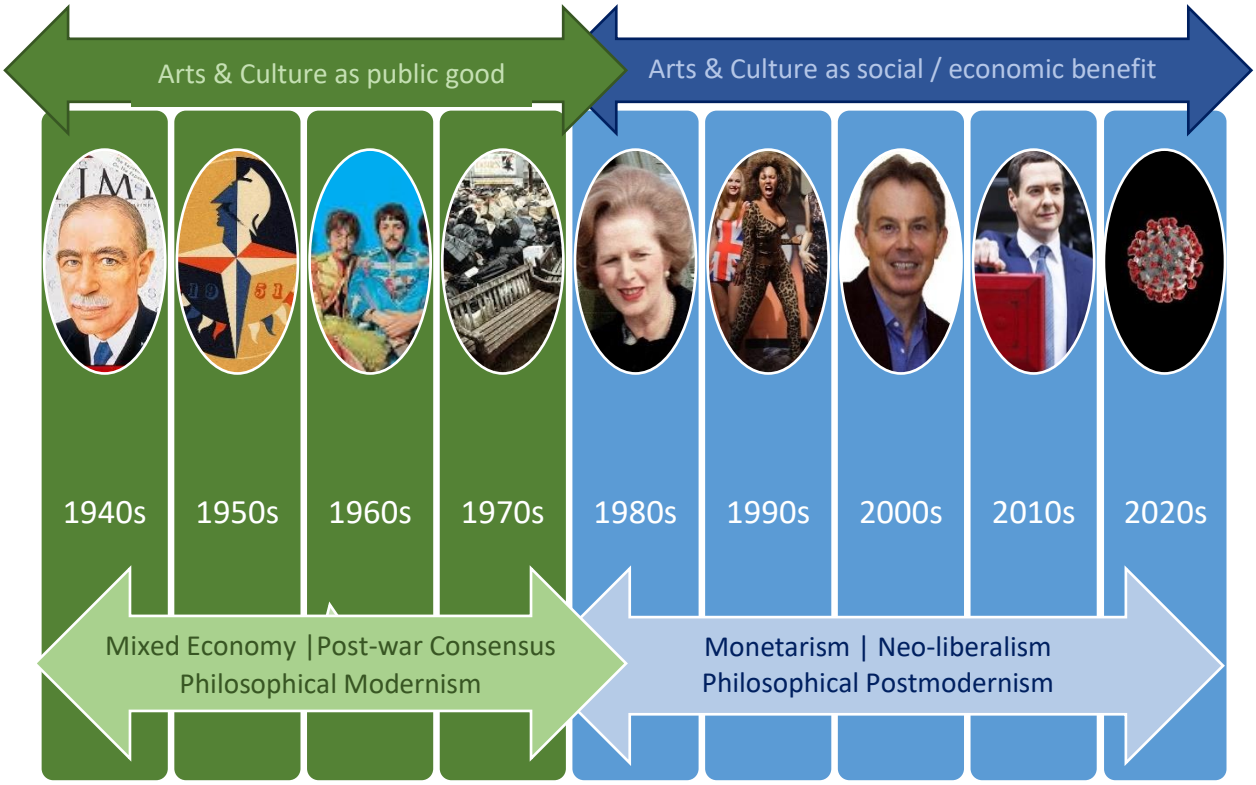

Fig 1: The rationales underpinning Arts & Culture provision in economically deprived areas mapped onto the dominant economic systems, their attendant political ideologies. and the wider philosophical paradigms of the two eras. (Lovatt, M., 2021)

The analysis undertaken in this chapter is specifically concerned with policy history as it relates to areas of economic disadvantage, although it draws upon and is influenced by other historical policy analyses.

According to McGuigan (1996) the history of arts policy in Britain contains a number of 'discursive moments' when government subsidies can be understood and rationalised as:

- Social control (mid-19th Century to mid-20th Century)
- National prestige (from the early 1940s to the early 1960s)
- Social access (the mid-1960s to the late 1970s)
- Value for money (late 1970s to the present and foreseeable future)

This value for money 'moment' is, according to McGuigan, characterised by 'an increasingly pervasive market reasoning and managerialist rhetoric.' (McGuigan 1996, in

Upchurch, 2016, p199.) That this is set to continue into the 'foreseeable future' must now be understood within the historical context of an analysis which pre-dates the 1997 Labour government and the era of 'policy attachment' (Gray, 2002). McGuigan addresses this more thoroughly in *Rethinking Cultural Policy* in 2004, where he notes the emphasis placed by policymakers on the role of publicly funded cultural organisations to tackle social disadvantage – a phenomenon which is explored in **2.2** below.

For Bennett (1995) there are a number of 'rationales' for government funding of the arts; and, although these are charted as a broadly chronological series of justifications, they are more usefully understood as a range of concurrent and interweaving validations, with one or other rationale dominating in any given era (Bennett, 1995).

For example, in examining the history of government support for the arts from its origins at the start of the 19th Century, Bennett describes the first government rationale as one characterised by *laissez-faire*. Compared to some European countries, such as France and Germany, where an inherited sense of royal and aristocratic patronage had been subsumed within the rationale of the state, Britain had a much less interventionist stance, illuminated rather neatly by Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne's, 1835 declaration that, 'God help the government who meddles in art.' (Minihan, 1977, in Bennett, 1995.) And yet, Bennet argues, we see echoes of this laissez-faire attitude in the 'arms-length' principle underlying the ethos of the Arts Council of Great Britain at its establishment in 1946, with echoes permeating down the ages, perhaps most notably during the Thatcher era of the 1980s and 90s.

The same can be held for Bennett's other rationales: *national prestige*, *economic importance*, *the civilising mission*, *correcting the market*, *post-war reconstruction and the welfare state* – each explored more thoroughly in the remainder of this chapter and each to be regarded by Bennett as part of a collectivising attempt to 'reveal the dominant ideas behind state intervention in cultural affairs, and to show how these ideas were repeatedly used, from the nineteenth century onwards, to promote and to justify further government action in this field.' (Bennett, 1995.) This is in much the same way that McGuigan sees the discursive moments of social control and national prestige coming

together in the formation of the ACGB in July 1945 (McGuigan, 1996, in Upchurch, 2016, p200).

When viewed as a facet of national policymaking, the (predominantly) twentieth century articulation of cultural policy has been expressed in a number of ways, for a variety of purposes, for example, 'nationalistic, propagandistic, redistributive' (McGuigan, 2004) but, when specifically applied to the people and communities of economically disadvantaged areas, there are two broader and over-arching justifications for subsidising the arts, as noted in **Fig 1** above: because it is a ***public good*** (1940s-1970s) and because it has a ***social or economic benefit*** (1980s to the present). As with McGuigan's 'discursive moments,' and Bennett's 'rationales', these are not distinct justifications, nor wholly applicable to one era and not the other, but should be regarded as overlapping – even, interweaving – justifications which, by identifying them as overarching trends, help us to understand the broader implications of cultural policy in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation and to exemplify the paradigm of Cultural Democracy which is explored later in Chapter 3.

The distinction between a 'public good' and something which provides 'social or economic benefit' is an important one. A public good is 'something that no consumer can be excluded from using if it is supplied' (Black, J., Hashimzade, N., & Myles, G., 2009). It usually refers to a commodity or service which is provided by a government or private organisation without profit and for the benefit of all members of society. It has the dual characteristics of being *non-rivalry (or non-depletable)* – by which is meant that if the good is consumed it doesn't reduce the amount available to others, and/or it can have *non-excludability* – meaning that it is not possible to provide a good without the ability of others to enjoy its benefits (a common example would be a public dam: it protects all of those in the flood area whether they've contributed to the flooding defence programme or not). A public good is usually supplied because it is not provided (or it is under-provided) in a free market economy; it is more often provided by government than private companies due to those dual characteristics of non-rivalry and non-excludability which makes profit-generation difficult. As such, the definition of a public good is inextricably linked to the notion of 'market failure' [Sidgwick, 1883] – it is something that

the market cannot or does not (effectively) provide (due to the inability to generate profit).

By contrast, a social or an economic benefit is not dependent upon the notion of 'market failure' but is, rather, defined *through* the market. In the case of economic benefit, this is self-evident – either it enhances the performance of the economy overall, or it enhances the economic position of the individual, community, or group within a market framework. In the case of a social benefit, however, this is less obvious. A social benefit is derived from producing or consuming a good/service where the external benefits outweigh the personal benefits of the individual. If the social benefit is greater than the individual benefit, it *may* be under-consumed within a free-market economy and warrant government subsidy, but it is not dependent upon market failure. A social benefit, therefore, is a by-product of the economic system, whereas a public good exists despite it (in conceptual terms).

The perspective of analysis for a social benefit compared to a public good is also different. Whereas the focus of a social benefit is on something larger than the individual, it is – in a dialectic sense – dependent upon the concept of the individual; a public good, on the other hand, is focused on the whole itself (the public or society). The transition within the arts sector from seeing arts and culture provision as a public good to focusing on its societal (or economic) benefit, can also be understood as being underpinned by a philosophical and sociological change from attempts at a structuralist understanding of society, to one of post-modernism (Hewison, 1995, p220). As we shall see, this distinction is important for an understanding of how the notion of public subsidy (of the arts) is justified.

The next section of this chapter (2.2) undertakes an analysis of the history of sustaining arts and cultural activity in economically deprived areas in the UK from the post-war period, and the formation of the Arts Council, until the mid-70s. This latter part of the period is when the seeds of the ascendant neo-liberal ideology begin to manifest themselves in cultural policy and discourse (although seeing these put into practice takes slightly longer, as outlined by the overlapping arrows in **Fig 1** above). Section 2.2 examines the historical aims and aspirations of those who sought to widen access,

participation and to sustain provision in economically deprived areas, and places this within the context of the contemporary knowledge that, despite well-meaning initiatives and good intentions, this is still an issue that the arts sector finds challenging today.

The third and final section of this chapter (2.3) looks at the discourse and policy-framework from the mid-70s onwards, when, it is argued, the paradigm shift from a mixed economy model to one of monetarism took effect on policy and discourse relating to sustaining provision in economically deprived areas. This represents a change from provision as public good associated with market failure, to provision as a strategic part of the government's social policy agenda – namely using art and cultural as an economic or as a social good.

The chapter concludes with the most recent academic and sector-wide criticisms of this largely monetarist agenda and analyses the paradigm shift from structuralism to postmodernism (Hewison, 1995; Evrard, 1997)) and considers how this has impacted on contemporary discussions around a 'deficit model' or arts and culture and the resurgence of the notion of Cultural Democracy which is itself the subject of Chapter 3 and represents a pillar of the philosophical underpinning of the research methodology.

2.2 Expanding cultural policy and provision: 1945 to the mid-1970s

> *…let us plan the Civic centres where men and women may satisfy the whole range of educational and cultural interests between keeping fit and cultural argument. Let us so unify our popular culture that in every considerable town we may have a centre where people may listen to good music, look at a painting, study . . . join in a debate.*
>
> W.E. Williams, "Are we building a new culture?" 1943.

From our historical vantage point, Williams's 75-year-old quote now seems woefully utopian. Published just a few years before he became Secretary of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) in 1950, Williams envisaged a Great Britain 'covered with a national grid of cultural centres' (cited in Evans & Foord, 2008).

The Arts Council's first annual report in 1945 is full of the same optimism and ambition. The Council's predecessor, the wartime Committee for Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), had overseen a huge rise in people's interest in live music, drama, art and 'combined art'. Its role, according to then chair, John Maynard Keynes, was 'to carry music, drama and pictures to places which otherwise would be cut off from all contact with the masterpieces of happier days and times: to air-raid shelters, to wartime hostels, to factories, to mining villages… the duty of CEMA was to maintain the opportunities of artistic performance for the hard-pressed and often exiled civilians,' (Keynes, 1946 in Maelen, 2008, p17).

Buoyed by national pride and a 'Spirit of the Blitz', music concerts had taken place in factories at lunchtime, then spilled out into the communities beyond; theatre and art were exhibited and toured; and many independent Art Clubs were set up around the country. In the first six month of 1940, CEMA had set up 37 amateur orchestra groups and 224 choral groups. Moreover, although CEMA came to an end after the second world war, the newly established ACGB was set up 'with the policies, programmes, and to a great extent, the personnel which it inherited from CEMA.' (Minihan, 1977 in Maelen, 2008, p17).

According to Cultural historian, Robert Hewison, 'the uncertainties of the Blitz had served to create a new sense of national identity, a shift of attitudes made possible by the social solidary produced by common dangers,' and, although social and political divisions remained, it was a unique moment in British history and what the historian Peter Hennessy has described as 'a more politically united nation than at any other time in the twentieth century (Hennessy, 1992 in Hewison, 1995). Not only was it united politically (literally, with a coalition government) it was also united in preparing for change (Hewison, 1995). For, although it was Churchill and the Conservatives who had overseen a resolute Britain during the Second World War, it was the Labour Party who successfully captured the mood of the time and which was subsequently elected after the war on a programme of social change. As Bennett notes, 'There were significant advances after the War, and these can be related to a fundamental change in the political climate, of which one major consequence was the emergence of the Welfare State,' (1995). It was

against this backdrop of national unity and welfare provision, that the first major government intervention into the arts began.

The early 1940s was, for Jim McGuigan, a discursive moment where *national prestige* became the dominant justification for government intervention in the arts (1996). In terms of Bennett's 'rationales' we see a definitive move away from the *laissez-faire* attitudes that had dominated the pre-war era and a shift towards a *Post-war Reconstruction and the Welfare State* rationale – one that was closely associated with a *Civilising Mission* and *Correcting the Market*. It was a triad of justifications that would dominate the post-war consensus era right up until 'the arrival of the "radical Conservativism" of the Thatcher years' (Bennett, 1995); but, before then, it was barely challenged despite the successive Conservative and Labour administrations.

Much has been written about the *Civilising Mission* as the rationale for government arts' subsidy at this time. Hewison (1995, 2014) and Chris Bilton (1997) have argued that in the case of the ACGB, the council inherited a contradictory ideology that contained within it a belief in 'widespread provision of opportunities for hearing good music and the enjoyment of the arts generally' alongside 'the encouragement of music-making and play-acting by the people themselves.' This was, according to Bilton (1997), due to the fact that CEMA had been built upon, 'on the one hand amateurism and participation born out of the adult education initiatives and programmes of the 1920s and 1930s: and on the other the idealistic idea of the transforming powers of professional arts based on access and cultural consumption.' (Bilton, 1997 in Maelen, 2008, p20.) It is an apparent conflict that has echoes of TS Eliot's campaign against welfare state cultural policies in which he saw the value of culture threatened by the 'dogma of equal opportunity,' (in Maelen, 2008, p21); and one which has continued down the ages, manifest most notably in the Community Arts' challenge to the Arts Council in the 1970s and 1980s and expressed, albeit with an aim to resolve the 'contradiction', in the title of the Arts Council's 2010 ten-year vision paper, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone* (ACE, 2010). Indeed, it is an argument contained within contemporary discussions about Cultural Democracy and the Democratisation of Culture and, therefore, receives further consideration in **Chapter 3**.

The *Civilising Mission*, in Bennett's thesis, is closely connected with the *Correcting the Market* rationale. The question of whether culture could fulfil its mission turns quite naturally to the question of 'how'? Is the market or is the state the most suitable vehicle for this mission? Market success, as a meaningful indicator of value, had already been rejected by The English Romantics (Bennett, 1995) with its tendency to produce works of 'popular' rather than 'cultural' acclaim. Moreover, by the 1940s, the rationale was that art – like healthcare and education – was a public good, not one that should be left to the vagaries of the market (Upchurch, 2016). So, leaving aside the question of quality (amateur or profession, popular or 'high' art) and whether the civilising mission was best achieved through arts consumption as (active) participant or (passive) audience, the main preoccupation of those early exponents of state subsidised cultural provision was the distribution of this public good.

According to the first ACGB annual report in 1945, 'national' institutions such as Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden would receive public subsidy, as well as 'local' initiatives such as the emerging Arts Clubs. In addition, plans for an all-purpose Arts Centre 'made to the Directors' specifications by the Design Unit of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning' were published, inviting local authorities and other bodies to comment on the design. This they did – offering both enthusiasm and constructive criticism. Alongside the necessity for decent housing provision, Keynes had already made a plea to local authorities to consider building an arts centre within their post-war town plans:

> *Yet I plead for a certain moderation from our controller and a few crumbs of mortar. The rebuilding of the community and of our common life must proceed in due proportion between one thing and another. We must not limit our provision too exclusively to shelter and comfort to cover us when we are asleep and allow us no convenient place of congregation and enjoyment when we are awake. I hope that a reasonable allotment of resources will be set aside each year for the repair and erection of the buildings we shall need.*
>
> The Arts Council of Great Britain, First Annual Report, Appendix A, 1945.

Although Keynes was more of a liberal reformer than a democrat *per se*, there is at least a democratic flavour to his thinking, his public proclamations were often imbued with calls

for an equitable distribution of provision around the country and he saw the Council's role being to support the flourishing of locally generated art and culture wherever enthusiasm and a desire could be found. His 1945 announcement to the press upon launching the new Arts Council of Great Britain, for instance, had pointed to the establishing of the BBC, with its healthy arts programming, as another reason for this widening interest in the Arts. In this announcement Keynes outlined his vision of arts centres being built in every blitzed town in Britain. People had had access to the Arts, he proclaimed, and they wanted more. When Keynes died soon after, and William Emrys Williams took over as chairman of the Council, its main concern was building enough venues to support this rising demand.

Unfortunately, within a decade, the Council's optimism at what it might achieve had waned. The immediate post-war sense of national unity and desire for change had given way to a more conservative public mood by the 1950s as pre-war social values were partially restored (Hewison, 1995). Certainly, for the Arts Council, the ambition to be the main public patron of the arts had disappeared. By 1953 it was floating the idea for a series of nation-wide 'Civic Arts Trusts' which could support the development and encouragement of arts provision in places across the country; and it had already begun to explore diversified (and localised) funding streams for arts and culture, realising it could not support everything it wished.

In its 1953-54 report the Arts Council lays down the role for the proposed Civic Arts Trusts which includes a kind of 'mapping exercise' to see where local provision is 'deficient', to find out why, and to cost-up how much subsidy would be required to meet that deficiency.

> *…the basic activities of a civic Arts Trust would be to discover the reasons why a city is so inadequately or sporadically provided with some or all of the arts…. [and] finding out what the city must provide in entrance money and subsidy to secure the various companies it wants to see.*
>
> Arts Council Annual Report 1953-54 – cited in King & Blaug, 1973.

That the emphasis here is on cities rather than smaller towns or rural areas – or even what we might today class as 'areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation – is indicative of the centralised policy of the time: a distribution of the 'national culture' geographically through purposive buildings in regional centres; and, where none existed, the idea was to build more, for 'housing the arts' – a phrase that would become a tangible policy by the mid-1960s

The proposal for Civic Arts Trusts in 1953 had a primary focus on cities, and an implicit suggestion of the imperative to 'provide', rather than to support local creation and production. In addition, there was an acknowledgement that where it had previously been felt amongst policymakers and arts advocates that the free market, left to its own devices, could not sustain public culture (King and Blaug, 1973), the arms-length body of the state charged with arts advocacy was struggling to meet that requirement. Moreover, as King and Blaug note, even though the Arts Council claimed that 90% of its grants went 'outside London', the mechanism for distributing money was London-centred and, according to Lord Eccles' statement to the House of Lords, the regions were still dependent on 'direct subsidies from the Arts Council plus events produced, packaged and subsidised in or from London and then sent round the provinces' (Hansard, Vol. 329, No. 55, 22 March 1972 in King and Blaug, 1973). In other words, there was little emphasis on, or provision for, nurturing localised talent.

Although the first of the Regional Arts Associations was set up in 1956, this issue of regional production and distribution would go on to haunt the council well into the following decades with the 1965 White Paper on regional distribution; the *Glory of the Garden* report in 1984; and, most recently, Stark, Gordon and Powell's 2013 report, *Rebalancing our Cultural Capital* which noted the disparity between 2012/13 per capita spending on culture in London at £65.18 per person, compared to the regions where that figure was £4.91 per person (Stark et al, 2013 in Upchurch, 2016).

However, along with this concern about a London-centric system of public patronage, or a 'metropolitan bias' (Griffiths et al, 2008 in Upchurch, 2016), by the mid-1950s there was another growing public concern: the Council's prioritising of 'elitist' institutions and the middle-class nature of arts patronage. It was a criticism rejected by the Council in their 1957 annual report, when chair W.E. Williams – drawing upon a distinction between the

amount of public spending on libraries and the arts – writes, 'The notion may perhaps survive in the minds of some who have not lately considered these matters that certain class distinctions are involved. The habitual visitor to the opera house and the concert hall is still imagined, perhaps, as a person of comfortable means, while the borrower from a public library is conceived to be a diligent but impoverished person improving his mind in a chilly bed-sitter. These are out-dated fantasies.' (ACGB, 1957). Nevertheless, in order to meet some of these criticism about elitism and uneven regional provision, The Arts Council proposed the Third Force (of patronage).

Amid concerns about the financial situations at Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden, the Third Force aimed to harness private sponsorship (including regional TV companies' support) to shore up provision outside London, with the distinct suggestion that this is where ideally local art should find its support – leaving the Council's funds directed towards more national (i.e., London-based) concerns, 'It is vital that patronage should retain its individuality, and that industrial patrons, especially, should make their own choice of beneficiaries…. Nothing could be more disastrous than for a municipality to diminish its subsidies to the arts because a regional TV company was lending a hand, or for a government to contract out of any of its present modest obligations to the arts because reinforcements had arrived from elsewhere. The Third Force implies an extension rather than a redistribution of our national responsibility for the arts, in money as well as benevolence, and its success will depend upon its being accepted as such by governments and municipalities,' (ACGB, 1957).

This response to the accusation of 'piecemeal patronage' of local arts and cultural provision, and the solution, tentatively proffered – of a move to greater partnership between municipality and localised commercial patronage of the arts – however, never really met the challenge it had been set. It wouldn't be until the Thatcher years, some 25 years later, when the UK saw a more robust commitment to this idea of combined state and corporate responsibility for the Arts (Chin-Tao, 2002).

The 1950s' appeal that patronage in the regions should not be the sole responsibility of the Arts Council continued into the 1960s, marked by the title of its annual report of 1960/61, *Partners in Patronage*. It was an appeal for local patronage to be shared by

‘individuals, local and central government, voluntary bodies, industry and the universities’ adding that they ‘rarely come together in any unified effort in any city or region,’ (ACGB 1961). A notable exception being the North East of England, which was singled out for praise. ‘So far, the only all-purpose body of such a kind to be initiated is the recently created North-Eastern Arts Council, which combines representatives of Local Authorities, voluntary bodies such as chambers of commerce, the Tees and Tyneside Independent Television Co., universities, industry and trade unions. It is an example which should be followed elsewhere.’

The remainder of the decade proved to be more successful in terms of regional dispersal of provision and enjoyed a ‘Golden Age’ under the Wilson Labour government of 1964-70 thanks to the close relationship between its Chairman, Arnold Goodman, and the UK’s first Arts Minister, Jennie Lee, appointed in 1965 (Shaw, 1987). It was during this period that the Council established a national network of arts organisations who then acted as regular client organisations. The White Paper of February 1965 was the first ever British White Paper on cultural policies, and it launched a number of important proposals including setting up a capital fund to encourage regional and local authorities and other agencies to join forces in the building of new venues and an increase in ACGB funding to continue the grant-in-aid programme – now with an emphasis on supporting new artistic ideas and touring (Maelen, 2008, p25). Most notably, in terms of encouraging greater participation, the White Paper also encouraged ACGB to ‘experiment with actions that would reduce or eliminate barriers to access the arts’ (Maelen, 2008, p25) these would include looking at things such as subsidised transport, better audience facilities, an adjustment to opening hours and reduced ticket prices for special attendance groups’ (DES, 1965 in Maelen, 2008, p26). As a result, the Council’s renewed Royal Charter from 1967 included, ‘an explicit pronouncement of the Council’s obligation to increase accessibility of the arts to the public throughout Britain and across social classes.’ (Belfiore, 2002 in Maelen, 2008, p26.)

The ‘housing the arts’ policy, floated as an idea the previous decade, became another central policy of the ACGB in the mid-1960s as the Council laid out a series of rules on the needs of regions, cities and towns to provide facilities for arts performances or exhibitions based on the number of inhabitants (Evans and Foord, 2008). This was

matched with a further commitment to supporting local developments and this, in turn, had a significant impact on the expenditure priorities of local authorities for the arts (Gray, 2002). All of which was a marked improvement to the immediate post-war period that saw local government being concerned with only small-scale commitments (Gray, 2002) and with a Local Government Act in 1948 (the sixpenny rate clause: Hodson, 1986) which allowed local authorities the discretion to raise money to provide entertainment but with strict limits on expenditure on the arts (Marshall, 1974 in Gray, 2002).

However, despite this 'Golden Age', many voices remained critical of the elitist nature of both the type of art being supported and the way in which funding was distributed. By 1970, the Arts Council was receiving, 'an increasing number of applications that were non-literary, improvisational, cross-disciplinary, and multimedia-based' (Saunders, 2012, p33 in Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017, p12). This led to the setting up of a new committee, 'the Experimental Projects Committee' designed to administer funding bids which were coming from outside the normal applications for ballet, theatre, opera, and visual arts. According to the Arts Council Annual Report of 1974 these were grouped into two general types: 'Performance Art' and 'Community Art' (ACGB, 1974).

Although the Community Arts Movement had become well-established in certain regions by the mid nineteen seventies, the Arts Council was yet to be convinced (Saunders, in Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017, p13) and a 'New Activities Committee' was set up to 'consider the relationship between experimental work and community arts projects,' (ACGB, 1974) and to make a judgement on how much the Council itself should be concerned with providing subsidies to this work. Which, they concluded, it should – but only in conjunction with local authorities and Regional Arts Associations who must also assume part of the subsidy responsibility (ACGB, 1974).

Although Community Art often had a political element, being concerned with how communities related to their immediate environment and, also, to the wider socio-political landscape, it is worth noting that the movement itself was not always specifically about reaching the working class, or – in today's language – people in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. Its focus was on widening access but not to a specific demographic and it was, 'initially more concerned with creativity and expression for its own sake,' (Blumer, 1980, p18 in Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017, p13) – for making people

aware of their own creative powers and how to make use of them to enrich their existence.

The impact of the OPEC crisis in 1973, and the following years of 'runaway inflation' and economic recession, began to take their toll on the ability of the state's arm's-length body to provide and sustain the arts and culture it had previously patronised. When Roy Shaw, the educationalist and advocate for adult and continuing education, became Secretary General of the Arts Council in 1975, many were surprised at his appointment but, for Shaw, the connection between his background and new role was obvious: 'I was aware that the Arts Council's chartered duties were to improve understanding of the arts and to make them more widely accessible. So, the move to the Council was merely a step towards implementing, on a national rather than a regional scale, a life-long concern.' (Shaw, 1987)

However, just as a commitment to greater access was being acknowledged, Shaw's first annual report as Secretary General in 1976 was subtitled 'The Arts in Hard Times', reflecting the economic hardship of the time. It is also within this report that we first see reference, in Council reports, to the notion of 'Cultural Democracy'.

> *There is, however, a new creed emerging, to which we are totally opposed. This is the belief that because standards have been set by the traditional arts and because those arts are little enjoyed by the broad mass of people, the concept of quality is `irrelevant'. The term cultural democracy has been invoked by those who think in this way, to describe a policy which rejects discrimination between good and bad and cherishes the romantic notion that there is a 'cultural dynamism' in the people which will emerge if only they can be liberated from the cultural values hitherto accepted by an elite and from what one European `cultural expert' has recently called ` the cultural colonialism of the middle classes'.*
>
> Arts Council Annual Report, 1975-76.

Shaw's argument for resisting Cultural Democracy is based on the reasoning that it is insulting to the 'broad mass of people' because it assumes they will not enjoy art of a 'high standard'. Thus, the perpetual tension that has plagued the Council ever since – between excellence and access, between 'great art" and 'everyone' – emerges in full bloom during this time; undoubtedly fuelled by the increasing influence of the

Community Arts Movement of the 60s, 70s and 80s. And, in terms of our current historical analysis of provision as it relates to economically deprived areas, it is worth noting that it is within this climate of accusations of elitism, the growing community arts movement and economic recession that the Council really begins to turn its attention to those people who ordinarily hadn't had the chance to enjoy arts and culture provision. Thus, although Shaw is opposed to the notion of Cultural Democracy as it is expressed by the Community Arts Movement, we can see an increased interest in the idea of 'participation':

> *This demagogic doctrine insults the very people it is supposed to help. On the other hand, what is undoubtedly true is that many people who have had no chance to enjoy the arts can be helped to approach them by being encouraged to participate in creative activity rather than merely to experience it passively. It is this feature of community arts which is of particular interest to the Council. We have given work of this kind some encouragement over the past two years and the results are currently being reviewed. But here as elsewhere, we must not jettison our concern for standards, and we need to improve, not abandon, our methods of assessing them.*
>
> Arts Council Annual Report, 1975-76, p7

We also see here the first reference to the Council wishing to find 'methods of assessing [them]'. However, the report is referring to the quality of the artform and the provision as the thing that needs to be assessed, rather than the phenomenon we are more familiar with today of assessing the impact upon the participants themselves. That conception would take the following two decades to reach its full exposition and the shift in the UK from a mixed economy to the monetarism associated with the Thatcher government (1979-1993), and then the inclusion of a social-policy agenda within a monetaristic economy under Tony Blair (1997-2007).

Rather than being an early proponent of impact assessments, and of asserting the value – economic, social or otherwise – of the arts upon *the individual*, Roy Shaw was more interested in the arts' contribution to '*the collectivity*' (Shaw, 1987, p24) and of promoting the 'public good':

> *People enjoy playing football or swimming, but these activities would not receive public facilities if it were not for the fact that they also contribute to public health. Similarly, the arts are pleasurable and contribute to our spiritual, emotional, and moral health; by doing that they promote the public good.*
>
> Shaw, R., 1987, The Arts and the People, p24.

Whilst not altogether dismissive of the emerging emphasis on the economic benefits of the arts, Shaw was always keen to make arguments that today would be called, 'arts for art's sake'. Taking his term as Secretary General during the mid-1970s, as he did, Shaw sits at the cusp of the transition from the old post-war consensus and the new emerging monetarist economy; and in many ways we can see his views as representing the last of the old vanguard advocating for the arts as a public good, as the 1980s heralded in a new era of instrumentalization of the arts and the individualisation of the right to make art:

> *Professor J.K. Galbraith has convincingly argued that vigorous artistic life has its impact on design in industry and the 1982 all-party parliamentary report showed that the arts then constituted a £200 million industry – and one which, by attracting tourism and other spin-offs, earns far more than the amount of government subsidy. … however, I am not concerned with such benefits, vital as they are. It is more important to demonstrate that the arts, as well as religion, remind us that man does not live by bread alone.*
>
> Shaw, R., 1987, The Arts and the People, p27.

As we shall see in the following section, it was an argument that Shaw (and others) would ultimately lose. Moreover, from Shaw's part-autobiographical account of his time at the Arts Council, and the short study of arts policy during the first 30 years of The Arts Council contained within this section, we can see that Keynes's original claim to *support* arts and culture *everywhere* never really took hold. Not in a way that could satisfy that post-war hunger for the arts at any rate. The interests and passions, stirred by those factory concerts, town hall exhibitions and touring theatre shows, struggled to survive in any sustained way – particularly outside the big cities. State-supported provision in economically deprived areas all but disappeared almost as soon as 'the people' no longer needed a wartime, national morale boost from arts and culture. Moreover, as the social

and economic crises of the 1970s took effect and the shift from a post-industrial order was marked by an attendant cultural shift from modernism to post-modernism, the post-war consensus broke down entirely, taking with it the notion of art as a public good.

2.3 Expanding cultural policy and provision: mid-1970s to the present

If 1940 marks the beginning of the modern period in official British cultural policy (Shaw, 1987, Hewison, 1995), it is – as the following section aims to show – a period of two halves. As we saw in section **2.2** there had been a genuine attempt to expand the availability of culture to as many people as possible (O'Doherty, 1972) not only throughout the period of the Second World War, under the stewardship of CEMA, but also in the years immediately following the war, known in Britain as a period of 'Post War Consensus'. Although, this period presented challenges in terms of expanding provision, there were consistent efforts to meet them in the form of the 1950s Civic Trusts, the establishment of the Regional Arts Associations in 1959, the Partners in Patronage concept of the 1960s and the early work of Community Arts Movement. The first 30 years of official British cultural policy was marked by a sense of 'public good' – sometimes said to possess educational value, civilising qualities, or intrinsic value (Selwood, 2010). In addition, to the latter part of this period, in terms of McGuigan's discursive moments, we might add that the mid-1960s to the late 1970s was defined by an ethos of *Social Access* (McGuigan, 1996).

However, by the early 1970s, a new era of hardship loomed. In 1972, with the publication of O'Doherty's *Museums in Crisis*, the author signalled an end to the boom in the expansion of the state's cultural 'sector' that had been in existence since the end of World War Two. Similarly, for Roy Shaw, the early 70s represented an end to a period he called 'The Golden Age' of arts and culture in the UK. As he notes in his book, *The Arts and the People*, the new decade was, instead, marked by one of hardship for the arts:

> *…the oil crisis had begun to bite and the Labour government had some excuse for not being generous enough to the arts. I called my first annual report 'The Arts in Hard Times'; but times became harder and my work satisfaction slightly declined*

> *after the advent of Mrs Thatcher's Tory government in 1979. … Except for the period of less than ten years from the mid-1960s to the oil crisis in the early 1970s, [collective patronage of the arts] continued to be insufficient.*
>
> Shaw, 1987, pp13-14.

This level of hardship naturally affected any plans the Arts Council had to extend or support provision; instead – through Shaw's leadership – the Council continued to make a more generalised defence of funding for the arts (particularly traditional performing and visual arts) as a public good, and sought to democratise access through education (Shaw, 1974). The growing Community Arts Movement, on the other hand, offered a different approach. According to art historian, Claire Bishop, the aims of the movement were:

> *positioned against the hierarchies of the international arts world and its criteria for success founded upon quality, skill, virtuosity etc. since these concealed class interests; it advocated participation and co-authorship of works of art; it aimed to give shape to the creativity of all sectors of society; but especially to people living in areas of social, cultural and financial deprivation; for some it was also a powerful medium for social and political change, providing the blueprint for participatory democracy.*
>
> Bishop C., 2012, p177 in Jeffers & Moriary, 2017, pp4-5

In recognition of the growing strength of the movement, in 1974, the Arts Council's Experimental Projects Committee formerly split into 'performance arts' and 'community arts'. Although its chairman, Professor Harold Baldry, recommended the Arts Council should be directly engaged in subsidising community arts, in reality the Council was keener to outsource this responsibility to the Regional Arts Associations due to the movement's focus on 'social and educational benefit' rather than simply 'art'. As Jeffers notes:

> *Paradoxically, on the one hand, the location of community arts projects in all parts of the UK and in places very far, both geographically and socially, from the centres of excellence in London and the major cities allowed the Arts Council to fulfil its*

national remit. On the other hand, the local or grass-roots nature of much of this work precluded the Arts Council from fully supporting it.

Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017, p15

Whilst Regional Arts Associations and Local Authorities supported the work of community arts organisations throughout the 70s, the work was heavily reliant on charitable bodies, trusts, and foundations for financial support (Jeffers, 2017). Furthermore, in 1974, The Gulbenkian Foundation commissioned Lord Redcliffe-Maud to undertake a study on how best to support community art. His report, published in 1976, recommended greater spending through the new structures of local government whilst noting:

…community artists set themselves to stimulate rather than perform […] Their conviction is that local people should not only themselves control the buildings and equipment need by the arts but should themselves take the decisions about what is need and refuse the exclusive role of passive audience.

Redcliffe-Maud, 1976, p91 in Jeffers and Moriarty, 2017, p16

His central recommendation was that devolution to the regional level would make raising government support for public participation more likely; but, as community arts didn't prioritise raising artistic standards, support at the national level should concentrate on 'quality', leaving participatory arts to the regional and local bodies (Redcliffe-Maud, 1967 in Maelen, 2008, p28).

Although this moment appears to exemplify the tension between democratisation of culture (a position occupying the Arts Council) and cultural democracy (as propounded by the community arts movement), Bennett argues that, 'both accorded culture and the arts a key role in personal and social transformation,' (1996). In other words, the community artist's belief in the transforming potential of arts mirrored that of the idealist tradition (found in Schiller and Arnold) of the civilising effects of culture. The community arts movement was, in effect, invoking Arnold's faith in culture, disguised in the language of Marx (Bennett, 1997, in Maelen, 2008, p29).

However, despite its focus on participation, the Community Arts Movement, rather than becoming embedded in the communities, its people, buildings and resources, became reliant on the hard work of a small group of dedicated artists and activists and, ultimately, could not resist the ideology of the 1980s, in which the Conservative Party – elected for a second term on a strong mandate in 1983 – wanted to wean the arts away from a 'welfare state mentality' as Arts Minister, Richard Luce, explained it four years later in 1987 (Becks, 1989 p367 – in Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017).

Furthermore, for participatory advocates, the requests for government funding for work in economically deprived areas were met with an equally expanding bureaucratic requirement to provide evidence of its quality of provision and, eventually, proof of its 'value' (Hewison, 2014). Thus, when the Arts Council's *The Glory of the Garden* report was published in 1984, with its recommendation that responsibility for arts' support be de-centralised to the Regional Arts Associations except for a small number of companies of 'national significance' it essentially undermined the strength of the Community Arts Movement as a national network altogether (Jeffers, 2017 p42).

The de-centralisation of support for the arts and the failure of the Community Arts Movement to deeply embed its ideas and techniques within all but a small number of communities coincided with the fact that, during the 1980s, the old post-war ideas about arts and culture being a 'public good' - possessing both educational and intrinsic value – had lost ground as an argument for subsidising the arts (Selwood, 2010).

Within the *laissez-faire* world of the Thatcher-Reagan era, the idea that state support constituted a device for countering 'market failure' was also under fire - from both left and right (Selwood, 2010). Without the framework of the traditional economic argument that the state has a duty to provide where the market fails - particularly in terms of a public good (Cowen, 1988), the argument that art and culture should be supplied and distributed as part of a thriving democracy floundered. Instead, the Arts Council found itself under pressure to justify its subsidies in monetaristic economic terms – first in terms of supporting 'entrepreneurialism' within the arts sector, then by promoting the instrumental role of the arts as part of an urban policy agenda (Bennett, 2010).

Although public funding for the arts continued to rise from 1979, the year of Mrs Thatcher's first election victory, this was not in line with the high inflation of the time (between 12% and 18%) and had levelled off by 1988 (Selwood, 2010). The commitment to neo-liberalism saw the Conservative government of the 1980s pour time, effort and money into their belief that arts patronage should be brought into the realm of business (Chin-Tao, 1990). Furthermore, under the chairmanship of William Rees-Mogg (1982-89) the Arts Council underwent major reform. State sponsorship, in the form of Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) was cut in half and entrance fees were introduced at many public institutions; tax laws were also enacted to encourage private funding, and initiatives such the Association for Business Sponsorship for the Arts (ABSA) and the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme (BSIS) were set up to enhance a culture of corporate giving.

Although the economic benefits of the arts and, in turn, the development of the 'creative industries' is today seen as having its roots in those neo-liberal ideas of the 1980s, Bennett argues that the economic justification for subsidising the arts were first used in Britain during the 19th Century when exposure to the fine arts, it was believed, would improve the taste of the working man and lead him to manufacture goods of higher quality, thus boosting the country's export potential (Minhan, 1977 in Bennett, 1997).

However, in western Europe, in the 1980s this argument was given a more sophisticated justification when governments commissioned reports to demonstrate the economic benefits of the arts (Hansen, 1995, and van Puffelen, 1996, in Bennett, 1997), and the language changed from 'subsidy' to 'investment' as if to reinforce this economic focus. The reports gave rise to a wide number of arguments, not just that the arts were an industry but that they were a major employer, they could create jobs cheaply – more cheaply than other public job creation programmes – and that they were a major export earner, vital to the tourist industry and a major tool of urban and regional development – leading firms to invest in one place rather than another (Bennett, 1997).

The American economist Tyler Cowen (1998) has made a strong argument for allowing the arts to be brought into the realm of the free market, arguing that the market is libertarian with regard to taste and not at all censorious like the state (cited in McGuigan,

2005). However, in an article for Arts Professional entitled 'The Thatcher Hangover' (2013) Chrissie Tiller makes the point that where the market fails, and the arts must rely on philanthropic giving, it can only do so with any kind of real effect where arts institutions and organisations already possess kudos from having received sustained state funding. The smaller, out-of-city arts group or initiative is not well-placed to attract this kind of sponsorship. Furthermore, as Bennett (1997) has argued, when the economic case for the arts is made, it becomes subject to the competition of the market and therefore needs to demonstrate that it is the most cost-effective means of achieving the desired outcome and it is not clear that it would win in this argument to more economically productive players.

It is from these policy agendas of the 1980s, that we also find the roots of the contemporary notion of measuring the 'impact' of the arts. In *Measuring the Value of Culture* O'Brien notes, 'Since the 1980s the value of the cultural sector has been demonstrated through the lens of 'impact', whether economic (e.g. Myerscough 1988) or social (e.g. Matarasso 1997)'. [O'Brien, 2010.]

However, Matarasso's 1997 work, *Use or Ornament?* – a report produced for the New Labour think-tank *Comedia* – was, in some ways, offering a competing discourse to that of Myerscough's 1988 economic study; placing emphasis on the social – rather than the economic – impact. The focus was on human outcomes such as personal development, social cohesion, and community empowerment; moreover, it was a study which favoured a participatory and joint-evaluation model (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016). Nevertheless, a number of academics have raised concerns about the prevalence of the so-called 'impact studies' with Matarasso's work coming in for particular criticism (Merli, 2002; Selwood, 2002; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007) possibly, in part, due to its influence across the sector and on the government of that time. The report became the cornerstone of New Labour's programme to increase spending on the arts in the UK and, as such, was incredibly influential within the sector and continues to be regarded as a seminal work that defined the current paradigm of thinking about participatory art.

The *Comedia* report made impressive claims for the social impacts of participating in the arts and it also made a compelling case to many policymakers, that participatory arts

could be a panacea for many of society's ills. Critics contend, however, that rather than conducting a genuine inquiry into whether the arts do, in fact, have positive impacts, the researcher's starting point was one of aiming to provide evidence to support the policy of the day (Merli, 2002). Further still, that this relationship between policy and research has led to a wider trend of over-claiming the social benefits of arts participation (Belfiore, 2009) without a complete understanding of the cognitive, psychological and socio-cultural dynamics that govern the aesthetic experience (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007b).

This phenomenon became defined as instrumentalism in cultural policy (Belfiore and Bennett, 2006b) which led to further criticism of the then ruling Labour Party for its lack of ability to defend the intrinsic value of art (Belfiore and Bennett, 2006b, Gray, 2000, Hytner, 2003). This, in turn, led to successive Labour arts ministers – Estelle Morris (2003) and Tessa Jowell (2004) – acknowledging what they saw as the tension between the 'instrumental' and the 'intrinsic' value of culture (Maelen, 2008). Although this tension did appear, superficially at least, to resolve an old conflict between access and excellence when the newly reformed Arts Council of England (ACE) announced its first manifesto, Ambition for the Arts (2003-2006) with the affirmation that 'access to the arts goes hand in hand with artistic excellence. Participation, contribution and engagement in the arts are the bridge between access and excellence.' (ACE, 2003).

However, the tension between instrumental and intrinsic remained and was identified as a problematic trend. For instance, O'Brien (2010) noted that attempts to measure *instrumental* value didn't sit well with the cultural sector as it meant the sort of reductionism which ignores the *intrinsic* value of the arts. However, he went on to outline a sort of symbiotic relationship of mutual reliance that existed between government and the cultural sector. Cultural Historian, Robert Hewison goes further still. In *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain (2014),* he argues that at the dawn of the New Labour era a sort of 'Faustian Pact' took place between the arts sector and government:

> *In exchange for a dramatic £290m hike in the government grant to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (whose total budget was to pass the £1bn mark by 2001), the arts would be required to contribute to a (not very*

> *distant) post-Thatcherite agenda of marketised public services pursuing the government's economic and social objectives.*
>
> *Hewison, R. 2014*

It is easy to see why those working within the cultural sector were drawn to the arguments about the social benefits of the arts. For a sector largely at odds with the prevailing neo-liberal agenda which seeks to monetise 'value' (Hewison, 2014), the pull towards a more socially conscious justification for a share of the public purse could seem irresistible. This is perhaps why many arguments for the benefits of the arts persist, almost two decades after the publication of *Use or Ornament?* and those publications which were critical of its claims. Furthermore, Hewison (2014) has suggested that, from 2008 onwards and particularly with the crisis in the financial sector, the term 'public value' had been used to 'square the intrinsic/instrumentalist circle' – although he admits this period of attempting to reconcile the two was short-lived.

In the discussion that surrounded the Arts Council of England (ACE)'s publication of *Achieving Great Art for Everyone* (2010) – there was a further attempt to resolve the contradiction between excellence (*Great Art*), on the one hand; and access (*Everyone)* on the other. Whilst Dave O'Brien's report, *Are the Creative Industries Meritocratic?* (2014) finds the arts sector dominated by those from middle-class backgrounds and that there is a continuing tensile relationship between *professional* and *participatory* art.

Nevertheless, even if we accept that there was a need to justify arts spending in the face of a Conservative government policy of 'austerity', it is still the case that, in the New Labour era, an increase in spending and the widening of social access to the arts did not succeed (Hewison, 2014). In a Guardian review of Hewison's book, the playwright David Edgar cites the author as having noted:

> *…between 2005 and 2013… the 'voracious' arts audience – regular attenders active in two or more arts domains – …was as little as 4% of the population…. And all researchers agreed that the arts audience remained stubbornly whiter, older and more educated than the general population.*
>
> The Guardian, December 2014 [online]

The authors of the 2016 comprehensive and widely read 'Cultural Value Project' report, which was commissioned by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and deals with the topic of how to value and thus measure 'culture', also draw upon some of the problems of this so-called pact. In *Understanding the value of Arts & Culture* (2016), Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kazynska argue that this trajectory, 'subsequently created a climate in which the cultural sector felt obliged to make its case for public funding in terms *different from those of the cultural experience itself*.' Moreover, that, 'The focus on evidence of instrumental benefits meant that cultural institutions vacated the territory where a case for *the distinctive contribution of the arts* might have been made.'

There are, therefore, those who argue that we need to move away from a utilitarian view of the arts (Crossick and Kazynska, 2016; Belfiore and Bennet 2008, 2009, 2016). Not least because it is clear to see how, when subsumed into a larger social and economic policy brief, it has been easier for those pursuing a neo-liberal agenda to justify cuts to the arts in an 'age of austerity'. As Crossick and Kazynska say, '…the substance of value is elusive when approached through formal practices of grading, designation, re-designation, and designation removal.' (2016, p.21)

A third issue regarding the general acceptance of claims for the benefits of the arts; and the factor which may ultimately inform their resilience, centres on the point raised earlier about *who* is doing the measuring and, indeed, whose value(s) are we measuring them against? This is a concern centred largely upon 'class'. And it is a potentially perilous territory, where one risks falling into the trap of treating *'middle-class' v 'working-class' values* as akin to *'elitist' v 'democratic'* notions about the appreciation of art which they are not.

However, in the latter half of the twentieth century Bourdieu had been particularly influential in arguing that judgements of taste are related to social position. In fact, he argues that aesthetic judgements are conscious or unconscious acts of social positioning (Bourdieu, 1979). Merli cites Bourdieu's *Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception*, first published in 1968, as an argument that the arts exist only for those who are able to decipher them:

> *…the recapturing of the work's objective meaning […] is completely adequate and immediately effected in the case—and only in the case—where the culture that the originator puts into the work is identical with the culture or, more accurately, the artistic competence which the beholder brings to the deciphering of the work.*
>
> Merli, 2002, pp107-118

An argument which, ultimately, concludes that involvement in participatory arts is a cultivated need, not a primary need:

> *…thus asking people whether they are satisfied with participatory arts programmes is arguably not fair unless those who are being surveyed are fully aware of their cultural deprivation. Yet because of the particular characteristics of awareness of deprivation identified by Bourdieu, it is probably not correct to use questionnaire surveys to assess whether socially deprived people are satisfied with participatory arts programmes. In-depth interviews might prove to be a better tool because they offer chances to compensate, though only in part, for distortions in communication, allowing the interviewee to ask questions and obtain information from the researcher, and enabling the researcher to understand—and not simply to measure—the ideas and the feelings of the interviewee.*
>
> Merli, 2002, p117

In Nina Simon's The Art of Relevance (2016) we find a recent return to the suggestion that the largely middle-class arts sector needs to be wary of assuming the value of their work is relevant to everyone:

> *The key is that relevance is not about you: 'It's not about what you think people need to want or deserve. It's about them – their values, their priorities.*
>
> Simon, N., 2016, p27

Simon's argument is essentially one of agency, of not making assumptions based upon one's own beliefs about others' wants and needs.

This is central to the idea of Cultural Democracy and marks a differentiation from the democratisation of 'a culture' (singular), placing the participant or audience member in a more prominent role than the traditional 'top-down' artist to audience dynamic. '"Cultural Democracy" may be defined a one founded on free individual choice, in which the role of a cultural policy is not to interfere with the preferences expressed by citizen-consumers but to support the choices made by the individuals or social groups through a regulatory policy applied to the distribution of information of the structure of supply, as happens in other types of markets." (Evrard, 1997). Evrard goes on to suggest that the two models – the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy exist in a kind of 'Copernican' opposition. This is explored more thoroughly in **Chapter 3**.

In this chapter, however, this thesis has attempted to chart an historical journey through the official Cultural Policy of the UK, particularly as it relates to people who would now be classed as living in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation (although the term itself does not extend as far back as the period under analysis). It has been argued that the history of cultural policy falls into two broadly defined eras. From the 1940s to the mid-1970s it was dominated by a sense that the arts were a 'public good' sometimes said to possess intrinsic, civilising or educational value – sometimes all three. A public good has the characteristic of being non-rivalry and non-excludable, i.e., its consumption by one person does not reduce the amount available to others and it is not possible to provide this good without the possibility of everyone enjoying it – a symphony, a play, a ballet or an opera, once produced, do not diminish in enjoyment and they exist (in essence) for all time, to be enjoyed by anyone who chooses to engage. However, this 'good' has been limited, in terms of access, and the period was also replete with arguments, initiatives, strategies and counterstrategies to increase this access. What was less in question was the need for the state to provide this good where the market would fail to supply. In an era dominated by a mixed economy and post-war political consensus, there was very little substantial challenge to this notion.

It was, according to Anna Rosser Upchurch (2016), a period of Cultural Policy dominated by two privileged groups – philanthropists and intellectuals – who were allies in this process of policymaking with regard to the 'symbolic sphere of human life' (2016, p201). They persuaded governments to provide support to foundations, universities, libraries,

museums, and arts councils, to essentially create a cultural infrastructure that would nurture and encourage their humanist values (2016, p201). These liberal, humanist values (expressed through the liberal arts) found their roots in the rationalist project of the Enlightenment (Habermas, 1987) and flourished in an age of Modernism that defined the era.

It was a period the author and academic Noel Annan has described as one dominated by 'The Intellectual Aristocracy' (Annan, 1955 in Upchurch, 2016, p201); an 'elite' that was eventually eclipsed during the Thatcher years when intellectual expertise was replaced by a new kind of policy expertise, one which emphasised targets, outcomes and instrumental values. (Upchurch, 2016, p202). Griffiths et al (2008) have examined this 'rise and fall' argument from a sociological perspective, concluding that while, 'the neo-liberalisation' of cultural policymaking had diminished the power of the old boys' network, it had given way to a distinctive 'metropolitan formation', which resulted in 'a process where traditional intellectual elites have proved able to remake their authority through playing key roles as brokers in more dispersed social networks.'

This new era of neo-liberalisation or marketisation, surfaced in the first half of the 1970s (Maelen, 2008, p33) and continued to dominate the era that followed. According to Selwood (2010), the experience of the creative industries in London challenged the idea that public subsidy was organised around finding audiences for artists' work, suggesting it should be the other way round. This is exemplified by Nina Simon's 'The Art of Relevance' thesis (2016) where relevance to the audience or participant is placed on an equal footing, if not above, the expressive desires of the artist. Selwood further argues that, over the course of the 1980s, public subsidy became more justified in economic terms. 'At the beginning of the decade, it [the Arts Council] encouraged arts organisations' entrepreneurialism; by the end of the decade, it was promoting the instrumental role of the arts in the service of urban policy. By the time of Mrs Thatcher's third election victory in 1987, the arms' length agreement had visibly eroded' (Selwood, 2010).

According to Bennett (1996) the concerns around access took on a different formation during this period too; the democratisation argument became 'stripped of its missionary

language, the idea of access was conceptualised as… a kind of human right' (Bennett, 1996, p4). Thus, the concept of a public good, became replaced by the notion of an individual right. This can be seen in the ethos of the impact surveys which focus on individual personal development and its descendent the Arts Council's quality metrics with a focus on the self-confidence and self-esteem of the individual participant.

Bennett argues that cultural policy became translated into a different set of actions at the level of the Arts Council too, particularly with regard to access; it focused on increasing its support for touring and offered support to keep ticket prices down, arts organisations were encouraged to build audiences through offering educational programmes and enhancing their marketing techniques. (Bennett, 1996, in Maelen, 2008, p50). In terms of what kind of art should be supported, any kind of consensus which might have existed in the previous era, had now completely broke down (Bennett, 1997). The qualitative distinctions between high art and popular culture were now blurred and absorbed by the cultural sector's alignment with the leisure industry, making it harder to argue for one type of cultural provision over another. That this was accompanied by 'the massive increase in both the rate and volume of cultural production, which now characterises our media-saturated societies,' (Bennett, 1997). This, Bennett argues, meant a shift away from an arts-dominated concept of culture, towards one of culture in 'its broadest sense' as a way of living which became 'deeply embedded in the so-called era of postmodernity' (Bennett, 1997).

Chapter 3: Arts for Everyone or Everyone's Culture?

3.1 Aspects of Culture

As we saw in Chapter 2, there are those who have argued that the concept of culture has been gradually broadening in what some have regarded as a philosophical paradigmatic shift between the modernist and postmodernist eras (Bennett, 1997); a concept that has been expanded from one which focused on a narrower, arts dominated idea where 'culture is used to describe the product of intellectual, and particularly, artistic activity… music, drama, dance, painting, sculpture, literature, film and so on.' (Bennett, 1995) to one which sees culture in its broadest sense, and which 'has an anthropological meaning and refers to a whole way of life - as in Japanese culture, American culture, Black culture, youth culture and so on,' (Bennett, 1995). It is in this latter sense, culture as a way of living, that has become 'deeply embedded in the so-called era of postmodernity' (Bennett, 1997).

Definitions of the word 'culture' are notoriously riddled with difficulty. Raymond Williams described it as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language, partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages [with differing etymologies coming to denote differing connotations], but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.' (Williams, R., 1976, p87)

In *The Three Faces of Culture*, Dick Stanley attempts to bring together some of those incompatible systems of thought by proposing that the concept of culture has three aspects - or 'faces' - which work together in a mutually reinforcing dynamic model, propelled by the forces of socialisation, education, and experience (see **Fig 2** below). We use culture (S) as **a tool kit of meanings** to understand issues in our daily lives and develop strategies to deal with them. We obtain this tool kit through education and socialisation which draws upon our traditions and heritage (H) and we introduce major new meanings and test them through the creative arts and culture (C), to ensure that our tool kit is up to date and we remain equipped to deal with the ever-changing environment in which we find ourselves.

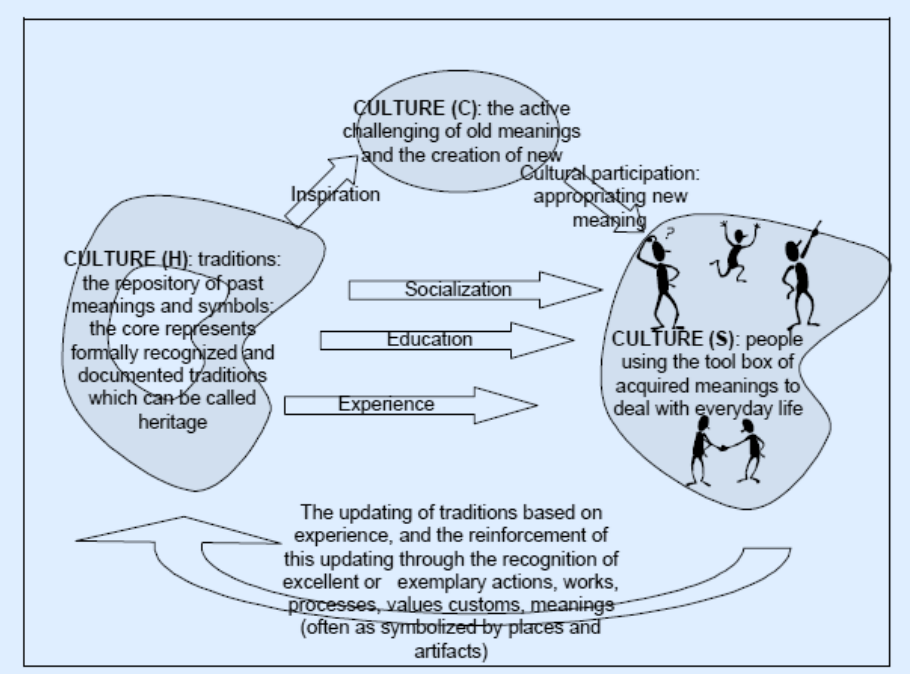

Fig 2: The Three Faces of Culture, Stanley, Dick (2005) in Caroline Andrew, ed. *Accounting for culture: Thinking through cultural citizenship*.

The 'face' of Culture (S) is a sociological definition and draws on the work of sociologist Ann Swidler who sees culture as a took kit or a 'repertoire of beliefs, practices, understandings and modes of behaviour from which actors select different pieces for constructing lines of action to deal with the manifold situations they face in everyday life,' (Swidler, A., 1998)

The view of Culture (H) is based on culture as the heritage of excellence in human intellect and artistic achievement. It draws upon the more traditionalist view of culture, espoused by Matthew Arnold, that culture is "the best which has been thought or said in the world." (Arnold, M., 1869) It was this articulation that offered justification for the 19th century development of museums, monuments, national historic sites, public libraries and archives, all institutions built to satisfy the passions of the time for the social status to be earned by being civilized or cultivated.

The third aspect of culture – the arts as culture – is, according to Arts Consultant, Alberta Arthurs, the most familiar use of the word, a common-sense usage, 'as well as various dictionary definitions: "the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement,"' (1996) This aspect has itself, been expanded to include the related

processes of the 'creative industries' which includes 13 distinct industries – advertising, architecture, art and antiques, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software and computer services and TV and radio – according to government and cultural policymakers.

If we take Dick's attempt to find a coherent model for embracing 'the three faces of culture' and add Bennett's 'media-saturated societies' (1997) with their 'huge increase in cultural production' then it's little wonder that the postmodernists of the late 1970s and early 80s declared 'art is everywhere' (Baudrillard, 1983).

Whether or not we go as far as Baudrillard who, in finding the world to be so saturated with reproductions of itself, declared that reality now *is* artifice, rendering the transcendental qualities once claimed for the arts impotent (1988, in Bennett, 1997), it is clear that cultural policy of the early 21st century is far removed from the first official cultural policy of the 1940s.

The historical analysis in **Chapter 2** gave some indications of the practical, individual developments and manifestations of the way this has developed and has highlighted a perpetual tension between 'excellence' and access', with various attempts to reconcile these. However, as we have seen, these have not always been successful.

3.2 The 'deficit' model of arts and culture

In 2015, The Warwick Commission published a report entitled, *Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth* in which it was claimed that the UK Arts Council model has nurtured a situation where government subsidised arts and culture is being consumed by only 15% of the population (in Upchurch 2016, pp. 207-208). Further, that those who do so are predominantly wealthy, well-educated, and white. The report echoed a series of criticisms within the arts sector and academia that the Arts Council model had failed to 'enhance democracy and creative expression by a wide diversity of citizens' (Upchurch, 2016 p208). In response to this growing body of criticism, a range of initiatives to support arts and culture provision in areas where people have had little access to the arts has emerged – typically in economically deprived areas. One of the main challenges facing

these initiatives is how to sustain provision once the project reaches its conclusion and when the funding runs out. In other words, how to embed a sustainable (or self-sustaining) model of cultural provision which is also the question at the heart of this research.

The idea that the Arts Council model of subsidised provision has failed to enhance democratic access to, and participation in, is termed the 'deficit model' of arts and culture. However, where the blame lies for this 'deficit', or with whom, is a matter of debate, as we shall see below.

The term 'deficit model' was first used in the 1980s in connection with making science accessible to the public (Dickenson, 2005). It was believed that the deficit in understanding from non-experts (the public), came from a deficit of information provided by the experts (the scientists). The argument was that if the public had greater access to information, this would lead to a greater understanding and interest in science, rather than the uncertainty and scepticism which was said to define the relationship.

We see this definition echoed in the application of the idea to arts and culture. However, the 'deficit model', when applied to the arts sector is further interpreted in a number of ways, with three arguments predominating. The first offers the simplest parallel with the science deficit model. It maintains that all that is required of the experts (the artists and arts organisations) is to raise public understanding of the arts and its 'accessibility', then their interest will follow. As such, it is incumbent on publicly funded organisations to actively 'reach out' to a more diverse range of people. Through funding requirements and sector discourse, the Arts Council, local authorities and other policymakers have encouraged arts organisations to offer participatory, education and outreach programmes to engage with those who don't ordinarily access their offer (Jancovich, 2015). Whether inadvertent or not, this argument places the blame for the deficit at the feet of those cultural organisations who receive public funding, but don't engage with a diverse range of people.

From the post-war historical analysis undertaken in Chapter 2, we saw that this concern about *who* is accessing state subsidised arts and culture has been part of the debate since

as early as the formation of the council itself – and, if we were to take our historical analysis further back, we would find its antecedents in many European countries. However, despite challenges from the Community Arts Movement of the 1970s and 1980s, the Arts Council has, to a certain extent, been able to maintain its position that providing and supporting 'quality' was its primary aim. Questions about *for whom* have been generally subordinate to *what* and *where.* I.e., criticisms have tended to focus on the type of art form being given support (ballet and opera, as 'elitist' forms, for instance) and the relative amount of money spent in the capital compared to the provinces. These issues have been the subject of reports from the *Glory of the Garden* in 1964 to *Rebalancing our Cultural Capital*, Stark, Gordon and Powell in 2013.

However, the question of *who* has always lain beneath the *what* and the *where*. By definition, elitist artforms are said to be more relevant and accessible to a certain section of society - i.e., the upper and the middle classes who might more easily afford them and whose values they might more accurately reflect; whilst subsidy to institutions in the country's wealthy capital - although not home solely to the rich - has always raised questions about who can access the most heavily subsidised culture:

> *The consistent theme about Britain's cultural policy not only since 1945, but probably long before, has been its exclusivity: the overwhelming skew of funding to the pleasures of the elite, to London and to traditional art forms, and the deep hostility to any form of democratisation.*
>
> Mulgan, G., 1996 in Hewison, R., 2014, p22

It was only with the introduction of the DCMS *Taking Part* survey in 2005/2006 that a more accurate demographic breakdown emerged of who was and wasn't using the subsidised cultural offer. One aim of the annual household survey was to measure the success of government's arm's length agencies (in this case, the Arts Council) in 'achieving increased engagement from different socio-economic and cultural groups.' (DCMS, 2006, cited in Jancovich, 2015). Whilst early findings provided the 'deficit model' critics with the 15% wealthy, well-educated and white figure, they also revealed that 'the main barriers to engagement were […] 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). They further uncovered the fact that there was a

reluctance on behalf of non-regular arts attenders to enter the very buildings charged with increasing access, participation and engagement.

For some, the centring of cultural provision on these buildings/institutions is, in fact, reinforcing disengagement (Holden, 2006). In other words, if people don't feel comfortable visiting cultural buildings, why centre the provision there? Whilst other research has revealed that some funded organisations see the 'participation problem' as not a deficit in the culture being offered, but a deficit within the public themselves (Miles, 2013). Non-regular arts attenders are regarded as needing to be 'coaxed into engagement through education programmes or concessionary prices' (Jancovich, 2015). Thus, we find the second interpretation of the 'deficit model': it is not those organisations in receipt of public funds, but the public themselves who are to blame for the deficit. They just don't want what is on offer.

The idea that people are 'self-excluding' from the cultural offer has, according to cultural historian Robert Hewison, provided a useful tool for policymakers in the problem of participation (Hewison, 2014, p71). Rather than being a structural issue, the lack of democratic participation is seen as a form of individualism, 'a parody of neoliberal personal choice' (Hewison, 2014, p71). According to Hewison, this allows policymakers to ignore, or disclaim responsibility for, any social or economic disadvantages that may exist, citing the Arts Council's 2008 annual report's rhetorical question:

> *Insofar as non-engagement with the arts is a matter of life-style choice, or "self-exclusion", should the state still intervene?*
>
> Bunting et al., 2008, p12

Within the context of the report, the authors' point is that even amongst regular arts attenders (who tend to be highly educated and of 'high' social status) there are many who *chose* not to attend; therefore, they are careful not to align this 'deficit' with education/awareness. Nonetheless, placing the 'deficit' with the public creates a problem for the arts sector. If public funds are used to subsidise activities that 85% of the public don't want, on what basis can public arts funding be justified? This presents a particular problem for arts subsidy when the 15% are predominantly those who can

afford to pay for their cultural consumption on a free market, supply-and-demand basis. Indeed, according to John Holden, in a piece of research for *Demos*, this scenario has led to a 'crisis of legitimacy' in the subsidised arts sector (Holden, 2006).

An attempt to answer this crisis lies, in part, with the adoption by the arts sector of the type of instrumentalization of culture outlined in section **2.4** and what Robert Hewison referred to as the 'Faustian pact' the arts sector made with the Blair Labour government the late 90s. Accepting culture as a social and political tool is traded 'in return for more equitable provision' (Cultural Policy Collective, 2004). In particular, the Arts and Health and Well-being agenda: You might not *want* arts and culture, but you *should* because it's good for you. This can appear benign to many working in the arts sector because 'it compels elitist institutions and distracted artists to be more socially aware' (Cultural Policy Collective, 2004). But, for the public choosing *not* to engage, the suggestion of a deficit presumably still remains: you simply don't understand how good the arts are for you!

There is a third response to the 'deficit' issue, which is framed by its opposite – through the active promotion of cultural democracy. This concept, too, is open to a variety of interpretations and these are explored more fully in the following section.

3.3 Cultural Democracy

As indicated earlier, the term Cultural Democracy refers to the idea that everyone in society should have the right to freely participate in the culture of their society. This is taken to mean they have the right to contribute to it *and* to access it. Cultural Democracy is also sometimes said to be underpinned by the concept of cultural diversity – namely, the notion that many cultures co-exist in a society and no one culture should be allowed to dominate and become the 'official culture' (Adams and Goldbarn, 1990). In *Cultural Democracy in Practice* (2018) a report by 64 Million Artists commissioned by Arts Council England, the definition is further extended to include 'an approach to arts that actively engages everyone in deciding what counts as culture, where it happens, who makes it, and who experiences it.' (Hunter et al., 2018, p2)

In this sense, we can see how it differs from the conception of culture that predominated in the Post-War Era where the focus was upon 'unify[ing] our popular culture' (W.E. Williams, 1945) and Keynes's concept of the 'common life.' In this prior sense, 'culture' was conceived of as a broadly universal concept. One that had its roots in the Romantic-humanist tradition of Schiller, Arnold and Keynes (Eagleton, 2000, p17). Whatever debates existed around the specific art forms deemed worthy of state subsidy, the question of access was ultimately about ensuring a greater number of people could benefit from the fruits of such state-subsidised aesthetic labour.

This argument for greater access came to be known as the 'democratisation of culture' – a top-down formulation that 'essentially privileges certain forms of cultural programming that are deemed to be a public good.' (Mulcahy, 1997). The problem with such a notion of access, its critics assert, is that it left itself open to the criticism of cultural elitism, that some expressions of artistic or cultural endeavour were inherently more superior (Mulcahy, 1997) and that what constitutes culture is determined by a relatively small number of people (Mulcahy, 1997, Hunter et al., 2018). The democratisation of culture thesis, therefore, led to a series of cultural policies that were based on creating larger audiences for performances and creative endeavours whose content was based on the experiences and preferences of society's privileged groups (Langsted, 1990, in Mulcahy, 1997). Furthermore, that the 'civilising' justification (Bennett, 1995) for state subsidy gave rise to criticisms that by promoting a certain type of 'cultural capital' associated with such elitist forms of culture and its privileged groups.

The notion of 'cultural capital' is a sociological concept, first used by Bourdieu and Passeron in *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (1977) in which they argue that cultural capital, like economic capital, is an asset that can be accrued and exchanged for status and power. Education, intellect, style of speech and dress, manners, material belongings, credentials and so forth can help a person achieve higher social status in a stratified society such as capitalism because achieving them are considered rare and worthwhile (1977). Moreover, lack of these material and symbolic goods can hinder a person's chance of social mobility in much the same way as lack of income or wealth. Linked to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (the physical embodiment of cultural capital in a person's disposition and tendencies), cultural capital is configured as a social interaction,

or social relation structure (Bourdieu ,1984). For Bourdieu the culturally ingrained habitus of the upper-class and middle-class might include aesthetic sensibilities disposed to 'high art' but the working class had not. Bourdieu raised the problem that cultural policy had taken for granted the cultural needs of all society's members were alike (Langsted, 1990, p17).

The Democratisation of Culture argument was based on the idea of culture as a public good and one that is good for you (civilising even), and those aesthetic works that represent this culture should not be the preserve of a particular class or accessible only in metropolitan locations. Dissemination was the key concept (Dueland, 2003, in Mulcahy, 2006) and policy centred on goals such lower costs, provincial touring initiatives and promoting arts education. Cultural Democracy, on the other hand, argues for a more participatory or populist approach to the definition and provision of cultural opportunities (Mulcahy, 2006).

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In recognising the diversity of cultural tastes and preferences – among the regions, between the capital and the provinces, the rural and the urban and between social groups – provides a stronger legitimisation for the principle of state subsidy as it is no longer deemed to be the preserve of a certain privileged group. Philosophically the concept of culture has shifted from a monocultural concept to a pluralistic one (Mulcahy, 2006).

Most recently, in 2017, the diverse-democracy view has been exemplified in a report for the Cultural Institute at King's College London entitled, *Towards Cultural Democracy: Promoting cultural capabilities for everyone*.

In part response to the *Warwick Commission on Cultural Value* (Needlands et al, 2015) and the AHRC *Cultural Value Project* (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016), the report offers what it refers to as 'a timely and distinctive vision of how to build a cultural life for the UK that is valuable for everyone and made by all' (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017). This vision centres on a national level policy objective of 'promoting cultural capabilities for everyone'. Having cultural capability means having 'the substantive freedom to make

culture' (Wilson et al., 2017, p5). The resulting condition, the report argues, is cultural democracy.

Whilst acknowledging the notion of the 'deficit model', the report is careful not to place the blame at anyone's door. In fact, it recognises, 'the vital importance and significance of much existing publicly supported arts and culture, and profitable creative industries' (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017). However, it does pay homage to the first definition of the deficit model outlined above in section 3.2 (above):

> *…this report strongly advocates a policy approach aimed towards achieving cultural democracy. This contrasts with 'the democratisation of culture', which is the prevailing approach of the deficit model: taking great art to the people.*
>
> Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017, p23

In reiterating the shift from 'the democratisation of culture' to 'cultural democracy', the report's authors argue for 'the substantive freedom to co-create a version of culture [which] places no obligation on anyone to conform to a preconceived model of what culture *is*; but it does embrace diversity' (Wilson et al., 2017, p.44) and propose a process for democratisation which is 'both top down and bottom up in its approach' (Wilson et al., 2017, p7).

As such, this argument for cultural democracy aims to recognise and place value on all types of creative activity, with a main intended aim of the report being to 'cast a spotlight on the everyday cultural creativity' which happens outside the realms of the publicly funded and privately profitable spheres. This idea of cultural creativity refers to 'the broad range of human creativity that is in some shape or form about "doing art" rather than some other mode of human creativity such as science or education' (Wilson et al., 2017, p3, n1).

With this emphasis, the report joins a number of recently emergent initiatives aimed at supporting 'everyday' creativity or participation, such as *Everyday Participation*, *Fun Palaces*, *64 Million Artists,* and *Get Creative* – a campaign run by the BBC and other cultural organisations to celebrate and support the everyday creativity happening in

homes and public spaces (BBC Arts, 2016). The suggestion is that there is a huge amount of cultural activity happening within the UK, but which has thus far remained invisible, and therefore undervalued, particularly in terms of national statistical analysis such as the results of the Taking Part survey and in terms of 'measuring' the value of culture, as found in the Arts Council's 'quality metrics' model.

However, despite the report's insistence on promoting cultural democracy, rather than the democratisation of culture, it is through the existing infrastructure of the cultural organisations, that the vehicle for cultural democracy is to be found:

> *Towards cultural democracy simultaneously seeks a radical overhaul of the sector and a perpetuation of the status quo. As the authors assert, "The central thrust of this report in no way invalidates the underlying commitment cultural policy has currently, and should continue to have, too much existing publicly supported arts and culture" (p. 8). The suggestion is therefore made that the current infrastructure for the democratisation of culture should also function as the delivery vehicle for cultural democracy.*
>
> Hadley, S., 2018

Hadley further argues that, in suggesting that democratisation of culture and cultural democracy be employed simultaneously, the report proposes a sort of 'doublestrategy cultural policy' (Langsted, 1990 – cited in Hadley, 2018) which 'avoid[s] upsetting the custodians of the existing cultural infrastructure'.

That this idea may be appealing to the existing cultural sector is supported by Liebowitz and Margolis's (2000) assertion that there is 'a tendency in policymaking to follow a path dependence…where it is deemed easier to implement new strategies, such as the one to increase participation, through partnership with the existing funded arts institutions' (cited in Jancovich, 2015). Moreover, that 'the influence of powerful voices from a cultural elite… dominate over newer voices, that contributes to maintain the status quo and reduce the potential of new policy initiatives.' (Jancovich, 2015).

The King's College London report is critical of other initiatives such as ACE's flagship cultural participation project Creative People and Places (CPP), citing it as being in, 'very

real danger of sustaining a deficit model approach and the "democratisation of culture" (taking "the arts" to the people as it were) at the expense of promoting cultural capabilities and cultural democracy,' (Wilson et al., 2017, p24).

Yet the overall cultural policy structure the report proposes appears to do little to change the status quo, '… we are not suggesting that "great" art or profitable industries shouldn't continue to be the focus of cultural policy attention…' (Wilson et al., 2017, p6) – the implication within the report is, rather, that 'everyday creativity' should be equally valued among these forms. Whilst the case studies highlighted in the report centre on two main types of participation: community-centred initiatives, delivered by existing cultural institutions (Case Study 3: The Old Vic Community Company) and home-made, independent groups (Case Study 2: Crafting in Norfolk) – neither seem to call for a change to the existing model of arts subsidy, with the latter appearing to flourish without any need for subsidy at all.

Indeed, it is this turn of emphasis in Cultural Democracy thinking, from the radical versions of the 70s and 80s, which is of most concern for the central thesis of the current research – the embedding of sustainable arts and culture provision in economically deprived areas where previously people have had little access to the arts. The emphasis placed on the everyday creative happenings that exist outside the realms of the publicly funded and privately profitable spheres, seems to fundamentally undermine the argument for public subsidy. It's happening anyway, why fund it?

As we saw in Chapter 2, the 'market failure' arguments of the post-war era acknowledged that producing art is often expensive and, without subsidy, would only be available on the basis of a person's wealth; moreover, the argument maintained that because art is a 'public good', it should be subsidised on the basis that the arts and culture were fundamental to a thriving democracy. By contrast, the argument for Cultural Democracy is made on the basis of individual choice and preference: culture is what I understand it to be. The role of cultural policy therefore is simply to support the choices made of those individuals, it is a distribution of the 'good' on the basis of supply and demand (or, actually, demand and supply) as happens in other types of markets (Mulcahy, 1997). Within this paradigm the participant plays a more active role, they become both creator

and consumer. The universal cannon and its attendant connotations of elitism is gone, but so too is any sense that the culture produced is non-rivalrous and non-depletable. In so consuming, the culture has been consumed (Wearing and Wearing, 1992).

This is perhaps related to what Robert Hewison called 'a parody of neoliberal personal choice' (Hewison, 2014, p71) – as long as the opportunity for cultural participation is evenly spread, any social or economic disadvantage can be effectively circumvented.

If Cultural Democracy is to be more than a numbers' game or of geographic equality, the key challenge for sustaining arts and culture in areas of economic disadvantage would appear to centre on resolving the tension between a) giving the power of decision-making to those who have no former experience of taking those decisions and b) avoiding the elitism that has locked-in decision-making with cultural elites throughout the history of subsidised arts provision – whether that is through central planning or under an arm's length principle.

According to Graeme Evans (2016) a focus on cultural mapping may provide us with a useful tool for understanding patterns of cultural participation and provision:

> *A focus on cultural mapping approaches to accessible cultural amenities reveals important evidence for bridging the divide between cultural participation and provision.*
>
> Evans. G., 2016

Evans goes on to argue that there exists a disjoint between cultural policy and those grassroots venues or organisations (i.e., community centres) who act as the gateway (or gatekeeper) to provision and access for people in their community. Shedding light on this disjoint may provide us with an indication of why sustaining arts provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation has been such a perennial challenge. It may enable us to look beyond a simple supply and demand model, where focus tends to be based on the twin issues of funding allocation and the quality or relevance of the art activity being delivered. In other words, to enquire whether there is something within the structural relationship between cultural policy, provision and participation that is

failing to embed a sustainable culture of artistic participation in those geographical areas under consideration – namely areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation.

> *A key observation from several decades of cultural activity surveys is that these have been undertaken with little or no reference to actual provision, their location or the relationship between place and participation.*
>
> Evans, G., 2016

The current research attempts to explore this, and to place the role of community venues and their managers at the heart of the enquiry, whereas previously it is felt they have been under-represented. The necessity to do this emerges directly from a methodological underpinning of Pragmatism – particularly that advocated by John Dewey which regards the experiences of everyday people as essential to discovering the truth of a situation whilst providing a guide to future action based upon this truth. The way in which Pragmatism has provided the warrant for this research is explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Pragmatism as Paradigm: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, this research aims to examine the question of sustaining arts and culture provision in areas of 'economic disadvantage and deprivation'. It began as an analysis of a specific model of work, aimed at embedding and sustaining provision and then used this as a catalyst to explore the wider issue of why sustaining provision continues to be a challenge for the sector. It was designed to explore why, despite a series of policy initiative and some well-funded and well-resourced programmes, this is still proving such a challenge, 70 years after the inception of the Arts Council (Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017).

The research question is thus:

> *What can the partnership model between New Writing North and community centres tell us about supporting sustained cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?*

However, the inquiry began with a series of ontologically prior questions:

- What is the history of cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?
- What are the rationales for providing such provision?

It then progressed to include one final question, affirming the methodological demands of Pragmatism to find a 'unified whole' in terms of understanding the issue:

- What are the community centre managers' understanding of the barriers to sustaining provision?

The research took place within a dynamic case study environment where both the delivery of the work and the partnership model itself continually developed and evolved through a constant process of reflection and re-evaluation – in part, although not

exclusively, – due to the research process itself. A theoretical framework of Pragmatism underpins this dynamic research environment.

As a framework for understanding the world, Pragmatism holds that truth is rooted in experience – that beliefs are derived from the world as we experience it, and – equally – that beliefs provide a guide to our future actions.

> *The driving motivation for pragmatism is the idea that belief in truth on the one hand must have a close connection with success in action on the other.*
>
> Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, ed. Simon Blackstone, 1994

In this sense, Pragmatism asserts that beliefs should be judged against outcomes – by how useful they are in terms of a guide to present and future action. What has worked well in the past provides us with a guide to what is likely to work well in the present and future. This perhaps explains why John Dewey (1859-1952), one of the founders of Classical Pragmatism, preferred the term 'Instrumentalism' (Decker, 2003), although he is most usually referred to as a Pragmatist by others. Although Pragmatism as a philosophy has a number of manifestations, it is John Dewey's 'instrumental pragmatism' that provides the warrant for this research.

> *'[Dewey]… saw inquiry as a self-correcting process whose procedures and norms must be evaluated and revised in the light of subsequent experience. But Dewey regarded this reworking as a social and communal process proceeding in the light of values that are not connected specifically to science, but rather values that are more broadly rooted in the psychic disposition of ordinary people at large.'*
>
> Ormerod, R., 2015, p893.

This quote from Richard Ormerod helpfully highlights two of the core tenets of Dewey's Pragmatism that have proved invaluable in terms of providing a robust paradigm within which to carry out this research. It points to the flexibility and resilience of Pragmatism in its ability to adapt to context, something considered necessary when dealing with a dynamic research environment. Moreover, it seeks to promote a democratic orientation towards knowledge by highlighting the social and communal process of knowledge

acquisition and rooting experience in the disposition of ordinary people. This approach sheds light on the issue of providing and sustaining cultural activity in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation as part of the wider Cultural Democracy school of thought. Further useful facets of Pragmatism are explored in the remainder of this section.

4.1a) Truth, Knowledge, Action

Within the western philosophical tradition, Pragmatism rejects the Cartesian appeal to 'first principles' and is critical of the Kantian notion of 'pure reason'. For Pragmatists, there is no categorial distinction between truth, knowledge and action – beliefs about the world are justified on the grounds to which they provide a useful guide to human action, rather than being related to a set of abstract principles. In this sense, it has been argued that Pragmatism finds its earliest manifestation in the beliefs of the Skeptics of classical antiquity - the Greek word *skepsis* means investigation (Omerod, 2005) Because, although concerned with issues of truth and reality, the Skeptics ultimately rejected the idea that any authentic or 'real' truth could exist beyond the realms of everyday experience in the way that, perhaps, Plato's Theory of Forms would suggest. i.e., Plato held that there are abstract Forms – or Ideals – (such as the perfect circle) which represent *truth* and that objects in reality (a circular object such as a wheel, for example) can only be *known* through contemplation of the 'Form'. A comparable idea can be found in Kant's 'thing-in-itself' or the related noumenon which is a posited object or event which exists independent of human perception, as opposed to a phenomenon which is anything that can be known through the human senses (Körner, 1955).

The Skeptics, however, rejected this idea of an unknowable/imperceptible realm, even if it might exist, they taught that 'we must make do with plausible information adequate to the needs of practice' (Ormerod, 2005). In other words, there is no such thing as Plato's perfect circle, but we can be confident that a wheel is indeed circular – confident enough for the practical purpose of life. Truth, then, is something which is invented or constructed by humans, rather than having a fundamental existence beyond human experience which must be somehow uncovered or revealed.

Therefore, Pragmatism transcends the traditional separation of ontology and epistemology. According to one of its earliest proponents, Charles Saunders Peirce (1839-

1914), it proposes a *philosophy of meaning* with, 'the meaning of any concept that has application in the real world lying in the relations that link *the experiential conditions of application* with *observable results*.' (Ormerod, 2005, my emphasis). This proposition demonstrates the link between philosophical Pragmatism and the etymology of the word 'pragmatic' and its association with 'what is practical' or 'what works'. So, in rejecting the separation of ontology and epistemology, Pragmatism makes an appeal to the *practical* basis of knowledge.

4.1b) What works?

As a paradigm of research, Pragmatism is often said to advocate the use of mixed methods. This has emerged, in part, from the fact that Pragmatism holds that there are different interpretations of the world, and that there are multiple views for understanding a given issue (Feilzer, 2009). As such, different methods for capturing data can be useful in terms of illuminating these multiple views. In light of this, Pragmatism can advocate a research design which uses mixed methods, choosing simply 'what works' best in terms of answering the primary research question – which, in itself, is held to be paramount within the design:

> *Pragmatism is a deconstructive paradigm that advocates the use of mixed methods in research, "sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality" (Feilzer 2010, p.8), and "focuses instead on 'what works' as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation" (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003b, p.173).*
>
> Morgan, DL., 2014

It 'sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality' because, for Pragmatism, 'what works' in terms of answering the primary question is what matters – that ***is*** the truth and the reality of the situation.

However, although many contemporary pragmatist social scientists advocate the use of mixed methods and point to an affinity between the paradigm and methods, David L. Morgan (2014) suggests there is, in fact, no deterministic link between them:

> *… pragmatism can serve as a philosophical program for social research, regardless of whether that research uses qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. As a new paradigm, it replaces the older philosophy of knowledge approach (e.g., Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln, 2010), which understands social research in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology.*
>
> David L Morgan, DL., 2014

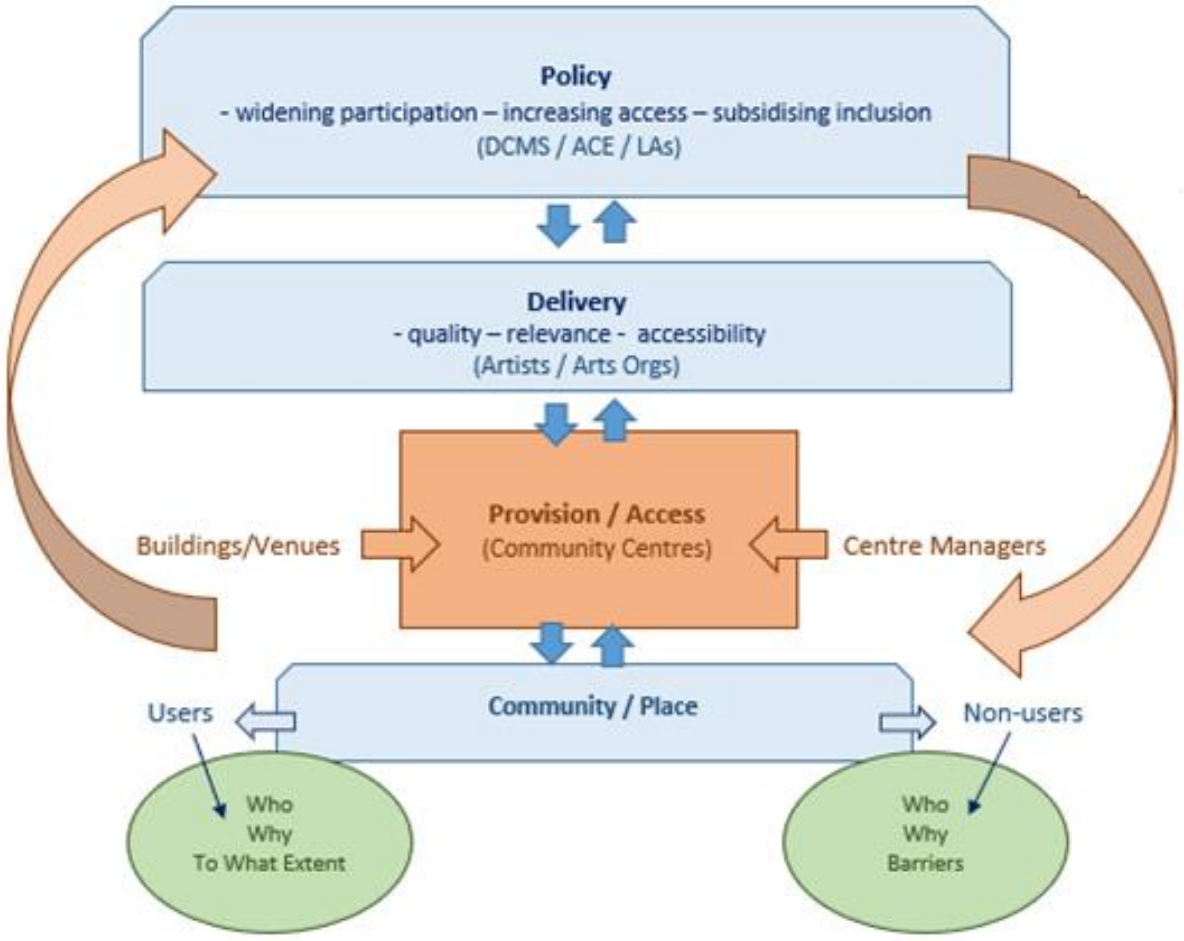
So, for example if a purely qualitative method of data collection is what works best in terms of answering the primary research question, a Pragmatic researcher shouldn't necessarily feel the need to employ quantitative methods. Furthermore, Morgan asserts that Pragmatism is more than just 'what works'. It is fundamental to the nature of pragmatic enquiry that there must be an existential connection between truth, reality and action. For Morgan, mixed methods are often used in pragmatic research simply because they are often the best way of gathering data from the relevant sources to most directly answer the primary question. It is a valid methodological approach but not a necessary one. However, in terms of this research, a mixed method approach has been used *because* this was found to be practical and worked best in terms of answering the research question. In order to understand why, it would be helpful to understand the process by which this conclusion was arrived at.

During the initial stages of the research, the inquiry began with an attempt to understand the 'problem' at the heart of the research question – sustaining cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage. The researcher did this by attempting to map the structural relationships at play within the 'situation' of the issue (please see **Fig 3** below).

This basic relationship outlined in **Fig 3** can described thus: policy, made at the level of the DCMS, the Arts Council and Local Authorities is focused upon such concepts as widening participation, increasing access and subsidising inclusion. Measures of success are usually based upon the relationship that the funder has with the arts and culture organisation they have supported to deliver the programmes (usually using impact studies and evaluation reports as evidence). Whilst these might vary across organisation, the Arts Council's quality matrix provides a useful guideline on what might be evaluated and include, presentation, distinctiveness, enthusiasm, relevance and local impact [ACE,

2010]. Arts Organisations focus their measures of success on participant surveys & feedback, which then relate back to the policymaker's (and their own) aims and objectives. Whilst venues and their managers focus on providing the offer made by arts organisations in relation to their community, they do so almost entirely on the basis of providing cultural activities within their own budgetary and organisational capacity without recourse to the wider policy initiatives. Managers provide access and activity based on community demand, but there is little awareness or acknowledgement – at the policy level – of their 'at the coalface' experience; and their intelligence in understanding their communities are largely ignored.

Fig 3: Cultural Mapping: outline of the 'situation' of cultural activity in areas of economic disadvantage.



Lovatt, M., 2017

In Fig 3 those sections of the diagram marked or shaded in orange are those that appear to be missing from traditional analysis of cultural mapping. For instance, the literature review and primary research identified a disconnection between what is termed the

supply (artists/organisations) and demand (audience) sides of cultural provision (McGuigan, 2005); namely that there is no connection between 'policy' and 'place' (or community) save that which is mediated through the arts sector. Furthermore, in terms of 'place'-based initiatives, the existing place-based provider is often missing from the analysis altogether and/or has little or no connection to policy or policymakers. In this piece of research, the provider is the community centre manager, and the findings of this research will demonstrate how problematic this is in terms of sustaining cultural provision.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the barriers to participation have been well-researched and documented (Bunting et al., 2008; Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017; Jancovich, 2017). As outlined in section 3.3, they are generally held to be:

a) cost (for those who need to travel, those on low incomes, those with children/family costs)
b) lack of time (work and family commitments, inconvenient programme times)
c) lack of interest
d) irrelevance of the provision to the participant's life (provision may be seen as too highbrow)
e) lack of awareness of the offer
e) lack of accessibility – (predominantly geographic, but also referring to less mobile groups)
f) perceptions of ineligibility – 'the arts are not for the likes of me'.

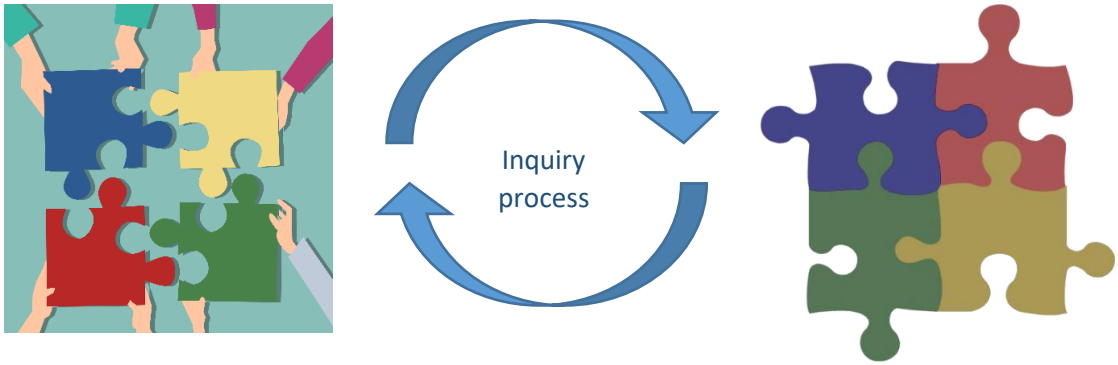
As we also saw in Chapter 3, the arts sector's response to removing, or at least lessening, these barriers was to prioritise of a range of place-based and grassroots initiatives; programmes which, it has been argued, don't fully deal with the thorny issue of 'sustaining provision.' From the literature and policy review, it became clear that the 'issue' should be explored from a variety of angles – in fact, from each of the areas outlined in the 'situation' mapped in **Fig 3**. As a methodology, Pragmatism demands this approach and can be understood in terms of what Dewey refers to as a 'community of inquiry' (Evans, 2000; Shields, 2003) and as articulated by Philipe Lorino in his 2018 paper 'Pragmatism and Organisational Studies'.

All actors significantly concerned by a given inquiry should take part in it, build together a plausible account of the situation, and agree on the subsequent course of action. Inquiry is always a collective and social enterprise.

Philipe Lorino, P., 2018.

For Dewey, the 'situation' represents the entirety of all conditions 'under which, and within which, an organism functions at a given time,' (Dewey, 1938/1986), where the 'organism' refers to the central issue under consideration. When an issue is seen as problematic, it is referred to as an 'indeterminate' situation, puzzling and insufficiently coherent. The purpose of inquiry, then, is to convert the indeterminate and unstructured understanding of the problem into a new state of understanding which is intelligible, to transform the situation into a 'unified whole' (Lorino, 2018).

Fig 4: Inquiry transforms an indeterminate situation into a reunified whole



Lovatt, M., 2018

Dewey's epistemological departure from his Pragmatist predecessors was in elevating the values and knowledge of 'ordinary people'. As such, he demonstrates a more democratic orientation towards understanding (Ormerod, 2005). This, then, demands that the researcher place as much emphasis on understanding the problem at the heart of the research question from a multiple of standpoints: from the perspective of the community centre manager, the cultural producer, the audience member and the policymaker.

Moreover, because Pragmatism holds that knowledge is produced and rendered meaningful within a given historical and social context, it supports the methodological approach employed in this research of examining the primary research question by using methods which focus on the issue from both a specific and a societal point of view a outlined in Fig 5 (below).

Fig 5: an overview of the rationale for the methods employed.

Participant interviews, questionnaires, focus group conversations	⟷ In relation to the specific case study environment.
Historical and Contextual analysis (cf 'Cultural Democracy' paradigm).	⟷ In relation to the societal (policy) and theoretical context.

Lovatt, M., 2018

Finally, Pragmatism supports examining the historical genesis of the concept of supporting cultural activity in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation which can be evidenced in Richard Ormerod's 2005 The History and Ideas of Pragmatism.

> *[Dewey] saw the proper method of philosophical criticism as that of genetic analysis, which is tracing the history of ideas and institutions in order to compare the actual causes and consequences to those they were originally intended to produce.*
>
> Ormerod, R., 2005

Pragmatism, therefore, has allowed the researcher to explore a variety of methods to find 'what works' in terms of answering the thorny question of how to *sustain* cultural activity. For example, it has afforded the opportunity to ask: Is there something problematic in the structure of cultural provision and sustaining it? What are the historical precedents for tackling the issue? Are there more specific, localised issues at play?

4.1c) A guide to future action

Pragmatism dictates that the research question be examined from a variety of perspectives. However, this is not an interpretivist view. Pragmatism holds that, 'we are [not] free to interpret the experiences in whatever way we see fit.' (Morgan, 2014.)

Rather, the aim of pragmatic research, as outlined in **Fig 4** above, is to reach a situation which presents a unified whole. So, although Pragmatism can support more than one truth about the world - held simultaneously – it can only do so, as long as each contributes to a coherent world view rooted in past and present experience and which can provide a credible guide to future actions in terms of predictable consequences.

Moreover, it is this focus on the relationship between past, present and future which furnishes Pragmatism with the tools to assess questions about sustainability. For instance, as we can see from the extract below, from William James' The Meaning of Truth (1909) it applies directly in terms of supporting cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation, it allows the research question to be explored by asking: what are the historical precedents, what are the present barriers and opportunities, and how might these impact on a future state of being?

> *Pragmatism considers thought as an instrument or tool for prediction, problem solving and action, and rejects the idea that the function of thought is to describe, represent or mirror reality.*
>
> *The Meaning of Truth*, William James, 1909.

4.2 Research Questions: the societal and the specific

As we have seen, answering the primary research question holds a position of central importance in Pragmatic research. Moreover, finding the answer to the question – moving from the indeterminate to the determinate situation – is to have practical implications. Thus, Pragmatism supports giving a great deal of thought to the research question, revisiting and refining it where necessary.

This research, in being part-funded by New Writing North, seeks to provide a practical outcome for the organisation in terms of contributing to its own practice and organisational thinking; and, in doing so, provide findings that will be useful to the wider Arts and Culture sector.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the primary research question sits within a body of research concerned with Cultural Democracy. Therefore, the question:

What can the partnership model between New Writing North and community centres tell us about supporting sustained cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?

contains an intrinsic assumption that, in a democratic society, we *should* provide and sustain cultural participation in economically disadvantaged areas. This has been argued in Chapter 3. However, important to note here is that the question contains a broad, *political/societal* emphasis and aim.

At the same time, the question seeks to explore how a *specific* partnership model can support this objective, which, in turn, suggests a more tailored analysis attached to a particular case study. The primary research question, therefore, places **the societal** and **the specific** side by side.

During the initial research phase, and in attempting to understand how sustainability could be achieved, it became necessary to examine a series of prior questions:

- What are the historical precedents to achieving sustained cultural provision?
- What are the rationales for providing such provision?
- What are the community managers' understandings of the barriers to sustaining provision?

These questions were generated by means of a literature review and through a pilot study in the form of unstructured interviews with venue managers. The pilot study shaped and helped with refining the primary research question, which, in turn, informed the research design. It also provided a light-touch, trust-building exercise in terms of the relationship between researcher and venue managers. The findings and analysis are presented in Chapters 5-7. The other method of inquiry – the literature review – attempted to understand, through policy discourse and historical precedent, what might constitute a successful, sustained programme of cultural provision in economically disadvantaged and deprived communities – what works, what doesn't and what needs to be in place to ensure sustainability.

Uncovering the fact that sustaining provision is regarded as a challenge across the sector led to the desire to undertake a historical analysis of policy and discourse to understand why this challenge had remained largely unmet. This is outlined in Chapter 2 and informs the analysis undertaken in Chapters 6-8 where the findings and analyses are presented. In summary, the questions at the heart of this literature / policy review were:

- To what extent, historically, has cultural policy supported or neglected cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?
- What is the relationship between supported provision and sustainability?
- Is there a cultural deficit in those areas and, if so, how can this situation be improved?

Both sets of sub-questions proved invaluable in terms of refining the research question – a process undertaken a number of times – in order to place both the societal and the specific at the heart of the arrived-upon research design.

4.3 The rationale for the case study approach and potential shortcomings

Focusing on the **specific** aspect of the research question – the partnership model itself – a decision was taken to focus the enquiry of investigation on five or six venues that had taken part in the Strategic Touring Programme. This was to examine some of the opportunities and barriers they face in providing cultural activity, to seek their understanding about the issue of sustaining provision, and to examine their relationship with New Writing North in terms of how this may have affected their ability to provide and sustain cultural activity.

By selecting a small sample of the total number of venues, rather than analysing data across the whole sample population, it was hoped that a more in-depth picture of each participating venue might emerge that would shed light on the qualitative, 'at the coalface' experiences of the venue managers involved in the programme in a way that, for example, a large-scale survey might not. In addition, the figure of five or six was deemed sufficient to provide variety of experience and offer some opportunities to

compare and contrast experiences – potentially identifying trends in those qualitative experiences.

In keeping with the pragmatic aim of generating knowledge which is useful, it was hoped that these five or six case study participants might form an informal cohort and that they themselves might benefit from a peer-to-peer learning process through their participation in the research.

Important consideration was given to the number of venues/managers, not only as individual case studies but in terms of the overall size of the informal cohort. Pragmatist researcher, David L Morgan, suggests that there is a general rule of thumb, applied to focus groups but with transferable points for case study size, that between six and ten participants is usually deemed appropriate. Having considered the fact that, 'smaller groups [may] produce more detailed data from each participant' (Morgan, 2014: p.16) and 'larger groups [may] cover the participants' range of experiences and opinions,' (Morgan, 2014: p16) he concludes that any self-questioning process such as this may result in sticking with the original rule of thumb of six to ten, concluding, 'If these rules of thumb do indeed represent the most frequent choices, then this is hardly surprising.' (Morgan,2014: p16) In other words, this number range between six and ten is potentially an optimal size because – pragmatically – it has proved to be so!

However, other researchers have made the objection that a small number of participants provides little credible basis for generalisation, for identifying trends, and for offering useful general learning points (e.g., Wisker, 2008: p216). Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) make a valid criticism that any sampling process involves an assumption that the researcher has prior understanding of the range of variation in results that may be encountered. Denscombe (2004) makes a similar point that the researcher cannot be sure, in advance, of what information might lie within and without the case study, although he concludes that the cut-off point for sample size could be considered somewhat arbitrary. These concerns are, to some extent, muted by the fact that the sample size of five or six venues represents some 12% of the overall research field, and that the results sought from this line of enquiry are deliberately information-

rich and specific, rather than about looking for over-arching trends and identifying generalised phenomena.

The view was taken that qualitative responses that could contribute to a deeper understanding, was more important than uncovering trends such as, for example, 'funding is a universal issue'. In addition, it could be argued that even if the whole population size (approximately 40 venues per year) had been analysed, this figure would still fall short of being able to generalise phenomena. In short, the aim of this research is to provide a contribution to the existing body of research in this field, by virtue of the qualitative responses of its participants, rather than attempting to identify a large-scale trend.

4.4 Participant selection: Five venues in County Durham

Over the five years of the programme, New Writing North has worked with approximately 40 venues each year, as outlined in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Total audience, number of venues and performances.

	Monster Zoo 2017	Hey Presto! 2016	Man on the Moon 2015	The Worst Princess 2014	Granny Pirate 2013
Total audience	3,934	3,743	4,303	3,965	3,157
Of which were children (incl under 12mnth)	2,416% (62%)	2,324 (62%)	2,866 (67%)	2,641 (67%)	2,049 (65%)
Total no of venues on tour	**41**	**38**	**41**	**40**	**30**
No of performances	49	49	49	44	35

Lovatt, M., 2018

Selecting *which* venues from this overall population was undertaken by using a process of 'purposeful sampling' to yield cases that would prove to be 'information rich' (Patton, 2001). According to Palinkas et al. (2015) 'Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest.'

The purposeful sampling undertaken in this research involved a short process of eliminating some venues on the grounds that they would not be information-rich, and then a subsequent selection process from the remaining venues to find a cohort that would be able to offer depth and detail to the topic under investigation. Those venues considered not 'information-rich' were those who had usually had a less deep involvement in the core aims of the programme and/or were not likely to be as responsive to the research aims (i.e., less willing to offer responses to questionnaires and interviews). Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011) regard the process of 'identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about, or experienced with, the phenomenon of interest' as essential to the purposeful sampling process.

The process itself was undertaken by means of an initial conversation with New Writing North who, as producers, had come to know the venues and their managers well. This was used to select a 'long list' which was then tested and refined through a series of interviews as part of the pilot study. In addition, the purpose of this process was to find a group of five or six venues that, when considered as a cohort, would yield opportunities to compare and contrast experiences in a like-for-like situation.

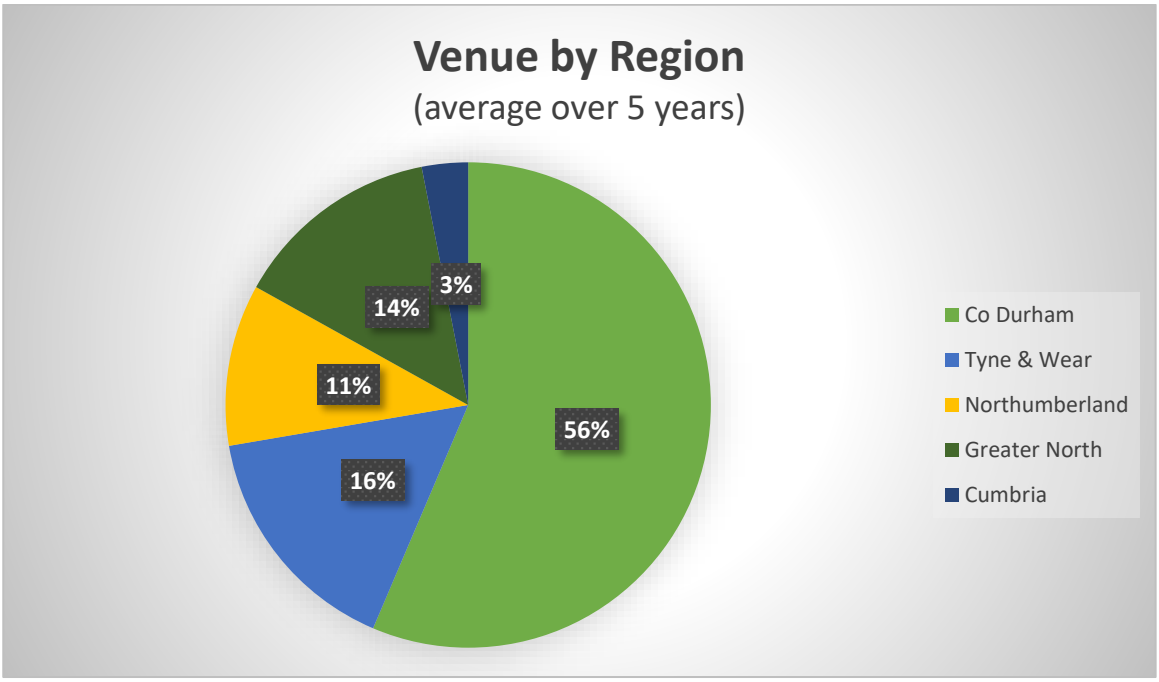
A final consideration when selecting the venues was the availability and willingness of the centre managers to participate in the research. This is a common facet of purposeful sampling, as is the ability of the respondent to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive and reflective manner (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979 – in Palinkas et al, 2015).

When these factors had been considered, it was decided to work with six participants (venue managers); however, during the period of the research, due to a change of staff, one venue removed itself from the study. In the end, **five community centre venues in County Durham** formed the case study group. The decision-making process that led to these five is deconstructed in the remainder of this section.

The idea for the Strategic Touring Programme (to present stage versions of popular children's books), was conceived during New Writing North's role in producing and programming Durham Book Festival on behalf of Durham County Council. Having become aware that engagement with the festival was low in certain communities (those where wider participation in cultural activity was also low and which are classed as areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation), the programme was devised to increase and sustain provision, both in reading and in arts and culture participation, in these areas.

As such, the programme focused predominantly on venues in County Durham but included venues in the wider catchment area of Tyne and Wear and Northumberland, as well as being extended to Cumbria and the Greater North in accordance with New Writing North's regional remit. The average (mean) number of venues in each sub-region across the five years is presented in **Fig 6.**

Fig 6: Average (mean) number of venues visited in each region over five years.



Lovatt, M., 2018

The programme was presented in association with a number of different types of venues: community centres, libraries, town & village halls, schools and a small number of arts venues. Not every venue was visited in all three years, with programming decisions being a matter of negotiation between the venue and New Writing North and usually dependent upon availability, cost, and suitability of each show (production-wise) for that

particular space. In addition, and in terms of revisiting a particular venue in subsequent years, this was often dependent upon whether New Writing North felt the venues had sufficiently 'bought into' the partnership model and had worked proactively to make the show and the wider aims of the initiative a success. Where scheduling decisions needed to be taken by the producers, and given that one of the aims of the programme was to support venues with less programming and presenting experience, priority was often given to venues who showed enthusiasm, rather than those who had a track-record of providing cultural activity:

> *…when given a choice we selected those venues that were less used to programming arts activity but were keen to try, so this meant some more experienced venues needed to make way for the less experienced.*
>
> Anna Disley, Executive Director, Programme and Impact, New Writing North
> Via email conversation 24th January 2018.

In consultation with New Writing North, a decision to work with only one type of venue was taken, in order to make best use of like-for-like comparisons. Town/village halls, schools and arts venues were discounted as a 'type' due to their relatively small representation in the overall list of venues (see **Table 2** below).

Libraries were given some consideration as a venue type and interviews with librarians formed part of the pilot study. However, they were ultimately discounted due to the fact that their organisational structure as part of local authority provision meant that the relationship between the 'at the coalface' librarian and New Writing North was often mediated by an area manager – with the latter being less familiar with the day-to-day running of the library and less able to answer the questions at the heart of the study regarding opportunities and barriers to provision and the former (librarians) being less familiar with the programming and decision-making process and having displayed some reluctance to speak on behalf of the library during the pilot study phase . In terms of sustainability it was further hypothesised that, with regard to libraries, this would be a matter of local authority budgets and priorities, rather than due to the specific

relationship with New Writing North and its programme. In other words, sustainability of provision was less likely to have been affected by the relationship under investigation.

As **Table 2** (below) reveals, the majority of community centre venues hosting the programme were to be found in County Durham, and these were the venues which had most consistently presented the programme over the three years of the study. This became a strong rationale for selecting case study venues from that locale:

Table 2: North East venues visited in 15/16, 16/17 and 17/18

Community Centre (Co Durham)				**Library (all)**				**Town/Village Hall (all)**		
15/16	16/17	17/18		15/16	16/17	17/18		15/16	16/17	17/18
Waterhouses	Waterhouses	Waterhouses		Cleadon				Briar		
	Trimdon	Trimdon				Ash'ton		Bowes		
Dipton	Dipton	Dipton				Gates'd		Durham		
Tow Law	Tow Law	Tow Law		Chester-le-Street	Chester-le-Street	Chester-le-Street		Prudhoe		
Tanfield Lea	Tanfield Lea	Tanfield Lea			Darl'ton	Darl'ton				
Jubilee Hall	Jubilee Hall	Jubilee Hall		Seaham	Seaham	Seaham				
Greenhills	Greenhills	Greenhills		Fenham						
Pelton	Pelton	Pelton		Newcastle	Newcastle	Newcastle				
Robin Todd				W. Bay						
		Blackhall		Peterlee	Peterlee	Peterlee				
		Horden								
		Shotton								
Community Centre (not Co Durham)								**Arts Venue (all)**		
15/16	16/17	17/18						15/16	16/17	17/18
Ashington				S Shields				Sage	Sage	Sage
Walker					Cram'ton	Cram'ton		Shildon	Shildon	Shildon
Seahouses					Blyth				Gala	Gala
		St Oswalds		Crook	Crook	Crook			Alnwick	
		Byker			N Aye					Exchange
		BOTM		Haltwh'tle		Haltwh'tle		**School (all)**		
						Word		15/16	16/17	17/18
								x1	X3	X4

Lovatt, M., 2018

In order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents, it has been decided to withhold further details about which of the twelve County Durham venues formed the final five selected for case study. However, it is important to note that, in terms of deprivation, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 using the Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) calculation, each fall within either the 20% or 30% range, representing five positions on the scale from 4,971/32,844 to 9,682/32,844. This means they are within the most deprived areas of the country in terms of income; employment; health; disability; education; skills and training; barriers to housing and services; living environment; and crime.

4.5 Focus Groups

The managers of the five community centres selected for case study were invited to take part in four focus group sessions. At its most simple manifestation, a focus group is an informal discussion between participants about the particular topic under investigation (Wilkinson, 2004; Liamputtong, 2011). They can be described as 'collective conversations' (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008) where the ***group*** becomes ***focused*** through the process of collectively discussing the topic under consideration (Kitzinger, 2005 in Liamputtong, 2011). For the researcher, it provides an opportunity to understand the issue by listening to the points of view of those taking part:

> *The primary aim of a focus group is to describe and understand meanings and interpretations of a select group of people to gain an understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of the participants of the group.*
>
> Liamputton, P., 2011

The decision to use focus groups as a method of inquiry is rooted in three key elements of the Pragmatic methodology: a) providing a democratic orientation towards knowledge by giving voice to the powerless; b) that the research be useful to those taking part; and, ultimately, c) as an effective means for answering the primary research question. Each of these elements is explored next.

4.5a) Giving voice to the powerless

Mapping the structure of cultural provision in relation to areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation revealed that venue managers from these areas, such as those who run community centres, are largely missing from the map (please refer to **Fig 3**). As previously noted, there is little relationship between these managers and policy makers and the lived experience, knowledge and intelligence of managers has been, historically, rarely tapped. Selecting five managers for case study was an attempt to redress this balance – to hear from people 'at the coalface'. Furthermore, the focus group method provided an opportunity to give those voices the space and time for reflection, and to imbue them with the authority they are seldom given.

> *A focus group method is a research tool that gives a "voice" to the research participant by giving him or her an opportunity to define what is relevant and important to understand his or her experience. In this way, the focus group method allows researchers to pay attention to the needs of those who have little or no societal voice.*
>
> Liamputton, P., 2009

According to the cultural mapping table, 'those who have little or no societal voice', in terms of the issue of sustaining cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation, are the community centre managers. In terms of a 360-degree understanding of the issue, this has created a situation of unequal positionality. Focus groups can be incredibly effective in this situation, as demonstrated by their increasing use in the fields of development research and in non-Western contexts (where 'Western' is deemed the dominant view), particularly for eliciting community viewpoints and understanding community dynamics (Lloyd-Evans, 2006).

This is predominantly due to the fact that, unlike one-to-one interviews or ethnographic methods, the focus group conversation can (helpfully) diminish the often-authoritative voice of the researcher; allow participants to define the terms of the debate; focus on what matters to them; refine and clarify their position; and give them the freedom to explore the issue through group interaction. This phenomenon has been termed 'the

group effect' by prominent focus group researchers (for example, Carey & Smith, 1994; Barbour, 2007; Steward et al., 2007; Davidson et al., 2010 in Liamputtong, 2011).

With the focus group method, then, a situation can be created where interactions between participants substitute the exchange between participant and interviewer more commonly associated with one-to-one interviews; in turn, this gives more prominence to the points of view of those often regarded as having a less powerful voice.

In an individual, one-on-one interview situation, the dynamic is between the researcher and the interviewee and, depending upon the openness and willingness of the interviewee, a certain amount of communication is required by the researcher to 'keep the conversation going'. This means the potential for unconscious (or even conscious) bias may creep into the questioning style. However, within a focus group setting, the interactions happen between the participants which can allow for a more naturalistic type of conversation. This, in turn, can yield interesting and in-depth answers that the researcher has not had to work to elicit – they can be revealed quite naturally.

In terms of the dynamic between community centre managers from areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation and research based within an Arts and Culture context this is particularly helpful, given that this research, and a wealth of existing contemporary research, has revealed that 'The Arts' have a perception problem in being seen as middle-class and/or elitist. Focus Groups allow for multiple lines of communication (Madriz, 2003), and can offer participants, 'a safe environment where they can share ideas, beliefs, and attitudes in the company of people from the same socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender backgrounds' (Madriz, 2003).

4.5b) The research can be useful to those taking part in it

Because the focus group format encompasses people from similar backgrounds, or those who inhabit the same 'situation' (as Dewey would term it), it can provide a way for participants to feel more involved and to have more ownership of the research. The first of the four focus group meetings used in the current research had a general focus of reflection and evaluation, which – as Chapter 5 shows – brought its own rewards to participants, most particularly in terms of affording the opportunity for peer-to-peer

learning and comparison of specific experiences. The remaining three focus groups were centred on particular themes which were agreed upon in advance, between the researcher, New Writing North and the community centre managers, as being topics that would be useful to the participants in the research. They were framed as part-workshop and part-focus group, the workshop elements comprising:

1. Fundraising and Sponsorship
2. Programming
3. Marketing, PR and Audience Development.

It was hoped that the researcher could provide some useful information, from her own arts management experience, upon each of the three areas, as well as hoping the topics would provide a 'focus' for discussion on the specific opportunities and challenges faced by managers in these areas. In this sense, it was hoped that the research would be in keeping with the pragmatic aim of 'generating knowledge that is useful' whilst ensuring participants felt integral to the research process – individually and as a cohort.

4.5c) Planning as an effective means for answering the research question.

David Morgan (1997) has argued that, as a research technique, focus groups 'don't differ greatly from other qualitative methods of data collection' (p2). But, he argues, they do require more careful planning than other forms. This is particularly pertinent in pragmatic research when answering the primary research question is so central to the methodology. Morgan notes that increased attention should be paid to who the participants are to be, and how the researcher will interact with them. In addition, we might add that ensuring the focus group environment is conducive to achieving those 'information rich' responses Patton refers to, is also an important consideration.

In terms of the current research, and as outlined above, the sampling process and pilot study were used to select the participants; each of them a busy centre manager with scarce spare time and limited resources for travel and other expenses associated with extracurricular activities such as attending workshops and focus groups. Therefore, it was fortunate that the research was able to capitalise on a small amount of New Writing North funds which had been allocated for evaluation and legacy to cover the costs of the meetings. Furthermore, by combining the research element with the workshop element, it meant there was no necessity to pay participants for their time. In addition, it was

agreed, collectively with the managers, that four of the most central venues would host the workshops and that this would provide an added benefit of them being able to see (not just hear) how each other operated on a day-to-day basis. It also meant the meetings were held in a familiar environment that each felt comfortable with.

According to Hennink (2007), a successful focus group discussion relies heavily on, 'the development of a permissive, non-threatening environment within the group,' (Hennink 2007, p6) where each member can comfortably discuss their views and experiences without feeling negatively judged or subject to ridicule. He is referring not only to the physical environment, but to the creation of a comfortable dynamic between participants. The role of the researcher is crucial in this regard and is discussed at the end of this chapter.

In terms of planning, preparation time is crucial. This includes thinking about how the groups will be focused to elicit the best responses to the research question. First, this involves setting up dates for the meetings that will work with busy participants' schedules. Secondly, in this research, time factor consideration had to be given to preparing not just the workshop/ CPD materials, but also the focus group questions. Given the informal nature of the technique favoured by the researcher, this was about working out informal or 'skeleton' lines of enquiry that might act as signposts for the steering or focusing the discussion. Due consideration was given to this process, particularly in thinking about ice-breaking exercises and then returning to the audio recordings of the pilot study to see which topics might yield deeper responses or which hadn't been significantly followed up upon. Time for transcribing and analysing the material from four 90-minute sessions also had to be allocated.

A final consideration, when preparing a focus group discussion is the issue of 'invasion of privacy'. Not only does this mean taking into consideration the usual concerns which apply when conversations are recorded, but it also means ensuring the participants feel comfortable sharing their answers with one another. Again, the role of the researcher in facilitating ice-breaking initiatives and in creating a warm, safe environment for discussion is key and is discussed below.

According to Morgan and Krueger (1993) there is a catalogue of myths surrounding focus groups, most notably that they are a quick and cheap way to gather data. However, the authors warn, the quality of the data depends entirely on the quality of the preparation. Although careful planning can't guarantee the quality of the responses, it's clear that without planning the endeavour is likely to produce unsatisfactory responses.

With this research, as mentioned above, Focus Group 1 was a general, focussed discussion, whilst Focus Groups 2-4, were centred on a range of CPD workshops.

The Workshops / Focus Groups were devised and delivered by the researcher and aimed to provide some useful knowledge to the participants about key areas of, respectively, fundraising, programming and marketing/audience development. They covered several key elements of each topic:

Focus Group 2: Fundraising

1. What funders really want and how to speak their language.
2. Where to look and how to find the fund you need.
3. Crowdfunding and other home-grown sources of support.
4. Matched funding (including in kind support).
5. Raising more money in less time.
6. Writing the bid
7. Maintaining relationships (even if your bid is unsuccessful).
8. Partnership working.

Focus Group 3: Programming

1. What to programme and where to look and how do you know if it's any good.
2. What you have that the arts sector really wants! (negotiating a deal)
3. Types of programming deals / getting the most for your money.
4. What you already know and how to build on that knowledge:
    a. Your audience
    b. Your venue
    c. Your budget & capacity
5. How to manage programming risks (and what are those risks).

6. What you need to know about an incoming show/event.
7. What they need to know about you (and why they want to know it!)
8. Taking advantage of consortiums and partnership working

Focus Group 4: Marketing, PR and Audience Development

1. What types of marketing can you do and what's most effective?
2. What are you actually selling (an experience, not an 'artsy' thing)?
3. Connecting with hard to reach and new audiences.
4. Public relations – how to build those relationships and generate a loyal audience.
5. Using social media.
6. Offers, discounts and deals.
7. Data collection and why it's handy.
8. Finding the unique selling point and giving the audience what they want.
9. Taking advantage of consortiums and partnership working.

The sessions were pitched in a way that would be informative but not patronising (hopefully!). However, it became clear during the delivery of the session and the conversation that ensued that the researcher was not telling the participants anything they didn't already know, although there was an element of deepening understanding offering new approaches and ideas.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the purpose of presenting the Focus Group discussion in the format of a workshop partly emerged from a Pragmatic methodology which requires the research be directly useful to the participants, and partly as an enticement to busy people to give up their valuable time in aid of the research's objectives. It was always designed to be partly about sharing knowledge and partly about a conversation. In delivering the workshop it became quickly evident that the knowledge-sharing angle – from researcher/arts professional to participant had been widely overestimated and that what was to be the most useful aspect of the session for the participants was an opportunity to share with peers their frustrations about the wider constraints on their ability to find time to fundraise.

4.6 The role of the moderator/researcher

David Morgan had been much cited in this chapter due to his prominence as a writer and conductor of focus group research. In *The Focus Group Guidebook* (2002) he outlines the two broad types of focus groups: a) structured, which tend to be employed mostly in market research and, b) semi-structured or less rigid, which is the form more prevalent in the social sciences. Choosing whether to use a structured or semi-structured format will, to a large, extent, dictate the role of the moderator. Whether they will take a visible, active role or whether they will employ a more facilitative technique of allowing the participants to interact with one another is an important consideration. Because the aim of social scientific research is to understand the participants' own experience and interpretations of events/scenarios, the more informal, semi-structured approach is often preferred, as is the case with the present study. However, as noted in the previous section, that does not mean the researcher can simply provide a time and a space and let the conversation flow!

The planning and thinking process involves due consideration of the personalities of the participants and how best to facilitate the interaction between them. For example, as was found in the pilot study of the current research, some participants have a lot to stay (!), whilst others need a certain degree of coaxing and prompting to voice their thoughts.

Ensuring the facilitation is able to encompass and manage both types of participant (and those in between) is key to encouraging discussion, interaction and to guiding the conversation to elicit the broadest and most information-rich responses. In particular, the skill of not allowing the loudest voices to drown out the others but ensuring dominant characters remain advocates for the process itself. The pilot study proved invaluable in terms of getting to know the participants prior to the focus group sessions, in particular in understanding their individual concerns and motivations.

The aim of a focus group is not necessarily to reach consensus or agreement on the issues under discussion but rather to 'encourage a range of responses which provide a greater understanding of the attitudes, behaviour, opinions and perceptions on the research issues' (Hennink 2007: 6). This isn't simply a collection of individual accounts but instead, 'a means to set up a negotiation of meanings through intra- and inter-personal debates'

(Cook & Crang 1995: 56). It can also be an opportunity for participants to exercise divergent thinking about an issue and to examine their reasons for doing so. As documented below, in Chapter 6, with the current research focus groups they also provided an opportunity for participants to cross-check their own perceptions ('Is funding really the issue, or is it that I don't know where to look, or that I don't have the time to apply?'). They also give the researcher an opportunity to absorb the overall dynamic of the conversation and then follow up the comments and clarify points made in a more interactive manner than a one-to-one interview allows. In addition, given that a series of one-to-one interviews were conducted after the focus group sessions, a further opportunity to clarify and tease-out certain points was afforded by having the space to listen to the group conversation without having to undertake a 'hands on' interviewer role.

Furthermore, because the intra- and inter-personal conversation was happening between peers, it was communicated with language, phrases and in-jokes that were comfortable to the participants. For example, the recollection of a past touring project, that some managers had programmed, allowed them to recall some of the problematic – often comical – encounters this had provided. An artist's demand for blue M&Ms in the "dressing room" became a recurring joke! With this stand-out example, it became clear that, whilst not being stated explicitly, there was a general perception that 'arty types' needed to understand the ethos and parameters of working in a community centre rather than in a West End theatre. This, of course, needed to be further teased-out by the researcher but it offers an example of why focus groups provide a unique means of data collection and how the role of the researcher can capitalise on such passing remarks.

> *'The forms of communication that people use in their everyday life 'may tell us* **as much***, if not* **more***' (Kitzinger 2005: 58) about their knowledge and experience. As such, focus groups permit researchers to enter the world of the participants which other research methods may not be able to do.'*
>
> Liamputtong, P., 2011

This type of encounter between the participants may well have been missed if the research had only employed questionnaires or one-to-one interviews. In particular, since

it contained a criticism of the arts sector or 'arty types' – and with the researcher being one – it may have never been raised for fear of giving offence. The locus of the conversation within a focus group is with the participants and the job of the researcher is to allow that situation to flourish without overly steering the conversation. As noted above the authoritative voice of the researcher can be helpfully muted, her own particular concerns and biases can be more easily lain aside, and her presence can be unobtrusive, allowing information-rich responses to flourish in an unmediated way.

4.7 Limitations of the Focus Group Method

Even with all the careful planning and preparation undertaken and, even when the researcher feels they have found the right balance between listening and steering the conversation, it is possible for the dynamic of the focus group to go off on a tangent; for louder voices to dominate; and for 'pet peeves' to preoccupy the conversation to a less-than-useful extent. In some cases, it may be prudent to allow this to run for a while and then to look for a gap to steer the conversation back on track, or to take a firmer stance and insist quieter voices in the group be heard. Even then, negotiating the particular dynamic of the group may mean that certain voices don't come to the fore. Or, it's possible that worries over anonymity remain, that some members of the group withhold their views for fear of their comments being repeated outside the group, or due to of a sense of peer group pressure – saying the wrong thing, or contradicting a 'firmer voice' within the group. In addition, a common criticism of focus groups is that they prevent issues from being explored in real depth (Hopkins, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2009), perhaps because without a firm steer, they can have a tendency to go off at a tangent or become focused on 'pet peeves'. Furthermore, there is always the chance that key members of the group become unavailable at the last moment but that the meeting has to go ahead without them, which happened with two of the four focus group sessions in the current research.

However, because one-to-one interviews had been set up with each of the five managers some of these limitations were mitigated and an opportunity was created to gather more detailed data on a range of specific points that emerged from the focus groups. One final issue faced by the current research was due to having centred three of the four focus groups around CPD workshops. As noted above, this was due to adhering to the pragmatist principle of making the research process, as well as the final outcome, useful

to the participants themselves. However, the problem with focusing the groups around a model of imparting training in a CPD context meant that the researcher's voice, input and opinions were too dominant within the discussions. That said, participants did report back that they'd found the sessions useful for the training aspect, as well as an opportunity to discuss certain challenges to sustainability with their peers and someone (the researcher) who has experience of the more mainstream arts sector.

4.8 One-to-one interviews

In terms of the current research, one of the unforeseen benefits of conducting the focus groups *before* the one-to-one interviews was that it offered the researcher the opportunity to observe the participants using language, turns of phrase and thought processes that they felt comfortable with. Therefore, when it came to conducting the single interviews it was possible for the researcher to somewhat mirror that language and those turns of phrase in order to create a sense of comradery and to put the interviewees at ease. Trust and rapport had been built up through the pilot stage and during the focus groups although on one occasion this didn't prevent encountering one of the respondents on a particularly 'bad day at the office' meaning responses were a little more defensive than was usual for that respondent.

The interviews were conducted using the same semi-structured style as the focus groups except that a list of questions was prepared in advance to ensure all pertinent areas were covered. So, in this sense, they were more structured than the focus group signpost-questions. This more formalised structure of the individual interviews also allowed the researcher to ensure cross-case comparability could be achieved between the responses to the five interviews.

Table 3: Interview Questions Pro Forma

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS PRO FORMA
Question 1: What are the challenges and barriers you face in providing more cultural activity at the centre? Possible follow-up: - Cost - Apathy / Engagement - Travel / Accessibility - Lack of time/ availability of offer - Relevance - Marketing / Awareness of offer - Perceptions of ineligibility / 'arts not for me'

Question 2: What would be support you to provide more art and culture activity? Possible follow-up - Support with fundraising, marketing, other CPD - Where to look / how to negotiate a deal - More money, time, staff - Relationship building	
Question 3: Has your relationship with New Writing North helped you to provide cultural activities; and, if yes, in what way? What worked? What didn't? What could be better? Where would you like to see it going?	
Question 4: Do you regard yourself as someone with a passion for the arts, or of providing opportunities for others (particularly children and families)? Background Personal interest Child's/ family interest Any formal arts training / qualifications?	
NOTES ON THE INTERVIEW	
How did the interview go? (was the interviewee talkative, cooperative, nervous, otherwise preoccupated)?	
Where did it take place?	
Any other feelings about the interview (did it open up other avenues of interest)?	
The setting (was it busy/quiet, were there interruptions, what facilities did the venue have?)	

Lovatt, M., 2017

Following the advice of Lofland and Lofland (1995), the researcher undertook a process of deep thinking about the research questions in order to really ascertain what was interesting and pertinent to the overall thesis. This was combined with picking up threads from the focus group meetings (and pilot study) transcripts. Therefore, this process of 'what is interesting and pertinent to *this* research?' ensured that there was a balance between being led by the participants' concerns and the wider sector concerns, which were understood from the researcher having worked in the participatory arts and from undertaking the literature review. This was particularly necessary in ensuring the central research question was answered, although some care was taken not to be too prescriptive in attempting to yield the 'correct' responses and to eliminate the researcher's own bias.

The questions themselves were then ordered in such a way that it might be possible to segue way from one point of interest to another in a logical manner. Space was also

given within the interview framework for respondents to ask their own questions or to follow up on points they had made previously. Finally, a factsheet of the participants relevant biographical data was produced, although some of this has been withheld from the thesis for the purposes of anonymity. It included: name, age, gender, position in the organisation, how long that position had been held by the respondent and some general questions about previous encounters with the arts on a personal level. The latter question was an attempt to gain some understanding of how much sustaining arts provision might be a personal driver for each individual project manager.

An attempt was made to video the first interview, as well as audio recording it. However, the camera felt unnecessarily intrusive, seeming to yield slightly stilted or overly self-conscious responses from the participant, and was therefore abandoned half-way through, giving way to purely audio recordings for the remaining four (and a half) interviews. All interviews were conducted in the respondents' place of work (the community centre) to ensure maximum comfort. Recordings were simply made on the researcher's smartphone and interviews took place in quiet rooms without background noise. However, in one instance, where the respondent had a particularly soft voice, this still led to the slightly cumbersome task of having to replay the recordings over and over to hear the responses in their entirety. Some notes were taken on pen and paper, during the interviews, where the researcher wanted to follow up a point later without interrupting the flow of thought; however, these were rare and occasional to ensure eye-contact and other positive communicative body language indicators (head-nods, for example) could be maintained.

After each interview, a series of notes and observations were taken, adapted from advice contained in Alan Bryman's *Social Research Methods – 4th edition* (2012). They comprised:

- How the interview went (was the interviewee talkative, cooperative, nervous, otherwise preoccupated)?
- Where did the interview take place?
- Any other feelings about the interview (did it open up other avenues of interest)?
- The setting (was it busy/quiet, were there interruptions, what facilities did the venue have?)

An attempt was made to type up the transcripts very shortly after the interviews had taken place to ensure the ideas were fresh in the researcher's mind – although, in reality, this didn't always happen.

4.9 Questionnaires

The final method of data collection was by means of audience questionnaires. As stated earlier, these were not specifically made for the research itself, but were parent-audience feedback forms relating to the quality of the show(s). They were devised afresh each year by New Writing North but increasingly included input from the researcher who undertook the evaluations as a side-project to this thesis. The questionnaires can be found at Appendices C-E. In summary, each form contained questions to ascertain demographic data; reasons for coming to see the show; who was bringing the children; how many and how old the children were; and how the adults rated the performance quality and value for money of the show.

In addition, and in order to understand whether the New Writing North programme and/or the venue was beginning to sustain an arts audience, some more bespoke questions were added. These included:

a) Have you attended any of the previous New Writing North shows (with tick-box option);
b) Have you attended any other family events, arts activities or performances at *this venue* in the last 12 months? (With space to state where, when and what?)
c) Have you attended any other family events, arts activities or performances at *other venues* in the last 12 months? (With space to state where, when and what?)
d) Would you describe yourself as an 'arty' person? (tick-box range of options)
e) How likely is it that you will attend a similar event again? (tick-box range of options)

In the final year (2017/18) an additional 'postcard' inviting longer and more open-ended responses was produced and distributed to audiences. This built upon recommendations from the previous years' reports' recommendations that some more in-depth, qualitative responses should be collected to "dig deeper" into the short-form answers the original questionnaire allowed for. This was only partially successful in that there was a small (8%) take-up rate. However, where responses were made, they were incredibly positive about the shows, demonstrating a desire for more of the same provision in their

community, and – as a little bonus – New Writing North received many original drawings of made-up characters (monsters from the Monster Zoo) from young audience members!

In addition, this final year's questionnaire included a short section designed to collect household data. This was in order to attempt to assess whether the programme was reaching its target audience in each community i.e., those people who don't ordinarily attend arts activities and those people who live within the community surrounding the centre, rather than those having travelled some distance. As noted previously, the venues had been targeted to reach people who don't ordinarily attend cultural activities, so it was felt important to find out if the people attending the shows were from the host community where the 'deficit' had been identified. Thus, a small selection of additional questions, adapted from the Active People (arts) survey were asked including:

How many adults (aged 18 and over) in your household are:
Working full time | Not working | Working part time | In training or education.

Which of the following applies to your education?
Not yet finished school/training | Never went to school | Finished high school | Professional, technical HE qualification | Degree or equivalent | Post graduate.

Is the accommodation where you live:
Owned outright | Owned with a mortgage | Rented from Council or Housing Association Rented privately | Rented with a job/business | Other (please state).

Unfortunately, responses to these questions were low. In part, this may represent a reluctance on behalf of the audience to provide such information. However, because the form was typed over two sides and a note of 'PTO' was not included on side one (an admin error), this more likely accounts for the low response rate because other general questions (readily responded to in previous years) were also not answered.

However, despite this frustrating error, it was possible to collect some useful in-depth data on the impact the programme had had on audiences over the five years. This is presented in Chapter 7.

4.10 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted during November and December 2016 (Year One). Three community centre managers, two librarians and one library area manager were interviewed in a series of unstructured, open-ended interviews. The purpose of the interviews, as stated above, was predominantly a trust-building exercise between the researcher and potential participants as well as an opportunity for the latter to 'survey the land' before selecting the more precise nature of the research, formulating the research questions and creating a more formalised methodology.

4.11 Data management

The dual primary concerns for managing the data gathered for this research centred on protecting the anonymity of the participants on the one hand, and ensuring the integrity of the data on the other. As noted above, data was gathered in the form of hand-written field notes and via audio recordings.

At the commencement of each interview and focus group, the researcher verbally committed to assurances of anonymity. In fact, two of the participants didn't want anonymity and hinted that they'd quite like their voices to go on record. However, this was not expressed by the other three participants so the preservation of anonymity for one, became the preservation for all! Indeed, as the data will show, participants spoke quite freely about their challenges in sustaining cultural activity and the framework in which they operated which included some criticisms of local initiatives, including a Creative People and Places programme, as well as reflective comments about support from local authorities and boards of trustees, staff and volunteers. Therefore, to provide anonymity for those within the wider catchment of this data set, anonymity was strictly adhered to.

A simple coding system was devised, labelling the five community centre managers as CM1-CM2. Some of the demographic and personal information gathered has been used in a more generic way so that the individual centre manager cannot be identified from it. For example, when one manager talks of her Masters Degree in Ceramics, this is not referred in the thesis with specific reference to that manager's interview but is analysed

within the generalised context that shows the variety of backgrounds of the five managers *taken as a whole*.

As noted, audio recordings were taken using the researcher's smartphone. In fact, this was an old device, not used for any other function and not connected to a network. The device was stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's office which only she has access to. Similarly, printed transcripts of these interviews and hand-written field notes were stored in a locked drawer which no-one else had access to. Typed transcripts were stored on the researcher's own laptop which only she has access to and which is password protected. Backups were stored, again, on a personal, password-protected Dropbox folder. Initially, backups were made every two weeks but, unfortunately, in the first year, following a hard-drive crash, the transcripts from the pilot study were lost and are not included in this thesis. Backups were made every day following this error.

4.12 Research ethics

This research has been guided and underpinned by Northumbria University's Research Ethics and Governance Handbook 2016/17 and has been approved by Northumbria University in January 2018. The data protection and data management procedures have been shared with participants and have received their informed consent, in line with the Data Protection Act 2017. Participants have been respected throughout with due diligence given to operating with honesty and integrity and avoiding any harm to those involved.

The risk of harm to those involved could potentially arise if any of the information gathered was deemed to reflect badly on their position as community centre managers and as part of a more informal network of venues receiving arts and culture offerings from the formal arts sector. The information presented in this thesis is designed to be constructively critical to the sector and aims to enhance understanding of the opportunities for, and barriers to, sustaining cultural activity in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation.

Chapter 5: Masters of our destiny

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters in which the findings and analysis of the field study research is presented. The findings from the Focus Group conversations and the One-to-One interviews with the five community centre managers, are presented in chapters 5 through 7, together with an analysis of those findings. In Chapter 5, the role and day-to-day experiences of the community manager is explored with particular reference to her relationship with extending arts provision and cultural activity. In Chapter 6, the barriers to providing arts and culture are examined. In Chapter 7, an analysis is undertaken of the way in which the relationship with New Writing North during the Strategic Touring Partnership project has supported or hindered the ability to provide arts and cultural activities.

Each of the three chapters are then drawn together in Chapter 8, which further integrates the historical analysis presented in Chapter 2 and the theoretical analysis presented in Chapter 3. In this way, and as demanded by the Pragmatic methodology, the following four chapters bring together the incoherent elements of the indeterminate situation to present a reunified determinate situation at the conclusion of Chapter 8.

Thumbnail image of **Fig 4:** Inquiry transforms an indeterminate situation into a reunified whole

5.2 Community centre managers

A community centre is a public location where members of a community tend to gather for group activities, social support, public information, and other purposes. Sometimes community centres are open to a specialised group such as a religious group or a certain section of the demographic (youth centres for instance) but often they are open for the whole community, and one which is geographically located. The five community centres

at the heart of this thesis are open to all and used predominantly by their local community within County Durham.

Community centres in the UK emerged at the beginning of the 20th Century, founded and promoted by three organisations: the National Council of Social Service, the Federation of Residential Settlements and the Educational Settlements Association. They were often found in the most impoverished areas and their emphasis was on 'social services' (Mess and King, 1947, p70)

However, after the First World War, the idea of community associations really began to take hold as part of the development of new housing estates, such as those in Dagenham, Watling, Middlesex and Birmingham and a national organisation was set up to promote their work in the new estates: the National Council of Social Services (NCSS). Just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War there were over three hundred community centres, defined as:

> *A Community Centre may be defined as a building which (1) serves a community organized in an association which is responsible for the management of the building; and (2) provides facilities for the development of the recreational, cultural and personal welfare of members of that community; and (3) constitutes a meeting place for voluntary organizations or other groups in the community which need accommodation.* [NCSS, in Mess and King, 1947, p73]

After the war, with the large-scale restructuring of British social and economic life, the community centre became a government endorsed essential amenity and by the 1960s they had grown in number to over 900. Rather than being seen as a social service, they took on more of a recreational and educational aspect, becoming sites for dances and other entertainment and were operated and maintained with assistance from their local council. By the late 1990s, it was estimated that over 4.4 million people used community centres every week [Marriot, P., 1997].

The role of the community centre manager has expanded during this period and now typically involves a combination of 1) centre management, such as ensuring the effective day-to-day running of the centre, managing the clerical, cleaning and caretaking tasks, as well as assuming overall responsibility for the maintenance of the building; 2)

administrative management, including budget management and fundraising, ensuring the centre has up-to-date policies and health & safety procedures; managing staff and volunteers; and 3) programming the venue and building relationships with community users.

The role of the community centre manager as a broker of the relationship between demand (the audience) and supply (the art) side of arts and culture provision is of particular interest to this thesis; particularly in terms of understanding the central question of sustaining cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation.

The community centre managers who took part in the research for this thesis all live and work within the immediate locale of their centre. They are all women with ages ranging 30 to 65 years. However, each of them has had a different background, they've had different life and career trajectories, and each of them approach programming and managing their venues in different ways, albeit with common elements to each approach. Throughout this thesis they are referred to as **CM1** to **CM5** with their identities anonymised.

Of particular interest to this research was to find out how each of them regarded their role in terms of programming arts and culture within their venues. And, whether having a propensity towards programming arts for their community was reflective of their own background and views, those of their community users, or for any other reason; as well as whether the relationship with New Writing North was instructive in this regard.

Across the five centres there was a similar level of arts provision, with programming factors explored in more detail below. However, a typical level of provision – within a standard week's programme can be exemplified by quoting – at length – from a one-to-one interview with CM5:

> *Monday is mature guys playing bowls, aerobics for mature ladies, and we have the ladies line dancing in the evening for three hours. Tuesday is our craziest day; we have our mental health group – for both men and women – a ladies coffee*

morning; and the community garden people are in. Tuesday night is the drama group – we have our own drama group who perform our annual pantomime but they're working towards our summer performance at the moment. Wednesdays is bingo, toasties and beef sandwich afternoon; then the ladies who 'knit and natter.' Thursdays is Crafty Girls (ladies who make greetings cards); Thursday night drama [group] are back in; and, also, line dancing back and it's karate night for kids and adults. Friday, we usually have someone who's booked a wedding or an engagement or a kids' party. Friday night can be pretty much anything from line dancing to a country & western night which we have once a month. Saturday, again, it's kids' parties or christenings during the day. Saturday night can be anything from the big band night, North Skelton and or an Elvis tribute. Or maybe someone's booked a wedding party. Sunday is the same as Saturday during the day but Sunday night we have an exercise class with drumsticks called "Pound".

CM5, Interview

As this extract illustrates, what can be termed arts or cultural activity is happening at the centre seven days a week. As well as sports and fitness activities, or general social activities, some form of arts & craft, dance, music or drama performance is available each day. For the community centre manager this is typical of what the centre is expected to provide. The drama club itself has been running for fifty years and is very much seen as belonging to the centre – it is its home. However, this provision is not seen by the manager as being particularly within the framework of 'cultural provision' – it's not seen as, or spoken of, in that way. It is simply regarded as the normal, expected provision at a community centre. Thus, when it comes to understanding the topic of 'supporting sustained cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation' we will need to dig a little deeper into the differentiation the community centre managers make between normal community centre provision and what is understood by "the Arts."

What CM5 thinks of as "the Arts", is the professional shows which she is offered through the local government arts development team, or those offered by her nearby NPO or the Arts Development Trust, and through the New Writing North programme. As with all five community managers, the difference between what is seen as their regular offer and "The Arts" is not explicitly identified, but it is implicitly apparent in the language

employed and the discourse on the subject. For example, in the second focus group meeting, when all five managers began discussing what they'd like to programme in terms of the arts, the differentiation is discernible:

> *Convincing people to come along to artsy things is difficult… Our main hall and stage is available every Friday night and if we shuffle one of our groups around we can perhaps put on a cabaret or a tribute act. But to me that's the social side of things. I would love to have a theatre group here because we haven't got one, but you have to look at the social side of things and then convince people to come.*
>
> **CM1, Focus Group 2**

In this extract, you can see CM1 is attempting to differentiate between the centre's 'our groups' with a paid-for act, such as a cabaret or tribute act, and a 'theatre group'. And furthermore between 'theatre' and 'the social side of things', implying that those two things are separate. In another example, CM2 describes the work of her amateur theatre company and their annual pantomime before making a segue way into discussing 'theatre groups':

> *And the pantomime is such a massively professional show which is why sometimes – because I do the lighting and the rigging and the wiring and the sound and vision – which is why when theatre groups come in, they can't talk over me. I know what I'm talking about.*
>
> **CM2, Focus Group 2**

For another manager, the differentiation was more explicit, but with an added category of 'quality' used to mark the two, as this extract from a one-to-one interview suggests:

CM5: *I've started to expand our offering and move away from sort of crappy paper craft. So, we've done… so we brough in Crushed Chilli to do a glass workshop and I've got a bid in at the minute which is built around bringing in, 'a minimum three quality arts experiences for children per quarter...'*

ML: *What do you mean by quality?*

CM5: *… stuff they can't do at home, stuff that isn't bringing in things that cost £1 at B&Ms. The bid was written around the fact that we wanted to bring in new and different things. Hopefully there'll be a touring production within that, we're going to bring in gaming and animation. Things they're not going to get at another community venue*

On other occasions, when discussing barriers to programming arts events, the responses frequently turned to the difficulty of 'convincing people to come along to artsy things' (CM1, Focus Group 1) and this is explored further below.

Their perception of their own role, as an arts and culture provider is also varied and was often related to their own background – in terms of having had an arts or arts education background, compared to those who'd come up through a community volunteer route. CM1, for instance, was aware of many of the instrumental benefits of the arts and how that might apply to her current work:

> *I believe the arts can help in many ways, assist in mental health and wellbeing, bringing the community together, and giving new opportunities. I studied contemporary arts back in university, although I haven't done much with that experience since. But I see how introducing small amounts [of arts] into most things we do here in the community centre does have a high impact and does help us get our message, point, event or even feedback across*.
>
> **CM1, Focus Group 4**

Whereas for CM2, the arts are viewed as a somewhat unknown quantity but one she is embracing, albeit with some signs of discomfort, seen here with the reference to 'theatre drama talk':

> *I don't have a passion for arts as such; but I do have a passion for providing opportunities and showing people new ideas. I have no arts background but I have been a community activist for fifteen years… I have however learned loads through this scheme [working with New Writing North] and now consider myself someone that can hold my own within theatre drama talk.*
>
> **CM2, Focus Group 4**

For CM5, on the other hand, who made the comment (above) about 'quality' there was a slight reluctance to see herself as 'arty', even though others may indeed think so. For example, in a one-to-one interview, she states:

> *I don't consider myself arty. I can do what I need to do to support the kids. But that's why it's nice when something like [the New Writing North programme] comes along and it's done for you. You can see what they've done, you can get ideas from what they've done, but you can have it done for you and that's a breath of fresh air.*
>
> **CM5, Interview**

Whereas, in a Focus Group session, the same manager says:

> *I can build my house out of my son's books – I was brought up with books. You wanted to know something; my dad had a book on it. I read to my son before he'd even been born! I started taking him to theatre at just 17 months old. But do I consider myself as high-brow arty? No, of course not. I just like what I like. When I programme work for the community, a huge consideration is, "Would I want to take a child to that?" or "Would I consider it value for money and a great experience for a child."*
>
> **CM5, Focus Group 4**

Although CM5 doesn't regard herself as 'high-brow arty', she is aware of what cultural provision she's like to provide to her community, she has strong opinions on what she considers to be 'quality' and is keen to experiment will bringing in more activities. This, she puts down, quite clearly, to her relationship with the New Writing North programme:

> *I've sent many emails to New Writing North to say they have been a catalyst for loads of our activities here. It prompted us to make a [funding] bid which resulted in a £1,000 grant; introduced us to Ruth [a drama facilitator]; introduced Storytimes [another New Writing North programme]; other workers; various trusts we've applied to. We've started working regularly with workshop leaders that New Writing North has introduced us to. We don't get massive numbers for workshops, but people do get a quality experience and it does propagate to other*

areas, and the word gets out that that's what we do [provide quality experiences] – the New Writing North related activities plus the stuff we get from Cultural Hubs, means we're developing a growing following for all our events.

CM5, Interview

Not only is CM5 conscious of how her relationship with New Writing North has become a catalyst for her to seek out new and interesting cultural provision, but she is also aware that the centre itself is building up a reputation for presenting arts and culture activities. Whilst she may not use the term 'audience development' she is clear that her own engagement with a variety of arts and culture practitioners is supporting an increase in community centre users. She also notes how much her confidence has grown, in terms of knowing what to programme, what to expect and how to manage the booking. Having begun by asking for support from New Writing North personnel to negotiate the programming, she now manages this process on her own.

For CM3, there was a similar self-reflection about her growing self-confidence when it came to programming more cultural activity. CM3 has an educational background in the arts, having studied a BA and an MA in Fine Art. She enjoyed arts and cultural activities with her parents when she was growing up and describes herself as 'Always having worked in youth and community with a strong bias to arts and culture' (CM3, Interview). However, despite this background, she had for many years simply left cultural provision to others until a range of community arts activities came her way; or, as she says, 'just popped into my inbox.' Work with music organisations and the local NPO opened her eyes to the possibilities and enabled her to build upon that:

Building on that with avenues of delivery for developing opportunities with small local grants and local initiatives, this also created a self-fulfilling momentum of people stepping in to share their skills, with bands developing and young people becoming instructors themselves. They then began to attract leaders with skills potential they wish to develop. We have now crated a community musical base at our adjoining centre.

CM3, Interview

CM3 describes her relationship has having created an important 'impact and legacy… it is a very giving relationship providing us with a much greater understanding of the reach and impact of cultural activity.' This, in turn, has enabled her to reflect upon herself as someone who not only manages the centre but as a community artist herself; one who can provide opportunities for her community:

> *…and I thought why am I paying out X amount of money for a practitioner who isn't very good when I'm an artist, and I can deliver stuff, and I would a) do it better because I believe in my community and b) I can save some money? And, actually, it gets me going again with my practise.*
>
> **CM 3, Focus Group 2**

Similarly for CM1, who had studied contemporary arts in university, found that although she hadn't personally developed her practice, being involved in more arts programming was having a positive impact on her community:

> *I believe the arts can help in many ways, assist in mental health and wellbeing, bringing the community together, and giving new opportunities… I see how introducing small amounts into most things we do here in the centre does have a high impact…*
>
> **CM1, Interview**

Although personal encounters with the arts, and whether the managers considered themselves 'arty', didn't necessarily have a huge impact on their motivation for presenting arts and culture programming, the sense that they were not part of the arts sector, that it was a different world to their own, was apparent to such an extent that it could be considered one of the barriers faced by community centres. This is explored more in the next chapter. However, to conclude this chapter, it is worth noting that for each of the community centre managers, providing arts and culture opportunities was seen as an important part of the fabric of community centre life.

This became more evident during the third focus group meeting which was centred on a 'Programming CPD workshop'.

Part of the workshop was designed to provide inspiration for different types of programming ideas and pointers on where to go to find new things to programme. At the same time, the aim was to understand what the centres were already programming and where they were drawing their existing inspiration from. This discussion was centred on a slide outlining the thirteen DCMS Creative and Cultural Industries 'sectors': Advertising, Architecture, Arts & Antiques, Craft, Design, Designer Fashion, Film & Video, Television & Radio, Interactive Leisure Software, Software & Computer Services, Music, Performing Arts, Publishing.

The list itself came as a surprise to managers and, indeed, they are not alone in this! There have been many criticisms within the arts sector and academia of this wide definition used by the DCMS (for example, Galloway and Dunlop: 2007). However, that 'Interactive Leisure Software' was included provided a source of inspiration to CM5:

> *Can you just back up a bit there… Are you saying, well are they saying 'interactive leisure software', is that art? Gaming? Coz that's just given me an idea. Gaming workshops. Does anyone do gaming workshops? Because we could definitely get the kids in for that.*
>
> **CM5, Focus Group 3**

In fact, this idea was followed up on, and the centre found a company that provides workshops in gaming which were then run during the following school summer holidays. This was just one of the many positive experiences to come out of the focus groups, the connection into the arts sector and of the peer-to-peer interaction/learning that emerged from discussing their 'situation' with one another. It also links back to one of the key elements of the Pragmatic methodology that 'the research be useful to those taking part'.

However, it should not be taken as a given that community centre managers *want* to be tapped in to the arts sector, or that this would necessarily be an entirely positive outcome. Throughout the focus group discussions and interviews, the relationship between the arts sector and them as arts programmers was regarded as being fraught with both opportunities and challenges. These are examined in Chapter 6. What was very

clear, however, from the research findings is that community centre managers were incredibly knowledgeable about *how* to programme their centres.

In each of the focus group-workshops, where the idea had been to pass on some knowledge or experience of – respectively – funding, programming and marketing, it became clear that each manager was incredibly well-versed in each of these aspects. For example, one centre manager (CM2), regularly raises around **£10,000 per month** to keep her centre afloat:

> **CM2:** *I spend all my time fundraising currently, like I say, whether it's for a new roof, or an electricity bill, or for wages, because we don't get core funding. Every single penny we make in here has to be found by me and my team; and it costs me £11,000 per month to run this place, to open the doors, that's before anything goes wrong. That's wages, that's lighting, insurances, whatever it may be.*
>
> **M:** *That's £11,000 a month you have to find!?*
>
> **CM2:** *I might rephrase that, because it's probably about £9,500 now because we've made some redundancies.*
>
> **CM2, Interview**

Moreover, this was true across the board, with each manager having to fundraise almost perpetually to 'keep the doors open'. They were fully competent on how to write an application and compile reports back to funders; how to draw up budgets and complete evaluations. The workshops weren't without merit, however, with good tips being passed between managers and from the researcher, and some important knowledge was shared about how to note in-kind support, how to budget contingencies and how to deal with the risk of not getting funding. The same was true of programming and marketing, as well as engaging with schools and early years centres. With each workshop revealing the managers' own high levels of competency but also providing ideas to their contemporaries of how to do things differently or to incorporate skills/knowledge they hadn't come across before. The five-year relationship between the centres and New

Writing North had clearly had an impact on their developing skills and knowledge, as well as confidence levels, and this is further examined in Chapter 6.

So, although many of the managers didn't consider themselves 'arty' or had even regarded what they do as 'cultural programming', their contribution to providing opportunities for their community was hugely in evidence. For one, a children's reading room within the centre had become a personal project; initially furnished with her own child's books, she'd then applied to two trusts (outcome of one still pending at the time of writing), with support from New Writing North on where to look for funding and had succeeded in creating a wonderful space for children to read and explore stories, with plans to make it bigger and better (funding application success depending).

That was true across the cohort. Arts and Culture may have been part of the centre's offering, but the emphasis was on the community and the centre itself, not the art, and that emphasis and commitment ran deep:

> *We work within a deprived community, who sometimes have different priorities in life than maybe I do, but we all have the ability to enjoy ourselves and make our children happy, and they're quite often pleased with themselves after doing something in our centre – and that is why I do my job.*
>
> **CM1, Focus Group 4**

Ch 6: Barriers to providing cultural activity in community centre venues

6.1 Introduction: barriers to providing cultural activity in community centre venues

Although it was noted in Chapter 5 that the community centre managers don't regard themselves as being primarily providers of cultural activity, their engagement with the New Writing North programme, and other similar initiatives from regional NPOs, has meant that they regard arts provision as something they enjoy providing when possible.

However, there are a number of barriers to doing so; some of which relate to their situation within the ecology of arts provision. These are examined in Chapter 6 through an understanding of the barriers faced by managers in providing cultural activity. They centre on five areas, as indicated by the managers themselves:

- financial considerations,
- programming decisions, particularly around the issue of taking risks,
- barriers to achieving a well-engaged and consistently attending audience,
- the particular challenge of being a community centre rather than a bespoke arts venue,
- the relationship of the venues to the wider arts sector.

These areas are explored thematically in the following five sections of the chapter.

6.2 If money was no object

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the most common and immediate response to the direct question, '*What are the barriers to providing cultural activity [in your centre]?*' was 'money', 'cost' or 'price'.

> *Money, if money was no object, we'd programme loads more arts.*
>
> **CM2, Focus Group 1**

> *The price. If the price looks good, I think, "We'll have that then."*
>
> **CM5, Interview**

> *It always comes down to the cost of the activity and whether we can afford it.*
>
> **CM4, Interview**

Each manager has an instinctive sense about what they can afford to pay for an incoming arts' offer and what they could charge, together with the likely audience-to-capacity ratio which is illustrated quite neatly by CM3's response within a conversation between the managers about what they might programme:

> *We've gone up to [paying] £500 for a pantomime but we had all year to fundraise for [it]. We can't programme anything at a loss and we've got a capacity of 120 so around £200/£300 at £2/£2.50 is about right.*
>
> **CM3, Focus Group 1**

A constant consideration was in keeping the costs low to their users, obviously conscious of the fact they are providing for audiences in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. For example, CM1 would keep her costs as low as possible but this had a trade-off in terms of negotiating programming decisions with her board of trustees:

> *We find that although we can gain funding, the cost of such activities means the cost to join in those sessions or events can sometimes be high. The majority of our activities for children and their families are normally around the £1.50 to £2 mark, per child. Which then makes these activities non-profit making, which then effects the trustees' decision to go forward with them.*
>
> **CM1, Interview**

Negotiating the relationship with trustees is explored in more detail below and provides some interesting food for thought in terms of the barriers faced by community centre managers. However, in terms of fundraising, each manager was used to finding money for additional activities in the centre and there was a 'can do' attitude towards meeting this challenge. Indeed, in Focus Group 3, which was specifically related to costs and funding, the conversation between the managers moved swiftly on from a brief consideration of cost, price and money, onto how and where to find the funding needed. The challenges associated with this were similar across the board:

> *I could do more if I could raise more money. But I'm stuck in a precarious position. There's no core funding for my job. So, in a night-time, when I take work home, do*

I continue to work, investing in this place by finding more money, or do I look for another job because I need to live? They owe me 96 hours unpaid and 42 days' holiday. No cover for holidays. I'm on my knees, it's been a hard year, running backwards and forwards just trying to keep this place open. But, in terms of project funding, yeah, I've brought some really cracking projects here, but it's been a massive, massive workload.

CM5, Focus Group 3

For four of the five managers, the challenge was predominantly one of juggling the demands of keeping the centre going, including raising the funds for their own salary, and of putting in additional bids, specifically for arts funding:

Whilst fundraising for the arts is high on the priority it's difficult when I don't even have money for my own post or for core costs. And whilst doing things with the community, by the community and for the community is up there [indicates high] because this is what I've been working for over the past few years, it's really hard to find X number of hours to write a bid that might only cover simply furnishing the room.

CM4, Interview 2

I would love the time to do that [fundraise], personally and for the centre. But I don't go out of my way to specifically raise money for arts programming simply because there's always another fire to put out first. So, that might be funding for a part of the roof, or if we've got a party on, or whatever it is, but the arts - in my world – always seem to take a back seat.

CM3, Interview 2

That the arts need 'to take a back seat', to building repairs or to dealing with a running cost issue, can be regarded as an understandable attitude when you have a menu of competing demands upon your time, and keeping the roof on is clearly a prior consideration to presenting a workshop. However, it does illustrate a fundamental barrier to a community centre manager's ability to sustain cultural activity – even if offers are presented to them in a cost-effective and easy-to-produce way. Moreover, it isn't

only maintenance and daily running costs that preoccupy the managers' fundraising plans.

With the exception of one centre, where the manager's post was funded by the Parish Council, all the others were performing the juggling act of keeping the centre going and raising money for programming and for core costs, including their own salary. This was an issue the researcher picked up on again during the one-to-one interview with CM5. It's an interesting exchange and worth quoting the exchange in full:

ML: *You mentioned at the meeting that you don't have core funding for your position.*

CM5: *Yes chick, I have to fundraise for my own fee. It's not supported. So my board could turn round tomorrow and say goodbye.*

ML: *How do you go about finding it?*

CM5: *Say I put a bid in for £5k then about £500 sticks to us. And there's been a change of wind at CDCF [County Durham Community Foundation] which has knocked the wind out of my sails because we used to get money like, well not a dead cert, but you had confidence you'd stand a chance of getting it. So out of a £4,500 bid, £4,000 goes out to pay providers, so only £500 sticks to us for refreshments and decoration and flyers and stuff. That's a £500 PM [project management] fee and we have to put another £500 in as matched. It's just a token, it's nothing, £4,000 to deliver and a £1,000 per quarter is not very much for arts but you can only go for £5k at most. But the thinking behind it is that it'll bring in footfall, it'll be something different.*

CM5, Interview

Here, CM5, is highlighting a common quandary amongst the managers, that the funds raised for arts activities generate little profit to reinvest in the development of the centre's programme – that only the £500 project management fee 'sticks to us'. In other words, the amount granted only covers the cost of putting on the activity. Whilst this might be something that a not-for-profit organisation would expect to be familiar with, the suggestion from CM5 is that she'd like to accumulate some surplus for forward planning or to contribute to core costs; the money is essentially for 'delivery'. She

justifies the work put in to raising the funds as one that increases footfall, but the worry about 'fire-fighting' remains and is compounded by the fact that the community centre has little core funding as discussed in the next section of the same interview:

M: *What sort of core funding do you get?*

CM5: *It's low at the minute, I'm really worried about it. Whatever you get is what you can apply for. I've got a couple of bids in, but because of the way funding goes, the bids are delivery money, so the rationale is, we'll put the donkey work in, to a bid that's delivery money, because that is giving activities; it's keeping the doors open, and people coming in. But it doesn't pay the bills, but it is giving activity. You can't get core funding for love nor money, not for wages, not for core costs. So, you have to find a way. So, I have to use that £500 PM fee to pay for refreshments and save a bit on that for staff costs. But every bid is different. I've put one in, to the People Health Fund, and we've put in more costs for that than in most we do, but I don't have confidence that we'll definitely get it.*

CM5, Interview

The lack of confidence mentioned in this exchange suggests a fundraising climate that has changed, become more challenging – whether that is due to the manager's own situation or the climate within the charity sector is something worth exploring, which is followed up upon in the next section of the interview. The answers given by CM5 suggest a climate that is becoming more difficult but also that for an individual community centre manager to maintain a fundraising role is a situation that is ultimately unsustainable:

M: *Have you got less confidence about funding bids than you used to have then?*

CM5: *Every bid's different, every funders different. I now work on 0% confidence, whereas I used to work on 50% confidence, 50-75% with CDCF but they are changing. They've got a different CEO, there's different staff, just the feel is different, so my confidence with CDCF has dipped. But say Comic Relief, I've yet to get the money out of them, but for the amount of effort that had to go into that bid compared to the amount of money we're going to get out of it, it was hardly worth it. But out of thousands of projects, they only funded 17 and we were one. And I was the only community centre that they funded. They funded big housing associations. It [the money] wasn't for creative stuff, it was for "Active*

Agent" [aimed at people aged 65+] so we'll be able to bring in adult shows, and it's around getting that age group active in the community, not active as in physically active, but as in contributing, taking part, volunteering, this that and the other. It's really hard to get though, I lost two weeks of my summer holidays last year writing that bid and yes we went through all the stages and we got it, which is cracking, but it's a nightmare. The amount of paperwork and the amount of work involved in that bid, well, yeah, we get a bit out of it, a bit of core for me, but nowhere near what justifies the work put in. But every fund's different, you can't assume you'll get a management fee, that you'll get money towards staff costs, or anything. I've got one in with DCC [Durham County Council] and there was literally something in there that said you can't apply for more than 3% for core funding. So, it's basically delivery money.

CM5, Interview

This revealing exchange demonstrates how much of the community centre manager's time is spent on fundraising for activity – for delivery, with an additional attempt to chip away at core costs by building a management fee into each bid. Furthermore, it was typical of the amount of personal time given *pro bono* by managers to fundraising – in the evenings, in the summer holidays, at quiet times during the day-to-day running of the centre. Therefore, not only is money or funds an issue but finding time to write funding bids in the busy life of a community centre is something that all managers discussed as a major barrier to focusing on providing more arts programming, particularly when trying to provide a low-cost cultural activity to audiences in an area of economic disadvantage and in attempting to provide something on a regular basis to sustain interest.

The interview extract from CM5 (above) and the Focus Group 2 discussion which centred on a workshop about fundraising, demonstrated that the community centre managers are adept at finding pots of money to apply for and are able to adapt their programming needs to what is available. For example, where CM5 refers to the 'Active Agent' fund above. However, a further consideration with fundraising was whether the product on offer would be taken up, as this extract from an interview with CM4 points out:

> *Yesterday we just had a trial of an instrument day. We got £5,000 for that, from the Local Area Action Partnership, and so we can run it for free. I wrote the bid but it's in the village partnership's name. We'll do textile art, singing and hopefully a*

painting course. We have applied for grants in the past and run this sort of programme but it's hit or miss [in terms of successful bids]. We did an art workshop but we didn't have any attendees.

CM4, Interview

This sort of disappointment has an impact on the desire of the managers to take programming risks and be confronted with low (or non-existent) attendance. This is explored more thoroughly in 6.3 below.

In addition to funds from grants and foundations, the centres also have income streams from regular activity such as fitness classes, from room hire for weddings, parties and other private functions, and for one centre their local drama group and its yearly pantomime was a welcome income strand providing £3-3.5k per annum.

[The drama group has] been here for fifty odd years and are part of this building. The main family that run it have been here for years and years and years and they're what we call a section of the community centre, so they're part of us. They pay subs that go towards the hire of the room and then when they produce the pantomime, the proceeds from the door come back to the community centre. So they usually generate us £3-3,500 per year. And the pantomime is just such a massively professional show.

CM2, Interview

However, despite the constant juggling and the evident time-strain this placed on managers, it was clear that they were constantly looking at news ways to raise funds. As mentioned above, this came out quite prominently in the funding workshop-focus group – as in the example given in Chapter 5 of the centre manager who regularly raises about £10,000 per month. Further into the same interview, the researcher asks her to go into more detail about the money she raises and where it comes from:

My fundraising in the last 13 years has equalled £420,000 for various projects. And I'm not Esther Rantzen, I'm not some public figure, I'm not Bob Geldof, it's just by being here, tapping into £36,000 for some gym equipment, some new catering equipment, £250,000 from the Big Lottery for some refurbishment, £5000 to do

the gardens. £36,000 from Greggs Charity Trust for my salary for three years. Or we apply for £5,000 to pay for our electricity bill. And I can speak to the council about certain things, so the car park cost us £30,000 and the roof we're having done at the minute is £26,000 and the council might chuck us a couple of hundred here and there or maybe even a thousand from a neighbourhoods' budget, but that's not paying for our caretaker. Some other community centres have caretakers paid for by the council, have a centre manager paid for so [references another centre manager] has all the time in the world to fundraise, no point in me raising funds to put on a play if we haven't got a roof or if we haven't got any staff because we can't afford wages.

CM2, Interview

For one community centre, the story is a more positive one, albeit having started from a negative situation:

We're lucky with our Parish Council supporting us, but we have to weight popular shows against low attending shows. Our Parish Council fund our salaries and so we have 13 members of staff to support. [This figure was greeted with gasps of general shock and awe from the other participants in the focus group!] *Our venue was close to closing, but we managed to persuade them to keep us open.*

CM1, Focus Group 2

As we see from the above quote, even when a centre is more generously supported, 'weight[ing] popular shows against low attending shows', was an issue. This taking of programming risks was widely cited by the managers as a challenge or barrier to planning a programme of sustained arts and culture and is explored in the next section.

6.3 Taking a Risk

Although taking risks is a major consideration for any venue wishing to programme arts and culture, there emerged a distinct set of challenges for the community centres. What was particularly pertinent for the venues which form this case study was how to manage that risk when they were particularly focused on the long-term aim of sustaining cultural activity. For example, when they are aiming to build up a reputation for presenting good

work, or work of a particular nature (i.e., for children and families). Risk is also a major consideration when attempting to entice audiences to try new things, which can often seem like an uphill battle even when presenting regular, 'comfort zone' programming. However, each manager was clear that they weren't there to make a huge profit. Rather, the risk which they're referring to centres on building trust within their community for presenting work their audiences will enjoy and sustaining that audience, with financial risk being a much more secondary consideration:

> *We programmed something from [a Creative People and Places programme] and it was subsidised so we could afford it but about 50% hated it and 50% loved it. The problem is, you risk losing them if you programme a lot of stuff they don't want to see. It's not just about price, but about building trust.*
>
> **CM5, Focus Group 1**

> *It's not just the price of a show but whether people will want to come. If I spend all my time promoting things that people don't want, they're going to start losing trust in the centre. I made that mistake once and now I sometimes sell new things on the basis that 'It's good, it's nothing like the X show'* [with the X show being the name of a show that hadn't gone down at all well!]
>
> **CM3, Focus Group 3**

However, their concern isn't solely focused on the audience. Even where managers are prepared to take a risk, to try a new type of cultural offering, they often face resistance or outright opposition from their Boards of Trustees as this exchange between two managers during Focus Group 2 demonstrates:

CM1: *All they're [the board] interested in is the bottom line. I might want to do something because of an educational benefit or a health benefit – this project here [points to a flyer] was about getting more families in, but they're not interested…*

CM3: *Yes, inclusion and participation seem not to matter.*

CM1: *They only want to know if it's been financially successful – even though we're a not-for-profit organisation – they don't seem to think beyond [the money] … Even when I want*

to spend time developing something new, say for a Friday night, convincing the Trustees that I need to spend time on doing these things, that I need to spend some money to get them off the ground and to get our community in every Friday night. I could have something on every Friday night and the community could drop in and out. But they're [the Trustees] like, 'Hmm, we've got a funding application that needs to go in for the roof…' But we're here as a community centre as well.

Focus Group 2

So, building new audiences and creating trust around the type of cultural provision by programming appealing events is intermingled with taking some calculated risks and this combination is seen by the managers as an important factor in terms of developing and sustaining an audience for their venue. This issue is picked up again in Chapter 7 where we examine the impact of working with New Writing North on a longer-term, sustained programme. But, even in the short term, the community centre managers were aware of needing to develop a reputation for presenting certain types of offering, even if they faced resistance from board members.

For CM1 the solution seems to lie, in part, in getting 'some fresh faces on the board'. She is planning to advertise a free rehearsal space to attract a resident drama group who she feels will animate some of the quieter points in the week, and which could lead to generating extra income from scratch performance nights and drama workshops; in addition, she believes this might encourage, 'a couple of people from the theatre [to] come onto the board':

> *That would really help with advocating for the arts and that's my plan. So, at the minute, our trustees are… Well, there's one lady from the dance school and she's good, but the rest are just older people who want to put something back into the community… but you just spend your life convincing them and as soon as something doesn't go well, the ticket sales haven't gone that well, they're like, "Well, we did tell you." But you know, you've got to try these things.*
>
> **CM1, Focus Group 2**

For another venue manager, this process of replacing older board members with 'fresh faces' has already happened, partly as a result of programming more things for young people, and partly through demographic changes in the composition of her community:

> *One of the things that's happening in [my village] is that we've got new groups coming out, and the new board members are younger and they've got young families, whereas they used to be much older. So, I do feel there's a sense that they're more in line, they know what you're doing, so you do feel you're moving forward, but you have to keep chipping away at it.*
>
> **CM4, Focus Group 1**

Despite these 'internal' issues around taking risks, the predominant issue for venue managers in terms of programming is not only in ensuring that they are building a reputation for presenting good work, particularly in an area of economic deprivation where cultural activities may be limited, but that they can sustain it as well:

> *I'd programme more children's theatre if it wasn't so costly – we're definitely building up a reputation for children's theatre. And we'd like to build on that, to programme something every couple of months. We can't do that at the moment but we still programme as much as we can.*
>
> **CM3, Focus Group 2**

> *I would definitely like to programme more family theatre if cost wasn't an issue. Because it's important not to have long gaps in programming so you can build momentum.*
>
> **CM2, Focus Group 2**

Children's (or family) theatre is a popular way for community centres to experiment with arts programming, partly because it's seen as something that the local community will do as part of a general offer of activities and for some it is seen as 'planting a seed' (CM3, Focus Group 2) for the younger generation to enjoy arts and culture activity. However, it is seen as a lesser programming risk than theatre or arts activities aimed at adults. Moreover, there was a perception that, as a small venue, with a limited programme, the risk of something being 'a bit hitty-missy' was greater than it would be for a more established arts organisation:

We're a small centre and our users are mostly from the estates round here, so if we take something that goes down badly, we suffer quite a lot from that. Maybe if you were in a bigger organisation you could, say, programme stuff that was a bit hitty-missy, and people wouldn't notice so much. But for us, we've noticed a bad programming mistake can have a big consequence.

CM4, Focus Group 3

And the trust issue is something that not only defines the relationship between the centre and its audience, but also between the centre and the cultural offer.

*I was given a choice of shows from [*a Creative People and Places programme*] and they wanted me to take a certain one, and I could have done. I could've chosen… I mean it was a lovely one about the war, set in a dance hall with the American troops and the ladies and it would fit ideally, it would be lovely, you know, the hall would lend itself very well to it, but I just didn't feel I'd get the people through. Maybe I would've but, I don't know, I just didn't want to take the risk but [there was another show] I knew I'd get the kids in for. So, in the end, I took a programming decision to take shows for kids because that's what we're building a reputation for.*

CM 2, Interview

Knowing where to look, and who to trust, was part of the challenge of attempting to build a sustained programme, at low-cost for communities who don't necessarily have a history of active arts attendance as CM5 notes in this extract:

I don't have time to actively go out and search for arts and bring things in. So yes I've built up relationships with [NPO] and New Writing North and you. And I've been with New Writing North the longest, and people like Ruth and Claire and stuff like that and I kind of got Kitchen Zoo through that relationship. Then I got Topsy Turvey because of Kitchen Zoo… So recommendations. But I haven't got time to sit and search and look – nah! … But you need recommendations. And again, it comes back to risk because taking Topsy Turvey was a risk but because it was recommended by someone good then I think okay.

CM5, Focus Group 3

Word of mouth, from trusted sources and, in fact, being tapped in to the network of arts providers was clearly seen as something that was helpful in building momentum, variety and helpful in terms of sustaining cultural activity. But, in addition, bespoke opportunities, such as a showcase of touring shows, hosted by a local NPO was useful.

CM2: *It was definitely beneficial to go and see the [NPO] showcase.*

CM4: *Yes, I'd pay to go if you had to.*

CM2: *But, what do we get out of it? I know they get £600 and they get a venue for their show but we don't get anything – we get bums on seats and something good for our audience, but we don't make anything financial out of it.*

Focus Group 3

Again, where opportunities present themselves, the sustainability issue is focused on a financial model that creates a surplus – as a cushion for the centre itself to be sustained, to contribute towards core costs and for forward planning.

Sustaining audience, when you are constantly raising funds just to 'keep the doors open', feel like an incredible challenge for the community centre managers. However, as the comment (above) from the interview with CM2 suggests, there is a sense that, as community centre managers, they know their audiences better than outside agencies or arts organisations and that they have developed the confidence in recent years – and through a process of programming trial and error – to trust their own instincts about what programming risks to take.

Throughout interview and focus group conversations there was a sense of 'us and them' about the relationship between the arts sector and the community centres. An issue which the researcher picked up on in Focus Group 3:

ML: *So, do you feel, I'm picking up from what you're saying, do you feel there's an imbalance between the arts sector and the community sector?*

CM5: *Our problem's not with the arts sector but with people telling us what to programme because they think it should be there. Those who tell us what a high standard of quality art is. So if I cut out the middle-man, and speak directly to the artist, I have a better relationship then with someone who comes and says, the artists is going to come and this is what they're going to do.*

CM2: *Yes. The thing is, all of those people who want us to take their shows, they never even come to the venue, to see what we do and who we are.*

Focus Group 3

Whilst it can be argued that those agencies promoting shows and cultural offerings to community venues may themselves lack the time and resources to visit all community venues, there is a useful learning point for the cultural sector in these comments, and once again this comes back to understanding the community centre managers wish to be in control of their programming, to have a say in what works for their audiences and for it to be recognised that a 'one size fits all' approach to bringing in arts and culture offerings is not necessarily productive.

However, as we shall see in Chapter 7, where a relationship has been built up with an organisation – such as the local NPO or New Writing North, then there is much more of a two-way relationship between the centre and the artistic offer, one which helps in terms of mitigating the risks of programming innovatively whilst sustaining a welcomed offer of activity.

6.4 The audience

As we have already seen, a number of issues can be regarded as barriers to providing arts and culture opportunities: cost, time, fundraising needs, trustee expectations, and how to mitigate programming risks. And, as the extracts from the interviews attest, these aren't a set of stand-alone factors. Rather, each challenge impacts on the other, creating a complex pattern of negotiations required by the community centre manager.

At the heart of this complex pattern, however, lies the audience. Or 'users' of the facility. As noted above, funding applications are often made simply to 'keep the doors open',

challenges with trustees often centre on trying something different to create new audiences, and programming decisions are made on the basis of what a new or existing audience might like.

In this section we explore some of the challenges and barriers concerned with meeting the expectations of existing audiences, sustaining them in the short and the long term, and providing opportunities that might lead to creating new audiences, i.e., audience development. These challenges centre on a number of factors which, again, are interrelated, but which have been divided into discreet areas to shed some light on the various considerations community managers must make in order to present and sustain cultural activities. They are:

a) Perceptions of 'The Arts'
b) What works
c) How to make it work
d) How accessible are the centres

6.4 a) Arts are posh

As outlined in Chapter 2, the barriers to arts and culture participation have been widely documented (Bunting et al., 2008; Wilson, Gross and Bull, 2017; Jancovich, 2017), with 'perceptions of ineligibility' being one of the six most reoccurring factors. 'The arts are not for the likes of me,' is a phrase that is often used to sum up this phenomenon. This echoes many of the experiences of our five community managers who have experienced similar resistance:

> **CM1:** *And our second thing [barrier] is people's perceptions of the arts. We have to convince quite a lot of people to take part.*
>
> **CM3:** *Yes, the word 'performing arts' or just 'arts' can put a lot of people off. It can act as a barrier.*
>
> **Focus Group 2**

> *This is a pit village, Mo, a mining community, the arts and culture are seen as posh.*
>
> **CM2, Focus Group 4**

As the literature review has highlighted, this resistance might well have been expected in 'areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation'. However, what is also evident from the interviews is that the managers themselves may have some reservations – not simply because their audiences might not engage, but that they too might not regard participating in the arts as something that is part of the fabric of their community:

> *I don't feel our arts culture is moving forward. I mean, you keep doing it, and you plug away at it, and they do come and love it, but I don't think they necessarily think, 'Oh my goodness…' I mean, it's not a natural way for parents to choose to spend their leisure time, is it?*
>
> **CM4, Focus Group 1**

There was a sense from some of the managers that the audiences needed to be coaxed, or cajoled into attending, or that they needed to be 'educated' in order to see the value of arts participation – or both!

> *People's perceptions of what the particular activity is going to be, if they feel it's not suitable, the family won't be able to participate, it will be above their ability, things like that. It's only until we spend time and explain the activity that they are then persuaded. We have to spend a lot of time persuading, but we can't do that with everyone.*
>
> **CM1, Focus Group 4**

> *Yeah, unless they've been educated in the arts… I mean, they might come and have a good time but they just identify it as having a good time, rather than an arts experience. You get the odd few who seek out arts activity, but for most it's just something fun to do.*
>
> **CM4, Focus Group 1**

Prompted by their local development agency. some of the managers had been invited to a focus group to discuss how to engage arts audiences, where the issue of audiences needing to be educated cropped up, as this interview exchange with CM2 indicates:

CM2: *People go, 'The Arts, whoa, no thanks', but the other side of that coin is that they don't know what the arts means, so it was established [at the focus group] that [our area] needed to be educated almost. Needed to have something brought into them, so they could go and see, say, a piece of theatre and then say I enjoyed that but that wasn't art, it was a play, it wasn't in a gallery. So, we got involved in the focus groups that established some kind of need … a programme to have in here.*

ML: *So how do you feel about this idea that came out of the programme, that [the people of this community] needed to be educated?*

CM2: *I think they did need to be educated, even me personally, I would think of art as you need to go to an arts gallery or to the theatre, I wouldn't necessarily think, to see the Knit and Natter ladies who made a [knitted] penguin to go over a chocolate orange, that's quite arty, but we'd never have seen that as art, maybe as craft, but wouldn't have seen that as having been in the arts kind of thing.*

CM2, Interview

The idea that people need to be educated to enjoy the arts is a long-standing argument and was more fully discussed in Chapter 3. It essentially centres on the idea that people who don't actively seek out art are simply people whose tastes need to be refined, to be developed, that they to be educated into seeing the value of art – aesthetically, intrinsically or otherwise. It is, in many ways, linked to Bennett's 'Civilising mission' thesis (Bennett, 1995).

Nina Simon, in *The Art of Relevance*, expresses the same concern about the paternalistic nature of such a view:

> *In 2007, I sat on a panel at the National Academies of Science about the future of museums and libraries. I was the youngest person there, cowed by the leaders and experts in the room. I'll never forget a distinguished CEO, banging his fist on the table and saying, "Our job is not to give people what they want but what they need."*

> *I was too nervous to say anything at the time, but the phrase stuck like a thorn in my brain stem. The thorn jammed in a little further each time I heard it, dozens of times over the years, in meetings and conferences and brainstorming sessions. This phrase drives me nuts. It smacks of paternalism. As if it weren't enough to be the experts on our subject matter. Now we're the experts on what people "need" too?*
>
> Simon, N., 2016. p92

Simon goes on to argue that this interpreting of what people "need" is often less reflective of their needs and more to do with what the arts professional "wants" (p93).

For CM2, however, it wasn't just that she was being asked to educate her community into what sort of artistic encounter they might need or what they might want, once they'd tasted the finer things on offer, there was also a suggestion that she herself was ignorant of what 'art' was and that she needed educating too. For example, she had not assumed that knitting a penguin could be considered art, until she was told otherwise.

The philosophical considerations at the heart of what constitutes art are perhaps beyond the scope of this research; however, the central thought that people need to be educated or to be told that what they are doing *is* art, is reflected in many of the comments made by centre managers. At the beginning of this section, CM4 discussed people being educated into understanding what it is that they're participating in, noting that, 'they just identify it as having a good time, rather than an arts experience.' And, again, below CM2 talks quite openly about the tendency to give people an arts experience almost by stealth:

> *But you've almost got to coerce them to get here, talk them into it, tell them a lie almost – you're going to come and see this and you're going to really love it and you're going to get pie and peas [laughs]. There's going to be some crazy actors going on but you're not … Well, I mean, it's the pie and peas that gets them through the door. And then you can tick a box.*
>
> **CM2, Interview**

These responses hold a certain complexity within them. There was a slight cynicism with regard to programming arts and culture activities in order to 'tick a box' which is mixed with a lack of confidence in their own ability to determine what art is (most noticeably with the three centre managers for whom arts participation was not part of their own upbringing), and these two facets are interwoven with a genuine desire to programme arts and a belief in the value of that artistic participation.

Tick-box cynicism and a belief in the value of art could be said to be quite common in the arts sector too. However, this lack of confidence in one's own artistic knowledge, or credentials, is something that feels particular to the community centre manager, or certainly at a more pronounced level than you would find in a venue that exists to foremost programme arts and culture. This undoubtedly relates to the fact that the centre managers are individuals who have chosen to work in the community rather than in the arts. Yet this does indicate a demonstratable difference between community venues' approach to arts programming and the more traditional, mainstream arts sector. In section 6.5 below some light is shed on this feeling of disjointedness and why some managers may feel a lack of confidence when dealing with matters surrounding programming arts; whilst in Chapter 8, the way New Writing North (a part of the arts sector) has managed their relationship with community centre managers as an aspect of their intended longer-term 'partnership model' is examined in full.

Returning to the issue of understanding what audiences want or need and how this could be deemed paternalistic, Nina Simon further remarks, 'Does this mean we shouldn't care about what people want and need? Of course not… But *learning about* someone's needs and *prescribing* those needs are completely different.' (Simon, 2016:93 – researcher's emphasis.) The issue of what the users of community centres want and/or need is discussed in the following section.

6.4 b) What works?

During the interviews and focus group discussions much attention was paid to the 'barriers' and 'challenges' of presenting work, and also whether the venues' relationship(s) with New Writing North had helped to alleviate some of those barriers. And, indeed, what light this might shed on how to sustain provision. These findings are

presented in Chapters 7 and 8. However, notwithstanding the relationship with New Writing North, it was clear that managers already had a sense of what worked well in their communities. The answer to the question, 'What does work [in your venue]?' was fairly similar across all five centres with children and families being a key target for many of their programmes – particularly in relation to developing an arts and culture programme. However, other sections of the community were also a focus, with provision (not necessarily always arts and culture) being made for the elderly, retired people, stay-at-home mums, young adults and the general adult population, the latter being centred mostly on weekend evenings.

In *The Art of Relevance* (2016) Nina Simon argues that the arts sector needs to be wary of assuming the value of their work is relevant to everyone. The key is that relevance is, '…not about what you think people need to want or deserve. It's about them – their values, their priorities.' (p27)

We have already seen that for a small, precariously-funded venue, where attracting audiences can be a challenge, taking a risk on programming unusual shows and events is a difficult call to make; so it is, perhaps, not surprising that centre managers had a keen sense of what goes down well with their community. However, what was more revealing was the way in which managers contextualised their programme choices - placing the emphasis not simply on *what* to present, but ***h****ow* to present it:

> *Our barriers are the same, certainly in terms of price and the terminology: how we sell it, what we sell it as, and when we sell it. So, for instance, when we did Monster Zoo we incorporated it within Halloween. So, we promoted it as a Halloween thing, rather than a theatre thing. And packaging things as part of half term activities [also works well].*
>
> **CM2, Focus Group 1**

> *If we can make things part of a package, or like a theme. Themes work well. We might have a seaside theme, or we had an African Day, things like that. It helps with the marketing but I think people just like the idea of something with a*

different theme. Maybe more than just a single show that's a bit different, it's the theme that's important. That's why they come.

CM4, Focus Group 3

6.4 c) How to make it work

Not just what to present but how to present it, then, is something each manager was adept at judging, constantly coming up with new and innovative ways to promote or frame a particular event. The way it was packaged, or what the marketing 'hook' might be, was constantly being considered alongside what sort of arts and culture offering might appeal. This is exemplified by the exchange between the researcher and CM2 in the following short extract:

CM2: *To make them turn up to something like that. There's got to be a hook, an attraction, there's got to be a thing. They won't just come because there's a play on, it's got to be something they want, need or can relate to.*

ML: *What would you say those want, need and relate to things are?*

CM2: *Pit stuff always gets them going, heritage gets them going. Stuff for kids if they've got grandkids or kids, so the adults bring them in. That's pretty much it really. Or, if there's the promise of some free food [laughs] that often gets them to come through the door. Pie and pea supper and you can be… you know, advertise a pie and pea supper but we'll be showing this film. So, we did an afternoon tea for Valentine's last year and we got a really good turn-out for that. And that was quite arty because we showed some really old movies, not movies as in movies-movies, but footage of old stuff – whether it was down the pit or whether it was footage of the coastline or whatever. They came, and they saw, and they had afternoon tea. And we had little things around, so like paper aeroplanes and loads of crafty stuff and it worked really, really well. It became a Valentine's special but without the hearts and bows. So, it was nice and they came to that because it was vintage-y.*

CM2, Interview

In this extract we can see that Nina Simon's language of 'want' and 'need' crops up again; and in this instance we see it being positively linked to 'relevance' – or, in the words of CM2, 'something they can relate to.' It's difficult to overstate how much community managers took pride in their ability to find events and activities that their community would relate to, with an often-genuine sense of pride when they got the balance right. And, conversely, frustration when the producer of an incoming theatre show didn't think to provide them with the relevant hook:

> *Another show didn't tell us that they had actresses from Casualty and Emmerdale and when we found out, the ticket selling went wild but they didn't think to tell us up front for God's sake! I mean, some [people] went to the Gala Theatre and paid to watch it again – and for £7.50!*
>
> **CM2 Focus Group 1**

There are two sources of frustration for the community manager here. First, that the incoming theatre show producer had not thought to arm her with what was to her an obvious marketing hook. It may have been the case that the theatre promoter had not anticipated the marketing value of the actresses having been in Casualty and Emmerdale, although even in a traditional theatre setting this would likely have been a good piece of marketing information. However, certainly for a community in an economically deprived area, the idea of having a Dingle in their home village, was liable to raise a lot of interest (and did – as CM2 went on to relate). Perhaps it is unfair to focus too much on this one example, but it might be seen as a small piece of evidence of how the arts sector is not as tuned-in to what communities in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation want. This issue is covered in more depth in section 7.5 below.

The second source of frustration for CM2 was that, given the ticket price at the community venue was £2 per head, compared to the theatre cover-charge of £7.50, it was frustrating to find out that that particular family was prepared to pay almost four times as much simply because it was in a more traditional venue. We can see how the challenge of attracting an audience for the centre manager compared to her [perceived] ease of presenting work in a traditional theatre venue might be a cause of frustration. It might also be rightly termed a 'challenge' or 'barrier' and this is examined in more depth

below and what the managers themselves term, 'the stigma of being a community centre.'

The issue of there being a stigma attached to being a community centre was revealed almost by accident during an interview with CM3 when the researcher, talking about arts programming, asked the question, 'So, if it was left to you to programme things, and if money was no object, what would you do with this place?' The answer wasn't about programming and came as a bit of a surprise, and the whole exchange is worth quoting in full:

CM2: *If money was no object? Oh my God! I would…. Well, there'd be a huge redecoration and rebranding and try and remove the stigma of it being a community centre. Because that's what we're up against.*

ML: *What's the stigma of being a community centre?*

CM2: *Community Centre, they go in and they expect coloured squared tiles, plastic chairs, checky tablecloths; old style ashtrays on the tables, and the old chairs and that kind of thing. So, 'oh there's a play on at the Community Centre – well it can't be that good.'*

ML: *Well, that's an interesting point.*

CM2: *Yeah, so when they come in it'd be like, 'Oh God, I didn't realise you had all this in here – I didn't know you had a gym and a bar and a café and a meeting room and a projector and the lights and an audio system and all of that.'*

ML: *All of which you have got?*

CM2: *Oh yeah.*

ML: *So you mean, it'd be about rebranding the centre so that people know what you've got?*

CM2: *Yes, and we've talked about the rebranding in previous years and there's … well, some people still see this as 'the Welfare' [the Miners' Welfare Hall], older people; so they'll say, 'I'm going down the Welfare on Saturday for a wedding.' Whereas me and my kids know it as the Community Centre. So when it used to be the Miners' Welfare Hall… so if we were to rebrand it as, 'The [place 2] Hub' or. 'The Arc of [place 2]' or whatever it may be, it'll still be the Community Centre to my kids and it'll still be the Welfare to Joe Bloggs and his family. But, you see, I think the rebranding future proofs us, to make it, and get some signage outside, to … I mean some people call it the '[place 2] Community Association' because that's our trading name and so people look for an allotment or a Women's Institute.*

ML: *So, you know earlier, when you said, people might see there's a play on, but it's only at the Community Centre so it's probably not very good, where do you think they would go if they wanted to see a 'good' play?*

CM2: *So, typical example would be, 'Our Teacher's a Troll', we had that here and we charged £1 to get in but nobody came so we invited schools and filled the hall. 'Our Teacher's a Troll' the adults who came loved it so much they went up to the Gala Theatre [in Durham] and watched it again and paid £12. And so people say, 'Oh I'm going to the theatre, and I won't just come in me flat-cap and jeans I might actually put an overcoat on. And while I'm in Durham I might get a coffee. At £12 a ticket for the same show, for exactly the same show. The very next night.*

CM2, Interview

There is a lot to unpick in this exchange. Certainly, there's the interesting point about future-proofing the centre through rebranding, renaming and redecoration. This will be picked up upon in Chapter 7 when we look directly at the issue of sustainability. First, however, there is the issue of what an audience might perceive about the quality of a particular event or production because of it being shown at the centre. The idea that 'it can't be that good' because of the setting. And the adjacent issue of how that might lead more discerning arts attenders to seek out the same cultural event at a more traditional arts venue – putting their flat-cap away and donning their overcoat in the process! This was a concern echoed by other centre managers too:

Competition, entertainment for families comes in many forms, and we do have quite a few higher priced activities based around our area, such as cinemas, theatres, museums, galleries, role play sessions etc. These are all higher priced and some are popular, however I don't know if people think little of what we can provide, but our prices have to remain low. We often find it bizarre that deprived families spend lots of going to the latest 'arts thing' when they can entertain the kids for a lot less in our building. Maybe they feel because our prices are low and in the community centre, that the children aren't going to enjoy or get much out of it... It's how to get this message across: you don't need to pay more for better quality all the time. Does that make sense?

CM1, Focus Group 4

Another centre manager also bemoaned the fact that families will pay £1 to come and see a show at her venue and then go again, to a big theatre, and pay £7.50. Where to pitch the price-level of their shows was a constant concern in this regard. There seemed to be a general feeling that you had to charge around £1/£2 for family shows (with children going free, or adults accompanying a child being the ones to go free), thereby keeping the prices low to attract local audiences who may not be regular arts attenders, whilst at the same time noting that audiences who do go to cultural events were prepared to pay up to ten times more for the same show when attended by the 'glitz and glamour' of being in a 'proper theatre'.

This may be simply an unavoidable characteristic of being a community centre – somewhere that provides cheap, good, fun entertainment for the kids in the holidays and somewhere that can bring in professional theatre shows or arts exhibitions or other cultural events at other times. And, as we saw in section 6.1, sustaining momentum for professional or 'quality' arts programming is a challenge due to the precarious nature of successful funding bid outcomes and the availability of touring shows suitable for the venue type.

As we shall see in Chapter 7, CM5 explicitly links her desire to present 'quality' arts projects as a direct result of her relationship with New Writing North. As noted above, in

the comments about recommendations, this relationship has opened her eyes to what else might be on offer, what's out there in the arts sector that she can tap into. What CM2 reveals above, is that, as a community venue, she is able to offer opportunities in the community to people who may not venture as far as a gallery in Durham, or a National Portfolio Organisation in Sunderland – or, indeed, that they would be aware these venues exist.

So alongside having to negotiate the stigma of being a community centre, managers are also aware that they are uniquely placed to provide opportunities in arts and culture to their local community. CM1 who is quoted above as struggling with the audience attaching a stigma to her centre, is also aware of the positive outcomes that community centres are uniquely placed to achieve:

> *Yeah, the fact that you might have to make the child sit still and be quiet, they think in their head that they have to do that. So we have to convince them that they don't, they can wander out if they want and if you've paid your pound a ticket you can wander out halfway through, you're not going to lose out on £20 per ticket, stuff like that. We have to persuade most of our people to come along, if they don't realise in their heads what is going to be, if they've never been before, stuff like that.*

> *There's a strong case for it being on their doorstep rather than going to a big show in town and we also find parents are surprised that their kids will sit through a theatre show… but they do because it's so interactive and it's on the floor so they're so close to the action. They think kids will sit through a film (cinema club) but don't think it about theatre – so we explain it's a bit like sitting on the floor hearing a story from the teacher.*

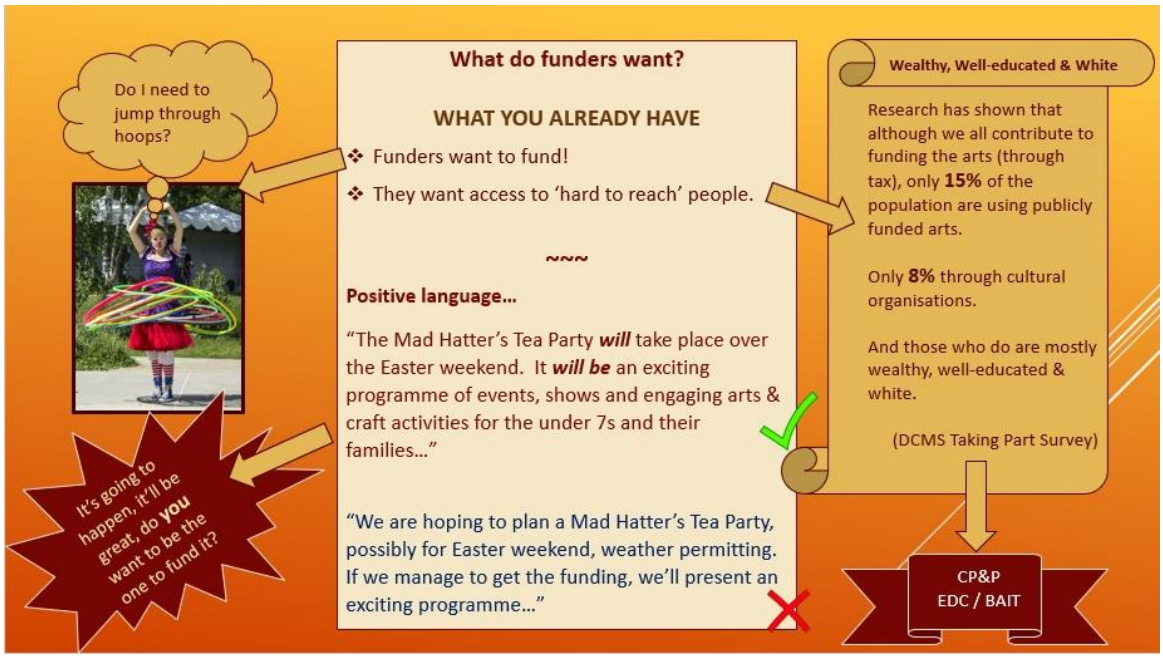
CM1, Focus Group 1

This is a great example of how a community centre manager, tuned in to her audience, can remove some of the perceived barriers for non-regular arts attenders. For example, dispelling the myth that in a children's theatre show the children need to sit still and be quiet. And, earlier, as we saw, removing some of the barriers around people perceiving the arts to be 'posh' or 'not for people like me'.

Given the contemporary concern within the arts sector for achieving greater Cultural Democracy, as outlined in Chapter 3, this seems like an important point to draw out from the research findings.

However, what was interesting to note was that none of the managers were particularly aware of the fact that there is a national focus within the UK arts sector to reach people in 'areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation'. There was an acknowledgement of (and no sensitivities around) the fact they were serving a disadvantaged community and there was an awareness that more opportunities were being created to bring arts and culture to their communities; however, the bigger picture about Cultural Democracy and their potential role within that narrative was missing, or incomplete at least. This became clear during the funding workshop / Focus Group 2, when the researcher discussed what funding priorities they might be able to tap into in terms of trying to provide more arts opportunities for 'hard to reach' people.

Fig 8: slide from Fundraising workshop – what do funders want?



Lovatt, M., 2018

Even though some of the centre managers had been involved in, and attended, focus groups about its aims, there didn't seem to be an acknowledgement of the role that community centre managers could play in linking the art to the community. Or, rather, as the next section shows, there seemed to be a lack of respect for the uniquely placed position centre managers hold within the 'setting' of arts provision in the UK. Again, this

links back to one of the fundamental findings at the heart of this research that community centre managers are, to a large extent, not seen as part of the overall picture of the demand and supply sides of arts provision.

It could be argued that this is simply about the managers not being connected to research findings, such as the Taking Part Survey, and that isn't necessarily a major issue, or even an unexpected phenomenon. Or it could be argued that centre managers are simply not aware of some of the terminology used, such as 'cultural democracy' or 'hard-to-reach audiences'. Again, though, this isn't necessarily a major barrier. However, there does seem to be something more to this phenomenon of 'disjointedness' as the researcher has termed it – a disconnect between the wider arts sector and community venues. And, as we shall see in the next section, it relates to the managers' comments about stigma, what is meant by quality and another issue, which are related to some of the barriers that can emerge for the centre manager from working with the arts sector itself.

6.5 Relationship with the arts sector

During the interview with CM5, when she was discussing the issue of 'crappy paper crafts' and of wanting to do more 'quality' stuff, the researcher made an attempt to see if this might be related to CM2's concerns about the stigma of community centres. This revealed a dilemma about whether the centre is providing what works, or what is deemed 'high quality' by someone associated as being part of the arts sector:

M: *Do you think – and I suppose this is a bit of a leading question but I know you're strong enough to not take the lead if you don't want it – do you think there's an association between being at a community centre and taking your kids to something and ending up with a crappy craft experience – that that's a bit of a stereotype or is it an expectation? So, I suppose what I'm asking is, do you see yourself as breaking that stereotype?*

CM5: *It's about… to move into… I don't want to say "high quality" as in what X says [reference to manager of local arts agency] what he says I don't deliver apparently. Right, with touring theatre?*

M: *He said you don't do quality?*

CM5: *"Touring theatre for children and family is not high-quality arts, it's just pantomime."*

M: *He said that? I saw your flyer actually for [the Y] show. That looks like quality!*

CM5: *That'll be our fourth production from [Y]. The first one we took was part of a trilogy so when I said I was bringing in the first one, I took the flyer to show him and he just threw it back across the table at me and said that. And I said, "No it's not, it's based on books, it's literary, whatever…" But apparently it needs to be highbrow. And children and family work is what sells here… They only give us to programme what they want.*

CM5, Interview

It's clear from this extract that this is a relationship that hasn't developed well, or perhaps even simply got off to a bad start; however, it does speak to a common complaint from the managers that often work was presented to them as something they ought to have, rather than it being a negotiation about what might work well, in that venue, for that particular audience.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, CM5 is aware of the risk of programming something that might not go down to well; she goes on to explain, however, that she feels she ought to programme shows offered to her, as opportunities to present theatre at an affordable price are few and far between and that her appetite for presenting theatre had already been whetted.

CM5: *They have the budget and they just make an offer… if I hadn't had a good relationship with New Writing North I might have never tried it because the show they offered was meaningless to us. But because we'd done My Granny is a Pirate, it made me say, 'Okay, let's see what they've got for us.' But they seem to have an agenda that they're pursuing. And I might not have carried on because I had a really bad experience with the first thing they offered us.*

ML: *What sort of agenda do you think they have?*

CM5: *To present 'high quality' shows. But if it's too 'high', who's going to come and see it? Whereas when we work with New Writing North and X [another NPO organisation] they just seem to get it, they actually listen to us and they offer us stuff that she [the producer] understands will go well in a community venue; because she talks to people; we can also talk to her about what works well, like we can with Anna [from New Writing North].*

CM5, Interview

In this exchange we see that CM5 is resistant to the idea of 'high' art / quality of provision; yet, earlier she spoke of a desire to get away from 'crappy paper crafts'. So, the resistance may be less linked to the type of art offering (although that can't be ruled out) and more to do with the fact that with the two NPO organisations she mentions, she feels listened to. It is also possible that the element of consultation before selecting shows to programme are helpful in forging relationships. CM5 further talks about her community centre having been assigned the designation 'Cultural Hub' without any sort of consultation.

> **CM5:** *The first meeting I ever went to I came away thinking, 'What was that about then?' I didn't even know I was a cultural hub until they told me I was one!*
>
> **CM5, Interview**

A lack of consultation between cultural offer provider and the community centre manager here seems key. That the centre managers, who – as we have already seen – spend many out of office hours putting in the additional work to raise funds, who take pride in getting the programming mix right and who feel committed to serving their communities, might want to be in control of the destiny of the centre seems to be an entirely reasonable suggestion. In fact, for many of the managers, the ideal situation would be to find themselves relieved of some of the more centre administration duties, to be able to develop their programming plans more:

> *What I could do with is a full time administrator so that I can spend more time looking for work to bring in. Even just checking it out. I mean I do nothing now without seeing a YouTube clip or whatever, but imagine being able to go to see more stuff, or the Edinburgh Festival. I went there with a friend, just as a social*

thing, but imagine being able to see what was out there. But there's no chance of that.

CM4, Focus Group 2

I wouldn't mind which way round. If I could find a pot of money to bring on board a salaried person who can look at bringing in more arts stuff, look at housing a theatre group residency and do workshops, that sort of thing. I mean, I think that would help to sustain arts activities… it could have a knock-on effect.

CM1, Focus Group 2

…sometimes you feel you need another layer, to focus on different things, another layer more centered on creative projects, on participation, and that sort of thing: arts and things.

CM3, Focus Group 2

Again, the issue of capacity to do all that the managers would like to do with their centres and sustaining arts provision is apparent here; and perhaps this is a common issue across the public sector; but what it does show is that there is expertise and skill within the community centre manager cohort that is currently under-utilised in terms of supporting sustained cultural activity in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation.

However, as well as the idea of being more in control of the programming of work, there were other important factors that were raised as challenges of working with the arts sector for a community centre in an area of economic disadvantage and deprivation. For example, being aware that the community centre is not a theatre venue:

We had these two actresses from [Z] production and they were real prima donnas, we almost felt like they wanted us to feed them only blue M&Ms and they actually asked if we could do their washing. And I said we're not geared up like that, we're a community centre but they didn't even like the fact there was other stuff going on in the centre. That was a big learning curve for me, I won't take people like that.

CM4, Focus Group 3

The first time we ever dealt with a theatre group or a production company, [they said], can you tell us what we'd have in our rider? And I'm like, what? Didn't know what a rider was, so we were told it was like flowers, grapes, whatever it may be, and so we learnt from that and I said, 'You know we're a community centre. And really, you're coming here to help us promote what you do to help us get people through the door. We want people to come and have a good time and you're a bit precious about your rider aren't you?' … it's little things like that, they talk in a theatre language and expect us to know. But we're not the arena or the 02.

CM2, Interview

Whilst blue M&Ms on the rider is probably hyperbole, how professional artists or production companies manage their relationships with centre managers is clearly important. Perhaps the learning point is that they need to discern what experience the manager already has in terms of taking incoming shows, exhibitions etc, and modify their language so as not to overwhelm them with 'theatre talk'; although of course that could lead to a condescending 'talking down' issue. How to 'pitch' your approach is probably a fine balancing act!

The above exchange also highlights a potential difference of priority, with the centre manager claiming the theatre company is there 'to help us get people through the door,' when presumably the theatre company wants people to see their show and, really, the over-arching priority for all concerned is a large, contented audience. It's likely, however, that if the relationship has been nurtured carefully, and where both parties felt they were working together towards a common goal, this difference of priority would have disappeared. This certainly felt like the case with a number of successful relationships, which are examined in the following chapter. Putting in the foundation work, to build the relationship carefully, seems to be key.

The final learning point amounts to respecting the work of the community centre, being mindful of what its existing provision is, and why it appeals to their audiences. For CM5, the fact that the producer from the NPO had taken time to get to know her and what her audience wanted carried great weight in terms of building trust in their relationship.

There does, however, seem to be a feeling from the managers that their programmes are 'looked down upon' by the arts sector. CM2's pantomime, which she is very proud of, provides an interesting example of this phenomenon.

> *Also, we do have our pantomime, so when it's panto season, you know, we sell 400 tickets a night and we do six shows in one week, so we get a massive turn out for that. So, it's not that we don't have an arts programme. But 'they' won't particularly recognise our panto, there's not once [anyone from the arts sector] have been to see our pantomime, as closely as we work with them, not one of them has said, 'Do you know what, I might come along and just see what it's all about? They all say, they want to work with local people, we want to sell a local theme – but this is local people, in a pantomime in a local venue. But none of them come, they just don't come. But as soon as they need a hand from us, they want us to have one of their shows.*
>
> **CM2, Interview**

Clearly, this is a one-sided view of the conversation and the relationship with some elements of the arts sector; but it is revealing to see how the centre mangers view the disparity of power in the relationship and how, paying some interest in the pantomime, or the work already happening in the centre, would have gone a long way to strengthening the sense of partnership.

Furthermore, having an insight into what works for the centre audiences (through going to see work there or listening to the centre manager), and building upon those deep, long-term connections between centre and community, seem to be acutely important in terms of sustaining arts provision. To strengthen the existing infrastructure of arts provision seems to be fundamental to ensuring provision is more deeply embedded in the community and can be sustained long after the well-meaning initiative has run out of funding and the professionals have moved on. In other words, the role of the community manager is pivotal in achieving sustained cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation, therefore policymakers and the arts sector need to find a way to address this disjoint between them and cultural policy, and cultural provision.

The New Writing North programme, by having the specific aim of embedding cultural provision, was focused on meeting many of the anticipated challenges of working with community centre venues from the start. Furthermore, it began from a starting point of wishing to understand how the relationship might best develop between community centre mangers (and librarians) and the organisation itself. So it is important to see which elements of this partnership model proved fruitful. This is explored in the next chapter, Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: A Two-Way Street

7.1 Introduction: The New Writing North partnership model

The findings and analysis presented so far – in Chapters 5 and 6 – ascribe a pivotal role to the community centre manager within the overall arts and culture infrastructure (or ecology) if embedded provision is to be achieved. And, given the right support, it is suggested they could be a key element to meeting the challenge of sustaining cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. However, as we have seen, the community centres face a number of challenges – some which any provider of cultural activity must meet (such as attracting and developing an audience) and some which are more specific to the particular position they hold within the overall ecology of provision. A major concern in this regard lies with the (lack of) strength in the relationships they have with the other elements of the arts infrastructure – funders, policymakers, arts producers, and other parts of the cultural sector. But, as we have seen, some aspects of these relationships have been positive. This chapter focuses on the partnership model with New Writing North, delving deeper to examine that relationship, looking at what has been positive and what are some of the challenges and limitations to the model. As such, it deals directly with the central research question:

What can the partnership model between New Writing North and community centres tell us about supporting sustained cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?

The central research question and the successes, challenges and limitations of the New Writing North programme are considered concurrently under a number of chapter sections which represent these. However, as this attempt to thematically break-down and categorise the responses demonstrates, many of these fundamental elements are overlapping and mutually supporting. Furthermore, they aren't easily delineated within the findings and the community centre managers' responses. Therefore, the overall analysis contained in this section will be a concurrent one, only loosely structured around the following themes for ease of presentation.

7.2 The structure of the partnership model

7.3 The 'fit' of the show.

7.4 The relationship and its impact on the likelihood of sustainable provision.

7.2 The structure of the partnership model

As outlined in Chapter One, the partnership model was proposed, developed and forged by New Writing North with a number of specific aims, one of which was to strengthening the existing infrastructure thereby leaving a legacy of self-sustaining provision at the completion of the programme. The audience development plan for the programme (please see Appendix A) outlines two overarching aims the second of which is, 'To sustain provision within these communities so that local people see arts attending as a core part of their leisure time.' And, in order to do this New Writing North proposed the following:

- Working with partners to signpost venues to other arts development opportunities within their communities, so that they can develop a year-round arts programme.
- Providing training, contacts and hands-on project development support for venues to encourage them to programme more arts activity in the venues.
- Gaining an understanding of the audience profile within each venue and ensuring that information is shared with the venue so that it can be built on.

Therefore, unlike many other touring programmes, the aim ***from the outset*** was centred on the relationship between the arts organisation and the community centre venue, with shows being selected, produced and presented on this basis. As a consequence, the following analysis does not seek to make a comparison between the New Writing North Strategic Touring Programme and differently configured programmes, or those with the aim simply of touring to deprived communities. From the beginning, sustainability was a key issue for New Writing North so any comparison would be unfair.

The structure of the partnership model was able to build upon research undertaken from a Strategic Touring Project in 2013 and 2014. In doing so it was able to identify new audiences from areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation which had low levels of cultural provision but which may be receptive to arts and literature initiatives. Working with libraries and literature partners enabled New Writing North to identify a number of areas and venues and to begin by providing a range of reader development and participatory arts work, designed to identify and to develop audiences for culture. This gave New Writing North an opportunity to signpost other venues and to gain an understanding of the audience profile within each venue – information which could be built upon and shared. It also supported the ability to provide training, new contacts and hands-on development support for venues.

Throughout this process, particular attention was given to 'unengaged families'. Marketing for the shows and the participatory programmes was targeted at harder to reach families and those not accessing services in the local community with particular support and guidance from venues and the local community.

In terms of supporting longer term sustainability, New Writing North worked with the venue managers to undertake much of this work themselves. A marketing plan was produced which specifically emphasised the importance of parental engagement in any participatory activity. Whereas community centre managers may have traditionally seen themselves as providing a service to 'keep kids entertained' (a glorified creche service, as CM5 referred to it), New Writing North encouraged centre managers to see how integral engaging children and their parents (and/or grandparents) together could be.

In addition, New Writing North worked with centre managers to identify local schools and nursery groups, as well as Beavers and Rainbows, to encourage them to promote the show's literature and to invite parents to attend. Some one-off taster workshops were provided in schools and the venues were given fun resources to incorporate into a range of activities in a build up to the shows.

Despite these initiatives, two of the five community centre managers stated that 'how to market and promote the activity' was a major barrier for them, although they attributed

this to 'audience apathy' and 'lack of willingness to try something new'. One manager, CM3, said she felt the promotion materials weren't glitzy enough, although after two years of programming the show she did see that the programme had 'brand recognition'. Whereas another manger, CM2, felt 'our guys [audiences] wouldn't know if it was a New Writing North or another company.'

And all managers felt that the ability to link via their own Facebook page to New Writing North's Facebook page had been a valuable resource in terms of generating more traffic / interest in the shows:

> *Our Facebook page gets used a lot with a certain group of people. I used it to promote the show a lot and link to* New Writing North*, it's a good way of asking people to share the detail. But marketing direct to local schools and toddler groups is more effective. It's easier for me to have a direct relationship with them than with parents.*
>
> **CM4, Interview**

However, despite the varied success of marketing and engagement initiatives, there was a sense amongst the managers that 'convincing people to come along to artsy things is difficult,' (CM1, Focus Group 2). For others, the simple fact of having a regularly programable product [the New Writing North yearly shows, and that they are specifically aimed at under 7s] had been helpful over and beyond a marketing strategy which they were already utilising to the same extent as the advice on offer. Therefore, although the marketing kits and advice had often been helpful, offering new insights to some, a missing element of the strategy was the ability to fully get to grips with the difficulty of attracting new 'unengaged' families.

Another potential shortcoming was the difference in expectations between New Writing North (and, in fact other arts providers) and the venues themselves. The former tended to focus on selling the show, whereas for the community centre managers, it was important that whatever offering they provided for their audiences, also had to promote the centre itself:

> *The marketing material we get sent is about the show, not our venue, but someone might come and see something here and they don't think, 'Oh that was a*

great show that [company X] brought us,' they think, that was a great show we saw down the centre.

CM5, Interview

Nevertheless, the opportunities to connect with the New Writing North show's producers and to collectively come up with fun 'hooks' for the show (such as promoting Monster Zoo at Halloween) were greatly appreciated, particularly where they afforded the opportunity to bring personal touches for the community:

So for Monster Zoo, I said can the kids meet the monster and she said there isn't really a monster but we can organise photographs at the end with the actors. … that helps to sell it and it helps to keep it real, to put that memory in someone's mind – whether they're 93 or just 3, the memory is in their minds. 'So I went to see a play at the community centre and I actually met that person. I've got a photo, look at that!' ten years later.

CM2, Interview

What stands out from this quote is the fact that the experience was looked at from the point of view of the audience member alone – particularly with regard to someone who has little experience of going to the theatre. Whereas what might be more typical within arts and culture providers, would be to look at it from the point of view of the cultural offer and how to sell *it,* in this case what was being considered was the personal interaction between the art, the artists and the lasting impact that might have on the young audience member.

This is a great example of how the 'at the coalface' knowledge the venue manager has of her audience can work together with the position New Writing North are in, in terms of their ability to make it happen. Clearly this sort of 'meet the cast' opportunity would be possible in any type of venue and, although it might be harder to make happen logistically in a large venue with a closed backstage area, it often happens. However, what is evident from this exchange is the ability for the 'local' and the 'worldly' experience to come together – that of the child in his/her own community being able to meet an actor or a monster from another place – either of which has the potential to fire the young

imagination! The fact that the idea emerged organically from the trust in the relationship means the community manager felt ownership of that experience and part of the positive impact it had on the child.

New Writing North's partnership model also included the aim of holding group meetings with the community centre managers and librarians – at the beginning and at the end of each tour. The idea being to exchange ideas on promotion, participatory activities as well as practical issues such as pricing. In addition, there was an offer to hold one-to-one meetings with venue managers who wanted further support or advice on fundraising and project management. The one-to-one offer of support was taken up by some managers, particularly CM5 who had worked closely with the organisation to develop and fund the children's reading room at her centre which she had done successfully with New Writing North support:

> *We had a couple of thousand from Community Foundation a couple of years ago, and* New Writing North *helped us with that bid… if it hadn't been for them, then we wouldn't be able to make this children's room.*
>
> **CM5, Interview**

The group meetings were also well received:

> *The fact that* New Writing North *and you have taken on the additional work of pulling these ideas together and between us communities who wouldn't otherwise have come into contact with each other has been helpful. It's helped us to value our input and organising strengthen to carry on this legacy and deepen our reach.*
>
> **CM3, Interview**

But there was a sense in which there could have been more of this sort of activity, not linked to a training workshop or official agenda:

> *In an ideal world I'd love for us [community centre managers] to get together and share notes and share best practice and all of that, without it being a training session. You know, I've thought many a time, one Friday night I'll open up by bar here and open a bottle of wind and invite all the centre managers. Even if we just get to bitch about it. Whenever we have a meeting there's always an agenda [she*

is referencing an official, written-up agenda, not an ulterior motive!] so we just don't get to sit and talk. It's a refreshing change to go to other people's centres… but I don't know if we'd meet with CM4 [furthest in distance to travel] if there isn't a driving force because none of us has the time to look in our diaries and say, shall we all just get together. It just won't happen.

CM2, Focus Group 3

The idea of forming a consortium of venues is one solution to this but, as CM2 (above) says, it will probably take an outside organisation or agency to prompt this type of initiative, although – in theory – it is something the managers could take the initiative on themselves. However, there's little doubt from the managers themselves that the partnership model as at least pointed the way to a range of different ways of working and that the relationship with New Writing North personnel has been a positive factor in determining that. However, before going on to examine elements of the relationship itself (in 7.4), the next section looks at the thing which unites funder, producer, venue and audience: the show itself.

7.3 The 'fit' of the show

We love these shows! We saw Hey Presto! and Man on the Moon and were so excited to see Monster Zoo was coming to town… [The books] are now firm family favourites… Any show that can entertain our young family for this length of time is a real winner. Our boys are 2 and 4. Thanks very much for the fabulous entertainment.

Parent from Place 1, Co Durham

We first came to see a New Writing North show at [Place 5] when they did Man on the Moon. We bought the book and my (then) 3-year-old loved it. The interactivity and humour and inventive costumes. He was transfixed all the way through. Since then we've made sure to see it every year. We buy the book and by the time we see the performance the children know the book word for word and really enjoy seeing it come to life. The performances seem to capture all ages – both my 2-year-old and my 5-year-old loved the Monster Zoo. My eldest son also enjoys the

workshops around the book and performances which are great fun as well as building his confidence and speaking and listening skills. Long may this fantastic institution continue.

Parent from Place 5, Co Durham

These quotes, taken from audience feedback questionnaires, encapsulate many of the core elements that have made the New Writing North shows popular with audiences. The fact that they are entertaining, naturally, but also that the shows are engaging enough for young children to sit through (with intervals for dancing of course!) We also see that they are appreciated for their high-quality theatrical elements such as the 'interactivity and humour, and inventive costumes'; that the workshops build confidence and skills whilst creating a sense of anticipation for the forthcoming show; that they are linked to children's books that can be enjoyed before and after the performances, leaving a lasting impression upon young audiences; and that they are something regular attenders have begun to look forward to each year.

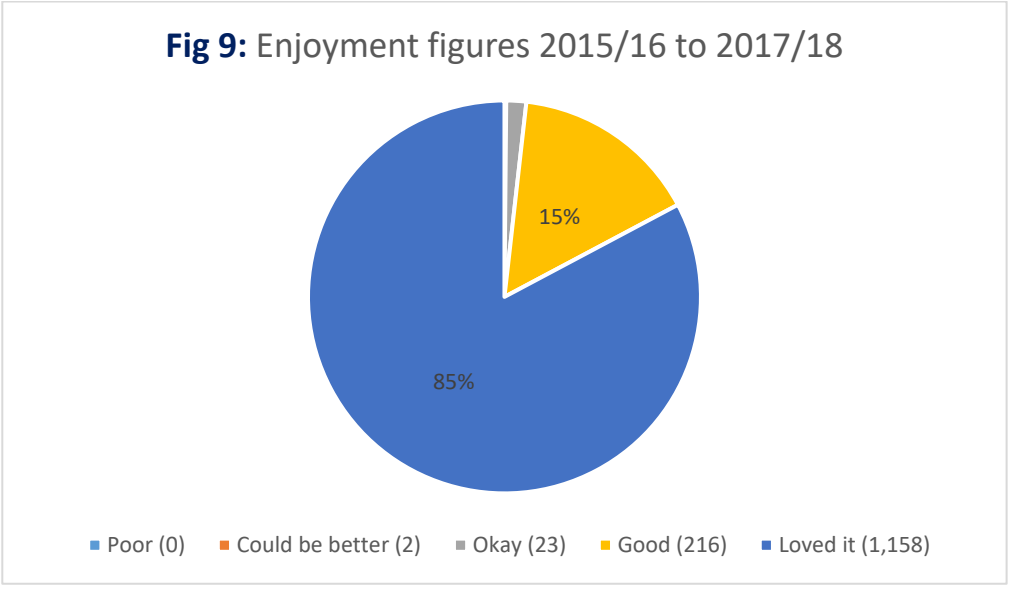
In addition, the fact that they are on the doorstep and in a familiar venue was a popular response from many audience members:

Came with friends and their children on their first theatre visit 2 years ago, and it is now a yearly tradition. I LOVE that you are bringing theatre to different spaces that are accessible. So special to see the children LOVING it!

Parent from Place 4, Co Durham

It can be argued that without these core elements, the central reason for the partnership would be meaningless. At the heart of the partnership is a 'product' that works. Some shows have been more popular than others with regularly returning audiences, but the overall standard of artistic presentation and the enjoyment factor remained consistently high across the three years that the researcher conducted the annual evaluations (and, indeed, for the two years before this).

Fig 9: Enjoyment figures 2015/16 to 2017/18



Lovatt, M., 2018

New Writing North initially approached each venue by email after having developed a list of venues to target because they were in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. For some venue managers the combination of the offer, the subsidised price of £125 per performance, and the offer of marketing and technical support led them to seize the opportunity at once. For others, a follow-up email and/or phone call secured a provisional booking.

For venue managers, particularly those trying something new for the first time, the fact that the offer came with marketing and technical support was greeted with enthusiasm.

> *"They [New Writing North] come in and just get on with it. We make sure the room is clean and tidy, set up chairs, mats in the front for the children and they do the rest. The first year it was in the round and that was a bit trickier; end-on is definitely best for us. But, they make it so easy to do."*
>
> **CM4, Interview**

Although one venue remarked that, during the first year of hosting the show, they had misunderstood the requirements upon them to prepare the space for the set coming, in subsequent years they had experienced no problems. A range of responses from 'The show just runs itself,' to 'It's incredibly slick,' were typical. The fact that the show's requirements were easy to understand, with no overly technical language used, was noted by one manager as a nice change from the usual correspondence she receives.

As we saw in Chapter 6, an approach from a theatrical production where demands were complex and/or not befitting the capacity of the venue (size-wise, technically and in the appropriateness of the venue's facilities such as dressing rooms, a laundry service and rider provision) had proved a barrier to her wanting to present future theatre shows. However, the simplicity of New Writing North's requirements was considered a welcome change. An example of the tech spec is shown in **Table 4** below and demonstrates that it outlines – very simply – get in times, get out times, and staffing requirements.

Table 4: Example tech spec

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE	**Date**	**Time**	**Notes**
Arrival of set, etc	Saturday 7th October 2017	8.00am	2 Stage Managers arrive in a van containing the set
Get in & Set up	Saturday 7th October 2017	8.00am	
Arrival of cast	Saturday 7th October 2017	9.00am	4 cast members will arrive in one car
Doors open	Saturday 7th October 2017	9.45am	
Performance start time	Saturday 7th October 2017	10.00am	
Get out	Saturday 7th October 2017	11.00am – 12.00pm	

STAFFING	**Staff function**	**Number**	**Any additional cost**
Get in	Staff available for access to the space	1	
Set up	-	-	
Performances	Staff available to help manage audiences	2 if possible	
Get out	Staff available to help hand out evaluation forms and pens at the end	2 if possible	

Lovatt, M., 2018 compiled from information supplied by New Writing North

As demonstrated by the audience responses shown above, the simplicity of the technical arrangements did not detract from the 'inventiveness' or the theatricality of the shows. A potential downside of this approach, however, is that it could create a false sense of security or of expectation, leading venue managers to assume that all incoming shows will provide such bespoke and easy-to-relate-to information. Similarly, with the low cost of the show (having been heavily subsidised) one manager said she still felt, despite having

had the show for three consecutive years, she had no real understanding of how to budget and price herself within a normal market of supply and demand for theatre productions. However, as a first step towards breaking down initial barriers, the approach and introduction to a way of working by New Writing North was well received.

Although the managers regarded the shows themselves as popular with their audiences; easy to receive and to run; and – for the most part – easy to sell; the scheduling of the show proved to be more difficult for some within the context of their busy, highly-programmed week. A Sunday performance was offered to one venue but the manager was clear that this wouldn't be convenient:

> *We have done things on a Sunday [before] but people tend not to come, even if we package it as an end of term treat, they [the parents] just won't bring them [the children] out. Unless it's a school holiday, something like that.*
>
> **CM4, Interview**

Whilst another felt that the internal New Writing North tour schedule could be too fixed for her centre at times:

> *[They] tell us when they want to put the shows on. We don't really get a say, we don't get involved. It's fixed a lot because of their own schedule. Even with the workshops we get a bit of a say on dates but it's quite fixed.*
>
> **CM2, Interview**

From one manager, we had the observation that unless they could programme the show during the Half Term holiday or on a Saturday, it was more difficult to sell, but this appeared to be more about her expectation than the actual times offered:

> *But I always programme in the Saturday of the October Half Term. This year, New Writing North said they might not run in Half Term, so I suggested the Saturday running up to Half Term, they said that depends on casting and who might be involved in rehearsals for various Christmas shows. However, for us, New Writing North has become a feature of our own Half Term programme.*
>
> **CM5, Interview**

For others, centring the show on half term brought challenges because it was a busy time of year with many theatre companies targeting that week and with their own regular Halloween celebrations. The issue here centres on supply and demand – competition on the supply side (from other activities / visiting companies) at a time of year which has a high demand for activities for the under 7s and their families.

Perhaps more interesting for the question of sustainability was the phenomenon of programming 'one-off' performances and workshops at community centres which had a weekly schedule and the fact that this routine was what audiences / centre users were more used to, particularly with regard to working mums:

> *…it really depends what else is going on. It's easier sometimes to get people coming to regular sessions than one-off things like the workshops because parents might be in a pattern [routine] and can't fit them in. Even if some can, it's knowing which date you're going to catch the most parents. And trying to work that out can be hard, you know if they're working it's like, 'Well, I'll have to check with the childminder what they're [the kids] doing.' So, then you're encountering that other level of negotiation. So, when mums go back to work, arrangements get very complicated. Again, the performances are for under 7s but what you're going to get, if the shows are programmed in the school day, is the very very little ones. That's what we've found, when we've looked at the age ranges, 2, 3, 3 ½ , [reads off list] and I think these [shows] were really aimed at 4 or 5 year olds. Reception age is where it really suits.*
>
> **CM4, Interview**

Given the logistics of organising a regional tour, that may well extend beyond half-term holidays, these are difficult challenges for the producers to circumvent; and, in many ways, simply represent a challenge that any producer-to-venue relationship might face. However, for an initiative that aims to engage children *and their families* (rather than engaging children through schools and other groups) this is an important scheduling point to bear in mind. However, overall, venue managers found the programming approach from New Writing North was flexible enough for their needs:

But New Writing North are very accommodating – this year I had a clash between a date I'd reserved with them and with an adult show coming from elsewhere but New Writing North were able to change and it was quite early in the planning process so it was fine.

CM5, Interview

Moreover, as the relationship developed and subsequent shows were booked, we saw this level of accommodation grow and, as the next section demonstrates, the venue managers began taking more ownership of the shows themselves.

Within the research case study of the five County Durham venue managers, all but one of the venues had presented the New Writing North shows for five consecutive years and for one they had only presented the show in Year Five (Monster Zoo). A consistent finding across the venues was that, after they'd programmed the show once, it was much easier the following years, leading to an important finding about the value of repeating a familiar offer year-on-year. This was also true in terms of marketing to their audiences; in knowing what to expect from the setup and get-out protocols; and in terms of securing addition funds to present the shows from funding bodies, as well as endorsement from their Trustees. In other words, once New Writing North had proved themselves to be a trustworthy provider of quality theatre for children, venues were comfortable about return visits. Establishing that first moment of contact and building the relationship is explored in the following section.

7.4 The relationship and its impact on the likelihood of sustainable provision.

New Writing North approached each venue by email after having developed a list of venues to target due to their being in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. Key to the early formation of a good working relationship appears to have been in the nature and tone of this initial approach:

ML: *So how did the relationship with New Writing North develop and was this different to others you've been involved with?*

CM2: *Chalk and Cheese. New Writing North was a breath of fresh air because of Sarah [the shows' producer]. For starters, for me, because you either meet somebody and you get on, like I did with you and like I did with Sarah, or you don't. And that's the key. And if you can work with somebody, you can usually make anything work. But if you don't have that connection.*

CM2, Interview

For CM2 the contact made with the show's producer, Sarah Churlish, had been a welcome change from other approaches she'd had in the past. For other venues, contact from New Writing North was their first experience of taking a children's theatre show. However, whether new to programming children's theatre or not, each venue in the case study was effusive in their praise for the personalities of the New Writing North team. In the quote above we see that 'she was real, she was normal' was an important factor for CM2. This came across in all the interviews and focus group discussions. There was a sense – from some managers more than others – that the arts sector could be 'snooty' and, at times, they felt looked down upon. An ability to talk to the managers on their own terms, in their own language, was key to the establishing of this relationship with New Writing North.

> *It has opened our eyes to what's possible, to new possibilities within the arts for our area, and provided some excellent opportunities for our families to participate and we now know we can build on that.*
>
> **CM1, Focus Group 4**

> *Their influence has helped build a pivotal change beyond our experience and expectation of arts and cultural activity.*
>
> **CM3, Focus Group 4**

> *Everything was there from the beginning, she made it seem so appealing and she came and saw the building and knew what would work here. The approach was fresh, and modern and not stale. She was excitable and with a passion. She had a passion for the show and I have a passion for this place and so we just put the two together and it was dynamic.*
>
> **CM1, Interview**

I explained how we worked and what I was trying to do with this place so she then brought Anna [Disley, Executive Director, Programmes and Impact] and we talked about how we could build on from the first show, how I could get my reading room started. You felt it wasn't just about selling a show but about doing something together. I've always said New Writing North are really easy to work with. Anna really gets where I'm coming from but she knows I'm not full of bullshit, I'll deliver what I say I will. It means I'm interested in the relationship with New Writing North and not just after their money.

CM5, Interview

As noted previously, the community centre managers have a passion for their building and for creating programmes for their community, so – from the start – the fact that New Writing North were able to relate to their vision(s), to make trips to see their venues, and to meet the managers in person were all fundamental in terms of building early trust in the programme and in that relationship. And, as has been previously noted, there was no sense of a hidden agenda – in either direction. The reference CM5 makes above to the strength of the relationship and 'not just after their money' is a telling one and one which, during the interview, she offered in contrast to experiences with other arts providers which she felt to have been more about a financial transaction. There was a notable sense, from all the venue managers, that the drive to fulfil their role is underpinned by passion and commitment; and so, the suggestion of a financial transaction or 'an agenda' seems to go against this. There is a self-perceived sense of 'doing it for the love of it' and therefore, the idea of agencies having an 'agenda' or of the partnership being based on a financial transaction is sometime treated with suspicion and the sense of an (undefined) 'ulterior motive'.

However, this feeling that they were creating things together with New Writing North was appealing to the venue managers and this was also true of the marketing campaigns which were often conceived jointly:

Granny Pirate was the first one and it had a massive buzz, I think because it's the first time we'd done something like this. But the title itself [My Granny is a Pirate]

really got to them [the community] and we did a marketing campaign where grannies got to come free. I mean, we never charge adults anyway, but this helped us to create a buzz.

CM5, Interview

We had previously struggled with certain people in our community, getting to the parents directly. We'd put things in the local paper which goes to every home in the village and posters up but even so people would say, 'I didn't know that was on.' But New Writing North suggested some new things we could try and we capitalised on their Facebook page and made our own which made it easier for some parents who maybe aren't walking past the centre on a day-to-day basis, and the materials they supplied were really lively so that got interest. It was something different and exciting.

CM4, Interview

Clearly, in terms of a learning point for others wishing to establish relationships with community centre managers, these pointers would depend upon a number of issues and could be budget-dependent, such as the company's proximity to the venue to arrange pre-visits, and whether they have created a bespoke show for community centres or whether they are offering the show to a combination of small theatres, town halls and other types of venue. However, what is clear from the responses is that these 'personal touches' go a long way and are not always budget-dependent. There is a sense, from CM4's comments above, that New Writing North has opened the door into the arts sector world and this is also apparent from comments about sustaining provision.

Personal touches, working towards a common goal to provide engaging, quality provision, and the idea of a two-way partnership held true in terms of maintaining the relationship over the 3-5 years of the programme; increasing as both producer and community venue manager felt more confident about what could be asked of the relationship.

Ultimately the relationship between New Writing North and the community centres has had to evolve beyond the three-year parameter of the funding bid. However, an analysis of the data provided through focus group and one-to-one interviews provided some clear indicators of how medium-term sustainability has been achieved, as well as the likelihood

that it will continue into the long term. These factors *could be* grouped under a number of thematic sub-headings which centre on:

a) The importance of **respect** between New Writing North and the centres. This has led to a number of important features that contribute towards sustainability, particularly in terms of the centre managers having developed self-confidence *through* being respected by a highly regarded arts organisation, as well as centre managers respecting their own place within the ecology of arts provision.
b) The **trust** between New Writing North and the centres, leading to managers being able to take risks with their programming and knowing where to turn to for support if they want to experiment with new types of productions and other participatory initiatives.
c) The importance of **communication with**, and **access to**, the rest of the arts sector and to other opportunities available to them.
d) **Capacity building** initiatives such as training provision, development support, and hands-on advice; leading to a greater sense of self-confidence, as well as confidence in the centre (and its brand).

The following extract, from an email by a centre manager who couldn't make one of the focus group sessions, sums up how interconnected all these factors are:

M: *Has your relationship with New Writing North helped you to develop cultural activities; and, if yes, in what way?*

CM3*: Yes, our relationship with New Writing North has definitely helped develop positive arts and cultural events, activities and opportunities. Their influence helped build a pivotal change beyond our experience and expectation of arts and cultural activity. From our initial take up, the impact and legacy [of the] New Writing North [programme] has been significant. It is a very giving relationship, providing us with much greater understanding of the reach and impact cultural activity can have, engaging, drawing out people, bringing them together in shared and uplifting experiences. The developing trust of the relationship, the legacy of cultural activity, in a series of workshops – always with a really excellent calibre of artists. Their confidence in knowledge subject, delivery,*

engagement and infectious enthusiasm drawing out group individual strengths and trust of process and of enabling people of their own strengths […] Creating unexpected layers of shared enjoyment within our community from books read, reading and writing workshops which result in a richness in conversations and insight between people they wouldn't have otherwise had. All having an effect of positive cultural momentum linking with other opportunities given and creating more.

Email from CM3, February 2018

The sense of respect *for* New Writing North is apparent from the responses which have been outlined in previous chapters, but that sense of *being respected*, of trusting that you know *your* community, of being prepared to build upon *your* existing knowledge, rather than impose ideas and ways of working upon you, was equally striking. More often than not, this was articulated by centre managers in their comparison of experiences with New Writing North (and other organisations) who had worked with them as equal partners, compared to other organisations who had not. In previous chapters this sense of trust element has already been demonstrated in the way in which some managers (most notably CM2 and CM5) contrast their dealings with other agencies, which – amongst other things – were based on a fairly clean transactional basis: 'you need a show, we have a show, let's see if we can make the figures work.' (CM2, Interview), and then their relationship with New Writing North:

> *I've always said New Writing North are really easy to work with. Anna really gets where I'm coming from but she also knows I'm not full of bullshit, I'll deliver what I say I will, I'm interested in the relationship with them not just after their money.*
>
> **CM5, interview**

As noted earlier, what was interesting about the responses to 'money' or about programming being a simple economic transaction is that it was regarded with the (undefined) suspicion of an ulterior motive, possibly because it was coupled with a lack of interest in the venue's wider programme or its own programming policy. This is evident from the conversation with CM2 when talking about why – after a bad experience programming arts in the past – she had decided to embrace the opportunity from New Writing North:

But they just had a very fresh approach because they were listening to what we wanted and it wasn't just, 'we've got this money and we need you to put six of these shows on, and there's the list.' It wasn't like that with Sarah. She came down here and she knows how we work and what we have and I think she wanted us to be involved. She was real, she was normal, she didn't have any agenda. She would listen to what we said, but really listen and understand. And then try and fit in with what we said and not just pay that lip service.

CM2, Interview

The method of interacting with small scale venues such as village halls or community centres that CM2 outlines here – we've got this money and we've got these shows – is not, in fact, untypical of the way in which touring shows approach venues. Often professional arts programmers will ring up or email with the offer of a particular piece of work and during the follow-up conversation they may take interest in the capacity of the hall or in the typical audience for that venue – in essence to see whether they are likely to sell the show. However, in doing so, they effectively bypass the venue itself, seeing it as a means to an end, rather than a place with a manager with active agency or with its own rightful place within the ecology of arts provision. This is unlikely to be a deliberate policy of disrespect, but it seems to have had that effect.

By contrast, New Writing North, in visiting the venue, getting to know the manager and her audience, taking an interest in the wider work of the centre, have all demonstrated a respect that is noticed by the managers. This is shown in the way New Writing North have deliberately attempted to support the centre, even when an 'ask' from the venue, falls outside their own remit and simply because they believe in the centre:

New Writing North, even though they're busy, they helped us write a bid for a different project, told us where to look, that kind of thing. I have a fundraising book but it's out of date, so they're able to help with stuff like that. They go out of their way to help us because they believe in what we do here.

CM5, interview

Not only has this respect been noticed, it has also led to greater sense of self-confidence:

I've really appreciated what New Writing North have brought to us in their legacy to us and just really in having worked with them. The work and the opportunities with them and actually with the new local art officer [at Durham Council] has built bridges. Of drama, writing and reading and these resonated with different groups from children and families, youth groups, community groups, all sorts and even with our new board members […] New Writing North's have also helped us […] to value our input and organising strengths to carry on this legacy ourselves and deepen our reach.

CM 3, Focus Group 4

All five managers commented on a rise in their own self-confidence through the programme – whether that was in practical terms, such as their ability to build capacity (more on this below), or simply in valuing their own position as providers of arts and culture activities. However, for CM3 and CM1, in particular, it wasn't just valuing themselves that had increased, but also that is has helped them garner a greater sense of respect from their Boards of Trustees.

The chair [of Trustees] said to me, "New Writing North wants to leave a legacy with you." Ah, if we've got people wanting to leave a legacy…! You see? They see you the way someone from outside sees you and suddenly they see the value in what you're doing.

CM3, interview.

What is noticeable here is that CM3 has gained status from her experience with New Writing North and therefore feels respected. The sense of trust that emanates from this two-way relationship, between partners who respect one another, has also been instrumental in building sustained provision.

Just the familiarity with people associated with New Writing North has helped [in terms of sustaining provision]. Once we trust someone then we have a cracking relationship; and they get to know us and we them; so it's a two-way street, it becomes a catalyst for more working together.

CM2, Focus Group 4

ML: *What do you think would best help you to sustain your cultural activity here?*

CM5: *Not having long gaps in programming so you can build momentum. And having a rapport with certain people, like we have trust with Sarah. Working with the same people that you have trust with, that helps to build on what you already know and where you can push things.*

CM5, Interview

It was clear from many other responses that the fact the New Writing North programme was delivered over a 5-year period helped to build that sense of trust. Equally, that the offer of a family-orientated show was such a consistent offer – both in quality and in its target audience – had an impact on sustainability:

> *I'd say probably 50% of our [regular] audience have come to each show, which is lovely. And, one of the families, we only see for this kind of thing. Not for any sports activities and, even if we haven't seen them for months, they always come back to this. As soon as they see your [New Writing North's] logo on there, they know what it's going to be like.*
>
> **CM1, Focus Group 1**

As noted above, one centre manager said that the brand identity hadn't impact positively on marketing the shows – 'Our guys wouldn't know if it was New Writing North or another company.' (CM1, Focus Group 1). However, most centre managers felt that, in working with New Writing North, they were building together to create a brand that their audiences could relate to. This certainly seems true from the many audience references to 'looking forward to the show' each year, supporting the views of managers that they were part of creating a distinctive theatre event that was sustaining audiences year on year.

> *Yeah, if they've been to the first one you can point out that it's the same as last year. Especially if they've got the books. Quite a lot of the families have got them beforehand and read them.*
>
> **CM3, Focus Group 1**

But for most it was the fact they were communicating with the same personnel over a five-year period that created this increased sense of trust. One centre manager expressed frustration at the fact that personnel changes within the Local Authority and another regional agency meant that you instantly lose the trust that comes from knowing the person you're liaising with and them knowing you.

Whilst changing personnel in any sector can create the same challenges, and is one that any arts provider has to navigate, this is undoubtedly more acutely felt at the local level, where local knowledge is important. Moreover, it does provide support for the central argument of this thesis that centre managers are an asset in terms of the longevity of their position within their communities.

As well as respect and trust being values that had a catalytic effect on managers' confidence and supported them directly or indirectly in strengthening their ability to sustain cultural provision, there was a more direct impact on sustainability in terms of the partnership model providing access to the wider cultural sector.

One centre manager discussed her ability to approach the workshop facilitators directly, after an initial introduction from New Writing North, and how this had enabled her to present workshops at other times of the year, not just around the October Half Term break. Another said simply, that 'having artist that know us and know the area and the history, and bringing something of that to what they present, will sell itself.' (CM2, Focus Group 3). CM5, who had been involved in the programme for the whole five years, remarked that as soon as the first show had proved to be a success, she had begun seeking out ways to enhance and sustain the provision at her centre:

> *We've started working regularly with workshop leaders that New Writing North has introduced us to. We don't get massive numbers for the workshops but people do get a quality experience and it does propagate to other areas, and the word gets out that that's what we do. The New Writing North related activities, plus the stuff we get from Cultural Hubs, means we're developing a growing following for our events. None of this would have happened without the relationship with New Writing North. Taking* Granny Pirate *was a risk but it has paid off because everything has stemmed from there.*
>
> **CM5, interview**

Another, found that a useful way of accessing the sector was through social media:

> *I'm watching out all the time now for new opportunities, I look at New Writing North's Facebook and then see who they're following, then follow them, or who they're reposting or whatever, I can begin to see where we can go to for new opportunities.*
>
> **CM3, Interview**

Whilst for CM4 and CM5, it was simply the snowball effect of knowing more people, leading to more opportunities and also of having a time-saving way of knowing where to go, and who to trust:

> *I've got to know more artists, actors, facilitators that sort of thing and I know who I can trust. Even if they're not available, I can contact them and ask who is and they'll give me a good suggestion, I feel like I'm building links with more arty types. You just need one or two people you can trust and that snowballs into having a network.*
>
> **CM4, Interview**

> *I know more place to go now if I want to programme a show and if someone approaches me I'll just ask Anna – or you. I have people who know the arts world better than me and I can ask them but I definitely know more about what I'm looking for – or where to go to ask.*
>
> **CM5, Interview**

Not only has being connected into the arts sector been of value in knowing how to harness new opportunities in order to sustain provision, it has also had an impact on mangers feeling they belong within the sector.

The values of trust and respect, together with having access to, and feeling more comfortable within the arts sector are well-evidenced within the responses community managers gave in Focus Group and One-to-One interviews. However, to conclude this section on how the relationship with New Writing North has led to more sustainable

provision in the medium-term and the likelihood of it extending over the long term, it is necessary to show some evidence of how the partnership model had directly impacted on capacity.

The first, and most obvious way, in which this has been demonstrated, is in the ability to show to stakeholders that a performance can be economically viable and also that it will be popular with audiences:

> *At the beginning it was hard for us to raise the money but, five years in, more people are prepared to put the money in because they know how successful it is, which is excellent. It's been easier to raise money these past two years than it was at the beginning when it was a new project and something new for the centre. With our committee as well, you tell them the full price of the show and how much we're getting it at the reduced price and it makes it easier to sell [to them]. You can give them the numbers and the figures from last time and the comments from the families. […] But if another show came along at a higher price, we could give them the numbers and figures from the New Writing North show and the comments from the families and we know that certain families always come back to this type of show.*
>
> **CM1, Focus Group 1**

> *The cost to us had been reasonable and we have a small cover charge, we don't do it to make money and in previous years we applied to the local councillors and they've underwritten it; this year I think we'll just about break even and cover the cost of the show ourselves.*
>
> **CM4, Focus Group 2**

The fact that it has become easier for the centre managers to justify to their Trustees investing funds in a production because it has proved popular in previous years, and has not been a huge financial risk, is clearly a result of a five-year relationship with New Writing North who offered the production at a subsidised rate. However, the fact that some managers now feel confident they could take non-subsidised shows and that they are less reliant on underwriting is testament to the programme. However, challenges do

remain in terms of the time-competition for raising funds to maintain the upkeep of the building and in being able to keep up the momentum of a regular quality arts programme.

It is evident from what has been outlined above that, by taking part in the New Writing North programme, the community centre managers have grown in confidence in terms of seeing themselves as arts programmers and their valued place within the arts sector ecology. Moreover, they spoke about ways in which more contact with the sector has inspired them to look for addition opportunities and how to judge the quality of something they might be prepared to take a risk on. For some, they spoke about knowing they could ask trusted colleagues at their local NPO or at New Writing North; for others, the ability to judge for themselves had come from a deeper experience of programming theatre.

> *So, now I know what I have to do, I need to see a YouTube clip and I always do that now. I always like to have footage of real people. Not some kind of studio shot of an artist's foot, holding a puppet. I know I need to see real people interacting with that puppet – real people that I can sell to my real people.*
>
> **CM2, Interview**

> *I'm now more experienced about what questions I'll ask an incoming show. I know what my users will do and not do; they won't sit quietly drawing pretty pictures for instance. I know what will engage them though. But I've learned from the bad and the good – know what will work and what won't. A bad experience can have a significant impact.*
>
> **CM5, Focus Group 3**

Some managers also benefitted from taking up New Writing North's offer of partnering on co-creation programme within the Strategic Touring Programme. Two of the community centres that form the case study for this research (as well as others who fall outside this cohort) actively embraced the opportunity. By partnering with the creative team for the Man on the Moon production in 2015, they engaged children and their families in devising workshops to come up with ideas for the show which then enabled the children to see their own ideas incorporated into the production when the finished

production was presented on the stage some weeks later. For one venue in the case study this became a regular feature of their yearly programme with young people contributing ideas through workshops in 2016 and 2017 as well. This type of engagement stimulated thinking by the centre manager about other ways she could find co-creation projects to her engage her community.

Again, a key determinant in this co-creative strand of the project was the relationship between personnel at New Writing North and the centre manager herself. An important element of sustainability has been achieved at this venue because of the enthusiasm of the centre manager and due to New Writing North seizing on this enthusiasm to provide a substantial investment in her skills.

More generally, the managers have become increasingly creative at finding new ways to expand their arts offer; from programming gaming and animation workshops, as outlined above, to approaching other cultural organisations to see what's on offer. One centre manager described trawling through New Writing North's Facebook page at 3am to find something to fill a programming gap! But in addition to thinking of one-off activities, managers have also been inspired to build deeper connections with other agencies and in more inventive ways than simply as a receiving house. The centre manager whose pantomime is popular has begun thinking of offering free rehearsal space to other theatre companies; whilst another had been thinking of developing similar reciprocal relationships, such as connecting with a national charity that provides one-to-one literary support to children who struggle with reading ability and confidence:

> *I recently wrote to Beanstalk who've moved into [our area] and I had a meeting with them. It turned out they don't have budget to project fund, but hopefully there is some opportunity for partnership work like training and book swap events. I suggested they could use our venue for free in exchange for training and workshops. They mentioned they're currently doing a programme in Durham schools but if they can't do the work in schools, I'm suggesting they could do it here instead. It's a bit of a departure from what they normally and what we normally do, but hopefully I've planted the seed with them.*
>
> **CM5, Interview**

For two of the centres, working with schools had been a longstanding element of their work, for the others, however, the opportunity to engage with schools through the New Writing North programme and helped to expand their reach within the community.

> *Ruth and Laura went in [to schools] and got really good stuff in terms of developing the piece [of theatre for New Writing North] and they were really, really well-received […] Historically they'd been really hard to work with but the workshops were offered here with cookies and juice.*
>
> **CM5, Interview**

> *We were building our arts offer anyway, but during this time New Writing North offered us an affordable opportunity of yearly under-7s performances and related workshops. This was extremely valuable to us as it helped us in bringing our schools and community together in our centre, reaching as many children in the village as possible, as well as pre-school and Beavers, we wanted to make those connections anyway but the productions gave us something distinct to offer them and now we have that connection we can keep it up.*
>
> **CM3, Focus Group 4**

As well as the workshops that accompanied the Strategic Touring Programme which engaged 3078 children and 800 adults across the three years, New Writing North has also worked with the venues to devise bespoke projects according to the venue's own interests and needs. Project have included reading development initiatives in and around libraries, youth theatre projects in community centres, and creative writing projects in urban libraries with refugee and asylum seeker women. These initiatives aimed to support the venues to view the arts as a way of further engaging their local community, and to provide them with the skills and experience to take these sorts of projects on themselves if they wish, thus sustaining a wider-ranging and deeper cultural provision.

At the conclusion of the Strategic Touring Programme, community venues (those who formed the case study for this research as well as other venues) and libraries from across the North East of England were invited to a focus group meeting about how to build a legacy from the programme. The idea of a consortium of 'receiving house' venues emerged from the discussion although there was a concern that none of the managers had the additional capacity to be take the lead on such an initiative and, without

additional support, they felt it would be difficult to get such a project off the ground. However, there was also unanimous support for the idea of continuing to programming arts events especially for families. As a result, New Writing North followed up on this enthusiasm to provide a programme that would build on the Storytime events of previous year. Artists from the productions devised an event called 'Story into Song' where they worked with children and adults to coproduce new songs based on Aesop's fables. This initiative toured to five libraries and four community centres, three of which are part of the case study for this research.

At the end of the three-year programme, New Writing North invested an underspend from the original programme budget into a second legacy project, the cost of which was supplemented with a funding contribution from Durham Council and some crowdfunding. As a testament to the legacy of the original programme, four of the five community centres from the case study (and others) took part in the project which created a live music and story-telling performance with workshops in individual community centres which then fed into a final public performance at Durham Gala theatre as part of the 2018 Durham Book Festival.

The way in which the centre managers have looked to further their own involvement in initiatives and have used their newfound or deeper understanding of what could be achieve, as well as how they can build capacity, demonstrates that a sustainability mindset is already present in their thinking with the potential to harness this enthusiasm still further.

In conclusion, then, a combination of respect and trust; access to the arts sector as well as other partners such as schools and nursery groups; ease of communication; tangible capacity building initiatives such as CPD training and simply greater experience in presenting the shows – has led to a more resilient group of community centre managers.

However, the ongoing challenges remain, particularly in terms of maintaining a long-term sustainable arts and culture offer in their communities. It may take the arts sector – from policymakers and funders to arts organisations and local agencies – to change the way in which they approach their relationship with community centre managers to really

capitalise on this legacy, and to realise the important (and often steadfast) role within the ecology of arts provision that community managers play. Some recommendations on how this might happen will be presented in the next chapter, together with some concluding remarks which draw together the historical analysis of Chapter 2 (cultural activity and cultural policy in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation) and the theoretical analysis presented in Chapter (Cultural Democracy).

8. Conclusion and recommendations

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings and analysis presented in Chapters 5 to 7 are drawn together to present a summary of the ways in which the research has helped to answer the primary research question:

How can a partnership model between New Writing North and community centres support the sustaining of cultural participation in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation?

This will be interwoven with the findings and analysis of the four related research sub questions, which were:

- What are the structural relationships that surround cultural provision?
- What role do the community venues play within this structure in terms of cultural provision and sustaining it?
- What are the historical precedents to achieving sustained cultural provision?
- What are the community centre managers' understanding of the barriers to sustaining provision?

In doing so it will use the findings to point to several ways of dealing with the wider question of how to sustain and embed cultural provision in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation more generally, not just in relation to the New Writing North Strategic Touring Programme. It will then present a range of final thoughts and a series of recommendations for New Writing North and the arts sector in general which consider both the policy and practical implications of the findings.

8.2 At the coalface

The Pragmatist methodology of this research has provided a warrant to look at the question of sustaining cultural provision by rooting the inquiry in the 'psychic disposition of ordinary people at large' (Dewey, J., in Omerod, 2015); in other words, looking at the

challenge of sustained provision from the point of view of those working at the coalface – the community centre managers. Not only has this enabled the research to take into account the 'situation' (Dewey, 1919) from their perspective but it has also afforded the opportunity to consider their role within the situation – the way in which they fit into traditional thinking about the ecology of arts provision in the UK.

In addition, the Pragmatist methodology has enabled the research to enquire into a range of alternative solutions to the challenges faced in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation by re-orientating our perspective away from the arts sector and towards the community centre itself. By combining the arts research undertaken in the literature review and the audience development plan from New Writing North with the responses from the case study respondents, a democratic orientation towards knowledge of the situation has been sought.

For example, from the point of view of arts research, the 'problem of perception' – that art is 'not for people like me', is supported by community centre managers' responses that it is considered 'posh' and the term itself is off-putting. However, the different manifestations of this problem lead to different solutions. Arts sector solutions may centre on changing people's perceptions of the arts, to make it a more accessible term, thereby challenging the idea that 'the arts are not for people like me'. To do so would be a success for a sector which defines itself as 'The Arts'. However, from the point of view of a community centre manager, we could just as easily use another word, or rebrand the experience altogether. As we saw in Chapter 5, this is what many centre managers do anyway – rebranding events as a Pie and Pea Supper, a Halloween Party or just a night of fun. From their position, there is no need to change people's perceptions of the arts, they can simply not use the word! This re-orientated solution would be entirely in keeping with the social and communal process of knowledge acquisition demanded by Pragmatism.

However, it is not a recommendation of this research that we do abandon the term 'art' or that we don't attempt to change people's perceptions of it, this example is simply offered as a way in which looking at the issue from only one perspective means that

solutions can be, likewise, single-minded, rather than using the democratic orientation of knowledge offered by Pragmatism.

Notwithstanding this rather hyperbolic example, we can take the principle of re-orientating our perspective to find some useful ways to look at the challenge of sustaining provision from a community centre point of view.

For example, as we saw in Chapter 6, the bespoke challenges faced by the five centres at the heart of this research centre on a number of issues which can be summarised as:

a) FUNDS: Having time to fundraise and to prioritise funding for the arts
b) RISK: The (proportionally high) risk associated with programming something you would not normally programme just because it's on offer to you with a subsidy
c) AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT: How to attract and sustain audiences particularly in areas of economic deprivation where arts attendance is low.
d) INTEGRATION: A mistrust of, or uneasy relationship with, certain parts of the arts sector, potentially caused by a lack of integration into the wider cultural ecosystem.

There are other challenges, of course, to do with marketing and administrative abilities, as well as general budgetary concerns, but the four outlined above seem to be particular to their 'situation' rather than issued faced by any programmer of arts, with a) and b) being based on their greater situation of precarity and c) and d) being specific to being a community centre not an arts venue.

Taken together, we can proffer a set of solutions to sustaining arts and culture provision, which take the community centre as their starting point.

a) FUNDS. As outlined in Chapter 6, this centres on a combination of barriers regarding having enough time to search out applications, forward plan your programme, write and submit bids, as well as knowing where to look. This challenge could be met by the creation of a set of bespoke funds which are directly targeted at centres and which don't require overly bureaucratic completion and monitoring procedures. These funds do exist, with trusts and foundations, and are often available through the Community Foundation;

However, the question is, could the arts sector do more? Could more be done to support community centres to easily access these funds? And, if the Arts Council is committed to Cultural Democracy, could more be done to directly support venues in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation? This could range from simple (and relatively low-cost) initiatives such as producing an annually updated electronic funding catalogue or guide; to higher cost initiatives such as providing centre with a funded fundraiser post which could be extremely part time (1/2 day a week), or shared between venues in a similar locale or region. Specific funds for community venues could be better integrated into the arts funding ecology too.

A popular idea with the community centre managers was either the idea of a fundraiser, so they had time to look into programming opportunities, or of a project manager, dedicated to programming so they could focus on fundraising:

> *I know there are places I could look [for programming] and who to ask for recommendations now. But I haven't got time to sit and search and look – nah! Neh chance! It's like how many balls am I juggling today? But if there was another one of me, to get the money in or to find the stuff, then we could programme arts stuff as long as you like.*
>
> **CM5, Focus Group 2**

> *What would be useful to me is to find a pot of money to bring on board a salaried person who can look at bringing more arts stuff, look at hosting a theatre group residency and do workshops. To me, the theatre group would help to sustain arts activity because we wouldn't charge them for rehearsal space and they could be our advocates. But I don't have time to look at these things myself. I can have the ideas, but I need someone to help me implement them.*
>
> **CM1, Focus Group 2**

b) RISK: Risk-taking for any programming organisation is part of the challenge to providing cultural activities; however, as we saw in Chapter 6, this is particularly the case for the community centres who are positioned in locations where there hasn't been long-term arts provision. Taking a chance on a show that might be harder to sell (or-brand) or that

might simply not be appropriate for your venue can have a big implication on trust between audiences and venue than in more dedicated arts organisations with audiences who might be more used to taking a risk or to expect a more eclectic range within annual programming. In addition, Community Centres that are valued by their users because of the regularity of their programme. So, something new may be more of a financial risk than the manager (or their board of trustees) is prepared to take. However, many of the opportunities presented to managers for arts programming are done so on an *ad hoc* or opportune basis. Touring shows that contact the venue at just the right time, or productions that comes their way by virtue of outreach and touring initiatives.

It is not that managers were resistant to trying new things *per se*. In fact, the managers welcomed the opportunity to programme more high-quality performances that fit with their programme policy (albeit, a loosely defined notion of 'policy'- by their own admission). Of particular note was the 'showcase' opportunity given to two of the centres as part of their involvement with their local NPO theatre. Although reservations remained about feeling they *had* to take one show rather than another, the upshot was they did have an active choice in which show they presented and that this was a good way of having access to high-quality provision:

> *Now, would I have the time, if I had nothing else to do, maybe I would programme an arts programme for twelve months. I have so much else to do. So we could do with an events manager or something but generally in a community centre this is what happens, one person does everything. So if I could dedicate some time to having a good look around, go off to see other stuff, like we did when we did, we did a showcase event where the artists came and we all stayed in the [local NPO theatre] one day and watched fifteen minute clips of lots of shows and it was amazing.*
>
> **CM2, Interview**

Therefore, the issue is not that community centres can't be a place of risk-taking and innovative programming, it is simply that the manager needs to be placed at the heart of the decision-making process about what to present.

We see from CM2's comments above that having the opportunity to see new and different work was helpful to her. In addition, the fact that she felt connected to the arts sector through this experience. Managers often work in isolation, not having time to network with other parts of the sector. In addition, in focus group sessions the managers expressed how much they had benefited from the sessions themselves, for an opportunity to come together and talk about common issues, as expressed in this exchange:

CM2: *I really liked the meeting we had last time too; so much better to have an open discussion than a set agenda. […] I thought it was a refreshing change to come to another area [centre] and meet other managers. […] We don't get anywhere with those hub meetings but in an ideal world I'd love for us lot to get together and share notes and share best practice and all of that, without it being a training session. You know, I've thought many a time, one Friday night I'll open up my bar here and open a bottle of wine and invite all the centre managers. Even if we just get to bitch.*

CM1: *Well sometimes good things come out of that bitching.*

CM2: *Yeah, we're not bitching at each other, it's just about offloading because we all go through the same stuff.*

CM4: *It's helpful to us all especially when you've got your head down most of the time. Even just to go to another centre and see how they do things there.*

Focus Group 2

Out of this discussion emerged the idea of a 'consortium' where they would join, with other community venues across County Durham, to bid for touring shows, to share the cost between themselves, thereby lowering the cost to touring companies by offering productions within a smaller radius as part of a 'Durham Programme'.

CM5: *I was just going to say that too. Why doesn't the Arts Council come to a consortium of community centres and instead of employing [an external agency] and giving them a huge management fee to do it, why not come to us direct and say, 'Look we've got some*

money, we know you're already doing bits and bobs. Here's a wad, what can you do with it?'

CM3: *But I think they don't because of [those external agencies] I think we're covered as far as they're concerned. They're sort of competition in a way.*

Focus Group 2

This was undoubtedly prompted by the research process itself and the series of focus group sessions centred on training workshops, and also inspired by the New Writing North Programme itself which took place across a few weeks of the year and was concentrated in one locale. Given that around 66% of audiences lived within 5 miles of their venue, this would be feasible in terms of avoiding saturation and diluting audiences across venues, from the point of view of the incoming production. It would also keep travel and accommodation costs lower than a tour dotted across the country.

However, managers also expressed concern that they themselves would not be able to start and maintain such a commitment to an idea where leadership would inevitably be needed – to coordinate programmes, to negotiate dates, to raise funds and so on. A dedicated project manager was suggested during Focus Group 3 as one way in which the idea of a consortium might be achieved.

CM3: *I don't know if we'd have time to do it, if there isn't a driving force, like delivering this programme, it needs that because none of us will stick our heads up and look at our diaries and say, shall we get together to discuss things. It just won't happen, we just won't have time.*

CM5: *Yeah, I'd be up for it but I'd need another 72 hours in a piggin' day to do everything. I would love, after slogging me guts out in this place for ten years, I would dearly love to set up a consortium, I would dearly love to apply for arts council funding and then do real stuff. Stuff we know we can make work… maybe do something at [CM1] or they could do something down with me. But you know what, come back to the real world, I've got a roof to keep over me head, I've got a little lad to support and I've got a community centre*

that's like a bloody beast to try to look after. But could I do it? Whey aye. I could do it with me eyes shut. Not being funny and all the rest of it, but we all could.

Focus Group 2

This is another potential way in which arts investment could be directed more towards the venues themselves. In creating new networks of community venues where high-quality art can flourish and which can become a hub of activity within the community, connecting schools, churches, village halls and residential homes as well as voluntary organisations in the way that William Emrys Williams imagined in his post-war vision that 'every town should have one'.

c) AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT: In one-to-one interviews the researcher asked each of the community managers 'If money was no object, what would you do here?' The answers overwhelming related to making improvements to the venue itself, rather than programming things into it. This was a uniform response highlighting the fact that for centre managers, pride in their centre is paramount as a way to providing the best facilities for their users. In terms of developing audiences as much thought was given to the environment and a sense of ownership of the centre – by both managers and their audiences, this is something that arts producers more widely could be more aware of.

As we saw in Chapter 7, this represents a good learning point for arts producers who wish to programme or host co-creative projects there. Respecting the ethos and supporting the 'brand' (for want of a better word) of the centre is a good way of building trust. For centre managers, the centre and the community come first. The art and culture provision is secondary and part of a diverse range of offerings to their centre users. As such, any approach that seems simply about a financial transaction, based on a single offering, is treated as having an undefined ulterior motive. Any lack of thought to the central role of the community centre itself lacks an awareness of what is important to the manager.

In terms of the specific improvements, managers stated outside signage was one particular area of concern, as well as interior refurbishments and, mostly popularly, bespoke branding on marketing materials with one manager noting this as something she

would have dearly loved when she was allocated the title of 'cultural hub'. These are things the sector is prepared to invest in for mainstream venues and the question is, why not for these community centres too?

Clearly this is a question of finances and priorities. Yet, as Mark Robinson notes in his piece, 'Changing the Cultural Landscape Isn't Too Mighty a Task' (2018) a reflective note on the themes and learning of the People, Place, Power conference, the Art's Council has a 'decades-long track record of tinkering at the edges of regular-funding rather than restructuring embedded privilege' (p3). Perhaps this is the type of far-thinking restructuring that it is needed.

As well as investing in projects, individuals and one-off commissions, which is often the focus of arts sector initiatives, it would make sense to place equal emphasis on promoting and rebranding the on-the-ground facilities in order to have a greater impact on sustaining provision. These centres have been around for longer than the Arts Council itself and are likely to continue for many decades, long after particular engagement strategies and specific funding is being allocated to one programme or another. Moreover, investing in the people (the centre managers) attached to the places, *through* the infrastructure that exists, may be a more sustainable option, than in funding programmes, as they are less likely to be geographically mobile than young artists and participants, thus the knowledge and investment is embedded in the place through the centres.

This recommendation to invest in the centres themselves could be a wide-ranging restructuring of allocated funds, or it could simply be an acknowledgement within existing funding streams that centres have a need to allocate some money towards branding and refurbishment of their venue because having to find capital funding on top is creating a strain on them in terms of finding additional resources to make their 'house' a welcome receiving house.

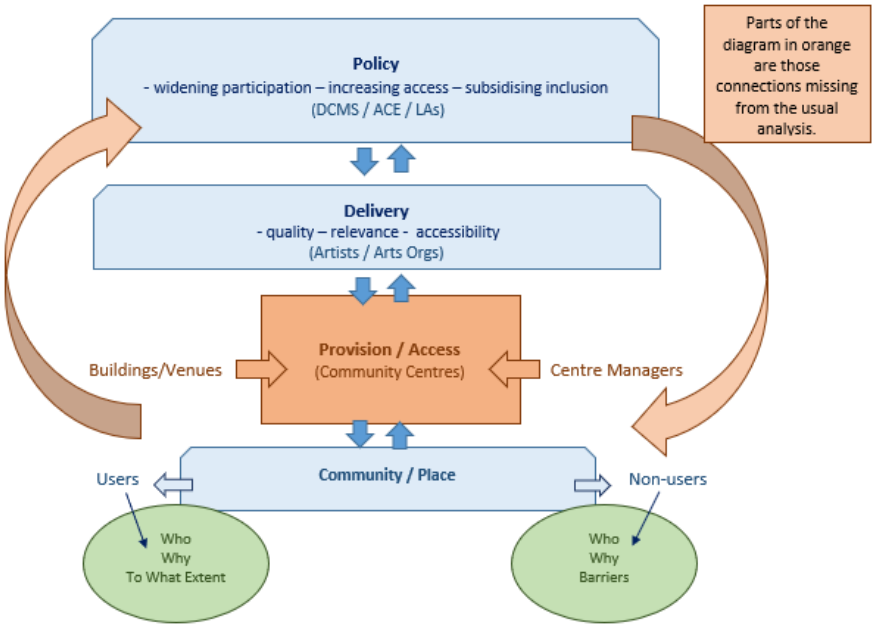
> *We've talked about rebranding for years, but never been able to do it. You know, getting rid of the squared tiles and the plastic chairs, refurbish with new furniture…*

you see, the thing with rebranding is that I think it future proofs us, makes it a place that people can really feel at home.

CM2, Interview

d) INTEGRATION: Much has already been covered in this research about the sense of mistrust or the uneasiness of the relationship that some (although not all) managers have experienced in dealing with certain parts of the arts sector, therefore it is not necessary to restate it here. However, it is worth relating this 'barrier' to the argument made in Chapter 4 that this may be partly down to centres not being valued for their place within the wider cultural ecosystem, particularly as providers of arts and culture in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation.

This, it was suggested, in Fig 3 that this was down to a 'disjoint' between policy and place (or community) save that which is mediated through other agencies; and one in which the centre manager is ideally placed to meet:



Thumbnail image of **Fig 3**: Cultural Mapping Table: an outline of the 'situation' of cultural activity in areas of economic disadvantage.

This thesis has made the case for regarding the role of the community centre and its manager as elemental in achieving sustained cultural provision in the areas where they exist. They are performing this role in many ways already and with the type of support

outlined above it is possible they are the best-placed agencies within the ecosystem of arts provision to develop and increase this role. However, they can only do this once their position is acknowledged and the wider sector, particularly policy makers and funders, are prepared to offer the right level of support.

> *I just don't see the point of the middle-man. I would much rather speak directly to the production team and say, 'What's the footprint? What time do you need to be in? What time will you be out?' Because they [the agency] haven't always given us the right information. But if I negotiate directly, I can maybe help them [the visiting company]. 'Why don't you come in on Thursday night because we've got nothing in that night.' Little things like that. And I would love to tap into the arts council and say we want £600,000 and for that, this is what we're going to do. You know, work with some partners in the community, but we know who we are, what we want and what we need. And let's not put a huge management fee to this place or that. Let's use the real money, for the real people, for the real thing.*
>
> **CM2, Interview**

In Chapter 7 we saw how the partnership model between community venues and New Writing North had achieved a situation that provided the right level of support. It was demonstrated in a number of ways that the programme had been successful on many levels. First, the fact that New Writing North's programme structure had been built up over a number of years and was adaptive to the needs of the community venues. Second, that the show at the heart of the programme was a good 'fit' was essential to the success of the partnership, not simply because it was an enjoyable piece of work, relevant and engaging to the young audience and their family, but that it achieved a high level of theatrical inventiveness whilst being easy to produce in a non-theatrical space and that it came with an easy-to-understand and to implement technical specification.

The partnership model, however, was built on more than its structure and the production. Chapter 7 also noted the importance of building the relationship through a process of mutual trust and respect, as well as more practically orientated aspects such as providing access to the wider arts sector and capacity-building initiatives such as training and development support. Section 7.4 drew these elements together to show how they

had contributed to self-confidence and empowerment in the community centre managers themselves, which simply built on a wealth of knowledge and experience which they already possessed.

In terms of sustainability, the New Writing North partnership with community centres (and libraries) has been well-placed to discover ways of embedding sustainable thinking and creating a range of empowering strategies for the centres themselves. This is in some part to do with the fact that it was an aim of the programme from the beginning and, as such, has benefited from a self-reflective practice throughout the five years of the Strategic Touring Programme tenure.

According this pivotal role to community centres relates back to one of the initial discussions of this research which stated that whilst many arts and culture programmes aimed at sustainability do challenge the notion of elitism in terms of the type of art they promote and engage in; and do reach out to all sections of society on the basis that 'everyone is creative' or 'make it and they will come'; however, many such initiatives have not seriously challenged the structures of provision in any systematic way. In other words, they continue to place trust in the existing, more 'privileged' sections of the sector – the arts organisations and artists – to directly engage with people they find 'hard to reach' without respecting their contemporaries – the community centre managers – who have this reach because they are already working at the coalface.

9.3 A final word on Cultural Democracy

As we saw in Chapter 3, the concept of Cultural Democracy has evolved from a post-war era concept which saw 'culture' as being universal as demonstrated in W.E. Williams notion of 'unify[ing] our popular culture' (1945) and Keynes's idea of our 'common life' (1945); to a more post-modern notion that stresses the diversity of cultures within our society which must necessarily co-exist and with no one culture able to become the 'official culture' thus dominating all others (Adams and Goldbarn, 1990). Furthermore, that the 'democratic' part of Cultural Democracy is now defined through the market as providing social or economic benefit, rather than being a response to market failure as a non-rivalry or non-excludability public good (King and Blaug, 1973). Whilst these changes clearly and rightly embrace demographic changes in the UK towards a more multicultural

society, they also have the adverse effect of providing cultural opportunities which no longer focus on non-excludability, but – in the case of areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation – are often based on the notion of meeting a social policy objective, such as the community 'need' for cohesion. There is a differentiation in the offer to working class communities and the slightly-metaphoric, 'wealthy, well-educated and white' who are not presented with opportunities to 'socially engage' but are able to afford an offer that is most usually based on a criterion of 'aesthetic quality'.

Is it possible that this trajectory to engage with those who don't engage, although well-meaning, has led to a situation where the arts sector has invested in what they think people need, rather than what they want? As Nina Simon (2016) noted, in order to be relevant, art needs to be not about 'what you think people need to want or deserve,' but about 'their values, their priorities'. One of the surest ways to ensure this relevance is achieved is to place the decision-making in the hands of the communities themselves. But not simply through co-creation and participation, but by investing in the infrastructure of those communities and embedding the 'gatekeeper' role within them.

This is a version of Cultural Democracy which challenges the idea of democracy as a numbers' (of participants) game – a proportional representation of provision, but recognises the building-blocks surrounding democratic provision, of building upon the structures needed in order to fulfil its aims. It takes note of geographical, social and economic disadvantage whilst affording agency to the communities to be decision-makers for their own wants and needs and avoids Simon's charge that such thinking 'smacks of paternalism'. It involves a democratisation process which avoids the type of 'doublestrategy' referenced by Stephen Hadley (2018) which continues to see the democratisation of culture through the existing infrastructure.

Offering equality of provision, could be simply about opening up the channels from communities to the wider sector, as well as bringing the sector into the communities for inspiration and to engender aspiration. However, it may well call for a more radical overhaul of the infrastructure by entrusting the custodians embedded within the communities, rather than the traditional custodians of arts and culture. By re-orientating its perspective and by implementing some of the recommendations outlined in section 8.2, the arts sector could radically change the sustainability agenda. Namely, this would

involve investing directly in sustaining the community centres and supporting their managers, whilst continuing to provide inspiration, aspiration and practical support to the community managers who – as this research has demonstrated – are more than willing and able to take on the task of sustaining arts and culture provision in their communities.

Chapter 9: Personal Reflections

As noted from the outset, the direction of this research was in no small part due to my initial encounter with the community centre managers during the initial pilot phase. It was, as indicated, a genuine response to having witnessed first-hand their commitment, hard work, expertise and ingenuity. However, this response belies a confrontation with my own starting point and a lack of awareness of the vital role they play in supporting arts and culture in their community.

To some extent, then, the direction of this thesis has been propelled by having my own prejudiced pre-conceptions confronted by reality. I have tried not to over-romanticise the community centre managers and have attempted to allow them to speak in their own words. However, I suspect, at times, I have allowed my respect for them to push the direction of the research and have orientated my inquiry in a favourable direction towards them. This has led, I believe, to a new way of looking at an old problem; and which has produced some positive findings. And, although I believe the decision about cohort size has been justified for the reasons outlined in the Methodology chapter, it remains true that the case study is small (five venues) and the findings may not be representative of community centre managers everywhere.

Indeed, as also outlined in Chapter 4, the case study selection actively sought the most engaged and interesting managers for the research, using a process of 'purposeful sampling', because it was thought they would be 'information rich' participants (Patton, 2001). Although this produced a wealth of interesting information with participants who were always willing to meet and to engage in follow-up clarification conversations – either in person, or by email – the case study selection has meant that some important facts have gone unexamined. Namely, that community managers who may have been less expressive and less reflective have not been included. This means that the analysis is based on the 'best of the bunch' and has omitted considerations such as managers who are resistant to programming arts activity and even more reluctant than some members of this cohort to engage with the wider sector.

One such centre was originally due to be part of the cohort but this idea was ultimately abandoned. It was a centre which had embraced the New Writing North programme and had requested more in-depth provision, including a young people's performing arts project which ran throughout the summer of 2015 and also a Christmas production the following December. However, these projects relied on the enthusiasm and commitment of a youth worker, placed at the centre, rather than the centre manager himself. When the youth worker was taken ill, the activity didn't cease (the young people continued the work themselves) but the relationship between New Writing North and the venue became harder to navigate because the manager was results-orientated rather than interested in the relationship *per se*:

> *Both projects [Summer and Christmas] were very successful, unfortunately the key youth worker left in 2016 and engaging the Community Centre Manager in further conversations about arts activity in the community (apart from booking the show each year) proved wanting.*
>
> Extract from New Writing North's Participation Report to Arts Council
> Shared via email, February 2018

In addition, libraries were given some consideration initially but, as mentioned above, ultimately rejected for the case study. This, as we saw in Chapter 5, was partly due to librarians at the coalface not being as in charge of programming decisions as community centre managers, instead being subject to decisions taken by area managers and those above them in terms of internal structures. However, in most part, it was due to their funding prospects and organisational nature being integrated within local authority structures.

As a consequence, what the research didn't consider was the sense of competition felt by some community centre managers with the libraries themselves:

> **CM5:** *What I don't understand is why [the council] is making all these cuts […] and they're programming all this stuff in libraries and I'm thinking, why don't you come and programme stuff in a community centre then love?*
>
> **CM4:** *Because they don't have to pay for the venue if they put it in a library.*

CM5: *Yes, but they don't have to pay for the venue if they put it in a community centre, we'd just get the work.*

Focus Group 3

This could have been an interesting line of enquiry to pursue, however it would have involved a new series of interviews as it was an issue merely touched upon, rather than expressed as a major issue or barrier.

I think at times my twenty years of experience of working as a producer in the arts sector has enabled me to pursue lines of enquiry that I've noted from personal experience as having been missing from the usual analysis. On the positive side, this may have given my research a depth of analysis that someone new to the sector may not have had; on the other hand, it may also have been over-dependent on *my* experience, rather than someone else's. Furthermore, due to it being a personal experience, I'm not certain that I have always delineated analysis of the findings within the context of the research framework from my own twenty years of thinking. This is not necessarily a problem if the research is seen as a contribution to the overall debate and it is in that spirit that it is offered.

Another self-reflection is that I was led at times by those members of the focus group who were the loudest, who didn't hold back, and that I could have worked harder to include the quieter voices in the room. For instance, in Focus Group 2, it was twenty-five minutes into a ninety-minute conversation before I included CM4; although I think it's fair to say that, of all the participants, CM4 was naturally the quietest and that she wasn't as experienced as other members of the group. In fact, CM4 expressed in a follow-up email that she had benefited enormously from the Focus Group sessions because she was able to contextualise her own position better after having been part of a peer-learning session.

However, it remains the case that one of the aims of this research, albeit a subordinate one, wasn't achieved. This was the hope that the informal cohort, brought together through the research process, would find enough value in the experience to consider continuing to meet and to eventually create for themselves a formal cohort. The reasons for this have been outlined in Chapter 7. And, it is clear that the five participants did benefit from the peer-to-peer learning process, which is in keeping with the pragmatic

aims of generating knowledge that is useful for the participants, even where this didn't lead to a long-term strategy of consortium building.

Finally, one of the underlying issues reflected in the findings and analysis presented in Chapters 5 to 7 is the issue of class – essentially a middle-class arts sector forming relationships with working-class communities. It was the researcher's original intention to confront the issue of class directly and most particularly throughout the findings and analysis chapters. However, traditional (or, even, old-fashioned) ways of talking about class created a number of stumbling blocks, not least because it is often difficult to discuss class without resorting to inaccurate stereotypes, generalisations or overly patronising language. In addition, it is possible that class analysis in the 21st Century is often found to fall short of fully grasping what are traditionally important class identifiers.

There has been some well-regarded research in this area, which formed part of the bibliography for this research, such as Mike Savage's, 'Social Class in the 21st Century' (2015) and, although not an academic work as such, David Goodharts 'Road to Somewhere' (2017) has also proved insightful. Ultimately, however, I felt an undertaking of a class analysis of the 'situation' was beyond the scope of this research, save for the way in which it is expressed through the participants' own words. Words that are often missing from analyses of sustaining arts and culture in areas of economic disadvantage and deprivation. Their words held a lot of sense for me and I hope that readers of this research will also hear their wisdom. I hope their words have has much currency with readers of this research as they did with me.

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Appendix A

Audience Development Plan

New Writing North: Touring Literature Across the North.

This plan for audience development identifies how we will draw upon existing research, partners' knowledge and expertise, and our own resources to maximise the social impact of our work.

The plan is to identify new audiences for high quality arts and literature in areas of low cultural provision in the North of England. It will also put in place strategies to ensure those audiences are retained and developed during and beyond the life of the project.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The two overarching aims of our project are:

- To provide more people across the North in areas of low cultural provision with an opportunity to experience high quality literature and performing arts in their local communities.

- To sustain provision within these communities so that local people see arts attending as a core part of their leisure time.

We will achieve this by:

- Producing one high quality performing arts adaptation of a children's book per year, which will to tour to non-theatre venues

- Drawing on our own resources and our partners' expertise, provide a range of reader development and participatory arts work designed to develop and sustain audiences for culture

- Working with literature partners across the North who will identify and help develop venues in areas of low cultural engagement that we can tour to over a three year period

- Working with partners to signpost venues to other arts development opportunities within their communities, so that they can develop a year-round arts programme

- Providing training, contacts and hands-on project development support for venues to encourage them to programme more arts activity in the venues

- Gaining an understanding of the audience profile within each venue and ensuring that information is shared with the venue so that it can be built on.

This project builds on a Strategic Touring Project we undertook in 2013 and 2014, for which the majority of venues were in County Durham. In 2015 – 2018 we will be returning to venues in County Durham with the aim of supporting their capacity to programme arts activity in their communities, and we will also be rolling the project out to new venues in the North of England.

Programming to target audiences

In selecting the areas to target, we have drawn upon data from the Active People survey, which highlights the areas of least engagement in the arts. We have also used local knowledge about disadvantaged areas within cities, which don't necessarily show up in the Active People data (as this looks at the level of engagement within a whole local authority). In addition, we have included some venues, for example in Northumberland, which are in very rural areas. Although these venues appear to have better engagement in the arts, in fact they rely heavily upon touring work for almost all of their arts provision.

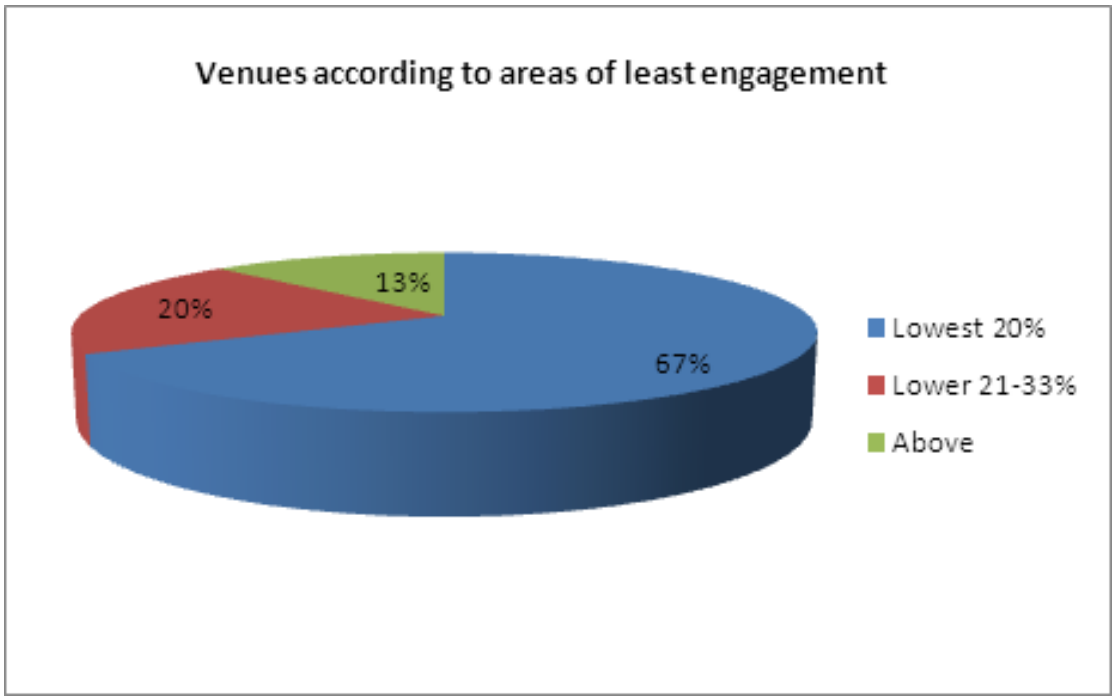
The table below splits our chosen venues into local authorities, using the pre-2009 authorities, which were used in the Active People survey.

Venue	Local Authority (pre-2009 changes to boundaries)	Active People (arts) 2 year av. %	Groups
			Lowest 20%
Peterlee Library	Easington	31.01%	
Waterhouses Community Centre	Easington	31.01%	
Robin Todd Community Centre	Easington	31.01%	
Greenhills Community Centre	Easington	31.01%	

Seaham Library	Easington	31.01%	
St Cuthberts Church, Peterlee	Easington	31.01%	
Ferryhill Library	Sedgefield	33.73%	
Jubilee Hall, West Rainton	Sedgefield	33.73%	
Newton Aycliffe Library	Sedgefield	33.73%	
Trimdon Station Community Centre	Sedgefield	33.73%	
St Cuthberts Community Centre, Crook	Wear Valley	34.05%	
Crook Library	Wear Valley	34.05%	
South Shields Central Library	South Tyneside	35.12%	
Hebburn Library	South Tyneside	35.12%	
Ashington Children's Centre	Wansbeck	35.13%	
Tanfield Lea Community Centre	Derwentside	35.66%	
Tow Law Community Centre	Derwentside	35.66%	
Dipton Community Centre	Derwentside	35.66%	
The Greatfield Hub	Kingston Upon Hull	35.71%	
Endike Primary School	Kingston Upon Hull	35.71%	
Chester-le-Street Library	Chester-le-Street	35.92%	
Leeds Central Library	Wakefield	35.92%	
Featherstone Library and Community Centre	Wakefield	35.92%	
Normanton Library and Community Centre	Wakefield	35.92%	
Blyth Children's Centre	Blyth Valley	37.14%	
Gateshead Old Town Hall	Gateshead	37.21%	
Pelton Community Centre	Sunderland	37.49%	
			Lower 21-33%
Cruddas Park Library	Newcastle	40.03%	
Newcastle City Library	Newcastle	40.03%	
Walker Activity Dome	Newcastle	40.03%	
Beswick Library	Manchester	40.36%	
North City Library	Manchester	40.36%	

Longsight Library	Manchester	40.36%	
Frosterley Village Hall	Darlington	40.77%	
Millennium Gallery	Sheffield	41.08%	
			Above
Seahouses Hub	Berwick-Upon-Tweed	42.04%	
Durham Town Hall	Durham	46.19%	
Prudhoe, St Mary Magalene	Tynedale	52.96%	
Haltwhistle Library	Tynedale	52.96%	
Allendale Village Hall, Hexham	Tynedale	52.96%	

The below chart shows that 67% of venues are situated in areas which have the lowest 20% of engagement in the arts nationally. 87% of venues are in areas which are in the lowest third of nationally for arts engagement.



Research

We will be drawing on the research that we undertook to evaluate our previous Strategic Touring programme and extrapolating that across the new venues in the North for the first year.

(Nb. The evaluation which was undertaken by Consillium Research and Consultancy focused on the tour of County Durham venues, which formed 71% of the tour in 2014. It

is based on a response rate of 631 audience questionnaires, 53% of adult attenders).

Attendance

The average attendance in libraries and community centres in 2014 was 93 and in 2013 it was 79. The majority of the audience was children aged between 3 and 7 years old (in County Durham in 2013 63% of the audience was children and in 2014 it was 67%).

For this project across the North, we are planning for an average attendance per venue of 79 in Year 1, 93 in Year 2 and 103 in Year 3.

The adults attending were majority female (this was 88% in 2014) and aged between 25 – 44 years (just over two thirds in 2014). These tend to be parents bringing one or two children, although the other third of adults are often grandparents.

The majority of attenders considered themselves 'kind of' or 'not especially' arty (68% in 2014) with 22% describing themselves as 'arty' and 9% saying not arty at all.

We would expect around 50% of the audience to be irregular or first time attenders at arts events. In 2013, just less than half (45%) of the audience attending the performance indicated that they had attended arts or performance events elsewhere. In 2014, some 61% of the audience attending the performance indicated that they had attended other arts events or performances at other venues in the last 12 months.

The reason for attending performances are: because 'they thought the children would enjoy it' (46% in 2014) or that the children wanted to attend (18%). Only 8% came because their children had read the book and 6% had attended a workshop prior to the performance. It is also clear that for some audience members they were encouraged to attend because their friends were coming to the performance (10%).

The vast majority of audiences in libraries and community centres came from within a 3-mile drive.

It would seem that the main audience segment for this work will be the family and community focused segment.

Target Markets

The target audiences we would like to attract to the performances are as follows:

Unengaged Families

As the evaluation report for the previous tour points out:

'The performances have been well promoted at strategic and venue level. One consideration for future performances is the extent to which more targeted marketing is required to engage harder to reach families, including those not accessing services in the local community. This is likely to require additional support and guidance for venues and liaison with a wider range of organisations that are providing support and services for families in target communities.'

New Writing North will take strategic responsibility for this area, researching, identifying and making relationships with voluntary sector organisations that work with harder to reach families and children. There will be some venues which already have these links.

This is an audience we will actively target by:

- Making contacts with key personnel in those organisations

- Directly inviting families to come and see the show in their local community

- Offering of participatory activity with hard to reach families (see section on participation)

Once the relationship has been brokered, we will expect the venue to continue building it.

Parents and their children

Our research has established that the main audience for this work is parents and their children, which is very positive. Many venues choose to target local school groups as a way of establishing an audience.

'However it appears that not all schools or early years promoted the performance to parents. This represents a missed opportunity for families to share the experience together and importantly to reinforce theatre and literature as a leisure activity rather than something associated with education'

Strategic Touring Project: New Writing North, Consillium Research 2014

Recent reviews of child poverty (*Field, F. (2010)- 'The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults'*) and *Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Department for Education (2011)- 'A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives'*) have identified early language and literacy as building blocks for children's lives and a critical factor in narrowing the gap in life chances experienced by children from poorer homes. Parental influence continues to be highlighted as the most significant factor in life chances.

We will be emphasising the importance of parental engagement in this activity.

- We will ask venues to encourage schools and nursery groups to invite parents to attend the show. This will also be made clear on the promotional literature

- We will also provide the schools with fun resources that the children can take home and work on with their parents based on the show.

- We will provide workshops specifically aimed at family learning based around the show, where there is a demand or need for it.

Irregular attenders at arts events

In both years of our previous Strategic Tour the majority of the audience hadn't attended any other arts events at the venue in the previous 12 months. This may be down to the fact that the venues don't regularly programme arts events, which is something we will address later. In 2013, 54% of the people attending the performance hadn't attended arts events elsewhere in the previous 12 months. This figure was less in 2014 with 39% of the audience indicating that they hadn't attended any arts events in the previous 12 months, but we can conclude that a significant proportion of the audience will be irregular arts attenders and in some cases first time attenders.

There is a range of barriers to attendance according to national research. By taking work into communities, we are addressing one of the main ones in many cases, which is about travel and transport. Another issue that is often cited as a barrier is price. In poorer communities, venue managers cite the price point as imperative to whether an event succeeds or not.

Many of the communities being served are very deprived. In our 2013 evaluation, for example, the venue manager at Greenhills Community Centre in Wheatley Hill, County Durham estimated that out of an audience of 103 attendants, at least half were not in a position to pay more than the admission price (£2.50 per child, first adult free, further adults 50p). The venue manager also gave away (discretely) a number of free tickets. This sort of local knowledge and understanding is vital to the project's success and will be drawn upon. Therefore, it is a policy of the project that the individual venue pays a subsidised rate for the production of £125, but they set the ticket price locally based on their knowledge of their own audience.

The motivation most often cited by people for coming to see The Worst Princess was that they thought their child would like it (46%), or the child wanted to come (18%). From this we can surmise that children's work attracts parents who may not otherwise attend arts events.

10% of respondents said they came because their friends were coming. Research for the Arts Council by Consillium has found that opportunities to socialise is a common motivating factor in attending arts events amongst disadvantaged communities.

To encourage irregular attenders, we need to:

- Ensure that venues target local groups or clubs aimed at parents (mothers and toddlers groups, health visitor drop ins, GP surgeries, nursery notice boards etc). An example could be seen in West Rainton Community Centre, County Durham in 2013, when the venue was pleased to welcome a group of women from the local traveller site to the performance. They realised it was because the group were coming to the local mother and toddler group which wasn't on because of the performance, but the mothers chose to stay for the performance and had a very positive experience.
- Ensure that the work is priced appropriately according to local circumstances.

- Encourage venues to try out ticket offers that encourage a social experience for adults (eg a free coffee afterwards; buy four adult tickets get the fifth free)

Diverse communities

In County Durham there is a very low culturally diverse population, so targeted work amongst this community did not really take place. However there are significantly culturally diverse populations in some of the areas we will be attending eg. Harpurley in Manchester, South Shields, Leeds, and Sheffield. All partners are keen to target their local culturally diverse populations and many have strong relationships with community leaders. We will ensure venues do the following:

- Target groups where parents and their children meet (South Shields Central Library is a destination for many mothers and their children in the local Bangladesh Community)
- Target specific community groups working with the local cultural diverse population
- Target local schools catering to diverse pupils and inviting parents to come too.

Marketing

We will provide the following marketing resources at all venues:

- A website which will be added to as the project progresses with blogs, reviews, photographs, resources. This will be helpful to community venues many of whom rely on social media, especially Facebook, to communicate with their audience.

- A model press release for use in their local free paper or village/community newsletter (eg. Durham Advertiser, Peterlee Star etc).

- Leaflets, posters and models of direct mail letters, which they will use to directly target local schools, toddler groups, users of the centres and libraries.

- A copy of the book in advance and suggest ideas for displays in their venues.

- 'Resource boxes' containing craft materials venue staff or volunteers may want to use to lead creative activities in advance of the show. We will also suggest staff, volunteers and audience members may want to dress up for the show (pirates, princesses etc).

- A CD of the songs in the show, which we will make available in advance of coming to the venue so audiences can learn the songs in advance.

Where a venue is particularly keen, we can contribute to additional marketing costs. For example, putting a banner up outside their venue.

Libraries

We want to encourage libraries to see the production as an opportunity to bring new borrowers into the library. To support libraries in this, we will:

- Offer the book to libraries as lending stock, which they will be able to buy from us at a reduced rate.

- Encourage them to link the show to initiatives that are happening already Chatterbooks, Rhyme Time and Summer Reading Challenge.

- Ensure that libraries create displays around the book

- Work with them to create and disseminate resources to families and children that have attended performances, such as recommended reads, or follow up creative activities and events hosted at the library venue.

Sustainability

Our experience so far tells us that there is real demand for this work in more culturally deprived areas as well as in well-served areas, with venues achieving almost capacity audiences and sometimes over-achieving that. (In fact 'a common worry highlighted by a number of community venues in our evaluation was the need to avoid stimulating too much demand for the performance' *Consillium Research*)

So although the job of this project is to stimulate demand, it is also to keep those audiences engaged in cultural activity throughout the year. This is a challenge, because capacity in many of the venues is limited. They are not well funded, staffing is thin and confidence about programming arts activity is low. The venues and promoters are key to ensuring there is sustained arts provision for the local audiences that are built throughout the year. Our role is to support them in this as much as possible. With this in mind, we will:

- Hold group meetings of community centre managers and librarians at the beginning of the project and at the end of each tour, to exchange ideas for promotion, encourage partnership working across venues, debate about issues such as pricing, identify the types of participatory work we can put in place to address local need, evaluate and reflect on what went well and what needs developing for the subsequent year.

- Hold one-to-one meetings with venue managers who require further support or would like advice on fundraising, project development etc.

- Ensure the literature partners involved in this project support the venues to programme arts activity through the year (eg. New Writing North runs Durham Book Festival and we will programme Big Read events and author events into some of those venues).

- Ensure that other cultural initiatives eg. Creative People and Places, local authority arts teams as well as other arts organisations know about a venue's interest in the arts (eg. The North East Children's Touring Network, Rural touring initiatives)

- New Writing North will run up to 3 training events for librarians, community centre managers and volunteers per year on fundraising and project development for the arts.

- The participatory programme we offer as part of the project can be designed to help build artistic capacity in a community (see below).

Libraries and Sustainability

In libraries, there are further constraints down to librarians' capacity, time and autonomy. Having said that, several of the librarians involved in the project are interested in the ways that arts activity could feed into their core programme. They have said that they would like training in relation to programming and project development, as this is a role they are asked to take on more and more.

There are ways that libraries could establish a programme of related activities and events across a calendar year that can help maintain engagement of children and families in-between future performances and grow audiences on a more sustainable basis. Initiatives that libraries may utilise to run literature and arts related activity include, Children's Book Week, National Family Week, National Bookstart week, National Libraries Day, National storytelling week, Summer Reading Challenge, World Book Day.

Participatory Programme

We ran a series of audience development open access workshops in 2013-14 led by visual artists and musicians in the run up to the performance in their community. The

workshops were very well received but only 6% of respondents said that they attended the performance because they attended the workshop, so it seems using open access workshops to develop an audience has limited impact on this project.

The three main objectives of the participatory work will be as follows:

1) To sustain an interest in arts activity amongst local people after seeing the show (this activity may happen at any time during the year)

2) To build the capacity of staff, volunteers and local people to use arts techniques to engage people

3) To engage harder to reach families and encourage them to come along to a performance

The menu of activity we can provide will be as follows:

- A project over a series of sessions led by the same artist engaging with the same group to develop a piece of artwork that they celebrate in the venue (eg. a new choral piece)
- A project over a series of sessions of fun engaging activity for local families to promote reading (eg. storytelling sessions)
- A participatory project over a number of sessions with a target group that the venue wants to engage (eg. the local Bangladeshi community)
- Sessions for venue staff, volunteers and play leaders showing a range of techniques using music and performance to help speaking and listening
- A family reading day in a library which involves dressing up, story-telling and music using professional artists around the book that has been adapted
- A session for disengaged families which uses books and music to encourage parental engagement with their children.

Audience Development Officer

This participatory programme is more complicated to organise than a series of workshops, but with the partners in place and with an Audience Development Officer on board overseen by New Writing North, we have the capacity to take this approach. New Writing North has a lot of experience delivering participatory work and many artist contacts. We can also draw on contacts of Sage Gateshead as explained in the Managing Your Project section. The Audience Development Officer will be responsible for the following:

- Joining the Programme Director in leading a partners' meeting to discuss the resources we have available to us and ideas for audience and reader development activity surrounding the show

- Arranging and leading a series of venue managers' meetings to plan the marketing and audience development strategy for the show each year

- Where required undertaking a follow up meeting with individual venue managers to devise a bespoke approach to audience development within their venue

- Ensuring that the website for the show is updated, relevant and interesting

- Taking responsibility for New Writing North's social media in relation to the project

- Ensuring each venue is collecting information about attenders at the point of booking

- Researching appropriate marketing avenues in each of the communities the venues serve and feeding those into the venues' marketing strategy

- Taking specific responsibility for making relationships with voluntary sector organisations that work with non-engaged families, to encourage them to attend the performance and take part in audience development activities

- Managing the participatory programme and responding the venues' needs and interests

- Ensuring appropriate numbers of leaflets and posters are distributed to the venues and other relevant places

- Coordinating and distributing marketing and resource packs to all venues

- Attending performances and supporting the capture of evaluation data amongst audiences

- Recruiting and coordinating people who will help capture evaluation data

- Holding follow-up meetings with each of the venues to evaluate the experience of promoting the show

- Making recommendations about how we may work with community centres, schools and libraries effectively next year.

- Being the first point of contact for all venues and partners, responding to queries or problems and encouraging ideas and ambition

Evaluation

In evaluating the project we will be collecting audience profile data as follows:

- Demographic profile: postcode, ethinicity, disability, gender, age, how far they travelled
- How regularly they attend professional arts activity
- Whether attendance at this event has led them to seek out other similar events
- Social impact - stories about the impact of their involvement in the project as audience and / or partcipants.

Measures of Success

- Capacity at venues will be on average 75% for the performances
- Project partners say they have developed new and sustained relationships with venues and audiences
- Audience and participant feedback about the quality of the production and participatory programme is consistently high (75% say it is good or excellent)

Measures of Success: Sustainability

- By 2018 when the funding ends, we will have a group of venues who are more confident about using the arts to engage local people in their activity. Audiences will use their local libraries and community centres for arts activity more because there is more for them to engage with.
- 20% of venues will be regularly programming high quality professional arts activity, including having the confidence to approach arts organisations to help them run arts projects.

- 20% will be raising funding to run participatory arts projects.

- 20% will have established regular storytelling sessions for families, or drama groups for local young people, music making activity, or regular reading days for families.

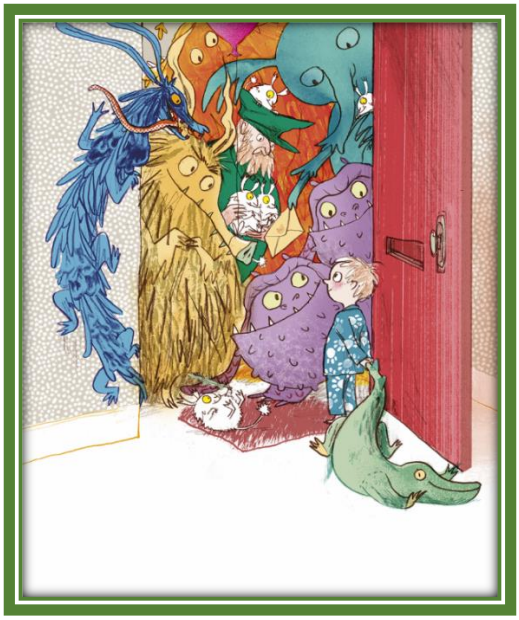
- 20% of the libraries involved in the project will be using artists to promote reader development amongst families.

Appendix B

New Writing North

Strategic Touring Programme 2015-2018

Year 3 Evaluation Report



Do not Enter the Monster Zoo (2017)

Illustration by Sara Ogilvie

Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo is the fifth and final children's theatre show in New Writing North's 5-year touring programme for the under 7s and their families which is presented in communities who've previously had little access to the arts. The programme is presented in association with Durham Book Festival with support from a range of partners such as libraries, local authorities, literary/book festivals, reading development agencies, creative agencies and universities (please see Appendix A for full the full list) has been funded by Arts Council England, as part of their Strategic Touring Programme fund. It has been delivered in two phases, each part of a separately awarded fund.

Phase One (2013-2015)

My Granny is a Pirate	2013-2014
The Worst Princess	2014-2015

Phase Two (2015-2018)

Man on the Moon	2015-2016
Hey Presto!	2016-2017
Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo	2017-2018

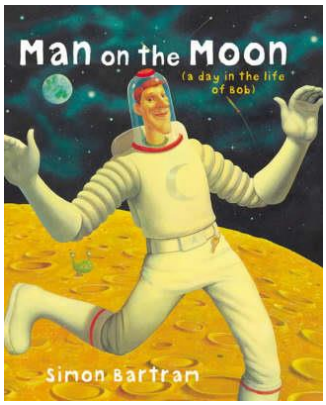
This report will examine and evaluate the programme for 2017-2018 and the production of *Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo*. It will do so within the context of the whole 3-year tour from 2015-2018, whilst drawing upon additional comparative data from 2013 and 2014, to assess the overall success, impact and legacy of the programme.

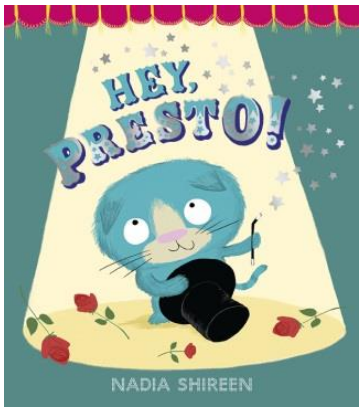
Mo Lovatt, December 2017
Independent Arts Consultant & PhD candidate
with Northumbria University & New Writing North

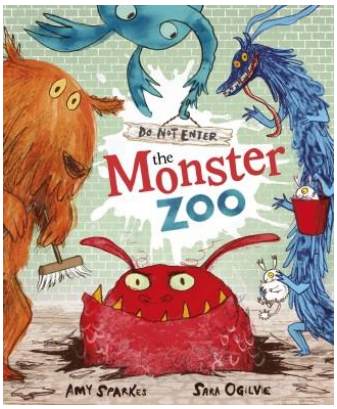
Background: Reaching for the Moon, Creating Magic, Keeping those Monsters in check

New Writing North is the writing and reading development agency for the North of England. The central aim of its Strategic Touring Programme is to make and tour high quality children's theatre to local communities in non-traditional venues across the North of England where, previously, arts and culture provision has been limited. The shows are adaptations of popular children's books and a new one is produced each year. One year, young audiences joined an alien fan-club and followed Astronaut Bob as he travelled to the moon to pick up litter dropped by space-tourists; another year, they enjoyed the adventures of Monty the magician-dog who became the star of his own TV show and let fame go to his head, before ultimately discovering the true meaning of friendship with his magical partner, Presto the cat. This year, they helped to run a very strange zoo, where a host of weird and wonderful creatures needed to be taught some manners! They are delightful shows, complete with original, sing-a-long tunes and plenty of opportunities for audience interaction. The programme is funded by Arts Council England and is part of a longer-term audience development initiative in association with Durham Book Festival and other partners across the North of England (Appendix A).

The performances are aimed at children under 7 and their families. The productions, which change each year, are newly-written adaptations of popular children's books:







In 2017 the show was based on *Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo* by Amy Sparkes and illustrated by Sara Ogilvie. Each year the productions are directed, designed, produced and performed by professional theatre-makers, usually from the North East of England (where the NEW WRITING NORTH team is based), and the shows tour to local communities where cultural provision is limited. The production values are such that they are easily adapted to non-theatre spaces (predominantly community centres and libraries), with minimal technical, get-in and get-out requirements, whilst they retain a commitment to theatricality and with high quality production values.

Initially, the programme was conceived for County Durham only, but was gradually rolled out across the North East, and then the 'wider North' (please see Fig 1).

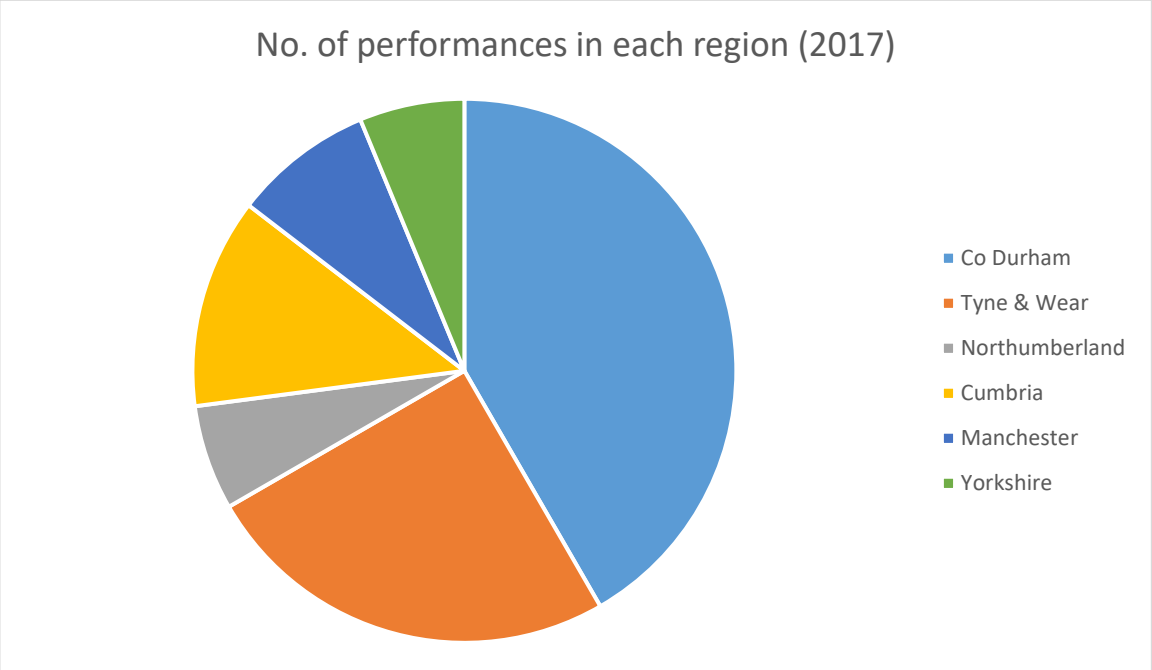


Fig 1: number of performances in 2017 by region of North England

The idea for this project was conceived during *New Writing North*'s role in producing and programming Durham Book Festival on behalf of Durham County Council. Having become aware that engagement with the festival was low in certain communities (those where

wider participation in cultural activity is also low) the programme was devised to increase and sustain provision, both in reading and in arts and culture participation, in these areas.

The programme for 2015-2018 builds upon the model developed in a previous Strategic Touring funded project (2013-14), and draws upon the learning from that to effectively build audiences amongst irregular arts attenders and disengaged families. A full marketing pack is provided, along with advice for venue managers on how to market the production, should they need it. Alongside the performances, New Writing North offer one-off participatory workshops in music and craft at a number of venues to support the audience development for the shows. They also work with the venues to devise bespoke projects according to the venue's own interests and needs. Project have included reading development initiatives in and around libraries, youth theatre projects in community centres, and creative writing projects in urban libraries with refugee and asylum seeker women. These initiatives aim to support the venues to view the arts as a way of further engaging their local community, and to provide them with the skills and experience to take these sorts of projects on themselves if they wish, thus sustaining a wider-ranging and deeper cultural provision.

> We love these shows! We saw Hey Presto! and Man on the Moon and were so excited to see Monster Zoo was coming to town… [The books] are now firm family favourites… Any show that can entertain our young family for this length of time is a real winner. Our boys are 2 and 4. Thanks very much for the fabulous entertainment.
>
> **Sarah, Greenhills Centre Wheatley Hill**

Headline Figures

Table 1 (below) presents the headline figures for *Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo* and offers comparative figures for each show since 2013. For the most part, capturing these figures has been a consistent process, continued year on year, enabling a longer-term analysis. The current evaluator has evaluated the programme since 2015 and has been able to draw upon previous evaluations in most (but not all) categories of measurement. In addition, each year since 2015, as the longer-term picture emerged and as part of a responsive methodological approach, some questions were omitted from the previous year's parents' questionnaire to make room for new angles of enquiry. For example, in Table 1 below, the question of 'Would you attend future events?' was omitted in 2016 and 2017. Partly, this was because the response had been consistently high over the

preceding three years (98%/99%), meaning the data (although nice to see!) was not particularly illuminating, and partly because the feedback form needed to make room for new questions where the analysis of the year-on-year data showed some gaps in understanding.

An important consideration in terms of gathering information from parents, at the performances, where they are with small children (and often babies), so on a tight time-schedule, is making the questionnaire easy-to-read and inviting to respond to. Two sides of A4, with adequate line-spacing and ample room for subjective responses dictates the amount of questions that can be included.

Table 1: Headline Figures

	Monster Zoo 2017	Hey Presto! 2016	Man on the Moon 2015	The Worst Princess 2014	Granny Pirate 2013
Total audience	**3,934**	3,743	4,303	3,965	3,157
Of which were children (incl under 12mnth)	**2,416% (62%)**	2,324 (62%)	2,866 (67%)	2,641 (67%)	2,049 (65%)
Total no of venues on tour	**41**	38	41	40	30
No of performances	**49**	49	49	44	35
% who hadn't attended a performance at the venue in the last 12 mnths	**54%**	53%	65%	71%	78%
% of not regular arts performance attenders	**59%**	65% (defined as attending only one art event a year or less)	46%	39%	54%

% who would attend future events	Not collected	Not collected	99%	99%	85%
Music workshops	**5**	6	12	9	15
Craft workshops	**19***	4	10	9	12

Figures finalised by Sarah Churlish October 2017

*This figure refers to Storyburst workshops combining music, storytelling and craft.

Table 1 suggests that the shows have consistently attracted a large audience, with a significant (59%) number of non-regular arts performance attenders. Although these headline figures will be explored in more detail below, in terms of engagement, the programme would appear to be hitting its targets. In terms of enjoyment, too, the figures have been consistently high as Table 2 below demonstrates.

Table 2: Audience show ratings

ON A SCALE OF 1-5 HOW WOULD YOU/YOUR CHILDREN RATE THE PERFORMANCE?	Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo 2017		Hey Presto! 2016		The Man on the Moon 2015	
Loved it	347	**85%**	399	80%	412	83%
Good	54	**13%**	87	17%	75	15%
OK	5	**1%**	11	2%	7	2%
Could be better	0	**0%**	2	0%	0	0%
Poor	0	**0%**	0	0%	0	0%

2. Methods, Aims & Objectives

This evaluation report assesses the third year of the programme and builds upon the recommendations contained in previous reports, as well as from venue manager and through audience feedback. The project model for the Strategic Touring Programme has two overarching aims. These form part of a comprehensive Audience Development Plan

submitted by *New Writing North* as part of the original application to Arts Council England for funding. The full plan can be found at Appendix B. The aims of the programme are:

AIM ONE: To provide opportunities across the North for people in areas of low cultural provision to experience high quality literature and performing arts in their local communities.

AIM TWO: To sustain provision within these communities so that local people start to see arts attending and participation as a way to spend their leisure time.

1. Indicated Measures of Success for New Writing North for **Aim One (Engagement & Enjoyment)** are:

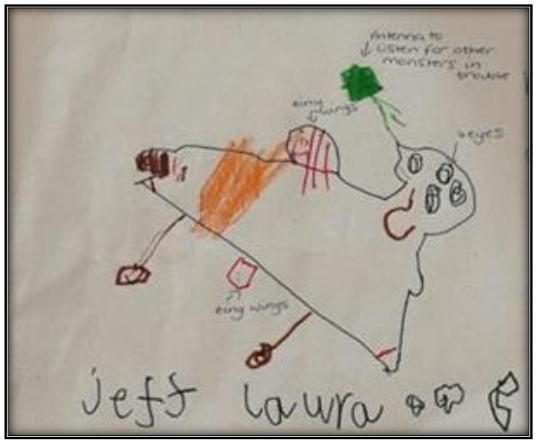
a) Capacity at venues will be on average 75% for the performances.
b) Project partners say they have developed new and sustained relationships with venues and audiences.
c) Audience and participant feedback about the quality of the production and participatory programme is consistently high.
d) Audiences and participants continue to attend and engage with literature and performing arts activity.

2. Indicated Measures of Success for New Writing North for **Aim Two (Sustainability and Legacy)** are:

a) By 2018 when the funding runs out we will have a group of venues who confidently use the arts to engage local people in their activity.
b) Audiences will use their local libraries and community centres for arts activity more, because there is more for them to engage with.

Building upon recommendations in previous reports, additional data has been collected for 2017. In particular, in 2015, it was recommended that some more in depth qualitative responses be collected to "dig deeper" into the quantitative data. Therefore, an additional 'postcard' inviting longer and more open-ended responses was produced and distributed. This was only partially successful in that there was a small (8%) take-up rate. However, where responses were made they were incredibly positive and New Writing

North received many original drawings of made -up monsters from younger audience members! These responses can be found throughout this report.



Jeff-Laura

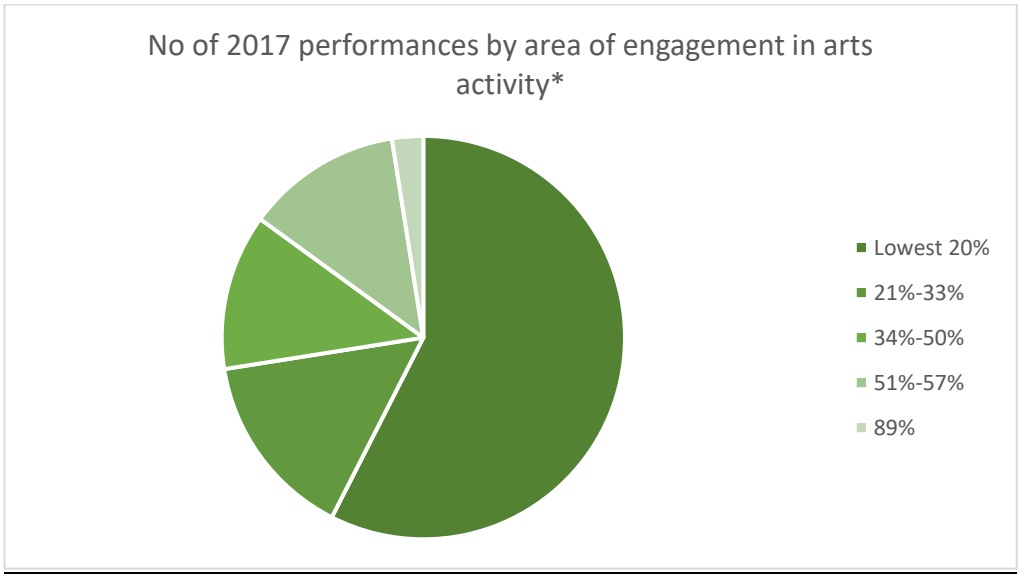
Discovered by William

Jeff-Laura had 4 eyes and tiny wings to fly. He likes to run and jump. He has an antenna on top of his head to listen for other monsters in trouble. His favourite things to eat are lemon and pineapple.

In addition, this year a short section collecting household data was added to the usual questionnaire. This was in order to attempt to assess whether the programme was reaching its target audience in each community i.e., those people who don't ordinarily attend arts activities and those people who live within the community surrounding the centre or library, rather than those having travelled some distance.

As noted in previous reports, venues have been targeted to reach people who don't ordinarily attend cultural activities, so it was felt important to find out if the people attending the shows were from the host community.

Fig 2: attendance by area of engagement in arts activity.



***Data in accordance with Arts Council England (ACE) measurements of engagement, taken from the Active People (arts) 2 year av. %** survey results and representing the percentage of adults in the local authority who have either attended an arts event or participated in an arts activity at least three times in the past 12 months. Engagement must be for leisure purposes.

Additional questions, adapted from the Active People (arts) survey were asked including:

How many adults (aged 18 and over) in your household are:

Working full time | Not working | Working part time | In training or education.

Which of the following applies to your education?

Not yet finished school/training | Never went to school | Finished high school | Professional, technical HE qualification | Degree or equivalent | Post graduate.

Is the accommodation where you live:

Owned outright | Owned with a mortgage | Rented from Council or Housing Association Rented privately | Rented with a job/business | Other (please state).

Unfortunately, responses to these questions were low. In part, this may represent a reluctance on behalf of the audience to present such information. However, the questionnaire form was 2-sides in total and, unlike in previous years, a note of PTO was not included on side 1. This may more likely account for the low response rate as not answering these household questions coincides with responses given to all the questions on side 2 (see Appendix C).

However, a range of numerical data from side 1 of the audience questionnaire, has been collated which are presented below. This includes:

- Demographic profile: postcode, gender, age.
- Number of people who've attended previous NEW WRITING NORTH Strategic Touring shows.
- Whether respondents regard themselves as regular arts attenders.
- How they rate the show in terms of quality of performance.

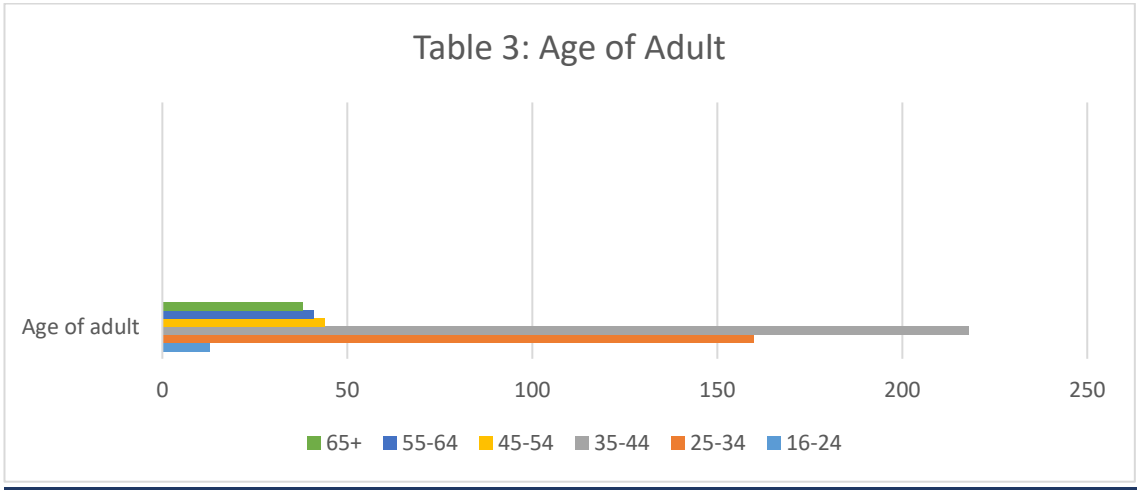


Table 3: Age of Adult
Age of adult
0
50
100
150
200
250
65+
55-64
45-54
35-44
25-34
16-24

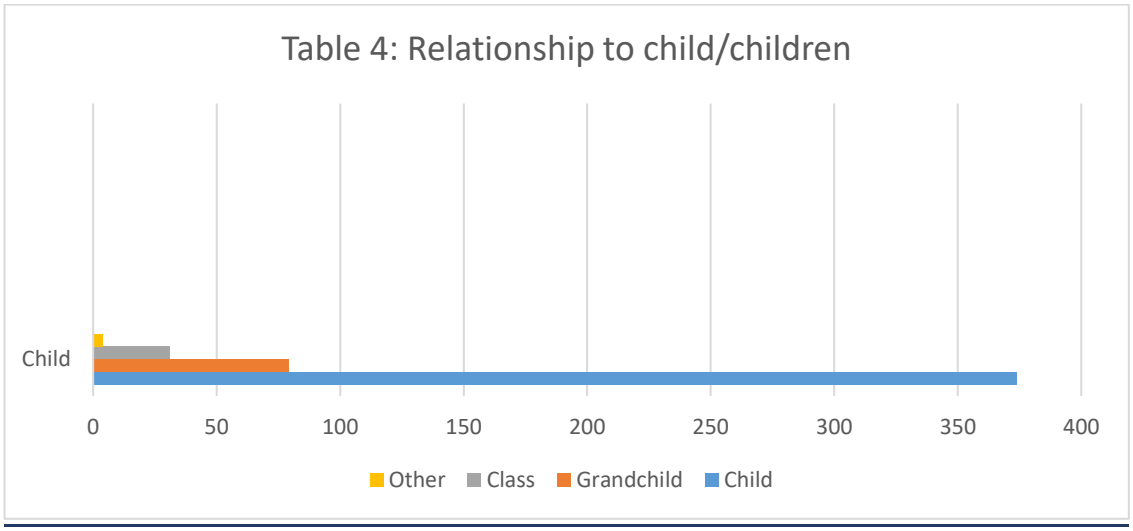


Table 4: Relationship to child/children
Child
0
50
100
150
200
250
300
350
400
Other
Class
Grandchild
Child

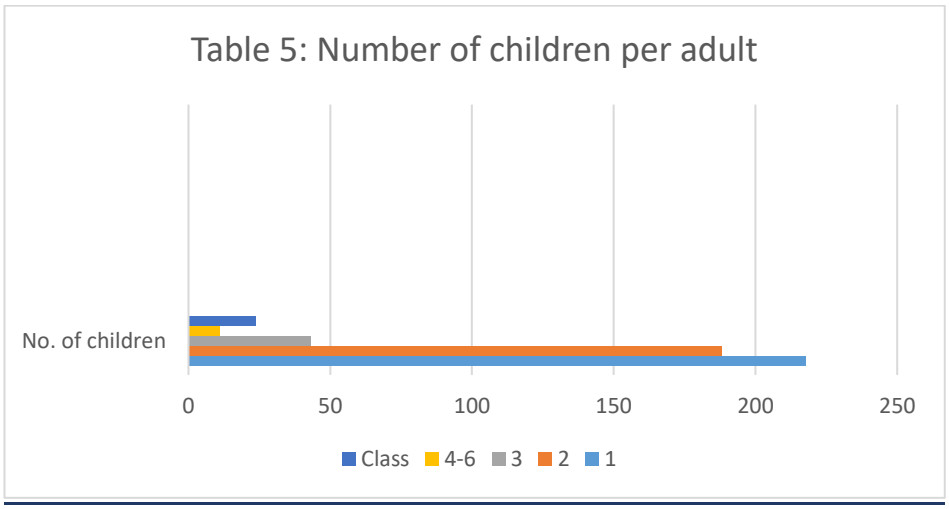
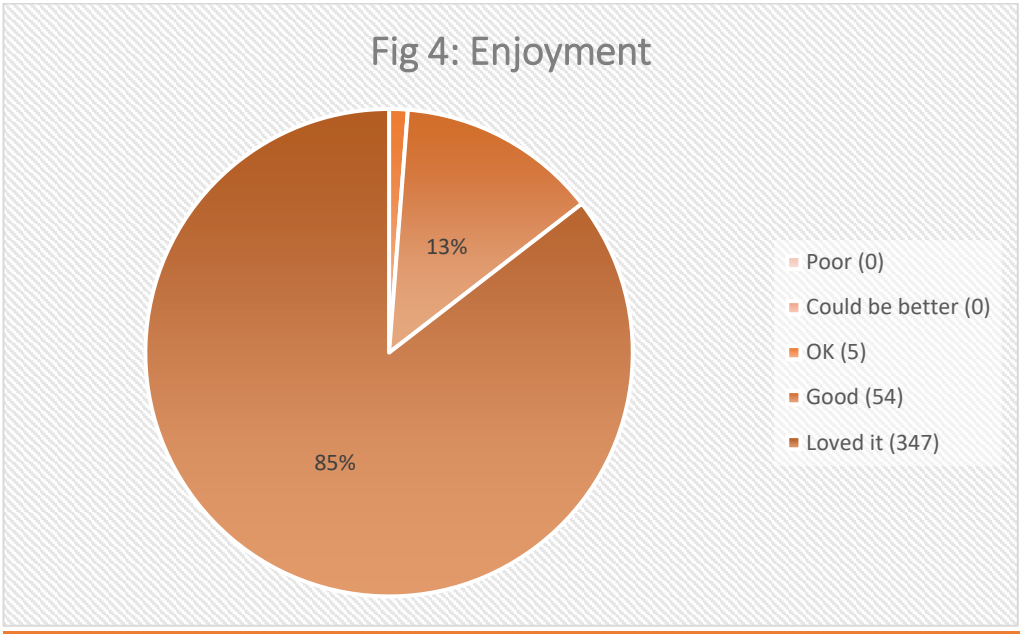
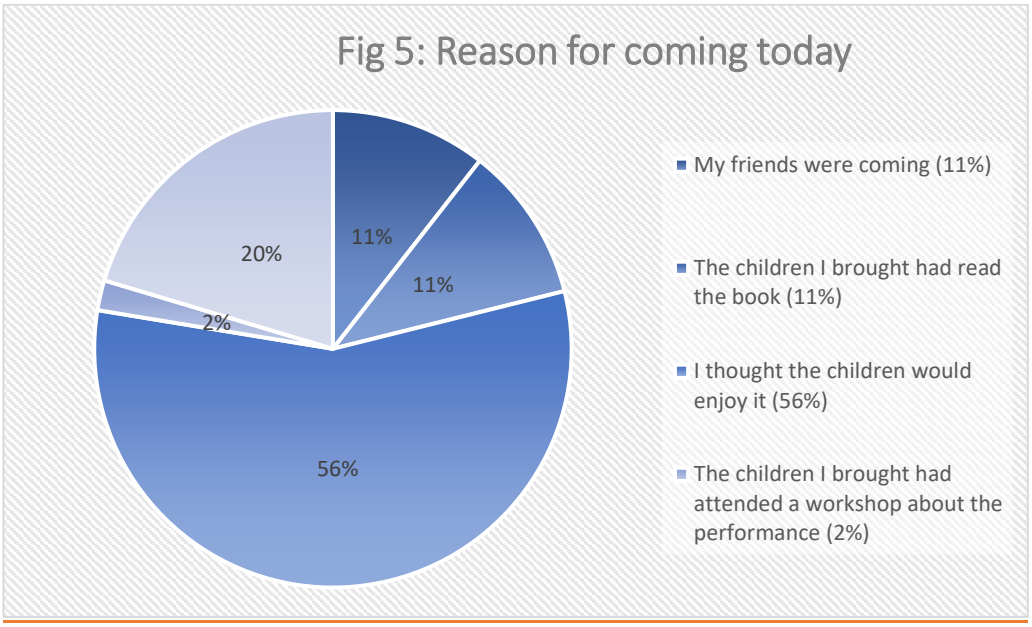


Table 5: Number of children per adult
No. of children
0
50
100
150
200
250
Class
4-6
3
2
1



Response rate = 406/583 (question on reverse of questionnaire and not completed)



Response rate = 540/583

What has proved more illuminating is a deeper analysis of postcode data, revealing how far people have travelled to attend the show.

Mileage has been calculated using Google Maps "Directions" facility with an assumption that audience members have travelled by car. Where audience members have travelled between 0.3 miles and 0.7 miles (i.e., within a 0.2-mile margin of the 0.5 mark) then pedestrian routes were also examined to see if a walking route might be more convenient and therefore likely. Although no definitive categories exist within UK urban design theory, 0.5 miles or less is generally considered "within comfortable walking distance"

(Calthorpe, 1993). The evaluator has assumed anything more than a 15-minute walk (with young children) would not be within comfortable walking distance. Because of the smaller number of venues in the North West and Yorkshire, data here is only presented from the North East region where a more representative sample of total population is achieved.

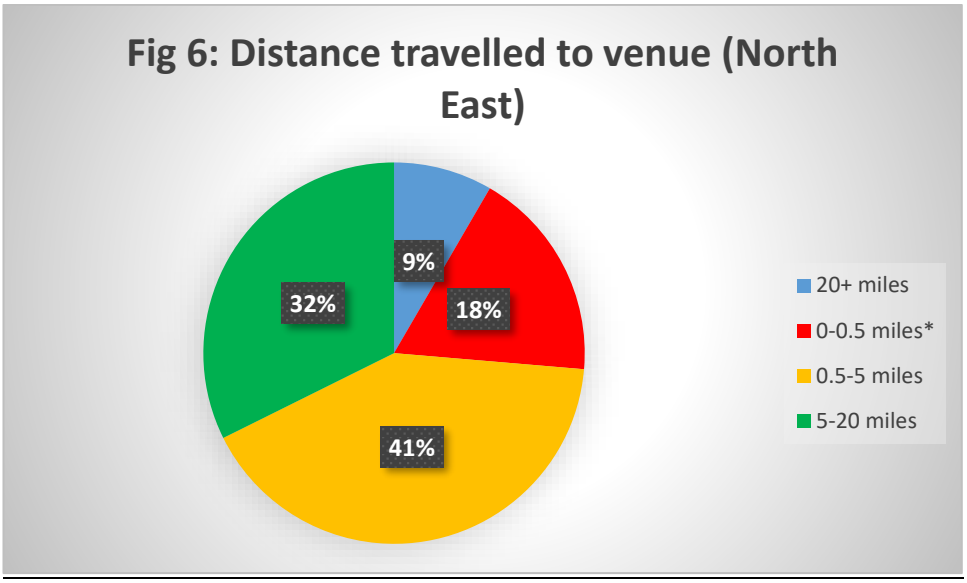
Colour coding:

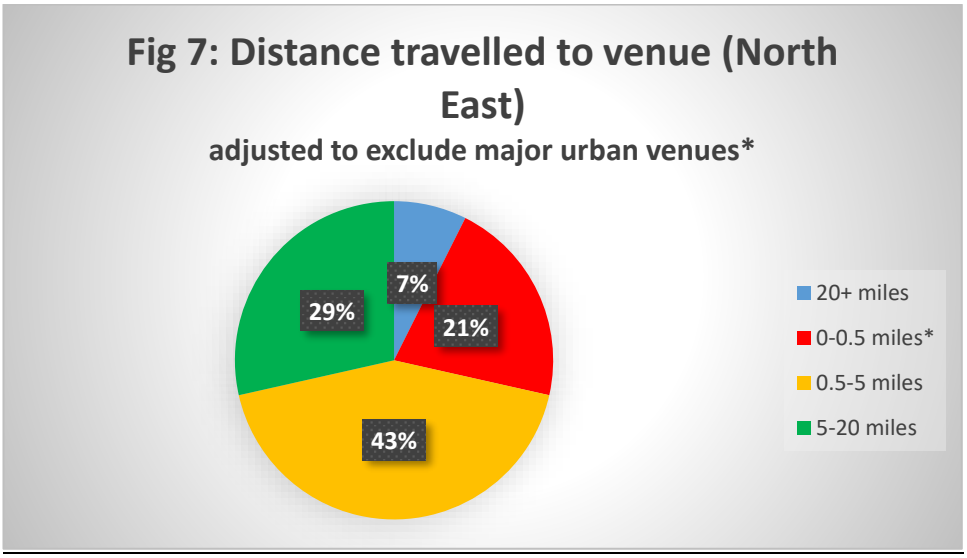
RED: 0 to 0.5 miles

YELLOW: 0.5 to 5 miles

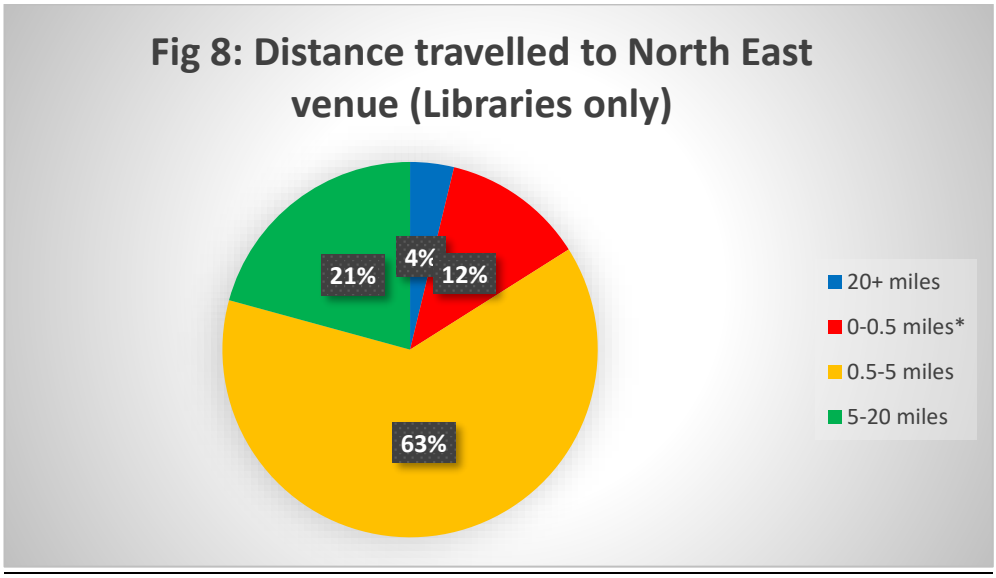
GREEN: 5-20 miles

BLUE: 20+ miles





The individual venue results showed a significantly higher amount of people had travelled 20+ miles to **Locomotion: National Railway Museum at Shildon** (67%) making it likely that, as a regional attraction, people had travelled to the museum and found the performance by chance. However, if data from the four venues that could be considered regional hubs are removed from the results we find little change in the overall percentages. The venues excluded are: *Sage Gateshead, Newcastle City Library, Gala Theatre Durham and Locomotion: National Railway Museum at Shildon. However, when we examine the data taken specifically for local libraries and targeted community centres we see more people have attending from the immediate locality.

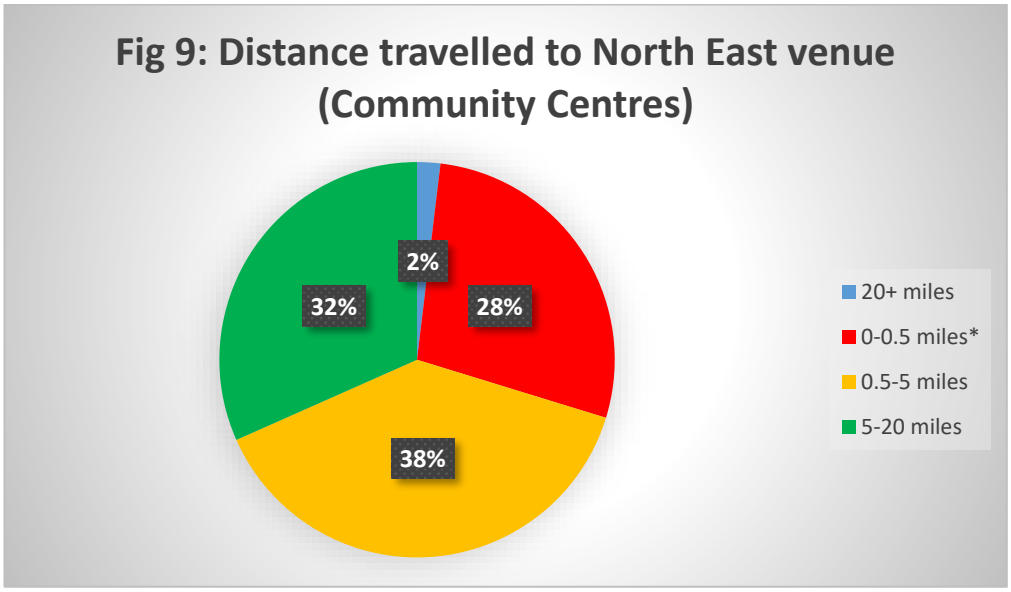


Libraries included

Cramlington Library
Haltwhistle Library
Darlington Library
Horden Library, Peterlee
Newcastle City Library
Newton Aycliffe Library
Seaham Library
Chester-le-Street Library
The Word, South Shields.

Discounted due to low return rate of questionnaires

Crook Library (3 returned)
Gateshead Library (1 returned)



Centres included

Shotton Community Centre
Ashington Leisure Centre
Trimdon Station Community Centre
Tow Law Community Centre
Jubilee Hall, West Rainton
Greenhills Centre, Wheatley Hill
Blackhall Community Centre
Waterhouses Community Centre
Byker Community Centre
Dipton Community Centre
Tanfield Lea Community Centre
St Oswald's Communicare, Sunderland
Pelton Community Centre

Not included due to low response rate

Back on the Map (4 returned)
Horden Youth & Community Centre (4 returned)

The data found in Figures 8 and 9 suggests that many more people travelled a shorter distance (less than half a mile) to their community centre (28%) compared to their library (12%) to see a performance. If assumptions about mode of transport (as outlined above) are relatively accurate we can see that walking to a performance at a community centre was more likely than to a library. This could, in part, reflect available public transport links, with libraries being generally better served than community centres; although, according to centre managers and librarians, it is more likely that the NEW WRITING NORTH shows are building upon, or capitalising upon, the higher footfall from people in their immediate locality that already exists for centres. Either way, when we take into consideration the combined figures for under 0.5 (red) and 0.5-5miles (yellow) we see that there is less disparity in the figures, with 66% of community centre audiences having travelled less than 5 miles to see a show, compared with 74% for libraries.

These are important figures as they show that a significant majority of the show's audience members are from the immediate locality of the venue which, as outlined above, was targeted due its location in an area of low arts and Durham Book Festival engagement.

In terms of whether the shows have been successful in retaining their audience base, the question of 'Have you attended any previous NEW WRITING NORTH touring shows?' was used to assess the picture. As Table 5 below suggests, there has been a steady increase in people attending the shows from 2013 to 2017 – a rise from 13% to 38%.

Table 5: Return Attenders at a NEW WRITING NORTH show

Have you attended any previous NEW WRITING NORTH touring shows?	Number	Percentage of total
MY GRANNY IS A PIRATE	39	13%
THE WORST PRINCESS	65	21%
MAN ON THE MOON	88	28%
HEY PRESTO!	117	38%

Total respondents 309/583

However, some care must be taken when interpreting these figures due, in part, to the fact that new venues are added each year and to the evolving nature of the target audience (i.e., that children grow up!) For a show aimed at the under 7s and their parents, it may well be the case that the reason only 13% of 2017 respondents saw My Granny is a Pirate (2013) is down to the fact that their 5-7 year olds (for example) will now be 9-11 year olds. Nevertheless, in answer to the question, 'What were your reasons for coming today?' 20% of the audience selected the answer 'We've been to other NEW WRITING NORTH shows and we liked them. This was the second top answer (compared to 59% 'I thought the children would enjoy it). The full data is presented above in Fig 5.

Despite these caveats, it is clear that 38% of the audience for Hey Presto! (2016) returning to see Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo (2017) is a positive indication that the audience development plan goals are being reached. Qualitative responses from parents and venues support this view.

We have attended all of the shows and as a parent I look forward to October to see what is coming next. My boys love that we can recite the show with the book at bedtime. Great shows.

Nicola, Seaham Library

Other responses are contained within this report, with all completed feedback forms being available upon request.

As well as understanding how many audience members New Writing North had retained over the duration of the programme, we were also keen to know whether the shows were attracting new audiences, in particular those who weren't traditionally regarded as regular attenders or had never attended children's theatre before. In previous years, the questionnaires allowed for a more qualitative response to these questions, combining the two with 'Anything else you'd like to add' which provided us with a range of interesting points of feedback. However, with regard to whether this was the first time attending children's theatre, it was difficult to gauge an exact figure because responses were subjective and varied. (For example, in 2016 only 58 out of 610 respondents directly mentioned it was their first children's theatre show.) Therefore, this year we opted for a simple YES/NO option which yielded a better response rate (just under half), and which showed that 54% of this year's audience members were attending children's theatre for the first time (Table 7).

Table 7: First Time Attenders to children's theatre

We are interested to know if any of the above were your FIRST time attending children's theatre.	YES	NO
	182 (**54%**)	157 (46%)

Total respondents 339/583

In terms of non-regular attenders, this year's show has seen a significant increase on previous years in terms of the number of people engaged at 59% (see Table 8). In addition, of those 59% there were **62 people (14%)** who responded that this was **their first time** at any sort of arts or performance event. Looking at the overall 5-year picture we also note that there has been a significant decrease (from 78% to 54%) in people who hadn't attended a performance at their local venue in the last 12 months (see Table 9) which suggests that the New Writing North programme has a significant impact in supporting venues to build their own audience capacity.

Table 8: Five-year picture of engagement with non-regular arts attenders*

	Monster Zoo 2017	Hey Presto 2016	Man on the Moon 2015	The Worst Princess 2014	My Granny is a Pirate 2013
% of not regular arts perf attenders	**59%**	41%	46%	39%	54%

Total respondents 457/583 (*defined as those people who attend one arts activity per year or less.)

Table 9: People who hadn't attended a performance at the venue in the last 12 months

	Monster Zoo 2017	Hey Presto! 2016	Man on the Moon 2015	The Worst Princess 2014	Granny Pirate 2013
% who hadn't attended a performance at the venue in the last 12 mnths	**54%**	53%	65%	71%	78%

Although these figures must take into account their dependence on those audience members who were prepared to fill in the questionnaires (18% average across all venues) and must allow for a certain degree of inaccuracy (responses were collated by means of a tick-box question) these figures suggest that New Writing North are balancing an audience of first time attenders whilst retaining their regular audience in venues where the tour has returned. This conclusion is supported by the range of answers provided to the more qualitative postcard responses.

Came with friends and their children on their first theatre visit (2 years ago) and it is now a yearly tradition. I LOVE that you are bringing theatre to different spaces that are accessible. So special to see the children LOVING it!

Tanfield Lea

We first came to see a NEW WRITING NORTH at Waterhouses when they did Man on the Moon. We bought the book and my (then) 3-year-old loved it. The interactivity, and humour and inventive costumes. He was transfixed all the way through. Since then we've made sure to see it every year. We buy the book and by the time we see the performance the children know the book word for word and really enjoy seeing it come to life. The performances seem to capture all ages – both my 2-year-old and my 5-year-old love the Monster Zoo. My eldest son also enjoys the workshops around the book and performances which are great fun as well as building his confidence and speaking and listening skills. Long may this fantastic institution continue.

Waterhouses Village Hall

Venues and New Writing North are clear and confident of this returning audience and what we were keen to capture this year was whether those who had attended the performances had been prompted to do more arts activities in their local venue or more generally.

Table 10: The shows as a catalyst to further activity

We're interested to find out if coming to our shows has made you think about doing other things.		
This is our first time but we'd like to do more similar activities in the future	228	41%
We enjoyed today but this isn't usually our sort of thing	9	2%
We enjoy coming to the shows and this has made us seek out other shows/activities	190	34%

We've always come to lots of shows / done lots of arty stuff	130	23%

Total respondents 557/583

In conclusion, year five of the programme has reached its target of continuing to build a sustained number of returning audience for the shows whilst being able to reach new audience with the shows becoming something local communities look forward to year.

3. Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo [Cast & Crew]

Director	Ruth Johnson
Associate Producer	Sarah Churlish
Producer	Anna Disley
Adapted by	Stacey Sampson
Designer	Andy Stephenson
Production Manager	Paul Aziz
Stage Manager	Nicola Morris
Stage Manager	Rachel Glover

Adapted from the children's book Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo by Amy Sparkles with illustrations by Sara Ogilvy. https://www.waterstones.com/book/do-not-enter-the-monster-zoo/amy-sparkes/sara-ogilvie/9781849416597

Technical info: each venue is provided with a tech spec which outlines get in, get out and staffing requirements.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE	Date	Time	Notes
Arrival of set, etc	Saturday 7th October 2017	8.00am	2 Stage Managers arrive in a van containing the set
Get in & Set up	Saturday 7th October 2017	8.00am	
Arrival of cast	Saturday 7th October 2017	9.00am	4 cast members will arrive in one car
Doors open	Saturday 7th October 2017	9.45am	
Performance start time	Saturday 7th October 2017	10.00am	
Get out	Saturday 7th October 2017	11.00am – 12.00pm	

STAFFING	Staff function	Number	Any additional cost
Get in	Staff available for access to the space	1	
Set up	-	-	
Performances	Staff available to help manage audiences	2 if possible	
Get out	Staff available to help hand out evaluation forms and pens at the end	2 if possible	

Appendix C: Sample Focus Group Script

Focus Group

14th December 2017

What are the barriers to you programming arts activity in your centre? Did you have a different answer 5 years ago?

CM1: Cost, mainly. At the beginning we had less money to spend. 5 years in, more people are prepared to put money in because they know how successful it is, which is excellent. It's been easier to raise money these past two years than it was at the beginning when it was a new project and a something new for the centre.

Do you mean in terms of persuading the committee?

CM1: Yes, more the committee side of things but also councillors. If we can then fund it, we can make our price for parents easier. The prices have to be very low. Most or our activities are 50p or £1 (agreement from **CM4**). And where we have families with 5 or 6 kids, round these areas, the cost soon mounts up. (general agreement) So we price things around… £2/£2.50, is our limit. And we do things like family tickets. So cost was our main barrier but it's getting easier.

And New Writing North made our costs low to you because it was heavily subsidised but I imagine other shows you are being offered is higher…? Does that [the subsidy] make it easier to persuade your councillors or committee?

CM1: Yes, you tell them the full price of the New Writing North show and then tell them we're getting it at the reduced price and it makes it easier to sell.

But if another show came along and said we need £500, would you find that conversation [with councillors/committee] easier now?

CM1: Yes, because you can give them the numbers and the figures from last time and the comments from the families. I'd say probably 50% of our audience have come to each show, which is lovely. And, one of the families, we only see for this kind of thing. Not for any sports activities and even if we haven't seen them for months they always come back to this. As soon as they see your logo on there, they know what it's going to be like.

CM1: And, our second thing [barrier] is people's perceptions of it. We have to convince quite a lot of our people to take part.

CM3: Yes, the word 'performing arts' or just 'arts' can put a lot of people off. It can act as a barrier.

CM1: Yeah, the fact that you might have to make the child sit still and be quiet, they think in their head that they have to do that. So we have to convince them that they don't, they can wander out if they want and if you've paid your pound a ticket you can wander out half way through, you're not going to lose out on £20 per ticket, stuff like that. We have to persuade most of our people to come along, if they don't realise in their heads what is going to be, if they've never been before, stuff like that.

Has that got easier over the years?

CM1: Yeah, if they've been to the first one you can point out that it's the same as last year. Especially if we've got the books in the libraries. Quite a lot of the families have got them beforehand and read them.

CM3: Sometimes if I've found it hard to convince parents, I do it through schools, and established groups like beavers and cubs who want active things. So, the plays I put through the schools, so I know the children [in my village enjoy it], I see them laughing their heads off, and I see the teachers enjoying it, and I know it's been successful. So one time we had a really good turnout, but nobody from [my village].

So, the missing bit is with parents, parents bringing kids, which is what we hoped to do?

CM3: I don't have relationships with the parents, but I have a lot of direct relationships with children and young people. I do with some parents, and they say, 'oh yes, I'll come to that,' but they don't necessarily follow through, whereas with groups and schools they do have that relationship.

So when you do it in a school week, do the parents turn up then?

CM3: No. So I see my job as planting a seed with the younger generation all the time…

Library: It would be nice for the programme to go to smaller libraries but due to size of shows we bring it to the same libraries, space can be an issue for smaller libraries but we'd like to extend it further (gives examples of libraries and the floor space required). A smaller show (a spin-off of the larger show) is something to be considered to go to the smaller libraries.

CM3: Hansel and Gretel – I got some money from Children in Need, so I could decide how to spend it. And I think you just have to keep at it in lots of different ways.

CM2: Our barriers are the same, certainly in terms of price and the terminology, how we sell it. What we sell it as and *when* we sell it. So when we did Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo we incorporated it within Halloween. So we promoted it as a Halloween thing, rather than a theatre thing. And packaging things as part of half term activities [works well]. We

have done things on a Sunday but people tend not to come, even if we package it as an end of term treat they [the parents] just won't bring them out. Unless it's a school holiday, something like that.

CM3: One of the things that's happening in [my village] is that we've got new groups coming out, and the new board members are younger and they've got young families, whereas they used to be much older. So I do feel there's a sense that they're more in line, they know what you're doing, so you do feel you're moving forward, but you have to keep chipping away at it.

CM4: I don't feel our arts culture is moving forward, I mean you keep doing it and you plug away at it, and they do come and love it, but I don't think they necessarily think, 'Oh my goodness… (it's not a natural way for parents to chose to spend their leisure time). Yeah, unless they've been educated in the arts… I mean, They might come and have a good time but they identify it as a good time, rather than an arts experience. You get the odd few who seek out arts activity, but mostly it's just something fun to do.

CM5: That's why we seek out the smaller theatre shows. There's a strong case for it being on their doorstop rather than going to a big show in town (price and distance) and we also find parents are surprised that their kids will sit through a theatre show… but they do because it's so interactive and it's on the floor so they're so close to the action. The think kids will sit through a film (cinema club) but don't think it about theatre – so we explain it's a bit like sitting on the floor hearing a story from the teacher.

Is it the 'family offer' that's most appealing to you?

CM2: We programmed something from [CPP] and about 50% hated it and 50% loved it - but you risk losing them – in fact we say, 'It's not like [X theatre show]' as a way to promote other things!! – it was too arty, too dancy, too experimental. We also had [W theatre show] and it died a death.

CM5: We had it too and those who came, loved it, but we had a very low turnout. We went for it because it was so random – we had a mixed response.

Had anyone else had children's theatre? Do they think it's the same producers or is it seen as different to NEW WRITING NORTH?

CM5: I'd programme more children's theatre if it wasn't so costly – we're definitely building up a reputation for children's theatre. We'd programme something every couple of months but we still programme a lot.

CM4: Our guys wouldn't know if it was New Writing North or another company.

CM3: We've programmed pantomime. It had been a decline in recent years, funding issues etc, but we've seen an upsurge recently.

CM2: [our centre] has their own theatre company and people grow up with it as part of the community. We also have Theatre Hullabaloo – and it's always the same time as New Writing North (October) which is a shame, but they don't get the same numbers as New Writing North (less). October can be a busy month with the two shows and Halloween.

Library: We think X-Factor and shows like that have an influence. Little pots of money are easier to come by than bigger funds

What's the most you could spend?

CM3: We've gone up to £500 for a pantomime but we had all year to fundraise for. We can't programme anything at a loss and we've got a capacity of 120 so around £200/£300 at £2/£2.50 is about right.

Where do you get the funding from?

CM1: We're lucky with our Parish Council supporting us, but we have to weight popular shows against low attending shows. Our Parish Council fund our salaries and so we have 13 members of staff to support. (general shock/awe!!) For most it's hand-to-mouth. Our venue was close to closing but we managed to persuade them to keep us open. Our Board of Trustees aren't very hands on and they tend to assume a flop, and don't really support us at the ground level.

Do you have any missions to engage audiences that aren't engaging?

CM1: Yes, I do try to engage and make activities for low income families – through family workers and schools – and we do day-trips like to a Nature Reserve and Beamish to try to engage people. AAP money.

CM5: We try to raise money through AAP by saying we're getting people out of the house and engaging. Different AAPs operate differently – and there are lots of hoops to jump through. I don't think my AAP would support – it all feeds into [the CPP hub].

CM1: I got money for a cookery course for adults and kids on the basis that it was health related.

CM3: I find it's always target related and I can't fit in with that.

CM1: Yet if you say you've got a car park repair or something needs fixing they'll give you money for that.

Are you likely to continue to programme arts activity without us?

CM2: Would definitely like to programme more if cost and offers / provision stay the same. And also not long gaps in programming so you can build momentum. And having a rapport with certain people (like we have trust with Sarah) – working with the same people that you have trust with. It's also about working with people who deliver what they say they will. And about the show's expectations. For instance, we had the actresses from [XX theatre production] who were real prima donnas, we almost felt like they wanted us to feed them only blue M&Ms and wanted us to do their washing, they thought we were some sort of geared-up venue, not a community centre, and they didn't like the fact there was other stuff going on in the centre. – that was a big learning curve for me. I won't take people like that.

Another show didn't tell us that they had actresses from Casualty and Emmerdale in it and when we find out, the ticket selling went wild but they didn't think to tell us. Some went to the Gala theatre and paid to watch it again in for £7.50.

I'm now more experienced about what questions I'll ask an incoming show… I know what my users will do and not do… they won't sit quietly drawing pretty pictures for instance, I know what will engage them though.

But I've learned from the bad and the good – know what will work and what won't (learning about risk). A bad experience can have a significant impact.

Appendix D: Sample Interview Script

Community Centre Manager 2 (CM2)

Interview: 30th April 2017

M: Can you give me an overview of the kinds of stuff to you programme here? Generally, not just in the arts.

CM2: Monday we have the mature guys playing bowls, aerobics for mature ladies, and the line dancing ladies in the evening for three hours. Tuesday is the craziest day, our mental health group (men and women) are in, then ladies coffee morning, the community garden people are in as well. Tuesday night is drama group - we have our own drama group who perform our annual pantomime but they're working towards our summer performance at the moment.

M: What ages?

CM2: They're adults but they take in little ones as part of the chorus, so the youngest is 7 and the oldest is 87 and then there's everything in between. Wednesday it's bingo, toasties & beef sandwich afternoon, then we have nineteen ladies who come and do their 'knit and natter'. On Thursday we have the Crafty Girls. They're ladies who make cards. Then, Thursday night, drama are back in, and also line dancing are back in and karate is back in, that's a new class we're running for kids and adults. Then Friday, usually someone's booked a wedding or an engagement or a kids' party. We have line dancing again, a Country & Western night once a month, Friday night can be anything, pretty much, really. Saturday, again during the day kids' parties or christenings. Saturday night can be anything from the big band night, North Skelton band, or an Elvis tribute or someone's booked a wedding party, whatever it may be. Sunday is the same as Saturday with kids' parties or christenings etc. Sunday night we have an exercise class with drum sticks called 'Pound'.

So, it's pretty full up! Last weekend we had a bunch of people turn up on Friday evening to do a dance festival and they stayed all day Saturday and Sunday and hosted a kids' dancing competition.

M: So, loads of arts stuff there from the knitters as a craft to the line-dancers, to everything. But just thinking about the drama group, how does that work? Do they come and book the space from you or…?

CM2: They're been here for 50 odd years and are part of this building. The main family that run it have been here for years and years and years and they're what we call a section of the community centre, so they're part of us.

M: So, they get the space for free…?

CM2: No, they pay subs and that goes towards the hire of the room and then when they produce the pantomime, the proceeds from the door come back to the community centre. So, they usually generate us £3-£3,500 per year. And the pantomime is just such a massively professional show which is why sometimes – because I do the lighting and the rigging and the wiring and the sound and vision – which is why when we get theatre groups coming in, they can't over-talk me. They can't say that, 'We want this.' and 'We want that.' Because I can say, 'Well, we don't have that, but we do have this.' So, there's a slight advantage of me to be able to say to them, based on what I do here. Really Mo, because for thirteen years, I've kind of worked up from the ground and built it to what it is. So, there's nothing I don't know really about this place.

M: So, I'm just picking up on what might be the subtext of what you've just said there…. So, when you do get professional [theatre] groups coming in do you find that that's what happens, that they talk over you, or …?

CM2: Try to. They have done. First time we ever dealt with a theatre group or a production company, [they said], can you tell us what we'd have in our rider? And I'm like, what? Didn't know what a rider was, so we were told it was like flowers, grapes, blue M&Ms, whatever it may be, and so we learnt from that and I said, 'You know we're a

community centre. And really, you're coming here to help us promote what you do to help us get people through the door. We want people to come and have a good time and you're a bit precious about your rider and your blue M&Ms. Really?' [Then they said] 'And, oh by the way, while we're here, please can you do our washing?' So they were my first experience, my worst experience and my learning curve.

M: How long ago was that?

CM2: Two year, maybe two and half. So, it's little things like that, they talk in a theatre language and expect us to know. But we're not the arena or the 02. I can't remember the exact language but it was things like do we have DMX connectors, that sort of thing. So now I just say, you need to chill, you need to tell us what you need and I'll tell you what we've got and you need to speak in English. It's a little bit easier now I know what I'm doing and what I can offer them.

M: So two years ago was your first time with experimenting with your programme and bringing a theatre show in? What made you do that?

CM2: I think I was talked into it, either by X from the [NPO theatre] or there was some scheme or some pot of money that [CPP] wanted us to get tapped into or there was something. You know, we've always had, over the years, our Christmas Pantomime and we've had people say, 'Give us £600, and we'll come and do this.' And I've always said, 'No thanks,' and never got involved with that sort of thing. So, I think there was a pot of money to be had and we've worked with partners so we kind of got roped into it, I think.

We got involved with the focus groups about what the arts meant in [this area], so we held a couple of focus groups here.

M: From [your CPP]?

CM2: Before them. So before then, it was established that in [this area], the need for the arts… the *want*… One, the want isn't there. People go, 'The Arts, whoa, no thanks', but the other side of that coin is that they don't know what the arts means, so it was

established that [this area] needed to be educated almost. Needed to have something brought into them, so they could go and see say a piece of theatre and then say I enjoyed that but that wasn't art, it was a play, it wasn't in a gallery. So we got involved in focus groups that established some kind of need … programme to have in [this area].

M: So how do you feel about this idea that came out of the programme, that [this area] needed to be educated?

CM2: I think they did need to be educated, even me personally, I would think of art as you need to go to an arts gallery or to the theatre, I wouldn't necessarily think, to see the Knit and Natter ladies who made a [knitted] penguin to go over a chocolate orange, that's quite arty, but we'd never have seen that as art, maybe as craft, but wouldn't have seen that as having been in the arts kind of thing.

But they're a tough crowd, [in this area].

M: In what sense?

CM2: To make them turn up to something like that. There's got to be a hook, an attraction, there's got to be a thing. They won't just come because there's a play on, it's got to be something they want, need or can relate to.

M: What would you say those want, need and relate to things are?

CM2: Pit stuff always gets them going, heritage gets them going. Stuff for kids if they've got grandkids or kids, so the adults bring them in. That's pretty much it really. Or, if there's the promise of some free food [laughs] that often gets them to come through the door. Pie and pea supper and you can be… you know, advertise a pie and pea supper but we'll be showing this [film]. So, we did an afternoon tea for Valentine's last year and we got a really good turn-out for that. And that was quite arty because we showed some really old movies, not movies as in movies-movies, but footage of old stuff – whether it was down the pit or whether it was footage of the coastline or whatever. They came, and they saw, and they had afternoon tea. And we had little things around, so like paper

aeroplanes and loads of crafty stuff and it worked really, really well. It became a Valentine's special but without the hearts and bows. So, it was nice and they came to that because it was vintage-y.

M: So, do you think people are becoming – I don't like the word, but let's keep using it – more educated about the arts, or do you think it's a night out.

CM2: It's just a night out, a good time, I think certainly people in [place 2] they're used to going out … well, less so now, they tend to go to the club where they've gone to for the last thirty year and they sit in the same seat, watch whatever's on, whether it's rock and roll, heavy rock or a magician, they sit in the same seat and they listen and they clap at the same time and they drink the same beer. God forbid to think they would ever change their beer or their seat – if a stranger comes in and moves them round!

M: So, it's regular, routine-type stuff?

CM2: Yeah, stepping out of your comfort zone, I think we're just scratching the surface. And sometimes they do step out and have a really good time. But you've almost got to coerce them to get here, talk them into it, tell them a lie almost – you're going to come and see this and you're going to really love it and you're going to get pie and peas (laughs). There's going to be some crazy actors going on but you're not … I mean, it's the pie and peas that gets them through the door. And then you can tick a box, because then they have an opinion. They'll either love it or they'll hate it. And it doesn't matter whether they love it or hate it because they've got an opinion and they'll go off and talk about the arts and what happens.

M: And do you think people do, when they come through the doors, and they see something new do they love it, or do they just remember the pies and peas?

CM2: No, I think they do like what they see, they might say 'I wasn't expecting that but it was really good.' Or, 'What on earth have you brought me to? I enjoyed the pie and pea but that was a load of crap.' That sort of thing. But then I'll say, 'but you giggled a lot,' and they'll be like 'oh yeah.' So there's a bit of feedback on the forms to say did you

enjoy that? So, it's really scratching the surface. But then I think what the government would expect to say is that Joe Bloggs came to see an arts production at [place 2] and Joe Bloggs can't wait to see the next arts production at the community centre. Well, actually, that's not true. Because if I was to knock at Joe Bloggs' door and say, 'By the way, Joe, we've got another thing with a bit of pie, do you want to come?' He's not going to be looking for the next arty thing and that's what we're up against, I think. And I don't think there's enough life in that [points to the CPP programme which is on the desk between us] and I think it's going to have run out of legs before we've gotten to the people.

M: So, if it was left to you, to kind of, programme stuff that would have people streaming through your door – any kind of stuff, doesn't have to be arts stuff – and if money was no object, what would you do with this place?

CM2: If money was no object? Oh my God! I would … well, there'd be a huge redecoration and rebranding and try and remove the stigma of it being a community centre. Because that's what we're up against?

M: What's the stigma of being a community centre?

CM2: Community Centre, they go in and they expect coloured squared tiles, plastic chairs, checky tablecloths; old style ashtrays on the tables, and the old chairs and that kind of thing. So, 'oh there's a play on at the Community Centre – well it can't be that good.'

M: Well, that's an interesting point.

CM2: Yeah, so when they come in it'd be like, 'Oh God, I didn't realise you had all this in here – I didn't know you had a gym and a bar and a café and a meeting room and a projector and the lights and an audio system and all of that.'

M: All of which you have got?

CM2: Oh yeah.

M: So, you mean, it'd be about rebranding the centre so that people know that?

CM2: Yes, and we've talked about the rebranding in previous years and there's … well, some people still see this as the Welfare (the Miners' Welfare Hall), older people, so they'll say, 'I'm going down the Welfare on Saturday for a wedding.' Whereas me and my kids know it as the Community Centre. So when it used to be the Miners' Welfare Hall… so if we were to rebrand it as [place 2] Hub or the Arc of [place 2] or whatever it may be, it'll still be the Community Centre to my kids and it'll still be the Welfare to Joe Bloggs and his family. But, you see, I think [the rebranding] future proofs us, to make it, and get some signage outside, to … I mean some people call it the [place 2] Community Association because that's our trading name and so people look for an allotment or a Women's Institute.

M: So, you know earlier, when you said, people might see there's a play on, but it's only at the Community Centre so it's probably not very good, where do you think they would go if they wanted to see a 'good' play?

CM2: So, typical example would be, 'X' [theatrical production], we had that here and we charged £1 to get in but nobody came so we invited schools and filled the hall. 'X' [theatrical production], the adults who came loved it so much they went up to the Gala Theatre (in Durham) and watched it again and paid £12. And so people say, 'Oh I'm going to the theatre, and I won't just come in me flat-cap and jeans I might actually put an overcoat on. And while I'm in Durham I might get a coffee. At £12 a ticket for the same show, for exactly the same show. The very next night.

M: That is quite something. So, I'm just thinking, two years ago you had 'Production Z' (your first professional theatre show) and you had New Writing North for the first time last year, Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo, - how did you find out about that?

CM2: Sarah. Sarah Churlish. Word of mouth. A lot of the stuff is word of mouth. Now, would I have the time, if I had nothing else to do, maybe I would programme an arts programme for twelve months. I have so much else to do. So we could do with an events

manager or something but generally in a community centre this is what happens, one person does everything. So if I could dedicate some time to having a good look around , go off to see other stuff, like we did when we did, we did a showcase event where the artists came and we all stayed in the Arc (Stockton) one day and watched fifteen minute clips of lots of shows and it was amazing.

M: And was that arranged through [CPP] or was it direct from the Arc?

CM2: Well it was Chloe at the Arc but I don't know if she was tagged by [CPP]? (The brochure logo suggests that it was a CPP project). And we watched, oh maybe, all of those [points to programme].

M: This looks amazing, this programme, so did you end up programming anything from it?

CM2: Yes, [Production XX]. And they came and they've been and gone and they were marvellous. And they're coming back again next month to do another two shows. [Production XX] was the actual name of the production and it was by [AA theatre company]. Emma and her team came and it was pretty much a rigging set up to look like a tent and to look like a bedroom and it was very much about, 'Oh Mam, do I have to go to bed, can I not stay up, you know, five more minutes?' Never spoke a word in any legible English, they just talked through props and puppets and the wardrobe came to life and these crazy kind of sounds that kids would relate to and it was amazing. It was for kids and it completely sold out. So when you say, I mean there's only room for 45 people here, 45 bums. But we also sold it on, someone who works in a nursery and she came and so we sold it to the nursery, two shows on a Monday and another two shows on a Tuesday.

M: How much did that cost you then?

CM2: £600. But we couldn't have done it without… because they gave us some money to choose, to programme one of these. So, we've had, ['YY' theatre show] as well. So, in total, [YY, ZZ,] Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo, and [XX]. And they were all for kids. I

could've chosen… I mean there was a lovely one about the war, set in a dance hall with the American troops and the ladies and it would fit ideally, it would be lovely, you know, the hall would lend itself very well to it, but I just didn't feel I'd get the people through. Maybe I would've but, I don't know, I just didn't want to take the risk but I knew I'd get the kids in. And I ran the kids' shows through the summer holidays, because everyone's looking for something to do with their kids in the summer holidays so we marketed it as part of half term holiday. I think we charged about £2 a ticket so, you know, you're only going to make £90 back on a £600 production. But we did it twice because they said it'd cost them £600 to be here whether we did one or two shows, so we did it twice – once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Managed to knock the price down a little bit with the next one. But that's the thing with these artists, they gave you a price and I say, no I can't afford it and they say, well what can you afford so I tell them and they usually do it. You don't have to be governed by what it says on the ticket.

M: So, in a way, [CPP] has helped you to do that.

CM2: Financially, yes. I don't think they've helped in other ways necessarily. Gosh, that's really harsh isn't it?

M: No, that's fine.

CM2: So, I'd say not very helpful in any other way, in that, the marketing material they send out… Hang on, let me just take a step back… so Joe Bloggs comes to [Place 2] to see a play about the war and he goes and tells his mates, 'I went to the Community Centre to see a play about the war, and then he tells his mates.' Now, he didn't come to see a show that [CPP] has brought us. He doesn't see it as going to see an arts event that [CPP] are trying to promote. So therefore, when the marketing material comes out, we have to brand it, with our leaflets, with our brand, because that's what people know. When [CPP] stuff comes out, it's often – well, it's not just them – it comes with everywhere they'd toured to, and what they were doing, and that's a waste of space, all that other information about what they're doing, how good they are, people just want to know what's on. [points to marketing blurb in CPP programme]. I mean sometimes they say they'll come and do the tickets, but then they're not here on time… I don't know, maybe

we just don't like to let go of the reins, maybe we want to be masters of our destiny… However, if they say they'll send over 150 of their tickets and they want to use their printer, and their ink and their time and then just plonk them here, then great. The other thing as well, with [names a few NPO producers/promoters] I learnt to … I mean, if they say they've been talking to the show and they're coming to see you on Thursday [to perform], I think well what have they been told about what [equipment] we've got. So, always, now, I cut the middle man out and speak to the production team direct and say, 'What's the footprint? What time do you need to be in? What time will you be out?' Because they haven't always been given the right information and then they come too early because we weren't expecting them. And if I negotiate directly, also about the price, but I can say, 'Why don't you come in on Thursday night because we've got nothing in', and then they don't have to come in really early on Friday. Little things like that. Whereas if you go through the theatres, they don't always give each of us the right information and the company comes in and says, 'But I told them we needed this and that,' but that message hasn't made its way to me.

M: We've talked a little bit about the challenges of arts programming (also in previous meet-ups), we've talked about perceptions and price, is there anything else you want to say about the challenges…?

CM2: The challenges of getting people to see it, or the challenges of working with 'The Arts'?

M: Haha, both! Let's start with getting people in…

CM2: Well, I think we've pretty much covered it, just want to say again it's about having a hook, a carrot to dangle. That's the problem and then getting them in and keeping them in. Getting them to come back is down to whether they've had a good experience or not. So, they'll say, 'Oh it's not going to be like that [theatre production YY] again, is it? Because that was weird.'

M: So you need to be in charge of managing your own programming risks then?

CM2: Yes, oh I need to see a YouTube clip. I always do that now, I always like to have footage of real people. So not some kind of studio shot of the artist's foot, holding a puppet, I want to see real people interacting with the puppet which I can then sell to my real people.

M: So what do you look for in a promo video from a theatre company?

CM2: To see how real it is and whether it's set up on a Broadway stage or whether it's set up in a shopping centre and they've managed to get some real people into it.

M: So how did the relationship with New Writing North develop and was this different to the one with CPP?

CM2: Chalk and Cheese. New Writing North was a breath of fresh air because of Sarah. For starters, for me, because you either meet somebody and you get on, like I did with you and like I did with Sarah, or you don't. And that's they key, and if you can work with somebody, you can usually make anything work. But if you don't have that connection. But they had a very fresh approach because they were listening to what we wanted and it wasn't just, 'we've got this money and we need you to put six of them on – there's the list.' It wasn't like that with Sarah and also Sarah's been here and she knows how we work and what we have and I think she wanted us to be involved. She invited us to be involved anyway. So that was the key for me. She was real, she was normal, she didn't have any agenda. She would listen to what we said, but really listen and understand. And then try and fit in with what we said and not just pay that lip service, which very often happens. 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, we can do that' but when they actually get here, 'No we don't do that'. So, for Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo, I said can the kids meet the monster and she said there isn't really a monster. Well can we have photographs at the end with the actors? Yeah, okay. So little things like that… and that helps to sell it, it helps to keep it real, to put that memory in someone's mind – whether they're 93 or just 3, the memory is in their mind. So I went to see a play, at the community centre and I actually met that person. I've got a photo, look at that, ten years later.

M: So you asked New Writing North to do that because you knew people would like that. And did you sell it like that?

CM2: Yes, they knew that would happen at the end. And the reason I went down that line was , when it was '[Production XX] – I think I've told you this story before so just tell me if I have - there was two actors on the cast, one used to be on Casualty and one used to be on Emmerdale. They didn't tell us that upfront but as soon as we found out we went made on Facebook. You know, come and have your photograph taken with Chuck of Casualty – he's here in [Place 2] and he's doing [XX] but he's been on Casualty – look! Or I'm meeting with Daisy Dingle!

M: [laughing] Is that who it was? I don't watch Emmerdale.

CM2: Neither do I but it was something like that – it was a Dingle but I don't know which one! But it's just that it was her from Emmerdale. And I'm like, why, as part of the marketing team, why didn't they tell us that? Hey, you might know some of the actors in this because … and as soon as the actors knew we knew they didn't care, they'd have their photo taken with anybody. And I thought it might be because the actors said, don't tell anyone what we used to be in, because that's in our past and we're trying to move on or… but no. And that helped to sell tickets and people just went mad on Facebook. So I did Chuck in his Casualty outfit and Chuck how he looks in the play and put them side by side on Facebook. And he's coming to [Place 2] for God's sake!

M: and you sold out?

CM2: Yes!

M: Changing direction slightly, where do you go to get your funding for arts programming?

CM2: It's never, it's if [CPP] want to give us money to programme stuff, or if there's another pot of money somewhere. But I don't go out of my way to specifically raise money for arts programming simply because there's always another fire to put out first. So, that might be funding for a part of the roof, or if we've got a party on, or whatever it is, but the arts - in my world – always seem to take a back seat. I would love the time to

do that, personally and for the centre. Also, we do have our pantomime, so when it's panto season, you know, we sell 400 tickets a night and we do six shows in one week, so we get a massive turn out for that. So, it's not that we don't have an arts programme. But 'they' won't particularly recognise our panto, there's not once [CPP] have been to see our pantomime, as closely as we work with them, not one of them had said, 'Do you know what, I might come along and just see what it's all about? They all say, they want to work with local people, we want to sell a local theme – but this is local people, in a pantomime in a local venue. But none of them come, [CPP] don't come. But as soon as they need a hand from us, they want us to have one of their shows.

M: So, you're saying they want you more than you want them, in a way, then?

CM2: They *need* us. They wouldn't be glorifying how fabulous they were, if they didn't have us. Who knows what [CPP] is? If I didn't know you and you didn't know me and we … would anyone outside know what [CPP] is? And I've been bleating on for two and a half years, if we're part of [CPP] and we're a hub, can we have some signage outside, if we're part of this programme, two and half years I've been bleating on about that. Nothing. We are an arts centre, we are forum for arts, we are a cultural hub, please can we have some signage, but no. So they wouldn't, [CPP] wouldn't have, would have everything they have ... if it wasn't for all us little community centres. Ask [place 5] about [CPP], they'll put you right, they'll say the same.

M: I think it's sad they don't come and see your pantomime, but can you tell me why you want them to come?

CM2: Because it's fabulous. I want them to see what a professional show it is. And it's all unpaid. We've done it with a whole bunch of volunteers, for £345 for six shows with lights, with costumes, with actors, the whole works. I want them to come and say, 'Flippin' heck, I can't believe how good that was.' I want them to say 'wow'. I want them to come and see the summer show when we do it… But no, because Mo, because they work nine to five and community sector people go to stuff when it's not nine to five. I'll still be here at 8.30 tonight and weekends.

M: So, you know you said before, you'd like to do more stuff if you weren't always firefighting, you know the new roof or the children's party coming in. If you weren't firefighting… I mean, there's money out there for the arts…

CM2: I would love to tap into the arts council and say we want £600,000 and for that £600,000, this is what we're going to do. You know, work with some partners in the community, but we know who we are, what we want and what we need. And let's not put a huge management fee to [CPP]. Let's use the real money, for the real people, for the real thing.

M: So, basically, you don't get time to do fundraising?

CM2: I do do fundraising, just not for the arts. I spend all my time fundraising currently, like I say, whether it's for a new roof, or the electricity bill, or for wages, because we don't get core funding. Every single penny we make in here has to be found by me and my team. And it costs me £11,000 per month to run this place, to open the doors, that's before anything goes wrong. That's wages, that's lighting, insurances, whatever it may be.

M: That's £11,000 a month you have to find?!

CM2: I might rephrase that, because it's probably about £9,500 now because we've made some redundancies, but ten grand a month, nine grand, it's still huge.

M: That's massive. How do you do it?

CM2: Well we get £200 here and there, we're tossed crumbs for doing stuff. I have a bar, so this weekend the dance festival gave us £850 but we also ran the kitchen/café and that produces over £600. So we put on Christenings, room hire, membership for the gym, subs for all the little groups that we do.

M: Are your accounts publicly accessible?

Yes, charity commission. xxxxxx is our charity number. My fundraising in the last 13 years has equalled £420,000 (averages out at £2,700 per month) for various projects. And I'm not Esther Rantzen, I'm not some public figure, I'm not Bob Geldof, it's just by being here, tapping into £36,000 for some gym equipment, some new catering equipment, £250,000 from the Big Lottery for some refurbishment, £5000 to do the gardens. £36,000 from Greggs Charity Trust for my salary for 3 years. Or we apply for £5,000 to pay for our electricity bill. And I can speak to the council about certain things, so the car park cost us £30,000 and the roof we're having done at the minute is £26,000 and the council might chuck us a couple of hundred here and there or maybe even a thousand from a neighbourhoods' budget, but that's not paying for our caretaker. Some other community centres have caretakers paid for by the council, have a centre manager paid for (references centre manager of place 1) so [that centre manager] had all the time in the world to fundraise, no point in me raising funds to put on a play if we haven't got a roof or if we haven't got any staff because we can't afford wages. So, yeah, I would go to Arts Council and I'd say I need so much for this which would help with revenue and I need to pay a centre manager and, you know, we need £600 a pop to put a show on and I need lights, I need wires, I need marketing, I need paper, I need ink… All of those things that [CPP] has the money for, but they don't…. they don't give it to us, I don't get my time back, so my job as centre manager is to raise £9,500 per month to make this place run, but when I spend my half a day doing marketing, they don't say, 'we'll pay you for half a day's marketing, if you'll run our show. I'll give you £600, I'll give you £1,200 you need to run 3 shows and have a little bit of room hire.' I mean, I'll take it, of course I will, because it's a bit more towards my £9,000 but I need back-filling, I need a project manager, why doesn't [X employee of CPP] come out and manage it? Instead we have to do it. So, why don't they give us the pot of money? Because I was at the first meeting and when we were told they'd got the arts council money and I was like, brilliant and then I thought but how much of that has been scraped off the top for admin, management fee, the real money doesn't come down to the grassroots. Ever.

But I think I'm big enough and strong enough, maybe with [centre manager of place 5] or maybe as part of a consortium to go and make a bid for some big money. And I love working with the other side of Durham, instead of just [this side of] Durham. It's a breath of fresh air because they come from a different side of Durham, a different part of the

county, they have different issues, I'm sure they've got their own issues as much as we have but it's a refreshing change. Because me and [centre manager of place 5] can meet with other centres in [this area] and bleat on about how unfair it is and we do bleat on, but I'm sick of bleating on about how unfair it is, I just want to get on, we don't need to reinvent ourselves, but I think we need to spread our net wider.

M: And what about working with New Writing North?

CM2: I've only worked with them once but everything was there, the communication was there, even though Sarah only works a couple of days a week, the fact that she knew us, she knew the building, it was fresh and it was modern and it wasn't stale. She was excitable, there was a passion, she has the passion for her craft as I have the passion for this place and just putting the two together it was just dynamic.