

Creative People and Places

**National Evidence Review and
Evaluation Report**

| Executive Summary |
November 2019

Authors: Icarus
www.icarus.uk.net



1. Introduction

This Executive Summary summarises the evidence review and evaluation findings for Creative People and Places (CPP), an Arts Council England programme. It summarises the evaluation evidence base for the period **from the end of 2016 to June 2019** and considers two key research questions.

Question 1: To what extent is power genuinely being shared with communities and how is this happening?

Question 2: Reaching the ‘least engaged groups’. What is most effective in reaching more of the so-called least engaged groups in the specific places? What are the challenges? Are there gaps or groups not reached – particularly groups that are specific to the demographic of the places?

1.1 About the Creative People and Places programme

The overall aim of CPP is to address the gap in engagement in parts of the country where involvement in arts and culture is significantly below the national average. Creative People and Places is about more people choosing, creating and taking part in brilliant art experiences in the places where they live.

The first phase of CPP invested £37million in independent consortia in 21 ‘Places’ across the country and ran from 2012–15, awarding funds in three rounds in 2012 and 2014. A further £20million was committed for the period 2016 – 19, with the intention to fund approximately 20 new Places, across two further rounds. Twelve of these have already been announced, with an investment of around £17million. A new round opened in October 2019, with awards to be made in summer 2020. A total in the region of £108million has been committed to the whole programme to date.

- **CPP has engaged people more than 3.5million times.**
- **90% of the people engaged are from the lower Audience Spectrum segments – they are the people who are usually not engaged in art and culture.**

1.2 About the evidence review and evaluation

CPP is an action research programme, an approach that promotes curiosity, inquiry and reflection. There is an emphasis on taking action, reflecting on the results and proposing and testing new solutions and learning is embedded in CPP. This report summarises the evidence from this learning utilising previous meta evaluation reports, peer learning products, local evaluations and Arts Council England commissioned products.

4. 2. To what extent is power genuinely being shared with communities and how is this happening?

2.1 Key findings – power sharing

- The ethos underpinning CPP is that new norms are needed in order to engage new people in art and culture. CPP has had to disrupt the established ways of decision-making, planning and working to find approaches. Places have adopted new ways of taking decisions about the art and culture that happens, ways that involve and engage those people who have not traditionally been engaged in arts and culture.
- Places are developing their own models for sharing power, designed to reflect their local circumstances. This reflects their different contexts and local stakeholders and demonstrates that there is no perfect ‘one size fits all’ model. At this stage there is little in the way of evidence about this shifting power base from the perspective of residents.
- As well as representation via community and voluntary organisations on consortia, Places have created a variety of structures and processes for engaging local people in decision-making. These include creating community or commissioning panels, community champions or community connectors. Or, utilising existing structures of processes, such as community forums and communities of interest.
- The involvement of non-arts organisations within the consortia, and including local people in decision-making, are key features of CPP; both have contributed to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of local needs. It is a requirement of CPP that power should not sit wholly with arts organisations and the traditional arts infrastructure, and that power should be shared with non-arts partners in a consortium. In addition, consortia have had to grapple with how to involve local people in decision-making and how to bring decision-making as close to the community as possible, to create this new norm.
- Power sharing in CPP has made a difference. Power is shared with other agencies and crucially with local people. Numerous impacts are associated with power sharing: creating a more expansive terrain for art and culture; creating art that is more relevant and that in turn increases engagement; developing artists’ sense of responsibility; growing cultural democracy; building social capital; and contributing towards long-term impact and sustainability.
- One significant challenge that Places face is the fact that there are typically low levels of participation in community activity and decision-making across all kinds of interests and sectors, so arts and culture are not uniquely affected. National

data shows that the socio economic status and education of residents in the areas covered by CPP means they are inherently less likely to get involved.

- In any engagement initiative it is not always the case that power sharing is a force for good and it is therefore something that needs to be handled with care. Some people will want to get involved in programmes like CPP for their own advancement rather than for a broader community or societal gain – this is something that Places have to be mindful of.
- There can be power struggles, particularly in the early stages of CPP in an area. Borne out of a limited understanding and experience of CPP, and an appetite to maximise the potential benefit from it, local organisations (including local authorities, health organisations and other partners with their own agenda) and artists have brought their own vested interests to the table. This is challenging and there is potential for mission drift where there is a lack of alignment with CPP goals, and for losing the support and trust of local parties.
- Power is finite. One party must relinquish some power in order for another party to gain power. When power sharing is a goal then there will need to be organisational, systemic and / or behaviour change to allow this transfer of power and this is not straightforward to achieve, nor is it always obvious that it is required. This is a complex concept and one that Places have to get to grips with in order to genuinely share power with others.
- The structures for decision-making processes will not alone deliver power sharing. Rather, they need to embody and demonstrate principles such as reciprocity, values and collaboration. This requires us to think not only about *what* we do, but also *how* it is done.
- The question of quality is often considered when discussing power sharing. There can be concerns that devolved decision-making, for example, results in poorer quality art, although the evidence suggests that this is more a perception than a reality. In CPP the question of quality is more complex and has led to some interesting challenges to the perceptions of who the arbiters of quality are and how quality of process and quality of product are both relevant concerns.
- There are a number of key elements required to create an environment for power sharing. These fall into three general themes: understanding the local context; timing and timescales; capacity and skills; and organisational and systemic change.

2.2 Questions for further research

In reviewing the evidence for this research question several themes emerged about power sharing for which we could not find answers. Any of these would be an

interesting starting point for future research.

How do we know if power sharing is happening in a genuine way? At this stage we know that structures and processes exist for power sharing and there is a real sense among Places that this results in a different kind of project and programme. What we don't know is the extent to which this reflects a direct shift of power that is evident to residents. It would be useful to undertake research, possibly longitudinal, that explores residents' experiences of being involved in the decision-making processes of CPP.

What does the future hold for co-creation? Is there a place for co-creation and power sharing in every Arts Council England funding stream? Does it sit more comfortably with certain types of provision? How do we ensure it is not tokenistic and paying lip service to the excellent practice demonstrated by CPP?

Where does accountability start and end? Is it possible for power to be fully devolved when communities do not have direct accountability for the money, since that responsibility sits with the consortium? Is there an implicit tension between financial accountability and power sharing?

At what point, if any, should power sharing stop? We know that power sharing is advantageous for CPP. However, residents are the only people in this picture who are not being paid for the time they commit to CPP. Is there a point where this is no longer feasible, when expectations and demands on unpaid volunteers are unsustainable, or simply unfair?

3. Reaching the 'least engaged groups' What is most effective in reaching more of the so-called least engaged groups in the specific places? What are the challenges? Are there gaps or groups not reached – particularly groups that are specific to the demographic of the places?

3.1 Key findings – extending reach

Please also refer to Section 2 of this summary - the approach to power, decision-making and co-creation has a significant bearing on CPP's capacity to and success in extending reach.

The Places and their spaces

- The frequent necessity to make and present art in spaces that are not designed for that purpose brings out many opportunities for new forms and resonant content.
- Large scale outdoor free events can increase engagement numbers and when integrated into other strategies that build longer-term connections and reach into some communities, they can enrich the choices for cultural engagement.
- Working in spaces that are familiar for other uses requires a process of building trusting and collaborative relationships that recognise the sense of belonging and ownership of those who use them.
- Neutral or 'third' spaces can be a route towards engaging with people who are not accessing managed facilities and resources. Artistic processes can offer new encounters in such spaces, enabling communities to re-imagine them and reveal and celebrate the histories and identities of the area.
- Digital spaces: while the Places' predominant approaches have been about building face to face relationships, there is scope for greater engagement by CPPs and their communities in the opportunities that digital technologies can offer – as distribution methods and as artistic and creative processes. This can be especially the case when collaborating with people with specific access or sensory needs.

The art

- Expanding the knowledge of what's possible through 'Go and See' programmes has been a vital part of the expansion of interest and knowledge as well as developing a dialogue with communities. 'Star' names of the art world will not necessarily be known to or draw audiences from areas of low engagement.
- CPP has seen existing arts spaces re-programmed with new ideas through working with community members as programmers. There is a clear synergy between this work and the work of other initiatives, including Fun Palaces and Rural Touring Networks. There are a number of examples of these initiatives working effectively, in partnership with CPP.
- Many diverse and original artworks produced in collaboration and in response to the experiences of life in CPP's diverse contexts. Places have spanned the spectrum of collaborative arts practice and mainly occupied a middle ground in art form terms.

- **Expansion of knowledge** of what is possible and what is available locally, nationally and internationally has expanded appetites for and confidence in pursuing a local cultural programme.
- **Quality and relevance have become better understood through dialogues with communities** and attention to processes and impact.

3.2 Questions for further research

In reviewing the evidence for this research question several themes emerged about engaging the least engaged groups for which we could not find answers. Any of these would be an interesting starting point for future research.

What local structures and resources can lead to a sustained environment for life-long engagement in art and culture? CPP has revealed the many and complex factors that accompany low engagement and developed approaches that create engagement. How can this be made sustainable?

How can the learning about working in a facilitative and collaborative way with local communities be shared and implemented more broadly? Is there a case for what is being learnt through CPP to further influence artist training? Is there further potential for the experiences of CPP to be shared by the non-arts sector partners?

How can CPP's most effective lessons influence and inform the work of NPOs and project-funded arts practice and grant-giving? There is an imperative for the Arts Council's core investments to benefit a more diverse public.

What scope is there for decision-making concerning Lottery funds to be made closer to the point of benefit, acknowledging that cultural opportunities need not depend entirely on professionals? Micro commissions and their equivalents have demonstrated the potential for communities to make decisions about the allocation of resources closer to the beneficiaries.

To what extent is the growing local appetite for arts and culture developing into confidence to seek out cultural activity wherever it is? Data about this is not currently available and would give a sense of the degree to which residents in CPP Places are going further afield for arts and culture experiences.

4. Conclusions

This report has summarised the existing evidence base around two key questions, questions that reflect principles at the very heart of CPP. Our findings align with those of the 2018 meta evaluation report and we can return to the concluding themes that we identified there.

CPP is a maturing programme. Places are casting a critical and informed eye over their progress to date to make intelligent, insightful decisions about how they work as well as how they move forward.

CPP is an evolving programme. Places continue to review and refresh their governance and their programming as a result of better insights, contextual changes and smaller core budgets from Arts Council England.

CPP is impactful. It is reaching more people from among those who are the least engaged and it is developing long lasting relationships with local people.

CPP is empowering. It is supporting local people to build the skills, capacity, confidence and knowledge to become part of the arts ecology.

CPP is learning. Individual Places, partner organisations within Places, the CPP network and Arts Council England are learning about what it takes to extend reach and to engage local people in art and culture.

And, there are additional insights about CPP in 2019.

CPP is growing its influence. The expansion of CPP to new Places is validation of the programme's success to date.

CPP is demonstrating the collaborative advantage of partnership working. The concept of the multi sector, multi agency consortium is contributing to the success of CPP in a significant way.

There is a considerable amount of learning that has been recorded about the CPP programmes, both in the meta evaluation reports and the learning products referred to in this report. This body of knowledge is invaluable as a reference point for new Places joining the programme. It is equally valuable for Arts Council England in examining the degree to which CPP can, or should, influence its other work streams.