

Using participatory decision-making in the arts

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Summary

This paper looked at ways in which participatory decision-making can bolster the links between arts organisations and their local audiences, particularly those not traditionally engaged in the arts. It looked at two practical examples of participatory decision-making in the UK.

Participatory approaches remain a rarity in the operating models of UK arts organisations

Participatory decision-making involves the community in every stage of the process by which public policy decisions. It does not merely provide them with a suite of pre-determined options. It gives the so-called 'expert' a reduced role in the decision-making process and is not simply a process of legitimising the status quo but rather fostering change. The paper is based on interviews with staff at arts organisations, policymakers from Arts Council England and local authorities, and members of the public who had taken part in participatory decision-making projects in the arts.

The Castleford Project was a collaboration between the local authority, local people and Channel 4

The plan was to regenerate the Castleford area by commissioning public art through a participatory mechanism. The author sets out that despite the fact that the local authority in Castleford provided the public with a constrained set

of choices in the process, overall the project was a success (possibly due to strong pre-existing civic and social links in the town).

The paper also looked at the way in which Contact (a multi-artform venue in Manchester) used a participatory model to shape their artistic programme

They brought young people's input to bear on the way in which productions were put together. Staff at Contact and local young people involved with Contact were interviewed as part of the research. The author found that those already engaged in the arts were most likely to be involved with participatory programmes at Contact, so it didn't necessarily reach out to new audiences.

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