



LeftCoast Evaluation Report: spectacle, co-creation, co-commissioning and audience development

January 2017

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Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to all those who have supported this evaluation in different ways.

The audience members and participants from the projects which are the subject of this research who shared ideas, experiences, plans, as well as elements of their lives and views with us over the course of the work, and to whom we have offered anonymity.

John Patterson – Corporate Development and Research Officer, *Blackpool Council* and Scott Butterfield – Delivery Unit Priority Lead, *Blackpool Council*, who commissioned the work and supported it in a variety of ways.

LeftCoast staff who have all supported the project in different ways: Michael Trainor – Artistic Director; Julia Turpin – Executive Director, (until December 2016), Duncan Hodgson - Marketing and Audience Development Manager (until July 2016); Kerenza McClarnan – Creative Engagement Manager, (until January 2016) Helen Clay – Communications and Audience Development Manager; Laura Jamieson – Creative Engagement Manager; Jenny Rutter – Creative Development Manager; and Tina Redford – Programme Manager.

Artists, directors and producers whose work has been the subject of this report: Leo Kay and Anna Smith, Unfinished Business - *Walk Talk Eat with Me*; Harriet Riddell - *Bread & Butter Stitches*; Emilie Taylor and Victoria Dawes - *People's Pottery Project*; Philip Parr - *Lost Orchards of LeftCoast*; Michael Powell - *Banquet Table*; Maya Chowdhry and Jessica Mautner - *Wyre Salters*; Génèrik Vapeur – *Bivouac*; Abi Collins and Rod Laver - *Blackpool's got Strictly X Factor*; *Akoreacro – Klaxon*; Invisible Flock – *Rossall Beach*; *Wooden Spoons Theatre* - The Friends of the Highfield Road Park; *Miss Inform – South Beach*; Mykey Young, *Blackpool and Fylde College* - *Bivouac*; Laura Jamieson, *LeftCoast – Neighbourhood Commissions*; Adam McGuigan – Festival Director, *Spare Parts*.

Community partners who have contributed to interviews and case studies: *Blackpool and Fylde College*; *Grow Blackpool*, *Winnipeg Residents Association*, *Chepstow Allotment Group* and *Cherry Tree Allotment Group*, *Street Life*, and the residents of the Grange Park.

Community co-commissioners: Dave Carlos, Cheryl Ridsdale and Pete Brown – *Spare Parts*; Jane Littlewood and David Hewitt *The Friends of Rossall Beach*; Karen Pennington - *The Friends of the Highfield Road Park*; Susanne Johnson - *South Beach Beacons*; and Michael Higgins - *King Edward Avenue*.

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Executive summary

LeftCoast

LeftCoast is a partnership of 5 Blackpool & Wyre organisations - *Blackpool Coastal Housing, Blackpool Council, Wyre Council, Blackpool Grand Theatre and Merlin Entertainments* - funded by *Arts Council England* to deliver a three year programme of arts activity designed to increase local engagement with the arts.

It is one of 21 partnerships funded by the *Arts Council* as part of its *Creative People and Places Programme*.

LeftCoast's core objectives are:

- Engaging more people with arts and culture
- Developing the arts and cultural sector in Blackpool and Wyre
- Creating, generating, importing and exporting great art
- Changing internal and external perceptions of Blackpool and Wyre

Context

There is considerable debate about what forms of impact are desirable from programmes such as the one *LeftCoast* is undertaking in Blackpool.

These debates are more pressing given the level of *Arts Council* funding invested in the *Creative People and Places* programme nationally at a time in which many Local Authorities are questioning whether they will be able to invest funding in the arts in the near future.

Research

This research and evaluation has been commissioned in order to explore the differential impacts of two key commissioning strands within the *LeftCoast* programme - 'Spectacles' and 'Co-creation'. These reflect different propositions made by *LeftCoast* to the people of Blackpool and Wyre in realising its ambitions as a *Creative People and Places* programme.

Between June 2015 and January 2017 we explored *LeftCoast's* use of Spectacle and Co-creation through detailed research on five projects: *Banquet, Showzam!, Spare Parts, the Neighbourhood Commissions* and *Absent*.

Models of practice

Through the research we have been able to identify that a series of distinctive models are beginning to emerge, in which LeftCoast is utilising Spectacle, Co-creation, Co-commissioning and audience development in different ways and in distinctive combinations as part of its work. These models are not yet settled or established, but LeftCoast's commitment to learning from experience suggests that over time they will develop and hone the use of these models into something distinctive.

In the report we develop five case studies through which we identify five distinctive approaches developed by *LeftCoast* in realising its work through spectacle, co-creation, co-commissioning and audience development:

Case Study 1 - Spectacular events with community involvement in which an event was produced by a professional company but with the involvement of local people.

Case Study 2 - Combination of co-creation with public events in which commissioned artists collaborated on projects with communities while linking them to public events.

Case Study 3 - Co-commissioned community art which speaks to the desires and interests of the community concerned.

Case Study 4 - Co-commissioned and co-produced community festival involving co-production with a volunteer organising committee within an existing transport festival.

Case Study 5 - Commissioning of artistically ambitious work that necessitated audience development.

Spectacle and co-creation

We find that the dual strategy is successful, answering to a range of needs and interests locally and *LeftCoast* should continue to develop both of these approaches, with the objective of developing a model of arts development and commissioning that responds to the context of Blackpool and Wyre.

Spectacle plays to Blackpool's existing cultural forms and history of putting on a show, and offers the opportunity to insert art into entertainment. It develops

relationships of enjoyment and interest with audiences and provides a context in which levels of provocation and artistic risk taking can be calibrated according to audience experience.

Co-creation offers the opportunity to engage with people in terms of where they have come from and what they do in everyday life and in informal micro-cultural practices. It allows for unearthing lost stories, histories, habits, practices and traditions, celebrating them and making them visible within local cultural space.

Spectacle and co-creation are not mutually exclusive. *LeftCoast* has shown they can be successfully combined, but this is not without its problems in that some participants and audiences engage for different reasons. The programme must actively work to ensure that large-scale initiatives in the town centre are accessible to people who may feel more comfortable engaging in cultural activities in their localities.

Co-commissioning

LeftCoast has demonstrated considerable skill in developing and realising five *Neighbourhood Commissions* with communities. Co-commissioning is an increasingly popular mode of practice in the arts, but without established models to work to.

LeftCoast's work in this area has thrown up a range of issues that reflect the different desires, motives and skills that such projects draw together. It has demonstrated considerable skill in developing a process capable of holding artists and communities together. One essential component of this is a skilled producer – or, at the very least, a programme representative - with mediating skills, capable of ensuring good communication and safeguarding community interests while ensuring artists have the space to develop vision and innovate in their practice. The skilled delivery of this role has allowed *LeftCoast* to input advice, expertise and development opportunities, whilst respecting the implied democracy of such projects.

Partnerships

LeftCoast has signalled its intent to develop a series of long-term strategic relationships with local organisations such as *Grow Blackpool* and the organising committee for *Spare Parts*, part of the *Fleetwood Festival of Transport*. Here the work of *LeftCoast* has been to influence the structures, practices and objectives of these organisations through collaboration. This involves a deliberate move away

from realising collaboration simply for the duration of a specific project and reflects LeftCoast's programmatic ambitions around developing and implementing a sustainable and locally relevant model of arts commissioning and co-production.

In order to be as effective with its resources as possible *LeftCoast* is seeking to support organisations such as *Spare Parts* towards commissioning and financial independence over time.

Excellence in art and engagement

We have been able to document how taking part in projects has affected people in a range of positive ways, by increasing people's sense of connection to others around them and a desire take part in similar projects in the future. This has produced a shared sense of citizenship and community amongst those who took part, especially appreciated by vulnerable and marginalized groups.

We identified unequivocal evidence of happiness, excitement and pride amongst audiences for the events discussed in this report. Many people were proud that artistically ambitious and spectacular shows were happening in Blackpool, and this boosted local self-esteem and confidence.

In some projects *LeftCoast* has been able to combine excellent art with excellent engagement, developing cultural capacity and sense of involvement in local people, raising artistic ambition for the arts locally, and shifting local perceptions about Blackpool.

The inclusion of *Absent* was a worthwhile risk which demonstrated *LeftCoast's* ambition and determination to 'shift gears' in framing an arts programme for Blackpool. Modest ticket sales should not be taken to detract from the impact of the show for those who did participate. Its inclusion in the programme reflected *LeftCoast's* ability and willingness to challenge audiences. It also showed the potential for audience development on an ongoing basis.

Internationalism

LeftCoast has successfully introduced international artists in ways that speak to local interests and concerns. This counters any tendencies to parochialism and provides alternative cultural influences for Blackpool at a time of national uncertainty in the wake of the EU referendum.

Conclusions

The *LeftCoast* programme has made a major contribution to individuals and communities across the Blackpool and Wyre region. The different modes of participation within the programme are changing the ways people in Blackpool view the arts. Impacts have not been uniform or consistent across participants and audiences, but *LeftCoast's* strategy in programming and commissioning, coupled with skills of the staff, has produced an exciting and worthwhile model for future development that speaks to a range of local preferences and interests.

This positive result has in part been produced by the open-mindedness of *LeftCoast*, which has been open to learning from the less successful projects, and is therefore in a strong position to further improve arts commissioning in the future.

Taken together, the findings suggest that *LeftCoast* is, through its different approaches, successfully developing an ecology of arts commissioning which responds to the context of Blackpool and Wyre as well as the objectives of *Creative People and Places*.

Section 1 - Introduction

Background

LeftCoast is a partnership of 5 Blackpool & Wyre organisations - *Blackpool Coastal Housing, Blackpool Council, Wyre Council, Blackpool Grand Theatre and Merlin Entertainments* - funded by Arts Council England to deliver a three year programme of arts activity designed to increase local engagement with the arts. It is one of 21 partnerships funded by the Arts Council as part of its Creative People and Places Programme.

LeftCoast's core objectives are:

- Engaging more people with arts and culture
- Developing the arts and cultural sector in Blackpool and Wyre
- Creating, generating, importing and exporting great art
- Changing internal and external perceptions of Blackpool and Wyre

The research

LeftCoast's arts programme is designed to engage local residents in arts and creative activities, conceived in terms of two distinct strands - 'Spectacles' and 'Co-creation'. These are broadly distinguished by scale and level of participation, in which Spectacles are described by *LeftCoast* as 'large scale festivals and performances which aim to draw in mass participants and where the emphasis is on entertainment and new experiences', and Co-creation is conceived as 'activities which bring communities together to participate in more involved, co-created or self-directed creative events and enterprises, where the process and participation of the group is central to the work'. In these co-created projects, arts processes blur the distinction between artist and audience, drawing on local and vernacular forms of creativity, and there is often an emphasis on the creative exchange of talk and ideas more than the production of art objects or events.

This research focuses on these two strands, which reflect different propositions made by *LeftCoast* to the people of Blackpool and Wyre in realising its ambitions as a *Creative People and Places* programme. Simply put, the use of Spectacle seeks to generate an interest through a lively and excited engagement with large public events, and through this to provoke a wider interest and engagement with the arts; Spectacle might take the form of a planned and ticketed event that attracts people from Blackpool and Wyre and beyond, or chance encounters in the street. The use of Co-creation aims to generate public interest in the arts through exposure to and

involvement with smaller, quieter artistic processes and interactions often located in communities.

Objectives

1. To critically assess the differences in two approaches to audience engagement, 'Spectacles' and 'Co-creation' and explore their on-going impacts against *LeftCoast's* objectives.
2. To gather evidence of good practice, learning opportunities, and effective strategies in engaging communities.
3. To tell the story of excellence in engagement/artistic excellence from the respective views of participants.

Questions

1. What is the impact of participating in or attending a LeftCoast or partner event on perception of the arts and culture in general?
2. Is there any discernible impact in wellbeing of attendance or engagement in LeftCoast activities?
3. Are any of these impacts sustained after the initial attendance?
4. To what degree does each of the two approaches meet the aspirations for both artistic excellence and excellence in engagement?
5. What can be learned about sustainable community engagement through art?

Data collection target groups

1. Key members of programme team (Director, Administrator, Lead Producer, Community Engagement lead).
2. Artists commissioned to deliver projects within the programme.
3. Staff from partner organisations (housing organisations, local arts organisations, the Council, Blackpool Coastal Housing).
4. Participants and audience members who attend or participate in commissioned projects (theatre shows, festivals, community art events, family arts days).

The structure of the report

The report focuses on LeftCoast's achievements in relation to the above named aims and objectives. The following structure aims to help readers find routes through the report according to their priorities:

- An **executive summary** - synthesises key themes and findings.
- Section 1: **Project Pen Portraits** introduces the five projects which are the basis of this research
- Section 2: **Case Studies** develop five detailed case studies which reflect LeftCoast's models of working with spectacle, co-creation and co-commissioning
- Section 3: **Discussion** – considers the findings of the research under a series of key themes which address LeftCoast's modes of engagement and the programme's sustainable effects and impacts
- Section 4: Identifies a series of **Key learning points**
- Section 5: Sets out our **Conclusions**
- **Appendices** - including methodology and references.

Section 2 – Project pen portraits

In this section we briefly introduce the five projects which have been the focus of this research, providing summary details of their structure and approach as well as identifying the artists who were commissioned and the communities engaged.

Banquet

Banquet was a participatory project delivered by *LeftCoast* across Blackpool and Wyre in association with *They Eat Culture*, Preston, who were the producers. The project was seen as an opportunity to realise a large project in collaboration with communities in Blackpool and Wyre. The focus was on the social production and use of food and the sociability of eating built on work already undertaken with local homeless charity *Street Life* that had addressed issues around food and homelessness. *LeftCoast* were aiming for a project that would be visible to the wider public, of high artistic quality, that would find connection points with local communities and link to recognisable customs and social rituals (for example, making plates, apple picking, craft activities) within which engagement with artists could be realised in an accessible context. The project celebrated a number of different aspects of food and food culture, for example tea drinking rituals and salt making. It also explored in different ways how communities are constituted and sustained through food and its modes of consumption.

The *first phase* of the project involved six participatory strands in which artists collaborated with communities across Blackpool and Wyre:

Wabi Char - Artist Caroline Jupp explored the tea making and drinking rituals of local people including members of the *Ibbison Community Centre* and the associated *Memory Lane Café* for people with dementia.

Bread & Butter Stitches - Artist Harriet Riddell – a textile performance artist – collaborated with the Blackpool Embroiderers' Guild and people with dementia living in care homes to create a tablecloth for the banquet.

People's Pottery Project - Artists Emilie Taylor and Victoria Dawes collaborated with communities engaged by *Grow Blackpool* – a food based community project supported by Blackpool Council and Groundwork - to create slip pottery bowls adorned with food memories to be used at the banquet.

Lost Orchards of LeftCoast - Artist Philip Parr spent time walking in different areas of Blackpool in search of lost fruit trees and stories, using the foraged fruit to create apple jelly and dried apples, as well as creating forums for children and adults to make and talk about food.

Banquet Table - Artist Michael Powell collaborated with *Grow Blackpool*, *Winnipeg Residents Association*, *Chepstow Allotment Group* and *Cherry Tree Allotment Group*, to make a series of planters for the *Banquet* events, made from recycled wooden pallets.

Wyre Salters - Artists Maya Chowdhry and Jessica Mautner made an open call to the residents of Wyre to take part in a project exploring the history of local salt making and making different types of salt for the *Banquet* events.

The *second phase* of the *Banquet* project aimed to bring artists and communities together in the *Pavilion Theatre* in the *Winter Gardens* for a series of events which would explore and celebrate food in a variety of ways including performances, installations, talks and shared meals food. One of these projects (*Walk Talk Eat with Me*) was co-created with young people.

Walk Talk Eat with Me - A project and evening performance realised by *Unfinished Business* – a performance company which makes experimental theatre - in collaboration with young people from the Blackpool homeless charity *Streetlife*; audience members made food together during which stories of homelessness were shared.

Dishing the Dirt – *In-Situ*, environment artist and food activist Kerry Morrison and *FoodRiot* chef Gill Watson hosted a combined performance and meal entitled *Dishing the Dirt* that questioned where our food comes from; a range of unusual and challenging ingredients were incorporated into the meal.

Homestead Pancake House - The residents of the Grange Park area of Blackpool alongside *Squash Nutrition* – a creative arts and health organisation interested in food and communities - created a *Pancake House* in which people were invited to try free pancakes.

Food Hall Horseshoe - Over the two days the Horseshoe area around *the Pavilion Theatre* hosted food themed stalls, installations and talks exploring all aspects of

food, sustainability and health. Two of the phase one projects (*Wyre Salters* and *Lost Orchards of LeftCoast*) hosted stalls.

Showzam!

Showzam! 2016 was Blackpool's 9th annual celebration of circus and street performance. Historically the objectives of *Showzam!* have been about generating visitor numbers and it tends to attract more than 25,000 visitors to the town every year boosting the local economy by about £2m. 2016 was the second year that LeftCoast had programmed the event. The programme cost about £200K to run in 2016, financed by *LeftCoast*, *Blackpool Council*, *Visit Blackpool* (the Council's tourism arm), *Blackpool Business Improvement Consortium*, *Grants for the Arts*; it was further supported in-kind by *The Winter Gardens* and *The Tower*, including the waiving of room hire charges. The events sought to combine artistic excellence with a popular appeal that the people of Blackpool can identify with. It forms a central pillar of LeftCoast's drive to supporting the transformation of Blackpool into a nationally recognised centre for the arts. The programme in 2016 was produced by *Sea Change*, Great Yarmouth (<http://www.seachangearts.org.uk>) who do a lot of circus production work.

Showzam! was a large programme, from which we looked at three different elements as follows:

Bivouac was a free 90 minute event produced by French artists *Générik Vapeur* and involved a piece of roaming performance that sought to transform the centre of Blackpool. Mykey Young a teacher from *Blackpool and Fylde College* (B&FC) was supported, trained and developed by *LeftCoast* in the role of Assistant Producer and the project provided an opportunity for local drama and dance students to work with a professional company of street performers. The performance featured pyrotechnics, a rock soundtrack and a weird and wonderful cast of young people from *B&FC* as co-performing blue figures alongside the artists themselves.

Blackpool's got Strictly X Factor was advertised to possible contestants as the opportunity to participate in a five-day informative and talent development programme that would help them hone stagecraft and performance skills and offer the chance to be a star of *Showzam!* The project provided the opportunity for talented local cabaret acts and performers to work with Abi Collins and Rod Laver (a well known television cabaret personality) during a period of three days to prepare for two nights of performances in the *Bootleg Social Club* in Blackpool. The workshop mentors supported successful applicants through the process of creating a short act

for cabaret and theatre, from conception to performance. The artists who performed were drawn from local talent and from people in the UK in general and in one case, from Belgium.

Klaxon was a show produced by French circus company *Akoreacro*, who were commissioned by *LeftCoast* to produce a modern take on the traditional circus at the bottom of *The Blackpool Tower*, where circuses have been performing over many years.

Spare Parts

LeftCoast describes *Spare Parts* as 'The UK's only festival of art, performance and spectacle dedicated to transport and travel'. The festival is one element of the *Fleetwood Festival of Transport*, originally called *Tram Sunday*, which has been running for 30 years and attracts around 60,000 people annually to the town. It is organised by a volunteer committee and since 2014 *LeftCoast* and *Wyre Council* have been working in collaboration with the committee to realise *Spare Parts* as an integrated arts strand. In 2016 *Spare Parts* secured funding from *The Arts Council* under *Grants for the Arts*. This money helped to fund a Festival Director for the first time – Adam McGuigan, who has introduced a new strand of work around community involvement. Another new element in 2016 was the expansion of the *Spare Parts* festival into Memorial Park with a series of installations and performances as well as a high wire act as the finale.

Our work has focussed on the experience and viewpoints of the organising committee as well as the partnership with *LeftCoast* and the sustainability of the event.

Neighbourhood Commissions

LeftCoast has initiated a series of *Neighbourhood Commissions* with a view to giving communities the chance to work alongside it to develop a project and to commission an artist to work directly in the spaces and places relevant to the activities of the community. Five *Neighbourhood Commissions* have been developed so far:

The Friends of Rossall Beach organize regular beach clean-ups and encourage environmental awareness in the local community and especially in local schools. The group commissioned artist collective *Invisible Flock* to transform waste plastic

discarded on the beach into an artwork.

The Friends of the Highfield Road Park realized a project with theatre producer Sharon Lancaster which sought to celebrate the park and the lives and stories of people who use it. The community group collected a series of stories about the park which were transformed into a promenade play and performed by *Wooden Spoons Theatre*.

Members of the **Claremont Park Community Centre** developed a project which encouraged the local community to engage with the arts, to learn creative skills and develop a sense of civic pride.

A group of local traders in **South Beach** worked with a performance artist Jenny Wilson through her alter ego *Miss Inform* to realise a series of walking tours which explored the creative potential of their area, seeking to challenge people's perception of the place where they live and work.

A group of hoteliers from **King Edward Avenue**, North Shore, Blackpool commissioned an artist to work on developing a festival for the hotel owners and residents of King Edward Ave. The group wanted to commission work which could develop an annual festival that celebrates wind, transforming the perceived negative of wind and the environment into a positive.

In each of the five cases above *LeftCoast* has worked with the community in order to co-commission an arts project seen as relevant by the community, with a *LeftCoast* Producer Laura Jamieson supporting the development of skills and briefs and working with communities through recruitment of artist and realising the projects.

Absent

Absent was an artistically ambitious ticketed show that ran at *The Winter Gardens* in November 2016. Audience members were given the opportunity to 'Take a journey through the hidden spaces of Blackpool's iconic *Winter Gardens* to explore the bygone splendour of its glorious past before it is redeveloped by a modern property development company.' People travelled together in small groups or alone at their own pace, taking a theatrical journey through the corridors and rooms of a mock cheap budget hotel. In their travels, they engaged in a personal atmospheric experience of the feelings and stories related to the various rooms and spaces in the new hotel, as well as tracing the story of a fictional long-stay protagonist who was said to have been evicted from the hotel having used up all her money. The work

was produced by *dreamthinkspeak*, a company formed in 1999, which is interested in the evolution of site-responsive work under the Directorship of Tristan Sharps.

Section 3 – Case Studies

Introduction

In this section we develop detailed case examples of five projects we have looked at in the research which we see as emblematic of *LeftCoast's* approaches to realising work through spectacle, co-creation, co-commissioning and audience development. In this respect, the five examples also speak to the objectives of this research and the themes we develop in relation to all five projects in the discussion. At the end of each case example we identify the main learning points.

Case Study 1 - Spectacular events with community involvement

The first case example, *Bivouac*, is an example of the ways in which *LeftCoast* has developed spectacular events produced by a professional company but with the involvement of local people.

Case Study 2 – Combination of co-creation with public events

The second, *Banquet*, is an example of the ways in which *LeftCoast* has commissioned artists able to co-create projects in collaboration with communities and in which attempts have been made to link these co-created projects with public events.

Case Study 3 - Co-commissioned community art

The third, *Rossall Beach*, is an example of *LeftCoast's* approach to co-commissioning art with communities - of interest, place and practice – and which speak to the desires and interests of the communities.

Case Study 4 - Co-commissioned and co-produced community festival

The fourth, *Spare Parts*, is an example of *LeftCoast's* approach to co-commissioning and co-producing an arts festival with a volunteer organising committee within an existing transport festival.

Case Study 5 - Commissioning artistically ambitious work

The fifth, *Absent*, is an example of *LeftCoast's* approach to audience development through the commissioning of ambitious artwork.

Case Study 1: Bivouac – a spectacle with community involvement

Introduction

Bivouac, a strand of *Showzam!* is an example of an artwork that was primarily conceived as ‘spectacle’ by *LeftCoast* but which also included significant elements of community involvement. We have chosen to base one of the five case studies on *Bivouac* because of the ways in which it combines spectacle with local community participation and performance.



Bivouac was a spectacular performance that included cars, a truck with a rock band, pyramids of oil drums (above), fireworks (below) and more!



Bivouac is a world-renowned street performance by the French company *Générik Vapeur*.¹ The performance is not new, even to the UK (for example it was performed

¹ <http://www.generikvapeur.com>.

at *The Peterborough Festival* in 2013). Nevertheless, it combines the power to surprise with the guarantee of a tried and tested piece. For an hour, the performers wind their way through the streets with a show featuring pyrotechnics, a rock soundtrack and a cast of figures painted blue.

For the Blackpool performance, *Générik Vapeur* were accompanied by arts students from *B&FC*², who had previously attended an intensive training and educational session with the artists, organized with the enthusiastic participation of *LeftCoast* producer and *B&FC* teacher, Mykey Young. The company went to the *B&FC* studios and ran some workshops in the days running up to the performance.

Professionalism, opportunity and pride

Both the fact that the artists were from France and that they were professionals was important to the students. The students' collaboration with the visiting artists produced a palpable sense of excitement and a feeling of privilege. They expressed these feelings as individual career enhancing achievements and as a shared experience of companionship and solidarity among themselves which they described as a 'sense of togetherness, emotional bonding, one massive family'. It was seen to be a 'unique opportunity', a kind of 'thrilling fear' that seemed to go significantly beyond the education they might expect from the College on a day-to-day basis.

To work with them is really good. The way we are in lesson with our tutors, these past few days we have upped our game so much because we know that we are going to be with these professional people.

(Student B&FC)

Employability

Some of the students explained how in this broadening of horizons for themselves they could also expand the visions of their own families by getting them to accept art as being legitimate, something that you could lead you to a job.

They more accept it [art] when they see that you can actually do something like that [getting paid to perform art]. It shows that there is actual jobs and actual stuff that you can do within this kind of work.

(Student B&FC)

² <https://www.blackpool.ac.uk/campus/university-centre>

Bringing *Générik Vapeur* to Blackpool generated a changing sense of how art might be valued and respected as a means of earning a living in a way that might never otherwise have been considered by many members of the community in Blackpool. This speaks directly to the shift implied in the *LeftCoast* programme that intends to give value to art as well as traditional entertainment.

The transformative potential of art in relation to people and place

Within the excitement was a feeling that the students were privy to something unknown or mysterious that was ready to be unleashed to the town, and from this point of view there was a great satisfaction in the idea that street art could be more accessible to a bigger and diverse audience, 'everybody able to come, no limits'.

It's more creative because someone might not watch shows or anything but if you're walking down the street and see something like that ...

(Student B&FC)

The students placed a great emphasis on their performance representing a changing Blackpool and therefore a sense of responsibility that goes beyond each individual's personal ambition. That is to say they were prepared to consider their position as citizens and representatives of the Blackpool community in collaborating with *Générik Vapeur*. The idea of connecting to an audience in the street naturally linked up to a sense of Blackpool changing and the students being part of this change. There was talk of Blackpool becoming rejuvenated, moving from being a traditional centre of entertainment to something else, something newer and more sophisticated.

Blackpool. ... it's not got the best reputation... it's not seen so much as a performance city, arts city, but it could be, so I think the purpose is to change it a bit and be seen more theatrical and arts like.

(Student B&FC)

Sometimes, students expressed their desire to be part of a change for Blackpool almost as a 'mission' encouraged by *Générik Vapeur*. They felt that with their friends and family coming to the event, all of them with different ideas about what to expect in *Bivouac* - some opposed to art, others thinking it was a 'bit weird', and others laughing off the blue performers as 'smurfs' - they could play a part in change for Blackpool. For *LeftCoast*, therefore, this is a fine example of how unusual and challenging art can be transformative for the local community and can also help meet the *Arts Council's* ambitions around Great Art for Everyone.

When bringing together professional artists from abroad and local students, there is a need for a strong bridge or nexus between them. In this case, *LeftCoast* had been working for some time with local arts teacher and producer Mykey Young, whose role in this bridging between professional artists and amateur *B&FC* students was essential to the project's success. Students agreed that they felt they owed a debt of gratitude to Mykey and that his involvement played a significant part in their commitment to participating in the show; for example, they were prepared to put in extra hours of work, in addition to their existing study commitments.

We didn't have to get involved in this thing on Saturday but we're willing to be a part of it in our own time. They [the teachers] are proud that we are like being independent and going and doing it ourselves, proud that we can do that, it makes them feel a bit better about it as well.

(Student B&FC)

The success of Young's role in giving support to the students and as a connection to the *B&FC* and artists came from personal skills and qualities including evident enthusiasm, pro-active engagement and absolute commitment to the project and a good relationship with students with roots in personal experience:

On a personal level it means quite a lot, helping to provide opportunities to young people ... not only professionally do I get to help them but I also get to provide them with an opportunity that I didn't necessarily have myself. It means quite a lot to me actually.

(Mykey Young, B&FC Teacher and Showzam! producer)

Expanded opportunities through partnerships

The already established connections between Mykey, *LeftCoast* and the college clearly provided the institutional basis that allowed the potentially complex relationships between *Showzam!*, *Générik Vapeur* and *B&FC* to become smooth flowing.

I helped *LeftCoast* out in the sense that I have been the key to the college... I've been the person who's been able to come in and talk on behalf of them, and help them reach our managers here at the college for the successful engagement of the students.

(Mykey Young, B&FC teacher and Showzam! producer)

As part of this successful partnership, it is clear that the support in the form of training and development that *LeftCoast* was able to provide for Mykey was highly valued. This was particularly important in order to fulfill one of *LeftCoast's* objectives of providing quality arts for Blackpool and Wyre. Young's background in entertainment was superficially closer to the Blackpool tradition of light entertainment rather than challenging art. Through working for *LeftCoast* as well as the *B&FC*, Young was able to contribute to efforts to combine the Blackpool tradition and the ambitions of *LeftCoast*. The project with *LeftCoast*, therefore, provided a positive, nurturing environment to expand the horizon of the college's work.

LeftCoast were never put off by the fact that I was from a mainstream background, they've helped me to adapt, I'm very interested in why art is art and why entertainment is entertainment, there's a massive grey area for me in the middle of it... my journey over the next few years is trying to look at that...trying to fuse things together that might make art more accessible...
(Mykey Young, *B&FC* teacher and *Showzam!* producer)

The *Bivouac* project as part of *Showzam!* was able to tap into a sense of potential change in the town's relationship with the arts. There was a feeling that local pride and a desire to evolve might be producing change in Blackpool.

At the moment it seems as if there is a collective, a group of people who want to do great things for Blackpool, who want it to be known for more than stags and hens, and I want the town to be known as a producing town, where great things are made, where things start, I hope we get to the point where we don't have to keep bringing everyone in. because we'll be making stuff and sending it out. There's a network developing... group of people that is expanding...
(Mykey Young, *B&FC* teacher and *Showzam!* producer)

Internationalism

As part of the *LeftCoast* programme, the emphasis on bringing international quality to Blackpool was clearly a powerful influence on the community of local students. When the researchers asked the students to draw pictures illustrating their most important feelings of anticipation with regards their collaboration with *Bivouac*, one of the most interesting recurring images was that of the comparison or merging of The Blackpool Tower with The Eiffel Tower, along with the French flag, all of which indicated a recognition of the international aspect of the artists and the breaking down of barriers, not just artistic barriers, but cultural and social barriers too.

I mean how many people get to say we did ballroom dancing in the centre of Blackpool as blue people with a French company?

(Student B&FC)

The artists of *Générik Vapeur* regard working with the local community as part of their artistic expression, which is sometimes difficult due to practical pressures of time and finance and also in order to protect the integrity of the work. They regard the Blackpool experience as having been part of the shows they have put on in England before, particularly in Great Yarmouth's *Out There* festival.

It's more than a connection with Blackpool because we didn't arrive directly to Blackpool. ... we have done a show in Great Yarmouth... and we established a relationship with the country...

(Artistic Director, Générik Vapeur)

This suggests that successful street art depends on developing relationships with the various institutions and stakeholders and cannot be expected to emerge from nothing, or simply as a result of budget and booking an act. This is why the connection with *Sea Change* (from Yarmouth) was important and it demonstrates how the *LeftCoast* policy of working for the longer term development of relationships and therefore community embeddedness, is vital to the process.

We established a relationship with the country, so some English artists made an exchange with us, and some went to festivals in France, ... then Newhaven, Brighton, Great Yarmouth... so this doesn't happen by chance, it's a question of development, not just floating in and making a show.

(Artistic Director, Générik Vapeur)

From the artists' perspective it was a great advantage to be able to work with committed arts students:

The students were particularly attentive and that surprised us ... They have an immediate perception of the movement and what they have to do, they listen, and they completely got the graphics that we make, and then they were also able to work safely (we have safety precautions), and that's great when you only have four days of workshop... you have to get on with it... and then they entered into the spirit of things...

(Artistic Director, Générik Vapeur)

Spectacle meets community – imagination, excitement and change

The student performers' experience of *Bivouac* was transformative in a way that suggests the kind of change that *LeftCoast* and Blackpool as a town and community are seeking: a long-term development from the entertainment industry to a quality arts programme with a national reach. This ambition implies a desired shift in perspective and identity for the town which was felt in this project, and this was reflected in the emotional reactions as described by the participating students in the artwork.



B&FC students performing in Bivouac

In their feedback to researchers, the students described their experience of performing as if it were a revolution or rebellion against norms and expectations. In our visual matrix³ feedback session, which gave the students a chance to express their emotions related to Bivouac in a creative and open manner, there was an idea that a French company of performers would be able to perform a kind of French revolution – “the French revolution, the paintings of the French revolution, the French flag, old metal canons like the metal steel drums [referring to the steel drums used in the show]” (Student *B&FC*) – which, in the students’ imaginations was turned into a British identity through sophisticated references to Guy Fawkes. The students

³ This approach is described in the methodology (p.87).

went on to compare the experience of *Bivouac* with contemporary rebellions, such as the *Occupy* movements throughout the world:

- The image of bonfire night, I had that image too and it brings to mind smell of sulphur, bright bangs and clouds of smoke, colours, and it also brings to my mind Guy Fawkes and something sinister as well...

(Student group feedback)

- If you go back to the masks it's like a hidden identity so they get to overthrow what's normal in order to right a wrong that's been done to them

- Anonymous, the Guy Fawkes mask.

(Student group feedback)

In a similar vein, and bringing out once more the excitement of participating in the show, the students compared their feelings of performing in *Bivouac* with the riot in the film *Billy Elliot*, where a working class boy is being swept away by talent and desire to dance. In this way, the *B&FC* students could identify the effect of the performing arts on the old and tired views of Blackpool.

In their feedback, students made references to masks, ranging from artistic references, (such as the masks of Jacques LeCoq -“a practitioner with masks, a shady character and a lot of anger”), to African masks, (“Animals/ Tribal dances/ Big masks/ Spyro, the game, they've got all these big masks and they're all really tribal”).

Through these references, the students discussed the excitement that participating in the performance inspired, the idea of overturning the norm through art and a feeling of togetherness as implied in the idea of a 'tribe', which echoes the way *Générik Vapeur* define themselves. Similarly, through the reflection on the image of the mask, the students, through the artwork, are questioning the identity of the town: can the 'mask' of Blackpool be removed and can the 'soul' behind the mask be reinvigorated?

These images were further developed by many students suggesting ideas of possible transformations, places where the bizarre could co-exist or even become reality, such as references to the fantasy world of Marvel comics, a fantasy world within a domestic setting. Another image of this kind was that of Dr. Who



The *Bivouac* 'dog'

and the dog, K-9, whose fantastic world expands into the living room through the TV set but who almost seems to have made an appearance in *Bivouac*:

- Dr. Who
- The dog, it was like the dog came back, K-9
- I can see where you're coming from...
- It did to me...
- Dr. Who brings to mind the Tardis, Dr. Who's Tardis and being transported to some other place.

(Student group feedback)

Audience: another kind of participation

The audience expressed excitement at the noise and the spectacular nature of the performance, and linked this to a new potential for Blackpool, referring both to the recognition of Blackpool's changing identity and the idea that this was money well spent:

Remember the explosions really... Remember the climbing down, from the building to the ground, yeah, that was... It was quite spectacular really. Quite new for Blackpool. Money well spent. I think it needs more, and try to turn Blackpool round.

(Ad-hoc interview with audience member 1)

Should see more of it in Blackpool, where everyone gets more involved

(Ad-hoc interview with audience member 2)

Many expressed enjoyment at the participative nature of the performance:

Yeah, this one was probably better [than the Christmas lights] because they've got the crowd jumping in and got them dancing and everything.

(Ad-hoc interview with audience member 2)

We just stopped one of the blue men and took pictures with us so that was good.

(Ad-hoc interview with audience member 3)

Yes, I liked when they was offering a cabbage like and a blue drink, I had a bite of the cabbage, it was horrible, I didn't have any of the blue drink...

(Ad-hoc interview with audience member 4)

And it was clear that many had come across spontaneously, not knowing what to expect, which resonated with the idea that people might go to see or become part of an arts performance if it is un-ticketed and in the street:

People from the arts college? Is it? Very good...We didn't know what was happening, we just came along to see, didn't know what was going on...I thought it was just going to be a little show.

(Ad-hoc interview with audience member 2)

There were visitors from outside Blackpool, such as Buxton and Preston, and it was perceived that this might be the kind of event that would open Blackpool out to the rest of the UK :

They should advertise it outside Blackpool more. People come down on holiday, they'll come to see it like.

(Ad-hoc interview with audience member 2)

Main learning points

- Bivouac has been an unequivocal success in achieving *LeftCoast* objectives. It has done this partly because it can be conceived of both as 'spectacle' and 'co-creation'. On the one hand, the audience was clearly dazzled by the show: the noise, the fireworks, and its relentless physical activity; on the other hand, Bivouac was also successful in engaging the street audience and the student participants in ways that were exciting and unusual, and beyond spectacle.
- Many members of the street audience came across the performance by chance, which demonstrates the advantage of producing a non-ticketed event which can attract people who might not otherwise engage with the arts.
- Bivouac has generated multiple effects through the development of an art work that: (1) engages with an institution (B&FC) through workshops that develop the skills, aspirations and employability in the arts for students and a legacy for Blackpool; (2) is available to a diverse range of the community by the nature of its freely accessible public street performance; (3) is at the same time a hugely entertaining spectacle that influences people's sense of the forms of public spectacle available in Blackpool.

- The way the artists previously engaged the students of B&FC in learning workshops brought about an added value to the student community. Including teaching and learning and participation in workshops as part of the artists' visit provides an extra dimension to what the artists can bring with teaching and learning at the College and this found fruition in the most significant community participation: actual performance as part of an international professional show.
- Bringing international artists from France enabled the students (and through them, their friends and families) to expand from a local to an international perspective. In the case of Blackpool, where there is a strong tradition of entertainment, the international aspect of *Bivouac* presented the local imaginary with an alternative that was clearly brought in from abroad, and therefore easier to accept in its 'foreignness' rather than be compared to the local, the tried and tested. By being international, *Bivouac* brought to Blackpool a fresh way of approaching its potential and a turning outwards and beyond, coupled with a sense of hope that such outward thinking can bring with it.
- In practical terms, *Bivouac* was a clear example of the success brought about by having an appropriate bridge between visiting artists and local community, as provided by the *B&FC* and the *LeftCoast* producer/teacher, Mykey Young. The project demonstrates the need to include a skilled and dedicated person in the role of mediator/broker between the various stakeholders. It further demonstrates the opportunity that such a project can provide for professional development for that person which, in turn, can help to contribute to future arts events in Blackpool
- The excitement and learning that was delivered by *Bivouac* to the students was spread out to their friends and families. This demonstrates how direct engagement by artists with a community group for whom the work can potentially become a life changing experience (given that the students are aiming to pursue careers in the arts) can have both a direct and lasting effect both on the people directly involved but also, through ripple effects, on other parts of the community.

Case Study 2: Banquet – combining co-creation with public events

Introduction

In the *Banquet* project, *LeftCoast* were aiming to develop something that would be visible to wider communities in Blackpool and Wyre and of high quality both artistically and in terms of engagement. *LeftCoast* staff described the ways in which the project represented an intended move towards long-term collaborations with local partner organisations, rather than those limited to the lifespan of a specific project. There are plans for *LeftCoast* to work with partners such as *Street Life*, *Grange Park* and *Ground Work* over many years.

Michael Trainor described how *Banquet* was intended to address important objectives from the wider *Creative People and Places Programme* by taking art to communities, unearthing lost food stories and practices and realising a project in collaboration with communities.

In the **first phase** of *Banquet* the arts practices drew their integrity from the ways in which they embedded themselves in the conditions, situations, daily lives, interests, and concerns of people. As is described in the pen portraits in section 2, six artists were commissioned by *LeftCoast* and introduced to different communities with the aim of developing high quality arts projects in ways that spoke to the local food history and culture of the town. Some of the projects (*Wabi Char*, *People's Pottery*, *Bread and Butter Stitches*) developed engagements through organisations, such as *Grow Blackpool* and *Ibbison Community Centre*. These connections helped to engage vulnerable groups - including those with mental health issues and older people with dementia - by working in collaboration with trusted community organisations. The *Wyre Salters* project made a more open call to the community of Wyre and in *Lost Orchards of LeftCoast* the artist Phillip Parr developed a community of interest around the project through walking around Blackpool in search of apple trees to pick.

In the **second phase**, *LeftCoast's* intention was that the artists and communities from the phase one projects and the wider public of Blackpool and Wyre would come together in *The Pavilion Theatre* in *The Winter Gardens* for a series of events which would explore and celebrate food, what it means to people in the community, where it comes from and the experience and pleasure of eating together. This would be presented in a variety of ways including performances, installations, talks and shared meals.

Combining the familiar with the unusual

The projects introduced new sensory experiences such as making and tasting food and drinks, encouraging people to revisit elements of their lives, histories and identities around food. For example, in the *Wabi Char* project, the 16th century Japanese wabi-cha ceremony, in which tea is made, served and drunk as a simple ritual for body and mind ('wabi' meaning beauty found in simple things and cha meaning tea), encouraged local people to explore and document their own tea making and drinking rituals. A series of pamphlets were produced to present individual tea-drinking rituals and these were distributed at various art and community events. *Wabi Char* created a space in which a gentle invocation of ideas of cultural exchange, commonality and difference was made possible, allowing a series of very different tea drinking rituals to be aired, compared and discussed. The project drew people from *The Ibbison Community Centre* and the associated *Memory Lane Café* for people with dementia together over a series of sessions to discuss recognisable customs and social rituals in Blackpool and Wyre through making and drinking tea together. Artist Caroline Jupp produced a series of high quality printed cards, which described people's own tea drinking rituals, for example the one below produced by Martin. These were distributed to people in the project and also at *The Food Hall Horseshoe* in phase two where Jupp made tea for the public and talked about the project. In this way the cards were both an archive of the work and an object for those who took part.

Tea Ritual No. 26 - Carnation Tea – Martin, Blackpool

It was the way m' Gramma used to make it for young'uns. This was in Bradford, Yorkshire. For the grown-ups, she would have fresh milk in the house and for the young'uns she'd pour Carnation cream in their tea, so it was very sweet. It were different than just drinking it straight out o' tin!

The kitchen was always the heart of the house. Gramma was always cooking or washing, so she either had her hands in sink, washing clothes, or she'd have them in baking bowl making buns or cakes. Nine times out of ten I'd be at the end of table watching her and treated to a cup o' tea and a bun.

If we had guests, like other members of family that we didn't see until Christmas, they were allowed in the front room, but we had to stay in the kitchen -- heard but not seen, basically. Only allowed in on special occasions and Sundays. The front room had the television in it and all her nice ornaments. If you were ever caught in there, you knew about it. She'd grab the walking stick and give you a quick whack over your head if she copped yer.

As soon as school were finished I were always down there. I were close to my Gramma, out of all the grand kids, well, I were the only boy, a little bit special. If I got in trouble or got hurt, owt like that, Gramma were the first there, rag out, bit of spit on it, and if you banged yer head, she'd rub a bit o' butter on it.

Memory, ritual and everyday experience

The tea drinking ritual is an example of how – in different ways – the artists made these phase one projects feel accessible. This was important for those from more vulnerable group to become engaged – such as those with mental health issues and older people with dementia - but so too was the opportunity to evoke and share early memories and stories of childhood and communities. For example, at The Memory Lane Café, the Ibbison community members told the research team how they had enjoyed tastes that they had never experienced before, and how some seemed strangely familiar. The project had allowed them to reconnect with lost pasts, to share these with others, allowing memories to be voiced, cherished and documented, and hence possibly held in the future.

In another of the phase one projects, *Bread & Butter Stitches*, artist Harriet Riddell set up her sewing machine in a care home for people with dementia. The evocative whir of a sewing machine became the means to stage conversations with residents about their food memories. The presence of the sewing machine involved something unexpected – because it isn't normally there in the care home - and something familiar – because the specific sound of the sewing machine evoked memories of childhood. In some cases Harriett produced personal portraits – such as the one below - whilst talking to people. People enjoyed the opportunity to reminisce and the memories and portraits produced were beautiful.



Portraits produced by Harriet Riddell in *Bread and Butter Stitches*

Bread and Butter Stitches also involved Harriet Riddell working with members of *The Blackpool Embroiders' Guild*, in order to help them develop their own practice. In the project, people from the Guild also visited people at *The Wainwright Club* for people

with dementia and collected their memories of food. One example – which is discussed on the project blog⁴ introduces Janet’s cloth which tells the story of Rose and Patrick who were from Oldham originally and came to Blackpool to retire. Sadly Rose got dementia which developed into Alzheimer’s so she is now in a home. Patrick lives in the flat they bought for their retirement and picks her up to take her to *The Empowerment Club*.

Cow heel: the lower part of a cow’s leg. Gail loves it. She used to cook it when first married, chopped it with stewing steak into a dish with water and onions into the oven, then thickened with Bisto. This was back when there used to be tripe shops.

When we interviewed people from the Guild they described how the project had altered their own practices, allowing them to develop new embroidery skills and also to develop a different appreciation of the potential for a new social role for the work of the Guild. However, the experiences of different community participants in *Bread and Butter Stitches* was less consistent. Many from the dementia group had enjoyed the project, but in a few some cases people felt that food stories had been collected from them for reasons they were unsure of. For example one person said:

... then the next time they came, they had tablecloths with things that we had mentioned, such as rabbits and food and things that we had said. It is all very nice, but we didn’t actually do anything, or see the point really. Sorry to be like this, I don’t want to be critical.

(Pat – Dementia group member– Wainwright club)

Whilst talking about the past and reconnecting with their memories was enjoyable, it was not always enough to create a sense of understanding of the purpose of the project and some participants would have preferred a clearer idea of how they were participating in the artistic work, beyond conversation.

Conversation through craft

This was not an issue in *The People’s Pottery Project*, where Emilie Taylor and Victoria Dawes took great care in creating the right relational conditions for working with a group of people with low level mental health problems at the *Cherry Tree Road Allotments*, who they worked with through the medium of slip pottery. Emilie and Victoria are interested in the ways in which the craft of making allows

⁴ <http://banquetblog.leftcoast.org.uk>

conversations to start. Over the summer of 2016 they ran a series of weekly workshops at *Groundwork's* community gardens. These have been developed as safe places for people, including those with mental health issues, to meet, learn about growing plants and socialise. The quality of the stories and images captured on the plates is indicative of the ways in which those who took part were open to the creative invitation of the project and also that they understood and appreciated the thinking behind it. The project generated forgotten stories, tributes to loved ones and food memorials and the quality of plates – as objects – also contributed to the sense of value amongst those who took part.



A pot produced in the People's Pottery Project decorated with images of Custard Cream biscuits

Here are comments from three of the community volunteers:

- I didn't think I would like it, you know what I mean, do it, but they [the artists] were good. Showed me and that ... now I have a bowl and plate with the vegetable that I have grown here. [It] really pleased me ... It was good!
- I liked talking to them as we made the bowls, Emilie and that, and being able to draw on them, pictures of Blackpool that were important to me, in my childhood, rock and the local chippy and pub.
- I couldn't believe how they looked when they came out of the kiln. They look great! [I'm] really happy.

The People's Pottery Project enabled people to discover a shared sense of purpose by connecting with artists. The artists worked in a patient and gentle fashion to create a space in which participants could try out new creative activities, explore their own food memories and share these in the company of others. As one of the *Grow Blackpool* workers put it:

They [Emilie and Victoria] brought integrity, patience joy and humour ... they gave the volunteers an opportunity to learn new skills, reconnect with their childhood memories, to recall these memories and provided space in their mind to think about their past.

(Grow Blackpool Worker – Cherry Tree Allotments)

In *Banquet Table* Artist Michael Powell collaborated with *Grow Blackpool*, *The Winnipeg Residents Association*, *Chepstow Allotment Group* and *Cherry Tree Allotment Group*, to create a series of plant pots to be placed on the tables at the phase two events - *Walk Talk Eat with Me* and *Dishing the Dirt*. Michael, who has a background in community work and youth justice, is a self-taught artist who is particularly interested in making things with natural and recycled materials. The pallets used in this project were chosen because they offered the opportunity to make something out of every day wooden materials used for delivering goods and then often thrown away or discarded. Michael visited *Grow Blackpool* at *Cherry Tree Allotments* over a few weeks and focused on working with some of those who came regularly to the allotment, mainly men. In a similar way to *The Peoples' Pottery Project*, this provided a framework in which the men could work alongside each other and share stories about making things and food. Michael took pallets he had collected to the allotments and worked with the men to design and building simple plant pots. The gentle way in which Michael worked, helped to develop people's artistic and imaginative capacities and engendered confidence and a spirit of camaraderie.

Linking art, place, identity and community across generations

Banquet invoked different and distinctive elements of local histories around food and food production and how these were related to landscapes and place-identities. It tried to appeal to a range of communities through art and food. Local identities were explored and supported through projects which rediscovered lost food production practices (*Wyre Salters*); food resources present and past were mapped (*Lost Orchards*); temporary communities were created to examine food issues (*Lost Orchards*; *Walk Talk Eat with Me*; *Dishing the Dirt*). The effect in many cases was to insert the arts into the communities through food related practices.

For example, in *Wyre Salters* people in Wyre were invited to join an arts project that combined cooking, science and art. The project was deliberately positioned in terms of adventure and the revival of the lost local tradition of sea-salt making. As the call out to communities suggested

No experience is necessary, just enthusiasm and persistence! We will learn together by trial, error and a bit of help from the experts. Once we have mastered the basics, the world of flavoured salt is our oyster, as they say...

The project attracted a cross-section of people of different ages. Those who took part described the ways in which the project had incited a sense of their own potential and they communicated a desire to undertake other collaborative projects in the future and even an intention to lead them.

In *Lost Orchards of LeftCoast*, theatre producer Phillip Parr searched for abandoned fruit trees across Blackpool and Wyre, walking widely around the area and knocking on doors to ask if he could pick the fruit and using this as an opportunity to find out people's stories about fruit picking and cooking with apples. He also made apple jelly and dried apple slices to serve at the banquet. He wrote a series of posts about his visits to Blackpool on WordPress⁵. In a post in June 2015 he wrote

- There were lots of stories – Angie spoke about how, when she was a child, the family picked all the apples from the tree in the garden, wrapped them in paper to keep them for Christmas and into the New Year, and then stored them under beds and in dark places. The whole house had a lovely smell of apples.

- And I found some new apple trees in the hall garden – a King of Pippins and a James Grieve – along with a plum and a pear, a great sign for the future. I'm looking forward to finding more.

Phillip also worked with local children and their parents to draw a map of all the apple trees and orchards in the Blackpool area. Parents who took part described the ways in which the project had provided them with an opportunity to retrace forgotten elements of their childhoods, to remember experiences of the outdoors that they had not recalled for many years, but that turned out to be indelibly printed in their minds. For the children, it provided an opportunity to learn about making

⁵ <https://lostorchardsoftheleftcoast.wordpress.com>

food that was sweet, enjoyable and natural, whilst also enjoying being outdoors in their own local area. One of the workers explained the process as follows:

We had lost orchards of the *LeftCoast* and we had a guy who was mapping all the apples across the area, it sounds a bit random, but our families had the knowledge and were able to tell us where the apples were and this guy went out with them. We took loads of pictures of children in random gardens picking apples. ... He picked the apples, he cooked the apples, he came in first thing in the morning and didn't leave till 4pm in the afternoon. We went out with thirty children and their parents and picked and dried the apples. He made apple crisps, they had never done that before. ... He brought out some apple jam that he made before ... these were the rosier apples that he had that you can ever imagine with speckles of pink in them. He dried the apples the children had never experienced anything like that before. ... He made them dried apple and crisp and children had never eaten or experienced anything as tasty and as fresh as that before.

(Carol Whiteside - Mereside Childrens' Centre manager)

Carol's comments demonstrate the ways in which the project was creative in an unusual and unexpected way. It had allowed parents and children to look at local histories of apples and orchards together, to discuss these in terms of their current communities and eating habits and to make food and eat it together. The dried apples and Jelly were made available as a part of the *Horseshoe Foodhall* in *The Winter Gardens*.

Encountering otherness through food and people

Some elements of the project, especially in phase two, were deliberately more provocative and unsettling seeking to stimulate the development of a critical consciousness and posing challenging questions about food sustainability and inequality.

In-Situ environment artist and food activist Kerry Morrison and *FoodRiot* chef Gill Watson hosted a performance and meal combined entitled *Dishing the Dirt*, which questioned where our food comes from. The meal was a ticketed event which involved a range of unusual and challenging ingredients. As the promotional material suggested

Not always for the faint hearted, the meal will include a host of culinary surprises as science and art collide to create an unforgettable experience for audiences...

The scene that greeted people at *Dishing the Dirt* was one of relative darkness and greenery. The banquet tables were arranged in the shape of a horseshoe and the guests were asked to take a seat, browse the menu and talk to those people that were sitting either side of them on the table. Kerry and Gill talked the guests through a variety of courses, including various kinds of fish, shellfish, snails, duck, cricket, earthworms, milk and honey. Video footage was shown of the various plants, sea food and animals that they were eating and they were encouraged to talk to each other to discuss how they could devise their own menu from their back gardens and from nature in general.

The hall itself was adorned with green plants and plant pots from the *Grow Blackpool* allotments and guests were invited to peruse the edible plants and vegetables. Soil expert Dr. Charlie Clutterbuck explained about the multitude of insects and worms that populated a small area of soil. He projected a magnified live image of soil on the screen above the guests' heads, teeming with insects. There was also a talk from a vegan taxidermist. Jewellery made from insects was also circulated for people to touch and to view. Wood, soil, honey and bee cones were circulated for guests to smell and touch.

Guests found it very different to anything they had experienced, but enjoyable.

- I enjoyed it. It was really interesting. The food was nice, and different, but it shows what we can eat from our own gardens and from nature.
(Audience Member – *Dishing the Dirt*)
- I couldn't eat all the courses, the insects were a bit much, but, yes, great fun and it amazing what you can eat, really . . .
(Audience Member – *Dishing the Dirt*)

Challenging perceptions through storytelling

Throughout the week running up to the banquet events at *The Winter Gardens* theatre company *Unfinished Business* worked with young people from Blackpool homeless charity *Streetlife*, which provides shelter and support to young people under 26. The collaboration in the *Banquet* project addressed questions which included: Where is home to you? And, what is it? On Friday evening a new show

called *Walk, Talk, Eat With Me* was delivered at *The Winter Gardens*. This began on the sea front and audience members were given a personal tour through the town by one of the young people. The banquet which followed involved stories of homelessness shared by young people and hence the creation of two temporary communities and a powerful mode of public storytelling.

Walk Talk Eat with Me elicited quite a broad range of responses. Many people interviewed on the night mentioned 'enjoyment', 'fun', 'anarchy', 'co-operation', 'community' and a 'sense of bonding'. A few comments made to the researchers on the night included:

- I really enjoyed tonight, it felt exciting and fun to do this together.
(Audience Member 1 – Banquet)
- I was thinking, is this really happening in Blackpool? Just brilliant.
(Audience Member 2 – Banquet)
- Loved this evening, it was a very challenging experience and rates up there with the best experiences I have had with performance.
(Audience Member 3 – Banquet)

A few audience members reported feeling uncomfortable. Some were able to recognise the skill with which young people's involvement had been managed and the different roles they had taken on in the performance – as tour guides, as performers and as question masters - others felt uncomfortable about young people presenting highly personal material in this public forum. However, the young people who participated from *Streetlife* found it a challenging, yet valuable experience. This kind of creative engagement and public performance was completely new to them and the project worker for *Streetlife* explained that the project had given them a "massive confidence boost ..." when they realised that they could do it.

In an interview after the event, *Unfinished Business* identified the collaboration with *Street Life* and the involvement and guidance provided by an experienced youth worker as central to creating a process that worked. However, they also suggested that the short time scale of the project had worked against the objective of a genuine collaboration with the young people, because there was less time to work together to develop the performance and to prepare the staging together.

Through using the production of food to bring together local people, who under usual circumstances, would not meet and engage with each other, *Dishing the Dirt*,

and *Walk Talk Eat with Me* enabled those who participated to understand and empathise with a worldview other than their own. Each experience took the participants into a different world, one that had always been around them, but which many had never explored, opened up to, or questioned. Yet, through producing and eating food together, participants had been challenged, emotionally, psychologically and morally. Those from disadvantaged and discriminated communities had articulated elements of their life experiences, encountered new opportunities for self-expression, and the possibility of hope and change. Hence, these projects managed to provide the opportunity for questioning unfounded assumptions. The projects were ambitious, unsettling for some and challenging for all who participated. They brought diverse people from disconnected communities into a place that was uncomfortable and encouraged them to explore their mutual understanding of life through food.

Bridging local co-produced projects and public facing events

In the *Food Hall Horseshoe* the area around *The Pavilion Theatre* hosted food themed stalls, installations and talks exploring all aspects of food, sustainability and health. The location of the food hall in *The Winter Gardens* raised visitor numbers and many people who were there for other events wandered in. More than 1000 people took part over the two days. Some of the strands from phase one (*The Wyre Salters*, *Wabi Char* and *Lost Orchards*) had stalls at the event and some people who took part in these strands either visited the food hall or helped out on the stalls. Other community organisations representing issues such as dementia care were represented. Comments from the ad hoc interviews included:

- It feels nice, I love the exchange-y conversations that are happening
(*Ad hoc interview – Foodhall Horseshoe*)
- It looks like a bad village fete, but what is happening here is great
(*Ad hoc interview – Foodhall Horseshoe*)
- It feels a bit dowdy compared to the banquet space.
(*Ad hoc interview – Foodhall Horseshoe*)

However, there were mixed feelings and responses to the *Food Hall Horseshoe*. The low participation from people who took part in the co-created projects, alongside responses from *LeftCoast* staff seem to suggest that linking fine-grained community level arts practices to large public events had been a complex process. To the more

confident and assertive participants – such as those in *Wyre Salters* and *The Embroiderers' Guild* – the finale of the project provided a valued public showcase for their work, whereas the more vulnerable and shy participants felt disconnected and found it difficult to take part. In *Banquet Table* very few participants attended the final events at *The Winter Gardens* and the artist Michael Powell commented

The uptake was good on the allotment, but ... it's a big step to take them somewhere else. It can be about a lot of things, a lack of confidence, a personal inclination not to go to big public spaces, the fact some people don't usually go into the city centre

(Michael Powell – Artist, Banquet Table project)

Main Learning Points

- The six phase one community projects – *Wyre Salters*, *Bread and Butter Stiches*, *People's Pottery*, *Lost Orchards of LeftCoast* and *Banquet Table* demonstrate that, within *Banquet*, *LeftCoast* was able to commission artists capable of collaborating with communities and developing projects involving participatory forms of sharing, creative expression.
- The phase two public events – *Walk Talk Eat with Me*, *Dishing the Dirt* - offered new gastronomic and social experiences to those ready and willing to receive them.
- The *Banquet* project is an example of the less spectacular elements of *LeftCoast's* work, but one which has invited people to think about how basic needs are met in local cultural forms and how these have changed.
- Through *Banquet* *LeftCoast* has worked to collaborate with the wider community sector and has successfully engaged a broad cross-section of local people.
- The disconnection between the first phase projects and the second phase events suggests that some form of mediation or support is necessary to sustain the engagement and inclusion of more vulnerable citizens.

Case Study 3: Rossall Beach – co-commissioned community art

Introduction

Rossall Beach demonstrates the successes and risks associated with the *LeftCoast* approach to co-commissioning art with communities, giving those communities, often represented by already established community groups, leadership and autonomy in the art commissioning process. In this way, the aim is to ensure that the authentic desires and aspirations of the community are realised and that the ensuing collaboration can lead to a sense of ownership and a lasting legacy.

In this process, brokered initially by Michael Trainor and sustained by Laura Jamieson of *LeftCoast*, the artists collective *Invisible Flock*⁶ were commissioned by the *Rossall Beach Residents and Community Group* (RBR&C)⁷ to collaborate in stimulating local involvement and creative reflection on the work of the RBR&C group - to raise awareness of the environmental heritage and preservation of the local beach. The RBR&C hoped to involve a broader community

We wanted to attract young people and people interested in the environment. Not just a bunch of old folk that sit drinking tea.
(Organiser 'A', RBR&C)

The partnership lasted 18 months and culminated in a celebration event on the 11th September 2016.

One of the group's main activities is clearing up waste, most of which has been washed ashore from the sea. They are interested in light touch environmental protection

We're not rampant environmentalists, we want to improve this area in a normal way that normal people can engage with. It's not about not washing your hair for 12 months because you might plug the waterways, it's about picking the dog muck up and looking after the environment, not dropping litter, picking up what's there...
(Organiser 'A', RBR&C)

Their concern touches on other community interests - for example, ensuring socially acceptable behaviour on the promenade and safe speed limits.

⁶ <http://invisibleflock.com>

⁷ <http://www.rossallbeach.org.uk/index.html>

Meeting and sharing time with others is also important. The sense of shared pride in their work is palpable, but comes with a feeling of preoccupation about the group's future prospects given the fact that a large number of members are in retirement.

Invisible Flock are a group of artists based in Leeds who work with community engagement. Within the field of the collaborative arts, Invisible Flock specialise in creative technology, digital design, illustration, interaction design and interactive fiction.

We create artworks that invite people to re-imagine the world they live in and how they participate in it, using technology to incite meaningful encounters.

(<http://invisibleflock.com>)

The commissioning process

The commissioning process was taken up by Laura Jamieson on behalf of *LeftCoast* and the group relied heavily on Laura's guidance. From a *LeftCoast* perspective, the challenge was to ensure a sense of ownership without excessive intervention, requiring a careful balance of support, advice and facilitation. The engagement of the community with the process began long before the artists arrived. In the case of *RBR&C*, this process was enjoyable and educational, as acknowledged by the group organisers.

The actual process of shortlisting and finding artists was quite interesting.
(Organiser 'A', *RBR&C*)

In the commissioning process the Trustees voted unanimously for *Invisible Flock*. This was a challenging choice for the *RBR&C* group, considering their initial tendency to aim for a simple public object such as a statue; doubtless, the choice was encouraged by the Laura Jamieson's facilitation of the commissioning process:

[Laura] arranged a meeting with us to write the brief. She was clever, she asked us about the beach the area - what we liked and didn't like about it, and from all the information she put a brief together. And she did a wonderful job with the brief, very well written. And 50 artists showed interest. So interest was generated, but we didn't have a clue... Laura advised that we shouldn't worry too much about what they are proposing but rather 'would you like to work with them?'

(Organiser 'B', RBR&C)

This was vital in bridging the gap between the community group and socially engaged artists, especially bearing in mind that this gap can often appear to be very large, especially to those involved in commissioning art for the first time in their lives.

Before giving up working I was an electrical engineer and I couldn't get my head around it.

(Organiser 'B', RBR&C)

Furthermore, the whole process of commissioning, which included thinking about alternative proposals opened minds and instigated a learning process that changed attitudes and perceptions of 'art' and inspired confidence in their decision-making:

We have a better idea about what an artist can do. We've seen what the other artists could have done for us, so we've got an idea. For example one of the artists was mainly going to do a film mainly about the community group, and we didn't go with them because we thought 'well we could do a bit of filming', and we wanted to do something that we can't do. Some other artists were about doing a show on the promenade, actors and things like that... maybe in the future...

(Organiser 'B', RBR&C)

Project overview

During an 18-month period the central artistic focus was on the collection of waste plastic from the beach inspired by the fact that 'by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the sea'.⁸ The plastic was to be collected as part of the beach clean and also through donations from the local community recycled and transformed through cutting edge technology, including a machine for grinding plastic and a 3-D printer. The aim was to create sculptures of seabirds which could adorn rather than spoil the beach. A connection would be made between global environmental situation and the group's local efforts. The artists organized formal residency and workshop dates (7-9 June; and 20-21 June 2016) and other visits to the area, including two workshops with schools with the aim of meeting local residents, exploring ideas, developing and sharing the 3D printing techniques, and collecting plastic waste for

⁸ (<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jan/19/more-plastic-than-fish-in-the-sea-by-2050-warns-ellen-macarthur>)

recycling. A further aspect of the project consisted in asking residents to leave the artists 'messages' in bottles that could be incorporated into the final artwork objects. These were later inscribed into the wings and feathers of sea bird sculptures.



Recycled plastic birds



Detail of bird feathers with messages from the community

On the 11 September, from 1.00-4.00pm, a celebration event was organised to launch a pop up exhibition about the project, including the presentation of the finished artworks before they were temporarily fixed onto poles on the beach, where they would light up and become part of the landscape as the tide drew in.

Community engagement with the artists

As it turned out there were some mismatched perceptions between the various stakeholders in the project:

I expected a process of collaboration with us and the community, in terms of what would be delivered as an outcome.

(Organiser 'A', RBR&C)

There was also a frustration with the nature of this collaboration:

I thought we would go through a process of community engagement, brainstorming, workshop sessions, talking to different people, asking questions on the beach.

(Organiser 'A', RBR&C)

On the part of the community who were responsible for the budget there was frustration that the artists were not able to spend more time and had other commitments apart from Rossall Beach. Laura described the anxiety as a “meltdown” whenever the group felt that the artists were not around, not communicating. At times it looked as if the project might collapse. That the process continued despite these difficulties was in large measure due to Laura’s vigilance and support. Complaints about perceived lack of communication were overcome through setting up a Facebook page, where the artists and the group could exchange ideas. Despite these difficulties, the group learnt about the value of process over outcome in the socially engaged arts:

Initially they wanted a sculpture on the beach, like a permanent bronze sculpture. Now they understand the importance of working with an artist in that process.

(Laura Jamieson – Producer Neighbourhood Commissions)

This was borne out by one of the organisers who explained that the commissioning process had been akin to a lesson in the arts and that by having to sift through the other proposals for the commission, his eyes were opened as to what might be called ‘art’.

Left Coast and the RBR&C group concurred that the artists were faced with technological challenges that seemed to divert them from the engagement side of the project, which was important to a group that had had no previous experience of working with artists:

...they came over for a week and stayed here and that was useful. Generally we were ok working with them. It was quite strange for us working with artists...

(Organiser 'B', RBR&C)

The artists appeared to become distracted by the technological problems:

You can't just take plastic and recycle into more plastic... once plastic it loses some of its properties. So you have to mix it with some more plastic. So that process took a lot longer, they had to grind this plastic down before they could melt it, and they had to have a grinder made. Couldn't buy one. Long time, then it didn't work properly.

(Organiser 'B', RBR&C)

They got carried away with the technology side of things ... the whole collecting the bottle from the community with the message in was a lovely concept and could have worked a lot better, if they had put more time into that element of it.

(Laura Jamieson – Producer Neighbourhood Commissions)

Considering the enthusiasm and goodwill displayed at the celebration event, this does seem to have been a missed opportunity:

People collaborating, collecting the plastic, breaking it down, it was all a learning curve. How to make something out of that, and how the heck to get plastic on a 3d printer. Chopping plastic up, putting it into a machine, little bits, heated up and melted... [whole process is explained]. The message in a bottle... the messages, most of them are hidden because it's personal... printed in the feathers... birds tomorrow on the perch, above the sea and illuminated... at night by solar lighting, a fascinating process.

(Trustee RBR&C)

Dealing with disappointment

Partly as a result of the fragility of the process and the lightness of the community/artist engagement, the RBR&C group was left somewhat disappointed with the outcome.

I think they ran out of time at the end of the project. There would have been four of them [the sculptures] on four separate perches... Could have set up a proper programme, by this time this will have happened... and stick to it. Instead it's almost just gone along... no structure... We've got two birds, it's cost us 16 grand...

(Organiser 'B', RBR&C)

We didn't want to spend the budget and say we've had a right nice day out but we've got nothing left. We're in our 9th year and this is the first time we've ever worked with anybody and been given anything. We wanted to make it count. And we get a plywood board... that we've got to store and we can't manoeuvre, can't carry, it's useless!

(Organiser 'A', RBR&C)

The reference to the 'plywood board' is to a piece that the artists created to record the process of engagement leading to the creation of the sculptures, displayed with the birds inside the final pop up exhibition. Dissatisfaction with this is striking considering that the RBR&C group spend a lot of time visiting schools and disseminating their work, and it could be used for that purpose.



The wooden board recording the timeline of the Discarded Things project for Rossall Beach

The artists' perspective

There was a mismatch between the artists' feedback and that of the RBR&C group:

We've delivered the project we said we were going to deliver. Getting the community group to collect plastic, and to mobilise the community at large to donate plastic, and content and messages and transforming that into 3d images that are going to sit out there, ... with the sculptures, they will be noticed... but there were some practicalities of process that ... an effect that the community wanted to have was exposure, and the artistic commission has an effect of process and final product. The journey to get there has meant that these two things have not always played well together. But now, the way they are talking about the project and how they are showing the birds, show that they are proud of it.

(Artist, Invisible Flock)

The point of agreement is that also from the artists' perspective, the mediation of Left Coast has been critical:

Left Coast as a broker has been really great, actually more than a broker, to have that someone who can speak on both sides, and help communicate between the two parties, groups. I think that's quite a useful thing to have, like a mediator, We just kept having meetings, any time something came up we would just regroup and move on again.

(Artist, Invisible Flock)

Project management

While the mediation of Left Coast was invaluable in keeping the project going, forward planning and a clear structure and frame of reference to deal with difficulties as they arise might have been helpful. Laura points out that a Statement of Intent would take some of the pressure off the mediator. Both pre-briefing and debriefing about the nature of socially engaged practice and its processes, together with the professional value that an artist brings, is essential, and so are formalised and consistent two way channels of communication, as the issue of branding and the consequent breakdown in trust reveals

The group didn't like the branding, and they went into complete meltdown mode. They didn't have any trust that the artists could take that on board and reframe it in some way. The artists were doing a lot of work behind the scenes that they didn't know about, and lack of belief, trust.

(Laura Jamieson – Producer Neighbourhood Commissions)

The contrast between this opinion of the branding and how it was presented to the group and that of one of the organisers is oppositional and significant:

When Invisible Flock did the initial branding it was rubbish! It might fit 'your' brief but doesn't fit the demographic of the people we're trying to attract. And the answer I got was the guy who done it designs covers for Bloomsbury Press. 'And...'??! They just wouldn't listen.

(Organiser 'A', RBR&C)

In the absence of a perceived ability to 'listen' to the community there are unfortunate overtones here of snobbery or one-upmanship on the part of the 'educated' artists in relation to the community group.

The Celebration Event

The event was a pleasant, good-natured affair, but brought out the strained relationships between community and artists. This was remarked upon:

You can see them today, they stick together. We've all been talking to people, making everybody feel welcome, company is valued, and they've not budged, they've not really engaged with us!

(Organiser 'A', RBR&C)

On the community celebration day, they had no input into at all. They have presented the birds but not had any input...

(Laura Jamieson – Producer Neighbourhood Commissions)

The responsibility for organising many of the features of the day once again fell to Laura:

She organised the cabin, for example, we knew we were going to have an exhibition but didn't know how that was going to happen. Don't know what we would have done without the cabin. I'm not sure it was part of the scheme that Invisible Flock had in mind.

(Organiser 'B', RBR&C)

It is true to say that the artists themselves were not present in the cabin exhibition, where there was another artist, brought in by LeftCoast doing activities with children, and a stall setting out the RBR&C group's activities, as well as some of the community members offering food to visitors.

Main learning points

- Artists in community commissions should be prepared to fully collaborate with the community group and formally agree a process with them. This might seem an obvious point but needs to be inscribed explicitly in initial agreements, so that artists do not, as in this case, get distracted by technical difficulties, and necessary adjustments to the process are jointly agreed.
- The mediating and facilitation role of *LeftCoast* has been critical to the success of the co-commissioned community art projects. It was *LeftCoast* that provided the nexus between the artists and the local community group regarded the idea of commissioning and working with professional artists as extremely alien and anxiety provoking, especially when the co-commissioning process included giving responsibility for the budget to the community group.
- More preparatory work might partially alleviate this burden, including, for example a Statement of Intent for clarity and a Facebook page initiated from the start for maintaining the flow of communication between face to face meetings. These can be used as reference points during the course of the artistic and collaborative process. Continued and structured Communication processes are vital.
- The commissioning process was a steep learning curve for the community group, but resulted in a sense of satisfaction and a final choice of artist that maybe would not have been expected of them had they not been accompanied by *LeftCoast*. The commissioning process is also a process about learning about the different possibilities of art interventions in community, which was both interesting to the group and left open the

possibility of future work. This overall teaching and learning aspect of the commissioning process could be overtly emphasised in the future partly to facilitate the commissioning process itself but also to instil curiosity, interest and engagement in the group.

Case Study 4: Spare Parts – A co-commissioned community festival

Introduction

LeftCoast describes *Spare Parts* as ‘The UK’s only festival of art, performance and spectacle dedicated to transport and travel’. Realised as part of *Fleetwood Festival of Transport (FFoT)*, originally called *Tram Sunday*, has been running for 30 years and attracts around 60,000 people annually to the town. It is organised by a volunteer committee and since 2014 *LeftCoast* and *Wyre Council* have been working in collaboration with the committee to realise an arts strand named *Spare Parts*.

In 2016 *Spare Parts* secured funding from the *Arts Council England* under *Grants for the Arts*. This money helped to fund a Festival Director for the first time – Adam McGuigan. Adam has introduced a new strand of work around community involvement. Another new element in 2016 was the expansion of the *Spare Parts* festival into Memorial Park with a series of installations and performances as well as a high wire act as the finale.



Street Performances at Spare Parts

Collaboration, trust and independence

The collaboration between *Wyre Borough Council* and *LeftCoast* around the festival has been developing over a number of years, but has been structured from the start towards an objective of financial and commissioning independence. In an area of low

incomes and limited inward investment, where the original festival is realised on a shoe string and by volunteers, the organisers felt a particular pressure to 'spend wisely' and a worry about what might be expected of them in the future. *LeftCoast's* objective has been to upscale the ambition of the arts offering over time and to secure the interest and commitment of the local committee, as well as developing their expertise as arts commissioners. The fact that inside three years *Spare Parts* has successfully won a grant from the *Arts Council England* (under *Grants for the Arts*) indicates that this strategy has been well planned and successfully delivered.

LeftCoast has supported the voluntary committee in developing commissioning skills through taking them to see many different art works in other places as well as collaborating in commissioning discussions and decisions. Despite not feeling like arts commissioning experts, and certainly not being keen to claim such expertise, it was clear to the research team that the voluntary committee had developed some confidence in co-commissioning art works for the festival and a capable approach to discussing and debating what was appropriate for the Fleetwood context. An example of this emerged when *LeftCoast* suggested an artwork which would have involved a Viking longboat being burned on the beach. As people from the organising committee said:

- It would have been a fantastic spectacle, but people of Fleetwood would have taken against it.

- They would have seen it as a reference. These people have been paid to scupper their boats, scupper their livelihoods, and so you can't do that and then respect their lives. But I have seen that show and it is spectacular.

(Committee Members – Spare Parts)

Here, the fear is that the burning of a Viking longboat might bring to mind, even in an art event, the 'scuppering' of the town's fishing boats and livelihoods, which is highly significant and difficult issue for many people in the town.

However, despite the trust between the committee members and *LeftCoast*, it was clear that there was in some ways still a felt gap with the wider art world and arts professionals. For example, one of the volunteers reflected on the way he had felt at a recent meeting with *Arts Council England*, in which he had experienced difficulties and differences in language, vision and philosophy.

Last Monday, the meeting with the Arts Council, I found it quite challenging and it made me question deeper involvement. It was the degree to which

these folk were committed to their professional objectives, through the arts, whereas I am not sure we have any objectives, professional otherwise, and to be sat at a table as a, presumably reasonably important stakeholder, and to see that going on in front of me, I found that really quite challenging. ... The Issue was what do we have to contribute to this whole thing, and how do we fit it into their worldview because it is a very different worldview, to a couple of old gits who are trying to make something happen in their town for the benefit of the town.

(Committee Member – Spare Parts)

This quote wonderfully captures the difficult role the voluntary committee members take on in holding two different worlds and two different worldviews in tension. It demonstrates that even those committed to and involved with extending arts engagement into towns like Fleetwood can, in some ways, still end up feeling on the margins of the art world themselves.

Merging organisational intent through collaboration

The collaboration between *LeftCoast* and *FFoT*, which produced the *Spare Parts* festival, is one which involves a merging of organisational intent. *LeftCoast's* interest was partly strategic, being drawn by an existing transport festival with a large and well-established audience as well as a defined local identity. *FFoT* was drawn by a desire to develop the existing festival in a new direction, to appeal to a broader demographic and attract new audiences. The *Spare Parts* festival has commissioned work which has provoked an appetite amongst local people for new cultural experiences and engaged with artists capable of nourishing this. Many people interviewed by the research team reported enjoying the new experiences and elements that it has introduced to the wider festival. This has been documented both in this research as well as in two previous rounds of evaluation in 2014 (Blackpool Council) and 2015 (Wootton, Williams and Lane).

Balancing nostalgia and innovation

One of the main themes raised by the voluntary organising committee in the research was the struggle to balance the old or nostalgic and the new. They contrasted the traditional pedigree of the transport festival with the 'newness' of the idea of introducing the arts, as well as the fact that this brings new people into the town, as performers and as audience members.

Image of the parade coming down and a guy in a beautiful old car frantically polishing his car and not looking at the parade. It's a balance between a traditional festival and an arts festival. It has to be carefully kept in check, that one isn't bigger than the other.

(Committee Member – Spare Parts)



Images of car owners and performers from the festival

The sense of holding the traditional and the novel in tension was felt to be especially important and was expressed in terms of having two conflicting feelings – pride and disappointment – about the event at the same time. These feelings expressed by the committee members were often ambivalent, fearful and frustrating, which emphasises the difficulty and responsibility of meeting the expectations of the local community and simultaneously opening out to the challenges of engaging with the art world.

There's a fear that we have been given a treasure that we are expected to cherish and develop, enhance and we might not do that. The whole thing has a weighted responsibility that leads hopefully to a creative fear that causes you to struggle and strive to do more so that the treasure can be passed on.

(Committee Member – Spare Parts)

These difficulties of balancing an amateur transport festival organised and delivered by local volunteers ('realised for less than the price of a second hand car'), with a professional art festival organised by a professional director and including paid professional artists most of whom are from other regions or other countries ('you're the expensive bit') were important concerns.

I was challenged ... to think, how do we possibly keep innovating? One heck of a challenge! How do we find the resources – and I'm thinking particularly financial - to make this kind of thing happen? Because that is incredibly challenging.

(Committee Member – Spare Parts)

There a fear that by developing the festival they might be seen as interfering and spoiling a cherished object. Here the idea of the classic cars is quite important. When we were at the festival we interviewed two car owners who were not entirely enthusiastic about the changes introduced by *Spare Parts* at the *FFoT*. They said they were happy to do an interview but didn't want to be identified. Their cars were absolutely pristine and highly polished. They said that they liked the festival but that you now 'have to beware of the sticky fingers brigade' and they told us that 'too many kids touch the cars here', whereas at other car festivals people have more respect. These comments remind us that classic cars are cherished and maintained as close to their original state as possible and for some this feeling extends also to the festival itself. However, there is a linked fear that for the festival, as with the town itself, to do nothing is to risk a reducing interest and appeal. This idea was developed further in an interview with one of the festival committee members:

Well, we are dealing with a 30 year old festival, and you will know and ... your audience ages with you. So we find that if we hadn't done something, and if LeftCoast hadn't come in with something or something else hadn't have happened then we would have been dealing with a reducing interest in the whole thing, and this town. A lot of what we do around this festival is about the economic growth, the economic sustenance actually of the town. And this town needs this day and they need it in more ways than they might think and they need it to expand their mind as well as their pockets as well as to give them a really good day out.

(Committee Member – Spare Parts)

Main learning points

- The collaboration between LeftCoast, the volunteer committee and Wyre Borough Council around *Spare Parts* has, inside three years, successfully won a grant from the Arts Council (under Grant for Arts) which indicates that the move towards sustainability and independence has well planned from the outset.

- LeftCoast has supported the committee in developing skills and confidence on commissioning art works for the festival. However, the weight of responsibility borne by the organising committee is significant and the appointment of a Festival Director is an important step in maintaining a move to independence.
- This is a shared responsibility which has successfully commissioned work which provokes an appetite amongst local people for new cultural experiences and has worked with artists capable of nourishing this.
- The continued involvement and support of LeftCoast in the medium term might be important, because the gap between the arts world – its language, philosophy and vision – and community partners, even those with arts experience and great commitment, can still be great.

Case Study 5: Absent – commissioning artistically ambitious work

Introduction

In the panorama of different art projects in the *LeftCoast* programme, *Absent* stands alone in terms of artistic ambition and challenge. The experience it offered, of engaging as an audience member by wandering, at your own pace and without guidance, through a fictional hotel which is in the process of being refurbished for the modern world – the Blackpool of the 21st century – was a singular sensation and probably represented a unique experience for most people. Unlike the spectacles or co-created artworks in the rest of the programme, *Absent* was more like a ‘Happening’, blurring the boundaries between artworks, theatre and real life and demanding of the active participation of the audience who were obliged to move through the created spaces. For this reason, the outcome and feedback received from audience members were of a different form and especially sophisticated and reflexive in nature. As such, they provide a significant diversity of experience to the *LeftCoast* programme. The feedback that we received from audience participants was recorded in a visual matrix some time after the experience.

The claustrophobia of a lost past

The experience of walking through dimly lit corridors and stumbling across rooms in the 'hotel' incited an overall claustrophobic sensation which was interpreted as a metaphor for what it is like to live in Blackpool today, especially compared to a lost past. This was symbolised through the combination of experience of the artwork, a sadness of modern living and a different quality of sadness – almost a nostalgia - with what has been lost. Three audience members speak of:

Being trapped and having to conform. Where is the individual, the individuality because you are pressured to look the same these days.

A dream I had when I was a child that I was trapped in this sort of triangular box. It was quite uncomfortable breathing in there.

There's quite a separation between you and the action in there whether it was live or what. There was this sense that you were impotent to do anything because there was always that degree of separation between you and whatever was going on

The powerful sense of trapped conformity to a template of modern existence, which reduces each individual to a clone of others was a powerful reaction to the endless characterless repetitions expressed in the new hotel for Blackpool in *Absent*. The experience of the angles and corridors of the new hotel seem to become a place of confinement where it was difficult to breath. This was combined with the feeling of separation from everything, including the separateness from a nostalgic past evoked in the audience reaction to *Absent*, emphasising these feelings of sadness, loneliness and claustrophobia.

Loneliness and the thin veneer of modern life

Expressions of loneliness ranged from the modern life experience of being situated in a world of superficial veneers to a sense of the artificiality of digital repetition, as represented in the show's repeated monitor images in some of the rooms. This was the loneliness of being unable to find a presence in a real world that we actually inhabit and yet the impossibility of locating yourself in the supposed past grandeur of another world.

Participants reported feelings evoked by the artwork that they had missed out on some enjoyment and company that was gone forever and not replaced by anything new which was associated to participants' feelings about Blackpool's past:

A visit to the Imperial Hotel. We went on Heritage Open Days and we were taken round the back and shown the Turkish bath which was plastered over in the 1960s. Hearing the history of different rooms and how this was changed for that and how the Palm Court is now a restaurant. The glory days are gone...

(Audience member – Absent)

Although the loneliness was an essential aspect of the fictional protagonist in *Absent*, Maggie Morgan, it was also a loneliness felt by the audience as part of the experience:

Although it was about her she was very ghostly and she was hardly there. That feeling of loneliness wasn't just her loneliness, I felt lonely myself.

(Audience member – Absent)

Loneliness, then, emerges as an existential fact of *Absent*, where the audience are encouraged to question the meaning of an individual's life, especially a modern existence, where ironically being like everybody else leads to a questioning of your own existence and a feeling that if you do not conform to life's template, as symbolised in the new budget hotel in *Absent*, you can only be alone.

Voyeurism, surveillance and perception

Audience members also reported a sinister feeling of voyeurism, surveillance, the exercise of hidden power, prohibited acts and a sense of agency in contravening prohibition. It was almost as if contravening the prohibition implied in voyeurism was the only way out of the claustrophobic feeling created by the labyrinthine corridors, secret doors through wardrobes and the silent vigilance of the staff in the show:

Peepholes from the show. It kind of links to the first image as well because people always come with all these questions of whether

you should or shouldn't look through and it is kind of linked to agency and whether I should look through peepholes.

(Audience member – Absent)

Some audience members commented on the strangeness in *Absent* of being in a hotel room and peering into a mirror, only to see someone (the protagonist, Maggie) staring back at you, which brought up questions of what is seen and unseen:

Now I'm thinking about the panopticon or of being forced into a space where you might not want to be and it all seems to link back to the question of who is peering at whom.

(Audience member – Absent)

With this, the audience felt able to discuss the nature of surveillance as part of modern life, as displayed in the budget hotel of *Absent*:

1984 a television on every wall, observing and being observed. Then the idea that this all we can aspire to in modern life. This kind of repetitious boxy modern bland hotel taking over something more elegant.

(Audience member – Absent)

In the audience feedback, people expressed the idea from *Absent* that to be human we need to break free from the 'hotel of life', where you can't really live fully ('Can you ever live in a hotel?' someone asks), and maybe find our way to another, better way of living, that which Maggie could never have, and that which maybe somehow defines the image of Blackpool as a place for hotels and escapism from life through the entertainments industry. This comes across in comments about the difference between the hotel life of Blackpool and Blackpool as a living town:

There was a heyday and stuff like the Imperial Hotel but how much was that true for Blackpool as a whole. Made me think that if the budget hotels had been operating in our area in the early days that is what Blackpool would be known for.

(Audience member – Absent)

The corridors and rooms of *Absent* encouraged the audience to consider challenging their perceptions of normality, their own perceptions, the perceptions of those who perceive us through surveillance and also our own voyeuristic perceptions of others. The hope is that a change of perception will lead to changes of reality leading to direct action for a better, a healthier change for members of the audience and for Blackpool, and a possibility of agency and worth in individual action:

The smugness of all the images of the CEO of the hotel group. I wanted to punch him. He looked far too arrogant and far too happy with himself. I wanted to take him down a peg or two.
(*Audience member – Absent*)

The virtual, the real and the ghostly

This reflection on the seen and unseen acquired a more profound meaning as *Absent* encouraged the audience to experience a sense of the unreal while still being 'real' in their physical bodies. Instead of suspending disbelief, the audience found itself actually inside the fantasy. This was compared by audience members to Alice in Wonderland, where the realities of place and space are questioned and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, where walking through a wardrobe (as the audience were required to in *Absent*) leads to a magical place. It was also compared to physically entering a virtual computer game:

It was like a virtual game and associating it with ghostliness. That feeling that you're not quite sure when you're there whether it's real or it's virtual or dreamlike or ghostly and that's a very strange feeling to have when you yourself are alive and walking through the place – don't quite know where you are.
(*Audience member – Absent*)

Some audience members discussed the temptation to 'test reality' by actually considering lying on the hotel beds in *Absent*, where the question of what is and isn't permitted again comes to the fore and is combined with the question of what is real or unreal:

...at one stage I thought 'shall I just lie on the bed?' But I didn't dare to.
(*Audience member – Absent*)

In this way, the audience was able to consider new ways of seeing and thinking which took them to another world:

You've entered a world but you weren't absolutely sure what it was all about. You weren't sure where you were placed in it. So how did you relate to it if you didn't know what your place was?
(Audience member – Absent)

Faded glory – regeneration

The idea of Blackpool as a place of a faded glorious past (which now seems almost virtual, faded and unreal), now in need of regeneration was also in the minds of the audience, and people commented on the set of the budget hotel in *Absent* as being like a 'veneer' that was covering up the more wonderful possibilities of Blackpool's past:

All the modern elements were gradually peeled back and exposed to us and then gradually the hotel room and floor that did really peel away this veneer and that is where this kind of underlying more attractive and compelling architecture started to merge but you were left with a kind of sadness because you realise that it was just covering up what had been there and what could be there
(Audience member – Absent)

However, the potential nostalgia for the better past of Blackpool's heyday was never felt to be fulfilled. The virtual experience of entering the past in *Absent* never provided an easy escape route into that past but rather challenged the audience to consider their own agency and imaginations. The need for a new imaginary came to light in a reflection from an audience member about the falseness of objects in the real world as described in the following metaphor:

I went to an antique fair with my mum and she got interested in a tea set and she wondered if they were really antique but the lady said 'no I've got a whole boxful and they're selling hotcakes'.
(Audience member – Absent)

Art and authenticity

The question of authenticity was explored through references to art, inspired both by the fake reproductions of great art that adorned the budget hotel space in *Absent* and by the authentic experience of the audience in the sensory space of the artwork. In the context of Blackpool and *LeftCoast's* programmatic ambitions for the area, these thoughts touch directly to the core of the fine line between 'art' and 'non-art' or entertainment, which Blackpool is famous for but struggles to maintain in contemporary Britain. The quality of modernity and what the budget hotel brings with it is superficial and shallow art designed uniquely to adorn the walls:

The complete uniformity of the art on the walls in each room and the terrible quality of the reproduction and the awful framing. The sense of well I'd rather not bother with that there but the sense that you have to have it there because you have to lift the atmosphere of the room in some way. So you use some of the most common artistic images.

(Audience member – Absent)

The difficulty of seeing the 'real thing' was expressed by one person as being like a visit to an art gallery where there are so many people in the room it is impossible to view the paintings. In a final reflection from another audience member, behaviour is more important than the artwork as an object:

When The Mona Lisa painting was stored and people would still go and see the space where it hung as though there was some sort of collective memory of what that might have been. Maybe sometimes the art isn't important and it's the human behaviour around it.

(Audience member – Absent)

In this, we have a message about the need for individual behavioural change and action for change rather than passive acceptance of art and whatever art is trying to communicate. This may have implications about *Absent* and the kind of art that *Absent* brought to Blackpool, an art of action, agency and imagination, based on the willingness of the audience to interact and not on a predisposition to passively observe.

Main learning points

- *Absent* was unusual in the *LeftCoast* programme in the sense that it was neither spectacle nor co-creation. Its impact on those who attended was, however, profound and moving. Taking place in the iconic *Winter Gardens*, participants had a direct opportunity to reimagine an actual site, as well as to explore complex feelings about place and people's relationship to place. In this reimagining of Blackpool, the entertainment industry is located in a past that is waiting to be transformed into something else.
- *Absent* demonstrated an ambitious and broadened scope of the *LeftCoast* programme. The subtle and sophisticated audience response showed the value of pushing the boundaries of the programme in this way. Despite the modest audience numbers it attracted, such a piece can provide an experience that increases overall diversity of the programme and its artistic ambitions. Audiences for artworks - radically new and strange in this context - need to be built. *Absent* was a valuable starting point.
- The artwork was made more acceptable and locally relevant to the audience through its location in the *Winter Gardens* and parallels that audience members were able to make between the show and Blackpool. Unusual art might be successfully introduced into the *LeftCoast* programme through careful selection of subject matter and location that makes strangeness palatable through other familiarities being made present.
- The inclusion of this piece into the *LeftCoast* programme lifts the overall status of the programme in terms of quality and range, potentially creating the groundwork for the continued transformation of Blackpool towards being nationally recognised as a centre for the arts.

Section 4 – Discussion

Modes of engagement

Spectacle and co-creation

LeftCoast, as part of the *Creative People and Places* programme, has chosen to focus its efforts on exploring the benefits of Spectacle and Co-creation, and in this way to open out a range of avenues that together can lead to the development of and engagement with the arts in Blackpool and Wyre. The achievement of the programme largely depends on its successful delivery to the public of these diverse forms, and in doing so aims to send out a message of inclusivity in the arts. Through Spectacle, the programme has sought to generate an interest in the arts amongst people who might have neither the time nor inclination to actually become involved in co-creation and community development, but whose imaginations and understanding of ‘art’ might be stimulated by shows and events. Large public events such as *Showzam!* - including shows such as *Klaxon*, *Bivouac*, *Close Act Theatre*, *Compagnie du Théâtre du Vertige*⁹ - are all intended to appeal to a wider public who, if they are from Blackpool, are used to shows that provide entertainment, but not necessarily to art and events that sometimes challenge commonly held ideas and feelings. In contrast, the use of Co-creation in the programme aims to generate a more intimate and incremental public interest in the arts through collaboration and participation in artistic processes between artists and community peers, where a major part of the artistic challenge is in the act of actually creating or at least actively participating in an arts practice with a community interest or situation.

We have seen in the course of our work that Spectacle and Co-creation are often brought together in distinctive combinations within individual projects and we believe that the success of such fusions represent a central achievement of the programme. An example of this is provided by *Bivouac*, which is the subject of a detailed case study in section 2. There, we see how the artists and young people were able to deliver a work together which generated new perspectives on the town, a sense of pride, a feeling of empowerment and hope for the emergence of a lasting legacy capable of creating new opportunities in the future. Another example of joining Spectacle and Co-creation is provided by *Banquet*, which is also the subject of a case study in section 2. In phase one of this project genuine and authentic connections between artists and communities were apparent to the research team. However, in this case the connections between the co-creation in phase one and the

⁹ The full programme for *Showzam!* 2016 can be seen here:
https://issuu.com/leftcoastuk/docs/showzam__2016_programme

public events in phase two were problematic; in Michael Trainor's words the phases could have been 'more joined up'. It should be acknowledged that *Creative People and Places* is conceived by Arts Council England as an action research programme, which involves risk taking and iterative cycles of learning. *LeftCoast's* ambitious merging of approaches to developing arts engagement in Blackpool and Wyre is entirely consistent with this and worthy of further attention and development.

Co-commissioned community art

As has been observed in other work on this subject, community commissioning processes, by their very nature, involve a merging of different desires, interests and forms of expertise (Froggett and Roy, 2016). It is vitally important that the process developed around co-commissioned projects is able to ensure that such differences are recognised and respected. In research on a community commissioning project in Bristol, Froggett and Roy (ibid) note that when community members whose knowledge about the arts was limited were involved in co-commissioning, they were drawn – initially at least - to the appeal of permanently sited artworks, seeing these as the best route to achieving a tangible legacy and value for money from the projects. Spending on the arts can be perceived by the public as less important than other pressing local priorities (O'Neill and Doherty, 2013). Risk aversion can dominate local political processes where the disbursement of funds is involved, and many would argue that this is quite properly the case.

The co-commissioning strand of the *LeftCoast* programme, reflects growing interest in community commissioning in various areas in the UK (Froggett and Roy, 2016), and within the *Creative People and Places* programme. In each of the five *Neighbourhood Commissions* developed so far, *LeftCoast* has worked with the community to co-commission an arts project seen as relevant by a local organisation. A series of 'Go Sees' with the community groups has introduced a broad range of artist approaches and enabled exploration of the contribution of arts practices to the aspirations and objectives of the community. *LeftCoast* has respected the views and decisions of active community members in each of the projects, seeking to influence decisions and to insert art specific ideas and expertise, but always respecting the democracy of the community commissioning approach. This has included respecting decisions that communities have made about commissioning, even when *LeftCoast* staff might have felt another artist would work better.

LeftCoast's approach to this work indicates how a gentle facilitation can become an enjoyable, non-patronising form of education for community partners – bearing in

mind that many of these community groups had neither worked with artists nor socially engaged arts processes before. Making commissioning decisions themselves rather than merely agreeing to a decision from the *LeftCoast* facilitator was culturally empowering. It required considerable skills of facilitation and mediation from the *LeftCoast* team. The importance of effective implementation of democratic principles to the success of the *Neighbourhood Commissions* cannot be overstated, and it can help to bridge cultural gaps between the community groups and socially engaged artists.

Facilitation of the Co-commission: process and outcomes

Local community groups tend to be drawn together by a desire to change things, often in quite a deliberate and locally focused way. They may struggle therefore with projects that privilege process over outcome. Community leaders often want to be seen to be achieving concrete outcomes, and in the co-commissioning process – from artist selection to implementation project – their *raison d'être* can be severely challenged by the uncertainty inherent in the processes of creativity in the socially engaged arts. This is the challenge for the *LeftCoast* facilitator who, at the same time, has to deal with the various demands and expectations of the artist under pressure. In the *Neighbourhood Commissions* the artists have had to develop the social skills required to interface with the community, the wider public and the art world all at the same time. As Froggett and Roy (2016) point out matters concerning aesthetic judgment inevitably bear on the emotional life of a community and can touch nerves, arouse shared passions and foster disagreements and conflicts. In the *LeftCoast* co-commissions, the quality of the facilitation of the multiple pressure points felt by artists has been indispensable, managing to hold the tensions between community group and artists that might otherwise have led to the breakdown of projects.

The experience gained from these five projects should allow for better forward planning and anticipation of possible issues. As we saw in the Case Study for *Rossall Beach* (section 2), Laura Jamieson has suggested that a more formal structure in the commissioning process including something like a Statement of Intent, would take some of the pressure off the mediator. We also noted that some of the solutions for improving communications between community group and artists included setting up a Facebook page. Such measures could be instigated at the beginning of the process rather than waiting for a need to arise through anxiety and disagreement, thereby reducing the need for a full-blown intervention on the part of the *LeftCoast* team.

Merging art and entertainment

Blackpool is a seaside resort famous among other cultural forms for stag nights and hen do's, slot machines and bingo. Its entertainments have been known to sacrifice innovation in favour of certain popularity – or at least such is its reputation.

Showzam! and *Spare Parts* are emblematic of the ways in which LeftCoast has sought to tap into existing cultural infrastructures and established audiences in the region. This has elements of both respect and opportunism: respect for the established cultural forms and existing local festivals and programmes, (such as the circus at the Tower as part of *Showzam!* and *Showzam!* itself, or the *Spare Parts* festival), as well as the opportunity they provide to demonstrate programme reach and to develop something new within them. This deliberate strategy on the part of *LeftCoast* has merged art and entertainment in a way that taps into the precise nature of a place and its traditions, developing a relationship with its audiences. It has thus been able to introduce more artistically ambitious work which might otherwise not have been attractive, relevant or understood.

This strategy makes sense in theory and was also successful in practice. Some of this has been described in the Case Studies in section 2, but it is worth emphasising the on-going efforts on the part of the *LeftCoast* team to capitalise on Blackpool's tradition of seaside entertainment, and regenerating these traditions through the arts. Such a focus on gradual change that finds unrealised potential for innovation within a tradition rather than attacking it keeps the public on board. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Showzam!* with its long-standing appeal, maintained and developed in a turn towards artistic quality and internationalism.

The lesson here is that an arts organisation needs to be respectful, knowledgeable and in touch with its place and sphere of influence if it is to stand any chance of realising its artistic ambitions. It can learn from the successes of other similar towns. It is no coincidence that the Great Yarmouth producers, *Sea Change Arts*, were asked to produce the 2016 *Showzam!* and had been previously responsible for bringing *Bivouac* to Great Yarmouth. It also made sense to promote *Showzam!* given its significance in attracting more than 25,000 visitors to Blackpool, boosting Blackpool's economy by about two million pounds for total programme outlay in the region of £200K.

In sum *LeftCoast* has demonstrated how art and entertainment can be merged and that the virtue of doing so is that existing vernacular cultural traditions, infrastructure and reputation and existing local audiences are respected whilst the culturally familiar is infused with more challenging artistic programming over time.

Internationalisation

Julia Turpin (former Executive Director) and Michael Trainor (Artistic Director) both described how generating an international feel was one important way in which *LeftCoast* could develop the arts in Blackpool and Wyre. They each reported that experiments with international programming undertaken earlier in the programme had met with an uneven reception, which indicates the delicate balance that has to be struck between place, expectation and ‘otherness’.

In some cases (for example *Klaxon* – discussed below) the foreign in both its otherness and fascination was emphasised through the languages the performers spoke. Music offset the ‘foreignness’ of the verbal language while the ringmaster’s words were ‘translated’ into Spanish! This play on the familiar and the incomprehensible was intriguing rather than alienating and encouraged older audience members to extend their concept of circus.

Example - *Klaxon Akoreacro*

In the French *Akoreacro*’s circus *Klaxon*, as part of *Showzam!* international aspects of performances were contained, encapsulated within a tradition, and therefore respected by the audience. By being both old and new at the same time, *Klaxon*, was acceptable in its foreignness to an audience that consisted of a diverse mix of families and generations from the local area, some from places like Barnsley, Buxton, Manchester and Wigan, and others with an expressed interest in international artists and circuses.

Through the circus unusual jazz music could be introduced and enjoyed. The performers might have been from elsewhere, but they were admired for being highly skilled trapeze artists and improvising actors who could transcend the local – international cultural gap and hence also possibly between Blackpool and Europe at the time of the EU referendum debate, when the potential for parochialism and national exclusivity was high.

LeftCoast’s success lies in the ways in which it has commissioned work that has made difference feel curious, puzzling and even enchanting while providing points of cultural connection. The skill with which it has done this, demonstrates that carefully pitched internationalism can help meld art and entertainment, opening minds to the excitements and gratifications of difference.

Developing audiences and taking risks - artistically ambitious work

LeftCoast developed relationships of trust with local audiences upscaling the artistic ambition of the work developed by the programme and commissioned over time. In the *Neighbourhood Commissions* we saw how in working to co-produce projects and

programmes *LeftCoast* encouraged communities to take risks. Developing reciprocal long-term relationships, such as those with the voluntary committee for *Spare Parts* festival, makes this easier.

The *LeftCoast* team has shown a capacity to be both ambitious and sensitive to local reticence, as, for example, when the organizing committee for the *Spare Parts* festival were able to reject the idea of having a Viking Longboat burned on the beach (discussed in section 2), which, in this case, aroused unpleasant and unwanted associations with the decline of the fishing industry in Fleetwood.

In *Banquet*, *Dishing the Dirt* and *Walk Talk Eat with Me*, the programme pushed the boundaries for some of the audience, and yet these projects were generally accepted. *Bivouac* was radical, but accepted partly because of the participation of local students. The most radical of all the *LeftCoast* programmes we have looked at is *Absent*, which is described in a case study in section 2. This is an example of *LeftCoast's* willingness and desire to take risks and yet gain respect as a provider of stimulating and provocative work that clearly goes beyond the regular fare of the Blackpool entertainment industry.

Education partnerships

The only project we have explored in our work on *LeftCoast* which included an explicit focus on education was *Bivouac*, in which an important component has been the opportunities provided for education, training and development. In this project, the engagement with the college and the participation of the students was significant in supporting the possibility of longer term effects (or legacies) for the future. The relationship with the college, the professional development opportunity for a local producer as well as for the students all combined to support the potential for a quality local network of art and performance professionals for Blackpool.

The involvement of College teacher Mykey Young led to a number of positive effects, which demonstrate the value of a trusted and respected mentor or facilitator who has the social skills to mediate between a community group and the artist(s). In another context, but with similar effects and demonstrating similar skills, we saw this in Laura Jamieson's work with in the *Neighbourhood Commissions*.

LeftCoast's work in this area demonstrates that engaging in new learning environments and actual public performance can be a source of great pride and satisfaction to friends, families and the wider community, who become more

interested in engaging with unfamiliar art. *Bivouac* showed how working to realize a large and challenging performance with a professional international company could be a source of personal and professional development for students. It demonstrated the potential importance of working in partnership between an education provider and visiting artists, embedding new expertise and laying the foundations for the development of the Blackpool arts scene in the future. Indeed, teachers and students made reference to past *Showzams* (*Cirque Bijoux* and the 'umbrella project' for example) indicating a sustainable development of the arts in Blackpool. The partnership with *B&FC* could also support wider development of the college curriculum beyond commercial theatre.

Sustainable effects and impacts - different forms of value

Engaged citizens, experience and wellbeing

There is considerable debate about what forms of impact should emerge from projects such as those funded within the *Creative People and Places* programme and how these should be understood, evaluated and evidenced. Inevitably, the demand for accountability and transparency in publicly-funded programmes requires evidence of impacts. If participation in culture does have a health benefit it is important to know what kind of participation is required to achieve this impact and how cultural services can respond to evidence of this kind.

A great deal of international research attests to the ongoing interest in such issues. A substantial body of evidence sets out the established health benefits of individual and group engagement in cultural activities (Ruiz, 2004; Leadbetter and O'Connor, 2013). Taken together this evidence suggests that people who participate in culture are more likely to report good health, to be satisfied with their lives and to live longer than those who do not. In many studies these findings remain true even when a series of demographic variables is taken into account.

A different emphasis is put forward in the introduction to the AHRC's Cultural Value Project, in which Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) argue:

... we need to begin by looking at the actual experience of culture and the arts rather than the ancillary effects of this experience. ... The value begins there, with something fundamental and irreducible

This argument is relevant to this evaluation: it is very difficult in project of this sort -

which operates within a relatively short time frame of 16 months and where much of the project related work is cross-sectional in nature and lacks long term follow up - to identify the specific health outcomes that individual projects stimulate either for individuals or communities. Feelings, experiences and intentions reported during and at the end of projects may change over time. Nevertheless, what we *are* able to elicit and identify with some clarity are elements of 'actual experience' and how that experience relates to a sense of place, time and connection with Blackpool and the wider world. Furthermore, there is a considerable body of research and scholarship (for example, Wilkinson 2005 and Putnam 2000) that has alerted us to the health effects of community connectivity and solidarity, and it is clear that here the *LeftCoast* programme has helped to build networks and relationships founded on the pleasures of shared cultural experience.

Many people who had taken part in co-produced projects were prompted by their experience to do new things either on their own or with other people. For example, the *Blackpool Embroiderers' Guild* intended to continue fostering working relationships with community and social groups once the *Bread & Butter Stitches* project was completed. The *Wyre Salters* group were looking for a new project to undertake together. In this regard we would argue that elements of programmes such as *Banquet* and *Showzam!* could justifiably be regarded as representing forms of 'excellence' in engagement, because in many cases taking part in the project had raised people's interest in their own creativity and in some cases had increased people's ambition and desire to participate in similar projects in the future and even to realise them independently. In the case of *Spare Parts* festival, the introduction of a participatory focus for 2016 by new Director Adam McGuigan has achieved some results in terms of the numbers of local people involved, but it's probably too early to make any firm claims about the sustainability or effects of these.

In the co-produced components of projects we looked at we saw numerous examples of the ways in which involvement in meaningful artistic and cultural production could open out new forms of expression, symbolism and conversation. The research team saw how projects such as *Banquet* had set in motion imaginative processes in individuals and communities that had allowed people to establish new connections, to imagine how things might be changed and even possibly to reconsider their lives and situations. As artist from the Lost Orchard's project Phillip Parr put it:

[It's in the] lives of individual people who have talked and might continue to talk about it, people who have built a little bit of trust, or who have told a story to me or someone else.

In the best examples these practices were able to emphasise the benefits of modes of public storytelling that celebrated marginalized communities, lost childhoods and experiences of otherness which had often left behind enduring and resistant feelings of isolation and alienation. An example is provided by *Walk, Talk, Eat With Me*, which is discussed in detail in section 2. Another example is provided by Phillip Parr's *Lost Orchards* of *LeftCoast* project, which also provided opportunities for public telling giving public value to private – often hidden – histories and traditions. The subtle, low visibility and not immediately obvious legacy of these practices lies in the effects of 'creating spaces for public storytelling across generations' and in which hidden and stigmatised histories can be attended.

These are important ways in which arts processes offer something distinctive and different from what are often more deliberate interventions provided in community development and social care. These co-created practices, which provide valuable opportunities for social gathering, for provoking new artistic and imaginative capacities and for public storytelling, are important strengths of the *LeftCoast* which respond to the objectives of the wider *Creative People and Places* programme.

A reimagined sense of the town

A great deal of emphasis has been placed in arguments about the instrumental value of the arts on the potential contribution of the development of major cultural buildings and centres to projects around – especially urban – regeneration. However Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) draw an important distinction between the 'regeneration of places and the regeneration of communities', suggesting that 'a key component of cultural value' lies in 'the ability of arts and cultural experience to shape reflective citizens'. This argument seems central to the objectives of the *Creative People and Places* programme and *LeftCoast's* models of practice.

The projects we have looked at have explored a wide range of personal, community and social issues including ageing, dementia, homelessness, substance use, abuse, mental health, residential care, regeneration and the environment. In contrast to other forms of public involvement and engagement – such as Neighbourhood Partnerships, consultation exercises, information and activist campaigns – which often engage the rational thinking subject, immersion in the work of *LeftCoast* has

often extended the capacity of communities to explore and express hitherto unarticulated lifeworlds and situations in ways which preserve their vitality and help them shape and express their aspirations.

Many people we interviewed used words such as 'authenticity' to describe what they had taken from the experience of taking part in projects. Sometimes, too, a sense that they had 'found a voice' and even had it heard by others in their communities and elsewhere. In this way the co-created projects evoked in people a sensuous appreciation of their surroundings and an embodied sense of connection with other people. This was often valued most strongly by those who had previously felt isolated or disconnected for different reasons. Animation, or re-animation, of the links between individuals, communities and the town through the cultural field is a valuable way in which the programme contributes to a reimagining of Blackpool and Wyre.

Contributions such as *Absent*, the subject of a Case Study in section 2, also offered ways for people to reimagine and reconsider their relationship to Blackpool. *Absent* was quite different from the other projects we looked at. Its impact on those who attended was, however, profound and moving, and in this sense testifies to the value of introducing unusual and ambitious artworks to the town. Taking place in the iconic *Winter Gardens*, participants had a direct opportunity to reimagine an actual site, as well as experience complex feelings about place and people's relationship to place. In this reimagining of Blackpool, the entertainment industry is located in a past that is waiting to be transformed into something else. *Bivouac* also offered audiences the chance to re-imagine Blackpool in new ways, temporarily creating a town with blue figures scaling buildings.

The art commissioned and co-commissioned by *LeftCoast* has stimulated reimaginings of Blackpool that might be held and transferred into the future, potentially becoming real. Imaginative resources such as these nourish the ability to conceive how things might be different and can ultimately support local processes of regeneration.

Section 3 - Key learning points

Spectacle and co-creation

The five projects we have looked at in this evaluation demonstrate the skill with which *LeftCoast* has been able to use these different approaches. It has combined spectacle and co-creation in many of its projects and the examples of *Banquet* and *Bivouac* are instructive in relation to the benefits and challenges of combining the two. It is our view that in terms of the objective of developing an ecology of arts commissioning which responds to the context of Blackpool and Wyre as well as the objectives of *Creative People and Places*, *LeftCoast* should continue to pursue both approaches.

- Spectacle plays to Blackpool's existing cultural forms and history of putting on a show, offering the opportunity to insert art through entertainment, to develop relationships of trust with audiences and to calibrate the levels of provocation and artistic risk taking on the basis of experience.
- Co-production offers the opportunity to engage with people where they are at, unearthing lost stories, histories, habits, practices and traditions, making them visible and reinserting these into the local cultural space.

Co-commissioning

Co-commissioning work has been a key area of success for *LeftCoast*. It is important to state that this is an increasingly popular, but still relatively new mode of practice in the sector, without established models to work to. A range of challenges has emerged in developing a good enough process capable of responding to the different desires, interests, expertise and aspirations of communities and artists involved, keeping everyone on board, and providing expert input without working against the implied democracy of the projects. This task should not be underestimated. Even those community partners with arts experience and great commitment can find engaging with the arts world bemusing on occasion because of difficulties and differences in language, vision and philosophy.

LeftCoast has taken on the considerable task of holding two different worlds and two different worldviews in tension in its co-commissioning enterprises and done so with considerable expertise. It has developed a way of working in which community

groups can be supported in the commissioning process through the delivery of consistent, careful guidance in which *LeftCoast* holds the relations needed to promote and maintain co-commissioned projects.

Sustainability and effects – relationships, engagement and wellbeing

Context

There is considerable debate about what forms of impact are desirable from programmes such as *LeftCoast*. They are more pressing given the level of *Arts Council* funding invested in the *Creative People and Places* programme nationally at a time in which many Local Authorities feel obliged to withdraw investment from the arts. Such concerns are reflected in the brief for this research in which we are asked to identify any sustainable impacts which can be attributed to engagement with the programme, as well as identifying ‘any discernable impact of attendance or engagement ... on wellbeing’. Given the cross-sectional nature of our research we are not well placed to provide incontrovertible evidence on whether processes invoked by the programme will be sustained and developed over time. However by considering our findings about local experiences of the programme (see Section on sustainable impacts above) alongside research which has demonstrated the importance of cultural capital and social connectivity to health and wellbeing, we can say with some confidence that the programme is making a significant difference to the area.

Partnerships

LeftCoast has signalled its intent to develop a series of long-term strategic relationships with local organisations. Here it has worked to influence the structures, practices and objectives of these organisations (for example *Spare Parts*, *Grow Blackpool*, *Street Life*) through collaboration. In some cases there is a need for *LeftCoast* to sustain these specific relationships in the medium term and in others this is less pressing. Such recognition allows it to be more effective with its resources and to tap into and put into effect a number of networks in Blackpool and Wyre over the course of the programme.

In projects such as *Spare Parts*, in which the relationships will operate on a more medium term basis, the collaboration between *Wyre Borough Council* and *LeftCoast* around the festival has also been structured from the start towards an objective of financial and commissioning independence. The fact that inside three years *Spare Parts* has successfully won a grant from the *Arts Council England* (under *Grants for*

the Arts) indicates that this strategy has been well planned and successfully delivered.

Excellence in art and engagement

Elements of the five projects can justifiably be regarded as representing 'excellence' in engagement. We have been able to document how taking part in projects has affected people in a range of positive ways. In many cases involvement has increased people's sense of connection to others around them, as well as creating an ambition and desire to take part in similar projects in the future and some said they intended to find new projects and realise them independently.

LeftCoast has also shown itself to be capable of combining excellent art with excellent engagement. Projects such as *Bivouac* have led some students to believe seriously for the first time that they might be able to realise a career in the arts, not confined to the world of entertainment, and to have this aspiration taken seriously by their families.

Also, in the spectacular elements of the programme we identified unequivocal displays of happiness, excitement and pride amongst audiences for all the events discussed in this report. Many people were proud that artistically ambitious and spectacular shows like *Bivouac* and *Klaxon* were happening in Blackpool, indicating local self-esteem and confidence were also boosted.

Section 6 - Conclusions

The *LeftCoast* programme is making important contributions to individuals and communities across the Blackpool and Wyre region.

It has offered some sections of the population creative participation with artists in ways that they would not otherwise have experienced, and these collaborations have enhanced a shared sense of citizenship and community in the area.

In other cases, *LeftCoast* has successfully managed spectacular arts events that have shifted perceptions in Blackpool audiences from an enjoyment of entertainment, which is part of the town's heritage, to an appreciation of art, which is part of the *LeftCoast* mission.

The *LeftCoast* programme has shown itself to be sensitive to local engagement in several ways by:

- (1) adapting to the more traditional and customary festivals in the region, injecting into these a different, artistic perspective
- (2) respecting tradition, such as the circus performances in the Blackpool Tower, yet commissioning alternative circus performances
- (3) forging partnerships between renowned international artists and local communities
- (4) proactively engaging with communities and neighbourhoods and creating points of connection between local concerns and arts practices.

In all these cases, in slightly different ways, we have documented how modes of participation have led to an impact that is changing the ways people in Blackpool view the arts. Furthermore, this impact can be seen in legacies that have continued to resonate after the artist has left. The impact has not been consistent throughout the programme, and we have noted examples that have been less successful. In the main, however, the *LeftCoast* strategy in programming and commissioning, coupled with skills of the staff, has produced an exciting and worthwhile model for future development.

This positive result is further supported by the open-mindedness of *LeftCoast* in being open to learning from the less successful projects, and therefore being in a position to improve these for the future.

It is also clear that larger spectacular events have been thought through for sustainability, whether this is made manifest through institutional participation, such as the *B&FC*, which guarantees continuity, or by other means, such as securing commissioning and financial independence.

LeftCoast has successfully introduced international artists in ways that speak to local interests and concerns. This provides an alternative political backdrop to Blackpool at a time of national uncertainty in the wake of the EU referendum.

The inclusion of *Absent* – a ‘high culture’ event – was a risk that demonstrated *LeftCoast’s* ambition and determination to ‘shift gears’ in framing the arts for Blackpool. Even in this case, the strategy of bringing in local relevance to bear on quality art, by situating the event in the *Winter Gardens*, was a sign of respect for Blackpool’s heritage that maintained connections and established a sense of relevance. The fact that ticket sales were modest, does not take away from the success of the show for those who did participate and the proper ambition of an arts organisation such as *LeftCoast* to make significant challenges to the perceptions of the local population.

Taken together, the findings suggest that *LeftCoast* is, through its different approaches, successfully developing a model of arts development and commissioning which responds to the context of Blackpool and Wyre as well as the objectives of *Creative People and Places*.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Methodology

Overall research design

The research design takes into account the dual focus on spectacular and co-created elements of the Left Coast programme, incorporating methods specific to each that are designed to capture the distinctive nature of the activity, together with methods common across different types of event which will facilitate comparison.

In accessing the stories of audiences and participants we follow key guiding principles which have informed the methodological development work of the PRU within the arts and cultural sector over the last 15 years. The research questions and objectives for this research, alongside *LeftCoast/Blackpool Coastal Housing's* own objectives, imply the need for methods capable of capturing the process of realizing different projects as well as understanding people's initial response to them and elucidating any longer term effects. We have developed an approach in which findings from research activity (e.g. good practice, learning moments, and effective strategies) were fed back iteratively in order to support learning. We have also, where relevant, positioned the projects undertaken in Blackpool and Wyre in relation to other similar examples in order to consider elements of learning which are context specific and those which are generalisable regionally and/or nationally.

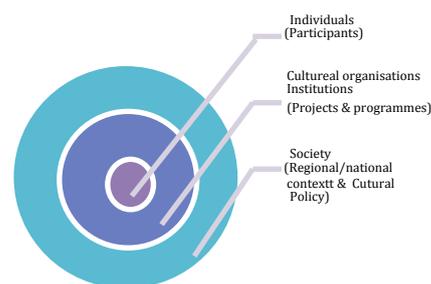
Psychosocial approach

Individuals bring to their experience of a public artwork, event or process a personal life history and disposition but this is formed within a social and cultural context they share with others and mediated through networks, communities and organisations – in this case the *LeftCoast* programme. Furthermore the existence of a programme of this nature raises societal questions that bear on investment and cultural policy, about who we imagine ourselves to be and how we wish to live. We therefore developed a psychosocial approach which combined methods directed at individual artists, participants and stakeholders with group based data collection where responses to the programme could emerge in a shared setting, in dialogue with others. Hence, we put the stories of participants at the centre of the study while attempting to grasp how these different dimensions of the programme interacted, and to what effect.

The multi-level analysis depicted in the diagram below attempts to grasp the complex inter-connection between projects people participated in, their own

networks (both temporary – possibly project based - and sustained – family, friends, place based) which have shaped and driven them, and the wider local, regional, national and global context of which they are a part. By using these different lenses we have been able to show not only *how* different approaches were developed and implemented from different perspectives, but also *whether* and *how* they elicited change in individuals and communities of interest. Hence, the research took as its focal point of enquiry the interfaces between the specific projects and the individuals and wider communities who have taken part. This has allowed an understanding of the interaction between various components of *LeftCoast's* approach rather than an exclusive focus on outcomes.

Psychosocial model:



Realist evaluation principles

Although we conceive of this study as research, realist evaluation principles (Pawson and Tilley, 2008) were highly relevant. This led us to focus on context and mechanisms: we asked when people engaged with either a spectacle or a co-creative process what happened, for whom and under what conditions? In this way we could develop a depth understanding of the components of high quality experiences and the changes they bring about in individuals and communities.

Cross-disciplinary art-sensitive, social science based research

Much recent research into public art has been based on qualitative or quantitative social science based methodologies which are better at measuring audience access, attendance, segmentation and demographics or instrumental impacts rather than artistic experience. The *Psychosocial Research Unit* brings together researchers with backgrounds in both the Arts and Humanities and the Social Sciences and has worked intensively on methodological development for the cultural sector. This work has been funded by Research Councils, Arts Council England, Foundations and Major Charitable Trusts and Local Authorities (e.g. *ACE, ESRC, AHRC, Gulbenkian and Northern Rock Foundations, Wellcome Trust,, Manchester City Council, Bristol City*

Council) tested and refined in empirical projects and published in peer reviewed journals. Hence, we have the ability to combine innovation with recognised rigour. Our projects have allowed an understanding of the contribution that the Arts can make to individuals, communities, localities and regions, adapting our methods so they are fit for the particular artistic and social objects of study. We regard this as essential if we are to gauge the *distinctive* effects of an artwork, project or programme.

Focus on audience and artist experience combined with critical analysis

We combine experience near research techniques with the critical distance required to understand the nature of arts experience from the inside and the outside. Hence in some cases we aim for a close up, fine-grained appreciation of how people work together to produce art, or how a particular artist embeds her work in a local context. We then take a 'step back' to assess the effects on a number of factors such as relationships, identities, aspirations, skills and solidarities. We have adapted methods of panel analysis from British and Continental traditions to ensure that the tension between 'nearness to' and 'distance from' our object of study is maintained. This enables us to keep in mind what is particular about elements of an arts programme, while assessing and comparing its effects on intended audiences and drawing out the implications for decision-makers.

Case based approach to understanding forms of artistic production and reception

We have considered each artwork process and event as a complex case that develops through artistic intention, design, commissioning and production to the critical point where people interact with it and may be changed by it and its ongoing effects for individuals and community. Furthermore these complex cases take place in a cultural context of the local everyday, while invoking the interests and judgments of different stake-holders. We have work with *LeftCoast* to identify and study key cases, which we have used to furnish rich data on a range of activities and their intended and unintended effects. In the final phase of analysis we have worked across the cases to identify key issues for cultural programming, related to type of activity and short and longer- term outcomes.

Short and longer term perspectives on changes brought about by *LeftCoast*

Although the time frame and resource allocation for this research did not permit a systematic longitudinal approach, questions of sustainable effects remained important. We have developed protocols of interpretation that are sensitive to effects of arts processes on the social imagination. These can also be inferred from

perceptions of stakeholders such as community representatives, businesses, local educational and cultural institutions, and the Local Authority.

Methods

Data collection and fieldwork

Our Case Based Approach entails a selection of methods (for use individually or in combination) in ways which can be tailored to specific events, projects or processes being studied. A one off spectacle involving hundreds of people calls for a different set of methods, from a small process-based and co-created project. The particular methods and their objectives that we feel would be of value in addressing the objectives of this research are set out below. However, we developed a plan for data collection prospectively in order that the specific approaches could be used for each project and which were discussed and agreed in consultation.

Observation, participant observation and observant participation

Method:

Researchers trained in ethnographic observation and visual methods spent periods ranging between one hour to entire days observing the process of planning, developing, realising and/or delivering specific projects. The approach to observation and its duration depended on the nature and timescales of specific projects, but was applicable to both 'Spectacles' and 'Co-creation'.

Objectives related to this project:

- To gain an understanding of the operation of projects and events with a particular focus on participation and engagement and with artistic process and outcome.
- To record observational data by whatever means appropriate (observational notes, photography, digital audio and/or video recordings) for subsequent interpretive panel analysis, with particular attention to the interactions of participants with each other and with the artworks.

Visual Matrix

Method:

The visual matrix (Froggett et al 2014) uses a group-based process of reflection in a public setting and is led by imagery and visualisation. It is highly participatory and usually enjoyable. Members of the matrix themselves begin the process of analysis, leading to findings that are co-produced. If convened for specific groups, it is highly sensitive to group specific interactions with an artwork and the ways in which it

stimulates the social imagination. It is designed to facilitate expression of responses that people would otherwise find difficult to express. It also overcomes the well-known difficulty of group-based methods whereby the most powerful voices dominate. A visual matrix takes about 2 hours to deliver and is then subject to panel analysis.

Objectives related to this project:

- To understand the reception and experience of an artwork by the different sections of the public aesthetically, emotionally and cognitively
- To provide an arts-based evaluation method where public responses to an artwork are expressed in a social setting, in interaction with others, thus taking into account the social conditions under which art is normally accessed and discussed.

Semi-structured and open-ended interviews with key respondents

Method:

Topic-specific semi-structured and open-ended interviews were conducted with the artists and other key stakeholders. Some of these were impromptu, opportunistic, occasioned by specific experiences and recorded in note form, while others were oriented to wider institutional functions such as strategic policy and planning. These can be of various lengths depending on the reason for use.

Objectives related to this project:

- To clarify areas of organisational/project functioning and the roles and views of individuals located differently within them
- To clarify responses to specific forms of arts practice as they arise

Rapid capture interviews

Method:

These short impromptu interviews were carried out on the spot at public events, or without pre-arrangement in public locations. They were employed at a range of events where audience members could be accessed immediately after engaging with an artwork, and conducted in relatively large numbers. This ensured a wide coverage as a complement or more intensive forms of interviewing, thereby multiplying the voices that are heard. Both structured and narrative pointed formats were used.

Objectives related to this project:

- To capture spontaneous and unrehearsed audience responses to artworks

- To achieve extensive interview coverage without pre-selection or self-selection of respondents
- To triangulate findings with the more intensive-interview methods used in the study

Ethics

The research plans and methods for this project were reviewed and approved by the University of Central Lancashire's Ethics Committee. All potential participants were provided with information about the focus of the study, details of the bounds of confidentiality and information about data protection in advance of involvement in research. Verbal consent will be taken in all cases.

Data sets

Programme level interviews – LeftCoast: Duncan Hodgson – Marketing and Audience Development Manager, Michael Trainor – Artistic Director, Julia Turpin – Executive Director, Laura Jameison – Producer for Neighborhood Commission and Kerenza McClarnan – Creative Engagement Manager.

Banquet: Photo-ethnography and ad hoc interview; Interviews – Artists; Community partner interviews; social Media analysis:

Showzam: Photo-ethnography and ad hoc interviews; Interviews – Artists; Community partner interviews:

Spare Parts: Photo-ethnography and ad hoc interviews; Interviews – Artists; Community partner interviews; visual matrix with volunteer organising committee.

Neighbourhood Commissions: Photo-ethnography and ad hoc interviews; Interviews – Artists; Community partner interviews.

Absent: Participant observation; visual matrix with audience members.

Appendix 2 - Artist's brief

NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMISSION ARTIST OPPORTUNITY 22.03.2016

This is an exciting opportunity for an innovative artist to work in partnership with a group of local business owners and residents in the South Beach area of Blackpool. The commission has been developed through the enthusiasm of the local traders who are keen to explore the creative potential of their area, take risks and challenge people's perception of the place that they live and work.

We are commissioning an artist to work in partnership with South Beach Trader's community group which is made up of business owners and residents from this area which is focused around Bond Street. We would like to use this commission as:

- A way to engage people who live there, those who live in the wider Blackpool area and visitors to the area with a high quality creative experience
- A way to raise the profile of this area
- A way to help people explore the area
- A way to inspire people to learn new and unexpected things about the area
- A way to encourage people to use the businesses on this stretch

We are not prescriptive about form; this could be anything from a guided walk or a piece of street theatre to a digital experience or a temporary space that the group could use again. We would like the work to have an interactive element to it, something that encourages people to think, can be used as an opportunity to further spread the word or pass on a positive story about the area.

The work should have a positive legacy. This might be that, for example, what is discovered inspires the commissioning group to embark on a larger project, a set of skills that are passed onto the residents or a digital archive that can continue to grow.

We are inviting proposals from interested artists who feel that their practice fits with our aims and objectives. We would like to see:

1. Information about your practice (200 words)
2. Three examples of previous work that you feel are relevant to this brief (link to websites or documents no bigger than in total than 5MB)
3. Why you are interested in this opportunity (300 words)
4. How you feel your practice would fit with the brief (150 words)
5. How you would envisage working with the South Beach business group (300 words)

The fee for this commission is £4,500. This will need to include all artist fees, travel, materials, and infrastructure.

From this call out we will invite 4 artists to interview, from which we will appoint 1.

Appendix 3 - Marketing information for Absent

EXPERIENCE A SHOW LIKE NO OTHER

Take a journey through the hidden spaces of Blackpool's iconic Winter Gardens to explore the bygone splendour of its glorious past before it is redeveloped by a modern property development company.

In 1958 a young woman wins the jackpot on the Premium Bonds and celebrates by checking into the exclusive Pavilion Suite at the fashionable Winter Gardens Hotel. Over 50 years later, she is still living there.

Now the new owners of the building say they are redeveloping the hotel to make it more affordable for working people, creating jobs and prosperity. They have a reputation to maintain and they want her out.

But what are they really up to? What's really going on inside the once darkened corridors and faded interiors of this mysterious hotel?

Above all, who is this enigmatic woman and why has she been there for so long?

Travelling in small groups at your own pace, ABSENT takes you on a theatrical journey along a maze of rooms and corridors that are inexplicably transforming before your very eyes. Mixing film, architecture and vast model-making installations with a haunting soundtrack, you will enter a kaleidoscopic world that shifts between Blackpool's past, present and future to create a beautiful and unforgettable experience.

You'll never look at the Winter Gardens in the same way again; you'll never look at Blackpool in the same way again.

"Beautiful and unbearably heart rendering" The Telegraph

" A singular experience" The New York Times

Appendix 4 – References

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