



PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH UNIT

Qualitative Evaluation of the Super Slow Way Programme

2015-2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND PART 1

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Super Slow Way is the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme for East Lancashire made possible by an investment of £2 million from Arts Council England. The Super Slow Way partnership is made up of the Canal & River Trust, Newground, the Local Authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Pendle and Hyndburn and Arts Partnership Pennine Lancashire (APPL).

This report presents findings from the qualitative evaluation of the programme undertaken by the Psychosocial Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire. It updates the interim report which documented the programme as it has developed in its first year and it includes an overview of the second year, its challenges and its most significant achievements.

Background

At its outset, the programme took inspiration from the slow moving waters and narrow boats of the Leeds and Liverpool canal to develop 'slow art' attentive to the rhythms, vernacular traditions, built environment and landscape of the communities who lived along it. Having in its first year established the canal and its architecture as backdrop and site of intended cultural renewal, the programme focussed still more intensively in the second year on industrial heritage, especially in the form of textile manufacturing and its significance for identity, belonging and place.

Super Slow Way has endeavoured to re-imagine the canal and its industrial buildings, many of which remain for the moment empty, not merely as sites of post-industrial decline and dejection but in a moment of transition, as potential places of cultural regeneration and developing social capital. This has been the basis of its successful proposal for second stage funding, and its business plan moving forward.

Structure of the report

The report is divided into sections for ease of handling. It includes:

Part 1. The background, challenges, achievements and summary outcomes of the programme. It draws on case studies and vignettes presented in part 2, which were completed in the first year, and part 3 which were finalised in the second year.

Part 2. The completed case studies from year 1

Part 3. The completed case studies from year 2.

Part 4. is a contribution to thinking about how best to support artists and programme staff in this new and challenging area of socially engaged practice. It identifies the benefits and

drawbacks of four different models that Super Slow Way has used and it offers recommendations that could help to offset some of the pressures on staff and artists.

Part 4 also presents a write up of a visual matrix held on an awayday for artists in the summer of 2016. This helps to illuminate some of the imaginative and emotional difficulties some of the artists faced in working on the programme.

Appendix: Methodological Note

Action Research and Methods

Super Slow Way was conceived from the outset as an action research project, in line with the CPP programme as a whole. The evaluation was designed to support this aim and findings have been fed back into the programme iteratively through review meetings with the Director and staff team. This took place more frequently in the first year which demanded a steep learning curve on the opportunities and challenges of working in the area. In the first year therefore there was a strong emphasis on artistic and social process and on analysing and articulating in detail the progress of a large number of projects many of which were small scale, experimental, targeted at vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups. On a larger canvas there was also an overview of the more complex signature commissions and their strategic significance in the programme as a whole.

The basis of our evaluation has been a series of case studies of commissioned projects of varying complexity, interviews with artists, key stakeholders, Super Slow Way staff, audiences, partner organisations and publics. Within an action research frame, we have used participant observation to experience the programme for ourselves, ethnographic (observational) data and a new group based method for assessing audience experience called the visual matrix.

Challenges for the Programme

In addressing these over-arching aims the programme has faced considerable challenges.

- A stretch of canal with variable assets and drawbacks which include sites of post-industrial dereliction, areas of semi-rural natural beauty, and industrial heritage.
- The scarcity of pre-existing canal user communities, such as boaters, invested in the canal as a safe and attractive public space.
- A major partner – the Canal and River Trust – yet to elaborate a cultural policy; there were mixed views among its staff on the value of an arts programme as a regenerative stimulus.
- Low income and impoverished canalside target wards for the programme – many of them directly suffering the effects of de-industrialisation.
- Low levels of cultural attendance, and low expectations of what it might achieve
- Little knowledge outside of the communities themselves of which models of cultural participation might be appropriate for the South Asian population.
- Little experience among the general public of cultural investment, or social arts practice, and therefore little appreciation of its potential benefits.
- Fractured inter-community relations and anti-social behavior in some areas.

- A number of mono-cultural white British and South Asian heritage neighbourhoods (of mainly Muslim faith), with little cross-cultural contact and a recent history of inter-community tensions.
- Different agendas of members of the consortium, some of whom would have liked Super Slow Way to operate primarily as a funding source compensating for previous disinvestment by Local Authorities (who also varied in the degree to which they were able to contribute financially and professionally to the programme).
- Competing priorities between the Local Authorities, who would have welcomed town centre initiatives, and the Canal and River Trust whose focus remained on the canal.
- A delayed start to the programme which meant that that it was under pressure to commission work very quickly once it moved into delivery phase – imposing intense pressures on programme staff.

Programme response to the challenges: overview

Throughout the report we attempt to show how Super Slow Way has confronted these challenges through

- Evolving an increasingly coherent vision focused on the concept and practice of ‘slow’.
- Developing a three-pronged commissioning strategy of large signature commissions that would achieve impact of scale; residencies hosted by local community groups or organisations; and community commissions developed through local resources, artists and organisations.
- Focusing on the canal as a shared physical asset and potential connector between neighbourhoods, communities and industrial heritage sites, especially textile manufacture as a socio-cultural connector.
- Using art to develop relationships with and between the communities who live adjacent to the canal.
- Creating opportunities for cross-cultural encounter and dialogue through art that crosses cultural boundaries and traditions.
- Developing a socially inclusive arts practice with particularly vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Working with local small arts organisations and individuals who are embedded in the area, in the sense that they live and work in it and their practice has developed within it.
- Raising the profile of the arts locally by bringing in artists of national and international reputation to work with local organisations and communities by responding to the cultural and economic history and assets of people, built environment and landscape.

Community commissions and residencies

In the first year Super Slow Way focused on producing community commissions that were produced and supported by the Super Slow Way community coordinator and residencies where local organisations were offered the opportunity to host an artist of their choice. The process was very specific to each project in question and examples are documented in the case studies. In their delivery both community commissions and residencies encountered conditions that were challenging for artists and programme support staff alike, as they adapted to the unfamiliar cultural territory of Pennine Lancashire and the process of creating art with people who had never

experienced anything like it before. The particular challenges of working in the area varied according to the project as the case studies will show. These community based projects and residencies, as well as producing outcomes for specific target communities also became sites of innovation and learning for the programme itself and for participants.

A key learning point was that short-term projects with strong focus on particular artistic outcomes were often frustrating for artists and participants alike. Longer term projects (such as *The Egg*, a six month residency Part 2.) which had time to embed themselves and work emergently with communities were more successful in establishing the relationships that overcame obstacles and allowed the work to flourish. It also became clear just how challenging some of the settings were for socially engaged practice and the considerable strain artists found themselves under. A section of the report (Part 4.) is devoted to exploring four different models that Super Slow Way adopted for working with artists who wish to do socially engaged work.

We conclude there is much more work to be done in the Arts Sector generally in articulating the support and skills required to sustain such practice. Besides its commitment to action research, Super Slow Way has supported the *Faculty of Social Arts Practice*, led by Kerry Morrison from In Situ and Chrissy Tiller, along with three other CPP's who share an interest in the development of knowledge and skills required of practitioners in the field of socially engaged practice. The Faculty was organised around a series of residential weekends where a practical component was combined with critical thinking.

The appended selection of case studies documents learning within projects as well as evaluating, specific outcomes and what each project contributed to the programme as a whole.

Signature Commissions

Larger scale projects such as *The Kinara Festival*, *Rhapsody for the Leeds Liverpool Canal* and *Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope* served to extend the reach of the programme to new audiences in year 1, to raise its profile locally, and particularly to engage the diverse communities of multi-ethnic East Lancashire. Sounds of Water Shapes of Hope was the most ambitious and in many ways the most challenging project in the entire portfolio and spanned almost the entire arc on the programme. It was based on an encounter between vocal traditions (Dhikr, a form of Sufi chant, and Shape Note, also a form of chant with distant roots in Lancashire's nonconformism) and a parallel process of community development. It set in motion a social process of re-configuring inter-cultural relations through 'community conversations' between white British and South Asian Heritage and is the subject of a substantial and extended case study.

The second year also saw the production of *Fabrications*, a festival that took place in the Autumn of 2017 focussed not merely on textile art but as artists' responses to textiles. This is also subject of a case study (Part 2). The focus on manufacturing was intensified by *The Festival of Making* which drew crowds to the city centre of Blackburn over the weekend of the 6th and 7th May 2017. The historical significance of partition for migrant workers from the Indian sub-continent and their families was commemorated in *Home 1947* in Brierfield Mill.

Strategies for reaching new audiences

Super Slow Way has taken on the challenge of programming for the specific needs and interests of audiences. It has

- addressed the decaying physical and built environment and celebrated the canal as regional heritage with civic potential (*The Egg, idle women, A Rhapsody to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, Burnley Canal Festival, Harkat, Hugging the Canal and The Island of Mill Hill, Circle of Friends*)
- focussed on industrial heritage and textile manufacturing which are central to the people's understanding of place, history, identity and awareness of current and future prospects (*Fabrications, Festival of Making, Home, Metis-World Factory, Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope*)
- commemorated events of historical importance to identities and histories of migration (*Home*)
- countered through art and inter-cultural practice the divisive racialisation of difference (*Kinara, Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope, idle women, Circle of Friends, Home, Verd de Gris*)
- included marginalised, vulnerable and under-resourced groups (*idle women, Circle of Friends, Verd de Gris, Men Who Care, Nightsafe, Beyond Labels, Shared Threads at the Mechanics*)
- supported and explored threatened identities of settled and migrant communities (*The Egg, The Island of Mill Hill, Harkat, Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope, Kinara, Home*)
- begun the work of regenerating locality through place-making and heritage (*The Egg, the Pavilion Community Café in Nelson, Fabrications*)
- recognised and developed through contemporary art, existing traditions and vernacular cultural forms (*Hugging the Canal, Burnley Canal Festival, Blackburn Canal Festival, the Pavilion Community Café, Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope, Metis- World Factory*)
- brought artists of international repute and ambition to East Lancashire (*Kinara, Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope, Harkat, A Rhapsody to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, the Island of Mill Hill, Metis – World Factory*)

Summary outcomes

1. Through the partnership with the Canal and River Trust, Super Slow Way has raised interest in and awareness of the canal and its potential as a civic and leisure space, local public asset and visitor attraction. This has created a platform in public consciousness for the second phase of Super Slow Way, starting in 2018
2. The programme has stimulated a great deal of local interest in industrial heritage and particularly textile manufacture, an important contribution to place-making
3. Super Slow Way has successfully delivered an intensive programme of arts activity to East Lancashire in 2016 and 2017, with major signature commissions (*Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope, The Kinara Festival; a Rhapsody to the Leeds Liverpool Canal; Fabrications*). These signature commissions have established a recognisable profile for the programme and signalled its strategic priorities in the area
4. By targeting communities who live close to or along the canal (through for example, *Island of Mill Hill, The Egg, Harkat*), or make use of it for specific needs (for example *Circle of Friends* with people with disabilities), the programme has raised awareness of the canal as a public resource
5. The programme has created opportunities for conversations and for a cultural encounter between communities by developing innovative and ambitious forms of inter-cultural practice, commissioning for the ethnically diverse population and reflecting the different cultural needs and preferences of the South Asian heritage and white British communities

6. It has worked with small arts organisations, capitalising on their existing networks and local knowledge, offering them an opportunity to host artists or projects of their choice. This has raised capacity and strengthened the local arts ecology. In some instances, the commissions have stretched these organisations beyond their comfort level. However, in the process they have grown in confidence and capacity. The partnership with In Situ, a long standing arts organisation embedded in Pendle, has been of particular importance and the organisation has subsequently gained NPO status.
7. There has been significant progress in building audiences for contemporary art in East Lancashire. Feedback forms and rapid capture interviews have confirmed that some people have experienced contemporary art for the first time and want to repeat the experience. There has been public recognition and acclaim for the quality of experience in most of the projects. Initiatives which offer opportunities to try things out have been particularly popular. Building audiences for 'big ticket' events such as *Rhapsody for the Leeds and Liverpool Canal* is more challenging as there is little local custom and practice.
8. In times of political crisis, art projects have provided safe havens of creativity, which we have denominated 'third space' for especially vulnerable sections of the community, for example, political refugees, asylum seekers and long-term male carers. For some people Super Slow Way has filled a vacuum created by the current social climate in ways that are enlivening and empowering.
9. The bold and wide-ranging programme of Super Slow Way has contributed to the ongoing debate on the role of the socially engaged arts and the relationships between funders, producers, artists and communities in ways that are essential to the success of future programmes for in East Lancashire and beyond.

PART 1

Introduction and background

Time is a major theme. Taking its cue from the Slow Movement, Super Slow Way asks how can we use our time more creatively; bringing art and artists to this space where time slows down, to look afresh at how people live their fast-paced lives and how they relate to their environment, their neighbourhoods and to each other. (Super Slow Way website)

The programme partnership and target communities

Super Slow Way is the Creative People and Places programme for East Lancashire made possible by an investment of £2 million from Arts Council England. The Super Slow Way partnership is made up of the Canal & River Trust, Newground, the Local Authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Pendle and Hyndburn and Arts Partnership Pennine Lancashire (APPL).

The programme's primary site has been, and will continue to be, the Leeds & Liverpool Canal corridor between Blackburn and Brierfield, and its target communities have been the people who live and work along it (total population in the catchment area, 320,000, living in 56 neighbourhood wards). The programme has worked to develop models of participatory, collaborative or co-produced social arts practice that respond to the different demographic and cultural particularities of the various sectors of this population. Among its most important features has been the history of inward migration, largely as a result of the textile industry which attracted a South Asian Workforce in the 1960's and 70's. Two or three generations later, patterns of settlement have led to the existence side by side of largely monocultural white working class and South Asian (predominantly Pakistani heritage) neighbourhoods.

Background conditions

The loss of employment and a marked slowing of the regional economy has impacted negatively on prosperity, work identities and local pride. The decline of textile manufacturing and the de-industrialisation of a once vibrant area has also led to the dwindling influence and diminishing membership of institutions such as trade unions that formerly provided a context for cross-cultural encounter, solidarity and the pursuit of common interests. The safeguarding of public space and amenities, and fair distribution of resources - albeit imperfect – remains largely in the hands of the Local Municipal Authorities. However, since the financial crisis of 2008 they have suffered dramatic

decline in revenue and this has impacted on the already fragile public arts and library sector which has seen closures and withdrawal of funding.¹

Although traditional vernacular cultural forms persisted, for example in brass bands and canal festivals, prior to Super Slow Way, small arts organisations in the area suffered further disinvestment on the part of the Arts Council (ACE), as some were dropped from the NPO portfolio in 2012. In a difficult financial climate, the announcement of Creative People and Places funding was understandably viewed in Burnley and Blackburn – the two Local Authorities with arts officers - as an opportunity to replenish diminished resources. The small arts organisations² also welcomed the prospect of a new funding stream and a consortium was therefore formed to develop a bid for around £2 million pounds. An accountable body capable of holding a budget of this size was clearly required and the Canal and River Trust, relatively recently formed out of British Waterways, was a natural partner. This served to re-emphasise the canal as a potential public asset along with the virtue of placing its physical and cultural regeneration at the centre of the any future programme.

Programme staff

There followed a convoluted process, whereby the competing interests of the various members of the consortium had to be negotiated and this further complicated the process of producing a common vision and a viable business plan. The appointment of a programme Director was somewhat delayed. Eventually Laurie Peake agreed to return from Los Angeles, where she was working at the time, to take up the post. Her qualifications for the job included a very substantial track record in large scale arts programmes, and experience in the intricacies of socially engaged arts practice. Of particular value was her local knowledge deriving from an up-bringing in Pennine Lancashire. Laurie Peake took up her post in late 2015 and in the following months was able to pull together a team of five which included herself, programme manager Katy May, Ruth Shorrocks who has a strong community work background, Zephi Begolo, communications officer and Laura Kelly with responsibility for finance and administration. This team delivered the first phase of the programme. In its second year Kate Kershaw took over the post of marketing and communications manager, and Jenny Rutter was employed specifically to deliver the Fabrications programme.

General aims

This short historical note explains some of the strengths of the bid in bringing together a consortium with a strong interest in promoting the development of the region and also some of the key issues Super Slow Way has subsequently had to face. Its responses to these challenges have shaped the programme in 2016-17 and will continue to inform its vision going forward as it seeks to embed itself in the area; build on its efforts to introduce new and ambitious artworks and develop new audiences; build local arts capacity by working through participation and co-production in partnership with local organisations; respond to cultural diversity and contribute to the regeneration of the canal as a physical, social and cultural public space with the potential to develop a visitor and leisure economy.

¹ Whilst the average percentage of adults attending at least one of eight art events twice within the last year in England as a whole is 26%, it is 22% in Pennine Lancashire and 20% in the Super Slow Way area. Within the core area, research has identified six wards (population 36,450) that are particularly low in levels of engagement with the arts, with only a 16% arts attendance average. These wards have populations that are predominantly Asian and Muslim heritage (from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan).

² In our case studies these include, In Situ based in Nelson/Pendle, Action Factory in Blackburn and Mid Pennine Arts

Challenges for the programme

- A stretch of canal with variable assets and drawbacks which include sites of post-industrial dereliction, areas of semi-rural natural beauty, and industrial heritage.
- The scarcity of pre-existing canal user communities, such as boaters, invested in the canal as a safe and attractive public space.
- A major partner – the Canal and River Trust – successor to British Waterways and yet to elaborate a cultural policy; there were mixed views among its staff on the value of an arts programme as a regenerative stimulus.
- Low income and impoverished canalside target wards – many of them directly suffering the effects of de-industrialisation.
- Low levels of cultural attendance, and low expectations of what it might achieve; the South Asian population, have distinctive models of cultural participation, which are little understood by most of the arts sector.
- Little experience of cultural investment, or social arts practice, and therefore little appreciation of its potential benefits.
- Fractured intra-community relations and anti-social behavior in some areas.
- A number of mono-cultural white British and South Asian heritage neighbourhoods (of mainly Muslim faith), with little cross-cultural contact and a recent history in the area of inter-community tensions.
- Different agendas of members of the consortium, some of whom would have liked Super Slow Way to operate primarily as a funding source compensating for previous disinvestment by Local Authorities (who also varied in the degree to which they were able to contribute financially and professionally to the programme).
- Competing priorities between the Local Authorities, who in some cases would have welcomed town centre initiatives, and the Canal and River Trust whose focus remained on the canal.
- The halting and delayed start to the programme which meant that that it was under pressure to commission work very quickly once it moved into delivery phase – imposing intense pressures on programme staff.

Strategic response to the challenges

In what follows we attempt to show how Super Slow Way has confronted these challenges through

- Evolving an increasingly coherent vision through the concept and practice of ‘slow’.
- Developing a three-pronged commissioning strategy of large signature commissions that would achieve impact of scale; residencies hosted by local community groups or organisations; and community commissions developed through local resources, artists and organisations.
- Focusing on the canal as a shared physical asset and potential connector, and on industrial heritage, especially textile manufacture as a socio-cultural connector.
- Using art to develop relationships with the communities who live adjacent to the canal.
- Creating opportunities for cross-cultural encounter and dialogue through inter-cultural practice.
- Developing an inclusive arts practice with particularly vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Working with local small arts organisations and individuals who are embedded in the area and whose practice has developed within it.

- Raising the profile of the arts by bringing in artists of national and international reputation to work with local organisations and communities by responding to the cultural and economic history and assets of people, built environment and landscape.

Third space and social arts practice

For me one of the best projects has been The Egg, that is because it had that mixture of a spectacle, something different, but this is a man living on the same street as the residents. It fits on that space, it is a democratic space. When people went to the community centre it is a charged space; when people went down to Finsley Gate, the power goes, no one has more power, everyone is on a neutral ground. That was very nice to see people's own view of themselves had changed. People with very little confidence realised who they are and what they can do. (Ruth Shorrocks, Community Development Co-ordinator, Super Slow Way)

Many of these themes will be threaded through the case studies and vignettes that follow. In them we will illustrate the concept of 'third space' and its importance in characterising the models of practice that have developed through the programme. We exemplify this idea through our case studies. In the meantime, we define it as a space that an artwork, conceived as a social practice, can open up between communities, or between a community, its environment and an artist. The artwork may take a myriad of forms and we have noted examples involving sharing food; engaging in dialogue; writing, photographing, drawing, walking or singing together; making things; mingling cultural traditions; working together on a production or event; sharing the frisson of humour that pushes at the boundaries of convention and acceptability; developing quality of attention to relationships with one another and the physical environment. Third space, as can be seen in these examples, can range from actual environments to ephemeral and relational situations that are created between people.

What is distinctive about the third space of the artwork is that on entering its ambit, preconceptions about others who exist outside of this space are suspended in favour of an ability to reach out and see where the new encounter may lead. In the words of D.W. Winnicott (1971) it is the space where notions of 'me' and 'not-me' are suspended, a space full of potential in which one can discover for oneself what is there to be found, whether in the shape of other people, or places, or things.³ In the pleasure of discovery one can then form relationships that have a particular vitality, by virtue of the fact that they involve an encounter with otherness that also surprises or challenges. Third space is therefore an intrinsically creative space. It is both a locus of culture and a state of mind achievable in the everyday lives of individuals and communities. Artists - particularly those working in the public realm - have a practical role opening up third spaces, and the function of a programme like Super Slow Way is to hold them open – which sometimes means 'holding the artists' as they hold them open. In this way people can make best use of them, thus contributing through art to the creative invigoration of communities and their environments, civil society and the public sphere.

Methodology

A detailed methodology is appended to this report. Here, however, we identify the key principles that have informed our work. The research and evaluation proposal from the Psychosocial Research Unit (PRU) at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) aimed to support the programme objectives of Super Slow Way and identify its distinctive contribution to the Creative People and

³ Winnicott, D. W. (1971) *Playing and Reality*, London: Karnac

Places Programme (CPP). CPP advocated action research to solve real world problems - how to raise arts participation in the UK's areas of low cultural engagement. Super Slow Way from the outset adopted a participatory action research strategy in Pennine Lancashire. The research plan was designed to enable collaborators (artists, audiences, stakeholders, participants) to take an active role and sustain an interest in co-producing and understanding the knowledge gained throughout the programme and using it to develop and enhance practice.

PRU's role has been to collaborate in the production of a methodology to study the programme through selected stands and project case studies, as well as taking an overview of strategic development and commissioning. As the programme has evolved, its various foci have been clarified and particularly the importance of developing inter-cultural practice and relationships to the unique physical, cultural and industrial heritage of the area. A wide range of methods has been brought to bear, including: rapid capture and in-depth modes of interviewing with artists and audience members, ethnography, observation of cultural processes and events, analysis of documentary outputs, visual group based methods. Periodic review meetings with individual staff members and the team have enabled us to feed back our emergent findings in dialogic form.

A further methodological principle, consistent with our aim of understanding what happens in the art spaces generated in the programme is that in order to observe third space 'in action', one sometimes has to create one. We have therefore conducted two visual matrices – one with the artists from the programme in the context of a review day and another with the group who engaged intensively with *idle women* in Accrington and Blackburn. These have thrown into relief some of the aesthetic and affective dimensions of the programme, its canal setting and its impact on the cultural imaginaries of those groups. The visual matrix as a method is briefly explained in the appendix and its results are woven into the discussion that follows.

Informants

The research has been undertaken in the period from December 2016 to November 2017 in what follows our informants have been

1. Key members of programme team (Director, Project Manager, Community Engagement lead)
2. Selected Artists commissioned to deliver projects within the programme
3. Representatives from partner organisations and community groups who have engaged with the programme
4. Participants and audience members who have attended events or taken part in commissioned projects

Super Slow Way and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal

The Leeds and Liverpool Canal as setting for the programme

Super Slow Way's work in partnership with the Canal and River Trust has taken the Leeds and Liverpool Canal as physical and temporal inspiration, background, setting and focus of many of the projects it has commissioned. We have seen that the idea of the canal as a civic and cultural space has gathered momentum and credibility, with a number of commissions intentionally linking up various locations and stretches of the canal and offering the opportunity for visitors and the communities who live along it to begin to appreciate it as a shared link between communities who would otherwise feel separate and isolated from each other, (*idle women, Hugging the Canal, Circle of Friends and the Burnley and Blackburn Canal Festivals, Rhapsody to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal*).

Animation of the canal as civic and leisure space

The experience of the research team in the first year supports the vision the partnership has developed for the canal as 'a string of pearls' in which key sites or hubs of cultural interest are perceived as being connected by the waterway and canal bank. This leads to a more expansive understanding of the canal which goes some way towards achieving the Super Slow Way objective of generating a growing interest in its future uses and in volunteering related to the protection and promotion of the canal as an environmental asset. The canal-focused projects have facilitated the creation of convivial spaces where people take time to attend to their relationships with one another, and their communities of interest or place. Our case studies show that artists have illuminated the historical and contemporary meaning of the canal to different sectors of the public. Its potential has been explored through walking, looking, smelling, studying, photographing, drawing and singing of the canal. In many instances, this has been a consciously 'slow' engagement with slow art, and slow living, reflecting, perhaps, the gliding of barges along the waterway which differentiates travel on the canal from the fast-paced movement of the surrounding urban spaces. The canal's human, animal and plant life have been at heart of much of the artwork in the programme, which has also addressed its historical, industrial and cultural significance and the canal's ongoing importance for the people of Lancashire.

The canal as a cultural resource and venue: canal festivals

In partnership with Mid-Pennine Arts, Super Slow Way transformed the traditional Burnley canal festival in 2016 and 2017, giving it a contemporary aesthetic. The large crowds attracted offered a window on how the canal could become a leisure destination. The festival made use of three distinctive sites, and a walk between them. Sandygate Square provided a space for contemporary music, dance and participatory activities. It included, for example, Folk Dance Remixed, a collage of ceilidh, clogging, street, hip hop, house dance and music; and essence of African Dance and Bollywood in performance. In the second year of the festival the main event was Urban Playground performing *Steam*, with a mixture of synchronised gymnastic, dance and *Parkour* that involved daring manoeuvres that captured the audience's imagination and breath. There was the sol cinema where children were ushered into a solar powered cinematic experience; in rag tag arts they could

try out juggling, hoola hoop and unicycling; also a sing along store where people were invited to choose their favourite song and join in singing it. On the canal itself people could jump aboard the Lifeboat and enjoy 'the slowest ride on earth'. For those who wanted an experience of South Asian art there was henna hand painting. In the 2016 Festival here was also an opportunity to take a ride on the free water bus with a canal cruise to the *Exbury Egg* at Finsley Gate Wharf. The Egg artist, Stephen Turner was on hand with local volunteers to host visits and explain and promote the programme. In 2017 the Egg was replaced by craft stalls and the wharf became a departure point for basic canoe lessons. At the Inn on the Wharf, Burnley Alliance Silver band played a mix of contemporary and traditional music. The pub yard provided with stalls and activities for children, including a Punch and Judy, mini-fairground, circus skills and insect circus.

The two-day events in Burnley contrasted with the Blackburn canal festival that by and large retained a traditional format with a display of moored canal boats, traditional food and drink, folk, rock and reggae music. We conducted a large number of impromptu 'rapid capture' interviews at these events, not only to evaluate experience of the event itself, but to try and gauge the nature of public engagement with the canal and the extent to which cultural activities would be welcomed in the future. Although public attendance and feedback was very positive for both festivals, people particularly enjoyed the element of novelty in Burnley, the mix of the modern and traditional, and the revitalisation of the festival through art. Both events demonstrated that local people and visitors are anything but indifferent to the fate of the canal. They welcome its environmental and commercial regeneration. However, the Super Slow Way programme also shows that it is through cultural re-animation – see below - that a sense of ownership, curiosity and possibility can take root and grow.

Re-imagining the Canal

There is also a very real sense that despite the potential, there is still a way to travel. It is clear from the interviews and in particular from the visual matrices⁴ that we conducted that the canal still arouses ambivalent and sometimes conflicting images and ideas. It is experienced both as a place of beauty, interest, leisure and local pride and of danger and decay. The swan – emblem of the Canal and River Trust – is also emblematic of these mixed feelings. It recurs in our interviews and visual matrices as a creature of grace and dignity, at one and the same time an aggressor and a victim of toxic waters, vulnerable to destructive people and marauding dogs. The swan thus symbolises conflicting perceptions of the canal and its immediate environment that reflect the reality, for many local people, of life in its vicinity. The first year of Super Slow Way's programme has begun to encourage people once again to see the canal in its positive and problematic aspects as theirs, and to re-imagine its future place in their lives and communities.

Super Slow Way and the Future of the Canal

The arrival of Super Slow Way and the injection of investment and energy it has brought to animate the canal as a cultural space and physical asset is raising its profile and stimulating local people to think of what they might want it to be in the future. The canal is no longer taken for granted, but for people who have participated in Super Slow Way's projects, or attended events it can be looked at with fresh eyes through art. Stephen Higham who is responsible for enterprise and regeneration for the Canal and River Trust in the region makes it clear that a primary value to the Trust of the

⁴ The visual matrix is a group based method, led by imagery and affect that is particularly useful for understanding shared imaginative responses to an object, event or process (See methodology, appendix and also Part 3. for write up of artists' visual matrix and case study of idle women)

partnership with Super Slow Way, is in brand recognition. Super Slow Way's activities have created an excellent platform to enhance brand recognition by enabling diverse publics to engage with the canal in new ways. With the canal planned to be ever more central to the profile of the programme in the second year, there is an excellent opportunity to further consolidate the partnership.

The plans for the second phase of the programme will also depend on on-going partnerships with the five Local Authorities. Super Slow Way has developed a 'string of pearls' vision of the canal as a linear park which will link up key sites of special interest and develop the canal as a commercial and leisure resource and public space. With the support of PLACE Lancashire (the consortium of Local Authority Chief Executives) a feasibility study is to be commissioned early in 2018. Envisaged is a major programme of physical and cultural regeneration a place-making initiative which will embrace infrastructure, architectural heritage, commercial opportunities. and green space. Super Slow Way's vision is to put arts and culture at its core

Audience engagement and development

Cultural consumerism or artistic and social mission?

Super Slow Way (SSW) has been committed to programming that reaches the diverse communities of East Lancashire and increases opportunities for attendance and participation in the arts. Some projects have offered opportunities for co-production. However, as already pointed out, the programme has had to face specific challenges in audience engagement and development.

The resources of the five Local Authorities who are partners in the programme, have dwindled as austerity has hit budgets for cultural and civic activities. Many of the target wards for the programme, distributed along the canal, are low income, mono-cultural communities living in closely knit ethnically defined groups. Race relations in the area have often been characterised by mistrust or overt hostility.

This complicated the task of cultural programming, if it is not unwittingly to reinforce existing divisions among local people, and disinterest or rejection of anything that might be interpreted as 'alien'. Not only is the task therefore to increase the reach of the arts and build audiences, it is also to re-animate and re-configure a public realm, once shared in the domain of work, among populations where cultural and social capital are often low. In other words, the mission of the SSW is necessarily civic, as much as it is artistic. Specific challenges to audience development are:

- There is an absence of a 'booking and ticketing culture'; as one respondent at the Kinara Festival put it "people simply have not developed 'the going out for culture stuff'".
- Some communities such as South Asians in the area have been all but invisible to funders of public art, including the Arts Council, and have low expectations of what they might provide.
- There are many 'hard-to-reach' groups in the area such as refugees, substance misusers, women who have suffered violence and abuse, for whom art and culture has to be offered in carefully calibrated, containing settings.
- Divergence in cultural tastes, customs and languages has deterred attempts to provide for cross-cultural audiences.
- Some communities have their own vernacular cultural traditions which are little understood or appreciated by arts providers.
- Relative poverty and the sense of cultural exclusion produced by de-industrialisation has done little to encourage cultural engagement

Here is a range of examples to indicate the diversity of strategies of engagement.

Strategies for reaching new audiences

SSW has taken on the challenge of programming for the specific needs and interests of audiences. It has

- addressed the decaying physical and built environment and celebrated the canal as regional heritage with civic potential (*The Egg, idle women, A Rhapsody to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, Burnley Canal Festival, Harkat, Hugging the Canal and The Island of Mill Hill, Circle of Friends*)
- focussed on industrial heritage and textile manufacturing which are central to the people's understanding of place, history, identity and awareness of current and future prospects (*Fabrications, Festival of Making, Home, Metis-World Factory Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope*)
- commemorated events of historical importance to identities and histories of migration (*Home*)
- countered through art and inter-cultural practice the divisive racialisation of difference (*Kinara, Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope, idle women, Circle of Friends, Home, Verd de Gris*)
- included marginalised, vulnerable and under-resourced groups (*idle women, Circle of Friends, Verd de Gris, Men Who Care, Nightsafe, Beyond Labels, Shared Threads at the Mechanics*)
- supported and explored threatened identities of settled and migrant communities (*The Egg, The Island of Mill Hill, Harkat, Shapes of Wate, Sounds of Hope, Kinara, Home*)
- begun the work of regenerating locality through place-making and heritage (*The Egg, the Pavilion Community Café in Nelson, Fabrications*)
- recognised and developed through contemporary art, existing traditions and vernacular cultural forms (*Hugging the Canal, Burnley Canal Festival, Blackburn Canal Festival, the Pavilion Community Café, Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope, Metis- World Factory*)
- brought artists of international repute and ambition to East Lancashire (*Kinara, Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope, Harkat, A Rhapsody to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, the Island of Mill Hill, Metis – World Factory*)

The following consists of a number of sections describing a multi-pronged approach to audience engagement and development.

Small arts organisations and community engagement through embedded practice

The small arts organisations in the area⁵ have been delivering small scale participatory projects over many years by embedding themselves in their communities. However, their capacity and reach has been limited by an ever more restrictive funding environment, while the challenge of working in an area of minimal cultural infra-structure is considerable. This can foster a mind-set of defensive survivalism accompanied by a reluctance to bring in fresh artists from outside the area. In some cases, such as In Situ, they have been dedicated to a 'small and local is beautiful' philosophy. SSW

⁵ The existing small arts organisations form part of the APPL consortium and Super Slow Way has worked with a number of them in the course of the project. In this study we have so far encountered work by In Situ, Action Factory, Mid Pennine Arts and Burnley Youth Theatre. Partnerships with APPL organisations will be a focus of study the second phase of the programme, in which we will assess how far Super Slow Way has helped build capacity and its infrastructure

has attempted to work in partnership with the small arts organisations on projects they wished undertake, building on their local knowledge, presence, networks and reputation in the area, and recognising this as a vital resource; *Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope* was built on years of patient relational work by In Situ and could not have been delivered without it. *The Burnley Canal Festivals* have depended on Mid-Pennine Arts' understanding of how to put a new artistic spin on old traditions in a way which people would still recognise and enjoy. Burnley Youth Theatre drew on an existing base of support and interest among young people and other young artists to perform theatre, poetry, parkour and artwork on the banks of the canal on Sandygate Square to tell the story of how the canal has connected East Lancashire to the world for the past two centuries.

Social need and socially engaged practice

If the programme vision is to be grounded in the reality of people's lives, it also needs to take heed of and respond to the social issues that shape the way they live and interact with one another and the wider world. Artists working in the programme have encountered poverty, racism, substance misuse, homelessness, de facto segregation of communities, mental illness, domestic violence, and abuse, decline of community solidarities, sexist and homophobic violence and abuse, the problems of migrants and refugees and the specific vulnerabilities of people with disabilities or age-related frailty. It cannot be the task of an arts programme to turn artists into social or health workers. However, SSW has recognised that in an area with the multiple disadvantages of East Lancashire, it must work in collaboration with other agencies; support artists to build relationships; and work with communities to produce locally relevant and (inter)nationally significant art. The programme has, therefore, produced numerous projects – some small and intimate, others large scale, that in some measure address local needs through art. They introduce people to the possibilities of art and culture and they have the potential to intertwine with other social processes to positive effect. Selected examples are documented in the case studies (*idle women*, *Circle of Friends*, *Verd de Gris*, *Men Who Care*, and on a much broader canvas *Shapes of Water*, *Sounds of Hope*)

Some of the residencies commissioned by the programme proved very challenging, especially where they relied on communities to host and those communities had little conception of what an artist might be able to offer. They also demanded of artists a particular model of practice in which the community and place were the primary resources and material for the artwork, and any objects produced were a means to animate social relations to other people or the environment, rather than ends in themselves. This could create tensions between the desire for a strong aesthetic outcome and a mode of practice in which the primary outcome was a social process. The case studies of *Harkat*, *The Island of Mill Hill* and *The Egg* should be read with these dilemmas in mind.

One of the key learning points of year one was just how challenging this kind of arts practice can be. It became clear that artists working in communities where there has been no tradition of either cultural attendance or embedded arts practice are vulnerable in many ways that have yet to be fully understood or documented. They can feel de-skilled in the face of the severity of social need, caught between community rivalries and are sometimes recipients of hostility, which appears to be directed at their person and not only their work. This kind of arts practice is at the frontier of a new field of possibilities and uncharted waters. The toll both on the artist 'front-line' and supporting personnel can be heavy. The different models for managing this in the programme are described in Part 4. As a result of her experience in year 2. Jenny Rutter who produced the Fabrications programme now supports the idea of a 'ladder' where the first rung is sensitive projects involving hard-to-reach groups in carefully curated relational settings are allowed to grow organically. Subsequent 'rungs' would increase in ambition, perhaps involving a provocation or an intervention designed to shift the way people think about things. An effective model of support for participants and hence also for

artists is to partner with a community organisation, such as Community Solutions, who can both recruit for the group and address support needs as they arise. The experience of *idle women* was that external practice supervision was invaluable to the project producers themselves when the work was taking a severe emotional toll.

Animation of local settings

In building audiences, SSW commissioned a range of projects which illustrate the value of small-scale and intimate interventions into community settings. They have included locally meaningful activities delivered in everyday contexts such as *Hugging the Canal* (see case study) where artist and singer Jen Reid, accompanied by visual artist Simon Woolham, took her singing directly into the pubs by 'singing for her supper', as she and Woolham walked along the 127 miles of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. The impact of a project like this is not necessarily to be confined to the numbers of people reached in any one moment, rather its value resides in a localised animation of public space that, combined with other similar contributions, could incrementally accumulate. By taking art into quotidian settings that people are familiar with, the 'cultural ice' is potentially broken through simple and pleasurable, yet often unusual or out-of-the box activities, opening people up to a more ambitious offer.

A further example was the Pavilion Café where Mark Mellville, Louie Ingram and Lee Mattinson invited the local residents who frequent Victoria Park in Nelson to explore a different understanding of nature, biography, music and art through installing audio recordings in the park café with six broad headings, they were *Food and Friendship, Industry and Integrity, This Park and the World, Nature and animals and Health and Wellbeing*. The Pavillion café was a social enterprise that supported volunteers who worked there and local people who frequented the café to develop audio art, music and biographical recordings and subsequently enjoy them along with casual visitors. The idea was to inspire those who listened to the recordings to walk around the park again and experience it through a different prism.

In Blackburn, SSW collaborated in the re-opening of the emblematic Cotton Exchange building in the centre of the town, with an exhibition that was part of the Fabrications project. This old, revered building, that last opened its doors as a cinema in the 1980s, became alive again through the exhibition and was able to bring the past into communion with the present in much the same way as the opening of the mill in Brierfield, Nelson for *Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope*.

Raising the profile of the arts through large scale events

At the other end of the scale, in October 2016 *A Rhapsody to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal*, composed by Ian Stephens, with poems by Ian McMillan, was commissioned to celebrate the bi-centenary of the canal. It involved five local primary schools, the Blackburn People's Choir, the Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band, as well as acclaimed soprano Amanda Roocroft, cellist Johnathan Asgaard and tabla player Kuljit Bhamra. The choir and band, and the choir of school children attracted families, friends, relations and public enough to fill the vast King George's Hall in Blackburn with an ethnically mixed audience. Despite the evident quality and popularity of this celebratory event, which was well marketed and initially ticketed, it became clear to SSW, as they tried to sell tickets in the run up to the event, that many local people did not expect to pay for culture in the form of live performance. Eventually tickets had to be given away. Commercially, therefore, the event was not a success. However, this did not mean an absence of audience engagement. Less spectacular than the impact of the final event, but possibly of longer duration, will have been the

effect on the children of five local primary schools (and their families), who rehearsed over the preceding months and found themselves on a huge stage with professional and amateur adult musicians, singing of the canal, its history and meaning, through a highly original and dedicated choral composition.

Metis, a performing arts company, performed the *World Factory* in Brierfield Mill where the audience were cast in the 'capitalist' role of factory owners in communist China. The audience were furnished with information through choices provided on cards, for instance, to pay the workers more, or invest in more stock. The performance encouraged the audience to think about the textile industry, the connection with the West and in particular with East Lancashire and Manchester and the exploitative nature of capitalism. It contrasted the glitzy presentation and marketing of clothing in the West with the reality of sweatshops in China and South Asia. Through performing it in Brierfield Mill, Metis skilfully made the connection between mill workers of the past in East Lancashire and factory workers in China and crucially, capital, (re)production, and exploitative working conditions. It demonstrated that the clothing industry always follows the cheapest mode of production.

Diversity, durational projects and long term engagement

Projects that take place over many months are especially valuable from the perspective of engaging and building audiences as well as reaching large numbers. The most ambitious mass participation project of all, Suzanne Lacy's *Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope* (see case study) lasted over a period of nine months and included groups of Sufi chanters (Dhikr), Shape Note singing and mill songs, in a process that included a series of mass public events with the participation of multiple local organisations, networks and conversations. These occurred as South Asian heritage and white British communities encountered one another in a series of mass 'Community Conversations' that went straight to the heart of the most pressing distinctions and divisions affecting their social relations and daily lives. The prolonged interaction through the enactment of two cultural traditions culminated in parallel and fusion performances of Shape Note and Dhikr at a day of filming in Brierfield Mill, which concluded in a banquet for 500 local people. SSW estimate that in the course of the final 3 days between 750 and 1000 people attended. Many more were involved over the course of the entire project - effectively a community development project as well as an art project. It is very difficult to estimate numbers of people who engaged or came to know about it. The whole point of the process was its cumulative diffusion into the community through friends, families, networks and organisations, and therefore both first and second hand knowledge. The film, *The Circle and the Square*, was launched in Brierfield Mill in September 2017. It remains as a record of the project as well as a historical and artistic record of an event. It will now have an international showing.

Encountering the arts 'slowly' and in small things

While large scale signature commissions such as *Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope* create large audiences, intensify impact and establish the presence of the programme in the area, they do touch all areas of cultural experience. There is a very important place for small scale arts experiences in projects that undertake the painstaking work of building audiences in ways which achieve a lower profile but where in-depth, fine-grained, attentive work takes place that seeks to embed art in everyday lives and practices. SSW's portfolio has ranged over a wide variety of activities in terms of scale, modes of engagement and participation, talent, art-form and target audience. Some well received projects have been those that have concentrated on the small, intimate experiences that develop curiosity, the ability to see, and the quality of attention to social relationships as well as the

natural and built environment. Sharon Marsden of *Verd de Gris* (see case study) encouraged mainly South Asian women to talk, dance, sing, draw and write poetry as they explored their feelings of being carers for loved ones with dementia and their identity as Muslim women.

Within *Fabrications* that focussed on textile heritage in the second year of the programme, Lisa Ryan worked with local community groups in Burnley some of whom had struggled with substance misuse or mental health difficulties. Ryan and community arts group *Ground Up* worked with local people to make art for the display in Burnley Mechanics, a theatre and former mechanics institute with exhibition space. They used recycled materials, cotton, wool, straws, and plastic to design two and three-dimensional artworks for display on the wall. Local people who were socially excluded were encouraged to discuss issues that were relevant to their lives, including race and community relations, mental health, and substance misuse. The art was their own, which was subsequently, produced and sold and the money raised re-invested for the group's benefit.

The Egg by Stephen Turner (see case study) epitomised the philosophy of 'slow' enabling local people to engage at their own pace re-claiming a derelict site beside the canal. Many of the activities involved minute attention, for example, to moths, bugs and plant life. *The Egg* developed an enthusiastic local following that was able to discover what was already there in their surroundings that hitherto they had never found. This was a classic creation and use of third space in which relationships changed through slow engagement in the project and a new sense of cultural agency began to develop. *The Egg's* success in overwhelmingly white working class and socially conservative Burnley Wood, was achieved through the granular 'infiltration' of a way of seeing and relating. This gradually instilled in the community the idea of owning and caring for a public space as a communal resource. Many of the relationships formed in the process have been quietly transformative at an individual and community level.

A similar process took place in *The Circle of Friends*, except that this time the focus was on the group itself, as opposed to public space. This was another 'slow art' project, formed out of a group who had not been used to getting out and about prior to their canal walks with artist, Jean McEwan. They grew in enjoyment and confidence by developing a sensuous and aesthetic relationship to the canal. Through sharing it as a third space they arrived at more animated and appreciative relationships with one another.

idle women (see case study) brought together women from different neighbourhoods, organisations, ethnicities and walks of life who within the contained space 'curated' by Rachel Anderson and Cis O'Brian (the creative producers of the project) interwove their life experiences with the industrial history of Lancashire's mill workers and canal dwellers. Many of the women who became part of the project had their own histories of trauma and loss and yet were able to reach across their differences to one another to breathe new life into an old idea of cross-cultural sisterhood.

From locale to community of place

A number of artists (for example Stephen Turner, *The Egg*; Alwin Reamillo, *Harkat*, Anthony Schrag, *The Island of Mill Hill*) have focussed on very defined local areas – a few adjacent streets in a ward, or a small stretch of the canal bank. Invariably these have been areas with settled populations but declining resources, suffering from collapse of civic institutions and neglect of public space as Local Authorities have withdrawn under financial pressure from the support of community centres and other local assets. With this has come a retreat from their role in sustaining local democracy and the public sphere.

In the face of this, volunteers have in some places effectively taken over the running of community assets with good intentions, poor resources, and often little experience. Under these conditions there is a danger that the third space that sustains a civic culture implodes. Far from being a liberation, the retreat of the local state has only too often left community institutions vulnerable to dominant personalities, meagre funding and quarrels between neighbours.

Although they may not have conceived it in these terms, the role of the SSW projects that have focussed on localities has been to begin the work of reanimating the idea of 'public' through changes in the uses of space in the natural and built environment. They have worked to create new public spaces through art for revitalised community relationships. *Harkat* and *The Egg*, for example showed how a place based project could help local people take pleasure in and from a new sense of community investment in their locality. The most successful of these projects was *The Egg* for the good reason that this was a six month residency that occupied a disused canal bank site at Finsley Gate Wharf and allowed time for a new community relationship with place to form organically through care of the site and appreciation of the nature that had overtaken it in its many years of closure. Members of the community who had been involved in the programme became active in developing ideas for the future of the site through a Heritage Lottery bid, to continue activities in the spirit of *The Egg*. People who engaged in the project formed groups based on common interests such as photography and writing, developing skills that were rooted in the locality but that expanded their horizons beyond it.

Sometimes the mere fact of an art project has provided a sense of 'uplift' and pride in place for a marginalised group. For example, Lee Affen encouraged local young people to make music inside a local community/youth centre in Clough estate in Burnley. Affen did this by working with six young people over a period of a few weeks in October 2016 using musical instruments and mixing this with electronic music. This predominantly white working class estate-based community has been isolated and alienated with very little investment of cultural and physical resource. However, by preparing for a performance event, the young people were able to develop new skills and feel a sense of pride in themselves and their local community/youth centre. Likewise, in *Beyond Labels* in Accrington, young men used poetry, music and film to explore issues of identity, culture and ethnicity and expressed their feelings, thoughts and hopes. This group included white, South Asian and African Caribbean young men and produced a film, as well as poetry and music, to articulate what it is like to be *In young Men's shoes*.

In re-constituting public space through an art project, people are encouraged to extend their sights beyond the local. *Harkat*, through its cross-cultural celebration of the idea of home and migration resonated with the experience of local people despite its 'exotic' strangeness. It symbolised and enacted aspects of human necessity, commonality and generosity with which different groups could identify. The local Filipino population suddenly became visible. *Harkat* also became, albeit fleetingly, a treasured focal point for a refugee group who by virtue of circumstance are geo-culturally adrift. In this example, Reamillo as Filipino artist and as someone who is working far away from home and his outside of his own culture was able to connect with the local Filipino population and the refugee groupings in the local area with ease and thus provide a new lens for the local indigenous population who were otherwise ensconced in a different mindset and mode of perception. The gathering of Filipinos in the Community Centre and the creation of the floating shrine with the special help from refugees brought new possibilities into the local community imaginary.

By their very nature these locally-based projects that have been about the re-ignition of an idea of public space and social life as a basis for the extension of cultural and geographical horizons.

Art and care

SSW has commissioned projects aimed at professional and informal care situations (*Men Who Care*, *Verd de Gris*, *Nightsafe*) as well as others where care - whether of people or the environment - was a defining ethos (*idle women*, *The Egg*, *Circle of Friends*). In a region with so much deprivation and disadvantage, it should come as no surprise that artists choose to work with specific needs and with populations who would otherwise have no access to the arts. The association between art and care is not simply that art compensates for shortcomings in the care system (it doesn't, and shouldn't); or that it provides something that 'livens up' care - but that through generating a particular 'aesthetic' quality of attention, people can use it to enable both carers and cared for to 'feel alive', and this could be regarded as intrinsic to good care.

The carers in *Men Who Care* repeatedly stressed the 'interest' that the arts had ignited in what they do, that somehow lifted them out of the incessant demands placed upon them in their role as carers. For the male carers, art was both intrinsically creative and potentially useful as a connection or bridge between them and the local community. *Verd de Gris* provided the opportunity for mainly South Asian carers to express through art and creativity their feelings about each other and hopes for life. *Circle of Friends* is another example of art infusing care of one another with vitality so that a group of people who might be classed as 'vulnerable' by virtue of their disabilities grew in curiosity, confidence and self-awareness. Young people in *Nightsafe* were able to explore their relationships with each other and identity with Najia Bagi through music and performance. This took place over a number of months, beginning in 2015 - where the young people used their daily experiences to express how they felt about each other and their lives through Karaoke and interviewed each other. They walked together, wrote music, recorded soundscapes and took photographs.

idle women was centrally concerned with creating a protected art space for women and it is clear from the visual matrix we conducted that it developed a group culture of mutual care across cultural difference and across age groups and occupations. Within this environment women in very precarious circumstances were able to safely join the group and take part in its creative activities. The creativity nourished their quality of attention to one another, but also overflowed the boundaries of the group and created an appreciation of care in and of nature and for the history and industrial legacy of the region.

Intercultural commissioning and practice

By ensuring that the demographic profile of East Lancashire informs its commissioning strategy, SSW has moved well beyond the 'diversity' agenda (still dominantly concerned with diverse artist representation and mixed audiences), to explore what inter-cultural provision and practice can deliver in terms of community relations and high quality art. Once again the nature of projects has varied from locality based (*The Café*); to creating a temporary 'hybrid' community (*Harkat*); to a month long festival (*Kinara*) and an extensive, durational project of international ambition (*Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope*). In addition, many of the community commissions with a defined target population have actively worked with the cultural diversity of its participants – (examples are *Verd de Gris* with older people, and *Circle of Friends* in which participants had learning or physical disabilities).

It would have been possible, and perhaps less risky, for SSW to have fulfilled its obligation to ensure that different communities were provided for within the programme by ethnically targeted commissions which would have left existing cultural differences, distinctions and preferences untouched. The programme has not taken this safe route. The closest example of targeting in this way was *The Kinara Festival* (see case study) directed by Rizwan Iqbal from Love and Etiquette where a large proportion of the scheduled events were South Asian in inspiration, or of specific interest to Muslim audiences. The festival did indeed achieve a majority attendance from South

Asian/Muslim communities, but much of its offer was contemporary and cross-cultural in character, including some of its music and poetry and its politically provocative comedy and drama. The festival was rewarded with a substantial white British audience which built up over the course of the month and where people came from surrounding towns and cities to enjoy renowned international artists and high quality events.

Suzanne Lacy's *Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope* is the subject of an extended case study but is summarised here. The project, which unfolded over many months, depended for its social and aesthetic outcomes on the juxtaposition between two culturally specific forms of chant: Dhikr, a form of Sufi meditation and spiritual expression, and Shape Note a musical notation which gave rise to a vocal tradition with distant origins in Lancashire. Both chant forms therefore in different ways had roots in the lived spiritual practices or historic vocal traditions of the region. The intercultural contribution of *Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope* developed out of both the aesthetic encounter between these two forms, and conversations between South Asian heritage and white British communities over the course of the months that led up to the finale in Brierfield Mill in October 2016. The project did not gloss over the sensitivities of social relations between communities but enabled an encounter in which both distinctiveness and mistrust, and commonality and acceptance were articulated around a developing artistic vision.

A measure of the difficulty and courage needed to undertake a project of this scale, with the potential to make a lasting impact on inter-community perceptions and relations was also the degree of ambivalence and controversy it aroused at the time, mainly among arts professionals, with arguments that ranged over the resources required, the degree and nature of participation, the relevance of Shape Note in modern East Lancashire, the import of an American artist (Suzanne Lacy) and music Director (Ron Pen), the male domination of the Sufi chanting, whether the initial projected numbers were realistic, and the aspiration of the artist for a strong aesthetic outcome as well as a community development legacy. As far as the publics were concerned it does appear that there was some equivocation over the suitability of Shape Note, however we have recorded no criticism of the wider goals of the project. Both South Asian heritage and white British communities, who were involved were overwhelmingly moved, grateful and enthused by the meeting between cultures it had engendered.

Conclusions

Diversity of provision

SSW delivered an ambitious and varied programme with a strong focus on socially engaged community based participatory projects, alongside festivals and larger signature commissions. This mixture has laid the basis for a developing arts ecology with projects varying from small, intimate and neighbourhood based, to durational, festival, spectacle and events of regional and international significance. It enabled a diversity of modes on engagement, allowing for everything from simple 'taster' activities, where members of the public could try things out (*Festival of Making*), reclaim disused sites (*The Egg*), engage in large scale productions (*Rhapsody for the Leeds and Liverpool Canal*); form supportive and transformative relationships (*Circle of Friends*); create a temporary community (*idle women*); recover industrial heritage (*Fabrications*); work with international artists

(*Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope*); enjoy local festivals (*Burnley and Blackburn Canal Festivals*); discover the art of South Asian and other minority communities (*The Kinara festival*); commemorate significant events (*Home 1947*); and create a context for care (*Verd de Gris*).

Diversity of participants and target audiences

The programme has successfully created new art spaces, events and processes for a wide range of individuals and the diverse communities of Pennine Lancashire including some of its more vulnerable residents. It has not shied away from the difficult issues of inter-community relations in a post-industrial area of high migration and diminished resources. In particular, it has worked to create, through art, conversational opportunities and sites of encounter where racialized differences estrange communities from one another. It has done this by commissioning a range of small projects that have successfully attracted ethnically mixed participant groups (*Verd de gris, Circle of Friends*). The *Kinara Festival* produced by Love and Etiquette presented very high quality classical and contemporary art, music and performance of Islamic, South Asian and other international inspiration, to audiences that were mixed but majority South Asian. Some initiatives (*The Festival of Making*) effortlessly attracted audiences that reflected the ethnic mix of the area where they were staged, precisely because they were so well pitched – appealing especially to the interests of young adults and families. This in itself is an achievement in East Lancashire where there are no ready-made audiences for this kind of cultural attendance. Finally, a durational project in Pendle (*Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope*) enabled an evolution of relations over time via artistic and conversational encounters that address directly sources of mistrust and division. This has created the basic conditions for sustainable change.

Local ownership of the canal

The canal was not only the backdrop and setting for the programme's commissions but also their inspiration, providing a visually compelling and historically significant environment that infused the artworks with imaginative content and provided a living link to the region. It allowed people to reclaim the canal as heritage, including those who for reasons of vulnerability felt least confident about using it. *idle women* provided a floating art space for women throughout the spring and summer of 2016 with four different moorings along the canal. By privileging access for very vulnerable women, including those who had experienced violence and abuse, it built up a sustained following and demonstrated the emancipatory potential of art in women's lives. The canal also influenced a philosophy of 'slow art' that lent the programme coherence and purpose and informs plans for the future of the canal as a cultural and leisure resource.

The 'Slow' Way

The features of the canal that are central to the programme and the tempo it suggests are first, the idea of the water as a communications artery between communities and second, a change of pace from the 'fast lanes' of modern life (typified by fibre optics or motorways) to the slow motion of water transport along the once thriving canal. SSW has used art to create a third to re-experience the value of 'slow' in our lives and how slowing down can help people to relate in new ways to their environment, communities and to each other.

The programme takes its name from a poem by Ian McMillan that tells the story of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, the original 'Super Highway' of the Industrial Revolution that transformed Pennine Lancashire, bringing with it hundreds of mills and thousands of homes and placing it at the epicentre of global commerce and culture.

[\(https://superslowway.org.uk/about/\)](https://superslowway.org.uk/about/)

In SSW, this is a water and canal metaphor for the programme as a whole, but in many cases art works and processes have taken place in or by the actual canal itself, in this way bringing together a cultural imaginary and real life presence of the canal.

Heritage and art as change agent

SSW has developed and refined an approach to programming that will build arts capacity going forward. Laurie Peake, explicitly (and rightly in our view) rejects a consumer choice model where cultural programming is a question of reflecting local demographics and associated tastes in order to maximise ticket sales. The approach taken by the programme has been to regard art as a change agent where cultural programmers must reflect heritage and current life situations. The programme has celebrated the historical resources of the area and its communities by responding to heritage in the form of the canal, textiles and other manufacturing industries, understanding that these occupy an important position in regional identity and sense of place. However it has taken care to avoid the trap of a backward looking nostalgia, preferring to re-appropriate heritage through contemporary art. This has involved calculated risks informed by an over-arching vision that has offered new opportunities to experience what may never have been experienced before

Partnership working for future development

There are limitations to what a cultural programme can do, certainly over the course of just two delivery years. For example, the regeneration of the built and natural environment requires huge capital investment and is not in any case the primary role of an arts programme. However, an arts programme working in partnership or in collaboration with the primary responsible agencies can make a valuable contribution to generating new cultural capital and sense civic responsibility and pride in the region. Partners and collaborating organisations now include the Canal and River Trust, Local Authorities, major public institutions such as the University and other educational providers, existing arts institutions, community organisations and the business sector. These partnerships are at various stages of development as a result of the first phase of the programme, which has established a solid platform for cooperation that will be needed for the ambitious plan foreseen in the second phase.

Supporting socially engaged Practice

SSW's programming has supported artists in what are often new forms of socially engaged practice, working in circumstances that are often not well understood. The programme has explored various ways to support artists and organisations (these are explored further in part 4, of this report). Sometimes, as the case studies will show, there has been a considerable strain on programme staff and artists alike, as work had to be adapted on the ground to conditions and situations that could not have been foreseen. In the first year of the programme a number of projects ran into difficulties, which were addressed often with a steep learning curve and successful outcomes.

Extending the reach of the arts

SSW has delivered an injection of much needed investment in arts provision and this has considerably extended the reach of the arts into communities along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, where, depending on the nature of the project, audiences varying in size from single figures to

hundreds have attended, participated and enjoyed arts events and processes, perhaps for the first time in their lives.