



PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH UNIT

Qualitative Evaluation of the Super Slow Way Programme

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APPENDIX

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APPENDIX

Methodology

Overall research design

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 than artistic experience. The *Psychosocial Research Unit* brings together researchers with backgrounds in both the Arts and Humanities and the Social Sciences and over the last 15 years 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 Foundation, Northern Rock Foundations, Wellcome Trust, Manchester City Council, Bristol City Council*), tested and refined in empirical projects and published in peer reviewed journals. We aim to combine innovation with recognised rigour. Our methodological development has allowed an understanding of the contribution that the Arts can make to individuals, communities, localities and regions. We adapt 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* nature and impacts of an artwork, project or programme.

In accessing the stories of audiences and participants we follow key guiding principles which have informed the methodological development work of the Psychosocial Research Unit within the arts and cultural sector. The action research approach of *Super Slow Way* demands methods capable of capturing process as well as outcomes and both immediate and potential longer term impacts. Given the programme's purpose and aims they should also be able to capture changes in the cultural imagination and cultural capital related to the activities of the programme, as well as social process and impacts on individuals. We have developed an approach in which findings from research activity were fed back iteratively to programme staff in the form of formal review meetings and informal conversations, in order to support learning. This supports the action research approach of the programme.

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 *Super Slow Way* 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.

Our multi-level analysis of data 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 *in what ways* 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, the processes instituted by artists and the responses or individuals and wider communities who have taken part. This has allowed an understanding of the interaction between various components of the *Super Slow Way* programme, rather than an exclusive focus on outcomes.

Third space

In our previous work (Froggett et al. 2011) we have illustrated the concept of ‘third space’ and its importance in characterising the models of practice in socially engaged arts projects. We exemplify this idea through the case studies in this report, through which we define it as a space that an artwork, conceived as a social practice, is able to open up in a variety of ways: across the whole town at the level of regions, towns, communities and organisations, as well as the networks of relationships that compose everyday life.

The *Super Slow Way* commissions take many forms designed to inspire and delight, promote conversation, bring about encounters, bridge social divisions, stimulate the formation of groups and communities of interest, involve the arts sector, form and consolidate partnerships, re-claim public space, animate places, support forms of care, address cultural exclusion and raise cultural capital as well as feeding into a strategic vision for the regeneration of a post-industrial region.

We consider that the impact of an art object, event or process in any of these forms often depends on the particular quality of the imaginative space that it opens up between people. In this report we use the concept of third space to explore the generative potential of this space within the case studies we report. Third space is always intrinsically an aesthetic and relational space in which the distinctive aesthetic of a work is formed in interaction with participants or audiences. It is useful to capture the nature of this space in order to account for *how* an artwork affects participants and audiences 8

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 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 on wider agendas such as raising cultural and social, capital, reclaiming heritage and place-making

Case based approach to understanding 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 indeed might change it, tracing the immediate and longer term effects into individuals and community. Furthermore, these complex cases take place in a cultural context of the local everyday, while invoking the interests of different stake-holders. We have worked with *Super Slow Way* to identify and study key cases, which have provided rich data on a range of activities and their intended and unintended effects. We have identified the outcomes and potential or actual legacy in each case, relating these to the objectives of the artist and programme and potential longer-term effects on the location where the project was delivered, or where appropriate the wider area and its population.

Short and longer term perspectives on changes brought about by Super Slow Way

Although the time frame and resource allocation for this research did not permit a systematic longitudinal approach, questions of sustainable effects remain important. We have developed protocols of interpretation that are sensitive to effects of art on social processes on the social imagination. The methods used in this report have yielded a view of change processes in a relatively short period. They will enable a longitudinal perspective to develop over the course of Phase 2. of the programme.

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 diversity of projects commissioned by Super Slow Way called for a mix of methods, particularised for each case.

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.

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

Documentary Analysis

Method

great deal of data compiled by the programme itself was accessed and analysed, much of this was from web-based sources. We also consulted audience feedback forms, media reports, and audience data

Objectives related to this project

To compare and where possible triangulate monitoring data and critical commentary with emergent findings

To analyse Super Slow Way's self-representation and promotions

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.