

FASTER, BUT SLOWER SLOWER, BUT FASTER

Creative People and Places Learning 2016



THINKING
PRACTICE

**A report by Mark Robinson
Thinking Practice**

About Creative People and Places

Creative People and Places (CPP) is an action research programme happening in **21 areas** across England, aimed at increasing arts engagement by bringing artists and local people together so more people choose, create and take part in brilliant art experiences where they live. Arts Council England invested **£37m** of National Lottery funding into 21 independent consortia working within a common framework. It has committed to investing a further £20m between 2015 and 2018 and has so far awarded in excess of £12m over two further rounds of funds for existing places. Managed independently, each consortium has identified its own priorities and ways of working with local people and partners. By March 2016, **CPP had collectively created 1.2 million engagements**. In 2015 **90% of audiences** were from lower or medium engaged groups, higher than the average of those groups in the general population.

Terminology

CPP: national network/programme

Place(s) with a P: individual CPP programme(s)

Round 1, 2, 3: the 21 places were funded through three different funding rounds in 2013 and 2014

Arts Council: Arts Council England

Phase 1 and Phase 2: three-year funded phases of activity, Phase 2 begins November 2016 for six Places.

NPO: National Portfolio Organisation – organisation receiving three-year funding from Arts Council

21 Creative People and Places Projects

Round 1

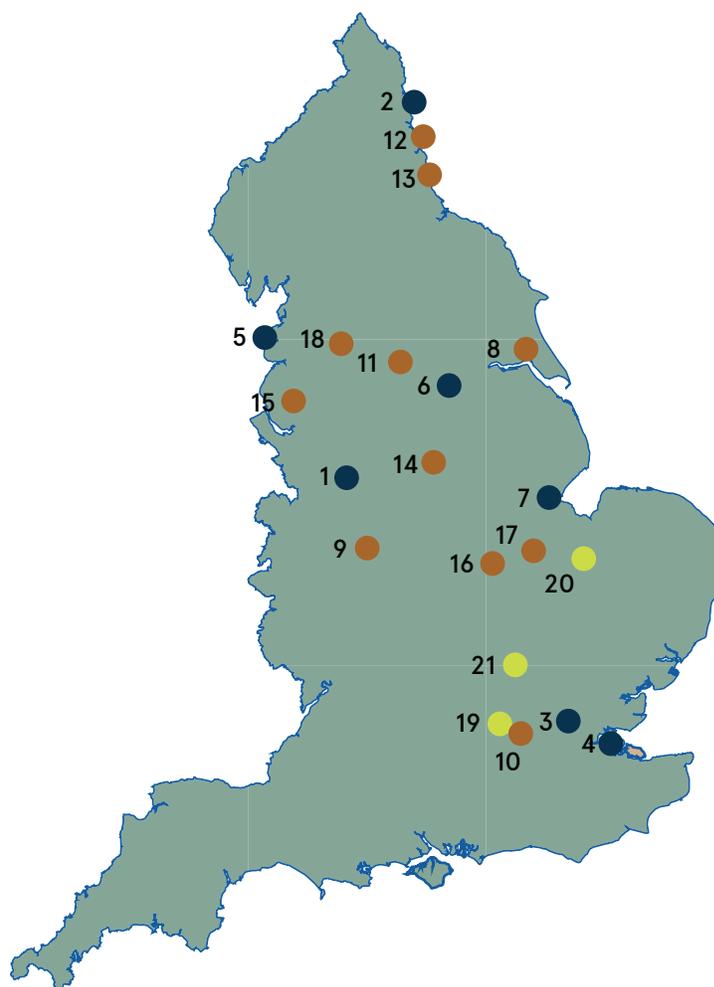
- 1 Appetite: Stoke
- 2 bait: South East Northumberland
- 3 Creative Barking & Dagenham
- 4 Ideas Test: Swale & Medway
- 5 Left Coast: Blackpool & Wyre
- 6 Right Up Our Street: Doncaster
- 7 Transported: Boston & South Holland

Round 2

- 8 Art for Hull
- 9 Creative Black Country
- 10 Creative People & Places Hounslow
- 11 Creative Scene: North Kirklees
- 12 Cultural Spring: South Tyneside & Sunderland
- 13 East Durham Creates
- 14 First Art: Ashfield, Bolsover, Mansfield & North Derbyshire
- 15 Heart of Glass: St Helens
- 16 Made in Corby
- 17 Peterborough Presents
- 18 Super Slow Way: Pennine Lancashire

Round 3

- 19 Home: Slough
- 20 Market Place: Fenland and Forest Heath
- 21 Revoluton: Luton



For more information see:
www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/map

Contents/Summary

- 0 Introduction: How CPP is learning to play it faster, but slower and also slower, but faster
- 1 CPP so far: learning in three acts
- 1.1  The process
- 1.1.1 Consortia: Different voices, changed language, new conversations, new work
 - 1.1.2 Delivery: A long time, no time at all, and full of surprises
 - 1.1.3 Collective Reflection: Act. Think. Repeat. Together.
 - 1.1.4 Evaluation: Ways to find what we know and know it's worth knowing
- 1.2  The insight
- 1.2.1 Place: How every place is more than one place
 - 1.2.2 Relevance: If art pays attention to more people, they will return it
 - 1.2.3 Excellence: A product and a process of 'what it does to you'
 - 1.2.4 Impact: Valuing people, their lives, their homes, their histories
- 1.3  The change
- 1.3.1 Co-creation: The power of deciding and designing together
 - 1.3.2 Capacity: Practising the collective ability to take action
 - 1.3.3 Non-arts partners: The arts and the social and the local working together
 - 1.3.4 Asset-based: To use what you have, not what you mourn or miss
- 2  The cliff-hanger: 'Faster, but Slower' / 'Slower but faster'
- 2.1 System change: Possible tipping points and transitions
 - 2.2 Participation: Changing the maths of expressive lives in 'grim' beloved places
3. CODA: And so then, what to learn next?

A different way of summarising

CPP has learnt:

- To make the process collective and collaborative and to invest the right time into it
- That each Place is different and each Place is many places
- That people previously not active in the arts will engage if the work is relevant and useful to them, their lives and where they live
- That change is possible by working *with* people not *on* them, involving non-arts partners and taking an asset-based approach

It makes me wonder:

- If CPP has lessons for changing the system that created 'low levels of arts engagement'
- If confidence, a place and a platform for local voices can increase social capital at a time when that is urgently needed

How CPP is learning to play it faster, but slower and also slower, but faster

This is the second learning summary for Creative People and Places (CPP), following 'Building Whilst Flying'. That report highlighted infrastructure, risk and failure, big splash activity versus embedded activity, freedom and flexibility and future sustainability as key themes for the future. Each of these can be traced, a year on, in this report.

I have tried to give several 'ways in' for different types of reader by taking a hybrid approach. For a quick read concentrate on the headings, summaries and 'road signs' – some guidance, some warnings. Alongside those you will find longer descriptions and arguments, and links to more detail and local stories. The rare person that wants a sonnet-shaped executive summary may turn to the final page.

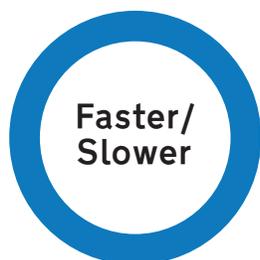
What follows should be read with caution. Large bodies of evidence are now emerging from the Places funded in Round 1 but Round 3 Places are still establishing frameworks. Evidence considered is unevenly spread and at times contradictory. Full clarity is yet to emerge. About the crucial question of the sustainability of behavioural change, for instance, it is too early to say. The area of digital engagement is not very apparent, although some digital art has been commissioned. The impression is that CPP is essentially a face-to-face practice.

My title attempts to embrace contradictory dualities within CPP. Excellence of product and process. Depth and breadth. Leadership and co-creation. Big splashes and careful partnerships. And so on. Record producer Martin Hannett once demanded another take from A Certain Ratio's guitarist by urging him to 'Play it again, faster, but slower'. This sums up the challenge facing CPP at this incomplete and uncertain moment.

On the one hand, it is making change, gathering pace, but it can only progress in a patient and rooted way. Yet, it always wants to go faster, to meet the needs of communities, audiences, funders and partners. (Not to mention the teams themselves, hungry for change.) But next year the extended consortia will have less money and smaller teams... These are some of the tensions CPP teams hold everyday. It is a moment of inadvertent poise that could still lead to a leap or a slip.

This is a time of such uncertainty – economically, politically, socially, culturally – that the need to be creative together as citizens feels urgent. But if that is true, only the fullest possible cultural participation – 'everyone' – will do.

So what can help people go faster, but slower, slower, but faster? Constantly listen deeply, developing a feel for the emotional and artistic heart of what people say and do. Unobtrusive facilitation as well as active delivery, with careful attention to pace. The ability to recognise resistance and enthusiasm, and the tact to respond. A bold risk-taking sharing of the artistic process, full of care. These all seem vital elements of CPP's success and learning so far. They are not present at all times in all Places, but the attempts to 'fail better' are constant. They are as essentially artistic as Hannett's paradoxical instruction.



Links:

[Building Whilst Flying](#)
[National Evaluation Year 2](#)
[Ecorys Report](#)
[CPP Learning](#)



Consortia: Different voices, changed language, new conversation, different work

Arts Council's guidelines for CPP required bids to come from consortia. This has brought together partners who have not combined in this way before. Non-arts partners include housing associations, a rugby club, community foundations, commercial entertainment companies, charities, FE colleges, and voluntary sector umbrella bodies. The skills, networks and experiences of consortium partners are used in practice as well as on paper.

Combining 'world views' is both the challenge and power of the consortium model. Mixing people with different specialisms and constituencies brings together professional languages. At one level this means explaining acronyms taken for granted in other circumstances. (NPO has several potential meanings, for example) At another, staff must bring many conversations together into a clear action plan.

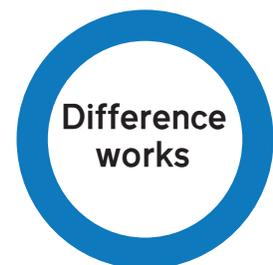
Establishing shared understanding takes trust and openness. This has sometimes led to new sorts of conversations that integrate different perspectives. Evaluations describe consortium members becoming more positive about arts activity after their experiences with CPP. They can then, sometimes, collectively shape new offers that avoid instrumentalism or 'outreach'. A report on governance concludes: 'This is driving new approaches to delivery – taking activity to different places and communities – which seem to be achieving results in terms of excellent (and distributed) art and genuinely engaged audiences.'

The pressure felt to be delivering manifests itself at consortium level. The time needed to form as a group 'felt scary because the clock was ticking and we weren't moving forward', as one person put it. Establishing a shared sense of mission takes time and is also influenced by the power dynamics within a group. Moving through Tuckman's stages of 'Forming – Storming – Norming – Performing' is rarely avoided. Fleming and Bunting's report contains recommendations for effective partnership and governance development.

Agreeing the best lead organisation is vital. There have been instances where this has changed, or where consortium partners have withdrawn as paid involvement was impossible. Where a partner is an existing arts provider, the change programme aspect of CPP has sometimes created tension. In some areas, some felt the dominance of a lead organisation limited the contribution they could make. As in so much, clarity and trust are the magic ingredients.

Finally, it is noteworthy that some recent Arts Council schemes have required consortium bids. Working together is often seen as more effective, efficient and sustainable, despite all the work required. Being open about the challenges and benefits is vital for others considering the approach.

Consortia create new dynamics and new ways of working because they bring an unusual mix around the table. They develop best when combining programme thinking and reflection with planning and partnership development.



Links:

[Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing](#)
[Left Coast Governance and Partnerships](#)
[Governance and Consortium Working – Tom Fleming and Catherine Bunting](#)



Delivery: A long time, no time at all, and full of surprises

Things always take longer than originally imagined, and surprise you. Allow for this in planning timelines and in programme design. Three years is both 'a long time' and 'no time at all' so tracking signs of change can be helpful to maintain momentum without undue pressure.

If getting a consortium working well together is like starting an engine, then maybe setting the sat nav, the delivery phase is a journey. (This may be why some Places reference the metaphor specifically in names such as Transported and Super Slow Way.)

Two simple learning points about the 'journey' come up repeatedly. Firstly, things always take longer than originally imagined. Secondly, plans will change as a result of what happens and how people involved respond. No matter how well you predict, you'll be surprised. This makes delivery hugely intensive in terms of time and attention. Teams need to keep alert for surprises of all kinds, good news and problems. They must also maintain progress, including spending time-limited funds. (Many Places have spent their money more slowly than originally anticipated.)

Time has been a source of urgency and creative tension from the start of CPP. Three whole years for action research – luxury. Just three years to change engrained patterns – tough. The first year's learning talked of 'the pressure of the clock ticking'. The ticking echoes the expectations of stakeholders, artists, the public and of teams themselves. What's happening and when? What difference is it making? To push ahead or take stock? These questions become more urgent where others see CPP as the main 'arts capacity' in an area. The learning remains to resist pressure to deliver activity for the sake of it.

It is hard to assess potential changes without a clear vision of how change will happen. Some Places have developed theories or stories of change that do this. These consider what success looks like after a decade and also identify signs or factors to monitor in the short and medium terms. This provides a way to manage the 'no time at all' of short-term urgency whilst maintaining focus on the long-term vision.

Places were often nervous of becoming either a temporary blip or another needy organisation. Experience is teaching that sustainable change may, in some Places, mean continuing into the long-term in some form, or via longer-term partnerships. In many respects, the staffing and delivery structures of Round 1 Places reflect a start-up mindset that prioritises responsiveness in both programming and internally. CPP has learnt not to tie itself into too rigid a structure.

The time issue also influences Place relationships with arts organisations. Many NPOs have very different planning horizons, which can vary from a season to five years. They must address immediate business imperatives that Places have not so far had so directly. Dual focus on long-term vision and current targets will be crucial for CPP and partners in the next few years, how ever long they feel.



Links:
[Creative Scene Case Studies](#)
[Right Up Our Street Final Evaluation Phase 1](#)



Collective Reflection: Act. Think. Repeat. Together.

Developing work that people new to the arts want to engage with is, CPP has learnt, an iterative process. (Hardly surprising news, perhaps, but many learning experiences involve repetition as well as discovery.) Minds and habits take time and flexibility to change. Developing trusting relationships that inform decision-making takes shared experience and the ability to digest it. Places have learnt to build in reflection involving partners and not expect transformative results immediately. CPP is learning to encourage this in a number of ways.

Places have learnt that spending time together discussing local contexts, ambitions and issues is crucial, and to create meaningful settings for this. Many Places have run 'Go and See' activities, which are partly about raising people's awareness of arts practice – exploring what could be done, what they like and don't, what might suit their situation and what definitely won't. A positive side effect is CPP teams and others spending time together discussing the arts. These are experiences people educated, trained and working in the arts can take for granted.

The network aspect of CPP has also developed peer learning. This has encouraged better connection, support and challenge, ideas generation and reflection on practice. The network has learnt that sharing experiences and ideas, as well as elements of programming, means it can move faster.

CPP nationally has some of the five characteristics identified by John Kania and Mark Kramer as crucial for 'collective impact': a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communications and a backbone organisation pulling things together. The common agenda arises from Arts Council's aims for the programme. There are to some extent shared measurement systems, although the differences in approach to evaluation reduce the ability to compare and contrast learning from results across all areas. The audience data analysis has created extremely useful insight and suggests a more standardised approach may be useful.

There are increasingly collaborative activities, especially between Places in the same region. Ongoing reflection on performance, including failures, has been an important element of peer learning. Project leads meet regularly to consider progress and learning and are open and frank in sharing experience. Places have also shared their evaluation frameworks.

Although there is no 'backbone support organization' as such, a national network team focused on learning, communications and evaluation has brought people online and in person. (Inevitably some use the network more than others.) This peer network of independent teams working within a shared framework is an unusual aspect of CPP as a programme. It has encouraged a reflective culture of high support and challenge.

Change is an iterative process involving action, reflection and repetition. Building in reflection helps embed and spread change. Local shared learning and peer learning across the national network have both been shown to be beneficial.



Links:
[Stanford Social Innovation Review article by John Kania and Mark Kramer on Collective Impact](#)
[The Faculty: collaborative skills development](#)



Evaluation: Ways to find what we know and know its worth knowing

CPP has used a variety of evaluation methodologies and frameworks to address the core research questions set by its main funder Arts Council. Adaptation to the local has strengths and weaknesses. Audience data has been important in providing national benchmarks and intelligence on behaviour at population level.

CPP has three core evaluation questions set by Arts Council England:

- Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?
- To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?
- Which approaches were successful and what were lessons learned?

Given this, the variety of approaches to evaluation is striking. It stems from the different situations and focuses of the different programmes. For instance, Transported has taken an approach rooted in Social Return on Investment. bait built the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWEBS) into their arts and health work. Creative Scene adopted an ethnographic approach to reflect on their creative practice. Some Places have Theories of Change in place, others do not. A compendium of approaches to evaluation has been put together by the national network.

Most Places combine quantitative and qualitative data. Case studies often complement this data. Some Places assess 'whole population' views through, for example, phone surveys. The national evaluation has taken a meta-evaluation approach. This relies mainly on information provided by Places, with some additional case study interviews. The national network has also commissioned reports on voluntary arts, governance, excellence and talent development. Suppliers of evaluation include consultancies, evaluation specialists and academics. Specialisms range from arts management and practice to community development and social policy.

This variety has strengths and weaknesses. Evaluation frameworks are designed for their specific context, increasing commitment to the process, and potentially the relevance of findings. However, this also makes drawing conclusions across the programme difficult. The evaluations complete so far look very different from each other. They tell different kinds of stories.

Ecorys, who have delivered the national meta-evaluation, also describe inconsistent reporting. There was also initially a lack of consistent demographic monitoring of audiences at individual area level. In Year 2 the Audience Agency were commissioned to examine audience profiles and mapping and to compare events of different types in 2015. CPP is not, however, simply about the numbers. Numbers as a proxy for excellence or inspiration for instance, miss how CPP is changing the terms of cultural engagement.

Understanding changing patterns of behaviour is a challenge for the next phase. A more holistic and longitudinal approach may be more able to consider the potential sustainability of activity and engagement. This remains one of CPP's central 'known unknowns'. Arts Council and academic partners may wish to consider planning now for longitudinal research in the CPP places beyond the original 10-year vision horizon.



Links:

[I'm not going up there and wiggling! Driving participation through transportation in Fleetwood.](#)

[Ideas Test: How we measure what we do](#)



Place: How every place is more than one place

Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh wrote that 'Parochialism is universal.' The idea related to his 'cultural parish' – an area covered by how far he could walk or cycle in a day. He contrasted it with provincialism, rooted in distance from centres of culture or power. Kavanagh argued that 'Parochialism and provincialism are direct opposites. A provincial is always trying to live by other people's loves, but a parochial is self-sufficient.' CPP is beginning to suggest that importing 'great art' from elsewhere is an unnecessary provincial approach and that to build arts engagement the arts must work hyperlocally.

A starting point for Places was the data for arts engagement from the Active People survey for their local authority areas. Yet these areas contain huge variations in health, wealth, populations and culture. They contain many lived 'places'. People may be proud of their own neighbourhood but distanced from others in the same town. Town centres especially can be off-putting to some people. People can become reluctant to travel.

As a result, Places have often focused on specific areas within their area. Villages, neighbourhoods, estates, parks all feature. Some evaluations suggest activity in familiar localities can encourage previous non-attenders to engage. Evaluation of Right Up Our Street found free outdoor work and ticketed theatre shows were equally effective at attracting audiences new to the arts. Work in targeted communities, however, was almost 50% more effective, with no major difference between indoor and outdoor activity.

That something is happening in a specific place matters. It influences who gets involved, how they experience activity and their view of the quality of it. This does not mean work cannot tour into an area. Many outdoor shows appear in several CPP programmes. But the specific occasion in a specific place is a main factor in both reach and quality.

Some Places have involved local people to work hyperlocally, connecting programmes to local assets, voluntary groups and networks. In Stoke-on-Trent community members called 'Appetite Builders' worked to gather feedback, which developed a strong sense of local ownership. Creative Barking & Dagenham have worked with residents associations. Transported have worked with local businesses. People feel strong ownership of where they live and 'outsiders' such as CPP need to be invited in to work well and ethically. Sometimes, however, programmes – and indeed local people – can become over-reliant on highly active individuals.

Working with local people to understand the landscape, history and nuances of small localities, and encouraging groups to be independently active and attract their own funding has removed barriers. This suggests potential for a new kind of self-sufficiency as described by Patrick Kavanagh, with people not reliant on 'other people's loves'.

Working at local and often hyperlocal level – estates, neighbourhoods, parks – has proved effective in reaching people new to the arts. Programmes have increasingly reflected the local nature of people's participation in society and culture



Links:

[Creative Scene: Scene Makers Art in Everyday Spaces film](#)
[Engaging Communities in the Arts Case Studies](#)



Relevance: If art pays attention to more people, they will return it

Working with local people to develop work with local resonance and relevance is increasing engagement, although the lasting changes remain to be seen. CPP suggests it is at least possible that if art stops ignoring most people they will return the attention.

Analysis of postcode data by The Audience Agency suggests CPP is reaching areas with typically low or medium engagement, people who live in the Places, and people from lower socio-economic groups. 47% of participants belonged to one of the lower engagement Audience Spectrum segments, 43% to medium engaged segments. This is 12% more than in the English population as a whole. Audience segments typically amongst the most engaged are most under-represented amongst CPP participants and those with lowest engagement are strongly over-represented.

As the Ecorys Year 2 report suggests, 'CPP is increasing knowledge, confidence and empowerment among the individuals, groups and organisations involved. Furthermore, CPP is shifting perceptions of artistic excellence by demonstrating the transformative power of art, which in turn is changing the local context for the arts in CPP Places.' However evidence suggests CPP is not simply providing for communities as a result of 'new money'. It is involving them, to varying extents, in how work is commissioned and designed, in its content and style, and in its presentation.

Some strategies emerge as key to this approach. Broadening definitions of 'the arts' involves a wider set of people and groups. (Sometimes people may not consider their cultural activities as 'the arts'.) The difference between free and paid for events in attracting people was small: 'Free' is not a simple solution. Locality and familiarity of site seems to make the most difference. Lower engaged segments are more likely to engage as participants than others.



Working where people already gather can work well. It is important to take an integrated approach to work well with disabled artists and groups, although there is little focused attention on this in the evaluations. Adapting materials target audiences is also important. Made In Corby found expensive marketing actually put some people off, so use a local print shop instead. For those unsure about the arts, the language of excellence is described as unhelpful. Talk normal, is the general advice.

Involving people in decision-making has been crucial to perceptions of relevance. Credibility comes from local connection and sharing of power. A note of caution is raised in evaluations though about the necessity of maintaining artistic input to maintain quality. Greater public involvement does not lessen the role of the artistic leader, although it may complicate it.

Links:
[Audience Agency Profiling Year 2 Comparing Events of different types in 2015](#)
[Working better with disabled artists and communities](#)

The question remains what might help turn engagement into habit, connection to participation? Learning suggests any approach must be rooted in genuine involvement of local people. This requires a genuine attentiveness to their situations, desires and ideas. Adrian Mitchell said that 'most people ignore most poetry because most poetry ignores most people'. CPP is suggesting it is at least possible that if art stops ignoring most people they will return the attention.



Excellence: A product and a process of what it does to you

Ecorys's Year 2 Report concludes that CPP is shifting perceptions of 'excellence' amongst local people and arts professionals. Place evaluations also suggest non-arts partners' sense of what art can be and achieve is changing due to their involvement in CPP. Direct involvement in decision-making and review panels provides insight into different artforms and ways of making art.

The second of CPP's three research questions addresses excellence of product and excellence of the process of engaging communities. There is no one CPP approach to 'excellence'. The thematic study on Excellence found frameworks in some Places but no national standard definition of either aspect of Excellence. Project leads, working with Claire Doherty from Situations and artists Sarah Butler and Nicole Mollett instead created Taking Bearings which contains 'An Incomplete (and Contradictory) Glossary of the Qualities of Artistic Quality'. This has 7 themes: integrity, resonance, originality, technical proficiency, ambition, long-term impact and magic.

Some approaches to excellence appear to be more likely to succeed. Framing discussions around local and personal context and active and meaningful community involvement increases relevance. Places have been collaborative in leadership style, often working in partnership with local activists. Although there is a move away from the 'leader as guru' model across the programme, making choices shaped by clarity of vision remains crucial.

Overall the CPP network has learnt that it must provide breadth and choice in different routes to engagement. Excellence cannot be tied to one kind of activity, be it participatory or spectacular, intimate or large-scale. Neither these factors nor art form appear to be as important as locality and relevance in attracting audiences new to the arts. Ensuring artists have the right skills, approach and values for the specific project and context is vital, as is avoiding 'artspeak' - a barrier to many people.

The use of quality metrics is a live debate, and CPP has not applied any metrics consistently. Flexibility and local fit are felt to be more productive, with reflection based on relationships and shared aspirations. Involving a wider range of people in these reflections is beginning to emerge as a central idea in relation to Excellence. This can include local people, local businesses, other stakeholders, as well as arts professionals and peers.

There are questions for CPP as it progresses about how notions of quality or excellence change as people become more experienced in the arts. If excellence is a process, what happens as people practice that process? As they develop what sociologists would call 'cultural capital', do they find new uses for art? Do they adapt it as cultural omnivores might or become bored by it? Do they, even, start using the peculiar language of Excellence, a tongue they may help to change?

There is no one CPP approach to 'excellence'. Excellence involves artistic product, a process by which it is developed, and engagement with people as much as a set of fixed characteristics. CPP is broadening ideas of excellence by involving a wider range of people in a wide range of ways.



Links:
['What it does to you': Excellence in CPP Taking Bearings 2016 Conference Panel on Excellence](#)



Impact: Valuing people, their lives, their homes, their histories

CPP is having an impact on the people it works with in terms of confidence, well-being, social capital, as well as arts engagement. These benefits are connected to helping some people feel more confident and proud about where they live.

CPP is not a purely community, participatory or socially engaged arts project, although it has much in common with those different practices. Nor is it an arts in health programme, a talent development scheme, or a project to revivify town centres or 'deprived' areas. It is an arts project aimed at increasing arts engagement by bringing artists and local people together so more people choose, create and take part in brilliant art experiences where they live.

Creating opportunities to experience excellent work has been a constant guiding principle. This now makes for a varied picture of commissions, participations and events of different scales – from performances in parks, social clubs, pubs, high streets, and theatres to magazines, exhibitions and closed workshops for people in health or care systems.

The kinds of benefits typically described are well illustrated in the case studies in Transported's Evaluation, which uses a Social Return on Investment methodology. They include pride, increased use of community resources, new perspectives on where people live and work, improved well-being and 'people feeling valued and that their life, experience, village, and what they care about is valued.' Participatory activity elsewhere is credited with increased social networks and specific creative skills. For some, benefits have included creative expression, often reconnecting to art-making in later life. It should be noted that the evidence base is small and varies across the programmes. For example, only bait have collected evidence around health, using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale, and then only in parts of their programme.



The importance of the relationship between community and personal identity is a key learning. Many CPP commissions relate to local history and culture. Super Slow Way's name reflects the canals of Pennine Lancashire, and it has used old mills and other sites for projects. Community stories in settings resonant with community history seem to have a different power than touring stories. They can engage people deeply and change perceptions about the arts, which may in turn enable benefits such as increased confidence.

Places have learnt much about how to integrate the various strands to their work. Projects must be rooted but not narrowly parochial, and work with appropriately skilled artists. It's vital to invest time, money and care to build trust, develop artworks and the best possible sharing. Stories or images of a place can be sensitive or controversial. Some stories rooted in the past, for example, can be off-putting to young people keen to leave their home towns. Being honest, open and ready to change as a result of feedback is important. Equally, teams must be ready to celebrate the achievements of local people and give them the same profile and status as other artists.

Links:
[Building relationships with people new to the arts: tips and approaches](#)
[Ashington Star Case Study](#)
[Transported Interim Evaluation](#)



Co-creation: The power of deciding and deciding together

The 2016 CPP conference, organised with Leeds Beckett University, was entitled People, Place, Power. The power dynamic within CPP has been an area of attention from the design stage. Is arts engagement being imposed on local people? If so why, and who decided it was 'needed'? What if the 'non-engaged' are simply otherwise engaged, busy with some other activity?

These questions are not dispelled by learning so far, although methodologies are increasingly doing with rather than to or for. Some people may have felt that bringing world-class events to a place would create audiences by itself, but have learnt otherwise. Understanding has grown that engagement flows from a relationship with local communities, or individuals and groups within that community. (The term 'local community' can sometimes be a little misleading, as any locality contains overlapping communities.)

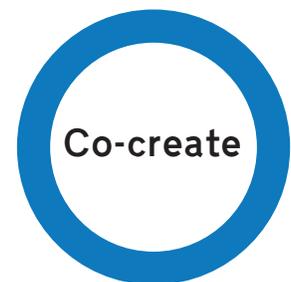
It is clear that power imbalances create barriers to arts engagement for many people. Feeling powerless does not breed the confidence necessary to enter an unfamiliar venue. Opaque 'in crowd' artspeak does not inspire the curiosity needed to go to even a familiar place to try something new. Resentment and worry deter people – 'I won't know what to do and I won't know anyone'. CPP is learning to break down those feelings by sharing power over what goes on. In some circumstances it is also giving artistic commissioning power away to local people.

As one project lead put it 'Co-creating projects with the community is key to successful engagement. Having a group of people invested in the project, working alongside a professional artist and exploring their local setting/heritage/space through the arts is what gets people excited and involved, and brings their friends and family in.'

Some, however, remain unconvinced by this as a strategy. There is a spectrum of involvement apparent. Some Place project leaders retain responsibility for commissions and programme. Conversely, delegating decision-making power to local panels is beginning to be a design principle for more Places. This is a process that takes time and facilitative expertise to do well, as well as a certain risk appetite. (Community panels may not always choose the 'prize-winning' artist, the one that looks best on the curators' CVs. The commissioning body has to be comfortable with that democracy.)

Another lesson has been that the consortium should include at least one community partner, to support and enable a co-creative approach. This helps with continuity and gives greater intelligence when making choices, especially about timing of delegation. One example of 'failure' shared by Made In Corby suggested that variable support to community members was damaging. It is vital people feel their CPP project was always there for them.

An approach based on co-creation has advantages when engaging those who have not previously engaged in the arts compared to traditional provision/outreach models. It builds in relevance, connection and involvement. Variety is needed because places vary in assets and culture.



Links:
[Appetite Case Study](#)
[Creative Barking and Dagenham Case Study](#)
[Made in Corby Case Study](#)



Capacity: Practising the collective ability to take action

To deliver change means developing collective capacity – of community groups and local people, and of artists, Places, arts organisations, non-arts partners. Nothing builds capacity like doing something together, if seen as part of a learning process.

The 10-year visions required of all Places often refer to sustainability of engagement and activity, if not specific organisations or events. Capacity-building therefore forms a strand of many business plans. Capacity means, in this context, the skills, ability and willingness to create, develop, promote or engage with arts activity, and the things which mean that ability can be practiced, such as people, systems, and resources. Capacity is what makes action possible.

CPP has learnt to build capacity in many ways. Importantly, local CPP consortia and teams are themselves 'capacity'. They have stimulated the use of non-arts venues for arts events and supported networking amongst artists and promoters. They have helped professionalise practice, often in places with few professional freelance artists. Places have tended to recruit locally and build on available skills, although leadership roles have often been filled from outside the areas. This has had a diversifying effect, as well as arguably bringing more varied perspectives to the task. Some have been instrumental in increasing local numbers of artists, facilitators or project managers. They have given people the space and money to try an idea out and then develop it. They have been an advice resource for people developing projects and funding applications. This has included projects moving to being independent, attracting arts or community funding.



Lessons have been learnt. Expectations must be managed to avoid overload or disappointment. Building capacity is a time-consuming iterative process. Apprenticeship or placement roles need support. The skills to develop individuals and networks must be built into job descriptions, not 'add-ons'. Places need to be ready to move at the pace of groups and individuals.



Behind these lessons is experience in growing the collective capacity in an area. This includes artists, project managers, venues, community groups, Place teams, consortium members, partner arts organisations and non-arts partners. The network of individuals, organisations, venues, and others add up to the ability to sustain arts engagement in the future. Having developed their own team capacity and systems, Places have learnt they cannot fulfil their visions alone. This has informed training schemes, Go and See programmes, tasters and network development.

CPP's own capacity is also collective. As well as the national network, alliances are now emerging to address common needs. One example is The Faculty, a collaboration of LeftCoast, Creative Scene, Heart of Glass and Super Slow Way to support socially engaged artist skills development.

Finally, it is becoming clear that some Places moving into Phase 2 may form ongoing 'infrastructure' in their area. In some cases such as Left Coast and Heart of Glass this means an evolution towards independence, in others greater integration with host organisations.

Links:
[Whose Capacity Are we Building conference sessions](#)
[Benefits and challenges of partnership working: conference session](#)



Non-arts partners: The arts and the social and the local working together

CPP Places have worked with around 1000 partners, the majority of them beyond the arts sector. Consortium partners are incredibly diverse. Partners at project level range even more widely, from social clubs to drug recovery centres and private businesses.

Evaluations show these have enabled projects to happen in unusual places and helped attract people less likely to engage in the arts. Many Places report changed perceptions of the role of the arts, leading to greater appetite for arts projects. Case studies from the national evaluation illustrate how Places have worked with non-arts partners. These show that building shared understanding and confidence amongst partners is vital. Trust allows people to take a risk when commissioning an arts project.

Voluntary Arts' 2016 report identifies opportunities to work more with community groups to promote creative activity. They note the roles played in communities by non-arts groups from churches to nature conservation groups. Using the networks and capabilities of a strong community partner can be useful, but it is important to have a clear plan. All partners need to live up to commitments whilst maintaining flexibility. It is also beneficial to evaluate jointly and to articulate the benefits clearly.

In many ways, work with non-arts partners has emerged as a positive channel for artists within communities because of CPP's focus on the art. Projects combine the social and the artistic in many different ways. Sometimes this involves an artist entering a community to share their practice, such as US artist Suzanne Lacey working in Pennine Lancashire. Sometimes CPP is working directly with artists based within its own communities. Sometimes the work might be described as explicitly socially engaged – work in family and women's centres, for instance. Other times the primary focus is fun.

Heart of Glass observed that partners wanted them to connect local conversations to national and international arts practice. This included plugging local artists into wider networks so they could develop their practice. The benefits of arts activity to arts audiences as art, on its own terms, are integral to any wider benefit. The arts expertise of the teams and of the artists commissioned is not secondary but vital to the social or business partners. It should be front and centre of any CPP offer.

Fusing social connectivity and deep arts expertise within a partnership approach helps scale up projects. LeftCoast and Heart of Glass, perhaps un-coincidentally both originally based with non-arts partners, have major projects supported through Arts Council's Ambitions for Excellence scheme combining innovative artists with large-scale community involvement via partners.

Working with many different types of non-arts partners broadens networks, brings in groups of potential arts engagers, especially amongst those often most excluded. Non-arts partnerships may have a crucial role in future sustainability.



Links:
[Building Partnerships Beyond the Arts: Heart of Glass and Transported Case Studies](#)
[The Role of voluntary arts in CPP](#)



Asset-based: To use what you have, not what you miss or mourn

CPP has learnt to focus on assets rather than 'deficits'. Places have no lack of creative people, often with surprising skills and passions. They also have useful buildings and spaces which may even be better for attracting local people than traditional 'arts infrastructure'.

Asset-based community development turns the deficit model on its head. Instead of focusing on what is missing or wrong, an asset-based approach starts with what is present in a community or situation. What physical or organisational resources are there? How might they be used? What formal and informal networks exist and what uses might they be put to? What skills, hopes, or aspirations do people describe?

As such it could be said to differ from CPP, which some argued was shaped by top-down, 'deficit' thinking. In practice, however, CPP has taken an increasingly asset-based approach. This embraces professional and amateur activists, promoters, teachers, artists and craftspeople. It also includes people whose creative passions may not fall into neat categories, from knitters and mat-makers to folk dancers of many cultures. (CPP appears to be learning to prefer the broad approach.)

CPP has used spaces of all types: community centres, village halls, town squares, parks, pubs, empty shop units, shopping centres, buses, old factories and mills, working factories, warehouses, churches, sports clubs, trains and train stations, libraries, museums, galleries, theatres and arts centres. The variety is a lesson in itself. There are things to use in even what may be called by some 'deprived' places.



CPP has learnt to focus on what can be achieved with what is to hand and can be developed. Conversations have shifted from arts infrastructure to building an infrastructure for the arts. (These are not necessarily mutually exclusive, of course.) It has connected available assets to people with ideas, and worked to develop local skills and networks.

CPP has learnt to use existing community networks where possible, and then build what is necessary. Artist networks, promoter networks and groups of local supporters working together are common features. This does not reduce the value of professional arts venues and their teams. In some Places, arts venues play major roles. Exhibiting in a big gallery or performing at a theatre with professional artists and production standards has given participants insight and inspiration for their own creative journeys. Some described this as life-changing.

Implicit in all this is the insight that for the arts and everyday creativity, people are infrastructure assets too. They need attention and investment – upkeep – as much as buildings. Without their input, connections can be sporadic, weakening effect. Without community activists to get involved in commissioning panels or promote work, the model frays.

Infrastructure for the arts thus becomes the sum of assets usable by artists and audiences within their community, and the networks that facilitate that use. This can then be nurtured and invested in, part of the ongoing challenge for all involved in CPP.

Links:

[Asset-Based Community Development: an introduction](#)
[Stop making sense: making a scene - how to grow your own cultural ecology](#)



System change: Possible tipping points and transitions

These last two sections suggest other ways to think about the future.

As they mature Places are not simply bringing great work to their locality, they are intervening in a system that produces statistics depicting low levels of arts engagement. (Actual levels of 'everyday' participation may differ.) These interventions include money, expertise, projects, capacity building, sharing power, convening different people.

In Systemic Innovation, a NESTA discussion paper, Anna Birney describes '6 steps to significant change'. After experiencing a need, Places have been experimenting, diagnosing local systems, sometimes finding 'pioneering practices', building on a history of community, education and socially engaged arts practices. Their visions have always been to enable tipping – behavioural change that doesn't flip back. An example 'tipping point' might be if more Places successfully use community decision-making panels than not, and design processes around this so it becomes the new norm within CPP. NPOs adopting this might be an example of transition to new mainstream 'rules'.

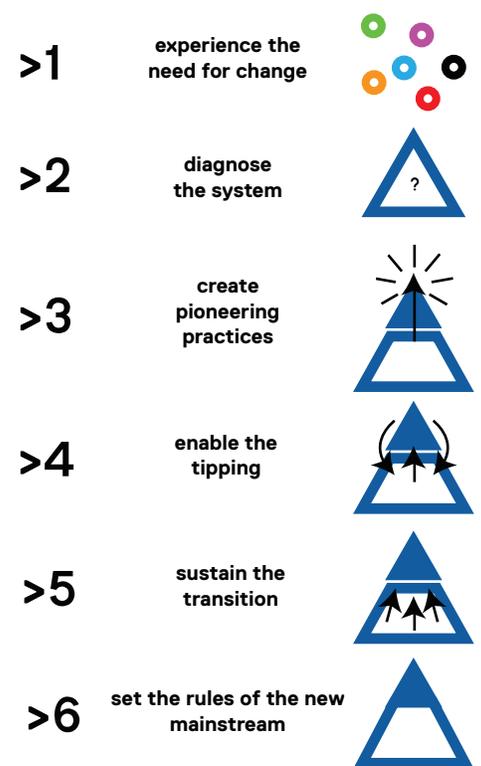
Phase 2, is therefore a transition phase. It is positive that Arts Council has recognised this by instigating a second phase of funding albeit at reduced levels, and are playing a lead role in the national evaluation. This should enable better spotting of potential tipping points.

The final step in Birney's model is setting rules for the new mainstream. For CPP there are more questions than answers right now. How might CPP influence future investment? What might it be reasonable to expect of NPOs in the light of what CPP is suggesting? Where might CPP practice work best? The CPP network itself should continue to think through how it wants to effect sector behaviour. Its biggest influence may be showing it is possible to shift the demographic of arts audiences beyond the super-served 8% highlighted by the Warwick Commission on Cultural Value.

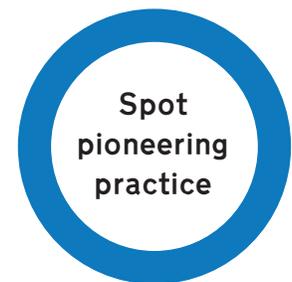
Places are challenged to earn more of their income, and create sustainable models less reliant on Arts Council. This brings new challenges as well as freedoms. Some Places are experimenting with charging and pricing levels, including variants of 'Pay What You Think', but it is too soon to draw conclusions. Innovative investment models may also help. Building on local non-arts partners, as well as national interest, might Place-based endowments support CPP-style work in future, with Arts Council, Community Foundations and others collaborating to encourage local philanthropic support?

All of these are areas where CPP needs to play it again, faster but slower, slower but faster. In some areas such as pricing rapid innovation and experiment is necessary. In others slow nurturing of roots. To change the system both must be done at once.

It is early. But there may be elements of pioneering practice with potential to become tipping points locally, changing patterns of behaviour. CPP could aim to be in a position to help sustain any changes, and to change the system that produces low levels of arts engagement.



Based on Anna Birney's '6 Steps to significant change'



Links:
[Systemic Innovation, NESTA Discussion Series](#)



Participation: Changing the maths of expressive lives in grim beloved places

If *Creative heritage x People's voice x Place = Expressive Life*, can CPP help people express the full experience of their lives and where they live by focusing on confidence building and better use of spaces and places for the arts?

In 20 of the 21 CPP areas, most people who voted in the EU Referendum voted to leave the EU. (The exception being Hounslow.) Aspects of the debate are reflected in CPP, even if indirectly. One can see deeply rooted local identities with traditions of change and welcome. Loss is a common theme – of industries, heritage, confidence, self-esteem. Some people, some places, have felt ignored and denied and CPP is a way to promote and inspire them. There are passionate demonstrations of pride, resilience, stubbornness, imagination, generosity and creativity.

This is not to pass judgement on a vote either way in the referendum, nor to argue that CPP areas are unique. But the themes of personal and community confidence and capacity form the warp and weft of CPP so far.

At the People Place Power conference, writer Lynsey Hanley described how many people suffer psychological damage inflicted by class. Arts participation is based on confidence in your own opinion, which comes from the habits and skills of 'cultural capital', she argued. Less stressful lives would equal more participation. This is echoed in research in South East Northumberland, which found negative perceptions of the arts amongst unemployed respondents. A phrase from Sarah Butler and Nicole Mollett's *More Than 100 Stories* also captures the damage described: 'Having a passion for a town that's grim, that hurts'.

I want to end with an idea that may bring these elements together. American folklorist and policymaker Bill Ivey has argued that 'expressive life' combines 'heritage' and 'voice'. Heritage for Ivey describes the 'continuity and community' of a place, set of people or art form or genre. Voice is the ability to express something, through 'skilled autonomy' and innovation in practice. This seems to fit well with the lessons of CPP. It moves away from the notion that arts engagement equals great product plus persuasive marketing. It also swerves the hierarchical aspects of 'excellence'. But it underplays two factors the learning from CPP emphasises: the importance of place and how new conversations involving different people lead to challenging new ideas.

Innovation brings challenge to 'heritage'. Place combines intangible elements of community with sites and spaces that seem so influential on engagement. The asset-base of a place can bring together and share people's voices. The change equation begins to be even clearer:

Creative heritage x People's voice x Place = Expressive Life.

CPP is learning, on its own terms and with partners, that it can change the maths of engagement in more ways than simply increasing numbers. It can multiply local skills and assets, spaces and heritage to increase confidence, so that passion for 'grim', beloved places can be expressed without hiding any of its tensions or hurt.



Links:

[Lynsey Hanley People Place](#)

[Power keynote](#)

[More Than 100 Stories](#)

[Expressive Life and the Public](#)

[Interest by Bill Ivey](#)

CODA: And so then, what to learn next?

Every CPP Place has been through the creative process of assembling a network of partners and then its teams, resources and plans. Places from Round 3 are still in early stages of their work. Others are reflecting on successes, failures and frustrations, even the odd scar, as they prepare for Phase 2. With the insights gained and the changes made, this will not be the same journey they have been on since 2013.

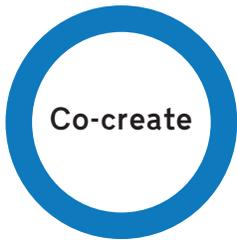
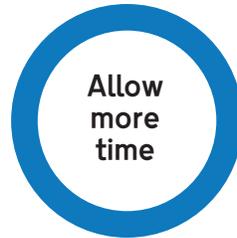
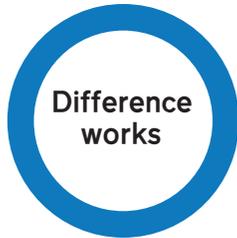
Beyond the network, people are beginning to pay attention. Arts Council England is highly supportive, and has arguably had some preconceptions shifted by CPP. Arts organisations are becoming involved in CPP projects. More challenging changes continue at local level, as a result of cuts to funding and services. The imperative to ensure people who might otherwise not engage in the arts have genuine opportunities to do so is more urgent than ever. But CPP is only part way through its story. What will happen in the next part remains excitingly unknown.

The last part of my brief is to suggest areas for future research or thematic studies that might add to previous studies and to the national evaluation. These four recommendations address areas that my reading suggests would benefit from focused attention.

1. Social capital – the bridges, bonds and networks in and between communities – is an ever-clearer sub-text to CPP. What impact is CPP having on social capital in its places, or on the social energy within communities? What are the effects on arts engagement of increased or diminished social capital? Is CPP more effective at bridging different groups or bonding similar people together – and what are the implications if so? A study could be useful in equipping CPP and partners with a useful framework for their work.
2. Relationships between CPP and funded and unfunded arts organisations and groups have varied enormously. Given the different imperatives, what are the best ways of working with both the funded and voluntary arts infrastructure in an area or region? What issues need to be considered? How could CPP and NPOs become an even more powerful mutual influence on each other? A highly practical thematic study could be useful for Phase 2 and also for other groups beyond CPP looking to work to similar aims in the future.
3. A variety of approaches to branding and marketing have been taken – what are the pros and cons of each? What are the specific challenges and opportunities faced by Places in terms of programmatic marketing to attract and inform people and strategic marketing to build stakeholder support for their work? A study could assist Round 2 and 3 organisations facing choices as they evolve.
4. To build on data work comparing audiences for different types of events, a thematic study into the strengths and weaknesses of different types of programming in relation to the aims of CPP would be useful. This would give a useful space for CPP's to consider their programming practice in relation to 'everyday participation' already ongoing within communities. It may also be a useful context for considering earned income generation models that might contribute to future sustainability, a subject that will also benefit from study as more learning emerges of the extent of fundraising and earned income opportunities.



21 Creative People and Places tips



FASTER, BUT SLOWER / SLOWER, BUT FASTER

'Play it again, faster, but slower.'

Martin Hannett



Different voices, changed language, new conversations, different work -
A long time, no time at all and full of surprises,
To act, think, repeat together,
To find what we know and know it's worth knowing.



How every place is more than one place,
If art pays attention to more people, they will return it,
A product and a process of 'what it does to you',
Valuing people, their lives, their homes, their histories.



The power of deciding and designing together,
Practising the collective ability to take action,
The arts and the social and the local working together
To use what you have, not what you mourn or miss -



To spot the tipping points and transitions possible
To change the maths of expressive lives in grim beloved places.

[And so then: what to learn next?]

Credits

Mark Robinson, Thinking Practice / www.thinkingpractice.co.uk

Mark Robinson is a writer and cultural consultant. He founded Thinking Practice in 2010 to work with the cultural sector to help it be more adaptive, more resilient and more powerful in the world. His *New & Selected Poems, How I Learned to Sing*, was published by Smokestack Books in 2013. He lives in Eaglescliffe, Stockton-on-Tees.

Lou Robinson Design / www.lourobinson.co.uk

Thank you to Tamsin Curror, Holly Donagh, Richard Erwin-Jones, Helen Featherstone, Ruth Melville, Ben Morgan and Sara Robinson for all their help and insight.



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

**THINKING
PRACTICE**