



## **Chapter 6 Conclusions**

### ***Cross-sector Collaboration: Challenges and Opportunities***

The findings of this research show that in Europe both policy designed to encourage cross-sector practice between arts/culture/heritage and other sectors (education, community and economic development as well as social and health services) and cross-sector practice itself continue to be underdeveloped. Furthermore, the countries looked at in this study are at quite different stages of development; the UK, Finland and Flanders having had decades of integrative experience and countries like Hungary still struggling to introduce change. This is due in part to the individual histories of the countries. For instance, the legacy of community arts in the UK has enabled artists to experiment in a wide range of settings, whereas at the other end of the spectrum, the legacy of social control in Hungary has meant that notions of community building are still regarded with suspicion. Yet even in the UK where there is a new impetus toward collaborative practice, owing to the introduction of social inclusion policies in recent years and a slow but steady transition in health services from a system designed to treat illness to more of a culture that encourages well-being, there is much work to be done to make creative community building effective long term. .

It is apparent, for instance, that even when there are integrative policies developed, they are not necessarily understood or wholly adopted by the practitioners working in the field. Many practitioners tend to carry out their work independently from official policies or schemes and often, as a result, must struggle to secure funds. Policy priorities are not always practitioner-friendly, as they are often designed to encourage work in certain priority areas and not in others. As a result, proposals might have to be framed in those terms solely to come under the policy.

It is not unusual for practitioners to feel that they have to compromise their own agenda in order to fit in with what funders are looking for. There can be a conflict between wanting to appeal to the funders and wanting to be innovative and creative at the same time. As a member of the Finnish focus group said: *you asked what key words we are using – 'marginalisation' is one; combating marginalisation is crucial. There are whole programmes that aim at combating marginalisation - you are somehow more able to get money if you are combating marginalisation, instead of saying you are developing expressive skills with at risk children in schools. It is obligatory to use these concepts.*

Even when the policies are well designed to accommodate and facilitate work across-sectors, effective practice can still be difficult to achieve, where conflicting values, agendas, and leadership problems arise. Equally, collaborative practice can be extremely successful making the interconnected nature of different parts of our lives and development more explicit. Collaborative , cross sector work can be driven or inspired by either policy decisions or by determined, enthusiastic practitioners or a combination of both.

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In Finland, there is a sort of dialogue between policy, research and practice of the health and social services with arts and culture. The growth of activity is slow but continues to develop.

A number of issues emerged from the processes of enquiry led by the research project: the focus groups, the face-to-face interviews and the questionnaires. The issues reflect in particular the main concerns shared by practitioners working across sectors in the arts, education, health and community settings in the countries covered by the research. The questionnaires showed that, for instance, issues of training, quality, and sustainability are truly international and are felt as urgent by practitioners working in alternative settings in the UK and the rest of Europe alike.

This report on cross-sector collaboration concludes here with grouping the issues raised in a series of topical clusters that highlight some of the contemporary challenges and opportunities for collaborative policy and practice in Europe. Hopefully this study will provide a benchmark for further exploration of the nature and extent of cross-sector work that involves arts/culture/heritage in Europe.

### *Policy and Practice*

The relationship between these two levels of activity is a complex issue, and one of the most frequently referred to in the focus groups and the questionnaires. Specifically, people commented mostly on the lack of interaction between policy and practice. A member of the Finnish focus group summed this up by saying: *You are right that the authorities are using concepts like inclusion, access etc, and these are indeed intriguing - But they do not always seem to connect to the grassroots projects.*

One reason for this lack of interaction is to do with language. The language of policy can remain abstract with no impact on the practical state of the development of projects, and therefore the implementation of policy. The fear of 'empty rhetoric' was something that was levelled particularly at the intergovernmental level policies. For example, following the Amsterdam treaty's 151 (4) many papers expressed the risk of the involvement of culture being neglected due to lack of clear definition of what we mean by 'culture', or by phrases such as 'taking into account', which have little legal clarity. So sometimes it seems that policy contains the permission to think or act in a certain way, but only in the abstract; in reality, it remains hard for policy to be implemented on a practical level.

Instead therefore, practitioners often found themselves in a situation where policy was playing catch up. It has often been the case that projects have begun independently of policy: they are marginalized, privately funded, and not recognised on a governmental level. Then, policy 'catches up' and provides a final acknowledgement of what has been taking place all the while anyway, and it gives official status to what was once experimental. In a reversal of expected roles, practice informs policy. An example of this is some of the Health Action Zones in the UK, such as Walsall.

This process of policy playing catch up can be a positive thing for practice since it

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allows for experimentation, with time to make mistakes and clarify the aims before the projects become codified, but it can be difficult to find resources to support them. If the policy is constructed before the practice, there can be an additional problem in that policy and funding structures are often too rigid to allow for the wide range of practice that may be available. This is especially the case with artistic practice, which finds itself confined to certain targets and policy aims in order to fit into funding patterns, at a time when its effectiveness is based on being bold and innovative.

### ***The Question and Definition of Quality***

The study revealed that the issue of 'quality' was a main concern for practitioners working in non-traditional arts settings. There were many opinions and deep feelings about whether the emphasis should be placed on the process of the work or on its products?

Many people felt that placing the emphasis uniquely on the creative process carries a risk of compromising the quality of the art. On the other hand, others felt that in projects with social aims, products should come second to processes. The question of quality is also inextricably linked to the structure and definition of evaluation attached to the project. The evaluation must be designed around agreed aims and criteria for success, but these can be complicated with input from more than one sector of expertise such as health services and the arts.

Paternalism was also an issue: many practitioners were aware that there is often a danger of imposing a high culture agenda onto a community and that these kind of projects carry the risk of cultural imperialism. For instance, as a Belgian respondent argued, *is it really necessary for every disadvantage person to go to the theatre or a high culture venue?* Many feel that the distinction between high arts and low arts should be abolished and that we must re-think the concept of culture.

### ***Evaluation***

In the questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions, one of the most frequently mentioned problems was that of the evaluation of cross-sector projects. People noted it that is not effective to evaluate a project without clarifying the aims and agendas shared by the stakeholders in the first place. This is especially the case with cross-sector collaboration, when there is more than one sector involved and a greater likelihood of misunderstandings because of different definitions or perspectives.

The question of evaluation is inherently linked to the basic decision as to whether measurement is to be quantitative or qualitative or a defined mixture. This can be problematic when the arts are involved and outcomes or successes are expressed in changes in behaviour of the participants rather than the participant's ability to participate in the creative process or produce an artistic product.

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In order to try to address this challenge, some collaborative projects surveyed for this study, reported working with external expertise such as that held by anthropologists who recorded what took place and formed a sort of evaluative judgment about what took place.

Practitioners argued that what is needed are suitable evaluation frameworks that take into account the creative nature of the work, since the sort of standard evaluations required by funding bodies (often quantitative) can be dry or rigid and run the risk of being not suitable for the type of project that is taking place. The UK Focus Group suggested that evaluation could actually be part of the creative process, and therefore suitable for the artists to undertake as part of the work. Storytelling and the recording of people's experiences can form a revealing part of the evaluative structures. One UK artist said that what he would like would be to have a creative writer follow a project and then to write a novel or set of poems.

There are those that would question whether the artists should be responsible for evaluation; should this be part of their job? Should artists be trained in evaluation, or should an outsider be appointed to undertake this task?

### **Training**

Training is a big issue for work that shares the expertise of several sectors. The study showed there here is a general feeling among practitioners that suitable training should be made available for those wishing to work in alternative settings, as many professionals feel that they lack the skills required to work to work with people from other sectors. Though increasing numbers of art schools and conservatoires offer professional development courses that prepare artists for working in communities and education, there is practically no training for social, health or community workers or for teachers that prepares them for work with artists or arts organisations. Target groups like, for instance, older or young people, youth at risk, people with physical or mental disabilities have a complex of needs and can benefit from a range of approaches.

### **Sustainability**

Many respondents expressed the need for long-term projects and partnerships between institutions, rather than the short sharp interventions that are so common these days. In the Finnish focus group a theatre worker expressed disappointment that her project, which after 2 years was only beginning to be effective, could not be followed through and made long term because funding was not available.

To have long-term sustainability, funding structures are needed that permit and facilitate this type of work. Creative Partnerships in the UK shows promise of being a longer-term system of partnership. This is not to undermine short-term and pilot projects, but simply to highlight the fact that more opportunities are needed to be able to sustain the initiatives that wish to continue. Within the long-term projects which do exist and which do have funding, there is also a need for funding to be flexible, to allow for adaptation and development over time, to ensure that the impact remains beneficial and effective.

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***Barriers to the Success of Cross-Sector Projects***

Similarly, when we asked people to describe some of the main barriers to making a project successful, practitioners from all sectors were in strong agreement:

- People from different sectors speak different languages, and have different agendas
- Lack of communication between partners and collaborators
- Lack of clarification of shared vision.
- Differences were rarely reconciled or resolved.
- Scepticism about the knowledge and abilities of other sector workers
- Lack of funding
- Rigid and inflexible bureaucracy.

***Elements that Contribute to the Success of Cross-Sector Projects***

There seemed to be a high level of agreement among practitioners regarding the factors that contribute to the success of a project. Some of these elements are clearly interrelated.

- Clarity of vision
- Strong involvement of participants
- Ownership of the project
- Clear communication
- Adequate economic resources
- Clear structures
- Better
- Good management
- Strong partners