

PEOPLE PLACE POWER

Increasing arts engagement



PEOPLE
PLACE
POWER

Increasing arts engagement:
a national conference

27–28 September 2016
Hosted by Right Up Our Street in Doncaster

**CREATIVE
AND PEOPLE
PLACES**

creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/conference

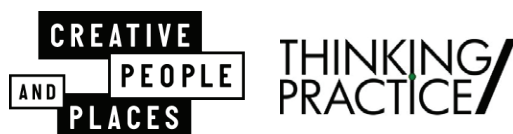
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Conference Report
Mark Robinson - Thinking Practice

Introduction

Creative People and Places* is an action research programme with 21 projects based in locations where evidence shows that people's involvement in the arts is significantly below the national average. The programme was developed by Arts Council England, which has invested £37m from the National Lottery between 2013–2016. The projects are experimenting with different approaches to programming work and engaging people with the arts in those communities.

People Place Power was the third conference of the Creative People and Places programme. Over 200 delegates gathered at CAST in Doncaster on the 27th and 28th September 2016 to debate issues, and to share challenges and learning from their different approaches with people working in a range of contexts, and find out how the CPP experience may relate to their practice. There were keynote speeches from Darren Henley, CEO of Arts Council England and writer Lynsey Hanley, as well as 16 parallel sessions involving almost 60 people in panel discussions and workshops. There were also open space sessions.

The conference hosted by Right Up Our Street at CAST and other venues in Doncaster with organisation led by Leeds Beckett University, building on their work leading a Knowledge Exchange Network on Participation and Engagement in the Arts. The speakers and panel participants had been selected by Right Up Our Street's Critical Friend and evaluator, Dr Leila Jancovich of Leeds Beckett University in liaison with the Creative People and Places National Steering Group, following an open call for papers.

This brief report attempts to give a flavour of the content and style of the conference, and of some of the learning that came out of it. It is not an evaluation, nor can it do full justice to individual presentations, which can be found [on the conference website](#). It obviously cannot capture the many discussions that took place across Doncaster over the two days. It aims to record what can be recorded relatively simply and to stimulate thinking based on the learning evident at the conference. Films shown at the conference and behind the scenes interviews can be found in the [Youtube playlist](#).

I would like to thank the organisers of the conference, especially Dr Leila Jancovich and Cassandra Kilbride of Leeds Beckett University, CAST and Right Up Our Street, the National Steering Group and everyone who agreed to take some notes of individual sessions. Any mistaken interpretations, notations or other missteps are, however, entirely my own.

Mark Robinson
Thinking Practice
October 2016

**Although everyone, including me, hates acronyms, Creative People and Places takes a lot of space and comes up a lot so is shortened in the main report to CPP. Similarly Arts Council England is shortened to ACE.*

The keynotes: Hanley and Henley

'If people had less stressful lives they would have more head space to engage with other things.'

Lynsey Hanley



'Difference can be the most valuable commodity'

Darren Henley

Each day began with a keynote presentation. Day one was kicked off, after a brief presentation by the conference MC, Holly Donagh of [A New Direction](#) on [emerging numbers and themes from the national evaluation](#), by Darren Henley, Chief Executive of [Arts Council England](#). Arts Council England is the progenitor of CPP and [Darren Henley described his many visits](#) to projects as some of the most memorable of his first 18 months at the Arts Council. He emphasized how some people had shown him the ways CPP had changed their lives for the better.

The local nature of the projects was key, and he saw CPP as democratising access to culture. He also gave examples of learning for ACE from CPP, which he felt needed more time than at first envisaged, as things took longer. The work of CPP was also opening up new discussions around the definitions of quality in strong community-based work. He felt big organisations had much to learn from CPP, and that good local leadership from people determined to change perceptions of often challenged areas helped ACE make a good case for culture.

[Lynsey Hanley](#) related ideas from her book [Respectable](#) to participation in the arts, describing the ability to have 'the middle class conversation' of confident cultural likes and dislikes as integral to social mobility but also constrained by the psychological damage inflicted by class. [She argued that education](#), social mobility and cultural capital are linked, but have become more difficult in a world of ghetto-ized digital culture. 'Why is there a BBC 4?' she asked, describing the positive effects of stumbling upon French films on late night television. She also mourned the passing of Top of the Pops.

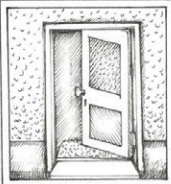


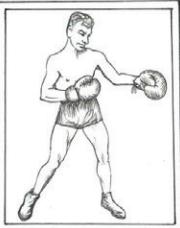
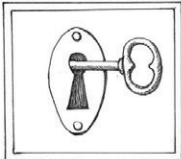


Even wider access to university may have negative effects, as it may create new barriers to 'respectability' and increase the resentment of people who do not go to university. Essentially, Lynsey Hanley argued, arts participation is based on confidence in your own opinion, which comes from cultural capital. 'Non-engagement' flows from a lack of resources and confidence in people's lives – less stressful lives would equal more participation. She urged people to share not hoard their expertise, and to find and invest in what is already going on at local level.

The Artists: More than 100 Stories

More Than 100 Stories artists Sarah Butler and Nicole Mollett were commissioned to creatively map Creative People and Places, responding to its achievements, the problems it faces and the questions it has generated. The artwork had ten themes: confidence, trust, partnership, decision-making, people, local, taste, failure, language and time. The work – which contains the ‘more than 100 stories’ of its title, alongside images and animations – can be found on the [Creative People and Places website](#).

Sarah and Nicole [spoke about](#) how they had approached the project and of the stories they had been told as they had travelled the country. (This included cycling from Manchester to Hull in Sarah’s case.) The texture of the places CPP works in was a clear theme – often challenged in some way, often feeling a lack of confidence, but also proud of their heritage and their people, their welcome. CPP had been empowering for many, which is communicated in the stories, which are short and evocative, full of echoes of people and places.

All delegates received a copy of a map drawn by Nicole Mollet and a story by Sarah Butler, ‘Ever tried. Ever failed.’

<p>An A to Z of Partnership</p>		<p>Justify your opinions</p>	<p>Saying yes can open new doors</p>	
<p>Approach any partnership with generosity</p>		<p>Know where your boundaries lie</p>	<p>Try to see things from others' perspectives</p>	
<p>Be patient</p>		<p>Look for the positives</p>	<p>Understanding takes time</p>	
<p>Cups of tea are rarely wasted</p>		<p>Maps only show what we already know, you might need to venture into unknown territory</p>		<p>Vanity keeps the world small</p>
	<p>Discord can be productive</p>		<p>Never pass up an opportunity to learn</p>	<p>Why is a useful question to ask, over and again</p>
	<p>Egos should be left at the door</p>		<p>Openness breeds creativity and surprise</p>	<p>Xeno means foreign, strange, alien - know that everyone is not alike</p>
	<p>Fight for what you believe in</p>	<p>Push yourself</p>		
<p>Growing anything requires patience and care</p>		<p>Questions help</p>		<p>Yelling creates more yelling</p>
<p>Hurrying will slow you down</p>		<p>Remember you don't all have to agree on everything</p>		
<p>It will be difficult</p>			<p>Zest and passion is priceless</p>	

A Donny welcome

One of the aims of the conference was to make use of Doncaster's facilities for conferencing at Cast, the new performance venue and the Point, Darts' community arts venue. The conference used the Point for registration on the first day, Cast for the main conference and the Mansion House (a heritage site) for dinner. There was also an exhibition about Right Up Our Street at The Point, which was the starting point for [a walking tour of Doncaster](#) animated with performers from Right Up Our Street projects.

The conference dinner was held in the Mansion House, and guests enjoyed theatrical and poetry performances as part of the evening. In addition, the opening session of the conference featured a welcome from a group of local performers, artists, activists and members of the Right Up Our Street team. Delegates were given a sense, therefore, of the town, its history and the creativity within the area.



Photos: Clare Danek, Right Up Our Street

Summary of individual panels and workshops

Panel: Meanings of participation

Chair: Nikki Locke, East Durham Creates
Paul Biddle, Northumbria University - [From combat to creativity: engaging veterans in creative projects – a case study of Cultural Spring’s glass making project](#)
Andrew Jackson, Canterbury Christ Church University - [From opera in living rooms to installations in white cubes: understanding participation, engagement and impact](#)
David Stevenson, QMU, Edinburgh - The problem of cultural non-participation: discursive structures, articulatory practice and cultural domination

Points and Questions

- Be clear on understanding of audience/visitors and participant and why participation matters to you
- Greater understanding and acceptance of non-participants is needed – it’s ok for people to not want to participate
- Does the arts sector replicate hierarchies and therefore contribute to the challenges of not being representative of population?
- Why do we always justify and explain?

Panel: Building the local arts infrastructure

Chair: Ruth Melville
Nancy Barrett, Creative Scene - [Stop making sense: how to grow your own cultural ecology](#)
Victoria Durrer, Queen’s University Belfast - [Let’s see who’s being creative out there: lessons from the creative citizens programme in Northern Ireland](#)
Liz Pugh, Walk The Plank - How to build legacy through training for artists and creative practitioners

Points and Questions

- CPP is challenging professional habits through a wider idea of culture, new perspectives on assets and expertise
- People are infrastructure too
- Bringing artists in can be catalytic
- Data ignores some activity and can create a deficit model
- A successful scene creates space for people to get involved

In conversation: Different approaches to community commissioning

Chair: Helen Ball, Creative Barking and Dagenham
Jeremy Brown, Creative Black Country - Who knows best?
Emma Horsman, Cultural Spring - Local arts commissioning – the motivation to get involved
Katherine Nightingale, 20Twenty Productions/Market Place - How does our garden grow?
Helen Willmott, Made In Corby - Exploring Made in Corby community commission

Points and Questions

- There are lots of different ways to do it – the place dictates the approach
- Sharing decision-making develops deep ownership, pride and confidence
- Teams need to be brave to really pass on decision-making power
- Community capacity is a challenge – people are busy
- Ambition can grow quickly when things go well

Summary of individual panels and workshops

In conversation: Cultural programming for diverse communities

Lynn Frogett, University of Central Lancashire; Patrick Fox, Heart of Glass; Laurie Peake, Super Slow Way; and Dr Alastair Roy, University of Central Lancashire – a facilitated conversation on cultural programming for diverse communities: realism or utopia?

Points and Questions

- Diversity in CPP areas is about class/culture/ gender/education as well as other factors
- Language and power: some artspeak excludes people, make the language accessible and the way people talk
- Conversations and time are crucial to get behind demographic stereotypes

Panel: How does context and sense of place affect engagement?

Chair: Nikki Locke, East Durham Creates
Sheelagh Colclough, artist – Approaches to participation in a post-conflict publicly-subsidised paradise: Ulster says maybe
Amanda Dalton, Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester – You, the audience: audiences as collaborators, audience as community
Sophie Hope, Ideas Test – [Out of the ordinary: mapping the unfamiliar and strange in Swale and Medway](#)
Ian Parks, Right Up Our Street – Ted Hughes in Mexborough

Points and Questions

- The language used is crucial: excellence can be off-putting
- A building can be a great tool and a great enemy/ barrier. Needs to be welcoming
- It takes time to dig under the surface of a place
- Is CPP reimagining key principles of community art – eg ownership and authorship?

In conversation: Social arts practice

Chrissie Tiller and In Situ – A facilitated conversation on training in socially engaged practice, focused on example of The Northern Faculty of Social Arts, a partnership between: Super Slow Way (Pennine Lancashire), Creative Scene (North Kirklees, West Yorkshire), LeftCoast (Blackpool and Wyre) and Heart of Glass (St Helens).

Points and Questions

- It is possible to teach how to commission a process of co-production rather than a 'piece of art' in whatever form
- Work is needed to develop the language and the platform for sharing this kind of practice
- Practical skills are also needed by artists
- Avoid the deficit model

Summary of individual panels and workshops

Panel: How can we build audiences for and from one off events/surprise encounters?

Lynn Frogett, University of Central Lancashire, Patrick
Chair: Andrew Ormston

Andrew Jackson, Canterbury Christ Church University
- [Breaking down barriers to engagement: Bell Square, Hounslow](#)

Nick Jones, Transported - [How do we build sustainable audiences from one off inspirational events?](#)

Kate Sully, artist/Right Up Our Street - [Using creative participation to build audiences](#)

Michael Trainor, Left Coast - [Can King Kong save Blackpool?](#)

Points and Questions

- Add to existing event and infrastructures by including participatory elements in events
- Work in partnership with existing infrastructure and community teams
- Under-promise and over-deliver, although this is a hard conversation to have with local authority partners
- Crucial to get marketing correct so that people that are aware of what they are going to experience, especially if ticketed

Panel: What are the benefits and challenge of partnership working?

Chair: Elaine Speight, University of Central Lancashire
Jocelyn Cunningham, Arts and Society - [A spectrum of change](#)

Nikki Locke, East Durham Creates - Working in partnership: listen and respond to make long term change

Andrew Ormston, Drew Wylie Projects - Sensing place

Points and Questions

- Add to existing event and infrastructures by including participatory elements in events
- Work to understand each others' situations and priorities
- Listen to build trust and confidence
- What do you do when partnerships need to change?

Panel: Whose capacity are we building and how?

Chair: Ruth Melville

Bev Adams, Faceless Arts - [Creative engagement: people and places at the heart of creating sustainable events](#)

Sarah Fox, People United - [The best of us: connecting a community through arts and kindness](#)

Nic Gratton, University of Staffordshire - [From confidence at zero to doing it all: how Appetite supports communities to keep taking the next step](#)

Vicky Holliday, Creative Scene - [Making art a part of everyday life: what happens when communities play a strong role in commissioning?](#)

Points and Questions

- Management of complex needs with individuals/communities can be challenging
- Wider community development issues affect building capacity
- Need to manage expectations and learn how to cope with rejection/failures - it's important to build resilience
- What is the capacity of the funding system to meet the expectations and ambition grown via these processes?

Summary of individual panels and workshops

In conversation: What is quality and how do we measure it?

Chair: Robin Simpson, Voluntary Arts

Kathryn Goodfellow and Juliet Hardy, *bait*; Abigail Gilmore, University of Manchester; Mark Robinson, *Thinking Practice* - Framing and assessing excellence and quality: perspectives from programmes, places and people

Points and Questions

- Frameworks can be useful for discussion with participants
- Always add a blank box at the bottom of any framework
- Frameworks can be as or even more useful in planning than evaluation
- Quality is a form of reassurance, but how to stop it being restrictive
- How best to measure quality?

Workshop: More Than 100 Stories-creating a manifesto

More Than 100 Stories artists Sarah Butler and Nicole Mollett focus on their learning from Creative People and Places structured on the ten themes of the artwork: confidence, trust, partnership, decision-making, people, local, taste, failure, language and time.

Points and Questions

- There are many ways of expressing conviction and belief in the project
- Thinking in CPP applies to other places/fields
- All places seem to share at the outset a lack of confidence

Panel: How do our evaluation research methods influence learning?

Chair: Chris Bailey

Mandy Barnet, MB Associates - [Social return on investment](#)

Scott Butterfield, Blackpool Council/Left Coast - [I'm not going up there and wiggling! Driving participation through transportation in Fleetwood.](#)

Sylvie Fourcin, Artlink WY - Using ethnographic evaluation in the context of working with learning disabled adults

Nic Gratton, University of Staffordshire - [Responding to change creating new research methodology to meet our needs \(Notes\)](#)

Points and Questions

- People are often shy or embarrassed about evaluation
- Narrative based on observation is key, although can experiment with numerical data
- Evaluation brings the intuitive into the open sphere
- Learn to balance values and expectations
- Balance breadth and depth so as not to over-stretch capacity

Summary of individual panels and workshops

Panel: Sustaining long term work in communities

Chair: Richard Erwin-Jones, CPP

Ruth Ben-Tovim, Encounters - Encounters Arts: the Connect and Inspire programme in South Devon

Karl Greenwood, Appetite - [Identifying additionality to support sustainability](#)

Kate Hall, Market Place - [The tightrope of sustainability](#)
Elaine Speight, University of Central Lancashire - [Part of a place's DNA: the value of long-term approaches to place-based art](#)

Points and Questions

- Creating sustainable relationships based on trust and leaps of faith takes a long time
 - Adapting is key
 - Capturing evidence such as economic impact can make a case for support from other (non-arts) organisations
 - Financial sustainability through income streams/ alternative funding is key to the long term
-

Workshop: How do we work better with disabled artists and communities?

Jaime Beddard and Becky Chapman, Diverse City - [A practical training opportunity for artists, practitioners and cultural leaders in the performing arts looking at models of integrated performance and participation](#)

Points and Questions

- Role models from communities in the process and/or product can attract people to take part
 - Identify potential barriers – then find solutions – eg Training for hosts/FOH staff etc is helpful
 - How representative are board/consortium/ advisory groups?
-

In conversation: What is the relationship between risk and familiarity?

Patrick Fox, Heart of Glass and Karen Smith, Critical Friend - On reflection: learning from Heart of Glass, St Helen

Points and Questions

- Long-term relationships essential to mitigating risk
 - Need to be transparent
 - Are we managing out risk and failure too much?
-

Open space discussions

Right Up Your Street discussed development of its work, projects and structures into the next phase. Moving from Arts Supporter roles to community team programming has had pros and cons. Deeper engagement emerging from independence in some areas.

Points and Questions

- There are practical challenges/support needs around becoming constituted or working with other body
- How can peer learning support model of working?

21 encouragements and cautions

These are not 'dos and don'ts' exactly but are split into Encouragements and Cautions. They are all drawn from feedback received, presentations or discussions during the conference.

Encouragements

'Don't do too much without thinking, don't think too much without doing'
Everything will take longer than you think. Allow enough time.

'There is only so much time and only so much money'

Start from language people understand & work from there

Tell people what to expect

Use existing networks

Trust mitigates risk

It's ok to get lost

Be transparent

Ethics are vital

Reflect

Cautions

Lip service is easy. You need to see the walk walked not just the talk talked.

Some people hate uncertainty. Make sure you support if needed.

Don't let perfection get in the way of progress

Beware if you already know the answers

Some cultural groups don't see their culture as 'art'

Ticketed events can be a barrier

Beware getting too comfortable.

Separate out taste and quality

Test your prices now

Don't patronise

Just one more thing: What is the relationship between excellence of product and excellence of engagement ?

The final session of the conference was the most popular amongst delegates according to the feedback received. Chaired by Guardian theatre critic Lyn Gardner, the panel considered the relationship between excellence of product and excellence of engagement from four perspectives.

Jo Hunter, co-founder of [64 Million Artists](#) set out three questions arising from her work promoting 'everyday creativity'. Firstly, who knows what Excellence is or means, especially given how off-putting the language of Excellence is to many. Secondly, who cares? Thirdly, how could we do things differently? She challenged us to turn hierarchies of excellence on their side, so they became a non-judgmental continuum.

Jo Verrent, Senior Producer at [Unlimited](#) argued that equality and access are key to any discussion about excellence, and that disabled people were still systematically excluded. She described Unlimited's task as 'to boldly go where everyone else has been before'. The serious side being that Unlimited is only necessary due to systemic oppression and the failure of mainstream arts organisations. Solutions lay in people changing attitudes, sharing, avoiding labels and creating access.

Matt Fenton, Artistic Director, [Contact Manchester](#) described how Contact engages with those it aims to reach by involving them in governance and programming decisions. There were similarities in CPP, from what he had heard at the conference. This presented challenges to his peers in other theatres and arts organisations. Could what he called 'slow engagement' change the cognitive dissonance of people's lives and the messages of arts organisations that breeds disengagement?



Sylvan Baker, Associate Artist at [Peoples Palace Projects](#), admitted that as an artist his instinct was always to body-swerve excellence and head towards quality, which could only be defined by its absence. Essentially, excellence was relational, discoverable only by people being alongside each other and subverting hierarchical notions. He felt that subverting the idea of excellence was vital, and a way of putting into practice the utopian impulse in the arts.

21 Questions, equations, aphorisms and statistics

Five Questions

1. 'Political risk hasn't been discussed over the last few days and how as cultural leaders can we feed into the political agenda?'
2. 'What are we going to do with all this emptiness?'
3. 'But what happens the day after? And the day after that?'
4. Is there a fear of maths/numbers in the sector?
5. 'What happens when the £ runs out?'

Three statistics about delegates

1. 230 delegates
2. 55% delegates from CPP Places, 45% not from CPPs
3. 86% described expectations as met or exceeded

Five possibly provable equations

1. Resource + Opportunity – Stress x Confidence = Participation
2. Observation + Story + Numbers x Reflection = Insight
3. People + Spaces + Training = Infrastructure
4. People + Spaces + Training x Money = Sustainable Infrastructure
5. Trial + Reflection + Time x Trust = Sustainable Relationships

Three Twitter stats for #CPPconf

1. 210,012 reach from 486 posts
2. 784,244 impressions
3. 50% positive, 46% Neutral, 3% negative



Five aphorisms

1. 'You can and this is how'
2. 'Don't do too much without thinking, don't think too much without doing'
3. 'Become a hammock not an umbrella'
4. 'We won't stop you unless it's illegal or it's not art'
5. 'Having a passion for a town that's grim, that hurts'


Tweet Of The Day 1

142 people tweeted or retweeted about the Conference. These tweets had a reach of more than 210,000 users, and had 784,244 impressions over the two days of the conference.

You can read about the day in tweets using the #CPPconf hashtag here: <https://storify.com/ThinkinPractice/people-places-power-cpp-conference>. These are just four of the tweets of the day.

 **Jo Hunter**
@thesonghunter [Follow](#)

What if instead of 'putting arts and culture' in places, we thought about it as uncovering & nurturing the great creativity there?
[#CPPconf](#)
1:48 PM - 27 Sep 2016
↩️ ↻ 23 ❤️ 35

 **David Stevenson**
@mrdjstevenson [Follow](#)

Arts funding policy still seems to lack a theory of the lifecycle of creative organisations and how best interventions might occur
[#CPPconf](#)
1:58 PM - 27 Sep 2016
↩️ ↻ 1 ❤️

 **Steph Fuller**
@steph_fuller [Follow](#)


People working in the culture sector think some stuff is 'not for me'. Why isn't that a valid position for non-participants too?
[#CPPconf](#)
3:16 PM - 27 Sep 2016
↩️ ↻ 3 ❤️ 2

 **Carolyn Black**
@FlowContempArts [Follow](#)


Liz Pugh local = no status, national & international does have status, even though it's the same people, depends on context
[#cppconf](#)
3:19 PM - 27 Sep 2016
↩️ ↻ ❤️

Tweet Of The Day 2

And you can experience the second day through tweets here: <https://storify.com/ThinkinPractice/people-place-power-day-2>.

 **ISAN**
@ISANOUTDOORARTS [Follow](#)

The arts: 'we animate the shit bits!' Matt @ContactMcr
[#CPPconf](#) @CPPnetwork
3:55 PM - 28 Sep 2016
↩️ ↻ 1 ❤️ 4

 **Jocelyn Cunningham**
@otherwayswork [Follow](#)

[#CPPconf](#) "stop worrying about what art is and change the discourse between us"
4:21 PM - 28 Sep 2016 · Doncaster, England, United Kingdom
↩️ ↻ 1 ❤️ 3

 **Jess Watson**
@monstersneedluv [Follow](#)

Why has more choice of TV led to art being segregated to separate channels? The loss of top if the pops is a loss to art
[#CPPconf](#)
10:46 AM - 28 Sep 2016
↩️ ↻ ❤️

 **Amelia Ideh**
@putmeonit [Follow](#)

Research by @64M_Artists shows that the term "excellence" is a actually a barrier to participation in the arts. Can we drop it?
[#CPPconf](#)
3:38 PM - 28 Sep 2016
↩️ ↻ 5 ❤️ 12

A Few Observations

This was the third CPP conference, following ones in Hull and Stoke-on-Trent. It was the first organised in partnership with a university, and 'opened up' the CPP conversation to people outside the large network of Places and partners involved in the programme itself. The conference successfully attracted good attendance, especially from interested academic researchers and to a lesser degree from arts organisations.

This mix led to interesting and productive juxtapositions of language and perspectives within individual sessions and discussions. It did also, perhaps, inevitably lead to some differences of opinion. Whilst one person said 'at times it felt too academic with inaccessible language', another commented 'it felt that the tone became a little anti-academics, there was little acknowledgement that you can be academic and creative and participatory and human all at the same time'. The difficulty of bringing different ways of thinking and languages together is, arguably, one of the things CPP has been tackling within communities, so this can be seen as another example of that paradigm. (If I may use a slightly academic word.)

In general opening up the learning from CPP to others was felt to be a sign of growing maturity of the network. One person commented 'I enjoyed it widening out beyond CPP. I didn't think I would so it exceeded my expectations. I felt this really began to build a different perspective and see CPP in a wider national context.'

The final plenary, which did not include anyone directly involved in CPP, was felt to be an inspiring way to close: 'honest, tackled challenging issues and avoided one of the dangers of self-congratulation'. Conference sessions, presentations and panels showed a willingness to consider in detail the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. People were, in general, challenging to themselves and others, as well as sharing achievements. Most presentations shared issues, although at least one person fed back on 'too much sugar coating'. However, comments such as this were more representative: 'of all the CPP conferences I have attended I felt this the most grown up – we were challenged'.

Although many of the presentations and panels talked about ways in which CPP is involving people in its various places in developing work, and taking decisions on commissioning, there was little direct involvement of participants in the conference. Some felt this a weakness, and it was picked up by [Matt Fenton in his post-conference blog](#). (He made a related point about a lack of visible diversity.) The involvement of participants from Right Up Our Street projects was welcomed, but how best to create space at future conferences for people to speak for themselves should be considered.

One final theme which struck me was a suspicion, perhaps even a fear of numbers, emerging from various sessions and presentations. Partly this arose from recent announcements about Quality Metrics, partly from a sense that CPP is about much more than numbers and percentages of people and audience segments, partly it goes back to a language issue. For many involved in the arts, data is a foreign language. But as research shows, learning a foreign language is good for the brain in many ways, so perhaps this could be another future focus?



Credits

Report written by 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. He has recently written a learning summary for Creative People & Places, *Faster, But Slower / Slower, But Faster*. He also co-wrote 'What It Does to You': Excellence in CPP. His New & Selected Poems, *How I Learned to Sing* is published by Smokestack Books.

Design by Lou Robinson Design / www.lourobinson.co.uk

Thank you to Leila Jancovich, Cassandra Killbride, Tamsin Curror, Richard Erwin-Jones and Sara Robinson for all their help putting this report together.



Supported using public funding by
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