How do we define effective public involvement in cultural decision making

DISCUSSION PAPER

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Abstract

This Discussion Paper investigates mechanisms that have been effectively deployed to support local cultural decision-making. Drawing on theories of participation, co-production and deliberative democracy, it explores the risks and opportunities of approaches such as public value, co-production, citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting, community asset transfers and place-based funding. The paper considers potential implications for policy that seek to avoid the pitfalls of 'best practice' and 'one size fits all' approaches in favour of a more granular understanding of how different methods can achieve different purposes in different places and for different people.

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This Discussion Paper will be submitted as formal evidence to the programme's policymaking phase.

If you have any questions or comments about anything in this publication, we welcome your views: please email us contact@culturecommons.uk

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Introduction

Since the millennium, there has been a global trend in public policy towards a shift from 'government to governance'[1] – or from centralized power to more devolved decision making. This is evident in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which call for more localised decision making to address global challenges, through to the growing consensus we see among politicians in the UK around the need for more public involvement in the decisions that affect people's lives. What has been termed the 'choice and voice agenda'[2] has influenced globally both at policy and implementation level.

This paper explores existing mechanisms for delivering local cultural decision making both in theory and in practice. While theoretical frameworks provide an understanding of the principles underpinning these mechanisms, UK-based examples from practice offer valuable insights into the reasons behind success and failure.

Commissioned as part of an open policy development programme led by Culture Commons and a coalition of 30 UK-wide partners entitled 'the future of local cultural decision making', this discussion paper delves into the complexities of defining effective delivery mechanisms of decision making as part of the 'Local Voice' research strand. The aim is to better understand how and to what extent different forms of participatory decision making provide platforms for local people to engage in decision making associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem, and consider how policy might best support these mechanisms. These kinds of consideration are becoming increasingly salient with the ramping up of devolution anticipated in the coming years.

Some of the approaches we explore in this discussion paper are being applied effectively in different contexts around the world. For example, in the USA, approaches to public value have been employed to help organisations gain greater understanding of the needs and wants of different stakeholders.[3] In Brazil, participatory budgeting has been used to redistribute funding more equitably.[4] In Ireland, Citizens' Assemblies have informed legal

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[1] Alessandro Palumbo, *From Government to Governance*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2010).
[2] Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes, *The State as Cultural Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[3] Mark H. Moore, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
[4] Bridget E. O'Rourke, Slicing Up the Pie: Community Involvement in Participatory Budgeting, Porto Alegre, Brazil, Community Pride Initiative (2003).

frameworks.[5] In culture specifically, professional-led cultural organisations are increasingly engaging in [co-production](#) to reimagine their programmes and their audiences[6]. While often volunteer-led cultural centres have provided spaces and mechanisms for people's everyday cultural practices[7]. In the UK, at the national policy level, there has been a growing increase in [place-based funding](#) promising a 'Levelling Up' of areas that have seen underinvestment in social infrastructure. While at a local level, there are a growing number of [community asset transfers](#)[8] devolving the running of local infrastructure.

This variety of aims and approaches deployed to support local decision making means there is a corresponding need to ensure understanding of the different mechanisms that may be employed to achieve different ends – and in different places – and that this is underpinned by learning from what has worked, and equally what has not worked, in the past.

The aim of this discussion paper is therefore to investigate mechanisms for participatory decision making and to consider policy implications that avoid the pitfalls of 'best practice' and 'one size fits all' approaches by acknowledging the value of different methods of achieving different purposes, in different places, and for different people. It further seeks to contribute to knowledge exchange between academia, policy and practice by providing insights to the following questions.

1) What do we mean by public involvement in decision making and why does it matter?
2) What can we learn from successes and failures of previous mechanisms in local authorities, the cultural sectors and beyond?
3) What are the levers and barriers to its implementation?
4) What might these insights tell us about how local voice might be factored into the devolution of cultural policy in the coming years?

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[5] Jane Suiter, David M. Farrell, Clodagh Harris, and Peter Murphy, "Measuring Epistemic Deliberation on Polarized Issues: The Case of Abortion Provision in Ireland", *Political Studies Review* 20, no. 4 (2022): 630-647.
[6] https://participatorymuseum.org/read/
[7] Birgit Eriksson, Camilla Møhring Reestorff, and Carsten Stage, 'Forms and Potential Effects of Citizen Participation in European Cultural Centres', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 15, no. 2 (2018).
[8] https://locality.org.uk/.

What do we mean by public involvement in decision making?

Approaches to public involvement in decision making draw on theories of participation[9], in which those with an interest in a problem have agency in solving it, co-production[10] where deliverers and beneficiaries design solutions collaboratively, and deliberative democracy which involves, 'public reasoning between citizens, rather than counting the votes or authority of representatives'[11] to discursively arrive at solutions.

What all these theories share is a challenge to established decision-making processes.

Decisions, including those associated with policymaking, commonly involve a narrow range of voices to inform their decisions based either on elected members with different political positions who seek to convince others of their point of view; professional expertise which is often informed by 'advocacy coalitions'[12] who exist to protect vested interests, or evidence collected to make the case for different courses of action, often without recognition that what works for one group or in one context may not benefit all equally.

Current decision making can encourage 'group thinking' which limits exploring the range of options that might facilitate better solutions.[13]

In contrast, approaches that involve participatory decision making or social learning[14] seek to involve a wider range of voices in decision making. In so doing, they draw on different interests and form decisions in a more discursive or deliberative manner based on exploring and weighing up all possible options. The benefits of these approaches may

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[9] Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation", *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 4 (1969): 216-224.

[10] Elinor Ostrom, "Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy, and Development", *World Development* 24/6 (1996): 1073–1087.

[11] Jürgen Habermas, "Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research," *Communication Theory* 16, no. 4 (2006): 411-426.

[12] Paul A. Sabatier, Christopher M. Weible, "The Advocacy Coalition Framework Innovations and Clarifications", in *Theories of the Policy Process*, ed. Paul Sabatier (Routledge, 2007).

[13] David Jubb, 'A Shift from Group-Led Decision-Making to Something That Is More Citizen-Led', David Jubb (blog), 14 November 2023. https://davidjubb.blog/2023/11/14/a-shift-from-group-led-decision-making-to-something-that-is-more-citizen-led/.

[14] Peter J. May, "Policy Learning and Failure", *Journal of Public Policy*, 12, no. 4 (1992): 331-354.

equally be building greater public confidence in existing institutional structures and/or finding alternative solutions to what have been seen as 'wicked' or intractable problems.[15] Such approaches can include professional stakeholders from a broad field of expertise. An example is local cultural partnerships where the local authority collaborates with those working in the cultural sector, property developers, community groups, tourism etc. The key to such approaches is that they involve those with the capacity to implement decisions once they have been taken. But they may struggle to move beyond the 'group think' of their own professional contexts.

Other approaches, which take an asset-based approach to acknowledge the expertise in everyone, can involve local citizens, whose interests and expertise may come from being beneficiaries rather than professional deliverers of services. An example of this could be participatory budgeting processes where local residents are invited to have a say in setting priorities for spending and assess possible delivery options. The key to this approach is that local citizens have some agency over the decisions but also in setting the agenda for them.

But without appropriate level of support and investment being made available, such approaches can fall short of making sustained change which, can lead to raised expectations that increase disillusionment[16].

Public involvement in decision making is therefore often a 'catch all' for involving people living and working in a place in solving local problems.

Rikki Dean[17] distinguishes between different modes of participation: those that are **prescribed** or top down, versus those that are **negotiated** or bottom up and those that are based on **solidarity** and consensus and those that give space for **agonism** or dissensus. This is a useful tool for analysing the relationship between purpose and

[15] John Alford and Brian W. Head, "Wicked and Less Wicked Problems: A Typology and a Contingency Framework", *Policy and Society* 36, no. 3 (2017): 397–413, https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2017.1361634.

[16] Stranak, Benedikt, Emmet Kiberd, and Abi O'Connor, "Devolution Won't Work Unless We Fix Local Government Funding", *New Economics Foundation*, 2 May 2024. https://neweconomics.org/2024/05/devolution-wont-work-unless-we-fix-local-government-funding

[17] Rikki John Dean, "Beyond Radicalism and Resignation: The Competing Logics of Public Participation in Policy Decisions", *Policy and Politics* (2016). DOI: 10.1332/030557316X14531466517034

processes, and thereby ensuring mechanisms and interventions are locally relevant in very different contexts.

Figure 1. Modes of Participation from Dean, "Beyond Radicalism and Resignation", *Policy and Politics* (2016), 5.

But the potential breadth of modes in 'Public Participation' also risks making the term meaningless and can ignore the power dynamics within such processes.

In their book *Participation, the new tyranny*, Cooke and Kothari show how the wider perspectives that are a crucial component of participatory decision making can be easily subsumed by the same group think of established decision-making processes.[18] Despite claiming to be more democratic, they also accuse such processes of decreasing democracy through their lack of representation and accountability with fewer people taking part than through the ballot box. More recently scholars have criticised the focus on 'the local' which assumes that place-based solutions are appropriate in a globalised world where the increased mobility of some people make place a more neutral concept and therefore people-centred approaches more relevant.[19]

But despite these critiques of the practice, few in UK politics or policymaking now challenge the principle of increasing local power, or of widening the range of voices involved in decision making. It is therefore vital that we understand why this approach is so important before we look in detail at some of the different models being employed in the cultural sector in the UK today.

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[18] Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (New York: Zed Books, 2001).
[19] Fabrizio Barca, Philip McCann and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, *The case for regional development intervention: place-based versus place-neutral approaches,* Journal of Regional Science, 52, no 1(2012): 134–152. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9787.2011.00756.x

Why does it matter for culture?

There is a global democratic deficit and growing disillusionment in representative democracy,[20] seen in the decline in voter engagement and the increasing polarization of political discourse. There is also distrust in our public services and in the decision-making processes that support them. This has led to calls for alternative forms of democracy and more public involvement in decision making.

There is evidence to support the argument that the more voices that are listened to, the greater variety of alternatives that are considered, and the better decisions and outcomes from these decisions are.[21]

But it is also clear that such approaches can also be used as a tool to increase accountability for the public realm; to share a sense of civic responsibility amongst citizens; to gain greater understanding of what the different needs and interests of different people are; or to generate alternative visions of the future we want to live and work in.

While in some cases the objective of public engagement is to increase the legitimacy of existing institutional structures, in others it is to challenge the status quo and find new ways of working altogether.

Culture, at least in part, is about meaning-making and, as such, has the potential to play a significant role in creatively finding new ways of imagining the world we live in.[22] But culture can also be part of the problem if we do not consider whose meaning of culture is allowed to be heard. The same 'crisis in legitimacy'[23] in the democratic realm has been identified in the subsidised cultural sector, with many groups feeling their culture and their values are not represented.[24]

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[20] Lally, Clare, and Emmeline Ledgerwood, "Election Turnout: Why Do Some People Not Vote?", Rapid response, *POST*, UK Parliament, 10 April 2024. https://post.parliament.uk/election-turnout-why-do-some-people-not-vote/.

[21] Bevir and Rhodes, *The State as Cultural Practice*; Vivien Lowndes, "Citizenship and Urban Politics", in *Theories of Urban Politics*, ed. David Judge, Gerry Stoker, and Harold Wolman (London: Sage, 1995).

[22] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Hammonds, W., Culture and democracy, the evidence – How citizens' participation in cultural activities enhances civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion – Lessons from international research, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/39199.

[23] John Holden, Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy: Why Culture Needs a Democratic Mandate (London: Demos, 2006).

[24] Orian Brook, David O'Brien, and Mark Taylor, *Culture Is Bad for You* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526152152.

As in the broader political landscape, there is a need to refresh our approach to how decisions about creative, cultural and heritage policy are made.

A democratic right to culture is enshrined within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

> *Article 27:*
>
> *Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.[25]*

But significantly, this right includes both the right to have access to the arts and mainstream culture and the right to freely practice our own cultural traditions.

Participatory decision making can be an important way of exercising our cultural rights.

Historically, the Arts Councils in the four UK nations have prioritised improving access for citizens to the professional arts, seeing most of the funding directed towards London and the South East,[26] while local authorities and nationalised industries have supported everyday culture or 'everyday creativity' locally. At its peak, the National Coal Board invested more in culture than the Arts Council of Great Britain (as it was at the time). To this extent, distinct cultural rights were addressed by different bodies.

With privatisation in 1980s and then a squeeze on local authority finances since the millennium, the community cultural infrastructure that supported everyday cultural practices have been one of the greatest casualties. While evidence suggests that there is still widespread engagement in everyday culture,[27] it is woefully under resourced.[28]

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[25] United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 217 A (III), 1948, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

[27] Niall Cunningham, and Mike Savage, "The Secret Garden? Elite Metropolitan Geographies in the Contemporary UK", *The Sociological Review* 63, no. 2 (2015): 321-348, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12285.

[27] Understanding Everyday Participation https://www.everydayparticipation.org/ ; Creative Lives https://www.creative-lives.org/.

[28] Sarah Snelson and James Collis, *The Impacts of Social Infrastructure Investment: A Report for Local Trust* (London: Frontier Economics, June 2021), https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Frontier-Economics_the-impacts-of-social-infrastructure-investment.pdf.

At the same time, there is growing evidence of disengagement in participation in subsidised culture and the professional arts.[29] This has placed an expectation on the Arts Council's and other Arm's Length Bodies to work beyond their traditional remit and expertise to develop a response to everyday culture, while also trying to increase participation in the work they fund. However, evidence suggests that such approaches have failed to shift the inequalities in resource or participation.[30]

This has led to the Matthew effect[31] in cultural policy which sees those with the most receiving the most in benefit from public funding.

This has long applied in terms of the geographic spread of public investment[32]. But more recently, place-based funding, such as DCMS's *Creative Cities*, Arts Council England's *Creative People and Places*,[33] or UKRI's *Strength in Places[34]* programmes, have tried to address this but have tended to create competition between places rather than responding to gaps in resource.

Competitive investment increases inequalities, pitting cities and towns against each other rather than distributing resources for all.[35,36]

But even within the winning places or areas most funded, inequalities exist in terms of the demographic of those people who benefit from public funding for culture[37]. There has therefore never been a greater need for public involvement about what the priorities for this spend should be.

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[29] Taking Part https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey; Scottish Household Survey https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-household-survey/.
[30] Jancovich and Stevenson, Failures in Cultural Participation.
[31] Daniel Rigney, *The Matthew effect: How advantage begets further advantage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[32] Rachel Johnson, Abigail Gilmore, and Benjamin Dunn, "Working with and Supporting Cultural Organisations: Local Cultural Policies and Newton's Law of Cultural Funding", Centre for Cultural Value, 2021, accessed June 12, 2024, https://www.culturehive.co.uk/CVIresources/working-with-and-supporting-cultural-organisations-local-cultural-policies-and-newtons-law-of-cultural-funding/.
[33] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places-0.
[34] https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/strength-in-places-fund/.
[35] Rebecca Riley, "What Next for Levelling Up?", *UK in a Changing Europe*, 2023, accessed June 12, 2024, https://ukandeu.ac.uk/what-next-for-levelling-up/
[36] Mark Fransham, Mark Herbertson, Mihaela Pop, Marta Bandeira Morais, and Neil Lee, "Level best? The levelling up agenda and UK regional inequality", *Regional Studies* 57, no. 11 (2023): 2339-2352. https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2022.2159356.
[37] cf. Ben Walmsley et al., Culture in Crisis: Impacts of Covid-19 on the UK Cultural Sector and Where We Go from Here (Leeds: Centre for Cultural Value, 2022).

If UK policymakers are going to meet their obligations to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, cultural policy must involve a wider range of voices to consider whose meaning is being made through culture.

There are many examples where parts of the UK's creative, cultural and heritage sectors have been thinking about how the public might influence existing institutional operations and other models that reconsider the kind of culture and cultural institutions citizens might want to see. The main body of this paper therefore considers some examples from practice before concluding with the implications for policy that these case studies present.

Policy approaches and case studies in the UK

From a political perspective, much of the interest in involving the public in decision making in the UK started when New Labour came to power in 1997 and began the process of devolving power from the UK Parliament to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Across all four nations, the stated objective was to ensure that the public were 'informed, consulted and involved in the issues that matter to them'.[38]

By the end of their term in office, in England this had extended to a general 'duty to involve' citizens placed on every public body – from local authorities to arms' length bodies such as the Arts Council England. This required public bodies to not only consult the public, but to invite them 'to discuss spending priorities, make spending proposals, and vote on them…[as well as having a] role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process'.[39]

There was therefore a shift from an approach based on consultation to one of participatory decision making.

When the Conservative-Liberal coalition took over, the duty to involve citizens was removed but there was a degree of continuity in devolving powers and increasing local decision making, first through the *Localism Act 2011* which stated its aim was to 'disperse power more widely in Britain'[40] and subsequently through the Conservative government 'Levelling Up' agenda which promised to 'address economic disparity across the nation by giving more consideration to local voices'.[41] This approach was less prescriptive about how this might be done or who was involved.

While the removal of the directive allows freedom for bespoke approaches in places it may also reinforce existing power structures rather than disperse them.

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[38] Department for Communities and Local Government, *Planning Together: Updated Practical Guide for Local Strategic Partnerships and Planners* (London: Communities and Local Government Publications, April 2009), Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a75607940f0b6360e473a3c/1193492.pdf.

[39] Department for Communities and Local Government, *Participatory Budgeting: A Draft National Strategy* (London: Communities and Local Government Publications, 2008).

[40] Department for Communities and Local Government*, Localism Act, 2011* (London: Communities and Local Government Publications, 2011), Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents.

[41] Department for Levelling UP Housing and Communities*, Levelling up the United Kingdom White Paper* (London: HMSO, 2022), Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom.

In the cultural policy space, these approaches led to what has been described as a shift in focus from 'supply to demand',[42] or from a focus on art form development to an acknowledgement that 'artists and arts organisations are not the ultimate beneficiaries' of public funding and should therefore not be the only stakeholders involved in consultation and decision making.[43] This influenced approaches to data collection through surveys such as the *Scottish Household Survey* and England's *Taking Part Survey* which helped policy makers to gain greater understanding of the cultural lives of UK citizens.[44]

Public value surveys and citizen's assemblies have been used to develop understanding of what citizens value thereby *'bringing public opinion closer to the centre of decision-making processes'*,[45] if not directly involving the public in the decision making itself. Place-based funding has been employed to support local culture that is bespoke to its contexts and involves different constituents in decision making, with a growing number of local authorities having co-produced their cultural strategies,[46] experimented with participatory budgeting and/or encouraged asset transfer of cultural infrastructure from their control to community control.

While the level of involvement the public have in decision making varies, what all these approaches require is the resource to deliver on the aspirations developed, which may prove problematic in a context of austerity funding.

However, approaches to public decision making have not only been influenced by government interventions. The call for more public involvement in decision making has a longer history from within the cultural sector itself.

Since 1970s the community arts movement have argued for better and more distributed resourcing of local cultural activities and many cultural institutions have also recognized the value of greater engagement with their local communities to better understand the needs and wants of their current or potential audiences.[47]

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[42] Catherine Bunting, The Arts Debate – Arts Council England's First-Ever Public Value Inquiry: Overview and Design (London: Arts Council England, August 2006).
[43] Emily Keaney, *Public Value and the Arts* (London: Arts Council England, 2006), p. 35.
[44] Taking Part https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey; Scottish Household survey https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-household-survey/.
[45] David Lee, Kate Oakley, and Rebecca Naylor, "'The Public Gets What the Public Wants'? The Uses and Abuses of 'Public Value' in Contemporary British Cultural Policy", *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 17 (2011): 289-300.
[46] See for example AL and AL, *The Fire Within – Cultural Manifesto*, (Wigan: Wigan Council, 2019). Available at: https://www.thefirewithin.org.uk/TheFireWithin-Cultural-Manifesto.pdf
[47] Su Braden, *Artists and People* (Gulbenkian Studies – Routledge and K. Paul, 1978).

As early as the 1980s, Wester Hailes Community Representative Council, involved residents in making decisions about cultural activities in their community using funding from *New Life for Urban Scotland*.[48] Since 1990s, Contact Theatre in Manchester has changed both its artistic programme and audience profile by inviting users (in this case young people) into every level of management from programming to marketing to the recruitment of staff.[49]

The charity Engage,[50] which has branches in England, Scotland and Wales, has been helping galleries and museums rethink how they participate with audiences since 1989, and more recently Derry in Northern Ireland used their year as City of Culture as a 'resource for peace and reconciliation' by creating deliberative spaces for those with very different interests; this seems to have influenced all subsequent cities of culture to take a more participatory approach.[51]

At the same time, there is evidence of resistance to such processes, from politicians who question the representativeness of people involved in public decision making, to cultural practitioners who fear that such approaches undermine their artistic autonomy and may increase their already precarious working circumstances.[52]

There is clear evidence that there is greater buy-in to such approaches once people have seen them enacted.[53]

But the different approaches and the different ways in which these are implemented have a significant impact on the transformational potential of public decision-making processes.

This relates to the nature of the approach taken, the aims of the processes and whether they are focused on 'inclusion' or 'transformation' and the people involved in their delivery. The following pages will therefore review the main models of involving the

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[48] "My Stories & Wester Hailes", *From There… to Here: The Social History of Wester Hailes*, September 6, 2012, https://hailesmatters.wordpress.com/tag/wester-hailes-representative-council/.
[49] https://contactmcr.com/.
[50] https://engage.org/.
[51] "Cracking the Cultural Code 10 Years on from UK City of Culture", Derry City and Strabane District Council, September 14, 2023, Accessed June 12, 2024, https://www.derrystrabane.com/news/cracking-the-cultural-code-10-years-on-from-uk-city-of-culture.
[52] Jancovich and Stevenson, Failures in Cultural Participation.
[53] Leila Jancovich, "The participation myth", *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 23, no. 1 (2017): 107-121.

public in decision making mentioned above by drawing on examples of current practice across the UK to consider some of the benefits and drawbacks of each approach and the levers and barriers to making them happen, before reflecting on their implications for policy.

Public Value

The public value framework comes from US management theory[54] and suggests strategies for public managers to increase their legitimacy and efficiency by being more outward facing in proactively seeking stakeholder feedback on their work. The concept has gained prominence in the UK as a principle for organisational governance to support organisational learning and build advocacy coalitions. Rooted in the notion of creating societal benefits beyond economic value, the *Public Value Framework* (PVF) emphasises the importance of aligning institutional activities with the interests and preferences of stakeholders.[55]

As such public value puts organisations in dialogue with stakeholders, rather than embedding them in decision making processes.

The UK government adopted a *Public Value Framework* as a tool to assess the value delivered by public services and organizations for taxpayers and society as a whole. The framework is designed for public bodies to evaluate and improve the performance of their organisations by assessing how effectively they create value for the tax-payer and for society as well as consideration of how they might increase value.

By considering the needs and interests of different stakeholders it is claimed PV can make public services more relevant and support the case for their ongoing public investment.

In its original form, the framework did not refer to the inclusion of the general public as stakeholders, but rather focussed on the involvement of professionals. However, the UK framework, extended beyond experts and commercial interest, to include the public and communities,[56] with the aim being "to retain a connection with people, remain in touch with their desires, as well as generate income and justify investment, in order to compete with wider claims on resources".[57]

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[54] Mark Moore, Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government (London: Harvard University Press, 1995).
[55] John Benington, "Creating the Public in Order to Create Public Value?", *International Journal of Public Administration* 32, no. 3–4 (2009): 232–249, https://doi.org/10.1080/01900690902749578.
[56] Gavin Kelly, Geoff Mulgan, and Stephen Muers, *Creating Public Value: An Analytical Framework for Public Service Reform* (London: Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office, 2002).
[57] Kevin Clarke and Richard Lennox, "Public Value and Cultural Heritage," in *Public Value: Deepening, Enriching and Broadening Theory and Practice*, ed. Adam Lindgreen, Nicole Koenig-Lewis, Martin Kitchener, John D. Brewer, Mark H. Moore, and Timo Meynhardt (Abingdon, England and New York City: Routledge, 2019), 287-298

The approach to capturing public value moves beyond delivering outputs, to examination of several key elements (or pillars): Pursing goals, Managing inputs, Engaging users and citizens, Developing system capacity. Each pillar is then broken down into a set of further areas to consider (13 in total across the framework). Within each of these there are a series of headline questions (35 in total) designed to explore a specific element of departmental performance. The diagram below illustrates the structure of the framework.
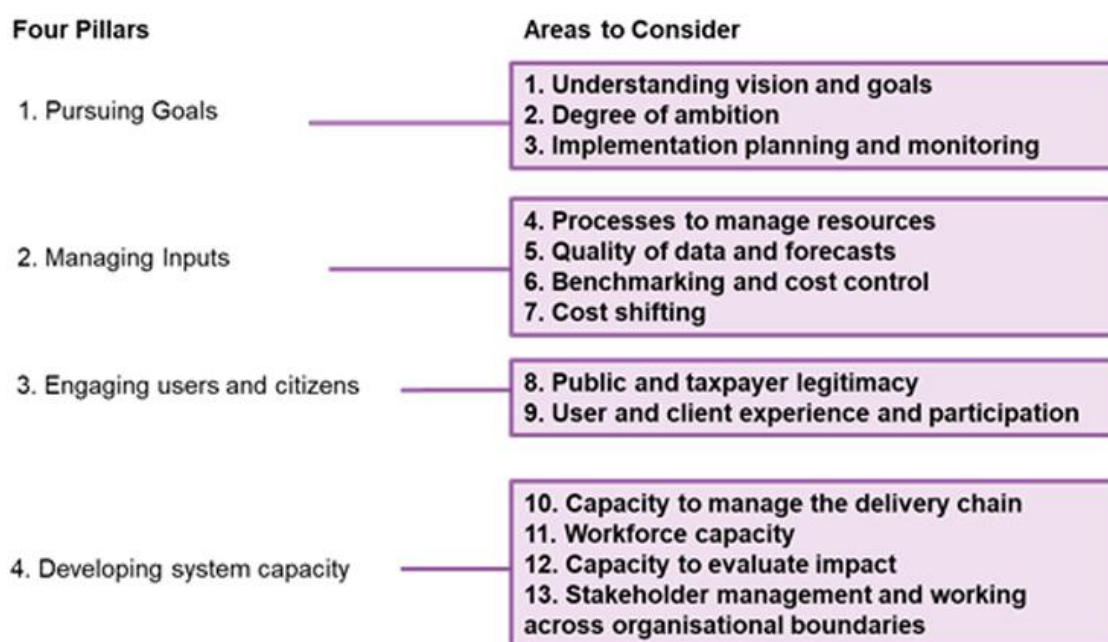

Figure 2. The Public Value Framework from HM Treasury, The Public Value Framework, 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c883c32ed915d50b3195be3/public_value_framework_and_supplementary_guidance_web.pdf

The *Framework* has been employed by national cultural policy, including Arts Council England[58], the BBC[59] and Historic England[60] as a way to enhance their transparency and accountability. While they have tailored the mechanisms used to include public value surveys conducted by the Arts Council; focus groups conducted by the BBC; and attempts to identify contingent valuations by English Heritage; they share commitment to fostering dialogue, institutional learning and enhancing the public value of their services, programs, and assets.

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[58] www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The_arts_debate_overview_design_consultation%20responses.pdf
[59] https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/policies/pdf/bpv.pdf
[60] https://historicengland.org.uk/about/what-we-do/corporate-plan/public-value-framework/

The Public Value Framework aims to encourage a culture of regular self-assessment, reflection and learning which it is hope will improve service delivery and increase efficiency in resource allocation.

Public value therefore offers a consultation mechanism for both policy makers and cultural organizations to solicit input and gather feedback from diverse stakeholders, including the public, to *inform* decision making rather than as a *tool* of decision making. But by involving a wide range of stakeholders in the development and implementation of public value criteria, policymakers give greater consideration to the wider impacts of cultural provision to achieve multiple policy objectives, such as social cohesion, economic development, and environmental sustainability, This ensures that cultural policies and programs are more responsive to diverse needs and interests.

This integrated approach to policymaking is intended to foster collaboration across government departments, sectors, and disciplines, leading to more holistic and impactful interventions.

However, some critics argue that while the notion of public value is often invoked in cultural policy discourse, its application is fraught with ambiguity and potential for misuse. as there is little consensus on the methodologies for how it should be measured, evaluated, or prioritized by policy makers or delivery organisations. As Keaney argues, while public value is often used to legitimise what cultural policy makers already do it "*does not explain what the organisation does to create value or whether the organisation might create more or different value if it did things differently*".[61] It is therefore uncertain how it could lead to the improvement or change aimed for. This is particularly the case where, while policy makers have used it to garner public perspectives and uphold the importance of transparency and accountability, the responsibility to implement change is largely devolved to delivery organisations rather than adopted by national policy makers.

While public value may provide a useful tool for organisational learning, it does little to shift power balances associated with cultural decision making.

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[61] Emily Keaney, *Public Value and the Arts: A Literature Review*, 40.

It is interesting to know that the UK government have been moving away from their public value framework towards outcome delivery plans, but only time will tell whether these include citizen engagement and/or decision making.[62]

Reflections on public value in practice

Arts Council England (ACE) acts as both a public funder and advocate for the arts in England. Since its inception in 1946, its remit has been to address the "market failure" that might accrue from a reliance on commercial interests to fulfil the cultural rights of citizens. As a non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (and its equivalent prior iterations) ACE's decision making has been at arms' length from the UK Government and has historically been informed by peer review from those within the cultural sector.

As such, ACE's decision-making processes benefit from the expertise of professionals but may also be hampered by vested interests of those already in receipt of funding.

In a competitive funding climate, ACE has been increasingly required to make the case for the level of funding it receives from HM Treasury, as well as the way in which it chooses to invest it. This has led to a recognition of the need for more transparency in how they reach investment decisions, as well as more consultation on how these decisions might be being received by the public.

In 2006, ACE undertook their first "public value" consultation.[63] What became known as *The Art Debate* was a comprehensive programme of research and consultation involving 28,000 participants from arts organisations, artists, other individuals working in the arts, local authorities and other stakeholder organisations, as well as the general public and their own staff.

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[62] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/outcome-delivery-plans
[63] Ibid.

Through online surveys, focus groups, and public forums, ACE endeavoured to access diverse perspectives on the value of the arts and culture to help shape its future investments and policy interventions.[64]

It should be noted that responses from their own staff to this approach highlighted a tension in terms of balancing the protection of arts and culture at risk of market failure whilst responding to public opinion. But the survey, along with data from DCMS's Taking Part Survey[65] and Sport England's Active Lives Survey[66] has influenced the articulation of Arts Council policy since.

This research collectively found that a significant proportion of the UK population engaged in various cultural activities, including visiting museums, galleries, and historic sites, attending live performances (e.g., theatre, concerts), and participating in arts and crafts activities[67]. However, participation rates varied according to art form preferences, regularity of engagement and what most influenced the cultural policy discourse, across demographic groups, with disparities observed based on age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status[68]. The survey also highlighted inequalities in access to cultural opportunities in different geographic locations.[69]

In interview for this paper, the current Director of Place at ACE, Paul Bristow cited both the Let's Create[70] 10 years strategy and the Creative People and Places[71] investment schemes as policy responses to these findings. He identified Creative People and Places as 'a prime example' of ACE's public value work as it is about putting local audience' voice at the centre of the provision of service. He further said that ACE understand that "if you want to see engagement rise, you've got to talk to people about what they want" highlighting the importance of widening the range of voices involved in defining the local cultural offer. This approach is also manifested through ACE other, such as Priority

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[64] Arts Council, *Let's Create, Arts Council England Strategy, 2020-2030* (London: Arts Council England, 2020).
[65] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey.
[66] https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/data/active-lives
[67] Andrew Miles and Lisanne Gibson, 'Everyday Participation and Cultural Value in Place'. *Cultural Trends* 25, no. 3 (2016): 151–57.
[68] Hei Wan Mak, Rory Coulter, and Daisy Fancourt, "Patterns of Social Inequality in Arts and Cultural Participation: Findings from a Nationally Representative Sample of Adults Living in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland," *Public Health Panorama* 6, no. 1 (2020): 55-68. World Health Organization.
[69] Miles and Gibson, Everyday participation and cultural value.
[70] Arts Council England, *Let's Create.*
[71] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places-0

[Places](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/your-area/priority-places-and-levelling-culture-places)[72] and [Culture Compacts](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/review-cultural-compacts-initiative),[73] which all seek to "engage the public, or voices that aren't necessarily found in decision making." He was keen to emphasise that through these ACE has evolved its public value strategy to deliver value to the public, through support organisations such as Culture Compacts and local organisations. He argued that devolving the responsibility for engaging public voices to organisations and institutions locally allowed them to use their own local ecosystems and knowledge to work with citizens on the right cultural provision for their area. In turn, they may choose to adopt some of the other forms of public engagement strategies outlined in this paper, should they wish to.

The Director felt confident local organisations and institutions are best placed to know what works in a place, but also what doesn't. Through peer-based learning networks, supporting Culture Compacts and local cultural education partnerships, the ACE strategy is to try and support those working locally in the hope that they will engage publics within their specific locales. He did however acknowledge the enduring challenges of "privileging particular voices" through local processes and of putting expectations on Arts organisations who are "small and might not have those skills in-house" to deliver on ambitions. He also recognised the greatest risk of the PVF was to "disappoint those expectations and destroy the very trust that you're trying to create" - i.e., garnering public trust and support by soliciting the publics' opinion but being unable to deliver all their requests.

Despite these challenges moving forward, ACE future aim is to support the good practices which have emerged from these programmes through encouraging all local authorities in England to develop a cultural strategy with their communities, rather than just for them. But there was no suggestion of public involvement in defining ACE's own national strategy. The result is that whilst the public are being engaged in local cultural activity, there are no mechanisms for ensuring local voices are engaged in the creation of the Arts Council England's overall strategy.

This begs the question of whether processes that are devolved locally without effecting decision making within cultural policy nationally can bring about the scale

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[72] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/your-area/priority-places-and-levelling-culture-places.
[73] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/review-cultural-compacts-initiative.

of change needed to increase confidence in and legitimacy of cultural policy decision making processes.

Co-production

Initially borrowed from public administration and governance, the term 'co-production' originated in the work of Elinor Ostrom in the late 1970s.[74] Like with public value above, Ostrom argued that public services need to take more account of their beneficiaries, because active citizen participation produces better public goods.

But at its core, co-production is about moving beyond consultation to fostering participatory decision-making within existing public institutions.

It values and empowers (in the sense of giving agency to) the expertise of all stakeholders involved with public institutions, be they professionals or community members. But unlike community asset transfer which is addressed later in this paper, the legal structure of the institution itself remains the same, albeit, as museum specialist Nina Simon says, it 'often require[s] institutional goals to take a backseat to community goals'.[75]

Co-production, as a process involving citizens in the making of culture, is now well-established across various domains of cultural production, from performance to museums and heritage contexts.[76] It has been used in these different contexts partly for its 'flexibility and definitional ambiguity'[77] but some argue, this is at the risk of 'stretch[ing its] meaning to the point of uselessness'.[78] As Andrew Miles and Lisanne Gibson note in their study on cultural participation, "the logics of the 'social inclusion' narrative within cultural policy and across cultural practice have recently been extended through discourses of 'access' 'and 'participation' into collaboration, co-production and co-curation"[79]. But while the logics and discourses may change, they question whether existing power relationships are shifted.

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[74] Elinor Ostrom, "Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy, and Development", *World Development* 24, no. 6 (1996): 1073–1087.
[75] Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2010), Chapter 8.
[76] Marlene Zijlstra, Sophie Mamattah, and David McGillivray, "Co-Production in Arts & Culture: A Review of Evidence" (University of the West of Scotland, 2024).
[77] Bandola-Gill, Justyna, Megan Arthur, and Rhodri Ivor Leng, "What Is Co-Production? Conceptualising and Understanding Co-Production of Knowledge and Policy across Different Theoretical Perspectives", *Evidence & Policy* 19, no. 2 (May 2023): 275–98, 276, https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16420955772641.
[78] Marlene Zijlstra, Sophie Mamattah, and David McGillivray, "Co-Production in Arts & Culture: A Review of Evidence" (University of the West of Scotland, 2024), 8.
[79] Andrew Miles and Lisanne Gibson, "Everyday Participation and Cultural Value in Place", 151.

Co-production encompasses various participatory practices, including 'co-curation', 'co-creation', and 'co-design', and at times extends towards 'participatory governance'.[80] In practice, it entails activities where the expertise of professionals and participants is (or should be) valued equally, and the needs of communities are considered as much as institutional needs.

While these terms are often used interchangeably, in **co-curation** projects, participants and professionals contribute to the selection, interpretation and display technique of cultural artefacts and oral histories. **Co-creation** refers more broadly to the collaborative process of creating something new – whether this is a product, experience, or content. **Co-design** is about involving participants in the early stage of planning for exhibitions or events to ensure final outputs meet the needs of the end-users, and **participatory governance** entails inviting community stakeholders to shape institutional policies, programmes, and practices.

	Contributory	Collaborative	Co-Creative	Hosted
What kind of commitment does your institution have to community engagement?	We're commited to helping our visitors and members feel like participants with the institution.	We're commited to deep partnerships with some target communities.	We're commited to supporting the needs of target communities whose goals align with the institutional mission.	We're committed to inviting community members to feel comfortable using the institution for their own purposes.
How much control do you want over the participatory process and product?	A lot - we want participants to follow our rules of engagement and give us what we request.	Staff will control the process, but participants' actions will steer the direction and content of the final product.	Some, but participants' goals and preferred working styles are just as important as those of the staff.	Not much - as long as participants follow our rules, they can produce what they want.
How do you see the institution's relationship with participants during the project?	The institution requests content and the participants supply it, subject to institutional rules.	The institution sets the project concept and plan, and then staff members work closely with participants to make it happen.	The institution gives participants the tools to lead the project and then supports their activities and helps them move forward successfully.	The institution gives the participants rules and resources and then lets the participants do their own thing.
Who do you want to participate and what kind of commitment will you seek from participants?	We want to engage as many visitors as possible, engaging them briefly in the context of a museum or online visit.	We expect some people will opt in casually, but most will come with the explicit intention to participate.	We seek participants who are intentionally engaged and are dedicated to seeing the project all the way through.	We'd like to empower people who are ready to manage and implement their project on their own.

Figure 3. Models of participation from Nina Simon, The Participatory Museum, 2010, Chapter Four

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[80] Frank Fischer, "Participatory Governance as Deliberative Empowerment: The Cultural Politics of Discursive Space", *The American Review of Public Administration* 36, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 19–40.

As shown in the table, compared to other approaches (contribution, collaboration and hosting in Simon's work), co-production (or co-creation in the table) endows participants with decision-making powers, leading to co-ownership of goals and outcomes.

In the museum and heritage sector, co-production approaches are commonly applied in exhibition making, interpretation and design, but more rarely embedded across the organisation and at the strategic level.[81] However, some argue that genuine co-production is a 'leadership model' in which all participants must be active agents of change across the whole organisation.[82]

Examples of co-production where community members are involved in strategic top-level decision-making can be found in some theatre contexts,[83] alongside recent experiments with citizen juries, citizen panels and citizen assemblies in museums.[84] But as Director of Nottingham Contemporary, Sam Thorpe explained it can be difficult to embed such processes in a context where:

> *Funders are often very interested in things that reach huge amounts of people over short periods of time. [...] It's also very difficult to get funders interested in something that's been happening very successfully for like five or ten years. [...] They're often interested in doing something new, rather than supporting continuity or legacy.[85]*

For institutions, a key challenge is how to embed co-production long-term and move beyond a short-term project basis which is often dictated by the fast pace of programming as well as funding structures.

[81] Bernadette T. Lynch and Samuel J.M.M. Alberti, "Legacies of Prejudice: Racism, Co-Production and Radical Trust in the Museum," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 25, no. 1 (March 2010): 13–35.
Melissa Strauss, "Democracy at the Top: Embedding Community Participation in Governance and Strategic Decision-Making in Museums and Heritage," Arts and Humanities Research Council; Clore Leadership, 2022, https://www.cloreleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/files/democracy_at_the_top_mel_s_full_v3.pdf.
[82] Laura Aldridge, Polly Andrews, Rachel Ayrton, Katherine McAlpine, and Naomi Shoba, "Who's in the Room? Co-Production as a Leadership Model" (2016).
[83] Leila Jancovich, "Breaking Down the Fourth Wall in Arts Management: The Implications of Engaging Users in Decision-Making", *International Journal of Arts Management* 18, no. 1 (2015): 14–28.
Steve Vickers and Janet Batsleer, "Creativity and Enterprise: The Agency (A Manchester Case)", in *Reshaping Youth Participation: Manchester in a European Gaze*, ed. Gráinne McMahon, Harriet Rowley, and Janet Batsleer (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2022), 157-172, https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80043-358-820221010.
[84] Strauss, *Democracy at the top*; Saad Eddine Said, Interview by Lucrezia Gigante, MS Teams, 26 April 2024.
[85] Sam Thorpe, Interview by Lucrezia Gigante, MS Teams, 09 September 2022.

Short-term funding structures, alongside internal staff turnover, constitute structural barriers to the sustainability of this work[86]. It is therefore crucial that organisations engage in this work with an attitude of 'radical transparency'. This means not only sharing processes of decision-making and empowering participants to make informed decisions, but also setting clear expectations.[87]

Co-production requires institutions to communicate to all stakeholders the conditions as well as limits of their participation.

Museum studies scholar Helen Graham identifies a conflict which arises when the diversity of voices that co-production invites into shaping public services want 'change', while the participating organisations' focus is for their legitimising the structures in place.[88] Organisational culture, fear of poor-quality outcomes and a perceived sense of threat to expertise and status may also hinder co-production approaches, together with a lack of confidence in working with communities.[89] In particular, cultural organisations have lamented a struggle to engage in co-production when they are part of a parent body (e.g. local authority-run cultural organisations) and decisions are taken above the organisation's level.[90]

This leaves uncertainty as to whether co-production in culture is mobilised to enhance the legitimacy of public institutions (without changing them) or to open up space for genuine transformation and institutional learning.

A common risk in co-production is engaging the communities that are already engaged, therefore reinforcing the exclusion of those who lack the skills and confidence to access and meaningfully participate in such activities. Broadening the reach of co-production requires organisations to provide skills development and expertise support alongside increased access to allow participants to contribute.[91] This is time-consuming work that

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[86] Lucrezia Gigante, "The Spatial Politics of Art Organisations: Public Programs as Sites of Cultural Citizenship", (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2024), https://doi.org/10.25392/leicester.data.26207021.v1.
[87] Janet Marstine, "Situated Revelations: Radical Transparency in the Museum," in *New Directions in Museum Ethics*, ed. Janet Marstine, Alexander Bauer, and Chelsea Haines (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 1–23.
[88] Helen Graham, "The 'co' in Co-Production: Museums, Community Participation and Science and Technology Studies", *Science Museum Group Journal*, no. Spring (2016), https://doi.org/10.15180/160502.
[89] Pietr Bienkowski, "No Longer Us and Them: How to Change into a Participatory Museum and Gallery" (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2016), accessed 9 April 2024, http://ourmuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Our-Museum-Report_single-pages.pdf; Strauss, *Democracy at the top*.
[90] Bienkowski, No Longer Us and Them.
[91] Ibid.

can demand long-term commitment, communication and, above all, openness to change. Being invited to participate in activities designed by others without the power to change the structures can be perceived as tokenistic by participants and result in a sense of frustration and mistrust towards the organisation that sought, instead, to connect with its communities.[92]

Co-production therefore requires organisations to reach out beyond their current user base and be open to the possibility of changing their existing practices.

Reflections on co-production from practice

In 2017, the Birmingham Art Museum and Gallery (BMAG) engaged in a process of co-curation with fifteen community curators, working alongside museum staff, to produce *The Past Is Now: Birmingham and the British Empire* (2017-2018). While called 'community curators', participants were not art professionals but selected from Birmingham community activist groups in line with BMAG's aim to engage its BAME audiences as part of the *ACE Change Makers* programme.[93] Across eight sessions, the co-curators and staff met to discuss what stories were to feature in the final exhibition, starting from an object list prepared by the museum to which the community curators were invited to add.

While BMAG had set out to disrupt established institutional practices by bringing in external voices, the process proved nonetheless more challenging than anticipated. For example, disagreements arose around the final textual interpretation that would accompany the exhibition, written by the co-curators but edited internally by the museum staff to bring texts to age-reading standards.[94] Overall, the museum sector regarded this as an influential exhibition, sparking a debate about whether or not the museum will be decolonised, to paraphrase the title of a blog post by one of the community curators.[95] But another co-curator reported that they felt as if 'the institution was fearful of using an unfiltered version of their voice', which led to a renegotiation of the texts[96].

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[92] Aldridge et al., *Who's in the Room?*.
[93] Arts Council England Change Makers Programme https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-matters/news/change-makers-building-confidence-and-transforming-lives-0#:~:text=Our%20Change%20Makers%20programme%20is,are%20diverse%20and%20appropriately%20skilled
[94] Cesare Cuzzola, "Materiality in the Socially Engaged Museum: The Role of Collections within Socially Purposeful Museum Practice at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery", (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2023), https://doi.org/10.25392/leicester.data.21695186.v1.
[95] Sumaya Kassim, "The Museum Will Not Be Decolonised", *Media Diversified* (blog), November 15, 2017, accessed 15 April 2024, https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/.
[96] Rachael Minott, "The Past Is Now: Confronting Museums' Complicity in Imperial Celebration", *Third Text* 33, no. 4–5 (September 3, 2019): 559–574, https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2019.1654206.

Co-production processes need to consider how they will manage dissenting voices which are not always easily integrate into institutional narratives.

The exhibition was also well received by audiences, and the museum included some of the panels that were co-produced into its permanent displays. As a temporary project, *The Past is Now* was hosted in the Story Lab, a flexible gallery space used by BMAG as an incubator space to test new ideas before incorporating them into permanent displays[97] – an approach observable in other cultural institutions (see, for example, the Manchester's People's History Museum and their *Protest Lab*).

This example echoes literature pointing to the benefit of using smaller pilot projects for more long-term and embedded co-production.[98]

This is further demonstrated in the second example. New Art Exchange (NAE) is an internationally renowned art gallery in Nottingham. Having started with smaller participatory projects over recent years, NAE has recently set out to embed co-production within the institution's governance structures.

Within its public programme, NAE originally convened the *YOUnique Producers Programme*, a popular youth theatre programme which aimed to support the co-production of *YOUnique Festival*, a three-day-long annual 'take over' festival organised for and by young people. NAE's Talent Development Officer explained that, over the course of the year, the organisation provided support to the young producers to help them to develop skills essential to cultural production, as well as plan and deliver the culminating event to their own vision.[99] Industry experts supported delivery of key elements of the programme, to enable the realisation of the vision of the young producers.[100] In this way NAE sought to create a pathway for young people to cultivate skills in performance first, and in event production later.

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[97] Cuzzola, "Materiality in the Socially Engaged Museum".
[98] Jancovich, "Breaking Down the Fourth Wall in Arts Management".
[99] Gigante, "The Spatial Politics of Art Organisations".
[100] Manya Benenson, Interview by Lucrezia Gigante, MS Teams, 26 May 2022.

US-based anthropologist Christopher Kelty warns against 'oppos[ing] participation to expertise', but instead argues co-production can 'enhance or extend expertise' or use it as a 'corrective to [narrower] forms of expertise'.[101]

Building on the format of the building takeover, since the end of 2021, NAE has undergone significant organisational restructuring as it moves towards embedding co-production at leadership level.[102] With changes including new roles such as 'Head of Neighbourhoods' and 'Neighbourhood Producer', NAE has experimented with citizen juries to embed co-production in strategic choices about programming. This aligns with the vision of Artistic Director and CEO, Saad Eddine Said, to create a citizen-led gallery.[103] This is explored further in the following section of this paper.

BMAG offered an example of community curators contributing their expertise in the lived experience, alongside the exhibition expertise contributed by museum staff. While NAE provided participants with exposure to in-house expertise, to enable them to develop their skills in taking a leading role in the new organisational structure.

While forms of participatory governance have been observed in other cultural sectors, such as theatre[104], the shift in museums and art galleries appears more recent, albeit long-awaited, with Arts and Humanities Research Council's recent report *Democracy at the Top* documenting museum directors' intentions to integrate forms of participatory democracy into the structures of their organisations.[105] Embedding co-production and moving beyond short-term projects confront institutions with the necessity of sharing (or renegotiating) their own decision-making authority, as well as handling dissent effectively – a process of uncertainty that perhaps not all organisations are ready to embrace. But shifting the focus from individual organisations, meaningful cultural co-production poses a challenge for funders and, in turn, policymakers: creating structures that support long-term vision and allow open-ended outcomes (or perhaps understand the process itself to be the outcome).

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[101] Christopher M. Kelty, *The Participant: A Century of Participation in Four Stories* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 259, https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226666938.001.0001.
[102] Gigante, "The Spatial Politics of Art Organisations".
[103] Ibid.
[104] Jancovich, "Breaking Down the Fourth Wall in Arts Management".
[105] Strauss, Democracy at the top.

Citizens' Assemblies

The origin of citizens' assemblies lies in the scholarship of deliberative democracy which emphasizes the centrality of reasoned and inclusive public deliberation in democratic decision-making processes. Building upon the works of political theorists such as Habermas[106], Rawls[107], and Dewey[108], deliberative democracy posits that genuine democracy requires active and reasoned engagement among citizens. Drawing from these ideas, citizens' assemblies (CA) have begun to emerge as a corrective to some of the failings in our electoral form of representative democracy.

Citizens' Assemblies offer processes of deliberation to solve complex problem, rather than voting for the most popular solution.

Citizens in Power[109] state that CAs are characterised by 2 key features: citizen selection and deliberation. The selection process, known as 'sortition' aims to create a random but representative sample of the community, that includes people with not only different demographics, but crucially different points of view. In that way it ensures that interests that are not otherwise represented in our existing democratic systems are included. Key to the process is that there is an equal and fair chance of every citizen (a person who lives, works or stays in a place) being selected. This selection may be from a particular geographic area, or the people who may be affected by the decisions and outcomes of the process.[110]

The Federation for European Democracy (FIDE)[111] suggest a two-step process to sortition encompassing firstly the random selection of a large number of citizens (for example via a ballot of those willing to take part across the electoral register) and then a second stage which aims to provide a microcosm of the local community, selecting to ensure balance and representation. To reach those who might not respond to the ballot they suggest reaching out to ambassadors and organisations that represent target groups.

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[106] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015)
[107] John Rawls, *A theory of justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005).
[108] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916/1944).
[109] Citizens' In Power (2023) *Six Steps for a Citizens' Assembly*
[110] Ibid.
[111] https://www.fide.eu/

Organisations such as the Sortition Foundation provide support for lottery and sortition processes and use algorithms[112] to put together a final assembly.

The sortition process takes time and consideration and requires organisers to have a close understanding of the communities in which they are operating.

Once the selection process is complete deliberation may begin. The deliberation process aims to create space for people with different points of view to discuss, deliberate, and crucially, listen to people who do not share their views. Through a process of listening and questioning the assembly reviews and explores evidence and hears lived experiences. The organisers normally employ a trained, independent facilitator to ensure all voices are heard, and that complex language can be explained to those who need it for full participation.[113]

By emphasising communicative action, the CA process is iterative, allowing all parties involved to build a deeper understanding of an issue, develop their own views and suggest a range of alternative solutions to a problem. The decision making process based on these options is grounded in the mutual understanding that grows from this reflective process. It has been argued that it offers the potential to strengthen democratic oversight and enhance the legitimacy of political outcomes.[114] But Birgit Geissel[115] observes that the linkages between deliberation in CAs and actual decision making remain relatively weak but concludes that, outputs and recommendations need to feed systematically into the decision-making process.

However, it is important to note that the process is designed to create a range of solutions to specific and complex problems rather than to implement them.

Critics of the CA model have asserted that there are weaknesses to the model.[116] Some suggest that whilst the process of sortition enables a diverse range of voices they may lack

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[112]https://assets.nationbuilder.com/sortitionfoundation/pages/434/attachments/original/1655367146/SortitionFoundationServices-Web.pdf?1655367146

[113] Min Reuchamps, Julien Vrydagh, and Yanina Welp (eds.), *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110758269, 266.

[114] cf. https://europeandemocracyhub.epd.eu/getting-real-about-citizens-assemblies-a-new-theory-of-change-for-citizens-assemblies/.
Lala Muradova and Kevin Arceneaux, "Reflective Political Reasoning: Political Disagreement and Empathy", *European Journal of Political Research* 61 (2022): 740-761, https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12490.

[115] Min Reuchamps, Julien Vrydagh, and Yanina Welp (eds), *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies*, 59.

[116] Min Reuchamps, Julien Vrydagh, and Yanina Welp (eds.), *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies*, 267.

the experience or expertise to produce the desired results. Rather than suggesting alternative solutions therefore they may in fact produce over simplified solutions. This position has been countered in John Rountree and Nicole Curato's work.[117] They suggest that the assembly brings together different forms of experience and expertise and it is important to ensure this includes representatives whose role is to assess the competence of those undertaking the deliberative process. But Marina Lindell[118] argues that this may silence some voices and overlook the fact that as writes "feeling heard does not equate to being heard". Lindell further suggests participants may have different styles of communication. CAs must therefore find communication techniques that support the voices of those who are less able to construct compelling argument. Such techniques might include storytelling or humour.

This underscores the importance of the facilitator role in managing difference, bringing out complexity without creating unequal power dynamics that lead people towards a desired outcome.

Citizen's Assemblies are an emerging process in shaping cultural futures. Some of this work is being done by Citizens in Power, a not-for-profit organisation based in the UK which promotes and supports citizen-led decision-making who are discussed in the case study below.

Reflections on citizens' assemblies in practice

Citizens in Power have been working to develop a Citizens Assembly for Culture in the West of England.[119] An insight paper also written for this programme outlines the work they have done in developing a Citizens' Assembly for creativity and culture.[120] This aims to shape a cultural delivery plan for the region. The West of England Combined Authority agreed to adopt the citizen-led approach to the region's cultural plan. In doing so, it created significant levels of support, enabling the creation of the assembly.[121] They also helped to engage the different layers of actors – including the combined authority, the

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[117] Min Reuchamps, Julien Vrydagh, and Yanina Welp (eds.), *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies*, 59.
[117] Min Reuchamps, Julien Vrydagh, and Yanina Welp (eds.), *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies*, 76.
[118] Min Reuchamps, Julien Vrydagh, and Yanina Welp (eds.), *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies*, 266.
[119] https://www.citizensinpower.com/.
[120] https://www.culturecommons.uk/_files/ugd/ba7a73_c66a6d606eab4574b1fb809a585cc346.pdf
[121] https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/innovation/culture-west/

unitary authorities, the cultural compact, sector organisations, freelancers and the communities and community organisations.

We interviewed David Jubb who is their co-director in order to understand why he is committed to citizens' assemblies and how this has worked, in practice, in the arts, culture and heritage sectors.[122] He argued that current governance structures within the arts, culture and heritage sector reflect a 'Victorian philanthropic' model of providing for citizens rather than a 21st century model of making with them. Many organisations are governed by voluntary governors and directors and an executive director. This system, explained Jubb, tends to behave in repetitive ways, with studies showing that there is a lack of diversity amongst the cultural workforce as well as audiences.[123] Describing the narrowness of the individuals and activities that are supported in the sector as 'sticky', he said this was the reason that continued policy attempts to diversify the sector and widen participation are having only limited success.[124]

He hopes that Citizens' Assemblies may, therefore, provide a new tool for developing innovative ideas within the sector and addressing some of these failures.

Citizens in Power is using the CA model by working alongside organisations to help create the space for people with different points of view to discuss, deliberate, and listen to people who do not share their views. They define citizens as the people who live, work or stay in a place and argue that they are best placed to identify and discuss issues of local concern. This supports the evidence from literature that citizens can help providers to gain a deeper understanding of a problem and avoid simple technocratic solutions to complex problems, as discussed above.[125]

One of the key findings for them has been that citizens are not only motivated but enthusiastic to take part and to influence decisions in the interests of fellow citizens.[126] But for the process to succeed, they argue citizens must be able to participate equitably.

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[122] David Jubb, Interview by Claire Burnill-Maier, MS Teams, 22 April 2024.
[123] https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Arts-Culture-and-Heritage-Audiences-and-Workforce-Creative-PEC-State-of-the-Nation-report-May-2024.pdf
[124] Jancovich, "The participation myth".
[125] Cf. John S. Dryzek, *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Jane Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation," *The American Political Science Review* 97 (2003): 515–528.
[126] https://www.citizensinpower.com/all-resources/six-steps

Resourcing is therefore required to ensure that no one is left out due to financial barriers. This might include the provision of appropriate technologies i.e. sign language, IT support, translation, childcare. Like jurors in court cases, representatives are also paid for their attendance as well as having additional costs they may incur met.

While this is still at an early stage of development to see the outcomes of this process in the London Borough of Newham, Citizens' Assemblies have become permanent as part of their [People Powered Places Programme](),[127] which is at the heart of local decision making. Community Assemblies in Newham have created a significant increase in resident engagement and residents feel that the projects delivered are varied and make a difference in their local area. The [programme's evaluation]() found that 89 % residents felt more connected to their local area after attending a Community Assembly; 85% felt that the Assemblies provide an opportunity to discuss and identify issues of local concern; 84% felt that the Assemblies provide an opportunity to be involved in decision making; and 82% felt that the Assemblies gave them a greater say in allocation of funding locally.[128]

Another example of CAs in the context of culture can be drawn from New Art Exchange (NAE) in Nottingham. As their CEO Saad Said explained in an interview for this paper, the organisation is moving towards a three-pillar leadership model.[129] In this new governance model, forty residents from Hyson Green will form a permanent Citizens' Assembly sitting alongside the Board and the Executive Team, to inform the gallery's strategic vision. In Said's words, this transition has been carefully planned through two years of 'cultivation' to build internal confidence.[130] The cultivation phase entailed conversations with the board and the funders to create a solid business plan, with the neighbourhood to spread the voice and with staff to communicate future changes.

This highlights how crucial time and communication are in projects that seek to involve community stakeholders in decision making.

The three pillars are set up to deliver different functions: the Permanent Assembly ('Voice') will bring 'relevance' (understood as responding to local needs), the Executive

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[127] https://www.newham.gov.uk/council/people-powered-places.
[128] https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/5576/final-evaluation-report-community-assemblies-2021-2023-1-2
[129] Saad Eddine Said, Interview by Lucrezia Gigante, MS Teams, 26 April 2024.
[130] Said, Interview.

Team will contribute 'excellence' (understood as committing to developing artistic practice), and the Board of Trustee will ensure that plans are financially sound and aligned with NAE's overall mission as the largest gallery in the UK dedicated to artists and communities from the Global Majority.

The Sortition Foundation has guided the process to ensure that the final assembly is representative of Hyson Green's local constituents. 12,000 invitation letters have been sent to local residents, alongside carrying out appropriate dissemination of the project through ambassadors in the community. In practice, the process will last two years, during which the members of Voice will be brought together at various points (for nine days in total) to discuss their strategy and vision for the neighbourhood in response to the core question: 'What is the future of art and culture in Hyson Green?'. The assembly will produce recommendations that will be published externally and to which NAE commits to respond with actionable plans. With NAE committing to establishing this as a permanent assembly, the process will go through cycles of two years, in which new assemblies will be convened and new core questions formulated.

Aware of the risk of engaging the 'usual suspects', Said recognised that preparing the ground for this new governance structure was crucial.

Beyond building on its past experiences of co-production (as explored in the previous section), NAE approached this, for example, by embedding citizen juries across different areas of programming that created opportunities for 'real decisions' about programming in the previous year. In these, local community members, participants from the youth programme and Arts Council representatives sat alongside each other, building capacity for expertise exchange and decision making. [131]

Whilst Citizens' Assemblies are emerging as an important tool for engaging local people, they can involve lengthy administrative processes. With this increased administration comes a corresponding increase in the level of responsibility for project leads. This may be one of the reasons this approach is not more widespread. But those with experience of such processes have argued that by supporting and recognising the work of Citizens' Assemblies, their mandate can be strengthened.

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[131] Said, Interview.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a process in which citizens are directly involved in decision-making processes linked to the allocation of public spending. The model originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989 as a strategy to reinstate public trust and address social inequalities after a period of military rule.[132] PB was initially built on grassroots activism to set local agendas, with the objective to challenge the existing public funding paradigm rather than trying to legitimise it.[133] Evaluation of programmes in Brazil suggests this led to significant redistribution of funds to previously underfunded areas as an effective mechanism for more equitable development.

Throughout the 1990s, despite being suspended in its home country,[134] PB became a popular 'travelling policy innovation',[135] with the endorsement of global organisations such as the World Social Forum, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN).[136] On its travels, PB was adapted to different contexts and arguably different agendas. Ganuza and Baiocchi identify two main phases in which PB was used: first as an instrument of reform to improve the conditions of disenfranchised community members and second, specifically in Europe, as a 'politically neutral device […] that could improve governance and generate trust in government'.[137]

The process of PB involves different stages, but it is crucial that a range of stakeholders representative of the local communities is involved through the cycle (different groups of stakeholders may be involved at different stages).[138] This begins with the design of the overall process, including decisions over engagement strategies criteria for selection and voting system; and continues through to application development support (where applicable); shortlisting of proposals; deliberation and voting; commissioning or implementation of the projects; and final evaluation to review initiatives and set future

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[132] Emily Fennell and Karin Gavelin, *Participatory Budgeting and the Arts*, Involve, 2009.

[133] Bridget E. O'Rourke, Slicing Up the Pie: Community Involvement in Participatory Budgeting, Porto Alegre, Brazil.

[134] Tarson Núñez, "Porto Alegre, From a Role Model to a Crisis", in *Hope for Democracy: 30 Years of Participatory Budgeting Worldwide*, ed. Nelson Dias (Faro: Oficina, 2018), 517–537.

[135] Anja Röcke, Framing Citizen Participation: Participatory Budgeting in France, Germany and the United Kingdom (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[136] Osmany Porto de Oliveira, *International Policy Diffusion and Participatory Budgeting* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[137] Ernesto Ganuza and Giampaolo Baiocchi, "The Power of Ambiguity: How Participatory Budgeting Travels the Globe", *Journal of Public Deliberation* 8, no. 2 (2012): 1–12.

[138] SQW Consulting, *National Evaluation of Participatory Budgeting in England* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).

priorities (see Figure 4). As in co-production, successful PB also benefits from a clear understanding of the PB process and of the context within which it is taking place and meaningful discussions around the proposals.

The outcomes of PB are said to vary based on the extent participation is invited from agenda setting, through grant distribution, to delivery and evaluation.[139]
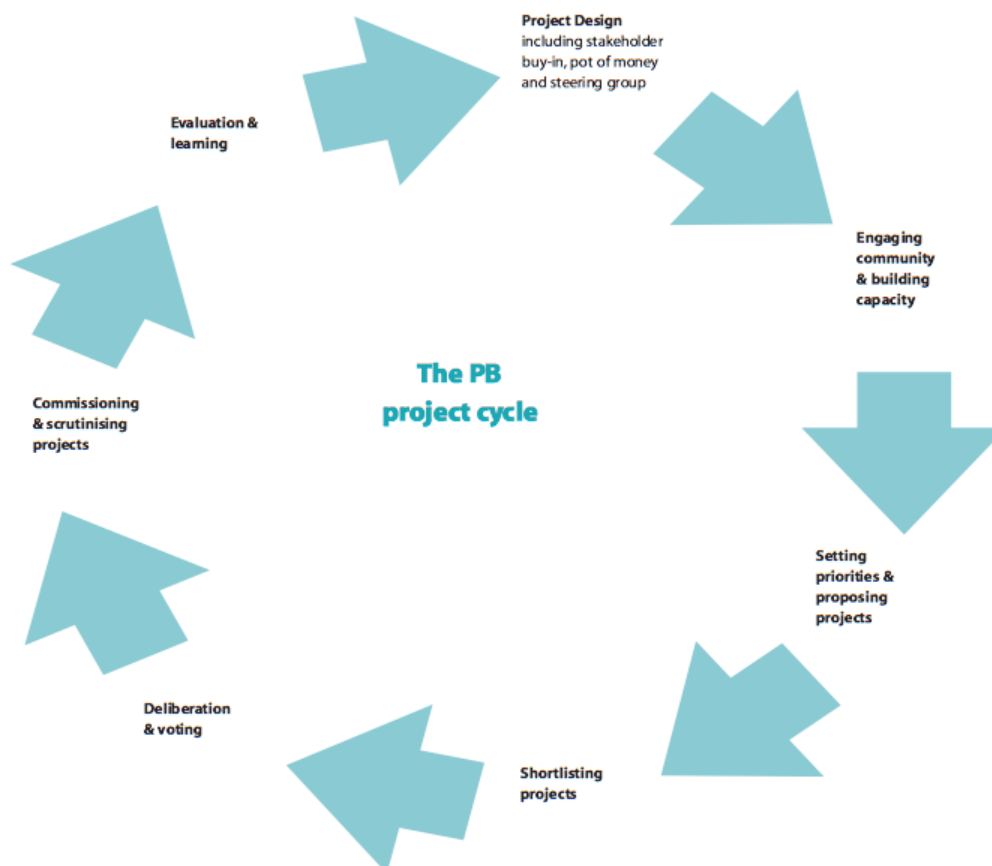
Project Design
including stakeholder buy-in, pot of money and steering group

Evaluation & learning

Engaging community & building capacity

The PB project cycle

Commissioning & scrutinising projects

Setting priorities & proposing projects

Deliberation & voting

Shortlisting projects

Figure 4. The PB Project Cycle from PB Unit, Participatory Budgeting in the UK – A Toolkit (Manchester, 2010), 35, *https://pbnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Participatory-Budgeting-Toolkit-2010.pdf* .

In the UK, PB received political support under the New Labour Party in the early 2000s, leading to the announcement by the Department for Communities and Local Government that all local authorities should have deployed some form of PB by 2012 as set out in the

[139] Pauliina Lehtonen, "Policy on the Move: The Enabling Settings of Participation in Participatory Budgeting," *Policy Studies* 43, no. 5 (September 3, 2022): 1036–1054, https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.1895981.

Communities in Control white paper[140] – while the duty was dropped in 2010 many such processes have continued.

Current examples of UK local authorities using PB for arts and culture include Moray Council;[141] and North Ayrshire, also in Scotland, who both invited local sector-relevant organisations to apply for funding and local citizens to vote;[142].In West Cumbria in England a citizens' jury have been invited to advise and create a new cultural project with a budget of £100,000.[143] Although significantly in none of these examples have citizens been invited to set the agenda.

An inquiry into the implications of PB for cultural policy, was conducted by Involve for Arts Council England, while the duty was still in place. This captured both the sector's appetite and scepticism towards this approach.[144] On the one hand, evidence suggests that PB could help cultural policy makers understand what people value and increase relevance of the cultural offer, on the other, resistance is motivated by the fear that PB might hinder 'excellence' in not being led by professional expertise. But the report found no evidence to substantiate this fear, and even suggests that 'the notion that arts decision making is too intricate for the average citizen to engage with does not hold up and can come across as elitist, even slightly reactionary'.[145]

Resistance to PB in the cultural sector is underscored by a fear that PB will threaten 'excellence' and potentially reduce arts budgets, which is not substantiated by evidence.

Evidence from the British Governments own evaluation of PB projects suggests that continuity of PB initiatives over years increases levels of participation and engagement,[146]

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[140] Communities and Local Government, *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power* (London: Communities and Local Government Publications, 2008).
See also Department for Communities and Local Government, *Participatory Budgeting: A Draft National Strategy* (London: Communities and Local Government Publications, 2008).
[141] https://newsroom.moray.gov.uk/news/moray-council-invites-arts-culture-and-heritage-groups-to-apply-for-grants-up-to-gbp-20k?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR0DZGrLP5J6TdOVTQsdeyYOCVJTf59ofdmvErt_4VPsgdILGiUdKUyuC20_aem_AUzYRiWGDb-7jochEuvJUEjxMA-UG8C0z2i4ztR_kCY8hNEcjiUwwsQPt8UuQIPHgmJhZcykWSSys_bKCYxbVvv8.>.
[142] https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/news/Get-ready-to-vote-Arts-and-Culture-PB.aspx>.
[143] https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/residents-decide-west-cumbrias-cultural-spend#:~:text=A%20citizens'%20jury%20of%2030,a%20budget%20of%20%C2%A3100%2C000.&text=A%20new%20initiative%20in%20West,and%20how%20money%20is%20spent>.
[144] "Participatory Budgeting", Involve, Accessed June 13, 2024, https://involve.org.uk/resource/participatory-budgeting.
[145] Fennell and Gavelin, Participatory Budgeting and the Arts, p. 14.
[146] SQW Consulting, *National Evaluation of Participatory Budgeting in England* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).

leads to long-term benefits such as social capital and ownership,[147] and improves representation of diverse segments of the local population.[148] Conversely studies report that benefits are reduced when budgets allocated are short term or restricted to small pots rather than core funding because they "do not challenge existing decision-making processes but merely allow people to 'play' at the fringes, spending small amounts of money on one-off projects".[149]

The evidence makes a clear case for embedding PB in long-term funding decisions.

Further, PB is not just a feature of local authority actions or English government directives. It has also been investigated at national policy level in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Since 2014, the Scottish Government supported PB through the *Community Choices Fund* to deliver on the commitment to strengthen citizen decision making as stated in the *Community Empowerment Act (2015)*.[150] In 2020, this was extended through the establishment of the *National Participatory Budgeting Strategic Group Scotland*. This body has produced a national PB Framework, published in 2021.[151] In 2017, the Welsh Government commissioned an evidence review as part of a commitment to developing children and young people's participation. The review found PB in Wales to be delivered mainly through small grant allocation schemes, as a means to[152] which is at odds with the founding principles of PB. While Northern Ireland has no national framework, Belfast City Council has employed PB, inviting individual residents and community groups to apply for funding and vote for the best proposals. The latter has been taken as a case study to think about how PB facilitates local voice when applied to culture.

Reflections on participatory budgeting from practice

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[147] "Participatory Budgeting", Involve.
[148] Leila Jancovich, "Great Art for Everyone? An Examination of Arts Policy on Participation and Participatory Decision Making in England from 1997-2013" (PhD diss., Leeds Metropolitan University, 2014).
[149] Fennell and Gavelin, Participatory Budgeting and the Arts, p. 30.
[150] Community Empowerment Act https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/contents/enacted>.
[151] National PB Framework https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-of-participatory-budgeting-in-scotland-framework/.
[152] Emyr Williams, Emily St. Denny, and Dan Bristow, "Participatory Budgeting: An Evidence Review", Public Policy Institute for Wales, August 2017, https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/PPIW-report_participatory-budgeting-evidence-review_-July-2017-FINAL.pdf.

Bank of Ideas is a PB initiative within the wider creative programme of *Belfast 2024*, a year-long celebration of culture and creativity in the city. *Belfast 2024* is one of the deliverables of *A City Imagining*,[153] Belfast's ten-year cultural strategy, which was designed through extensive consultation with local stakeholders.[154]

The implementation of PB was proposed by the Engagement Officer (a newly created position in connection with the cultural strategy), Niamh Kelly, as an effective way to deliver against the ambitions and values set out in the Cultural Strategy, particularly in relation to the priority of 'developing a people focussed approach to cultural development'.[155]

Kelly identified the Cultural Strategy as a lever to test new approaches to local participation and harness what felt like a collective sense of excitement and ambition around local culture and, in PB, a method through which to achieve the strategy's objectives. Further, having experienced first-hand the benefits of co-production in culture as a participant and a youth ambassador first, and then cultural producer before joining the Council, Kelly brought a confidence in experimenting with such processes to the role. Before the *Bank of Ideas*, PB had been employed only once within the Council. This had been for *Move More Eat Well*, a project on community wellbeing organised by the Health Unit in early 2023. For Kelly, not only had the ability to draw on in-house expertise and cross-departmental knowledge exchange been extremely beneficial to the project, but this precedent also served as an enabler for what might have been otherwise a hard thing to initiate from scratch. Nevertheless, with this being the first PB experiment in the Tourism and Culture Unit, there were 'certain setbacks around the timelines […] in getting this off the ground'.[156]

Initial resistance because of a lack of knowledge about PB was eventually overcome through the recognition that PB would effectively deliver on all the ambitions of the cultural strategy.

[153] A City Imagining https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/a-city-imagining.
[154] Culture Commons, "The role of cultural strategies in local cultural decision making", April 2024, Available at: https://www.culturecommons.uk/_files/ugd/ba7a73_eb0c8db33cf0483cbf6714e1281c66b3.pdf.
[155] Belfast City Council, nd. Available at: https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/a-city-imagining
[156] Niamh Kelly, Interview by Lucrezia Gigante, MS Teams, 23 April 2024.

It is the combination of the Council's strategic commitment and an Officer's personal values and competencies that was the key lever to PB in Belfast.

In practice, *Bank of Ideas* was set up as an open call to residents to apply for up to £2,000 funding pots for the delivery of a creative project. The overall pot accounted for £50,000 to be divided equally between North, South, East, West and Central Belfast. While small-scale community grant allocations can sometimes be indicators of tokenistic operations, evidences suggests that small pots can be effective in testing the methodology and preparing the ground for future PB initiatives, by building confidence in the process.[157] At the time of writing, the application process had been open for three weeks, and the team was in the middle of delivering a series of *Idea Generating Sessions* across various community spaces, such as pubs, cafes, and community centres. In these sessions, the Belfast 2024 team helped potential applicants unpack the theme of the open call (creativity), identify their community assets, and consider resources and local needs. In so doing the aims was to encourage applications from individuals or community groups with little or no experience in funding applications. It is hoped this will broaden the call beyond the cultural sector. Face-to-face sessions aligned with the values of the charter ('being supported') developed by the Design Team with the support of the PB consultancy organisation Community Places.

Kelly reflected on the wider benefits of their approach to PB in the sense that it created a platform for the activation of local networks beyond the logics of more traditional funding schemes, with which nonetheless this initiative shared a competitive component. By giving people means and resources to decide about their local area, *Bank of Ideas* was said in interview to have created a collective sense of custodianship of place.

An unintended outcome and success for the project was the organic collaboration and sharing taking place in the Idea Generating Sessions between bidders and residents more generally.

> *It's not just about the money, it's about all the other benefits of collaborating and then connecting, and people going through the process, where they get to see who*

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[157] "Participatory Budgeting", Involve, Accessed June 13, 2024. https://involve.org.uk/resource/participatory-budgeting.

else is in the room, and they get to talk to people who are maybe gonna get to vote for them.[158]

After submitting their proposals, the bidders will present their ideas at the final voting event, where residents will have multiple votes (and must use them all) to have their say in what projects are successful for their local area.

While the Design Team set the voting criteria,[159] this had been done in 'minimal' terms, as Kelly emphasised, with the intention of allowing every 'safe, legal, feasible and creative' Belfast-based idea to have a chance to be voted. 'We are trusting the public to make the decisions here', said Kelly, highlighting how facilitating a genuine decision-making process had been a crucial driver behind the team's approach. Nonetheless, critiques of PB question the reliance on voting and argue that participants must have time to discuss the proposals for this to be a meaningful deliberation rather than a popularity contest.[160]

While PB in Belfast has proved effective at engaging people and generating new ideas, the challenge can be managing how decisions are reached via these processes.

Disseminating information about the *Bank of Ideas* and ensuring understanding of the PB process were among the main challenges faced by the team, alongside initial bureaucratic delays and an overall investment of time and effort in 'bringing people through that journey and helping them develop their idea'.[161]

On her hopes that PB could be embedded as a long-term strategy of cultural engagement with citizens with perhaps larger budgets, Kelly said:

The perception and the trust that builds with people where they feel they're being not just consulted, but really genuinely influencing. And I think that would make people more likely to engage in other forms of local voice as well. […] It gives people a really fun, engaging, direct way to kind of exercise that muscle.[162]

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[158] Kelly, Interview.
[159] The Design Team brought together representatives from cultural and community organisations across the four areas of Belfast, local artists, members of the team and a participant from the Health project who was able to contribute her experience with PB.
[160] "Participatory Budgeting", Involve.
[161] Kelly, Interview.
[162] Ibid.

It is not yet known whether Belfast City Council will continue to employ PB beyond Belfast 2024. Similarly to other approaches in this paper, such as co-production, processes that require investment of resources and relationship building also benefit from what Kelty describes as 'inertia' in its plea to give participation stability.[163]

Pocketed experiments such as the *Bank of Ideas* could be used to test the appetite of local citizens for agency over local cultural spending, enhance their preparedness and support organisations as they learn new ways of creating avenues into decision-making platforms like PB. **It requires investment to support PB initiatives, which could give local citizens impactful decision-making powers, but also potentially raise their ambitions for local culture more generally.**

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[163] Kelty, The Participant, 260.

Community Asset Transfer

Community Asset Transfer (CAT) entails the transfer of ownership or management of land or buildings from a public sector body (usually a local authority) to a community-based entity, for example a local based charity, or a community interest company (CIC).[164] For such transfers to take place public bodies need to demonstrate that the transfer will facilitate local improvement (economic, social or environmental).

Unlike the commercial right to bid for local assets[165], which also transfers public ownership, CAT transfers are made at less than the market value of an asset in recognition of the benefits of local community governance. The process of CAT is voluntary and frequently long and complex.[166]

Commonly, the existing public owner of the building (usually the local authority) will identify an asset for transfer and invite local organisations to tender an expression of interest. In many cases, this requires the founding of a community organisation – which may be a charity or cooperative or community interest company.

Interested organisations are then required to develop a plan for the asset they wish to obtain. Plans are required to lay out a clear vision of how the building will be funded and maintained in the long term. Garnering support from the community is crucial to the processes, whether through providing information about the plan, with a right to respond, or collecting views to inform the writing of the plan at public meetings.

Once a plan has been developed (and depending on the CAT policy of the asset owner) a negotiation phase will begin. This phase may have many rounds and organisations may be required to amend plans to fit with wider local objectives, eventually signing a legally binding contract setting out terms for the transfer, which may include a buy back clause, limitations of use, etc.

Acquiring a community asset is therefore a long and complex process, that requires legal advise for community groups to take on.

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[164] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/OPE%20-%20publications%20-%20Building%20powerful%20communities%20through%20Community%20Asset%20Transfer%20%28March%202018%29.pdf
[165] https://mycommunity.org.uk/files/downloads/Understanding-the-Community-Right-to-Bid.pdf
[166] https://locality.org.uk/assets/images/Understanding-Community-Assets-Transfer-Guide-for-Community-Organisations.pdf

Scotland's Development Trust Association's Community Ownership Support Service encourages communities to use their 'road map' (fig. 5) in order to guide communities through the complex journey from identifying an asset to getting the keys.[167] Whilst this roadmap is specific to the process in Scotland, it highlights the length and complexity of the process which is common across the nations.
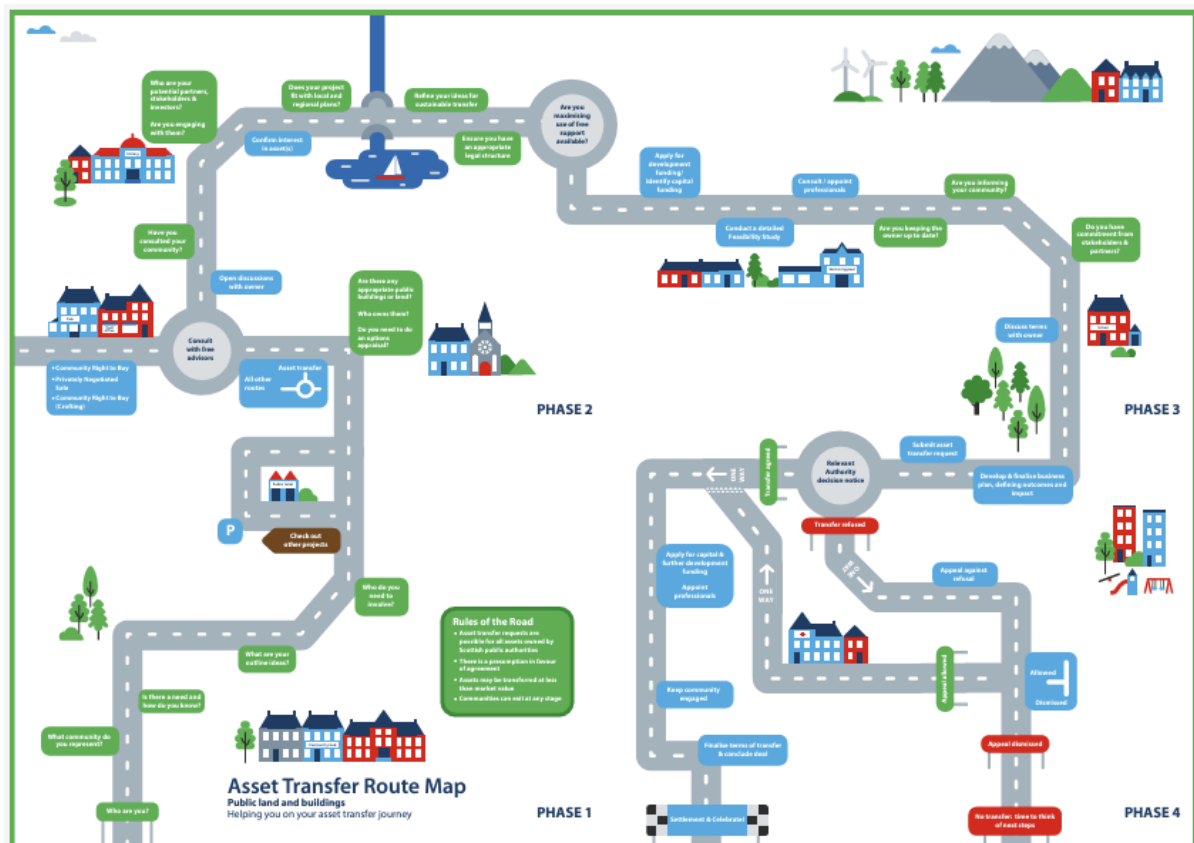

Figure 5. DTAS Asset Transfer Route Map from Community Ownership Support Service - Development Trusts Association Scotland
https://dtascommunityownership.org.uk/sites/default/files/Asset%20transfer%20route%20map%20web.pdf

While the idea of community asset ownership has a long history, in the UK it was the Government's 2007 'Making Assets Work' – or 'Quirk review' that emphasised the need for citizens to have a greater stake in their own communities. It sought a "major cultural shift" in local authorities with regard to local assets by identifying ways in which barriers to community ownership of local assets could be overcome.[168]

The report recommended a campaign to foster citizen engagement, advocating support to build active local communities. It highlighted that by transferring assets to the

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167 https://dtascommunityownership.org.uk/community/community-asset-transfer
168 http://www.lgiu.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Quirk-Review-Making-assets-work.pdf

community it would enable opportunities for the provision of local services and bring about more confident empowered communities and positive local change. The review therefore advocated for increased participation and better outcomes for communities. The review included a community call to action, urging government support for community management and strengthening capacity building for community groups and local authorities.

The subsequent shift towards 'localism' in 2011, when the UK Government introduced 'the Localism Act 2011' continued this approach, with increasing numbers of assets transferred in the last decade.[169] Through the Act, it was hoped that assets of value to the community could be taken over by community groups rather than falling into the hands of private businesses. It seems that CAT has become part of the 'communities' and 'localism' vernacular.

A 2020 report by My Community claims an estimated three-quarters of local authorities are actively engaged in the transfer of assets to communities.[170]

A support organisation for their development, Locality has created CAT guidance for Councillors.[171] This outlines how CAT can contribute to fulfilling key strategic policy goals, rather than short term financial gain of a commercial transfer. The document also evidences how CAT has succeeded in providing opportunities for job creation, the maintenance of local services, protects valued local spaces and contributes to a vibrant local economy – as well as fostering stronger community ties.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the increase in CAT is partly a result of it representing a way to make significant budget savings for local authorities, as the disposal of an asset helps relieve the financial burden and responsibilities for holding these assets from local authorities. Community ownership may also open access to funding sources for which local authorities are ineligible.

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[169] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted.
[170] https://mycommunity.org.uk/files/downloads/Download-Understanding-Community-Asset-Transfer.pdf.
[171] http://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/OPE%20-%20publications%20-%20Building%20powerful%20communities%20through%20Community%20Asset%20Transfer%20%28March%202018%29.pdf.

However, as Briggs[172] notes, the resource required for local authorities to bring about transfers is more significant than the desire for efficiency gains suggests and Rex[173] states that the CAT model requires greater support than is often seen in practice. It is further argued that approaches that position the 'state' versus 'local' often romanticize communities as more flexible, adaptable and responsive, without due consideration of their democratic nature[174].

The evidence suggests that CAT's work best when delivered as a partnership between local government and communities, rather than devolving liability from one to the other.

Instead, CAT's have been accused of creating a 'use it or lose it' approach to local decision making, whereby the provisions of important locally assets depend on the capacity of volunteers to take on governance, not on equitable right of resource for different communities[175]. This is particularly problematic as the evidence suggests that CAT may further embed inequality between places, when, as has been noted in the Scottish context 'the majority of community-owned assets are to be found in areas that do not experience marked levels of deprivation[176].

Furthermore, within the governance of CAT Briggs[177] has found that "individuals in the community who do not join the group [to whom the asset is being transferred] are mostly excluded from this process, thereby forfeiting any power they might have had to make changes'. This represents a form of privatisation of public assets which excludes some community members. Without local authority oversight CAT may not increase community power but may place it in the hands of a few unaccountable citizens.

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[172] Briggs (2022) *Community Asset Transfer in England*
[173] Bethany Rex, "Community Management of Local Cultural Assets: Implications for Inequality and Publicness", in *Cultural Policy is Local*, Eds. Victoria Durrer, Abigail Gilmore, Leila Jancovich, David Stevenson, (Berlin: Springer, 2023), 115-137.
[174] Jack Newman and Michael Kenny, "Devolving English Government", Bennett Institute, 2023, Available at https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/devolving-english-government/
[175] Leila Jancovich, "Building Local Capacity in the Arts", *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 8, no. 3 (2016): 289-306.
[176] Tom Black, "Community ownership in Scotland: A baseline study", Community Ownership Support Service, 2012, Available at https://dtascommunityownership.org.uk/sites/default/files/Community%20Ownership%20in%20Scotland%20-%20A%20Baseline%20Study.pdf
[177] Amanda Briggs, Community Asset Transfer in England: Enabling Innovation for Social Change, or Perpetuating Inequalities?, (Bradford: Ethics International Press Ltd, 2022).

Successful CATs therefore are not a quick fix to save money for local authorities but rely upon strong resources, local authority oversight and community approaches that are inclusive.

Reflections on community asset transfer in practice

In September 2012, Gwynedd Council's Estates Department accepted a recommendation to transfer the freehold of Neuadd Ogwen, an arts and music centre, to the responsibility of Tabernacl (Bethesda) Cyf, a social enterprise.

Tabernacl social enterprise was established 20 years ago to celebrate the local arts scene of Bethesda, home to a number of successful Welsh artists including internationally renowned musician Gruff Rhys, the lead singer of Super Furry Animals. The purpose of the transfer was to secure finance to redevelop the centre and included a parcel of land adjacent to the building.

Tabernacl was not successful in its first bid to the BLF for a Community Asset Transfer grant, and in preparation for its bid to the final application round, they worked with a peer mentor, Promo Cymru. This mentorship was facilitated by DTA Wales. The mentor had previously been successful in its bid for grant money and was able to provide guidance and knowledge to Tabernacl which they did not already have in their group.

The transfer of the asset took place for a nominal sum of £1 because the building was already let to Tabernacl and the council put a restriction on its use in the lease. The CAT allowed Tabernacl access to funding which was unavailable to the Local Authority including a £600k grant from the *Big Lottery Fund* (BLF) Community Asset Transfer programme to redevelop Neuadd Ogwen. It also secured £312k from the local *Môn Menai Regeneration Fund* for the building project.

The refurbishment and internal modification of the building created a multi-purpose Community Arts Centre. The building now provides cinema, live theatre, concerts, musical tuition, drama and dance, adult education, a variety of workshop opportunities, office space for the community council as well as other community groups, heritage activities

and a gallery space for local artists. Conferences have also been held in the building and the 'Crawia' kids drama club is also hosted in the hall.

The directors have since developed plans for the next stage of its development which includes further building purchases with the support of a business loan from the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) to expand the community and arts space available. Having a Local Authority champion, and social enterprise peer-to-peer mentoring have been identified as key factors that aided the transfer process for Gwynedd Council and for Tabernacl.

Drawing from this example as well as from Locality's report, Community Asset Transfers seem to work best if they have strong support from the local council as well as strong community support.[178] There is a need to establish good communication and trust between the community and local council to ensure successful joint working between the stakeholders. Measured risk taking and innovation should be encouraged – underpinned by a sound business plan which outlines sustainable capital and revenue funding for the future.

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[178] https://locality.org.uk/assets/images/COP33979_In-Community-Hands_2020.03.18.pdf.

Place-based approaches (PBAs)

Place-based approaches to funding (PBAs) and cultural policy have become an increasing priority both at the international and domestic levels, often framed as a return to 'the local, the domestic, the proximate' in response to globalism, COVID-19 and a rejection of more centralised cultural policy.[179] The term is used to describe:

> a range of approaches, from grant-making in a specific geographic area to long-term, multifaceted collaborative partnerships aimed at achieving significant change. In most cases, it is more than just a term to describe the target location of funding; it also describes a style and philosophy of approach which seeks to achieve 'joined-up' systems change.[180]

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[179] Victoria Durrer, Abigail Gilmore, Leila Jancovich, and David Stevenson, eds., *Cultural Policy Is Local: Understanding Cultural Policy as Situated Practice*, New Directions in Cultural Policy Research (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 2.

[180] Marilyn Taylor, Eliza Buckly, and Charlotte Hennessy, *Historical Review of Place-Based Approaches* (London, UK: Institute for Voluntary Action Research, 2017), Available at: https://lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Historical-review-of-place-based-approaches.pdf.

Figure 6. Creative Civic Change Tree, Local Trust, https://localtrust.org.uk/other-programmes/creative-civic-change/about-creative-civic-change/.

Overall, place-based funding can be defined as spatially targeted investment aiming to align funding to local needs rather than support specific or pre-determined forms of cultural provision. PBAs can take a top-down configuration – with specific objectives established at the outset by the local or national government – or a bottom-up one – with objectives and priorities shaped by the communities in the targeted place[181] which have the potential to allow communities to redefine culture locally.

A distinction is made in the literature between 'place-focused' and 'people-focused' (or place-neutral or spatially-blind) approaches to local development, often seen as borne out of distinct sets of concerns. For Barca et al[182] place-focused approaches seek to address inequality by making improvements to a place in response to local knowledge which, in turn, is believed to benefit communities.

Spatially targeted interventions adopt place-specificity as a core principle, with the view that context and local knowledge are integral and, therefore, policy must be situated and developed through interaction with local groups.

On the other hand, people-focused approaches prioritise a capability approach and develop interventions in response to communities, without explicit considerations of place.

Spatially-blind strategies are understood as effective means to tackle disparities between people within places rather than between places.

A recently published report from the AHRC's *Place Programme* attempts to overcome this binary thinking. In looking at the contribution of arts and humanities research to place-based policy and practices, the report argues for 'developing a people-centred, place-led

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[181] Catherine Walker, "Place-Based Giving Schemes: Funding, Engaging and Creating Stronger Communities", Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b9944dfed915d666ca7d0b3/Place-based_giving_schemes_in_England__final_.pdf.
[182] Fabrizio Barca, Philip Mccann, and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, "The Case for Regional Development Intervention: Place-Based versus Place-Neutral Approaches", *Journal of Regional Science* 51, no. 1 (n.d.): 134–52, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9787.2011.00756.x.

approach' as one that 'holds the lived, felt, geographic, and economic dimensions together'.[183]

The rationales for employing place-based approaches include consideration of the scale at which policy interventions can be most effective in engaging local communities; the intention to integrate public services and overcome siloed ways of working; the potential for new spaces of participatory decision making; and the goal to reduce inequality and therefore lessen demand for public services, by building local capacity.[184]

In principle, good place-based cultural policy – as defined by Creative Scotland – 'recognises the individual needs of people, communities and places, recognises unique culture and heritage of individuals and communities, and responds to the ambition, need and challenges of each place'.[185] Further, it is co-created with all local stakeholders and integrated with other aspects of policy, such as health and planning.[186]

However, in cultural policy, place-based funding often translates into competitive funding mechanisms that exacerbate inequalities between places.

Whilst LAs are still the largest funders of local culture, they do so unevenly. Public bodies across the UK have, therefore, committed to delivering place-based development programmes. Illustrative examples of these interventions are initiatives such as *Creative People and Places* by Arts Council England and *Place Partnership Programme* and *Culture Collective* by Creative Scotland. The latter is taken as a case study in the following section. McCann understands this move as necessary to counteract the UK's highly centralised and spatially-blind governance, which he proposes is inappropriate for the internal heterogeneity across the four nations.[187]

Across the four UK nations, PBAs and, more specifically, place-based investments for culture have taken different forms.

[107] Rebecca Madgin and Elizabeth Robson, "Developing a People-Centred, Place-Led Approach: The Value of the Arts and Humanities" (University of Glasgow, June 2023), 6, https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_978141_smxx.pdf.

[108] Sophie Baker, "A Scoping Review of Place-Based Approaches to Community Engagement and Support" (Cardiff: Welsh Government, 2022), https://www.gov.wales/place-based-approaches-community-engagement-and-support.

[185] Creative Scotland, "Response Number 810479883", Culture in Communities Consultation, Scottish Parliament, accessed June 13, 2024, https://yourviews.parliament.scot/ceeac/culture-in-communities/consultation/view_respondent?uuId=810479883.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Philip McCann, *UK Research and Innovation: A Place-Based Shift?* (Swindon: UK Research and Innovation, July 2019).

Scottish policy has been characterised by a place-based approach since the 1960s and 1970s but this, arguably, intensified in the early 2000s with the establishment of the *Social Inclusion Partnerships* and the *Community Planning Partnerships* (CPP).[188] Following the *Christie Commission Report* which set out participation, partnerships, prevention and performance as core elements of the public service reform,[189] the *Community Empowerment Act (2015)* established the requirement that each CPP divided the local authority's areas into smaller areas described as 'localities'.[190] This aimed to 'empower community bodies through the ownership or control of land and buildings, and by strengthening their voices in decisions about public services'.[191]

These localised approaches were believed to be more effective in tackling inequalities by requiring plans for citizen services at the sub-authority level. In 2019, an agreement between COSLA and the Scottish Government officially adopted the *Place Principle*, which later informed the 'place-based' approach to culture in *A Culture Strategy for Scotland*. In this strategic document published in February 2020, the Scottish Government recognised that 'a collaborative, place-based approach can help create the right conditions for culture to thrive', and highlighted that 'partnerships between local government, cultural and creative organisations, businesses and organisations in Scotland's most deprived communities can and do realise a wide range of outcomes for people including improved health and wellbeing, social cohesion and reducing inequality'.[192]

In England, PBAs date back to the early 2010s, following the UK Government's requirement for public bodies to involve the public in decision-making processes. Programmes such as *Creative People and Places* (CPP) by Arts Council England were borne out of this context. Launched in 2012, the programme was conceived by Jim Tough, then Director of Arts Council North, (interestingly previously Director of the Scottish Arts Council). The aim was to involve the public in decision-making and address inequalities through a ten-year-long commitment (while in the end applications only

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[188] Claire Bynner, "Rationales for Place-Based Approaches in Scotland", What Works Scotland, July 2016, https://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/RationalesforPlacebasedApproachesinScotland.pdf.
[189] *Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services*, Scottish Government, June 29, 2011, accessed June 12, 2024, https://www.gov.scot/publications/commission-future-delivery-public-services/.
[190] Community Empowerment Act (2015) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/contents/enacted>.
[191] Scottish Government, "Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act: Summary," February 7, 2017, available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-scotland-act-summary/.
[192] Scottish Government, "A Culture Strategy for Scotland", February 2020**,** Accessed April 13, 2024, https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/02/culture-strategy-scotland/documents/culture-strategy-scotland/culture-strategy-scotland/govscot%3Adocument/culture-strategy-scotland.pdf.

covered a three-year funding period).[193] The allocation of funds was driven by a specific set of data derived from the *Active People Survey*, which Arts Council England used to identify locations with lower rates of cultural engagement that competitively applied for funding.

Northern Ireland and Wales also developed PBAs through policy interventions such as the *Social Investment Fund* (2011) and the Welsh programmes *Communities First* (2001-2018) and *Flying Start* (2006-present).[194] The Social Investment Fund was an investment scheme that allocated funds based on measures of multiple deprivation across Northern Ireland.[195] Similarly, *Communities First* was a programme that aimed at collaborating with communities from deprived Welsh areas to improve the local area, as part of the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Plan.[196] Described as a community-driven initiative, the programme integrated community involvement in planning, implementation, and monitoring through a multi-agency partnership, enabling local communities to work collaboratively with service providers to tackle local challenges.[197] On the contrary, the *Flying Start* Programme was a top-dow initiative with a focus on people – particularly aimed at children under the age of four living in disadvantaged areas of Wales.[198]

Below, two models from Creative Scotland offer examples to unpack how culture-focused place-based funding can work in practice.

Reflections on place-based approaches in practice

Launched in 2013, the *Place Partnership Programme* was described as a strategic initiative with the aim of encouraging local partners (local authorities and cultural trusts) to work with their communities to 'spark ideas, promote collaborative working, build capacity and

[193] Mark Robinson, *Ten Years of Learning* (Arts Council England, 2022). Available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/10-years-learning-creative-people-and-places.
[194] Baker, A Scoping Review of Place-Based Approaches.
[195] Northern Ireland Executive, "Northern Ireland Audit Office: The Social Investment Fund", 2018, Accessed June 26, 2024, https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/media-files/NIAO_Social%20Investment%20Fund%20Report.pdf
[196] Welsh Government, "Written Statement – Tackling Poverty Action Plan", 2013, Accessed June 26, 2024, https://gov.wales/written-statement-tackling-poverty-action-plan-2013 .
[197] Baker, A Scoping Review of Place-Based Approaches.
[198] Welsh Government, "National Evaluation of Flying Start: Area case study synthesis report", 2013, Accessed June 26, 2024, https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-04/national-evaluation-of-flying-start-area-case-study-synthesis-report.pdf

ultimately deliver creative activity which responds to the distinct opportunities and challenges within different localities'.[199]

With an emphasis on collaborative planning the programme required local partners to demonstrate a clear vision and solid understanding of their communities, to be able to match the funding, and to engage with Creative Scotland in developing their proposal. Often, the first step involved cultural mapping to appraise existing community assets. Sixteen local authorities benefitted from the programme, with good geographical distribution across Scotland. Outcome varied from cultural strategies to new formally established cultural networks, festivals and culture-related job posts – a particularly poignant result considering the lamented loss of Arts Development function across local authorities in Scotland.[200]

The programme was sparked by an understanding that national bodies must understand locality to cater to the needs of different communities and places, and of different artforms and creative practices, and that, to do so, engagement with local partners and communities would need to be a requirement. In this sense, Place Partnership Programme is presented as an exemplar of the 'development role' that Creative Scotland seeks to fulfil for the nation, trying to address regional disparities through bespoke, PBAs.[201]

While this model was recognised to be effective in developing trust between the funder and local partners and supporting strategic development and building capacity,[202] it also exposed risks associated with louder community voices dominating activities.

The overall vision of the activities on the ground became conflated with those of the leading cultural organisations involved. Further, community needs were found to be

[142] Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, *Culture in Communities: The Challenges and Opportunities in Delivering a Place-Based Approach* (The Scottish Parliament, September 14, 2023), https://bprcdn.parliament.scot/published/CEEAC/2023/9/14/4c816e37-a817-4de7-b22e-4b4c924d81fd/CEEACS062023R4.pdf.
[200] Creative Scotland, "Response Number 810479883", Culture in Communities Consultation, Scottish Parliament, accessed June 13, 2024, https://yourviews.parliament.scot/ceeac/culture-in-communities/consultation/view_respondent?uuId=810479883.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Constitution Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, *Culture in Communities*.

unmet as communities continued to be invited to choose from pre-determined offers rather than included in early agenda setting.

Building on this learning, in 2020, Creative Scotland launched a new programme, *Culture Collective*, described in a recent preliminary report by Queen Margaret University as 'relatively unique in that it has allowed those funded to design and deliver activities that respond to the particular priorities of the places they are from'.[203]

Culture Collective was set up as a network of 26 participatory projects to support local communities in shaping and delivering local cultural projects alongside cultural organisations and artists. This new scheme was designed to be flexible. [204] Originally funded through COVID-19 emergency funds with £1.5 million for the pilot project, it later received further funding from the Scottish Government for an overall amount of £10.2 million.[205] Set to conclude in October 2023 with no official plans for its continuation, the project's legacy is hoped to be the network of communities and organisations that developed locally and nationally.[206]

The programme has been recognised as a 'powerful example' of a national initiative that provided 'unique, flexible and long-term' support to local cultural projects by recognising the need and potential of fostering local networks and funding at scale. [207]
In submitting evidence to the Scottish Parliament, one representative from *Culture Collective* explained: 'Proper investment allows the question to shift to, 'What is most needed? How can we be most effective and most brilliant?' It allows us to work with ambition and ask, 'How could this be as brilliant as possible?' as opposed to, 'How can we do this cheaply because that's all we've got?''.[208]

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[203] Rachel Blanche, David Stevenson, Anthony Schrag, Alice McGrath, Bryan Beattie, and Caitlin McKinnon, "National Evaluation of the Culture Collective Programme: Part One: 'Unprecedented and Revitalising' - Emerging Impacts and Ways of Working: Reflections from the First Year of the Culture Collective" (Queen Margaret University, 2023), p. 12. https://www.creativescotland.com/resources-publications/research/archive/2023/national-evaluation-of-the-culture-collective-programme.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Constitution Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, *Culture in Communities*.
[206] Rachel Blanche, David Stevenson, Anthony Schrag, Alice McGrath, Bryan Beattie, and Caitlin McKinnon, "National Evaluation of the Culture Collective Programme".
[208] Scottish Parliament. Official Report of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. May 4 2023. Available at: https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-andcommittees/official-report/search-what-https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=15286.

While these initiatives are reported to strengthen local networks, improve capability through training and support, create new employment opportunities, foster fair work practices, enhance community confidence and ownership, and local partners' understanding of the areas they are part of, they nevertheless encounter challenges. These are both at the delivery (challenges in relationships, inertia to change, pressure to deliver, limited capacity, among others) and the funding/political level (longevity, lacking infrastructure, among others).[209]

Evidence shows that the main achievement of PBAs like Culture Collective is the development of a cultural infrastructure between partners, organisations and artists, creating benefits for local stakeholders at different levels.[210] This result is particularly significant in light of the 'decline in access to spaces and resources through which people express themselves culturally'.[211]

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[209] Rachel Blanche, David Stevenson, Anthony Schrag, Alice McGrath, Bryan Beattie, and Caitlin McKinnon, "National Evaluation of the Culture Collective Programme".
[210] Ibid.
[211] Scottish Parliament, Official Report of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, 13th Meeting, Session 6, April 27 2023, 13, Available at:
https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=15276

Policy implications of involving the public in decision making

This document, in line with a growing body of literature on the local in cultural policy, has demonstrated the value of thinking about policy making as 'a horizontal, dynamic and relational process involving multiple agents, with different perspectives, areas of skill, knowledge and interests'.[212]

Involving the public in decision making can be an important component in creating such a process associated with the production of creative, cultural and heritage sector policy.

But to include a wider range of voices means also recognising that decisions made through such processes will be perceived differently by different people. Implementation of policy therefore needs to pay due consideration to the fact that it will include successes and failures across different facets, to different degrees and for different people, at different points in time.[213]

The framework below offers a tool for open and honest conversations about these successes and failures as a vital process of policy learning.

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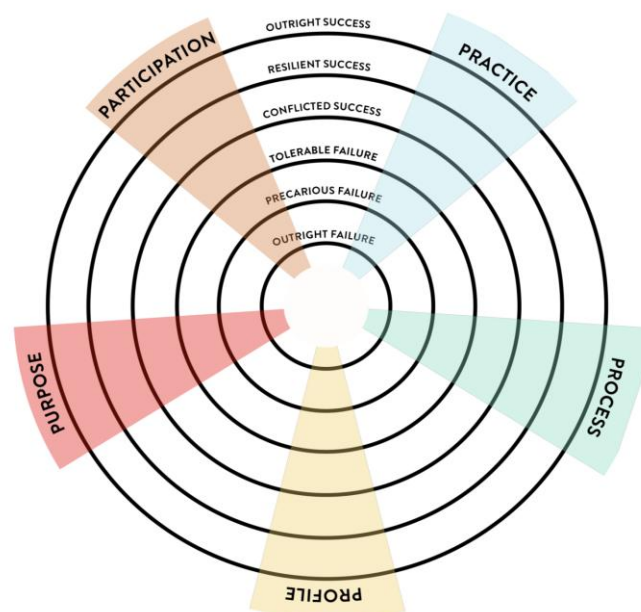
[212] Abigail Gilmore, Leila Jancovich, David Stevenson, and Victoria Durrer, "Situating the Local in Global Cultural Policy", *Cultural Trends* 28, no. 4 (2019): 265–268, p. 267.
[213] See Jancovich and Stevenson, Failures in Cultural Participation.

Figure 7. The Wheel of Failure from *https://failspaceproject.co.uk/wheel/*.

Most commonly, public decision making is characterised as helping citizens to:

- ○ create alternative visions which can transform understandings of culture
- ○ build confident and active citizens who feel they have a stake in their communities
- ○ increase the legitimacy of public institutions and accountability for public money
- ○ facilitate learning for professionals that moves beyond group think and build collaboration and networks with a wider range of voices

We propose that the first task when involving the public in decision making is to determine the primary purpose and ensure this is communicated clearly to those taking part. Failure to do so may lead to processes that are not fit for purpose, feel tokenistic to participants, or only engage the 'usual suspects' in decision making.

In the section on co-production we introduced the concept of 'radical transparency' to explain to participants how the process works and their role in this. The table below attempts to summarise some of the findings on each of the models proposed in relation to the core purpose, process and level of participation to help build an understanding of what might work in what context, and to help articulate this both within an institutional frame and with other stakeholders including the public participants.

The rest of this section then draws out some of the key findings above to consider the policy implications of this paper.

Action	Public value	Co-production	Citizens assemblies	Participatory budgeting	Asset Transfer	Place-based funding
Purpose	• Learning from others • Increase legitimacy	• Give agency to others • Improve relevance	• Problem solving • Alternative solutions	• Redistributing resource • Increase equity or legitimacy	• Devolving ownership • Reducing liabilities	• Utilising local knowledges • Resourcing place not activity
Process	• Consultation • Surveys • Focus groups • Contingent valuations	• Facilitated collaboration • Take-overs • Knowledge exchange	• Sortition • Deliberation • Facilitation	• Calls for ideas • Pitch events • Voting	• Negotiated contracted • Business case • Community engagement	Varies: sometimes competitive, sometimes redistribution
Level of participation	Consultation	Varies: institutional invitation to participate to co-ownership of goals and outcomes	Recommendations not implementation	Varies: Agenda setting to delivery and evaluation	Take on liability for resource	Varies: Agenda setting to delivery and evaluation

For some time, cultural policymakers have directed programmes towards people. But the local has increasingly been where 'questions of what culture is valued and resourced'[214] have come to the fore, as community cultural infrastructures have been worst affected by changes in funding levels. We argue that it therefore follows that 'the local' is an important level at which approaches to deliberation and decision making around culture are had.

However, at a policy level, what constitutes 'the local' is by no means consistent. In our study, while some of the [place-based funding approaches](#) we looked at work at the hyper-local or ward levels, [participatory budgeting](#) and [asset transfers](#) more commonly work at local authority level, and [CiP's citizen assembly](#) is working regionally.

At the same time, the local is not the only lens through which to consider public involvement in decision making. [Co-production](#) often works in an institutional context where place is less important than deciding whether to work with existing users or those not currently engaged. Furthermore, through the [public value approach](#), adopted by national institutions we questioned the limitations of only devolving decision making locally without changing the way decisions are made at a national level.

It is important to recognise how the scale at which decisions are made impacts both the types of people who are likely to engage in processes to involve the public in decision making and the outcomes of such processes.

The *Culture Collective* place-based funding has demonstrated the benefits of working at a hyper-local level to maximise 'resonance',[215] or deep engagement, for people who have a real stake in their communities. Citizens in Power's Citizens' Assembly aims to make systemic change by working at a regional level, in partnership with those who have the capacity to change funding. But they also recognise the importance of representing a breadth of interests through their approach to sortition. In the asset transfer model we demonstrated the risks of inequities in processes that advantage those with existing capacity to take part and in all the cases we looked at, a tension exists between engaging those with energy and enthusiasm and ensuring representation from the different

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[214] Durrer et al., Cultural Policy is Local, 7.
[215] Danny Burns, *Systemic Action Research: A Strategy for Whole System Change* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2007).

constituents to increase equity and avoid offering 'privileged backstage access to decision-making'.[216]

To address this NAE provided training and support to participants to enable them to become young producers. For the Bank of Ideas, the Idea Generating Sessions served to build capacity among local community members and support people who did not possess the skills to participate meaningfully. Citizens in Power resourced participation to ensure no one was excluded for financial reasons.

A key task when involving the public is ensuring everyone has the capacity to take part and, where necessary, provide resources to endow participants with the skills or means to participate.

But it is also important not to 'essentialise and romanticise the local' as a simple entity.[217] Doing so ignores the diversity of interests, values and beliefs at play within a place. For example, the museum studies literature on migration illuminates, on the one hand, the complexities of reproducing senses of place that can exclude certain communities and, on the other, the role of advocacy museums can play 'in the development of richer local cultures of hospitality and mutual recognition'.[218]

There is a responsibility implicated in situated cultural practices to engage with place identities with openness, rather than perpetuating ideas of localness rooted in history and authenticity that may exclude some parts of a community.[219]

It is not always easy (or even advisable) to seek consensus on what course of action to take through such processes. However, without consensus, it is challenging to determine how decisions are reached. Bank of Ideas' worked hard to reach beyond the usual suspects by going into the community to host sessions in different locations (cafes, community centres, pubs, etc.). This helped them collate options for use in participatory budgeting. But while they kept the selection criteria simple in order to give as many proposals as

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[216] Durrer et al., Cultural Policy is Local, 8.

[217] Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke, "Participatory Development and Empowerment: The Dangers of Localism," *Third World Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (2000): 247–268, 249. https://doi-org.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/10.1080/01436590050004346.

[218] See Domenico Sergi, *Museums, Refugees and Communities* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 150.

[219] Doreen Massey, "Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 60–70.

possible a chance to be selected, they relied on a voting mechanism to make the ultimate decision. But majority-based decisions can squeeze out the very minoritised voices they had worked so hard to include. *Citizens in Power* talked about the importance of creative facilitation to manage difference and deliberation instead of voting to reach decisions. However, some critics of citizens assemblies fear this may affect the power balance in such processes and may recreate the group-think of existing decision-making processes. This is not only a problem in terms of equity but also ignores the fact that, particularly in relation to culture, the most innovative or creative ideas, may not be the most popular.

All decision making processes, including those associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem, should allow space for dissent, recognise that the majority view is not always the best option, and provide support and feedback for those who are unsuccessful with funding applications.

Having worked with the public to develop ideas, a process, therefore, needs to be established to determine once a decision has been reached and provide feedback and support to those whose suggestions are not being implemented. Evidence associated with participatory budgeting methods shows that failure to do this can increase disengagement from citizens. Conversely, where the public was involved from agenda setting, through grant distribution, to delivery and evaluation over the long term, there is clear evidence of greater buy-in to the approach once people have experienced it in practice and seen it result in change.[220]

But this does not mean that processes always have to start with a long term commitment. NAE started with a small-scale project to build their own skills and then upscaled the approach as they built confidence in it. Similarly, CiP said that while many local authorities resisted the idea of Citizens' Assemblies, they encourage providers to experience the process so that they may see the benefit of them. Across all our examples, people said there was greater buy-in to processes once people had seen them in action.

One of the key levers to involving the public in decision making is therefore to start the process in a spirit of learning and with a commitment to the longer term.

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[220] SQW Consulting, 2011. *National Evaluation of Participatory Budgeting in England* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).

Processes that try to create a quick win for efficiency gains are likely to fail to be sustainable and may increase rather than decrease inequalities.

So what all the processes need is a combination of the social infrastructure to facilitate deliberation, which moves from an institutional focus to a people-based focus, and investment to support change. There is widespread acceptance of the need for this, across the literature cited above. We have further argued that this is a crucial component to ensure that the cultural rights of all citizens are being met by cultural policy. However, it is important to recognise that all our case studies demonstrate that implementation is complex. The evidence suggests that while local authorities often employ CAT to reduce their financial liabilities they work best when delivered as a partnership between local government and communities, rather than devolving liability from one to the other. Similarly, most models support the case for some professional facilitation and all show the importance of having the resources to deliver on the aspirations and expectations raised through these approaches.

Processes that involve the public in decision making require time to deliver and ongoing resources to avoid raising expectations amongst citizens that cannot be met.

Directives like the 'duty to involve' and legislation such as the *Localism Act 2011* have played a role in ensuring such approaches are embedded in public institutions, but the imposition of such approaches risks leading to tick-box approaches that may not achieve the policy intentions. The example of the Arts Council England's 'public value' work, undertaken in response to the duty, has shown tangible shifts in their understanding of cultural attitudes and behaviours that have fed into the way they now articulate policy. However, it has not affected how they make decisions. Approaches to asset transfer in local authorities, supported through the Localism Act, have provided opportunities to increase local ownership in public resources but they have tended to advantage communities who already have the capacity to deliver. Some local authorities express concern that public decision making does not have the same accountability as existing representative democratic structures.

It is important to ensure accountability for public decisions and public decisions-making processes, particularly where they challenge rather than reinforce more traditional local power relations.

However, in many of our examples it is the combination of the policy lead and a value-driven approach from the implementer that has played a crucial role in these processes. Belfast's Bank of Ideas demonstrated how it is the combination of the Council's strategic commitment and an Officer's personal values and competencies that were the key lever to Participatory Budgeting in Belfast. New Art Exchange in Nottingham similarly recognised through their own experiments in co-production that it was not enough for them to just give people a voice. They also wanted to give away some of their power. But while this was not in response to funder requirements, NAE they said their new Permanent Assembly, relied on Arts Council England supporting them through a slow process of confidence-building, embedding co-production in different areas of their programming to ultimately change their governance structures. Similarly, the success of Citizens in Power's work in West England is contingent on buy-in from the regional executive to ensure that the ideas generated by their Citizens Assembly are considered for implementation.

Funding is one of greatest levers to facilitate public involvement in decision making, but it requires a values-based approach for effective delivery.

We therefore argue that cultural policy can play a key role in meaning making and give optimism, but it can also be accused of 'art-washing', offering hope but ignoring genuine problems and voices. What all our case studies show is that a shift from a deficit approach that offers top-down solutions to address people's cultural needs to an asset-based approach that gives people creative agency, could support a more vibrant, more sustainable and more equitable creative, cultural and heritage policy landscape.

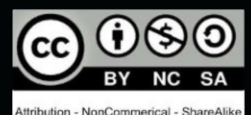**This relies on processes that seek to involve the public by:**

- **encouraging diversity of experience and opinion in the decision-making unit**
- **providing mechanisms for people to express themselves in different ways**

- **creating processes to manage dissent and feedback to those whose ideas are not realised**

- **have a long-term commitment and willingness to change actions in response to these processes.**