

## Participatory Practice in Arts and Heritage – MACCH Conference 17-18 March 2017

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### **Abstract Title: Co-Design and Co-Production in Art and Cultural Heritage**

Successive policies and efforts to increase participation in a range of arts and cultural activities have tended to focus on the profile and attitude of individuals and target groups in order to justify public - and therefore achieve more equitable - funding. Rationales for such intervention generally reflect the policy and political regime operating in different eras and countries, but widening participation, increasing access (and audiences/visitors) and making the subsidised arts and heritage more inclusive have been perennial concerns. However, despite decades of arts policy and programmes to improve accessibility and widen participation rates across the population, the cultural capital deficit divide persists. For example in the UK, those from least deprived neighbourhoods are twice as likely to attend museums as those from the most deprived.

Historically, research into arts participation has focused in an unbalanced way on 'demand' and a preoccupation with the sociological determinants of cultural activity. This is apparent in the reliance on socio-demographic distinctions in formal cultural engagement, from Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, drawing on earlier foundations of sociology – from Marx, Durkheim, Weber to Simmel: 'the most influential theories that have focused on the ways in which taste-formation and cultural consumption are linked to social differentiation and stratification' (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008, p.164). Academic attention has reinforced this tendency with further classifications of individualistic cultural consumer types (e.g. Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Bennett et al., 2009), in an otherwise cultural production and spatial vacuum (Evans, 2016).

Whilst cultural institutions have responded to these policy and funding imperatives - with collections management and arts programming roles evolving from 'caretaking' to critical curatorship, to audience/visitor engagement and today, digitisation – some artists and cultural organisations have developed more culturally democratic approaches that embrace co-design and new forms of cultural governance. This is also reflected in research on cultural development and management which has used co-design in research formulation and the phenomena under investigation (Grounded Theory). In some cases this has moved further into the co-production of research and in the creative production chain itself.

The paper will discuss these developments in cultural participation and the emerging practice of co-design in the context of wider cultural governance of arts and heritage at policy and institutional level. This will include examples (based on the author's research) of community engagement in cultural activity, networks and production – notably heritage and festivals - that have responded to and reflected local issues, the identification of cultural assets, and local knowledge.

## References

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