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Creating the Environment



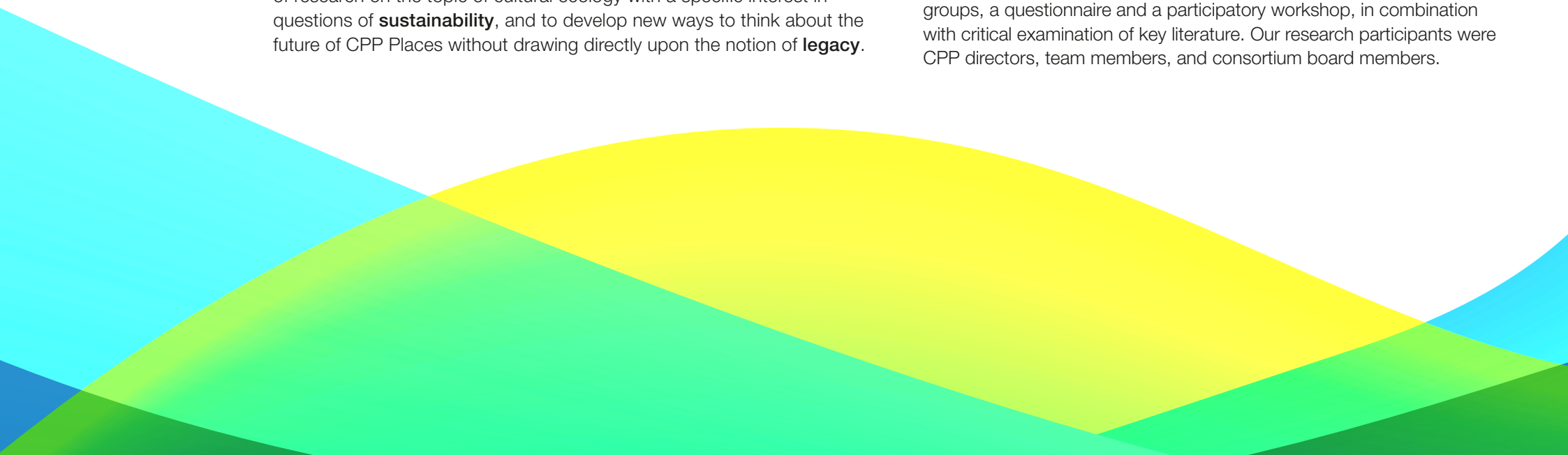
The cultural eco-systems of
Creative People and Places

Jonathan Gross and Nick Wilson

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Executive summary

- This report draws on research conducted with the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme between June and November 2018. It explores the idea of **cultural ecology**, and the **cultural eco-systems** within CPP locations. By examining the local environments of which CPP Places are a part, it offers new ways to understand what place-based cultural programmes, such as CPP, can seek to achieve in the long run.
 - **Ecology** is the study of relationships between organisms and their environment. The term cultural ecology has been used by anthropologists since the 1950s to mean the study of human adaptations to social and physical environments. In recent years it has been more directly associated with the 'cultural sector'.
 - However, the language of cultural ecology has been used with a variety of intentions and inflections. The CPP network commissioned a piece of research on the topic of cultural ecology with a specific interest in questions of **sustainability**, and to develop new ways to think about the future of CPP Places without drawing directly upon the notion of **legacy**.
 - **Previous CPP network-commissioned reports** have highlighted questions of legacy. How to ensure lasting legacy / sustainability is a key issue within CPP, and one that has particular significance given the nature of the programme. As Sarah Boiling and Claire Thurman (2018) highlight, "many CPP communities are (justifiably) wary of another short term 'project'", and CPP teams are clear in their commitment to enabling long-term positive benefit for the people and places with whom they are working. Major questions remain, however, as to how best to achieve this. This report shows how the wealth of insights concerning 'co-production' emerging from across the CPP programme has the potential to inform and enable long-lasting change, but that key **systemic questions** require further consideration.
 - Our research questions focused on what a cultural eco-system *is*, what a **flourishing** cultural eco-system looks like, and what has enabled cultural eco-systems to flourish within CPP. We conducted interviews, focus groups, a questionnaire and a participatory workshop, in combination with critical examination of key literature. Our research participants were CPP directors, team members, and consortium board members.
- 

- Through our fieldwork we observed the **diversity of cultural resources** across the eco-systems of CPP. We offer an ‘inventory’ of the components of these eco-systems, which illustrates the huge breadth of elements involved in enabling **cultural opportunity** within these Places. We also identify a range of **systemic factors** that play significant roles in the cultural eco-systems across CPP. These include: public services, the funding and structures of local authorities, the presence or absence of universities and FE colleges, housing and changing demography, digital platforms, the geographic size and shape of the cultural eco-system, the role of neighbouring eco-systems, the places to which people feel they belong, and the extent to which people recognise themselves as *part of* a cultural eco-system.
- In undertaking this research, it was important to distinguish between **three different senses of ‘cultural ecology’**. Cultural ecology is: (i) a condition of the world (an ontological reality). (ii) a descriptive and analytical perspective (an epistemological framework). (iii) an approach to cultural policy, programming and practice (an organisational, managerial or strategic method). In this report we explore the ways in which culture within CPP Places *is* ecological, needs to be *understood* ecologically, and how it can be *actively nurtured* ecologically.
- It might appear that any place-based approach to cultural policy, programming and practice is inherently ecological. But to take an ecological approach (in the third sense) means engaging at a strategic level with **interconnections and interdependencies** between cultural resources of many kinds. It means paying attention to the **dynamic** nature of the relationships between the (tangible and intangible) ‘assets’ that enable and constrain cultural opportunity. Placed-based initiatives are not equally ecological in the approach they take. The reasons for this are, in part, due to the variations in what they are each trying to achieve.
- Questions of cultural flourishing are inherently **normative**: they involve judgments of value. Our fieldwork makes clear that whilst there are many overlaps – and a strong family resemblance – between what different CPP Places are trying to achieve, they do not share exactly the same goals. We identified **seven strategic aims** across CPP Places:
 1. Increasing arts engagement
 2. Increasing listening, conversation and consultation
 3. Increasing demand
 4. Enabling voice
 5. Telling stories
 6. Community development and capacity building
 7. Wider social change
- Clarifying this range of aims, and their possible relationships, is an important part of considering the lasting influence CPP Places may have within their environments, and how this can best be achieved.
- What the strategic aims of a CPP Place are has consequences for understanding what sustainability could and should look like. A key question is, **sustainability of what?** This is both a normative and a practical question. The answer depends on what kind of (cultural) world we want to make. It also depends on understanding what will *work* in bringing that world about.
- Notwithstanding the differences between them, flourishing eco-systems are typically highly connected, heterogenous and conducive to **emergence**. Our research indicates that effective **ecological leadership** will involve ‘holding open’ conditions in which connections can be made, experiences shared, skills developed, and diverse practices of culture-making interact. **Holding open spaces and structures** is at the heart of ecological leadership.

- CPP Places are inseparable from broader conditions of **social, economic and political change**. The CPP Programme is one of a growing number of placed-based cultural initiatives. As such ‘cultural’ programmes develop, it is increasingly difficult to separate them from wider questions of social justice, which so often find their crystallisation in **the politics of place**. This should not be shied away from, and is ever-more central to discussions of what cultural policy should be seeking to achieve.
- There has been a recent upsurge in debates around **cultural democracy**. Building on our previous work in this area, this report makes a specific contribution to those debates. What should **the role of the state** be in culture, and in cultural eco-systems? In Chrissie Tiller’s CPP paper on ‘power’, she notes that “There are those who question if any ‘top-down’ initiative can bring about real change.” One of the reasons notions of cultural ecology are helpful is the alternatives they offer for thinking **beyond the dichotomy of the top-down state and the neo-liberal market**.
- This research demonstrates that a key benefit of the language of cultural ecology is that it offers a way to communicate the plurality of culture (and of cultural value), whilst highlighting that such plurality is part of an interconnected system, for which there must be public responsibility. Cultural eco-systems can never be ‘outside’ of the domain of public policy. This report shows why this is the case; and drawing on the **capabilities approach** to human development (with its non-paternalistic account of state responsibility) suggests new ways to understand what the role of public policy could and should be in supporting conditions of cultural opportunity: in which people have the **substantive freedoms** to live flourishing lives.
- On the basis of the research presented, the report offers **a set of considerations** for the development of a flourishing cultural eco-system. These are intended not only for discussion within existing CPP Places, but for any communities, networks, agencies, organisations, groups or individuals seeking to adopt an ecological approach to cultural development.



Right Up Our Street. The Awakening by Stoppap Dance at DN Festival 2017 in Doncaster.
Photo: James Mulkeen

Considerations for the development of a flourishing cultural eco-system:

1. **Take time to build and sustain relationships:** with a clear focus on developing trust, on an ongoing basis.
2. **Seek out partnerships with specific organisations embedded within the life of the area:** to enable deep local knowledge and connections.
3. **Make sustained and creative use of consortium boards (or other collaborative governance systems):** to enable deep local knowledge and connections.
4. **Deliberately build and support networks:** in ways that are democratically co-designed and appropriate to the specific location.
5. **Support skills development and cultural ‘capacity building’:** in ways that are democratically co-designed and appropriate to the specific location.
6. **Make use of non ‘arts’ spaces:** as part of the process of developing interconnections between cultural resources of many kinds.
7. **Reframe local ‘assets’:** exploring ways to defamiliarise, refamiliarise, reframe and reclaim cultural resources within the area.
8. **Work in the spirit of action research:** establishing conditions in which it is okay to try things out, take risks, learn from experience, and work iteratively.
9. **Undertake ongoing processes of (always unfinished) ‘mapping’ of the cultural eco-system:** collectively co-producing knowledge of the cultural life of the area, including tangible and intangible cultural resources of many kinds.
10. **Develop, test and promote ecological leadership:** with particular emphasis on practices that enable connections to be made, experiences shared, skills developed, diverse practices of culture-making to flourish, and ‘open structures and spaces’ of cultural governance to be sustained.
11. **Ensure clarity of strategic aims within cultural governance systems:** whilst holding open the space for these aims to evolve and grow.
12. **Create democratic spaces for ongoing discussion of cultural experience, value and ambition:** ensuring people have the substantive opportunity to get involved in shaping strategic aims for the cultural life of the area – as part of a process that is maximally welcoming to all, and open to processes of evolution and growth.
13. **Explore possibilities for adopting the language of ‘cultural ecology’ and the capabilities approach:** to better communicate the nature of cultural opportunity, the plurality of culture (and of cultural value) – and, in turn, to help develop and sustain a non-paternalistic account of state responsibility.
14. **Make an explicit and sustained commitment to ‘holding open’ the cultural eco-system.** In practice, this will mean those involved in cultural governance systems asking a series of evaluative questions on an ongoing basis:
 - i) Does our existing strategic plan keep ‘open’ a) who we engage with; b) who we partner with; c) our relations with and role within local, regional, sectoral and national networks and structures; and d) the kinds of outcomes being produced?
 - ii) Where there is evidence of ‘closure’, how can we challenge the strategic approach (from the inside) to consider what could be done to open it up? And, in turn:
 - iii) Does our strategic governance have in place a decision-making ‘feedback loop’ that attends to this ‘ecological perspective’?

Introduction

1

1.1 Creative People and Places

Creative People and Places (CPP) is a programme funded by Arts Council England that supports people choosing, creating and taking part in brilliant art experiences in the places where they live. There are currently 21 independent Creative People and Places projects in areas where people have traditionally had fewer opportunities to get involved with the arts. By talking to people about what they want to see happen locally, each project has created a distinctive programme that's unique to the people and places that have shaped it. Local people are involved with Creative People and Places projects as participants, decision-makers, artists, ambassadors, volunteers and, of course, audiences.¹

¹ Creative People and Places website: <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/>

1.2 CPP research

An important part of CPP has been its emphasis on learning. In fact, CPP is explicitly framed as an ‘action research’ programme. This report, *Creating the Environment*, was commissioned by CPP network. It builds upon and adds to the preceding series of research and evaluation reports produced within CPP, including recent pieces on social capital,² engagement,³ and power.⁴ In doing so, we intend this report to be of value to the CPP network, but also to be of interest more broadly within the ‘cultural sector’ and beyond.⁵

1.3 Research questions and methodology

Our top-level questions in undertaking this research were as follows:

1. What is a cultural eco-system?
2. What does this look like in different places?
3. What does a healthy or thriving eco-system look like?
4. What are the conditions for a healthy or thriving eco-system?
What has helped to create the eco-system, and why?

To address these questions, we built upon our previous research on cultural eco-systems,⁶ employing the following methods:

1. Interviews with CPP directors



Appetite. The Big Feast Taster Tour to Spode & Stoke Town 2016. Photo: Clara Lou Photography

2. Interviews with leaders of other ‘placed-based’ cultural programmes in the UK
3. Focus groups with CPP teams and participants
4. Questionnaire – distributed to CPP directors, staff teams and consortium board members
5. Participatory workshop – with CPP directors, staff teams and consortium board members

² Karen Smith. (2018). Persistent Encounter: What is the relationship between social capital and Creative People and Places? http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/Persistent_Encounter_Karen_Smith.pdf

³ Sarah Boiling and Claire Thurman. (2018). ‘It’s not somebody coming in to tell us we’re so uneducated we need to draw pictures’: Mapping and analysis of engagement approaches across the Creative People and Places programme. http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/Mapping_and_analysis_of_engagement_approaches.pdf

⁴ Chrissie Tiller. (2017). Power Up. http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/Power_Up_think_piece_Chrissie_Tiller.pdf

⁵ Indeed, what the cultural sector consists of – its boundaries and identity – is a question with which this report is concerned, offering a distinctive perspective.

⁶ Nick Wilson and Jonathan Gross. (2017). Caring for Cultural Freedom: An Ecological Approach to Young People’s Cultural Learning. <https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/research/cultural-ecology>; Jonathan Gross and Nick Wilson. (2018). ‘Cultural Democracy: An Ecological and Capabilities Approach.’ *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10286632.2018.1538363?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

1.4 Sustainability of what?

The commission for this research was entitled, *Creating the Environment*, and the research brief was specifically focused on the notion of ‘cultural ecology’. As John Holden has documented, there has been an increase in the use of ecological language within the UK cultural sector in recent years.⁷ But this language has been used with a variety of intentions and inflections. In taking on this commission, therefore, we were interested to know more about the specific ways in which notions of cultural ecology had arisen across the CPP network, and why there was an interest in researching this topic within the context of this programme. It became apparent that for the CPP network, a focus on cultural ecology was specifically linked to questions of *sustainability*. In particular, there was an interest in developing new ways to think about the future of CPP Places, and their value, that do not draw directly upon the notion of ‘legacy’.

Much of our research is *empirically-informed conceptual analysis*. In other words, using fieldwork – such as interviews, focus groups and ethnography – in combination with critical literature reviews, we investigate key ideas employed within cultural policies, programmes and practices. Ideas matter. Concepts matter. It is precisely because concepts do so much work in shaping policy and practice that work of this kind is necessary. Empirically-informed conceptual research is the approach we are taking in this report, and one of its central concerns is to explore the potential value of the terminology of ‘cultural ecology’ as an alternative to the frequently employed language of ‘legacy’.

Previous CPP reports have, of course, highlighted questions of legacy. How to ensure lasting legacy / sustainability is a key issue within CPP, and one that perhaps has particular significance given the nature of the programme.

As Boiling and Thurman highlight, “many CPP communities are (justifiably) wary of another short term ‘project’”,⁸ and many CPP teams are very clear about their commitment to enabling long-term positive benefit for the people and places with whom they are working. Major questions remain, however, as to how best to achieve this.

In his report *Faster but Slower, Slower but Faster*, Mark Robinson writes that the “sustainability of activity and engagement [...] remains one of CPP’s central ‘known unknowns’”.⁹ This is in part because there is still much more to come from many CPP projects. It is also because understanding change over time requires exactly that, time, as well as longitudinal research methods. However, we would also stress that one of the reasons sustainability remains a central known unknown within CPP is because it is inseparable from the complex issue of strategic ambition. Robinson’s reference to the sustainability of “activity and engagement” highlights this. How, exactly, should the activity and engagement that CPP Places are seeking to enable be understood? The answer to this question has many implications for what ‘sustainability’ looks like, and what will be required to achieve it.

Subsequent to *Faster but Slower*, Boiling and Thurman have documented the range of ‘engagement’ being practiced within CPP, whilst Chrissie Tiller’s *Power Up* addresses questions of social justice and how these are playing out across CPP. Building on this series of reports, we suggest that a key question remains for many CPP projects, and for the CPP network. When seeking to ensure sustainability: *sustainability of what?* This report shows how the notion of cultural ecology can be useful here, helping to clarify the range of approaches to legacy / sustainability that CPP Places may develop. In doing so, it invites those involved to think even further about underlying values, and long-term aims.

⁷ John Holden. (2015). *The Ecology of Culture*. Swindon: Arts and Humanities Research Council. <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/the-ecology-of-culture/>

⁸ Boiling and Thurman. (2018). p.5.

⁹ Mark Robinson. (2016). *Faster but Slower, Slower but Faster: Creative People and Places Learning 2016*. p.8. http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/Faster%20but%20Slower_0.pdf.8.

1.5 Introducing ‘cultural ecology’

Given the programme’s focus on place, perhaps it is not surprising that those involved in CPP should take an interest in notions of ecology. The term ‘ecology’ was coined by German biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866 to describe the study of how organisms relate to each other and to their outer world. Ecology seeks to answer the question ‘Why here and not elsewhere?’¹⁰ It is the study of relationships between organisms and their environment.¹¹

The term ‘cultural ecology’ has been used by anthropologists since the 1950s to mean the study of human adaptations to social and physical environments. However, since the mid-2000s it has been more directly associated with the ‘cultural sector’. John Holden defines the arts and cultural ecology as the complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings.¹²

In our own work, we particularly emphasise that ‘the cultural ecology’ is a highly interdependent, complex and adaptive system with self-organising patterns. We also distinguish ‘cultural eco-systems’ from the cultural ecology. An eco-system is an ecology of several different species living together;¹³ and in our work we use ‘cultural eco-system’ to refer to complex networks operating within and across a range of scales, including

home, school, the borough, the region, and the nation.¹⁴

Additionally, in referring to ‘cultural ecology’ throughout this report, it is useful at the outset to distinguish between three different senses:

- i) *A condition of the world* – an ontological reality
- ii) *A descriptive and analytical perspective* – an epistemological framework
- iii) *An approach to cultural policy, programming and practice* – an organisational, managerial or strategic method

We are interested in all three. We explore the ways in which culture within CPP Places *is* ecological, needs to be *understood* ecologically, and how it can be *actively nurtured* ecologically. In the first instance, it might appear that any ‘place-based’ approach to cultural policy, programming and practice would inherently be ecological.¹⁵ But to take an ecological ‘approach’ means, specifically engaging at an organisational or strategic level with *emergent interconnections* and *interdependencies* between cultural resources of many kinds. It means paying attention to the dynamic nature of the relationships between the varied resources that enable and constrain cultural opportunity, including processes of cultural growth and evolution.

In this regard, not all ‘placed-based’ initiatives are *equally* ecological in the approach they take. Some may be much less interested in interconnections,

¹⁰ John Howkins. (2009). *Creative Ecologies. Where Thinking is a Proper Job*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press. p.43.

¹¹ John Howkins. (2009). p.11.

¹² John Holden. (2015). p.6. after Ann Markusen.

¹³ John Howkins. (2009). p.11.

¹⁴ Nick Wilson and Jonathan Gross. (2017). p.3. It is also important to stress that cultural eco-systems are not separate from ‘economics’ and ‘nature’. Moreover, the systems of human exchange we call economics must be understood as inextricably interconnected with the earth’s planetary systems. The urgent need to recognise this latter point has been highlighted by writers such as Kate Raworth. (2017). *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*. London: Random House Business; and Tim Jackson. (2017). *Prosperity Without Growth: Foundations for The Economy of Tomorrow*. Second Edition. Oxford and New York: Routledge. It is beyond the scope of the present report to address the embeddedness of cultural eco-systems within broader environmental eco-systems: but we highlight the planetary sustainability of cultural eco-systems as a hugely important issue, which we will address further in future publications.

¹⁵ At the ontological level, of course, all human activities and practices are ‘ecological’; this is simply a given.

interdependencies, evolution and growth than they are in bolstering a small number of ‘spectacular’ organisations, for example.¹⁶ Perhaps we should go so far as to say that placed-based approaches are not inherently ecological. Why this is so is closely connected, we suggest, to the question of what they are trying to *achieve* – and we return to this issue at several points in subsequent chapters.

1.6 Why is the notion of cultural ecology helpful?

To the extent that ecological perspectives take an interest in diversity, interdependencies, collaboration, learning, change, and competition (amongst much else), there are potentially many features of CPP projects to consider.¹⁷ Clearly what matters, however, is how ecological perspectives enable *new* and *valuable* ways of understanding such projects. To begin to see the potential value of the idea of cultural ecology, we can note the emphasis within CPP on *partnership*.

Reflecting on how the consortia within CPP are delivering ‘innovation’, Fleming and Bunting suggest that the models of consortium working within CPP are innovative in themselves, writing that “incentivised cross-sector partnership is itself an innovation that, should it become a sustainable practice, could be ground-breaking, and the networks being developed within and beyond consortia need to be recognised as valuable outcomes and assets in their own right.”¹⁸ The language of cultural ecology enables perspectives that look beyond formal partnerships, to consider a potentially wide range of current and future interdependencies between cultural resources of many kinds.



Creative Barking and Dagenham. Glow Festival 2018. Photo: Jimmy Lee Photography

Across CPP, we can observe examples of culture happening through interconnections between varied ‘cultural resources’. In this sense, to be properly understood, these examples demand ecological analysis. (We can immediately recognise, for example, that it would be foolish for one or two organisations to take full credit for the cultural vibrancy within a CPP Place.) But our research, as documented in the following chapters, also demonstrates the potential value of adopting an ecological approach to cultural management, strategy and decision-making.

¹⁶ The investment in the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, for example, is frequently cited as an example of this kind.

¹⁷ By way of illustration, More Than 100 Stories, a digital collection of texts, images, sounds and animations responding to Creative People and Places, highlights the following themes: confidence, decision-making, failure, language, local, partnership, people, taste, time and trust. <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/more-than-100-stories>

¹⁸ Catherine Bunting and Tom Fleming. (2015). Governance and Consortium Working. p.15 <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/Governance%20and%20consortium%20working.pdf>

Through our interviews, focus groups, questionnaire, and workshop, we observed the need to address the relationship between CPP's many practices of cultural 'co-production' and questions of *strategy*. Ecological analysis, as outlined in the following chapters, can enable this. CPP directors have a lot to say about practices of co-production, and these are increasingly well documented.¹⁹ But whilst there is plenty of appetite for systemic change, long-term strategy is, in some cases, less clearly articulated, with many questions still to be answered.

This report shows how the wealth of insights into co-production emerging from across the CPP programme has the potential to inform and enable long-lasting change, but key *systemic* questions require further consideration. Ecological perspectives can again be useful here: helping to clarify the (current and potential) relationships between practices of cultural co-production, approaches to leadership (in a place), and structures of decision making (governance).

Through its exploration of the cultural eco-systems within CPP, and the language of cultural ecology, this report makes a contribution to clarifying the choices open to CPP Places in terms of their strategic aims. In doing so, we show how, for policy-makers, cultural leaders, local authorities, community groups, and other agencies, to adopt an 'ecological' perspective has the potential to support distinctively *systemic* approaches to cultural policy and practice.

Why are systemic approaches to cultural policy and practice important? Discussing the 'journey' of CPP teams in developing their CPP projects, Chrissie Tiller helpfully invokes the metaphor of the map and the 'trig points' by which travellers orient themselves in the landscape. Thinking ecologically suggests a further metaphorical resource. Not only is the map 'not the territory': the territory is alive and abundant and constantly in flux.

To think ecologically is to embrace being always 'in the middle of things'. This doesn't mean giving up on leadership, strategy or clarity of mission. Quite the opposite: it opens new approaches to each of these, in ways that CPP Places are already beginning to explore, but which could be developed further – explicitly committed not just to a cultural programme, nor even to a 'place', per se, but to nurturing the interconnections and interdependencies within a cultural *system*.



Museums Northumberland bait. Participants from the Open Door project in Cramlington working with artist Eva Mileusnic. Photo: Jason Thompson

¹⁹ Boiling and Thurman. (2018).

What do cultural eco-systems across CPP look like?

2

2.1 Aspects of cultural eco-systems across CPP: a provisional inventory

Through our interviews, focus groups, questionnaire and workshop, research participants from across the CPP network were asked about the cultural eco-systems in their Places. This included questions on what the cultural eco-system looked like before CPP, how the cultural eco-system has changed (if at all), and what could enable it to further flourish.²⁰ Reading across the data, the great diversity of these eco-systems is immediately apparent. In the first instance, a simple inventory can be made of their different observable features. We can understand each of these as a type of *cultural resource*. The following list summarises the range of such resources across the CPP programme:

²⁰ 'Flourish' is a keyword within this report. Our research questions ask what enables cultural eco-systems to be healthy and thrive. 'Flourish' is defined as follows: "(of a living organism) grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly congenial environment." English Oxford Living Dictionaries. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/flourish>

1. Artists ('professional')
2. Artists' collectives
3. Arts organisations – National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs – organisations that receive regular revenue funding from Arts Council England)
4. Arts organisations – not in the National Portfolio
5. Bed and Breakfasts (and hotels)
6. Bingo halls
7. Building preservation trusts
8. Businesses (specific enterprises)
9. Business partnerships / city centre partnerships / steering groups improving the 'visitor economy' in the area
10. Business profile / economic profile of the area
11. Cafes and restaurants
12. Car parks
13. Carers' associations
14. Civic buildings and venues (e.g. town halls)
15. Churches
16. Churches Conservation Trust
17. Communities
18. Community arts organisations (and individual community artists)
19. Demographic features / population characteristics
20. Emerging leaders / emerging decision-makers (within the local population)
21. Existing festivals, parades and annual events
22. Histories (of and within the area)
23. Housing associations and social housing providers
24. Housing stock
25. Individuals
26. Landscape / geographic features (e.g. canals, coastlines, parks, woodlands)
27. Learning and participation teams from arts organisations
28. Libraries
29. Local authorities
30. Local authority museums and historic houses
31. National Trust properties
32. Networks of artists / creatives (informal and formal networks)
33. Organisations that steward aspects of the landscape / geographic features (such as the Canal and Rivers Trust, Friends of the Park, Friends of the Woodlands)
34. Police service (and police stations)
35. Property developers
36. Public health systems (including hospitals and community health programmes)
37. Public services / the public sector
38. Pubs
39. Radio stations (including voluntary radio stations)
40. Residents' associations
41. Self-organising cultural interest groups or sub-cultural groups (such as skateboarders and pigeon fanciers)
42. Shape (of the geographic area)
43. Shopping centres
44. Shops
45. Size (of the geographic area)
46. Social media (and other communication systems)
47. Sports clubs (including professional and amateur clubs)
48. Third sector organisations working with specific groups (such as refugees, asylum-seekers, or homeless people)
49. Town squares (and streets)
50. Transport systems
51. Universities, FE colleges, and schools
52. Voluntary arts groups (e.g. male voice choirs, country dancing groups, brass bands)
53. Volunteers (and systems of volunteering)
54. Youth services

This list is presented alphabetically, with a deliberate equality afforded to these 54 cultural resources, despite their clearly being of different kinds. Undoubtedly, many further aspects of the cultural eco-systems across the CPP network could be added to the list generated by our fieldwork. The intention here is not to be exhaustive. (Indeed, as we make clear in a previous report, on the cultural learning ecology in the London Borough of Harrow,²¹ knowledge of eco-systems is always partial. There is no definitive 'bird's-eye view'.) Instead, the significance of the inventory is to highlight the extensiveness and diversity of elements within the cultural eco-systems of CPP.

²¹ Nick Wilson and Jonathan Gross. (2017). *Caring for Cultural Freedom: An Ecological Approach to Supporting Young People's Cultural Learning*. London: A New Direction.

In undertaking ecological research, we seek to explore what might be the consequences of recognising such diverse features as ‘housing stock’, ‘histories’, ‘NPOs’ and ‘shape (of the geographic area)’ alongside more obvious cultural resources (such as artists and arts organisations) within cultural eco-systems. As part of this approach, we highlight the need to recognise the *emergent relationships* between such resources as possessing their own properties and potential value for those involved.²² As we show in our report *Towards Cultural Democracy*,²³ it is in the relationship between a shopping centre, a children’s theatre company, a church, a school, a NPO, and a local authority, that we can observe ‘cultural opportunities’ being afforded.²⁴ The danger is that any simple exercise of cultural mapping or auditing includes only those things that can be readily observed. In what follows, we try to also think beyond this, not only paying attention to cultural resources that are often overlooked, (such as many of those in the inventory above), but also by attending to *systemic* conditions.

Recognising the diversity of elements involved in cultural eco-systems is in itself potentially consequential, in at least two respects. Firstly, it can expand our understanding of what cultural ‘infrastructure’ consists of, and what it is needed for. Infrastructure is typically used to refer to roads, railways, sewage works, buildings and other ‘hard’ items. However, the American sociologist Eric Klinenberg has recently written about the need to insert the notion of *social infrastructure* into our political and everyday vocabularies: “the physical places and organizations that shape the way people interact.”²⁵

Introducing the term social infrastructure, (and making the case for investment in it), is, for Klinenberg, essential to meeting our current societal, political and environmental challenges. He defines social infrastructure broadly:

Public institutions, such as libraries, schools, playgrounds, parks, athletic fields, and swimming pools, are vital parts of the social infrastructure. So too are sidewalks, courtyards, community gardens, and other green spaces that invite people into the public realm. Community organizations, including churches and civic associations, act as social infrastructures when they have an established physical space where people can assemble, as do regularly scheduled markets for food, furniture, clothing, art, and other consumer goods. Commercial establishments can also be important parts of the social infrastructure, particularly when they operate as what the sociologist Ray Oldenburg called “third spaces”, places (like cafes, diners, barbershops, and bookstores) where people are welcome to congregate and linger regardless of what they’ve purchased. Entrepreneurs typically start these kinds of businesses because they want to generate income. But in the process [...] they help produce the material foundations for social life.²⁶

Within the context of cultural policy, programmes and practice, ‘infrastructure’ (or ‘cultural infrastructure’) may typically be associated with big buildings such as theatres, cinemas and galleries. Our research participants frequently made use of the language of infrastructure, sometimes slipping without comment between the language of infrastructure and the language of ecology. In other

²² Support for this view can be found in Pierpaolo Donati and Margaret Archer. (2015). *The Relational Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²³ Nick Wilson, Jonathan Gross and Anna Bull. (2017) *Towards Cultural Democracy*. King’s College London. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/Cultural/-/Projects/Towards-cultural-democracy.aspx>

²⁴ For further discussion of why analysis of the nature of cultural opportunity is a key step in clarifying and re-thinking the fundamental aims of cultural policy, see Gross and Wilson. (2018).

²⁵ Eric Klinenberg. (2018). *Palaces for the People: How to Build a More Equal and United Society*. London: Penguin. p.5.

²⁶ Eric Klinenberg. (2018). p. 16.

cases, they reflected directly on the relationship between the two. One CPP director, for example, suggested that:

There is infrastructure and there's an eco-system. And the infrastructure, for me, is the cultural institutions and the buildings, and the existing people with the existing investment in arts and culture in the town. Whereas an eco-system feels that much more organic, it doesn't have to have a building, it can just pop up and do its thing, and it can pop up and do its thing and disappear again.

These comments imply that infrastructure is permanent, whilst an 'eco-system' (or at least its elements) can be much more temporary. We suggest, however, that it is helpful to think of infrastructure – including the kinds of 'social infrastructure' that Klinenberg highlights – as *part of* the cultural eco-system. In this perspective, the cultural infrastructure and the cultural eco-system are not separate. The former is *one part* of the latter. A useful way of viewing this is with the help of 'asset-based' practices. Within asset-based approaches to community development,²⁷ an asset can be understood not just as finance or a building. It can also be relationships, skills, knowledge and other intangible 'wealth' within an area, with which the people in that place can address a challenge or opportunity they face. (As emphasised above, such intangible assets may not be easily observable).

This does not mean, of course, that an asset-based approach overlooks the significant differences between such resources as buildings, finance, skills and relationships. The important points are, firstly, to expand our view of what 'assets' (or resources) consist of; and secondly, to frame processes of empowerment or change by starting from a commitment to *currently existing possibilities and potentials*.



East Durham Creates. *VoiceOver* developed by Umbrellium and Forma with local residents.
Photo: Richard Kenworthy

²⁷ See, for example, Ian Hargreaves and John Hartley (eds.). (2016). *The Creative Citizen Unbound: How social media and DIY culture contribute to democracy, communities and the creative economy*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Mark Robinson offers an interesting discussion of whether CPP Places are undertaking ‘asset-based’ practices. Such approaches typically ask not ‘what is lacking?’, but, ‘what is available?’. Writing in December 2016, Robinson indicates that it is a mixed picture, but that, as a whole, CPP is not operating an asset-based approach. The ways in which CPP Places are (and are not) currently taking an asset-based approach is a question for further discussion. For now, the important point to establish is that, with the assistance of an *ecological perspective* – and resonant with asset-based approaches – we can usefully expand our understanding of the range of (emergent) ‘resources’ that make up what culture is, and how it happens.

With this expanded perspective in mind, it is worth noting that in our research the *breadth of view* that CPP directors and staff are currently taking of cultural eco-systems varies a great deal. When asked to describe the cultural eco-system that existed in the area prior to CPP, for example, there was a wide range in the types of answer given. Some respondents focused specifically on the presence or absence of NPOs and building-based arts organisations. In other cases, answers offered a much wider account, discussing many and varied elements of the cultural eco-system, including a diverse set of the resources listed in the inventory above.

2.2 Systemic conditions

To reiterate a crucial point, what a cultural eco-system consists of is not just a question of the ‘items’ within it, but of their interrelations and interdependencies, their levels of connectivity, their *systemic* conditions. The configuration of these different elements varies from one CPP location to another, with notable similarities and differences. Our interviews, focus groups, questionnaire and participatory workshop identified a series of key systemic factors, as follows.

Public services

Macro-level changes in public spending and public services have significant consequences for cultural eco-systems. Previous CPP research has highlighted the wider context of public spending cuts and political change. This includes the report by Boiling and Thurman on ‘engagement’, in which they comment that “A number of Places are acutely aware of the responsibilities and tensions of having a significant budget to spend in areas in which community structures and resources have, as they describe it, been ‘decimated’ as a result of cuts to public funding.”²⁸ Cultural eco-systems are not autonomous from wider social and political systems. They are inextricably linked. In fact, as discussed further below, our research indicates the ways in which public services, such as the local health system, need to be understood as *part of* the cultural eco-system within a place.

Local authorities

The role of local authorities was discussed across our fieldwork. In answering questions about what cultural eco-systems looked like prior to CPP, how those cultural eco-systems have changed (if at all), and what would enable them to flourish further, local authorities were a key consideration. Previous CPP reports have, of course, touched on this topic. Bunting and Fleming’s 2015 report on governance, for example, reflects on the sometimes complex relationship between CPP consortia and local authorities, including “mixed messages” regarding the role that local authorities should be playing, whilst also recognising the necessary variation in local authority roles across the CPP network. Notwithstanding these previous discussions, when considering the possibilities for *systemic* approaches to cultural policy, programming and practice, as raised by a focus on cultural eco-systems, the role of the local authority once again

²⁸ Boiling and Thurman. (2018). p. 32.

becomes a key question. Perhaps more than any other type of agency, local authorities have the capacity to influence systemic conditions within a locality – an issue discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

Universities and FE colleges

Universities and FE colleges are a significant cultural ‘asset’, with potentially far-reaching roles and influences on the cultural eco-systems in which they are located. One CPP director highlights the significance of her CPP’s partnership with the local university, and indicates the strong possibility that, in the long-term, the CPP’s function will be absorbed within the university and continue from that organisational position. Another director emphasises that a notable feature of her CPP area is that it is “not a university town”.

Housing and changing demography

In some cases, fast changing conditions of housing and demography is having a significant impact on cultural eco-systems within CPP. In other cases, research participants point towards current and planned housing developments, and anticipate significant implications these will have for the cultural eco-system. This can involve, for example, processes of gentrification, with consequences including the arrival of a greater number of ‘professional’ artists and creatives in the area. In other cases, the rapid ‘churn’ of populations within the area has included the arrival of large numbers of people from particular countries, introducing distinctive cultural traditions to the area, but who may not, at first, be well-connected with other parts of the cultural eco-system.

Digital platforms

Many CPP Places report that they are in the process of developing online platforms or portals. On the other hand, there is a strong emphasis within CPP on the importance of face-to-face interaction and relationship building. The extent to which a digital information-sharing system is necessary to supporting a flourishing cultural eco-system is a question for further discussion, which we return to in Chapter 4.

Size and shape

The ‘scale’ of CPP eco-systems varies considerably. In some cases, the eco-system has a size and shape determined by the boundaries of a local authority. In other cases, CPP Places cover four local authorities. This has implications for how cultural eco-systems function, and for how systemic conditions can both be understood and nurtured. We can fruitfully connect with the language of ecology here. “Scientists talk of *habitats*, which are real places like streams and urban environments, and also of *niches*, which are systems wherein a species thrives”.²⁹ If ecological approaches to cultural policy, leadership and governance are to be developed, to what extent is it important to establish a *standard* ‘unit’ (or *standard niche*) to work with: for example, local authority boundaries? Moreover, if CPP initiatives will only be funded on a time-limited basis, to what extent is it their role to help constitute a *self-perception* of people within a geographical area that they are part of a cultural eco-system with identifiable bounds?

Neighbouring cultural eco-systems

Consideration of the boundaries of cultural eco-systems raises a number of further questions. The first of these is the relationship between different cultural eco-systems within an overall cultural ecology. Where does one cultural eco-system begin and another end? How might they be mutually supportive? (As we indicated earlier, the relationship *between* cultural eco-systems will possess its own, potentially very influential, emergent properties.) May there be tension and competition between them? And how might the overall cultural ecology (i.e., national or international) best support the various cultural eco-systems within it? Some of our research participants indicate that they are actively thinking about these questions. One CPP director, for example, explained that “we’ve got a knowledge transfer project over the next two and a half years, which is looking to make a strong connection with partners in the neighbouring local authority regions”.

Geographies of belonging

Considering the boundaries of cultural eco-systems raises the question of what are the ‘units’ of geography with which people *identify*. As one focus group participant in Hounslow commented, “People still identify as coming from Chiswick or from Brentford, or from Hounslow [Town] or Isleworth, or Feltham. There is no sense of what is ‘Hounslow’. Because they are all part of the Hounslow Borough, but there are lots of people there who would not identify in that way.” Mark Robinson comments that CPP has learnt that “each Place is different and each Place is many places”.³⁰ But as another participant in a Hounslow focus group comments, this makes it all the more important for the CPP to offer “shared spaces”. The geographies with which people identify may not align neatly with the geography of a local authority or cultural policy programme. At the same time, part of the work of CPP

Places may be, precisely, to create conditions in which new geographies of belonging may develop. This, of course, is wholly consistent with the *emergent* nature of cultural eco-systems.

Self-recognition

The significance of *geographies of belonging* – and the importance of size, shape and boundaries – raises the question of whether cultural eco-systems always-already exist. To what extent is it necessary for cultural policy-makers, funders, or community leaders to bring cultural eco-systems into being: perhaps, simply by ‘recognising’ them, paying attention to them, or naming them? We need to consider whether, once a cultural eco-system is conscious of itself as such (so to speak) – and, perhaps, once it has the *resources* to engage with itself as such – it can do active work on its collective self-understanding and self-representation. This, potentially, is one of the important possibilities of ‘placed-based’ initiatives such as CPP. Of course, subsequent questions need to follow. Who is involved in the process of a cultural eco-system’s process of self-recognition? Who is in the room? Who holds open the space for self-recognition? And how?

³⁰ Mark Robinson. (2016). p.3.

2.3 Case Studies: CPP Hounslow and Creative Scene

In addition to the interviews, questionnaire and participatory workshop we conducted with CPP teams from across the programme, we held focus groups in two Places – CPP Hounslow (West London) and Creative Scene (North Kirklees) – to explore the cultural eco-systems in those locations in greater detail. Here we present our findings from these focus groups as a pair of brief case studies.³¹ Whilst these eco-systems are distinctive in many ways, by presenting some of their specific features we illustrate the two key points outlined in the preceding parts of this chapter: the plethora of tangible and intangible ‘cultural resources’ involved in cultural eco-systems, and the necessity of paying attention to the *systemic conditions* mediating the relationships between these resources of many kinds.

CPP Hounslow

The shape of the borough

One of the notable features of CPP Hounslow is the shape of the area which it covers. As with several other CPP Places, the geographic boundaries of this Place are those of a local authority. Our research participants indicated that the shape of Hounslow has consequences for how the cultural eco-system operates. This includes being responsible, in part, for how *separate* parts of the borough can feel from one another. One participant explained, “it’s a long, skinny borough. It starts at Chiswick at one end, being relatively affluent, and tends to get more and more disadvantaged the further you

go heading towards the airport.” Another added, “because it’s a long, thin borough [...] it does tend to be very sort of chopped up and separate. A lot of boroughs do a lot more together.”

The areas with which people identify

Whilst the geographic scope of this CPP Place is co-extensive with the borough boundaries, ‘Hounslow’ is not a unit with which people readily identify. This became particularly clear in one focus group, in which tensions between different parts of the borough were discussed – largely in good humour. Participants joked, for example, that Chiswick does not really want to be in Hounslow; and when the Olympic torch relay passed through the area in 2012, the person carrying the torch shouted, ‘Hello Hounslow!’, and the crowd shouted back, ‘This is Brentford!’ Nevertheless, whilst there may be a sense of separation between different parts of the borough, there are pockets of strong community on a micro-scale, with one participant saying, “we’ve got a very, very close community in our roads. [...] [with] our own WhatsApp group just in our street and everything.”

Mobility

The issue of the locations with which people identify is closely connected to questions of mobility.³² Participants commented that transport links are not always conducive to easy travel across the borough. Most pointedly, one explained that, “Bizarrely, it’s got Heathrow Airport in the middle of it, so if you want to go to Australia it’s quite easy, but, you know, if you want to get around the borough it’s a nightmare! Local transport, buses and things like

³¹ We do not intend these, of course, to be ‘comprehensive’ accounts of either cultural eco-system: the very possibility of which we question elsewhere in this report, and in our previous work (Wilson and Gross 2017). These are two pen portraits, primarily serving to exemplify key points established in the preceding sections of the chapter.

³² In this context, the notion of ‘psycho-geography’ is helpful. In previous work we have used this term to refer to “the ways in which people experience the spaces and places in which they live as complex environments – shaped by a range of historical and contemporary factors including class, race, gender and (collective) memory – in which ‘psychology and geography collide’.” (Wilson and Gross 2017). p.8.

that, are just really not very good at all.” Moreover, aspects of physical infrastructure can create barriers that people simply do not cross in day-to-day life:

“It does feel a bit like that: that you belong to ‘that’ bit. I think it is because of the shape of the borough. It does make it harder. Because of travelling.”

“People do stick to their areas, or identify with their areas, don’t they?”

“Yes, but if you don’t drive [it’s even harder, and], to drive from Chiswick to Cranford it’s a hell of a time, really.”

[...]

“And even people from Crane Park won’t go to central Feltham, it’s only a mile.”

“It’s that train track as well.”

“There’s always a road. [...].”

“Yes, nobody moves across the 215. Yes, it’s amazing.”

“No. And the schools have got that sort of rivalry.”

“Yes, they’re divided [...] by the roads.”

Local and outdoor events

Responding to issues of mobility – in relation to cultural opportunity – is, for some of our participants, a key part of what CPP is all about. One commented that many people living in Hounslow “aren’t just going to hop on the tube and rush into central London. It’s not going to happen. So that kind of local provision is really critical.” A significant part of the approach of CPP Hounslow has been to hold outdoor events, in places that people

encounter as part of everyday life. This has included the four months of activities held on the high street each year, involving music events, banner-making, chalk-drawing, gardening, and recipe-sharing. Through activities and events such as these, CPP Hounslow seeks to offer a range of cultural opportunities in places where people already are.



Creative People and Places Hounslow. Winter Lights 2016. Photo: Vipul Sangoi

This is not always without challenges. The role of parks is particularly interesting and instructive. According to one participant, there are 201 parks within the borough. Many of these are well-used and well-loved. In some cases, however, there is tension over how the parks are used and who controls them; including controversy over the ways the local authority control (and outsource) park management. This has had consequences for the staging of some local events and festivals (outside of CPP), with parks management companies charging event organisers fees they deem unacceptable and/or prohibitive.

Connecting communities

Our research participants indicated that one of the key capacities that CPP Hounslow has is to connect people within the borough – bringing people together in new ways. This includes, in particular, via large outdoor events such as the Winter Lights Festival. These have been “incredibly popular”, with numbers attending exceeding expectations. One participant describes how a fete in a local park “brought people out of their houses” and that there is now a “growing web of chat” about the fete, months after it happened. Another discusses the aims of CPP in terms of the potential of art to be the “glue of a community”, bringing people together of “any age, ability, culture, size, anything.” For these focus group participants, there was a strong emphasis on shared experiences, with a key feature of CPP Hounslow being that it provides “the spaces, the opportunities, for people to come together and have those shared experiences and connections.”

Connecting artists / connecting organisations

Previous to CPP, there had been professional ‘artists’ and ‘creatives’ in the borough. But as one research participant puts it, they were “very isolated, really. Not at all networked into anything. So, getting that network up and

running has [...] been quite important. They meet quarterly; and it’s an opportunity to hook them up with, you know, either funding opportunities or [...] programme opportunities – within CPP, but other stuff as well. And they can meet each other, and people they might work with, and that sort of thing. So, that’s sort of helping, I think, [to] get the feeling of a creative community going.”

One participant commented that, prior to CPP, there were “well-developed voluntary sector networks” in the borough, but that “arts and creative stuff wasn’t well developed at all”. Another observes, “I think before CPP none of the creative organisations, or, none of the organisations that have a serious creative interest, really worked together in any coherent way.” There were youth centres that participated in project-based work, for example, but this was sporadic: lasting for the duration of a summer holiday, a school term, or one-offs. “Nothing connected, and nothing borough-wide or [joined up] in the sense that it is now.” As another participant saw it, there was a “complete lack of coordination”, in which arts organisations working with youth organisations could find themselves replicating each other’s work. “Quite often we’d rock up to do a project at some location in the borough on a Tuesday night, or whatever, only to find that somebody else was going to be there the following night doing something terribly similar. There was [...] – as well as the fragmentation – a complete lack of coordination.”

Cultural strategy

Prior to CPP, then, there were low levels of sustained interconnection between different aspects of the cultural eco-system within Hounslow. One participant goes so far as to say that “there wasn’t a system at all. There was no system.” A few years prior to CPP, discussions did take place regarding a cultural strategy for the borough, but our participants highlighted a series of shortcomings of this process. These included, as they put it:

1. A lack of engagement with “what communities might really want”
2. No clarity in the “definitions” (e.g. was this an ‘arts’ strategy or a ‘cultural’ strategy)
3. A failure to articulate clear “deliverables”
4. No “resource” to provide direction
5. A lack of leadership and “vision”

By contrast, they suggest, CPP has created conditions conducive to a more coordinated approach to the cultural life of the borough. For example, one participant suggested that the requirement that CPP Places operate a

consortium model has been extremely effective in itself, bringing together cultural organisations who were previously very disconnected.

This increased connectivity has had a number of beneficial consequences (some of which have only been partially realised so far, with more to come). As one participant says, “I think there’s a more shared understanding of what’s needed across the arts and culture and creative sector in the borough, rather than lots of people having partial views of that. So, I think that’s quite important [...], because we can talk to the local authority, and talk to the Arts Council about what the borough needs, with some confidence.” If not a ‘bird’s eye view’, this is a much more coordinated process of understanding what is going on within the cultural eco-system, and what would help it to flourish.

Capacity building

An important part of the approach of CPP Hounslow has been ‘capacity building’. This has involved the development of a series of Local Advisory Groups (LAGs), which one participant describes as having a “key role” within how this Place works. The LAGs “have been really important, because they’ve brought people together in quite a regular and sustained way.” None of the LAG members have been involved in “arts development” before, and through their involvement they have obtained new skills, including project management and event planning. Whilst the experience of the LAGs hasn’t been uniform, with some variation in the extent to which they have ‘taken off’, in discussing what success would look like for CPP Hounslow, one participant suggests that central to this would be a series of “constituted groups”, emerging from the LAGs, “that are all attracting their own funding and putting on stuff that was really important to them” and to the people in their part of the borough.



Creative People and Places Hounslow. Hounslow Creatives Network meeting

Capacity building has also involved CPP Hounslow supporting small arts and cultural organisations via specific training opportunities and small grants. This has included, as one participant put it, “workshops on different aspects of growing your arts group.” Offering business support to small arts organisations has been central to the approach this CPP Place has taken to supporting a thriving cultural eco-system in the area. One participant describes the approach to capacity building as a ‘holistic methodology’:

It’s that direct investment in the people and individuals, and it’s that ongoing skills building, and it’s that ongoing [...] connection-building and the signposting, and the networking outside of even just the CPP programme. It’s really showing that it’s not a ‘helicopter in’ and, ‘we will drop this in and you will engage’. It’s a real, very holistic methodology that has been applied and implemented, and that’s what’s going to give it the longevity, and that’s what’s going to give it the legs.



Creative People and Places Hounslow. Poetical Word monthly open mic. Photo: Quddous Ahmed

Creative Scene

The cultural eco-system prior to CPP

Creative Scene covers the area of North Kirklees in West Yorkshire. We conducted two focus groups, one with members of the CPP team and board, the other with volunteers and participants. In the first of these, our research participants indicated what they saw the area’s cultural eco-system to consist of in the following terms:

“it’s not just ‘culture’ [...] it’s [...] all the demographic factors that influence business and everything else [that] creates that ecology as such.

[...] politics.

Sometimes the influence of faith. [...]

Transport.

Yes.

Heritage.

Lack of venues [...]

And lack of producers and production capability [that] we started with.

[...]

It would be fair to say we had very few professional organisations, cultural organisations, in the area.

[...]

Artists have come out of the woodwork as such. Because when we started we didn’t think there were many artists in the area. [...] actually, there are people there.”

Our research participants reported that, prior to CPP, there was “quite a thriving amateur arts scene” in the area. This voluntary arts scene was primarily theatre, dance and music, “you don’t see visual arts groups really around the area, there’s one or two.” One participant suggests that the cultural life of the area is “typical of the kind of industry of the area [...]”. There’s lots of things like brass bands and choirs, and small festivals as well as amateur dramatics and amateur operatics.” One participant explained, “virtually all of the towns have got some kind of tradition of a festival or an event linked to them, and some quite long-standing events like Cleckheaton Folk Festival, which tends to be a lot of amateur activity and professional activity brought into those events”.

However, one participant cautioned not to overestimate how well the voluntary sector in the area was doing in advance of CPP, commenting, “I’m not sure that it was thriving.” Membership had been dropping off, and the groups were “desperate to get younger people.” There was also a lack of rehearsal space. In some cases, this was connected to the amateur groups having long rehearsal periods, with “quite a big production and set building”, and “they were running out of spaces to do that, as local authority spaces came with charges attached to them.”

Geographies of belonging

As in Hounslow, here the locations with which people identify are often not the same as the geographical boundaries of the local authority, or of the CPP Place. One focus group participant commented that “Kirklees is an artificially constructed and named district, and there is still a lot of loyalty within the population to the market town that they live closest to.” Moreover, as within Hounslow, research participants indicate there are divisions within the borough, as “politically there’s always been a sense of a bit of a north/south divide”.

There are some parts of the Place where CPP-enabled activity has grown successfully, and others in which it has been more of a struggle. In one location in which activity has not taken off, “we think part of it is to do with there are very strong communities out on the estates around Dewsbury, but nobody feels a sense of belonging to Dewsbury town centre itself, so it’s never really made things happen within the town centre here.”

Some research participants suggested that the experience of ‘belonging’ is central to the value – and potential value – of what Creative Scene is supporting to happen in the area. Reflecting on what a flourishing cultural eco-system looks like, one participant suggested, “just a sense of belonging, I think. [...] every single person in that town feeling like the town is a home for them, as well as everybody else.” Another reflected on her involvement in Creative Scene as a volunteer (since moving to the area) – comments that other participants then responded to:

“I just wanted to understand the community. And the more I understand the community, the more I want to get involved [...].

It’s belonging.

Yes.

Isn’t it? It’s belonging.

It is a belonging thing.

And I think that’s a huge thing.

Yes.

A lot of people are involved in these things, and not just the creative side of things – like, I don’t know, you going to cadets – [...] they’re involved because it’s that belonging aspect.

Yes.

To be a part of something, isn’t it?”

Closely related to questions of belonging, focus group participants raised the question of the role of the past within the contemporary cultural eco-system. They reflected on the importance of exploring local heritage, whilst not allowing the past to overwhelm the cultural practices of the present: including the range of stories that can be told, and the enthusiasm (or otherwise) with which contemporary cultural events and activities are viewed.

They linked this issue to questions of identity. Some contrasted the extent to which different towns in the area have a sense of themselves. “Batley has a stronger sense of identity. [...] Batley has still got its head in Batley urban town council, it’s still got its head in what Batley was and is.” Across the activities of Creative Scene, identity has emerged as a central consideration. As one participant put it, “this was an area that was struggling with its identity, and is still struggling with its identity. But [...] pulling these stories out [...], that’s what we’re doing, is where we start to build some of that again.”

Segregation and the value of public space

Alongside questions of identity, some research participants suggested that there are separations between different parts of the area. As one comments, it feels like:

“there’s a lot of segregation. And when I say that I don’t just mean in terms of racial and religious segregation. There’s segregation in terms of where people live. [...] you’ve got other little enclaves, haven’t you, [...] it can be anything from very affluent places to middle class places, to poverty-stricken places, and that kind of thing as well.

[...]

There are really, really small groups of people.

Yes. And that’s what I’m saying. It’s enclaves, segregated enclaves.

So Dewsbury Moor is one, Pilgrims another, Heckmondwike’s another. [...] [and] Batley in itself, breaks down into smaller areas. [...] If you talk to people in Batley they’re not from Batley, they’re from a specific area in Batley, and that seems to be quite strong.”

In this context, our research participants emphasised the importance of outdoor events. They highlighted the value of using public spaces, including the potential to enable serendipitous encounters. “There’s something about the streets, and using the streets as part of that broader experience, so it’s more immersive”. Due to the lack of venues, some activity has taken place in venues that sell alcohol, and “that immediately means that a large section of the community in this area will not go into that space”. There are “very



Creative Scene. *Like Mother Like Daughter*, with Complicite Creative Learning. Photo: Karen Rangeley

few spaces that are seen, except for the streets, as a place where different communities will come together.” This is a central aspect of how Creative Scene has operated. As one focus group participant explained, “we’ve been quite conscious in trying to work in public spaces, and in the areas or the societies and clubs where people already gather”.

Conversation and listening

Bringing people together, and holding spaces ‘open’, is key. Our participants emphasised the centrality of conversation to how Creative Scene works, and how it makes a difference. One commented that this is an important learning for other place-based programmes to draw upon: “not to just jump in [feet-first], and just start programming loads of stuff. [...] Even if you’re from the area, you’ve done a bid from the area, you know the area – it’s about allowing it to shape itself in some way through conversation.”

This is echoed by others, including one participant who highlighted how, even though the Creative Scene team “kind of hit the ground running when they first set up, they [still made sure that they] spent a lot of time talking to people, and I think that was really valuable”. For another participant, creating open spaces for conversation is central to what Creative Scene can offer. As she explained:

For me, a really pivotal moment was [...] the week of the Brexit vote [...]. I was going to a Creative Scene event and it was fantastic that we could have this really challenging conversation about Brexit between people on either side, and it was a safe space to have that conversation. That’s really important: that that possibility for those kinds of conversations could happen, given that people aren’t talking about these things, [and] Britain is really trying to – will have to – rethink its identity.

Possibilities for ecological leadership

The centrality of conversation, and holding spaces open, was connected to the question of what is required to ensure that such conversations can be sustained. One participant emphasised the need to recognise, at a national level, that a programme such as CPP is developing leaders with specific skills: quite a different mode of leadership from a “traditional arts model of an organisation that’s producing or programming work.” Another participant added:

It’s not just about leading the organisation, the team and the project. It’s about how you lead within communities as well, and become that community facilitator. I think far too often nationally in the cultural sector we look to the cultural ‘leaders’ being the ones that are paid the most money, [leading] very high-profile venues or organisations. And actually, I think you’re quite right, it’s looking at what actually are the leadership skills of the future that are needed.

The focus group members further developed this theme through the language of cultural ecology, and the metaphor of gardening. As one person put it, a new model of cultural leadership is required and is emerging:

There need to be gardeners putting stuff in, and bringing people together, and that’s where we started from really. All of these ingredients were here. They [...] keep needing to be brought out and put into play, and [...] the compost needs to be spread. [...] It is that sense [that], yes, you nurture something, and look at what is happening not just here but in and around the wider area, and what we need to respond to. I think without that model [...] it just becomes fragmented.

Making a scene

This CPP Place is one of the few that has explicitly employed the language of ‘cultural ecology’ within its documentation and planning. This is directly linked, by one member of the Creative Scene team, to the need to ensure long-lasting positive effects for the area. As she explains, “there had been a lot of consultation about regeneration initiatives, some of which had then been quite short-lived. We were very keen that we didn’t want to have a sense of a lot of investment coming in but it wasn’t going to make a difference, or it would go away again very quickly. We wanted to make sure that our approach was very embedded.”

With the aim of developing an ‘embedded’ approach, this CPP Place employs the language of ‘creating a scene’, developing a ‘movement’, and ‘creating an ecology’. Discussing what Creative Scene has been trying to achieve, one research participant commented:

Well, I think for me it was about creating an ecology. That was the core vision. I think we wrote in the original vision statement it was about an area where creativity just started to bubble up from the seams of the place, and to become something that was more visible. That people recognised [creativity] as a viable part of where they lived and worked and that the area was known for, and that it was an interdependent kind of ‘scene’ that had a circuit of internal inspiration, I guess, from the different people involved – and that that would cut across all art forms and all scales, and all professional or voluntary suits.



Creative Scene Spring Gathering. Photo: Len Grant

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In the preceding sections of this chapter, and illustrated through these two case studies, we have surveyed some of the key characteristics of cultural eco-systems across CPP: both the plethora of ‘cultural resources’, and key systemic factors that mediate the relationships between these many resources. In the next chapter, we turn to the question of what it means for a cultural eco-system to *flourish*.

What does a flourishing cultural eco-system look like?

3

3.1 Shared characteristics of flourishing cultural eco-systems

Our research addressed the question of what a flourishing cultural eco-system looks like from a variety of perspectives. This included asking the question directly (*what does a flourishing cultural eco-system look like?*), as well as posing more indirect questions which generated data relevant to this topic, (including the question, *what did the cultural eco-system in this area look like prior to CPP?*). Through analysis of the data, we have identified the following themes which cast important light upon (but, given the 'open-ness' of culture, don't prescribe) the nature of a flourishing cultural eco-system.

Connectivity

Connectivity is a key feature of flourishing cultural eco-systems. In describing situations prior to CPP, directors emphasise conditions of disconnection. There was “just no coordination”; “it was all quite patchy and not connected”; or “none of the organisations that have a serious creative interest really worked together in any coherent way.” Such observations were made commonly across the CPP Places. In some cases, this relates to specific geographical features of the area, such as one borough which is very large, made up of “lots of villages” which can feel “all quite isolated and remote” from each other. In describing what CPP projects have achieved, this is often described in terms of increased levels of connection: between organisations, between people and organisations, and between people. In some cases, CPP directors identify “a critical mass of connections” as a key factor in, and marker of, success.

Heterogeneity / Diversity

Some research participants indicate that what characterises a flourishing cultural eco-system is the co-existence of a wide range of types of art form and cultural practice, as well as a wide range of people and organisations. One CPP director describes how, “even though we’re funded by the Arts Council for ‘art’, we are getting involved in baby weighings and orchard-plantings, and all manner of things [...], doing ‘cardboard cities’ with kids, and generally just getting involved in anything on the estate where people are employing their energy and their creativity.” This involves a wide range of modes of culture-making, across a variety of ‘presentational’ and ‘participatory’ forms, which do not need to be antagonistic to one another, or subject to a zero-sum game.

This diversity extends to the types of organisations involved, too, and where culture-making can happen. As one CPP director puts it, five years ago, “there were just these huge institutions, delivering arts for us. That’s actually not healthy. A healthy environment, a healthy cultural town, is one where there’s creativity happening everywhere. And anybody has the opportunity to make work.” And as another says, “it’s not just enabling opportunities for artists and arts organisations, but for opportunities for individuals, communities, to take part in activity, and see their part in that whole ecology.”

Clarity of pathways and networks

It is not just the volume of opportunities that matters. It is also about the clarity of pathways and networks. Some CPP directors emphasise the importance they give to ensuring that, however people participate, “there’s always something that comes next”. Some staff see a key part of their role as supporting people to understand “the arts and cultural landscape”. This opens up the range of ‘real’ opportunities that people have available to them.

Access to information, support and advice

Closely related to clarity of pathways, is the need for access to information, support and advice. A number of CPP directors describe the success of their projects, in part, in terms of people in the area now knowing where they can go and “who to talk to”. In other cases, this is a key consideration for future development. As one CPP director puts it, despite the many achievements to date, what people in the area want is “a kind of one-stop-shop for understanding what’s going on in the borough, what the opportunities are; and that is lacking at the moment.”

Possibilities for starting or developing a creative career

A frequently expressed notion is that, if CPP projects have succeeded, it will mean that people in the area seeking to begin or sustain a career in the arts or creative industries will not need to leave the area. In some cases, the emphasis is on young people, and creating conditions such that they can flourish creatively in the area “who would otherwise just have gone to London, actually, because the opportunities weren’t there”. In other cases, CPP directors have been told by artists that they were thinking of moving out of the area, but are now staying; and in others, “people have actually



Appetite. The Big Feast Site Dressing Workshops 2016. Photo: Andrew Billington Photography

wanted to move here, because there’s a vibrancy, there’s an energy going on, that people want to be part of.”

Strategy and objectives

Strategy brings together an organisation’s major objectives, policies and activities into a cohesive whole. Objectives represent what is to be achieved (but not how). Whilst policies are rules or guidelines which define the limits within which activities should occur.³³ Across CPP Places, there is a range of views regarding the extent to which a strategic vision for the cultural life of the area has been developed. In some cases, there is a clear sense of strategic partnership and direction. In other cases, our research participants emphasise the need to develop greater strategic clarity. To what extent is having a strategic vision part of what it means for a cultural eco-system to flourish? To what extent are ecological approaches and strategic approaches to cultural management compatible? Our research with CPP indicates not only that the two are compatible, but that strategic partnership is very likely to be a key characteristic and enabler of flourishing cultural eco-systems (a theme explored further in Chapter 4).

3.2 What are CPP Places trying to achieve?

Having briefly surveyed our research participants’ indications of what a flourishing cultural eco-system looks like, it is instructive to take a step back and make clear that this is, in part, a *normative* question: it involves values; it involves judgements about the kind of world we want to make. Answering the question, *what does a flourishing cultural eco-system look like?*, is inseparable from such questions as, *‘what are you trying to achieve?’*, or, *‘what would success look like?’*

33 David Stokes and Nick Wilson. (2017). *Small Business Management and Entrepreneurship*. Seventh Edition. CENGAGE Learning. p. 218.

There is a rich diversity of potential strategic aims for ‘place-based’ programmes such as CPP. We should not presume that they are all seeking to achieve the same thing. This manifests itself in at least three respects: (i) comparison with other place-based programmes; (ii) comparison between the different CPP Places; and (iii) the evolution of the overall ambition of CPP at a national level. Place-based cultural programmes can be directed towards a variety of aims. A leader of another programme – who has consulted widely with other place-based programmes, surveying their similarities and differences – reflected with us on the variety of their goals:

It was really interesting talking to the European Capital of Culture teams, because they’re going through a bit of an evolution. Where it had very much been about tourism, economic development and regeneration, because of the migration of people around the world and the impact that was having on cities, it was becoming much more people focused. Obviously with CPP it’s much more people focused. Great Places probably more about tourism and heritage, but it’s still about creating an authentic approach to city storytelling.

One of our interviewees was involved in the development of the London Borough of Culture programme, and outlined to us the range of ambitions that the different applicant boroughs articulated in their bids (to be London Borough of Culture 2019 or 2020). There was a deliberate openness to how the competition was set up, giving each borough the chance to be distinctive in what it was seeking to achieve:

We said to every borough, “You all have a different starting point and you’re all going to be taking a different journey. You need to explain to us what your starting point is and the journey you want to take.”

Some of the bids were very much about strengthening the creative economy, so investing in talent, supporting local creative and cultural businesses, creating spaces for those businesses. Some of them were about the identity of place or places, and putting them on the map a bit more. So, having festivals and events that helped them to do that. Some of them were about really connecting different communities and maybe the new incoming communities, and helping them to think about their role. [...] They were all trying to do a different thing. But I think it’s very much for them to tell us what their challenge was, and how they thought that being London Borough of Culture could create that change.

As these comments indicate, we should not presume that because a cultural programme is ‘place-based’ its aims are precisely the same; and even with a single programme such as CPP, our research shows that there can be a range of distinctive strategic aims. Although there may be a strong family resemblance between the ambitions of the 21 CPP Places, they are by no means precisely the same, and we suggest that some commentaries on CPP have, at times, overstated the unity of aims across the programme. Being alert to the different aims of each CPP is important. Mark Robinson comments that:

CPP is not a purely community, participatory or socially engaged arts project, although it has much in common with those different practices. Nor is it an arts in health programme, a talent development scheme, or a project to revivify town centres or ‘deprived’ areas. It is an arts project aimed at increasing arts engagement by bringing artists and local people together so more people choose, create and take part in brilliant art experiences where they live.³⁴

Later in his report, he adds, “Social capital – the bridges, bonds and networks in and between communities – is an ever-clearer sub-text to CPP”,³⁵ a theme which was subsequently explored in Karen Smith’s report on social capital.³⁶ Has the overall aim of CPP changed? The leader of another place-based programme reflects on the developing ambitions of CPP, suggesting that “initially, it was very much about finding new audiences for culture, or developing new audiences”, but, implicitly, this may have moved on.

Arts Council England has three core evaluation questions. These, of course, provide one key indicator of the strategic aims of the programme as a whole:

- Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?
- To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?
- Which approaches were successful and what were lessons learned?³⁷

Our fieldwork, building on previous CPP research and evaluation, strongly indicates that the aims and self-understandings of many CPP projects now go well beyond the scope of these questions. The Arts Council England questions appear to confine CPP’s description to an ‘arts engagement’ programme. At this stage in the life of CPP, it is difficult to sustain that notion.

Notwithstanding the excellent clarity that Boiling and Thurman’s report provides on the multiple varieties of ‘engagement’ within the programme,³⁸ it was apparent from our research that there remain a number of interrelated ambitions operating within and across CPP projects. Further clarifying this range of strategic aims is particularly important when considering

questions of ‘sustainability’, and what it might mean for a cultural eco-system to flourish. Our research identifies seven aims CPP projects are working towards. We present them here, in ways that reflect our research participants’ use of language.

1. Increasing arts engagement
2. Increasing listening, conversation and consultation
3. Increasing demand
4. Enabling voice
5. Telling stories
6. Community development and capacity building
7. Wider social change

(1) Increasing arts engagement

Some CPP directors do speak with the language of ‘arts engagement’, indicating that this is at the centre of their ambitions. As one CPP director put it, reflecting on one of the strengths of the partnership process, “we came from a starting point where all consortium partners were, and still are, invested in the project, invested in the ambition around increasing arts engagement”. The language of ‘engagement’ has, of course, been used for many years, with a variety of meanings, indicating an effort to increase the number of people buying tickets to be audience members, through to various modes of ‘participation’ and ‘co-production’. One CPP director, when asked, ‘what are you trying to achieve?’, replied, “growing audiences for the arts”. Another said, “it’s about getting a greater percentage of the community to engage, experience, participate with the arts.”

³⁵ Mark Robinson. (2016). p.19.

³⁶ Karen Smith. (2018).

³⁷ <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/frequently-asked-questions>

³⁸ Boiling and Thurman. (2018).

(2) Increasing listening, conversation and consultation

Across our fieldwork, CPP team members emphasised the value of their work in terms of the introduction of new processes of listening, conversation and consultation. In many cases, this involves processes for the commissioning of artworks and cultural projects funded via CPP. However, there are two respects in which the parameters of this type of arts conversation and consultation often expanded.

The first is that, as one CPP director put it, when undertaking consultation activities “people are as likely to tell us about fencing and dog fouling as they are to tell us about what they like to do socially.” In this way, when taking a broad approach to cultural activity, and embedding this within everyday life, the range of conversations that ensues can cover an extremely wide range of topics, many of which strongly connect to the wider politics of place, such as how public spaces and public services are managed.

The second respect in which processes of consultation can expand is in relation to (property) development. One CPP held an arts event in and around an historic building in the area, which led to their being approached by the local Building Preservation Trust. They “got some money to get the building back into use, and use it again as a venue, but they were keen that it be developed with the council and be developed as an arts venue”. In this way, the CPP and its participants became connected to a development process. One CPP director even goes so far as to suggest that the skills of “art as consultation” are the key contribution that CPP is making.

(3) Increasing demand

Some of our research participants describe one of the overall aims of their CPP as being ‘increased demand’ within the area. This overlaps with, but



Made in Corby. Grow Festival 2018. Photo: Adam Balcomb

extends beyond, traditional frameworks of audience development. In some cases, increased demand can simply be equivalent to more people wanting to be audience members or participants. But some CPP directors also use the language of increased demand as a way of indicating a process of empowerment, in which people in the area increasingly feel themselves to have a ‘right’ to culture, and the ability to make demands as to what the cultural life of the area should involve.

(4) Enabling voice

Connected to increased demand in that second sense, many CPP teams use the language of ‘voice’, with enabling and empowering the voices of the people in their area a key part of what they are seeking to achieve.³⁹ One CPP director describes local success in these terms: “in the eco-system now – they’re able to go and ask for what they want, which is brilliant, because this work is about giving people voice who don’t have voice.” Voice, here, can mean creative self-expression – something that art is particularly good at. But it also refers to involvement in decision-making, such as within commissioning processes. It can involve, in both these senses, the power to articulate the identity of a place.

Some CPP directors emphasise that this is not just individual voices, but collective voice, and in some cases, there is a deliberate effort to create conditions for collective voice. In one instance, a national newspaper published a particularly unflattering article on a town where there is a CPP project. A group of artists in the area was brought together to discuss how to respond to the article, with a number of projects emerging that gave a very different perspective.

(5) Telling stories

Many CPP directors describe an important part of their work as telling the stories of their Place, ensuring that the stories that are told via CPP “come from those places and those people that make [this Place] so unique”. As we noted in the opening chapter, ecology seeks to answer the question ‘Why here and not elsewhere’, so these acts of storytelling are particularly

germane to ecological perspectives. Boiling and Thurman comment that “building on what makes this place special to the people who live here, and telling the stories that are important to them [...] is a fundamental way to make arts programmes that are relevant to people’s lives.” However, “striking a balance between celebrating and recognising this history and imagining a new future is an issue many CPP directors are grappling with.”⁴⁰ This challenge was one that we also identified in our research. A key question is, how to create conditions in which to tell the story of a place *pluralistically*? Whose story gets told? Who gets to tell the stories? And regardless of how many stories there are within it, does a place have only one *overarching* story?

(6) Community development and capacity building

Respondents often employed the language of ‘community development’. A CPP director, for example, explained that one of the most important aspects of learning from the programme, potentially of value elsewhere, is how you “build that community development”. Within our research data, it is not always clear whether ‘community development’ is being used to refer to an *outcome* (the development of community), or to a *process* (of ‘capacity building’ more broadly).⁴¹ The International Association for Community Development clarifies that ‘community development’ can refer both to a process and to the outcome of such a process:

Community development is a set of practices and methods that focus on harnessing the innate abilities and potential that exist in all human communities to become active agents in their own development, and to organise themselves to address key issues and concerns that they share.

³⁹ For a significant contribution to understanding the role of ‘voice’ within politics and culture – its importance and the limits placed on it by ‘neoliberalism’ – see Nick Couldry. (2010). *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics After Neoliberalism*. Los Angeles / London / New Delhi / Singapore / Washington: Sage.

⁴⁰ Boiling and Thurman. (2018). p.35.

⁴¹ To complicate matters, our respondents also made frequent use of the language of ‘capacity building’, a key term within the community development field.

Community development workers may be members of the community, paid workers or volunteers. They work with and alongside people in the community to identify concerns and opportunities, and develop the confidence and energy to respond together.

The building of community and social capital is both a core part of the process and an outcome, and in this way there is an extension of co-operative attitudes and practices that are built through community development that can increase community resilience over time.⁴²

Previous CPP reports have also used this language. In their report on governance and consortium working, Bunting and Fleming write that CPP “consortia have positioned arts-based approaches at the heart of local community development.”⁴³ A focus on community development raises a number of important questions concerning the interrelationship between the multiple strategic aims that CPP projects have. (We return to consider the potential interrelationships between different strategic aims at the end of Chapter 4.) Not least, it raises questions of power, a topic very effectively discussed in Tiller’s report;⁴⁴ and the relationships between CPP projects and the wider social, economic and political conditions in which they exist, such as the funding and structure of public services.⁴⁵ We suggest that ideas of *community development* could fruitfully be explored further within the context of CPP, potentially through a subsequent research project.

It may be valuable, as part of this, to develop conversations with experts in community development outside of the immediate contexts of art and culture,⁴⁶ as well as those within.⁴⁷

(7) Wider social change

A fundamental question is whether – and in what way – CPP is a programme of ‘social change’. This kind of language is used by a number of CPP directors, and appears to extend ambitions considerably beyond audience engagement. (Though there is the possibility, at least, that audience engagement could be considered a sub-category of ‘social change’.) One director sees CPP as part of an international trend in which “the most significant artistic practice happening around the world at the moment is very much driven by social, political and community agendas and initiatives. I think we’re very much part of that discourse.” Another director sees CPP as a way to “unlock transformation in our area, at a much deeper or higher level of societal change”, whilst recognising that CPP can only be, at most, “a kind of a crucial cog” in a much bigger system. These views not only have implications for understanding what CPP projects are seeking to achieve, but also for the lengths of time over which realistic ‘success’ can be understood as possible.

⁴² Quoted in Alison Gilchrist and Marilyn Taylor (2016). *The Short Guide to Community Development*. Second Edition. Bristol: Policy Press. p.2.

⁴³ Bunting and Fleming. (2015) p. 12.

⁴⁴ Tiller. (2017).

⁴⁵ Discussing the many different definitions that have been given of community development, Akwugo Emejulu writes, “Due to its pliable form, it is often difficult to discern what is being invoked (or silenced) when community development is deployed in discussions about social problems and solutions. [...] What is particularly interesting and important about community development are the differing configurations it can take depending on how groups frame their political claims and collective identities.” (2016) *Community Development as Micropolitics: Comparing theories, policies and politics in America and Britain*. Bristol: Policy Press. pp.2-3.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Alison Gilchrist and Marilyn Taylor, (2016); Akwugo Emejulu. (2016); Margaret Ledwith, (2016), *Community Development in Action: Putting Freire Into Practice*. Bristol: Policy Press.

⁴⁷ A recent report in the US context observes that, “Within the professional community development sector, although people-centered and creativity-centered approaches have become more widespread, these strands have evolved in parallel, but separately, with different champions, philosophies, and funding sources. However, at the grassroots level there are long traditions of activists and organizations working to build communities by placing people and creativity, in an integrated way, at the center of their strategies for change.” Helicon Collaborative. (2018). *Creative People Power: A renewable natural resource for building community health*. p.5.

3.3 Sustainability of what?

Alongside each of these seven strategic aims, all CPP Places explicitly seek to support sustained cultural activity within their Place. Exactly what this is anticipated to look like, however, varies considerably. In Chapter 4, we return to these seven strategic aims, and suggest their potential interconnection as part of an ecological approach to cultural leadership and governance. As the preceding analysis shows, when considering what a flourishing cultural eco-system looks like, this will vary according to judgements of value, and the kind of 'world' we are trying to make. Are we trying to create a Place in which more people attend arts performances? One in which more people make art? In which people have greater opportunity for personal self-expression? Collective decision-making? Political power? Many CPP Places appear to combine aspects of these and more, and no two CPP projects are precisely the same in how they understand their mission.

These differences matter. Not least, they have consequences for considering how 'legacy' or 'sustainability' can be achieved. If the question, *what does a flourishing cultural eco-system look like?* raises the further question, 'what, ultimately, are you trying to achieve?', this, in turn, demands that we clarify questions of sustainability. If each CPP is interested to ensure longevity, we need to consider, what, exactly, is the CPP seeking to sustain, and what conditions will best ensure this?

Through our fieldwork, we heard a range of perspectives as to how CPP teams are currently thinking about questions of sustainability. In some cases, this was via answers given to questions focused on 'legacy', and to questions on what would further enable a flourishing cultural eco-system in the area. In the following, we draw on responses to this range of topics to consider current perspectives on the question: *what exactly are CPP Places seeking to sustain?*

An ongoing funded 'programme'

For some CPP directors, a flourishing cultural eco-system in the area requires sustained investment in cultural programmes of the kinds CPP has been enabling. One director explains that, given the "lack of other funded organisations" in this locality, "some kind of ongoing programme" is essential. Whilst we need to recognise that cultural eco-systems are not one-and-the-same as a cultural 'programme', nonetheless, in some cases, and particularly at some stages of development, a cultural programme supported by public funding may be an important part of how cultural eco-systems flourish.



Transported. Samba dancers at Illuminate Festival 2018. Photo: Electric Egg

The current CPP organisation

Respondents, in a number of instances, articulated specific visions of what kinds of organisation needs to be in place in the future. For some, this is the CPP organisation itself. As one CPP director puts it “Well, actually, here it is about an organisation”, an organisation in the service of a quite clear and specific mission. Central to the ‘legacy’ of CPP in this area is that “a new, independent, permanent organisation with the ethics and ethos of CPP at its heart emerged out of this place, and that we are providing a centre of leadership within the arts sector and beyond, both in [this Place] and regionally”. Another director would like to see the CPP structure develop into an independent organisation with an ongoing role in the Place, working “at that mid-tier [...] really brokering that relationship between the major institutions [...] and the small, individual grassroots practitioners”, and continuing a process of “creating community [and] finding creatives within communities. That can’t stop, you know. It has to continue, in some ways”.

New organisational forms

Whilst there is a commitment, from some respondents, to the need for an ongoing organisation to sustain a flourishing cultural eco-system in the area, there is an openness to what that organisation needs to look like. Some CPP Places are actively exploring new organisational possibilities. One CPP director explains that they are seeking to support a new Culture Council for the locality. “We’re exploring what form that will take at the moment. Whether that is a new body that is a delivery agency for the arts, a commissioning agency, a co-production agency, or whether it’s just an advisory body, I don’t know yet. But we’re hoping that there will be a voice of the people in the area, and that will be something that continues into the future, whatever the delivery model is.”

A cultural broker

Some CPP directors suggest that however the funding situation develops in the future, there will be a need for some kind of ongoing *brokerage* role within their CPP area. As one director puts it, the change that CPP has achieved is “so relationship based”, and “there does need to be a role that is about sustaining these relationships”. Without funding and staff to do that, it is very difficult. The catalysing and enabling of the relationships needs to be “resourced beyond the end of CPP, to continue to support this legacy.”

The commitment of key organisations outside the ‘arts’

Research participants identified key organisations within the area who they suggest will be crucial to ensuring the cultural eco-system flourishes beyond the life of CPP investment. One director identifies the local housing association as pivotal, explaining that this organisation is key to making the eco-system “thrive”, and will be so in the future. Because, “actually, they’re the bit in this – in the petri dish – they’re the bit that’s probably not going to go away.” The central CPP team could “go away, the artists could leave town, the community groups could all shift and change, but the thing that will remain the same is the housing association.” It is both the fact that it will endure and that it is embedded within the lives of local people that makes it key to ensuring a thriving cultural eco-system at “a really deep, people-integrated level”.

Community groups and small arts organisations

Many CPP directors explain that ensuring that the community groups and small arts organisations CPP is working with can continue activity is a central aim. Many (perhaps all) CPP Places offer training to local groups, to enable them to sustain themselves, with one CPP director describing this kind of training as vital to “sustainable change”. One of the legacies, in this Place, will be community groups that continue once CPP is gone: these groups having been taken through “quite a rigorous programme”.

Local leadership

Many CPP directors report that there is now, as one puts it, a group of people “who have come out of the community as cultural leaders”. Several CPP directors talk about long-term success involving *doing yourself out of a job*. In discussing how the CPP is seeking to enable a flourishing cultural eco-system, one CPP director explained that they are actively asking, how can we step away from being the “convenor, facilitator, producer”. Another says, “I love it when people don’t need us anymore. And people find the confidence not to consult with us to do things, and that’s exactly the way it should be.” And a third: “I would love that in a couple of years someone bangs on my door and says, ‘get out, I wanna do your job!’” We return to the theme of leadership at the end of Chapter 4.

Infrastructures for listening

A strong ethos across the CPP programme is that projects are developed with people. How does this segue into a sustained cultural eco-system that flourishes? One CPP director speaks of “genuine community leadership”, which is about “where the ownership of something sits”.⁴⁸ The projects within this CPP that haven’t endured are the ones “other partners have influenced a bit more. [...] If you want to create legacy, well, we need to concentrate our efforts on what people really, really want to do”. This raises challenging questions of how to work in this way on an ongoing basis.

Many CPP teams emphasise the importance of *listening*. This is a theme also highlighted in previous CPP reports, on topics including engagement and power, and is an aspect of enabling flourishing cultural eco-systems

we discuss further in the next chapter. Here, the point to emphasise is that part of what might be needed to ensure cultural eco-systems can flourish is, precisely, the practices, systems, resources or organisations that enable listening to take place on an ongoing basis. As one research participant put it, this is about “the infrastructure [...] to listen”. In our research on the cultural learning ecology in Harrow, we highlighted the central challenge of developing sustained systems of co-producing knowledge. How best can we ensure an ongoing and democratic process of understanding ever-changing cultural eco-systems, and what is needed within them? This is a key question, which our research with CPP also raises.

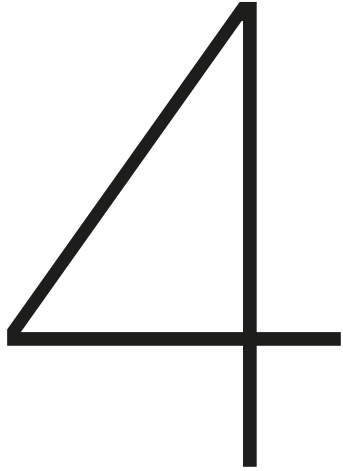
Conditions in which everyone has the right to make meaning

Some CPP directors articulate the underlying aims of their work with a specific emphasis on the *emergent capabilities*⁴⁹ of the people living in that area. One says, “I think what we’re trying to do is to create the conditions for more work and more opportunity to happen” in which “everybody has the right to take part in the making of meaning”. In Chapter 5, we will offer some specific concepts – related to notions of ‘cultural democracy’ and ‘cultural capability’ – that we suggest can be helpful in taking forward recent discussions of the expansion of cultural opportunity, and *the right to make culture*. At this stage, what’s important is to recognise, firstly, that not everyone involved in CPP has the same degree of conceptual clarity as this director does, in articulating underlying aims; and, secondly – beyond clarifying these aims – there remain key questions of what will work in achieving them. This is the focus of the next chapter.

⁴⁸ The language of “ownership” is interesting to note. To what extent is it in tension with an ecological approach to cultural leadership and governance, which, as we discuss further in Chapter 4, is particularly characterised by openness?

⁴⁹ In Chapter 5 we discuss the ‘capabilities approach’ to human development (see Sen, 1999; Robeyns 2017). Within that field, ‘capabilities’ are defined, specifically, as the substantive freedoms to do and be what we have reason to value.

What enables cultural eco-systems to flourish?



4.1 What is working?

Some CPP Places are already explicitly employing vocabularies of ‘cultural ecology’ in describing their work. Others are not. In both cases, we can observe what is already *working* in terms of enabling the conditions for a cultural eco-system to flourish. In many instances, insights into effective practices of cultural *co-production* provide the basis for understanding how cultural eco-systems can flourish on an ongoing basis.

Taking time: to build and sustain relationships

Across our fieldwork, CPP directors, team members and consortium members strongly emphasise the centrality to their work of relationship building, and the need for *time* to do this. As one CPP director puts it, “relationships, partnership, collaboration [...] you can’t shortcut those things, and actually, the more time you invest the greater the reward.” The time it takes to build relationships is a key theme, emphasised widely. As another CPP director explains:

We need to invest time in sustaining those relationships, even outside of projects. So, we might have worked with a group of partners on a project, but at the point at which that project finishes, we do need to continue to stay in touch, we need to sustain that relationship. Not with the same amount of contact as when you’re running the project, but you still need to sustain that relationship, in order to kind of keep that intelligence going.

The importance of time extends from the quality of co-production it makes possible, to the strength and sustainability of relationships which endure beyond the initial encounter. This has significant consequences for considering what conditions are needed to develop a sense of shared belonging to the cultural eco-system.

Action research

Connected to the theme of having the time to build relationships, many of our research participants highlight the fact that CPP is an *action research* programme. The ability to take risks, to try things out, to learn from experience, to work iteratively, is identified as an important part of how CPP projects have been able to develop the quality of the relationships they are

growing, and to establish connections that would not otherwise have been possible. As with ‘time’, we can understand action research as ‘holding open a space’ for the eco-system to develop, and flourish.

Developing trust

Robinson’s report, *Faster but Slower*, highlights “trust” as a key condition for “shared understanding”.⁵⁰ In our fieldwork also, trust arose as a key theme. What enables trust? In some cases, CPP directors are very clear that building trust requires funding staff for whom relationship building is a major part of their role. “You need funded posts, or you need somebody who’s there in a development capacity, in a support capacity, and not just projects coming in and going away again.” Moreover, part of the conditions for trust in a lead or central organisation is that it *doesn’t go away*. As one CPP director put it, you must avoid a situation in which you start the work “again, and again, and again”.

Consortium boards (that enable deep local knowledge and connections)

Some of our research participants emphasised that their consortium partners provide local intelligence that is crucial to building connections in the area. All CPP Places are required to constitute a project ‘consortium’. This model has good potential to support an ecological approach. One CPP director explains that, via the consortium partners, “we’ve got a much deeper knowledge of the borough” than would otherwise be possible. Another director has a slightly different perspective, distinguishing between the “intelligence at the strategic level” that consortium partners are able to provide, such as developments within the public health authority, whilst more “on-the-ground-stuff” comes from “delivery partners”, and from people running voluntary groups.

Partnerships that enable local knowledge

Our research participants emphasise the importance of partnerships with organisations that have extensive knowledge of the Place. “I think there being partnerships with groups and organisations that have a really detailed knowledge of the local area and local people makes all the difference.” The breadth of these potential partnerships is indicated by one CPP who “trained” staff in a local pharmacy to let people know about CPP activities, as part of a response to the issue of loneliness in the area. As the CPP director explained, the pharmacy had been:

getting a lot of older people in who are isolated. And at Christmas time they were talking to people and saying, ‘did you have a nice Christmas?’, and people were saying ‘I haven’t seen anybody, I’ve just been by myself’. So we did a talk about what the [CPP] is, and they were keen to put up a stand about the [CPP], because we are working in one of their particular ward areas, and we trained up staff to talk to people, the customers, that are coming in about the programme and what we’re doing, and so they can give them a flyer or a booklet and saying ‘there’s this and this going on’, and why don’t you go and take part?’

Deliberately building and supporting networks.

Most CPP Places are deliberately seeking to establish and support networks. These are varied in format, frequency and membership, from quarterly gatherings of ‘artists’ in the area, to monthly meetings of a newly constituted What Next? chapter,⁵¹ to “creative cafes, where we bring creatives together, with the intent of encouraging them to collaborate, and create work, and connect with each other.” In some cases, CPP Places are



Heart of Glass. Mark Storer's *Baa Baa Baric: Have You Any Pull?* 2017. Merseyside Police Officers take over a chip shop in St Helens town centre to highlight child poverty in the borough. Photo: Stephen King

cultivating networks directly via the arts projects they commission. As one CPP director explains:

We commissioned a project involving four brass bands and those brass bands, previously, were all doing their own things. They'd largely come from the traditional competitive brass banding world. And bringing them together into a commissioning panel, to kind of go,

⁵¹ “What Next? is a movement bringing together arts and cultural organisations from across the UK, to articulate, champion and strengthen the role of culture in our society.” <https://www.whatnextculture.co.uk/about/> [Accessed 08.01.19]

‘what would you like to do together?’. And then selecting an artist that they wanted to work with, who then made a piece that they all worked on together, and was then performed at the Northumberland Miners’ picnic, and was also performed at Sage Gateshead. The legacy of that is that those voluntary bands are much more networked with each other, and have now, if you like, rebranded themselves as The Brass Marras, and now do things together.

Across the CPP programme, a range of approaches to initiating and supporting networks is in evidence. From this, a number of questions arise for further consideration. What more could be learnt across the programme from reflecting on the variety of approaches to network building? When it comes to networks, what works, for whom, under what circumstances? Who is involved in which networks (and who is not)? How are networks made as inclusive as possible (and not just the usual suspects)? How can the networks develop and evolve? And does each cultural eco-system constitute one *primary network*, (with secondary and tertiary networks within it), or are there multiple parallel networks, within the same eco-system, that do not interconnect?

Skills development and ‘capacity building’

All CPP Places report ways in which they support skills development in their area. In many cases, this involves expanding local capacity to manage cultural groups, activities and events – including such varied skills as commissioning, event management, business planning, fundraising and blogging. Sometimes, the language of ‘capacity-building’ is applied to the skills development taking place within CPP Places. One CPP director,

for example, reports convening meetings with a “capacity-building focus, which is around supporting local people to access training opportunities, to skill-up, to be able to sustain locally-led participatory activities.” Many CPP directors place this kind of work as central to what they do.

Using non-arts spaces

Using ‘non-arts’ space has already been identified by Boiling and Thurman as a central part of successful CPP ‘engagement’ activity. They comment that, “For all CPPs, presenting work in non-arts venues is a key part of their approach, and this ranges from bus stations to hospitals, shopping centres to sports clubs, derelict factories to parks, pubs to church halls and bingo halls to working men’s clubs.”⁵² The role of such spaces is particularly significant to our purposes in this report, when flourishing cultural eco-systems are understood as constituted, in part, by the connectedness between cultural resources of varied kinds, including the ‘social infrastructures’ of everyday life. One CPP director described the following residency within unused spaces in a shopping centre:

We’ve also been working with The Bridges, which [...] gave us free shopping units for six weeks last year, and are keen for us to take another shopping unit this year. And for us last year that was really helpful, as it meant we could consult with people we hadn’t met before, have a bit of an exhibition, run workshops, but also offer space to groups and organisations that haven’t had the opportunity to promote themselves. So, they could run things in our space and make people aware of what they do. So, that partnership with a local business has proved to be really excellent.

52 Boiling and Thurman. (2018). p.49.

Working in this way has the capacity to connect different kinds of cultural resources, open up opportunities for conversation and ‘consultation’, and may be an important part of multiplying the connections and interdependencies within an area.

Reframing assets

A striking aspect of our fieldwork was the strong emphasis on outdoor arts, which seems to be a significant feature of many CPP Places. This is particularly interesting in terms of the potential role that outdoor arts may have in enabling cultural eco-systems to flourish. Outdoor arts appear to have particular capacities to establish new connections (in ways not available to ‘indoor’ arts). They are, after all, readily ‘visible’. One aspect of this is what one CPP director referred to as “reframing the assets of the place where we are”, enabling people to engage with spaces and sites in new ways. She gives the example of a circus taking place in a local park:

The really great thing about that was, people could have been going in that park all their lives but they wouldn’t have gone in at night, and they certainly wouldn’t have seen it dressed and presented the way that it was. And [another] example of that is there is a windmill on a housing estate – and there are people who have lived on the housing estate for sixty years and never been inside that windmill, and so it’s just opening that up. And we’ve been telling stories out of it, and doing some craft sessions out of there. So, actually, people can explore an asset that is literally on their doorstep, but they’ve kind of looked out of their window and seen it all their lives but they’ve never kind of investigated how they can get inside it.

With this kind of practice, CPP Places are drawing on specific capacities of art and play⁵³ to ‘make the familiar unfamiliar’. Artworks defamiliarise, refamiliarise and reframe the everyday in multiple ways, enabling conditions in which we think, feel and/or act differently. In examples such as these, reframing is taking place at the scales of local geographic sites and features.

The value (and the limits) of ‘mapping’

In some cases, CPP directors describe the value of processes of cultural mapping or cultural auditing that took place prior to, or in preparation for, CPP. As one explained, this is useful because you can know “who you can work with, but also not to try and replicate and duplicate what is already out there.” The leader of another place-based cultural programme describes the value of a piece of preparatory research as “an incredible starting point for us to really understand the city and who we are, and what the needs are moving forward.”

Within the context of taking an ecological approach, one question is: to what extent are such mapping exercises effective in engaging with the forms of everyday, ‘under-the-radar’ culture-making of the kinds often only appreciated via sustained collaborative work with local organisations and communities? To what extent do such mapping processes pay attention to the breadth of cultural resources outlined in Chapter 2 of this report? Or the ‘invisible’ resources and systemic conditions that emerge through interactions, relationships and encounters? Perhaps, as with many processes of knowledge and understanding, this needs to be an on-going, iterative and inclusive process. An initial mapping can have value, to then be followed up with more fine-grained and systemic processes of understanding a locality, including in terms of its interconnections and interdependencies.



Cultural Spring. *WordPlay!* Photo: Dan Prince

Vision and ambition

Whilst we might recognise eco-systems as organic and emergent, our research also raises the question of the ways in which they need to be deliberately managed, nurtured or stewarded. (A theme we also discuss in a previous report.)⁵⁴ One CPP director suggests that what has supported the development of a flourishing cultural eco-system within the area is “vision and ambition being shared by a lot of people, a lot of partners.” Several of our research participants describe how beneficial it has been to be involved in the development of a bid to be UK City of Culture. Whilst not ‘winning’ the competition, the process of developing a shared vision enabled a

step-change in the partnerships within the area. Closely connected to the issue of telling the story of a place pluralistically, a question this raises for ecological approaches is: how can a shared vision and ambition be developed in a way that is *democratic*, and which is open to the processes of evolution and growth?

4.2 What more needs to happen?

Section 4.1 has outlined a series of indications as to what ‘works’ in supporting the development of cultural eco-systems, as evidenced within our fieldwork. From the viewpoint of this research project, given its scale and specific aims, it is not possible to make a full evaluation of the extent to which CPP Places currently *are* enabling cultural eco-systems to flourish. This would require a research project of a far bigger scale. (Instead, please note: one of the primary contributions of this report is to lay the conceptual foundations for the criteria against which such a major evaluation could be conducted.) On the basis of this research project, however, it is possible to identify a number of key respects in which CPP Places could go further in the ongoing process of enabling cultural eco-systems to flourish. Across the fieldwork, the key insights were as follows.

Ensuring income, and clarifying what money can do

It should not come as a surprise that in discussions of what is needed to enable cultural eco-systems to flourish, the topic of money arose frequently. In some cases, our research participants emphasised the importance of securing further grants from arts funding agencies, whilst others emphasised diversifying income streams (via partnerships with the private sector, for example). However, the fieldwork also raised the question: what, exactly, can money can do to enable a flourishing cultural eco-system?

⁵⁴ Nick Wilson and Jonathan Gross. (2017).

At times the answer was that money can fund current staffing and activities. Depending on what responses are given to the issues discussed in Chapter 3 – *what are CPP Places projects trying to achieve?* and *what exactly needs to be sustained?* – the fact that more money can fund current staffing and activities may (or may not) be begging key questions.

But some of our research participants took the discussion of money to a greater degree of detail. For example, one CPP director explained that what money enables, (and which is essential), is the time and staffing to build relationships. Another commented that, what matters is what “the money [can] leverage. And often, for me, that’s about time and quality.” In turn, time and quality build trust. What is crucial is “the trust it can enable, and the experience it can create between you and the people you are working with”.

Other interviewees indicate that larger budgets allow for support to be provided across a wider range of cultural activities, with the capacity, thereby, to affect *systemic* change. For example, one CPP director describes how, with a reduction of funding in the second phase of their CPP grant, the sums received would constitute “tonnes of money” if the only aim was to run “creative engagement work with community groups”. But to really achieve “sector change”, supporting professional pathways for artists, large-scale events that attract people from across the Place, and community work – “all that feels very threatened”.

In the context of asking what, precisely, money can do – and what it cannot do – in enabling a cultural eco-system to flourish, we should also note the tensions that may emerge between multiple aims, or multiple *logics of development*, within CPP Places. The question must be raised: in what ways will it be possible (or not) to develop an eco-system in which the aims of enabling voice and community development, (for example), smoothly co-exist with new ways of generating income outside of the Arts Council England funding system?

Developing a more strategic approach

As indicated in Chapter 3, although all CPP Places are required to present a 10-year strategy as part of their proposal for getting funded, across the fieldwork we heard a range of views on the extent to which CPP directors, staff and boards feel their CPP Place has strategic clarity. This was not a question that we posed directly, but it emerged as a prominent theme. One CPP director describes how, although there has been good engagement from a range of partners, this has not yet been sufficiently strategic in outlook, explaining that, “we have managed to have a lot of relationships with partners from, for example, public sector, third sector, but not real strategic engagement, not real buying into the longer-term vision of what we’re doing”. Another director comments:

We work very hard to ensure that we are delivering a programme that is an exceptionally high standard. And as I said, I’m really pleased with how we’re doing, and I do think we’re doing a fantastic job. But to take time out for strategic stuff, to make sure that we’re talking to the community about how things are changing and the direction we’re going is very, very difficult when you’ve got no time to do it.

Some research participants made clear that they have made deliberate efforts to address questions of strategy, with one commenting that “this year we’ve spent quite a lot of time looking at our strategic approach to delivering within the borough.” In some cases, CPP Places have had a strategic role thrust upon them, with one director explaining that, “we find ourselves taking on, kind of accidentally, a kind of strategic arts development role for the town, because no one else is doing it!” She indicates mixed feelings about this role, but stresses that “more joined-up strategic thinking” in the area “would help”, because, with cuts in local authority funding, “all of that has kind of just gone”. In the context of substantial changes in local authority funding and structures, the question of strategic oversight of the cultural eco-system has even greater salience and urgency.

More effectively communicating role and mission

Several directors indicate that there have been misperceptions, locally, of what CPP is there to do: who CPP is there to help, and how. One director comments that some people see them as having loads of money, and that they need to make clear that they do not have limitless funds. They need to make clear that “this is a research project, that this is for local people to really try out something new, to test their own appetites for art and culture”. Another reflects that there is a need to communicate more effectively “what the work is for, and what it’s aiming to achieve.” In one case a CPP director comments that:

I don’t think we’ve been very good at communicating exactly why we’re here. So, some of the smaller cultural organisations have felt very much like we’ve been treading on their toes. So that’s been difficult. And [...] that understanding of who we are, moving forward, has been blurred as well. So there’s still a little bit of presumption, I think, for Joe Public, that we’re not supporting their area anymore, because we’ve not got a staff member over there focusing on them, and we’re not pouring cash into it any more. It’s a very difficult process to have changed so much but to be able to relay that information successfully to a community.

In another part of the country, one CPP director comments:

I think there is more to be done in terms of communicating what we are doing, both as a CPP initiative, in our area, and what the CPP programme is doing nationally, and how to communicate that not just to the arts sector, but to the wider public sector, or, you know, partners who may potentially come on board. And I think there’s a difficult challenge there, because I think a lot of the CPPs, there are quite distinct differences in the way in which people are working. So, as a

national programme it doesn’t, sometimes, step up. So, I think stronger and more consistent messages about the action research or the kind of findings that are coming out of the programme [are needed].

To achieve a lasting ‘legacy’, or to enable sustained systematic change, it may be very important for organisations such as CPP to have a clear account of what they are doing and why it is valuable. In some cases, we should note, CPP teams feel very confident that the role of their CPP within their eco-system is “really, really clear”, as one director put it. This is an issue that varies considerably across the programme.

Being in it for the long game

Discussing what needs to happen next, one CPP director comments: “being in it for the long game. And actually, ten years is ten years, but ten years is actually quite a short period of time! So, yeah, longevity.” Several interviewees made similar points. Another CPP director, for example, explaining that what they are doing is “social change”, suggests that this needs a 25-year plan, not a three- or even a ten-year plan. Another emphasises that a flourishing cultural eco-system will be an ongoing process of building partnerships, and expanding the range of people involved. “I think the process of CPP is to continually keep saying, ‘what else?’ and ‘who else?’.”

Connecting with the private sector

Many research participants identified the need for more and deeper partnerships with local businesses as an important area for development, with one CPP director, for example, reporting that there is “very, very little [partnership] with the private sector.” Another specifically discusses connections with the ‘creative industries’, commenting:

I don't think we've even begun to scrape the surface of the creative industries, and they're essential to the eco-system. Who knows what could germinate if we worked with them. I've tried it in other places. I think the difficulty with that is that the creative industries, like some of our partners in town, if they've got a commercial imperative or a drive, public sector money and public-sector organisations, often it's not a great mix. Because creative industries and commercial sector organisations can be very transactional, and obviously, you know, we tend to let things take their own course and take as long as they need to, and they're developmental, and it's a bit 'let's see what happens, and we can change it if it's not working'. So, creative industries: there must be a way to connect, and perhaps that's the digital agenda as well. There must be a way to connect more with them as well. At the minute I think we just hire them for design and things like that, and I think there's more to come.

Taking an ecological approach, CPP Places need to further consider how their work could (and should) be connected to the 'creative industries'.

Connecting with local authorities

As indicated above, the current and potential role of local authorities in supporting cultural eco-systems to flourish was an issue raised widely across our fieldwork. There is a diverse range of current situations with regards the relationships between local authorities and CPP projects. In some cases, there is a strong strategic partnership in place. In others, the relationship is much less clear. One CPP director reports "a genuine commitment to arts and culture at the council". At the other end of the spectrum, a CPP director reports that there has been "a period of great flux in the local authority, whilst they determined what their priorities are and what resources they've got." This has meant that this CPP is "almost starting again" with its local authority partnerships in that Place.

In some cases, CPP teams identify the development of more strategic collaboration with local authorities as a central aim. The local authority is a key factor in the conditions within which CPP Places are operating. Our research participants were sensitive to the pressures on local authorities, whilst clear about the consequences of cuts. One director, for example, describes how changes in the organisation of local government has had knock-on effects:

The boundaries are changing. So, you're talking about an evolution process, which actually brings together a number of different local authorities. There's also a rationalisation of staff, so someone that you might have been working with on a project suddenly isn't there next week because their post has been rationalised. Or we're working on a long-term women's programme of work with women and women's services at the same time as women's services are being dismantled. Working within an education framework where youth services might be closed or dismantled.

Our fieldwork strongly indicates that relationships and partnerships with local authorities are a key consideration when asking what cultural eco-systems look like, how they work, and how they can be enabled to flourish.

Connecting across digital platforms

Several CPP areas report being at various stages of developing digital platforms for sharing information locally and supporting networks. For example, one CPP director explains:

We are currently looking at developing something called an Arts Bank, which is going to be an online platform where we will share information, resources and toolkits to help local people put on

events. And it will have a directory, as well, where people can access production managers, artists, toilets – anything. Because we get emails all the time asking us where we get our fencing from and things like that. So, the idea would be that the Arts Bank is a go-to platform where we can help develop skills and we can make videos about five tips around volunteering, or provide a template or a PDF around a risk assessment. Just to make life easier for people, but also to improve – not necessarily the quality of events – but just to help improve the processes and procedures that local community, especially local community groups who are doing it on a voluntary basis, can just kind of upskill and put on better and safer events.

It remains an open question as to how significant a role such platforms will play in enabling flourishing cultural eco-systems. There appear to be significant variations between these emerging websites, including intended users, and what kinds of functionality they will offer. Writing in December 2016, Robinson comments that “The area of digital engagement is not very apparent [within CPP], although some digital art has been commissioned. The impression is that CPP is essentially a face-to-face practice.”⁵⁵ This is an aspect of CPP that requires further research and discussion. The role of digital technology within flourishing cultural eco-systems is a key question, that will only grow in importance in the coming years.

Developing beyond a hub-and-spoke model

Some CPP directors make reference to a ‘hub-and-spoke’ model, and the need to take further steps beyond this in order to ensure a flourishing eco-system. One director explains that “quite a few of the partners were identifying that they felt that they had a really strong relationship with us

as a CPP, but, still quite a light touch relationship with other groups and organisations” in the area. She goes on to reflect on the unsustainability of this, and the need to avoid a “hub-and-spoke” model. The problem, of course, is “if the hub disappears, the wheel falls to bits.” Instead, there is a need to move to a “web model”, she says. The goal should be that “at the point where the CPP disappears, the web is strong enough to be sustained.”

We suggest that taking into account the preceding points in this section – including developing a more strategic approach, and increased connectivity with local authorities, the private sector and digital platforms – could serve, precisely, to enable the further development of a “web model”.

4.3 Implications for other cultural programmes, policy-makers and funders

A new normal?

Towards the end of her interview, one CPP director reflects on the experience of CPP so far. In doing so, she raises some fundamental questions for contemporary cultural policy.

My hope [for] CPP is that it becomes not a time sensitive anomaly within a funding landscape, but becomes actually a new normal: actually [addressing] who gets to make art and where it gets made. I think what CPP [across the whole network] has demonstrated for me, certainly, and I hope that this is the case internally within Arts Council or DCMS, or other structures, [...] is that they’re not areas of low engagement or aspiration [...]. What has existed has

⁵⁵ Robinson. (2016). p.4

been a lack of support and infrastructure development that has led to less opportunities for people to engage in the arts. But that's a very different problem than one that was described as an area of low engagement. I think what I would hope would be that [...] CPP as a conversation leads to a much more rigorous conversation about cultural democracy and engagement opportunities, and who gets to be part of the making of meaning, really, in terms of the development of the cultural sector nationally.



LeftCoast. The Golden Repair, Jayne Simpson. One of five Left Behind commissions. Photo: Henry Iddon

To what extent does CPP constitute a new normal? We can certainly recognise a recent and growing trend towards 'place-based' cultural policy, of which CPP is a leading example. How should this trend be understood? One of our interviewees, the leader of another place-based programme, suggests that this range of recent initiatives reflects "the government's move towards localism and devolution", and "a recognition that there needs to be a focus on greater place-based working in terms of investment in arts, culture and heritage." He goes on to indicate that "clearly" place-based approaches are going to be a significant part of the next phase of Arts Council England strategy, including "thinking about what place-based working means five, ten years into the future." Within this context, what might be some of the key implications of CPP for adopting specifically *ecological* approaches to how place-based cultural policy and practice develops in the coming years?

Explore possibilities for ecological leadership

One of the final contributions that Boiling and Thurman make in their report on modes of engagement within CPP is to reflect on leadership practices, and what could be learnt from CPP for leaders elsewhere within the cultural sector:

The CPP Programme appears to be enabling/creating a cohort of audience focused cultural leaders, and this feels important if the cultural sector genuinely wants to expand its audience reach. This style of leadership is manifest at the philosophical level in how CPP directors talk about their practice as well as at the strategic and operational level.⁵⁶

Beyond ‘audience focused’ cultural leaders, our research highlights the need to consider what an ecological approach to leadership requires. In other words, if strategic aims are adopted which take a broad view of *cultural resources*, and their interconnected roles, what does this require of cultural leaders? What kinds of expertise are needed to support a cultural eco-system to flourish?

A key skill of CPP directors may be to create conditions in which their staff can grow within their roles. This was a point emphasised by one of our research participants who observed that the director of her CPP was particularly adept at enabling members of the CPP team to develop. The skills needed to undertake the kinds of co-production processes characteristic of CPP projects may go beyond the typical skills-set of many cultural ‘producers’. The competencies required will vary from place to place, depending on the specific nature of the work and the environment. However, in many cases they involve relationship building and skills of ‘community development’, and the capacity to grow with the role. Ecological leadership is likely to require people with the capacity to enable others within that eco-system to explore and develop the specific skills they need, without necessarily knowing what these will be in advance.

Given that flourishing cultural eco-systems are highly connected, heterogeneous and conducive to *emergence*, effective ecological leadership will involve ‘holding open the space’ for connections to be made, skills to be developed, and diverse practices of cultural-making to interact. *Holding open the space* is at the heart of ecological leadership, (as it is of creativity and the creative process).⁵⁷ Capacities to nurture partnership working

will be an important part of this. Ecological leadership is likely to require the ability to build partnerships in ways that combine both flexibility of membership / involvement *and* clarity of purpose: such that, regardless of the ebbs and flow of funding, relationships last.

Further attention should be given to the nature and possibilities of ecological leadership.⁵⁸ It may be that a small number of people can make a big difference. As the leader of another place-based cultural programme commented, from observing the crucial importance that local leaders can have, particularly in city authorities in which mayors have considerable devolved powers, “sometimes it really does come down to individual people” to make things happen. At the same time, a key lesson of CPP is that – if conditions are conducive – new leaders, distributed leadership, and collective leadership can emerge.

Explore possibilities for ecological funding

One of our interviewees works for a major funding agency, and discussed some of the pros and cons of the language of ‘cultural ecology’. One of the downsides is that this terminology potentially implies that cultural outcomes are “accidental”. Implicitly, there is a danger that taking an ecological approach may undermine the case for public funding for art and culture at all. Our research does not support the view that taking an ecological approach means there is no need for public funding. Instead, it raises the question of how to fund in innovative ways that are up to the task of supporting culture-making ecologically.

⁵⁷ Nick Wilson. (2018). ‘Creativity at work: Who cares? Towards an ethics of creativity as a structured practice of care’, in Lee Martin and Nick Wilson (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Creativity at Work*. Switzerland: Springer. p.634.

⁵⁸ There is a small but potentially useful range of management texts that may be helpful to draw upon in developing ideas, here. For example, Richard Wielkiewicz and Stephen Stelzner. (2005). ‘An ecological perspective on leadership theory, research, and practice.’ *Review of General Psychology*, 9(4), 326-341. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.9.4.326>. It may also be valuable to engage with literature taking an ecological perspective in education and learning. See, for example, Mark Graham. (2007). ‘Art, Ecology and Art Education: Locating Art Education in a Critical Place-based Pedagogy.’ *Studies in Art Education*. 48(4).

This will require funders to be committed not only to the long term, but to allowing for the evolution and growth of the cultural eco-systems being supported. Robinson raises the possibility of place-based endowments. “Building on local non-arts partners, as well as national interest, might Place-based endowments support CPP-style work in future, with Arts Council, Community Foundations and others collaborating to encourage local philanthropic support?”⁵⁹ Further research should investigate possibilities for place-based endowments, and alternative models of ecological funding.

Support partnerships beyond the usual suspects

One of the clear insights of CPP is the value of working with ‘non-arts’ partners. This has the capacity to radically widen the range of cultural resources mobilised within a place. As one CPP director put it, some of the most transformational potential comes from “cross-sectoral working”. A leader of another place-based cultural programme makes the observation that “sometimes the gatekeeper of the local authority can get in the way of innovation”, indicating one advantage of the Arts Council England prescription that CPP consortia cannot be led by a local authority. Further, “if you ask people to innovate in terms of their partnership, stuff comes forward” that funders and policy-makers “might not have thought about.” Significant challenges remain, however, as to how to embed sustained partnerships that can affect lasting change. As this interviewee puts it, “there’s a question that we have which is, within a locality, what’s the critical mass? What’s the scale by which the arts and cultural sector can [...] engage with some of these big [strategic] agendas”?

Be ambitious, be brave

Our fieldwork shows how inseparable CPP Places are from the broader *politics of place*. In some CPP areas, for example, imminent property development brings potential benefits, but also concerns. Regeneration, gentrification and housing are very live political issues in the UK. Who benefits? Who doesn’t? Who is involved in the decision-making? In contexts of rapid urban change – as well as in locations in which change is all too slow – a key priority must be, as one CPP director puts it, “to ensure that it’s positive change, that local people and organisations don’t feel that they’re being done to, that they are really taking a lead in that change for the better.” Many of the lessons of CPP regarding ‘working alongside’ people, cannot be separated from wider questions of empowerment and democracy.

The leader of another placed-based cultural programme comments that initiatives of this kind have the capacity to be “more ambitious [and] brave” than “standard outreach programmes”. As we have seen, the range of aims of CPP projects is wide, including many committed to processes of “social change”. As these initiatives develop, it appears increasingly difficult to separate ‘cultural’ programmes of this kind from wider questions of social justice, which so often find their crystallisation in the politics of place. This should not be shied away from. What the experiences of CPP projects help illustrate are some of the challenges and opportunities of understanding ‘culture’ as a part of what social change can involve. This is a theme we pick up in the final chapter, in our discussion of cultural democracy and cultural capability

Commit to 'holding open' the eco-system

As we suggested in Chapter 1, taking an 'ecological' perspective is at one level, unescapable. Living organisms are 'organised' in more or less complex eco-systems. Whatever strategy or mode of governance those working in the cultural sector (or elsewhere) deploy, therefore, their motivations, practices and behaviours can always be understood 'from an ecological perspective' (the guiding viewpoint of this report). This being the case, one might well ask – what is the particular value of taking an 'ecological perspective'? Putting this another way, does taking an ecological perspective actually *commit* one to anything at all? This is a very important question; it is also the cue for thinking further about the additional underlying perspective of this report, which is to say, our focus on 'healthy', 'thriving', indeed *flourishing* cultural eco-systems.

The dictionary tells us that in respect of living organisms the term 'flourish' denotes growing or developing in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly congenial environment. In the context of the nationwide CPP programme (notwithstanding the range of different overall aims held by individual CPP Places, as discussed in Chapter 3) there is an explicitly shared normative motivation: more people choosing, creating and taking part in brilliant art experiences in the place where they live. But given the particular focus CPP has on areas where there are fewer opportunities to get involved in the arts, this is itself premised on a deeper implicit motivation. In our research, we find this variously discussed in terms of enabling people's voice, developing communities and/or social change. To 'flourish' in this context, therefore, can be understood in terms of a potentially wide range of outcomes, but all linked in some way to enabling or increasing social justice, opportunity, equality, fairness, and/or democracy.

One very real difficulty with this state of affairs is that the outcomes just listed are not necessarily understood in the same way, or indeed compatible with each other. Indeed, even within programmes or initiatives that prioritise society-level equality and fairness arguments under the banner of 'social justice', there is scope to do quite different things. (For example, re-distributing cultural opportunities in terms of 'equal' funding per head of the population vs. a regional approach, or one that seeks to factor in tax-paying contributions). CPP directors, staff and, indeed, people across the country, hold different views about what are the priorities within the areas in which they live. This is wholly understandable. However, this is also where we see the potential value of focusing on a 'flourishing' cultural eco-system. For such a perspective is not just useful or informative at a metaphorical level, but does involve a *commitment*.

A flourishing cultural eco-system is a *sustainable* eco-system. It follows, by virtue of the fact that eco-systems are necessarily open relational structures, entailing diversity, adaptation and emergence, that those responsible for stewarding, nurturing (i.e., governing) such a sustainable eco-system *must* be committed to holding it open. Putting this another way, their strategic approach must be such that leads to the shared aspiration of community development and social change without closing-down how this is done, who is involved, or even what specific outcomes are achieved.

In practice, of course, this is extremely difficult to do (not least since having definable outcomes and impact pathways for all publicly-funded research projects – including CPP – is now a pre-requisite of funding). However, given our overall focus on taking 'an ecological perspective' we suggest that the research findings in this project clearly point to the value of bringing this commitment out into plain sight, at least as a starting point for further consideration.

As an initial suggestion for how to actively implement this commitment, we suggest that – regardless of their specific aims – CPP Places (and other communities, networks, agencies, organisations and initiatives seeking to develop an ecological approach) could introduce the following three questions into their strategic governance arrangements, always asking:

1. Does our existing strategic plan keep ‘open’ a) who we engage with; b) who we partner with; c) our relations with and role within local, regional, sectoral and national networks and structures; and d) the kinds of outcomes being produced?
2. Where there is evidence of ‘closure’, how can we challenge our strategic approach (from the inside) to consider what could be done to open it up? And, in turn:
3. Does our strategic governance have in place a decision-making ‘feedback loop’ that attends to this ‘ecological perspective’?

Enable interrelationships between multiple strategic aims

Finally, building on the preceding commitment to *holding open* spaces and structures – and taking a broad view of the range of potential aims articulated in Chapter 3 – we can begin to conceptualise the possible interrelationships between multiple strategic aims within cultural eco-systems. Notwithstanding its overly linear presentation, (collectively, we can work on a superior, more ‘networked’ model that nevertheless communicates with the same clarity), this can be visualised as follows (Figure 4.1):

Figure 4.1: Interrelationships between multiple strategic aims



The purpose of this diagram (Figure 4.1) is to indicate that a commitment to 'holding open' may enable the systemic achievement of *multiple* aims. To illustrate this, we use the seven aims our research documents within CPP. But these, of course, need not be the same as the strategic aims identified within the context of other cultural programmes, policies or specific eco-systems; and in providing this diagram, our intention is to lay out the indicative space for (other) aims, and the relationships between them, to develop. With a commitment to *holding open* spaces and structures – which, we suggest, is at the heart of ecological leadership – the interrelationships between strategic aims may, in many circumstances, be multi-directional.

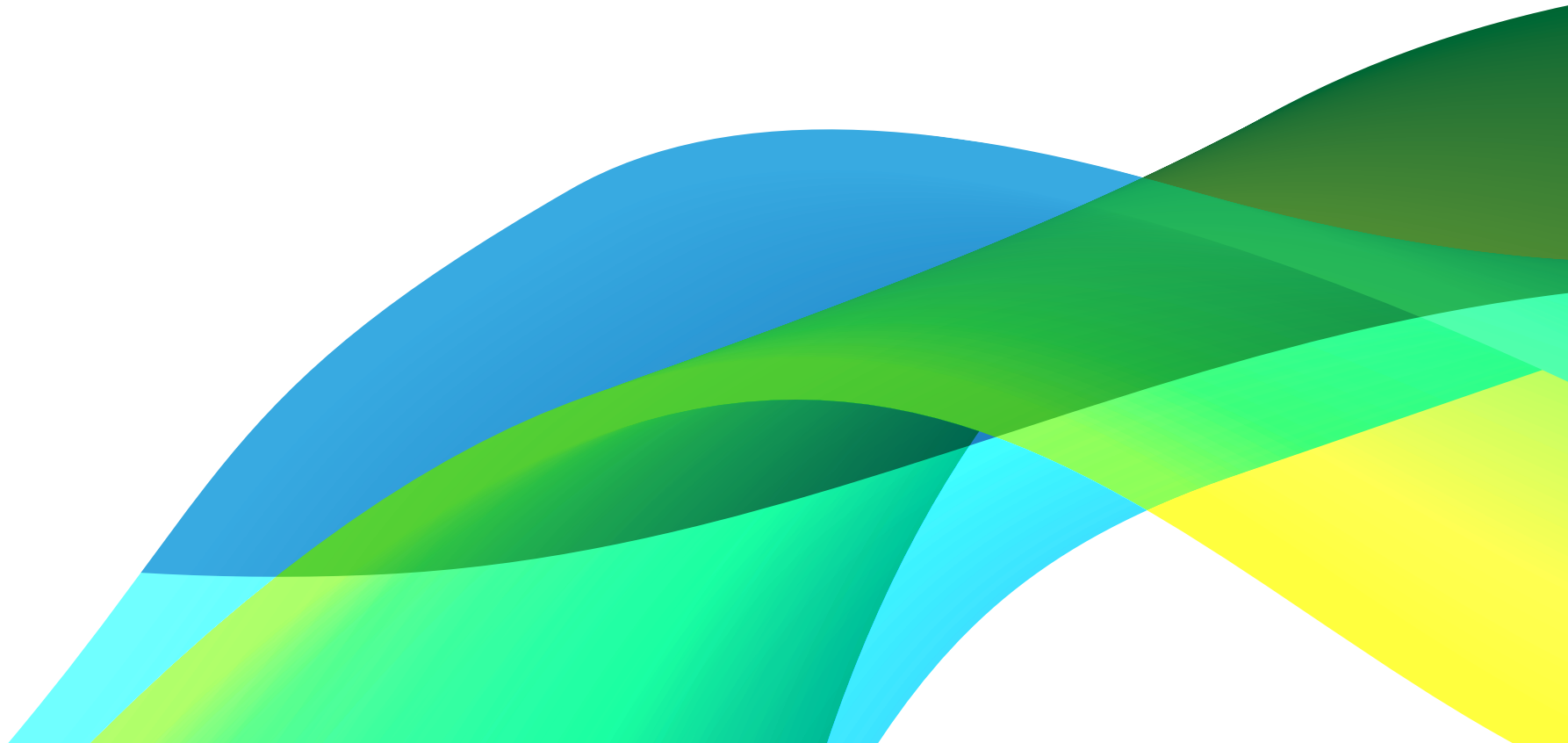


Super Slow Way. Local Colour at Gatty Park, Accrington with artist Claire Wellesley-Smith.
Photo: Huckleberry Films

Conclusion: Holding open the future

5

“You are trying to juggle being part of a massive national bureaucracy, really, and working at grassroots level at the same time. So, how do you marry, you know, those two kinds of almost competing directions?” – CPP director



5.1 Cultural ecology and the state

CPP, an action research project that breaks new ground in how Arts Council England supports culture, raises fundamental questions of cultural politics. In recent times, notions of *cultural democracy* – a term particularly associated with the UK community arts movement during the 1970s and ‘80s – have been renewed. A series of events, manifestos, reports, and articles – including some that we authored – have explored what cultural democracy might look like in the twenty-first century. A central thread running through the many different historical and contemporary accounts of cultural democracy, is that each is concerned with who gets to make culture, (or, who controls the ‘means of cultural production’). Typically, the idea of cultural democracy is presented in opposition to a narrower conception, ‘the democratisation of culture’, which focuses on access to particular (state-supported) cultural forms.

The recent interest in ideas of cultural democracy needs to be understood as part of a wider set of conversations about the role of the *state* in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, and the subsequent years of austerity. As Neal Lawson of Compass⁶⁰ has put it: after the state bureaucracy (of the post-war consensus) and the market (of neo-liberalism), what comes next as the way to build a good society?⁶¹ When it comes to culture,

how can we think beyond the paternalism of state-sponsored, top-down cultural ‘provision’, and, on the other hand, the clear dangers of leaving culture (solely) to the market? In *Power Up*, Chrissie Tiller notes that “There are those who question if any ‘top-down’ initiative can bring about real change.”⁶² One of the reasons notions of cultural ecology are helpful, we suggest, is the alternatives they offer beyond the dichotomy of the top-down state and the neo-liberal market.⁶³

Part of what it means to take an ecological approach is to recognise that there is a *plethora of cultural creativity* – much of which has little direct connection to state funding agencies. A five-year AHRC research project, based at the University of Manchester, has documented this ‘everyday participation’ extensively, in locations across the UK.⁶⁴ Recognising the plethora of cultural creativity is an essential corrective to the ‘deficit model’⁶⁵ presumption that it is where the state chooses to fund that ‘cultural value’⁶⁶ is located.

Alert to the richness of ‘everyday’ culture, ecological approaches have the potential to point towards a future in which the state simply withdraws from involvement in culture. A kind of Big Society vision of voluntarism and the market. However, there are several strong reasons to reject and resist such a possibility.

⁶⁰ <http://www.compassonline.org.uk/>

⁶¹ Neal Lawson. (2010). Beyond Bureaucracy and the Market. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/neal-lawson/relevance-of-zygmunt-bauman>

⁶² Chrissie Tiller. (2017). p.12.

⁶³ In this context, it is useful to consider Lambert Zuidervaart’s analysis, which, in addition to ‘public’ and ‘private’, emphasises the crucial contributions the arts make to ‘civil society’ in terms of ‘democratic communication and a social economy’. Lambert Zuidervaart. (2011). *Art in Public. Politics, Economics, and a Democratic Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁴ <http://www.everydayparticipation.org/>

⁶⁵ See Andrew Miles and Alice Sullivan. (2012). ‘Understanding Participation in Culture and Sport: Mixing Methods, Reordering Knowledges’. *Cultural Trends*, 21(4): 311–324; Leila Jancovich and Franco Bianchini. (2013). ‘Problematising Participation’. *Cultural Trends*, 22(2): 63–66. David Stevenson, Gitte Balling, and Nanna Kann-Rasmussen. (2017). ‘Cultural Participation in Europe: Shared Problem or Shared Problematisation?’ *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23 (1).

⁶⁶ For the most authoritative and extensive survey of perspectives on ‘cultural value’, see Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska (2016). *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture*. The AHRC Cultural Value Project. Swindon: AHRC. <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/publications/cultural-value-project-final-report/>

As with many areas of socio-economic life, when it comes to ‘culture’, the unregulated market is a very poor instrument of social justice. One of the potential benefits of the language of cultural ecology is that it offers a way to communicate the plurality of culture (and of cultural value), whilst highlighting that the many varieties of culture are part of an interconnected system. Moreover, cultural eco-systems can never be ‘outside’ of the domain of public policy. Culture, after all, is comprised of *all* those value-producing or value-laden phenomena that are reproduced and/or transformed through people’s creativity in giving form to their experiences (and this includes a host of institutions and structures that are normally associated with the ‘economic’, the ‘political’, or the ‘social’).

As our research shows, there are very many aspects of the cultural ecology that are, *prima facie*, the domain of ‘other’ government departments: including health, housing, transport, and education, to name just four. An ecological perspective shows that the state is necessarily involved in culture. The question is, in exactly what ways *should* it be?

5.2 Cultural capability

How can we judge what should be the role of the state in culture, and in cultural eco-systems? This is both a practical and a normative question (involving judgements of value). In response to the practical question, our research with CPP indicates specific ways in which public resources can play an important part in enabling cultural eco-systems to flourish, including supporting the labour-intensive work of building networks, relationships and trust. We also suggest, however, that *what works, for whom, under what circumstances*⁶⁷ is likely to vary considerably between different eco-systems.



HOME Slough's Streets Alive 2018 with Cardboardia. Photo: David Blood Photography

In this report we have also outlined a wide range of strategic aims that our research participants are working towards, with CPP Places often combining more than one of these aims at the same time. What resources are needed, and whether the state should be providing these, is, of course, inseparable from the question of what a programme or policy is trying to achieve. In this context, we make the case for the *capabilities approach* (CA): a set of ideas (and an underlying normative project) that we suggest has the potential to be extremely helpful in clarifying and assessing the multiple, overlapping aims of cultural policy, and of programmes such as CPP.

⁶⁷ Ray Pawson and Nick Tilley. (1997). *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage.

The CA was first developed by the Indian economist Amartya Sen during the 1980s, as an intervention in development economics.⁶⁸ The CA presents an alternative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the primary indicator against which to judge whether the prosperity of a country and its people is increasing. Instead of focusing on GDP, which, of course, can increase whilst leaving (and producing) great inequalities and injustices, the CA asks: what can people do? What kinds of lives can they live? ‘Capabilities’ are the *substantive freedoms* to do and be what we have reason to value, and at the centre of the CA is a commitment to these substantive freedoms – their presence or absence – as the key indicators against which to judge if people’s lives are improving, if public policy is working, and whether a state is treating its people justly.⁶⁹

We have discussed these ideas in more detail elsewhere.⁷⁰ Here, we want to highlight that the CA offers a way to combine a commitment to pluralism – that there are many ways to live a ‘good life’, and the state should not prescribe what a good life consists of – with a commitment to the role of the state in ensuring the conditions necessary for meaningful choice over how to live. This may involve, for example, ensuring access to clean water, health care and education, as well as to ensure political rights. But it also involves the state addressing the kinds of opportunities people have (or don’t have) to co-create culture.

In Chapter 3, this report documented the variety of views CPP directors (and other CPP team members) hold regarding what they are seeking ultimately to achieve. In many cases, there is not only a commitment to

supporting people’s access to existing cultural ‘provision’, but to supporting people to *make* culture, to have greater voice, as well as to community development and social change. At the same time, we did not speak to anyone who actively called for the state to simply get out of the way and stop supporting culture. Our work here and elsewhere convinces us that the CA is a very promising framework with which to think through the possibilities for a coherent commitment to both human freedom and the responsibility of the state: including, specifically, in relation to the substantive freedom to (co-)create culture. What we refer to as *cultural capability*.⁷¹

Moreover, in the specific context of this report, it is important to recognise that the CA provides particularly useful tools with which to understand the potential value of *ecological* perspectives. With its insistence that in order to effectively evaluate public policies (and states) we need *more information* – significantly expanding the indicators of human wellbeing – the CA is strongly resonant with ecological approaches. Both the CA and ecological perspectives draw attention to *the breadth and diversity of conditions* that enable and constrain human flourishing.

Researchers working with the CA are very well aware of the need not just for individual opportunities to be enabled, but also for the social conditions of *solidarity* that make this possible.⁷² To this end, we feel that an overtly ‘ecological’ approach, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, openness and emergence, could very generatively build on the CA. But we also suggest that our research with CPP can speak back to the CA: encouraging it to take still greater account of (cultural) relationality – including related

⁶⁸ Amartya Sen. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁹ Martha Nussbaum, particularly, has developed the capabilities approach as a framework with which to assess the justice of states. See Martha Nussbaum. (2011) *Creating Capabilities*. The Human Development Approach. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Gross and Nick Wilson. (2018) ‘Cultural Democracy: An Ecological and Capabilities Approach’. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*.

⁷¹ Gross and Wilson. (2018). Wilson and Gross. (2017). Wilson, Gross and Bull. (2017).

⁷² See, for example, Graciela Tonon (ed.) (2018). “Special Issue on Communities and Capabilities.” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*. Routledge.

issues, such as trust, discussed in this report – as a vital condition of human flourishing. In other words, we are not only suggesting that a programme like CPP should ‘use’ the CA, but that it could constitute an important action research site for exploring just how a capabilities approach can be understood, implemented and developed.

5.3 Ecological governance

Both within and beyond CPP, future exploration of ecological approaches to cultural policy and cultural management would benefit from drawing upon the CA, as part of the conceptual tool box. Having said this, it is important to emphasise that the CA’s commitment to pluralism cannot be used to simply smooth over the many tensions and uncertainties that face the development of ecological approaches to cultural policy and practice. We need to recognise the inevitability of disagreement, competition and conflict.⁷³

As documented in Chapter 3, CPP projects often involve competing aims, and working ecologically will not be straight-forward, harmonious or easy. It will be challenging in many ways. Our research indicates what some of these challenges are. Doing this kind of work is the stuff of politics – and the *politics of place*, in particular. The task of realising cultural democracy requires facing up to all the ways that cultural freedoms (and powers) are interconnected with broader questions of social (in)justice and inequality.

We have written elsewhere that cultural democracy needs to be understood, in part, as a system of cultural governance.⁷⁴ Within CPP, a number of approaches to cultural governance and decision-making are being tried

and tested. How these might be developed into ‘ecological approaches’ to cultural governance is an important question for further discussion. This report indicates that, as a priority, whatever form such governance arrangements may take, they should consider their capacities for ‘holding open’ the space of culture-making within the area.

One CPP director describes the experience of being constantly surprised within her work. “Surprise is just the normal!” The capacity to expect (and encourage) the unexpected⁷⁵ may be a key part of the responsibilities – and skills-set – of those with leadership, decision-making and oversight roles within the (ecological) cultural governance structures of the future.

Could a cultural eco-system ‘flourish’ whilst being *undemocratic* in its governance? We hypothesise that cultural eco-systems are likely to be at their most interconnected, heterogeneous and abundant when conditions are maximally conducive to a plurality of voices being heard and having power: not only the power of self-expression, but of decision-making. For this to be actualised, cultural governance needs to ‘hold open’ spaces for culture-making – leading to new, possibly unexpected futures.

This includes holding open the emergence of new *(inter)relationships*. Such relationships are central to what the cultural eco-system is. In this regard, Creative People and Places is (potentially) *about* ‘open structures and spaces’. Further research should explore what varieties of ecological governance structures, and what types of necessarily open ‘caring’ behaviours and practices,⁷⁶ are required to promote and support this type of collective and visionary endeavour.

⁷³ Chrissie Tiller emphasises this, too. Power Up. (2017). p.39.

⁷⁴ Gross and Wilson. (2018). p. 12.

⁷⁵ Which we touch upon in our research in Harrow. Wilson and Gross. (2017).

⁷⁶ The theme of caring (for cultural freedom) is explored further in Wilson and Gross. (2017).



Heart of Glass. The St Helens Day Citizens' Parade, June 2018. Performance artists Eggs Collective led a procession through St Helens town centre in celebration of the town's unsung heroes. Photo: Stephen King

In whichever ways such structures develop, one of the responsibilities of leaders within cultural eco-systems will be to enable people to recognise themselves as *part of* a cultural eco-system. This collective self-recognition, in itself, extends people's cultural capabilities, by making visible a greater range of resources, connections and opportunities. For people to recognise themselves as part of a cultural eco-system, as such, represents a powerful part of what CPP and other place-based programmes can enable. This is a key mechanism of holding open the space in which culture can be made pluralistically, but with awareness of our mutual dependencies.

5.4 The language of the future

We began this report by emphasising that concepts matter; language matters. What is the language with which we should talk about the future? The leader of one place-based cultural programme told us that “‘legacy’ is not quite the right word, but it is about that long-term thinking”. Are people already actively using the language of cultural ecology within CPP? Some directors are. One, for example, explains that enabling a cultural eco-system to flourish is “what we exist to do”, whilst the team at Creative Scene is actively employing ecological ideas within their future planning. However, there is likely to be a spectrum of opinion as to how attractive this terminology is. The leader of another place-based cultural programme indicated mixed feelings about the language of cultural ecology:

I think it's really good for thinking about the cultural sector in place, I genuinely do. It makes it clear that everything is dependent upon everything else. It makes it clear that [...the] eco-system doesn't just depend on the 'cultural sector'. [...] You need to think about some of those understated relationships, or where there's not direct funding relationships. This really, really helps [...] an organisation like the Arts Council conceive of its role in place, and also arts organisations understand their place within a place, and how they should be operating. [...] I know why we use 'ecology' and 'eco-systems'. However, it sometimes seems so woolly as to not be able to land or have a purchase with conversations that you need to have. However, it's a really good descriptor. At the other end of the scale you've got 'infrastructure' which is less woolly, lands better, but is a terrible descriptor, and I think the language doesn't help. 'Infrastructure' and 'equality' [together]: it doesn't work for me. Sometimes that's tactical and practical. So, if I am [...] going in to talk to some quite senior officials in [government] about a lot of these agendas, if we start wittering on about

ecologies they're going to [say], you know, "We want to get some purchase in the industrial strategy here." They're going to think, "What are these idiots talking about?" But by the same token, if I start talking about infrastructure within the context of a place, people think you're just talking about buildings, and you miss all the questions about freelancers, everyday participation, all the other stuff that's going on. I think one of the problems we've got is the language doesn't work and I don't have an answer to that yet. It might just be, as a sector, we've just got to get better at a 'horses for courses' language thing here.

We hope this report helps to clarify precisely how the language of cultural ecology is useful. This includes the ways in which ecological perspectives can deepen understanding of the challenges and opportunities for CPP (and other place-based programmes) to affect *systemic* change. We invite readers to take up these discussions, including the question: on what occasions is it helpful to employ the terminology of *cultural ecology*, and when do alternative vocabularies – also able to describe 'the system' – need to be found? It is in part through our use of language, after all, that we *hold open the future* for each other.



Museums Northumberland bait. Colour to the Grey, Art Activism and Wellbeing exhibition in Blyth led by young people. Photo: Jason Thompson

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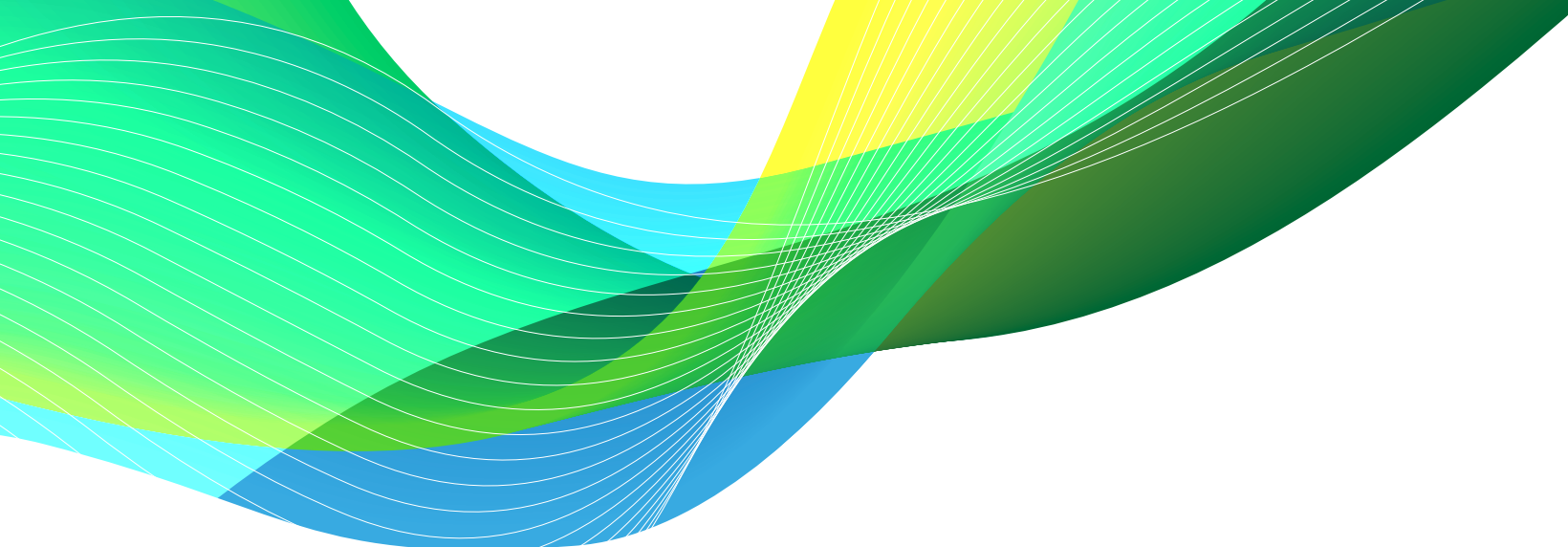
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⁷⁷ <https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/>

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