

**Public libraries, arts and cultural policy in the UK**

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Article Title Page

Title: Public libraries, arts and cultural policy in the UK

Structured Abstract:

Purpose:

Public libraries in the UK are increasingly expected to provide arts activities and events as part of their usual operations. This paper summarizes recent policy trends in this direction from both the perspective of libraries' and the arts sector. A touring theatre project aimed at children and families is discussed in further detail to examine some of the outcomes of these policies.

Design/Methodology/Approach:

The paper will present a brief history of policy developments and debate in this area. Mixed method findings from the research element of 'Among Ideal Friends' (AIF) will be discussed, having used surveys and interviews with audiences and librarians, geodemographic profiling, box office records and library card data.

Findings:

Public funding across both libraries and the arts has decreased at a national and local level, though both sectors are encouraged to work together to share expertise and community knowledge. Costs and benefits of the project are presented and while the holistic view is broadly positive, the return to any specific agency or stakeholder group less certain.

Practical implications:

Public libraries can see the results and challenges of a successful touring theatre project for consideration in their own activity planning, especially those related to families and younger users.

Social implications:

Libraries and Arts organisations have different priorities in regards to these areas. Though co-operative, the situation is not without tension. The topic is illustrative of some wider debates around cultural value, participation and 'cultural democracy'.

Originality/value:

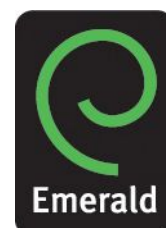
This paper offers a timely discussion of cultural policy in relation to libraries, eg: The Society of Chief Librarians 'Universal Cultural Offer' (October 2017).

Keywords: Public libraries, Evaluation, Arts, Culture, United Kingdom, Children, Theatre, Performance

Article Classification: Research paper

For internal production use only

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Library Management

Introduction

Public libraries have always offered activities other than book loans and one recent trend in the UK has been in the emphasis of a wider 'cultural offer', typically oriented around the provision of arts activities and events. Commonly cited reasons for this are the general pressures on public funding and changing public needs and perceptions of libraries. Collaborations with other cultural sector organisations seem to have increased.

This paper gives some policy background and a case study of one project in the UK, delivered by The Spark Arts for Children (The Spark) in association with a regional network of library authorities. The Spark is a registered charity, founded in Leicester in 2003, originally delivering a two week summer arts festival before growing to encompass other projects. They have programmed individual events in Leicester libraries since 2008, leading to a 2013 project ('Tree Child') that toured Leicester libraries and helped establish ongoing artist-in-residence projects. In 2016, with the support of a number of surrounding library authorities in the East Midlands (Leicestershire, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire and Rutland) The Spark received Arts Council England (ACE) Strategic Touring Funding in 2016 for 'Among Ideal Friends' (AIF). The project has been seen as successful, and funding was extended for a further 3 years (2018-2021). The project was accompanied by a research and evaluation aspect for which the author was commissioned.

Methodology

The methodological approach was in line with what Flyvbjerg has called Phronetic social science: *"the primary purpose of phronetic social science is not to develop theory, but to contribute to society's practical rationality in elucidating where we are, where we want to go and what is desirable according to diverse sets of values and interests."* (Flyvbjerg, 2009).

At the outset, it was anticipated that audience surveys and interviews would be key methodologies, though box office records, interviews with library staff, a literature review and library card data all also emerged as fruitful areas of investigation. This can also be described as a mixed method approach, though a hierarchy of evidence arguably remains with more quantitative approaches often taking priority; given their relatively low resource requirements, broad scope of both audiences and venues, comparative familiarity among the partners and perceived relevance and transferability to other regions. The research data was collected throughout the project and used for interim and final reporting to project and funding partners. Key data is re-examined here and further contextualised within recent policy developments with the aim of synthesising a fresh understanding of the potential

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3 benefits and pitfalls this type of collaboration can generate. More information is given on the
4 specifics of each method in the findings sections.
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7 **Literature review**

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9 Restructuring, budget cuts, increasing and changing public expectations are familiar themes
10 in many corners of the public sector and have been for some time. For example, in the
11 1990s, despite one poll ranking 'visiting a local library' as the nation's fifth most popular
12 pastime, they nevertheless felt the dual pressures of increasing demand and reduced
13 funding (Makin & Craven, 1999). It seems that more nebulous, 'softer' functions around
14 leisure and culture are often the most likely to be amalgamated or rationalized into other
15 departments during restructuring. These processes, though unpredictable (Asser, 1994)
16 cannot always be said to be unnecessary or unwanted (Asser, 1993) and recent changes
17 could be viewed as a continuation of libraries' original emergence around broad themes of
18 community development.
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26 Whether a broadening mission is any kind of net positive is very much up for debate.
27 Declines in public library usage cannot be satisfactorily addressed solely by simplistic
28 arguments around reduced funding. Coates robustly argues that libraries have been more
29 significantly affected by a long-term dilution of their core mission and appeal (Coates, 2018).
30 Possibly the most dramatic trend recently is that of facilities being transferred to charitable
31 trusts, community-run or voluntary-led basis, often with the implied or actual alternative of
32 being closed entirely. Though not a comprehensive survey of the issue, it could be that a
33 greater focus on arts activities and events is one area where community-run libraries might
34 further differentiate themselves; whether this is deliberately planned or otherwise (Smith,
35 2018). Other research has interrogated the geography and 'attractiveness' (services offered,
36 proximity of other spaces) of both council-run and volunteer-run libraries. This suggested
37 that while some of the smallest and least used libraries in this particular area were volunteer-
38 run, other factors (opening hours, user groups, transport links) were more significant in terms
39 of overall usage across libraries of all sizes (Delrieu & Gibson, 2017). Ownership of libraries
40 and arts in libraries are two quite different themes, though both point to significantly
41 changing perceptions and relationships with communities.
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52 Parallels can be seen in other, long-running (even historic) debates around the
53 "convergence" of museums, libraries, galleries and archives. There is clearly a heightened
54 interest in collaborations across the cultural sector, though there is insufficient empirical
55 research around how these work in practice and whether the risk and investment is
56 worthwhile (Warren & Matthews, 2018). The role of the arts in contemporary library services
57 is an emerging area, though at least one textbook on the topic exists (Smallwood, 2014).
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3 The role of performing arts, specifically, is even more of a niche area. In the UK there have
4 been a variety of policy documents and toolkits (Williams, 2017) (Loud in Libraries CIC,
5 2019) (Society of Chief Librarians, 2017) but these are predominately broad, 'how-to' type
6 guides. There remains space for more detailed overviews and critical perspectives. This
7 paper aims to contribute to this gap in the literature and we will first illustrate the
8 convergence across separate policy domains of libraries and the arts.
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13 **Library policy**

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16 In times of austerity, libraries and other cultural provisions are viewed as relatively soft
17 targets for public funding cuts. Local authorities in the UK have a statutory responsibility to
18 provide 'a comprehensive and efficient library service' and this legal definition was tested in
19 1991 in Derbyshire and in 2009 in the Wirral, where library closures were being planned.
20 These are the only two cases to date in England where the Secretary of State has exercised
21 powers for an independent inquiry to be carried out, under the Public Libraries and Museums
22 Act 1964.
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28 In 2010, with the ambition of reducing the public deficit, the Conservative & Liberal Democrat
29 coalition government announced a review of public bodies, sometimes referred to as the
30 'Bonfire of the QUANGOs' (Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisations). Most
31 relevant here was the closure of the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA,
32 established 1931) and the Advisory Council on Libraries (ACL, established 1964). The
33 museums and libraries activity of the MLA were then transferred to Arts Council England
34 (ACE) while the ACL was not replaced. In the case of the MLA, justification was made on the
35 basis that its remit could, largely, be delivered by other bodies, while the ACL was relatively
36 inactive at this point. As a further backdrop, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport
37 (DCMS) total budget was cut by 24% between 2011-12 and 2014-15, despite nearly
38 doubling in 2012 due to the delivery of the London Olympics (National Audit Office, 2016).
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46 The Culture, Media and Sport Committee reported on Library Closures in 2012-13, with
47 CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) statistics quoting yearly
48 declines in visits (-2%) and loans (-3%) albeit in the context of reduced budgets (-6%) and
49 stock acquisition (-14%) (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2012).
50 The committee noted that while campaigning was vocal, sometimes the public focus could
51 be centre on saving specific buildings, rather than other important areas of spending such as
52 staff, stock and mobile libraries. By 2016, DCMS statistics state that 34% of adults had used
53 a public library (at least once) in the 12 months prior to being interviewed, which was down
54 from 48% in 2005/6. Among adults whose library use had increased, the most common
55 reason given was in encouraging a child to read (Department for Culture, Media and Sport,
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3 2016). The Taking Part Annual Child report for 2015/16 showed that 66% of children aged
4 between 5-15 visited a library in the last 12 months, which was a decrease from 75% in
5 2008/09 (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2016).
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9 A reduced budget alone might solely mean delivering less of the same, but libraries are also
10 experiencing wider shifts in priorities and underlying purposes. The Sieghart report, or
11 'Independent Library Report for England' was published in 2014 (Department for Culture,
12 Media and Sport, 2014). While some appreciated the attempt to move the debate forward,
13 others responded that: "...one way of viewing the report is to admire the Machiavellianism of
14 people working out what is needed and couching it in terms that are acceptable to the
15 decision makers, tiptoeing around the reality of dire budgets and an increasingly atomised
16 and demoralised service" (Anstice, 2014).
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22 One impact was the establishment of the Libraries Taskforce, whose report 'Libraries
23 Deliver' outlined a national strategy for libraries from 2016-2021 (Libraries Taskforce, 2016).
24 This was also criticized for failing to address falling staff numbers, poor quality buildings and
25 book stocks, despite agreement around some wider trends. The report itself makes concrete
26 the kind of assumptions implicit in the Sieghart report: "*Library budgets will continue to be*
27 *constrained*" and "*Competition will come from technology, entertainment and information*
28 *services*". Around this time, The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) published a trio of national
29 policy papers that outlined the 'universal offers' that a contemporary library service could be
30 expected to offer. In 2013, this covered four areas: Reading, Information, Digital and Health.
31 In 2015, a Learning offer was added, followed by a Cultural offer in October 2017 (Society of
32 Chief Librarians, 2013, 2015, 2017).
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40 While official bodies have responded within a tight framework, further opposition to cuts
41 came from campaigning groups, specifically The Library Campaign. Analysis of Chartered
42 Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) data showed that total expenditure on
43 libraries was previously rising from 2000/01 to 2008/9 (Coates, 2015). Other surveys have
44 suggested that the quality of book collections remained a principle reason for public library
45 visits. International comparisons with Australia and the US also show that circulations and
46 visits have seen far less of a decline than the UK, over a 20 year period (Coates, 2017).
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52 This rapid flurry of national policy activity in the last decade shows some optimism relating to
53 new opportunities, purposes and partnerships, albeit clearly accompanied by the grey clouds
54 of funding pressures and uncertain futures. The final Cultural Offer report from SCL (2017)
55 states that 94% of libraries surveyed provide space for cultural activities and over 80%
56 provide cultural activities at least monthly or quarterly. Over 80% organised events that were
57 related to books (authors talks/workshops) while over 60% organised arts events
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3 (performance, concerts, film). However, this survey was only based on responses by 102 out
4 of 177 library services, so it is largely unknown what the remaining 42% provide. We might
5 assume that those with limited interest or resources would also be the least likely to respond.
6 Some cultural activities, as defined here, might not typically be considered as 'arts' activities
7 by arts funders (board games, group reading, arts and crafts). Libraries are expected to be
8 venues for and organisers of arts experiences and events. How much of this ambition is
9 reflected, and in what specific forms, is likely to vary greatly across authorities.
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14 **Arts and cultural policy**

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17 Despite the national direction of cultural policy coming from DCMS, Arts Council England
18 (ACE) and the considerable influence of London in general, local authorities are often
19 significant funders of much of the cultural sector. Harvey summarizes the national balance
20 as £700 million from the Arts Council, £450 million to National Museums and a collective
21 £1.1 billion from Local Authorities (Harvey, 2016). At the time of the report, between 2009/10
22 and 2014/15, and factoring in population growth, local authority spending on arts and culture
23 had reduced by 23% per head.
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29 Brownlee challenges the assumption that local authorities are the largest funder of the arts
30 (Brownlee, 2016). Amongst other things, the relevant budget data at a local authority level
31 often conflates arts, museums, libraries, open spaces, sport and recreation facilities.
32 Funding for an arts project could easily be coded under other headings, such as community
33 or youth work. Regardless, the conclusions are similar to Harvey, with a decline of 35%
34 culture funding per head between 2009/10 and 2014/15. Libraries may have taken the brunt
35 of these cuts, but remain a not insignificant proportion of total spending compared to arts,
36 museums and galleries. If libraries can be described as "*frontline cultural infrastructure*"
37 (Fletcher, 2017) how are artists engage with them?
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45 ACE's increased involvement with libraries as a result of the loss of the MLA has opened up
46 some new opportunities, campaigners are keen to point out that the relative value of the new
47 funds available through ACE (the £4m Innovation fund in 2016, £1.6m to National Portfolio
48 library organisations in 2017) are entirely dwarfed by the scale of local authority cuts.
49 Struggling authorities are presumably less likely to be able to access additional arts funding.
50 In relation to this, ACE has needed to reiterate that: "*Our funding is not in any way intended*
51 *to replace cuts in local authority library services.*" (Kean, 2017).
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57 A number of local authorities have cut culture funding entirely, or transferred responsibility to
58 an independent charitable body. One entire local authority (Northamptonshire) has recently
59 gone bankrupt (Jenkins, 2018). Close to half of local authorities have no dedicated arts
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3 officer or arts service (Hill, 2017) and National estimates suggest a further reduction of 2.2%
4 from 2017-18 to 2018-19 in local authority culture budgets (Romer, 2018). Both
5 Northamptonshire and East Sussex have announced that they are aiming to provide only the
6 legal minimum of library service; a legal minimum which is arguably not particularly well
7 defined or likely to be challenged by central government (Anstice, 2018).
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11 ACE commissioned a three-phase review, 'Envisioning the library of the future' to provide
12 insight into future challenges over the next 10 years across wide-ranging socio-economic
13 and technological changes. It argued that despite substantial challenges, the national picture
14 of decline did not reflect the reality of those who were running 'libraries of the future' in the
15 here and now (Arts Council England, 2016). ACE also commissioned the Audience Agency
16 to use arts based segmentation on a selection of data from participating library authorities.
17 This segmentation classes individuals into high, medium or low engagement with regards to
18 their tendency to attend various arts events. The library segmentation found that 38% of
19 library visitors would be classed as low engagement compared to 18% of audiences at arts
20 events (The Audience Agency, 2017). This last point is particularly relevant to ACE as it
21 faces ongoing scrutiny over the general socio-economic composition of its main beneficiaries
22 and audiences (Belfiore, 2014).
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31 Wider cultural policy debates have emphasised the value of 'everyday' cultural experiences;
32 the Arts and Humanities Research Council Cultural Value Project (2013-2016) and the
33 Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value (2013-2015). This seeks to diverge
34 from the largely instrumental basis for existing policy, from the reformist acts of the Victorian
35 era, to more recent emphasis on social cohesion, educational benefits and economic impact.
36 Modern cultural policy continues to take a democratizing, but predominately deficit-
37 orientated approach, underpinned by an Arnoldian view of culture as a pursuit of the 'best
38 that has been thought and said'. 'Cultural democracy' is proposed by some as an alternative
39 paradigm.
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47 A capabilities approach is placed at the core of the argument in 'Towards Cultural
48 Democracy' (Wilson et al, 2017). This aims to change the policy focus to one of enabling
49 individual freedoms rather than delivering to institutionally defined deficits. This re-orientation
50 would require a huge shift across the entire government and cultural sector, such that the
51 authors readily admit they would not quite know what cultural democracy would entail if it
52 emerged overnight. The Movement for Cultural Democracy and others have criticized uses
53 of the term by the perceived establishment and the negation of more radical underlying
54 principles (Hadley & Belfiore, 2018).
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An area around which arts organisations, libraries and schools have previously found grounds for co-operation is in reaching children, young people and families. At the national level, DCMS statistics show that in 2015/16, 98% of children have engaged in the arts in the last 12 months and 66% have visited a library. 'Engagement in the arts' is a broad definition, but within this, it can be seen that only 31% of 5-10 year olds have engaged in 'theatre and drama activities' specifically, down from 47% in 2008-9 (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2016). The 'quality' of arts experiences is a hotly contested topic. The National Foundation for Educational Research was commissioned by ACE to investigate principles of "*quality in arts and culture, by with and for children and young people.*" (Lord, 2012) leading to a pilot of seven 'quality principles' among 51 lead organisations and over 9,350 children and young people (Sharp & Lee, 2015). Amongst others, the Reading Agency annual campaign, the 'Summer Reading Challenge' reflects the Quality Principles in their participation reports (The Reading Agency, 2015). The 'Family Arts Campaign' also emerged as a response to the assumption that arts for children and families was often not of sufficient 'quality'. As well as some excellent work, the term 'Family arts' was also seen to encompass: "*...tokenistic face-painting and many hours of tedious workshops that have marginal interest for children and absolutely none for accompanying adults.*" (Rose et al, 2015). The specific overlap of cultural education and literacy is too detailed to cover, but these are both areas in which interventions such as Among Ideal Friends have found further relevance, particularly following the Henley Review of Cultural Education (Henley, 2012). Evidently the national picture is challenging for both arts organizations and libraries, yet there are motivations on both sides to collaborate.

Findings

Key findings from the project, Among Ideal Friends, will now be presented under subheadings that refer to the various methodologies employed.

Box office records

Number of performances	151
Number of libraries	54
Number of seasons	5
Total audience	7961 (5827 children, 2134 adults)
Average attendance at a performance	53
Median capacity of a library venue	60
Total capacity sold	78%

Box office records were kept at individual libraries and reported back to The Spark at the end of each season. Each season presented a different performance. Booking and payment

procedures varied from region to region, with some able to book and pay online, and others only being able to pay at the venue. It was noted that the specific capacities of individual venues could be easily influenced by various factors, and around 1 in 4 shows sold out or sold over their originally stated capacity. Underestimating the original capacity could lead to a venue seeming to sell out very easily, conversely overestimating the capacity could give a more pessimistic view. Some librarians reported that capacity was limited more by availability of appropriate seating than by floor space or by any legal limits of their building.

Over the duration of the project, it was hoped that libraries that received multiple shows would see an increasing audience as they became more familiar and proficient with selling the shows to their users.

It was found that 55% of libraries who received 2 or more seasons and 70% of those receiving 4 or more seasons saw either a stable ($\pm 5\%$) or increasing ($>5\%$) box office. Despite some inaccuracies, this presented a relatively positive picture, one that was reflected in interviews and surveys with library staff, although it might show a tendency to programme further shows into venues that were already doing well. From audience surveys, we can also observe that in Season 1, 15% of the audience stated they had only found out about the show on the day of performance, whereas by Season 4 and 5, this had reduced to 6%, perhaps indicating an increased likelihood of booking in advance.

Audience surveys

Total surveys completed by adults	1364 (64% of adults)
Children aged 4-6	50%
Children aged 4-8	75%
Adults that did not have library cards	7%
Children that did not have library cards	11%
Have not seen theatre with their child before	18%
Season 1: Have seen theatre in a library before	23%
Season 5: Have seen theatre in a library before	38%

Adults at shows were provided with a paper questionnaire for self-completion after the performance. This was kept to one side of A4 paper with around 10 questions, some of which were open-ended. Some questions were altered between seasons to investigate new topics or alter the phrasing of questions. The typical (median) adult attended with 2 children. In city authorities, it was more likely (27%) that adults had never seen a theatre performance before with their child, than in the county authorities (11%). Examining the distances travelled, we also found that an average of 40% of audiences were not attending the library nearest to their home address, so there is a degree of appetite to travel for a special event.

Audience postcodes were collected and analysed according to the Audience Agency 'Audience Finder' arts-based segmentation method. This is based on a variety of national statistics such as the Taking Part survey and market research data from Experian.

Sample	% defined as Low arts engagement
Project: Among Ideal Friends	38%
Region: East Midlands	37%
National Libraries estimate	38%

The proportion of the audience that could be classified as 'low engagement' was essentially identical to both the East Midlands population as a whole (37%) and to the national estimate for libraries (38%) based on 1.4m users from 14 library authorities. Finally, as a measure of satisfaction, the 'Net Promoter Score' approach was used, receiving an overall rating of 82%, compared to a national average for arts for children and young people of 76%. The Net Promoter Score has also seen some use in other libraries literature (Laine & M, 2019).

Librarian interviews

Four telephone and two in-person group interviews were conducted with senior library managers in each authority to discuss their experiences (a total of 13 people). These took place between Season 2 and 3 of the project. One of the authorities covered (Nottinghamshire) is a charitable Community Benefit Society, (Inspire) while the others remained in direct local authority control. Despite Inspire having a wider 'culture and learning' remit, they noted that libraries remained one of the largest responsibilities. One of the city authorities (Leicester) had recently merged libraries as a separate department into 'Neighbourhood services' and all the authorities noted the trend towards libraries being absorbed into other agendas and departments. Very few were responsible for libraries that had been transferred to private sector or voluntary control, it seemed more likely that smaller, rural (or both) were more likely to be transferred to voluntary control and that more urban libraries were more likely to be merged into buildings.

Libraries responded positively to some of the challenges involved with promoting and presenting a live performance. Managers felt confident that the key target audience for these shows, children, would already in many cases feel excited about any trip to the library, so special events could be an even stronger draw. Few practical or technical concerns were experienced, isolated cases where the amount of seating available was a problem or where a co-located library experienced some scheduling issues. In some cases it was difficult to ensure complete silence for a performance. Overall, there were few if any criticisms of the quality of the performances, managers and audiences each seemed to appreciate the diversity of shows that were on offer. Workshops for staff were also held in between seasons

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3 to build confidence around the artistic content of the work itself and how to promote and sell
4 to audiences. Some managers commented that with restricted budgets, they felt it more
5 effective to deliver fewer, higher quality arts activities rather than spread resources too thinly.
6 In this respect, the input and expertise of a partner like The Spark was invaluable to source,
7 identify and help develop appropriate work.
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12 Libraries' relationships with schools was a key topic and the show in Season 2 was
13 specifically designed for selling to school groups. Both schools and libraries were felt to want
14 to do more of this type of activity, though resources, staff or volunteer support were all
15 barriers to varying degrees. There was a degree of tension around where activities would
16 take place, with managers generally preferring to encourage schools to visit libraries rather
17 than taking activities or resources to schools. Partly this was a resource issue but it was also
18 thought to help build the habit of visiting the library more regularly, outside of school. The
19 prices for school groups (£2-3 per student) were broadly affordable and compared very well
20 to other extra-curricular visits. The addition of a fee also helped secure attendance, whereas
21 free events in the past had sometimes been forgotten about or cancelled at short notice. A
22 short survey provided to school leaders after performances established that 58% had not
23 previously been to the library before as a school, while 92% stated they were developing a
24 class-based activity to take place after the show back at their school.
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33 *Library card data*

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35 It was not possible to examine library card data in detail for each individual participating
36 venue, or potentially, for each audience member attending. It was possible to examine a
37 smaller sample of library card data that covered a month before and after shows from 18
38 venues. This found that seasons 1 and 5, which were timed to coincide with the Summer
39 Reading Challenge experienced a higher level of new sign-ups than the other seasons.
40 Across all seasons, we compared the level of new sign ups at both 5 and 30 days before
41 and after the show. The 30 days leading up to the show saw above average sign ups at 58%
42 of venues, reducing to 31% covering the 30 days after each show. Commensurate with other
43 feedback, this suggested that shows were programmed towards the culmination of other
44 activities that encouraged sign-ups. Put another way, the show potentially provides a helpful
45 focus to build up to, though it is less clear what sort of legacy it leaves in terms of ongoing
46 activity, at least going by this one measure. The precise ongoing impact on reading levels
47 and enjoyment remains uncertain. While the systems for retrieving and analysing data on an
48 individual library card basis do exist, the expertise and appetite for carrying out such work
49 amongst more immediate pressures remains low. Simultaneously, libraries own agendas
50 around broadening participation mean that solely reporting on headline lending figures is
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perhaps not the 'key stat' it once was (if ever), meaning they have less reason to engage with this data.

Project budget

The key funding from Arts Council England was for around £170,000, with library authorities contributing around £40,000 in cash and an estimated £100,000 worth of support in kind (staff time, room hire, marketing support). Libraries would effectively buy in each individual performance for around £300, which they could at least partially recoup through ticket sales. Exact pricing and policy varied across authorities though the trend was slowing increasing the ticket price from around £1 to around £3, with some discounts for children, library card holders and groups. The second phase of the project has also encouraged libraries to simplify and normalise adult and child ticket prices across the board to around £3 each. Some library authorities further subsidized some free tickets though this was a very limited and targeted initiative.

The total income of the project was distributed as roughly: 12% audience tickets, 21% libraries cash contribution, 37% ACE funding and 30% support in kind from libraries. Importantly, these proportions do not include the costs of developing a new show, which skewed the overall level of contribution much more towards ACE. However, it is assumed most library authorities would, first of all, be interested in touring or programming existing work, rather than developing new work where costs could vary significantly. Throughout the project and its previous incarnations the issue of economic sustainability has been a familiar debate, but the mixed model established here seems to have proved successful, albeit still within the constraints of 'austrian realism' (Davies, et al., 2018). Furthermore, the nature of the venues and audiences reached provide a healthy counterbalance to familiar arguments that ACE funding primarily benefits those who live in London: benefiting from £20 funding per head, compared £3.60 per head for those outside London (BBC News, 2013).

Operationally and financially it seems more viable for a small touring company (eg: two performers and one stage manager) to book on a basis of usually two shows per day and an average of 30 shows over each season. Library authorities also benefit from being able to book multiple shows in a seasonal rotation, rather than trying to book these independently. It was noted that further shared savings around printing marketing or educational materials were also achieved. For individuals and schools it was noted that as an extracurricular activity, this was extremely good value for money, compared to theatre performances at a traditional venue or other non-arts trips such as a theme park.

Conclusions and recommendations

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3 As established at the outset, the purpose of this research was not primarily to develop
4 theory, but to develop practical rationality according to a diverse set of interests. Projects like
5 this highlight the collaborative potential of libraries, arts organisations and schools and
6 hopefully readers have gained some insight into whether working along these lines is
7 attractive or relevant to their own priorities or not. Libraries seem to benefit through
8 broadening their offer and arts organisations seem to benefit through broadening their
9 audiences. The neighbourhood or district level connections of libraries are less familiar to
10 arts organisations, which may tend to be more city or region orientated. The voice of a more
11 informal, everyday cultural sector may be becoming clearer, at least if only by virtue being
12 pushed to co-operate for shrinking funding.

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20 Due to the limitations inherent in the project, this paper cannot fully answer the longer term
21 impacts hinted at by the project, for example, on return library visits, increased stock
22 circulations, or children's literacy levels. The key funding body, despite having recently
23 absorbed some responsibility for libraries, remains predominately arts orientated and this is
24 largely reflected in the objectives and outcomes.

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28 We can still attempt to come to an extremely broad indicator of value for money. Guidance
29 from the Educational Endowment Foundation was briefly consulted, which compiles results
30 from a wide range of educational interventions, including in the area of 'Language and
31 Literacy' which might be the closest for comparison for our purposes. The three main
32 interventions currently suggested are 'Oral Language Interventions', 'Phonics' and 'Reading
33 Comprehension Strategies'. These at least share some surface aspects with both the direct
34 performance element and the kinds of post-show activities that were reported to have taken
35 place at schools as a result. Overall, interventions of this type have been evaluated to give
36 'moderate to high impact' on language and literacy for 'low to very low costs' in the region of
37 £40 per pupil (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019).

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45 Disaggregating the exact costs and benefits of a multi-partner project is very much open to
46 interpretation, but if we only took the libraries contribution to the project (£140,000: both cash
47 and in-kind support) over the total children engaged this would equate to cost of £24 per
48 child. If we include the accompanying adults the cost was £17 per person. Both would be
49 reduced slightly further when ticket prices are taken into account. Of course, the £140,000
50 in library costs was contingent on the £170,000 in core funding from ACE enabling the whole
51 project: the artistic direction, marketing, project management and staff workshops. The total
52 cost per child in this case would then be £53 per child. Whether the project had a
53 comparable positive educational impact to other interventions is still unknown, but then
54 literacy alone was not the sole objective and perhaps this type of narrow comparison is
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3 unwarranted in the first place. Enjoyment of reading would likely be a more appropriate
4 measure for this project, but despite a broadly acknowledged link to reading attainment,
5 there appears to be little in the way of similar cost-benefit analyses that we could highlight
6 for comparison.
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10 If nothing else, this illustrates that while convergence and partnerships can be celebrated in
11 theory, disaggregating all of the relevant costs and benefits accordingly across participating
12 organisations is challenging. There is certainly a continuum of partnership working or
13 convergence. It seems idealistic to suggest that a 'true' partnership would only be concerned
14 with one unique holistic worldview rather than one that at least attempted to meet and delimit
15 the specific interests of each stakeholder. It is difficult to pull apart interventions to examine
16 one output or the other, without seeming to lose the holistic overview making it possible in
17 the first place.
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23 Nevertheless, efforts in this direction seem both possible and necessary. The reality of this
24 project and surely others like it meant that "needing to understand and speak a different
25 language" in terms of metrics, targets and success was a common refrain from all partners.
26 The concept of 'asymmetric leadership' has been raised as a potential answer to managing
27 open and fluid partnerships in periods of seemingly constant change (Arts Council England,
28 2016). Is this to be celebrated or does it mask an acknowledgment that a relatively
29 straightforward and compelling core mission has been lost? To be replaced with a continual
30 'flavour of the month' policy and funding merry-go-round? Either way, it seems that critically
31 examining multi-agency partnerships will continue to be a valuable area of investigation
32 going forward. For instance, building a more robust base of evidence for these sorts of
33 interventions has emerged as a key focus of the Royal Society of Arts 'Learning about
34 Culture' project (Royal Society of Arts, 2019).
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43 It is easy to imagine that in other regions, the relationship between arts organisations and
44 libraries is not as active. For example, it has been ten years since the critical 2009 statutory
45 challenge to proposed library closures in the Wirral but despite 'winning' this important case,
46 the matter has hardly been laid to rest. In 2017, the Wirral commissioned an independent
47 needs assessment into achieving a sustainable library service (Shared Intelligence, 2017).
48 This proposed that a consolidation of resources in fewer physical locations; approximately
49 half (the same as suggested in 2009) would nevertheless result in a *"more effective and
50 impactful balance between physical locations and staff capacity"*. At the time of writing, these
51 proposals do not appear to have been taken up fully, but neither would it be accurate to say
52 the library service remains the same as it did in 2009. Perhaps we could say that some
53 diversification of the library core mission has potentially led to its survival, albeit in a still
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3 evolving form. It is not uncommon to hear that both qualified librarians and curators are to be
4 replaced with more generalised staff (Orton, 2019). Will new professionals of the cultural
5 sector be drawn from a libraries background, an arts background, a 'converged' background
6 or perhaps none of the above?
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10 Despite a pragmatic ethos, the research has touched on some relatively novel, overlapping
11 areas in terms of cultural policy. The interactions of these subtle networks chime with the
12 theory of 'Cultural ecology', which may be a valuable tool to inform wider cultural policy
13 (Holden, 2015). The practical difficulties of sharing knowledge and expertise across sub-
14 sectors while agreeing shared goals, retaining individual identities and priorities is
15 considerable. The application of cultural ecology may be essential in articulating the multi-
16 faceted impacts of cultural experiences and the subtle networks that sustain them. The
17 ongoing, 3 year phase of the project is proposed to investigate further into the relationships
18 between libraries and schools, with cultural education a critical area for further collaboration
19 and investigation.
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