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The role of grassroots arts activities in communities: a scoping study

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Abstract

Over 2009-2010, the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) undertook work to identify the current state of knowledge on small, below the radar, community groups and activities. This highlighted the lack of research into the contribution of grass-roots or amateur arts organisations make in communities. This gap in knowledge is substantial, given that there are an estimated 49,000 such groups in England.

In partnership with the Universities of Exeter and Glamorgan as well as Voluntary Arts, and with financial support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Connected Communities programme, the Centre undertook a scoping study to assess the lessons from the academic and grey literature across the arts, social sciences and voluntary sector.

This identified a range of different impacts and outcomes in terms of amateur arts groups. For individuals, participation in arts based activities 'for their own sake' could promote their mental health and wellbeing. Some involved, particularly young people, made the transition from amateur arts to paid employment in the creative industries. Improvements in educational attainment and functioning in the work-place were also reported as positive outcomes in some of the literature. Claims were also made about the economic role such activities play in communities: through the hire of village halls, the management of local assets, equipment hire or the employment of professional artists in, for example, preparing for performances. However in this, and other areas, there was a lack of empirical evidence exploring or quantifying the exact nature of impact.

The measurement of the impact of amateur arts was explored further with members of grass-roots arts networks at a day conference in October 2011 at Cecil Sharp House ([Conference Report – Growing the Grassroots: the contribution of amateur arts to communities](#)). It is the hope of the current partners that further research can be undertaken over 2012 to develop a practical toolkit for assessing the outcomes of amateur arts activities in communities.

Keywords

Amateur arts, communities, social and economic impact, grassroots organisations and activities.

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Executive summary

Introduction

This Study of the role of grassroots arts activities in communities offers an overview and analysis of available policy, academic and 'grey' literature in this field. The Study has flagged up a number of gaps in the existing evidence-base and research and indicates areas where new research and empirical investigations might be undertaken in order to provide robust evidence for the relationship between participation in amateur arts activities and its potentially beneficial social, economic and educational impacts on communities in the UK. The Study is also intended as a first step in laying the groundwork for a research framework in the longer term, which in turn might inform policy development and implementation in this area as well as in providing grassroots arts organisations with a broader and more deeply informed perspective on their role within civil society. This is particularly important considering Arts Council England's (ACE) recent commitment to amateur arts and the potential investment that might be made in amateur arts activities in addition to implications emerging from government rhetoric concerning 'Big Society'.

The study focused predominantly on literature from 2005 onwards, additionally referring to some earlier key texts in order to give the fullest contemporary picture of the state of research into amateur and voluntary arts in the UK today. In addition to a wide range of academic literature from different disciplines such as ethnography, mathematics, music and the visual arts the review draws on policy documents from the political and economic sectors, voluntary arts literature and grassroots arts groups membership publications and newsletters. We were explicitly looking at voluntary and amateur arts and therefore did not focus on community arts or art as therapy, although we have included cases where there are direct parallels, such as where arts activities have been participant-driven.

The clearest key finding to emerge from this study is the fact that throughout the UK sustainable grassroots, amateur arts activities are thriving and participation is on the increase, with a considerable focus on involving young people. The Study has revealed that while there is a limited and fragmented amount of research literature which examines the function and role of grassroots arts activities on a local, single project basis, there is little robust, empirical research on the subject, particularly from a UK perspective. Moreover, these studies are frequently in the form of single project and case study evaluations, making it problematic to extend these claims to inform a bigger national picture of arts activities. This considerable lack of research suggests that a large-scale, empirically-based research framework would enable studies to be carried out that would contribute significantly to a robust and rigorous evidence base on grassroots arts activities in the UK. Such studies would then further and broaden contemporary debate and discussion on the role of arts activities in civil society.

This Study therefore offers an overview of the some of the issues and common themes that emerge from our initial investigations, with a view to making recommendations for the directions that further research might take.

Background to the study

Grassroots arts

'There are currently more than 49,000 amateur arts groups in England with an estimated 5.9 million members, in addition 3.5 million people volunteer as extras or helpers making a total of 9.4 million participants in activities'.¹ However, until recently most policy literature, with notable exceptions, (Giesekam, 2000, Dodd, Graves and Taws, 2008, Simpson, 2010, Lowe, 2010) has paid scant attention to a sector which is diverse in scope, rich in passion and talent, and vast in the knowledge and skills that it draws upon. Even less attention has been paid to the growth and development of relationships between people and groups in communities who would not normally, in the round of their everyday lives, meet 'different others', with whom they create and develop friendships, on an international as well as national level, through a shared interest in an arts activity.

As Lowe and Simpson have reported, '[s]ince the publication of *Our Creative Talent* in 2008 by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and ACE, there has been an acknowledgement of the important contribution of amateur arts to the participatory arts and crafts scene in England'.²

Robin Simpson, Chief Executive of Voluntary Arts (VA) noted that the Arts Council England (ACE) 2010 report, *Achieving great Art for Everyone*, paid increased attention to the grassroots/amateur/volunteer arts sector:

We were really pleased to see the word 'amateur' used 5 times including the specific commitment on page 31: we will champion the value of the commercial, amateur and voluntary arts sectors in encouraging people to take part in the arts - I know this may not seem like much (and I agree ACE still has a long way to go) but this felt like a breakthrough (and was a direct result of *Our Creative Talent*).³

Simpson's comments point to the limited attention that has been paid to grassroots arts activities in the UK by policy-makers or Arts Councils and echoes the absence of grassroots arts in Big Society literature, (such as *Building the Big Society*, 2010, *Big Society, Not Big Government*, 2010) found by this Study. Simpson's observation also indicates that the way grassroots amateur arts activities are perceived is changing: no longer seen as the poor relation to 'high' art performed and exhibited by publically funded professionals, amateur arts activity is starting to be recognised as an integral part of civil society that brings real benefits to communities and individuals. There are a number of reasons why amateur arts activities might be the focus of increased attention by policy-makers, funders and commercial interests alike:

- The effort of **advocacy organisations** such as Voluntary Arts (VA), independent reports (Gieskam, 2000, Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC), 2010, for example) and some amateur arts groups (National Operatic & Dramatic Association (NODA), for example) to increase visibility and lobbying power.

¹ Direct quote from *Our Creative Talent* in Simpson, R. (2010) The role and potential of amateur arts groups in building an empowered, participative, fulfilled and healthy civil society, *Taking Part* Conference paper; Written evidence submitted by Voluntary Arts England (arts 129) to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, September 2010, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmcmums/464/464vw117.htm>, accessed May 2011

² Lowe, M. and Simpson, R. (2010) *Achieving great art for everyone: Voluntary Arts England response to Achieving great art for everyone*, UK: Voluntary Arts, p. 2

³ From a personal email communication to Hilary Ramsden

- The increasing connection being made between **arts and wellbeing** – for individuals and communities - between arts and community development, social cohesion, identity and belonging and economics which have been demonstrated by many arts projects with individuals, community groups and communities. (Arts Council England, 2007, Hui and Stickley, 2009, Kirmann, 2010, Burt and Atkinson, 2011)
- The increasing use of arts activities led by professional artists in projects related to community and neighbourhood **regeneration**. (Wohlheim, 1998, Taylor, 2008, Dunin, 2009)
- **Knowledge transfer**: there is an increasing recognition of the use of art and the skills acquired in participating in arts activities as a means of creating knowledge and developing understanding in other spheres of living. (Gray, Ore De Boehm, Farnsworth and Wolf, 2010, Howard-Spink, 2005, Jackson, 2003, Kafewo, 2009)
- **New directions in practices** and modalities throughout the arts (public participation and social change, for example, Bishop, 2006, Kester, 2004, Hutchinson, 2002, Bourriaud, 2004, Shaw and Meade, 2007).
- There is a recognition that ‘arts-based projects have a particularly effective role in enabling people to develop a **relationship with the environment**’.⁴ This is particularly pertinent given national and global concerns about natural resources and climate change.
- An increase in **networking between amateur, community and professional bodies, groups and organisations** through a blurring of boundaries as a result of development of community arts programmes, groups and activities and through a wider remit of funding as in Awards for All. This has allowed the more organised amateur arts activities to gain a greater profile while offering opportunities for smaller scale groups to participate in events of a larger scale. (Such as *RSC Open Stages*, a scheme initiated by the Royal Shakespeare Company and Voluntary Arts inviting all amateur theatre groups to perform their own Shakespeare production, or the *Making Music* initiatives, collaborations between Making Music and BBC 3, offering amateur music organisations the chance to perform and record music as part of the Light Music Festival.)
- Media and the **X-Factor factor**: reality TV shows which feature talent competitions, such as *The X-factor* and *Britain’s got talent*, have succeeded in spotlighting the wealth of amateur talent in this country. Moreover, recent events such as Sky Arts competition⁵ for amateur theatre groups and BBC’s Music Nation⁶ festival demonstrate the increasing attention being paid by high profile media companies to amateur arts activities in this country.

⁴ Darwin, T. (1995) *Creativity, Ecology and Becoming a Person*, Trumpeter (1995)

⁵ For information on this competition see www.skyarts.co.uk/theatre-drama/article/stagestruck, accessed June 2011

⁶ For more information on this festival see www.classical-music.com/news/bbc-announces-uk-wide-music-nation-celebration

Although the focus of this Scoping Study is grassroots or amateur arts activities, the research team recognises that the lines between community arts, professional arts and amateur arts are increasingly blurry. For this reason it is important to note that the evidence for the impact on communities of engaging in arts activities has focused on amateur- and community- led activity. Where projects are centrally focused on amateur arts participation, but have involved limited, professional facilitation, these have also been included. The individual literature analyses make clear the balance of amateur/professional involvement in each case study.

Our study draws on literature and material⁷ from policy documents, academic and 'grey' literature to present an overview that indicates that while there is a thriving culture of amateur arts in the UK little research has been done to monitor, evaluate or even to broadly analyse the circumstances and reasons for this.

Research on civil society organisations

There has been a steady growth of interest amongst policy-makers and academics in the role of 'civil society organisations' (CSOs) (also termed the third sector). There has been particular interest in the potential of this heterogeneous group of organisations to contribute to the resolution of social problems (Harris and Rochester, 2001; HM Treasury, 2002). Substantial knowledge has accumulated about aspects of CSOs including volunteering; relationships with policy; management and organisation (Billis and Harris, 1996; Kendall, 2003) although little of that knowledge relates to the community arts sector (McCabe et al., 2010).

Churchill et al. (2006) see grassroots arts as a movement in which people take part voluntarily for enjoyment, community development, self-improvement and social networking. Activities are largely self-financed, and run by volunteers. Little is known in research terms about the role of voluntary and community activities in this field. It is argued that the role and function of such activities is to provide the opportunity for a group of people to get together, usually on a regular basis, and partake in some kind of cultural or arts based creative activity either for a social purpose or for enjoyment (Dodd et al., 2008) although the latter is acknowledged to offer potential for indirect social and well-being benefits (Phillimore & McCabe 2010). The Cabinet Office report for Local Authorities⁸ (LAs) on the third sector mentions a need to alert LAs to third sector activities in their area. The guide suggests that more mutual 'recognition and appreciation'⁹ is needed from both third sector organisations (TSOs) and statutory bodies. For example, the LA could potentially organise meetings between users and owners of local amenities or venues to see how each could benefit from closer collaboration. Local Authorities should encourage their staff to foster co-operation with TSOs and add endorsements or notes of appreciation on their publicity material. Although the report acknowledges the difficulty of finding out the views of smaller TSOs and also does not suggest how this is to be done, the guide encourages

⁷ We have researched material from 2005 – to present, with some reference to key texts from earlier dates – such as Bourriaud (2004), Jowell (2004), McCarthy, Ondaatje and Zakaras (2001), Matarasso (1997), Putnam (2000), Gablik (1991, 1995), Darwin (1995), Jermyn (2001), Guetzkow (2002).

⁸ Cabinet Office, (2010) *Thriving Third Sector: Creating an environment in which charities, voluntary and community groups and social enterprises can thrive. A user guide for the National Survey of Third sector Organisations*, London: Office of the Third Sector

⁹ Cabinet Office, *Thriving Third Sector*, p. 20

LAs to 'build up the strength of local community groups'.¹⁰ However, in all of this there is no mention of arts activities. Despite policy interest and the claims made of the sector, little is known about the role and impact of grassroots arts CSOs in meeting need. The area remains one of the least explored in studies of the third sector.

Research on arts and participation

Since the publication of Francois Matarasso's *Use or Ornament*,¹¹ in particular, there has been an increasing amount of academic and policy literature devoted to the importance of the arts and culture to the wellbeing, personal growth and social development of the individual within civil society. There has also been an ever-growing body of academic literature attesting to the blurring of boundaries between audience and spectator (Bourriaud, 2004), professional and amateur arts (Gablik, 1991, 1995) and continuing debates as to the role of the artist and authorship (Bishop, 2006, Kester, 2004) and to the nature and future of what is termed 'art' today (Hutchinson, 2002). However, very little has been explored concerning the effect of grassroots arts activities, and by this we mean here amateur arts activities, on the individual and on the community/ies within which the activities take place.

Research on community-based participatory arts

Facilitated and centrally-funded community arts projects are frequently targeted at specific user/client groups, aimed at building skills or confidence within a designated community. However it remains the case that community arts projects are assessed and analysed predominantly in terms of their impact and outcomes, rather than their artistry or artistic ambition (van Erven, 2001; Haedicke and Nellhaus, 2001). A further area of research centres on questions of accessibility and participation (Adamson, Fyfe, Byrne, 2007). At the other end of the spectrum are amateur arts activities, which have been accused of generating community through processes of exclusion (Heddon and Milling, 2006). There has been some research interest in amateur performance companies which tends to rely exclusively on local expertise and participation (Cocke, Newman, Salmon-Rue, 1993; Giesekam, 2000; Cohen-Cruz, 2005; Cochrane, 2001; Taylor 1976). Broadly speaking, amateur arts activity is unregarded, unstudied and poorly represented, largely because its artistic content is perceived to be weak and its politics retrogressive and exclusionary. Such arts activity is visible as community activity, but invisible in the arts literature. Yet, if the claim is made that arts participation can operate both as community generating and enhancing, we need to know how these grassroots arts organisations serve and produce understandings of identity, locatedness, economy, culture, well-being and community.

Definitions of key research terms

Role: We understand the term 'role' to mean here the 'impact' of arts activities in communities. By the term impact we also recognise that this does not merely consist of an outcome or output; rather it is the creation and development of processes involved in or of participating in the different arts activities that create impact. We are looking at the variety of impacts of arts activities on communities: social impact - on both individual and community development; educational impact - concerning the development of skills and understandings in formal and informal settings; economic impact – which

¹⁰ Cabinet Office, *Thriving Third Sector*, p. 22

¹¹ Matarasso, F. (1997) *Use or Ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts*, London: Comedia

includes direct and indirect revenue-creation as well as in-kind goods and services; aesthetic impact – which proposes arguably more intangible effects of arts activities on individuals and communities.

We suggest that the difference between the role/impact of participatory arts activities in communities and those of participation in other activities – such as sports, charity and volunteer work and environmental work might be focused on creative, imaginative, improvisatory experience and skills development.

Taking ‘role’ to imply ‘impact’ it is useful to draw on Joshua Guetzkow’s¹² work of the ‘Mechanisms of Arts Impact’ to define some categories. We consider this to be useful since he makes a distinction between impact on the individual and impact on the community. Guetzkow also highlights the shortcomings of arts impact studies in terms of being able to make generalisations about impact on the overall population from small sample studies.

Grassroots, amateur: the term ‘grassroots’ is frequently used to encompass more than ‘amateur’. Although amateur may have connotations of being less than ‘professional’, grassroots denotes a more activist, broader remit, also including ‘community’ arts. For the purposes of this Study we take **grassroots** activity to mean any self-governed, amateur, arts based activity undertaken by formal or informal groups or organisations whose income is less than £10,000.¹³ We also understand grassroots arts activities to include, for example, amateur music activities that go on in peoples’ living rooms, though finding evidence for such activities goes beyond the scope of this study.

Arts: by community **arts** we mean shared, socially, and self-expressive creative activity in the fields of visual arts, dance, storytelling, music, theatre, craft, film-making and new technology.

- For the purposes of this Study we have not made a separation between arts and crafts although we recognise that within the art world and for other purposes this distinction has become necessary. Thus, arts activities here include a group of knitters who meet to knit together as they include amateur choirs who are hired by professional orchestras to perform with them. We also include participation in evening/day/weekend classes such as dancing, pottery, drawing and painting, whether or not they are run by a local authority or other organisation.

Communities: while recognising the contentiousness of the term community we plan to adopt the Research Councils United Kingdom definition of **community** as ‘cooperative or interactive groups sharing a virtual or physical environment and aspects of identity (such as location, race, ethnicity, age, history, occupation), culture, belief or other common bonds and/or a shared interest in particular issues or outcomes’¹⁴

¹² Guetzkow, J. (2002) How the Arts Impact Communities: An introduction to the literature on arts impact studies. Working Paper Series 20, prepared for the *Taking Measure of Culture Conference*, Princeton, 2002

¹³ This figure relates to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations’ definition of micro organisations. Some grassroots organisations may generate substantially more income than £10,000 but they remain below the research and policy radar.

¹⁴ Connected Communities Briefing Document

Initial investigations of grassroots arts activities for this study note the following impacts:

Social impact - individual and community development

Participation in arts activities has been shown to have a number of beneficial effects :

For an **individual's** personal development:

- enhanced health and wellbeing;
- increased self esteem and self confidence;
- improved communication and social skills;
- development of leadership skills.

For **groups**:

Furthermore participation develops social networks contributing to:

- a sense of identity and belonging;
- social cohesion;
- increased intergenerational contact;
- for migrant groups there is the opportunity to maintain links to their country and culture of origin in addition to developing hybrid traditions and customs that occur as part of a process of living in the host country;
- improved community image and identity, with increased visibility within a town or country even. this in turn can contribute to a sense of pride for residents;
- increased desirability of an area.

Educational impact

There is evidence that participation in arts activities:

- develops learning performance in formal settings with participants demonstrating an increase in literacy, verbal and communication skills;
- leads to the development and creation of knowledge and technical skills specific to those activities and also to transferable skills in other fields and potentially employment;
- can contribute to understandings of contemporary related but tangential issues to the art form itself that emerge from discussion and debate within their specific field or arts group;
- develops an awareness of the international scope of the specific field, leading to the building of international social networks and sometimes to travel abroad, extending participants' experience of other cultures and customs;
- develops literacy skills among those who are no longer in formal learning settings;
- develops opinions and skills in argument and debate;
- develops skills in improvisation and experimentation frequently resulting in new discoveries and innovation.

Economic impact

Grassroots arts activities generate a considerable amount of economic activity and value in a number of ways:

- unpaid labour of participants and volunteers in the activities;
- purchase of materials and equipment – nationally and locally;
- donated goods and services;
- revenue from membership subscriptions to groups and organisations;
- revenue from advertising in magazines and newsletters;
- revenue for local and regional services and organisations where meetings, exhibitions, classes and festivals are held (such as church, village and community halls);
- revenue from fundraising through an arts activity for other charitable purposes;
- increased employment opportunities through skills development and networking of individual participants;
- increased revenue for advertisers from purchases by members;
- a potential decrease in the use of the health service due to enhanced health and wellbeing leading potentially to financial savings;
- establishing arts activities in an area increases its desirability, attracting new residents and tourists.

Aesthetic impact

Aesthetic impacts from participatory amateur arts include:

- encouraging a passion for the art – participants consider their art activity more than a ‘hobby;’
- rendering a community more aesthetically pleasing – for example through public artwork, murals & mosaics and beautified community gathering places;
- promoting and enhancing an individual’s and community’s sense of ‘beauty’ and/or aesthetics;
- encouraging more people to become involved in arts activities that exist within a community.

Participants starting other arts activities as a result of enjoying one.

Below follows a more detailed investigation of these impacts of grassroots arts activities from examining the literature available. Most of the evidence for the impact of arts activities from articles and reports is made through interviews and participant observation. Therefore participants’ responses (and in cases where participants were not willing or unable to participate verbally, the responses of carers and health professionals) to questions and surveys are the main indicators for/of empirical evidence. In some cases participants are quoted verbatim, in other instances we have taken the words of the author writing the cited article as claimed evidence. In terms of the ‘grey’ literature we have tried to make clear distinctions between what are our inferences and what participants and arts group/society members write and say, in and through the literature.

Key impact findings from the review of the policy, research and 'grey' literature

Social Impact - Definition of Social Impact

Social impact has been defined as: 'The effect of an activity on the social fabric of the community and well-being of the individuals and families'.¹⁵

There has been a growing interest in recent years, spurred partly by the economic downturn as well the longer term development of such concepts as corporate social responsibility and social enterprise, in measuring (or scaling/quantifying) social impact.¹⁶ This has been reflected in the growing number of methodologies for assessing social benefit. In the UK there are two dominant models: Social Auditing¹⁷ and Social Return on Investment.¹⁸ International examples include the Global Reporting Initiative Guidelines¹⁹ and Triple Bottom Line²⁰ which aim to assess the impact of investment or activity in economic, ecological and social terms.

Each methodology attempts to place an economic value on social, often preventative, interventions: namely, if we invest or spend x amount on a particular activity now, how much will this save in the longer term. This model is currently being applied in England through the development of Social Investment Bonds whereby money is transferred to community or other groups where they can demonstrate their activities are more cost effective than existing interventions or services.²¹

The literature reviewed in the following section suggests there may be substantial added social value in grass roots arts – in terms of participants well-being and social connectedness. However, various critics warn against adopting a purely economically based analysis of the value of the arts and acknowledge a tension between the instrumental and intrinsic value of the arts.²²

Social Impact - individual and community development

Amateur arts activities arguably offer more opportunities for agency and self-determination contributing to individual and community development than participation in community or professional arts activities. Additionally, participation in arts activities can have a number of beneficial effects on an individual's personal development such as:

Enhanced health and wellbeing

Perhaps the most common and most publicised beneficial effect of participation in arts activities is the claim of enhanced health and wellbeing. In a study of Australian amateur arts groups Lawrence J. Bendle and Ian Patterson (2009) state that volunteering and leisure activities have positive effects on

¹⁵ <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/social-impact.html>

¹⁶ Bloom, P. and Smith, B. (2010) Identifying the Drivers of Social Entrepreneurial Impact: Theoretical Developments and Exploratory Empirical Test of SCALERS. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 1 No 1 pp126-145

¹⁷ Kay, A. (2010) *The New Guide to Social Accounting and Audit*. Social Audit Network, Wolverhampton

¹⁸ Cabinet Office (2009) *A Guide to Social Return on Investment*. London, Cabinet Office

¹⁹ Global Reporting Initiative (2011) *Sustainability Reporting Guidelines Version 3*. Amsterdam, GRI

²⁰ Savitz, A.W. and Weber, K. (2006) *The Triple Bottom Line: How Today's Best-Run Companies Are Achieving Economic, Social and Environmental Success—and How You Can Too* Hoboken NJ, Jossey-Bass

²¹ See <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/Article/1055662/analysis-social-investment-bonds-help-tackle-social-problems> for a short introduction to SIB

²² Bakhshi, H., Freeman, Freeman, A, and Hitchen, G. (2009) Measuring intrinsic value – how to stop worrying and love economics available at http://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/14902/1/MPRA_paper_14902.pdf

'people's physical and mental vitality'.²³ According to a 2007 report on *The arts, health and wellbeing*, by Arts Council England (ACE) 'there is increasing recognition that people's health and wellbeing is influenced by a range of interconnecting factors'²⁴ and that art has an important role to play in enhancing and improving this. In other words physical, mental and social wellbeing are interlinked and art can work on all these levels. Between 2003 and 2007 ACE awarded 441 projects with a focus on arts and health a total of £6.52m and the report cites a number of these arts and health projects taking place in the different regions of the UK: for example Paintings in Hospitals East in Suffolk, Dance4 in Nottingham, Q Arts in Derby, Sampad Ante-Natal Music and Movement in the West Midlands.

The ACE report also noted that: 'The methods [artists] have developed over the years produce, at their best, startling artistic, personal and social outcomes. The success of this work is borne out in the considerable evidence base, which now makes a strong case for the effectiveness of arts interventions in healthcare and for improving wellbeing'.²⁵ However, with few exceptions²⁶ it is professional artists who create and facilitate these projects and participants are arguably 'recipients' of this facilitation. Amateur arts activities on the other hand put the agency of the process firmly in the minds and bodies of the participants themselves.

A study by Emily L. Burt and Jacqueline Atkinson, (2011) published in the *Journal for Public Health* which reveals that 'creative craft hobbies such as quilting can be a meaningful vehicle for enhancing wellbeing'²⁷ particularly for older people, with the activity helping their 'cognitive, creative and emotional well-being'.²⁸ The authors went further to argue that:

Whether it is growing vegetables, knitting a jumper or discovering a new scientific formula creativity may be fundamental for wellbeing and has received little attention so far within Public Health. Exploring creativity and what people do in their everyday lives, which they deem creative, may be an important avenue for wellbeing promoters. Additionally, more consideration needs to be given to all hobbies, from reading to train spotting, and their potential for enhancing wellbeing.²⁹

It is perhaps indicative of the prominence that grassroots arts activities is gaining that the UK *Daily Mail*³⁰ ran an edition referring to the study. The headline was: 'Why quilting improves your health in ways even exercise can't manage'. As the medical report indicated knitting, vegetable growing and trainspotting produce a range of opportunities for enhanced physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing for a wide range of participants of different ages and abilities.

²³ Bendle, L. J. and Patterson, I. (2009) *Mixed Serious Leisure and Grassroots Organizational Capacity: A Study of Amateur Artist Groups in a Regional Australian City*, *Leisure Sciences*, 31, p. 273

²⁴ Arts Council England (2007) *The arts, health and wellbeing*, London: Arts Council England, p. 4

²⁵ Arts Council England (2007) *The arts, health and wellbeing*, London: Arts Council England p. 7

²⁶ One such example is Creative Minds, a user/survivor-led arts and mental health networking forum <http://www.creativemindslondon.co.uk/> accessed June 2011

²⁷ Burt, E.L. and Atkinson, J. (2011) The relationship between quilting and wellbeing. *Journal of Public Health*, June 2011, p. 1

²⁸ Daily Mail online <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2002862/Why-quilting-uniquely-good-us.html> accessed June 2011

²⁹ Burt, & Atkinson, quilting and wellbeing, p. 5

³⁰ Daily Mail online <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2002862/Why-quilting-uniquely-good-us.html> accessed June 2011

Increasingly articles and letters in arts groups' and societies' magazines point to the connection between the activity and health and wellbeing. The editorial in *Highnotes*³¹ for example highlights the connections beginning to be made between health and wellbeing and music-playing, specifying wind and brass instrument playing where the capacity of the breath and lungs is improved. The effects on health and wellbeing may be experienced in a number of ways:

1. Physical wellbeing

Studies over the last ten years show increasing evidence testifying to the positive effects of participation in arts activities on physical health and wellbeing: from singing having a positive physiological effect on levels of hormones that facilitate emotional balance (mentioned in a study of group singing and performance on two groups of people – one choir created for homeless men, the other of 'middle-class singers' by Betty Bailey and Jane W. Davidson, 2005, p. 271) to a study by Ada Hui and Theodore Stickley³² (2009) which noted that working with Guidelines to Art³³ improved Alzheimer's patients' memory and independence over a number of sessions to a major longitudinal study by Gene Cohen, Susan Perlstein et al (2006) showing that 'professionally conducted' arts activities had a positive impact for older adults on 'overall health, doctor visits, medication use, falls, loneliness [and] morale'.³⁴ There are also arts projects, such as the Tremble Clefs³⁵ (an American amateur music group) which have been set up specifically for Parkinson's disease sufferers which have been successful in countering some of the physical effects of the illness. An article in the *Oxford Mail* featured an interview with a woman who maintains that singing has enabled her to live with Parkinson's without taking medication.³⁶ Participants in Burt and Atkinson's (2011) UK study observe that quilting 'helped to maintain cognitive abilities' which is borne out by empirical research (Geda, Roberts Knopman et al, in press, in Burt & Atkinson, 2011) showing that 'participating in hobbies...reduced the rate of cognitive decline in older individuals'.³⁷

Articles in *Animated*³⁸ draw a connection between physical and mental health and wellbeing, and one article (page 29) focuses on the organisation Diabetes UK which suggests that participation in dance can help prevent and educate people about diabetes.

As mentioned in the overview the editorial in *Highnotes*³⁹ makes quite specific connections between improvement of the capacity of breath and lungs and wind and brass instrument playing.

Improved physical wellbeing not only benefits the individual but also arguably the rest of the community through a reduction in demand on health services. This is discussed further in economic impact.

³¹ *Highnotes*, Making Music, Issue 15, February 2011

³² Hui, A. & Stickley, T. (2009) Guidelines to Art, Making art available to all, An Evaluation Report, Nottingham: Society for All Artists/University of Nottingham, p. 15

³³ Guidelines for Art: A tool kit for drawing and painting designed by John Whyman c.1991. The toolkits are supplied by the Society for All Artists.

³⁴ Cohen, G. D., Perlstein, S., Chapline, J., Kelly, J., Firth, K. M., & Simmens, S. (2006) The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on the Physical Health, Mental Health, and Social Functioning of Older Adults, *The Gerontologist* 2006, Vol. 46, No. 6, pp. 726–734

³⁵ <http://trembleclefs.com/> accessed June 2011

³⁶ Allen, E. (2010) Singing proves surprise treatment for Parkinson's, *Oxford Mail*, 3rd February 2010 http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/4886434.Singing_proves_surprise_treatment_for_Parkinson_s/ accessed June 2011

³⁷ Burt & Atkinson, quilting and wellbeing, p. 5

³⁸ *Animated*, the community dance magazine, Autumn 2010, UK: BC Publications. The magazine of the Foundation for Community Dance. www.communitydance.org.uk

³⁹ *Highnotes*, Making Music, Issue 15, February 2011

2. Mental, emotional and social wellbeing

Overall the literature reveals that participation in arts activities has demonstrable positive benefits for individuals on mental, emotional and social wellbeing. Unsurprisingly, these findings are supported and mirrored by the extensive user art movement which uses art in therapeutic contexts. In an article for *Animated*, the community dance magazine, choreographer and facilitator Liz Lerman writes: 'In the beginning I used to say that all artists do art as a way of feeling better'.⁴⁰ From the evidence of this Study such a claim might be extended to include many individuals who take up an arts activity within the context of grassroots arts.

3. Increased self esteem and self confidence

Bailey and Davidson (2005) found that for the homeless men in their study group singing 'seemed to facilitate emotional balance'.⁴¹ Participants overall found their self confidence and self esteem improved. They were able to make 'positive changes in their lives'⁴² as a result of gaining confidence from participating in the choir. Similarly, the lifestyle of ageing homeless men who formed a *Musubi* storytelling troupe in Osaka 'changed dramatically'⁴³ through their performances 2 to 3 times per month and the media coverage they received as a result of their work. Shin Nakagawa (2010) maintains they are now 'certain of their *raison d'être* and now possess a connection to society'.⁴⁴ Hui & Stickley's (2009) study shows that working with the Guidelines for Art scheme created a sense of achievement and a 'huge boost to...self esteem and confidence'.⁴⁵ The work reinforced participants' self worth and they appeared to 'have the confidence to carry on trying more things at home'.⁴⁶ One of the Nurse Managers suggested that 'creativity creates confidence and with confidence comes choice'.⁴⁷ Participants in Burt and Atkinson's (2010) study felt that 'Finishing a quilt and receiving praise from others boosted confidence'.⁴⁸ One participant observed that she felt she was "still valuable" and that the activity of quilting "brought back confidence...because you begin to learn new skills...you begin to become a person rather than a machine".⁴⁹ Another participant felt that receiving affirmation from others was important: "to get appreciation back is good".⁵⁰ Individuals in Smith's study (2006) of symphonic choirs listed 'self esteem...feelings of accomplishment' amongst 'durable benefits'⁵¹ of participation.

⁴⁰ Lerman, L. (2010) in Dilemmas of practice in art and healing, *animated*, the community dance magazine, Autumn 2010, p. 12

⁴¹ Bailey, B. A. and Davidson, J. W. (2005) *Effects of group singing and performance for marginalized and middle-class singers*, *Psychology of Music*, 2005 33, p. 277

⁴² Bailey and Davidson, *Effects of group singing*, p. 277

⁴³ Nakagawa, S. (2010) Socially inclusive cultural policy and arts-based urban community regeneration, *Cities* 27 (2010), S21

⁴⁴ Nakagawa, Socially inclusive cultural policy, S21

⁴⁵ Hui & Stickley, *Guidelines to Art*, p. 14

⁴⁶ Hui & Stickley, *Guidelines to Art*, p. 14

⁴⁷ Hui & Stickley, *Guidelines to Art*, p. 14

⁴⁸ Burt & Atkinson, *quilting and wellbeing*, p. 5

⁴⁹ Burt & Atkinson, *quilting and wellbeing*, p. 3

⁵⁰ Burt & Atkinson, *quilting and wellbeing*, p. 4

⁵¹ Smith, R. (2006) *Symphonic Choirs: Understanding the Borders of Professionalism*, in Alquist, Karen ed., (2006) *Chorus and Community*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, p. 295

4. Improved communication and social skills

There is also evidence that participation in arts activities can lead to improved communication and social skills. A desire to engage members of an older generation in conversations about their Harlem neighbourhood enabled two young African American adults to develop their communication and social skills through an arts activity which included photography, poetry and painting.⁵² Participants learning Celtic Traditional Music (CTM) also found that when they had to teach others who didn't understand how to play or could not play as proficiently, they had to develop their people skills to communicate these things in constructive ways.⁵³

Bailey and Davidson for example found that for the homeless men performing in a choir 'enables members ...to connect to the larger society from which they have been estranged'.⁵⁴ Successful communication through an arts activity which might not be based on verbal or oral skills might increase an individual's confidence to subsequently communicate through those skills.

5. Development of leadership skills and community mindedness

Different from community arts where in most instances the activity is organised and led by a professional artist or group, the self governance of amateur arts groups means that many participants take on more responsibilities than just that of participating in the activity. Roles such as Chair, Treasurer and Secretary require much extra time and commitment on the part of individuals, for no financial reward. In Bendle and Patterson's (2009) study these members 'showed a strong identification with the group' and 'understood their leadership and ethos of the group'. They saw that their role was necessary to the sustainability of the group: "someone has to do it",⁵⁵ said one participant. These responsibilities require individuals to develop (amongst other things) leadership skills which in turn boost confidence and self esteem. Participants in Bendle and Patterson's study identified 'personal enrichment, self-actualisation and self-image' as rewards of taking on leadership roles. They also were aware that in this leadership role they were contributing to the group's sustainability and developing a sense of community mindedness. Con O'Neill (2008) suggests that it is not technical skill in the activity which will make the group work but rather the 'effort and involvement of everyone who comes'.⁵⁶ He warns readers not to do all the work alone but to get others to share it. Bendle and Patterson (2009) suggest that the people skills necessary for leadership roles within grassroots organisations have a positive impact on an individual's social interactions outside the group.

⁵² Kinloch, V. (2007) Youth Representations of Community, Art, and Struggle in Harlem, *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, DOI: 10.1002/ace

⁵³ Waldron, J. and Veblen, K. (2009) Learning in a Celtic Community: An Exploration of Informal Music Learning and Adult Amateur Musicians, *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* Spring 2009 No. 180

⁵⁴ Bailey and Davidson, *Effects of group singing*, p. 277

⁵⁵ Bendle and Patterson, *Mixed Serious Leisure* p. 277

⁵⁶ O'Neill, C. (2008) Running a Local Area Group, *Harmonica World*, Magazine of the National Harmonica League, April/May 2008, p. 24

Social networks

Whether it is joining a dance class, a knitting group or being part of an *anime* music video network, the social aspect of participation figures prominently in individuals' reasons for taking up an arts activity. Helene Lawson's study (2009) found that 'seeking a sense of community' was one of six motivations for taking up a dance class. Additionally she observed that the 'affectual element' of the activity 'develops ties amongst participants and serves social ends'.⁵⁷ Frances Reynolds (2010) also identifies staying connected and involved as being an important motive for older women for making art. For the homeless men their choir provided a kind of social support system. An *anime* music video network provides a similar social connection of being in a creative community: one participant referring to it as a "community type effort, village minded".⁵⁸

Rosalyn Smith's (2006) participants' remarks on rehearsals demonstrate that these are not merely means to an end – as in the performances – and although the social aspect of the choir is not what most cited as a reason for joining, this aspect of the work was important for them. A member of the Knitting and Crocheting Guild describes⁵⁹ how the friendships emerging from belonging to a 'cafe knitting group' provide a 'glue' to keep the group going in addition to the inspiration and learning that she has received.

In an Australian study, Monica Madiyaningrum and Christopher Sonn (2010) found that creating social connections through a community arts project called the *Seeming Project* brought together individuals and social groups that were previously isolated from one another and participants made connections with people they had had no contact with before. There was intergenerational contact as well as interracial contact; these connections 'stimulated personal changes',⁶⁰ such as re-looking at the way they thought about themselves, others and their community, breaking down stereotypes and learning another's cultural rituals. The authors suggest that 'the meaningfulness of community participation for those who are involved in it is related to its ability to foster individual and social awareness about 'different' groups within the broader community'.⁶¹

Although the *Seeming Project* was a professionally-led 'community project', what is interesting is the focus on the creation of 'meaning' of participation in community arts by participants themselves. Such a study done in the UK, where the 'meaning' of participation in grassroots arts activities comes from the participants' perspective would be a vital piece in creating a fuller picture of the amateur arts sector in the UK. It would be a valuable companion report to DCMS/ACE's *Our Creative Talent*. As evidenced by the authors the value of such projects lies in potential and actual increased awareness and understanding between community members and increased opportunities for exchange and communication.

⁵⁷ Lawson, H. M. (2009) Why Dance? The Motivations of an Unlikely Group of Dancers, *Music and Arts in Action*, Volume 1, Issue 2, 2009

⁵⁸ Ito, M. (2010) The rewards of non-commercial production: Distinctions and status in the anime music video scene, *First Monday*, Volume 15, Number 5 - 3 May 2010, p. 6

⁵⁹ *Slipknot*, the Journal of the Knitting and Crochet Guild, No. 117, September 2007,

⁶⁰ Madiyaningrum, Monica E. and Sonn, Christopher, (2010) Exploring the Meaning of Participation in a Community Art Project: A Case Study on the *Seeming Project*, *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, Published online in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com), p. 6

⁶¹ Madiyaningrum and Sonn, Exploring the Meaning of Participation, p. 110

Tong Soon Lee (2007) in a study of Chinese Opera (*xiqu*) tradition in Singapore suggests that another significant difference between 'amateur' and 'professional' *xiqu* groups is the emphasis on community - whereas the professionals set store by individuality and 'stars', the amateur troupe practices and performs as a group and often presents choral-style arias not found in professional performances. Amateur groups focus on communal interaction rather than individual technical prowess, creating what another writer, James Cahill, terms 'a community of spirit'.⁶²

The social networks of grassroots arts organisations extend widely. In addition to the local networking offered by activities, there are considerable regional and national networks of all the activities examined in this Study. Newsletters and magazines put out by amateur arts groups and societies have substantial sections dedicated to lists of regional and local groups, reports from regional groups, meetings and events put on in the regions (*Harmonica World*, pp. 31-35, *Reverberations*, pp. 81-86, *Slipknot*, pp. 59-63). This is impressive evidence of the reach and connection of local groups at a national level.

Intergenerational contact

Although few of the participants in the literature surveyed referred directly to intergenerational contact as an important outcome of participation in arts activities, it is clear from the research that this is the case. The young African American artists in Valerie Kinloch's (2007) project engaged older residents in their walk through Harlem neighbourhoods. Kinloch suggests these conversations resulted in a learning which 'became reciprocal, active, and transformational for both the adults and the youngsters. Youth activism was met with adult learning'.⁶³

The amateur arts groups' magazines emphasis on the importance of attracting younger members in order to sustain the field is evident from *Reverberations*,⁶⁴ for example, which has a special section *Young Vibrations*, printed on different paper which is dedicated to younger members. In addition there are many photographs in the rest of the magazine which feature young and older members of groups playing together. *Highnotes*,⁶⁵ and *Theatre Business*⁶⁶ also feature articles and photos for and with younger members in mind. *Theatre Business*⁶⁷ puts a clear emphasis on continuity and youth to ensure the thriving of amateur groups: young people are given much support and encouragement to join theatrical groups, in the form of training, funding and sponsorship; articles and adverts are oriented to attract them to courses and projects: the National Operatic & Dramatic Association (NODA) itself runs a Youth Academy, and a Summer School. Many of the groups have special membership rates for young members.

⁶² Lee, T.S., (2007) Chinese Theatre, Confucianism, and Nationalism: Amateur Chinese Opera Tradition in Singapore, *Asian Theatre Journal*, Volume 24, Number 2, Fall 2007, pp. 397-421(Article) Published by University of Hawai'i Press, p. 409

⁶³ Kinloch, *Youth Representations*, p. 46

⁶⁴ *Reverberations*, Journal of Handbell Ringers of Great Britain (HBRGB); Issue Spring/Summer 2008

⁶⁵ *Highnotes* is the official magazine for the organization, Making Music; *Highnotes*, Making Music, Issue 15, February 2011

⁶⁶ *Theatre Business* is the official magazine for the National Operatic & Dramatic Association (NODA); *Theatre Business*, magazine from the National Operatic & Dramatic Association (NODA), Vol. 68 No.3 Autumn 2010

⁶⁷ *Theatre Business*, Vol. 68 No.3 Autumn 2010

Where the passing on of traditional arts and culture is concerned the notion of continuity between generations is also particularly strong. Eleanor Dunin (2009) found that in order for Dubrovnik communities to earn money from tourism older generation dancers were being recruited to teach younger members who had with no previous knowledge of traditional communal dances. Such knowledge differences between young and old might be particularly of concern to migrant groups. In Macedonia, for example, Aida Islam (2004) notes that the activities of culture and arts societies (CAS) are particularly important in developing and disseminating Turkish musical heritage to the younger generation. In Osaka, the *Musubi* senior citizen storytelling troupe develops links with the younger generation by performing in schools.

Maintenance of traditions; sense of identity and belonging

From a review of the literature, in particular the different societies' newsletters and magazines, there is a clear sense that members and participants are aware of the need to preserve and maintain traditional arts and crafts products and processes at the same time as moving with the times and being open to new and innovative approaches. LACE⁶⁸ magazine works well to demonstrate a concern with preserving traditional lace designing and making whilst promoting new methods and designs, particularly with young lace-makers in mind. The Lace Guild's motto interestingly is 'Custodians of the Past, Guardians of the Future'. There is an emphasis on attracting younger members to organisations and newsletters and magazines include special sections, advertise courses and classes, and for younger participants.

Players of CTM in Waldron & Veblen's (2009) study found a sense of community and belonging by joining other like-minded people in the learning and playing of traditional folk music. Members of the Australian symphonic choir also listed 'social interaction and belongingness' as 'durable benefits'⁶⁹ of participation.

For migrant groups participating in arts and cultural activities provides an opportunity to maintain links to their country and culture of origin in addition to developing hybrid traditions and rituals through the process of living in the host country. In the Introduction to *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, Thomas Turino and James Lea (2004) propose that 'Artistic practices have a special place in the realisation and presentation of identity because they are usually framed as heightened forms of representation for public perception, practice, and effects. Once externalised through public artistic forms, the meanings subjectively produced become part of the environment that dialectically shape the emergent models of the self'.⁷⁰ Jane Sugarman's study of music and the Albanian transnation also confirms this creation of new subjectivities through popular music and dance. She suggests that mass media commodities such as cassettes, CDs and music videos offer means through which a sense of transnational community can be reconstituted.

Turino and Lea (2004) also suggest that 'To maintain distinctive cultural lifeways in a host country, a greater degree of self-consciousness is required, especially if there is concern for subsequent generations upon whom the existence of the diaspora depends. Whereas greater attention must be

⁶⁸ LACE: The Quarterly Magazine and Newsletter of the Lace Guild; Number 137, January 2010

⁶⁹ Waldron, J. and Veblen, K. (2009) Learning in a Celtic Community: An Exploration of Informal Music Learning and Adult Amateur Musicians, *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* Spring 2009 No. 180, p. 71

⁷⁰ Turino, T. and Lea, J. (2004) *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, Detroit Monographs in Musicology/Studies in Music, No. 40, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, p. 10

placed on 'doing things *just* as we did them at home', this very same heightened self-conscious desire typically produces new creative practices that are unique to the diasporic formation'.⁷¹

In some cases the very sense of community identity and belonging can produce unintended exclusionary effects (Heddon and Milling, 2006). For example, an investigation of amateur arts organisations publications *Harmonica World* and *LACE*, seems to reveal that harmonica players are men, and lace-makers are predominantly women). It may be that certain traditional crafts such as coracle-making and border stick dressing tend to be male preserves and crocheting and knitting are predominantly done by women. Although there are no references to gender bias in the 'grey' literature that might evidence this, patterns of inclusion are suggested by the demographic of membership groups. These perspectives point to significant areas for further research.

In Singapore, amateur opera theatre, *xiqu*, groups were set up originally for newly arrived Chinese immigrants as a kind of support network. Through the continuation and development of this traditional art amateur *xiqu* groups have achieved more social recognition than professional groups of the same art and are now seen as being the 'bearers of cultural heritage in Singapore'.⁷² Another aspect of amateur *xiqu* groups is their emphasis on community – whereas professional groups focus on the individual rather than, necessarily, the collective performance and experience.

Marion Jacobson's study (2006) of the Reinvention of the Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus of New York City (JPPC) confirms other findings (Turino, 2004, Islam, 2004, Ito, 2010) that music is a 'marker of collective identity and self-definition'.⁷³ She also pinpoints the needs experienced in this case by '1990s Jewish Americans' as different from the needs of those who set up the chorus in 1923. In other words how to encompass these differences within an activity, and do those differences threaten the existence of the organisation? Might there be a *raison d'être* for an organisation that transcends differences or potential conflicts, such as those that might be termed, in this case, 'Jewish identity' or more generally, cultural, ethnic or national identity? Some dissension occurred when the conductor decided to introduce a 'religious song' into their repertoire: older members were angry at this idea, coming from a more secular, leftist Jewish tradition. As a solution, for their annual performance at the North American Jewish Choral Festival the conductor then divided the chorus into two, with a smaller, younger, more highly vocally trained chorus rehearsing the 'religious song'. (This case study has some interesting resonances with Smith's study of an Australian symphonic choir). According to Jacobson, instead of labour advocacy and highlighting the worker's struggle the JPPC has made the 'preservation of *Yiddishkeit* its primary aim'.⁷⁴

It is therefore possible to say that grassroots arts activities can play an important role in the affirming and maintenance of identity and tradition and that they contribute to social cohesion, reaffirming community identity and highlighting its presence in a host country or culture.

⁷¹ Turino & Lea, *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, p. 17

⁷² Lee, *Chinese Theatre*, p. 404

⁷³ Jacobson, M. S. (2006) *From Communism to Yiddishism: The Reinvention of the Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus of New York City*, in Alquist, K. ed., (2006) *Chorus and Community*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, p. 214

⁷⁴ Jacobson, *From Communism to Yiddishism*, p. 218

Social cohesion and place identity.

The young adults in Kinloch's (2007) study were developing a sense of community and cohesion through a collective process of conversation with other residents and information gathering, which resulted in organising material in the form of stories, interviews, videos and photographs. The gathering process developed reciprocal learning between different generations of residents of the Harlem neighbourhoods enriching and affirming a sense of identity and belonging in that locale.

Residents of Ravensthorpe, Western Australia (Mayes, 2010) engaged in the production of local postcards which they sold to tourists. What began with residents' desire to put their community on the map has developed over a period of twenty years into a local small arts industry which offers individual and local views of Ravensthorpe distinct from the images on commercial postcards. In addition to creating revenues for themselves and the community the 'lay' or amateur postcard production has contributed to the creation of a local rural place identity, for residents and tourists alike, putting Ravensthorpe on the map.

Similarly residents of Stokes Croft, Bristol took partial control of the development of their neighbourhood by forming the People's Republic of Stokes Croft (PRSC). Their mission statement reads: 'PRSC will seek to promote and bring to fruition the notion of Stokes Croft as a Cultural Quarter, as a destination. PRSC will seek to promote creativity and activity in the local environment, thereby generating prosperity, both financial and spiritual'. They do this through a number of public events and activities including art exhibitions, competitions, and notably the construction of a small-scale industry – Stokes Croft China, taking china and designs from closing Staffordshire factories and producing what has been affectionately termed 'Royal Doulton on Acid'. Through arts activities they have succeeded in creating a place identity for Stokes Croft in addition to generating revenue for the neighbourhood.

Nakagawa (2010) affirms the benefit for community of arts and culture activities from a 'governance from below' perspective in a study of such a district in Osaka, Japan. After initial failure of a 'top down' Arts and Culture Action Plan for the city, a community organisation initiated the creation of a senior citizen's storytelling group, *Musubi*. The group involved ageing homeless men on welfare who were isolated and lacking in self-esteem. Working with a poet, the troupe created and performed stories and succeeded in turning their lives around. Furthermore, the men decided to start volunteering at local school events, able to donate their time because they are supplementing their welfare assistance with income from performances. Thus an arts initiative has clear effects and consequences that reach beyond the arts activity itself.

- Such activities and processes can lead to improved community image and identity, with increased visibility within a town or country even. This in turn can contribute to a sense of pride for residents in that community.

Moreover, D. G. Taylor (2008) suggests that the correlation between arts activity and neighbourhood stability is evidence of *magnetisation*—'an increase in the desirability, commitment, social integration, and quality of life in a community area'.⁷⁵ He maintains that arts have the ability to create enjoyable public spaces, to create shared experience, and to encourage intergenerational activity.

⁷⁵ Taylor, D. G. (2008) Magnetising Neighbourhoods through Amateur Arts Performance, a Report for the Urban Institute, September 2008, USA, p. 1

Educational impact

Participation in grassroots arts activities, with a variety of ways of peer-to-peer learning might be considered to have a greater influence on an individual's educational development than community arts where there still tends to be an expert to whom attention is directed for guidance and a setting of parameters and standards. More empirical research is needed to verify such an assertion, nevertheless there is evidence that participation in grassroots arts activities increases and enhances learning in a number of ways and on a number of levels.

Technical skills and knowledge creation

A review of the 'grey' literature demonstrates the considerable skills and expertise that participants in grassroots arts activities possess, acquire, develop and disseminate. In addition to the peer-to-peer learning that takes place within the groups, the arts societies' newsletters and magazines offer further opportunities for skills development and learning. These can be picked up by those who are not able or do not wish to join a group. Most of the grassroots arts magazines and newsletters examined provided direct technical information for developing skills in their particular field. *Harmonica World*⁷⁶ for example, has a page of copied sheet music, and an interview between a student and a master harmonica player discussing vibrato technique. LACE⁷⁷ devotes ten pages to patterns and instructions, *Reverberations*⁷⁸ lists the kinds of music that are available for different skill levels. *Paint*⁷⁹ newsletter devotes eight articles plus some of the editorial in its 31 pages to instructions – from how to get more detail when drawing wildlife, moving from watercolour to oil paints, to 'castaway' - what can be created using only a minimum of tools and materials.

The instructions for a pattern in *Slipknot*⁸⁰ require complex understanding and to those not in the know it might seem hard to decipher:

Cast on 20 sts

1. k3, yrn p2 tog, k to end of row
2. m1, k2 tog, k13, yrn, p2 tog, k3
3. k3, yrn p2 tog, k5, k2 tog, yrn twice, sl1, k2 tog, pssso, yrn twice, k2 tog, yrn twice, k3

Similarly an article in LACE⁸¹ describing the construction of a 3-dimensional lace snail are complex and technical.

Thus it would seem a stereotypical trivialisation of such work can no longer be upheld. In addition to technical information and advice there is also a considerable amount of historical material related to the specific activity. So, for example, the Bead Society newsletter includes articles on 17th century bead-making in London, *Harmonica World*⁸² features a Tribute to Little Walter and his induction into

⁷⁶ *Harmonica World Magazine* of the National Harmonica League, April/May 2008

⁷⁷ LACE: The Quarterly Magazine and Newsletter of the Lace Guild; Number 137, January 2010

⁷⁸ *Reverberations*, Journal of Handbell Ringers of Great Britain (HBRGB); Issue Spring/Summer 2008

⁷⁹ *Paint*, The Newsletter of the SAA (The society for all artists), May 2007

⁸⁰ *Slipknot*, the Journal of the Knitting and Crochet Guild, No. 117, September 2007, p. 35

⁸¹ LACE, January 2010, pp. 22-23

⁸² *Harmonica World Magazine* of the National Harmonica League, April/May 2008

the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, *Clarinet & Saxophone*,⁸³ includes four historical perspectives (a 3-page feature on Klezmer music, for example) and LACE has an article about the search for early English lace. A couple of the newsletters, LACE and *Reverberations*, for example, have dedicated archive sections underlining the importance societies attach to the historical contextualisation and consequently the preservation and continuity of their activities. Through these numerous articles readers can develop a broad and deep understanding of the historical background to their art.

Additionally, the use of art as metaphor to explain and elaborate on concepts outside the field of art demonstrates a sophistication that is belied by stereotypical viewpoints. Daina Taimina for example, used crocheting to explain complex mathematical concepts: 'The idea of visualising the hyperbolic plane through crochet grew out of her motivation and perseverance to explain hyperbolic geometry to her students'.⁸⁴

Again, with limited empirical evidence available, it would be unwise to state categorically that participation in arts activities increases literacy and computer skills. However, membership of or participation in an amateur arts group will often entail some reading of technical instructions, reading musical notation, writing publicity or promotional material, letters and articles, use of the internet. Similarly, there is evidence from the societies' newsletters and magazines of passionate and informed debate on subjects not always related to the field. As mentioned above use of the internet has exponentially increased the amount of information available to anyone with access to a computer at the same time as increasing possibility for international networking and collaboration in informal ways. The Bead Society's magazine attests to the amount of international exchange undertaken by members, featuring articles on a Society-sponsored visit from two Russian bead experts and a follow-up visit of a UK member to Russia, a conference in Istanbul and a trip to meet a renowned American glass-bead-maker.

Increased knowledge and competency enhances self-confidence and self esteem. Moreover, the development and creation of knowledge and technical skills specific to those activities can also develop transferable skills in other fields and potentially employment.

Creativity and 'Flow'

Connected also to health and wellbeing the notion of 'flow' has emerged as an interesting point of discussion for investigators in a number of research projects (Burt and Atkinson, 2011, Reynolds, 2009). Some might call it 'being in the zone', others call it being 'on a roll'. Whatever the term we choose to use, there is a recognition that intense focus or concentration on a particular activity has the possibility to take us into a different space, with the potential to distract the participant from worries and stresses of their everyday life and work.

Burt and Atkinson's study (2011) revealed that participants experienced a feeling that can be termed 'flow' and that this played a major role in their ability to relax:

⁸³ *Clarinet & Saxophone*, The Official Publication of the Clarinet & Saxophone Society of Great Britain. Spring 2008, Volume 33, Number 1

⁸⁴ Osinga, H. M.(2010) 'Crocheting adventures with hyperbolic planes', *Journal of Mathematics and the Arts*, 4: 1, p. 52 Book review of Taimina, D. (2009) *Crocheting adventures with hyperbolic planes*, Wellesley: A. K. Peters Ltd.

The majority of participants reported that the creative process captivated them, distracted them and they described an experience analogous to 'flow'. There was loss of self-consciousness and lack of awareness of things going on around them, which displaced anxieties and facilitated relaxation.⁸⁵

Participants felt that the action of concentrating on an activity, in this case quilting took them away from their everyday life experiences.

'It [quilting] helps me detach myself from life . . . I just put myself in a little bubble . . . I become totally absorbed in it . . . because I have to concentrate, other things disappear, forget what else I'm supposed to be doing, forget that time is passing . . . you become detached because you've got something to focus on.' (Heather)⁸⁶

Burt and Atkinson observed that the psychological benefits from 'flow' continued even when participants were no longer involved in the activity.

' . . . it [quilting] just puts it [anxieties] into a different perspective, you are viewing it in a different light . . . you are doing something that you are enjoying . . . are a bit lighter in your thinking . . . when you come away from it [quilting] you are not in the same mood.' (Maggie)⁸⁷

Further research into this phenomenon would be timely and valuable, in particular in relation to the capacity of an arts activity to initiate it.

Beyond the field: understanding of other contemporary issues

Participation in arts activities also encourages participants to discuss and debate issues beyond the art form. In *Reverberations*⁸⁸ for example, the letters section reflects concern and involvement with contemporary issues wider than the activity: one member, for example, advocates abandoning national rallies in order to reduce carbon footprint. He uses the example of the Olympic Games where there will be a ban on car use to sites. For this reason he suggests members concentrate on organising and attending regional rallies instead of national ones. A second writes enthusiastically about the Handbell chatroom, the 'L':

...you can find anything you need to know and more on the 'L'. Recently we were asked to perform at a corporate event with a Swiss theme. So I went on the 'L' and asked if anyone knew of any Swiss music we could find or use. The response was wonderful. Sandra Winter wrote us a processional and a team from Alabama loaned us eight copies they had of a Swiss song they had in their library at a minimal cost to us.⁸⁹

A third correspondent warns the membership about the dangers of not being insured with the example of an incident involving a boiled sweet. In *Slipknot*⁹⁰ one topic in the *Your Letters* section was knitting machines versus hand knitters, which in addition to sparking debate introduced the topic of networking with international online groups through the internet. There is considerable scope here for researching how the internet might be being used by different amateur arts groups and individuals, and this is discussed further in the section on the Internet in 'Other key issues' on page 32.

⁸⁵ Burt and Atkinson, quilting and wellbeing, p. 3

⁸⁶ Burt and Atkinson, quilting and wellbeing, p. 3

⁸⁷ Burt and Atkinson, quilting and wellbeing, p. 3

⁸⁸ *Reverberations*, Journal of Handbell Ringers of Great Britain (HBRGB); Issue Spring/Summer 2008

⁸⁹ *Reverberations*, Issue Spring/Summer 2008, p. 65

⁹⁰ *Slipknot*, the Journal of the Knitting and Crochet Guild, No. 117, September 2007

International awareness

From studying the 'grey' literature it is apparent that there is considerable awareness of organisations and developments in the field outside the UK, some of which has been encouraged developed through increasing use of the internet. The Bead Society newsletter, for example, has a strong international perspective with two and three page articles respectively about trips to Russia and Turkey (Istanbul was the venue for the 2007 International Bead and Button Conference), a four page feature article about US bead-maker, Art Seymour, a four page article on beaded moccasins of the Native American Plains Indians, (both well illustrated with photos) and smaller articles and information pieces about members' trips to Venice bead shops and a workshop drawing on Native American Plains Indians' designs.

A number of articles in *Harmonica World* have an international focus with a feature by an American harmonica player about his work in New York and a report on a music trade show in California. It also includes a section 'East/West' which features an interview between student Chen Jang Ming and master harmonica player Willi Burger, of Italian origin. (The interview, originally with answers from Burger in Italian, had been translated into English.)

One issue of *Slipknot*⁹¹ includes an article about knitting in Peru by a member who had spent three weeks travelling there. Adverts for festivals, workshops and meetings abroad are found in many of the societies' publications and such opportunities often lead to the building of international social networks and to travel abroad, extending participants' experience of other cultures and customs.

International communication and networking have been made easier and more immediate through the internet. Most societies have a website and newsletters are full of references to internet usage, URLs of relevant organisations and sometimes debate about use of the internet itself. Using the internet requires computer skills which in turn might be developed for other purposes, such as word processing, creating spreadsheets, designing publicity and promotional material. Whilst they may not be highly visible on a policy or academic level grassroots arts activities have become a global phenomenon.

Skills in improvisation and experimentation

There is evidence that participation in grassroots arts activities develops skills in improvisation and experimentation frequently resulting in new discoveries and innovation.

For example, although the Lace Guild has a traditional committee set up, the magazine reflects a contemporary attitude to lace-making and lace-makers as well as a concern with preserving lace-making traditions. The current editor expresses a desire to 'move some of our articles in a slightly different direction to encourage and support design'. She suggests being 'brave' and try 'designing yourself'⁹² which seems to be a way to promote a more independent, DIY attitude, not so reliant on 'experts' to determine what is interesting or possible. There are small articles describing and advertising courses and workshops, from traditional lace-making to contemporary lace textiles where 'all rules will be forgotten and broken'⁹³

⁹¹ *Slipknot*, the Journal of the Knitting and Crochet Guild, No. 116, June 2007, pp. 47-50

⁹² LACE: The Quarterly Magazine and Newsletter of the Lace Guild; Number 137, January 2010, p. 1

⁹³ LACE, January 2010, p. 6

A contributor to *Slipknot* also advocates experimenting:

The pattern can be altered by changing the number of stitches in the repeat to 30, 32, or 26, but more excitingly by changing the number of stitches along the row in each pattern for example a band of 28 stitches then a band of 32 then a band of 24 then back to 28. The depth of the wavy ribs can be altered by changing the number of rows worked between each pattern row.⁹⁴

Learners of Celtic Traditional Music in Waldron and Veblen's (2009) study also stressed the importance of improvisation, acknowledging that learning to experiment increased confidence in their own ability.

Economic impact⁹⁵ - Definition of economic impact

Interest in the economic impact of the arts is not new. Indeed, it stretches back to the 1980's and arguments for the value of increased Governmental investment in the arts or 'cultural industries'.⁹⁶ The recession and Government deficit reduction strategies have given this approach to measuring the arts a new urgency and there are currently a number of attempts to measure the value of culture.⁹⁷ This approach is perhaps most developed in the USA where Americans for the Arts estimates that the non-profit arts sector is worth £166.2 billion to the American Economy and sustains 5.7 million jobs.⁹⁸

UK studies have tended to focus on the impact of capital investment in the arts as a strategy for urban regeneration, the role of heritage sites in the local economy or the contribution of festivals to rural community business.⁹⁹ Such studies, however, focus on the funded, formal, nonprofit parts of the arts sector, or on the role of individual entrepreneurs in developing cultural festivals rather than grass roots groups. Very little is known, certainly in the academic/accessible literature on, for example, the role voluntary arts play in sustaining village halls and other community buildings.

This applies even when the literature on 'softer' socio-economic impacts is analysed. There are no publically available social audits on grassroots arts groups.¹⁰⁰ There are three Social Return on Investment Reports lodged with the SROI Network. These however, relate to community arts groups, with various sources of funding, where social added value is measured through work to return long term unemployed to the labour market or the use of theatre as a tool for health promotion with assumed savings to the NHS.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ *Slipknot*, the Journal of the Knitting and Crochet Guild, No. 117, September 2007, p. 35

⁹⁵ Some information in this section taken from Voluntary Arts website, <http://www.voluntaryarts.org/> accessed June 2011

⁹⁶ Myerscough, J. (1988) *The Economic Importance of the Arts on Merseyside*. London, Policy Studies Institute

⁹⁷ O'Brien, D. (2010) *Measuring the Value of Culture: a report to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport*. London (DCMS) with AHRC and ESRC

⁹⁸ Americans for the Arts (2010) *Arts and Economic Prosperity III. The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organisations and their Audiences*. Americans for the Arts, Washington DC

⁹⁹ See for example: Clark, K. (ed.) (2006) *Capturing the Public Value of Heritage: The Proceedings of the London Conference 25-26 January 2006*. London, English Heritage./ Snowball, J. (2008) *Measuring the Value of Culture: Methods and Examples of Cultural Economics*. Dusseldorf, Germany, Springer-Verlag/ Maugham, C. and Bianchini, F. (2004) *The Economic Impact of Cultural Festivals in the East Midlands of England*. East Midlands Development Agency, Nottingham

¹⁰⁰ www.san.org.uk

¹⁰¹ Examples available at http://www.thesroinetwork.org/publications/cat_view/23-sroi-case-studies-not-assured

Economic impact

The economic impact of amateur arts activities, from unpaid labour and donated resources to revenue from subscriptions and purchases from local businesses is significant. However, the true value of these activities is difficult to measure in financial terms. If these activities are multiplied across the UK, the economic impact of voluntary arts activities at community level is considerable. They generate this considerable amount of revenue in a number of ways:

Unpaid labour of participants and volunteers

Amateur arts groups and activities are created and run with much unpaid labour and time. Money is not a determining factor in whether or not participants will take up an activity. In fact they appear willing to spend time and money on activities that they derive so many benefits from. Burt and Atkinson mention that in terms of responses to the benefits of quilting ‘The only negative mentioned was potential cost, although no-one saw this as a deterrent’. People will often work part-time, and then during the staging of events many will work full-time. Bendle and Patterson (2009) suggest that volunteers in a lead role might spend anywhere from 4 – 32 hours per week working on some part of the activity. Writing, editing, and publishing a society’s magazine or newsletter takes up a large amount of energy, time and resources: *Clarinet and Saxophone*,¹⁰² for example, a quarterly 64-page glossy magazine, has an editorial team of thirteen, including the Editor. *Theatre Business*¹⁰³ similarly has a large production team. It is worth noting here that the issue of numbers of volunteers is also relevant to the debate on inclusion/exclusion: who has access (in the broadest sense) to arts activities as well as who has the time to commit to participate.

The *anime* music video (AMV) fans in Ito’s (2010) study devote ‘extraordinary amounts of effort to support AMVs as a passionate hobby, something that they expend financial resources to support’¹⁰⁴ because they consider it art: “I did it because I considered the videos art and that’s what you do”, says one participant. In a similar way to more traditional kinds of amateur groups the organisation is sustained by ‘volunteer and member contributions’.¹⁰⁵

In Red Chidgey’s (2009) study, two ‘zine distributors, Sonja and Vina, acknowledged that “The most challenging thing is probably the money and time issue—there is simply never ever enough of both”.¹⁰⁶

Purchase of materials and equipment – locally made and from local shops

Another significant economic impact appears to be in the purchase of materials and equipment to pursue amateur arts activities: from wool to paints to willow to costumes to sheet music. An astonishing fact from Voluntary Arts reveals that the ‘Sports Council estimates that £150 million is spent on clothing and footwear for football alone!’¹⁰⁷ Although there are no figures for equivalent items

¹⁰² *Clarinet & Saxophone*, The Official Publication of the Clarinet & Saxophone Society of Great Britain. Spring 2008, Volume 33, Number 1

¹⁰³ *Theatre Business*, magazine from the National Operatic & Dramatic Association (NODA), Vol. 68 No.3 Autumn 2010

¹⁰⁴ Ito, M. (2010) The rewards of non-commercial production: Distinctions and status in the anime music video scene, *First Monday*, Volume 15, Number 5 - 3 May 2010, p. 14

¹⁰⁵ Ito, M., The rewards of non-commercial production, p. 7

¹⁰⁶ Chidgey, R. (2009) Free, Trade: Distribution Economies in Feminist Zine Networks, *Signs*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Autumn 2009), The University of Chicago Press, p. 34

¹⁰⁷ From Voluntary Arts website, www.voluntaryarts.org, accessed June 2011

purchased for arts activities examination of the many newsletters and magazines attests to the considerable amount of economic activity generated through this. In addition, most voluntary arts organisations and activities draw on their local community with money spent on staff, materials and services being fed back into that community.

Revenue for local and regional services

Other revenue is generated for local and regional services and organisations where meetings, exhibitions, classes and festivals are held. Articles and adverts in the amateur arts organisations' magazines and newsletters attest to the wealth of festivals, fairs, fetes and fundraisers nationally that generate revenue for local businesses and services, in particular local venues such as church halls and community buildings. (For example, the 19th Annual Beadwork and Bead Fair is held at Harrow Leisure Centre, the fee for which is financed mostly through the rental of stalls to members; the National Harmonica League's Spring Festival hires Kings Heath Cricket & Social Club which is financed through ticket sales;) Correspondence in *Reverberations* (p. 64) raises the issue of the high costs of venues for national events which is then reflected in high ticket prices. These can be deterrents for members and one correspondent suggests abandoning national events in favour of smaller regional ones which would also help to reduce their carbon footprint as well as providing more revenue for local venues.

Revenue from fundraising through an arts activity for other charitable purposes

Articles and comment in amateur arts organisations' magazines and newsletters show that there is a considerable amount of revenue which is raised through the specific arts activity in order to donate to other charitable causes: for example, the Wiltshire Serendipity Singers raised money for the charity Childline, South West Handbell Ringers raised money for St. Thomas' Church in Exeter, Utopia Costumes raised money for MacMillan Cancer Support.

Revenue from membership subscriptions

Most organisations and societies charge members a fee to belong. Some, like the National Harmonica League for example have one fixed rate (£20 per annum) others have a wider fee structure, such as the Lace Guild, with Young Lace-maker's subscription of £6.50 and Full Membership rate of £26, European rate £30.50 and Overseas rate of £35. These fees go to produce the magazines and newsletters and to fund annual events such as AGMs (Annual General Meetings) and in some cases to pay for outside speakers/artists at events. The magazines and newsletters also generate revenue through advertising.

Revenue from advertising in magazines and newsletters

Examination of grassroots arts magazines and newsletters reveals the considerable potential revenue that is generated through participants' purchasing of materials to use in their activity: approximately three pages of the Bead Society's newsletter¹⁰⁸ are filled with adverts for beads, shops fairs and related products. Articles about new techniques, styles and designs demonstrate the use of many products the sources of which are listed in the magazines. More than one third of the pages in *Highnotes*,¹⁰⁹ six and a half pages in LACE¹¹⁰ and between twelve and fourteen pages in *Theatre*

¹⁰⁸ Bead Society of Great Britain: Newsletter 91, Spring 2008

¹⁰⁹ *Highnotes*, Making Music, Issue 15, February 2011

Business,¹¹¹ for example, are given over to advertising, in part a way for organisations to produce a regular newsletter and additionally providing revenue opportunities for subscribers and advertisers. Moreover teachers and facilitators of workshops and classes find students (and therefore income) through the pages of these newsletters.

Employment opportunities

Participants can potentially increase their employment opportunities through skills development and networking. Magazines and newsletters are a valuable way for participants to make their skills known and much of the space in many of the magazines are devoted to adverts for workshops and classes run by members: for example, Elise Mann in the Bead Society's newsletter writes an article about her about her freelance work as a beader; *Animated*, community dance magazine advertises a register of 1,500 dance teachers; in the same magazine, choreographer Liz Lerman writes about the skills she acquired through Reevaluation Counselling (*sic*) which she employs in her dance work; an article in *Slipknot* describes a new shop opened by two members of the Knitting and Crochet Guild.

Desirability of an area

It has been suggested that 'there is a significant correlation between the amount of amateur, informal arts activity and neighbourhood stability and/or improvement'¹¹². This increases a locality's desirability, attracting new residents and tourists. Taylor (2008) suggests that this correlation is evidence of *magnetisation*—'an increase in the desirability, commitment, social integration, and quality of life in a community area'.¹¹³ Taylor asserts that 'over a five-year span low-income neighbourhoods with more arts activity showed a larger decrease in crime rates than did neighbourhoods with less arts activity'¹¹⁴ He maintains that arts have the ability to create enjoyable public spaces, to create shared experience, and to encourage intergenerational activity.

Decrease in the use of the health service

Although there is limited empirical evidence to demonstrate this, researchers such as Burt and Atkinson (2011) and Ruiz (2004) have pointed out the potential savings that will be made from a decrease in the use of the health service due to enhanced health and wellbeing.

Decline of revenue for the commercial music industry

As Sam Howard-Spink asserts the increase in amateur music creators and their projects through improvements and innovations in technology and in particular online music production might result in greatly reduced revenue for the commercial music industry. Furthermore he argues that audiences are 'not only active in the sense of creating meanings: they are active in the evolution of the technological and economic structures of the music circulation system'.¹¹⁵ With this then there is the potential development of a new kind of economics as far as music creation and distribution is concerned.

¹¹⁰ LACE: The Quarterly Magazine and Newsletter of the Lace Guild; Number 137, January 2010

¹¹¹ *Theatre Business*, magazine from the National Operatic & Dramatic Association (NODA), Vol. 68 No.3 Autumn 2010

¹¹² Taylor, D. G. (2008) *Magnetizing Neighbourhoods through Amateur Arts Performance*, a Report for the Urban Institute, September 2008, USA, p. 10

¹¹³ Taylor, *Magnetizing Neighbourhoods*, p. 1

¹¹⁴ Taylor, *Magnetizing Neighbourhoods*, p. 1

¹¹⁵ Howard-Spink, S. (2005) *Grey Tuesday, online cultural activism and the mash-up of music and politics*, First Monday, Special Issue #1: Music and the Internet, 4 July 2005 accessed 28/02/2011, p. 19

Aesthetic impact

Arguably the most contested and most difficult impact to measure is that of aesthetics. In their study of the impact of encounters with the arts Eleanor Belfiore and Oliver Bennett (2007) suggest that it is not possible to 'develop a rigorous protocol for the assessment of the impacts of the aesthetic experience that can be boiled down to a handful of bullet-points and a user-friendly 'evaluation toolkit''.¹¹⁶ They conclude that further research needs to be done in order to fully understand the complexities and unpredictability of aesthetic experience and how it is shaped. Furthermore, we suggest that it is even harder (perhaps impossible) to make distinctions between the aesthetic impacts of professional, community or voluntary arts on an individual or community. For this reason what follows are a number of impacts created through engagement with arts activities in a more general sense.

Hobby or 'serious leisure': passion for the art

In the final paragraph of an editorial of *Theatre Business*, National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA) Chief Executive, Tony Gibb, writes that 'together we can continue to ensure the success of this wonderful hobby of ours'.¹¹⁷ While there is limited empirical research into the way participants define their arts activities, there are not many references to the word 'hobby' in the literature. One Celtic Traditional Music learner in Waldron and Veblen's study (2009) says: "It's not a hobby, I'm passionate about it".¹¹⁸ Participants took up CTM for the love of it and other benefits such as performing and socialising though considered valuable were incidental. Passion for the arts emerged as a significant factor in the reason for taking up and developing an arts activity. In her study of symphonic choirs Smith (2006) introduces Stebbins' notion of 'serious leisure' which s/he describe as 'the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge'.¹¹⁹ Participants in her study were 'passionate and moving' in their responses to her questions about motivation for participation. Interestingly, Smith's participants, aware of the lack of a similar, professional choir in their city, felt 'obliged to achieve professional standards' thus most critical comments concerned other members perceived 'lack of commitment'¹²⁰ to the choir. Members of choirs studied by Bailey and Davidson (2005) felt that more important than the social support system of the group was the 'creation of a worthwhile musical product'.¹²¹ They felt that performing for an audience was not 'an integral component of participating in a choir',¹²² rather that the music was the most important thing.

Ito's (2010) study of the *anime* music video (AMV) scene suggests that the motivation of fandom is tied to the motivation to create and the 'ecology' of the anime music video scene thrives on a wide range of quality and skill that does not exist in the professional video-making scene. Ito writes that

¹¹⁶ Belfiore, E. and Bennett, O. (2007) Determinants of Impact: Towards a Better Understanding of Encounters with the Arts, *Cultural Trends*, 16:3, pp. 225-275

¹¹⁷ *Theatre Business*, magazine from the National Operatic & Dramatic Association (NODA), Vol. 68 No.3 Autumn 2010, p. 6

¹¹⁸ Waldron and Veblen, Learning in a Celtic Community, p. 71

¹¹⁹ Stebbins, R. A. (1992). Amateurs, professionals and serious leisure, Montreal: McGill University Press, p. 3

¹²⁰ Smith, R., (2006) Symphonic Choirs: Understanding the Borders of Professionalism, in Alquist, Karen ed., (2006) *Chorus and Community*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, p. 299

¹²¹ Bailey and Davidson, Effects of group singing, p. 292

¹²² Bailey and Davidson, Effects of group singing, p. 292

AMV fans are 'evangelical' about their passion and at the same time amass subcultural capital by displaying 'insider knowledge'¹²³ of the genre. Clearly AMV is more than a hobby, yet Ito suggests that the rewards and incentives for this passion 'centre on recognition and social participation'¹²⁴ facilitated through the 'properties of open access and sharing that support an amateur ethos'. Here then, recognition of the artwork by peers is as important as the creation of it.

In her exploration of the motivations and strategies of feminist 'zine distributors, Red Chidgey asked women what motivated them. Two responded:

'Well, it means a lot of unpaid work. But it also means getting together with similarly minded women (and also reading about/from them) and raising our own voice in a money-dominated mainstream press with making only very few amends to the marketability of the 'product'. It means writing about the things we care about in ways that we want, not having to fit into any preformatted media slots, not having to care if enough people will buy the 'zine if we speak our minds freely. (And of course it's great to do something you are really passionate about and that you believe in without thinking about money and target audiences.)'¹²⁵

Smith (2006) refers to studies (Juniu, Tedrick and Boyd, 1996) concerning the 'intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of amateur and professional musicians'¹²⁶ which found that although both groups showed little differences in their feeling towards performances, 'professionals were more influenced by the extrinsic motivation of remuneration'¹²⁷ as opposed to satisfaction derived from doing the activity itself.

Such passion for the activity seems to be a hallmark of amateur arts and it would be interesting to conduct similar investigations among professional artists, in order to see whether there is something distinctive about amateur arts or whether there is something inherent in the nature of arts activities in general that elicits such a response.

For some, explaining why they participate in a particular activity is not easy: Lawson (2009) in a study of the motivations of people who take up tap dancing expresses an inability to articulate the feeling herself: tap dancing for her does "something exciting...that I cannot easily explain". So already there is a sense of inexplicability or something that is not easily articulated when confronted with a need to explain why we do an arts activity. Her co-participants in the tap dancing class 'had difficulty in coming up with instant answers other than it was 'fun''¹²⁸ In other words they appeared not to have thought about it analytically before. Perhaps this lack of ability or perhaps desire, even, to take apart or analyse this, might be borne out in further investigation of participants in grassroots arts activities. Developing this idea further, such intangibility and inadequacy of scientific frameworks to explain such feelings arguably plays a role in making arts activities notoriously tricky to measure, quantify and evaluate. Recognition of this might in turn have bearing on the kinds of monitoring and evaluation frameworks that might be created for arts activities.

Thus, participants join a group or activity because they are interested in or passionate about the art-form, whether it is drawing, playing the harmonica or beading. It is this impulse which impels

¹²³ Ito, M. (2010) The rewards of non-commercial production: Distinctions and status in the anime music video scene, *First Monday*, Volume 15, Number 5 - 3 May 2010, p. 6

¹²⁴ Ito, The rewards of non-commercial production, p. 1

¹²⁵ Chidgey, Free, Trade, p. 34

¹²⁶ Smith, Symphonic Choirs, p. 299

¹²⁷ Juniu, Tedrick and Boyd (1996), p. 299

¹²⁸ Lawson, Why Dance? p. 6

people to make art. Little empirical research has been done where participants are directly asked why they participate in a particular group or activity. However, the initial investigations of this Study show that further research into this question alone might discover valuable information on the reasons why art can and does play a crucial role in the lives of individuals and communities.

Beautiful surroundings

Artwork renders a community more aesthetically pleasing – for example through public artwork, murals & mosaics and beautified community gathering places. An interesting take on this notion was created by residents of Ravenscroft, Australia (Mayes, 2010) who painted postcards of their town for tourists, in part to raise money to make “things around town...look more presentable”¹²⁹ and in part to raise the profile of the town, which they considered to be worth visiting.

Magnetising neighbourhoods

As Taylor (2008) suggests, individual and community commitment to and engagement with arts activities may create a magnetising dynamism to a neighbourhood or community. In his case study of the Japanese *Msubi* story-telling troupe Nakagawa (2010) suggests that a socially inclusive Creative Cities Theory, which foregrounds the use of culture as primary force in urban regeneration, would begin at the citizen level, rather than at a policy level. As an extension to this Turino (2004) suggests that ‘Artistic practices have a special place in the realisation and presentation of identity because they are usually framed as heightened forms of representation for public perception, practice, and effects. Once externalised through public artistic forms, the meanings subjectively produced become part of the environment that dialectically shape the emergent models of the self’.¹³⁰ Thus engaging in arts activities might create a cycle whereby an individual is seen to be ‘artistic’ and therefore considers her/himself ‘artistic’. The community that such artwork is created and produced in might then be also seen to be an ‘artistic’ community.

Aesthetic Sensibility

Engagement in arts activities may promote and enhance an individual’s and community’s sense of ‘beauty’ and/or aesthetics. Reynolds (2010) found that participants in her study began to pay attention to the aesthetics of their environment, in particular to colour, texture and details of nature. Confronted with the notion of ‘Harlem as art’ Kinloch’s (2007) participants had to start to consider parts of their neighbourhood which had been left abandoned and in disrepair as historic and as art. Furthermore they came to redefine their understanding of the term ‘art’ to include notions of struggle and experience.

Contagion

Reynolds (2010) suggests that participants engaging in one arts activity are more likely to start other arts activities as a result of enjoying one. Moreover, they might encourage others to do the same. Thus experiencing arts activities as an audience member or hearing or reading experiences from other participants can also encourage people to become involved in arts activities that exist within a community.

¹²⁹ Mayes, R. (2010) Doing cultural work: Local postcard production and place identity in a rural shire, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 26 (2010) p. 4

¹³⁰ Turino, T. and Lea, J. (2004) *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, Detroit Monographs in Musicology/Studies in Music, No. 40, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, p. 10

Other key issues emerging from the review of the policy, research and 'grey' literature

Importance yet invisibility

Much of the literature from amateur arts organisations and independent reviews of the sector points to the importance of amateur arts contribution and its simultaneous invisibility in relation to the public face of the arts, funding bodies and other government arts advocacy organisations.

Taylor (2008) states that in the USA 'The amateur and mid-range sectors of the arts industry are much larger than the professional sector'.¹³¹

As observed in the introduction formal arts bodies such as Arts Council England (2010, *Achieving great art for everyone*, p. 12) and Arts Council of Wales (2010, *Taking Part*, p. 3) have begun to recognise the importance of grassroots or amateur arts organisations and their activities with the result that they have started to include references to and recognition of them in their policy documents and investigations.

Notions, definitions and distinctions between Amateur and Professional

'Amateurism is a very important element in our artistic heritage...as long as it is not amateurish.'¹³²

As is apparent in the section above there seems to be some flexibility in the notions of amateur and professional. Smith's (2006) study investigates this further. Her study also probes the tensions and contradictions inherent in a process of creating art by people who are not considered professionals but work in a professional context with other so-called professionals. Furthermore, Smith also problematises the terms 'amateur' and 'professional' and the difficulties of locating artwork solely within one or other of these terms. She begins by exploring the term 'amateur' – from the common understandings of the word to mean an activity that one does for the love of it, not for money, in addition to its negative connotation of an activity or work that is of a less than 'professional' quality or standard. She suggests that in musical performance the two terms are not clearly distinct one from the other. According to Hutchison and Feist (1991) amateur and professional arts are 'intertwined and interdependent' and that there exists a 'complex amateur/professional continuum or spectrum of ambition, accomplishment and activity'.¹³³ Referring to Stebbins (1992), who coined the term '*serious leisure*', Smith suggests that contrary to what the word continuum implies, there is not necessarily a development from untrained amateur to highly qualified professional. Additionally, such amateur participants commit considerable time and energy to their activities and from which they derive 'durable benefits' such as 'self-esteem...feelings of accomplishment...social interaction and belongingness'.¹³⁴ In this context, because of the lack of professional (= paid) choruses, the amateur symphonic chorus is the equivalent and the standard of a professional chorus. Participants in Smith's study paid more attention to the reaction of the orchestra to their work, who they consider to be 'professional colleagues, than to that of other critics. They also felt that a mark of their professionalism

¹³¹ Taylor, *Magnetizing Neighbourhoods*, p. 5

¹³² John Cowie Reid, Professor and Head of Department of English at University of Auckland, 1968 – 72, in a public lecture in 1972. Citation taken by Tretchikoff from Devliotis, C (2005) *Dancing with Delight*, Auckland: Polygraphia Ltd.

¹³³ Hutchinson, R. and Feist, A (1991) *Amateur Arts in the UK*, *Policy Studies Institute*, p. 294

¹³⁴ Smith, *Symphonic Choirs*, p. 295

was performing in the city's main concert hall, which is a 'symbol of professional status' and also has 'superior facilities'.¹³⁵

In his online article on DJ mashup, Howard-Spink refers to Antoine Hennion¹³⁶ who redefined the notion of amateur in response to the 'explosion in the record market and media audiences through the mid-twentieth century'.¹³⁷ He defines 'amateur' as anyone who is a 'music user' 'from the Sunday pianist to the participant in a local choir, from a record store browser to an audience member at an opera or rock concert'.¹³⁸ Hennion may be reverting to the etymological root of the word, amateur being a lover or appreciator of an activity. Howard-Spink thus argues that 'those who download music, as much as those who produce the music, are part of the same matrix',¹³⁹ asserting that the music industry cannot exist without amateurs.

Amateur arts groups may hire in/employ professionals to lead/direct/conduct and/or are retired professionals themselves. There is still a prevailing sense that many amateur artists want to eventually become professional artists. Even of those that don't, many still aspire to 'professional' standards and value performing with professionals in their field. Perhaps following the trend to explore the blurring of boundaries between professional, community and amateur arts, the language used to define terms is changing, so, for example, instead of referring to professional and amateur artists, the terms 'established and amateur artists'¹⁴⁰ are used.

Taylor (2008) sees the professional arts sector as 'key to establishing the standards and skills that are transmitted to local neighbourhoods through the efforts of amateur and semi-professional artists'.¹⁴¹ Following a similar argument to Howard-Spink (2011) he suggests that no sector is more important than the other, both being 'elements of a more comprehensive ecology that includes both formal and informal acts activity'.¹⁴² This appears to be quite a traditional view of the separation and purpose of these two sectors of arts activities: the professionals set and preserve the standards and quality by which amateurs measure their work.

Yet in *Slipknot*¹⁴³ the 'Your Letters' section was ablaze with indignation and passion about an earlier editorial, which was on the subject of 'professionalism' within the Knitting and Crochet Guild and the views of the Chair of the Guild who appears to have dismissed the 'café knitting groups' which are informal groups of knitters/crocheters and not Guild meetings. Her views were termed 'elitist and off-putting' and had filled members with 'disquiet' and 'alarm'. The Chair responded and admitted her

¹³⁵ Smith, *Symphonic Choirs*, p. 300

¹³⁶ Antoine Hennion, 1996. "Music industry and music lovers, beyond Benjamin: The return of the amateur," In: Paul Rutten (editor). *Music, culture and society in Europe*, part II of: European Music Office, *Music in Europe*. Brussels. Reprinted in *Soundscapes: Online Journal on Media Culture*, volume 2 (July) 1999, at http://www.icce.rug.nl/~soundscapes/DATABASES/MIE/Part2_chapter06.html, accessed 8 May 2004. In Howard Spink, Sam (2005) *Grey Tuesday, online cultural activism and the mash-up of music and politics*, First Monday, Special Issue #1: Music and the Internet, 4 July 2005 accessed 28/02/2011, p. 9

¹³⁷ Howard-Spink, *Grey Tuesday*, p. 9

¹³⁸ Howard-Spink, *Grey Tuesday*, p. 9

¹³⁹ Howard-Spink, *Grey Tuesday*, p. 10

¹⁴⁰ News item on the Voluntary Arts website about Open Doors, inviting artists to submit work for exhibition in individual's houses: <http://opendoorslondon.blogspot.com> on

<http://www.voluntaryarts.org/cgi-bin/website.cgi?tier1=network&tier2=news&fp=true> accessed July 2011

¹⁴¹ Taylor, *Magnetizing Neighborhoods*, p. 11

¹⁴² Taylor, *Magnetizing Neighborhoods*, p. 11

¹⁴³ *Slipknot*, the Journal of the Knitting and Crochet Guild, No. 117, September 2007, pp. 22-26

previous editorial was written 'as deliberately provocative as possible in order to stimulate some ideas for the future'.¹⁴⁴ However, in charting the course for the Guild in the near future, she also feels that "one of the conditions for being a member of the Guild should be to be curious about knitting and crochet; we are not a café knitting club with an expensive secretariat". She wants the Guild to be 'innovative and exciting' as well as being able to campaign for 'better design and better materials'.¹⁴⁵ One of the responses to this was from member Denise Musk, who felt that for individual members more important than professional qualifications is that they "enjoy practising their favourite discipline". She suggests that if professional qualifications become mandatory for membership then the Guild will lose "a lot of the talented, dedicated people who do such sterling work in promoting the Guild". She continues: "Many members do have qualifications and a recognition of their skills which adds richness to our pooled knowledge but so does anyone who simply enjoys knitting and/or crochet as a pastime".¹⁴⁶ It is evident that this is an issue which will continue to be debated and discussed amongst members. It is also a pivotal issue for amateur arts and the complexities around notions of professionalism.

In her study on the motivations of amateur tap dancers, Lawson (2009) points out another aspect of this issue: if we call ourselves, 'tap dancers...are we tap dancers?'¹⁴⁷ Interestingly, this is a frequent question both professional and non-professional artists ask themselves. Are we legitimate? And where does this legitimacy come from? Lawson quotes Howard Becker (1982) who sees dance as an 'art' form which has 'been given a social constructed reality within the individual society where it is performed and only certain people in this society are given the right to define, classify, and rate its goodness'.¹⁴⁸ This leads to the question: what standards do participants in grassroots arts activities use to 'judge' their legitimacy as artwork? To what extent do participants consider themselves to be artists? Such questions point to further debate on notions of standards and legitimacy within art discourses which, though relevant to this subject demand more discussion than is possible within the parameters of this Study.

Lawson continues her investigations and poses a number of questions:

Can a dancer be a dancer without skill or appropriate body type? What will the audience think? How much can the dancer rely on amateur status to confer a license or excuse for the illegitimacy of not meeting professional standards?¹⁴⁹

She suggests that 'for amateur dancers, the structural constraint of legitimacy is lessened by the special status accorded to amateurs in a consumerist society. Amateurs, being the aficionados of commercial culture, are leaders'. This is borne out in previously mentioned articles (Ito, 2010, Howard-Spink, 2005, Hetrick, 2006) that discuss amateur music and video creation, production and distribution.

¹⁴⁴ *Slipknot*, September 2007, pp. 22-26

¹⁴⁵ de Lee, M. (2007) My view of the future of the Guild, *Slipknot*, the Journal of the Knitting and Crochet Guild, No. 116, September 2007, p. 44

¹⁴⁶ Musk, D. (2007) How do you see the future of the Guild? In Your Letters, *Slipknot*, the Journal of the Knitting and Crochet Guild, No. 117, September 2007, p. 21

¹⁴⁷ Lawson, Why Dance? p. 4

¹⁴⁸ Lawson, Why Dance? p. 4

¹⁴⁹ Lawson, Why Dance? p. 4

A further interesting perspective on legitimacy and on the distinction between amateur and professional is revealed by a YouTube¹⁵⁰ interview with classical harmonica master player Willi Burger. Burger's expectation of being rewarded with a series of concert dates having won the World Harmonica Championship in 1955 was only met with negative responses: the harmonica was not considered a serious professional, classical instrument. Burger gave up playing until 20 years later when he heard a recording by sixty-five year old Larry Adler (also a famous harmonica player). Since taking up the harmonica again he has given many classical concerts. Did the harmonica gain respectability during those twenty years? Why might some instruments be considered more or less professional than others? Does the harmonica nowadays have the same professional prestige as other classical instruments such as the piano or violin? Again, such questions demand further reflection and research.

In Smith's (2006) study participants were also very aware of 'the tensions created by the unresolvable conflict between the professional demands of the choir and the demands of their other lives'.¹⁵¹

Smith suggests that to achieve the choirs' goals, rather than treat members of the choir as 'professionals' in the conventional use of the term, it would be more valuable to 'tap into the most important quality that amateurs bring to their participation: the passion, which because they are shut out from many of the benefits of a fully professional life, is directed solely toward the activity itself'.¹⁵²

A survey of retirees from the choir confirmed that what they valued most about the experience was the professional standard of the choir. However, they also wanted more than that, in a sense: they had been retired by the organisation after not passing the audition for renewed membership but had expected some recognition of their commitment to the choir over the years (which ranged from 14 - 27 years) and the way in which their dismissal was handled was not concomitant to what they felt they deserved as long-standing members of the choir and of a community organisation.

Smith concludes that in order to at least partially resolve the conflict between the professional expectations of the choir and their simultaneous amateur status as members of a community organisation, management in particular needs to have a more sensitive understanding and recognition of the needs and existing tensions of membership of such an organisation.

Jacobson observes a similar trend in the Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus (JPPC): the director of the chorus wondered whether to make the JPPC an 'auditioned chorus' taking a step to professionalise the organisation and according to older members, moving the chorus away from a folk chorus where anyone can get involved regardless of talent.

Yet another perspective on the problematics of notions of amateur and professional is information from a report by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2008) which states that 'Over the last five years, 34% of amateur groups have had members who went on to become professional'.¹⁵³

This suggests that amateur artists aspire to becoming professionals and that this desire is supported, if only obliquely, by funding and policy-making bodies.

¹⁵⁰ Willi Burger, Masters of the Harmonica <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dJ4hC1nowl> accessed June 2011

¹⁵¹ Smith, *Symphonic Choirs*, p. 300

¹⁵² Smith, *Symphonic Choirs*, p. 300

¹⁵³ Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2008) *Our Creative Talent: the voluntary and amateur arts in England*, p.

It is therefore clear that distinctions between amateur and professional are flexible, blurry and open to contestation. Further research into this area will undoubtedly discover more complexities and nuances which will be valuable for understanding the value of grassroots arts activities for individuals and communities.

Amateur-professional collaboration

There is some evidence of an increasing connection and co-operation between amateur and professional arts organisations. The review cites these examples as indication of the greater attention being paid by professional arts organisations to amateur arts work and organisations for a variety of reasons. The policy and grey literature indicate that there is likely to be more emphasis/focus on collaborations and partnerships of this sort. In a report¹⁵⁴ on Amateur and Community Theatre in Scotland, Greg Giesekam makes a number of recommendations for the future recognition of the contribution of amateur arts. One of these is for professional theatre companies to develop their relationship with amateur groups and to look for ways to support and collaborate if so desired. This is being now being initiated in theatre with Open Stages, for example, a collaboration between the National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA) and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and also through the BBC Performance Fund support for youth projects.

As negative evidence, it might be argued that artist-led participatory arts activities can be *less* empowering than activities where participants are in charge. Jason Freeman and Mark Godfrey (2010) described a creative collaboration between audiences and musicians. Their article is pertinent in a number of ways. First, it highlights a recognition of the increasing participation of ‘audiences’ in music-making through interactive and collaborative online networks and software capabilities: we create our own libraries and playlists of music, we share our music with others and import from other people’s resources. However, this kind of participation and collaboration has not yet been extended in the same way to live performance. Second, through a live collaborative performance between musicians, dancers and audience, the authors/composers intended that *Flock* should ‘make its audience feel like participants who shape the performance, not spectators who merely watch it’. However, the authors found that audiences were divided over whether they had been ‘creative’ and ‘whether the performance would have been different without them’.¹⁵⁵ This also points to debates on agency and authorship (Claire Bishop, 2004, Grant Kester, 2006) emerging from the increasing amount of collaborations and participatory art work being undertaken by professional artists.

It would seem crucial that participants in any collaboration must be aware of the blurry distinctions between amateur and professional and within this the issue of self governance plays an important role.

¹⁵⁴ Giesekam, G. (2000) *Amateur and Community Theatre in Scotland*. Scottish Arts Council. Community Arts Network: no in stasis – archive housed at: <http://wayback.archiveit.org/2077/20100906194747/http://www.communityarts.net/>, pp. 132-135

¹⁵⁵ Freeman, J. and Godfrey, M. (2010) Creative collaboration between audiences and musicians in *Flock*, *Digital Creativity*, 2010 Vol.21. No. 2 pp. 85-99

Self governance and cooperation/sharing

Self-governance is key to differentiation from community arts, even though many groups hire in, employ or are made up of professional artists. It is evident from examination of the 'grey' literature that amateur arts activities provide opportunities for developing leadership skills, initiative and independence, in addition to creating a space where everyone can experience ownership of the activity. Groups may be traditionally organised with roles of Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Editor being filled. Con O'Neill of the London Local Area Group of Harmonica World feels a 'management structure is essential'¹⁵⁶ for local groups, but this need not be in the traditional mode mentioned above.

Writing an article for *Reverberations*, Sue Tipping describes an enormous bell-shaped cake that was baked to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Handbell Ringers of Great Britain: 'The cake was shaped as a handbell with individual cakes all working together to make a whole handbell. It made me think of an analogy in that each cake, like each HRGB member and each team, is important in so far as all the parts together form the whole organisation'.¹⁵⁷ The Editor of *Slipknot*, responding to members letters, writes about 'we' and refers to 'your Guild' implying the shared ownership and also responsibility of the organisation.

In an article¹⁵⁸ about running a local area harmonica group, O'Neill writes that 'the fewer professionals we have in the organisation...the better'. The slogan for his local area group is 'Come, Learn, Teach', emphasising the peer-to-peer learning philosophy which is at the heart of much amateur arts skill development. Even though such a comment is rare, and does not necessarily mean to be unkindly exclusive, there is a sense that participants in amateur arts are keen to preserve their independence. The emphasis is on sharing knowledge and skills and enthusiasm.

Remaining independent seems it might even mean changing the art activity – Anne Smith writes¹⁵⁹ that she was in a ladies choir whose conductor moved away, so rather than join a choir in another village they decided to take up handbell ringing, Since then the group has gone from strength to strength playing concerts in many venues and rallies and buying more bells.

Unpaid labour

Although mention of this has been made in the section on economic impact, it is discussed further because the focus here is not merely on economics, but on the nuances and complexities that emerge from notions of amateur and professional. Another differentiation made between amateur and professional artists is that professional artists are paid for their art. Again, the issue is arguably more complex and a survey of the literature reveals some interesting perspectives.

In some cases not being paid for doing something gives it more status: Lee (2007) explores notions of amateur and professional in his study of Chinese Opera tradition in Singapore. The two terms indicate the structural differences of performing troupes rather than performance standards and skill

¹⁵⁶ O'Neill, Con (2008) Running a Local Area Group, *Harmonica World*, Magazine of the National Harmonica League, April/May 2008, p. 24

¹⁵⁷ Tipping, Sue (2008) Southern Ringers Go North, *Reverberations*, Journal of Handbell Ringers of Great Britain (HBRGB); Issue Spring/Summer 2008, p. 21

¹⁵⁸ O'Neill, Running a Local Area Group, p. 24

¹⁵⁹ Smith, A. (2008) Archivist's Corner, *Reverberations*, Journal of Handbell Ringers of Great Britain (HBRGB); Issue Spring/Summer 2008

levels: 'professional' troupes are full time, for-profit organisations and actors in these troupes gain a living by performing *xiqu*; 'amateur' troupes are non-profit and practice *xiqu* for leisure.

Historically, *xiqu* groups would be formed by people of the same ethnic community who had migrated to Singapore. Most members of the troupes have not had any 'systematic'¹⁶⁰ training before joining and are trained by senior and more experienced members. Amateur groups 'present both small-scale and large-scale performances'¹⁶¹ in schools, community clubs, as part of Chinese New Year celebrations, fundraising events for the group, an annual or biannual performance. The costly productions are supported financially through fundraising events, by 'art and cultural institutions' and wealthy members of the group and other 'voluntary associations'.¹⁶²

Amateur performances feature large casts, 'elaborate props...colourful costumes and grand battle scenes'.¹⁶³ The audience can also follow the action through projected text translations which means they are far more accessible to the lay audience than professional performances which are less spectacular and do not use projected text translations. In terms of Confucian ideology, the 'amateur' who performs *xiqu* for leisure and advocacy is considered superior to the professional who makes a living from performing it. Is there a connection here to that notion of 'amateur' once espoused by the gentry-scholar in the UK? Sports for example were to be 'sporting' at, not paid for. Is there a similar distinction still prevalent in the division between Rugby League and Rugby Union?

Lee suggests that professional *xiqu* performers maybe be technically more proficient but amateur groups are considered to be 'better' as social organisations. Lee proposes that this 'value judgement is predicated solely on the amateur organisational ethos and thoroughly informed by the Confucian ideology' and that 'In Singapore, *xiqu* performance is respected as an avocation but not as a vocation. For the amateur, performing *xiqu* is significant more as a celebration of social status than an achievement of technical expertise'.¹⁶⁴ Thus Lee argues that the social significance of amateur *xiqu* groups lies not only in their technical excellence but in the 'values espoused through their performances'. Confucian ideology emphasises education and art for 'refining the mind and soul'¹⁶⁵ and as such is reflected in the amateur *xiqu* groups. Amateur performers are sometimes referred to as being associated with Confucian teachings and use of the word 'amateur' is significant both socially and aesthetically. Lee makes an interesting comment that younger *xiqu* performers would rather 'pay to perform with amateurs than be paid to perform with the professionals'.¹⁶⁶

A further twist on this issue, Lee suggests, is that because amateurs pay to perform, members must have enough money to do this. Lee argues that this reinforces 'class distinctions'. Members are educated and work in white-collar occupations. They are interested in promoting the art of *xiqu* and emphasise the 'importance of local artistic heritage in the context of modernity'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ Lee, Chinese Theatre, p. 403

¹⁶¹ Lee, Chinese Theatre, p. 404

¹⁶² Lee, Chinese Theatre, p. 404

¹⁶³ Lee, Chinese Theatre, p. 405

¹⁶⁴ Lee, Chinese Theatre, p. 406

¹⁶⁵ Lee, Chinese Theatre, p. 410

¹⁶⁶ Lee, Chinese Theatre, p. 410

¹⁶⁷ Lee, Chinese Theatre, p. 413

Lee argues that through the structure and practices of the amateur *xiqu* associations there is created what James Clifford (1988) terms an 'art-culture' system, through which 'the hierarchical values of culture are conflated with aesthetic concepts of art'.¹⁶⁸ In contrast to Western devaluing of the notion 'amateur' in terms of expertise and status, Lee suggests that the amateur *xiqu* troupes in Singapore have continued high status and that 'The cultural and aesthetic values espoused by both amateur *xiqu* organisations and the state reinforce and affirm each other, and in this way, the success of the amateurs in the current socio-political context is self-perpetuating. In the process, Confucianism is inscribed as a fully cultural process'.¹⁶⁹ Is there a similarity here to Welsh traditional music and the Eisteddfod?

The amateur operatic societies in Auckland studied by Julie Jackson-Tretchikoff (2008) are considered to be amateur because they do not get paid yet in many cases technical and artistic standards are of a professional level. Similarly in Smith's study of a symphonic choir – the members are required to be of a professional standard yet have none of the financial advantages of being paid as professionals.

Participants in Mayes' (2010) study of local postcard production in Ravensthorpe, Western Australia were paid for their work, yet Mayes observes:

Personal rewards expressed by interviewees centre on 'self improvement' and 'esteem-building', rather than potential financial profit. In fact, making money from this work was not offered as motivation or benefit for individual practitioners. Rather, individual social and cultural identity is a driving personal motivation and benefit.¹⁷⁰

Is doing unpaid work a radical statement against commercialism and capitalism, creating new kinds of economies or is it upholding the status quo? In answer to her own questions in her study of feminist 'zine distributors Chidgey (2009) writes in conclusion: 'Following a hybrid praxis of corporate sabotage, gift economies, non-alienated labour, financial remuneration, and social change agendas – shaped through the tools and technologies of late capitalism – the DIY feminist zine movement may benefit from turning its inherent self-exploited/voluntary labour into a more systematic practice that allows for the development of a living wage or income'.¹⁷¹ Would that then make these women professionals?

Again, the 'grey' literature is not helpful in making distinctions between amateurs and professionals in terms of being not paid and being paid: some amateurs might be paid for their services, some professionals might donate their services. To distinguish between the two terms merely by whether they are paid or not is to do a disservice to both amateurs and professionals. Again, further research is needed in order to explore this knotty issue in more detail and depth.

¹⁶⁸ Lee, *Chinese Theatre*, p. 413

¹⁶⁹ Lee, *Chinese Theatre*, p. 414

¹⁷⁰ Mayes, R. (2010) Doing cultural work: Local postcard production and place identity in a rural shire, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 26 (2010) p. 5

¹⁷¹ Chidgey, *Free, Trade*, p. 34

Informal versus formal learning

Informal learning is outside traditionally accepted techniques involved in learning a particular skill or art form. Yet with widening participation and a greater age range than ever amongst those wishing to continue their education there is an increasing interest in research that investigates the process and impact of informal learning (Carpentier, 2003, Bowl, 2010, Hippel and Tippelt, 2010,) especially since there is currently very little or no curriculum time, especially at secondary school level, dedicated to formal education in crafts.

It appears that there is a growing understanding amongst music education researchers, for example, of the significance of informal music learning outside an institutional setting. For this reason, there are an increasing number of researchers studying the process and impact of this type of learning on individuals (Waldron and Veblen, 2009, Bailey 2005, Brown, 2010). Waldron (2006) found that informal musical activities 'provided opportunities for learning that were equal to and/or more valuable than music learning that happened in a formal classroom'.¹⁷²

Most ethnic musics are learned outside a school context. With popularisation of recording and listening technologies and the internet, participation in folk musics, regardless of the participants cultural or ethnic background, has become more accessible. Because this music tends to be passed on aurally, participants do not have to know or learn musical notation making it accessible for those who do not have highly developed visual or literacy skills. One reason participants in Waldron and Veblen's study gave for taking up (CTM) was not having to pay attention to notation. The authors suggest that 'implementing informal music practices and different musical genres in school curriculums could be one way towards placing music education on a path to relevance in the lives of future adults'.¹⁷³ Learners acknowledged that learning aurally, different from learning from notation, allows more flexibility for the learner. They also saw self discipline as opposed to discipline imposed by a teacher or professional as being a positive rather than a negative element of the activity.

Waldron and Veblen's learners also felt that informal learning meant they were able, to a degree, to choose the people they played with. They enjoyed discovering the joy of playing with others in a community. They felt they learned more when they were with others, indicating that watching, observing and listening to others is important. Further research might begin with some of these questions related to how adults learn in the amateur arts. Answers may be sought in the 'grey' literature offered by the different societies and groups.

Digital media and the internet

There is an increasing amount of academic literature devoted to the exploration of the effects of digital technologies and the internet on the proliferation of networks and sites for the creation and distribution of media, with a focus, in particular, on young people, music and video. Furthermore, with reality TV shows being influenced by YouTube, amateur arts might therefore be considered to be driving the

¹⁷² Waldron, J. and Veblen, K. (2009) Learning in a Celtic Community: An Exploration of Informal Music Learning and Adult Amateur Musicians, *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* Spring 2009 No. 180, p. 62

¹⁷³ Waldron and Veblen, Learning in a Celtic Community, p. 72

professional arts in some sectors. What is particularly interesting is that notions of distinctions between amateur and professional, of authorship and agency, are being contested.

In his online article that examines 'Grey Tuesday', a particular event in the world of DJ mash-up/sampling, Howard-Spink (2005) highlights the exponential increase of people participating in the music world due to technological innovations and the subsequent increasing blurring of boundaries of professional and amateur music-making.

Howard-Spink suggests from this case study that not only can music 'be an agent for social and therefore political change'¹⁷⁴ but that the kind of activism which is emerging from this scene 'blends explicitly cultural issues with wider political concerns and engagements, facilitated though the use and deployment of new technologies that engender new kinds of support for, and contact between, members'.¹⁷⁵ The case of Grey Tuesday highlights other points of interest: first, the importance of web links for online web protesting: these afford quick dissemination and related sources for participants and online visitors, rapidly expanding and connecting online communities; second, technology has created the opportunity for increased participation in mash-up due to cheap computers and easy-to-use software. Expertise is no longer the domain of the professional music studio.

In his study of the anime music video scene, Ito (2010) examines the intricacies and nuances of this grassroots arts activity:

Non-commercial, amateur, and peer-based production scenes thrive on models of open participation and access, but processes for differentiating participation, recognising leadership, and developing status and reputation are also central to the scene....The value people get out of participation is a complex alchemy of community participation, recognition, and the pleasures of creation and connoisseurship.¹⁷⁶

Most groups and societies which have publications now have websites. The magazines and newsletters of the different societies frequently refer to use of the internet, or feature articles on particular uses of it: *Clarinet & Saxophone*, for example, features a 3-page article, 'Clickety Click', on how to find a saxophone and how to find inspiration for a new repertoire using the internet. 'Sensibly used the web is an invaluable functional tool, but it can also feed ambition and creativity, and entertain'.¹⁷⁷ *Highnotes'* middle spread is an article¹⁷⁸ on Making Music's new website, an explanation of its features and how to navigate it.

Clearly, the internet will continue to be used in increasingly different and innovative ways and it seems that we are only at the beginning of explorations by amateur artists in their search for ways to create, produce, promote and distribute online, with some emphasis on its non-commercial and free aspect. There is no doubt that information on the internet and the online creation and distribution of

¹⁷⁴ Howard-Spink, S. (2005) *Grey Tuesday, online cultural activism and the mash-up of music and politics*, First Monday, Special Issue #1: Music and the Internet, 4 July 2005 accessed 28/02/2011, p. 5

¹⁷⁵ Howard-Spink, *Grey Tuesday*, p. 6

¹⁷⁶ Ito, The rewards of non-commercial production, p. 14

¹⁷⁷ Mackney, C. (2008) Clickety Click, *Clarinet & Saxophone*, The Official Publication of the Clarinet & Saxophone Society of Great Britain. Spring 2008, Volume 33, Number 1, pp. 44-46

¹⁷⁸ Chuladul, M. (2011) Our new website is all about you, *Highnotes*, Making Music, Issue 15, February 2011, pp. 8-9

music, videos and performance will continue to expand, broaden its reach and diversify. Further research is required soon to explore this fascinating and valuable area especially in relation to civic participation.

'Grey' literature

Arts organisations' regular publications or newsletters appear to provide an important 'central' point of connection for participants, particularly for those whose contact with the organisation and other members is maintained predominantly through this channel. Throughout this Study, this literature has been examined and referred to, since it contains much of the evidence that supports the claim for amateur arts being a little known and researched field of the third sector and thus demanding further research. Much more information about grassroots arts activities can be studied and ascertained from further research with and through this material since it is primary source material created by participants.

Sustainability

It may be that amateur arts has greater impact and sustainability than community arts because participants tend to be involved for longer periods of time. This is demonstrated in the longevity of some of the umbrella organisations: the Handbell Ringers of Great Britain celebrated their 40th anniversary in 2007; The Knitting and Crochet Guild has been existence since 1978; in 2011 Making Music had been supporting voluntary music for 75 years; the Lace Guild was formed in 1976; the amateur theatre company The Kelvin Players has been performing since 1929. There may be therefore a more sustained contribution to community life, through both individual and community empowerment and development.

Lack of 'sector' identification

There seems to be less horizontal networking within amateur arts groups perhaps because participants do not appear to consider themselves to be part of a 'sector' as community arts participants do. This may be because participants tend also to be the organisers, whereas in community arts the activities tend to be led and organised by community workers and professional artists brought in to work with a 'community' or 'community group'. In community arts there is still frequently a distinction made between those who organise the creation of arts activities and those who participate in them. Whereas in amateur arts activities, participants generally organise, direct, manage and participate in the activity themselves. The most common mode of identification appears to be through participation in Voluntary Arts or through recent publications such as *Our Creative Talent*. However, these instances only serve to reveal the merest tip of the iceberg and further research is required to fully understand the extent and diversity of voluntary arts activities in the UK.

Different selves

Another emerging strand of the benefits of participating in arts activity appears to be the potential for individuals to experience or to discover parts of their personality which had previously been

concealed. One participant in Mayes' study (2010) felt that making the postcards gave her another social identity: she was seen not only as a "farmer's wife".¹⁷⁹

One participant in Lawson's (2009) study chose tap dancing as a way of 'seeking to free one's spirit and seeking a new identity'.¹⁸⁰ Bailey and Davidson (2005) found that 'the mental stimulation provided through group singing [that] furnished an opportunity to reveal concealed aspects of the self'.¹⁸¹ In his study of karaoke singers Kevin Brown (2010) suggests that karaoke offers people a 'way to enact their agency',¹⁸² which is frequently lacking in their daily lives, literally voicing themselves to a public.

With wider access to interactive music/video games and social networking technology apparently Americans are becoming encouraged 'to become active participants',¹⁸³ rather than passive consumers in a traditional audience setting. In this way karaoke gives people an opportunity to explore their musicality which may have been either ignored or discouraged in earlier years or simply not given the chance to develop.

Transcending barriers through a different kind of communication

Lawson (2009) quotes H. K. Langer to emphasise the power of dance as something 'mythic as opposed to the rational and scientific',¹⁸⁴ which transcended language and which was no longer recognisable once language took over as the main mode of communication for human beings. This relates directly to Turino & Lea's (2004) perspective on diaspora arts: 'We approach art with the expectation that it will communicate through the form itself at the level of icons and indices, in contrast to conventional language in which we expect speakers to play by a different set of rules codified in grammars and dictionaries'.¹⁸⁵ Here again is another potentially fruitful and significant area of research, which might focus on the intangible, inarticulable power of art to transcend yet simultaneously reinforce cultural and national differences - without armed conflict.

¹⁷⁹ Mayes, R. (2010) Doing cultural work: Local postcard production and place identity in a rural shire, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 26 (2010) p. 5

¹⁸⁰ Lawson, H. M. (2009) Why Dance? The Motivations of an Unlikely Group of Dancers, *Music and Arts in Action*, Volume 1, Issue 2, p. 6-7

¹⁸¹ Bailey and Davidson, Effects of group singing, p. 297

¹⁸² Brown, K. (2010) Liveness Anxiety: Karaoke and the Performance of Class, *Popular Entertainment Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, p. 65

¹⁸³ Brown, Liveness Anxiety, p. 66

¹⁸⁴ Langer, S. K. (1953) *The magic circle. Feeling and form* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. In Copland, R. and Cohen, M. (1983) *What is dance?: readings in theory and criticism*. Oxford University Press, pp. 28-47

¹⁸⁵ Turino, T. and Lea, J. (2004) *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, Detroit Monographs in Musicology/Studies in Music, No. 40, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, p. 14

Gaps in research evidence and information

The Study has revealed that within the myriad and diverse organisations and groups that comprise the voluntary and amateur arts sector there is a vast range of interest, passion, knowledge and skills base that remains largely unresearched and undocumented in policy and academic literatures.

In general it was found that although some research has been undertaken to investigate the role and function of grassroots arts activities within and on communities, much of it concerns communities and activities in Australia, the United States, with little emerging from and about the UK. Much of the available mainstream literature on community participation and creativity does not include specific mention of art or the arts. Moreover, there appears to be a lack of connection between 'hard' quantitative social science research and 'softer' more qualitative research. On the other hand, much of the research carried out to investigate the role of arts activities is focused on the individual and tends to be centred around notions of improvement of health and well-being, socialisation and group dynamics. On the whole it appears that more research is required in order to examine these points in more depth and detail.

Empirical evidence: there is little evidence of consistently regular empirical research that has been carried out on participation in grassroots arts activities. What exists has been mainly carried out on an 'ad hoc', single project basis, most frequently in the form of evaluation, with no connection made to other similar projects or to the research findings emerging from similar studies. New research might be carried out in the form of a large-scale project so that information is available at least at local authority level. The research should include participants' views and attitudes to such activities, as well as providing statistical data which can be used to develop and implement policy.

Assessments and studies: very few studies (exceptions might include Taylor, 2008 and Dodds, Graves and Taws, 2008) are available to inform an assessment of the role of amateur arts activities in general, and there are none which examine its long term impact on communities.

Horizontal networking: more research is needed to investigate the reasons for lack of horizontal networks in amateur arts. Advocacy organisations such as Voluntary Arts represent around 200 umbrella organisations within the sector yet most are discipline specific. Increased horizontal networking would increase communication on issues relevant to the sector (such as access to affordable meeting rooms, advertising relevant regional and national events) and potentially increase the lobbying power of amateur arts groups.

Measurement: research is also needed to find ways to measure the concepts that are used to calculate 'social and economic impact' and then subsequently to measure the impact these might or might not have, on communities.

Marginalised and under-represented groups and communities: diversity: amateur arts throws its net wide - drama, choir, life-drawing, historical re-enactments, knitting & crocheting, harmonica groups - albeit through arguably less diverse individual group demographics (Heddon and Milling, 2006). It is evident that there are a number of groups and individuals within communities who participate in arts activities yet whose presence is not documented or as visible as others. Such groups include lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender and queer groups, disability groups and refugee and migrant groups. Further research might be targeted to explore the demographics of different groups in terms of gender, age and ethnicity, for example.

Health: well-being and quality of life: while there is evidence of some acceptance of the concepts of 'well-being' and 'quality of life' as being valid criteria in the evaluation of arts activities, perhaps more robust research is needed to define these terms. Most of the empirical evidence for the health benefits of participation in arts activities is based on small, short-term evaluations of discrete arts projects. There is an understandable¹⁸⁶ general lack of breadth and depth in examples and case studies and therefore lack of empirical evidence. This lack suggests it is timely to implement a large-scale, empirically-based investigation of the grassroots, amateur arts sector in the UK. In addition to assisting in the development of health policy in relation to its connection with arts activities, such research might also assist with calculating the economic savings that participation in arts activities could have on the National Health Service and on the number of sick days taken overall in the region/country.

Transferable skills: there has been little research or evaluation of projects or programmes designed to increase participation in the arts in general and how these impact on future employment potential; research has demonstrated that participation in arts activities at school can develop transferable skills for the workplace, but there is little evidence on the *actual* employment effect.

Art for its own sake: the literature reveals that many participants take part in arts activities for the art itself. Yet there is little research on the social impact of the action of creating art for its own sake. Nevertheless there are many assertions which although difficult to evidence might be said to be part of an agreed social imaginary. For example: art work renders a community more aesthetically pleasing, through public artwork, murals & mosaics and beautified community gathering places; it promotes and enhances an individual's and community's sense of 'beauty' and/or aesthetics; it inspires and develops individual's and community's openness to the usefulness of art within everyday life; it encourages more people to become involved in arts activities that exist within a community. As Janet Ruiz eloquently suggests, further research on the 'intrinsic nature of art and its capacity to provide meaning to different individuals and different cultures'¹⁸⁷ might enable us to better understand why art is important for individuals and communities.

Monitoring and evaluation: the 'grey' literature in particular shows that amateur arts groups monitor and evaluate their work in diverse ways. A significant element in this appears to be the organisation's membership newsletters or magazines which feature interviews, reports, reviews and critiques written by members. Other ways may be through anecdotal assessment, a celebration party after the event, a mention at the Annual General Meeting (again many of these are also included in newsletters.) The lack of formal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is not surprising since most organisations are

¹⁸⁶ For reasons of time and resources invested in such projects, since most of these studies frequently form part of a single arts project evaluation and are not part of a broader, far-reaching study.

¹⁸⁷ Ruiz, J. (2004) A Literature Review of the Evidence Base for Culture, the Arts And Sport Policy, Edinburgh: Research and Economic Unit, Scottish Executive Education Department

self-governed and do not rely on public funding for subsidies. However, such organisations might find the potential impact of this research helpful to reflect on their organisations and membership in ways that they do not regularly do. It might also contribute to an understanding of a 'bigger picture' of grassroots arts activities in the UK of which they are a part. However, according to the research undertaken so far, it seems most are isolated from other/different arts organisations, tending to connect only with others participating in the same kind of activity. A further relevant factor is demonstrated through articles and correspondence in *LACE* and *Slipknot*, revealing the tensions existing between a desire to become more 'professional' (which might mean getting accreditation and qualifications) and the desire to remain inclusive. Furthermore, some members are of the opinion that these desires are not mutually exclusive.

Concluding remarks: making connections

This Study has revealed that although grassroots or voluntary arts activities in the UK are thriving, there is very limited empirical research on their impact on individuals and communities. Whilst professional, and to a certain extent, community arts enjoy a recognition that reaches a wider public, voluntary arts activities tend to be visible predominantly to their members and participants.

It is clear that further research is required in order to fully comprehend and document the full extent to which grassroots arts activities are integral to many individual lives and communities. This is particularly pertinent given the increasing awareness of the significance of the multiple and diverse heritages and cultures in the UK today and the role that voluntary arts activities can and do play in bringing these together.

Involving grassroots arts organisations themselves in a wider investigation of the scope and reach of their activities might subsequently produce findings that would be useful in arts policy provision and development at a regional and national government level. Furthermore, it would provide potentially interesting and useful information for the organisations and participants themselves.

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Below the Radar

This research theme explores the role, function, impact and experiences of small community groups or activists. These include those working at a local level or in communities of interest - such as women's groups or refugee and migrant groups. We are interested in both formal organisations and more informal community activity. The research is informed by a reference group which brings together practitioners from national community networks, policy-makers and researchers, as well as others who bring particular perspectives on, for example, rural, gender or black and minority ethnic issues.

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