

Exit 15



**A Creative
Placemaking
Project**

Ballyogan 2016 - 2020

Exit 15 was a partnership between Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council & Creative Lives (formerly Voluntary Arts Ireland) with people and organisations living, working and based in the Ballyogan Area.



It was a creative place programme responding to the artistic aspirations of local people and organisations living and working in the Ballyogan area of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County (dlr). The programme was called Exit 15 due to the proximity to Exit 15 on the M50 motorway – a C-shaped orbital motorway around Dublin and the busiest motorway in Ireland.

This project was funded under the The **Arts Council Ireland's Invitation to Collaboration Scheme** which supports initiatives in the field of local authority-led arts development. It was additionally supported by dlr's Community Development Section and Arts Office. The emphasis was placed on supporting partnerships that focused on developing projects, resources or services that were ambitious and tested new ground.

Learning and engagement were at the heart of this programme, which was part of a wider research project exploring local authority capacity building for local arts development. Led by Dr. Victoria Durrer and involving the exchange of shared learning with a partner local authority in Northern Ireland (Mid and East Antrim), Exit 15 allowed us to take an inquiry-led, rather than programme-led approach to understanding how we might develop local arts service provision that is more community-engaged and responsive than might have traditionally been the case. This document seeks to share this learning and recognise that we are at the beginning, rather than the end of our journey in designing provision that involves and responds to input from local people at the very start.

This document was written during the pandemic but is a reflection of what occurred before. It contains an overview of the Exit 15 programme in addition to articles and research documents written about it. Learning from the programme was one of the original aims and the funders wish to share this learning. It is not a conclusive document but we hope that it adds to the current literature and learning around creative place programmes in Ireland.

CONTENTS

Legacy & Learnings by Máire Davey, dlr Arts Office	pg. 4
How We Got Started	pg. 6
On Making Art & Community by Kevin Murphy	pg. 7
PHASE 1: Variety & Visual Arts	pg.10
Ballyogan - New Narratives of Place by Victoria Durrer	pg. 15
PHASE 2: CoisCéim Broadreach	pg. 19
Inquiring Minds - Reviewing Expectations by Victoria Durrer & Meadhbh McIlgorm	pg. 22
The Place & Voice of the Artist by Meadhbh McIlgorm & Victoria Durrer	pg. 26
Seeding Local Initiatives	pg. 30
Questioning What We Mean by 'Participation' by Victoria Durrer	pg. 33
The Research Approach by Victoria Durrer	pg. 37



Images

Cover Image: Film still from 'Splash Dance'
produced by CoisCéim Broadreach.

Page 2: Ladies from the 50+ Dance Group outside
the Samuel Beckett Civic Campus, Ballyogan

Page 3: Dance Facilitators from CoisCéim
Photo Credit: Rachel Burke, courtesy of CoisCéim
Broadreach



LEGACY & LEARNINGS

Written by Máire Davey, dlr Arts Office

In my experience programmes like Exit 15 throw up as many questions as answers. It is an example of a long-term programme that aimed to find better ways to work with a local community on developing the cultural offering in their locality.

One of the main goals of the overall programme was to further develop dlr Arts Office's practice in working with local communities to develop local arts provision that is responsive to the cultural needs and interests of local communities.

dlr Arts Office has a long history of working in and with communities of interest and place. For example, we have one of the longest running Primary Schools Arts Programmes in the country, initiated in 1994 to ensure that children can access arts experiences regardless of parental involvement. We continue to invest in building partnerships with other sectors such as health and education, in an effort to deliver programmes for and with people in an informed manner. We work with organisations and entities to engage with early years children, youth at risk, people with disabilities and older people living in communities and residential care settings.

We are acutely aware, as public servants, that resources are finite and look to statistical data to inform who and where we work at a given time. We view our work in general as supporting arts development at local level. We are often only involved at the development stages of projects and programmes and look at appropriate ways to support participants beyond this, be that via grant aid or advocacy.

This context is how we came to decide to develop a programme, Exit 15, focused on a particular place—Ballyogan. As articulated in other Exit 15 documentation Ballyogan was, on paper, an area with little to no arts development or activity prior to the establishment of this programme. The classic 'hard to reach'

community in terms of arts provision. What was of interest in this long-term arts programme that centred on 'place' as opposed to 'interest' were the people involved who were not part of a group per se but living and working in Ballyogan. We were interested in targeting people who were potentially unaware of or just disinterested in the cultural offerings from their local authority prior to this point, the infamous 'non-participants'. Local Authorities in general have good connections to services and organisations that work at community level, through the various arms of the Council, be that the Community Development Section, Parks, Libraries, Sports or Arts. Exit 15 wished to extend this reach, to find connections and gain an understanding as to what the cultural 'needs' or 'aspirations' of this area were for the people who live there.

On paper, as I mentioned earlier Ballyogan was 'hard to reach'. Viewing a place through statistical and demographic data has many benefits but doesn't take into account the lived experience of that community. The danger for those of us working in the public services is to 'label' and 'categorise' people and places that are not engaging in the service we are offering. We can identify who and where the cultural 'black-spots' are. However, while these filters are useful, they have their limits. These filters may help identify the issues and challenges within a place rather than the assets. Attention to the community-based assets and listening to the experience of people that live in that area ensures a more cohesive and person-centred approach. It also ensures that we are delivering a more tailored approach to programming within a place.

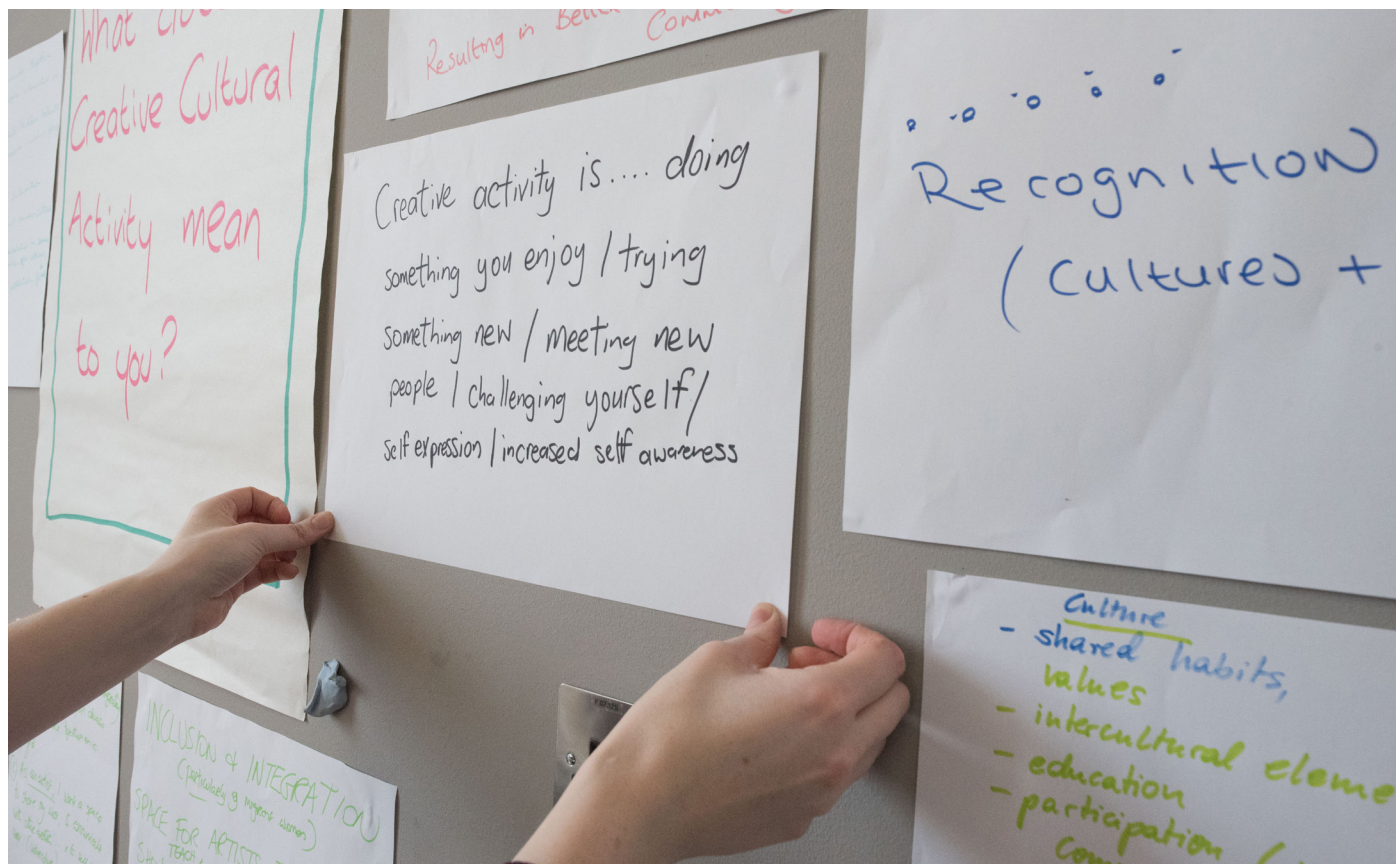
The beauty about a long-term 'place' based programme is that there is time to explore the nuances of the fabric of that community. There is time to test new ways of engaging, even to discover that people are just not particularly interested in certain art forms or ideas of culture. Time is a useful commodity for this area of practice.

In a nutshell the legacy of this programme is the time spent working with the community. Four years is not long but the questions raised by the programme will reverberate and shape this local authority arts service in subtle ways for years to come.

The foundations for continuing to work with people in Ballyogan are exceptionally strong as a direct result of Exit 15. We have reassigned our Youth Arts Programme to the Ballyogan area with the support and advice of local services and people. This work aims to engage youth at risk in creative ways and has managed to do that all through the pandemic.

We continue to support dance as an artform in the area. We also continue to find ways to include the voice of the local community at the heart of any future commissioning plans, in a 'quietly radical way' to quote Kevin Murphy. As the saying goes, time is the most valuable thing you can spend!





How We Got Started...

This project emerged as part of a longer process of inquiry, begun in 2016. Upon taking stock of dlr Arts Office's activities throughout the County, the team realised that they had a lack of engagement in the local area of Ballyogan.

Rather than assume that this lack of engagement is because there is a lack of artistic participation— interest and activities— dlr Arts Office began to wonder if they really understood what people's actual artistic participation is within Ballyogan.

#BALLYOGANcreatives

On the 7 February, 2017 a conversation towards understanding local cultural interest, activities and needs in Ballyogan was hosted by Voluntary Arts Ireland and facilitated by Michael Donnelly of 'Perspectivity'.

It used the 'World Café' methodology to structure discussion and from the outputs, a report was compiled by Áine Crowley and Meadhbh McIlgorm, outlining the context, methods and recommendations from this meeting. What was clear from this time was that there was lots of cultural activity already taking place in the area that the Local Authority and some services were unaware of. This cultural activity is the

basis from which much arts participation stems.

The aim of the #BALLYOGANcreatives conversation was to gain an understanding of the cultural interest, activities and needs of the local community so that together we can look at how we might develop and sustain cultural infrastructure in Ballyogan. This conversation was one of the main starting points of Exit 15.

"Creative & cultural activities are enjoyable, usually social activities, which involve some degree of expression, learning and skill, which also have the potential to create a stronger, more inclusive community".

(pg.4 Crowley & McIlgorm, 2017)

Images:

Page 4: Paint markings made during a workshop with Mark Storor. Photo credit; Jonathan Ho

Page 5: Banner image from Exit 15 Facebook page.

This Page: Gathered info from the Creative Conversation session. Photo Credit; Neil Hutchinson



Making Art & Community

A reflection on Exit 15 By Kevin Murphy

Exit 15 has been a part of the cultural landscape of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown since 2016 making art and community with people from Ballyogan in particular and the surrounding communities of Dublin 18.

For me it is a project which is situated within a wider frame of learning and exploration beginning around 2013 with the kernel of an idea originally expressed as citizen artists. The simple notion that artists are citizens and citizens are artists. The first UK City of Culture had emerged in Derry-Londonderry where I still live and where the HQ of Voluntary Arts Ireland (now Creative Lives), the company I was leading at the time, was based. In the lead up to the City of Culture I had been receiving many phone calls from local people and voluntary groups asking how they could contribute to the City of Culture programme. I soon realised that the organisations responsible for the programme were unable to respond to these offers in ways that supported the original intentions of the people who were making them. There was a disconnect.

The *Our City of Culture* programme that Voluntary Arts Ireland set up in response provided a bridge and by offering small enabling supports in terms of space, promotion and material and expense costs, a whole series of citizen-led events and activities took place. Although not a linear or directly causal process this explorative journey continued with the *Creative Citizens* programme in Mid and East Antrim starting in 2014, the *Our Cultural Commons* initiative in 2015, the Exit 15 project itself from 2016/17 onwards and the publication of *Making Common Cause* in 2018 which crystallised the idea of cultural commoning – the pooling of material resources, knowledge and capabilities to make culture together, wisely and hopefully, for mutual benefit.

What these initiatives often brought to light was that there is an abundance of creative cultural activity in all our communities. People are participating in and leading cultural and creative activities that matter to them. And yet this often goes unnoticed or unsupported by the existing cultural infrastructure which is primarily focussed on sustaining specific forms and standards of artistic practice, in increasing access to these artforms and supporting broader economic or political needs. Rather than passing judgement, especially as I play a part in the existing cultural infrastructure, this is a simple observation which for me as a cultural practitioner has had far reaching implications.

Exit 15 provided a distinctive opportunity to explore over time how we might shift the dial in terms of cultural policy and practice in ways that serve people and communities better. The fact that it was a partnership programme between Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Voluntary Arts Ireland and funded by Arts Council Ireland is suggestive that this shift was already underway. Equally the embedded action research project led by Dr. Victoria Durrer (then of Queens University Belfast, now of University College Dublin) and the key involvement of CoisCeím Broadreach and other leading artists, such as Mark Storor, Michael Fortune and Michael McLoughlin, all point to the wider narrative of change the project was contributing to.

I was fortunate to be involved throughout the 4 years of the project (if we take account of the initial community research phase prior to Arts Council funding) and working with people in the host, partner and funding organisations who were asking similar questions and grappling with the same issues.

The project has been a success on so many levels, but for me personally the opportunity to innovate, test policy, practice and organisational boundaries and crucially reflect on the learning with others has been seminal. One of the strengths of Exit 15 has been the embedding of action research throughout and that deep understanding, informed by real-life experience and collaborative enquiry, has already been articulated brilliantly and in detail by others (see #BALLYOGANcreatives Conversation Report by Meadhbh McIlgorm and Áine Crowley, Capacity & Value: Exit 15, Phase 1 by Dr. Victoria Durrer and Exit 15: Phase 2 Project Evaluation Report by Meadhbh McIlgorm). Alongside these reports and as the project begins to leave its legacy it has been very worthwhile taking the time to reflect on my own experience and what the learning from the project might inspire both locally for the communities of Dublin 18 and in the wider world of cultural policy and practice.

The beginnings of Exit 15 are rooted in curiosity. Why was the area of Ballyogan 'hard to reach' and not engaging with the Arts in significant numbers?

Armed with the official statistics and narrative around the area it would have been very easy to make assumptions about what was needed. It took a little courage and humility to seek first to understand what creativity meant to local people and what activities they were already engaging in. As a result one of the

first creative events that we held was an open civic conversation. Not the well-worn consultative pattern of presenting a set of ideas for people to respond to, but a genuine exploration of what mattered to people and how their energy and ideas could be supported in order to flourish. The simple creative act of conversation not only inspired how the programme developed but also, I believe, the qualities and ways of working that characterised its development. We perhaps didn't fully realise this at the time, but our early conversation was gently radical.

It became evident during the project that both individually and organisationally we needed to reimagine our roles and find new approaches that stretched how we worked and worked together. If I was to do a keywords search on the qualities needed for a project like Exit 15 it would include relational, participative, collaborative, open, caring, creative, trusting, listening, encouraging, emergent, democratic, integrating, transforming, thoughtful, abundant, regenerative....The challenge comes when these are put in stark relief to our current project development, delivery and funding cultures.

What do you do when your procurement practices don't adequately enable you to fund individuals despite the fact that their initiatives were chosen democratically by members of the local community in a process you helped set up?

How do you approach your role as an artist when it is clear that in order to make art you must be the catalyst that supports community development?

What use are our linear and fragmenting planning and project delivery practices when a community is interacting much more organically and with a sense of flow?

It is testament to everyone involved that we constantly found ways and work arounds within the prevailing systems and culture, even though that sometimes meant delay, loss of additional funding opportunities and some frustration. To my mind moving towards more ecological practices is what people and communities are asking for. That means, for example, in Ballyogan that people really do want all the key stakeholder organisations in the area to work together for mutual benefit and involve them meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. It means that people do already value creative cultural activity and are in fact already involved. They may



have a broader definition of the Arts and see its social value much more strongly but they clearly don't perceive themselves to be hard to reach and are baffled when they are described as such. It also means that they already understand how valuable expert artists are and want to support the artists themselves and their vital role in sustaining a healthy community life.

So what if we have been looking at this thing the wrong way round for some time? What if, instead of trying to change communities, we decided to learn and grow alongside them and put creative relationships in all their fullness at the heart of things? If we do then as cultural practitioners – both artists and arts administrators – we can bring our full selves and our own artistic aspirations into the picture. It turns out people are more curious and open than we often think and once trust is there will incorporate new ideas and practices. I'm not sure I would have picked Dance as one of the artforms, alongside Crafts and Visual Arts, that would become such a rallying point for people in Ballyogan. And yet, that is exactly what happened.

How the successes of Exit 15 will be developed into the future is, of course, uncertain. All of the organisational cultures and practices that often act as obstacles are still prevalent. However, a seed has been planted and there are roots visible which can be tended to and nurtured. We have broken ground and very often that is the hardest thing to do. The second hardest is to spend the time necessary to enable what you have planted to grow and flourish. It turns out that 4 years is not a long time and there is much still to do.

The culture that the learning from Exit 15 points to is already evident in Ballyogan and no doubt in a community near you. Like beacons in the landscape they mark our way and provide light, hope and encouragement.

Images

Page 7: Preparing pitches at Participatory budgeting event

This page:

(left) launch of 'Flourish' by Ballyogan Creatives.

(right) Crafty Hands Workshop.

Photo Credit; Jonathan Ho

PHASE 1.

Variety & Visual Arts

Engagement was at the heart of Exit 15 from the very start.

The approach was two-fold; to support grassroots creative engagement and to introduce experienced socially engaged artists to work in the local area.

Áine Crowley who at the time was the Community Liaison on Exit 15 supported the development of #BALLYOGANcreatives. This group formed from the initial conversations and financial support of the Exit 15 programme. **CraftyHands** and **Creative Adventures** are two community-based arts groups that have since successfully received Arts and Community Grants from Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.

A selection panel representative of local residents, services and arts expertise met to select the experienced socially engaged artists that would work on phase 1 of Exit 15. The three artists selected were visual artist Michael McLoughlin, video/ photography artist and folklore expert Michael Fortune, and award-winning artist Mark Storor.

The expertise of Create, the National Development Agency for Collaborative Arts, was enlisted to assist with the call out for artists and the selection processes of this phase to ensure the best possible outcomes for both artists and the local community.

Phase 1 involved:

- Three socially engaged artists were selected by local community representatives and Create.
- An Early Years arts project with artist Helen Barry (through dlr Creative Ireland funding) working with Ballyogan Family Resource Centre Community Childcare to continue to embed work in the Ballyogan area.
- Micro funding was made available for local community and voluntary groups to assist with small scale creative projects.

Early Years Project

‘The Kaleidoscopic Child’ was created in collaboration with the artist Helen Barry and the children and early years educators in Ballyogan Community Childcare.

It is a multi-sensory interactive installation designed with and for early years children that invites the children to twist, spin, build, turn, touch, solve, colour and peer into a world created to mirror the inside of a Kaleidoscope. Work with the Ballyogan Community Childcare has been ongoing since 2015.

Images:

Page 11: Clockwise from top left;

A family enjoying a workshop with Mark Storor

St Brigid's Cross Making at STAG with Michael Fortune.

Community Liason Officer Áine Crowley assisting with install.

Photo Credits: Jonathan Ho.

The Kaledoscopic Child Project by artist Helen Barry. Photo Credit; Helen Barry





Michael Fortune

Project: A Bird in the House God Bless Her

Worked with: Southside Travellers Action Group (STAG)

Michael Fortune has been a pioneer in the area of socially engaged work within Ireland over the past fifteen years and his practice has widened the conversations regarding the intersection of traditional and contemporary cultures.

His life, interests and practice are an intertwined and inseparable mix of the ancient, the contemporary, the private, the public and the intangible.

In November 2017, Michael began to explore a wealth of folklore, stories and contemporary rituals that connect us all, shared with him by a group of Travellers from the Southside Travellers Action Group using film, photography and media to capture findings.

Michael strived to create a body of material that would be a living resource to be shared and watched by the Travelling Community themselves; material that immediately has currency and value for those who feature in it and those who can relate to it.

The collection featured material which has never before been recorded on film, stories which have been resigned to past memory and the texts of many folklore collectors.

When working on the project Michael's aim was not to collect in the classic sense of a collector, who collects

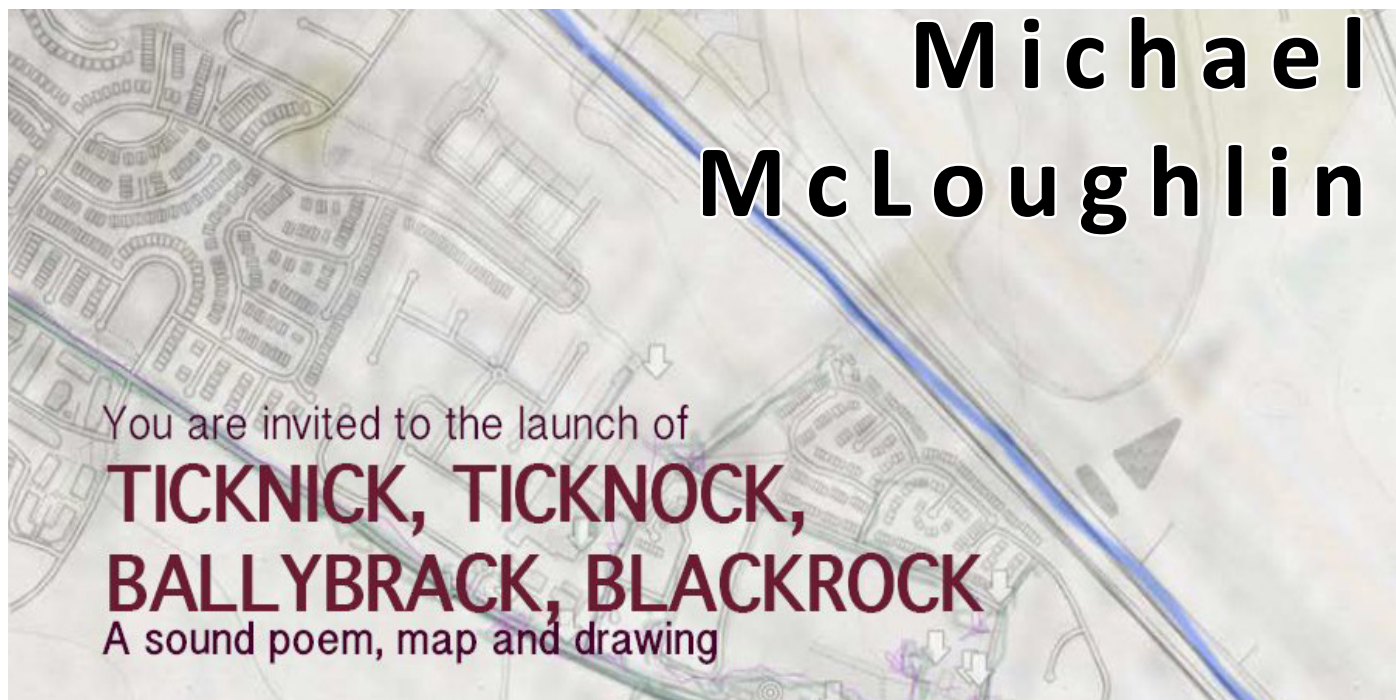
for academic research or archiving, but instead to capture these stories and beliefs in as true a voice as possible which he gently reworked and handed back to the local community, celebrating the richness which is on our doorsteps.

"A Bird in the House, God Bless Her" is a rare insight into the world of the people recorded where folklore is not a voiceless story on paper recorded for nostalgia but instead something which is alive, to be celebrated, reflected upon and enjoyed." - Michael Fortune

The stories shared ranged from rare Easter and May Day customs, personal stories involving fairies, the banshee and shape-shifting hares to more contemporary customs such as blessing cars and acronyms used on Facebook.

The films produced in the project were launched on Wednesday the 7th of March at the Samuel Beckett Civic Campus in Ballyogan.

There are 14 excerpts available to watch on YouTube, starting with this one <https://youtu.be/ii3SuiKJsP0>.



Project: Ticknick, Ticknock, Ballybrack, Blackrock

Worked with: Various Local Residents

Michael McLoughlin is a visual artist working in a variety of media including installation, sculpture, sound, film and drawing. His work typically has a social context.

McLoughlin's work often focuses on lived memory and how we define the space we live in. This could be first memories of a place. How we give directions or describe it to someone else, or how we define the places that are important to us.

There have been huge developments in the Exit 15 area over the past 30 years, the initial building in Ballyogan, local services, the M50, the LUAS, Carrickmines apartments, the Park and much more. With this art project, McLoughlin and the community set out to map experiences of all of these and the experience of an area in which people live, work, and play.

Michael's project engaged with residents of all ages including local skateboarders, footballers, 10-12 year olds from the local youth service and a Luas driver to mention some. They used various methods to map their experiences of living in the area of Exit 15. Using sound recording, stories about the area, mapping and drawings they explored together how residents negotiate the area now and how they did so at different points in time; 10, 20, 30 years ago. The artwork from the project is something that can be

shared with future residents, or revisited down the way as a reminder of generations past.

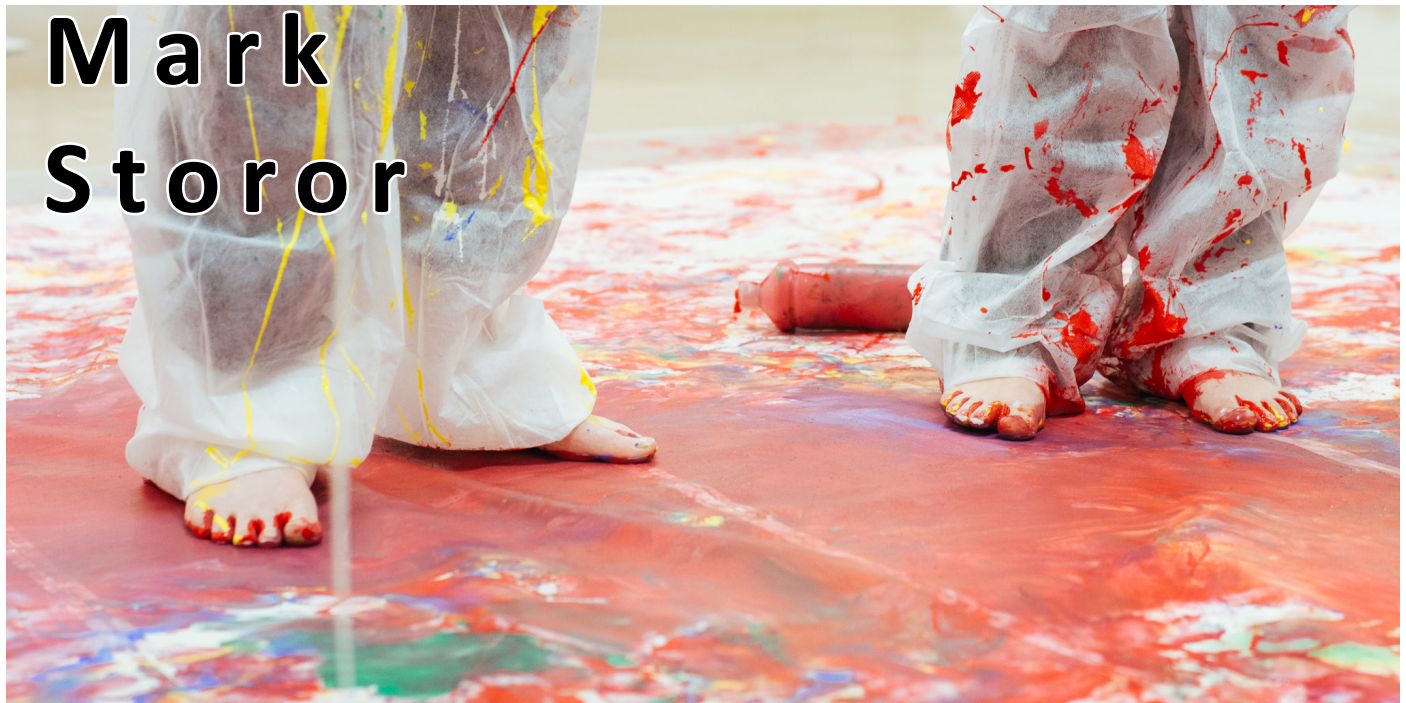
The launch event took place on May 31st 2018 in the Samuel Beckett Civic Campus.

Images

Page 12: Micheal Fortune at work with group.

Photo Credit; Jonathan Ho

This page; Imagery taken from Michael McLoughlin's project launch invite



Project: Flying Blind Semi Blue With A Belly Full Of Ring 'A Ring 'A Rosy
Worked with: Local Residents and Families

Mark Storor is an award-winning British artist with an international reputation and extensive experience of working collaboratively with organisations and communities with little connection with the arts, and in sensitive settings.

Mark works in the space between live art and theatre. He specialises in giving voice to those we all too rarely choose to hear, often collaborating with people from vulnerable and marginalised communities.

Throughout the month of February 2018, Storor took up residency in a local building known as the Blue House in Ballyogan. Mark worked with over 40 members of the community creating, sharing, making, laughing and exploring.

Through "Flying Blind Semi Blue With A Belly Full Of Ring 'A Ring 'A Rosy" Mark offered a way for local people in Ballyogan to get involved that led to creating something important and meaningful for them. He began through meaningful dialogue about what they were most interested in exploring and over time this wonderful story of creativity and hope emerged.

Images

This Page: A local family participate in painting workshop with Mark Storor.

Page 15: Art workshops with Creative Adventures
Photo Credit: Jonathan Ho (both)



Ballyogan - New Narratives of Place

Written by Victoria Durrer

Part of the goal of Exit 15 has been to better understand the artistic life of Ballyogan as a place. Artistic practice as well as social science based research methods have created new opportunities to meet and speak with people living and working in Ballyogan.

When one sets out to begin to understand the context of a place—a county, city, rural town or suburban area, one typically turns to the statistical narrative. This narrative consists of information about the geographic location of a place; socio-demographic make-up—for instance, ages of people living there, average income, percentage of local authority housing, and ethnic and cultural diversity; and crime and anti-social behaviour statistics as well as the types of schools, businesses, amenities and services in the area.

For a project like Exit 15 drawing on this narrative is initially useful for setting out a type of picture of who lives and works in Ballyogan and—to some extent—what they do and / or what they might encounter. While undoubtedly important information for creating a sense of what is available in Ballyogan, this information is largely about the physical and demographic composition of the locality. It neglects the personal and social meanings and experiences of people living and working in a locality. In essence, it neglects the daily-lived experiences of people—the

people who make up what a place really is—and thus the artistic and cultural life of a place.

The activities and interactions facilitated by way of Exit 15 assisted dlr Arts Office with learning more about Ballyogan. This section, presented and discussed with people living and working in Ballyogan, shares that learning.

'Ballyogan is personal.
Ballyogan has heritage.
Ballyogan is animated.
Ballyogan is social.
Ballyogan is dynamic.'

These are taken in turn below.

Ballyogan is personal

Meanings about Ballyogan as a place are shaped by our personal experiences.

As a site, Ballyogan is not necessarily the physical centre of any one person's life. In fact, we have many physical centres to our lives, as "one's life... takes place in several localities": work, home, nation, school, which thus influences how we experience living or working in Ballyogan (Paasi 1991).

Individuals living and working in Ballyogan draw personal experiences and perspectives from a variety of different physical sites, and thus personal and social experiences, that shape their experiences and perceptions of Ballyogan as a place. For instance, some of us are new to living in Ballyogan, having been born and raised abroad, some have grown up in rural areas and moved into our first house in Ballyogan, some have lived closer to Dublin city centre before moving to Ballyogan and others have lived in Ballyogan our whole lives. Some spend most of our day in Ballyogan while others leave Ballyogan for work or study through travel on the LUAS.

Where we've come from before we got to Ballyogan to live, work or even just visit; what activities, work and / or schooling we're doing now, our leisure interests, and what joys, experiences or even hardships we've had or are having in our family life, influence our opinions of, and our interactions with, people, groups, organisations and even buildings in Ballyogan.

For this reason, it is actually quite hard to say 'what Ballyogan is' as a place. Nevertheless, Exit 15 has afforded a different opportunity—not only for dlr Arts Office but also people living, and working in Ballyogan—to meet, share, and / or get to know a sense of the cultural life of Ballyogan—the ways of life, everyday interactions and traditions, including the artistic that take place in the area.

Ballyogan has heritage

There is a relatively strong collective memory about the origin story of Ballyogan as we see it today amongst many of the people who live here. This origin story largely starts with the idea that 'houses [were] dropped in the middle of nowhere' about 30 years ago with little to no services, schools, street lighting, shops and the like. Where children played games with one another in the streets and on the muck hills, families pulled together to help each other out, and local residents established childcare services.

Having lived through, managed to deal with or having worked around what have been "ongoing concerns about infrastructural and service deficiencies" (Corcoran, 2010, p. 2538) is part of what creates a strong emotional attachment to Ballyogan as a place. Even those new or newer to the area become aware of this origin story over time.

At the same time, engagement with the artists resident in Exit 15 has assisted both dlr Arts Office and those living and working in Ballyogan to share, learn about, explore, and discuss the area's longer history—its links to the physical land as well as folkloric traditions. For some people, this sense of collective memory or link to a longer historical tradition may be important, but perhaps not to all.

Ballyogan is animated

People living and working in Ballyogan are active in animating the locality. This might include anything from starting new activities to introducing people to one another and to services, to improving the physical appearance of the locality. Many different types of activities are taking place in and around Ballyogan. These range from yoga to bowling to arts to traditional dance to the playground to the skate park.

The physical infrastructure—like buildings, green fields and playground—around Ballyogan is important to facilitating and providing opportunities for these types of activities. However, new physical spaces can sometimes be prohibitive in making activities happen, like the hire costs of the Samuel Beckett and the bureaucracy and regulations that come with a new building, for instance.

Many people taking part in Exit 15 emphasised the sense of play they felt from being involved. Most activities were perceived as being fun and with an open approach as well as process focused with no pressure or expectation regarding a final product. There is an interest in more of that kind of activity taking place with people very open to being playful, "having a go" and trying something new.

Taking part does seem to require some sort of introduction to the project, the process and / or the artist(s), by way of someone that an individual knows and trusts.

People engaging in the project have aspirations for themselves and others as well as Ballyogan

as a whole—whether that be in work, in building community, in making connections with others living in the area, or in creative activity or in showing pride for Ballyogan. No one who has taken part in the research activities seems indifferent about Ballyogan, nor did anyone seem to perceive Ballyogan as just a physical setting to where they live or work.

Ballyogan is social

People engaging in Exit 15 enjoy interacting with one another and across different cultures and ages. Relationship building is key to the infrastructure of Ballyogan.

While many people like structured activities, sitting and talking with one another informally is also important. At the same time, facilitation of this informality is important—like through youth club activities, the women for women breakfast meetings or in the open / drop-in style approaches to some of the arts activities. Exit 15 and the work leading up to that project has facilitated bringing new people together.

Learning about one another's life experiences and perspectives, exchanging ideas and working together on receiving, initiating and delivering services and activities in the area—like through Exit 15, has been enjoyed by all I spoke to; even if there were some glitches with project activities.

Many people talk fondly of times when people living in the community have come together: for family days, for instance. And when asked about what activities they'd like to see happen, there is an emphasis on something that would bring the 'community' together. Particular mention was made of including those people who are new to moving into the area.

In conducting the research, I have witnessed and heard about a strong sense of neighbourliness in Ballyogan. However, young children as well as young people are a source of making social connections and a focus of a number of the services ... and it seems that if you don't have children, you may not be as socially connected in Ballyogan as those that do have children.

As a result, finding out about information and activities in the area is still difficult for some, particularly those who are older or new residents to the area. Facebook groups, the Family Resource centre, the pub, and other services as well as the Samuel Beckett Centre

have helped, but word of mouth—based on existing relationships and trust between people is really important to promoting activities and opportunities.

In addition to the issue raised about children and young people as a source of connection, it seems that the people that get socially connected are often those who are already inclined to do so—or have the confidence to do so—to come forward and to seek out information. So, isolation and a feeling of exclusion do exist for some.

This feeling of exclusion is important to recognise, particularly as many people encountered on the project are particularly socially active. Many having initiated some type of new event or activity in the area or volunteering in particular activities or social / political issues in the area, either as part of their work or out of a personal interest. What we've learned about Ballyogan so far is coloured by that and this does not necessarily represent all the people here.

Ballyogan is dynamic

The origin story referenced above creates an impression that there is a strong sense of nostalgia about what used to happen in Ballyogan. While some individuals are concerned about new housing developments that are planned for the area—in relation to if they will change the character of the place, many who live and work here appear to be positive about the local area development changes that have and are planned to take place.

It should also be noted that buildings like the Samuel Beckett, when funded and built by institutions like local authorities, as well as transportation links like the LUAS, are important 'signifiers' to those living both within and outside the area that change is happening, that the place is being paid attention to.

People are aware of a 'bad judgment' about Ballyogan and they feel this misrepresents the area, which was described as "so much different now". The establishment of the M50 for instance, like the LUAS and the Samuel Beckett are perceived to have helped put Ballyogan 'on the map'; raising a consciousness of the area to those who live or come from outside of it. People feel this may help facilitate stories different from those 'bad news stories' the people in Ballyogan feel those who live outside the area encounter.

But local activities challenge this narrative as well. Engagement in the work leading up to and within the

Exit 15 project has raised awareness within the area itself of the array of creative activities already taking place as well as what else is possible through meeting new people locally or even through local authority supports. It has also raised awareness of how existing services might tap into arts and creativity in new and different ways as well as provide support for the activities and interests of local residents.

There is a sense of ‘potential’ about the locality and a recognition that Ballyogan is not static, but changes over time, not only as people move in or out or on, but as development plans or local area plans come into play and as new businesses set up or old businesses close and as local people engage in shaping the area.

Exit 15 did not make Ballyogan a place or even a ‘better’ place, nor should it. The project has facilitated new meetings and meeting points for some people to share, voice, hear, and learn new, old, and current stories. In doing so, it has strengthened dlr Arts Office’s knowledge of the artistic, creative, and cultural (broader) interests of some of the people living and working in Ballyogan and new information about the opportunity to engage with local arts services for those people.

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Images

This page: Some textile outputs from the Crafty Hands group.
Photo Credit; Jonathan Ho





PHASE 2.

CoisCéim Broadreach

‘CoisCéim are always looking to work with different communities to develop audiences and opportunities to participate in dance... It was an exciting opportunity in that it was a bit of a blank canvas.’

CoisCéim Broadreach Director Philippa Donnellan

A selection panel representative of local residents, services and arts expertise met to select the experienced socially engaged artist/s that would work on phase 2 of Exit 15. CoisCéim Broadreach were appointed in January 2019. Helen Barry and Louise Osbourne were the appointed Community Liaisons during this period, and Create, the national agency for Collaborative Arts assisted in developing the selection panel process.

CoisCéim Broadreach was established in 2006 and works with over 5,000 people of all ages every year, enabling them to experience dance as creators, performers, educators and observers through a varied programme of projects and initiatives that draw on CoisCéim’s reputation of producing ground-breaking, distinctive contemporary dance theatre. They work in partnership with different cultural, social and educational organisations and communities at local and national levels (www.coisceim.com/about-broadreach).

During 2019 and up until March 2020, CoisCéim Broadreach were an integral part of Exit 15. They engaged with early years children all the way up to the now established 50+ Dance Group.

A full list of all the activities and programmes developed in Ballyogan is available on their website. www.coisceim.com/broadreachexit15/

In 2019, we were selected for the Exit 15 commission and had the opportunity to collaborate closely with the Ballyogan community. It was a real delight to meet and dance with people from Ballyogan and the wider Dublin 18 area, to collaborate and create dance for live performance and film, and to imaginatively record the community and the area as it changes and grows.

-Philippa Donnellan, March 2020

Some of the films produced during the project are available to watch on YouTube;

Runaway Pool: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUFPzZ7e5sg>

Splash! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80IKhVm5Fkg>





Images

Page 19:

Still from Splash!
film made with the 50+ Dance group

Page 20:

(Clockwise from centre)
Runaway Pool filming
Still from Runaway Pool
Tea Dance in full swing .
Photo Credit: Luke Brabazon.

This Page:

Tea Dance event dance showcase
Photo Credit: Luke Brabazon.
Workshop in progress with Early Years Group.
All photos courtesy of CoisCéim.



INQUIRING MINDS: Reviewing Expectations

Victoria Durrer & Meadhbh McIlgorm
reflect on the expectations associated with
designing programmes aimed at promoting
arts participation.

How does one 'get involved' in the arts? Are you involved if you attend your child's dance performance? Maybe when you did that crochet workshop last year... that counts right? Or did you go to singer-songwriter nights 'round the local a few times? The truth is almost everyone is involved to some degree in creative or cultural activity. From watching music videos to making the garden beautiful- creating, consuming and participating in 'the arts' in their broadest sense is something so intrinsic we rarely give it much thought.

Yet when it comes to (subsidised) arts policy, certain areas or groups are classified as 'hard to reach' as they are not known to be engaging with the arts or at least, the publicly funded arts. Often based on limited knowledge, this apparent lack of engagement is typically viewed as being a 'problem with the individual'. Research critiques have pointed out that this assumption risks neglecting the rich diversity of creative, cultural and artistic practices currently taking place and experienced every day in Irish society.

With Exit 15 dlr Arts Office had labelled Ballyogan as a 'hard to reach' place, a kind of artistic 'cold spot'. While founded on assumptions drawn from limited knowledge based on socio-demographic profiling and grant application records / databases, such assumptions afforded the Arts Office the opportunity to develop—what was for them—a new inquiry-led project, Exit 15. The approach focused on learning as opposed to

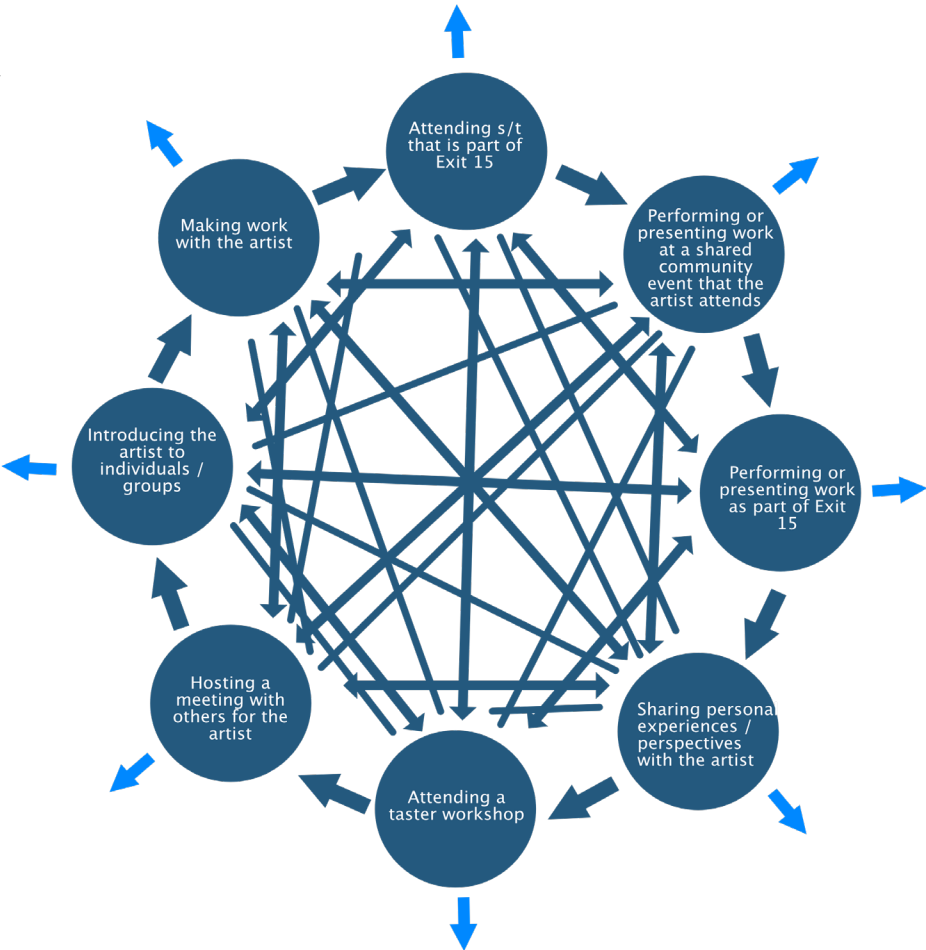
programming; specifically to ask people living and working in Ballyogan what creative, artistic and cultural activities people actually did and what they wanted to do more of. External funding and legitimisation from the Arts Council helped to secure a variety of ways for dlr Arts Office to structure this inquiry. New artistic activities in the visual arts, design, film, music, and dance resulted in addition to the support of existing, and the emergence of new, arts groups. Most significantly though, the project has led dlr Arts Office to reconsider that question of ‘how does one get involved?’ with greater critical reflection. We will explore this learning through a discussion that focuses on ‘entrances and exits’ and ‘perspectives’.

Entrances and Exits

When talking about ‘entrances and exits’ for an arts project we are talking about two things: First, ways of becoming involved and participating in a specific arts project and secondly, what type of arts participation is supported, desired, and / or expected upon the completion of that project. Key questions regard how participation in the (subsidised) arts comes to take place. Additionally, what are the intentions of those who design arts projects aimed at introducing or developing the interests of ‘hard to reach’ individuals? Moreover, there are questions to ask regarding who often holds authority in the forms of participation that are promoted and how participation takes shape. These are all related to a number of personal, social, economic, institutional and political factors beyond the scope of this piece. Anthony Schrag, David Stevenson, and Leila Jancovich are among many scholars who write astutely about this and the surrounding debates in the fields of artistic practice, arts management and cultural policy.

Activities in Exit 15 involved many of the typical tools of the trade. In Phase 1 (2017-18), these included residencies of different duration across three months by different artists who worked in various or multiple art forms and with different approaches to working with people. Community and arts-focused researchers met with people living and working in the area and observed Exit 15 activities. dlr Arts Office also worked on a committee with local people to select the artists, CoisCéim Broadreach who took up residency in Phase 2 (2019). Micro-funds have also been available for which existing formal and informal groups or individuals could apply.

Figure 1.
Arts related activity
and non-arts related activity



As a result of this design, Exit 15 facilitated a web of multiple entry and exit points for people living and working in Ballyogan to participate in the project. Across both Phases, individuals and groups took up opportunities to be collaboratively involved in the making of art work with an artist, while others made work for a performance or presentation, others shared a story, a photograph or a chat over a cup of tea that influenced an artistic process, and others got involved in making work of their own. Some individuals attended the presentation of an artwork, or a meeting in which the artist was introduced to people in the area and nothing more.

Still, a key question that remains at the close of Exit 15 is what opportunities or avenues remain for a person once that project is completed? What array of opportunities / avenues for other engagement may be available and how will people know about those opportunities / avenues? Who is shaping the decisions about what is available? These are questions about capacity, specifically the 'interrelations existing and emerging amongst a network of community groups and organisations as well as arts and cultural producers, service providers, funders, makers, attenders and venues' (Durrer, 2017, pg 16) to connect people living and working in Ballyogan to the various ways in which they might engage in creative, artistic, and cultural activity on their own terms.

Many artists and arts managers will be familiar with different ways in which to facilitate one's 'entrance' or initial engagement with an artistic or creative encounter. We found there was a high reliance on using existing networks and organisations from the area to meet people and build awareness and interest in projects and activities. For example, Michael Fortune exclusively worked on-site at the Southside Travellers Action Group. Such approaches may be fundamental to an artist's way of working and / or useful for building relationships and communication channels already established—especially when the duration of an artist residency is limited. However, it does risk 'missing out' on people who may not already be associated with particular groups. Alternative approaches rely on chance meetings within the community—like Michael McLoughlin 'rocking up at the skate park with recording equipment'. Such chance encounters may facilitate meeting people not engaged in formal services but may be problematic when it comes to maintaining contact. Another approach requires a consistent presence over a sustained period of time - which was taken by Mark

Storor, who 'hung out' in the community - at the shops, in the pub and held an open-door drop-in policy over the course of one month from the Blue House, a building familiar to many in Ballyogan. At the heart of all these approaches was a reliance on artists to make connections with communities.

CoisCéim Broadreach, the dance company awarded the Phase 2 residency were active over a full year in Ballyogan. Like Phase 1 artists, they made use of existing organisations and networks in the area to gain introductions to people living and working in the area, in particular Gaelscoil Sliabh Rua and the Family Resource Centre. The longer duration of their residency also allowed them to seed new groups, through people not previously connected in a formal structure. A standout example is the '50+ dance group' which began with a few women who used the local Samuel Beckett Centre Gym, some of which had been involved with the earlier stage of Exit 15. This group grew significantly over the year, gaining new members as friends of friends joined or as awareness of their activities spread through CoisCéim's publicity, which included 'pop-up' performances and a presence at community events and festivals.

Though approaches within Exit 15 varied considerably, what the publicly funded arts sector terms as 'engagement figures' were strong; Phase 1 activity collectively recorded over 700 participants and an audience of over 4,000 (including digital audience numbers). Phase 2 recorded over 1,113 participants and a viewing audience of over 2,855 (digital audiences not included). A collective reach of almost nine thousand people—all in an area of approximately 2000 people; 9,500 if you count its surrounds. While arguably demonstrating money 'well spent' per head of population in the Ballyogan area, this kind of reporting does not identify repeat attendance, nor does it differentiate between type of engagement, e.g. those individuals who took leading roles in shaping Exit 15 activity or building new projects, from someone who might have just come along to take part or attend something once. The split into 'attender' vs 'participant' also does not account for the fact that people are often both simultaneously, perhaps taking part in one type of activity themselves, then viewing another in support of a friend, family member or just out of general interest.

This diagram, Figure 2 (below) was drawn to illustrate that within those figures, there are different 'perspectives' and roles for those engaging in such

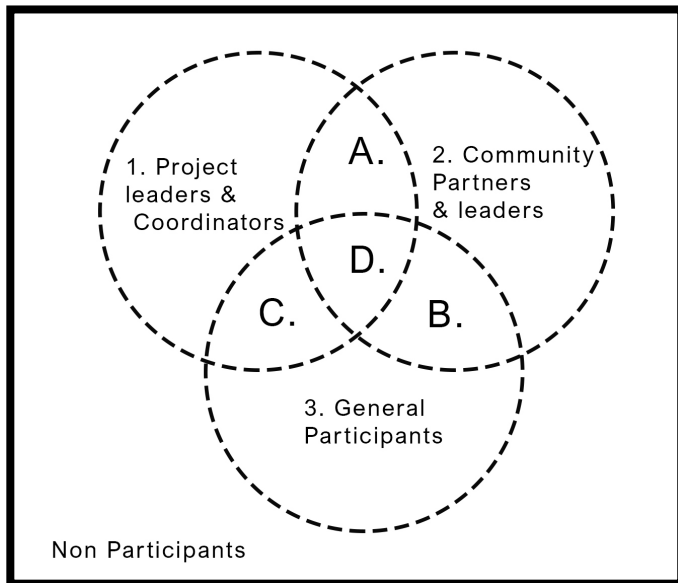


Figure 2. Participation Types

a project. The lines should be considered porous, with participants moving across or out of the circles, into the overlaps or out of engagement completely at different times. Some of the most interesting occasions are when the categories overlap, notably point D. Although it is possible to move through or into section D—and that could be considered the ideal or top level of citizen-led engagement, from the perspective of arts managers and community support professionals—people rarely have personal capacity to constantly maintain this level of engagement - as own priorities, responsibilities, enthusiasm for or interest in any one thing will change over time.

~

What we are talking about here is not new—scholars referenced here have been pointing out that arts and cultural policies need to re-examine how people and places are characterised in relation to normative notions of participation and the distribution of resources (financial and otherwise) that result from (and may even depend upon) such conceptualisations (Jancovich and Stevenson 2019). Institutions like local authorities (and their staff) hold strong purviews in this regard.

Projects like Exit 15 do not necessarily reshape entire localities or the lives of the individuals living in those localities. Sure, some people may become far more engaged in particular art forms than previously. Others may not at all, or even ever. What matters is that institutions like local authorities critically examine, evaluate, and review what labels like 'hard to reach' actually mean for people and localities, the

resources they receive and how the decisions are reached about the receipt (or not) of those resources. These decisions centre on what value we place in policy (and practice) on certain kinds of engagement over others and who is regarded as holding expertise.

As an inquiry-based project, Exit 15 facilitated such examination in the way it has prompted dialogue between the Arts Office and people living and working in Ballyogan. Whether or not this is the end or a very small step in a longer process towards considering what a local cultural policy might be like, is as yet unclear. What has emerged is a much richer picture of an area that is animated by this complex web of connections and networks than was previously understood within the local authority.

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THE PLACE & VOICE OF THE ARTIST

Written by Meadhbh McIlgorm
& Victoria Durrer

Underlying the whole of Exit 15 has been the artists, who have played a major role in facilitating individuals' participation in the arts.

At the same time, they have served as key brokers for dlr Arts Office. Artists who engage in community, participatory, socially engaged, dialogic and similar artistic practices—referred to here as participatory—are often articulated as the facilitators of participation. Artists are perceived as people who have a special kind of expertise to be an intermediary 'other'; someone who can meet with, engage with, and learn about people living and working in particular localities without an institutional agenda (even if funded by an institutional agenda).

These are quite significant roles and responsibilities. Yet, it is often the case that very little consideration is given to artists' perceptions of their own motivations, intentions and experiences in these projects (Schrag, 2018). The Exit 15 programme has thus prompted some questions aimed at fostering greater consideration of the 'artist' in this practice.

What are artists' intentions and motivations for engaging with people and places?

First, researcher and artist Anthony Schrag (2018) highlights the importance of understanding intent and motivation from both the perspective of institutions wishing to engage artists and from the perspective of artists taking on participatory art briefs. Recognising the varying way in which 'participation' might take shape in and through arts projects, Schrag (2018: 9) notes, "we may all be 'working with people' but we all seem to be doing it very differently, and for very different reasons."

Schrag (2018: 8–10) particularly notes the assumption that artists who engage in community settings are doing so for the purposes of "betterment" or the "amelioration" of particular 'deficits' that funding initiatives may indicate particular places and people to have. He continues:

"It is a pressing concern to unravel this confusion because recent years have seen a burgeoning growth of this practice. No longer considered a fringe activity, [participatory arts] receives major attention from policy-makers, institutions, conferences, large funding initiatives, academic journals, as well as

the establishment of a number of dedicated MA courses. All this activity guides a professionalization and instrumentalization of the practice either from government agencies who might position it as “social work lite,” or from activist agents who might use the practice for their own utopian notions of social betterment, for example activist artists aiming to create a better world based in leftist ideologies. In a world of plurality and diversity, it is therefore a crucial time to reflect on and analyse the multiple different approaches in regards intent” (Schrag 2018: 9)

What roles and expectations do participatory projects place on artists?

It is thus also important to clarify the role and the expectations placed on artists, not only in relation to the institutions initiating projects, but on the part of and by the public and localities in which artists are invited to engage. Are artists being expected to take on educative roles – somehow sharing knowledge and skills in arts making (Schrag, 2018)? Are they being asked to ‘develop audiences for the arts’ (Jancovich, 2015), or are they being asked to engage in “collaborative and egalitarian processes with no premediated outcomes” (Schrag, 2018: 15), which can be difficult given the nature of particular funding initiatives and applications.

In light of the points above, it is interesting to look back on how artists from Phase 1 self-described their roles within the project. Answers like ‘Facilitating participants in recognising the “magic” in them and their everyday lives’ and ‘Working to “normalise” creative processes in the locality by demonstrating that making art is part of the everyday experience and anyone can be part of it’ could be interpreted as collaborative and egalitarian motivations. By contrast, ‘Serving as a “catalyst” for local people to take part in creative activities’ sounds much more like arts audience development. Lastly the response of ‘Gathering material relating to place, community, beliefs and tradition - and presenting it to the audience in an open manner’ seems to sit much more within the realms of research and education. These responses were given at interviews mid-way through their projects and already, from just three artists working to the same brief, we can see a range of motivations emerging.

What methods might artists employ?

Thirdly, understanding these expectations and roles will then relate to the perspectives that an artist(s)

brings and how that relates to their approach. Of great importance to all artists, in Phase 1 and Phase 2 was the freedom to determine one’s own methodological approach and work to a flexible timeline. We hesitate to list any core methods here as what ‘works’ is subjective and dependent upon the time, the place, and the people involved.

“What exactly happens in the workshops is often quite difficult to talk about. There are many elements that can only be experienced rather than described.”

Exit 15 Artist

However, it is worth considering how the remit of a project shapes that ‘freedom’. For instance, artists in Phase 1 had a shorter time to engage with people living and working in Ballyogan. This design was reflective of a goal to offer people in the locality a greater variety of artforms and processes in which to engage through utilizing a greater number of artists over that period of time. In contrast, with Phase 2 the goal was to achieve greater depth of engagement with one particular selected artform (dance). As a result, CoisCéim Broadreach had a much longer period of time in which to ‘reach’ people living and working in Ballyogan and thus were able to design and adapt their methods in response to new information, opportunities or needs expressed by participants.

Who are identified as ‘artists’?

Our fourth consideration regards who we are engaging as professional ‘artists’ in participatory projects. A key point of interrogation that emerged in Exit 15, was why professional artists from Ballyogan did not receive the artist commissions. While recognising the unique skill set required for participatory arts activity, this question is indeed a fair one as it highlights a misalignment in how purpose and expectation has been communicated and / or perceived by different stakeholders. At the heart of the question is a query regarding what types of artistic expertise are most valued, why, and from whose point of view. It highlights a need for open and transparent communication regarding how and what type of artistic expertise is perceived and valued amongst (and perhaps differently by) all stakeholders.

Two points emerge here. First, relates to power. Expertise is typically associated with power. That power might reside, for instance, with the funding body, the residents, or elected officials who are

perceived to then influence what expertise is of value. Perhaps this is of no doubt, but power in and of itself is not a bad thing. In fact, an overemphasis on power as something that must be given over to another might limit any understanding of the success and /or failure of a participation-oriented initiative as being about the achievement or not of 'control'. In fact, while power may exist and exert influence over the type and processes of participation permitted or taking place, "individuals do not necessarily define their roles in relation to their sense of power" (Collins and Ison, 2006: 7). Instead, as Collins and Ison (2006: 7) argue "the roles and responsibilities of individuals are based on the construction of their interest (or stake) in the situation". In other words, equality of 'artistic' status is not a requirement for people to be mutually engaged in a participatory project such as Exit 15 (Wenger, 1998), but the question raised does indicate that awareness of the differing perceptions of expertise may be warranted in order to foster greater mutual understanding and engagement in the project and its goals.

Second is in relation to the infrastructure supporting an artist. As outlined above these development projects place significant responsibility on artists to be facilitators of participation. Therefore it is essential that resources and infrastructure exist to support them in navigating all other areas which can determine the success of a programme ranging from admin to data protection to marketing and scheduling. Within the Exit 15 project, a Community Liaison Officer was appointed to act as the broker between the various parties and support the artists with these ancillary tasks. This role was enthusiastically supported and appreciated by all contacted artists however availability of the Community Liaison was very limited due to low contract hours of just 1 day per week. It may be the case that the organisational structures and facilities available to individual artists, such as those appointed in Phase 1, may differ in comparison to those that are company-based. As CoisCéim was a differently experienced and resourced company, they seemed to have less reliance on the Community Liaison across Phase 2. The support and infrastructure available, therefore might influence who is able to apply for large-scale place-based commissions.

How are artists supported in this work?

Finally, Exit 15 indicated potential for greater peer support and connections for and amongst artists engaging in this practice and with the people with whom they are engaging. In Exit 15, there was focus on building capacity in two key ways. For one, capacity building referred to how dlr Arts Office might learn more about engaging with people living and working in Ballyogan. There was also a desire to build individuals' capacities to engage in participatory arts activity but also to engage in shaping decisions about what arts activity might be resourced for the project.

There was little to no focus on the capacity building of the artists, especially regarding this type of participatory decision-making. If we are proposing to move away from panels consisting solely of 'arts experts' who decide who and what artists and arts activity get resourced in particular localities, we may wish to ask artists what support they need for engaging with the public in this way. This may involve providing time and funds to support artists' engagement with peer to peer sharing between one another and with project stakeholders as well as amongst different projects. Create, the National Development Agency for Collaborative Arts often supports connecting artists, but further supports in this regard would be useful.

It is also important to provide space and time for artists to reflect with the people with whom they work after a project is completed. Providing a reflective space to review what took place, what skills were shared (in multiple directions), how and to what end, would not only build a greater sense of the impact of these experiences on the 'public' or people but the artists as well. It may also further foster the social learning (even if it may be contentious and conflictual at times, rather than ameliorative) that is the nature of this practice.

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Images

Page 26: Image from Crafty Hands.
Photo Credit; Jonathan Ho

This page:
(top) Michael Fortune mid workshop
Photo Credit; Jonathan Ho
(bottom)
'Folding & Unfolding Landscapes' by Doreen Kennedy.



Seeding Local Initiatives

Micro Funding

The aim of the Micro fund was to help people in Ballyogan put on new events or activities, to do something different and new and showcase it. It was open to emerging or established groups or citizens who wanted to try something new. Awards of €300 were made to 3 different groups.

The application requested a show of commitment or ambition to at least two main Micro fund aims:

- Engagement; reach new audiences, participants or volunteers.
- Partnership; work with other organisations or people that enable all of you to work more effectively as a result of sharing information, skills or pooling resources.
- Innovation; use new ideas or approaches in a way that has an impact on your event. So fresh thinking that creates value.
- Creativity; creative development in your art and craft form. Your event enables volunteers and participants to develop significantly in terms of their skill levels.

As well as to share the inspirational work being done locally.

Walking Bus Parade

A local Volunteer applied for funding to support a Walking Bus Parade with local children. The parade

was planned in collaboration with Gaelscoil Sliabh Rua school and students who made instruments, hats and other decorations. The Parades were aimed at bringing more families together in a creative way and to use the walking bus as a fun way to get to school.

Photography Group

Ballyogan Community Development Management Committee applied for the Micro fund to set up a photography group. They recently reopened the darkrooms that were once in use in Ballyogan Community Building. They hosted workshops to engage local people in skill building and to promote photography as an artform.

Exhibition of Young People's Work

Ballyogan Family Resource Centre who work directly with children and families in Ballyogan applied for funding to collaborate with a professional artist to deliver training workshops to staff from the childcare and after school's staff team, volunteers and others interested in participating. The aim was to enhance artistic skills that will enable participants to engage in a more meaningful way with the children and young people accessing their services. They also held an exhibition of the children's and young people's work (that will be supported and enhanced by the training the leaders receive) as part of the annual Ballyogan Festival that took place in August 2018.



Participatory Budgeting

One of the first Participatory Budgeting events in the arts on the island of Ireland, *Dublin 18 Is...* invited ideas for community-led projects that were able to grow local cultural life in Dublin 18, of which Ballyogan is a part, and invited local citizens to help decide how to allocate funding to support them.

Funding up to the value of €5,000 was made available by the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Council Arts Office. On 23rd November 2019, 11 projects pitched to a community gathering of 40 people who decided on which projects to give resources to through a deliberative discussion and voting process. Ideas ranged from signage for the local Gaiscoil to cake decoration classes, from support for dance groups to local area cultural heritage projects.

What is Participatory Budgeting

Participatory Budgeting (PB) can be described as “Local People deciding how to allocate part of a public budget.” It is a way for citizens to have a direct say in how public funds are used to address local needs. PB can be used to allocate spending from a range of sources including: Local Councils; Housing Associations; Schools; Public Health Trusts; Police and Community Safety Partnerships; Social Enterprises; Trusts and Charities. PB is much more than just deciding how resources are allocated. It provides opportunities to engage in non-traditional ways that reach out to people who don’t often have a voice and it can become a celebration of positive action in the community.

Why Participatory Budgeting in the arts and why now?

What has emerged from Exit 15 since it began in 2016 is not only a focus on participatory processes in art making but participatory processes in decision making. It was only a small leap of faith by the lead project partner, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to enable people to begin to make decisions about which community-led projects to invest small levels of seed funding in.

There is still a perception that the Arts do not connect with peoples’ everyday lives, which can be readily refuted by spending a little time with people in a locality to, first of all, understand the creative and cultural activities that they are already engaged in and value. Time and time again Exit 15 uncovered peoples’ curiosity and passion for the visual arts, crafts and dance along with cultural heritage, baking, learning and much more framed within a deep need for social connectedness.

The programme also uncovered the vital role professional artists and the local professional cultural and civic infrastructure play and the struggle they often face engaging effectively with local people.

Participatory Budgeting provides a very dynamic and engaging approach to bringing citizens and the professional cultural and civic infrastructure together around the common interests of culture and place. And it does so in ways that work for local people.

PB is only one way to engage people in local decision making but matters now in the Arts because there

is an urgent need to enliven the vibrant cultural lives led by local communities, which often remain hidden, and to do so in ways that build on the capacities of local arts offices and the capabilities of professional artists and arts organisations. PB in the Arts can help encourage a whole systems and ecological approach to supporting local cultural life

How did it work – what was the process?

Dublin 18 Is... was run as a public facing campaign over six weeks. A flyer was created and put out via all of the partners' networks digitally and via print in local community gathering places. People were asked to express an interest via an online form and email address.

On the 6th and 7th November people came together to chat through their ideas with some of the facilitators of the project. Some guidance on how to develop a pitch was given on the Exit 15 website and additional remote support was available for people giving feedback on their early presentation drafts and answering any queries in relation to the process.

The Pitch Your Project event on 23rd November was delivered by Kevin Murphy and Karin Eyben of Voluntary Arts Ireland and was organised as a creative, engaging and fun session over a few hours with light refreshments.

The aims were to:

- Hear and celebrate people's ideas through a pitching process
- Have a deliberative process where people discuss the merits of the pitched proposals in small table discussions and encourage a supportive atmosphere where people show their appreciation of each other's ideas.
- Have a voting process followed by an announcement of the funding allocations
- Agree to a community feedback session within six months so that people could report to the community how their project went and what, in the end, they spent the funding on

People, although often nervous about pitching, found the process enjoyable and the facilitators made sure to encourage a supportive environment. The small table discussions were designed to help people not only meet new people but explore the different perspectives in the room about the various projects pitched so as to inform their voting preferences.

People voted for their top 5 projects and those with the most votes were awarded funding up to the total amount that was available. Project funding of €600 was available for more developed 'Ready to Go' projects, €300 for 'Try it Out' projects and a further category of €150 for projects that clearly needed more time for research and development was decided on, on the day. In the end the community present decided to fund all of the projects that were pitched.

Conclusion

There is great potential for this to be a vibrant part of the annual cultural calendar across Dublin 18 and indeed for it to inspire other local authorities and arts funders to adopt this approach. PB in the Arts is an opportunity not only to uncover new community-led initiatives in an area or new initiatives from a community of interest and bring them together building relationships along the way, but opens up the possibility for the kind of healthy cultural democracy that many of us are seeking.

Images

Page 30: Selection of works made by Crafty Hands.

Photo Credit; Jonathan Ho

Page 31; Sorting votes at Participatory Budgeting event



THE WIDER CONTEXT

Questioning what we mean by ‘participation’

Written by Victoria Durrer

In considering the public policy context of Exit 15, this section explores why it is important for a local authority Arts Office to question its assumptions about the role of the arts in our lives and how Exit 15 is a part of dlr Arts Office’s work towards that end.

The Government and the Arts

Since 1994, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council has been supporting and developing the arts in the county through a dedicated Arts Office. As a local government Arts Office, dlr County Council is one actor in a network of bodies in Ireland that work to support and develop the artistic life of the country as a whole. These include, but are not limited to other local government Arts Offices as well as central government; non-governmental agencies like the National Youth Council, Age Action, and the Irish Traveller Movement; quangos, such as Arts Council Ireland, which provides public money to support the development of artists and public engagement in the arts—from music to visual arts, to theatre and film, for instance; publicly funded organisations like arts organisations and charities; and commercial artistic organisations, such as film and design companies.

In establishing and maintaining the Arts Office, dlr County Council recognises local arts development as a part of local government planning, with the arts having a role in the County’s social and economic life and in establishing a sense of community. The remit of the Arts Office is thus to support the “sustainable development of the arts within the County.” This work involves, but is not limited to, distributing funding to, for instance, individual art projects in youth services, venues like the Mill Theatre in Dundrum, individual artists to make work, and amateur music and drama groups. They also host exhibitions at dlr Lexicon, support festivals in different

communities and develop partnership projects like Creative Classrooms, an artist in schools scheme in partnership with Blackrock Education Centre. These activities are funded by dlr County Council itself as well as Arts Council Ireland. They are also supported through the development of partnerships with some of the agencies listed above.

As part of the work the Arts Office does, it is required by law to create an Arts Development Plan for supporting the sustainable development of arts in the County. The plan is informed by consultation events with County-based artists, residents and organisations; learning gained from the activities they do; and government policies and Arts Council Ireland policies. dlr Arts Office is informed by a number of wider policies, but there are three main national policy documents to note here:

- At national level, the Department's *Culture 2025*, the first national strategy for culture and creativity;
- Its associated implementation programme, Creative Ireland; and
- Arts Council Ireland's 10 year strategy, *Making Great Art Work*.

These documents help direct planning for the support and development of the arts in Ireland, including strategies for how funds may get distributed as well as to whom or what organisations in addition to the development of different projects or new buildings, for instance. There are additionally a number of local area social, economic, and cultural plans and local authority corporate documents with which the Arts Office would align.

Statements of Value

Government tends to describe the arts in two ways (Yúdice, 2009):

1. as a public good —like a product—an exhibition, theatre performance, or music classes, made available to the public to take part in, and
2. as a service – helping create jobs and bringing people together, and more

For instance, as government documents, what *Culture 2025*, Creative Ireland, *dlr Arts Development Plan* or even *Making Great Art Work* say about the arts is a statement of the value that the government places on arts activities. Across the documents “people and places are [described as] central to policy and provision in the arts”. Participation in the

arts is argued to have “transformational potential” in building people’s confidence or helping them to express themselves differently. Arts activities are also argued to support individuals’ “well-being” and have “the power ... to bring communities together and ... strengthen ...a sense of identity”. These documents also articulate the arts as being at the heart of “developing vibrant cultural locations” and building or showcasing a “sense of place” in urban, suburban and rural areas, making places more “attractive”, fostering economic success through the creation of new jobs and bringing in “tourism” and “investment”, and building local “pride” through, for instance, the building of arts centres.

What’s the problem?

What government funds and recognises as the ‘arts’ in these regards makes a statement that these activities are what is of value. What government does not fund or otherwise resource or support, what state policies and strategies do not discuss or acknowledge—what gets excluded—is perhaps perceived as having lesser or no value.

This raises some important questions:

What gets included and excluded when government and other agencies describe and develop policies and plans for people’s participation in the arts?

Who makes these decisions?

Who is not making these decisions?

Essentially, who knows best about what art we feel is important to our lives?

Perceived levels of participation in government funded arts have been cause for concern in the arts sector in the Republic of Ireland. Efforts to broaden access and tackle psychological, economic, social and spatial barriers to engagement remain key policy goals for the Arts Council. A strategic review of Arts Council policies held in 2014, *Inspiring Prospects*, highlighted how the emphasis on “funding the professional arts sector” has overlooked fuller consideration of the ‘public’ and the ‘citizen’s’ actual participation and interest in the arts (ACI 2014, p. 5). There has been acknowledgement that what we typically understand

as making up the arts: opera, theatre, painting, printmaking, drawing, music, certain forms of dance: Irish traditional or ballet, for instance, does not fully capture the range of activity that people are doing. The review indicates how policy and programming has typically presented the individual who is not accessing publicly funded arts and cultural activity as a ‘non- participant’, an individual disengaged. This assumption risks neglecting the rich diversity of arts-related practices currently taking place and experienced everyday in Irish society (Miles and Sullivan 2010), such as gardening, playing video games, doing crafts at home, reading a book, or watching a movie.

Critiques on strategies to broaden arts participation in other countries indicate that strategies tend to focus on individuals’ capacities for participation in government-funded arts. Initiatives often involve enhanced education and audience development approaches, rather than focusing on the capacity of the sector to engage individuals. Instead of seeing ‘people’s lack of engagement in art...’ as the matter to be addressed, researchers highlight a need for deeper consideration of the artistic and cultural offer and the capacity of the sector to engage with the public (Jancovich 2011, p. 272 – 273; Jancovich and Bianchini 2013; Gilmore 2014; Durrer 2017).

Arts Council Ireland seems to have taken on board these critiques. It acknowledges the need to consider, more strategically, the actual interests and participation of the public in the arts. The significant position of local authorities in this work has recently been more officially recognised. The new programme *Creative Places* is an exciting development in this regard. Creative Ireland’s broader remit has been important here as well.

Equally, dlr Arts Office is acknowledging that people are not being asked enough or perhaps even the right questions about the artistic activities in which they have an interest or participate. Additionally, the public they serve may not be involved enough in shaping the service they provide. These deficiencies foster a lack of understanding that impacts on how government appreciates what makes up the artistic life of a place like Ballyogan.

Through arts-based research activities, Exit 15 has helped dlr Arts Office better understand people’s everyday lives—their interests, lifestyles and traditions—and how these may relate to the artistic

activities in which people take part and thus what supports and policies could be in place as a result. Its methodology is based on the goal of working with people in Ballyogan. The emphasis is on learning for dlr Arts Office but also the community of Ballyogan: learning about existing and new artistic interests and activities of the people who live and work there and the decision-making mechanisms regarding that provision and support.

Images:

Page 33: CoisCéim Broadreach film screening celebration event. Photo credit; Rob O'Connor

Page 36: (left) A child suits up for a workshops with Mark Storar.

(right) invitation for Mark Storar's event launch. Photo credit: Jonathan Ho



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Understanding Everyday Participation; <http://www.everydayparticipation.org>



RESEARCH APPROACH

Written by Victoria Durrer

Together we are developing more democratic, dialogic-centred and shared approaches for nurturing and engaging in the artistic life of Ballyogan.

The goals for Exit 15 are set out on the table on page 38. Central to these objectives is the notion that the project itself is a piece of action-research for the Arts Office in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to learn more about what arts participation means to and with different individuals and different institutions and as part of the fabric of local life in Ballyogan.

This inquiry is about the local authority understanding its own role and capacity building needs for developing more democratic, dialogic-centred and shared approaches for nurturing and engaging in the artistic life of Ballyogan. In the longer term, dlr Arts Office seeks to apply this learning to the development of their work in other areas of the County.

Action Research

As Exit 15 emerged as part of a longer process of inquiry in dlr Arts Office, begun in 2016, into the artistic, cultural and creative interests of people living and working in Ballyogan. The research approach sees this work as a further step in an ongoing process. Capturing impact, in this instance, is therefore about capturing and understanding a “sequence of events” and experiences within a longer continuum (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016, p. 134; Brown and Novak Leonard 2007; Carnwath and Brown 2014).

As a result, exploring Exit 15 as an action research project has rested on the idea that “knowing occurs with the act, the process of constructing issues and seeking improvements” (Collins and Ison, 2006, p. 11).

Such a learning framework is appropriate for analysis of arts and cultural policy, activities and programmes aimed at participation, especially as participation processes are typically viewed as learning processes in and of themselves (Collins and Ison 2006; Parsons 2002).

Action research is an on going, flexible process of applied research that joins practice-based “action (change, improvement) and research (understanding, knowledge)” (Costello, 2011, p. 6). It involves both reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). This approach is in contrast to “traditional policy instruments” typically built on the belief that knowledge is static or permanent (Collins and Ison, 2006, p. 11). Continual reflection is at the heart of the research process with everyone involved bringing unique expertise to the process. While dlr Arts Office set the objectives for Exit 15 as an action research project. My role served to facilitate reflection on the learning gained in real-time as the project developed.

A Learning Framework

Understanding processes of change requires consideration of who learns, what is learned and how that learning is applied. In order to understand any possibility of capacity building, the role and experiences of the various individuals involved must be considered alongside the terms (like ‘arts’ and ‘participation’) and conditions (like programme design, organisational structures, physical infrastructure, financial resources and individuals’ existing and developing skills) present within Exit 15. As a result, individuals’ meanings and experiences of

SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES	Promoting and Increasing Public Engagement with the Arts in Ballyogan		LONG TERM OBJECTIVES
	To increase engagement with DLR Arts Office provision	To increase engagement with publicly funded arts, i.e. the fine and performing arts	
	To develop a high-quality artistic programme in collaboration with people living and working in Ballyogan	To enable high quality collaborative arts practice to develop and thrive in this area	
	Building Community Capacity in Arts and Culture		
	To develop a high-quality artistic programme that is reflective of, and responsive to, the needs and interests of the people living and working in Ballyogan	To develop understanding of how DLR County Council’s Arts Office provision and support might fit within a broader cultural ecosystem	
	To build on existing activity and further develop DLR’s practice in working with local communities to develop local arts provision that is responsive to the cultural needs and interests of local communities		
	Developing and Shaping Local Arts Policy Development		
	To learn more about processes for working with local communities on determining and developing local arts provision and support	To develop and further implement a new model of practice for developing and nurturing local arts provision and support	
To monitor, evaluate and reflect on the work in partnership with other local authorities, specifically Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Belfast City Council in Northern Ireland, and an academic researcher based at Queen's University Belfast.	To work with existing, and establish new, partners to build a wider sharing of practice in this work amongst local authorities on the island.		

the processes facilitated by Exit 15 and the ensuing capacities built from the perspective of the local authority and people living and working in Ballyogan had been the focus of this research.

An interpretive and social learning framework had thus been applied here. Learning is related to our changing abilities to “participate, belong, [and] negotiate meaning”, mutual engagement and shared endeavours (Wenger, 1998, p. 226). The research thus sought to understand the meaning of the actions, as well as the actions themselves and the experiences of them, undertaken in this project from the viewpoint of the individuals involved within their specific institutional, local and personal contexts.

There are a number of indicators of change that we have identified as part of this process, but overall, this had meant

- Capturing an understanding of what life is like in Ballyogan from the perspective of various people living and working there, including community and youth support services and the local authority
- Learning about what relationship Ballyogan ‘life’ has to the artistic activities in which people in Ballyogan take part, as perceived by those individuals
- Capturing what artistic activities are facilitated by Exit 15 and understanding people’s various experiences of those
- Documenting the processes for participation (in the arts as well as decision-making about local arts provision) employed in, and by means of, the Exit 15 project: who takes part, why, how and by what access points and toward what end

In practice, methods involved:

- Walking tours with people living and working in Ballyogan, discussing key sites, moments and activities in the area to assist in understanding what life is like in Ballyogan. The aim has been that the tours “activate memories and histories” (Aoki and Yoshimizu, 2015, p. 278) as well as illuminate any new ones that may result from Exit 15.
- Photography-based focus group discussions of key sites and moments in Ballyogan (historically and through Exit 15) to capture viewpoints on what life is like with people living and working in Ballyogan
- Interviews with artists involved in the project regarding their interpretation, processes and experiences of the project and of Ballyogan

- Interviews with participants involved in the project regarding their experiences of the project as well as their motivations for getting involved
- Observation and participant observation of Exit 15 activities
- Capturing the ways in which the arts activities themselves illuminate everyday Ballyogan

As developing and shaping local arts policy development is a key objective of Exit 15, much attention was paid to documenting and reflecting on the learning gained with the Arts Office team as well as with the local community. This took place through the following methods:

- Interviews with Arts Office staff involved in the project regarding their interpretation, processes and experiences of the project and of Ballyogan
- Monthly meetings with key staff directly involved in the project to critically reflect on the project activity and research to date in order to adjust and respond to developments as they arise.
- Diaries kept by key staff regarding self-identified changes to perceptions and practice resulting from project activity
- Sharing sessions with the local community on research findings in order to gather response and feedback and critically reflect on the researcher’s perceptions of what is occurring in the project, why and how
- Learning exchange of experiences on a similar project with the Arts & Cultural team in Mid & East Antrim (Northern Ireland).

In examining all of these points, the research sought to understand the implications the project has for facilitating democratic, dialogic-centred and shared approaches for local arts provision and support within the specific context of Ballyogan—its organisations, institutions and people.

Images

Page 37; Michael Fortune working with Groups in STAG

Page 40; Mark Storor installation 'Flying Blind & Semi Blue with a Belly Full of Ring a Ring a Rosey'

Photo credit; Jonathan Ho (both)

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Please note: Following the completion of this project, Voluntary Arts Ireland rebranded as Creative Lives to celebrate their 30th anniversary in June 2021

*Further info on the Exit 15 programme can be sought if required from dlr Arts office
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