

# \*interactions

creative strategies for business

**Arts Council Consultation Process**

**Meeting on Participatory Arts**

**29 April 2005, 10am – 4pm**

**IMMA**

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## **Introduction**

The Participatory Arts day was convened around a number of parallel sessions. During the morning 4 sessions loosely gathered around the Arts Council's four programme areas were convened.

### **Session 1      10.30 – 12.30**

- Group 1      Festivals,
- Group 2      Resource Organisations
- Group 3      Venues, facilitated
- Group 4      Production Companies

Three parallel break out sessions were convened on the following topics in the first part of the afternoon

### **Session 2      1.15 – 2.15pm**

- Group 1      What happens when artists collaborate with people?
- Group 2      Arts Council Core values (two parallel sessions on the same topic)
- Group 3      Cultural Diversity

Three further break out sessions were convened on the following topics in the latter part of the afternoon.

### **Session 3      2.30 – 3.30pm**

- Group 1      Training and development for participatory arts practitioners
- Group 2      Arts Council Support and networks/networking in participatory arts
- Group 3      Sustainable creative processes

This document contains summary notes from each of the sessions



## **Session 1: Festivals** (10.30 – 12.30)

### **1. Questions for Discussion**

General questions:

- What are the challenges facing participatory arts practice in Festivals?
- What current issues and developments are arising?
- How can successful practice be recognised by the Arts Council and supported through its core values, and its Development, Artform and Programme policies?

Specific questions or themes

- Describe the core purpose and the particular impacts of 'socially engaged' festivals. How should these inform Arts Council values and policy for festivals?
- What are the idiom and the practice? More than just the parade?
- How can short-term festivals enable lasting artistic impact and long-term engagement? How can our policies support this?

2 In discussing the questions the following emerged

#### **2.1 Challenges facing participatory arts practice in Festivals**

The discussion began with broad agreement that while festivals differ in scale, history, size and purpose – they share common issues and challenges. The group considered most aspects of their festivals to be broadly participatory. The first challenge discussed was that of meeting and managing people's/audiences increasing expectations and sense of entitlement regarding participation. Experience shows there is an expectation of broad inclusion from festivals that can be ill informed or unrealistic in terms of the festivals overall mission and purpose. While the desire for connection and participation was considered a positive by the group, it presents challenges in terms of resource allocation and managing the balance between it and the festival brand or image.

Managing varying and sometimes contradicting expectations from such a broad range of stakeholders– tourism, business, local arts community (voluntary, amateur and professional, audiences, etc.. is considered to be a constant challenge and time consuming. To be successful festivals must be clear about their core purpose. Tourism/ economic impact etc.. are important agendas but not the core of arts festivals. Local distinctiveness is particularly critical for small local festivals. Having artists at the heart of the programme is also deemed essential.

It was agreed that measuring success and defining value are key challenges and increasingly important for the future and that success is seen differently by different stakeholders. Measuring participation levels is extremely challenging. Festivals impact in both the short and the long term and those impacts take a number of years to emerge and can often – particularly initially - be quite subtle e.g. artists working in schools programme.

It was agreed that lack of awareness, education and understanding about the arts and particularly how festivals work is a constant challenge for festival managers and local arts officers who are at the coal face of managing diverging expectations. Mary Butler from Kilkenny gave a good example of how the success of the Kilkenny festival has influenced arts development in the county resulting in some unrealistic expectations and deeply felt but ill informed accusations of exclusion, particularly from the local community and local artists. This sense of being disenfranchised from the festival demands to be addressed and requires a slow process of education and engagement that is time consuming and difficult for a solo arts officer or festival manager to achieve. Everyone agreed their experience of local authorities councillors are particularly challenging in this regard.

It was agreed that festivals are a focal point and a showcase. All festivals present agreed that over the longer term their objective is to evolve and transform but that achieving this whilst also maintaining a clear festival brand and identity and building on success is a challenge. The primary instruments for achieving this transforming evolving dynamic are quality arts programming, the central involvement of artists and the capacity to think and plan over the longer term. Securing resources that enable long term planning is considered to be a major challenge. There was agreement that festivals must be able to plan long-term as change cannot be achieved on an annual basis – rather it is a rolling process and projects – particularly those involving deepening participation experiences - need to be conceived and managed over longer timeframes.

## **2.2. Current Issues/ Developments**

There was agreement that the need and the demand for arts and cultural festivals is ever increasing with a diverse range of funders taking an interest in the area. Festivals are thriving and the growth in interest in opportunities for participation was noted and shared amongst festivals present. New and interesting festival models are emerging (some from outside the Arts Council's client list) and within these there are some interesting developments regarding new models for participation e.g. (St. Patrick's Festival Transition Year programme, Cork City

of Culture). It was also noted that some of the most traditional and longest established festivals are increasingly interested in including arts/cultural elements.

There was agreement also that the festival sector is increasingly diverse and this is extremely positive. Any discussions regarding articulating value should be inclusive of this diversity and not simply mirror those festivals the Arts Council has an established funding relationship with.

All festivals described numerous examples of direct and indirect festival impacts both in terms of the arts and wider agendas. A common challenge was the difficulty in communicating these impacts to the Council and other stakeholders and having sufficient capacity to develop the opportunities they present. Some examples given were: demand for access to a particular art form (e.g. Fresh Film Festival and training in film); documenting and articulating the experience of a particular approach to creatively engaging with communities (e.g. Cork 2005) or maintaining partnerships and relationships established over a 5 year period (e.g. with schools). International programming is increasingly important element of festival programming but is the most difficult to project manage.

There was agreement that the demand and interest in festivals has to some degree resulted in a template – usually what other stakeholders want to emulate e.g. parade, fireworks, participation based events....The festivals present described themselves as dynamic and working to transform and challenge space, expectations, mythologies and practice however they felt it important that not all festivals must have this objective at their core in order to be successful – many significant and important festivals have established templates that work and are doing valuable work that should be recognised and supported in its own right. It was noted that The Arts Council is the only agency that has an interest/understanding in investing in and promoting this aspect of festivals.

### **2.3. How can successful practice be recognised and supported by the Arts Council?**

It was suggested that The Arts Council needs to be very clear about what its specific role and function is in relation to festivals. It should support festivals to articulate their value system and then fund those values as expressed through the programme.

It was also suggested that the key role for the Arts Council is advocacy for the value of festivals. The challenge for the Arts Council is to mark out its territory in terms of policy – defining clearly the aspects of festivals it supports.

The Council should champion the core values discussed at the meeting. No other stakeholder has this role and the meeting sees the Council's advocacy and endorsement role as essential.

Values put forward at the meeting included:

- Diversity as a central and positive aspect of festivals – The Arts Council should be as inclusive as possible when looking at festivals
- Festivals as agents of change – intentionally evolving and transforming spaces, practices, audiences, mythologies etc... Show flexibility and responsiveness in supporting and funding festivals<sup>1</sup>
- More than an annual showcase – value and support festival impact in broader terms and over a longer timeframe and enable festivals to better document and manage the diversity of creative outcomes that arise from their festivals
- Value the festival in its own terms – less on the detail of the individual annual programme and more on the values informing the festival overall. Support the systems that support quality programming.

The Arts Council's important advocacy role should also be acted on in an inter-institutional way with other festival stakeholders

There was agreement that The Arts Council also has an important role in maintaining an ongoing relationship and facilitating peers within the festivals sector to debate and define the emerging critical questions in terms of articulating the value of arts and cultural festivals and measuring success. There was consensus on the need for The Arts Council to get behind the leaders in the field and support them to do this work. This should be as inclusive a group as possible and include expertise from a wide variety of festivals and expertise.

In terms of methodology of funding decisions, the view of the meeting was:

- The Arts Council should look at the issue of long term funding and examine the possibility of guaranteeing amounts (percentages of grants possibly) over a number of years.
- Discussion with festivals regarding programming should involve a range of staff expertise and particularly the relevant Arts Council art form expertise. (The staff connection is potentially a positive but operationally festivals at the meeting found

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. Arts Council doesn't fund competition but in some cases competition serves the core artistic mission of the festival and is used as a vehicle to achieve results rather than an end in itself

the experience has proved more negative with some festivals having to introduce themselves to many different staff so that no established knowledge bank is being built up despite best efforts.)

- Advisory groups should be involved in the funding decisions.
- A diversity of funding types for festivals is needed. Meeting was positive about the small festivals scheme but suggests the Council also invest in aspects of festivals (projects/ programmes), the involvement of individual artists and overall in festival client organisations

Other indirect supports mentioned were:

- Support for lobbying locally and for tackling the lack of understanding about the arts from other funders
- Professional development supports for festival managers/directors.
- Opportunities for improving the quality of artistic programming particularly for non-arts festivals and small festivals

**Session 1: Venues**

(10.30 – 12.30)

**1. Questions for Discussion****Specific Questions or themes**

- Describe the core purpose and the particular impacts of a 'socially engaged' arts venue.
- How should these inform Arts Council values, purpose and policy for arts venues?
- Describe how arts venues are developing sustainable participatory arts partnerships, which have lasting impact on peoples' creativity and on an arts venue's engagement with its community. How can the Arts Council support this practice through its values, policies and programmes?

**General questions**

- What are the challenges facing participatory arts practice in Venues?
- What current issues and developments are arising?
- How can successful practice be recognised by the Arts Council and supported through its core values, and its Development, Artform and Programme policies?

2 In discussing the questions the following emerged

**2.1 Describe the core purpose and the particular impacts of a 'socially engaged' arts venue**

Broadly, the perception of a 'socially engaged' venue was one that was publicly funded and had a responsibility to its users to engage locally, regionally and nationally. The attendees also identified it as a facility that should provide access and comfort; a place for accessing the arts and for artists to access audiences; one that diminishes barriers to programme; an agent for change in a community context; and a place of community interaction.

There was some concern expressed by representatives of institutions about the dangers of becoming (or perceived as) marketing tools for the tourism industry. In related discussion, the issue of outreach, education and audience development emerged and how the Arts Council perceives these. Critically, one participant quoted the Arts Council's Auditoria report as stating that outreach work was "loss making" and there was concern that felt that currently reflected the Council's position. There seemed to be a widely held belief that the Arts Council should 'test' the outreach and education 'claims' made by some of its revenue clients. What do clients mean by their claims and how do they show relationship between their outreach activity and arts programme?

There was widespread agreement that a venue's programme should be fully inclusive of its outreach and education activity and that the Arts Council should allow for reporting of it in this way.

### **How should these inform Arts Council, values, purpose and policy for arts venues?**

The question was responded to in a series of challenges to perceived Arts Council values. Participants largely felt that the Arts Council has ghettoised participatory arts. It was suggested that Council activity reports are concerned with quantitative not qualitative data. The increasing use of business language is perceived to limit ability to articulate artistic values and can often result in a bland description of the arts activity. It was suggested that language and, by inference, the embedded values of the Council seem to be a constant barrier to acknowledging the quality and success of work.

In exploring some of these issues, the group further detailed aspects of what was felt to be a gap in Arts Council appreciation of participatory arts. There was a suggestion that Council funding structures did not adequately reflect the requirements of practitioners and organisations in this area of work and this in turn had an impact on the sustainability of some initiatives. A majority of participants wanted to see the return of multi-annual funding as this provided a level of security and supported longer term planning.

There was agreement that how the Council measures success needs to be challenged as current measures do not appear to recognise the length of time it takes to develop certain types of project; that not all activities have an output; that not every project or activity will be successful; and, some projects/activities require longer periods of time to demonstrate impact.

The discussion can be summarised as: increase dialogue, improve understanding, value the work, reward endeavour, appreciate the context that the venue is operating in, and be flexible and responsive.

**2.2 Describe how arts venues are developing sustainable participatory arts partnerships, which have lasting impact on peoples' creativity and on an arts venue's engagement with its community. How can the Arts Council support this practice through its values, policies and programmes?**

In order to stimulate a breadth of discussion, a number of participants were asked to give specific examples of how they had developed partnerships and their effectiveness. This was followed by a general response that identified health boards, local authorities and other state/semi-state bodies as either extant or former partners in local, regional and national activities. It was suggested that certain partnerships with funding bodies (specifically non-arts) and development agencies were not always successful often because of conflicting priorities, values and expectations (e.g. community development agency valuing process over artistic outcome). It was agreed that partnerships with other arts organisations and cultural institutions were/are valued and particular mention was made of partnerships with individual freelance artists. It was also revealed that there is a committee of national institutions that is exploring joint-policy/strategy – including an audit of resources available for participatory arts.

In response to the question, participants identified the following:

- More advocacy was needed to raise the profile of work in this area and to validate it
- The level of experience and comfort for arts practitioners needs to improve
- The Arts Council needs to recognise that participatory arts practice informs other arts practice and arts development and is frequently at the cutting edge of practice development
- Support training provision including skills exchange programmes with other countries and guest speakers/mentors
- The Arts Council should create a Stabilisation Fund (like that of the Arts Council of England) that can be accessed by organisations that want to enter into periods of review
- More support for research and development work in this area
- More latitude for experimental activity

The discussion ended with a quote from a character in the television programme, *The West Wing*: "Great achievement has no road map."

### **2.3 What are the challenges facing participatory arts practice? What current issues and developments are arising? How can successful practice be recognised by the Arts Council and supported through its core values, and its Development, Artform and Programme policies?**

The session concluded with a detailed discussion focused on issues of practice formation and development. There was agreement that there is a need for artists, organisations and the Arts Council to realise that participatory arts development is a serious, measured engagement. Documentation of work and critical reflection were viewed as crucial to recognition of the importance of the work and its advancement.

The following key points were made:

- Visibility of work needs to be raised, improved and recognised
- Children's/youth arts is frequently perceived as 'not real art'
- The Arts Council's shifting/changing ground – funding, language and reporting, etc. is problematic
- Language (frequent references to how this area of work is described in the Auditoria report ); new language needed to describe practice
- Arts Council needs to acknowledge that space is needed for work to be made (both physical/resource and within developmental activity)
- Participation in the arts needs to be recognised at government level i.e. Dept Education, Health, etc
- The boards and management of arts organisations/venues need to understand and recognise the integral nature of participatory arts practice
- Participatory arts not attractive to sponsors – The Arts Council needs to appreciate this and respond with investment
- Equality of opportunity for work in this area and Arts Council should support access for all
- Greater documentation of participatory arts practice is needed to build history of practice work and an archive needs to be established – documentation should be seen as integral to programme
- Greater sharing of experiences and dissemination of learning is needed
- Increased levels of collaboration between artists and arts organisations is needed
- Improve or establish international links
- More space to reflect on practice and practice development is needed
- More critiquing/criticism is needed
- Gaining recognition for non-Arts Council funded activity that currently is both under-documented and under-valued is important



## **Session 1: Production Companies**

(10.30 – 12.30)

### **1. Questions for Discussion**

#### **General Questions**

- What are the challenges facing participatory arts practice in Production Companies?
- What current issues and developments are arising?
- How can successful practice be recognised by the Arts Council and supported through its core values, and its Development, Artform and Programme Policies?

#### **Specific Questions or themes**

- What do you produce? What is the 'body of work'? Describe the core purpose and the particular impacts of a 'socially engaged' production company.
- How should these inform Arts Council values, purpose and policy for production companies?
- How do you ensure an excellent quality of artistic engagement for participants and for audiences? What should the Arts Council advocate by way of 'artistic quality', in relation to your work and your productions?

2 In discussing the questions the following emerged

#### **2.1 Awareness, Validation and Expectations**

How participatory arts practice is understood and critiqued is most important. Practitioners felt that the work they were doing was often not sufficiently understood or valued by employers/promoters, audiences and funding bodies alike. In certain institutional contexts, creative work is often seen as a way of passing the time, making it hard for the work to be sustainable in terms of financial and organisational support. Audiences and promoters want a professional show and have little regard for the 'community' nature of the work, which often involves non-trained performers with little funding behind them. In some contexts, the audience does not know what to expect (e.g. in the context of people with learning disabilities, the culture is one of being valued for what you can do. In this particular context, a new culture is emerging: people with learning disabilities are not often seen on stage. Are the Arts Council sufficiently informed about the artform in this context?).

There was agreement that participatory arts have generated a new set of values, yet often funding bodies do not share the same values. The fact that participatory arts are often judged alongside work made by more 'mainstream' organisations - with more financial and human resources - can be frustrating. It was suggested that criteria for evaluating the work need to be established and perhaps the Arts Council could help to establish guidelines that are closely aligned with these emerging values. One approach could be for the Arts Council to introduce values of creativity, capacity building and negotiation of process into the mainstream; so that this approach assumes a central - and not a peripheral - position. Such guidelines must have resonance for both the practitioners and the funding bodies. At the same time, it was suggested that perhaps what is needed is for this work to be presented in contexts where current artistic validation is got (e.g. Venice Biennale).

It was noted that historically, there has been a lack of informed criticism about the work and it is clear that greater critical discourse is needed. Courses such as the MA in Criticism, Curation and Practice in DIATD will hopefully create a larger group of people who can think and comment critically about participatory and socially engaged arts practice. Language itself has been problematic in describing this area of work; with the term 'community arts' being replaced in recent years by 'participatory arts'.

## 2.2 **Process and Product**

There was agreement that there is a clearly held view that a tension exists between process and product and that a lot of funding is product-oriented, which results in process being under-valued. It was also suggested that there is a direct relationship between the claims of significance for participants and the significance of the process. How then can one showcase the process? Inevitably, the process is included in the performance (and vice versa). It was noted that a performance should 'share who we are' rather than 'show who we are' and agreed that it is important that The Arts Council creates an awareness of process. The process needs to be documented and evaluated - in this way, the progress of project participants, which is not always evident in the finished product, can be acknowledged.

## 2.3 **Quality and Funding**

It was suggested that there tends to be a lack of clarity with regard to the definition of quality. Questions included; what are the indicators and how much does the context define the indicators? Do these issues inevitably affect funding? It was noted that the context in

which participatory arts happen can lead to a de-valuing of artistic quality. Work is often funded by developmental organisations with no artistic expertise and for whom the principle criteria are social inclusion and numbers.

## 2.4 Role of the Arts Council

There was a suggestion that the Arts Council does not fully understand or appreciate participatory arts practice, particularly the element of process. The request to applicants from the Arts Council in its funding application form to articulate outcomes of the work in fifty words was seen as limiting. Is it valid that the Arts Council funds this work or more valid that another agency does? Currently, there are other agencies who are involved in funding, but they need to come back to the Arts Council as the influencing body. It was suggested that The Arts Council needs to identify the gaps in the system and ways in which these gaps can be filled and that there is a need for more dialogue between the Arts Council and the sector. Concern was expressed with regard to the emerging artists in the field who aren't getting seen or considered for funding by the Arts Council. More flexibility is required of the Arts Council in its response to the sector and a question raised - can the importance of process and reflection be reflected in Arts Council funding?

It was agreed that there is potentially an advocacy role for The Arts Council in making the area more visible and in the encouragement of high quality training in the field.

## 3 Actions

- To commission someone to write about community arts (e.g. by choosing a good project and showcasing it)
- To draw up guidelines which would help artists working in the community
- To develop a strand of funding to organise seminars /forums for discussion
- To act as advocate with educational institutions and funding bodies
- To re-institute multi-annual funding, thus providing some sense of security for organisations
- To provide funding for long-term creative projects
- To establish guidelines for evaluation of participatory arts practice



## **Session 1: Resource and Service Organisations** (10.30 – 12.30)

### **1. Questions for Discussion**

Specific questions or themes

- Describe the core purpose and the particular impacts of 'socially engaged' resource organisations
- How does the principle of "resource" and "service" apply?
- How can this inform Arts Council thinking on resource organisations?
- How do you ensure an excellent quality of artistic engagement for participants? What should the Arts Council advocate by way of "artistic quality", in relation to your work, your programming and your impact?
- How do you disseminate skills, knowledge and lessons learned?

General questions:

- What are the challenges facing participatory arts practice in Resource Organisations?
- What current issues and developments are arising?
- How can successful practice be recognised by the Arts Council and supported through its core values, and its Development, Artform and Programme policies?

2 In discussing the questions the following emerged

#### **2.1 Principles, core purpose and impact**

The following key points emerged in relation to principles, core purpose and impact of 'socially engaged' practice from the perspective of Resource Organisations:

It was agreed that young people (meaning in this case teenagers) are one critical grouping within society who currently derive some benefit from the arts resource infrastructure – fragmented and under-supported as that infrastructure might be. Teenagers are highly visible and yet oddly marginalized in mainstream thinking, particularly - but not only - those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. It was noted that commercial and public resources, such as venues, funding schemes, etc. tend to leave them out, (the high-minded aspirations of various youth arts reports notwithstanding). It was also agreed that prejudice against youth is endemic (e.g. try hiring a funded arts centre for a youth rock event). Resource

organizations counter this prejudice by offering online and physical supports, but are hampered by the absence of affirmative policy and macro-provision in relation to youth.

There was agreement that the above points apply several-fold in relation the Traveller Community in Ireland which remains – even in these times of greater awareness of diverse cultures – subject to generations-old prejudice. It was agreed that priorities in providing for Traveller Culture need to be focused in the first instance on affirming identity. Arts can also play a role in challenging prejudice in practical – as distinct from theoretical/legal – ways.

There was agreement about the importance of participatory practice in affirming minority and/or marginalized communities' identities notwithstanding, there is more to participatory arts nowadays than just an arts response to social exclusion.

There was also agreement that much of the debate about standards in the voluntary arts arena is led by those unaware of the on-the-ground realities and fails to reflect the modernity and comparative sophistication of much amateur practice. The people involved in voluntary arts “are not stupid” – in fact voluntary arts tends to draw from great intelligence in the community – from legal and child welfare awareness to budgetary knowledge, not to mention handed-down artistic skills, as particularly evidenced in the traditional music sector which is almost entirely participatory/voluntary.

There was discussion around the determined splitting of “artist” from “participant” at the heart of Arts Council provision and agreement that this continues to place diminished value on the citizen as a person with cultural rights. It was suggested that the distinction is useful only insofar as it recognises an integrated role within society for the professional specialist artist.

Those in attendance suggested that The Arts Council holds a limited (if any real) role within those national power structures that are charged with formulating social and economic policy. Against this backdrop, where the Arts Council is itself excluded from serious socio-economic policy making, the primacy of the professional artist model within its (the Arts Council's) provision and thinking exaggerates the out-moded myth of the artist as apart from society. It was suggested that The Arts Council should therefore push and plan intelligently to be at the centre of new debate and advocacy about much broader cultural policy and provision in a “joined up” society – rather than leaving so much of the work of “socially engaged” cultural provision to non-arts agencies.

There was agreement that internationally, communities and individual citizens have recognised for some time that a multiplicity of agencies and forces have conspired – wilfully or otherwise - to create a range of global crises, from ecological neglect to poverty to cultural alienation of minorities. The meeting suggested that ordinary citizens see the need and have called for a “joined up” multi-agency response to reverse or move forward from these problems. It was noted however that governments, public service bodies and institutions however have been slow to change from the mono-sectoral, territorial approach bequeathed from the last century. It was suggested that The Arts Council has an opportunity as a small but vital national agency to connect with other agencies and bodies in providing for the cultural lives of the citizenry as a whole and thereby enabling identity-building, civic awareness, expression and democracy.

## **2.2 The Challenges facing participatory arts practice**

The following were identified by the meeting

Contemporary lifestyle – people spend more time now commuting etc. with the result that the voluntary ethos or simply “time for pastime” is greatly diminished. It was noted that consumerism is the dominant model – artists and community leaders must combat the notion that if you cannot buy it or sell it, it has no worth.

Physical facilities – especially in relation to young people were also identified - in particular, places publicly to perform music are few and far between and generally inhospitable to and disrespectful of teenagers.

There was agreement that organisations face both the challenge of raising and sustaining awareness within communities of the potential value of quality participative arts opportunities and also raising awareness among a range of funders of the value of the work once it takes root and requires development support. There is also a sense that practitioners are faced with the challenge of raising awareness within the arts sector, not only of the fundamental value of participatory arts within a civil society, but of what constitutes good and meaningful practice. (e.g. – submissions for a recent participatory practice award from artists were found – a few fine exceptions notwithstanding – to be impoverished in terms of ideas and values).

Recent developments in third level training that include or focus upon participatory practice as a viable option for artists were acknowledged – however, it was suggested that career entry routes and early career supports are almost non-existent. Likewise, the mid-career

artist seeking to expand her/his practice to meaningful participatory actions lacks essential training and career guidance opportunities (or perhaps information about such opportunities).

Marginalisation – particularly in relation to Travellers, but also ethnic minorities and people with disabilities was also highlighted. The day to day effort of combating prejudice from without and consequent ingrained lack of self-esteem can be a barrier to introducing the “luxury” of artistic opportunity.

Capitalisation that is not matched by revenue/programme funds was also cited as a contributor – this applies not just in relation to arts but also community and youth infrastructure (e.g. URBAN has funded capital infrastructure in Dublin – but where are the follow through, people-centred funds towards sustainable good practice?).

There was agreement that there is a tendency to fall back on dead language to describe living and evolving practice. There was consensus that participatory arts is transformative and forward-looking and requires its advocates and practitioners to reflect this.

### **2.3 How can successful practice be recognised?**

There was agreement that there are different levels of participation, different kinds of experience and different levels of entry. In evaluating “quality” and/or “success” this reality must be factored in. Sometimes it is a success to persuade a child to remain still for two minutes. It was suggested that The Arts Council has failed to articulate its own core values in the matter of participatory arts, making it difficult for others to relate their practice to any known benchmark.

An interesting debate arose in which the values of the concentrated, long-term relationship between a resident artist and a small group of teenagers v. the open access website/noticeboard model with several thousand hits arose. There was agreement that quality indicators should not favour one of these above the other. Certain processes require patient and comparatively more expensive investment where the results show in the long term. (If ten or eleven young people who might otherwise have remained ignorant of poetry, for instance, discover expression, truth and perhaps even a career in writing – through good, sustained engaged practice, the process will have been worth the investment.) By the same token, services and resources which are transparently wanted by and useful to thousands of young people but which cannot be sustained commercially, are deserving of subsidy/recognition.

As with any other area of practice, it was suggested that it behoves each organization/project to set out aims and objectives and to monitor and report upon outcomes. It remains a truism now as much as when articulated in the early '90s that "a good process will usually result in a good 'product' or outcome". There was agreement that participatory arts with its origins in or adjacent to community development and equality processes has been far ahead of mainstream arts practice in the rigour and intrinsic place of evaluation. The benchmarks of quality have been established in a range of documented projects. In this regard, it was deemed important not to confuse practice with programme. Practice is a lifelong process. Programming is stages along the way. There will be different stages and different indicators for different times.

It was noted that endorsement from the Arts Council and the wider arts community has often followed not from the practice itself but from the quality of post or mid-project documentation. It was suggested that artists and amateurs in participatory arts projects need to acknowledge this and seek to build capacity in disseminating the inside story of the work.

## **Breakout Session 1: What happens when artists collaborate with people?** (1.15 – 2.15pm)

### **1 Question for Discussion**

- What happens when artists collaborate with people?

2 In discussing the questions the following emerged

#### **2.1 Different contexts**

It was agreed that individual arts practitioners develop their work in different contexts through exploration of ideas, negotiation and engagement. Different arts disciplines demand different types of formation and reflection. It was suggested that The Arts Council needs to recognise and value this area of work and this recognition should be reflected in its funding structures and considered as equally as valid an area of practice as signatory practice is. It was agreed that if participatory arts are well resourced external perceptions of the value of the work would change. Additionally it was suggested that The Arts Council needs to examine how it can create an armature to engage more local arts practice.

When asked if some artists treat collaborative work or participatory arts as secondary to their 'mainstream' practice and consequently are less rigorous when working in this area a number commented on how they had observed this and were critical of the attitude. It was noted that this is an area of work that requires serious endeavour and should not be treated lightly by artists but those that fail to be professional in their application are quickly found out.

#### **2.2 Values**

Some comments were made about how, during the 1980s and 1990s there was a set of values underpinning participatory arts practice that now seem to have less presence. However, it was agreed that this area of work contains a wide range of perspectives and does not depend on consensus to either develop or exist.

Comments were made by some of the participants who are venue-based artists (or who work with venue-based artists) that in working on outreach programmes they are often perceived as officers of the organisation by both their employers and the communities within which they work.

There was agreement that artists need to be clear why they want to work in this area and be clear about the nature of engagement. It is valid for artists to seek employment in participatory arts activities but this is distinct from those that are developing their practice in this area.

Participants commented that the formal education system pre-conditions attitudes to how artists work and develop practice in this area – it takes time for artists to deconstruct the institutional bias when developing practice.

There was agreement that validation of participatory arts practice is essential if it is to be treated as a serious area of practice. The Arts Council could assist by promoting the work, organising showcases of good practice and supporting the documentation and dissemination of practice case-studies and models. The Council could also increase its support to local authorities.

## **Breakout Session 2: Arts Council Core Values**

(1.15 – 2.15pm)

### **1 Question for discussion**

- People have suggested that the Arts Council should give 'parity of esteem' to participatory/collaborative arts practice, relative to other practice. What would this mean in practice?
- How would this 'parity of esteem' be evidenced in Arts Council policies and actions? How would it inform our purpose and our value judgements in relation to artistic quality and impact?

2 In discussing the question the following emerged

#### **2.1 Terms and definitions**

The meeting agreed the subject could have been constructively debated for longer than the time available and should be debated further in the future as it was not possible to address all the issues in the questions outlined in 1 above in the time available. A broad range of backgrounds and practices was represented and those present participated in a lively and positive discussion. Initial thoughts were to do with definitions and common understanding of participatory arts and of the phrase 'parity of esteem'. There was some feeling that participatory arts in an awkward term as it implies participating rather than 'doing' or 'making'.

#### **2.2. Parity of Esteem and Cultural Democracy**

There was strongly felt agreement on the critical need for 'parity of esteem' between participatory practices and other more traditional areas and that the time is now. A core issue for all concerned is the need for the Arts Council itself to recognise and value practice in the area of participatory arts. The group acknowledged there is a more general issue in wider society about the lack of esteem in which the arts and artists are held (e.g. recent media coverage on artist's tax exemption) and that the question of parity of esteem must be viewed in that context.

Cultural and artistic expression must to be valued in their own terms. The Arts Council is struggling to respond to this broad cultural democracy agenda and to giving meaningful expression in policy terms to the principles of cultural democracy and right of access to arts experiences for all citizens.

The Arts Council should look to European and other models where both the intrinsic and extrinsic value of youth arts/ participatory arts is accepted and understood as a democratic right not just by arts funders but more broadly by local government and other key agencies. The Arts Council needs to show leadership and systemic change to begin to address the issue.

### **2.3 Political Issue**

There was recognition that the issue is inherently political and that participatory arts practitioners do not have a voice at relevant tables where policy is formed and resources decided. The sector needs to change this but it also needs to be supported to achieve this. Historically this has been due to low levels of funding, competition and lack of capacity.

Those present shared an appetite for lobbying to make cultural democracy and citizen engagement with the arts a contemporary political issue but are unsure how to go about achieving this effectively. Leaders and organisations need the tools, arguments and language to negotiate effectively with politicians and/or private business interests.

The idea of making pre-budget submissions from the participatory arts sector was discussed and welcomed but the mechanics of how to achieve this were also uncertain.

### **2.4 People's Experiences of a Lack of Parity of Esteem**

There was a suggestion that The Arts Council tends to view participatory work e.g. outreach, education, community arts work as an 'add on' attached to the main programme rather than on its own merits. It was noted that Arts Council reports often reveal this lack of value e.g. The Auditoria report describes outreach as 'loss making initiatives'. Participatory arts are most often seen as a tool for inclusivity rather than central to the mission of the organisation or intention of the artist. It was also suggested that The Arts Council rarely views or describes the practice in other more positive ways.

Youth arts organisations suggested that it is difficult to access venues to present their work and this is one of the main ways they do not get parity of esteem from the broader arts sector.

It was suggested that artists who work in participatory work are less respected by the Arts Council and are wary of putting this work in their CV when applying for more mainstream

funding.

## **2.5 Contribution of participatory practice to art form development**

There was agreement that art forms are enriched and developed by participatory arts practices but this is insufficiently recognised by the Arts Council. Questions need to be asked in different ways – an e.g. in supporting art for young people consideration needs to be given to the question what do young people do for the arts?

It was suggested that The Arts Council needs to be able to consider and judge the quality of the idea or process in addition to the quality of the product.

## **2.6 Arts Council role**

There was agreement that The Arts Council needs to advocate on behalf of participatory arts and be more political in its interaction with government departments i.e. The Arts Council has influence. Other departments are interested in what participatory arts practices can do for other agendas and the Arts Council needs to be the voice that advocates on the central role of artists and art in this work.

There was general agreement that The Arts Council needs to work in partnership with a number of agencies. This will attract additional resources and ensure a coherent policy context for the work. A good example is the recent partnership between Arts Council of England and Youth Justice Board. It was noted that Arts Council and Department of Education dialogue should be ongoing and those involved need to be kept informed of progress and that this partnership must be a priority. There appears to be a lack of evidence that the two agencies are working together and sharing open dialogue.

It was also suggested that The Arts Council needs to action and implement its own research and reports in the areas of arts and education, youth arts and community arts.

It was noted that low levels of revenue funding and lack of access to programme and project funding leave organisations promoting quality participatory arts experiences, in a very difficult position as this reduces capacity to leverage additional funds from other sources – which is one of the positives of participatory arts practice. Can the Arts Council find some way to positively address this?

Some suggestions made by the meeting included:

- Fill the Youth Arts Officer role on a full time basis. A three day week Education Specialist is insufficient to address the issues.
- Seek extension of Artist's Tax Exemption Scheme to include participatory arts work.
- Explain process of preparing budget submission to government to enable lobbying
- Council members and staff need to visit work – that is and is not funded – in order to gain a broader understanding of this area of practice. Seeing is essential.
- Have more internal dialogue between staff and to make the process of discussion more open and transparent – participatory arts organisations needs both art form and development expertise to be in the room when discussing practice and policy. This is important for making better connections between practice and art form development.

### **Breakout Session 3: Arts Council Core Values**

(1.15 – 2.15pm)

#### **1 Question for discussion**

- People have suggested that the Arts Council should give 'parity of esteem' to participatory/collaborative arts practice, relative to other practice. What would this mean in practice?
- How would this 'parity of esteem' be evidenced in Arts Council policies and actions? How would it inform our purpose and our value judgements in relation to artistic quality and impact?

2 In discussing the question the following emerged

#### **2.2 Visibility**

There was general agreement in the meeting that this area of practice is not visible and that the sector itself is not aware of the quality of what currently exists and that there is an onus on practitioners to place themselves on that same pedestal as other forms of art practice. It was noted that the dominant discourse does not include this way of practice. There was some discussion on "how old" this type of practice is – with general agreement that participatory practice has been around for quite some time – the critical language to describe this way of working is deemed to be new.

#### **2.3 "Joined up thinking"**

There was a discussion on the poverty of joined up thinking at national/central government level which leaves areas such as participatory practice falling between stools in terms of funding and credibility. There was recognition in the meeting that art can frequently be used as a vehicle for the delivery of other agendas and this also presented an opportunity if only those different agencies/agendas would line up.

#### **2.4 What would parity of esteem look like?**

There was agreement that at the heart of parity of esteem was the issue of respect – of feeling respected for this way of practice and of the work commanding a respect in its own right. It was suggested that every practitioner regardless of "label" (professional, amateur, voluntary etc) be eligible to apply for funding from The Arts Council – not everyone would have a right to be in receipt of funding but the criteria and evaluative indicators used by The

Arts Council should be made transparent. There was a suggestion that applicants had a right to know why they were funded as well as why they might be rejected. It was also agreed that artists and organisations had a responsibility to enter into dialogue with The Arts Council to continue to articulate clearly the value of this work. The Arts Council was invited to consider its funding mechanisms in a more holistic manner.

## **2.5 Ladders and continuums**

There was agreement in the meeting that participatory arts practice is part of a continuum of practice – not above or below any other. The application of a value judgement was deemed to be unhelpful and disrespectful to the practice. The Arts Council was invited to take up a role as advocate for this continuum of practice and to evidence that in appropriate funding mechanisms for those involved in this area of work. Documentation, evaluation and dissemination of learning was deemed to be essential and areas for continued investment.

## **Breakout Session 4 Cultural Diversity** (1.15 – 2.15pm)

### **1 Questions for discussion**

- How can the principles of Cultural Diversity be recognised and supported in the Arts Council's core values, development, artform and programme policies?
- What current issues and developments are arising in culturally diverse practice? How has this work evolved and developed in the last five years? What is your vision for the future?

2 In discussing the questions the following emerged

#### **2.1 Cultural Diversity**

At the outset it was agreed that the term Cultural Diversity presented some difficulties. It was presumed that it was intended to refer mainly to the new reality of an ethnically diverse population in Ireland. It was agreed however, that the debate should not be confined to ethnicity alone but should include a wider definition of "diversity". At the end of the meeting, a call was made to dispense with the particular label "cultural diversity" in favour of the older and more broadly inclusive term "cultural democracy" which can include new and ethnically diverse practice but which enshrines principles that are inclusive rather than exotic. The point was made that diversity is everywhere. Within the Traveller community, for instance, there is great diversity – it is not a homogenous entity, just as "Nigerians" are not a homogenous grouping. There is a risk of quick-fix ethnic or sectoral definitions that fail to acknowledge this lateral reality.

#### **2.1 Exoticism**

The risk of exoticism in relation to embracing the cultural practice of new ethnic minorities was discussed. A case was instanced in relation to a religious singing project in Ireland where the gospel and traditional singing of an African community was welcomed within an integrated local project, but the desires of the Africans also to sing songs from the Western canon now considered outmoded in Europe was frowned upon. The point being illustrated was that the liberal mindset will welcome new cultures as long as they conform to certain exotic stereotypes. It was agreed that the challenge of listening and engaging with diverse communities "where they are at" is much greater.

### **2.3 The right to art**

The primacy of The Right to Art was enunciated and placed within the context of human rights generally. It was suggested that we cannot comfortably enshrine the United Nations position on the right to art while disregarding rights generally. For instance, at the same time as the government was placing generous funding into the Citizen Traveller cultural awareness programme, it was rushing through restrictive and discriminatory legislation in relation to trespass. (This point was made by a person not directly involved with Traveller projects). The Citizen Traveller project model was interrogated and found to be wanting. It was perceived as a well intentioned "top down" initiative that became more concerned with branding and image making than meaningful participation. Evaluation indicated that attitudes about and among Travellers had not been altered by its expensive billboard and media messaging. It was suggested that where prejudice and ingrained self-image problems exist, cultural participation needs to be developed slowly from the ground up.

### **2.4 Dominant production models**

A discussion took place about dominant production models. It was felt that minorities generally – be they new Eastern European communities, people with disabilities or any other distinguishable grouping, will never be adequately addressed by Arts Council policy and schemes for as long as the dominant models of production remain sacred. Until the broad principles enunciated elsewhere in relation to Participation Arts generally are given greater priority by the Arts Council, there was a suggestion that there will be no sustained engagement of minorities with the arts here. The key outcome of this part of the discussion was that by enshrining participatory arts principles at the core of policy and schemes, the Arts Council can play an effective part in liberating the art form from the grip of conservative and commercial models and allow the form and the people wishing to pursue it to grow. It was acknowledged that while addressing the production models and enshrining diversity within policy generally will enhance long-term cultural policy for all artists and citizens, it was noted that specialised interventions in relation to specific given communities must also remain within the equation of provision.

It was noted that culture has a role to play in combating social exclusion and affirming minority identity. Certain groups in society, for example people with disabilities, are discriminated against through policy stasis generally and through inherited prejudice. Nobody at the meeting favoured quota systems or other "Big Stick" approaches to equality

within arts practice and provision, but all spoke of the value of “incentivisation” of positive models of practice.

## **2.5 A vision for the future**

In response to the opportunity to express a vision for the future, contributions included “a time when diversity will be understood as richness rather than difference” and a time when complexity in process and expression will be embraced and valued. Practical proposals included incentive schemes to encourage arts training for members of new ethnic communities, and advocacy thereafter of employment practice that recognises the differing social and domestic imperatives of diverse communities. Specific incentive grants to engage people from minority communities into arts administration through on-the-job training were suggested. Such incentives need not only to be funded but to be seeded, nurtured and evaluated, with support structures for organisations built-in.

Finally, there was a call to “Reclaim the Political in Art”. The Arts Council has the opportunity to lead best practice in the public sector by promoting cultural diversity and cultural democracy. Culture is seen as the key to embracing diversity in society. What agency can inform positive civic change better, therefore, than an enlightened Arts Council?

## **Breakout Session 5 Training and Development for participatory arts practitioners (2.30 – 3.30)**

### **1 Questions for consideration**

- How do participatory artists currently acquire their collaborative skills? What works best? How can the contexts and characteristics of these be replicated through future supports?
- What need is there for standard contracts, employment standards, and rates of pay?

2 In discussing the questions the following emerged

#### **2.1 Training and Development for participatory arts practitioners**

Discussion began with a criticism that formal education lacks provision for those involved in participatory arts practice and does not appreciate that, unlike in other sectors, arts careers are not linear – there is a lack of professional development opportunity. It was generally agreed that it is common to encounter practitioners that are seeking training after their first encounters with work in this area. Currently, formal education has no recognised credit for experiential learning. There was agreement that conservative colleges and universities need to recognise that there diverse pathways to training and education. Who will take responsibility for determining standards and accreditation? Who makes policy for education and training?

It was suggested that there needs to be a national database of experienced practitioners that could be used to identify suitable mentors to support less experienced artists. This needs to be accompanied by an information book/directory that lists available training and education supports – there is currently, not one publication/ resource that can provide a national/regional overview. Although training is available outside of the formal education sector, it is restricted by available resources. Many good training initiatives have taken place over the last 15 years that have had a demonstrable effect on how arts practice has developed this should not be forgotten.

There was agreement that training is needed for community organisations in participatory arts practice so they can offer appropriate support to practitioners they are engaged with. This would also improve the employment conditions of practitioners.

## **2.2 How do participatory artists currently acquire their collaborative skills? What works best? How can the contexts and characteristics of these be replicated through future supports?**

There was agreement that practitioners need to take responsibility for identifying learning/training opportunities. This area of practice is a challenge requiring that practitioners engage and reflect.

It was also noted that placement and support of artists in different social contexts lacks adequate support - this could be addressed through mentoring. Case studies and other learning experiences need to be documented and disseminated as access to training and education in this area is subject to where in the country you are located. It was suggested that more international education and training links need to be established. Internships and other supervised learning approaches lack adequate resources and there is a lack of clarity about who pays.

There was agreement that currently, arts funding is product focussed in order to change and recognise the need for professional development policy and funding needs to be linked to development.

## **2.3 What need is there for standard contracts, employment standards, and rates of pay?**

There was agreement in the group that artists are undervalued throughout society and this is reflected within many examples of poor pay and working conditions. Sometimes the enthusiasm of less experienced artists masks the inadequacies of the project host including poor pay and working conditions. There was also agreement that artists need to raise their own self-awareness of their value.

## **Breakout Session 6 Arts Council Support & Networks/networking in participatory arts**

(2.30 – 3.30)

### **1. Questions for discussion**

- Describe the ideal criteria and purpose, the ideal mechanism and the optimum funding models for Participatory Arts practice and infrastructure.
- Is there a need to review current Arts Council funding structures, schemes and programmes overall?
- As a development agency, what is our development priority? What should the Arts Council understand partnership to mean? How does an ideal relationship to Arts Council look? What role do you and the arts community want to take?
- What needs exist for improving networks and networking in participatory arts? What role for the Arts Council, and what possible solutions and models would you suggest?
- How is learning currently disseminated? How do you learn from others and share knowledge so as to inform your own work? How can this be replicated? Why don't people network more?

2. In discussing the question the following emerged

#### **2.1 Level and nature of Funding**

There was agreement by all in attendance for an increase in funding resources to the Arts Council.

There was also agreement that participatory arts requires a long term developmental approach and that short term funding is a primary barrier to achieving quality outcomes. Organisations are looking for commitment to long-term projects and programmes even if their overall grant remains annual. There was shared frustration with funding being cut for particular projects or initiatives in the middle of their life-span because of a perceived lack of understanding from the Arts Council about the developmental nature of this work.

#### **2.2 Timing of funding**

For some festivals the timing of the annual grant decision is extremely unhelpful and prevents them from being able to plan or use funding to its best potential. The Arts Council was asked to be more flexible around this or at least forward commit for festivals in this situation.

### **2.3 Relationship with Arts Council**

There was consensus in the group that a basic requirement is to be able to meet the officer responsible for your funding when it suits the organisation as opposed to when it suits The Arts Council. The nature of the relationship being sought is one that allows for a continuous dialogue and that facilitates understanding of developmental work over longer time frames.

### **2.4 Arts Council staff structures and funding**

The meeting was critical of the current staff structure in the Arts Council describing it as 'not working' from the clients point of view. People find continuous engagement difficult to achieve and don't know who they need to talk to about development ideas etc...

There was a suggestion that The Arts Council needs to be more publicly accountable for its role and decisions. At the moment the suggestion is that the sector is confused about how the Council makes its decisions particularly in terms of the relationship between the link between programme funding and policy. Organisations are uncertain about how the decision is processed through the Council's staff structures and this is contributing to some unease.

It was noted that society is changing and The Arts Council is challenged to reflect these changes within its own structures – this is a challenge for The Arts Council that the meeting had some sympathy with. However, the view was that these discrepancies were only going to increase reflecting the themes of the earlier discussion on parity of esteem for participatory arts practice.

### **2.5 Funding**

The festivals scheme was considered a positive funding programme and there was agreement that it should be maintained and developed. The meeting was also positive about the Artist in Community scheme – particularly the new increase in funding level within the scheme.

Support for Arts Offices is essential but the disparity between services – some having four staff others having only 1 is unhelpful. It was suggested that The Arts Council should resource local authorities to develop personnel and capacity within the services so that a basic standard of service is achieved and maintained.

Some of those present at the meeting are grappling with the issue of cutbacks in other

sectors – particularly FAS and don't see the Arts Council taking initiative in this area. There was an expectation that the Arts Council commission research on the impact of FAS cutbacks and use this information to inform and have a dialogue with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment.

## **2.6 Policy**

There was agreement that the key role of the Arts Council is as an advocate and to create the environment to enable everyone involved in the arts to do their job.

There was also agreement that there needs to be greater emphasis on accountability, communication and standard setting.

It was suggested that The Arts Council should include a glossary of their terms and definitions in the next plan so that people can be clear what the Arts Council means when it uses specific terms such as 'participatory arts', 'socially engaged practice' etc...

## **2.7 Artform/ Industry Networking**

It was agreed that networking across art form areas is best developed and experiences reported suggest that resource organisations are supportive and helpful once the connection is made. The difficulty is that it is up to the groups and those at local level to connect with these organisations. They find this difficult because they lack the capacity or the information to know where to look or what questions to ask. It was suggested that resource organisations need to be more proactive around the needs of local arts development in particular.

## **2.8 Local Networking**

The view of the meeting was that there is a need for networking at local level but that it is difficult to achieve and sustain. Permanent formal networks don't work well because of difficulties around scheduling and the divergence of needs represented. Voluntary Arts Network has a lot of experience in this area and some success.

The meeting agreed the following types of networking work best

- Ad hoc networking on a needs must basis works best – though events, gatherings, conferences, training opportunities etc..
- techno localism– this is best supported though websites and resource information available through obvious websites such as local authority arts offices, the Arts

Council website and resource organisations.

- networking over a short period on a particular issue e.g. informing a plan, infrastructure development

The lack of a set standard across local authorities in terms of information and networking opportunities available was seen as a barrier. There are insufficient opportunities on for networking at conferences and gatherings and this is a key gap. There was a suggestion that events should be regular and become part of an annual diary.

There was agreement also that there is insufficient networking across sectors at a local level particularly for building political and other support but most small organisations simply don't have the capacity to do it. It was also acknowledged that people need to be more proactive about networking but lack of capacity particularly amongst voluntary and community based groups is a genuine barrier.

## **2.9 Dissemination of Learning**

The meeting rolled the dissemination of learning into the theme of networking as the two are deeply inter-related. The meeting acknowledged that there are differing views on the value of network and dissemination of practice but the trend is increasingly to look for these kinds of opportunities.

Generally, people are preoccupied with their own work and agendas. Support for Arts managers to take sabbaticals and stand back from their practice or immerse themselves in other contexts is badly needed and would likely have a very positive effect.

## **2.10 Models of Networking practice**

Voluntary Arts Network is aware of some models in Clones, Cork, Sligo and Meath but the wider meeting was not familiar with this activity. It was clear generally that people are not well informed about existing models of good practice in the area of networking and that documentation and evaluation and dissemination of a broad variety of networking initiatives is needed.

There was agreement that documenting good practice would assist in promoting and making more explicit the value of networking. Some experiences of networking on the ground are experienced as negative e.g. community Fora connected to Better Local Government was one such example. Anecdotally the meeting heard that these fora are demanding of time and

energy and are not generally yielding positive results for arts organisations and community groups.

### **2.11 Role of Arts Council**

The role of the Arts Council was seen primarily as a clear promoter of existing resources and an initiator of new opportunities for networking both directly and indirectly - directly through an annual Arts Council conference and through its website. The meeting felt the Arts Council should ring fence funding for imaginative initiatives that promote local and regional networking possibly through the provision of challenge grants that would allow for documentation of existing working models and assist in identifying genuine gaps in networking opportunities. The Arts Council's website should be a key resource in enabling connection between arts organisation's needs and the variety of resources available and should be expanded and developed to facilitate this. The international desk and website should also be expanded to facilitate networking and accessing of resources that promote international arts activity.

There was agreement that there is a gap in the area of cultural diversity and it was suggested that The Arts Council should take a lead in promoting networking and connectivity in this area as many groups want to address cultural diversity in their programming and activities but don't know how to.

It was also suggested that The Arts Council should support arts managers to take sabbaticals/career breaks and professional development opportunities generally as this would support greater inter-connectivity, sharing, learning and networking in the arts.

The meeting suggested the idea of a Customer Service Desk in The Arts Council that would help those not familiar with its structures to navigate the organisation and identify who they should speak to. This would help groups and individuals to identify how to address their resource needs.

Indirectly Arts Council support is deemed important through its funding relationships with resource organisations and local authorities. There was agreement that there is a need to standardise what is available across local authorities in terms of networking or activities that facilitate connections. It was suggested that The Arts Council should promote active networking and connectivity in the arts amongst resource organisations.

## **Breakout Session 7 Sustainable Creative Processes** (2.30 – 3.30)

### **1 Questions for consideration**

- Describe the characteristics of successful, sustainable participatory arts partnerships which have lasting impact on peoples' creativity
- What should The Arts Council learn from this?

### **2 In discussing the questions the following emerged**

2.1 The brief for this session was somewhat ambivalent. Whereas the title referred to "sustainable processes", the tasks referred only to "sustainable partnerships". The discussion ranged over processes generally but concentrated on the question of partnership / multi-agency approaches.

#### **2.2 Time**

It was generally agreed that the key to sustainable participatory arts practice is time – lead-in time; relationship-building time; long-term engagement with participating groups and individuals; time to evaluate, plan, think, dream (it was suggested that all too often funded time is measured only in terms of contact hours, a fundamental misunderstanding of the creative relationship) – also acknowledging "real-time" the reality of people's lives – people with children, jobs, domestic priorities and so on. There are seldom quick fixes in best participatory arts experience. This fundamental fact needs to be acknowledged in how policy and funding schemes are shaped. Multi-annual funding would help greatly in planning of real time and long-term programmes. It was agreed that partnerships cannot be brokered and maintained where one party is insecure on a month-to-month, year-to-year basis.

#### **2.4 Awareness**

The issue of awareness arose again here – levels of awareness among non-arts partners seeking with good intentions but often poor understanding, to engage with arts practice – It was suggested that there is a role for The Arts Council in awareness raising. Other agencies also have an awareness raising role. In particular Blue Drum, the arts support agency for community development have played an important and growing role in this regard. It was

noted that a local community development company can be of much more immediate and tangible support to a good, long-term community arts project than the Arts Council might ever be. It was noted that key national and Dublin city agencies that have developed cultural policies and which “in a joined up world” would be natural partners to the Arts council and participants in a day such as today were absent – specifically, Blue Drum and also City of Dublin Youth Services Board. A call was made and endorsed that these bodies should be invited into preliminary dialogue with Arts Council prior to the finalising of the new strategy for the Arts.

### **2.3 Documenting**

It was agreed that the participatory arts sector itself needs to improve its archiving and documentary processes. While much work may have been documented in the past, much of the record (quantitative as well as human anecdotal) remains dormant and inaccessible. The new City Arts archive was referred to as one model. It proposes to accept diverse records from diverse sources over time and to act as a community and academic resource. Critically, it is managed by a professional archivist, whereas much of archiving in the arts tends to be well-intentioned but amateur and fragmented.

### **2.4 Space**

Physical space for various kinds of process-based work was referred to as a significant problem. Be it secure, long-term space for noisy or otherwise disruptive practice (e.g. percussion) or space that is community/person friendly while at the same time geared towards arts usage. The Arts Council was advised to look closely at the plans for arts and culture space(s) within the developing Fatima Mansions Regeneration Scheme in Dublin, which had been designed by the community in sustained consultation with architects and planners. Might it offer a new model for a more fluid future when new forms and new participant groups are likely to emerge?

### **2.12 Summary**

Those present throughout the day reflected that there was a high level of consensus across all the discussion areas, that this is relatively new phenomenon for this area of practice and is extremely welcome possibly signalling another stage in the development and evolution of participatory arts practice. The opportunity to debate and dialogue was enormously valued and appreciated and there was a shared desire to thank the Arts Council for providing this

opportunity. The meeting felt it would be useful and interesting to check this emerging consensus with colleagues engaged in signatory arts practice and that this would be a very welcome further opportunity for dialogue if the Arts Council were to facilitate it.