



ECLN White Paper Number 1 September 2014

PARTICIPATORY ARTS AND CULTURAL LEARNING

All of us start our journeys through a Cultural Learning Landscape as a novice; where, over time, we develop various degrees of competence; and a few of us, through the personal and professional blending of our talent, passion and motivation forge ahead to become the specialists and professional experts whose artistry, skill and vision take the world's breath away one by one, in small audiences or through the media window to the global community. These expert individuals invite and facilitate us to engage in the powerful and transformational experience of co-creation in the form of Participatory Arts. They excavate the profound in the mundane; they span dark dreary chasms weaving bridges of light; they tune in and amplify the silent whispers of the voiceless; they play with secrets until trust lets them out; they deliver the excitement of taking the power of a moment and running with it as fast and as far as it will carry you;

These Participatory Arts Leaders have a tool-box that consists of their own current and significant artistic practice in one or more art-forms; a deep repertory of experience working in Participatory Arts contexts that they draw on to intuit the appropriate strategies for the continuous meeting of artistic, social and learning facilitation needs. Those of us that work directly or indirectly in the Participatory Arts witness people 'growing and changing before our very eyes' just like the magically multiplying broomsticks that fetched the water in buckets for the stunned young Sorcerer Micky, the apprentice in Walt Disney's cartoon of Paul Dukas' composition of the same name. We tend to take this magic for granted but when we take the time to reflect or share anecdotes with people outside this field, we, too, like Micky, are amazed and gratified to have been involved in the process.

The European Cultural Learning Network (<http://ecln-network.com>) is a network of people working for Cultural Organisations in the Cultural Learning Landscapes of 11 European Countries. These organisations employ, commission and contract artists and creative professionals to work with people in a range of informal to formal contexts from education, well-being, rehabilitation, social care, employment and enterprise. The network has been going for 2 years and will be funded by the Leonardo Life-Long Learning Programme for a further year.

The State of Play report (http://issuu.com/collagearts/docs/ecln_research_report_the_state_of_p) which can be found on the ECLN website, and on the above link, is an exploratory and pragmatic piece of highly focussed professional research to uncover the vocational educational and training issues for the workforce and to begin to map the Cultural Learning Landscape through the networks of our network.

The research was highly qualitative, taking 2-3 hours for each of the 147 individual Freelance Artists and 41 Senior Staff from Cultural Organisations invited to participate from partner country networks. The Freelance Artists were highly qualified with 86% recorded as Graduates and 40% with Post-Graduate qualifications. At least 60% of their working time was spent on their own artistic practice and a maximum of 40% on Cultural Learning, including participatory arts. Music and Visual Art-forms were most frequently reported as used by Freelance Artists, however, there was an average of 2-3 art-forms



being used by artists and clear evidence of an 'Art-Form Portfolio' operating together with a ' Cultural Learning Context Portfolio'.

ECLN aims to create a bridge across single art-forms to avoid the silo effect and because individual art-form workers generally have access to supportive associations with strong traditions. Therefore, ECLN aims to concentrate on the shared and generic experiences of the combined single art-form workforce, the cross art-forms workforce and the participatory arts workforce. ECLN is also concerned with collecting and analysing the artist narratives about personal, professional, organic and blurred routes into this type of portfolio working and the organisational narratives about the development and structure of cultural organisations.

The ECLN approach to the mapping of Cultural Learning was to create an ecological model. This connected 3 generic rationales for Cultural Learning (*generalist*: fun, social, exploration, or edutainment; *specialist*: learn the art-form for its own sake; *professional*: to learn how to be a professional or work using the art-forms) with 3 generic contexts for Cultural Learning (*individual*: alone or one-one; *group*: one group however large or small; *community*: different groups working together). This then formed 9 zones, in which all Cultural Learning can occur. This ecological approach enabled an individual to reflect and trace their own historical and current cultural learning contexts using different art-forms as well as recording the zones in which they support the cultural learning of others. The approach highlighted the use of knowledge networks, informal systems and the characteristics of individual journeys as they move through the Cultural Landscape building their art-form, roles and context portfolios. It also highlighted certain country infrastructural characteristics e.g. Freelance structure; Organisation/employment structure;

The ECLN curriculum devised through the research is expressively prioritising strategies to develop human and artistic potential rather than to be used instrumentally or solely to create economic benefit. The curriculum includes *creative processes, artistic techniques, cultural contexts, self-awareness, communication, teamwork, coaching, mentoring, and training*. The research also highlighted that the key resources for Cultural Learning were dedicated artistic and creative space and active professional and creative networks.

Evaluation of Cultural Learning by those delivering it (81%; 80%) and by beneficiaries of it (85%; 93%) is the norm for both Freelance Artists and Cultural Organisations, respectively. However, evaluation by third parties is less common (67%; 73%) and this is an area in which support could be needed to assist the development and dissemination of a peer evaluation process. Another strand of European work has developed a recognition and validation framework for Participatory Arts at European Qualifications Framework Levels 7,5 and 3 which is currently being tested in 5 European countries, including the UK.

As a whole, the research depicts a sector that is fluid and structurally under-resourced. Furthermore, there are low financial returns and minimal security for the workforce. It has little public recognition or validation for the work that it undertakes. However, it has been sustained for at least 30 years, in some countries, by the goodwill, creativity and entrepreneurship of the workforce and the support of public and private sectors and other stakeholders.



Undertaking the research has been like a 'breath of fresh air' that has blown away the cobwebs of complacency and routine for mature partners and ignited the sparks of the more scattered and more recently formed organisations. ECLN is forging an embryonic European Community of Practice. We have embarked on a challenging and rewarding adventure that has enabled us all to reframe what is happening in the Cultural Learning Landscape of our own countries into demonstrating, witnessing, comparing, articulating and explaining our shared practice.

We warmly invite anyone who is working in the field of Cultural Learning and Participatory Arts to consider our findings in this report and to connect with us, to engage with us in dialogue, to constructively challenge or support our thinking and to articulate their own practice in relation to the shared practice of our network's networks. We hope this report can be used as a stimulus to activate, energize and support this broad emerging European Community of Practice and to identify potential benefits of scope and scale, particularly in relation to making connections, creating opportunities and addressing vocational and other issues.

As part of the research we were able to devise an outline curriculum for Cultural Learning and Participatory Arts and we have recently been testing this through our networks in 10 countries. This work will be shared through another white paper.

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