

INQUIRY INTO THE CIVIC ROLE OF ARTS ORGANISATIONS  
**PHASE 1**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

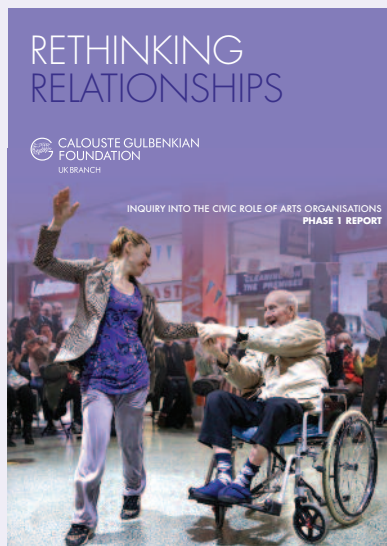


CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN  
FOUNDATION

UK BRANCH

**The Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations seeks to increase awareness of the valuable civic role that arts organisations play – or could play – nationally and locally. We want to create a strong and growing movement of organisations committed to demonstrating ‘next practice’. We will work with others to craft recommendations on how policy change and practical support can strengthen this role. We will build on research and consultation, working in partnership with arts and social sector organisations and the public and private sector.**

**If you work in an arts organisation, our intention has been to reflect your experience and views from the start. This paper summarises our report on what you told us during Phase 1 and sets out our plans for Phase 2.**



***Rethinking Relationships,***  
report on Phase 1 of the  
Inquiry into the Civic Role  
of Arts Organisations

THE CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION  
INQUIRY INTO THE CIVIC ROLE OF ARTS ORGANISATIONS  
**PHASE 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**We hope you will read our report, consider what it means for your practice and let us know what you think.**

- Do our findings reflect or contradict your experience?
- Do our proposed next steps respond to the right issues in the right way?

Chapter 6 of the full report has more details and asks some specific questions. Visit [bit.ly/civicrolearts](http://bit.ly/civicrolearts) to give us your views.

Part 2 of the report comprises 20 case studies. Take a look at these to see inspiring examples of how arts organisations are already re-imagining their civic role. They can also be found on our website [civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk](http://civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk)

During Autumn 2017, we will be present at sector events nationally. Look out for dates and venues on our website, [civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk](http://civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk)

You can sign up to the Inquiry's newsletter on the website too.

**We look forward to hearing from you and working with you to develop Phase 2 of the Inquiry into a programme that will make a real difference.**

## OUR FINDINGS IN BRIEF

- The civic role has a long history, gradually shifting from widening access, to education and community projects, to engaging communities in *creating* content that reflects social, environmental and economic issues.
- Activity is too diverse for the role to be strictly defined. Instead, we have drafted a set of principles for consultation (see box on page 5). We have also developed descriptive metaphors of arts organisations acting as *colleges, town halls, parks, temples* and *home* (see box on page 6). We will test these further in Phase 2.
- Case studies show arts organisations with a civic role share common features. They are dedicated to artistic excellence and fostering individual creativity. They have inspiring leaders, committed to a civic role. People and local communities are at the heart of their practice. Place matters. Developing relationships and strong connections are central to their approach. They seek to integrate their work with communities and their artistic programmes.
- But developing a civic role presents challenges. We lack a common language and classification system to define it. Leaders appear overstretched and under-supported. Co-production with communities requires particular skills: producers, curators and artists may require training and support. Approaches to funding and evaluation can make sustaining civic work difficult. Participants and staff groups need to reflect the communities in which they work.
- Opportunities for expanding the role include working in deeper partnership with other arts organisations and with different kinds of organisations, including in the private sector. This can open up access to alternative funding sources, for example, health commissions.

“We want to make the world better not just by making beautiful things, but by changing ... people’s lives and public services in a considered, measurable, rigorous way.”

Eloise Malone, Effervescent  
Effervescent is a case study in  
*Rethinking Relationships*.

## Principles for consultation

Our research shows that arts organisations with a strong civic role share these characteristics and operating principles. They:

**Demonstrate strong and effective leadership and governance.** The civic is part of the DNA of their directors. It is not an ‘add on’. It is *how* they deliver great art. Their boards of trustees are fully committed to the civic and engaged in creating links with other local organisations.

**Are rooted in local needs.** They understand their role in their localities. They are aware of and respond to opportunities to work with other community partners, including those from other sectors, to meet local needs.

**Develop community agency.** The local community plays a significant role in determining the artistic programme.

**Build capability.** These organisations are effective in developing community skills, capabilities and creativity.

**Build social capital.** Often significant volunteering opportunities are provided. Sometimes these organisations focus on encouraging kindness, empathy and understanding of others.

**Champion artistic quality.** This is quality in both process and in artistic output. They tend to believe that, to have a positive social impact, the art produced must be of the highest possible quality.

**Champion diversity.** They aspire to fully represent their communities, to tell untold stories and to give a platform to people and issues which may often be ignored or insufficiently recognised.

**Provide challenge.** They encourage discussion and debate, often on difficult issues. They challenge prevailing orthodoxies and ways of working.

**Are open and reflective.** They engage in ongoing reflection and dialogue, and are open to challenge.

(These characteristics are based in part on material from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation’s Our Museum programme.)

Email  
[civicrolearts@gulbenkian.org.uk](mailto:civicrolearts@gulbenkian.org.uk)  
with your thoughts

“Through art we  
reframe experience,  
offset prejudice, and  
refresh our experience  
of what exists so that it  
seems worthy of  
attention.”

Doris Sommer, *The Work of Art in the World:  
Civic Agency and Public Humanities*

## Metaphors for consultation

These emerged from Advisory Panel discussions about the potential of arts organisations to help communities cope with fast and unpredictable social, economic and environmental change. They are an attempt to convey the creativity integral to arts organisations and their ability to help us imagine and create more positive futures.

You can read the full text in *Rethinking Relationships* and send us your thoughts at [civicrolearts@gulbenkian.org.uk](mailto:civicrolearts@gulbenkian.org.uk)

### COLLEGES

#### – arts organisations as places of learning

Arts organisations have a role as places of lifelong learning, enabling everyone to reach their potential. They provide a special focus on creativity.

### TOWN HALLS

#### – arts organisations as places of debate

Arts organisations provide safe places for considering and debating difficult issues. They can present issues in their full complexity and give them a human texture.

### PARKS

#### – arts organisations as shared space open to all

Like a public park, which is an open community resource in which all can gather, arts organisations can help to create a sense of community by providing open and non-judgemental public space.

### TEMPLES

#### – arts organisations as places of enlightenment and solace

In a secular society, arts organisations provide us with an opportunity to contemplate moral questions and an opportunity to reflect. They provide solace in difficult times and encourage hope.

### HOME

#### – arts organisations as places of belonging

Arts organisations can provide diverse groups of people with the opportunity to create work based on their experiences and aspirations. They provide a place in which people's perspectives are legitimised and valued.

“We allow people to buy their sandwiches in Tesco and sit in our garden ... as a counterweight to huge swathes of the city where it's no longer possible to just be yourself, because they're owned or controlled by commercial interests.”

Mary Cloake, Bluecoat  
The Bluecoat is a case study in *Rethinking Relationships*.

## ABOUT THE INQUIRY

The Inquiry was launched in May 2016. Its focus is on arts organisations in receipt of public funds working in England and on influencing their practice. We gathered evidence from: literature reviews; interviews and a survey examining arts practitioners' understanding and conceptions of the 'civic role'; wide consultation and engagement with arts practitioners across England; four local area studies; and three artist commissions. We are building an extensive bank of case studies describing inspiring examples of what some organisations are doing already.

This project has been a partnership with our research and consultation and engagement partners: the Institute of Cultural Capital (ICC), What Next? and the RSA. The Inquiry has been supported by two groups of experts from the arts and beyond, its Advisory Panel and an International Reference Group (IRG).

**“Art does not change the world. But it does change the people who change the world.”**

**François Matarasso, *Making Nothing Happen: Art and Civil Society in Troubled Times***

## WHY IS A 'CIVIC ROLE' IMPORTANT?

Changes in public expectations of the arts, in patterns of consumption and participation, point to an urgent need for arts organisations to re-imagine or re-invigorate their civic role. This requires arts organisations to reflect deeply on how they engage with the public, their local community, or a community of interest. They need to think about how they work with and for them, and how they respond to communities' concerns, interests and needs.

Most of our interviewees underline the particular and unique capacities of arts organisations. These include: promoting empathy; providing safe space to discuss contentious issues; an emphasis on our common humanity ('everyone matters'); offering hope and fostering the notion that, collectively through our imagination, we can create better futures. Many understand the imperative to be relevant, especially with recent political upheavals.

Experts say that improving access and increasing participation are no longer enough: communities should be engaged at a deeper level in determining what the arts and creativity mean for them. Many of our case study organisations described processes and approaches already based on such engagement. The notion of 'everyday creativity' emerges as a strong theme. Some characterise this as moving beyond the 'democratising of culture' to 'cultural democracy'. Alistair Hudson, director of mima, one of the case study organisations in the report, cleverly encapsulates the progression from access, through participation to co-design or user-generated content when he refers to different generations of museums:

*[Version] 1.0 is where people come along and see the luxury artefacts and become better human beings for the experience.*

*[Version] 2.0 is one of participation, people participating in art and participating in the museum, in education and community projects and cafés and shops, but all these things work in support of that primary high-art agenda.*

*[Version] 3.0 is the user-generated version ... so it's not about people trying to join in the art in the museum, it's more about the museum trying to join in with what's going on out there [locally] ... and what's happening in the world, and demonstrating how art can contribute to some of the main significant social problems that we have.*

Alistair Hudson, mima

## WHAT DO OUR CASE STUDIES TELL US ABOUT THE CIVIC ROLE?

### Different starting points

For some of the larger organisations, their route to embracing a civic role has been through education and other community projects. Others have always had deep roots in their local community. Or an organisation's civic stance is a direct result of the personal experience of its executive leader.

### Common features

Case study organisations work across art forms and engage people through a variety of activities. However, all have features in common: strong leadership with vision and a belief in co-production; a commitment to artistic excellence or the fostering of individual creativity; a concern to create strong and positive relationships; respect and equal treatment as key aspects of their practice; most have a concern with place and seek to integrate their work with communities into their artistic programmes.

### The individual to the collective

Some organisations focus on the transformation of individuals. Others are seeking to achieve community cohesion. And some take this one stage further and (while not necessarily describing it as such) engage in community development: that is, they facilitate and develop community organisations and businesses so as to leave a legacy beyond any one project.

### Place and 'liveability'

Some organisations focus on place and how people can shape it to meet their needs and aspirations. This can even mean designing solutions with local people to housing, employment, education or health issues. But the emphasis tends not to be on the arts as a means of economic regeneration. Instead, our case study organisations are concerned with 'liveability' and building social capital.

### From global to local

Organisations operate at the local or hyperlocal level or have a national or even international remit. Notably, those most rooted in a particular area often have strong international connections. However, there did not appear to be strong networks of similar organisations within the UK.

**“Self-expression is all very well. Art is tougher, more purposeful, dangerous, and ultimately a means of change.”**

Ann Jellicoe, playwright, director and actor



## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS AND LEVERS FOR CHANGE?

Case study organisations told us about the challenges, opportunities and aspirations they have in re-imagining their civic role.

### Strains on leaders

While our case study organisations have excellent leaders, some are overstretched and under-supported.

### People and skills

Co-production with communities requires a different skill set. Producers, curators and artists may require additional training and support to enable them to deliver this work well.

### Partnership working

The case studies exemplify many different sorts of partnership – with other arts organisations, with universities, social sector organisations and local authorities. However, the impression is that our cohort *aspire* to build deeper partnerships, rather than having them already.

### Funding

Organisations acknowledge that the funding environment is difficult. Interviewees point to difficulties: funders tend to want greater certainty than co-production can offer; project funding makes it difficult to sustain community work; and, conventional evaluation techniques often sit uncomfortably with this kind of work.

### Growth and replication

Some smaller, newer organisations are seeking to grow or replicate their models. For others, the main emphasis is building social capital locally. Some have concerns about losing their community roots or diluting their artistic quality if they grow.

### Business models

An emphasis on the civic means working in new ways with different sorts of people and offering a different sort of product. This also brings opportunities for more mixed funding, for example, through health authority contracts or commissions.

### Diversity

Ensuring that both participants and staff reflect the communities in which organisations work can be a challenge. Success factors include a willingness to go to communities (not expecting them to come to you) and working with communities' definitions of what constitutes 'arts' and 'culture'.

### Language and communication

One strong theme from interviews is that we lack a common language for the civic role. This makes it difficult to describe this work, in all its variety, and means we lack the tools for analysing and understanding it better. Some also refer to the need to promote the role's value more effectively.

## NEXT STEPS

Building on this analysis, over Summer and Autumn 2017, we are consulting on the following possible next steps for Phase 2 of the Inquiry. Chapter 6 of *Rethinking Relationships* gives more details on these proposals.

### Supporting the development of practice

We want to examine how arts organisations could play a ‘connector’ role, in partnerships with social and commercial sector partners and public authorities. We want to share proven approaches, whether from the UK or internationally, that arts organisations might follow to develop their civic role.

### Capacity building

Working with other funders, we want to explore: the production of guidance and tools for the boards of arts organisations on what a civic role might mean for them; options for networking, international exchange and a leadership programme; training, support and networks for artists, producers and curators co-producing projects with communities.

## Funding

We want to examine the ‘funding ecology’ and the potential for greater collaboration between funders; the need for funding for ‘light touch’ infrastructure and capacity building; the feasibility of incentives for large and small arts organisations to work together and appropriate processes for application, evaluation and accountability.

### Public policy

We want to help create a public policy environment conducive to arts organisations fulfilling their civic role. We already have plans to identify potential levers for making a difference.

## Conclusion

When we established the Inquiry, our goal was to have facilitated a strong and growing movement of arts organisations that fully embrace their civic role by 2025. Our aspiration is for these organisations to improve the lives of large numbers of people across England.

This is a huge ambition – too complex and too large for one organisation. We want to work with others – arts organisations, funders, policy and research organisations – with ideas and resources to help design and deliver what we hope will be a strong collaborative programme for change.

**TELL US WHAT  
YOU THINK**

**Do these ambitions for developing practice feel right?**

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**Do you have examples of particularly strong practice – and could you work with us to disseminate this?**

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**What sort of training or development, guidance, tools or support would be most useful to those working in the sector?**

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**What appetite exists for collaborations between funders?**

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**What partnerships might we seek to build nationally or locally to improve the policy environment?**

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**Are the funding issues identified in this summary the right ones to focus on?**

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**Are you a funder interested working with us to take initiatives forward?**

Let us know by the end of October 2017 at [bit.ly/civicrolearts](http://bit.ly/civicrolearts)

## **ABOUT US**

**The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests. Our Headquarters in Lisbon contain a museum housing the Founder's art collections and recognised as one of the best small museums in Europe, the Modern Art Collection, an Art Library and a concert hall with its own resident orchestra.**

**The purpose of the UK Branch in London is to bring about long-term improvements in wellbeing, particularly for the most vulnerable, by creating connections across boundaries (national borders, communities, disciplines and sectors) which deliver social, cultural and environmental value.**

**In Portugal and the UK the Foundation runs programmes which support artistic projects that are co-designed and performed by marginalised people such as prisoners, the elderly and people with disabilities.**