Cultural Participation for Children and Young People Experiencing Poverty

Transforming Futures

Research seminar report
National Museum Cardiff
4 October 2013
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DISCLAIMER

The report summarizes the key points and issues raised in discussion during the research seminar held at National Museum Cardiff on 4 October 2013. It is not an exhaustive exploration of the theme, nor does it purport to reflect a consensus among participants on all issues discussed. It does not claim to reflect the views of individual participants, the authors, nor does it necessarily reflect the views of Amgueddfa Cymru. Amgueddfa Cymru cannot take responsibility for inaccuracies reported or raised in discussion during the day.
‘This is an important contribution to one of my key priorities as Minister for Culture & Sport – the challenge to our cultural bodies to support our wider efforts to tackle child poverty. It is imperative that we understand and disseminate the evidence around what works best – and how – so that cultural organizations and other partners can implement programmes and policies that are as effective as possible.’

John Griffiths AM, Welsh Government Minister for Culture and Sport
Part 1
Background
Summary
Actions and ways forward
In October 2013, 34 participants from a wide range of professional backgrounds across the UK attended a research seminar at National Museum Cardiff to explore the theme of cultural participation for children and young people experiencing poverty. The seminar was made possible by financial support from the Welsh Government.

These were some of the questions asked:

+ **What difference can cultural participation make to the lives of children and young people experiencing poverty?**
+ **What are the barriers to participation, and how can these be reduced?**
+ **What practical steps can be taken to make public cultural provision accessible to the individuals, groups and communities whose lives it would benefit the most?**
+ **How can cultural and heritage institutions make a positive contribution to wider anti-poverty initiatives?**

This report provides an overview of the issues, talking points and suggestions for future action that emerged during the day.
Cultural Participation for Children and Young People Experiencing Poverty
RESEARCH SEMINAR REPORT

Part 1
Background

Definitions

**Cultural participation**
Cultural participation can be defined in many different ways. It can mean engaging with traditional institutions like museums, libraries, theatres or heritage sites; or taking part in newer cultural trends like skateboarding, DJing, street dancing or social networking. It can mean different things to different people.

There is a perception that cultural activities like reading, listening to music or looking at an object or artwork are passive acts. But this is being challenged.

Such activities can stimulate a creative-thinking response to a world full of new ideas. They can release minds, opening doors to the imagination, and to future possibilities or creative activities.

For the purpose of this research seminar, cultural participation meant taking part in activities, events or programmes in the arts, heritage or cultural sectors. But it was acknowledged that it can mean something very different to children and young people, and that more work needs to be done to make the term meaningful and relevant for today.

**Children and young people**
For the purpose of the research seminar, ‘children and young people’ was used to describe anyone up to the age of 25. But it was noted that it is problematic to think of children and young people as a homogenous group, and that more effort needs to be made to understand their diverse interests, identities and needs.
Cultural participation and child poverty

Cultural participation is rich in potential to lessen some of the negative effects of poverty. Participation in cultural activities can develop personal and social skills, boost self-esteem, and have a positive effect on health and wellbeing. Yet culture is rarely considered a key component of anti-poverty initiatives. According to a 2012 report, *Combating Child Poverty*, ‘socio-cultural participation policies are the least developed domain of policy addressing child poverty’ across the EU.¹ Throughout the seminar there was a strong feeling that this needs to change.

The challenge facing the cultural, arts and heritage sectors today is to ensure that public cultural provision is used to benefit those who need it the most. Existing surveys suggest that participation in cultural activity is closely related to socio-economic status. Children from ABC1 households are more likely to participate in arts, cultural and heritage activities than those from C2DE groups.²

The Welsh Government Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) indicate a greater level of need within certain geographical areas. Furthermore, there are priority groups who suffer more acutely from a lack of cultural experience and opportunity for example looked-after children, children with Special Educational Needs, or those that have been excluded from school.

What steps can be taken to make sure that those whose lives are most severely affected by poverty do not miss out on the benefits that cultural participation can bring?

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Greater understanding of the benefits of cultural participation, and more effective advocacy are essential in allowing the cultural and heritage sectors to support wider efforts to tackle child poverty.

While it cannot be claimed that the cultural and heritage sectors alone can solve poverty, it can be claimed that they have a more important role to play in anti-poverty initiatives than is currently acknowledged.

The launch of the Social Justice Alliance for Museums (SJAM) at the Museums Association Conference in Liverpool in November 2013 is indicative of the positive steps towards social inclusion already being made, but much remains to be done.

This is not an easy task. Severe public sector cuts mean that local authorities are increasingly under pressure to make difficult decisions about their allocation of resources. Cultural provision, which is not a statutory provision, is under particular threat. This is evident in many areas across the UK. Even local authorities who have invested in cultural assets as a key feature of their core agendas have been forced to make deep cuts to their cultural budgets.

"I’m convinced... that participation in cultural activity boosts people’s life chances."
Jeff Cuthbert AM, Welsh Government Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty
The context in Wales

It is particularly appropriate that this research seminar was held in Wales. In 2010, the Welsh Government launched its Children and Families (Wales) Measure, which placed a statutory duty on public bodies and local authorities to demonstrate their commitment to eradicating child poverty. This was followed by the publication of its Child Poverty Strategy, and more recently a refreshed Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Building Resilient Communities.

In August 2013 the Welsh Government Minister for Culture and Sport commissioned Baroness Kay Andrews to produce a report on how cultural and heritage bodies can work more closely together to broaden access to participation in ways which contribute to eradicating the consequences of poverty in Wales. This will be published in March 2014.

The Children’s Commissioner for Wales, has also produced a Child Poverty Strategy. This promotes and supports rights-based practice, as set out in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that access to and participation in cultural and artistic opportunities is a fundamental right for all children and young people. This is also a key concern of the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group. In 2013, it published a report Rights Here, Right Now that attempted to measure the extent to which law, policy and practice in Wales are delivering against UNCRC guidelines.

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4 The Children’s Commissioner’s strategy was first published in 2012, and is to be updated annually. Children’s Commissioner for Wales, Child Poverty Strategy: 2012 onwards.

5 Save the Children, Rights Here, Right Now: Are Children’s Rights A Reality in Wales? Wales NGO Interim Report, ed. Rhian Croke (Cardiff: Save the Children Wales, March 2013). Chapter 7 ‘Education, leisure and cultural activities’ looks particularly at the rights of children ‘to engage in play and recreational activities… and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts’, although its emphasis is primarily on the development of the playwork sector and play theory in Wales pp.72-77.
Amgueddfa Cymru’s approach

Addressing social exclusion as a consequence of child poverty is a key commitment for Amgueddfa Cymru. Activity around this area has increased over the past few years.

Transforming Children’s Futures by creating pathways for cultural participation, published in 2012, set out the Museum’s strategic aims towards tackling participation poverty among children and young people. In the same year, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) announced that it was awarding £11.5 million towards Making History, an ambitious redevelopment project which aims to transform St Fagans National History Museum into a participatory museum on a national scale. Also in 2012 a one-day public conference was held at National Museum Cardiff, Transforming Children’s Lives, which considered the role of cultural organizations in addressing and engaging with the anti-poverty agenda.

The research seminar considered in this report followed on from these initiatives. The intention was to provide a platform for more focused, research-based discussion, and to identify recommendations for future actions needed to help support the child poverty agenda in Wales, and elsewhere in the UK. It coincides with the publication of Transforming Children’s Lives, a resource pack designed to support arts, cultural and heritage organizations in their efforts to create pathways for cultural participation. This will be available for download from the Museum’s website from April 2014.

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7 For Making History, see http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/4226/

8 Presentations from this conference can be viewed online at http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/transforming_futures
Summary

The seminar

The programme for the research seminar was structured around three key questions:

+ **What are the cultural lives and motivations of children and young people?**
+ **What are the benefits and impacts of participation in public cultural provision?**
+ **What does research tell us needs to be done to maximize impact on the cultural lives of children and young people?**

Each theme consisted of 5-minute provocations from selected speakers, followed by group discussions. A plenary session at the end drew together recommendations, actions and ways forward.

Welsh Government Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, Jeff Cuthbert, and Baroness Kay Andrews were also invited to address participants, and to give an overview of their priorities in relation to this agenda.

The day instigated wide-ranging debate, reflecting the diverse interests and professional experience of participants. This summary report gives an overview of key issues discussed, set in relation to wider debates.
Key discussion points

1. Defining objectives

If the cultural and heritage sectors want to make a credible claim for the role they have to play in relation to anti-poverty initiatives, they need to set realistic objectives. Over-ambitious claims will only damage credibility. As one participant noted, it is unlikely that cultural participation can eliminate poverty; but it can help to lessen some of its negative effects like social exclusion, stress, or poor educational attainment.

Professor Dai Smith’s recent independent review on Arts in Education in Wales, for example, suggests that the arts and creative learning have a key role to play in narrowing the educational attainment gap. This is a more credible objective than eradicating poverty altogether.

Many felt that there is a need to clarify terminology. ‘Cultural participation’ can be defined in different ways. The danger is that this becomes an umbrella term, used to signify any form of engagement. It needs to be defined more meaningfully, and used consistently across different sectors.

The term ‘poverty’ also needs consideration. Poverty does not just denote financial need or worklessness. Poverty of opportunity, expression, motivation or aspiration could also be taken into consideration. What and whose ‘poverty’ are the cultural and heritage sectors attempting to tackle?

9 Professor Dai Smith, An independent report for the Welsh Government into Arts in Education in the Schools of Wales (September 2013), p.15. The link between arts participation and academic achievement has elsewhere been contested. See Helen Jermyn, Arts and Social Exclusion: a report prepared for the Arts Council of England (November 2011), pp.19-20.

10 A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that 61% of UK children in poverty are from families with at least one working parent. http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2012/06/relentless-rise-work-poverty
2. Change from the inside out
Many felt that if cultural, heritage and arts institutions want to transform people’s lives, they first need to change themselves. This will not be an easy task. The level of change required will have a significant impact on governance, institutional priorities, allocation of resources and methods of working.

Suggestions from the seminar of ways in which institutions can make positive steps towards change included:

Embedding the principles of co-production
Children and young people should be given a place on decision-making panels, and should be directly involved in the design and delivery of projects and displays.

Developing listening skills
Cultural and heritage institutions need to develop their listening skills so that they are better able to recognize and respond to the voices and views of children and young people. A recent report by the UNCRC Monitoring group suggests that participatory forums have under-delivered in the past because too often the focus is on giving children the right to be heard, rather than listened to – an important distinction.11

Challenging existing preconceptions of children and young people
Sarah Crawley, Head of Poverty and Prevention for the City and County of Swansea, pointed out that children and young people are often described as passive victims of poverty and disadvantage; when in fact they have much to offer as active participants in the search for solutions.

One participant drew attention to a Financial Times article which demonstrates the positive outcomes of challenging such preconceptions. The article described how Washington’s National Portrait Gallery, after receiving complaints about a ‘problem’ group of teenagers on the gallery steps, invited them in to the Museum and gave them the opportunity to create and present their own fashion show.\(^{12}\) A positive experience was created by treating these young people as active participants with something to offer.

It was also felt that more attention should be directed towards understanding different youth sub-cultures, and the diverse interests and patterns of behaviour associated with these groups.

Children should be taking part in the struggle for social progress because they have the right to advocate their own interests... and because they have information and ideas from which everyone can benefit.
Sarah Crawley, Head of Poverty and Prevention, City and Council of Swansea

\(^{12}\) Anna Fifield, ‘Model Solution’, FT Urban Ingenuity (12 September 2013), pp.21-23. With thanks to Robert Willis for drawing attention to this report.
**Questioning evaluation**

Too often evaluations are driven by the needs of the institution rather than its visitors. A desire to prove worth or celebrate success sometimes over-rides serious attempts to find out whether a project had any real impact on those involved. Greater integrity, honesty and a more rigorous form of questioning is essential if evaluations are to be meaningful.

**Re-assessing the nature of projects**

Many participants noted that one-off projects have limited long-term impact. They are unsustainable, and often leave participants feeling abandoned when the project comes to an end. Lynn McDonald (Middlesex University) and Mark O’Neill (Glasgow Life) both argued that consistent, repeated exposure to quality cultural opportunities is key. Cultural engagement could be compared to exercise: regular, repeat encounters are more effective than short, intensive bursts of activity. Funders could help enable this by offering sustained, long-term support.

A more sustained view of embedded practice is possible, in which the involvement and participation of children and young people is a default position. This is less about single projects or initiatives, and more about an approach, where practical participation becomes an integral part of the development of any programme, event or exhibition.
3. Family learning

The importance of family learning arose several times. The attitudes of children and young people towards cultural participation is often formed by the views of their parents or carers. Negativity or apathy is easily passed from one generation to the next. Many recent studies and reports support this view. \(^{13}\) To increase both the value and frequency of participation, more emphasis should be placed on whole-family or multi-generational engagement.

A report by NIACE, *Family Learning Works*, published just a few weeks after the seminar, states that good family learning can enhance life chances, boost confidence, and improve educational skills. A key recommendation in the report for Wales was that ‘family learning should be integral to school strategies to raise children’s attainment and to narrow the gap between the lowest and highest achievers’. \(^{14}\)

During the research seminar, it was suggested that museums and cultural institutions should consider directing more resources towards family learning initiatives than formal learning programmes. This was met with mixed response. It is, however, an area that needs further interrogation, as the role, philosophies and culture of schools and formal education can act either as a pathway or a barrier to cultural participation. The recent and very different changes in approach to learning and the Curriculum adopted in England and Scotland, and the recent *Arts in Education* report by Arts Council Wales clearly indicate that formal educational approaches are not consistent in their support or recognition of the value of cultural participation.


4. Strengthening cross-sector collaboration
To optimize the impact of cultural participation, it is crucial that other sectors and service providers – including schools, local authorities, charities, funders, housing associations, health boards and higher education providers – work in closer collaboration with the cultural and heritage sectors. As the UNCRC Monitoring Group for Wales has claimed, tackling child poverty is a responsibility which should be shared across all sectors and governmental portfolios.\(^1\)

More needs to be done to advocate the importance of cultural participation in relation to child poverty; to demonstrate how other sectors can contribute to this agenda; and to advocate the need for greater systemic co-ordination. Baroness Kay Andrews’ report, published in March 2014, makes recommendations for ways in which strategic collaboration can be brought about to help reduce poverty in Wales. Greater collaboration would enable the pooling of resources, knowledge and research findings which are currently split across different sectors.

5. Working with communities
Many participants felt that too often children and young people are considered in isolation from their wider communities, and that this needs to change. ‘Community’ in this sense is not always geographical. It can also be cultural, or used to denote a group of people who share similar interests. The cultural and heritage sectors could benefit from putting more effort into understanding these communities, and developing and sustaining relationships with them.

More emphasis could be put on strengthening communication links with those at the front line like social workers, youth workers or Communities First officers to make them more aware of what is on offer and how cultural participation can be used to support their roles. In turn, cultural institutions can benefit from their knowledge and wealth of experience.
6. Transforming spaces
Local spaces could be used more creatively to support the anti-poverty agenda. As Baroness Andrews observed, there is power in the local environment. It can be used to nurture a sense of pride, belonging and cultural understanding within communities.

Cultural, arts and heritage sites could do more to make existing spaces more accessible and welcoming to a wider range of visitors. It was also suggested that they could explore the potential for more creative and multifaceted use of space.

Jo Reilly, Head of Participation and Learning at the Heritage Lottery Fund, for example, described an innovative project where the Royal Festival Hall at the Southbank Centre in London invited a local primary school to use their venue as a classroom base for a whole term. Caerphilly County Borough Council’s recent refurbishment of their library spaces into multi-purpose community centres was also cited as a good example of how existing buildings can be transformed into spaces which have the potential to attract new visitors, and engage entire families and community groups.
Actions and ways forward

Participants were asked to propose actions and ways forward. The key suggestions were:

1. **To establish a code of ethics or set of principles for cultural participation in relation to child poverty**

This code of ethics should:
+ demonstrate and define best practice;
+ indicate how service providers across all sectors including local authorities, charities, funders, housing associations, health boards, universities and researchers, as well as cultural and heritage institutions, can work collaboratively towards establishing and supporting participatory practice as a key feature of the wider anti-poverty agenda;
+ be practical, easily measurable, and clearly differentiated from other participation principles already in existence;
+ be developed co-productively;
+ be responsive to different regional and national contexts.

It was suggested that these principles could be developed in Wales initially, and rolled out to the rest of the UK in time.
2. To establish a steering group to drive forward this agenda in Wales
A core steering group should be formed to promote and support the value of cultural participation in relation to the child poverty agenda within Wales. The purpose of the group would be to:

+ advocate with government and other bodies for greater understanding of the benefits and impacts of cultural participation;
+ create pathways to put into practice the principles established by the code of ethics, including greater collaboration with other service providers;
+ identify and create opportunities for possible areas of new research; and
+ communicate progress with participants attending the seminar from the rest of the UK and other interested parties.

3. To open out the conversation with funding bodies
Funding bodies should be included in this conversation. Is there a way of better aligning our needs? Can funders be encouraged to prioritize projects, for example, which demonstrate a commitment to embedding best practice in cultural participation?
4. To strengthen the evidence base by supporting in-depth collaborative research

Cultural practitioners could become pro-active in developing a more credible evidence base by encouraging and promoting collaborative research. They could work with universities and academic researchers to bring about greater cohesion between the practice and theory of cultural participation, and create more opportunities for sharing and aggregating the results of existing research projects.

Suggestions for possible areas of research:

+ Longitudinal research on the impact of cultural participation in relation to health, wellbeing or educational attainment.\(^{16}\)

+ How formal education providers and family learning initiatives can be better co-ordinated to optimize impact on children's levels of cultural participation.

+ Comparative research on the impact of short-term and long-term participatory interventions.

+ How does structure, design and architecture affect perceptions and patterns of behaviour? How do non-visitors in particular perceive and respond to existing cultural venues, sites and spaces?

+ The distinct patterns of behaviour, attitudes to and engagement with cultural participation of different youth sub-cultures.

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Part 2
Themes and discussions
Themes and discussions

Introduction

David Anderson
Director General, Amgueddfa Cymru

David Anderson opened the research seminar by welcoming participants and outlining the key purposes of the day. The seminar focuses on child poverty and cultural participation rather than wider issues of access and inclusion because this is an area which holds the greatest potential for transformational change.

Cultural participation can and does transform lives; and though the arts, cultural and heritage sectors cannot solve poverty, they do have a key role to play in ameliorating its impacts and improving quality of life. How this can be achieved is perhaps the most intellectually challenging issue facing the sector today; but we all share an ethical and professional responsibility to actively engage with this challenge.

The purpose of this seminar is not to provide answers, but to formulate questions, and set in motion a process of debate, understanding and action that will be the foundation for future change.

“We are engaged today in addressing our deeper ethical responsibilities. This is a professional responsibility, and something that both legislation and professional codes put us under obligation to address.”

David Anderson
Director General, Amgueddfa Cymru
Keynote presentation
Baroness Kay Andrews

Baroness Kay Andrews has been commissioned by the Welsh Government to explore ways in which arts and heritage bodies can work collaboratively to bring a greater contribution to reducing poverty in Wales, particularly in Communities First areas. During her presentation she described the challenges and questions that have emerged during the course of her research.

Material poverty and cultural poverty are connected, she suggested. Enabling children and young people to access and participate in arts, culture and heritage is the first step towards preventing them from becoming the next generation of adults in poverty.

Liberating creativity in children can have a positive impact on the wider community. A Swansea school, for example, recently received funding to provide all pupils with iPads. This not only improved pupils’ educational attainment and appetite for learning, but it also had a positive effect on previously disengaged parents, many of whom became increasingly involved with the school’s activities and fundraising schemes.

Synergy and shared learning is crucial to optimize impact. The cultural and heritage sectors need to strengthen their lines of communication, open out dialogues and articulate common purposes, particularly at local community level where dialogue is currently at its weakest. Local places and the local environment have an important role to play. The heritage and historic assets of a community can help nurture a sense of belonging and cultural understanding, which is crucial for building resilient communities. Joint working and joint delivery, she concluded, is fundamental in moving forward with this agenda.

Enabling children and young people to access and participate in arts, culture and heritage is the first step towards preventing them from becoming the next generation of adults in poverty.
Baroness Kay Andrews
Keynote presentation

Jeff Cuthbert AM
Welsh Government Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty

Jeff Cuthbert AM provided an overview of the Welsh Government’s priorities in relation to social justice and tackling poverty. He summarized the Government’s key priorities as outlined in *Building Resilient Communities: Taking Forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan* (July 2013). These include a commitment to improving the educational attainment of children from the poorest families, and to tackling the barriers facing young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in Wales. 17

Culture has a role to play in the long-term solution to poverty. ‘I’m convinced… that participation in cultural activity boosts people’s life chances’ he stated, adding that the Welsh Government’s Child Poverty Strategy aims to increase opportunities for children and young people to engage with culture, the arts and heritage.

Several examples were given of successful projects that have already taken place within Wales, including Amgueddfa Cymru’s *Just Bling* project, funded by the Communities First Outcomes Fund, and Cadw’s *Llanmellin Community Project*, a community archaeology initiative. 18 While such projects and initiatives reflect the quality and variety of work taking place in Wales, the challenge now is to embed and roll out these examples of good practice, and to become more coherent in approach.

18 For information on *Just Bling*, see Amgueddfa Cymru, *Transforming Children’s Futures*, p.16 http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/transforming_futures
Theme 1: What are the cultural lives and motivations of children and young people?

The first theme of the day was based on attempts to define and understand the cultural life of the child. What does culture and cultural participation mean to children and young people today? How does public cultural provision fit into children’s lives? And what are the motivations and barriers for engagement with cultural provision?

Keith Towler, Children’s Commissioner for Wales, was first to address this theme. He began by emphasizing the importance of Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children and young people have a fundamental right to participate in cultural, artistic and playful activities. We are under obligation to enable them to access this right.

Voice, he argued, is key. If we want to understand the cultural lives of children and young people and what motivates them, we need to create platforms for their voices to be articulated. More importantly we need to develop our own listening skills so that we not only hear, but recognize and are able to understand what is being said. Children and young people express their views in a variety of different ways – ‘a potato print, a piece of theatre, a piece of music – all of those things are absolutely relevant,’ he argued; our challenge is to be able to recognize these different creative outlets as expressions of voice, and to respond accordingly.

He concluded by reminding participants of the many platforms already in place which allow children and young people to articulate their voices, including school councils, youth forums, and participation groups. The responsibility lies with us to tune in to these platforms, listen and understand what is being said.
Theme 1: What are the cultural lives and motivations of children and young people?

Following the Children’s Commissioner, Lynn McDonald, Professor of Social Work at Middlesex University spoke of her experiences working as professional consultant in 20 countries motivating low-income, socially marginalized families to participate in cultural and other activities; and of her considerable research into this area, which is rigorous and quantitative, including randomized controlled trials.

She began by stressing the importance of the family and wider community. Children crave positive attention from their families, parents or adult carers, and working with multi-family groups has proven to be a highly effective means of engaging their interests. Local communities sometimes harbour negative stereotypes of museums and cultural institutions which are a major barrier to cultural participation. Such stereotypes can only be overcome by positive, repeat encounters. ‘One-offs just don’t work,’ she claimed, ‘you have to get involved in projects that have repeated exposures; they have to be participatory and they have to have shared governance’.

She outlined several recommendations for good practice in engaging children and young people in cultural activities. These included embedding the principles of co-production; ensuring that planning committees are culturally representative; ensuring that children and young people make up at least half of decision-making panels; providing learning opportunities that are experiential rather than didactic; and offering positive reinforcement through the provision of refreshments, rewards, and celebratory events.
Theme 1: What are the cultural lives and motivations of children and young people?

The third speaker on this theme, Carol Rogers, Executive Director Education, Communities and Visitors at National Museums Liverpool, opened with a sobering provocation: the cultural and heritage sectors are simply not in tune with the lives and interests of young people. The DCMS Taking Part survey suggests that while 99% of all 5-15 year olds had engaged with the arts across the UK, only 61% had engaged with museums.

Many children and young people have little or no understanding of the cultural opportunities on offer to them, or how they can be accessed. This is not from a lack of motivation. Young people today are active consumers and contributors to culture, particularly through social media platforms and digital technology. ‘Our younger audiences are motivated to be the promoter, the designer, the curator, and the producer’ she argued ‘...if they are enabled to do so’. Our challenge is to become the enablers – to allow children and young people to access their cultural heritage in ways that best suit their needs – but, she warned, this is a bigger challenge than we might expect. Time-limited projects with short-term funding can only ever achieve superficial aims. Long-term strategy and investment is essential.

She concluded by pointing out a fundamental flaw: ‘where is the young person in the room?’ The views of children and young people are too often overlooked. They should be actively involved in these discussions.
Theme 1 discussions
Following the provocations, participants were split into break-out groups for discussions. The main issues and topics discussed were:

Whose cultural life? The challenge of definition
What does cultural participation mean to children and young people, and who should decide? Traditional definitions might include taking part in arts, heritage, music or theatre; but there are countless other activities which play a key role in youth culture, such as skateboarding, blogging, or street dancing which are not always accounted for. Many published surveys on cultural participation rely on traditional definitions of culture which do not reflect the reality of children’s cultural lives.

The family context
Many agreed that children and young people should not be considered in isolation from their families or carers. Too often ‘family activities’ are geared towards the child, and do not include means of engaging parents or adult carers. For participation to be more meaningful, emphasis should be placed on multi-level, whole-family engagement.

Understanding communities
Cultural institutions need to foster a better understanding of, and work more extensively with communities. ‘Community’ does not have to be geographically-based; it can be based on cultural identity or shared interests. Many communities have highly-developed communication networks, but the cultural and heritage sectors are not always adept at tapping into these. A more culturally inclusive workforce could help resolve this. The communication links between the cultural and heritage sectors and Community Development practitioners also needs to be improved.
Theme 1 discussions

Need for institutional change
Institutional change is essential if the cultural and heritage sectors want to better understand the cultural lives of children and young people. Many of these changes require a complete transformation of principles and organizational structures currently in place. Collectively, the groups identified the areas which require attention:

- **Governance.** Many felt that cultural and heritage institutions should do more to enable communities, families, children and young people to actively participate on decision-making boards and committees. The use of participatory forums as part of the *Making History* project at St Fagans National History Museum was given as an example of positive steps being taken in this direction.

- **Staff.** It is essential that staff at all levels, but particularly those on the front line, are equipped with the skills to work with children and young people from diverse backgrounds. This should not be the responsibility of a single member of staff or small team. The public should be able to build trusted relationships with an organization or venue rather than an individual.

- **Research and impact.** Many felt that evaluative studies can be misleading. Too often the emphasis is on celebrating positive results rather than dealing with the negative. Greater honesty is essential. Such evaluations rarely take into consideration long-term impact or wider social outcomes. There is a need for more longitudinal, qualitative research.
Theme 1 discussions

Overcoming barriers

Barriers to participation was a key theme. Transport was felt to be a major issue, particularly for rural areas. Access, cost and geographical barriers were also discussed. Suggestions for overcoming some of these barriers included:

+ **Tackling practical barriers.** Could cultural and heritage venues go further towards actively removing some of the most basic practical barriers? One museum, for example, succeeded in encouraging more disengaged families to visit by providing free transport, food, refreshments and logistical support to visiting groups. This was considered problematic. It is not possible for organizations to resolve public transport services, but more could be done to advocate the need for better provision.

+ **Using mobile technology to overcome the digital divide.** Mobile phones are perhaps the most democratic and inclusive platform for digital engagement available today. Cultural and heritage institutions could make better use of mobile technology to increase opportunities for engagement.

+ **Using intergenerational engagement to overcome time constraints.** Time is a major barrier for many working parents. Could the older generation take a more active role in engaging the younger generation in cultural activities?
Theme 1 discussions

+ **Creating inclusive buildings and spaces.** The formal appearance of some cultural buildings can act as a barrier to engagement. Some families may be unwilling to visit because they feel uncomfortable in such spaces. One group suggested looking to retail psychology for solutions. Supermarkets, for example, are designed to appear familiar, comfortable and welcoming; most people know what to expect, and how to behave within them. The group agreed that this was a proposal which needs further interrogation.

+ **Thinking in terms of route maps.** How do children and young people hear about and find their way in to cultural institutions in the first place? Is enough being done to strengthen these channels of access, or ‘route maps’?

+ **Increasing social capital.** One group felt that social capital is of critical importance in overcoming the ‘I don’t belong there’ mindset. Many activities such as choral singing, rugby and amateur dramatics attract participants from a wide range of different socio-economic classes. How can such inclusivity be reproduced within the cultural and heritage sectors?
Theme 2: What are the benefits and impacts of participation in public cultural provision, in terms of children and young people’s engagement?

Mark O’Neill, Director, Policy and Research at Glasgow Life opened the session by stating that the benefits of cultural participation are well-rehearsed. The real question which needs addressing is ‘how much is enough?’ Small gains, he argued, are perhaps no gains at all. Short-term projects are particularly problematic: they are neither generative nor sustainable, and can have little impact on the wider population.

He cast doubt over the value of evaluative studies, arguing that institutions can skew their results in an attempt to prove their worth or secure funding. Furthermore the ‘transformational value’ of cultural participation is an elusive concept, and is difficult to evidence in a credible, coherent way.

Epidemiological research can provide more credible evidence. Recent clinical research suggests that cultural attendance improves health and lengthens lives if attendance patterns are regular and sustained. As with exercise, one-off experiences or short bursts of activity will not make a difference. The challenge is to nurture a culture of regular visiting among visitors and participants. He concluded by asking whether cultural and heritage organizations should direct the bulk of their resources towards family learning, rather than formal learning and school groups, as familial influence can have a greater impact on children’s attitudes to cultural participation than any experience obtained at school.
Theme 2: What are the benefits and impacts of participation in public cultural provision, in terms of children and young people’s engagement?

Jo Reilly, Head of Participation and Learning at the Heritage Lottery Fund challenged Mark O’Neill’s suggestion that family learning should take precedence over formal learning. Schools are essential in allowing us to reach out to disengaged children and their families. The cultural sector, she argued, should see teachers and school leaders as advocates in this cause.

Social impact studies show that cultural participation can help children and young people develop skills and improve attainment; it can also have a positive impact on attitudes and behaviour. The challenge is to extend these benefits to those who are not currently accessing public cultural provision.

She emphasized the importance of local delivery and joint collaboration. Young Roots, a Heritage Lottery Fund initiative, was given as an example.19 This programme funds partnerships of heritage and youth organizations which give young people the opportunity to shape their own heritage projects collaboratively. A recent project at the Southbank Centre, London, was also cited as an example of good practice, where the Royal Festival Hall invited a local primary school to use the venue as their classroom for a whole term.

Through such innovative use of local spaces, she claimed, cultural and heritage institutions can help to establish a sense of pride and ownership over their own cultural heritage among children and young people.

19 http://www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Pages/YoungRoots.aspx
Theme 2 discussions

In the group discussion that followed, participants considered practical steps that could be taken towards increasing participation and embedding best practice. The following themes were discussed:

Making better use of public spaces
Museums and other cultural or heritage venues could encourage participation by creating opportunities for using their spaces in a more flexible, multifaceted way. Caerphilly Library, for example, is undergoing a major transformation of its building. Alongside the lending library, the new space will offer a much wider range of resources and services, including a museum area with study space, a space for young people, and community meeting rooms.20 Further research could help determine how structure and design affects patterns of behavior within existing spaces.

Funding streams
How can funders or funding streams help optimize the impact of cultural participation? On-going funding streams are more beneficial than short-term, project-based funding. More opportunities could be made for children and young people to access sources of funding for themselves, and a better support system could be in place to encourage and assist their applications.

Governance
Cultural, arts and heritage organizations could do more to enable children and young people to participate in decision-making processes and to sit on governance boards.

20 http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/site.aspx?s=1e2r0t4KDAs8Day9WnRgQi1wqHhsathao3Fy/qnp+Vy+UU1VxTQw==
**Theme 2 discussions**

**UK-wide code of ethics**
Throughout the discussion, it became apparent there was interest in creating a framework, set of principles or code of ethics which help to clarify, embed and encourage best practice in cultural participation for children and young people in poverty. These principles should not be aimed at the cultural sector alone, but at wider systemic co-ordination. Local authorities, funders, academics, health boards, schools and other stakeholders should all be able to sign up to them; and they should indicate how resources, evidence and research across the different sectors can be pooled to best effect.

**Defining objectives**
One participant observed that before such a set of principles can be formulated, the first step would be to define a credible aim or outcome: is this about using cultural participation in an attempt to alleviate poverty, or is it about the more achievable aim of tackling some of its negative impacts?
Theme 3: What does research tell us needs to be done to change children’s and young people’s cultural lives, sustainably and for the better?

Sarah Teague, Commissioner for Learning and Development at Isle of Wight Council was first to present on this theme. She argued that family learning is the most powerful intervention by which we can impact on the lives, attitudes and attainment of children and young people. It is often through a parent, or adult family member that children and young people receive their first introduction to public cultural provision.

The majority of parents, she claimed, would like to ensure that their children have better opportunities than they themselves had, but they face hidden barriers to participation. They may have had negative experiences of cultural engagement as children, for example, which have put them off participating as adults. ‘Family Learning is as much about changing attitudes to learning, cultural and civic participation as it is about qualifications and skill development’ she argued. The best Family Learning programmes tackle negative preconceptions by reducing anxieties or fears which can act as a barrier to participation; and are inclusive of the whole family.

She gave several examples of successful co-production projects with which she has been involved, including producing ‘rough guides’ to cultural provision written by parents for parents. She concluded by emphasizing that the skills, behaviour and attitudes acquired by participants on Family Learning programmes continue to have an effect long after the programmes have ceased.
Theme 3: What does research tell us needs to be done to change children’s and young people's cultural lives, sustainably and for the better?

The second speaker, Sarah Crawley, Head of Poverty and Prevention for the City and County of Swansea began with an overview of current governmental strategies aimed at tackling poverty in relation to children and families, within Wales and UK-wide.21

Getting individuals involved in arts and culture, she argued, is the first step towards building trusted relationships. It can help to open up conversations related to the experiences of poverty and social exclusion.

Children and young people are not just passive victims of poverty. They can help find solutions. Often adults lack the ability to ‘fresh think’, which is instinctive in children. ‘Children should be taking part in the struggle for social progress’ she argued ‘because they have the right to advocate their own interests... and because they have information and ideas from which everyone can benefit’.

Children and young people should be given the opportunity to decide what has cultural significance for them, and how they want to approach, experience and define culture. iPads, for example, could be used to encourage self-directed learning, and to bring culture, heritage and the arts to those who do not or cannot access our venues. Family Learning is also key.

21 The following were mentioned: DfE, A new approach to child poverty: tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families’ lives (5 April 2011); Welsh Government, Children and Families (Wales) Measure (2010); Welsh Government, Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (February 2011).
Theme 3 discussions

Participants suggested a number of means by which public cultural venues or institutions can optimize impact on the cultural lives of children and young people, including:

Embedding institutional change
The principles of participatory practice should be embedded into organizational strategies and job descriptions at all levels, and staff should be properly trained to work with difficult-to-reach or vulnerable groups. The Happy Museum was discussed, with one group suggesting that these principles should be adopted more widely, and that wellbeing and behavioural change should be embedded in strategic policies.

Increasing emphasis on family learning
Family interventions, it was claimed, are essential to achieving long-term impact, as attitudes and values are passed from one family member or one generation to the next.

Focusing on the wider context
An increase in cross-sector working and collective learning was felt to be essential. Collaboration and the sharing of best practice does not have to be restricted to Wales or the UK. Literature Wales, for example, are currently looking at how young people are becoming engaged in poetry and hip hop in New York, and seeing how these participatory models can be adapted for Wales.

Transforming local spaces
An example was given of a Coventry-based programme in which a little-used Scout Hut was transformed into a public space which then became the central hub of the local community.

22 http://www.happymuseumproject.org/
Theme 3 discussions

Defining co-production
Co-production was considered an essential methodology to adopt, but greater consistency is required in defining what it means in relation to cultural participation, and how it looks in practice.

Developing an awareness of gender preference
Research has shown that the expectations of visitors are often gender specific. An experiment conducted by NIACE found that men were more likely to attend if invites were addressed to ‘Dads and Mums’ rather than ‘parents’. By developing awareness of gendered preferences, cultural institutions can begin to tackle unseen barriers to participation.

Developing awareness of youth sub-cultures
Children and young people are not a homogenous group. Apart from differences of gender, age, ethnicity or geography, there are countless sub-cultures with which they identify themselves.

Nurturing peer-to-peer support
This is an effective way of reaching the wider community. Young mothers who have participated in a cultural activity, for example, could be taught the skills to run a similar activity for other young mothers in their local community.

Changes to funding streams
Could funding bodies help by changing their stipulations? Funders could prioritize projects which initiate a new approach to cultural participation and which demonstrate how this is embedded in the long term.
Conclusions and ways forward

The concluding session opened with a question: where do we want to be in two years’ time, and what practical steps can we take towards achieving this? The discussions raised a number of questions and challenges, summarized below. The actions and practical steps suggested are summarized in Part 1 of this report.

Questions and challenges

- **Defining key objectives.** Is the issue about tackling poverty, or mediating its effects?
- **How much is enough?** A tension exists between the quality of experience that can be obtained through participation in small-scale projects, and the quantity of such projects required to impact the wider population. Can the benefits of small projects be scaled up to achieve widespread impact, and how?
- **Including the voices of children and young people.** The idea that children and young people should be involved in the design and delivery of projects which directly affect them is a familiar concept, but to what extent has the cultural sector taken this on board?
- **Understanding and acknowledging difference.** Any attempt to foster cultural inclusion needs to take into account the complexity, variety and multiplicity of needs of children and young people. This is not only in terms of gender, age and ethnicity, but also in terms of geographical differences, learning styles, or the different sub-cultures with which they choose to identify themselves. What can be done to better understand these different needs?
Conclusions and ways forward

- **Becoming more honest in evaluation.** It is a challenge to produce evaluative evidence which satisfies the requirements of politicians, funders and governing bodies, but which is also useful, honest and robust. Too often evaluations are driven by a ‘show me this works’ mentality, rather than ‘does this work, and if not why?’

- **Strengthening cross-sector collaboration.** The cultural and heritage sectors need to work in collaboration with and share the objectives of other sectors and service providers, including schools, local authorities, charities, funders, housing associations and health boards. In particular, there is a need for greater collaboration between academic researchers and front-line practitioners. Governance strategies and policies, both local and national, are key in ensuring coherence of aim, and in setting up frameworks which will enable and encourage cross-sector working. How can this be encouraged?

- **Advocacy.** It was felt that more effective advocacy is required to demonstrate that cultural, heritage and arts institutions or venues are a core asset in anti-poverty agendas.
Appendices
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Programme
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9.35 – 9.50am
Introduction (David Anderson, Amgueddfa Cymru)

9.50 – 10.00am
Baroness Kay Andrews address

10.00 – 11.30am
Theme 1: What are the cultural lives and motivations of children and young people?

11.45 – 12.30pm
Theme 2: What are the benefits and impacts of participation in public cultural provision, in terms of children’s engagement?

12.30 – 12.45pm
Address by Jeff Cuthbert AM, Welsh Government Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty

2.00 – 3.15pm
Theme 3: What does research tell us needs to be done to change children’s and young people’s cultural lives, sustainably and for the better?

3.30 – 4.00pm
Conclusions and way forward: What needs to be done?
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