

INTERACTION AT ARNOLFINI

CONTEXT

Internal Environment

Following on from an Organisational Review and as part of a new strategic direction, Arnolfini is committed to placing interaction at the core of its mission. Therefore, a new executive post of Head of Interaction, combining learning, marketing and research, was appointed in August 2009.

Exhibitions such as Port City, Far West and SuperToys, and Live Art programmes such as Back to Back have shown what is possible in terms of Arnolfini being a mediator and a broker of relationships. We now wish to explore this further, working both outside and inside the building, working with artists, with new technology and embracing the digital opportunities available to fully engage with new audiences. The Review will give us the much needed information to ensure we fully understand who our new communities could be. Arnolfini wants to face outwards, encouraging debate and dialogue, and perceiving its audiences as users and producers rather than consumers.

We want to test out and understand the implications of providing a platform and resources for action, encouraging access to production, interpretation and discussion, and what the impact this has on programming and the role of the curator. Our perception is that knowledge and expertise held within the institution will be even more needed, but will be made more available and more transparent to others.

Interaction Review aims

- Conduct an extensive piece of audience research to investigate both who comes to Arnolfini and who doesn't.
- Use this to inform and revise marketing strategies ie all print, signage and web design
- Use this to identify potential new communities that want to be involved with Arnolfini.
- Maximise visitor numbers and extend audience profile
- Become a more porous organisation encouraging and supporting 2-way dialogue and exchange
- Develop mechanisms for networked delivery of core aims through increased meaningful partnerships
- Design bespoke interaction programmes designed with and for a range of groups, communities and organisations (including social networking)
- Share findings and models via an interim evaluation seminar for peer organisations, and a final major conference on interaction to conclude the review and look at ways forward.

This Interaction Review will run from April 2010 to February 2011. It will enable us to understand what our audiences' needs are. Not everyone will want to participate in debate. We need to remain open to a range of approaches whilst understanding and

respecting why we are working as we are. People visit galleries for a number of different reasons and these reasons will still be applicable for those visitors.¹

We plan to:

- Commission a comprehensive piece of audience research
- Explore different ways - both inside and outside the gallery, and on the web – of working with people in a meaningful 2-way exchange.
- Be outward facing into the city of Bristol and its regions, looking for sustainable working relationships with a multitude of partners
- Explore the impact of this on programme
- Explore what makes participation meaningful to people (rather than promoting it as an end to itself)
- Revisit our marketing in response to the Review findings

External Environment

In 2006, John Knell was commissioned by Arts Council England to write a report challenging traditional notions of authorship and production in the arts. This document entitled '**whose art is it anyway**'² looked at key questions such as: How can the arts best engage the public? How far does the language of personalisation, choice, and co-production aid our understanding of these challenges? What would it mean for arts organisations if they were to become much more responsive to their public?

His focus on personalisation and co-production has the potential to transform how we think about audiences. Personalisation will have a profound impact on the arts – for three reasons:

1. The transformative power of information and communication technology (ICT)
2. The new dynamics of consumer behaviour
3. The publicly funded arts will increasingly have to negotiate their value with the public

Charles Leadbeater in his book 'We-Think' (2009) suggests that arts organisations ignore the impact of new technology at their peril. Blogs and tweets mean audiences can critique, discuss and debate amongst themselves, therefore expanding and owning culture. Young people – the audiences of the future - increasingly understand culture as something they make, or something they remake and remix and remake, something that they get and through the tools of this technology, recreate.

Taking Part³ is a major, continuous survey of cultural and sport participation in England, commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in partnership with Arts Council England, Sport England, English Heritage and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

¹ As detailed in the Morris Hargreaves McIntyre report for Tate: *Anatomy of a Visit*, 2004; and in *Culture on Demand*, DCMS, 2007

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http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/projects/whoseartisitanycan_do_phpIPQaf.do

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http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/project_detail.php?sid=13&id=373&page=2#info

Every year it collects information from up to 28,000 adults (aged 16 and over) about their attendance at a wide variety of arts events, museums, galleries, libraries and heritage sites, and about their participation in creative activities and sport. The survey also asks about motivations and barriers to engagement and collects a large quantity of socio-demographic information.

Culture on Demand: ways to engage a broader audience (DCMS, 2007)⁴ looked at why people do not engage with culture. Whilst barriers may act to put people off or stop them coming back, some people may never think of taking part in the first place. It highlighted the following six key drivers of participation.

- **Children and family networks.** The desire to educate and entertain children is a major motivation for family visits to heritage sites and museums. Such trips are valued as an opportunity to share experiences and create family time.
- **Socialising and social networks.** The opportunity to socialise, meet friends and family, and support other people is a major stimulus for attendance. This is particularly powerful for encouraging excluded groups to get involved. Having a group or companions to go with also helps generate visits.
- **Identification and relevance.** People are more likely to visit if they feel that the event or site resonates with their own personal experience or has some relevance to their own cultural group
- **Local interest.** Locally-based activity is easier to reach and local projects often have greater relevance and interest. Because of this, the local community is a key audience for most projects. Volunteers are most likely to be locally based.
- **Positive experiences.** Good experiences tend to promote further visits and vice versa. Studies have identified that childhood exposure to culture through school trips or family visits leads to greater participation in adult life.
- **Trust and confidence.** Recommendations from friends and family, and confidence that the visit, event or activity will be a comfortable and enjoyable experience, encourage participation.

People's interest in what you offer depends on a complex interaction of a range of social and cultural factors. Successful audience development taps into the underlying elements which motivate participation.

Innovation in Arts and Cultural Organisations by Hasan Bakhshi and David Throsby was recently published by NESTA (Dec 09) and looks at publicly funded cultural institutions and their role in nurturing and advancing the arts and in creating public value. It looks at how, in this current economic downturn, cultural institutions are having to reassess their business strategies to ensure that they are still capable of delivering on the artistic and cultural objectives.

NESTA's aim in this research project is to develop an economic analysis of innovation applicable to a range of cultural institutions across the different areas in which they operate, and to generate robust empirical evidence, in particular on how they can use innovative digital technologies to expand, and deepen their relationships with, audiences. It mirrors Arnolfini's current realization of how digital technologies have the potential to allow us to achieve a step increase in the audiences. They identify three ways this can happen:

- **interactivity** – the potential to provide for two-way communication between the provider (such as a museum or gallery) and the audience, for example through arts-organisation websites that allow users to mix their own music

⁴ <http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/CultureOnDemand.pdf>

- content or to produce their own artwork online (Hughes and Lang, 2006; Knell, 2006);
- **connectivity** – the capacity of the internet to enable direct and high-frequency communication between and amongst providers and users of cultural services, for example cultural institutions creating online resources to enhance the experience of audiences for 'live' artforms, or social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter which enable consumers and audiences to share their critical reactions with both arts organisations and each other (Arts Council, 2009c);
- **convergence** – audiences can access information wherever they are and using whatever device is convenient and appropriate, for example downloading mp3 and mp4 multimedia arts content to handheld devices from arts organisation websites or third-party websites such as iTunes, or viewing live performances of theatre, opera and music at their local digital cinemas.

AUDIENCES

Arnolfini Audience Segments

Current (people who we already have a good relationship with and attract a lot of, but we can deeper penetrate these markets)

- Regular contemporary art exhibitions/live art audience
- Art world, artists and academics
- Schools and teachers
- Students

Developmental (people who are important to the future of Arnolfini and who we want to attract more of. These are the people in new markets that we want to develop, with the ultimate aim that they will shift into Current audience category in the future)

- Communities in Bristol
- Young people
- Families – split into different NSEC ratings
- Groups with particular access requirements

Experimental (emphasis here is on people we want to work with more in the future)

- Tourists (on holiday and staying in the region)
- Elders
- Business and corporate

Current audiences (snapshot)

Arnolfini is already involved in building relationships with its current core groups in its work with schools, teachers and families. The Interaction Review will run alongside this work and sometimes inform it. In 2010 we plan to extend and enhance our work

with these groups, whilst also focusing on two developmental groups - young people, and those with access requirements, in particular the deaf community.

Recent data suggests that up to 65% of Arnolfini's workshop attendees are aged 16-24. Recent figures also suggest that this group will be dramatically affected by the economic downturn with unemployment figures more than double the national average and rising more quickly than any other group.

Arnolfini has been slowly building its work with the deaf and disabled community over the last 3 years, due to hosting a deaf intern, Matt Roberts, and creating projects and events with that community in mind ie Back to Back, as part of Young AntiBodies.

Some examples:

Young People

Young Arnolfini Artists Collective – YAAC

This grew out of a teacher –in-residence idea, formed by Hugh Thomas (DCYF). Since Sept 09, Rebecca Prior from Cotham school has been based at Arnolfini every Wednesday. She wanted to engage a group of 17 year olds in making work at Arnolfini, and this has developed into a young collective, modeled initially on the lines of Young Tate, but which has grown very quickly due to Rebecca's energy and commitment.

They have:

- Launched a website of their own on 18 Jan 2010 at Arnolfini, attended by over 200 people.
- Made and exhibited some work in the Light Studio in response to Craftivism, the current exhibition.
- Produced a blog and a zine.
- Responded to the WiFi area in the café-bar
- Written press releases and looked at interpretation

Our aim is to work with the group of ten young people to look at ways in which they can market Arnolfini to other young people; and to also work with younger members of the school by July 2010.

Families

Current offer: Mash Up

Following on from a Cultural Consortium meeting held in Jan 2010, Arnolfini plans to meet with Bristol Museum and Art Gallery to identify how we might work together to attract families. We both recognize we already provide access to certain families but these are well-educated and usual gallery goers. How can we diversify this audience and are they the same audience for both our organisations?

Mash Up is a great success, but run without funding and on a ad hoc basis. In 2010 we plan to research in more detail what our family offer could be, with a view to forming a strategy by November 2010, and informed by the Interaction Review findings.

Communities in Bristol

The Interaction review will look in detail at our general public ie the casual visitor, passers by who drop in, alongside those that used to come and now feel intimidated since the refurbishment. Some conversations have already taken place with groups

and through small evaluations within the building. This evidence suggests people feel unconfident within the space, due to

- language used in both brochure and wall texts;
- the foyer appearance;
- the look of the exhibitions (ie no famous names)

The Interaction Review will highlight these concerns and suggest ways forward.

Bristol

75% of Arnolfini's existing audience live in Bristol.

Bristol has an active and developing community of artists. The local and regional Universities have nationally recognised Fine Art, History of Art, Live Art and Media courses. The Universities have a remit to work in partnership with outside agencies, in particular University of Bristol has a Centre for Public Engagement. We are working with them on two projects: Ballast Seed Garden and University of Local Knowledge. We are planning to host a new MA in Performance writing initiated by University of Falmouth, starting in Oct 2010.

Other current partnerships are with Bristol City Council, Knowle West Media Centre, Art and Power, Cotham School, St Marys Redcliffe and Temple School.