

Collaborate project proposals

Artichoke Trust <https://www.artichoke.uk.com/>

What do you want to explore and why?

Over the past twenty years, mass cultural gatherings (defined as large-scale, mass-participation, ephemeral arts events, which take place outdoors in public spaces) have become a key feature of the UK cultural landscape, from Jeremy Deller's *We're Here Because We're Here* (2016) to Spencer Tunik's *Sea of Hull* (2017).

Founded in 2005, Artichoke is an outdoor art organisation responsible for some of the most significant mass cultural gatherings in the UK, from *The Sultan's Elephant* by Royal de Luxe in 2006, to the *Lumiere* light festivals in Durham, London and Derry-Londonderry (2009-2021). We propose to explore why outdoor, public art matters and rethink how we capture the effects of mass cultural gatherings.

We know from anecdotal evidence and our own project evaluations that mass cultural gatherings make a difference to people's lives; improving wellbeing, promoting social inclusion, and restoring feelings of safety and belonging in public spaces. In order to better understand the value of mass cultural gatherings - especially in the context of increasing threats to congregation (including pandemics, terrorism and privatisation), it is necessary to develop a new method of evaluation, which goes beyond economic impact and audience attendance figures, to capture the lived experiences of audiences and participants.

This project will build on existing research into the value of cultural participation (for example, 'Understanding the Values and Impacts of Cultural Experiences', Carnwath and Brown, 2014; 'Cultural Activities, Artforms and Wellbeing,' Fujiwara and Mackerron, 2015). Further research is needed to address the specificity of mass cultural gatherings, which have not been sufficiently considered. The research will foreground perspectives underrepresented in the cultural and research sectors: outdoor art engages diverse audiences - including young people and groups with low levels of cultural engagement (Audience Agency, 2018).

We want to explore this topic as we have identified a gap in existing research. Understanding the value and capturing the effects of mass cultural gatherings relates directly to Artichoke's organisational purpose as producers of outdoor art events.

The process and findings of the research project would benefit our practice by enabling us to:

- Understand the need for our work and its potential impact – to inform the development of future artistic and community engagement strategies
- Identify gaps in our current evaluation frameworks
- Communicate the value of our work more effectively to the public – growing and diversifying our audiences

- Communicate the value of our work more effectively to potential funders and commissioners – encouraging continued investment in outdoor art events, in the wake of Covid-19
- Report to stakeholders including Arts Council England (ACE) – ensuring our organisational sustainability.

As a sector leader, Artichoke is committed to knowledge-sharing and dissemination of best practice. The project would have relevance for other arts organisations and creative practitioners, cultural researchers and policy makers. The findings will inform long-term ACE and DCMS investment policy, with funders transitioning from emergency response to long-term strategy (Covid-19 recovery is expected to play a role in funding decisions for the next two to five years).

We would share findings with sector peers and the public through networks such as ACE National Portfolio Organisations and Outdoor Art UK, the national membership and strategic organisation, which aims to bring together the many diverse parts of the outdoor arts sector.

The project would benefit audiences and communities by communicating the benefits of participation in mass cultural gatherings and ensuring that the lived experience of audiences is represented in decision-making.

What are you looking for in an academic research partner?

Artichoke is looking for an academic research partner to develop a research framework and methodology to investigate the value and capture the effects of mass cultural gatherings. We are seeking a partner with knowledge of public art and a willingness to take risks. Experience delivering practice-led research projects or working with industry partners would be useful.

We envisage that the academic partner would take the lead on identifying the specific research question, developing the research instruments, collecting and interpreting data, and overseeing analysis, with support from Artichoke. The academic partner would provide research infrastructure and data protection/management plans.

Artichoke would provide access to resources and archival material, such as meeting minutes, evaluations, correspondence, press clippings, photography/footage, participant feedback, grant applications and business plans, following a data-sharing agreement. In line with data protection regulations, we would give the academic partner access to staff and relevant networks (for example, audiences and participants, artists, stakeholders) for focus groups/interviews.

Artichoke would promote findings and support public interaction with the research (for example, through online questionnaires) using our online channels (over 30k newsletter subscribers and 10k Instagram, 15k Facebook, 12k Twitter followers). We would also invite our peers in the outdoor art industry to contribute their own audience data and/or participate in the project.

CENTRE FOR **CULTURAL VALUE**

We hope that an academic partner would approach the project as a collaboration and see working with us as an opportunity to develop research outputs that will support their own research practice.

Please note, the above is based on our limited experience working with academic researchers. We acknowledge that we are not experts in research projects and we are open to following the guidance and expertise of our partner as to the best way to structure the project, and the partner qualities that would be useful in developing a project of this kind.