Collaborate project proposals

Cinema Nation http://www.cinemanation.co.uk/

What do you want to explore and why?

We want to explore how cultural organisations function, paying attention to their structure, and how internal cultures might relate to external cultural value and impact. We would like to research organisations that embrace collectivity and DIY culture, especially those who have holistic approaches and see themselves and the communities they serve as interconnected eco-systems.

We are centring our research on four areas:

1. Environment

Do organisations with limited resources have an increased awareness of their environmental impact and does this have an effect on audiences?

2. Wellbeing and care

How has Covid affected internal and external welfare systems?

3. Collaborative culture

How do their audiences become participants in culture creation? (e.g. Culture 3.0)

4. Inclusion/accessibility

 Do collective organisations model best practice in creating safe spaces?

We will focus this new research on community cinemas across the UK and the value they might create at local and national levels, working with academics to develop a simple, innovative framework/model that is informed by our ongoing practices. We feel this topic doesn't get enough attention as these areas are often contradictory to the dominant culture in arts funding that prioritises outputs rather than culture change or institutional practices that often leave limited time to reflect on how they themselves function.

We believe this research would investigate how taking a holistic approach within organisations could create added value for both cultural workers and audiences. From our experiences as queer people working in Toxteth, Liverpool, we feel speaking out (or communicating non-verbally) involves being listened to. Therefore our project will look at organisations run by and/or involving marginalised groups and compare with those that admit that they have a lack of diversity in their staff. By working with our academic partners, we will commit to embedding marginalised voices at every stage of our research.

This topic is very important to us, both personally and professionally. As an organisation, we first met at Liverpool Small Cinema, a volunteer-led community cinema that offered an open space for local programmers to participate. But it lacked a holistic structure and inclusive

strategy that led to internal disagreement, exclusive practices and burnout. Since this experience, we have spent six years working on film screenings and cultural activities that focus on the wellbeing of the workers and audiences.

We believe that we need a new method and framework for our practice, one that balances the different organisational aspects and re-values culture's role in the midst of multiple crises (Covid-19, environmental, mental health, economic, social isolation and trauma). We want to research how thinking of culture as a holistic eco-system can lead to a more equitable and balanced arts sector, and help audiences and organisations to create collective plans of action to overcome adversities. We view cinema as a tool for personal, social and planetary healing. Our personal and ancestral experiences of being queer have shaped our own practices, including viewing audiences as active participants in culture creation and partnering with cinemas of all sizes, regionally and nationally.

With the pandemic highlighting both cinema's and the environment's vulnerability, as well as historic and ongoing cases of abuse and exclusion within the sector, we feel cultural organisations would benefit from new collective methods of working in order to tackle these problems and imagine, create and show alternative ways of living. We want to use this new research so that we and other arts organisations have tools to map our activities, revalue all roles necessary in our practices, identify imbalances and make plans of action that can connect easily with other organisations, based on proven evidence of their impact on society.

What are you looking for in an academic research partner?

We are looking for an academic research partner with a sense of adventure and with strong ethical values. Awareness of the historical context of organisational structures, especially collectives, is preferable and/or up-to-date knowledge of research in our key areas.

We need partners to help us create academic rigour to evidence gathering, develop methodologies of research and work with us to test principles and proposals raised from our findings. We prize the objectivity they will bring and benefit from a university's resources, namely staff time, recording equipment and access to academic libraries and journals. We also expect that partners will suggest ways to distribute our findings through conferences and articles.

As a partnership, we value the diverse ways of thinking that academic rigour brings, outside the groupthink of the arts sector and cultural practitioners, and different methods of communicating. We envisage their role to be an equal partner, one who is up for working in a slow and reflective way, with a focus on respect and trust between parties.

They would need to have time to spend building a relationship with us and together agree on shared ways of working, establishing several periods of reflection during the duration of the project. We will all set boundaries and expectations and create a safe space to talk about what pressures we might all be facing, both personally and professionally. We will focus on how we

communicate and identify language differences and sector-specific vocabulary.

Lastly, we will extend our wellbeing ethos across all partners, bringing together our own strategies for care to avoid stress or burnout. Working with partners will really help us develop our practice and we always end our collaborations with a celebration in order to socialise, share findings, evaluate processes, solve any issues and generate ideas for future activity.