

# Cultural Value

## The Story of Lidice and Stoke-on-Trent: Towards Deeper Understandings of the Role of Arts and Culture

Jackie Reynolds, Janet Hetherington,  
Ann O'Sullivan, Kelvin Clayton and John Holmes



# **The Story of Lidice and Stoke-on-Trent: Towards Deeper Understandings of the Role of Arts and Culture Summary Report<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

This report provides a summary of the research activities, findings and outputs from our six month Research Development Award exploring the value of arts and culture in relation to empathy, compassion and understanding. The project was carried out between February and July 2014. Our research focused on storytelling approaches in the context of exhibitions and community and participatory arts projects. We use as a case study the relationship between Stoke-on-Trent and the village of Lidice in the Czech Republic. Following the destruction of Lidice by the Nazis in 1942, Stoke-on-Trent Doctor and Councillor Barnett Stross launched the ‘Lidice Shall Live’ campaign, rallying local working people to contribute to a fund that eventually contributed to re-building the village after the war. Many people demonstrated tremendous empathy and compassion by donating up to a week’s wages despite the hardships of the time. In recent years, the links between Stoke-on-Trent and Lidice have been refreshed and are explored, expressed and celebrated almost exclusively through arts and culture. Our main research question is therefore why we would choose the medium of arts and culture to link distant geographical communities in ways that foster empathy, compassion and understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see project blog for full report , project films and other resources:  
<http://blogs.staffs.ac.uk/culturalvalue/>

## **Researchers and Project Partners**

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Co-Investigator: Janet Hetherington

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Dr Kelvin Clayton

Project Partners:

John Holmes: Visiting Research Fellow, Staffordshire University and Strategic Manager: Museums, Culture and Tourism, Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

## **About the Research Team**

This research was undertaken within the Faculty of Arts and Creative Technologies at Staffordshire University.

Dr Jackie Reynolds is a Senior Researcher. She is a Social Gerontologist, specialising in research on arts and ageing.

Janet Hetherington is a Senior Lecturer and Researcher in the Faculty's Creative Communities Unit. In both her teaching and her research, she specialises in Community and Participatory Arts.

Dr Ann O'Sullivan is a Sociology Lecturer, specialising in research with young adults, family conflict and mediation, and post-structural therapies.

Dr Kelvin Clayton is a Postdoctoral Researcher. His main research area is social philosophy. His work is highly inter-disciplinary and is influenced by complexity theory and evolutionary biology.

## **Key words**

Cultural value, empathy, compassion, understanding, creativity, global citizenship

## Background

As an AHRC Cultural Value project, our research first and foremost aims to contribute to the overall endeavour of capturing the value of arts and culture to individuals and to society. Part of the key rationale for doing so lies in the tendency towards a narrow instrumental rhetoric around the value of the arts, that focuses on measurable socioeconomic impact. By contrast, Cultural Value projects take a broader view of the notion of value, including the aesthetic and cognitive aspects of arts and cultural experiences. They seek to find new ways of articulating and demonstrating that value.

The focus of our project is on cultural value in relation to empathy, compassion and understanding. Whilst a focus on such concepts is often something of a taken-for-granted aspect of many arts projects, it tends to be implicit, rather than explicit, and therefore not directly addressed in the design and implementation of projects. Moreover, typical tools for evaluating arts and cultural interventions are limited in their potential to address the more complex aspects of ways in which people may have reflected on their experiences and potentially reached deeper understandings of themselves and others. We focus specifically on storytelling approaches in the context of community and participatory arts and exhibitions, and we therefore examine what is meant by narratives and why we feel that they are of central importance in understanding empathy, compassion and understanding in the context of arts and culture.

Our review of the literature found that to date there has been little written about the value of art and culture in relation to empathy, compassion and understanding. There are an increasing number of studies that examine more generally the positive impact of taking part in arts and culture, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing, including social capital, but those that focus explicitly on empathy tend to be limited to young people in education. The relationship with 'compassion' and 'understanding' is largely unexplored. Moreover, there is currently an evidence gap more widely about the personal and emotional impact that arts and culture can have on people (particularly in relation to health) and it has been suggested that more in-depth qualitative methods may be most appropriate for addressing this gap in our knowledge<sup>2</sup>. The overall aim of our research is thus to improve our understanding of the potential of arts and culture to develop reflection and empathy across geographical divides. This aim is underpinned by two questions:

- 1) Why would we choose the medium of arts and culture to link distant geographical communities in ways that foster empathy, compassion and understanding?
- 2) How can we design and evaluate arts and cultural activities in ways that better recognise and demonstrate their value in terms of empathy, compassion and understanding?

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<sup>2</sup> Arts Council England (2014) *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society: An Evidence Review*. Manchester, Arts Council England. Available from: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk> [Accessed 4 August 2014]

## Methodology

We adopted a qualitative research design (including creative methods) and a highly inter-disciplinary and participatory approach to our research project. In designing our research, we were aware that issues of empathy, compassion and understanding are relevant across a range of academic disciplines, and so we wanted to draw on some of this expertise. We felt that it would be valuable to explore how people engage with these issues in their own subject areas, as researchers, lecturers, and – in many cases – also as practitioners. Thus, not only was our research team inter-disciplinary, but we also drew on a much wider range of disciplines through our participant recruitment strategy.

We also invited artists and creative practitioners to take part in the research, as we felt that they would be able to contribute significantly to the research questions. We knew that issues of empathy, compassion and understanding were of central importance in the practices of artists who work with people in particular, but that the focus was an implicit one rather than explicit. We therefore hoped that by providing an opportunity for artists to get together to reflect on their practice in relation to the key research issues, then we would gain valuable insights into our research questions.

Our research methods included:

- 3 Focus groups and 28 individual and group interviews (some of which were filmed) in and around Stoke-on-Trent, involving a total of 40 participants from academic and arts backgrounds.
- Commissioning of film makers Junction 15 to produce a series of films about the research.
- A 'working group' of academics and creative practitioners that met to cross-check findings, refine research questions, and develop new resources for the design and evaluation of arts activities.
- A case study approach based on the relationship between Stoke-on-Trent and Lidice. This included a visit by some members of the working group to Prague and Lidice. The visit was filmed, and included three further interviews with participants in the Czech Republic.



(L-R: Filmed interview with The Cultural Sisters; Ann O'Sullivan interviews public artists Nicola Winstanley and Sarah Nadin)

## Focus Groups and Interviews

Academic participants included Lecturers in journalism, photojournalism, history, English and Cartoon and Comic Arts. There was also a Health Researcher, a Professor of Physical Geography, a Lecturer and Research lead in Holocaust Archaeology, a Lecturer in Community and Participatory Arts, and a Research Psychologist. We aimed to include as wide a range of subject areas as possible, and in particular to involve subject areas in which the topics of empathy, compassion and understanding would be especially relevant (e.g. psychology). The 28 artists and creative practitioners also came from a wide range of backgrounds and roles, including: community and participatory artists; public artists; theatre professionals; writers; visual artists; photographers; museum curators, assistants and managers; a Local Authority Culture and Events Manager; filmmakers; an artistic director and a local historian. We felt that the level of interest in and commitment to the project confirmed the extent to which artists and creative practitioners place significant importance on issues relating to empathy, compassion and understanding.

All of the interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, using a topic list as a guide. The questions focused on people's understanding of empathy and compassion and how their understanding was applied in the context of their work, their arts and cultural participation, and in their everyday lives. To address the research question, there was a particular focus on empathy and compassion across geographical divides, and also on how best to design and evaluate arts activities in ways that better demonstrates their value in terms of empathy, compassion and understanding. We structured such questions around a 'plan, do and review'; project cycle, which was also a useful way of structuring some of the resources that were created by the project.

The focus group discussions were enthusiastic, in-depth and insightful. Several people contacted the research team afterwards to express how valuable they had found the discussions. Many participants were also keen to be involved in the working group meetings, which enabled the discussions to be further explored and developed.



(L-R Filmed interview with the team at B Arts; Research team talking to artists and creative practitioners over lunch at the Mitchell Arts Centre)

## Working Group

Following on from the discussions in the focus groups, a working group of academics and creative practitioners met together in April and May 2014 to talk about the emerging findings from the research and to work out new strategies for the design and evaluation of arts activities in order to better capture their value in relation to those key issues. The working group met on three occasions and a total of 12 participants worked alongside the research team. A range of presentations, discussions and activities took place at the working group meetings. These were all designed to actively involve the group in addressing the research objectives. Activities included:

- Presentations on emerging findings.
- Discussions about emerging findings, focusing on exploring the key themes in greater depth.
- Review of existing resources and practice for the design and evaluation of participatory arts activities and discussions of what 'works'.
- Discussion of individual case studies.
- Developing new resources for the design and evaluation of participatory arts projects, based around the 'plan, do and review' project cycle.

Again, participants brought a wide range of experiences and backgrounds to the group, which prompted lively debate. The meetings were very helpful in terms of challenging some of the research team's assumptions, and offering alternative interpretations of the emerging findings. It also enabled a strong focus on understanding the types of resources that would actually be *useful* to people in their practice. This had a direct impact on the results of the project.



(The Working Group discussing emerging findings at the Mitchell Arts Centre in May 2014)

## Filming

In commissioning our film makers (Suzanne James and Darren Teale of Junction 15), we wanted to do more than simply document the project. As artists themselves, the film makers wished to be actively involved as part of the research team, thereby contributing to addressing the research questions. The filming therefore became a vital part of our methodology. Filming was used to record interviews, working group sessions, and the entire visit to the Czech Republic. As the research continued, we recognised the value of the many hours of film that had been accumulated and that rather than producing one short film to disseminate the project, we could actually edit a series of eleven films that could be used as resources for creative practitioners. These can all be found on the project blog.



(Filming in Prague and Lidice)

## Photography

Another creative research method that we used was that of photography. Our entire project was documented through photographs. The visual content of photographs, especially during the trip to Lidice, provided information that could not be captured through discussions and observation. The photographs have resulted in the development of an exhibition and a photographic book of the project, which supports the development of our own narrative of the research project. Along with the films, this enables us to extend our research to reach a wider audience.

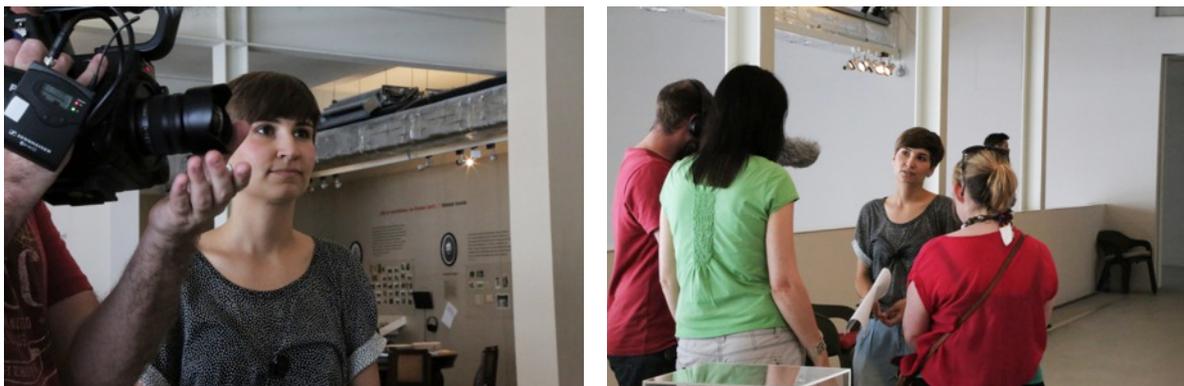
## Research Visit

An important part of the design of our project was a research visit to Lidice to attend the annual commemoration of the Tragedy, and to take part in the arts and cultural events that take place at this time. The approach also recognises that the challenges faced in terms of understanding and demonstrating cultural value are challenges that are faced by international partners rather than in the UK alone. The research visit was thus an opportunity for our group to consider the emerging findings from the research in relation to our case study, to exchange ideas with creative practitioners in Prague and Lidice, and to begin to formulate ideas for a new project to be informed by the outcomes of this research project.

The visit took place 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> June 2014. The team who travelled out to the Czech Republic included Jackie Reynolds, Janet Hetherington, Kimberley Watson, Cathie Powell-Davies (visual artist working with communities), Suzanne James and Darren Teale (film makers).

### A Visit to the Dox Centre for Contemporary Art

A new exhibition called 'Frontline' had just opened at the Dox, commemorating the 100 years anniversary of the beginning of World War 1. A large part of the exhibition was centred around people's personal stories, which was perfectly in keeping with the focus of our research. Not only were we given permission to film in the gallery, but Zuzana Masna, PR and Development Assistant at Dox, agreed to be interviewed on film, about the exhibition. This was an excellent opportunity to include in the research the perspectives of a creative practitioner in the Czech Republic.



(Filmed interview with Zuzana Masna)

The main exhibition space contained an impressive site-specific installation by Slovak artists Bohuš and Monika Kubinský, in which two battle lines confronted each other. The first was a trench wall, evoking those of World War I conflicts, and the second was a line composed of fragments from authentic anti-aircraft bunkers from World War II. The anti-aircraft bunkers contained miniature musical boxes, with tiny handles for visitors to turn.

As we looked around the exhibition, our responses to what we were seeing were filmed, which resulted in some interesting group reflections being captured as part of our research data.



(Images from the Frontline exhibition at the Dox Centre for Contemporary Art)

The second part of the exhibition, in the upstairs gallery, included diaries, drawings, photographs and other items from those who were involved in World War I. These artefacts had been donated after an open call on Czech Television as part of the making of a documentary series entitled 'Report on the Great War'. There were also short films of family members of those involved being interviewed about the involvement of their ancestors.

## Visit to Lidice

We were able to take part in the full programme of commemorative events that took place to mark the anniversary of the Tragedy. We met Luba Hedlova, Curator of the Art Gallery in Lidice, and Ivona Kasalicka, Manager of the Lidice Memorial Museum, and attended a reception event hosted by the Mayor Of Lidice, Veronika Kellerova.

The programme included an outdoor classical concert to honour the victims, survivors, and those bereaved by the tragedy in Lidice.



(The audience gathers for the commemorative concert at the Lidice Memorial)

After the concert the audience moved to stand in silence, looking out over the site of the original village. A candle had been lit at the site of each building in the village, and then the names of the 88 children who were deported from Lidice to concentration camps were read out over the speakers. This was an immensely poignant and moving part of the commemorative events.



(Cathie Powell-Davies at the Lidice Memorial in June 2014)

We also attended the Commemoration Act, which is the formal ceremony with military presence and visiting representatives from countries around the world. This was a time of quiet reflection for our group.

Later, we were shown around the Lidice Art Gallery by Luba Hedlova, who kindly agreed to be filmed. Conversations were focused on the 'stories' and meanings that were linked to the art works, and also about the way in which the gallery runs; people's participation, and about future ideas for projects that we could work on collaboratively. We were also honoured to film an interview with Sylvia Klanova, whose mother had designed the remarkable statue of the Children of Lidice. The interview focused on the telling of her Mother's story, and on the ways in which the statue of the Children of Lidice had been seen to generate empathy and compassion across geographical divides.



(Clockwise from top left: Statue of the Children of Lidice; Interviewing Sylvia Klanova; The Lidice Gallery; Interviewing Luba Hedlova)

## Findings

Our findings were informed by the interviews, focus groups and working group meetings, and also by our reflections upon our research visit to Prague and Lidice. They are focused on our key research questions (see p.4). We explored our research questions in relation to storytelling approaches in exhibitions and in community and participatory arts projects. This focus is rooted in our case study: the Story of Stoke-on-Trent and Lidice. We begin by examining people's interpretations of empathy, compassion and understanding and how they related these to arts and culture. We then focus on the first research question of why we would choose the medium of arts and culture to link distant geographical communities in ways that foster empathy, compassion and understanding. We consider the way in which stories function in the context of arts and culture, and other issues such as the idea of a 'universal language'. Finally, we address our second research question, considering our findings in relation to how we can design and evaluate arts and cultural activities in ways that better demonstrate their value in terms of empathy, compassion and understanding.

### Understandings of Empathy, Compassion and Understanding

It was essential to attempt to 'operationalise' these concepts in order to be able to develop resources for the design and evaluation of arts activities in ways that better demonstrate their value in this regard. We found that whilst there was close to unanimous agreement as to the significance of empathy and compassion within the arts, there was little agreement as to the meaning of these terms. Moreover, people struggled to articulate the deeper understandings and meanings that they attached to them.

Our findings suggested that the most common view of empathy is an emotional resonance or a perspective taking phenomena or a combination of the two. Perhaps in response to the complexity of the topic, participants tended to use two dominant metaphors that were coded visual or spatial, such as 'seeing through another person's eyes' or 'standing in another person's shoes'. As this was discussed in more detail, a rather more dynamic process of crossing, connecting or bridging was identified:

#### **Crossing**

...in a sense and empathy is kind of like crossing over from one area to another one... (Senior Lecturer: English)

#### **Bridging**

As I said earlier I am a midwife and the reason I was so interested in this project was, I think when I first saw those words, love, compassion, empathy and art there was this wonderful bridge ...(Multimedia artist)

#### **Connecting**

We do work with people who do horrible things to other people and something from working with people who do horrible things is that they

seem to be withdrawn emotionally and to be cold and to have turned something off and we often talk about finding some spark in someone who is beginning to turn those things back on in which case, empathy is an ability to connect somehow or somewhere. (Director, New Vic Borderlines)

The above quotes suggest that empathy is in essence a connection or a bridging of space between people. One of our key findings in terms of cultural value is the potential of arts and culture to be a catalyst for making those connections:

...people can stand in a queue for the bank, people can sit on the bus together, people can go to college together but they don't have that reason to connect. What is the thing that is allowing those people to connect one with the other unless it is a shared artistic experience or a cultural experience...unless there is something to get that conversation going?... (Artistic director)

The notion of arts as a catalyst is a crucial one in our research. It begins to address our first research question, of why we would choose the medium of arts and culture to link distant geographical communities in ways that foster empathy, compassion and understanding. Stories and storytelling play an important role in providing an artistic catalyst.

### **Arts as a Catalyst: The Role of Stories**

How does a particular art object or art/cultural event act as a catalyst to connect people and hence bring about some kind of understanding empathy or compassionate response? A strong theme that has emerged within our analysis is the idea of the 'story'. Participants often talked about particular physical objects (in museums for example), as being a means of creating that connection, which is then operationalised through the notion of voice or story.

...the reason why we display things is that there's a story behind it....it's the story that people actually relate to rather than the object itself...it's hard to bring little pieces of metal to life in a meaningful way (Staffordshire Hoard)...people empathise with the human side of it... (Museum Interpretation Officer)

The idea of stories as helping people to empathise with each other across and throughout time is also reiterated by another participant:

...so I do think if you can tell a story honestly and compassionately people find that quite difficult to resist, just a simple story is probably the oldest and easiest way of helping person A to understand person B a little better... (Freelance writer, actor and teacher)

Our findings support the widely held recognition that storytelling is universal: it is something that all cultures engage in, and indeed the very self is a narrative

construct. In our focus groups and interviews, we tended to ask participants about whether arts and culture have a 'super power' to develop empathy, compassion and understanding across geographical divides. Given our focus on storytelling, the themes that were identified were very much about the power of storytelling within the context of exhibitions and community and participatory arts projects.

- **Striking a chord....**

The first theme to arise from the data is that stories allow us to connect empathically with other people because it allows us to realise our **commonalities**. This is key to a process such as empathy where we are asked to stand in someone else shoes or to view the world from their perspectives. Some people spoke of this in terms of stories 'striking a chord', and thereby 'unlocking' a person's empathy.

- **Empathies of Scale**

Another aspect of cultural value that was discussed was the way in which stories enable us to know the other person as an individual. That is, stories can individualise and this in a sense allows us to empathise in a way that would be virtually impossible with a large number of people. The following quote was part of a focus group conversation about museum exhibitions that participants had found powerful and moving:

...when you go in there, there are twelve artefacts in glass cabinets and its not your traditional storytelling museum. It just said the person's name, their age and the fact that they were married or whether they had children and then it told an about their last days. So the one that absolutely got me was this guy was talking to his son and he just wanted to war to be over so he could go home and have chicken and chips for his tea. And that kind of just kicks you in the chest and I think that for me is the most powerful museum exhibition I have ever seen. It doesn't force you to have those stereotypes it actually made you realise that it was just a normal person... (Lecturer Photojournalism/History)

Perhaps some of the most powerful examples of arts and culture generating empathy, compassion and understanding across geographical divides are those that present people's individual stories in a way that challenges stereotypical, negative constructs of particular groups as 'the other' within society. This can occur when the power of storytelling has been used in a less than compassionate way that encourages the drawing of boundaries between 'us and them'. It can easily be seen within political rhetoric, as a powerful scare tactic that is used to divide and pacify:

... Societies are compassionate up to their boundaries so who you put in your in and out group really determines where compassion ends. And politicians can manipulate where that boundary is quite easily which has been shown repeatedly in history ...(Health Researcher)

For political reasons, those constructed rhetorical boundaries may coincide with geographical boundaries, and community and participatory arts projects have been developed specifically to address this issue, by challenging the view of the stereotypical 'other' and encouraging people to understand and empathise with the individual. A number of examples of such projects are included in the 'case studies' section of the project blog.

- **Crossing Geographical Distances**

As well as the value of arts and culture in individualising experiences, and challenging stereotypical perceptions of the 'other' our findings also suggest a number of other important aspects of cultural value in terms of bridging geographical divides. One of these is the important issue of language. Whereas to some degree, the interconnected nature of our digital world means that geographical distance does not have to be the barrier that it once was, it could well be argued that the lack of a common language can be the most significant barrier to empathic engagement. In this context, a number of participants referred to the value of the arts as a kind of 'universal' language:

I think if you are talking about crossing continents and people coming from all sorts of places to do art...[ ] I've found when I have worked with people who don't speak English as a first language it has a language of it's own. (Participatory artist)

The notion of arts as a universal language was explained with reference to emotional connections:

...it's why we are able to appreciate art that's made in other cultures and other parts of world. It's something that transcends boundaries and it's the reason why human beings are able to communicate because we share certain feelings and emotions and I think art really at its centre is about communicating those feelings so when you see something and you experience a piece of visual art...you are keying into something that is very human...(Theatre education practitioner)

To conclude, our first research question asked why we would choose the medium of arts and culture to link distant geographical communities in ways that foster empathy, compassion and understanding. Our findings suggest that arts and culture can act as a catalyst; they have the power to connect people in a number of ways. Storytelling approaches in particular can 'strike a chord' with people, enabling them to find their commonalities. Stories can also help us to relate to people as individuals, challenging stereotypical ideas of the 'other', and offering a common language. We will now turn our attention to our second research question, and what we have learned about how to design and evaluate arts and cultural activities in ways that better recognise and demonstrate their value in terms of empathy, compassion and understanding.

## Creating the Conditions for Empathy

In our discussions with creative practitioners, we explored the ways in which they address (implicitly or explicitly) issues of empathy, compassion and understanding in their work. We discussed whether you can actually plan for an empathic response: It was generally felt that artists could not 'plan' for an empathic response, but that if they undertook their work with care and empathy, then it would happen naturally:

...we feel it will bond people or build empathy or bring people together and I think you don't have to work very hard at that because it does happen quite naturally...[ ] and good stories will do that because they will have things that strike at the heart of people's feelings (Theatre education practitioner)

It is also important to note that to some extent at least, the idea of planning an empathic response was one that was perceived as having the potential to be unethical. In one of the focus groups involving creative practitioners, there was a lot of agreement when a theatre director suggested that artists have to 'park their own missions', and that the idea of manipulating audience responses was a dishonest one. A public artist agreed with this, reflecting on a project that she had undertaken related to the story of Stoke-on-Trent and Lidice, and commenting that: "We expected empathy, we trusted that empathy would happen and it did, but we didn't plan for it." Interestingly, several people agreed that the more important thing to plan for was actually *understanding* as opposed to empathy. It was suggested that since most people have the capacity for empathy, then if artists did their job well and conveyed a message clearly, then empathy would result.

Having identified the significance of 'understanding' as opposed to 'empathy' in relation to the planning of projects, we were able to identify numerous ways in which the ways in which creative practitioners' work encourages greater levels of understanding, which then results in empathy and compassion. Several participants talked about the context of their work, and the need to be inclusive and to understand people's lives:

We have to understand our lives, we have to think about and understand the lives of the people we come into contact with. I think as artists we're good at observing and that observation in a way is nothing without a compassion or degree of empathy that would allow you to imagine what it might be like to experience what you might be observing. So I think that that means that all of that information helps us to develop work that fits the context that you're working in, to fit where you are. (Artistic Director)

This quote points clearly to the importance of the creative practitioner's *own* empathy and understanding in being able to create the conditions for empathy in the work that they do. One example of this was the way that creative practitioners

reflected on the ways in which they created warm and welcoming environments for participants and about the ways that they sought to bring people together and to create spaces for conversations and the sharing of stories. These findings can also be found in the resources for practitioners that have been created as part of this project. They are significant because they all point to the idea that creative practitioners can create the conditions for empathy, compassion and understanding to develop through the ways in which they plan and deliver their work. We also explored the idea of what creative practitioners hoped to achieve through doing so, which led to discussions of change and social action.

## **Social Action**

A number of creative practitioners referred to the work that they do with marginalised people in communities. In doing so, they apply their own empathy and compassion to understand the lives of the people that they work with. They also aim to provide opportunities for people whose voices are often not heard to share their stories, to develop understanding of people's individual experiences, often with the aim of contributing to some kind of social change:

...So the works focus is on people who are pushed to the edges for whatever reason and our ambition really is the idea of creating a community and change so it's not just about participating in arts projects because it makes you feel good, and its very important to feel good, it's about being able to identify the changes they would like to see or working with organisations and communities to bring about some positive change. (Director, New Vic Borderlines).

We found that creative practitioners invested a lot of time and thought into understanding the questions that needed to be addressed in the planning of their work:

We do spend a lot of time discussing what are the questions, so we might spend as long as an academic talking about 'so what are the questions here? What are really the questions that are going to get us to the right place, that are going to set the framework for the conversations?' and we do really pick at that quite severely. (Artistic Director)

These discussions also bring us back once more to the value of art as a 'catalyst' for change, and the ways in which the sharing of stories contributes to that change. The importance of an arts event creating a 'legacy' was also discussed, based on recognition that change might happen in the longer term, not just during the lifespan of a project.

Many of the definitions of an empathic response emphasise the importance of it leading to action rather than a passive reaction that leads to momentary recognition but no real social transformation. These findings are therefore crucial in illuminating the ways in which creative practitioners may create the

conditions in which empathy and social action will result from increased understanding of people's stories.

## **Evaluating Outcomes**

In asking people about how to best evaluate arts and cultural activities in relation to empathy, compassion and understanding, we encountered a broad range of perspectives. These were some of the key findings:

- There was on the whole an antipathy towards quantitative measurements and a leaning towards more qualitative methodologies.
- Qualitative methods were felt to be more inclusive approach, helping to overcome barriers to participation and encourage more imaginative and metaphorical responses.
- Again, 'stories' were seen as a vital part of evaluation. For example, museum staff discussed various ways in which people could contribute their stories to include them as part of an existing exhibition.
- Story-based evaluation can therefore become an integral part of the project design, and a range of creative approaches to this were discussed.
- Arts-based evaluation responses (e.g. writing poetry in response to an arts experience), were felt to be exceptionally meaningful demonstrations of the value of a project.

In conclusion, we found that 'understanding' was a particularly significant concept in relation to designing arts and cultural activities in ways that better demonstrated their value in terms of empathy and compassion. This included understanding the contexts that people are working in and the lives of the people that they work with. The values of the creative practitioner themselves are central to this; they use their own empathy and compassion to effectively create the conditions in which further empathy can flourish. They tend to be motivated by creating some kind of social change, and the idea of arts as a catalyst and again the power of stories, are important in this respect. In terms of evaluating the outcomes of their work, participants felt that qualitative approaches were the most effective way of capturing the difference that the work had made, as it allowed for imaginative and metaphorical responses. Stories and creative responses could be used effectively as an integral part of the project activities, and the importance of inclusivity was emphasised.

## Discussion

Our discussion specifically links our findings to the concept of 'cultural value', with reference to literature and theory. An in-depth discussion can be found in the full report. For the purposes of this summary report, we will simply outline some of the key issues that were highlighted, beginning with issues relating to the role of the artist and the boundaries of the creative process. These included:

- The importance of creating time and space for artists and creative practitioners to reflect together on the value of their work in order to better understand and articulate such value.
- It is also important in considering cultural value to recognise the boundaries of the creative process. For example, it was clear that many artists and creative practitioners adopting storytelling approaches were undertaking a rigorous research process when developing their work, akin to that used by academics. We suggest that this process of research is an important component of cultural value.
- Considering the entire creative process also means considering everyone involved in the creative process. For example, commissioners also have an important role to play in shaping perceptions of cultural value.
- Another dimension of storytelling approaches was the political significance of the way that stories are told, and the ways in which this affected artists involved in sharing the stories. This highlighted some of the external influences upon artists and creative practitioners when independently demonstrating cultural value, especially in relation to the sensitive nature of the research themes and across both geographical and cultural divides.
- The arts are often used to tell stories focusing upon hardship, struggle and inequalities. It was noted that since empathy is about connecting people, we might also consider the ways in which it can be developed in joyful, celebratory contexts.

Overall, we argued that artists and creative practitioners have an important role to play in the on-going work to understand and demonstrate cultural value, and that their perspectives and priorities should be incorporated into future research into cultural value. The resources that we have developed from this project have thus been designed to include artists and creative practitioners in the debate and may be used as the basis for future research.

In analysing our findings, we also identified a narrative that demonstrates the potential cultural value of a project: the narrative is that **the art is a catalyst, that enables the telling of a story, that connects people in the immediate area and across the world**. The themes of art as a catalyst; connecting people; sharing stories and crossing geographical divides are inter-connecting rather than linear, but we feel that these four themes are highly significant in terms of cultural value, and that they run strongly

through our research. They are explored in greater depth in the full report, and will be further explored in our forthcoming publications

## **Art as a Catalyst**

We found that the potential of the arts to act as a catalyst to individual and collective action is an important dimension of cultural value. However, this requires evidence and critical understandings of the nature of the empathic response. This finding has helped to inform our evaluation resources, and we believe that on-going research is needed to provide evidence of the nature of the actions and changes that are prompted by the arts participation, including longer-term changes.

## **Connecting people**

Our research findings support the importance of social capital as a dimension of cultural value. They offer some new insights into the deeper emotional aspects of the connections between people, and of the role of storytelling, thus adding to our understanding of the nature of arts-generated social capital.

## **Sharing stories**

We included storytelling approaches as part of our research methodology, and our findings also suggest their value in relation to evaluating arts and cultural activities. We thus feel that stories and storytelling are crucial dimensions of cultural value. Moreover, our findings have suggested that in assessing cultural value, we need to ensure that the stories of artists and creative practitioners are included, as their experiences can reveal much about cultural value. The resources that we have produced have been shaped by the recognition of the value of storytelling, and we anticipate that they will support on-going research into cultural value.

## **Crossing geographical divides**

Our findings suggest that the idea of the arts as a universal language is a significant one in terms of cultural value. It can be related to psychological concepts and neuro-scientific research. The idea of emotional connections is a crucial one, whereby people experience interactions that transcend verbal communication. We suggest that such interactions have a particular value that warrants greater recognition, and that perhaps greater confidence is needed on the part of those working in the creative sectors, to highlight such seemingly unremarkable connections as a key part of the value of their work. The resources that we have created as an outcome of this project could be used to explore such connections. We suggest that exploring the value of art as a 'universal language' presents collaborative research opportunities between arts and science researchers.

## Resources

We have created a number of resources from this project that are designed to support the design and evaluation of participatory arts activities in ways that better demonstrates their value in relation to empathy, compassion and understanding. There were a number of ways in which the research findings influenced the development of the resources. Given the emphasis that artists placed on the need to understand cultural value at every stage of the creative process, we wanted the resources to focus strongly on a 'plan', 'do' and 'review' project cycle. We have incorporated much of our qualitative data into the resources and we have used our theoretical and thematic analyses to structure and present the findings in ways which meet the needs of the different audiences who have an interest in cultural value in terms of empathy, compassion and understanding. All of the resources included here are available now on the project blog.

## Films

The project resulted in a series of eleven short films:

- 1) The project film: the background to the research and discussions focusing on the key research questions and findings.
- 2) A short film telling the story of Stoke-on-Trent and Lidice.
- 3) The Czech Republic visit film: sharing the story of the research visit to Prague and Lidice, and some of the key activities and conversations.
- 4) 'Plan', 'Do' and 'Review'. Three short films that include interviews with creative practitioners about how they address issues of empathy, compassion and understanding at each stage of the project cycle.
- 5) Series of four case study films: highlighting projects that have connected people across geographical divides.
- 6) Short film about the impact of our research project on the people who have taken part, and on the next steps for the research team.

We hope that the films will contribute to developing a language for how we talk about the value of arts and culture in terms of empathy, compassion and understanding. We also anticipate that they will communicate the findings of the research in an accessible and far-reaching way, thus contributing to on-going reflection and discussion of cultural value.

## Caring Cards

We drew upon our research findings to develop a set of cards to support the design and evaluation of participatory arts activities. We commissioned artist Nicola Winstanley to design the cards, including original illustrations. The content of the cards is structured around the plan, do, review cycle, however the card format takes into consideration that creative processes are often non linear, and likewise, creative practitioners may only feel it is relevant to chose an individual card to focus on a specific aspect of their work. The cards consider the issues of cultural value and empathy, compassion and understanding

from a range of perspectives, all informed by the research, and including the challenges and barriers that were identified by participants. We feel that the cards have a number of important strengths as a resource for practitioners:

- The Caring Cards are an entirely original resource that has been directly informed by the research evidence.
- They include participant quotes and some key themes, thus they support the dissemination of the research findings.
- They are designed to be used as a tool for project management in community and participatory arts work; they draw out and discuss the implications of the research at every stage of the project cycle.
- Each of the 'plan', 'do' and 'review' cards contains questions for creative practitioners to reflect upon their own work, either individually or as a group.
- They also include 12 cards that can be used in a participatory way with arts project participants as a tool for evaluation. These cards include questions that were informed by the conceptual map, discussed above, and also visual images for people to respond to in creative ways.
- All of the cards include original illustrations that have been developed by an artist in direct response to the themes that have emerged from the research. They are therefore visually interesting in a meaningful and engaging way.
- The images also contribute towards developing a 'visual language' to help explore the themes of empathy, compassion and understanding.

The cards are currently freely available in an online format (on our blog). We plan to pilot them with as broad a range of practitioners as possible. Once we have gained feedback about the cards and responded accordingly, we will seek further funding to develop them into a printed resource, though we anticipate that the online version will continue to help us to reach as wide a range of individuals and organisations as possible, including overseas partners.



(A selection of the Caring Card images created by Nicola Winstanley in response to the research themes)

## **Photographs**

As well as using film and original artwork as part of our research design and dissemination, we also involved a photographer (Scholarship Enterprise and Research Co-ordinator Kimberley Watson), in documenting the entire project. We therefore now have a wealth of visual images relating to the project, which we are sharing widely in a number of ways. They are available in albums on the project Blog. We also created a Photobook that tells the story of the project in an accessible way, and includes some of the most outstanding images from the project. This will be used at conferences, seminars and other dissemination events to share our work. In addition, we have created a number of exhibition panels (using lightweight foam board), featuring photographs from every stage of the research. These will be exhibited at Staffordshire University, and a number of dissemination events are planned.

## **Teaching Resource**

The findings and outputs of this research project have been developed into a teaching session plan focusing on cultural value in relation to empathy, compassion and understanding.

## **What Next?**

Our research has highlighted the value of arts and culture in relation to empathy, compassion and understanding. We have gained new insights into the ways in which stories can make connections across geographical divides, and the resources that we have produced will have a direct impact on future projects. We now turn our attention to the development of a proposal for a new research project with partners in Lidice. The proposal will be informed by the findings of our Cultural Value project. We would like to further build upon the new and existing connections that we have made with academics and creative practitioners, both in Staffordshire and the Czech Republic. Whereas the present research has included a focus on the historical events and relationship between Stoke-on-Trent and Lidice, our aim for any new research project is to be forward looking and to develop new conversations and stories.

We are keen to gain feedback about any ways in which our research and the resources that we have developed, have influenced people's practice. In particular, we wish to pilot the Caring Cards in both countries, and would therefore be very pleased to hear from any individuals or organisations who may be interested in using them. Finally, we will be publishing the findings of our research in a number of academic and practice-focused journals and magazines, and all such articles will also be added to our project blog.

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*“People can stand in a queue together for the bank, people can sit on the bus together, people can go to college together, they don’t have any reason to connect. What is the thing that is allowing those people to connect one with the other unless it is a shared experience of an artistic experience, or a cultural experience - unless there is something there to get that conversation going? We have great faith that people will connect with each other if you give them that opportunity to have that conversation, to find those tiny little moments that are going to reach across continents; but without those - without that cultural context, without that art’s experience, how is that going to happen?”*

**Susan Clarke**  
**Artistic Director, B-Arts**

