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Taking Part Case Study: London Bubble Theatre

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1 About the Research

Taking Part is the ESRC research cluster for developing high quality research and a critical mass around active citizenship and community empowerment with the Third Sector. It is a partnership between researchers from The University of Lincoln, Goldsmiths University of London and Manchester Metropolitan University funded by the Economic & Social Research Centre (ESRC) in partnership with The Office for the Third Sector and the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

The Taking Part research cluster is part of a larger national programme developing Third Sector research. The cluster is one of the national clusters linked with the new National Centre for Third Sector Research. The cluster builds upon the research expertise of the three universities and the track record of the national Take Part Network promoting its approach to bring together local, regional and national third sector organisations and higher education institutions, concerned with strengthening civil society: promoting active citizenship, equalities and community empowerment. The cluster is developing innovative approaches to community engagement and empowerment, issues of central importance to the Third Sector, as well as to the public and private sectors.

Previous research within the partner agencies has focused upon facilitating user and community audit and voice in service planning and service delivery, across statutory, private and Third Sector organisations. The cluster has a particular emphasis upon enabling the voices of the most disadvantaged groups to be heard effectively, as part of wider agendas for social change, social solidarity and social justice.

The Taking Part research cluster underpins a portfolio of research and research-related activities over at least a 5-year period. The cluster supports postgraduate students through their PhD studies; employees Knowledge Transfer Associates and supports staff placements and smaller-scale research activities. It also promotes publication and dissemination of research findings to a variety of audiences.



Tommy Pullen interviews Alfie Wright

1.1 The London Bubble Case Study

The case study takes as its focus London Bubble's the Grandchildren of the Blitz project. This applied theatre project is a clear example of London Bubble's theatre making methodology and their intergenerational practice. This intergenerational research-led participatory project set out to explore the local experience of the Blitz period of the Second World War in Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and Deptford, and to uncover the experiences and stories of those who lived through the Blitz. This research-led process built on interviews conducted by children with elders, who themselves had been children during the Blitz. It investigated local memories of a period when the docklands and the surrounding areas, where London Bubble is based, were a key target for Wartime bombing raids. Many of the houses, buildings and some entire streets were completely destroyed. However, as the area has been developed over the years and subject to regeneration and gentrification more recently damage to the landscape is hidden today. A research and development phase culminated in a play *Blackbirds*, written by Simon Starin, in response to the research and workshop phase of the production. This culminated in a performance of a play entitled *Blackbirds* over 6 nights at Dilston Grove, an arts building within a former Mission Church a on the edge of Southwark Park.

The timeline ran as follows

May-June 2010	Local children recruited and trained as interviewers
June-Nov	Children interview elders, interviews transcribed, website constructed
Sept-Dec	Intergenerational group of 30 explore dramatic potential of material
January 2011	First draft of script read by group and discussed with writer
Dec-March	Make do and Mend sessions attended by elders and other volunteers
Feb-April 2011	Script rehearsed by intergenerational company of 40
May 2011	<i>Blackbirds</i> opens at Dilston Grove Church, Script published.

The project research aims are to

- Provide a subtle and relevant analysis of how active citizenship and community empowerment could be understood in relation to London Bubble Theatre's creative projects. The research focussed on London Bubble's Grandchildren of the Blitz project and the *Blackbirds* theatre production that emerged from the research.
- Assist London Bubble Theatre in developing more robust methodologies for collecting data/evidence in relation to the above
- Provide evidence from case studies of active citizenship and community empowerment
- Improve London Bubble Theatre's performance in relation to promoting active citizenship and community empowerment
- Develop London Bubble Theatre's research capacity.

The research questions focused upon developing appropriate research methods which London Bubble Theatre Company can employ to effectively evaluate the long-term impacts of their work addressing the following questions.

- What is the impact of the process of participating in London Bubble's work? This aspect of the research will examine London Bubble's performances and workshops as space of active citizenship exploring the process of participating as democratic, dialogical, engaging, a space to develop voice, attends to others and is attended to. A place of listening and giving and receiving support, framing this sociological in terms of creativity rather than as individual therapy.
- What is the wider impact of this participation in terms of active citizenship in spaces beyond London Bubble?
- How can London Bubble recognise the practice that engenders these impacts and develop tools that can evidence this?

1.2 Our Research Methodology

In conducting this research we used qualitative research methods. These included

- *A review of London Bubble's current evaluation methods and existing research data.*
- *Literature Review:* The researchers collected together academic literature from books and journals. This information included studies of the evaluation and monitoring of applied theatre practice, young people and public arts practice, human rights, citizenship and arts practice, collective memory and play.
- *Ethnographic participant observation:* The researchers visited the organization and observed the development of the intergenerational research project Grandchildren of the Blitz and the Grandchildren of the Blitz and Blackbirds, the theatre production that emerged from the research. During sessions the researchers participated in the theatrical process and made field notes and sound recordings during and after workshops. (See Appendix 1 for a discussion of this participatory aspect of the research process).
- *Focus Groups:* Three focus groups took place at London Bubble's headquarters. The researchers organized two separate sessions with young people and adults and a third focus group with participants at the end of the Grandchildren of the Blitz applied theatre project. These sessions were recorded and participants were given opportunities to discuss their long- term and short- term engagement in London Bubble's workshops and performances. Mind mapping and visual ethnography complimented interviews and discussion (See Figures 1 and 3).
- *Web research e survey* with survey monkey with audience members, and observation of the Grandchildren of the Blitz website.
- *Participant Case Studies:* Interviews took place over time with 3 participants from the younger, middle and older generations taking part in the Grandchildren of the Blitz applied theatre project.
- *Practitioner Focus Group:* Permanent and freelance staff were invited to reflect on their collective and individual creative practices. The themes of active citizenship and civic participation – the challenge of evidencing the *social or civic impact* of what happens within London Bubble activities and beyond was discussed during the two-hour session.



Figure 1: Mapping workshop

2 Executive Summary

The London Bubble Theatre case study was chosen as it offers an interesting example of an arts organisation which has a long-term engagement with local communities in the area where they are based, and beyond. London Bubble are based in the northern end of the London Borough of Southwark, a borough where urban regeneration along the southern Thames riverfront has attracted property development and created private estates that sit between extensive existing social housing in Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and Deptford. London Bubble delivers work within this social and physical infrastructure. London Bubble undertakes a wide range of Theatre productions and workshops which support these productions and those who participate in them. London Bubble's participative productions and the workshops and processes, which inform them, are interesting to the Take Part research cluster as spaces of active learning for active citizenship. London Bubble is an interesting case study as they attract a great deal of longitudinal participation from a wide range of participants.

Our focus in this case study is not in London Bubble's capacity to create active local citizens by helping them to identify desired local changes (in the spirit of Boal's approach to participatory theatre as a tool of social change) This is not the focus of London Bubble's work. Although London Bubble make participatory theatre, run workshops in schools, and make what can be described as community theatre, their work is not framed by the concept of community development. Therefore our focus is on the experience of participation and the ways that this engenders community participation and the participant's capacity to decide things for themselves.

London Bubble's participatory work is a space of dialogue, sharing, friendship, and action. Active participation in theatre making is central to their work, and in this process people move from being traditional spectators of the theatre experience, watching 'expert' actors, into active theatre makers and actors. As we will demonstrate, London Bubble is a space of active learning for active citizenship. Here participants practice participation, find and share their voices, are listened to, and their capacity for agency is encouraged and respected. Their long-term relationship to London Bubble is testament to the high-trust atmosphere and the welcoming and flexible space that is created.



Grandchildren of the Blitz, exploratory workshop

3 About London Bubble

London Bubble was established in 1972 with a mission to tour “shows” to audiences in outer London. Originally the company used a tent theatre format, then as it evolved it added a community projects team and delivered participatory or “applied” theatre projects within community settings.

Since 1998 the London Bubble Theatre has aimed to ‘[P]rovide the artistic direction, skills, environment and resources to create inspirational, inclusive, involving theatre, which shares stories that animate the spaces of the city and the spirits of its citizens’ (from London Bubble website). Their work is underpinned by the belief ‘that every Londoner should have access to creating, participating in, and enjoying theatre - to communicate, connect and inspire.’ (Taken from London Bubble website).

Their work includes

- *Resident Theatre Groups*: London Bubble run a number of resident youth theatre groups from their base in Rotherhithe open to ages from 6 upwards. These weekly sessions give the opportunity for a wide range of people to make theatre together, assisted by experienced theatre practitioners and other specialists. The groups explore a wide variety of theatre and storytelling techniques, as well as movement, voice work and improvisation.
- *Speech Bubbles* working in partnership with the Southwark Pupil Development Centre initiative delivering a programme of drama interventions that support children in Key Stage 1 to develop their speaking, listening and attention skills. The programme is a response to the increasing concern that as many as 50% of children from socio-economically disadvantaged populations have speech and language skills that are significantly lower than those of other children of the same age.
- *LB+* providing training in theatre making for 16-19 year olds not in employment, education or training
- *Site-specific and promenade theatre* During the summer months London Bubble tour promenade shows to outer London parks, woods and green spaces.

To deliver this work London Bubble work with a wide range of community organizations such as schools, care homes, youth providers and tenants groups.

London Bubble’s participative productions and the workshops and processes, which inform them, are interesting to the Take Part research cluster as spaces of active learning for active citizenship. London Bubble is an interesting case study as they attract a great deal of longitudinal participation from a wide range of participants. Their work they engages Londoners as participants, practitioners and audiences. So, for example, their current activities are inclusive to all age groups and inter-generational interaction plays a key role in the development of their programmes. As a theatre company that has been established since 1972, they attract longitudinal participation on a variety of levels. This research is concerned with the quality of this participation and understanding how it can be understood as a form of active learning for active citizenship.

London Bubble employs five full/part-time staff and a pool of twenty-three freelance facilitators (London Bubble annual report 2009-10). There is also a London Bubble board with fourteen members.

3.1 *The Grandchildren of the Blitz Case Study*

The Grandchildren of the Blitz applied theatre project is a clear example of London Bubble’s theatre making methodology and their intergenerational practice. Planning commenced in 2009, work with participants commenced in May 2010 and is planned to continue to January 2012. This intergenerational research-led participatory project set out to explore the local experience of the Blitz period of the Second World War in Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and Deptford, and to uncover the

experiences and stories of those who lived through the Blitz. The project investigated local memories of a period when the docklands and the surrounding areas, where London Bubble is based, were a key target for wartime bombing raids. Many of the houses, buildings and some entire streets were completely destroyed. However, as the area has been developed over the years and subject to regeneration and gentrification more recently damage to the landscape is hidden today. Local children were trained in oral history interview methods, and then, accompanied by a 'middle generation' interviewed local older people who had lived through the Blitz. This research-led process built on interviews conducted by children with elders, who themselves had been children during the Blitz. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The extensive research and development phase culminated in a play *Blackbirds*, written by Simon Staring, in response to the research and workshop phase of the production. This culminated in a performance of a play entitled *Blackbirds* over six nights at Dilston Grove, an arts building within a former Mission Church a on the edge of Southwark Park. The play tours in autumn 2011. This case study provides an example of the inventive and inclusive methods that go towards creating an applied theatre production. The final performance of *Blackbirds* performance was the result of a process that included participative workshops

- 'Make do and Mend' participative workshops.
- Food workshops.
- Walking with group in the neighbourhood using photographic and film archives to prompt thinking about local spatial/social change, stories and histories
- Costumes and prop making participative workshops
- Research at Imperial War Museum and interview training by British Library oral historians
- Script writing developed on basis of interviews and the workshop process.



Make Do and Mend Workshop

4 Art, Citizenship and Evaluation

4.1 About Take Part

Take Part is the national Active Learning For Active Citizenship network. The support of government sponsorship between 2004 and 2011 provided the opportunity to build upon a range of related approaches and techniques for delivering what has become known as the 'Take Part' approach. These developments, which were first promoted through the Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) hubs between 2004 and 2006, built upon previous models of good practice. Since the first ALAC programme was completed in 2006, the approach has been taken forward through the Take Part National Network¹ and through a range of further Pathfinder and Champions programmes, working with local government authorities as well as with the Take Part National Network. The results of Take Part programmes included increased confidence and skills in tackling local issues with service providers among groups such as migrant workers, Asian women, people with learning disabilities and carers, and others in disadvantaged and hard to reach communities. At the same time, Take Part programmes increased levels of civil and civic participation.

The Take Part approach to citizenship learning recognises that active learning for active citizenship is a process and that People are likely to be engaged in citizenship activities, on different levels, at the same time. So, for example, individuals may become active as volunteers, but this in no way suggests that individuals may not be supported to engage as members of community groups, actively participating in governance structures (such as school governing bodies or local strategic partnerships, for example), or as active members of organisations campaigning on human rights, the environment and social justice issues.

4.2 What do we Mean by Citizenship?

There are several models used in current thinking about citizenship and its relation to the individual, state and society. Westheimer and Kahne (2004)² identify three separate models of citizenship and citizenship education:

- The 'personally responsible citizen', for whom citizenship education increases their awareness of individual rights and responsibilities;
- The 'participatory citizen', for whom citizenship education also enhances their knowledge of participatory structures and rights; and
- The 'justice-orientated citizen' for whom citizenship education also adds a high level of awareness of collective rights, more widely, and a high level of collective political and social responsibility, including responsibilities to engage with issues of social justice and equality

While this approach is useful there is some merit in the notion of a typology consisting of three differing definitions of 'citizenship' and 'active citizenship':

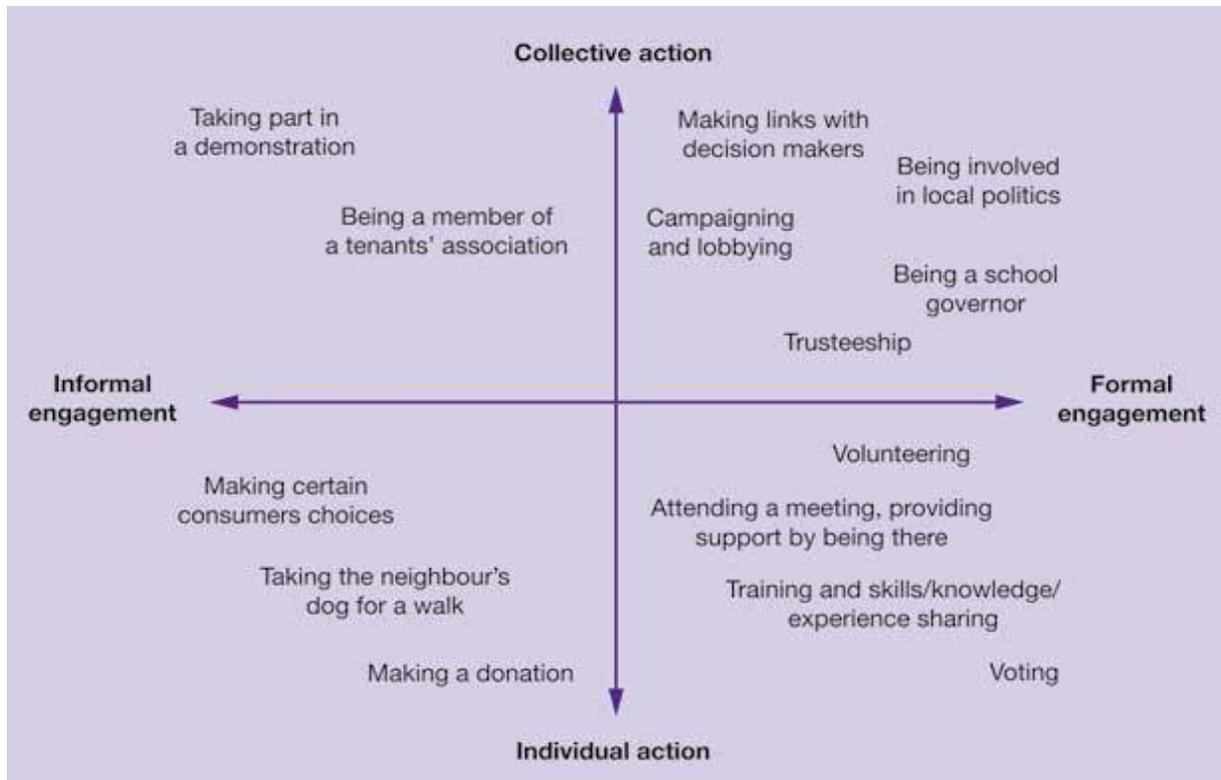
- The citizen as a 'voter' and 'volunteer';
- The citizen as an individual within a group or groups, actively participating in existing structures, taking up opportunities for participation, including participation in the planning and delivery of services; and

¹ Take Part Network is a group that has emerged from ALAC/ Take Part sharing experiences of providing publicly resourced community-based learning, aiming to enable citizens and communities to make effective use of the participatory spaces offered by government, and continuing to strengthen civil society's capacity for progressive autonomous action. Take Part National Network developed through partnerships between government and civil society organisations collaborating to promote active learning for active citizenship. The Take Part regional hubs or 'learning partnerships' are based upon networks linking voluntary and community based organisations together with learning providers in universities and colleges. Take Part Network is the key partner of the Taking Part National Research Cluster.

² Westheimer, J and Kahne, J. (2004) [What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy](#). American Educational Research Journal. 41(2). Summer.

- The citizen as an individual who also participates within group(s), actively challenging unequal relations of power, promoting social solidarity and social justice, both locally and beyond, taking account of the global context.

The diagram below illustrates a different type of citizenship framework, showing the connections between individual and collective actions, and formal and informal engagement (NCVO 2005)³.



4.3 Participatory Theatre And Citizenship

Participatory and collaborative art practice can be understood as a space of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000)⁴. There are clear parallels here with community engagement and community development practice. However, the crucial difference is that while the processes may be similar: outreach, engagement, working to identify methods of working together and common priorities, overcoming differences, the arts engagement generally results in the production of art (whether this is an encounter, event, situation, performance, or object).

When we consider community empowerment and citizenship, participatory and collaborative art and theatre specifically can be understood as a space of critical pedagogy (Freire 2000), whereby participation and arts praxis can be liberating experience, beyond the cultural opportunities available through cultural education and more passive participation in cultural activities. These issues are central to the ways in which participative and collaborative arts practices are conceived, delivered and evaluated. At one end of this spectrum participation may simply be attending an artistic or cultural event, while at the other end participation could include participants initiating a project, sharing in decision making such as the focus of a project, conducting research which informs a production, performing, making decisions about commissioning. So, for example, London Bubble aims to encourage audiences and participants of all ages to move between being audience members

³ Ochum, V., Pratten, B. and Wilding, K. (2005) *Civil Renewal And Active Citizenship: A Guide To The Debate*. London: NCVO.

⁴ Friere, P. (2000) *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary edition New York. Continuum Books.

and performers - between attending and making theatre. Encouraging an exploration and questioning of the roles and perspectives of the performer and the attender.

There are long, well established connections between participatory theatre, community development and community activism⁵ as part of a project of support social change and development. In the 1960s and 1970s, theatre began to be actively used as a tool for international community development as it moved to using greater participatory practices as part of a project of finding 'bottom-up' solutions to local concerns (these include participatory appraisal, participatory evaluation and participatory action research). Alongside this adoption of theatre as a community development technique within theatre itself there was the development of radical theatre, activism art, the Theatre of Cruelty, Grotowski's Poor Theatre, happenings, theatre in education and community arts⁶. These movements aimed to break down barriers between conventional theatre and art, change the relationship between audiences and art and support social change. They influenced the development of participatory theatre practice as a tool for social change. This was further influenced by education theoretician and practitioner Paulo Freire and led by theatre and education practitioner Augusto Boal and other international development and community arts workers⁷.

In contrast to this radical tradition, conventional theatre does not have a participatory approach, maintaining a clear boundary between actor and audience and a one-way message. Participatory theatre takes some of the conventions of conventional theatre but also offers an active way for the audience and community to become involved in the issues explored. Significantly the audience have the opportunity to develop sense of ownership. The work of Boal, influenced by education theoretician and practitioner Paulo Freire, and other international development and community arts workers is significant here, as Soloman explains,

Boal took Freire's theories and put them into theatre practice. He acknowledged, 'the dynamic and changeable nature of power relations and the significance of individuals' inner struggles to their level of conscientization' []. He saw by having a space to act out and explore these relations it could help bring about change. Thyagarajan [] argues that in conventional theatrical forms, "the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him'. In Boal's theatre the focus was on the action itself, on transforming the spectator into a participant' (Soloman 2011).

According to Brecht (1965), Brook (1968) and Boal (1979)⁸, drama is exposure, confrontation and contradiction which lead to recognition and analysis, which in turn awaken understanding. When the spectator enters into the theatre space, s/he enters into the reality of the situation enacted and thus, even when relating to personal or collective past, theatre praxis is always enacted and asserted in the present. This is what can make theatre more 'real' than the normal stream of consciousness and thus most effective (Jennings 1992)⁹ and offers a spectrum of opportunities for engagement and participation. Crucially as Nicholson argues,

⁵ For a review see Solomon, A (2011) Using Participatory Theatre In International Community Development, . 46 (3) *Community Development Journal*

⁶ See Harding, F. 1998; Neither 'Fixed Masterpiece' nor 'Popular Distraction': voice, transformation and encounter in Theatre for Development. (In) Salhi, K. (Ed). *African Theatre for Development; Art for Self-Determination*. Eastbourne, UK: Intellect Books. Prentki, T. 1998; *Must the Show Go On? The case for Theatre for Development in Development in Practice*, 8 (4) 419–429., Adams and Goldbard, 2001; *Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*, New York: Rockefeller Foundation.

⁷ See Boeren, A. (1992); Getting involved: communication for participatory development, *Community Development Journal*, 27 (3) 259- 271, Abah, O.S. 2007; Vignettes of Communities in Action: an exploration of participatory methodologies in promoting community development in Nigeria, *Community Development Journal* 42 (4) 435–448.

⁸ Brecht, Bertolt (1965), *'The MessingKauf Dialogues'*, London: Methuen Boal, Augusto (1979) *'Theatre of the Oppressed'*, London: Pluto Press

⁹ Participatory Theatre as a Research Methodology: Identity, Performance and Social Action Among Refugees

As a practice, knowledge in drama is embodied, culturally located and socially distributed. This means that knowledge is produced through interaction with others, and that reciprocity between participants creates new forms of social and cultural capital (Nicholson 2005: 39)¹⁰

At one end of this spectrum participation may simply involve attending an artistic or cultural event, while at the other end, participation could include participants initiating a project, sharing in decision making such as the focus of a project, and commissioning an artist, writer set designer, etc. Clearly the degree to which project is participative or collaborative is contingent on factors such as; the extent to which a project was commissioned in a way which encourages or allows participation, the resources available, the artists skills and expertise.



Blackbirds – the performance project that emerged from Grandchildren of the Blitz

4.4 Art, Evaluation and the ‘Big Society’

Before discussing the London Bubble case study, and how London Bubble’s creative projects, can be understood in terms of active citizenship learning it is worth briefly considering the current policy and evaluation context that London Bubble’s work sits within.

As we have discussed elsewhere¹¹ creative practice which has participation as a central element has often been evaluated in terms set out by funders and policy bodies in ways which are of limited use for arts practitioners and the agencies who commission them. The terms of evaluation often rely on quantitative measures (numbers of participants, skills gained, etc). While this information is useful,

by Erne Kaptani and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Sociological Research Online* 13(5)2
<<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/13/5/2.html>>

¹⁰ Nicholson, H (2005), *Applied Drama: The Gift Of Theatre*, London: Palgrave.

¹¹ See the Take Part Stream Arts case study for a discussion of the recent history of arts evaluation policy
[http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/TAKING%20PART%20CASE%20STUDY%20-%20Stream%20Arts%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/TAKING%20PART%20CASE%20STUDY%20-%20Stream%20Arts%20(2).pdf)

it often misses the *processual* and qualitative significance of these creative and often playful encounters.

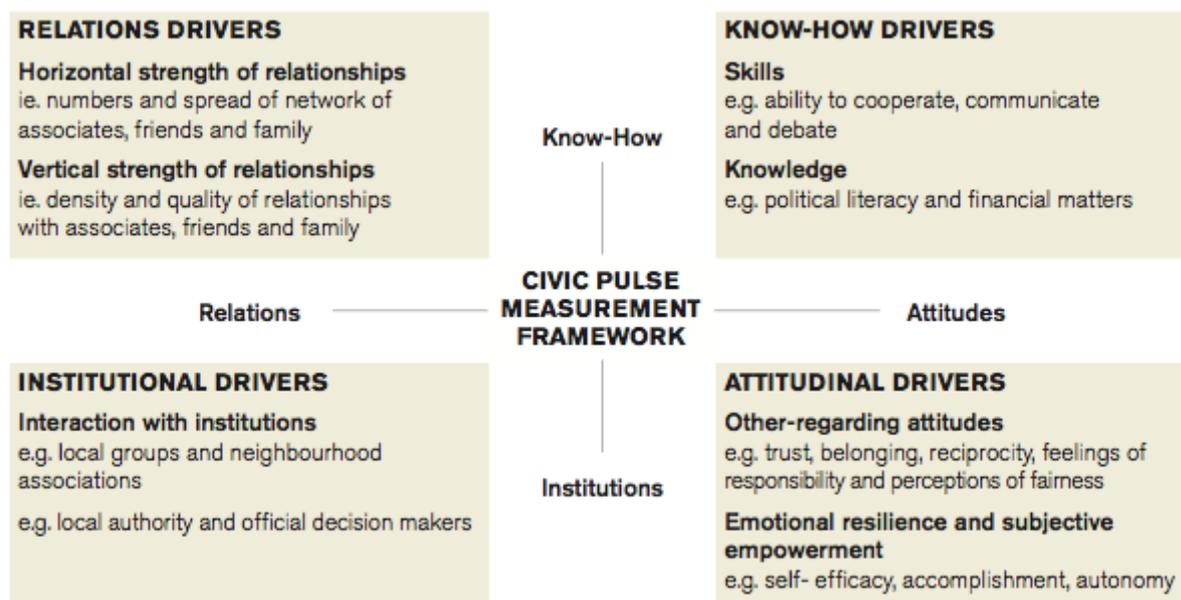
The Coalition government’s ‘Big Society’ agenda represents yet another policy framework for arts organisations to respond to. The Big Society, as the Prime Minister has implied, promotes the strands of ‘social action, public service reform and community empowerment’ as part of an overall aim to disperse power more widely in Britain today, with a fundamental shift of power to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals at a time when and philanthropic giving and corporate funding is hailed as a viable replacement for declining public investment.

. Here active citizenship is promoted with an emphasis on personal responsibility, volunteering and self-reliance (rather than the models of citizenship set out above in section 5.2 which emphasise citizenship as part of a project of challenging unequal relations of power, promoting social solidarity and social justice.

Today’s policy landscape raise question regarding the ways we might evaluate and evidence the contribution of art to civil society in a way that is meaningful to arts practitioners, the third sector and funders and simultaneously makes a case for the value of the work of participatory arts organisations such as London Bubble. One of the strengths of participative practice is that it can shift our attention from art (and associated theories of what makes ‘good’ art) to address questions of what makes the ‘good society’ in creative and imaginative ways that other forms of socially-engaged professional practice, such as community work or social work, do not.

This emphasis on arts and citizenship points to the significance of some of the subtler aspects and ‘softer’ measurements of ‘everyday citizenship’, such as acts of kindness and reciprocity and the underlying drivers of active citizenship, such as levels of confidence and emotional resilience that drive active citizenship, social assets as well as deficits, such as the presence of skills and strong social networks. These subtle measures may be of use to small participative arts organisations as ways of framing their work in terms of ‘softer’ impacts of participation in terms of building the know-how; attitudes; relations; that enable people to become active citizens. A report published by the RSA *The Civic Pulse: Measuring active citizenship in a cold climate* launches a useful research tool to which measures what its authors describe as the ‘drivers’ of active citizenship.

Figure 2: The Civic Pulse – Drivers of Active Citizenship¹²



¹² Taken from the Civic Pulse, Sam McLean and Benedict Dellot. RSA July 2011 See http://www.thersa.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/408006/RSA-Civic-pulse_2011.pdf

5 Findings

In this section we set out our findings and discuss London Bubble's work in light of the research questions

5.1 Multiple spaces of participation

London Bubble provides multiple and flexible cultural spaces of participation. Here participants have the opportunity to enact and practice citizenship skills and develop active citizenship. London Bubble can be understood as an open and dialogical space which mirrors some of the ideals of citizenship discussed in this report. Participants and practitioners are able to move within and through these spaces as they grow and develop their creative skills and their qualities as active citizens. These multi-faceted modes of participation are central to and a realisation of the company's commitment to co-production and collaboration. London Bubble is a flexible, open, welcoming organisation. New participants quickly become part of an evolving group of community performers from diverse backgrounds, and are subtly 'inducted' into the inclusive culture of the company as they move through the multiple spaces of participation that London Bubble offers. Participation in London Bubble is not circumscribed to a specific body, such as a consultative body, a user-group or a group of 'critical friends'. In contrast participation in London Bubble takes place on multiple levels. Participants may begin to participate in an age specific resident group or through a specific production but they are not limited to these more 'formal groups'. Participants experience London Bubble as open and responsive.

Bubble have tried to make themselves more open creatively, it's much more ambiguous, written through workshops, with the writer coming back with the scripts, the script getting changed the script getting changed.

The distinction between professionals and participants was distinct but it has changed. It has been eroded over time.

The way that Bubble reflects and listens is organic and involving. [I]t is a complex democracy.

Quotes from adult focus group

This was a strong theme in the focus groups conducted as part of the research. This is illustrated by this long-term participant who began taking part 'accidentally', as she explains here

I came in sideways, I was asked to fill in. I was actually doing the tea and biscuits and then they said, 'Will you stand in for this part?' And I did it. And then they said 'you might be interested in coming to the Bubble'. And I came, and was part of the group for a long while. [I] They always seem to provide challenges that people want. If you put the commitment in, if you want it, then things come your way, if you are up for it'.

Female Participant - Adult Focus Group

London Bubble is perceived, by its members, as having a horizontal structure. Their 'open door' enables people to participate in a way that is appropriate to their capacity and level of comfort at the time, given their other commitments, ambitions and desires. This flexible space of participation and development is one of the key factors in engendering the longitudinal participation that is the focus of this study. This was a strong theme in the focus groups when the research team asked participants to produce 'time lines' of their participation in London Bubble (see figures 1 and 3). Some adult participants who had begun coming to Bubble as small children, brought along by their parents, had flowed in and out of the company as they grew, moved, entered formal education or training and returned as practitioners or participants. As described here

I was a London Bubble baby, before I was born it has always been constant thing in my life and has always been there for me what ever is going on in my life. When I was seven my parents broke up and a social worker took me to a workshop and I remember thinking this is what I want to do. My mother took me to the show that night 'Arabian Nights' it was my first theatrical experience. If it wasn't for London Bubble I would not be where I am now I would not have gone to university and studied theatre and I thank my parents for being supportive. My teacher told me you should not do theatre you will not get anywhere you should stay here a do maths and business studies I told them I would not do that. I knew I wanted to be myself and I wanted my placement to be at London Bubble. London Bubble supported me through my professional career and when I was a student. It has given me confidence; others have asked how did it give you confidence? I was a shy child I would hide behind my parents. I can be who I want to be, people ask how is it going at London Bubble and it becomes engrained in your life and it has etched onto other people in my life –

Female Participant and facilitator –Young people focus group.

I have spent time reflecting on my time with the London Bubble, Coming back time and time again with a few years gap. The door is always open to me to explore something new. I have come back as a participant, as a workshop leader, as a performer, as a director. So it is quite special.

Jools, Practitioner group interview



Longitudinal participation mapping workshop

This longitudinal participation is also enabled through an inclusive approach to theatre making. Participants do not have to act and perform to take part in a Bubble production; they can also carry out research, make things, share memories and generally 'pitch in'. So for example, during the Grandchildren of the Blitz project people could participate on a variety of levels, as actors, as researchers, supporting the children in their research, exploring the material culture of the wartime period and thereby contributing to the final show. For example, during the Blackbirds production

the set designer held 'Make Do and Mend workshops' people who wanted to get involved, but did not want to perform. As well as deepening the companies understanding of the subject matter, these provided an alternative to performing, integrated elders and young people together as reminiscence was combined with sharing practical skills. This worked to keep the older people who did not want to perform engaged in a theatre production based on their memories. As Pip Nash, London Bubble's Set Designer explains

People had an opportunity to get to define what would be in the final event without having to perform in it.



Brenda, Maureen and Lucy in rehearsal

1.1 Professional Participativeness

Although the participants in London Bubble are not professional actors, the research revealed participants appreciation of the professional approach to theatre making within the company and amongst co-participants. Crucially, this professional ethos engenders a sense of active citizenship. Participants are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions as part of a greater collective endeavour. Focus group participants discussed the importance of developing a sense of commitment to the group, meeting deadlines, and take their practice seriously. Participants in the

focus groups contrasted the professionalism that was characteristic of Bubble with participating in amateur dramatic societies. Amateur dramatics places an emphasis on learning and practicing the lines and moves that have been pre-authored by an (usually) absent writer, stage entries and exits. Bubbles professional theatre making methodology was frequently describes as 'harder' 'more challenging' as it requires actors to be more flexible, open to uncertainty and willing to devise sections of script and propose various solution to the problems of staging. This reflects London Bubbles dramatic/theatrical mission to make work with, for and about a community. Inevitably this results in an approach to theatre making that places equal value on the participants, the theatre-making process and the final performance itself.

Significantly, this professional approach encourages participants to value their contribution to the company and develop ambitions within Bubble and beyond. As these participants state in a focus group

Looking back tonight, it shows how I have grown as a person. When I joined I was an idiot. I was childish, hyper. I went to the summer school and it told me a lot about my skills. I created a piece myself, and it went well. I did it really well. Directing a piece of my own. I take my talents seriously now. I take on a lot more activities.

Male Participant - young people focus group.

I am interested in researching and writing. I would like to do that. I was interested in doing research for the play, it could be a longer project: developing those research skills. Not just for the children. For the adults as well, it could be a much longer process. [] With Grandchildren of the Blitz, looking at Mayflower Street, it was simply a matter of looking in the electoral register. A lot of people didn't know that existed.

Female participant – Blackbirds focus group

5.1.1 Active Citizenship Beyond Bubble

The active citizenship that is encouraged and developed within London Bubble builds the capacity of participants to take part as active citizens in spaces beyond London Bubble. The skills and attitudes which are developed have an impact as participants take their learning beyond the company. This was a particularly strong theme in the young peoples group where participants spoke of the ways that they had developed their active learning through taking part in Bubble and the ways that this had impacted on their wider participation as citizens.

I don't think I would have volunteered in activities at school if I had not come to London Bubble in the first place.

My mum has seen a change in me. I want to go out and work with young people involved in crime now. When you come to London Bubble all your worries are gone it makes you feel comfortable. It is a family unit. I have become a different person since I joined.

Young people focus group.

5.2 Ensemble: social capital, friendship and family

London Bubble can be understood as providing a space which builds intercultural social connectedness between participants across differences of gender, ethnicity, social class and generation¹³. This is evident in the Blackbirds company which included 40 people aged from 8 to 73. Within it were 3 units of parent and child. (This also reflects other aspects of the company 's cross-generational attendance). Participants in the research frequently discussed the sense of 'friendship', 'family' and 'community' that they felt at London Bubble. It is evident that this sense of friendship is a key factor in connecting people and providing a solid base from which participants can work together cooperatively and inspire cultural and educational activities beyond the space of the theatre. Many participants spoke of introducing, or being introduced by friends and family.

The citizenship dimension of the social connectedness, which Bubble engenders, was expressed in terms of the theatrical idea of the *ensemble*. In the ensemble an emphasis is placed on working together in a production as a company rather than focus on the performance with individual 'stars' or principle performers. In the ensemble all performers are given roughly equal amounts of importance in the production.

Even though we do have individual parts, the commitment is to join the ensemble, and I think we are all committed to do that, if you have been coming for any length of time. The commitment is to join in the ensemble; you don't expect to be a star. We are content to do whatever, wherever you fit in.

Female Participant Adult focus group

In the ensemble an emphasis is placed on collective action, mutual support and trust, responsibility for oneself and others and working together for a group enterprise.

5.3 Active Citizens Creating Cultural Capital

The underlying principles of the participative impulse since the 1960s, can be summarised as *activation* (the desire to create an active subject, empowered by the experience of participation, with others), *authorship*, giving up a sense of authorship as a democratic and less hierarchical model of production, and the *restoration* of a social bond through the elaboration of collective meaning¹⁴. This can be traced back to a critique of what Guy Debord describes as the *Society of the Spectacle*¹⁵ whereby the experience of visual culture becomes one of passive spectatorship.

The research has found that within London Bubble, participants are not merely passive consumers of cultural activities and products and the visual pleasure of theatre. Instead they are cultural co-producers. Through the multiple spaces of participation that the company offers participants opportunities to develop a sense of agency. The theatrical production itself comes about through paying serious attention to this agency, realised in telling, remembering, researching, enacting, practicing and sharing. Together this produces community cultural capital found in the creation of a culture of celebration, the recognition of one's own culture, valuing and sharing local history and traditions and developing understanding and celebration across generations. Significantly, at Bubble

¹³ There are currently emerging research agenda's and research reports concerned with social connectedness, social capital and 'connected communities. These have emerged, in part, out of, and in response to the Coalition Government's policy 'Big Society' agenda as part of the Research Councils UK's priorities which seek to research and promote communities that are inter-connected and culturally diverse in order to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well being. This connectedness or social capital, can be understood as the 'glue' of the Big Society). See for example *Connected Communities How social networks power and sustain the Big Society* Jonathan Rowson, Steve Broome and Alasdair Jones 1 September 2010 which maps social connection and the role of 'community organisers' (<http://www.thersa.org/projects/connected-communities/connected-communities-report>).

¹⁴ See Bishop, C. 2006 *Participation* Whitechapel Press

¹⁵ Debord, G. (1987). *Society of The Spectacle*. London, Rebel Press.

participants do not need a lot of ‘high’ cultural capital¹⁶ usually associated with professional theatre productions, in order to participate. For example, in the Blackbirds production an individual participant’s experience becomes a form of cultural capital to share. In this sense London Bubble can be understood as providing a relational intersubjective space. London Bubble is a social environment in which people come together to participate in a shared activity. This is a space of relationality. Here individual participants share their subjective states: their perceptions, memories, feelings, opinions, and emotions with others. Through these encounters some agreement on a given set of meanings or a definition of the situation is arrived at, Moreover, a relational space is produced out of the collective elaboration of meaning that these encounters produce.

London Bubble’s work has clear creative impacts¹⁷. Within the Blackbirds production, for example, participants have had the opportunity to celebrate local culture and history together and in this process understanding across generations has developed. (See section 6.7 for further discussion). These participants include participants, across generations, who have had long-term engagements with London Bubble, and newer members coming to London Bubble for the first time.



Rehearsals for Blackbirds

5.4 Serious Playfulness: Boot Camp And Kindergarten

One of the significant themes to emerge out of the research has been the importance of play as a pedagogical tool, and an ethos underpinning Bubbles approach to theatre. An atmosphere of playfulness in the theatre workshops creates an informal, and open and welcoming space. This is found in the weekly adult and young people’s drama workshops we observed but also in the workshops that took place in the development of the Grandchildren of the Blitz project. Many of the

¹⁶ Cultural capital is a term used by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986). In *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* Bourdieu argues that capital takes social, cultural and economic forms and these different forms of capital are converted into symbolic power. Cultural capital can be found in both an embodied state, (expressed for example in deportment), in an objectified state (as cultural goods) and in the institutionalised state (resulting in such things as educational qualifications).

¹⁷ For further discussion see The Creative Impact Position Paper and guide at <http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/KnowledgeEAST%20position%20paper.pdf>

participants in the focus groups spoke of the ways they welcomed this opportunity to have fun, to get a chance to be silly and playful whilst *simultaneously* taking the project of theatre production seriously.

You have to be absolutely disciplined and applied and it is fun. Bootcamp and Kindergarten. Its theatre, its make believe, it's all a big game, we have rules and the discipline but we still have fun.

Tara

The dynamic of play also carried through the production process the performance, enhancing the production. However, as discussed in the practitioners workshop, at the point that the script arrives, playfulness often gives way to a period of repetition and rehearsal.

Play is child's work and play is what we make in theatre, when you play to an audience things tend to work. When the children interviewed the elders they talked a lot about 'play', and so when they were performing on stage on stage they 'played' those games, Jimmy Knacker. And there was an excitement of 'playing' to an audience showing something to an audience. That is the value of theatre. It is a place where you can rehearse emotions, and that feeling of heightened emotion, we never lose that heightened emotion.

Peth

During the Blackbirds production this productive tension between play and seriousness when moving from a workshop phase to a rehearsal phase led to some difficulties for some of the company. Some of the adults found the children's playfulness difficult to cope with when rehearsing and simultaneously, the children miss the playful element of the earlier phase.

Peth: So the children are saying 'Guys lets play, its important lets play', and the adults are saying, 'No, if you want to do theatre properly, it's about organisation and focus'

Simon: As an actor it is about finding your anchors. You are still playing, but less improvised, you are finding rules to behave within a space of play.

5.4.1 *The Significance Of Trust*

One of the significant themes to emerge from the research was the high degree of mutual trust between staff, practitioners and participants. This also engenders London Bubble's longitudinal relationship with participants. As Jools stated in the practitioner focus group, 'Over time these relationships of trust become 'rooted' in the fabric of London Bubble. The participants trust the company to co-produce theatre with high quality writing and direction resulting in theatre they can feel proud of whilst the company trust the participants (some of whom have been attending for ten years or more) to take part and contribute, share their ideas, experiences and energy and fully commit to a productions development over time'. Or, as Peth surmised 'They give us their expectation that we will make it work'.

Participants are willing to share their experiences, stories and time as they have faith that London Bubble would not abuse this trust and use their stories and experiences purely for their own artistic gain. As Bubble is rooted in the area, they have a sense of being accountable to the local community.

We would not take the ball and run with it, we would have Iris, Maureen and people knocking on the door saying 'What are you doing?!'

Jools

This high trust environment makes participants creative risk-taking possible. Bubble Create a spatial and social environment and a playful dynamic that is disciplined enough to produce professional theatre and yet open enough to allow participants to take risks, to try new things, to express themselves with trust that Bubble's creative director would not make them look silly, or have cause to feel embarrassed. As one practitioner stated

There is total trust in everyone that they re involved in something that is going to be not only good, but something that they are going to be proud of, That he might take them to a place that is a little bit uncomfortable or unusual, but not unpleasant.

This was echoed in a focus group with adult participants discussing the Grandchildren of the Blitz production

Iris: Every time I have done it you think, 'oh god, people haven't learnt their lines'. It's always changing. You don't realise until the last few weeks.

Rob. It's that last weekend. It all comes together. Every year it's the same.

Alex. Peth does it every year; he knows what he is doing. So it all comes together that last weekend. And there is a reason. It keeps it fresh.

Thus participants develop not just the skill of performance, but also the capacity to deal with risk and take risks in their personal lives. This risk-taking behaviour fostered through creativity is transferable to other aspects of life, as an element in other aspects of their lives as it impacts on confidence.

You get self-esteem and confidence. You learn to speak up. You especially in the beginning, you do all these workshops and you have to be silly sometimes. And you can't be self-conscious then, it gives you, confidence. I am less-self conscious now out in the world. You come to drama, you have to do speaking. It encourages self-confidence. Speaking up, like in a situation like this, with ten people, it does encourage that confidence. You still get nervous, but you know you can do it.

Chris.

1.2 On emotions

One of the concepts that has been central to London Bubble's GCOB work has been emotional recall. The concept and practice of emotional recall is central to much theatre practice, and can be traced to the teaching of Stanislavsky's method acting. Crucial here is the belief that in order to act one needs to dip into one's own lexicon of emotions. In the Grandchildren of the Blitz workshops the actors revisited past memories and reconnected with past feelings. Thus acting can be seen as an opportunity to *play* at grief, anger, joy, surprise etc. This method is used in order to refresh what can be described as some of our 'rusty neural pathways' within a safe environment, vitalising ones capacity for communication. There are also citizenship dimensions to this aspect of Bubbles work. Theatre is a place where participants have the chance to rehearse the feeling of heightened emotion and put it to use creatively. The confidence of acknowledging difficult feelings of anxiety for example can be put to work in situations out in the social world whether this be lobbying ones MP, going for a job interview or explaining why you haven't done your homework. Emotional recall can be a useful tool.

In the drama practice of emotional recall when acting or telling a story, we inevitably dip into our memory bank of feelings.

Peth



Gladys is interviewed by Billy and Daniella

5.5 Intergenerational Encounters

The Grandchildren of the Blitz project provides strong examples of the active citizenship dimensions of London Bubble's work. The intergenerational nature of the project encouraged people to work together across differences in a joint enterprise. In this process each generation has shared experience has been shared between older, middle and younger generations.

Through these intergenerational activities create social spaces where cultural memories and knowledge are shared and exchanged. The younger participants researched about the Blitz period and were trained in Oral History interviewing and then formulated interview questions. The questions were incisive, reflecting a desire to understand what it was like to be a child in wartime and how that experience had impacted on the older people's later life.

Could you tell me about how your area changed then? During the Blitz how it changed to what it was before the war actually happened?

Has your area changed since the war?

Tell us a bit more about the Docks, what you remember about the Docks?

Can I take you back to the closure of the Docks and how you felt about that and how you thought it affected the Bermondsey area?

Were you living in Bermondsey when the docks closed and do you remember the effect that that had on the area when that happened?

How do you think your mum and dad coped during that period?

How scared were you when the rocket bombs were coming?

Did you used to like school and did you feel protected with the soldiers there looking after you?

So did you think that you were going to die or were going to lose your family?

What do you think you would like to pass on? What do you think you have learnt from your wartime experiences that you would like to pass on to perhaps a boy or a girl who is 11 or 12 now?

So were there any years that you were completely without school then or education?

What do you remember about meal times and food about that time?

And what did you feel like when peace was declared and when the war stopped. How do you remember feeling?

So like being in Bermondsey now, don't you just think about the bombing?

So you feel much safer now than how it was before?

From the Blackbirds website

The stories that have been shared by the older generation in the in the research interviews speak to a particular moment in time, in a particular place, but they also speak to the experience of younger people now, to the ways in which the local area has been transformed, to different cultures of childhood and parenting and different social and cultural values. They also distil wider insights about the older and younger participants' lives and situations.

It brings it home to you how profoundly people were effected, and it affected them for the rest of their lives. You see people in a different light. Now you can look and see the whys and where's about it. People lost people and their homes and they bear those scars for years after. My parents never talked about it, and they both lived through the Blitz. My dad went away to fight in 1944, never talked about it. You can have more empathy and sympathy about it.

Adult Male Participant GCOB focus Group

At the end of the production, in the Blackbird production, these narratives became what Freire¹⁸ calls *generative themes*, as actors produce the main themes that emerged from their lived experiences. In this way London Bubble's workshops and productions are produced dialogically. Many participants spoke about the ways that their understandings of older people had been deepened through participation.

I enjoy mixing with the younger age group. When you get older it is easy to get moribund and just meet and mix with your age group. And I don't want to be like that, and I think no, you are not just living in the past. You have a present and a future. It is nice to be with people who are younger who will still be around.

Adult Female Participant GCOB focus group

It has given me a lot more respect for old people and patience for older people. Previously, there is a tendency to, you know, stand at the till and be like, 'Oh come on, get your money out'. So you have a bit more patience, and respect for them.

Adult Male Participant - GCOB focus group

5.5.1 Working With Children And Parents

The intergenerational aspect of the Grandchildren of the Blitz production was somewhat experimental for the London Bubble. In contrast to previous intergenerational productions, which included an intergenerational cast, Grandchildren of the Blitz was a more 'child led' production. The children decided on the research questions and carried out the research, while the majority of the adults involved joined the production later. Furthermore, in previous

¹⁸ Freire, Paulo (1970), 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', London: Penguin

shows, children were required to have their parents accompanying them. In the Grandchildren of the Blitz production, if children were over 9 year old they were allowed to participate without a parent being present (Although it should be noted that some parents of participating children became involved after finding out about the production through their children. One father spoke in a focus group about asking to get involved after seeing how much fun was being had while waiting for his daughter at the end of a performance). This child-led nature of the production led to some tensions. This is apparent in this post on the Blackbirds blog.

The children last night did seem to go a bit bonkers and the group can be quite rude. People seem to think mobiles have priority over the person you are actually presently speaking to in a room and also the mistaken belief that we are at school and that others are interested in our mucking about. Get a something life! The sessions are too short and this is more fun to do than dealing with silly stuff. All in all the more formal polite ways of the forties look more attractive day by day and couldn't children today do with greater independence both of adults & media including phones

Blog entry 18/03/2011

In focus groups, several of the adults (both practitioners and participants) found the children's behaviour somewhat challenging. This may be due to preconceived ideas of what theatre production requires of an actor and the children's sense of ownership of the project, as Peth and Jools discuss here,

Peth: The adults who had problems with kids were ones who had not done a performance with children in the past so they had a preconceived idea about what working on a show should be like.

Jools: yes this time I definitely saw a bigger tension between adults and young people, the performance brought so much life out of the children, it was their material that they had gathered. And so some of the adults who had come into the process a bit later found it difficult to cope with the energy of a big group of children who had a big sense of ownership of the project. [] For me there was a group missing, [] a group of teens who have done London Bubble projects before. We didn't really have them: people who have been in two or more London Bubble projects, who can really silly about but then they are on it. They find a focus easier because they have done project before. The group we had were so lively.

Jools - practitioner group interview

As Jools points out, this tension may have been exacerbated by the absence of many of London Bubble's regular teenage participants who did not attend due to several contingencies: the timing of the production, which coincided with school examinations and the fact that London Bubble are working with teenagers in other aspects of the companies work.

The light heartedness of the children was sometimes experienced as a possible lack of understanding of the emotional weight of the subject matter.

So it was difficult with the children, and as an adult, feeling the serious nature of being the guardians of these stories and memories. It was hard when everyone might not be feeling the weight of that guardianship. I sensed it with the adults. I wanted to know if the children felt it. Maybe they did, maybe they didn't? Maybe it didn't matter.

Jools-- practitioner group interview

5.5.2 *Beyond Paranoia*

This kind of intergenerational encounter, where most of the children's parents were absent is, in itself quite unusual in an age of what has been described as 'Paranoid Parenting'¹⁹ whereby the social production of fear in today's parenting culture leads to parents restricting their children's independent activities and opportunities for play (redefined as risk). In this cultural context it is becoming increasingly unusual for adults who do not volunteer or work with children (and have extensive Criminal Record Bureau checks as part of this process) to have opportunities to interact with children who they do not parent. This increases the social gap between the generations and decreases opportunities to bridge the gaps between generations. As discussed above, London Bubble creates a high trust environment (see section 5.5.1) and professional approach to theatre making. The high trust environment that Bubble creates ensures that young people are part of an intergenerational ensemble of adults, young people and children. Here young people develop their sense of themselves as actors and parents can 'step back' a little and trust that their children are safe and respected. Parents of some of the children were involved in the production, including the writer. He describes his experience of 'stepping back' seeing his children develop in the process and seeing them in a social situation

It was difficult being a professional artist and being a parent, I had to give up being a parent. I had to step back so that they could form a relationship. I dropped them off. Then I came back in quietly and watched [] watching my children in that context, where you don't see them as a parent... He is much better behaved at home. I was surprised; he is a scamp, and a ringleader of the scamps. But he was a boy who has been written off a lot at a school, he has 'behavioural difficulties' at school. He never gets a chance to be in the school play, they said he is not confident enough. But he has taken this opportunity, and he has done his job and he did it quite well. And Annie, I had not realised what an impact puberty was having on her. She has become a hair chewing shrinking violet. So it has been good for me, and for them, it was their arrival in London.



¹⁹ Ferrudi, F. *Paranoid Parenting*. Continuum Press, 2008.

6 Discussion

This report has set out some of the pertinent themes in London Bubble's practice, taking as a case study the Grandchildren of the Blitz project. Our case study researches has used a variety of methods, which are less concerned with methodologically evidencing impact, and are more concerned with reflexively understanding the significance of London Bubble and its activities as a space of active learning for active citizenship.

In this concluding section we will consider the ways that London Bubble can develop their research and evaluation capacity in order to better evaluate and evidence the active citizenship learning dimensions of their work.

6.1 Research and Evaluation at London Bubble

As part of this research we examined data generated by London Bubble through previous evaluation exercises. It was apparent, in reviewing this data that London Bubble have employed a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research methods when evaluating their practice and evidencing the impact of their work on audiences and participants alike (see table 1 below). Bubble are an organisation who have an active interest in collecting and analysing research data that is relevant and useful to the company's development and evolving practice. In reviewing the methods used, and some of the data produced through existing evaluation methods, we recommend that

1. London Bubble decide firstly, the *purpose* of their evaluation activities and secondly who the audiences for their evaluation are. Clearly a company of London Bubble's size with multiple and complex funding streams will be required to produce evaluation and monitoring reports to a number of funders. While this information is useful at times it may function more as an advocacy tool than evaluative research. Furthermore, while many funders approach evaluation and monitoring emphasising the significant instrumental value which risks overlooking the intrinsic value of the production the process that engender it.

London Bubble should consider conducting evaluation in a way that extends the spirit of *participation and co-production* that is central to the organisations ethos. Throughout this research we have found a high level of commitment to Bubble from participants and practitioners alike. This is an excellent evaluation resource which could be harnessed by London Bubble. The strong feelings safety and trust in order have already laid the foundations for participation. Bubble should consider establishing a critical, collaborative evaluation group who could help to develop the terms of success and identify the significance of projects. This could include defining the aims and objectives of evaluation activity, designing and helping out with evaluation activities. This is not merely a matter of occasionally using particular techniques from a participatory toolkit (which *could* include the tools of participatory theatre itself) but rather a matter of rethinking who initiates and undertakes the process, and who learns or benefits from the findings. This will need to be carried out with an awareness of the constraints on peoples time as well as a consideration of 'what counts as an impact' and 'how to evidence an impact', exploring the ways that individual participants and Bubble as an extensive social network have gone on to have an impact as active citizens.

2. London Bubble should approach evaluation as generative practice that is integral to the creative process. This can be achieved by building in learning and reflective conversations of all kinds from the start of a production. London Bubble could employ evaluation methods that are creative and appropriate to the pedagogical and participative ethos of the organisation,

3. Evaluation can be timed and designed to dovetail with the creative process, proving an opportunity for critical reflection whilst maximising on the milestones which occur in the production cycle to fold in learning into productions as they develop. (For example, participants in the Blackbirds focus group discussed how 'empty' they felt at the end of the production and the ways Take Part evaluation session was a welcome an opportunity to reconnect again and look back over the project, think about what had gone well and what had been challenging and what participants had learnt or developed in the process)

4. This report has demonstrated the importance of narrative as an evaluation method. In order to fully evidence the impact of London Bubble's work. Storytelling is a valuable but underused resource which could be utilized in developing evaluation techniques and identifying significant outcomes²⁰. So for example narrative has been central to the Grandchildren of the Blitz production. It has opened up a space for different generations to come together share their stories and in that process participants of all generations are confident in sharing their experiences and perspectives. Bubble's existing use of blogs and social media are already being used as part of the production process and they could easily be utilized as a valuable evaluation resources as both a space to gather accounts that occur and purposely generate evaluation data through posted questions etc. For example, throughout the Grandchildren of the Blitz project interviewees were asked to reflect on their relationships with each other and their engagement within storytelling processes generated during the project. Questioning focused on shared experiences and stories; participants were asked what they had learned as individuals and collectively within group activities. They were asked about how shared memories generated new spaces for cross-cultural and intergenerational generational narratives to emerge (rather than as merely only sharing memories with their own generations). In this process participants found common ground as storytelling produced new cultural knowledge that inspired them to work together and become active citizens in the daily life of the London Bubble Theatre and beyond.

Method	Activity	Purposes & Outcomes
Observation	Workshops	Provides useful independent insight. Allows for unobtrusive evaluation.
Photography	Workshops and Performances	Useful documentation of the range of work throughout the project. Proved effective in communicating with parents about the project. Provided images for wider dissemination of project: reports/ website/ newsletters.
Video	Performances/ Events	A useful record of the presentation of the work and the audience response. Could also include formal interviews.
Discussion	Freelancers/ Staff	Provides a review of practice, looks at development of project, explores challenges. Gather practitioner testimonies
Focus Groups	Participants/ Audiences	More in-depth feedback, helping to shape further development What do we have? Post performance questionnaires
<i>Workshop Leaders Questionnaire (2007)</i>		A4 sheet gathering qualitative responses from workshop leaders

²⁰ This was one of the conclusions of the discussion at the Taking Part: Measuring Impact Workshop, Goldsmiths, University of London 30/10/2010).

Evaluation Forms	Pre and Post - Participants/ Teachers Post – Audiences/ Parents	Monitoring of expectations and benefits. Audience feedback, demographics and on targeted themes Provides quotes. Numeric scales One word responses on feelings in self or about something
The Website	Audience feedback and participants resource	Interactive space for sharing process as it develops and final show, great evaluation resource. Live Qualitative
Celebration events	Participants	Qualitative data on impact of participation

Table 1 London Bubble’s Evaluation Process and Methods

- London Bubble make use of the commitment to the company that we have witnessed and harnessed in developing some flexible methodological tools for tracking longer term wider impacts of participation on individual participants themselves and the spaces of citizenship they move within (work , education, training, volunteering, local groups and beyond). These may capitalize on naturally occurring moments within the companies calendar (such as annual celebrations, premieres and other key occasions). The company already keep in touch with participants informally after they end ‘formal’ participation’. These relationships can be capitalised on to track participant’s development and engagement in London Bubble over time through relatively short mapping exercises and one-to-one interview for example.

6.2 Narrating London Bubble’s Work in the Current Policy Context

A critical consideration of the London Bubble’s relationship to active citizenship requires that we consider the wider policy agenda concerning active citizenship and the arts. Today’s arts and citizenship agenda²¹, framed by the current governments commitment to the Big Society encourages participation in the arts and volunteering more generally as modes of citizenship. However, while this represents a new way to frame and attempt to evidence the social impact of the arts it may also be yet another manifestation of instrumentalisation and, some would argue, another framework of governmentality which arts organisations and arts focused third sector organisations, to jump through in an already difficult funding landscape.

Within the Big Society citizenship is found in the actions of individual citizens who engage with fellow citizens connected to local, neighborhood organisations and institutions. This emphasis on citizenship may offer a new way to frame and evaluate the arts. However, critics would argue that and emphasis on *civic impact* is another manifestation of the instrumentalisation of the arts, , within a wider project of governmentality²². Clearly, framing arts practice in terms of active citizenship, and beginning to evaluate it in these terms, risks becoming yet another policy agenda which arts organisations must be seen to respond to and evidence. This could, ironically, ameliorate

²¹.Knell, J and Taylor, M. 2011 Ibid

²² see Yudice, G. *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Toby Miller and George Yúdice (2004). *Política Cultural*. Gedisa. Matarasso, F. (1997) ‘Use or Ornament – The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts’ COMEDIA Short version on:

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the critical possibilities of participative practice to engender active learning for active citizenship. Implicit in some literature on art and the Big Society is an emphasis on arts participation as a form of pedagogy, which is delivered to, deprived communities and citizens who need to learn how to become better citizens. There is also a risk here that governmental agendas which see art in terms of its contribution to the Big Society may employ a version of citizen participation in community activity which promotes insipid and innocuous artwork which is received by compliant well-behaved citizens. Framing this project in terms of the research question as potential spaces of citizenship and citizenship learning can risk overlooking the power and the potential of the art and aesthetics to confront social contradiction and make political and social matters apparent in interesting and provocative ways

The case study demonstrates the power and potential of participatory theatre to create a space for participation, engagement and active citizenship within a wider project of cultural democracy. Here theatre is not only available to and understood by for knowing elite with the necessary economic, social and cultural capital. Theatre production at London Bubble is a space of cultural production, critical pedagogy and activation and authorship that is valued by all who encounter it. Similarly community or participative art is not only socially worthy, it is also aesthetically accomplished.



Blackbirds – final performance.

Appendix 1: Insight Report By David Kendall

This insight report builds on the themes and findings made in the 'Taking Part Case Study: London Bubble Theatre 2011' and uses observational studies, interviews and conversations to explore these topics. These studies have explored how personal commitment and participation in performances within the theatre project has influenced the way young and old revisit past memories and reconnect emotionally with each other's past to develop new social and creative connections with each other. This process has produced the 'multiple spaces of participation' highlighted in the 'Taking Part Case Study: London Bubble Theatre 2011' between participants, facilitators and researchers. These themes include professional participativeness, social capital, friendship and family, play, co-production and trust that have emerged through the intergenerational activities that inspired and produced the Grandchildren of the Blitz project. 23

The Grandchildren of the Blitz research has considered how intergenerational relationships have inspired creative knowledge production which encourages social and cultural communication beyond the formal structure of theatre production. Throughout the Grandchildren of the Blitz project, interviewees were asked to reflect on their relationships with each other and their engagement within storytelling processes generated during the project. Questioning focused on shared experiences and stories; participants were asked what they had learned as individuals and collectively within group activities. They were asked how shared memories produced new spaces for cross cultural and intergenerational narratives to emerge as opposed to sharing memories solely with their own generations. What became evident is that over time many found common ground and storytelling produced new cultural knowledge, which inspired them to work together to become active citizens and researchers in the daily life of the London Bubble Theatre and outside in the wider world.

Practice Makes Perfect: Creative Evaluations And Practice Development

Storytelling is a valuable but underused resource in research and evaluation processes and is a sustainable and universal method that could be utilised in developing innovative evaluation techniques, research strategies and outcomes.²⁴ Emotional recall and collective memory could play a significant role in these processes. How do stories link people together and bring them back to tell new stories? What diverse narratives link people over time and space? How does storytelling bring together or undo participation? This insight report attempts to answer these questions using examples taken from interviews and observations conducted by researchers during the Grandchildren of the Blitz project.

The research methods employed during Grandchildren of Blitz have acknowledged that 'practice development' is central in the production of creative capital, cultural knowledge and research studies. 'Practice' could be defined as performance and repetition, acting over and over could produce theatrical performances, which in turn allows non-linear engagement to intersect and fuse distinct emotional levels over space and time. Creative practice is also a vital component in developing group relationships between professional facilitators and participants. New knowledge is formed by individual and group interaction. Sharing and learning new skills allows emotional intelligence to grow and both groups to gain confidence in experiences of everyday life. Over time relationships of trust have developed between these groups and have become 'rooted' in the fabric of London Bubble's research methods. Jules, London Bubble facilitator, Taking Part Practitioners focus group. This creates a spatial and social environment and playful dynamic that is disciplined yet allows the informality of artistic practice to encourage creative evaluation within the theatre company. All involved should be encouraged to take part in monitoring project development.

23 Taking Part Case Study: London Bubble Theatre, Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2011.

24 Taking Part: Measuring Impact Workshop, Goldsmiths, University of London 30/10/2010.

Organising regular focus groups and interviews between freelance project managers, full-time and part-time staff, volunteers and participants could encourage the development of diverse and innovative evaluation materials. The development of creativity is active and needs to be collected as part of the process rather than left as afterthought. Practitioners should accept their responsibilities in this process and incorporate and develop sustainable self-evaluation techniques from the start of a project and should become part of the participatory research process. As described here.

Participation in London Bubble workshops brings personal experiences and memories into observational processes. Marigold put me into a group of five young people (under 10) and adults (18-65) and we were given an extract taken from a wartime story. The paragraph described the process of directing buses through thick fog into congested Camberwell bus station during the Blitz. Young people began to drive buses and adults became passers by. I recalled recent memories of living in Kennington and travelling to Goldsmiths on a bus past Camberwell bus station and I remembered how congested it was at this spot with many buses turning into the depot. This was an anxious experience and the delay in my journey often altered my daily schedule. It was fascinating to consider how everyday memories fragment and situations that trigger them often generate similarities time after time. It is the context in which they are made that changes. There is no escape- we are drawn into the event and individually we fuse recent and past memories that may emanate from architectural spaces and different social experiences. Social play, imitation and repetition created a new collective space of memory and produced new interpretations of events. It was the realisation that life can visually appear similar yet incidents that trigger individual and collective anxieties can be dramatically different and have significant emotive consequences to those involved and pull in others emotional experiences over space and time

David Kendall, field notes.

Collective Memory as Visual Research Method

Collective or public memory has played a significant part in the visual development of the project and offers methodologies for future research within the organisation. Older people share their recollections with young members of their group and reorganise their stories of the past in accordance with the young people's understandings of events.²⁵ The formality of theatre practice is channelled through creative co-production, which in turn brings together elements of linear and non-linear activity; these elements allow hybrid and sustainable forms of social engagement, storytelling and memory to develop within London Bubble and filter out into the daily life of all involved. This could extend London Bubble's research capacity, influence social capital beyond its immediate environment into formal cultural and educational contexts such as schools and universities. The 'Taking Part Case Study: London Bubble Theatre 2011', the Grandchildren of the Blitz website blog and original evaluation techniques developed by the research team provides evidence of these processes. As described here.

The week before last, we all headed down to Mayflower Street, just behind Bubble HQ, we looked at the buildings on the street and set ourselves the task of imagining who might have populated the houses.... Then last week - we moved in! Iris got hold of the Electoral Roll for 1939 and we focused in on numbers 7-13. Having found out the names of the people that actually lived there, we formed little clusters of inhabitants for each house, compromised of family members of all ages and lodgers. We spent a bit of time creating the relationships between these individuals and building up brief portraits of their characters. Whilst we were keen to base these families on fact, we also wanted the license for these characters to be created through our own invention and ideas. For this

²⁵ Halbachs, M. (1992) *Collective Memory*, London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp.48.

reason, we kept the surnames of the individuals that lived in these houses and made up our own first names, based on the letters of our own names. So, for example - one of our participants, Lauren Rowley, becomes Rena Atkinson. If you were at this session - please give us details of your new household. We want to build up our very own street!! Let us know your number and who is living in your house.

The Mayflower Street census has begun....” – GCOB website blog.

“The frozen image is simply the starting point for or prelude to the action which is revealed in the dynamisation process the bringing to life of the images and the discovery of whatever direction or intention is innate in them.”²⁶

A book has a formal narrative; a beginning, middle and end yet if the book is dropped and falls open on a single page a new point of departure into the story is revealed. Walking ‘around the block’ I look at the photocopied photograph of Mayflower St in the 1940’s. I am forced to reconsider my immediate visual environment and consecutive movements in conjunction with the oral accounts of the individuals who lived there on the same day in 1940. What is different from any other historical tour is the role of the ‘image’ and how a single picture can bridge a gap between past and present. A photograph is open to multiple meanings and interpretations. Photographs create discussion and allow people to reconsider their social relationships with each other and immediate spatial environment. Augustus Boal’s theories of ‘Images of the possible and transition’ are evident in this process.

David Kendall, field notes.

Allowing participants to be involved in the collection of evaluation data through audio visual media such as camera phones and sound recordings is a fun and dynamic process that may enhance their storytelling skills, emotional recollections and build confidence to function as part of the collective performance. This could generate sustainable self-evaluation techniques and capture emotional and intimate details before they are lost and forgotten. All become active researchers within the project and enhance the social capital, prosperity and economic development of the theatre company.

Play, imitation and exploration are significant elements that may help explore these research concepts. Both young people and adults utilised ‘play’ within the project to learn new life skills from each other - returning to play with childhood²⁷ is a key factor in determining why some adults participate time after time. Adults may use their time at London Bubble to detach themselves from the responsibilities and expectations of public life. This method contrasted with the young people who utilised their time at London Bubble to form new social relationships and to use their experiences to become more confident and active in their daily lives. Adults appeared to utilise processes of ‘play’ as an escape from the ‘everyday’ embodied space where they withdrew from public life. Play in this context could be what Miller describes as the ‘The development of skilled movement’²⁸ The novelty of retreating from everyday life re-aligns events; spaces of play allow both groups to develop different emotive yet parallel strategies and social exchanges which come together informally within a performance.

It’s Good to Talk: Emotional Insights, Associations and Recollections

Discussion encourages co-production and provides frameworks for creative practitioners and participants to discover how people feel about each other and their placement within a theatrical

²⁶ Boal, A (1992) *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, translated by Adrian Jackson, London: Routledge, xix., Millar, S (1968) *The Psychology of Play*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 18, 19, 20, 107, 111, 131

²⁸ Millar, S (1968) *The Psychology of Play*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 135.

project; furthermore, it could create a productive environment that allows all involved to develop inventive methods for individual and collective research and evaluation. However, interviews with participants revealed that even within structures that promote open dialogue, personal communication can also confuse processes of participation and the development of social narratives. Verbal communications need to be constant in order to allow individuals to grow emotionally resilient and feel secure within the formality and constraints of theatrical performance. Yet when individuals come together and reflect on their relationships with each other, shared memories (recent and distant) could form new and lasting social connections. While holding focus groups is useful and has been explained in the 'Taking Part Case Study: London Bubble Theatre,' interviews allow small groups of people to reveal thoughts and feelings that maybe overlooked or hidden by group dynamics. Memories, recent and distant, are recalled and offer new intimate and emotional insights into personal associations and shared experiences between the old and young. This process could encourage trust, support and friendship, as interviewees Asya and Brenda state during conversations with the research team.

Brenda (73 years old) and Asya (11 years old) were introduced to each other at the start of the project when Asya interviewed Brenda. Brenda's wartime memories were introduced into the production and became a point of departure for a new friendship between the ladies. During early interviews it was important for her to tell stories about colleagues, friends and professional activities in theatre production. Brenda had worked with London Bubble in 1991 as freelance facilitator until she found other work, yet she needed to ground herself within the informality of the project. She was not sure if involvement with Bubble would fulfil her desire to perform and talked about her roles in amateur dramatics and traditional theatre and how this form of drama production had disappeared in recent years in the Bermondsey area.

Asya was a recent addition to the theatre company and was finding her feet within its structure. During early interviews she was apprehensive and unsure that her viewpoints were relevant to the research. During their first interview together Asya declared:

I like that there are different age groups as we all learn from the elders and I guess they learn from us – Asya.

It was clear that they trusted each other yet both parties lacked confidence. This was evident in emotional reactions to questions asked by the researchers. At this stage during interviews Brenda claimed:

I have not learnt anything back (from the young people) – Brenda.

Brenda relied on her memories from the distant past to ground her in the present. Asya used these memories to establish new social connections with her life as a young person in the present. Collectively they had begun to establish a new informal social narrative with each other that would become embedded within the formal narrative structure of the project. At this stage in the project the experience of working with Brenda as well as visits to museums inspired Asya to reconsider her cultural and educational position outside London Bubble. She began to question how she consumes the world around her and has realised that storytelling can influence how people absorb cultural and historical experiences over space and time.

I enjoyed interviewing Brenda because I learnt that there wasn't much distance between us because when she was young they played similarly to us now and made me think that we don't need all the toys and things like that to have fun – Asya.

Asya enjoyed exploring how young people in WWII had to recycle toys, clothes and games. This process has allowed her to reflect on her personal consumption of objects and products in

contemporary life. Asya enjoyed the Mayflower Street workshop, which allowed her to take on characters and find new relationships between the historical objects/props and the cast. During interviews Asya declared:

“I love studying history in school. My brother who studied theatre takes me to museums”.

Asya has revisited the Imperial War Museum (with her brother) and has developed an interest in clothing, household objects, games and toys used during WW11 and how these cultural objects could connect people over time. Her relationship with Brenda’s memories has brought the past into the present.

When asked about how their involvement in the project influenced their participation in cultural activities beyond the theatre production, two levels of cultural experiences became significant and provided two comparative storytelling methods within the research project. Brenda and Asya agreed that their visit to ‘Britain at War Experience’ provided a realistic and factual visualisation of social situations in WWII and Brenda found that she was emotionally ‘shocked’ and transported back in time by this experience. Asya was visibly and emotionally moved by Brenda’s poignant reaction and the experience appears to have enhanced the emotional bond between them. Brenda and Asya believed that the historical reconstructions at the museum offered realistic and factual representations of peoples experiences during the London Blitz. This cultural experience contrasts with their participation in the process of the dramatic reconstructions of events during the Blitz initiated by the GCOTB theatre production. Brenda and Asya were aware that formal cultural reconstructions (museums) and informal reconstructions (dramatic practice leading to a performance) were two different ways of telling the same story and that both events were equally significant. Yet the dramatic interpretation of events allowed Brenda to be emotionally detached from her wartime memories and generated new relationships with her past and new cultural activities in the present. Brenda felt useful to the company through sharing her memories and acting abilities. Asya felt useful helping Brenda to tell her stories and support her emotionally. During rehearsals Brenda found it hard to talk to the group of young people (who talked to each other and often excluded adults), yet their enthusiasm and youthful energy did have a positive effect on her determination to deal with the emotional and physical demands she faced before and during the final performance. She stated that her short-term memory was not good and she became focused on remembering the next part of the dramatic narrative. Asya helped with this process and it is apparent that they have become close. ‘Vision’ also played its part in the theatre narrative and allowed Brenda to emotionally recall her past and form productive relationships with painful memories in the present, as Brenda explains,

Watching myself as a young girl, was a joyful experience, a surreal, but magical moment.

The interviews revealed that Asya and Brenda feel socially responsible to keep these stories alive. During her first interview Asya was interested in the authenticity of the testimonies and declared that the narrative of the project was,

Coming from those who lived through it, it was their story
Asya.

By playing their part in the project Asya and Brenda had realised that that the theatre production revealed the stories of individual people, which could evoke a collective, critical, emotional reaction from an audience in comparison with the curated displays at museums, which may evoke collective memories based on nostalgic and institutional historical perspectives. During the final performances Brenda was visibly moved by the young lady who played Brenda as a girl- in Brenda’s words “hearing the age” of the young people’s voices allowed her to re-engage with her personal narratives and

memories through the collective activity of the performances. Brenda declared that the collective performance “brought into focus were I am now”.

By playing their part in the project Asya and Brenda had realised that their creative contribution to the performance had embedded themselves into a new social and historical narrative interpretation of the wartime story, which in turn has now become part of Asya’s and Brenda’s contemporary life story.

When asked what they would do next, Brenda felt honoured that she had been asked to participate and was keen to play her part in the performances in autumn 2011. By the end of the project Brenda acknowledged that her participation and shared relationship with Asya had opened her mind to how she shared recollections and acted collectively with others young and old. Recently Brenda had tried to become involved with a traditional theatre company and had been told that she was too old and would become an insurance liability. In contrast, she had felt welcomed into London Bubble and the event had reignited her interest in acting. Asya’s friendship and youthful energy continued to provide reassurance and emotional confidence in later life. Brenda’s attitude has begun to change from short-term perspectives embedded in her recollections of the past and she was optimistic about what new collective cultural goals she could achieve long-term. Asya’s respect for Brenda grew during the project and she will continue to expand her cultural knowledge inside and outside London Bubble through discussions with Brenda, visits to London museums with family, friends and school and Asya reaffirmed “we learned off each other, we became a Bubble family”.

The case study demonstrates the power and potential of participatory theatre to create a space for participation, engagement and active citizenship within a wider project of cultural democracy. Here theatre is not only available to and understood by knowing elite possessing the necessary economic, social and cultural capital. Theatre production at London Bubble is a space of cultural production, critical pedagogy and activation and authorship that is valued by all who encounter it. London Bubble demonstrate how participative arts are not only socially worthy, they are also stimulating and aesthetically accomplished.



Appendix 2 - About CUCR

The Centre for Urban and Community Research is an academic research centre within Goldsmiths at the University of London. The Centre's research work includes long term research contracts for research councils and major charities and shorter-term pieces of work for local government, central government and regeneration agencies. The Centre has existed since 1994 and as part of its parent Department of Sociology was rated as 5* (the highest category) within the most recent HEFCE Research Assessment Exercise rating of research institutions in British universities which indicates international excellence.

The Centre carries out teaching and research of the highest academic standards at the interface of the visual arts, humanities and social sciences. CUCR has a long track record of experience in the fields of active citizenship, community development and third sector capacity building. CUCR have extensive experience of work that draws on models of participatory democracy, evaluations of experimental social policy interventions. This includes work with a range of groups such as young people, older people, refugees and asylum seekers, Roma Gypsy and Traveller groups and fathers. A significant strand of work involves examining the social impact of the arts and cultural activity. We have been responsible for:

- KnowledgeEast Creative Impact project: development of indicator matrix and Evaluation Toolkit and arts practitioner/regenerator 'translation guide' for assessing impact of creative (and especially performing arts) and social regeneration projects. An on-line version of this work is now in development. Project funded by HEFCE Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF).
- Beyond the Numbers Game: An evaluation project within national ESF Equal-funded Hi8us/NESTA youth media programme Inclusion Through Media, to develop Toolkit for evaluating youth media interventions, including development of on-line version with Hi8us Midlands.
- Signs of the City project: An evaluation of an European Culture programme project which worked with EU cultural institutions, artists and young people using participatory photography to examine young people's contemporary urbanism in four European cities.
- Evaluation of the Serpentine Skills Exchange project where artists and architects are collaborating with older people in Westminster, Hackney and Camden in London to create new work and propose new models for housing. Skills exchange was developed by the Serpentine Gallery in partnership with Age Concern and Westminster Housing with Care Services.
- Dancing the Gateway 2008 – 2010, Evaluation of the London Thames Gateway Dance Partnership, to test the effectiveness of dance as a strategic intervention and effective tool for engaging communities in major urban regeneration projects.