

<b>Institution:</b> Newcastle University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 13 Architecture, Built Environment and Planning		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Revitalising Rural Planning Participation and Community Development Through Artistic Practice		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2011 – 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Paul Cowie	Research Fellow	May 2012 – to date
Dr Menelaos Gkartzios	Reader in Planning and Rural Development	September 2010 – to date
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> August 2013 – December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>This case study illustrates the impact of the performing and visual arts in revitalising rural community participation in development and planning processes across northeast England. It is informed by two innovative research collaborations with visual and performing arts organisations. The case evidences how artistic interventions can align planning processes with the community engagement ambitions of planning practitioners and lead to novel approaches to participation and plan-making, whilst also bringing benefit to the arts practitioners involved through extending their reach to diverse audiences and raising the profiles of the artists involved.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>This case study responds to the longstanding problem of engaging dispersed and diverse rural communities in English local plan-making and wider planning processes to ensure that local development recognises and responds to local community needs in the face of complex challenges such as ageing and environmental change. The cumulative body of research initiated and led by Cowie and Gkartzios attempted to address this problem by working with different arts practitioners and organisations in order to find innovative ways to both address this engagement deficit and, importantly, to attempt to sustain participation in the local planning process. The work of Cowie focuses on the opportunities offered by the performing arts for immersive participation and reflects his collaboration with a theatre company (Cap-a-Pie), whilst the work of Gkartzios focuses on the opportunities offered by visual artists in their responses to local issues and initiate engaged debate organised through a longstanding collaboration with Berwick Visual Arts.</p> <p>The research was initiated through Gkartzios' involvement in the Newcastle Institute for Creative Arts Practice (NICAP), who obtained a Newcastle-led UKRI research grant (<b>G2</b>), in order to catalyse artist-led models of knowledge exchange as part of rural development practices. This funding initiated the artist residency programme with Berwick Visual Arts (BVA) which has been operating since 2013 as an experimental and collaborative project with the Centre for Rural Economy (CRE) at Newcastle (home to both Gkartzios and Cowie). The residency aims to connect artistic practice with social science research conducted at CRE, and to provide a platform for engagement between artists, local communities and researchers. Art residency themes are developed in response to rural development research undertaken by CRE and agreed between Gkartzios and the Head of Visual Arts at BVA. This merging of artistic practice, community engagement and research is explored in detail in an article showing how the practice of the resident artist Sander Van Raemdonck, in collaboration with Gkartzios in 2015/16, supported rural housing research and planning consultation processes</p>		

**(PUB5)**. Specifically, the paper demonstrates how the artistic practice provided a methodological frame, resulting in an embodied community dialogue (through a performative walk) wherein both local residents and planning professions could engage in new ways about the future of a highly visible post-industrial site in the coastal town of Spittal proposed for new housing. This article is part of a Special Edition edited by Gkartzios *et al.* advocating for 'art as research' across rural planning **(PUB4)**. Earlier work evidences how art-led workshops with rural communities supported community governance goals, such as exploring community identities and disagreements about the development potential of rural places, in this instance on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, across different stakeholders **(PUB2)**. Similarly, in 2018, artist Gemma Burditt collaborated with Cowie on a project which examined how Brexit may affect rural communities' relationship to the landscape. This stemmed from a piece of consultancy research led by CRE and commissioned by Northumberland County Council **(G4)**. The result of the collaboration will be an art installation which has now been co-funded by Arts Council England, to be exhibited at the Sill, Landscape Discovery Centre in the Northumberland National Park and BVA. The installation will also form an ongoing provocation for the next phase of research which investigates the actual impact of Brexit as its effects start to be felt. The collaboration between CRE and BVA has resulted in an UKRI funded international research network **(G5)** with the University of Tokyo and other cultural partners, exploring the role of artistic practice as part of rural planning interventions.

At the same time Cowie's work on an ESPON programme research project **(G1)** explored how communities represent themselves in the planning process, and how the legitimacy of neighbourhood collaborative plans is established. This EU funded programme seeks to inspire policy making with territorial evidence. This research identified the tension between the need for communities to create a vision for their plan in a creative way and the strictures of the formal statutory planning system. It also highlighted the problems of asking communities to undertake what had previously been the domain of professional planners **(PUB1, PUB6)**. To explore these identified gaps between planning processes and community involvement further, a collaboration with theatre company Cap-a-Pie was formed by Cowie to develop a novel method to engage communities in planning issues **(G3)**. A play was designed to allow the audience to experience community planning issues over the course of a performance. Specifically, the audience takes the role of a small fictional town facing a significant planning decision. They are asked to consider issues of representation and legitimacy. Findings from the play (first performed 2015) have provided a number of insights into the process of community planning **(PUB3)**. Indeed, it has switched the focus of research away from matters concerning legitimacy and informal-self-organised community representation to issues of fairness and process in the planning system, particularly when dealing with the wider planning system and superior authorities. This 'Town Meeting' project was awarded the Sir Peter Hall Award for Wider Engagement in the RTPi Research Excellence Awards 2015.

### 3. References to the research

**PUB1:** Davoudi, S. and Cowie, P. (2013). Are English neighbourhood forums democratically legitimate? *Planning Theory & Practice*, 14(4), 562-566, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2013.851880>.

**PUB2:** Crawshaw, J. and Gkartzios, M. (2016). Getting to know the island: artistic experiments in rural development. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 43, 134-144, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.12.007>.

**PUB3:** Cowie, P. (2017). Performing Planning: Understanding community participation in planning through theatre. *Town Planning Review*, 88(4), 401-421, <https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.2017.26>.

**PUB4:** Gkartzios, M. and Crawshaw, J. and Mahon, M. (2019). Doing Art in the Country. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 59(4), 585-588, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12255>.

**PUB5: Gkartzios, M.** and Crawshaw, J. (2019). Researching rural housing: with an artist in residence. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 59(4), 589-611, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12224>.

**PUB6: Vigar, G., Cowie, P.** and Healey, P. (2020) Innovation in Planning: Creating and Securing Public Value. *European Planning Studies*, 28(3), 521-540, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1639400>.

All six research publications are the result of a rigorous peer review process in rural planning and disciplinary-relevant academic journals. The research publications are also outputs from one EU and three UKRI peer-reviewed funding awards (including one impact accelerator), complemented by one local authority award. In detail these **grants** are: **(G1)** *Territorial Approaches for New Governance*, EPSON (EU, GBP54,556), 2011 Davoudi (Newcastle) PI; **(G2)** *Northumbrian Exchanges: Creative Community Engagement in Rural Northumberland*, AHRC (GBP201,173), 2013 Cross (Newcastle) PI; **(G3)** *Town Meeting*, ESRC IAA (GBP9,986), 2014 Cowie PI; **(G4)** *Brexit – the implications for Northumberland and the rural North of England*, Northumberland County Council (GBP9,200), 2017 Cowie PI; and **(G5)** *Contemporary Arts in Rural Development: Lessons from Japan and the UK*, ESRC-AHRC (GBP46,705), 2019 Gkartzios PI.

#### 4. Details of the impact

In this case study we demonstrate two types of impact stemming from our research on arts-based engagement in rural planning: first, impacts on planning practitioners and innovations in public participation and community planning; and second, impacts on cultural production and artists' careers.

##### 1: Impacts on planning practitioners and innovations in public participation and community planning

In the case of the 'Town Meeting', since its performance debut in 2015 it has been performed in 20 venues across the north of England in rural communities and large cities, with more than 500 people having attended and participated in the play (**IMP1.a-d**). The original performances started to engage a variety of communities in the process of planning and how this impacted on their everyday lives. Feedback from the performances showed that audience members felt they had more confidence in engaging in planning matters whilst one audience member has been elected as a Parish Councillor in their local community as a direct result of attending the event as reported in the audience feedback (**IMP2**).

The 'Town Meeting' project has had an immediate impact on planning practice across northeast England. The initial touring play was developed by Cowie and Cap-a-Pie into a workshop method designed to allow planners at both Local Authority and community level, to use 'theatre as a method' to engage communities in the statutory planning process. Cowie and Cap-a-Pie worked with planners from Northumberland National Park to devise a theatre-based workshop that engaged communities in the early stages of the development of the Park Authorities Local Plan in 2016. This resulted in the Head of Forward Planning at Northumberland National Park commenting: "*I think the main benefit was that the interactive element helped to break down the traditional barriers between 'The Planning Authority' and the local community. The workshop encouraged positive discussions between the members of the community both amongst themselves and also with the Authority's Planners on a range of planning issues.*" (**IMP1.b**).

The workshop method developed was subsequently used by Startforth Parish Council (County Durham) to engage their communities in the statutory Neighbourhood Plan they are seeking to produce and explore the value of shared space and community assets in their area (**IMP2, IMP5**). Both of these workshops, and the work of Cowie were cited as being instrumental in leading to the Northern Heartlands programme of work with the national Town and Country Planning Association - 'Re:Place' - launched in 2019 (<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/replace>). This

campaign promotes the value of the arts in improving the planning process and helps shape local areas and policies, and the Town Meeting is one of five national exemplar cases (<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/art-and-planning-case-studies>) (IMP2). The Northern Heartlands Director stated: *“Would these changes have occurred without the Town Meeting project? No, I don’t think they would have done. Certainly, the personal experience of the parish councillor, and then ourselves, Northern Heartlands, going on to use it as part of our bigger debate about planning, it wouldn’t have happened.”* (IMP2).

Since 2013 the visual arts-based programme of engagement activities stimulated by resident artists responding to open research briefs have led to a change in attitudes and practice (similar to that engendered by the ‘Town Meeting’). For example, in the 2016 residency, artist Sander Van Raemdonck collaborated with Gkartzios, responding to an ‘open brief’ on housing development. The artist created a performative walk with the community to discuss the development potential of a particular site in the town of Spittal. The structured and interactive walk was attended by community members, planners and heritage officers from Northumberland County Council and created an opportunity to develop a walking planning consultation exercise different from the ones that the planners typically design involving the ‘usual suspects’, within formal planning processes. To consolidate the contribution of artistic practice in planning consultation processes, Van Raemdonck and the research team were invited by the planning unit of the Northumberland County Council to a two-day event called ‘New Ways of Seeing: Creating Pathways for Confident Market Towns’ for planners and heritage professionals (October 2016). The Head of Visual Arts at BVA commented on how they had observed this shift in individual planning officers practice and the local planning consultation process: *“It was something that they [the planners] really struggled with up to that point, in terms of getting communities on board with local planning processes and masterplans – to do with the language people use, the processes that local authority planners use – and it was, ‘oh, actually, there’s a really different way to engage with people around this’. ... As a direct result ... they [the planners] then went on to organise a conference in Berwick and they framed this conference around creative ways of looking at market towns and their development.”* (IMP3.a).

The impact of the arts-based interventions in revitalising approaches to public participation and community development in rural areas has focused on rural authorities in northeast England. However, the significance of this innovative approach has also been adopted by Japanese rural planners. As part of the ESRC-AHRC network activities (G5) we trained Japanese planners on the role of artist residencies in planning practice, in a day seminar co-organised with the Japanese Association of Rural Planning (IMP6). Following this, the Japanese Association of Rural Planning published a report of the seminar in its scholarly publication (Journal of Rural Planning) and stated that the work of Gkartzios and colleagues: *“was influencing the way we understand the role of artists in rural planning, and it has been instrumental to transform our thinking in relation to engaging with rural stakeholders.”* Noting that a participant had said: *“It was good to see how we might be able to take this further from an artistic experience to a rural development practice”* (IMP7).

## 2: Impacts on creativity, culture and society

Both the ‘Town Meeting’ and Artist in Residence Programme have had the co-creation of new cultural artefacts at their heart. Each artist/company has worked with a researcher to produce new research-led works that expand the reach of their respective audiences (IMP1, 2, 3, 4 & 8). In the case of the Artist in Residence programme, 7 artists have held residencies (IMP3.b) and the art has been exhibited in a range of venues and to a variety of audiences. The Head of Visual Arts at BVA used the example of a filmmaker exploring rural ageing and the reach of this output to document this reach: *“Those films have been shown in endless film festivals across the world now. So, there’s this reach that goes much further beyond Berwick”* (IMP3.a). With Arts Council England noting how the residency programme offered *“more opportunities for people to experience and participate in great art, particularly reaching audiences where there is a limited cultural offer including rural communities”* (IMP4).



Moreover, the Town Meeting project was the first time Cap-a-Pie had used a theatrical performance as a research tool. It proved to be a success and the play now forms part of Cap-a-Pie's repertoire and has according to the company's producer has "definitely affected Cap-a-Pie's way of working" (IMP1.c). It been used by them to develop collaborative partnerships with five other UK universities, as well as improving their survival, as Cap-a-Pie's producer confirmed: *"It impacted us in a business-sense as well. It got our names out there and opened doors for venues, building up our profile with venues and with programmers"* (IMP1.c).

The projects have also had an impact of the practice of the artists who participated in them. Both the artist residency programme and the theatre production have afforded creative practitioners with new skills in socially engaged practice. Early career arts practitioners have been afforded the opportunity to develop skills such as working in interdisciplinary contexts with communities and with researchers. This has raised their profile and visibility in the field. As artist Gemma Burditt explained: *"It's also opened the door to future projects that I'd like to work on [...] In terms of another positive from the collaboration, it gives exposure to your project [...] if you've got big organisations helping you with the project it gives a lot more exposure than you can get on your own. [...] Then I think in the follow up to the residency, quite a lot of people approached me and said 'can you apply for this project', or 'can we show the work as part of the festival', and it creates a buzz around the work and publicity which is really, really useful."* (IMP8).

Whilst BVA noted both how the residency programme was integral to its Arts Council funding but also the impact of the residency opportunity on a number of artists, considering a Polish filmmaker, he commented that: *"Some artists use a residency opportunity to really push their career forward, and he's done that"* (IMP3.a). This impact was reaffirmed by Arts Council England who noted that the residency project provided *"demonstrable impact on the career trajectories of participating artists and opportunities to build and nurture international exchange"* (IMP4).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

**IMP1: Town Meeting** see (1.a) Cap-a-Pie audience testimonials and web pages: <https://www.cap-a-pie.co.uk/the-town-meeting/> (1.b) The Town Meeting workshop, interview with the Head of Forward Planning at the Northumberland National Park Authority (p.7) <https://www.cap-a-pie.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Case-Study-The-Town-Meeting.pdf>; (1.c) Testimonial interview with Cap-a-Pie Producer; (1.d) list of performances and audience numbers provided by Cap-a-Pie.

**IMP2: Northern Heartlands** Testimonial interview with the Director, Northern Heartlands.

**IMP3: Berwick Visual Arts** (3.a) Testimonial interview with the Head of Visual Arts, BVA; (3.b) See the full programme of BVA artist residencies with the Centre for Rural Economy: <http://www.berwickvisualarts.co.uk/residency>.

**IMP4: Arts Council England** testimonial letter from the Relationship Manager, Combined Arts, North, Arts Council England.

**IMP5: Startforth Parish Plan** (Draft Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2039, 10 July 2019, see appendix 4) <https://bit.ly/359uGG9>.

**IMP6: AHRC-ESRC Network on Contemporary Arts in Rural Development** See webpages and programme of activities under 'Events' <https://conferences.ncl.ac.uk/ruralarts/>.

**IMP7: Japanese Association of Rural Planning** See testimonial letter from Associate Professor, University of Tokyo & Former Board member of the Japanese Association of Rural Planning.

**IMP8: Interview transcript with artist in residence** 2016-17 (The Art of Milk) and commissioned artist in 2018 (The impact of Brexit on rural communities).