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# The art of survival: community-based arts organisations in times of austerity

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**Abstract** This article examines the consequences of shifts in the terms of engagement with the state – since the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008 – for small-scale UK arts-based community organisations. Through an engagement with the accounts of key stakeholders from three case study organisations, the article considers the nature and extent of organisational changes in four main respects: the activities undertaken, the people and groups engaged, the income streams accessed and understandings of role or mission. Having outlined the variable fates of each organisation over this period, the article illuminates how the effects of austerity and associated policy shifts have served to mitigate against organisations' ability to sustain arts-based work with disadvantaged groups, resist neoliberal 'enterprise' agendas or maintain a practical commitment to community development aims.

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## Introduction

Community-based arts activities have been seen in the UK as important components of community development strategies since at least the late 1960s (Newman, Curtis, Stephens, 2003). Indeed, the radical cultural and political aims which first animated the burgeoning community arts movement – articulated within a broader philosophy of local empowerment and reflected in the work of writers such as Alinsky, Rogers, Illich and Friere – resonated with many community development theorists of the period. As advocates of cultural democracy (Braden, 1978), community-based artists typically

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stressed the potential for creative community-level activity to enable those most removed from power to communicate their interests. Indeed, many saw socially-committed arts practice as a way of not just asking questions but creating an alternative vision of society (Kelly, 1984).

Today, the social and political backdrop against which community-based arts activity takes place in the UK looks rather different. While participatory arts practices may continue to be framed as agents of change within neighbourhoods and communities, this increasingly occurs under the auspices of neoliberal policies which have encouraged free market values of private enterprise and competition across the third sector. In heightening controls over community-based organizations, ushering in new forms of governance and managerialism while encouraging the adoption of more entrepreneurial, business-like processes, the neoliberal policy agenda has ‘certainly trammelled possibilities for progressive community development’ (Burkitt, 2011: 113). As elsewhere in the third sector then, it has increasingly become the norm for socially engaged and participatory arts practice to be ‘used to reach aims defined through social policy and corporate interest’ (Rooke, 2014, p. 3).

Indeed, today’s community artists and community-based arts organisations operate in a landscape fraught with tensions and contradictions, as they negotiate a course between their principles, the requirements of their funders and the expectations of those with whom they work. That said, while such challenges might be seen as inherent to all community-based arts practice, what has brought a step-change in their character over recent years – and especially in terms of implications for the sustainability of community-based arts organisations – has been the fallout of the global financial crisis.

The ongoing period of economic austerity which issued in the wake of 2008 has brought significant implications for community-based arts organisations in the UK. On average, arts and cultural charities receive approximately a third of their income from government sources, typically in the form of grants (Bagwell, Corry, Rotheroe, 2015), yet this has been one of the areas to witness the most significant cuts since the onset of the crisis. Arts Council England (ACE), for instance, saw its government grant cut by 36 percent between 2010 and 2015 (Youngs, 2015), while local government grants suffered a 37 percent reduction across the period 2010–16 (Harvey, 2016). The picture is similarly challenging across other parts of the non-profit and voluntary sector, with grants from central and local government falling by 49.3 percent (£2bn) from 2008 to 2014 (NCVO, 2015), and ongoing trends in third sector finance bringing ‘serious implications for the long-term sustainability of many voluntary organisations’ (NCVO, 2015, p. 35). Given the way, income from government sources has historically enabled community-based arts organisations to secure the financial

platform needed to leverage funding from other sources (such as trusts and foundations), over recent years many organisations have faced difficult decisions about not only who and what to prioritise in their work but also how to achieve organisational sustainability.

Yet while the nature these cuts has been broadly acknowledged (and challenged), at present there exists only limited empirical data on the effects of recent years' events upon voluntary sector organisations (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015), and what does exist provides scant insight into the specific responses of arts organisations committed to community development aims. It is therefore with questions about community-based arts organisations' sustainability that this article is principally concerned. It approaches these questions by considering the fortunes, primarily since 2008, of three organisations located within the same urban area in the UK, as these were detailed by key staff members and stakeholders. As such, the discussion adopts a diachronic approach, charting the key factors relevant to organisations' changing functions and character over time.

The article is organised as follows: firstly, in order to better contextualise the discussion to follow, I briefly sketch some of the key shifts relevant to the UK-based community arts activity over recent decades. Following this I outline the approach adopted towards the research on which this article's findings are based, before discussing the changes experienced by the three organisations studied. Having drawn together some of the main findings, the article goes on to consider what they might signal for the future of the UK-based community arts practice and its relationship with community development.

## **Background and context**

In order to contextualise the current moment of famine across the UK's funded arts sector, it is necessary to understand this in relation to that period of relative feast which, beginning in the mid-1990s, preceded it. Two factors were especially conducive to the development of community-based arts activities in the UK in the years leading up to the millennium. First came the establishment, in 1994, of the British National Lottery, which had awarded more than £2 billion to the arts by 2006 (Mirza, 2006). The second factor was the election, in 1997, of a New Labour administration that repeatedly stressed its wish to create strong and cohesive communities, with civic engagement seen as central in this. As the potential value of participatory and community arts in tackling 'social exclusion' came to be ever more confidently affirmed (Matarasso, 1997) the UK's funded arts sector began to enjoy notable levels of government support, both rhetorical and financial.

Tied to the increasing levels of funding being made available for community arts activities from the late 1990s, however, came the expectation that they ‘contribute to neighbourhood renewal and make a real difference to health, crime, employment and education in deprived communities’ (DCMS, 1999, p. 8). This agenda, symptomatic of a wider ‘instrumentalization’ of cultural policy (Gray, 2008), signalled a shift in the arts funding landscape from one characterised by grant giving, to one in which government funding was to be ‘justified in terms of an ‘investment’’ (Belfiore, 2002, p. 94). Doubts were soon being raised about the claimed impacts of arts interventions however (Merli, 2002; Newman, Curtis, Stephens, 2003) and by the decade’s end, not only had some of the intractable challenges of accounting for their contribution to social agendas become widely acknowledged (Galloway, 2009; CASE, 2010), but reports to DCMS had begun to recommend that the cultural sector ‘use the tools and concepts of economics to fully state their benefits’ (O’Brien, 2010, p. 4).

The challenge of ‘proving the case’ for value must also be seen in the context of the subsequently growing trend, across third sector funding, towards commissioning and public service delivery contracting (Clark *et al.*, 2012). This aspect of the broader neoliberal agenda has led community arts providers to increasingly seek support for their work through commissioned service delivery contracts across health, education and social services. Commissioning processes are, however, highly competitive with service providers under pressure to demonstrate that they can outperform other bidders (McKay *et al.*, 2011). While organisations’ ability to gain income from commissioning and delivery contracts has become increasingly important, the arts and cultural sector has remained weak in this respect, accessing only 10 percent of its income this way (Bagwell, Corry, Rotheroe, 2015).

What then, it might be asked, have been the on-the-ground implications of such shifts across the funding and resourcing landscape for community-based arts organisations? The discussion which follows seeks to provide some answers to this question in respect of four key aspects of organisations’ functioning: firstly, the people with whom they primarily work; second, the nature of this work; third, the income streams they access to enable it and finally, the broader implications of these for the ways in which organisations now understand their role, scope and nature. Before moving on however, a few words are needed to explain the research approach employed.

## Research approach

The primary aim of the research approach adopted was to gain insights into the range of factors influential in determining how community-based arts organisations had changed – especially since 2008 – and how key

organisational role holders understood such change. In order to enable a detailed, responsive and contextual analysis of the events and conditions relevant to arts-based community organisations, the research team<sup>1</sup> selected three cases. Our sampling strategy was purposive, with each organisation selected for inclusion on the basis of the centrality of individual and/or community development to their stated aims and their employment of participatory arts (and media) activities within this. In light of the differences between the three organisations involved, the multiple-case design adopted could be said to offer what [Ragin \(2000\)](#), in discussing research attentive to heterogeneity and difference, terms a 'fuzzy set' of variables. Such sets make it possible to go beyond seeing individual cases as collections of analytically distinct variables, but rather as specific configurations of aspects and features. Exploring this set of cases therefore provides a basis for understanding the kinds of concerns liable to be relevant to the wider population of community-based arts organisations in the UK.

Our data collection approach principally involved one-to-one interviews (total  $n = 16$ ) with current and former (where present) holders of 'CEO' or 'Director' positions, longstanding and newer members of organisations' boards of trustees, along with other managers (e.g. business, marketing, education) able to provide further insights into organisational practices. By engaging with the accounts and perspectives of those occupying different professional roles in this way, the research sought to uncover commonalities and/or divergences in the portraits of organisational change provided. These accounts, when supplemented by the selected documentation made available by organisations (including annual reports, financial statements and impact assessments), offered insights into not only the realities of each organisation's experiences but also the ways staff members understood these and framed them in their talk. In this way, the research team were able to uncover not only the key forces and factors bound up with organisational change but also 'the variable and contradictory, psychologically and ideologically entangled, rather than singular, ways in which community development workers and organizations react and respond to neo-liberalism' ([Burkitt, 2011](#): ii111). Alongside an attentiveness to such variability, given that the meanings emerging from such interviews were, of necessity, actively negotiated between the researchers and participants ([Holstein & Gubrium, 2004](#)), the need for researcher reflexivity remains paramount.

While we employed an interview guide to assure consistency of questioning (across areas including organisational history, mission, core

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<sup>1</sup> The research team comprised the named author together with Dr Tom Phillips (University of East Anglia).

activities, users/clients, structure and management, income and funding, partners/networks, staffing, assets, resources and future plans), given the variation in interviewees' roles, this was not rigidly adhered to in all instances. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed using qualitative data analysis software with a view to both producing chronological portraits of organisations' fates and uncovering central themes in terms of the ways these were discursively framed. In what follows, the names of all respondents, organisations and locations have been changed or removed to protect anonymity.

## **Organisation 1: Community Art Works**

'Community Art Works' (hereafter CAW) was established in the mid-1980s and has played an active role in the development of community arts activity in the UK. CAW is a charitable organisation limited by guarantee and can be characterised as acting, across its history, to provide learning opportunities through the use of arts and media resources. In this, CAW has predominantly worked with those who might not have otherwise had such opportunities (e.g. young people in challenging circumstances, people either in, or close to being in the criminal justice system, as well as those with mental health problems or physical disabilities).

The early work of CAW focussed very much on placing arts activity within what the organisation's founder described as a 'social-educational process ... that related, as we understood it to, the people we were working with' (Former Director, CAW). Reflecting some of the values of the early community arts movement then, CAW's approach has been concerned less with the quality of artistic/creative outputs than in achieving 'excellence in educational process' (Former Director, CAW) underpinned by 'a sort of ideological driver ... extremely strongly felt, at least by the [then] Director ... to provide opportunities for more vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and individuals' (Chair of Board). Since CAW also ran a community arts traineeship, enabling unemployed artists to become community arts practitioners, it had developed 'a sort of DNA that goes through the tutors [practitioners], back to when the organisation was started' (Chair of Board).

Across its history, much of CAW's funding has come from arts grants, charitable trusts and foundations as well as through statutory funding schemes. In the 1980s, CAW attracted central government funding in the delivery of training for the unemployed. The organisation's high-water mark, in terms of staff numbers (seven full-time staff and approximately 30 freelance arts workers) and annual turnover (approximately £500,000), occurred during the period 2002–2006, when CAW accessed ACE funding to lead a local arts

consortium, alongside its government training-focussed funding contracts. Towards the late 2000s, however, and despite CAW's success in passing a 'very expensive process of accreditation' (Former Director), the scale of the latter contracts was to outgrow CAW's organisational capacity,<sup>2</sup> subsequently leaving the organisation primarily reliant on grant funding.

With the loss of its training-focussed contracts, and especially following significant cuts to ACE from 2010 onwards, CAW increasingly found itself 'sort of scrabbling around looking for project opportunities' (Chair of Board). As its Director explained: 'we've seen ... our traditional market die effectively...the funding streams available just, a number of them just disappeared'. Since then, cuts in central government funding allocations have further impacted upon local authorities, producing what CAW's Director described as a 'knock-on effect ... there was work that we did for people [organisations] who got their money from [local authority] arts services or social services. That whole chain was broken and the effect of that has been a bit like a train wreck'.

Compounding CAW's difficulties in accessing grant funding was the challenge of providing adequate evidence of outcomes. Although data collection requirements had, for some time, been placing what CAW's Board Chair described as 'quite an additional burden' on its staff, from around 2010, evidencing requirements became yet more challenging. As CAW's Director noted:

'Essentially, when the money started to become a problem [for funders] inevitably, it had to be about hard outcomes, it had to be about jobs and qualifications ... [but] it was difficult to evidence properly, it was really hard...we tried all sorts of things'.

Facing the near-impossibility of providing evidence of the sort of outcomes increasingly expected by its key funders, 'things got tighter and tighter and there simply wasn't the volume of work going through' (Chair of Board). As a result, since 2010, CAW has engaged in a series of organisational reviews. These have led to the loss of work for many freelance tutors and the organisation's core staffing levels have also been reduced, first down to four in 2012 and subsequently to just two. In 2013, CAW also sought to reduce costs by moving from its long-time premises to temporarily rent office space from another local arts organisation. As the Chair of CAW's Board of Trustees put it, 'over the last five years, our major pre-occupation has been the sustainability of the organisation'.

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2 As CAW's former Director put it, 'the strategy was to get pre-qualified, to be contract-ready ... [so that] we could actually bid for delivering contracts. We invested heavily ... in achieving that. And we got there. And then they [Learning and Skills Council] shifted the goal posts'.

In an effort to tap into new sources of income, in 2009 CAW hired a Business Development Manager. With the departure of its founder and longstanding director soon after, this manager was promoted to the organisation's directorship and began to reorient CAW's focus:

'So the focus [now] is much more on skills development, and economic development, as well as artistic development. So, although some of these things have existed in and been embedded in CAW's work in the past, the focus is different. There's much harder outcomes that we can evidence' (Director)

As was noted during interviews with CAW staff and stakeholders, this was a pragmatic decision, largely informed by funding priorities:

'All of the emphasis is really on how to develop that [creative skills] rather than its social impact ... that's the sort of thing that the Arts Council is now prepared to fund ... which would not have been among our founding principles' (Chair of Board)

'I think we just have to be really adaptable and really flexible ... and deliver what funders are looking for' (Business Manager)

A key element in this organisational reorientation has been CAW's establishment of an annual creative industries development event, where local artists showcase their talent and speakers discuss creative industry trends. In both offering visibility and amenability to quantitative measures, this initiative responds more directly to the requirements stipulated by its funders (primarily ACE). It also signals a shift in terms of the profile of those accessing CAW's services, towards 'the industry side of stuff' (Business Manager). Over the last few years, this focus on creative skills development has become more central to CAW's activities. So much so, in fact, that CAW's Director revealed plans to reflect this in a change to the organisation's name: 'what we're actually doing is we're dropping the 'Community' (Director).

After around three decades in existence then, since 2010 CAW has come to find itself facing the challenge of both repositioning itself in an increasingly market-modelled third sector landscape whilst, at the same time, providing sold services and seeking sponsorship and participant fees to cover its core running costs. Alas, this approach was to prove unsuccessful as, shortly after the completion of this project's data collection phase, CAW effectively ceased to operate.

## Organisation 2: Engage Community Arts

'Engage Community Arts' (hereafter ECA) is a charity and company limited by guarantee which was established in 2001. Since its inception, it has developed a track record in the delivery of arts-based initiatives, delivering



over 30 programmes of work across areas including community carnival development and performance, cultural diversity initiatives, participatory film and photography-based projects and music making/learning activities. ECA has worked with a range of local partners, including schools, local authority agencies and other arts organisations.

In terms of its organisational philosophy or focus, ECA positions itself as an organisation whose mission lies in 'transforming individuals' through 'high-quality arts and cultural engagement' (Director). Consequently, ECA might be said to place somewhat less emphasis on providing opportunities for especially disadvantaged groups than on generating creative outputs in whose actualisation project participants might take pride. Reflecting this particular inflection of community-based arts, ECA's establishment came primarily in response to a perceived gap in local arts provision:

'There were clear gaps in the market as a result of the focuses, ethos and remits of other local organisations. There was a whole swathe of people like me, who came from a middle-class background ... who had a strong impulse to get involved' (Director)

Consequently, ECA's provision has typically engaged groups and individuals interested in accessing music technology learning, carnival participation and singing workshops. As ECA's Director put it:

'There are certainly some client groups that we have only limited experience of or that we have not really worked with...there are organisations better placed or with greater experience of working with these groups' (Director)

ECA came into being when its founder and director became aware of both the recently completed refurbishment of a Council-owned building and the need for a local arts facility that different groups might access. As he noted,

'I was very aware of the struggle we had to find a place to rehearse and that my carnival costume colleagues had to do their making in. I was also aware from friends who were into film or music, that they had very poor access to facilities'.

While ECA's initial impetus therefore related to the aim of developing a resource for a creative activity, the subsequent organisational development of ECA equally responded to its director's ability to sense and tap into available funding streams.

'There had been very patchy involvement of arts organisations in the funded regeneration work going on in the less well-off parts of the city ... [which] left a gap for us to do stuff...we developed our own track record, looked for opportunities to bid for funding and those projects came in and our experience developed' (Director)

Undoubtedly, ECA's success was spurred by the fact that '[Director] is a prodigious grant writer and he is very good at it' (Chair of Board). As ECA's Director noted, '96 percent of our funding has come from those Lottery, local government and government sources ... if you know how to speak their language and meet those outcomes then ... obviously you can be successful'.

ECA continued in this vein – largely relying upon government grants to support its activities – until 2009. Just as the grant funding environment for community-based arts activities was beginning to become much more challenging however, ECA experienced its greatest organisational success – in grant bidding terms – through its application to deliver of a pilot of the *Moda*<sup>3</sup> initiative, a national arts education programme funded by ACE and The Department for Education: 'initially it was a very well-funded programme ... basically, we got £1 m over three years' (Director).

Although the funding received by ECA for the delivery of *Moda* was to cease in 2012, it nevertheless appears, in retrospect, to have provided a basis for its ongoing organisational survival in several key ways. Firstly, using capital funds attached to *Moda*, ECA was able to acquire (on long lease) and convert a sizeable building, which now acts as both home to ECA and a 'creative hub' (Director), leasing office space to local creative industries companies and guaranteeing ECA an income stream in the process:

'We are just about there with it [ECA] self-sustaining without a grant ... if we don't have a grant, at least we have office space ... it does give us a tiny bit of breathing space' (Chair of Board)

ECA has also been able to exploit the legacy of *Moda* in terms of the organisational resources, networks and learning developed over the course of 'setting up the programme ... training staff...developing a model' (Director). Equally important has been how wider perceptions of the *Moda* model – as 'something of value' (Director) – has appealed to new funders and supporters, especially corporate sponsors:

'*Moda*-inspired projects are quite 'in' [*fashionable*] ... there is lots of weight and interest there, we consistently are able to draw money into it' (Director)

Finally, ECA has also built on its experience with *Moda* by further orienting its organisational ethos towards what its Director described as being 'very much about artistic development and artistic platform, [although] not

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3 To protect the anonymity of the organisation in question, the name of this initiative has been changed. It might be noted, however, that *Moda* centred around the provision of school-based education activities using an artistic form traditionally considered amongst the 'high-arts'.

without any community involvement'. Although work of this kind had been central to ECA since its inception, it was now to become more pivotal to the way the organisation both viewed and presented itself, as activities oriented around community development aims became more peripheral. Indeed, this organisational shift fell in line with ACE's subsequent funding agendas in relation to creative industries skills development (ACE, 2012).

At the time of fieldwork, this renewed focus manifested into another successful grant application to ACE, this time to develop 'a new professional, semi-professional carnival company' (Director). As well as successfully tapping into funders' (and especially ACE's) changing priorities – by foregrounding high-quality artistic outputs and more professionalised forms of creative practice – ECA has also 'massively increased the service side of our organisation' (Director) in recent years. Along with pursuing local authority arts education contracts and sub contracts, this has involved ECA becoming what its director described as:

'Much more business-like about how we go about doing things ... much more strategic about what we do...judging our market, pitching to it, selling it and what have you' (Director).

This has led ECA to explore possibilities for working more in the provision of commercial services (such as team building and away-day activities) and adopting a social enterprise model. As ECA's Director noted:

'We have got to become good business people ... as a community arts charity we should be adopting everything from that [business-world] model that works but which doesn't undermine our core ethos ... if we, and I include our whole sector in this, are to survive then we need an imaginative rethink of how we operate'

### **Organisation 3: The Aspire Project**

'The Aspire Project' (hereafter TAP) is a charitable organisation based within a notably deprived suburban community setting. Founded in 2000 by two local parent-residents with backgrounds in youth work and community education, over time TAP grew to encompass arts-based learning activities (especially in music and media production), a community radio station, an independent school offering alternative educational provision as well as a drop-in support centre providing support to its local community. TAP's organisational roots lie in 'The Postcode Project'<sup>4</sup> (hereafter TPP), an initiative which began life as a temporary youth club engaging school-

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4 The word 'Postcode' is used here as a proxy for the actual postcode of the local area in question.

excluded children on the premises of the local high school. As TAP's co-founder and current deputy school principal noted:

'The music, the DJing ... that's what engaged the type of young people that we were working with at the time ... legally they should have been in the school ... [but] we said, well if they're coming to us anyway we might as well be teaching them. So basically that's what we thought we would do ... and [Local High School] agreed'

Over time, demand for TPP's services grew and having attracted some funding from the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme in 2004, the project secured its own premises, housing a small radio broadcast and music studio alongside spaces for general educational use. At this time, TPP's core activities – music, radio production and basic education in core curricula subjects – operated in both a synergistic manner and one which sought to respond directly to local challenges.

'In the early days it [TPP] was community-minded...asking them what they wanted and then we'd go out and try and set stuff up' (Co-founder and School Deputy Principal)

Effectively then, the origins, focus, and initial success of TPP was founded on the passion and of its staff combined with their commitment to serving the needs of the local community. With such a commitment resonating with funding initiatives of the time, TPP successfully accessed further funding from NDC (approx. 100k per year from 2005 to 2010) and a capital grant in excess of £600,000 from the Regional Development Agency's 'Investing in Communities' programme to develop the purpose-built premises which continue to house the charity's core operations today. Further short-term grants for specific initiatives came through trusts and foundations as well as grant funders. TPP also formally attained community radio station status in 2007 and, soon after, established its drop-in support centre.

From 2008 however, the organisation was to undergo important changes. Firstly, the local education authority (LEA) obliged TPP to attain accreditation as an independent special school in order to access future delivery contracts. This set TPP some key challenges and brought a number of changes in its wake. As well as being both an expensive and 'quite long, quite fraught' (CEO) process, TPP was required to both further formalise and broaden the geographical remit of its educational offer (to now include children from across the region). Having achieved accreditation in 2009, TPP subsequently changed its name to 'The Aspire Project' in order to 'show everybody that we weren't just working in the [local] area' (Co-founder and School Deputy Principal).

As the school began to access LEA contracts and work with more children – many now coming from across the county – TAP's relationship to its immediately local community began to alter. This shift was to be taken further from 2010 however as TAP experienced 'two big financial crises' (Trustee) which forced a broader reassessment of organisational strategy. According to the accounts gathered, a number of factors contributed to these crises. Undoubtedly, the fast rates of change and growth at TAP had put increased pressure on its then-CEO:

'I always felt that it grew too big, too soon ... she was struggling with the workload and the pressures and the changes to funding, business development and all the rest of that' (Co-founder and School Deputy Principal)

The situation was compounded, however, by the absences of key role holders – including the Finance Manager – at this time. Consequently, with the closure of the New Deal for Communities scheme in 2010 and the withdrawal of financial support for TAP's education provision (due to the annulment of its contract and indeed the withdrawal of the tender) by the LEA later that year, TAP found itself 'in 2010–11 looking at an operational deficit for the organisation of over £270,000...for a charity with a turnover of less than £1million, it was monstrous' (CEO). In an effort to recover its equilibrium, TAP's then-CEO recruited new members to the Board of Trustees (local councillor, solicitor, former NHS Regional Director, third sector organisation director) and staff cuts and pay freezes, together with changes in the organisation's management structure – as proposed by the Board of Trustees – quickly ensued. In an effort to renegotiate TAP's relationship with the LEA, the Trustees also 'stepped in and, with myself, managed that relationship ... [they] were able to apply a lot of political pressure' (CEO) as well as recommending that the then-CEO relinquish some of her responsibilities ('she wouldn't play the normal game that you have to play with [*name of local*] Council and I don't think they [council] liked her for that' – Co-founder and School Deputy Principal). TAP's relationship with the LEA was subsequently resolved such that the charity's school is today fully embedded within local authority commissioning as a registered independent specialist school on a rolling suppliers list for alternative education.

Since 2011, the Board of Trustees has come to take on an active involvement in the day to day management of the charity, engendering what the CEO described as a 'culture of organisational accountability'. In line with this shift, over recent years TAP has focussed on 'really driving our standards up and improving not just the services we provide but the way that we go about showing that to the outside world. So, it's almost a

commercialisation if you like' (CEO). Nevertheless, the changes wrought since 2010 continue to define the charity's character in important ways. TAP's music and media offer for local young people has diminished considerably, while the community radio station has seen a 50 percent staff reduction, a withering away of its local volunteer recruitment and training provision, alongside a growing emphasis on securing advertising revenues and a broader effort to engage with (more affluent) audiences beyond its local community:

'The Arts Council have given us funding ... to provide local arts programming ... [but] a lot of the people interested in 'the arts' aren't from this area' (Radio Station Manager)

Indeed, for the funding of its community radio station, its local drop-in support centre and its community arts and media activities, TAP has become increasingly reliant upon income from sold services and donations from small charitable trusts. Relatedly, adopting a particularly responsive and strategic approach to working with local authority commissioners has become central to how TAP now approaches questions of sustainability:

'We need to understand their [commissioners'] long-term plans, where they're headed. We spent a lot of time trying to establish that, and trying to shape our provision to the needs that they will have in six months, twelve months, even further' (CEO)

Since its inception, TAP has thus witnessed a series of significant changes, the combined effect of which mean that its relationship with the local community it was initially established to support has been reshaped considerably. Undoubtedly, some important aspects of the organisation's identity have remained unchanged (such as its location, some staff members, stated guiding ethos), yet in many other regards – and particularly the client base served and core functions fulfilled – TAP today looks like a rather different animal, operating in a notably different landscape than its predecessor. As its co-founder and deputy school head succinctly put it: 'we're still the same as we were, we're just not doing the same things basically'.

## Discussion

The foregoing portraits suggest that several broad trends can be seen as relevant to the four sets of issues (income streams, nature of work, people served and mission/role) identified for attention within this paper. Firstly, in terms of income streams, while the reductions in grant funding available for community-based arts provision since 2008 brought important effects for each organisation, they were especially deleterious for their community development-oriented work. Indeed, given that the two organisations most

committed to community development-oriented arts provision, CAW and TAP, were obliged to substantially reorient their activities in order to ensure survival (towards creative skills/local cultural economic development and specialist educational provision respectively), the community arts-based work to be most significantly affected across all three organisations was that involving local constituencies of particular need. The only organisation successful enough in accessing grant funding to sustain a great deal of arts-based work after 2010 was ECA, an organisation whose expressed focus has, since its inception, largely been oriented around 'high-quality arts and cultural engagement' with those 'from a middle-class background' (Director). ACE's increased prioritisation – since the financial crisis – of creative skills development, cultural economic development and the arts 'excellence' agenda (McMaster, 2008), certainly appears to have produced meaningful effects for the three organisations studied then. While ECA's approach met with success in responding to ACE's 'focus on the quality of artistic experience' (McMaster, 2008: 5), the community development-aligned approaches of CAW and TAP left them out of step with the changed funding landscape. As CAW and TAP looked to local authority funding streams as a means of supporting their arts-based work, the combination of stringent cuts and the shift towards service commissioning (since 2010) meant that neither organisation was able to sustain its community arts work with disadvantaged groups, much of which subsequently withered away.

The accounts gathered also illuminated how far both the nature of the work delivered and the make-up of the groups served by each organisation had undergone change in recent times. As suggested above, CAW's work moved away from an engagement with variously disadvantaged local groups entirely, instead towards would-be creative industry entrants. According to the accounts gathered, this occurred largely in line with shifted funding criteria and evidencing requirements. TAP's provision of arts and media activities for members of its economically-deprived host community also diminished considerably, as local education authority pupil referrals came to take precedence. ECA, meanwhile, continued to serve many participants of its (now rebranded and corporate sponsorship-supported) high-arts *Moda* programme, but also went on to develop participatory opportunities in carnival-related activities, at the same time selling packages of carnival activity (team building/away-day, and so on) to business clients.

Finally, in terms of broader mission or role, while those occupying CEO/director positions at each organisation said they continued to operate in line with their original aims or mission statements, in both rhetorical

and practical terms, a broad capitulation to the neoliberal agenda could be discerned in all three cases. TAPs CEO, for instance, reflected positively upon the 'culture of organisational accountability' inaugurated within the charity over recent years, framing its renewed relationship with local authority service commissioners primarily around 'the needs that they will have' and describing the organisation's character as having undergone 'almost a commercialisation'. The attitudes expressed by ECA's director, meanwhile, suggested a more thoroughgoing incorporation of neoliberal perspectives as he outlined his vision for developing the organisation's 'service side'/'sold services' by 'judging our market, pitching to it, selling it' and affirming a belief in the need for community arts professionals to become 'good business people' and organisations 'much more business-like' in their operations. Similar accounts of the need to 'be really adaptable' (Business Manager) were also in evidence at CAW, as was a pragmatic valuation of the 'much harder outcomes that we can evidence' (Director) by virtue of the recent effort to reorient the organisation. That said, it was also evident that staff at CAW – perhaps by dint of its considerable history of engaging disadvantaged groups – lamented the state of the landscape now facing organisations such as theirs. Indeed, those who had been involved with CAW since the time of its inception were keenly aware that recently shifted funding priorities sat less than comfortably with 'our founding principles' (Chair of Board).

## Conclusion

As the foregoing discussion suggests, important effects in the orientation and fates of community-based arts organisations have resulted from the cuts and changed funding priorities bound up with austerity and associated neoliberal policy moves. It must be noted, however, that these have not affected organisations in an equivalent manner. In essence, the willingness and ability of organisations to successfully position themselves in relation to either local authority commissioning, creative industry skills development or artistic 'excellence' agendas appears crucial. If and when organisations were unsuccessful in this, their sustainability was either severely threatened (as at TAP) or else completely unachievable (CAW). In summary then, it should be noted that while it may be the case that 'participatory organisations were hit hardest in cuts in arts funding levels from 2010' (Jancovich, 2017, p. 116), more detail can now be added to this picture. That is, even where community-based arts organisations have achieved sustainability in recent years, this appears to have come at significant cost to both their engagement with disadvantaged local groups and their commitment to community development aims.



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