

How does the funding source of a sculpture based project in the public sector influence its outcome? Richard Gibson 2003

Background

With the emergence of art from galleries into the public domain, and the traditional funding sources beginning to disappear, arts funders took advantage of funding schemes such as urban programs, e.g. “regeneration” schemes and employment schemes.

During the 80’s and 90’s, partly steered by the numerous art agencies that were set up, public art began to define its own forum as being quite separate from galleries and museums.

The work being produced was often architecturally influenced and more craft oriented, found in the form of seats, railings, litter bins, arches and signs.

In 1991, the Arts Council published a document campaigning for percent for art and cited European countries as successful examples. According to Susan Jones in an interview with Amanda Crabtree from Public Art (Art and Design) referring to this century “It followed the traditional way of doing things.....a management-led rather than practice-led approach. In short, the strategy rests on setting up specialist officers or agencies (with office space, administrative support....)devising suitable policies which dovetails reality into urban regeneration’s spheres, then going out to locate the artists who could perform the art functions required by the “clients” (property developers, architects, local authority departments). Arts agents became mediators.

With a greater understanding of the beaurocracy involved, artists and arts groups working in the public sphere negotiate their own projects taking an equal part in the designing of a projects to its its making and siting, e.g. Vic Fulkner- Yorkshire. In the same interview, Susan Jones goes on to say “funding boards find this practice led approach more difficult to cope with as it does not fit with the neat structures they have devised.....a practice led approach may generate different kinds of art from what the administrators are expecting; temporary rather than permanent, live art rather than fine art etc.”

In August 1995, it was reputed with reference to Labour Party policy that central government were spending over £5 billion a year on renovating exhibition buildings and new ones they developed a public art/percent for art policy tied to building work and believed that with the Millennium Fund, National Lotteries and the demand for new buildings. This would act as a “strong lead from control government” which would encourage local authorities “whose arts policies will be strengthened by a new statutory responsibility who can have the greatest impact on local artists, by developing new exhibition space, commissions, educational work (mark Risher – shadow arts minister).

In theory, since labour’s election, local authorities should have art policies, which would enable public art ??????. However, in my interview with Peter Newman (Principal cultural services officer for Peterborough) he stated “there have been cut

back generally for the council with little increase in funding since 1996. In 1998 the local arts council went out of services and was rescued by the council>....” He went on to clarify that there was no money available from within the city council itself but would be supportive of any good art ideas, but would strongly encourage funding being sent from alternative sources, like the lottery “awards for all” scheme.

It is interesting to note Susan Jones’ comment “although in theory these authorities have the potential for delivering good art policies and enabling public art work, there are many examples of political expedience taking precedence over any meaningful long term planning. To put it bluntly there is an awful lot of parochialism in local government, which could cause a great deal of innovative work...to fall through the works.”

Funding

“It’s a waste of money....I just don’t see what they’re trying to achieve with it.” – David Sanders, Tory city councillor, Daily Mail Jan 1998, commenting on New Earth Sculpture in the Ferry Meadows Park, Peterborough. The sculpture project, which took approximately five months to build made from Mud and Timber was funded by the “arts for everywhere” National Lotteries scheme in its second round through the regional arts board, following an unsuccessful application directly to the regional arts board for a one off award bid, under the heading “public sculpture”. The Peterborough sculpture trust, which commissioned the work, provided the matching 10% of funding giving a total budget of £5,500. The life expectancy of the piece was indeterminable and followed a vernacular tradition associated with an architectural process of building. The arts council visual arts officer for Lottery commissions, Ben Hayward, said the grant was given for the artist residence in the community, not for any specific work “although we are pleased a work has come about”. Although the scheme has been superseded by the Awards for All, the criteria is the same, with the main aim of the programme to fund projects which involve people in the their community, which also bring them together to enjoy arts, sports, heritage and other community activities. To what degree does the source of funding prescribe the end result? Ben Haywards comment suggests there is an emphasis on a process rather than an end piece of work or public art being produced. It also seems to imply that a sculpture being made was a fortunate bonus. In my interview with Lorna Green (established sculptress), She denied that the different funding sources available had any influence on the consideration of the sculptures design. Does this indicate that a strict selection criteria, when applying for projects may apply or does she adopt a traditional approach to the making of work from funding sources, i.e. the focus being on the “intrinsic nature of the work “ (ID). Commenting on the origin and funding criteria for New Earth sculpture are Ian Duckworth , who is now the secretary of the Peterborough Sculpture trust, believes it would now be unlikely to get funding from the same source for a similar type of project now. In Lorna Green’s own statement from her website she says that she “works mainly in public art/environmental projects, making functional earthworks and sculptures” in both urban and rural landscapes, indoors and outdoors, permanent or temporary, large and small scale. A comprehensive approach, such as this allows an artist to take advantage of the many different types of funding available.

Case study

In the recently completed Woodfield Park Millennium Green project, £3000 was secured from Bass breweries £1339 from the Millennium commission with some additional money originally for an entrance archway, being reallocated from the environment body for Cambridgeshire (Entrust) as this part of the project went over budget. The mosaic feature is sited within the millennium green, which was a national projects with up to 270 separate greens being proposed. The three sources of funding being identified were common to all sites. The countryside agency were the initiators nationally providing the majority of the money in the proportions of approximately 70/15/1.5 respectively. The total amount raised for the park in Welland, Peterborough, was nearly £200,000. The local city council, leased the intended site to a voluntary group of trustees, representing the three communities surrounding the intended green. The council was to act as a support for the trust dealing with contracts, landscape design, and consultancy. Once costs were identified, it would be the trustee's responsibility to claim grant money and pay back the council for services rendered. A project manager was appointed.

A report prepared in January 99 in accordance with the millennium guidelines, called the site preparation plan by Charles Clay was the initial phase towards a successful funding application. The report suggests the millennium celebratory feature to be a mosaic in paving which relates to the local brick industry and the natural site itself..... It continues "to encourage sponsorship, a sponsors logo could be accommodated within possibly the centre of the mosaic" In Feb 2000, this was reiterated in a letter to myself, which acted as a contract to myself, and although Bass breweries had already committed £3000, a red triangle was an approved part of the design for the centre. I asked Lorna Green to what degree did she design and make in relation to responding to materials ; although often offered materials, she was always offered a site as well. Lorna believes the challenge to herself is what she can do with the offered materials on the offered site.

The design concept is indirectly referred to here. How and to what degree the project is proscribed appears to affect the design concept ownership. The site can be an influential factor on the final design factor, not only through its geology, geographical location, physical and visual features, but also through its history and mythology. The report mentioned on the welland project describes the environment for the proposed mosaic, socially and proposes that the project offers "unique opportunity to bring together three communities who live.....alongside of each other, but have few opportunities of relating to each other.....to increase the spirit of local community, and develop a sense of pride in the area" This illustrates an intended social function of the project as a whole to be embodied in the mosaic feature.

The Public

Mike White, the assistance director of Gateshead borough council, explained at a conference I attended that the Angel In The North before it's execution received funding from reclamation grants in 1970's which facilitated the installation of many artworks by artists such as Goldsworthy and Deacon. Several projects by artists were situated within the community, one of which lasted up to two years, involving

children who carved windows and doors in houses on estate streets. Not only did the council become the champions of the Angel in the North, but were amongst the first to take advantage of new available funding sources to facilitate artworks, but recognised the potential for regeneration of the area through attracting funding via a major Public Sited art work, but identified the need for public and social inclusion. It is estimated that approximately 1400 children and 30 schools were involved in making work connected to the Angel. In Selwoods - The Benefits of Public Art, one of here conclusions is that permanent art works to be sited publicly, should be subject to public consultation. Mike White did not elucidate on public consultation during the initial stages of the project, but said that it was a mistake to release the initial drawings of Gormley's ideas to the press attracting enormous public comment as it was proposed to be a figurative piece which people find easy to comment on as they recognise it as being sculpture.

The two projects I have been involved in involved the public differently. In New Earth Sculpture project, a slide talk to be given by myself was advertised in the local newspapers and at the information desk and at the intended site itself, preceding construction. This was poorly attended, but met with interest by those who were there. The press were invited, but not represented. Interested students had the opportunity to work alongside myself, which was taken up successfully by many. A work in progress seminar was advertised and given, which was well attended, largely due to the verbal communication, which took place on site between myself and hundreds of members of the public. Similarly, the greatest degree of dialogue, which took place between the public and Gormley during the construction of the Angel in the North, was through the press, deeming the work as controversial.

A dialogue existed between the three communities surrounding the Millennium Park in Peterborough, up to three years before the mosaic was completed. Workshops that involved hundreds of children and adults at two key stages of pre-build took place. Few people appeared to be interested during the construction of the work, but this took only a few weeks, as opposed to several months, as in the Ferry Meadows example. Lorna Green involves the public at various points, either by initial consultation or on site by their assistance or chatting as well as giving presentations. She considers it to be her responsibility that the public understands the thinking behind the work. "If a work is critically treated with scepticism that it will gradually grow on them". Does this indicate that different intentions from the commissioning bodies are present? : Angel in the North, politically, ferry Meadows, culturally, and the Welland, socially. Sarah Selwood has described art projects as being often administratively led, or practice led. She attributes certain types of activities, like public meetings, running workshops in schools, putting maquettes in the Library for voting on, with the admin approach. She goes on to say that practice led approaches can often be more effective in terms of communication but only if the artist is resident in the community. Consultation can occur on a regular basis as in the case of Ferry Meadows during all stages of the work in progress.

For the Ferry Meadows projects, I was considered artist in residence, but did not live in the city. It is perhaps significant to wonder of the 500,000 visitors a year to the park, how many I spoke to who were local! Would there be a need for regulated consultation if an artist from the immediate community were involved in a residency?

Community Artist

“...the success of such projects should not depend on whether the communities engaged will come to accept them, for without their active involvement from the beginning, the projects will not even get off the ground....” “Hafthor Yugvason (P art. AND) Tim Betts and Julie Montgomery-Smith from Manic Ceramics describe themselves as community artists who complete community arts projects. As referred to by Sarah Jones, arts projects concerned with engagement are often defined as community arts projects. Tim and Julie endorse this and refer to an emphasis being on process and not an end piece. A vision from a project initiator, perhaps a youth group leader exists. The artists job is to manage, assist and facilitate this vision in this instance. By actively seeking out community members to be involved from the early stages of a project, political and social objectives being to be achieved. Through their residency continual consultation becomes an integral part of the project. Although artists involve the public at common stages, using directly or indirectly their input, conceptual or physical and share many other commonalties, like funding sources they separate themselves from community artists. Community art has been considered inferior to other types of art practice as the emphasis can be on the process of facilitation . Tim and Julie state “we are facilitators of ideas.... Working with people directly and helping direct their energy into achieving their ideas” When the artist leave a project, they regard that it is entirely belonging to the communities. In contrast, Gormley’s Angel in the North, although an established part of the Gateshead landscape, and made use of local engineers and fabricators, the design concept and final idea belong to the artist as does the New Earth Sculpture. Lorna Green states that the final ideas are always hers.

The visioners, community and artists share ownership of the welland mosaic, each having input at different stages. The boundary fences between arts projects have changed. The original objectives of a project seem to define the artist’s function and it is these objectives that we can look to in assessing the success of a project. The Angel in the North and the Gateshead public art program has attracted funding of approximately £46,000,000 for the development of the Baltic Flour Mills visual arts centre, £45,000,000 for the new music centre and £18.6 million for the Gateshead millennium bridge. Over 90,000 drivers per day see the sculpture on the A1 and railway. The Nene Park attracts 1 million visitors annually.