



# Conversations on Community Ticketing Schemes

## Foreword

Community Arts Partnership believes in the transformative power of the Arts. Our working definition of Community Arts, as contained in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland Community Arts Policy, co-developed with the community arts sector, is that

*“Community art is a process of harnessing the transformative power of original artistic expression and producing a range of outcomes: social, cultural and environmental. Looked at politically, socially, culturally and/or economically, community arts aim to establish and maximise inclusive ways of working, providing an opportunity for communities and their participants to continue to find ways to develop their own skills as artists and for artists to explore ways of transferring those skills. Through this process, community arts aim to maximise the access, participation, authorship and ownership in collective arts practice.”*

Put simply, community arts practice develops original creative thinking, activity and outcomes to affect positive change.

However, the transformative power of the Arts, and Community Arts in particular, cannot be harnessed without access, a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.





*Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.*

[Article 27: Right to participate in cultural life](#)

Despite being so enshrined, for many people in Belfast access to the theatre, opera, the ballet, festivals like the Belfast Festival at Queens, the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival, perhaps a performance of the Ulster Orchestra or even locally produced theatre productions, is simply not possible due to financial restrictions.

(We would suggest here that there are further restrictions and barriers which emerge from the impact of economic imbalances which we document below and which require sensitive consideration)

We already know there is evidence of a marked difference between arts participation, measured in the following document by attendance at arts events, of those living within the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived.

[http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/impact\\_of\\_poverty\\_on\\_engagement\\_in\\_the\\_arts\\_in\\_northern\\_ireland.pdf](http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/impact_of_poverty_on_engagement_in_the_arts_in_northern_ireland.pdf)

It might also be noted that the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure had a commitment for

*"pro-actively harnessing the transformative power of the creative and cultural sectors to tackle disadvantage and support a confident, creative, informed and healthy society in this part of Ireland."*



And beyond that the Departments top priority as presented by the DCAL Minister, Carál Ní Chuilín and supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland was

*"to promote social and economic equality and tackle poverty and social exclusion."*

Community Ticketing Schemes could be one avenue where an attempt can be made to provide access to the Arts for those people disadvantaged because of economic imbalances.

## Introduction

When Community Arts Partnership began our survey of "Community Ticketing Schemes" our thoughts were that there were a number of schemes in operation which might not be working to their fullest capacity.

We thought that there were audience development processes at work which aim was to increase creative engagement, particularly of those people living in areas of social and economic deprivation and that what might be required was some tweaking, maybe even a substantial amount of tweaking, of practices which were already active.

We knew people had criticisms, the schemes were ad hoc, poorly administered, often provision of tickets appeared last minute and there was general irritation with what was on offer.

Having now conducted face to face interviews, telephone conversations and focus group discussions with a range of community arts participants, venue managers, community groups, community centre managers, administration

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staff and community group members to understand and ascertain the extent and nature of the current provision and availability of Community Ticketing Schemes in Belfast, we would suggest at the outset that there is space for much wider investigation, it is reasonable to conclude that there is very little provision of “Community Ticketing” in general (we will come to a working definition shortly) and very little by way of official ticketing schemes which target those living in areas of multiple deprivation directly through Arts venues in Belfast.

## Discount Ticketing

What does exist can more adequately be described as “discount ticketing” for Community Groups; pricing is set at around £4-£5, these “discount tickets” require bulk buying and usually have restrictions on attendance, the “user” has very little control over the use of the ticket, insofar as that could be catered for.

Where criticisms exist, that systems are ad hoc, poorly administered, have poor levels of communication and tend not to understand that offering the ticket is only part of the equation, many community organisations need far more support to avail of a theatre or concert ticket; the ticket, however generous the discount, is not sufficient, **these criticisms describe the actually existing “community ticketing” system.**

There is no “Community Ticketing Scheme” which goes beyond this level of provision, no scheme which emerges from ongoing dialogue with the



communities in question which takes into account issues and concerns regarding such schemes.

## Authorship, Ownership, Access and Participation

It has been suggested that if such a dialogue was undertaken to allow **authorship** of the process, the resultant Community Ticketing Scheme might include a number of components. It might include support for attendance of events, transport, volunteer or carer support, it might include an Arts induction process prior to registration, a component connecting the experience of attending events and being an arts practitioner, (if someone from an area of social and economic deprivation were to attend a show at The Lyric and was inspired towards activity in the art of Theatre there is no provision for that eventuality with an ongoing Arts participation programme connected to the ticketing process), and perhaps also a post attendance process of dialogue to allow for wider processing of the experience. This could inculcate a feeling of **ownership** of the process.

Effectively now there is only provision of “the ticket”, and while CAP suggests that more can be learnt from organisations which spend a lot of time re-

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orientating attitudes of venue managers towards “the ticket”, the ticket isn’t enough to guarantee increased **access** and **participation**.

We may have started aiming to identify barriers preventing groups from availing of the available schemes and ascertain what might incentivise people particularly those residing in areas experiencing social and economic deprivation to engage with the Arts and therefore make use of community ticketing offers.

We may have started aiming also to examine what other ticketing options might be surveyed to provide the basis for a reinvigoration and remodelling of those schemes presently available but we feel now that drawing on our research, and the information provided through the conversations we conducted, may provide learning for the establishing of a new approach and the creation of new schemes.

With that in mind, what was most evident from our investigation; a general disenfranchisement from the arts of people in areas of social and economic deprivation. This tension and alienation echoed throughout our community discussions, and while it was sometimes conducted in the language of “community” a sensitive understanding can provide a much richer more dynamic understanding of what describing things in this way actually represents.



Couple this with our discussions with venue managers and admin staff from a cross section of the Arts venues in Belfast who raised a series of issues with us which clearly mitigate against providing an effective ticketing scheme which would maximise creative engagement with the Arts of people from the areas in question; while many would admit that there needs to be more work done to creatively engage people from socially and economically deprived areas there was a universal citing of the obstacles; financial pressures, Theatre company and promoters ticketing requirements, lack of time and capacity in terms of staffing, lack of a central strategic commitment or planning and a lack of knowledge as to what conversations are necessary to orientate constructive

relationships between the Arts venues and people experiencing social and economic deprivation.

The information available could be interpreted as an unbridgeable gap between those who run Arts venues and those who access them, that they are of a particular socio-economic persuasion, and the people from areas experiencing social and economic deprivation are from another.

There are certainly arguments in the political spectrum which put forward this to be the case.

We would suggest though that there is a process underway which requires new strategic thinking regarding Arts provision generally and “Community Ticketing” as one aspect of that process.

## Transitional Phase



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Contained within the conversations were the roots of a transitional phase regarding the Arts. People talked of lacking confidence, feeling as if their cultural contributions would have little value or that they could not participate in cultural life because of where they came from, where they lived now, the limits to their educational attainment, even citing in some cases a lack of knowledge of etiquette regarding attendance at Arts events like the Theatre or the Opera.

We discovered that some community centres are conducting surveys with their users and finding out that “confidence” is as much an issue as financial difficulty. Careful consideration might suggest that it was not the case that people wanted

wholly to reject a connection to the Arts, although the “communal language” and expressed ideologies might lead one to assume this, but more that they might not feel confident to make a connection.

Furthermore it appears from some of the conversations that a transitional phase is opening up in community relations where the possibilities of progression from separation to integration is evident, something that would connect arts programmes to the same sort of processes that lay the foundation for Together Building a United Community (TBUC) and CAP’s own Programme for Intercultural Arts Support (PICAS).





It is in that space, the space between what existed previously and what has the potential to exist, that we believe, with regards Arts provision generally and Community Ticketing in particular, there is required a sensitive reappraisal.

We have the capacity to collect vast amounts of data regarding audience activities since the advent over the past decade or so of the shift towards online ticketing and dynamic marketing practices based on data collection from online sales, we believe utilised for the purposes of connecting disenfranchised communities to the artistic and cultural life throughout Belfast, there is an opportunity for a significant reappraisal of current provision.

Our proposals, fusing the learning from our conversations with information gleaned from research on ticketing generally, suggest the adoption of new approaches and new practices.



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## Availability of Community Ticketing and responses from Arts venues.

We asked a series of questions in discussions with Arts venue managers, administration, box office and marketing staff regarding ticketing practices, availability of community ticketing and attitudes towards community ticketing schemes.





For the purposes of this section it would be reasonable to suggest that the present definition regarding what constitutes a Community Ticketing Scheme is - a process which offers tickets at reduced prices for community groups which have basic statutory requirements i.e. a constitution, board or committee, a bank account and designated individuals for receipt of information which requires registration with the Venue and once registered allows those registered groups to access the scheme.

Using this limited definition we can suggest that there is very little available for community groups in areas of social and economic deprivation to access but we can add that the venues are not opposed to implementing such schemes.

## The Opera House

There is no official community ticketing scheme at present. There is no registration scheme for Community Groups.

There are discounted tickets available but this is dependent on negotiations between the Opera House and theatre company managers and promoters.

There are cheap deals on bulk buying.

It was suggested to us that The Opera House is in the process of discussing how best to set up a Community Ticketing Scheme which would target those living in areas experiencing poverty and how best to administer such a scheme.



*“We don’t have an official scheme but we are likely to start the research process which could lead to the establishment of a community ticketing process. We wouldn’t be prepared to implement a scheme without the necessary research.”*

## **The Black Box**

There is no official community ticketing scheme at present. There are reduced price, subvented and discounted tickets available at most Black Box events and there is a commitment to creating performance spaces and events where there is no charge for entry.

The Black Box is also a host venue and so must negotiate with outside promoters or festival programmers regarding discounted tickets.

The Black Box conducts community development work with people with disabilities and older people through which there is an ad hoc process allowing for cheap or free tickets to Black Box events for participants in these projects. This has resulted in audience development with participants from these projects having gone on to attend Black Box events.

*“We don’t have a community ticketing scheme .....what we try and do is offer free events.....and we always have discounted tickets..... we also have events.... older people’s events, people with disabilities..... where it is free in”*





*“because we are a receiving house we only have so much control over what people want to charge so we try and make sure there is a concession rate and I’ll get in touch with our community groups to let them know ...”*

## **The Queens Film Theatre**

There is no official Community Ticketing Scheme at present. There are cheap and discounted tickets available.

There are school group concessions and there are targeted promotions of specific screenings which it is believed will appeal to particular sections of the community.

The Queens Film Theatre does screening of films produced by Community Groups and there are efforts being made to connect those screenings with audience development.

<http://www.queensfilmtheatre.com/booknow/special-offers/>

*“There is no official community ticketing scheme.....our tickets are reasonably priced.....from £4 through to £6.70.....we do have community outreach work where we work with community groups and we would offer free tickets to those groups.”*

*“There is a possibility that where our cinema is [situated] makes it difficult for people to access our screenings – we get people saying to us that they didn’t go to Queens so they didn’t think they could come to this cinema – others say they didn’t know it was here.”*





*“Our outreach work is difficult.....I’m only part time and so there are limited resources but it is difficult to get hold of people in community centres to work with them and it does seem as if community workers find it difficult to get young people to commit to working with us...it is hard to reach “hard to reach” people”*

## **The Spectrum Centre**

There is no official community ticketing scheme at present.

There are discount tickets and other ticket offers which are decided by individual promoters in conjunction with admin staff at the centre

There is an ad hoc community ticketing process which we discuss below.

## **An Culturlann**

There is no official community ticketing scheme at present.

## **Oh Yeah Music Centre**

There is no official community ticketing scheme at present.

Through the Oh Yeah Music Centre’s community development work with young people with disabilities and young people living in areas of social and economic deprivation there are free tickets available to attend gigs at the Oh Yeah Centre.

The Oh Yeah Centre does suggest that this community development work has stimulated audience development.



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## The Lyric Theatre

There is no official community ticketing scheme at present.

There are discounted tickets available to community groups and there are cheap tickets available at end of performance runs.

The Super Saver scheme is a Community Group scheme where £5 tickets can be bought in bulk, 10 tickets or more, by registered users. There are a number of restrictions on usage.

<http://www.lyrictheatre.co.uk/discounts.aspx>

*“One of our frustrations with the community ticketing system we have in place is that it hasn’t really hit the people we wanted it to hit....and the reason we had a ticketing scheme with tickets at discounted prices was that we wanted to do was attract people from economically disadvantaged areas who wouldn’t ordinarily come to the theatre to think about it and give it a go.....and that hasn’t quite come off ...yet”*

## The Crescent Arts Centre

There is no official community ticketing scheme at present.

The Crescent Arts Centre through its extensive arts courses and community development work offers discounted tickets to participants.

There are often occasions where through participation in community work tickets free of charge are made available to participants.



*“We don’t have a community ticketing scheme or a strategy to implement one yet ...but we are moving towards that. There is no written strategy at present but we do a lot of community based projects and we do a lot of offers on tickets for the people who participate in those programmes. We also provide buses to get people in and we do a lot of ticketing offers for Asylum Seeker groups who have no money.”*

## **The MAC**

It was unclear whether an official Community Ticketing Scheme is in operation at present. We believe there are discount tickets available to community groups and information for discounted ticketing is available on the MAC website. (We were unable to meet up with a representative from marketing to inquire further but have sent our questions to the Education officer)

<https://themaclive.com/offers/Four-or-More-Saver>

<https://themaclive.com/offers/under-25s>

## **The Waterfront and Ulster Halls**

The Waterfront and Ulster Halls have an official community ticketing scheme.

Community Groups with standard statutory arrangements, constitution, board or committee, bank account and designated person to register can access the scheme once registered.

There is a dedicated member of staff who oversees the scheme.



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community ticketing schemes



<http://www.waterfront.co.uk/aboutus/communityaccess.aspx>.

It is our understanding at present that the scheme is not currently operating at the same level of community support as previously experienced by community groups in Belfast.

## A VIRTUAL CHANGE

It is vitally important to understand at this point that “the ticket” has undergone a revolutionary transformation.

## Digital Revolution

The digital revolution has impacted ticketing just as much as it has impacted cultural offerings generally.

Tickets are no longer primarily something bought in a shop or through the box office, although in Belfast these options still exist.

By and large ticketing is an online experience and most venues want to move towards a substantial percentage of sales coming digitally.

The crucial development with online ticketing is the collection and collation of information. Venues now know who attends their shows, where they live, how often they attend, what their preferences are, and with the introduction of varied ticketing practices, dynamic ticketing and personalised promotions they can utilise the information collected to maximise the potential for attendance.

We will suggest that there is learning to be accessed from these new practices which could inform development of future Community Ticketing Schemes.



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## Online ticketing and Data Collection

*“Our online ticketing has really taken off and we are up around the 85% mark. Our data collection is not as good as it could be and we are aiming to improve on that.”*

*Crescent Arts centre*

*“We would sell around 90,000 tickets per year and around 45-50% would be online bookings. We collect demographic information through our online tickets sales ...we have high levels of engagement through social media....12,000 on Facebook and 14,000 on Twitter...Our demographic would be similar to that of The Black Box...but our attendees are a bit more varied.....people will travel long distances to come to film screenings.”*

*Queens Film Theatre*

*“We got a new system about two years ago...TicketSolve.....and before that we had 40-50 % online and 50 per cent in person sales....now it’s more like 70% online sales.....Our recent questionnaire gave us a clear idea of who are audience is .....we have a type of audience.....there isn’t a lot of crossover.....we have a more fringe left of centre audience.”*



## *The Black Box*

It would appear that venues in Belfast have embraced online booking systems and the data collection that accompanies them.

Below we look at discussions regarding this situation and why there might be advantages to be taken into consideration in any future developments.



## What people in local communities say about Community Ticketing Schemes

We have split the conversation into sections and themes and provided direct quotes which relate to those themes.

### Lack of Knowledge

It is reasonable to say that for most of the people we talked to there was no knowledge whatsoever of community ticketing schemes or even that an understanding existed where groups could be part of a registration process which would allow their group, or group members or community centre user groups to access artistic events throughout Belfast.

*“Until you mentioned it I’d never heard of the term Community Ticketing, and I didn’t know anything about registering for any scheme available in the past or even any available now...”*

#### *Bytes Project*

*“Well...I’ve never heard that term used.....we don’t really get many requests from the groups which use our centre for tickets for The Mac or the Opera House....I’m not sure it’s something people up this way do.....go to the Theatre or the Opera....we don’t have any connection to organising tickets for users of the centre”*

#### *Glen Road Community Centre*





*“Most people in our area wouldn’t know about that.....People in our area just wouldn’t go to see the Ulster Orchestra.....or go to the Lyric.....even if there were cheap tickets....”*

### *Lagan Village*

*“Every now and again I see emails for tickets .....but...I thought they were for staff.”*

### *The Markets*

## **Disgruntlement with method**

Insofar as people knew about cheap ticketing, the methods of application or avenues of access were considered ad hoc, poorly resourced and often appeared to be more about filling empty seats than about creative engagement.

*“...we might get an email saying there were some tickets available for free to go to the opera house. We’d stick an email out to staff but that’s it.....nothing else.....nothing you could call a regular ticketing offer which would be connected to the work we do....”*

### *The Bytes Project*

*“Every now and again we hear of tickets available.....to see a play or hear some music.....We often get the feeling this is about bums on seats – last minute attempts to fill the space.....”*



*Knocknagoney Community Centre*

*“We get rung up sometimes and told there’s some free tickets available to go the Waterfront or the Ulster Hall .....but it’s almost always last minute.”*

*Lagan Village Community Centre.*

*“We sometimes get offered tickets but it was always too late – always too few – always not suited to our needs..... The only time we look to take advantage of such offers is for the Christmas Pantomime season but even that did not suit us – the tickets were too expensive and the seats meant the kids would not have been seated in groups.”*

*Lagan Village Community Centre*

*“Where we would want tickets would be for the pantomime...around Christmas time.....but if you’ve got thirty kids with families a few pounds off a £12-15 ticket isn’t an option – we might have 70 people going....we need a bus...we need to provide community workers .....it just becomes very difficult without substantial support..”*

*Lower Oldpark Community Association*

*“As far as we know each centre has a designated member of staff and they tend to get the emails which say what is available.....every few months we hear of tickets to this or that play or concert...sometimes they fit with our user groups...we had tickets for Peppa Pig recently....”*



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## The Markets

### Poorly Resourced

It was also present in the discussion that while tickets might be available, the organisers of the schemes were not cognisant of the essential elements required to take advantage of such schemes – time – transport – facilitation of carers in the case of older people – community workers in the case of young people – it was suggested that there was no taking into account the added extras that allow for meaningful utilisation of the tickets.

*“We need a lot of notice – a lot of work goes into organising trips for young people even just to the city centre – there are discussions to be engaged in – agreements to be reached – behaviours to be managed... We could give a ticket/tickets to groups of young people but there is no guarantee with that approach - just giving over tickets - that anyone would actually go to the theatre or any event for that matter - In order to ensure that the ticketing was used appropriately – it would have to connect with one of our projects – suicide awareness for example – that way we could discuss the event – go through it thoroughly – organise accordingly – transport – carers etc – get a thorough connection with our young people – and then it would work..”*

## Bytes Project



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*“It seems very ad hoc... it’s always late on when information arrives ... if it arrives at all and the tickets are still too expensive even with reductions - £5 is too expensive for families on benefits and now the Opera House is too expensive to take kids to ...even with reductions...we wanted to take kids to the pantomime...but it was just too expensive.... - £3 is about the starting point...but it’s not just that... what about transport?...what about support staff?.....what about volunteer support?”*

*Lower Oldpark Community Centre*

*“A lot of the time we can get people to The Waterfront or the Ulster Hall...that’s walking distance really but anywhere else ...the groups don’t have money for the transport...that would mean they would have to ask us for it..”*

*The Markets*

## **Inefficient**

For others who did know about the schemes on offer, this was limited predominately to the Belfast City Council’s ticketing scheme which allows community groups to register in order to access tickets for events at the Waterfront and Ulster Hall. These schemes were both welcomed and subject to criticism.

*“We know about cheap tickets and we are registered...Every time we get emails letting us know about tickets to the Ulster Hall or the Opera House...we just email out to staff...they always come late on and generally we don’t have the*





*capacity to send them out to the community groups that use this centre...the staff get them and that's about it"*

### *Ballynafeigh Community Centre*

*"We know about the Belfast City Council scheme...you register to get cheap tickets...There are a series of problems...you get told too late usually by email...the emails come sporadically...you always feel it is a last minute thing to get some bums on seats at the Ulster Hall or the Waterfront.....and half the time you don't know what the thing is you're been asked to go to....."*

### *Spectrum Centre*

*"Sometimes the limits to tickets cause problems... if there's only two tickets or five tickets then a group will probably not go because they don't want to draw names out of a hat.....other times you have to buy a minimum of ten tickets and that's just not possible."*

### *The Markets*





## General Complaints

Many who used Community Ticketing schemes presently available were highly critical. They suggested that the schemes were

“Poorly resourced”

“Lack adequate processes”

“Lack support both leading up to and at the point of delivery”

“Lack travel support”

“Do not take into account requirements for carer support”

“Very little direct discussion with participants.”

“Not always offered at appropriate times”

“Work with very little information provided”

“Lack of availability when required”

“The application processes were very time consuming”

“You need to buy too many tickets...that doesn't work for us”

From the point of view of those people we conducted conversations with there were very little positive aspects in terms of experiences relayed.



## Learning from other local Community Ticketing Schemes

Some participants representing groups, organisations or venues which had their own ticketing schemes suggested that there was potential to make the schemes work but also had criticisms of the methods employed in their schemes.

*“There is a community ticketing scheme at the Spectrum Centre – it is informal – and much of my role is about discussing with groups what they are interested in – what they might attend – what kinds of shows they would be prepared to take a chance on – it almost doesn’t matter that tickets are free – people will attend if it is something they want to go to – but if it is something they didn’t know much about – it’s very unlikely that you will be able to convince people to attend – free ticketing just doesn’t work...but there’s a lot of time and energy required to administer even our ad hoc informal system...”*

Spectrum Centre

*“ The basis of my work at the Spectrum centre is that I have informal networks and when events are on – I inform people or they might ring me – and we organise to get them tickets – often what matters is whether they know people in performances or not – they go to local events put on by local people – now promoters have relationships with the centre and they determine what tickets will be allocated between them but otherwise it’s informal and ad hoc.....but people do get cheap or free tickets to arts events...”*

Spectrum Centre





One representative from the Hitchhikers Guide to the Arts relayed that this programme while limited was comprehensive.

*“the hitchhikers guide to the arts is a small, limited programme – 350 tickets – 2 schemes – the key scheme is to chaperone people to events that they might not otherwise attend - it is partially an audience development process - crucially we meet up with people – connect up with groups – we spend a lot of time talking to people about their experience – both before they go to an event and after they have been part of an event – so there is a debriefing process - This is an access programme – to find ways of getting individuals – and groups – to attend events – a mentor meets groups – will discuss with groups what is available to participants – what they might expect – what is expected of them.....”*

<http://blogs.qub.ac.uk/belfastfestival/hitchhikers-guide-to-belfast-festival/>

### *Belfast Festival at Queens*

A representative from Young at Art and the Belfast Children’s Festival told of how they also run a community Ticketing Scheme which has been in existence for 10 years. This scheme has led to a large percentage of the audience for the Children’s festival, close to 25% of attendees, buying their own tickets as part of our Community Ticketing scheme.

*“What we do is quite systemic – we cold-call groups – mother and toddler groups – sure-start groups – after school clubs– then meet people – build up relationships – we want parents to connect with the festival – so we offer*





*groups half price tickets – but we also want parents as individuals – we go for two sessions – find an advocate - then spend time training individuals to be bridge builders between Young at Art and the groups – personal contact is crucial - Once the relationships are cemented – we show people what is available to them - the organisation spends time selecting relevant arts activities for the groups – is it age appropriate – is it likely to engage the people who are being targeted – work on knowledge gained from discussion at the place where participants feel comfortable – then we provide them with a brochure – we connect that brochure to our bridge builder and that is how the process works. We aim to develop audiences as well as provide opportunities for creative engagement. Our process requires time and is very labour intensive but it is rewarding.”*

There are certainly some interesting points raised in the information given to us regarding the schemes employed by Young at Art and The Belfast Festival at Queens Hitchhikers Guide to the Arts. Some of this information informed our proposals for consideration.





## The question of confidence and tackling conservatism

Emerging from the discussions which was slightly unexpected was the issue of the lack of education regarding the Arts, and as a corollary to this an entrenched low level of confidence in terms of understanding the arts, which feeds into a fear of attempting new experiences, a fear of taking part in artistic endeavours and this was particularly acute in areas with high levels of deprivation.

We might add here as a note of caution that in our conversations there emerged a slightly awkward component to the discussions in that arguments are made slightly differently in areas of multiple deprivation which are predominantly Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist or Catholic/Nationalist/Republican. There is a language of “community” which needs sensitive interpretation.

In areas predominantly Protestant it was argued that Protestants do not engage with the Arts and see themselves by and large as alienated from the Arts – it is argued that the Arts generally are not part of their “culture” and not something to be participated in.

CAP was told though that when a recent exercise was conducted regarding the Arts in the Lagan Village area many people responded saying they felt a lack of confidence in their knowledge understanding and abilities regarding artistic activities.



*“Our community doesn’t see the arts as important or is disconnected from the Arts...it isn’t seen as part of our culture...our community will only connect if people see things as connected to our culture.....we’ve just started to look into this and we think it is connected to a lack of confidence generally”*

### Lower Oldpark Community Centre

*“The Loyalist community doesn’t connect with the arts – with the performing arts – doesn’t see the performing arts as connected to their community. Even if there was a lot of work done in the beginning – it is doubtful that there would be take-up. It is seen as something that simply doesn’t connect with the community. At best if there was an ideological connection you might get buy in”*

### Lagan Village Community Centre

*“We don’t have a culture of connection to the Arts – it is hard enough getting parents to acknowledge the talents of their kids in the Arts.....We’ve been having a lot of discussions around arts - trying to connect what we do in terms of local culture – bands - musicians – folk singers and connecting them to other artistic activities.....it’s a slow process”*

### Lower Oldpark Community Association

In nationalist areas a similar story is told but reflected through the culture of tradition - doing only what you know and a lack of confidence to try new things





*“We think there needs to be work done in terms of education – we have just done some survey research of our users and they just don’t know what to expect from*

*the Arts – don’t know what to do when they go to venues - how to behave – how to dress – there is as a real lack of confidence – they’ll say it’s not for them but then you discuss the issues they come on board...*

*We did a consultation with a mothers group – that worked - they are interested – so we are now looking for an artistic activity for them to become involved with and we will look at events they might like to attend...”*

#### *The Markets Community Centre*

*“A lot of what happens in this area is part of our traditions – it is handed down family to family – Irish dancing, music, crafts – there’s not much call for people going to plays at the Lyric – it’s being part of what you know..”*

#### *Glen Road Community Centre*

All this suggests that there is still much more required than just providing a Community Ticketing Scheme with affordable prices, even if work was done on streamlining services, creating some uniformity of form and function that all venues could sign up to and implement. There is an identifiable need for wider considerations regarding arts education or induction processes, and beyond







community ticketing schemes



that, confidence building measures through arts engagement in areas where deprivation and social exclusion are determining characteristics.





## Learning from discussions on ticketing and marketing

During the collation of this report, CAP researched other conversations regarding ticketing in general, as there isn't a lot of information regarding Community Ticketing Schemes and best practice models that might produce results in particular.

What we did find was a substantial amount of activity, conferences, symposiums, discussions and theorising on the "ticketing process", the "ticketing experience" and the use of online ticketing, digital data collection and dynamic marketing to create "communities" around Venues or Festivals and from that vantage point, how to build the relationship between the Venue or Festival and the "community."

There was also contained within these discussions the need to find ways of creating ongoing dialogue with the community and looking at ways of expanding the community and enhancing the opportunity to engage and attend.

One such conference report will suffice as an example of the conversation.

The Glimps Festival is a show case festival that features emerging bands and connects them with venue managers and promoters. The event takes place in music venues and cafes in Belgium in the city of Ghent.

The festival also includes forums and workshops some of which centred around a discussion on ticketing and its application.



*“The aim of the project is to have a prospective vision of: what will our venues need and what will our occupations be in 5 years? What is our future, how do our business models have to evolve, and how do we deal with the evolution of our sector?”*

*The first plenary sessions dealt with an extensive list of questions regarding ticketing.*

- 1. What is the capacity of your venue?*
- 2. How many tickets do you sell on a yearly basis?*
- 3. What is the average ticket price?*
- 4. Through which channels do you sell your tickets (shop, online, counter, ...)?*
- 5. What is the share of the different channels (in percentage)?*
- 6. What is the relation presales - door sales?*
- 7. How long do you work with e-tickets already?*
- 8. How is your ticket price built up? (actual price, reservation fee, transaction fee, ...)*
- 9. Is the fee included in the ticket price you announce in your communication?*
- 10. Which information do you put on the ticket?*
- 11. What options do you have to customize the information on the ticket?*
- 12. What are the possibilities for data reporting?*
- 13. With which system do you work? Own developed system or a package?*
- 14. Do you work with mobile ticketing?*
- 15. How do you handle guest and press demands? Would you use ticketing software or another solution?*



16. *Can you call upon a helpdesk for ticketing problems?*

17. *How do you organise the scanning of tickets?*

18. *How do you organise the refunds in case of cancellation of a show?*

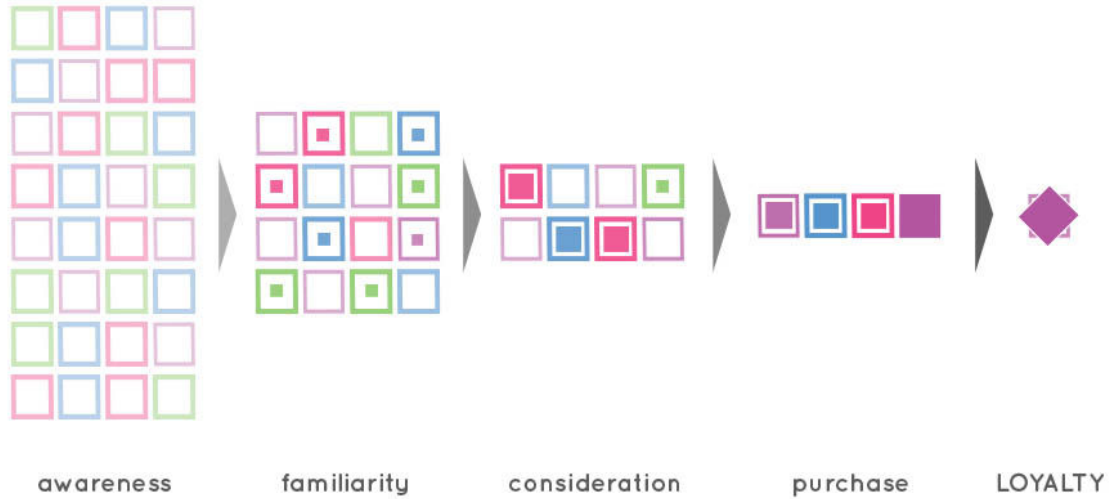
Other discussions centred around creating “community” models

*“The world has changed and we must adapt to new models and strategies : In the old model, the consumer knows a lot of different brands (awareness), but they reduce the number of brands in their mind (familiarity, consideration) to decide to purchase only one (purchase, loyalty).*

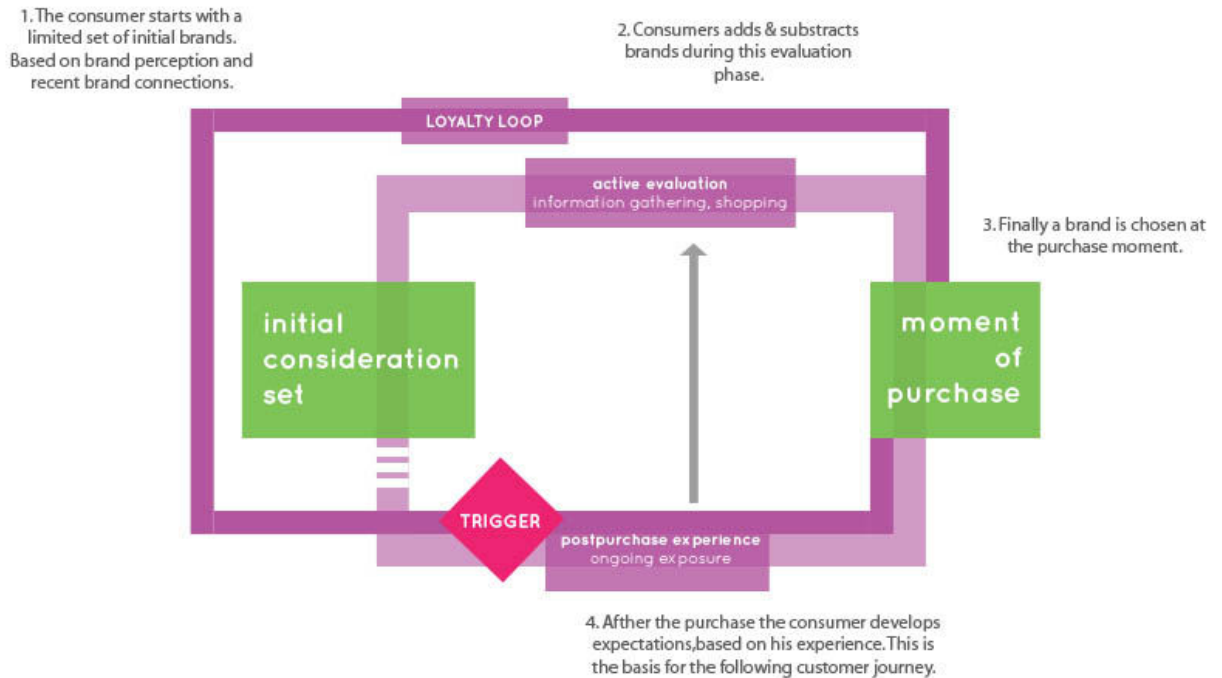
*In the new model, the consumer starts with a limited set of brands based on recent perception. Then, something happens that makes them decide to buy, it is an active evaluation : the consumer adds and subtracts brands during this evaluation phase.”*



### The Tradition Funnel



*"From this evolution, we notice that you should not be at the beginning of the schema (awareness) you have to be at the purchase moment.*



*After the purchase, if you create a relationship with the consumer (equalling a*



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*good experience), it will create a loyalty so people will go to you directly without going back to the active evaluation.*

*Do not think you have identified the correct target group of what you are doing? The target group is no longer our end destination, it is one medium.*

*People like it when they are asked their opinion because it is a mark of respect.*

*Be careful the way you ask opinion. Instead of “asking” people, it should be more about “involving” people, like a community.*

*Do not underestimate the number of communities you are part of. In each community there is a leader. You are targeting a person and the people around this person (their communities).*

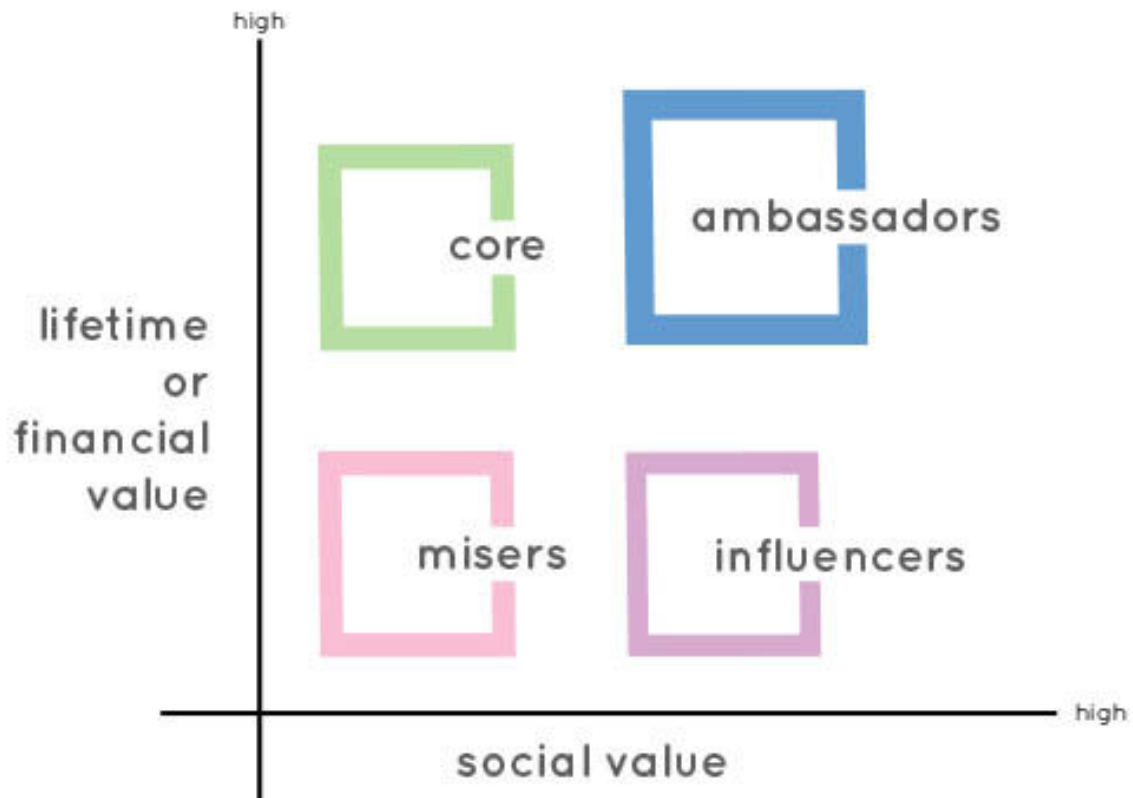
- *The misers are the ones who buy a ticket once and they don't tell anyone about the experience.*
- *The core are those who often come to your venue but they don't share their experiences.*
- *The influencers don't have time/finance to come often but they often share what they experience and what they want to do in the future.*
- *The ambassadors are those who share their experiences. They are people who create the potential for expansion.*



While much of this discussion is couched in the language of marketing methodologies, there are a number of concepts worth considering: the level of detail entered into just to build an audience, reach that audience, maintain a dialogue with that audience, create an enjoyable experience for that audience and maintain and ultimately increase audiences.

The idea that the audience or community must be treated with respect, they must be consulted regarding their opinions, that this dialogue is crucial to the possibility of expanding the audience.

Beyond that approach there is a theorization of how connectivity is made and maintained. Effectively audiences and communities are not considered of uniform opinion, instead there are people who advocate activity and support and others who may or may not do that.



*It is a huge communication challenge to combine ambassadors and cores. The idea is not only to try to reach them but to find many ways to motivate them.*

*The relationship with the consumer has to be a CONVERSATION. For example, social networks should not be a way to “announce” things. It must be a conversation, like asking questions... because if people react and answer, then your publications will appear more often on their wall. People who react will remember you longer.*

*When you communicate, think about relevance (i.e. it concerns me and not everyone, context and environment) and utility (it helps me to: save time, save money, be with friends, gain knowledge, discover things, avoid problems, make*



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*me feel better). You should make a list of the added value you bring to your target group.*

We think with a nuanced evaluation of some of these concepts we may achieve some useful methods for communication with those we wish to motivate to connect with the artistic and cultural events the city has to offer.

Beyond that, these concepts are not so far away from the ideas Community Arts Partnership puts forward for being involved creatively

*“So we turn to the real ambition for the arts: to help transform the lives of this place and it's people into a vibrant, artistic, got-to-visit, can't miss it, destination for us, our children and our visitors.*

*We can do this and in fact we have gone a long way to doing so. 14 major festivals in one city, countless other smaller events and festival happenings, citywide arts programmes in Belfast alone never mind the region wide arts programmes, festivals, events, etc in as many places as there are art forms ! And an ever present appetite for more.*

*This is what we want from our arts. We want variety, positivity, a celebration of talents and opportunities. We want continued affordable access and participation. We want quality. We want imagination and creative challenge. We want thoughtful exploration of who we are and how we relate. We want tomorrow to always be better than today even if today was an awesome day.*



community ticketing schemes



*And we want new horizons that promise the potential for shaping our futures and leaving our mark.*

*The arts give us all the opportunity to do this. We have a fantastic, varied, expert, dynamic arts scene here that has been painstakingly built up over generations. We should all celebrate that and not allow the short-sighted or ill-informed give the arts a kicking or damn it with faint praise. We need to sing a different tune, that the arts matter and represents a society that is winning and leave the negativity, back-biting and penny-pinching to yesterday.”*

*Conor Shields @CAP CAPtain’s Blog*





## Proposals

### **Authorship, Ownership, Access and Participation – generating new approaches to Community Ticketing**

Our conversations and research have suggested that even on a very limited definition of what a Community Ticketing Scheme would consist of there is very little official provision and what is available doesn't appear to have the confidence of the people it is aiming to help.

We have also seen that Venues consulted have a series of concerns, financial pressures, negotiations with promoters and theatre company managers, and lack of capacity and staff to fully drive forward policies to increase creative engagement with people living in 'hard to reach communities'.

We have unearthed attitudes towards the Arts, attitudes towards barriers and difficulties people in communities experiencing social and economic deprivation hold, which in our view require a sensitive approach in order to allow progression from a "communal" defence which engenders very limited connectivity with The Arts and Arts venues towards a more substantial relationship.

We reiterate what we proposed in our introduction to change the present situation.

1. Albeit that we have consulted a wide cross section of community active individuals and organisations, that the setting up of a process of community dialogue involving representatives from local communities,



Venues, arts practitioners, arts participants and statutory agencies with the aim to reappraise and develop a new Community Ticketing Scheme.

2. It has been suggested that if such a dialogical format was undertaken to allow **authorship** of the process, the resultant Community Ticketing Scheme might include a number of components, and these would have to be considered as part of the dialogue and subsequent strategies:

- \*include support for attendance of events, transport, volunteer or carer support
- \*include an Arts induction process prior to registration which might include visits to venues, experience of rehearsal performances, specific performances outside of venues, more use of relaxed audience methods etc
- \*include a component connecting the experience of attending events and being an arts practitioner, (if someone from an area of social and economic deprivation were to attend a show at The Lyric and was inspired towards participation in the art of Theatre there are avenues for ongoing an Arts participation programme connecting the ticketing process to further, specific engagement),
- \*include a pre/post attendance process of dialogue to allow for wider processing of the experience. This could inculcate a feeling



of **ownership** of the process, and allowing new audiences to interrogate the various arts specific protocols around conduct and behaviours .

3. The development of a volunteer scheme attaching community arts volunteers to venues to connect with and support community groups accessing venues including the provision of additional information on the events specifically for people new to the experience of attending the Arts venues.
4. The resourcing and investing in attendance ambassadors – those who can influence locally and who can be key participants in local community loyalty to art forms and venues.
5. From the learning associated with the online ticketing process and modern marketing techniques which emerge from the data collection processes associated with the new methods, format research into how these might be better utilised (instead of merely increasing market share) but rather to increase community engagement with the Arts and Art venues. Segmenting new audiences beyond “market” criteria in order that publicly funded inclusion and participation targets become sustainable.



6. Effectively now there is only provision of “the ticket”. While CAP suggests that much more can be learnt from organisations which spend a lot of time re-orientating attitudes of venue managers towards “the ticket”, online ticketing and its concomitant digital marketing has meant that what can be provided as part of the ticketing package (Youtube clips showcasing the event, first person interviews, information about the performers, future performances and other performers or events to investigate, information about your audience experience) is substantial. In itself, the ticket isn’t enough to guarantee increased **access** and **participation**. The platforming of engagement and the further financial and labour intensive investment in relationship building, creating a sustainable connectedness to artistic and cultural activity would increase attendance and participation in creative and cultural activities throughout Belfast. Such strategies and community ticketing initiatives require additional, value-based investment in audience development.
7. What this approach suggests is that there now needs to be a reappraisal of where we are and that a thoughtful, reorientation, invested with a determination to activate the building of new relationships and loyalties within the arts be developed.
8. It is further suggested that models of engagement have to better understand the implications of seeking to support a more diverse audience demographic through audience development processes. This



cannot be merely the communication of ticket opportunities but the provision of more tailored packages of supported, interactive engagement and programming of illustrative additional and appropriately resourced packages. This should be undertaken through a variety of community facing organisations with trusted, on-going relationships within so-called 'hard to reach' communities.

9. Developing loyalties to art forms and venues should move from piecemeal engagement opportunities to more collaboratively developed strategies that respond have regard to programme, setting, support services, artistic and creative exploration and engagement.
  
10. That investment in such activity must have enough actual and perceived value as to persuade non-traditional audiences of their value as current and future patrons and that recognising that 'hard to reach' does not equate to 'impossible to attract' or 'prohibitively expensive' or 'too demanding'.



## authorship

community dialogue involving representatives.

Support for attendance of events.

Arts education.

Connecting the experience of attending events and being an arts practitioner.

Dialogue for wider processing of the experience.

This dialogue could inculcate a feeling of

ownership  
of the process.

## learning

from the online ticketing process,  
the modern marketing techniques,  
the data collection and research  
→ for increasing community  
engagement

engagement

## provision of community ticketing scheme

ticket isn't enough to guarantee increased

access  
participation

principal funder



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