Arts Development UK

Residency- Creative tools to empower artists and communities

Ever wondered how community artists get trained nowadays? Residency, an EU funded project has spent the past two years engaging artists, local authorities, communities and academics in action research to look to see if the traditional model of an Artist Residency is the answer.

Residency emerged from a partnership formed by Staffordshire University, and the Universities of Barcelona and Warsaw. It was developed in response to an on going request from artists about the need for training in relation to developing civic engagement work and their preference for learning 'on the job', in a local setting whilst making work and social change happen.

As universities reduce their training offers for community artists, and the lack career pathways for community artists; this action research project set about to probe, question and explore whether the Residency model was a suitable structure to give artists the training they needed to make them successful in their work.

Self contained projects in the own right, artist residencies based upon civic engagement outcomes were created (each involving artists from partner countries).“Młynów na Woli” (Mill in the Wola district in Warsaw) worked with the UK based Plattformer collective in residential communities to challenge stereotypical views of the neighbourhood. Anna Zawadzka and Janek Dowgiallo (MECH) from Poland resided in Espai Germanetes, and engaged local people to participate in decision-making about public spaces. St Quentin Nursing and Residential Home and The Cambrian Care Home hosted Spanish artist Almudena Caso and explored ways to change perceptions of care settings.

Local communities managed the entire process from artist recruitment to artist supervision- and were pivotal in identifying the elements of the Residency structure, which could be exploited to help artist and communities to develop their skills to work together.

Apart from achieving positive civic engagement outcomes for each residency, the findings from the action research revealed methods, ideas and opportunities for how the model could be adopted to help support artists and communities to learn together, The learning was rich and varied ranging from what can be learned about civic life as a result of developing an induction programme for artists to the value of forming community led management and governance structures to support and supervise artists working within communities.

The action research team were made aware of the uniqueness of each civic engagement project- and whilst the findings suggested that some practices could be replicated to help support artist training in this context, the team are also keen to promote the uniqueness of each individual project. To this end, a Residency Toolkit has been produced- with advice and guidance which emerged during the Residencies- but which is open to re interpretation by anyone who uses it. The toolkit and additional resources are available as a free download from www.residencyproject.eu

For more information about the project contact Janet Hetherington, Senior Lecturer, Staffordshire University, J.Hetherington@staffs.ac.uk