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**‘Not Just a treat’:  
Issues in evaluating arts programmes to secure social inclusion**

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Evaluating complex social programmes*

'What works?' has become a mantra of the UK government (Davies et al., 2000). An expansion of public spending for public services is accompanied by requirements to demonstrate effectiveness (Blair, 2002). Monitoring and evaluation of existing and new policy has been joined in political favour by evidence-based reviewing of what is known about social conditions and programmes. Yet as evaluation expands, controversy about how to know what works continues unabated. From amongst competing frameworks and approaches, this paper follows others (for example, Suet Ying Ho, 1999; Judge, 2000) in adopting the scientific realist approach advocated by Pawson and Tilley (1997). The approach is applied to the preliminary evaluation of an arts programme intended to support social inclusion in deprived areas of Scotland.

### *The Social Inclusion Partnerships and the arts programme*

The Scottish Executive's social justice policy includes a commitment to tackle deprived areas:

'For too many of Scotland's communities, there is a concentration of linked problems – high unemployment, poor health, poor services, poor quality of environment, inadequate housing and high crime.... We will tackle the problems in the worst of these areas and prevent others from becoming disadvantaged' (Scottish Executive, 1999).

The area deprivation theme is pursued through local regeneration partnerships, called Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs). There are 48 SIPs, a mix of 34 traditional 'area based' partnerships and 14 local thematic or issue based partnership initiatives intended to assist particular disadvantaged groups. The key focus of area SIPs is deprived urban neighbourhoods, but the programme and choice of language encompass rural areas and small towns too. The long-term targets set for SIPs are to reduce inequalities between communities; and to 'increase residents' satisfaction with their neighbourhoods and communities' (Scottish Executive, 2000).

The SIP programme is intended to provide a co-ordinated, multi-agency approach with community involvement; and an agreed long-term strategy involving public, voluntary and private sector agencies. SIPs target their own resources to projects that complement or supplement the mainstream activities of partners. All but six local authorities (out of 32 in Scotland) have at least one SIP within their area. Glasgow has 13 and Edinburgh has five SIPs. SIP areas are intended to receive priority in local spending programmes and have received some priority in the budgets of a number of non-departmental public bodies, including that of SAC and Sportscotland.

The Scottish Arts Council's (SAC) National Lottery Arts and Social Inclusion Scheme (Goodlad et al., 2002) distributes lottery funds to arts projects in SIPs in Scotland. The scheme was launched in 1999, soon after the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive (cabinet) and continues, with increased

funding, for a fourth year. It is one of several uses of lottery funds for social inclusion purposes.

This paper starts to apply the realist approach by discussing the challenge presented by a desire to evaluate SAC's Arts and Social Inclusion Scheme, then considers the mechanisms that were thought to apply and the context within which the scheme developed. Most attention though is devoted to the social change that the scheme was intended to bring about.

## **SCIENTIFIC REALIST EVALUATION: EMBEDDEDNESS**

Achieving social inclusion in SIPs is unlikely to be easy. Many of the areas (and client groups) have a long history of previous regeneration initiatives with, at best, mixed results. The latest programmes are multi-dimensional, intended to achieve change through a variety of complementary actions amongst all the agencies engaged in delivering services or working in the areas or with the client groups. Understanding the nature of change in SIPs is difficult, since many contextual and historical factors can affect the behaviour and attitudes of residents (Docherty et al., 2001). This sets a challenge for evaluators, not made easier by the nature of the changes pursued, which are broad and not necessarily clearly specified. They are expressed in disputed terms such as community empowerment, social capital, capacity building, and social justice. At best, measures of these would require proxies on which agreement is hard to reach.

As Judge (2000) argues, the 'fundamental problem' in evaluating area initiatives with complex, intractable and poorly defined social problems is 'one of attribution'. Were neighbourhoods laboratories, holding steady sufficient factors to allow the impact of one on another to be measured might solve the problem of evaluation. In SIPs, other approaches to evaluation are needed, hence our resort to the scientific realist CMO (context-mechanism-outcome) framework (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). For a realist evaluator, outcomes can only be evaluated in the light of the contextual factors and a set of hypotheses about the mechanisms through which a programme seeks to achieve its ends. Participants and programme designers as well as literature and other sources of ideas can be drawn on to suggest the contexts and mechanisms needed if the potential of the programme is to be achieved. As Pawson and Tilley suggest, embeddedness in a particular social, economic and cultural context is an essential maxim of this approach: 'a programme is its personnel, its place, its past and its prospects' (1997, p. 65).

In this evaluation, a complex social, economic and cultural context is formed by a combination of national and local factors and by hypotheses about the possible ways in which participation in the arts could lead to social inclusion. Our empirical investigation therefore sought to put us in a position to make judgements about the ways in which the programme had been effective and the conditions in which that had occurred. However, we were commissioned two years after the programme began, and some potentially useful data had already been lost or not collected in that period. That is the source of the first weakness of this evaluation. Others will emerge later. We reviewed documents and conducted a postal survey of all SIPs, then we selected ten SIPs for further investigation using interviews and a small sample of three projects for more intensive examination using focus groups with participants in the arts

programme and with a small number of non-participant residents. These methods are described in greater detail in the appendix and in full detail in Goodlad, Hamilton and Taylor (2002). The paper now moves to consider the realist model of context, mechanisms, and outcomes.

## **MECHANISMS**

Programmes work through mechanisms. Important questions for the evaluation were about what, if anything, worked in the SAC programme and how, through what mechanisms? At the start we had to hypothesise about what the mechanisms might be in relation to two essential elements: the benefits of arts participation and the processes of social inclusion. With the assistance of interviews with key regeneration and arts agencies and other material we were able to suggest certain mechanisms.

Limited research evidence is available. Kay et al.'s (2000) study of the role of the arts in regeneration found evidence that the arts can:

- increase individuals' personal development;
- attract people who otherwise might not be attracted to participate in community activities;
- improve an area's image;
- attract economic investment;
- help in the process of community development; and
- lead to training and employment.

Participation in the arts was seen by regeneration agencies as an example of the type of community participation that is thought to build social capital and provide individual benefits. It is felt to have an advantage over certain other types of community participation in that participation, whether as member of an audience or as artist, is likely to have intrinsically more appeal than some traditional forms of personal and community development. The SAC programme was mainly focused on participation as artist, but participation as a member of an audience was a main feature of a few projects and at times of many others.

We adopted the view that social exclusion is helpfully seen as the consequence of exclusion from the means through which material and non-material resources are allocated in society. Four systems of distribution are:

- Private systems, operating through market processes
- State systems, incorporating bureaucratic and legal processes
- Voluntary systems, encompassing collective and community action, and
- Family and friends networks (Shucksmith and Philip, 2000).

Policies to foster social inclusion are particularly concerned to prevent the disadvantages people can suffer in one area of their lives from having an impact on others. Processes of inclusion can take the form of reconnecting people to the rest of society through, for example, the education system and job training schemes that lead to employment and a decent income; or through improved housing or health services that lead to fuller participation in community life; or supporting voluntary activities (such as participation in the arts) which fosters self esteem, civic culture and

community cohesion, leading to wider benefits. The *potential* social inclusion benefits of participation in the arts can therefore be summarised as:

- improved social networks, a strengthened civic culture, stronger community cohesion, and greater trust in fellow citizens;
- individual benefits of skills, self-confidence, self esteem and well being;
- improved life chances in spheres such as employment, access to welfare, public and private services and better family relationships; and
- a means of expression to help groups or individuals to communicate more effectively with the institutions of government and to achieve more responsive governance.

This multi-dimensional model can be illustrated by someone who takes part in a photography or dance group, because they enjoy taking photos or dancing. What begins as a case of taking part for the sake of it, produces benefits in skills, self-confidence, self-esteem and well being. This has implications for the person's family and friendship relationships and, further, produces a greater willingness or capacity to take up employment or to access welfare or other services, using the skills and self-confidence acquired directly or indirectly. Finally, participation in running the group could lead to wider participation and community benefits. Participation in the arts could therefore play a role in meeting the long-term targets set for SIPs:

- by assisting them to be more like other areas or social groups in their access to arts activities, thereby increasing residents' satisfaction with their neighbourhood or community;
- by assisting with aspects of the SIP's work such as the reduction of unemployment, drug misuse and crime rates; and
- by encouraging volunteering and hence civic engagement and participation.

Consistent with the Pawson and Tilley approach, our starting point was not to assume that the benefits would be found or be easily separable from other life experiences. We were able to look for evidence of a supportive context within which immediate benefits might be detectable and in which longer-term changes with more profound implications for changing lives would stand most chance of emerging. Our approach was useful as an aid to collecting and analysing information about the funding scheme. But it leaves open the possibility that further, longer-term benefits might yet result. In that sense this should be seen as an interim evaluation. We turn now to consider the varied contexts of SIPs' arts projects.

## **CONTEXT**

The relationship between mechanisms and their effects is not fixed but contingent on a combination of national and local contextual factors. As well as the national context, we identified as significant several components of the local context, and of the two acting together, in the application and development process.

### *The national context*

The National Lottery etc. Act 1993 (as amended by the National Lottery Act 1998) gives SAC responsibility for distributing a share of National Lottery funds for the

benefit of the arts in Scotland. SAC's *Lottery Funding Strategy* (1999) sets out priorities and details of funding schemes for those who have had few or no opportunities to experience the arts. The National Lottery Arts and Social Inclusion Scheme has been targeted specifically at SIPs and is intended to:

'Encourage non-arts agencies with responsibility for policy development in areas such as housing, environment or regeneration, to develop arts projects in their field. It will also encourage arts activities as an essential part of the work in SIPs' (Scottish Arts Council, 1999, p. 14).

The scheme has been running for three years: 1999/2000; 2000/2001; 2001/2002 with budgets of £189,394, £310,000 and £468,137 respectively. The budget for 2002/2003 was set at £480,000.

### *The local context*

We identified two components of the local context as relevant: SIP and wider local policy commitment; and arts provision in SIPs prior to the SAC scheme, which is considered later.

All Partnerships have some form of strategy document, whether prepared only for their original bid for Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) status or revised since. These documents, particularly in the 'general purpose' area-based Partnerships, frequently set broad all-encompassing aims for many areas of social, economic and environmental improvement. However, barely over a quarter (27%) of partnerships say anything in these about the possible role of the arts, yet a much higher proportion had applied for funds under the SAC programme.

A majority of applicants and over a third of non-applicants to the programme could name a person or organisation with a lead responsibility for developing the arts in their Partnership – a likely but not inevitable step towards giving them higher priority. Almost half the respondents could identify the subgroup or forum within their Partnership decision-making structure that has a lead responsibility for the arts. A few have created specific arts subgroups and nine named one or more Partnership subgroups that clearly deal with the arts as part of a different or more general remit.

### *The interaction between local and national factors*

Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) were invited to submit an application once during the year with a deadline in July and decisions were given in December. In line with most SAC funding schemes, applicants are required to demonstrate a commitment from other partners – SAC will fund up to 67 per cent of a SIP project with an expectation that at least 18 per cent of the balance is in cash: the remainder can be 'in kind'. For lottery funding there is an explicit requirement for the project to show 'relevant public benefit' and, specific to this fund, an applicant has to show that 'the project has demonstrable goals, particularly in relation to the SIP's aims' (Scottish Arts Council, 1999, pp. 10-15).

SIPs are organisations accustomed to making applications for public funding, and the stages of application and decision-making in this scheme were regarded as

straightforward. Three applicants found the application process complex, while the majority (15) found it ‘average’ or ‘more straightforward’ in comparison with other funding applications. The funding guidelines were in all cases seen as clear. Availability of funds, quality of decisions, flexibility of SAC’s approach and effective communication were all cited as positive aspects of the process. One project manager asserted: ‘Our own applications for funding are probably more rigorous and tedious than SAC’. Amongst the non-applicants, in only one case was the application process itself seen as a barrier to making a bid. The most common reason given (37%) for not applying was ‘low priority’. Four (21%) said they had no project and three (16%) said that they could not deliver. Overall SAC was praised for its role in developing ideas and advising on applications. National observers of SIPs who had experience of other funding schemes within SIPs agreed that this one was neither substantially more difficult nor much easier than others to apply to.

## OUTCOMES

Pawson and Tilley suggest that two types of ‘outcomes’ occur in social programmes: regularities and social change. Programmes that ‘work’ demonstrate regularities, associations or patterns. In the SIPs arts projects these had had very little time to emerge and varied across schemes. Few patterns that might lead to clear conclusions had emerged but some associations with implications for social change are discussed now after some details of the types of arts projects.

### *Applications*

SAC received 39 completed applications for funding under the scheme and dealt with them as shown in Table 1. Twenty-one SIPs never applied to the scheme in its first three years. The duration of proposed projects varied considerably, reflecting the variation in their purposes between, for example, promotional or pilot projects of a limited scale and longer programmes of strategy development. The average proposed duration was 15.5 months. Nine could be described as short-term (3-9 months), eleven were planned to take around a year (10-14 months), five around two years (21-25 months) and four around three years (35-37 months). Five of the 29 approvals went to Partnerships that had received previous approvals: in four cases for projects that built directly upon the work of their predecessors, and in one for an unrelated project in a different part of the Partnership area.

**Table 1** Outcomes of funding applications

Source – Scottish Arts Council

Year	No. of approvals	No. of refusals	Total
1999/2000	5	6	11
2000/2001	14	3	17
2001/2002	10	1	11

The average SAC grant was £33,363, with awards ranging from £3,300 to £150,000. Of the 23 projects that were approved as proposed, nine received grant to cover 67 per

cent of costs, a further seven for over 60 per cent, two each over 50 per cent, 40 per cent and 30 per cent respectively, and one just under 30 per cent.

A little less than a third of applicants proposed to contribute locally raised cash contributions at or around the 18 per cent minimum. Most were expecting to contribute considerably more. Twenty-two per cent of applicants included no 'in kind' contributions at all in their proposals, and almost all included contributions valuing 20 per cent or less of the total cost. Nevertheless, a wide range of 'in kind' contributions were made, including management, office and monitoring costs from SIPs themselves or other partners, venues or staff support from councils and others, and work free of charge by professional arts organisations. In total, the £967,531 in SAC grant offered to the successful applicants was expected to generate an estimated additional leverage of £479,998 in other cash contributions to arts activity and £112,530 of 'in kind' contributions. Our estimate is based upon a proportionate reduction in proposed cash and in kind contributions where applicants did not receive the full grant requested. This may provide an underestimate, to the extent that local contributions may have been maintained or even possibly risen to compensate for the shortfall in grant.

By far the dominant sources of contributions were Partnerships' own resources and local authorities. The great majority of projects were expected to receive support from both. There were 22 projects where the SIP proposed to contribute more than the council (in total, cash and in kind) and 15 where the opposite was the case. SIP cash contributions generally come from the SIP Fund provided to each by the Scottish Executive. SIPs were proposing to provide over 20 per cent of project costs themselves in a total of 44 per cent of applications. 'Private sector' contributions were expected to come from professional arts companies donating some of their time and materials, from general public fundraising in a handful of cases, and in similarly few cases from support (generally in kind) from local businesses unconnected to the arts.

### *Types of arts projects*

In general, whether a range of specific artistic activities was proposed in the application or was left to later development and public response, most projects were concerned to offer a range of artistic experiences to their target communities. There were few examples of projects that based their approach on any proposition that particular art forms were particularly significant to the targeted communities, or likely to elicit a greater response or have a greater impact in tackling social exclusion.

The types of activity that applicants proposed to support and the means by which they would deliver them are not easy to classify. Most applicants found the standard SAC list of art forms inappropriate since their purposes were broad ranging. Only two applicants named one category only, and one of these was 'combined arts'. Several ignored the request to specify only one 'main focus' and attributed this status to a number of art forms. Only 'drama' was the sole main focus of any significant group of projects. Furthermore, almost every applicant wished to claim that 'combined arts' would be promoted by their project to some extent as a subsidiary focus, and the same applied to drama, music and visual arts. More than half also nominated craft, dance and literature. Every suggested category received some apparently genuine and deliberate interest from some applicants, with the exception of opera, which was listed only by applicants who simply listed everything. The 'other' unlisted art forms, which

applicants themselves named, tended either to represent other ways of stating the broad ranging approaches aimed at, or to identify technological options not specifically included in the SAC list. The applications showed an awareness of the interconnections between the various art forms.

A few were clearly focused mainly on a particular range of activities, notably the pop/rock music based projects in Paisley and the Highlands and Islands, but even these projects saw connections, for example to broadcasting. These projects were clearly exceptional in this respect, being based on the perceptions that young people had an existing interest in these genres that required little or no stimulation but offered potential for skills development, and that there was significant career potential in the area for some of those involved.

‘We are dealing with an art form that you don’t have to sell. What you have to do is create the mechanisms that validate their initial reaction, to let them see that ... they are not the rebels, not the outsiders’ (Highlands and Islands).

Apart from this, there was a feeling amongst some applicants that technologically based activities such as video might be particularly appealing to young people. But generally Partnerships showed much greater interest in the generic promotion of arts opportunities, or in the possible impact of their chosen delivery processes, than in the specific relevance of any particular art forms.

### *Social change*

The most important question for public policy about programmes like this one is how were the existing social conditions changed? This can be considered under two headings. What were the mechanisms that operated? What were the cultural and social factors that provided the context for change? Below we discuss the five factors we considered most important: effective local staff; working with groups; achieving quality in the arts; developing effective partnership; and achieving an immediate impact on the participants.

#### Effective local staff

We have already seen that projects received support from SAC staff. There was also a less formal influence at work. In many cases, we found that there was a ‘cultural champion’ – someone working in the SIP at a senior level that had experience – personal or professional – in the arts and believed an arts project could deliver their priorities. As one such champion said, ‘the project was absolutely my baby’. The ‘cultural champion’ took on the role of pushing the other, sometimes sceptical, partners or colleagues into supporting the idea of an arts project linked to social inclusion goals.

Also important in encouraging applications was a prior history of arts projects. Overall, three-quarters of survey respondents (74%) reported at least one prior arts project, with a much higher proportion of SIPs (76%) that had applied to the scheme reporting prior experience than non-applicants (25%). Many SIPs could name particular activities or projects, some of which had survived for several years. Only a fifth described no or minimal activity but it was clear that applicants tended to be building on a considerably stronger base of existing activity than non-applicants. In

addition, a majority claimed to have used their own SIP funds at least once before to finance arts projects, with the difference between applicants and non-applicants here being less marked.

Once funded, projects depended for their success on the contribution of co-ordinators or development workers with good knowledge of the local context. This can be illustrated by reference to the publicity methods used:

‘[In recruiting staff for the project] we wanted people who could work in a SIP area. We needed [people who knew that] it is not good enough to put up a poster, you have to go out and get them’ (North Ayr Partnership).

However, in contrast, the South Edinburgh Partnership feels that the ‘South Edinburgh Echo’, a free community newspaper distributed through every door is the best means to reach the local population, and also reports a good distribution of publicity through public buildings. In another case, the staff member concerned instigated a dramatic attempt to build support by literally seeking to recruit off the streets:

‘In the first week nobody had turned up to one of the centres, so I was telephoned by the tutor. I jumped in the minibus, went round the streets and got about 20 that were just hanging around: “come on, it’s free lessons”. That created interest and then kids continued to come’ (Greater Pollok community activist).

#### Working with groups

The aim of SIPs is to tackle social exclusion. The areas or groups that they serve have been selected because they are known to contain relatively high proportions of people suffering various forms of exclusion. But most are also mixed areas, with residents who would not normally be considered deprived or excluded, except with reference to their area of residence. It can sometimes be legitimate for SIPs to support activities aimed at the entire community within their areas and not to target them more specifically because, for example, the projects are expected to improve the image of the area. Most applicants to the SAC scheme made some attempt to argue that a range of specific disadvantaged groups would benefit from their projects. However, most Partnerships felt that extra effort might be needed to make any impact on the most excluded groups and some felt constrained to do so:

‘Targeting socially excluded groups is a very difficult process and to have targeted very specific groups would have easily trebled resources required’ (South Edinburgh).

Five Partnerships (29%) said that their experience of the involvement of socially excluded groups was better than expected, six (35%) that it was as expected and only one (six %) that it was worse than expected (with five giving no reply). The only social group that most projects devoted particular attention to was young people. Of our ten case study SIPs, four specifically focused on young people and at least four of the others in practice devoted the majority of their efforts to working with them.

Overall, we found that the most effective approach to promoting participation and to achieving a more specific targeting of project activity on people suffering social exclusion, or at least to complement their main community wide thrust with some more focused activities, was through existing groups. Greater Easterhouse's interim evaluation report outlined a common view that classes open to the general public generally achieved lower attendance than those where particular groups were targeted.

Two aspects to working with groups can be partly, though not entirely distinguished. Some groups bring together people in specific circumstances which themselves constitute exclusion or make it very likely, and which mean that special and separate activities are possibly the most effective approach if they are to become involved in arts activities at all. For example, Greater Easterhouse has worked effectively with mental health groups. Work with learning disabilities groups has been found rewarding in several areas.

The other aspect is that people who may be relatively unlikely to be involved in recreational or community groups may be brought together in groups because of urgent needs for services such as child care, preparation for employment or tackling substance abuse. Arts activities may form an effective part of activity programmes in such circumstances, and involve people who would not have responded to more general publicity. This was certainly the case for the members of the Greater Easterhouse participants' focus group, who discovered their enthusiasm for arts activities through a family resource centre, with which they had become involved:

'I have a special needs boy and I was looking for organisations for one-to-one support'

'My health visitor told me to come because I was suffering from depression'.

Relatively few of the 'thematic' SIPs have become involved in the programme but the experience of the pilot project of Glasgow's Big Step SIP, which works with young people leaving local authority care, shows the possibilities as well as obstacles:

'There [is a lot of work involved in] tracking them down, giving them the opportunity, making sure that they have sufficient money to get there, that they are safe while they are doing so, that the care workers have time to monitor it properly... One session was in the City Hall, and we know that three or four people turned up and did not get beyond the door, because they were intimidated by the space' (Big Step SIP worker).

#### Achieving quality in the arts

The issues of artistic quality and innovation were particular concerns for SAC. Artistic quality was not felt to be in tension with participation and was considered to be a very important factor. None of the Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) encountered problems with the quality of the artistic work and it was considered 'as expected' or 'better than expected' in all of those who responded:

'The last thing a long term unemployed person wants is to come along and talk about being unemployed. We are trying to bring some positive aspects – involvement of arts and music to communities' (Paisley Partnership).

The quality of both the ‘process’ and the ‘output’ were seen as central to the success of one project:

‘The best projects so far are .. community driven... It is about allowing people the free will to express what they want to express’ (West Dunbartonshire).

Although, some tension in relation to quality were articulated in the Highlands and Islands, unusual in being concerned with commercial potential as well as artistic performance: ‘This is where we might differ from SAC. Coming from the Enterprise Network (another NGPB), we are not necessarily asking if this music is good... We are not necessarily making aesthetic judgements, but looking at what is a commercial, viable network’. Artistic skill does have a role to play, as he went on to point out: ‘We are giving people access to a range of enthusiastic people who work in this sector – they demonstrate, for example, a slide on the guitar, and everyone goes “wow”.’

#### Developing effective partnership

The aims of the programme included exploration of ways in which partnerships could allow a wide range of agencies to see the value of, and contribute to delivering, the arts. Partly as a consequence of the SAC scheme, the arts are discussed by Partnership Boards, frequently in the case of some successful applicants, and by a variety of Partnership substructures. However there was also evidence from some case studies that sometimes the best partnership working is developed away from the formal structures. A key partnership was that with existing arts workers in the local authority. In five out of our ten case studies, a local authority worker was one of the most important contacts whom we found it essential to interview to get an account of the background to and development of the project. Several of these were heavily involved in proposing and writing the applications, and several were jointly or even principally involved in supervising delivery. There were only two areas where there appeared to be significant tensions between the Partnership and the council over arts work. Some projects have developed other useful relationships, such as with the police and the community education service of local authorities.

Has any of this begun to have an appreciable influence upon agencies’ attitudes to the value and role of the arts? Few can claim such a clear-cut advance as Paisley, where we are informed that the Council has ‘now instructed that half of its arts budget should be spent in SIP areas’. Greater Easterhouse, as a long-term project devoted to developing a strategy by practical experiment, has provided several examples of partnership working. The arts project worker is now regularly involved in the Partnership’s whole network of ‘suburb groups’ in sub-areas looking at housing, environment and service delivery issues, and has become involved in several projects as a result. Practical examples of influence on a variety of agencies can be found elsewhere. More generally, though, informants found it hard to be sure about any longer term strategic influence:

*‘Has it influenced the work of other services or projects? It is probably fair to say that this is shaky. There are a number of practical demonstrations of work with housing providers, the health service, and the voluntary sector’* (Greater Easterhouse).

Work with schools emerges as the one area where several different Partnerships report considerable frustration and difficulty. This appears to be a common difficulty for Partnerships in other fields of work, connected perhaps to staffing and organisational structures in education.

### Achieving an immediate impact on the participants

The most convincing voices supporting the positive impacts of the projects come from the participants in our focus groups:

‘I have learned a lot, things I did not think I could have done – not at my age.’

‘I would say this is what this is all about - getting people into employment, using ... classes to get them in, to build confidence to come over the door, a first step. It does not matter what kind of class’ (North Ayr participants’ focus group).

‘Now I’d like to throw that toolbox off a bridge. Give me a camera. It’s a lot more exciting to do’ [unemployed ex-joiner].

‘I thought I couldn’t do anything, they proved me wrong ... people always were making out you were daft and stupid but you’re not’

‘It helps you to build your confidence and you need that to go out and get jobs and things like that’ (Greater Easterhouse participants’ focus group)

‘The class taught me to look at things differently and changed my perspective .. ’ (North Ayr participants’ focus group talking about a writing class).

Participants almost all wanted to carry on with the type of activities that they had been experiencing, though some were not confident that opportunities would be available: ‘It is difficult to motivate yourself at home’ (North Ayr participants’ focus group – speaking about creative writing). However, the women in the Greater Easterhouse non-participants’ focus group, though they viewed their brief exposure to arts activity positively, were much less sure that they would continue with it – preparation for work was their primary aim.

National and local observers of SIPs and the SAC scheme also detected these immediate impacts of participation in the projects. One interviewee paraphrased a councillor who had originally been sceptical about the role of the arts but now felt ‘you have to have sport and culture and mix them into the life of the community otherwise it’s not a living community’. Another said ‘the impact on people is the thing people refer to.’ He was, though, somewhat sceptical about the reliance on anecdotal evidence of impact and called for more attention to demonstrating more systematically what success meant. This may be an unrealistic expectation of a specific evaluation of a programme, more amenable in the longer term to population-wide research that seeks to identify the complex relationships between participation in the arts and other factors such as self-esteem and employment.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the use of the realist approach to evaluation in the context of arts community projects and social inclusion policy. This was a far from perfect evaluation, but it has illustrated the potential of the approach. The imperfections are themselves instructive about the possible applications of realist evaluation in the fields of arts programmes and social inclusion policy. Neither are fields in which evaluation methods have been developed very far. Following Pawson and Tilley again, the key issues arising for evaluation methodology are:

- The method did not treat the development and delivery of arts projects as a black box. Instead the interactions within the SIPs between the programme, the local context and the national context were given priority along with the elaboration of the mechanisms through which the SAC scheme would achieve change. We were not surprised to find that mixed results had been obtained from the application of apparently the same initiative in different places. The varied interactions of context and mechanism were crucial to understanding the outcomes of the programme. The key interactions that seemed to make a difference to this programme are effective local staff; working with groups; achieving quality in the arts; developing effective partnership; and achieving an immediate impact on the participants.
- The choice of evaluator is an issue often discussed in terms of the variety of evaluative methods available to the evaluation team, whereas the CMO approach suggests the choice be based on the need to identify the mechanisms through which the programme would be likely to succeed. In this case, the evaluation team's expertise – from the fields of area regeneration, community participation and social justice, and the arts – enabled them quickly to articulate and tap into a wide range of views about the mechanisms through which the arts might be able to contribute to social inclusion.
- We were not able to do more than begin to test the 'theory' of social inclusion on which the evaluation was built because of its nature. It stresses the inter-relatedness between forms of exclusion and suggests that inclusion is a long-term process, for example involving stages in confidence and skill-building as well as in changes to social and economic conditions over which individuals have little if any direct control. Our theory suggests that, at best, social inclusion might be supported by participation in the arts, but it is unlikely to be the only factor in securing inclusion in more than a very few distinctive cases. This makes unrealistic some of the expectations held of evaluations. This raises ethical and commercial issues for evaluators – to point out that they cannot provide easy clear answers may be the same thing as talking themselves out of the contract.
- We have made some progress in suggesting the 'context-mechanism-outcome configurations' that are most likely to achieve the desired effect of social inclusion through the arts. There is a need for further evaluations to develop our understandings of how these operate. The approach could be applied in other social inclusion and cultural policy contexts.
- Finally, the development of evaluation methods in this field is as much in danger of being dominated by the logic of experimental-control group methods as other public policy evaluations are. As in many programmes, the monitoring framework did not capture all the necessary data for evaluation, particularly in

relation to the local context and the interactions between context and mechanisms. Also typical was the poor engagement by projects with the toolkit for the evaluation of SIP projects provided (Dean et al., 2001), even though that encouraged projects to tell their stories of success. The realist method has a number of advantages, not least of which in this context is the way it makes a virtue of the stories and insights that those most concerned with the projects can tell, as in the case of a SIP member of staff talking of the way that the arts could contribute to the mainstream of social inclusion work:

‘In general people are a lot more accepting that arts is not just a treat at the end of the day at school, or a special trip to the panto’ (North Ayr).

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## Appendix – Methods

The research consisted of five main components:

### Review of documents

Documents reviewed included: applications for funding 1999-2001; internal and external referees' reports; and a limited number of final and interim reports submitted by projects.

### Interviews with key players

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with: two SAC officers; four members of the assessment panel for the programme; and three representatives of regeneration networks and agencies. In addition, discussions were held with community representatives on SIPs and comments were received from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations.

### Survey of Partnerships

All SIPs were surveyed by post, for views and information on:

- the relevance of arts projects (and outcomes) to Social Inclusion Partnerships' (SIPs) overall goals; their reasons for applying (or not) for funding; the role of the projects themselves and the degree of 'innovation' involved;
- reactions to the programme itself, the application process and the support received from SAC officers, either as a successful or unsuccessful applicant;
- issues experienced in the implementation of successful applications.

The complexity of the SIP scheme meant that 51 questionnaires were sent out, one version to Partnerships that had never applied and another, substantially longer one, but with identical questions wherever appropriate, to those that had made any application. One reminder letter was sent. The final overall response rate was 78.4 per cent, see Table A1.

Table A1 Response rates to postal survey

<b>Category</b>	<b>Total possible</b>	<b>Responses received</b>	<b>Response rate (%)</b>
<b>Non-applicants</b>	21	19	90.5
<b>Applicants with refusals only</b>	6	4	66.7
<b>Successful applicants</b>	24	17	70.8
<b>All applicants</b>	30	21	70.0
<b>All Partnerships</b>	51	40	78.4

### Case studies of projects

Ten approved SIPs/projects were selected for further study. The selection was made in consultation with SAC staff, with the aim of representing: a range of geographical areas of Scotland and types of SIP; projects approved in each of the years 1999/2000 to 2001/02, and which were completed, in progress, or recently approved; and projects of varying duration and costs and adopting a range of different approaches. Semi-structured interviews using standard topic guides were carried out with selected SIP managers or other key staff and arts workers involved in delivery of the projects. These interviews were tape-recorded and, though not fully transcribed, written up in considerable detail to allow further analysis.

### Investigation of public attitudes

Three SIPs were selected to identify groups of project participants and non-participants who could be invited to separate group discussions that covered people's understanding, experience and valuation of the arts, knowledge of local activities and barriers to their own and others' participation. Discussions were tape-recorded and noted.