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Title: Making the Connections: the arts, migration and diaspora**Summary**

'Making the Connections' is a regional network which will examine the transformative role of arts and culture in fostering integration and belonging for new arrivals in the East Midlands at the levels of history, experience, theory and policy. The network will build upon the strong regional work of the Arts Council East Midlands, academics in regional Universities, practitioners and policy makers in the arts, public and voluntary sector and diasporic communities to create synergies/collaborations across disciplinary boundaries, multiple layers of governance and lived experience. The network will thus generate recommendations for regional and national policy in relation to issues of Migration, Diaspora, Identity and Belonging. More significantly, perhaps, the network will address artistic access and cultural inclusion, in ways that will enhance the lives and well-being of recent arrivals in the English East Midlands.

Rationale and context

The proposed network is an outgrowth of previous AHRB-funded research in the East Midlands region (O'Neill and Tobolewska, 2001; O'Neill 2001) and the work of 'The Long Journey Home' initiative funded by the Regional Arts Council. The AHRB-funded projects undertaken by O'Neill and Tobolewska identified the need for more arts-based provision for new arrivals, acknowledging the central role of the arts in renewing social research methodologies and generating knowledge that can help us to understand experiences of diaspora and migration. This research thus outlined the importance of cultural strategies for fostering processes of inclusion, belonging and creative regeneration across the region; particularly in seeking to counter processes of marginalisation and stigmatisation through the integration of the arts into everyday life. 'The Long Journey Home festival'

funded by the Commonwealth Games “Spirit of Friendship Festival” RALP in 2002 successfully brought together artists and communities to explore issues of community, exile and displacement.

The proposed network will hence build on strong regional foundations, and develop a collaboration between researchers, practitioners and policy-makers across regional Universities, government and voluntary organisations. The value of such collaboration is already proven. For example, community cohesion funding for both the Home Office *Resolving Differences* programme and Home Office *Pathfinder* programme were mostly located and managed within arts organisations in the region (O’Neill 2003). This is highly suggestive of the role of community arts organisations in making connections with communities and fostering the building of bridges across diversity. Significantly, the Arts Council East Midlands is currently supporting and funding the ‘Three Cities Create and Connect’ programme celebrating the exciting arts activities, festivals and cultural quarters of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham, while Creative Partnerships have been established by the DCMS throughout the region to stimulate young adults’ participation in the arts.

Aims and Objectives

The broad aim of the proposed network is to create synergies across disciplinary boundaries in order to explore the transformative role of arts and culture in understanding and seeking to make interventions in public policy in relation to Migration, Diaspora, Identity and Belonging. To these ends, the specific aims of the network will be to:

1. Facilitate connection, communication and exchange – at both programme and project level – through a series of workshops. Workshops will focus not only on recent new arrivals but also on previous waves of forced and free migrants – for example from Vietnam, Montserrat, Poland (see www.charnwoodarts.com) As such, workshops will involve academics, researchers, practitioners and policy makers across disciplinary and geographical borders primarily in the East Midlands region.

The inter-disciplinary workshops will include a wide range of individuals and organisations (within and outside of the arts and culture industries) who have an interest in exploring:

- the impact of the arts and culture industries, cultural partnerships and academic research in providing a better understanding of the experiences of forced and free migration and the forging of diasporic identities.

- how arts based practice might help foster connections and border crossings to develop and sustain and reinforce health and well-being (both physical, emotional and social)
- the importance of arts in everyday life and the essential role of the arts in fostering personal as well as community ties and networks
- the importance of governance in relation to the transformative role of the arts. This includes vital questions concerning the role of the public intellectual in reflecting on why the arts matter; the connections needing to be made between new arrivals, settled micro-communities and white working class communities; the synergies and connections between vertical and horizontal processes of social inclusion and the impact of all of the above in contributing to the development of public policy.

This primary aim of producing a local capacity for consultation and discussion relates to two further aims:

2. To contribute to public awareness of arts and humanities research on diasporas, migration and identities. To these ends, the network will run a series of workshops and briefings as well as publications. A web-site will be developed to disseminate the work.

3. To develop new connections and approaches that may become embedded in the research agenda and resources of the arts and humanities, and may be built on in future applications to AHRC for funding. It is anticipated members of the network will work on projects which will have a life outside the initial two year period for which funding is sought, developing research bids accordingly.

Outputs

1. A stakeholder **launch event** at Loughborough University followed by a series of **workshops** founded on principles of PAR/PA. to be held in different locations around the East Midlands, including venues to be provided by non-academic partners and organisations as negotiated (arts and culture industries, artists, arts agencies, researchers, academics, public, private and voluntary sector agencies, micro communities, refugees/asylum seekers).
2. An **exhibition and regional conference** as the network finale. This will attract national and international speakers and participants (network participants and any others including representation from other AHRC networks)

3. A **web-based resource** that will include briefings, reports, work in progress and exhibitions, of work developed regionally and links to national and international sites and work.
4. **Publications** – briefing papers; report; and academic publications
5. **Dissemination presentations** to local and regional forums and strategic bodies – e.g. local strategic partnerships; local arts fora; refugee and asylum forums; Government Office East Midlands, East Midland Development Agency. Conference presentations.
6. **Final Report** – accessible to all and published on the web-site

Length of Project – 24 months