Creative resilience: Building community resilience through arts practice

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Abstract

This paper is submitted as part of a panel session co-organised by Helen Ross and Fikret Berkes on Community Resilience, Session 3: Exploring further possibilities (Chair Fikret Berkes)

This research brings arts and humanities to the heart of analyzing and facilitating community resilience and looks at how engagement in aesthetic practices - making things together - builds community resilience. It aims to extend understanding of resilience to embrace a range of non-tangible aspects, starting from more recognised notions of agency, self-efficacy, collective action and social capital, to consider performance, aesthetics and arts to define and effect ‘creative resilience’. It rests on the proposition that truly transformative change can only be enacted when creative capacities and energies are engaged, and people are empowered to identify, design and implement alternatives in the face of uncertainty and interacting stressors.

This presentation discusses the role of arts practice in building community resilience. Many existing initiatives use arts to sensitise and communicate environmental change, but this research takes a more community orientated practice-based approach to understanding transformational change at a collective scale. It brings together arts, humanities and social science scholars with a range of professional practitioners and change-makers/activists within the community to investigate transformative practice as it appears - by different names - in the pursuit of sustainable living with environmental change. It is distinct from most other approaches in focusing not on how arts practice might modify individual behaviours, but on how ‘making together’ might prompt a collaborative re-appraisal of our relations in the world and with the future.

The intention is to reflect on both the activities undertaken and their positioning in the wider political context, learning at a practical level about what is effective at altering cultures and inspiring a ‘custodian’ sensibility, and how we might evaluate this; and contributing at a theoretical level to debates about evolving communities, cultures of change and a co-constructed creative resilience, as living with climate change and dwindling natural resources come to dominate many agendas.

Drawing on different traditions, with their own methods and means of establishing impact, we investigate and build upon current practice, with the goal of understanding how the existing and potential contribution of arts and humanities to living together with environmental

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change might be recognised and acted upon. This paper focuses on projects in Cornwall in SW England, and the practices and rhetorics of community and resilience in arts practice.

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