



PORTRAIT OF A NATION – EVALUATION REPORT

Introduction to the Project

1. Background

Portrait of a Nation was a programme of creative work that took place throughout 2008 in conjunction with Liverpool Culture Company, member cities of the Cultural Cities Network (CCN), the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Youth Music. It was a high profile strand of the European Capital of Culture 2008 celebrations last year.

During the project young people across the UK showcased their own local, regional and national identities through a series of events in 17 cities. The projects of each city were showcased at celebratory events jointly hosted by the city and Heritage Lottery Fund before taking them to Liverpool.

The work of the individual cities fed into a pinnacle showcase that closed the *Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008*. This was a vibrant celebration and exploration of a sense of a nation, as seen and created by young people, and included installations, performances, exhibitions and high profile debate.

2. Aims and Objectives

Portrait of a Nation aimed to stimulate genuine debate amongst young people, through creative exploration, around the key themes of heritage, roots, identity and culture: Where do we come from? How did we get here? Who are we now? Where are we going? Who do we want to be?

Four specific project aims are outlined below, with details of how these were met:

2a. To increase young people's participation in heritage activities.

The above aim was met by the research that was carried out by participants in May 2008, including a visit to the BMW group car plant in Oxford and Oxford Castle. Oral history interviews also took place in July 2008.

2b. To increase awareness and knowledge of local heritage amongst the local community through production of a performance communicating Oxford's heritage.

This aim was delivered in the production of the heritage performance from August to November 2008. This was mounted as a public performance in Oxford in November 2008. Schools workshops took place in November 2008. There was a display of the design element of the production in the Oxford Town Hall in January and February 2009 which was an additional unexpected positive outcome from the project.

2c. To contribute the performance developed in Oxford to the Portrait of a Nation celebration in Liverpool.

The above took place in December 2008.

2d. To Evaluate the qualitative and quantitative effects of the project.

To achieve this filming took place throughout, at all stages of the project. A DVD was produced using this footage (including qualitative feedback). Participant and partner feedback was sought (including the use of questionnaires). The findings are included in this report.



3. Partners

Oxford Inspires, the cultural agency for Oxford and Oxfordshire, approached **OYAP Trust** and **Pegasus Theatre** to lead Oxford's input into this national showcase.

'*Car to Spire*' was the name of Oxford's performance showcase for this event and evolved over 7 months with **OYAP Trust** working in partnership with **Pegasus Theatre and Oxford Preservation Trust**.

Jo Griffiths and Helen Le Brocq from OYAP Trust project managed '*Car to Spire*', **Jane Baldwin from Oxford Preservation Trust** was the research and heritage partner and **Yasmin Sidhwa of Pegasus Theatre** led the creative process with co-direction from Street Theatre Company **Electric Cabaret**.

Wider partnerships included the **Museum of Oxford**, who collaborated with Oxford Preservation Trust to create **Schools Workshops** and a Heritage Resource.



4. The Project Structure

4a. Sections of the Project

The project had the following Sections:

- * **The young people brainstormed their thoughts and ideas about their city.**
- * **The research element took place.**
- * **The development of material and rehearsals took place.**
- * **The performance was shown at BMW in Oxford.**
- * **Participants took part in the finale performance in Liverpool. The design element of the project was displayed in the town hall.**
- * **The design element of the project was displayed in the town hall.**
- * **The project was filmed throughout by the participants and a project DVD was produced.**

4b. Project Details

The group of young people, aged 14-22 years, came together for single weeks or weekends in the half-term and summer holidays to create *Car to Spire*. From the beginning they were central to the research and creation of the piece.

They worked with Oxford Preservation Trust who actively brought history and heritage alive in a 'hands on' way and introduced the group to a rich archive at the Museum of Oxford. The cast also researched the backgrounds of local historic figures including 'William Morris'. Out of this research the young people worked in groups to create storyboards which would form the basis of *Car to Spire*. From very early on in

the process it became clear that Oxford has always been a place people travelled and migrated to, a place which is home to many diverse communities.

The young people’s storyboards contained four, clear elements about Oxford and what it meant to them: the influence and presence of the University; the migration of people to work in the car factory and how it changed the make-up, politics and culture of the city; the historic divisions that existed in Oxford between those from ‘the town’ and those from ‘the gown’ which, to some extent, still exist today and finally the sense of what Oxford means to young people now and how they see it’s future - a melting pot where different cultures co-exist and are all accepted. The young people although aware of their differences, whether geographic, socio-economic or cultural were still able to relate to each other, have a unity and acceptance of each other and a desire for this to continue to develop.

5. Participants

5.a Recruitment of Participants

Oxford’s involvement in this project started at ‘**The Big Umbrella**’, a youth arts showcase for groups of young people from across Oxfordshire, co-ordinated by OYAP Trust. Young people at this event were invited to take part in creating a performance that represented Oxford for them, at the Liverpool event.

5.b Participant Statistics

Figure 1.

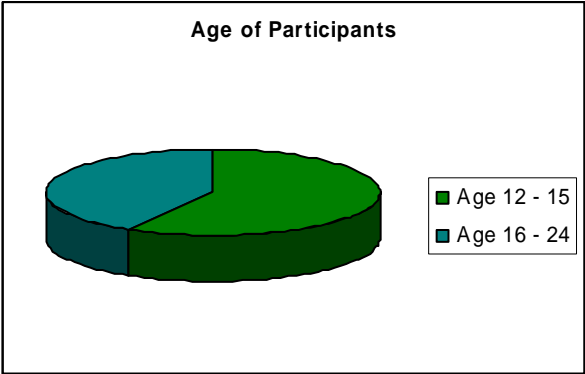
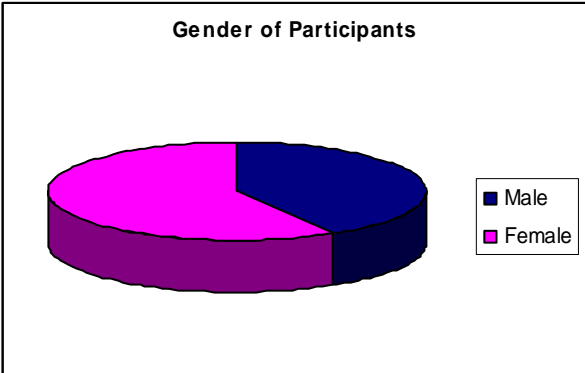
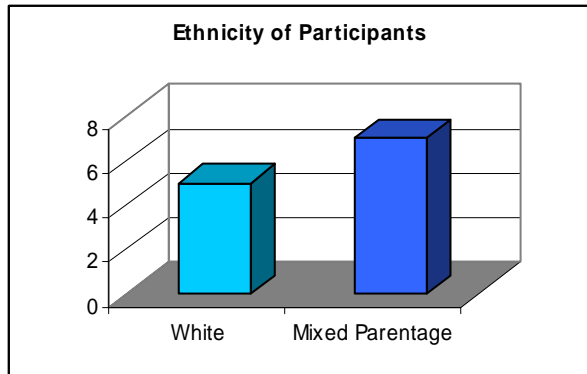


Figure 1 shows the total attendance and involvement in the project.





6 Participant Reactions to the Project

Reaction to the project, from all parties, was extremely positive. It is clear that all involved gained a great deal from it and this is shown in the feedback received (below).

6.a What Participants Learnt/Gained from the Experience:

Participants appear to have gained knowledge, skills and awareness both in terms of performance and from a heritage point of view. When asked what they had gained from being part of the project, young people replied:

"I've learnt loads about Oxford and physical theatre."

"I have learnt new physical theatre techniques and developed them thoroughly".

"School of fish. A lot about physical theatre and dance. Appreciate my city."

"I've learnt about different techniques – school of fish etc. I've made new friends and met people and also discovered a lot of different styles of physical theatre. Working as a team."

"Having the opportunity to design was really fun and I really valued the support I was given."

"I know far more."

"I've learnt more on the city I live in. I appreciate it more now and I am proud of it too."



6b What was Most Memorable About the Project:

The young people clearly have good memories of the project, that will stay with them. One aspect that stood out was the chance to meet and work with new people. When asked what was most memorable about the project, the participants replied:

"The people I met in Liverpool are going to stay in my memory for a long time!"

"The people we met."

"Singing on the bus back to Pontins with the other cities and the debate."

"Learning the Finale was really fun because I spent loads of time meeting new people."

"The debate because we were able to discuss things that were important to us and have the chance for people to 'make a change'."

"I remember the long trip around the city and the set. And the people. The performances. The bicycle ballet."

"I remember visiting Oxford Castle – fun times! The first Oxford performance – went really well and was our sending off to Liverpool. Performing in Liverpool – was amazing, can't not remember it!"

6c What Did Participants Feel About the Research Element of the Project:

Participants clearly valued the opportunity to learn more about their home city and found this aspect of the project both interesting and educational. When asked what they felt about the research element of the project, they replied:

"It was really great to learn about the city I live in. I learnt loads. It was a great chance to learn about our city. Really interesting – slightly ashamed I hadn't ever found out the stuff before."

"I really enjoyed the research in my aspect of the piece. I could go out and take pictures from all over Oxford."

"It was interesting but wet!"

"It was one of the most interesting and best bits."

"It was very tiring but very educational. I learnt a lot about the industrial history of Oxford."

"I enjoyed finding out about where I come from in Oxford/ my heritage. It makes me want to explore all of Oxford."

"It was useful because I found out things about Oxford I never knew before and it made me even more interested in discovering more."

"Slightly interesting, slightly boring. But the project wouldn't have been successful without it."



6d Participant's Reactions to Performing in Oxford:

Participants clearly enjoyed the performance at the BMW plant in Oxford. They valued the chance to share their work with family and friends and get feedback before the Liverpool performance. When asked how they felt about the Oxford performance, participants replied:

"It went really well. It was great to see the reactions of friends and family and also people who live in Oxford because it's their city."

"I thought it went very well, although my feet hurt after the long day."

"Good, more relaxed."

"It helped to gain audience feedback as well as finally put everything into context."

"I thought it went really well! I liked that our friends and families had a chance to see the performance in Oxford."

"It was great fun."

"I thought it went well."

"Great – well the 1st one anyway. The procession was my favourite bit because of the song and it was our sending off to Liverpool."

6e Participant's Reactions to Performing in Liverpool:

Participants were clearly extremely excited and inspired by the Liverpool performance. When asked how they felt about performing Car to Spire in Liverpool the young people responded:

"I want to go back! Fantastic! So much fun and great experience. The people were great."

"They were really good & I thought that the piece was interesting to others."

"Exciting, inspiring but more intense and long than BMW."

"It was very fun but incredibly tiring."

"I thought it went really well and I enjoyed our role play with the audience, especially episode 1."

"I didn't enjoy it as much as at BMW because of the 'free' audience in Liverpool."

"It was great to have such a diverse audience. The set was amazing and attracted many along with the role play."

"They were amazing. Loads of people came to watch and it was received really well."

6f Reactions to the Performances of others:

Participants appear to have gained a great deal from watching others perform. When asked how they felt about any of the other cities performances or installations the young people replied:

"I really liked Brighton because they had a really amazing techniques free runner."

"I liked the Brighton, Belfast and Newcastle."

"Bradford"

"I really liked Brighton's free running and Liverpool's dance in the finale."

"Everyone's were outstanding, but the ones that really stood out for me were Cardiff and Brighton."

"Brighton, I like dance."

"I didn't see many other cities but the ones I saw were brilliant – especially Bradford because they really represented their city (Threads)."

"Brighton!"



6g Reactions to Being Part of the Finale Performances:

The young people valued the opportunity to be part of the finale performance. When asked how they felt being part of the finale performance in Liverpool the young people replied:

"AMAZING!!! I felt really excited being part of something massive & I loved singing harmonies."

"That was amazing because that's how I met loads of people."

"It was amazing. It really brought everything together."

"It was a great opportunity to meet people from other cities."

"I enjoyed it a lot. I think it was then that I met most new people and that was great."

"It was fantastic because Jesse Jackson saw it, the acoustics in the hall were amazing, it was a good venue. It was a great mix of dance, drumming, singing, rapping etc. Diverse."

"At first I wasn't keen because of the rehearsals were quite long but in the end I was so glad that I did them as we got to stand up and represent our city one more time."

"I'm glad I did it because it gave me the opportunity to be in a piece with the other cities. And since we were all in PON it was good to all come together and do something."

6h Reactions to the Debate element of Portrait of a Nation:

The young people evidently also gained a great deal from being part of the debate. When asked how they felt about the debate part of the project, and what they'd remember most about it, the young people replied:

"I really loved having a say amongst people I didn't know & being heard."

"It was inspiring but the writing task was boring and uncomfortable."

"It was incredibly positive and I felt they had the right people there."

"I thought the debate was really interesting and loads of the topics were things that I'm very interested in and it was really interesting to hear everyone's views on the topics raised."

"Well, for some part, I felt it wasn't as organised, so we lost time in this and if the people we questioned had taken time with the cities separately I think that would have been better."

"I loved it, I remember Richard Blackwood talking about knife crime. I liked talking about ways we could make this [the project] happen again."

"It was really good to see that young people from other cities have a lot of the same views and aims and also it was good to hear a lot of views we hadn't really considered."

"I really liked the debate because I thought it was going to be dull but it was really interesting. I learnt some things that I will always remember."

6i Reactions to the Project as a Whole:

When asked what they enjoyed most about the project as a whole, the young people replied:

"The people I met & it was amazing being in Liverpool, because I really felt like we learnt & grew as a group."

"Meeting other cities."

"The meeting of people and the tying together of everything I had done."

"Finding out about other cities and challenging the stereotypes that are about Oxford."

"The opportunity to perform and meet new people. It was an amazing experience."

"Meeting the new people was great, eating 6 fried eggs on my whole visit!"

"Meeting people, listening to other people's ideas and thoughts and having a chance to share mine. Meeting the other cities."

"I enjoyed the performances – our city's and the finale. The people from other cities were amazing and easy to get a long with."

6j Challenging Aspects of the Project as a Whole:



The participants found the time commitment and giving up holiday time most challenging. When asked what they felt were the most challenging aspects of the project as a whole, the young people replied:

"Being the only young techie. I felt slightly different from the group."

"Rehearsing in the holidays and lack of free time."

"The commitment was tough, affected my school work short term, not long term though."

"Giving up loads of holiday for rehearsals as it clashed with the build-up to my mocks and a lot of my coursework for school."

"The mornings – I think we started too early and it was VERY cold!"

"Learning about how to use physical theatre and dance. It isn't what I was used to but it helped me become a better performer."

"The long days."

"The rehearsals! Not so much the one's for Oxford, but the finale rehearsals."

6k Any Areas That Could/Should be Included in Future Projects of this Nature:

Participants would have valued the chance to see the performances of other cities and also more networking opportunities. When asked whether there are any areas that could or should have been included, the young people replied:

"Maybe had more creative input in the painting & less in the building."

"More interactive experience and more involvement from Liverpool groups."

"Our own personal experiences as direct influences."

"I would have liked to have the chance to see other cities perform."

"It should be longer so we could've spent more time networking and developing the finale."

"No, not really. I think everything had been considered and catered for."

"Yeah, I think they need to make some time for all the cities to see each other's performances because there were some cities I really wanted to see and I didn't as there was no time."



6l What Would You Like to See happen Next out of the Portrait of a Nation Experience:

When asked what they would like to see happen next as part of the Portrait of a Nation Experience, the young people replied:

"AGAIN!"

" More cities involved and an annual event."

" More of a British identity coming through it in terms of its diversity. None of this very old fashioned reference points."

"Maybe another thing like the performances in Liverpool and the ideas being tackled that we discussed in the debate. Annually? More cities?"

"A more organised debate and more time with people. Also more care in the lunches, but breakfast and dinner were fantastic!"

"More cities from around the UK to come. More time to see other performances. I would like to be more involved in workshops."

"The same again, maybe for the young people to have more chance to see each other's work, a longer time to talk about their thoughts in the debate and Pontins."

"The same really – just a chance to see each other's performances because the rest of it was really amazing – there should be another one!"

6m Anything You'd Like to See Repeated/Not Repeated in Future Projects Like This? Why?

When asked what elements that they'd like to see repeated in future projects of this nature, and why, the young people replied:

"I really want to see the people again so I would love another Liverpool opportunity."

" Staying in Pontins cause good sense of community."

" Everything!"

" I hate to say it again, but the debate irritated me because there wasn't enough structure or time. I felt we weren't able to put across our views without getting a handful of propaganda."

"Working on the finale because it gave a community feel. Debating because it gave you the chance to be heard/ listened to."

" It was all perfect. Pontins was good."

"The chance for the cities to get together again and should definitely be repeated in future projects."

7 Feedback from Audience Members:

A great deal of excitement and enthusiasm was generated by the project. Following the performances and design installation OYAP Trust received much positive feedback:



"I was very impressed with the performance and thought the whole afternoon was excellent - I hope those attending the celebrations in Liverpool get the opportunity to watch all four pieces and see what a good job the young people had done."

"I just wanted to say how amazing I thought the production was on Saturday - it worked so well on so many levels - their performance, the music, Nomi's set were all fantastic and actually very moving a sentiment which seemed to be echoed through out the audience- a marvelous job incredibly well done! We are very proud to be your heritage partner."

"Congratulations for Oxford's excellent contributions to the PON event and in particular, to your performers and artistic collaborators for the fantastic performances on Monday afternoon, for their input into the debate and for their flexible, focused, confident and committed embrace of the finale performance: it was tribute to the excellent process you have created."

"Congratulations on a great performance on Saturday, the 4 pieces work really well to provide insight into past, present and future of Oxford as seen through the eyes of your young people. I really enjoyed the physical performance language of story telling, this is the only piece of this nature which is coming to Liverpool so will really stand out. Also, I loved the bicycle ballet, can't wait to see the film now."

"Congrats on an excellent presentation of 'Car to Spire' to Oxford. I thought it was fantastic and have heard so many positive comments from guests. I know it took tremendous commitment and effort by all involved - as was shown by the quality of the work."

"We were both absolutely wowed by [the set], and so I hope you don't mind us asking what happens to this fantastic creation now that the performance and exhibition have come to an end. It's such a wonderful installation."

8 Project Outcomes



The most obvious impact of the project is on the young people who participated:

- It was an important chance for all involved to learn about our city.
- The young people were able to widen and deepen knowledge about the heritage of Oxford through their performance development and delivery.
- The project enabled young people to be involved in a national arts project and to perform on a national stage in Liverpool in December 2008.
- The project gave the young people the opportunity to explore, question and celebrate notions of identity, heritage, roots and culture with specific reference to the city they live in.
- The young people were able to experience working with a variety of professional staff in a theatre making process, from theatre directors, to street theatre artists and musicians, to set designers.
- The project brought diverse young people together to explore and celebrate their differences and similarities. They were able to experience this in different ways, from seeing a variety of arts projects and performances as well as participating in debates and discussions.
- The young people were able to develop both performance and interpersonal skills through this process by being involved in the finale rehearsals and performance in Liverpool as well as sharing social time together with young people from across the UK.

Schools and the wider community also benefited from the workshops, productions and design installation elements:

- School pupils and staff benefited from the workshops that took place.
- Lasting legacies have been created in the form of a heritage resource that is being developed and the filming of the DVD.
- The design installation at Oxford Town Hall was an additional outcome, which shows the popularity and success of the production set.

9 Lessons Learnt and Skills Developed

This project was ambitious from the start. It combined a range of partners, all with differing needs and the partnership skills of all parties have been strengthened as a result. The project was also affected by staff sickness at OYAP Trust, which was covered by colleagues, and by the project team as a whole, however the impact of this is recognised and their efforts appreciated. We have learnt to negotiate contingency earlier in project plans to alleviate issues in case of similar in future.

10. Recommendations for the Future

- 'Portrait of a Nation' was a valuable opportunity for young people and here is a model that works, therefore it is crucial that this network is built on in the future and especially for 2012. However, a project on this scale could only work if funding is made available – without the funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund it would not have been possible for Oxford to have been involved!
- Projects on such a large scale as 'Portrait of a Nation' need to be given a sufficient lead in time to make them work smoothly for the organisations involved.
- The budgets and necessary staff time for projects like 'Portrait of a Nation' need to be worked through in close detail so that funding can be sought for all items in advance and a more detailed analysis of tasks and job roles needs to be defined much sooner in the process.
- Projects of this nature which are about promoting and representing Oxford and Oxfordshire need to have City and County council support both with regard to profiling it and giving financial assistance. Therefore the lead-in time is crucial so that networks can be developed and galvanised.
- Partnership working on this type of project is really useful and to some extent essential – clarity needs to be sought on realistic workloads in order for the partnership to be successful.
- Projects like this one show the value of linking the arts with other agendas, in this case heritage, and the potential for future projects to benefit from the ability of the arts to inspire and create experiences for participants and audiences.

11 Final Words from the Participants

The following are quotes taken from the DVD. They highlight the success of the project in terms of both being a heritage and performance project and show that genuine thought and reflection has taken place by participants about their city, feelings towards it and place within it:

"To know Oxford you have to know its people"

"It's a celebration of our city and who we are."

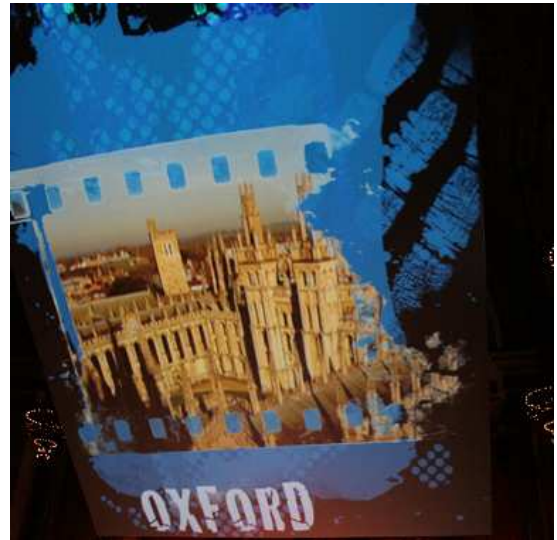
"I am proud to be from Oxford; we want to represent what Oxford truly is not the stereotype people think it is."

"You have to understand the two halves of the city, town and gown, to understand it as a whole."

"When we lose the right to be different, we lose the right to be free."

"Oxford is a home to all, from where ever we have travel to be here, it is a city for all."

"Oxford is the city of dreaming spires, Oxford is the home to BMW Mini, Oxford is a migratory city, Oxford is a diverse city, Oxford is our city."



OYAP Trust

May 2009

Photographs by Greg Smolonski and Nomi Overall