

## The Arts of Welcoming and Communities of Place

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With Don Flynn, Migrants Rights Network, Cllr Jacqi Hodgson, Mayor of Totnes, Juan delGado, Media Artist, Sarah Domville, Community Arts North-West

The workshop began with the speakers discussing their own experiences and backgrounds and then moved onto a discussion with the audience based on specific questions that were raised.

The first question was about the gap between the arts and politics. The panel responded with a variety of comments:

- Critical thinking about power relationships is taking place within the arts, but the challenge is how it gets back to politics and influences the discussion
- There is a place for connections to be made between the arts and local politicians you just have to look for it

The next question was about working together as artists and community activists and whether it is possible to engage people politically through art. The responses included:

- As creative producers we often don't share beyond the local level, but we need to be creating big platforms where we can share work and work can be accessed by all
- Sustainability, funding and income generating for artists is something that they are discussing at the moment
- Starting to see their role as an incubator, passing on knowledge as you don't know what other governing bodies will be there in five years time

The afternoon session began with a discussion about the role of strategic networking:

- There is a need to explore connectivity of devices, there is a lot of thinking about networking and trying to steer that into being helpful to us and what we are doing
- The issue we are addressing is not solvable by one solution alone, it will have to be a systematic and complex approach
- The critical thing in such a process is information sharing
- We have to confront that politics isn't the place where the solution to living in the modern world exists – gone are the days of locally based, organic politicians, nowadays it is more the political structures that house politicians and lacks that connection with people
- The artist is no longer the elite person but is much more often connected with a social/economic movement
- There is a need to pick up this momentum and take it back to politics to fill in the vacuum that exists in government – a network is necessary but nobody knows quite how to do this and it will be an emergent thing

The conversation shifted towards how this networking can become useful:

- Many groups are aligned in terms of causes but may not know each other
- Working in a large area, the strength of the organisation is strong links with lots of communities

The discussion turned to refugee employability and how CVs can become a stumbling block:

- Often artwork and documentation are an issue, in this case refugees need to be introduced and recommended to the right people which is why communities and networks are so important
- It is important to employ refugees and give them their own opportunities to make, create, document themselves