

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 34 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</p>
<p>Title of case study: <i>Nowhereisland</i>: developing public understanding of education, civil society, cultural life and citizenship through a durational public artwork</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p><i>Nowhereisland</i> by artist Alex Hartley was a public artwork curated and produced by Claire Doherty as part of the <i>Situations</i> public art commissioning programme. This large-scale touring public artwork and accompanying online programme of activity enabled over 23,000 active participants (including over 10,000 young people) from 135 countries to reimagine civic responsibility and citizenship and to rethink the nature of place, belonging and nationhood within the context of the London 2012 Olympiad. As an internationally recognised example of progressive, time-based, participatory public art <i>Nowhereisland</i> helped change perceptions about the nature of public art.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>In 2002, Claire Doherty, Senior Research Fellow in Fine Art, initiated <i>Situations</i> – a public art commissioning programme, with direct public benefits, operated from within the University of the West of England (www.situations.org.uk). From 2002-13, <i>Situations</i> commissioned over 50 artists of international repute to produce artworks for the public realm in the UK and internationally, often working in partnership with local authorities, city developers and educational partners. This external arts programme was combined with an academic research and publishing programme, ensuring that each public art commission resulted from and fed back into an on-going body of enquiry into public art.</p> <p><i>Nowhereisland</i>, an artwork by Alex Hartley, was produced and co-conceived by Claire Doherty, as one of 12 Artists Taking the Lead public art projects – the Art Council’s flagship programme for the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. The artwork was designed to test out conceptual propositions about nationhood and citizenship by creating a 30m floating island composed of territory retrieved from the High Arctic by the <i>Situations</i> team that was declared a new nation – <i>Nowhereisland</i> – with citizenship open to all, when it reached international waters north of Svalbard in Norway in September 2011. This floating island was transported to the UK, and towed around the South West coast during the summer of the London 2012 Olympic Games as a visiting island nation.</p> <p><i>Nowhereisland</i> was accompanied by a mobile museum – the Embassy – a collection of objects, documents and photographs hosted by a team of performers and artist educators over seven weeks in the summer of 2012. 42 regional partnerships with schools, choirs, music groups, young parents associations, cultural and environmental organisations and local community groups were developed in each of the seven ports and harbours visited by the island over the previous 18 months. An online programme of information, resources and activity was programmed on www.nowhereisland.org from autumn 2011 to 2012, including ‘Resident Thinkers’ – a year-long programme of 52 commissioned responses by academics, politicians, activists and broadcasters (including Yoko Ono, Sir Tim Smit (founder of the Eden Project), Professor Tim Cresswell, Dr. Simon Boxall, Dr. Sam Thompson, Professor Rachel Weiss, Professor Doreen Massey and Sir John Tusa). The programme included a research resource which contextualised the work within the history of Land Art, geographical research in mobility and migration and contemporary understandings of climate change.</p> <p>This online programme also included a facility by which members of the public could sign up to become ‘citizens’ of the new nation and contribute and rank propositions to the ‘<i>Nowhereisland</i>’ constitution: the values on which the nation might be built. Whilst <i>Nowhereisland</i> was an artist-led project, the curatorial skills and expertise to develop widespread public engagement with, and an international profile for, the project emerged from Doherty’s curatorial and research practice which argues for investment in durational arts projects (references 1 and 2) which evolve over time and place to allow for those critical dialogues to emerge and which accrue varied participants and co-producers.</p>

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. **Doherty** was invited to give the keynote lecture at Portland State University Open Engagement conference (April 2013) about new approaches to public art commissioning and an invited contribution, 'Relation to Citizen: Participation beyond the 'event' of the public artwork', to Magdalena Malm (ed.), *Imagining the Audience: Viewing Positions in Curatorial and Artistic Practice* (2012) ISBN 978-9197998550
2. **Doherty (ed.)**, *Situation (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art)*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press and London: Whitechapel, 2009) ISBN 978-0854881734

"Doherty's achievement is laudable. In her introduction, she sets out to 'consider the genesis of 'situation', as a convergence of theorizations of site, non-site, place, non-place, locality, public space, context and time, and as a means of rethinking the ways in which contemporary artists respond to, produce and destabilize place and locality'. She delivers all this and more, adventurously dipping in and out of a fascinating array of recent art projects..." Jennifer Geigel Mikulay, *Situation' (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art)*, College Art Association Reviews, 29 July 2010. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3202/caa.reviews.2010.85>
3. **Doherty and Cross** (eds.), 'One Day Sculpture, international temporary public art programme, New Zealand (2008-9) and One Day Sculpture (Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2009).
 - 2.a. "The disarmingly simple yet daring curatorial gesture of 'One Day Sculpture' established an open brief to support forms of art which provoke new conceptions of public and place, and new modes of engagement and reception." Max Delany, 'One Day Sculpture', *frieze*, June-August 2009, Issue 124. https://www.frieze.com/issue/review/one_day_sculpture/ - Available through UWE.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Explanation of the public engagement programme for Nowhereisland

The public engagement programme for *Nowhereisland* was built around the compelling story of a visiting island nation and the question of how we might build a new nation together, as recognised by the extensive press coverage (sources 3 and 4). 161 educational workshop sessions were developed with 42 different regional partners (outlined below). Quantitative data revealed that an estimated 10,000 people visited the Embassy; 10,953 people actively engaged in educational events and workshop sessions over 8-weeks; 23,003 people from 135 countries became *Nowhereisland* citizens over one year – which involved actively co-authoring an online constitution consisting of a set of values on which the new nation might be based and 2,077 people contributed responses to the weekly online Resident Thinker programme (described above in 2). 144,034 people made unique visits to the website from September 2011 to September 2012 (source 1).

Understanding of citizenship and civil society

Nowhereisland inspired people from the region of South West England to make connections with thousands of people across the world through a co-authored online 'constitution'. The encounters between 'citizens' were interactive, with respondents contributing to the ideas and meanings of this new nation itself and engaging with the wider issues it broached through the website.

Nowhereisland facilitated a process of change in individuals and communities by nourishing the capacity for creative illusion – that is, the ability to think and act 'as if' things were different. 71.7% of online survey respondents interviewed at the conclusion of the project said that *Nowhereisland* had provoked them to "think about ways in which I might be a more active citizen". All respondents had visited the website more than once, with 55% visiting up to six times and 14% more than ten times, thereby demonstrating the online programme's ability to encourage a deep engagement with the concepts behind the work and therefore to develop more complex understandings of citizenship, as was evidenced in the contributions to the online constitution. (source 1)

Nowhereisland enabled participants to explore their relationship to citizenship and civil society through a range of education workshops, skills development processes and parallel artistic projects which were developed with regional partners including: Ilfracombe Arts College and Budmouth

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College; National Citizenship Scheme students, Weymouth; WILD Young Parents groups in Cornwall Students at Room 13; Hareclive, Bristol and High View Primary School, Plymouth; and HMP The Verne in Portland.

The Community Partnership Manager at The Verne reported that even though the inmates could not see the island they debated its constitution, thus *Nowhereisland* “provided an excellent way of stimulating debate about society, culture and what makes a good citizen, both of which fit well with the settlement and reintegration programme” (source 2) The British Red Cross stated that *Nowhereisland* “was one of the few Cultural Olympiad projects to provide a solid platform for people to discuss and share international ideas and gain a greater awareness of intercultural issues. Nowhereisland was not just an inspiring concept, but also a real project with physical outcomes for people to engage with the diverse groups we already work with, such as young refugees, young foreign national prisoners, mainstream primary and secondary schools and university students, really engaged with the concepts that *Nowhereisland* brought to the fore...” (source 2).

Education

4,370 people under the age of 15 and 4,140 between the ages of 15 and 24, signed up online to become citizens of *Nowhereisland* in addition to the existing individual citizenships. The public engagement programme with groups such as Efford Take a Part, Plymouth Music Zone, the YPAC, WILD Young Parents group and Ilfracombe Ambassador programme, enabled young people to develop personalised senses of themselves as citizens and their role in civil society which can be evidenced in the testimonials documented in the Arts Council evaluation report (source 1).

Cultural Life

Nowhereisland created the spaces and opportunities for new things to happen – things that had not been conceived before its arrival. Most significantly, 82 other creative outcomes such as new songs, animations, new writing and musical compositions (source 1) developed in response to *Nowhereisland* clearly demonstrated the project’s impact on the cultural life of the South West region.

International impact as a public artwork

Though relatively recent, there is emerging evidence from the reception of the project in the international arts media and at the Portland State University conference (attended by 500 delegates in April 2013) that *Nowhereisland* is influencing other artists and curators and stimulating further imaginative engagements that rethink the role of public art projects.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Source 1: Arts Council Evaluation report (full confidential version submitted to Arts Council in February 2013 – ‘Who Engaged with Nowhereisland and Why?’, pp. 33-39. – **Available through UWE.** <https://www.dropbox.com/s/f3soln18bjpgcf/Final%20evaluation%20report.pdf>

Source 2: Testimonials from Arts Council, British Red Cross, Schools and community partners in the Arts Council Evaluation Report, ‘Summary of all partners and collaborators’ pp.28 & 30. – **Available through UWE.** <https://www.dropbox.com/s/f3soln18bjpgcf/Final%20evaluation%20report.pdf>

Source 3: Fiona Wilkie, “‘Choreographies of nationhood’: Performing aviation as spectacle”, *Public*, vol. 23, no. 45, June 2012, pp. 200-211 http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/public.23.45.200_1

Source 4: Christopher Middleton, “A new nation arrives in Ilfracombe”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 Sept. 2012, accessed at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/cultural-olympiad/9525199/An-entirely-new-nation-Nowhereisland-arrives-in-Devon.html> on 15 March 2013 – **Available through UWE.**