



Case study 1: Margate Pilot Project - led by Turner Contemporary

Summer of Colour - art where you least expect it

The Margate Pilot Project took place in 2014, only three years after Turner Contemporary first opened its doors in 2011, and was the first of the Culture Kent Pilot Projects to be delivered. Its aim was to support the *Summer of Colour* Festival, which was conceived as a town-wide festival connecting events inside and outside of the gallery, with further objectives of: attracting East Kent and non-arts engaged audiences; building cross-sectoral collaborations with local venues, businesses, arts organisations and education providers; and creating a sense of the joy of being by the sea, and Margate as a great place to be. With Turner Contemporary's major exhibition Mondrian and Colour at the festival's heart, Culture Kent made possible an additional layer of innovative programming and events, including Art Where You Least Expect It – cultural interventions in shops, restaurants, attractions and hotels in the town and surrounding areas – and First Friday – a programme of events held in the gallery, in conjunction with local partners. Working with Visit Kent, Turner Contemporary expanded the festival's social media presence and digital offer, to raise Margate's profile as a cultural destination regionally and nationally, and to maximise visitor numbers and engagement in the town.

Key Outcomes

- 1 Over 12,000 people came to the *Summer of Colour* Festival, comprising 72 events delivered over four months. These included 15 new artworks, installations and performances created for the festival, in addition to activities as part of the 'Ways to Wellbeing' pilot arts and health project funded by Kent County Council, successfully drawing in diverse non-traditional arts audience segments.
- 2 *Summer of Colour* marked a new level of collaborative partnership working in Margate and Thanet. 45 different organisations and individual artists came together to deliver festival events in Margate, Ramsgate, Broadstairs, Deal and Quex, with 156 events logged on the *Summer of Colour* website; half of which were uploaded by partners using the website and festival social media campaign to promote their own activity.
- 3 The festival created a real sense of Margate re-emerging as a destination, with the whole town working together to create a welcome for visitors and draw them into the events and experiences on offer. Turner Contemporary worked with Visit Kent to train 20 greeters to provide a reception to visitors to Margate and inform them about the cultural offer – an innovation that has carried on since.

Culture Kent - a 3 year project funded by Arts Council England and VisitEngland, as part of the Cultural Destinations Programme.

Led by **Turner Contemporary** the aims of Culture Kent were to showcase Kent's cultural assets; extend reach by attracting new audiences; create new strategic relationships and develop the information and knowledge core required to strengthen the Kent cultural tourism offer.

Culture Kent developed 6 pilot projects to test new initiatives and cultural offers and 6 case studies have been developed to disseminate lessons learnt.



Issues & opportunities

'There is nothing so magical as bringing artistic intervention into a wonderful place, and getting the buy-in of local people'

(Karen Eslea, Turner Contemporary)

As the first of the Culture Kent Pilot Projects, Turner Contemporary had to hit the ground running. The open call for contributions to the festival theme, and the enthusiastic response of the town, generated a huge amount of work for the festival team, and with 45 participating organisations and artists, and 156 events, coordinating the festival experience for visitors arriving in Margate proved demanding. In addition to the Greeters, who provided orientation for arrivals in the town on the cultural events on offer, the festival website played a crucial part in meeting these challenges – managed and updated on a daily basis by a dedicated member of the gallery staff, this was a simple, image-led site, to which people were invited to upload their own images of *Summer of Colour*, and was open to anyone in the town wanting to create an event linked to the festival.

Karen Eslea, Head of Learning and Visitor Experience at Turner Contemporary, is very clear that the way in which townspeople and local businesses embraced the festival helped to create a magical atmosphere of art and culture infiltrating the town and producing experiences that surprised and delighted residents and visitors alike. Good communication with local businesses – making sure that all the businesses were well informed about planned events, so that they promoted them to their customers – was a key element in this, and is a practice that has been maintained. Meetings now take place once or twice a year for the businesses to talk about what they are doing, and to be informed of Turner Contemporary's deadlines and exhibition dates, so they can plan for what is coming up.



Key learnings

Turner Contemporary's sense of its relationship to place has evolved over the years since it opened in 2011 and received more than two million visits in its first five years. As Karen Eslea observes, people working there initially thought of it simply as a gallery – 'Now we know we are a visitor destination, and a lot of people come here regardless of what the exhibitions are'. Understanding Turner Contemporary as a visitor destination means a realignment in thinking – about how it connects with other businesses in the town, visitor attractions such as Canterbury Cathedral, or the beach, and how it addresses its visitors and markets its exhibitions and events. The regular meetings with local businesses, instigated as part of the *Summer of Colour*, have played a key role in this. Turner Contemporary has learned that businesses suffer when the gallery is closed on Mondays and for installations, and as a result has decided not to close on Mondays during the summer season, but to remain open every day in August.

"Seeing before your very eyes how culture generates visits and tourism, and makes a difference financially, socially, and economically to a town... the successes in Kent, led by culture, are... an example of how cultural tourism really does work."

Karen Eslea, Head of Learning and Visitor Experience, Turner Contemporary

Legacy and ways forward

The success of the *Summer of Colour* festival has left a key legacy in terms of building momentum for an annual festival programme. Turner Contemporary followed up on the *Summer of Colour* with a 2015 festival themed around Grayson Perry's *Provincial Punk* exhibition, which maintained the focus on 'art where you least expect it', and has continued to attract increasing local support through subsequent festivals. The gallery is now a partner working to find funding to develop Margate Festival over a three year period and to enable it to become an independent initiative. A further important legacy has resulted from the development of a more coherent understanding of cultural tourism and cultural destinations, and the benefits of collaboration and a joined-up approach. For Karen Eslea, 'it's very exciting to have all those cultural organisations, who participated as pilot projects, all with a better understanding of cultural tourism, and a desire now to join up a bit better... The experience of doing it, and working together, has opened people's eyes to the reality and potential of collaboration'.



Written by - **Tourism and Events Research Hub**, Canterbury Christ Church University, as part of the Culture Kent Research Programme - delivered in partnership with **Visit Kent**



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Supported using public funding by
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Images: courtesy of Turner Contemporary