CultureCase

Pursuing social cohesion via the arts in rural communities

This research was conducted by **Hanne Otte** at the **University of Antwerp, Belgium**.

Summary

This paper examined arts engagement in the Netherlands, particularly in the rural province of Drenthe. Through a series of interviews and surveys it arrived at two main findings. The first finding was a correlation between experiencing ‘confirmative art’ (which agrees with your pre-existing ideas and expectations about the world) and ‘bonding cohesive behaviour’ (such as that between groups of the same sorts of people). The second finding was a correlation between experiencing ‘challenging art’ (art which invites people to think afresh about the world) and ‘bridging cohesive behaviour’ (which occurs between groups of different sorts of people).

The research looked at bridging and bonding activities

Bridging activities are those which forge links between different communities. Bonding activities are those which cement relationships within communities. Art engagement has been considered as a means to support both bonding and bridging. ‘Cultural policies with the aim of fostering social cohesion tend not to support [...] modern art, but rather [...] amateur art and folk culture.’ This study was keen to address that gap.

The research is based on five projects from the ‘Samen Delen!’ [Share Together!] Programme

This supported a range of contemporary community arts projects in the Drenthe province of the Netherlands. The data comes from more than 50

interviews with artists and organisers, along with a survey of 276 people who took part in the activities and of 718 others who were in the audience. The surveys asked about people's relationships to each other, to the area, and their attitudes to the subjects explored by the work.

This research has some suggestions for policymakers looking to foster cohesion through arts engagement

Ideally, policymakers should support 'art that seeks to challenge perceptions, [rather] than stimulating people to participate in arts that merely confirm their perception' so long as the policy carefully maintains 'a balance between the social context and autonomy of the artist'.

Keywords

interview **rural** **cohesion** **survey** **community** **the netherlands**

Title	Bonding or bridging? On art participation and social cohesion in a rural region of the Netherlands.
Author(s)	Otte, H.
Publication date	2019
Source	Poetics, online.
Link	**https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0304422X18302018?via%3Dihub**
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By **Culture.Case** | | **Neighbourhood impacts of arts and culture** |

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