

Using the Repertory Grid Technique to consult diverse communities

Home > Insights into arts and culture > Models of community engagement in arts and culture

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Summary

This paper describes a process of community engagement in Sheffield using the 'Repertory Grid Technique'. This informed the development of 'Burngreave Voices': a community project run by Sheffield Museums to create a co-authored book celebrating the heritage of the area, with longer-term objectives to increase the aspirations and skills of local residents. The researchers found that the technique provided a useful structure, allowing participants to express themselves in their own terms, taking complex ideas and creating a way to navigate through them.

The Repertory Grid Technique creates a map of perceptions

It works as follows: a *grid* is built around a specific topic (in this case motivations/barriers to attending events in Burngreave); *elements* are written down and they become what is discussed (in this case the names of events in Burngreave participants had or had not attended); *elements* are discussed using *constructs* (which are arrived at by taking three *elements* and asking how two are similar but different from a third). These are essentially qualities or attributes of the *elements*. This is repeated until no further *constructs* can be found. The relationships between all *elements* and all *constructs* form the basis for the subsequent discussion with the participant.

There was value in using the technique in Burngreave

It is particularly effective when consulting diverse communities like Burngreave where people may have poor education or where English is a second language. This case used people's existing experiences and opinions of real events to arrive at their general opinions. The researchers highlighted important constraints and attitudes towards events within the community. Despite it being a more labour-intensive form of consultation than focus groups or questionnaires they believed it provided useful and reliable insight. In contrast to the more common quantitative questionnaire method often used in museums, the repertory grid captures qualitative data which researchers argue are more useful in understanding perceptions and experiences. However, the grid can also be used to capture quantitative data.

Keywords

museum **UK** **gallery** **diverse** **consultation** **event** **community**

Title	Community consultation in developing museum projects: a case study using the Repertory Grid Technique
Author(s)	Canning, C. & Holmes, K.
Source	2006
Link	http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09548960600922590
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By **Culture.Case** | 16 March 2014 | **Models of community engagement in arts and culture** |



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