

EVA ELLIOTT How might art participate in productive critiques of regulatory systems and infrastructures and how might it contribute to developing new regulatory forms that involve people in decision-making?

I am a non-artist researcher frustrated by the limited legitimated forms of knowledge objects that have been available to me to communicate and make sense of the social. In my world I am expected to collect data and write papers for journals that have their own regulatory requirements around structure and language. If I publish in what is considered a high impact journal then that will provide me with good ratings and the honour of contributing the Research Excellence Framework. But it seems to me that this approach to research and knowledge creation simply reinforces the epistemological and political standpoints that I seek to critique. How can you speak about lay knowledge, civic intelligence or inequality when your very language generates and reinforces inequalities in inclusion, access and action?

The Productive Margins programme has sort to develop co-produced structures and processes to make research that both investigates and critiques existing marginalising regulatory structures, and proposes new emancipatory or inclusive regulatory forms. The starting points have been different but all projects have community organisations working alongside academic researchers from different disciplines. Although the full breadth of Arts and Humanities perspectives are intended to be at the heart of this and other programmes and projects funded by the Connected Communities programme it is through the use of artworks that researchers and community organisations have found a (potentially) liberating and common space to investigate, generate and represent ideas.

Although arts, community and academic co-producers (through different interests, logics of working, timescapes) bring their own forms of regulatory baggage that impose on the research process, working with artists and artworks has provided opportunities for thinking, talking and knowing in different ways. For me it has been a way to work with people, living in particular communities, to acknowledge the ways that they are represented in media and policy narratives and to challenge them. It can also provide a way of generating talk with other audiences about regulation in novel ways, as it breaks out of the forms of language and logic that, for instance, policy makers may take for granted. Language itself is tied to regulatory forms and regimes and so when art disrupts and unsettles then it can also be productive in terms of thinking and knowing in different ways.

This what we are trying to do in our current project, where artists are working alongside the researchers and community organisations to produce an interpretive artwork from our data. It treads a fine line of critiquing state led programmes while suggesting different ways of valuing and involving community based organisations. The artwork is intended to speak to people in policy and both offer, in the challenge, a different way of thinking about the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in Wales. We are currently feeling our way through this process and in particular to the extent to which the artwork will work be encountered though collective ephemeral but affective moments or through a permanent artwork that can act as a constant challenge to current modes of thinking about, and delivering, policy.