

Section 1: Research Digest

Policy

Arts - What's in a Word?

Ethnic Minorities and the Arts [UK]

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Objectives

The aims of this report were to bring together statistics about ethnic minorities in England, to review the literature on arts attendance and participation in the arts by people from ethnic minorities, to identify the perceptions of the arts amongst people from ethnic minorities, to explore their experiences of arts attendance and factors limiting their arts attendance.

Methodology

The research was based on desk research for the compilation of statistics and the literature review, and on a qualitative study in order to explore current experience and attitudes. The qualitative study used group discussions with Black African, Black Caribbean, South Asian and Chinese people selected [i] using standard market research methods and [ii] through community organisations and networks. Discussions were held with people from two different age and lifestyle groups, one of 18-24 year-olds and one of 25-50 year-olds. The report concentrates on less frequent arts attenders and non-attenders.

Contents

Acknowledgments - List of Tables - Executive Summary [Background / Key findings / Recommendations] - 1 Introduction [1.1 Remit of the report / 1.2 Structure of the report] - 2 Ethnic minorities in England [2.1 The size and composition of the ethnic minority population / 2.2 The distribution of ethnic minority populations / 2.3 The age structure of ethnic minority populations / 2.4 Diversity within ethnic groups / 2.5 Economic position and patterns of work / 2.6 The spending power of ethnic minorities] - 3 Policy directions and literature review [3.1 Shifting terminology and meaning / 3.2 The arts funding system and cultural diversity / 3.3 The Government and access / 3.4 Levels of arts attendance and barriers deterring attendance / 3.5 Key findings of research about ethnic minorities and the arts / 3.6 Knowledge through experience / 3.7 Summary] - 4 Introduction to the qualitative study [4.1 Research aims and objectives / 4.2 Research methodology] - 5 Patterns of socialising [5.1 Indian and Pakistani people / 5.2 Caribbean and African people / 5.3 Chinese people / 5.4 Popular leisure activities / 5.5 Summary] - 6 'Arts'-what's in a word? [6.1 Differing definitions / 6.2 Summary] - 7 Mainstream arts: a typology of attenders [7.1 Arts enthusiasts / 7.2 Arts experimenters / 7.3 Arts avoiders / 7.4 Summary] - 8 Black, Asian and Chinese Arts [8.1 Looking beyond mainstream arts attendance / 8.2 Festivals and community events / 8.3 Artists from abroad /

8.4 Black and Asian drama / 8.5 Roles of Black, Asian and Chinese Arts / 8.6 Summary] - 9 Barriers to attending mainstream arts [9.1 Time and cost / 9.2 Location and lack of availability / 9.3 Lack of information / 9.4 Language / 9.5 Social barriers / 9.6 The arts are not for us / 9.7 Feeling out of place / 9.8 Lack of understanding / 9.9 Cultural and social irrelevance / 9.10 The audience experience / 9.11 Summary] - 10 Attendance experiences and facilitating factors [10.1 Experiences of arts attendance amongst experimenters and avoiders / 10.2 Social triggers / 10.3 A special occasion / 10.4 Effective marketing / 10.5 Television exposure / 10.6 Summary] - 11 Conclusion and recommendations [11.1 Conclusion / 11.2 Recommendations for developing audiences for mainstream arts / 11.3 Recommendations for developing Black, Asian and Chinese arts] - Appendices - Bibliography

Summary

The statistical review revealed that in 1991 5.5% of the population of Great Britain were from ethnic minority groups and almost half of these were born in Britain. Greater London accounted for almost 45% of this total, with other high percentages in Birmingham, Leicester, Luton and Slough.

The dominant images of the arts amongst these groups were of ballet, opera, classical theatre and music and gallery-based exhibitions. Such activities were seen as being for "posh" older white audiences. Older people might also include images of African, Asian, Caribbean or Chinese heritage. In general people were interested in their own cultural heritages, though they may not use the term "arts". Arts activities were often part of larger social, religious or cultural events and the boundary between audience and performers was often blurred. Artists from abroad were popular, as were, among younger people, drama based on the experience of migration and more contemporary musical forms, such as hip-hop, ragga and bhangra, which were seen as part of Black British or Asian culture.

Factors deterring people from attending arts events included lack of time and money, availability and/or location, lack of information, language, social barriers, feeling out of place, lack of understanding, irrelevance, and the passivity of the audience experience. Word of mouth recommendations were important in encouraging arts attendance.

The report makes the following suggestions, in order for organisations and venues to develop ethnic minority audiences: changing the image of the arts, appropriate promotional methods for different potential audiences, creative programming and ticketing, the development of understanding using outreach, workshops and other methods, encouraging engagement and participation. Other factors to encourage culturally diverse audiences are community partnerships, 'product' development, education and youth work, assistance with organisation and administration, and programming which includes more ethnic minority work.

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Availability

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